

The End of Philosophy in Marx: Henri Lefebvre, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida

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## **Statement of originality**

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Roberto Mozzachiodi

## ABSTRACT

The arc traced by Marx's intellectual trajectory out of, or beyond, philosophy has been a major stumbling block for many if not all thinkers and activists working within a Marxist framework. Deprived of the Dialectics that Marx had intended on writing, Marxists in his wake have constructed particular configurations of the relationship between theory and practice or conceptual thought and political action to varying ends from his writing. Significant in this respect is the heritage of reception surrounding the well-known passage from the eleventh of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* in the *German Ideology*: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." The boundaries designating certain kinds of activity as properly political (i.e. transformative) and certain types of intellectual activity as properly non-ideological can be rooted in an indeterminacy prevailing in Marx's injunction to put an end to philosophy.

From this perspective, three variously politicized philosophers – Henri Lefebvre, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida – attempted to reconfigure these boundaries in distinct but overlapping historical and institutional contexts; principally in terms of their distinct proximities to the French Communist Party and their work within the French academic system. During the second half of the twentieth century, at particular moments of crisis for the Marxist political and theoretical project in the French context, these three figures engaged in vastly different and sometimes complementary political and theoretical projects consisting in an attempt to reconfigure the philosophy/politics dyad in Marx. They did so with wavering fidelity to the idea of the primacy of practice over theory. This dissertation historically situates these different intellectual and political projects and foregrounds the specific institutional contexts and philosophical resources that shaped their different expressions and engagements with the end of philosophy motif in Marx.

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This thesis was completed between the years of 2014-20. It is impossible to summarise the peculiar turbulence of living through this period but I would like to recount a political sequence that paralleled my research and which played an important role in my thinking at different moments of this PhD. The 2014 secessionist movement in Scotland revitalised working-class politics in my hometown, Glasgow, which had been long mired by sectarian division. Notwithstanding my anxieties about the nationalist unity that has taken the place of this division, the smothering of the Scottish referendum by the British state and its media apparatus had a profound impact on my political sensibilities during these years. The 2015 OXI movement in Greece also had a strong influence on my thinking. The crushing of the mass movement in Greece gave a preview of the technocratic authoritarianism that would, for better and for worse, come to be associated with European transnational powers. The 2015-16 European Migrant Crisis gave spectacular expression to this technocratic despotism, forming the backdrop of the rise of the far right in Britain, which would ultimately lead to the Brexit referendum – a Frankenstein monster of the two referendums which had preceded it. In contrast to the sclerosis of the British polity in these years, the worldwide conjuncture has provided moments of intense hopefulness. The most promising of these was the Sudanese revolution of 2018-19 which I followed closely throughout. The concerted uprisings of 2019 across the world, which sharpened throughout October, also gave a convincing indication of the international dimension of the current phase of anti-authoritarian struggles.

It is also necessary to briefly mention the political activities I have been a part of within the institution that will accredit this thesis. From the period of 2018 onward, the *Justice for Workers* group have been involved in a protracted struggle with the management of Goldsmiths College to transform the labour conditions of its precarious workers. In my estimation, we have gone further than any leftist group or individual currently working in the UK Higher Education Sector to re-establish an organic link between theory and practice. Of the organising work I have done with *Justice for Workers*, I am most proud of the in-housing success of our comrades in cleaning (2018) and security (2019) and the wildcat marking strike that was taken by precariously employed teaching staff throughout the month of June in 2020. At the time of submitting, more than 300 jobs of graduate teaching staff remain suspended as a cost reducing measure imposed by the management of this institution. If I have made any contributions to knowledge that might be considered original during my time at

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## EPIGRAPHS

*Help me, you countless thousands who died before me. Tell me how you managed to accept death. Teach me. Let me lean on you like crutches. Help me to cross the threshold you have crossed. Come back from the other side and help me.*

*Help me, you who were frightened and did not want to go. What was it like? Who held you up? Who dragged you there, who pushed you? Were you afraid to the very end? And you who were strong and courageous who accepted death with indifference and serenity, teach me your resignation.*

*I told myself that if one could learn to die, that one can also help other people to die. This seems to me to be the most important thing we can do, since we are all of us dying men who refuse to die. Indeed an apprenticeship in dying.*

Eugene Ionèsco<sup>1</sup>

*As for shaving the philosophy of Marx... a new Marx-slayer arises in each generation to slaughter a corpse already slain over and over again by his predecessors, but after the "death" there is no "rigor mortis," no wake, and each little killer scratches his head...and mutters, "He doesn't seem as dead as I thought he was, and I knew he wouldn't be!"*

John Smith Clarke<sup>2</sup>

*We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead. Le mort saisit le vif!* [The dead holds the living in his grasp. – formula of French common law]

Karl Marx<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Exit the King' in Eugène Ionesco, *Exit the King, The Killer, and Macbett Three Plays by Eugène Ionesco*. (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 48

<sup>2</sup> John Smith Clarke, *Pen pictures of Russia under the "red terror" (reminiscences of a surreptitious journey to Russia to attend the Second Congress of the Third International)*. (Glasgow: National Workers' Committees, 1921), 238.

<sup>3</sup> 'Preface to the First Edition (1867)' in Karl Marx, *Capital A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*. (London: Penguin Books, 1992.), 91.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC	Les Cahiers du communisme
CDFT	Confédération française démocratique du travail
ENA	École nationale d'administration
ENS	École normale supérieure
GREPH	Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique
PCF	Parti communiste français
PS	Parti socialiste
NC	La Nouvelle critique
UEC	Union des étudiants communistes



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Some months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Jacques Derrida would deliver a funeral oration for his departed friend and colleague Louis Althusser. He would conclude his speech by stating the following:

above this tomb and above your heads, I dream of addressing those who come after him, or after us already, and whom I see (alas, by several signs) as too much in a hurry to understand, to interpret, to classify, fix, reduce, simplify, close off, and judge, that is, to misunderstand that, here, it is a question of an oh-so-singular destiny and of the trials of existence, of thought, of politics, inseparably. I would ask them to stop a moment, to take the time to listen to our time (we had no other one), to patiently decipher everything that from our time could be ratified and promised in the life, the work, the name of Louis Althusser. Not only because the dimensions of this destiny should command respect (also the respect of the time from which emerge these other generations, our generation), but also because the yet open wounds, the scars or hopes that they will recognize in it and which were and are our scars and hopes, will certainly teach them something essential of what remains to be heard, read, thought, and done. As long as I live, that is, as long as the memory remains with me of what Louis Althusser gave me to live with him, near him: this is what I would like to recall to those who were not of his time or who will not have taken the time to turn toward him. This is what I would hope one day to express more eloquently, without bidding adieu, for Louis Althusser.<sup>4</sup>

Derrida's invocation of a future generation willing to lend a patient ear, not simply to the exhilaration and the tragedy of the Althusserian experience, but to the full range of passions that ran through the post-war period, became, in his later years, his refuge from a present increasingly convinced of its own understanding of the lessons of history. The absolute demise of Marxism, of its intellectual tradition, its explanatory power and its actually existing footholds was one such lesson. And yet, in a cruel parody of fate, the death of the 'last great thinker of Marxism' – who had been living

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<sup>4</sup> 'Text Read at Louis Althusser's Funeral' in Ann E. Kaplan & Michael Sprinker, *The Althusserian Legacy*. (London:Verso, 1993.), 245.

like a dead man for the last ten years of his life<sup>5</sup> – coincided with the great ceremony of the end of history, as the Iron Curtain receded with great geopolitical fanfare. And then, as if there were any doubts what the close of the century portended for post-war French Marxism, Henri Lefebvre, at the age of ninety, passed away in his maternal home in Navarrenx the following year.<sup>6</sup>

The fate of Lefebvre's posthumous existence would take a different path than that of Althusser. In the aftermath of his spectacular decline, the damage sustained to Althusser's reputation would only begin to lift some fifteen years after his death. While for Lefebvre, the English translation of his 1974 text *The Production of Space*<sup>7</sup> on the year of his death, would launch a surge of interest in his later spatial writings in the Anglophone context. Yet, Derrida's cautionary words to Althusser's critics – those quick “to understand, to interpret, to classify, fix, reduce, simplify, close off, and judge, that is, to misunderstand” – were just as relevant to Lefebvre's new champions. Lefebvre, who bore witness to the century, thirty years a committed communist philosopher, had become, for English commentators of a particular persuasion, the antidote to a profaned Marxist heritage.<sup>8</sup>

More than any of his other mourning works,<sup>9</sup> Derrida's ‘anti-memorial’ for Althusser would be the personal writing experience that most directly occasioned his confrontation with Marx three years later in *Specters of Marx*. In an interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco some years after the publication of *Specters* Derrida would say: “I wrote the book in 1993, three years after Althusser's death - and of course it can be

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<sup>5</sup> Althusser murdered his wife H el ene Rytman on the 16 November 1980.  lisabeth Roudinesco, who visited Althusser during the aftermath of the murder, said of him: “For ten years, between the date of the murder and that of his death on 22 October 1990, Louis Althusser lived a strange life as a specter, a dead man walking, a man who had become his own other... A mute spectator, he took in the implosion of the Soviet Union, the dismantling of its empire, and the slow erosion of institutions that had, for sixty years and despite the crimes of Stalinism, succeeded in offering an ideal of dignity, a Utopia, a dream, a faith, and also a culture, to the working classes of the democratic countries. In these circumstances neither Marxism nor the parties that had tried to realize these ideals appeared to have any future.” Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Philosophy in Turbulent Times Canguilhem, Sartre, Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 108.

<sup>6</sup> Lefebvre died on 29 June 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Elden, ‘Politics, Philosophy, Geography: Henri Lefebvre in Recent Anglo-American Scholarship.’ *Antipode*. Vol 33, Part 5, (2001), 809-825.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

read as an address to him, a means of ‘surviving’ what I lived with him.”<sup>10</sup> This tribute affirmed the work of mourning that singular time when the stakes of being a philosopher and a communist were high enough to demand the engagement of one’s life to realise the end of philosophy. Not without significance, therefore, is the fact that Derrida’s effort to survive Althusser, to reaffirm that heritage of which Althusser was a part, and thereby refrain “from all killing or putting to death”,<sup>11</sup> would begin with the evocation of another eulogy of sorts. That eulogy, which originally took the title ‘the End of Philosophy’ and then later ‘Slow Obsequies’, was given by Maurice Blanchot in the late 1950s. It had been written in honour of the philosopher, in this case Henri Lefebvre, who had committed his life to bringing an end to philosophy in the name of Marx by submitting to the Stalinist party for thirty years.<sup>12</sup> This inconspicuous resurrection of Lefebvre in the background of *Specters* – in the image of the Marxist philosopher riven by the contradictions of putting an end to philosophy as a militant to the communist cause and as a philosopher – was one that subtly punctured the image of Lefebvre lately heralded by Anglophone academia. It was a version of Lefebvre that had far more in common with Althusser than many would care to admit.

In that sense, *Specters* was in memory of those committed lives that, in the most extreme experiences of utopic engagement and tragic failure, had much to teach a present convinced of the death of Marxism and the end of philosophy. In this thesis I aim to pursue further this nexus formed in *Specters* between the life and work of Henri Lefebvre, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida – three figures who rarely ever appear together in secondary literatures. It is in an effort to lend a patient ear to the intellectual and political passions that allowed this heritage to thrive in its time that this thesis traces and links together a series of attempts to re-conceptualise the motif of the end of philosophy in Marx’s writing. The thesis identifies a number of theoretical gestures in the work of Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida that are connected

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida & Elisabeth Roudinsco, *For What Tomorrow ... A Dialogue*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 103.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4. Derrida goes on: “I have always forbidden myself...to injure or to put to death. It is always by reaffirming the heritage that one can avoid this putting to death”.

<sup>12</sup> Derrida cites Blanchot’s essay in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), 36. Blanchot’s original essay is Maurice Blanchot, “La Fin De La Philosophie” in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1 Aout 1959, 7 année, No 80, 286-298 and it appears as ‘Slow Obsequies’ in Maurice Blanchot, *Friendship*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1997).

by a shared preoccupation with a hermeneutic that regulated understandings of Marxism and especially the role of philosophy in Marxism throughout the twentieth century. This hermeneutic was the culmination of a series of authoritative readings of Marx that reaffirmed the basic presupposition that in his writing Marx designates or calls for the end of philosophy in one way or another and toward one end or another. The intellectual and political struggles that I bring together had the broader aim of re-establishing the political and philosophical calibre of Marxism in the post-war French context.

The primary thesis I aim to put forward here is that each of these three thinkers used – in distinct, but not disconnected, ways – the end of philosophy motif in Marx at certain crucial moments for the Marxist political project in the French context. They did so with the aim of wresting a conception or a practice of politics carried out ‘in the name of Marx’ away from dogmatic closure across overlapping institutional contexts. In contradistinction to the Eleventh of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it”<sup>13</sup>, they did this by way of interpretations that in one way or another reconfigured the structure opposing philosophy and politics in Marx with the aim of effecting change in the institutions within which they were working; that is, by way of a transformative interpretation. I additionally argue that these thinkers shared and transmitted conceptual frameworks and theoretical vocabularies to one another rooted in discursive and political efforts to pose, across distinct intellectual and institutional contexts, questions about how philosophy ends in Marx.

In the spirit of each of these thinkers’ different attempts to protect Marx from interpretive closure, I will draw together their different intellectual projects through their common engagement with the end of philosophy motif. What remains a consistent feature across these three thinkers’ work is the way that they welcomed into their theoretical registers seemingly impossible philosophical systems in an effort to stave off interpretative closure in Marx. For each of them, at particular junctions, the orthodox interpretation of the rejection of philosophy and the

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<sup>13</sup> “The Theses on Feuerbach” in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in three volumes Volume 1*. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 15. Also translated as “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

imperative to do something other than philosophy was met with interpretive lenses deeply suffused by other philosophical voices. This was done not so as to entrench Marxism in the history of philosophy, as one system among others. But rather, and somewhat paradoxically, the aim was to hold open and free from closure the interpretive field designated by the name Marx.

This, as a political stake common to each of the three thinkers' intellectual projects, can be tied to a polemical response to the great closure of Marx synonymous with the name Stalin and his own variant of Marxist philosophy, dialectical materialism or 'dia-mat'. But, as we will see, it was not simply the interpretive reduction of Marx by Stalinism that caused this antipathy toward closure. It was also the series of reductionist accounts of Marx and Lenin's thought that came in the wake of the Stalinist experience which consolidated this ambition. French critical theory of the second half of the twentieth century, especially after the student protests and general strikes of May 1968, fell into narrow positions regarding the legitimacy of Marxism-Leninism that were formed by the historical event of the Stalinist terror.<sup>14</sup> Peter Starr has called this phenomenon the "logic of failed revolt"<sup>15</sup> referring to the anti-dialectical cul-de-sac that French critical theory found itself in after reaching the limits of a revolutionary imaginary tied to Marxism following the events of 1968. Antipathy toward Marxism-Leninism hastened in 1974, with the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.<sup>16</sup> The text gained mass readership with its scandalising documentation of the Stalinist regime's bloody purges and system of forced labour camps. This literary 'event' initiated a string of works by French academics that advanced polemics against the proto-totalitarian aspects of all revolutionary movements across history.<sup>17</sup> The popular appeal of this anti-totalitarian consensus profoundly shifted the parameters of political acceptability in the French context. All the major political parties of the period, including the French Communist Party (PCF), fell under the sway of this new doxa.

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<sup>14</sup> See especially Jean-Marie Benoist, *Marx est Mort*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Peter Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May' 68*. (California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: Volume 1: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Especially François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française* (Paris, 1978); Pierre Rosanvallon and Patrick Viveret, *Pour une nouvelle culture politique* (Paris, 1977) and Jacques Julliard, *Contre la politique professionnelle* (Paris, 1977) in Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left The Antitotalitarian Movement Moment of the 1970s*. (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 1.

Along with this new common sense, was the establishment of a set of equivalences that collapsed the writing of Marx and Lenin into the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism instrumentalised by the Stalinist regime to perpetrate its crimes, and by extension the theoretical principles of Marxism with totalitarianism. The radical left – affiliated both with the student movement and the emerging parliamentary dominance of the Socialist Party (PS) – and the right-wing governments of the period, took up their respective positions vis-à-vis this anti-totalitarian hegemony. The political and cultural reach of the scandal of Stalinist totalitarianism forced the PCF to negotiate with this new political centre of gravity. It was forced to reckon with its historical link with both Stalinism and the thought of Marx and Lenin. At different moments in the formation of this legacy, Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida attempted to rehabilitate the theoretical and political credibility of the writing of Marx and Lenin against dogmatism of various shades. Most directly, these efforts referred to the ideological instrumentalisation of Marxist-Leninist doctrine within the Stalinist Party and the intentional conflation of this dogmatic reference with the thought of Marx and Lenin by the various constituencies of the anti-totalitarian movement.

The anti-totalitarian consensus that was increasingly shaping the conditions of acceptability within French political discourse and the appetites for Marxist thought within the intellectual realm coincided with a number of related phenomena. First, the monopoly that the PCF held over revolutionary politics had broken down and there was a decline in the perception that it was the rightful home of a progressive left-wing political project in the eyes of French voters.<sup>18</sup> The period of the Common Programme for a Government of Left Union (1972–78), in which the PCF entered an electoral coalition with the PS, marked the slow but momentous transference of left-wing credentials to the Socialists. The culmination of this epochal shift was the election victory of the Socialists in 1981. This transference took place as hostilities mounted against the PCF's continued attachment to the Soviet Union and, by extension, its fidelity to the theoretical principles of Marxist-Leninism. Keen to distance itself from

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<sup>18</sup> The high point of the PCF's electoral success was in 1946 when it secured 28.6% of the vote (5.5 million). After a brief upsurge in the early sixties, the party's electoral success steadily declined throughout the seventies leading up to the victory of the Socialists in '81. David Bell and Bryon Criddle, 'The Decline of the French Communist Party,' *British Journal of Political Science* 19, No. 4 (Oct, 1989): 515 - 536.

this toxic legacy the leadership of the PCF incrementally and unilaterally purged the Party of its link to Marxist-Leninist doctrine throughout the seventies.<sup>19</sup> The public face of this shift came in 1976 at the PCF's 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, where the Party officially abandoned its aspiration to establish a 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', committed itself to the parliamentary path to socialism and ideological pluralism, and boasted of its national independence from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union enshrined in the phrase "Socialism in French colours."<sup>20</sup> The lack of theoretical nuance or democratic process involved in this reversal<sup>21</sup> – where the Party had gone from repressing intellectuals for raising philosophical questions about the Marxist canon in the fifties to marginalising intellectuals for defending the status of certain aspects of Leninist thought in seventies – was indicative of the continuing hold of the dogmatic heritage of Stalinism over the internal organisational structure of the Party. Meanwhile, the intellectual and activist left, both spurned and blunted by the events of '68, were cast adrift in a nebulous political field. Amidst the anti-totalitarian wave, they would become organic to the electoral momentum behind the Socialist Party. Through its entryway affiliate, *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (CFDT)<sup>22</sup>, the Party would win many over with its promises of reconciling radical critique, effective reform and the decentralisation of the Gaullist state.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See "'In the colours of France' (1969 – 78)" in M. Adereth, *The French Communist party a critical history (1920 – 84) from Comintern to 'the colours of France'*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 198 – 214.

<sup>20</sup> Elise Engesland Halsne, *A question of loyalty The French Communist Party, 1976-81 – How a party's quest for democracy and ideological independence could lead to its support of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation or master's thesis). (University of Oslo, Norway, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Prior to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, Georges Marchais, the General Secretary of the PCF, was severely criticised for suggesting in a television interview that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' should be dropped from the party's aims without consulting the membership. Marchais' autocratic approach to communicating party policy was a consistent feature of his leadership during the Common Programme. Adereth, *The French Communist party a critical history*, 209

<sup>22</sup> Throughout the 1970s the CFDT sought to cohere a new alliance of support for the SP comprising a burgeoning class of young professional engineers in high-tech industries and a far left activist milieu. In their rhetoric, they used the vaguely defined democratic horizons of self-management [*autogestion*] and the progressive social attitudes of the new social movements to link the aspirations of an anti-communist left with the liberal attitudes of an emerging professional class. In the lead up to the 1978 election, CFDT played a significant role in grassroots political campaigns as varied as the *Lip* factory occupation in Besançon, the SONACOTRA migrant worker rent strikes, and the Occitan separatist movement. Following the 1978 election CFDT withdrew from much of its non-workplace political engagements and reoriented its priorities to serving members in workplace quantitative demands. See Thomas R. Christofferson, *The French Socialists in power, 1981-1986 : from autogestion to cohabitation*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991) and Luc Boltanski & Éve, Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Didier Eribon, *D'une Révolution Conservatrice et de ses effets sur la gauche française*, (Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2007).

The changes that took place in the PCF regarding the status of Marxism-Leninism in its political culture were simultaneous with changes that took place within the French education system. Following the events of '68, the governments of Georges Pompidou (1969–1972) and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974–1981) introduced a series of reforms into the education system. On the face it, these reforms were to redress the discontent expressed by the student revolts but in fact sought to appease the demands of industry by opening higher education up to the interests of business.<sup>24</sup> The reforms were framed by the objective of lifting secondary and higher education out of a rigidly top-down model and moving it toward a more modern and democratised vision of education provision. Yet, one of their outcomes was the diminishment of philosophy as a legitimate mode of intellectual inquiry and the dismantling of the social edifice that maintained its pronounced status in French culture.

Throughout the sixties, spokespersons of business campaigned to dismantle the economically protectionist and culturally conservative status of higher education in French society. The tenor of this polemic echoed arguments that had been made by the left about the elitism of higher education in the face of rising student numbers. It also cast those in the teaching body resistant to change as bastions of the 'university ghetto'. In a special issue of *Esprit* on higher education in 1964, one Parisian Banker remarked:

The universities today are one of the last national institutions that have not been shaken to the foundations by the twentieth century revolution...One of the major difficulties seems to lie in the universities themselves, and particularly in the teaching corps. Assuming, as is certainly the case, that the universities cannot command sufficient resources to deal with the growth in the numbers of students while at the same time maintaining their current protected environments and antiquated artisanal methods, will they be willing to accept radical changes?...Many are the friends of higher education who fear its fundamental conservatism in this regard.<sup>25</sup>

The aim of such diatribes was to bring the remit of university education and research output in step with the needs of modern capital. The establishment of the *Ecole*

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<sup>24</sup> Luc Boltanski, *The Making of a Class. Cadres in French Society*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 206.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 217.



*nationale d'administration* (ENA) in the forties was well known for furnishing France with its technocratic political and capitalist elite. But throughout the sixties, the engineering of a new political and social segmentation was further consolidated with the penetration of business management studies into the education system. This was itself paralleled by the implantation of psychological research into the mainstream of business management ideology.<sup>26</sup> Large increases in the numbers of students and the infiltration of private interests within academic research culture, prepared the way for the construction of a new middle-class subjectification. This process coincided with wider sociological and economic dynamics of class disaffiliation as a new tertiary sector began to gradually replace light and heavy industry in the French economy.<sup>27</sup> The entry of managerial and business science into French academia was complimented during the fifties and sixties by a growth of well-funded research facilities importing American social science techniques with a broadly functionalist bent.<sup>28</sup> All of this played a major role in consolidating a new private-public paradigm under which universities functioned. This new agenda promoted an ideology that unified state technocrats, newly emerging shareholder, management and administrative classes with scientists and engineers in high-tech industries. This campaign remodelled the university away from a selection hierarchy crowned by a narrow field of academic excellence, toward a selection hierarchy based on skills and knowledge prized by industry. By the late sixties this campaign had come far but with the events of 1968, the French government had been given a mandate to push through reforms in education with far-reaching ambition. The seventies reforms were strident in their intentions to relegate those critical disciplines that had previously formed a central part of French education to the status of an optional specialism. The outcome was an attempt to remove philosophy from the ambit of French public education; namely the “classe de philosophie” which was an obligatory requirement during the last year of high school to the attainment of a degree (the *baccalauréat*).

Together, the marginalisation of philosophy within French academia and the

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<sup>26</sup> Luc Boltanski and Alexandra Russel, 'Visions of American Management in Post-War France', *Theory and Society* 12, No. 3 (May, 1983), 375 - 403

<sup>27</sup> This argument appears in Henri Lefebvre, *Vers le cybernanthrope: contre les technocrates*, (Paris: Éditions Gonthier, 1967).

<sup>28</sup> Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 176 - 196

relinquishment of the PCF's historic link with Marxist-Leninist theory precluded a period of prolonged stagnation for Marxist philosophy and its political presence on the world stage. The crystallisation of these two developments – the marginalisation of the French philosophical institution and the advancement of an anti-Marxist consensus tied to an anti-totalitarian wave – was reached in the celebrity enjoyed by the “New Philosophers” Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann.<sup>29</sup> The popular appeal of their Foucauldian inspired polemics against Marxism dovetailed with the apparition of two ends: the end of philosophy and the end of Marxism.

This brief history condenses the trajectory plotted by the studies that make up this thesis. It also traces across different institutional contexts the movement of the motif of the end of philosophy in Marx. I trace the end of philosophy problematic as it develops in debates within the institution of the PCF and then in those peculiar to the institution of French higher education, with particular attention paid to discussions emerging in the mid-seventies within the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS). Of the three figures that have been brought together in this thesis, it is Althusser who connects these distinct institutions. As Sunil Khilnani puts it, Althusser launched his enterprise “from a particular structural position...situated at the intersection of two important institutional axes, one political, the other intellectual: the Communist Party and the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*.”<sup>30</sup> Althusser would inherit Lefebvre's initial formulation of the problem of the end of philosophy in Marx through their overlapping presence in the intellectual arm of the PCF, especially through their participation in debates within the Party journal *Le Nouvelle Critique* (NC). By privileging the site of theoretical practice in his re-interpretation of the end of philosophy in Marx, Althusser would then displace this inherited problematic into the context of the university, specifically the ENS. This transposition would then shape the conceptual vocabulary used by Derrida faced with the altogether different context of the early phases of the neoliberal university. Althusser's enterprise throughout the sixties of rehabilitating the philosophical culture of the Party while simultaneously politicising the conditions of the university formed a bridge between Lefebvre's struggle in the PCF of the fifties and Derrida's struggle in the ENS of the seventies.

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<sup>29</sup> Especially Lévy's *Barbarism with a Human Face* (1977) and Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers* (1977).

<sup>30</sup> Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution. The Intellectual Left in Postwar France*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 89.

What linked these different moments, and what connects them to our own, was the overwhelming certitude with which Marxist philosophy was pronounced dead or realised. It was against the real and discursive forces that held this certainty in place that these thinkers launched their theoretical campaigns. Althusser would use the term “theoretical conjuncture”<sup>31</sup> to designate the discursive whole that comprised these different forces at particular historical junctures. In this thesis, I shed light on the theoretical and institutional conditions that formed the conjunctures into which these thinkers intervened. For each of these thinkers the motif of the end of philosophy in Marx was used as a cipher to re-establish the link between philosophy and revolutionary political practice at moments of crisis for Marxism when this link seemed irreparably severed. Marx’s end of philosophy became the conceptual grounds for this re-articulation because it offered a route to thinking Marxist philosophy as neither absolutely renounced nor absolutely rehabilitated.

As I have already indicated these interpretations had their own interpretative mediators. Indeed, pivotal to the Marxisms of all three of these thinkers were Lenin’s own interpretations of Marx within his own historical and political conjuncture. Of particular salience to Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida was how Lenin had tried to marry the results of his empirical research, which had shown a profound sensitivity to the unevenness of socio-economic development, with a conception of a materialist dialectic in order to sharpen revolutionary political practice. This was especially important for Lefebvre and Althusser working within the Party to dislodge the ideological effects of the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Yet it was also the case in the French education system, as my discussion of Derrida’s Lenin will illustrate. In conflicting and complimentary ways, these three figures tried to break with what they saw as an extremely conservative – verging on the reactionary – preconception of politics and the political from dominating the Marxist political project in France. The PCF played a central role in this respect, dotting as it did for so long on a Stalinist rendition of Lenin’s “partisanship in philosophy” and a Plakhanovian inspired version of dialectical materialism. Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida all at different points and with varying degrees of proximity to the PCF used Lenin as a mediator to send out

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<sup>31</sup> Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966 – 67)*, (London: Verso, 2003), 1 - 19

politically disruptive signals against the liturgy of official Marxist-Leninism. This was done to re-route or frustrate the regulatory effect that certain shibboleths held over political practice within the PCF and political practice more broadly. As Party members, Lefebvre and Althusser more explicitly ventriloquized Lenin, forced as they were to make political gestures from within the rhetorical protocols of Party discourse.<sup>32</sup> However Derrida, the self-declared “crypto-communist”, was not impervious to the interpellating pull of the PCF and did indeed speak through Lenin on several occasions.<sup>33</sup>

Important in this respect, is the role played by Marxist and Marxian philosophical or theoretical *parerga* to these thinkers’ transformative interpretations. Beginning with *The German Ideology* manuscripts themselves, and the *Theses on Feuerbach* in particular, these thinkers variously mined from the Marxian and Marxist canon certain well-known, nominally unofficial or unfinished texts to dislodge interpretive norms surrounding Marxist political and academic scholarship. Among such texts, the most significant to this project will be Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* and Marx’s *1857 Introduction to the Grundrisse* along with various prefatory remarks, correspondences and letters involving Marx, Engels and Lenin.<sup>34</sup> While the publication history of these texts and their entry into the French canon certainly played a role in allowing these thinkers to construct their own Marx and Lenin against the orthodoxy, each of these thinkers read and translated German and were variously familiar with the German canon as much as they were the French.

Beyond speaking through and against Marxian and Marxist references, another feature common to the enterprises of all three of these thinkers is that they welcomed philosophical frameworks that were ostensibly foreign to the Marxist canon into their conceptual repertoire. In the background of their efforts to reckon with the end of philosophy motif in Marx, these thinkers were teaching philosophy within the French

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<sup>32</sup> “There was no way out for a philosopher. If he spoke and wrote the philosophy the Party wanted he was restricted to commentary and slight idiosyncrasies in his own way of using the Famous Quotations. We had no audience among our peers” in Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, (London: Verso, 2005), 27

<sup>33</sup> See Derrida, *Théorie et pratique* and Jason Smith, ‘Jacques Derrida, “Crypto-Communist?”’, Eds Gregory Elliott, Jacques Bidet, Eustache/Stathis Kouvelakis, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 625 - 646

<sup>34</sup> Below I will highlight Lefebvre’s role in introducing these particular bits of marginalia to a French reading public in his early translation work with Norbert Guterman.

education system. As such, their philosophical expositions within the conceptual vocabulary of Marxism were inflected by a set of philosophical frameworks that derived from the circumscribed curriculum they were routinely teaching. Warren Montag has convincingly argued that Althusser employed a “philosophical strategy” of *lieu-tenance* [place-taking] as a way of breaching the discursive fortification of official Marxism. Montag describes this strategy as “something like a guerrilla war in the realm of theory, that is, a strategy of infiltration and impersonation that would allow him to gain a position within its walls from which effective attack could be launched.” It was the case, Montag maintains, that Althusser spoke in the voice of one thinker to advance the conceptual problematic of another, dislodging the theoretical focus of the former in the process; “Lenin for Mao or Machiavelli, Marx for Spinoza, or the reverse.”<sup>35</sup> And Lefebvre, whose distinctive readings of Marx from the mid-twenties onward were profoundly marked by his pre-Party philosophical engagements, also spoke through others to keep a living Marx on the horizon. This was particularly stark in Lefebvre’s writing from the high years of French Stalinism, from roughly 1947 to 1953. It was in his writings on Descartes, Pascal, Rabelais, Lukács and later Lenin that Lefebvre fledged, under the cover of intellectual history, his own Marx against the orthodoxy.<sup>36</sup> As Elizabeth Lebas and Stuart Elden have argued “It would...not be true to say that Lefebvre wrote nothing about political or philosophical issues during the period 1947-58 – but more accurate to say that he wrote about them ‘in disguise’.”<sup>37</sup>

The phenomenon of *lieu-tenance* makes clear that Lefebvre and Althusser imported philosophical frameworks into Marxist discourse in order to extend the conceptual horizons of the Party for political ends. Less attention has been paid to how Marxism itself rebounded back into the way all three of these thinkers occupied the

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<sup>35</sup> Warren Montag, ‘Althusser’s Lenin’, *diacritics* 43, No. 2,(2015), 48 – 66. “To force their best opponents to pay them some attention, some Marxist philosophers were reduced, and by a natural movement which did not conceal a conscious tactic, to *disguising themselves* – disguising Marx as Husserl, Marx as Hegel, Marx as the ethical and humanist Young Marx – at the risk of some day taking the masks for the reality.” In Althusser, *For Marx*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Stuart Elden, ‘Through the Eyes of the Fantastic: Lefebvre, Rabelais and Intellectual History’, *Historical Materialism* 10, No. 4 (December 2002), 51-73

<sup>37</sup> ‘Introduction: Coming to Terms with Lefebvre’ in Henri Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, Eds Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas. (New York, London Continuum, 2003), xiii. They add “The books on literary figures such as Diderot or Rabelais are extremely political; they are both ways of thinking through what historical materialism is, and exercises in putting it into practice...The books on Pascal and Descartes are also extremely philosophical – and there are some interesting discussions on issues of spatiality which prefigure the later work of the 70s.”

philosophical institution. The title of one of Althusser's unpublished texts, *How To Be a Marxist in Philosophy* (1976-78), can be understood as a question referring specifically to the philosophical position or mode of inquiry proper to Marxism.<sup>38</sup> However, considered next to a questionnaire that Althusser drew up in the late sixties to be circulated to philosophy teachers who were also Party members, this question gains further dimension:

1. Today, how does one teach philosophy as a communist? What according to you are the terms of this problem?
  - a. What is the nature of your responsibility as a professional? (Curriculum? Success in exams? "Neutrality" Professorial freedom? Respect for the personality of the student? What is your attitude in relation to administration?)
  - b. How do you envisage the responsibilities you have to your position in the Party? (Is it necessary to make students communists? To teach a philosophy of Marxist inspiration? To make a resolute effort to revert all problems to the current content of the class struggle? Clarify any problem that arises – psychological, moral, social – according to the experience and the struggle of the working class?)
  - c. How do you reconcile your professional responsibilities and your responsibilities as a Party member?<sup>39</sup>

These inquiries constitute the wider stakes of what it meant for Althusser to ask the question 'how to be a Marxist in philosophy?' The question, among other things, asks how a Marxist is supposed to relate to philosophy – not simply at the level of the ideological struggle, but as a member of a concrete social formation whose job it is to teach philosophy? How is one to relate one's professional and pedagogical responsibilities and to one's philosophical ambitions as a Marxist and a member of the Marxist party? These questions open up the seemingly autonomous institutional realm in which philosophical thought is formed and transmitted to a Marxist analysis.

Of course, Althusser's inquiries were coloured by the unique role that philosophy played in the French education system. Philosophical education inherited its

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<sup>38</sup> Louis Althusser, *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). The title was a slight modification of a shorter article published in *La Pensée* in 1975: 'Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy' in Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, (London: NLB, 1976), 89.163 – 208.

<sup>39</sup> Letters consulted in the l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), Fonds Althusser: 20ALT49.7 *Questionnaire redigé par Louis Althusser*.

pedagogical pre-eminence in the French system from the function it served historically in unseating religious dogma in the realm of ideas. It was thereby closely aligned with the secularisation of the state (*laïcité*) and the formation of the bourgeois citizen of the French Republic. The educational reforms introduced by Victor Cousin – François Guizot’s Minister for Education and the Director of the École Normale in 1840 – sustained well beyond the political upheavals of 1848. After 1863 his recommendation for a yearlong immersion in the history of philosophical thought for final year *lycée* students was formally integrated into the structure of secondary education in France.<sup>40</sup> In that regard, philosophy as a mandatory fixture of public education had an intrinsic connection to the formation of the ideal citizen of the Third Republic. Religious demystification and developmental and civic formation could all be guaranteed by a thorough philosophical education. Hence, the teaching of philosophy and the discourse of philosophy had an intrinsic relationship to the aspirations of the French state.

Thus, the line of inquiry that Althusser had opened up put a considerably different accent on the end of philosophy motif in Marx. From this perspective, overcoming philosophy is not simply an epistemological pre-requisite to the advancement of the revolutionary project, but a task that goes to the very heart of the historical formation of the educational apparatus that pre-figures forms of knowledge transmission. Taken over from Althusser, this set of preoccupations would orient Derrida’s theoretical and political activities during the seventies with the *Groupe de recherches sur l’enseignement philosophique* (GREPH). Looking at one of the central nodes of philosophical education within French society, the École normale supérieure (ENS), I will show that, contrary to conventional periodisations of the ‘institutional turn’ in French Theory<sup>41</sup>, which frame it as a reaction against the limitations of Marxism’s explanatory logic, the activities of GREPH represented a fusing of Marxism and

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<sup>40</sup> Gary Gutting, *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4 -5

<sup>41</sup> We may think here of the *Centre d’études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles* (CERFI) surrounding Félix Guattari which focused on state institutions that constituted discourses and practices around mental health or the *Groupe d’information sur les prisons* (GIP) affiliated with Michel Foucault, which sought to analyse the penal institution to overcome “the division between the proletariat and the “non-proletarianized plebs.” See Centre d’études, de recherches et de formation institutionnelles. *Recherches*, (Paris: Germinial, 1966 – 1983) and Alberto, Toscano, “The Intolerable-Inquiry: The Documents of the Groupe d’information sur les prisons”, *Viewpoint Magazine*, September 25 2013. Available at <<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/25/the-intolerable-inquiry-the-documents-of-the-groupe-dinformation-sur-les-prisons/>> [Accessed 22 July 2020].

institutional analysis around theoretical and political ambitions rooted in Marx's injunction to overcome philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, GREPH aspired to articulate a materialist and institutionalist analysis within the educational apparatus so as to overcome the epistemological blind spots of philosophy without at the same time forfeiting the autonomy of philosophy or its teaching. In this thesis, therefore, I trace the dialectic that emerged in the relation between these two activities: the importation of philosophy into a self-described Marxist Party (the PCF) to rehabilitate its political practice, and the importation of Marxist theoretical and political principles into the academy to transform the function of the philosophical institution.

Forming around three overlapping periodisations, each of the chapters that make up this thesis will focus on a single thinker and locate their reconfigurations of the end of philosophy problematic in Marx within a period of roughly twenty years. In doing so, I aim to delineate a less obvious chronology of the French intellectual Left by shifting gravity away from the role of May '68. This chronology will trace echoes, resonances and returns across the mid-fifties, mid-sixties, mid-seventies and early-nineties. Each section deals with aspects of a thinker's engagement with Marx, Engels and Lenin and the question of the end of philosophy. I will orient my close reading of texts around elements of biography and political and socio-economic history so as to render discernible the conjunctures in which these interpretations developed.

Within the fields of intellectual history, philosophy and political theory there has been no attempt to link these three particular thinkers before. Modest amounts of work have been done around Lefebvre's critical engagement with Althusser's structuralist Marxism.<sup>43</sup> However, intellectual histories of both Lefebvre and Althusser have largely ignored or give fleeting attention to the parallels in the works and lives of these two communist philosophers, and indeed their letter correspondences.<sup>44</sup> In what follows, I develop the affinities between these two thinkers' lives and work by

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<sup>42</sup> Bob Jessop, 'Institutional re(turns) and the strategic - relational approach,' *Environment and Planning A*, 33, (2001), 1213 - 1235

<sup>43</sup> Kruzweil, Edith. *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault*. Transaction Publishers: New Jersey. 1996.

<sup>44</sup> William Lewis mentions Lefebvre very briefly in Williams Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005). While Warren Montag does not mention Lefebvre at all in Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2013).



looking specifically at the intellectual links that existed in their readings of Marx and Lenin while working within the same political institutions at different moments. Debates around the end of philosophy in Marx developed on the pages of the PCF's flagship theoretical journal *Le Nouvelle Critique* (NC, 1948 – 80). The writings of Lefebvre and Althusser that appeared in *NC* between the fifties and sixties had a profound influence on the direction of theoretical debates within the Party. It was through this shared intellectual forum that Althusser became acquainted with the initial set of debates that fed into Lefebvre's formulation of the end of philosophy in Marx and which he would take forward in his own engagement with this question.

Work has been done on both the theoretical and biographical confluences of the work and lives of Althusser and Derrida.<sup>45</sup> Yet little attention has been paid to the overlapping political engagements of Althusser and Derrida within the ENS, and how this shaped their writing and teaching of this period. Significant in this respect, is Derrida's 1975-76 *agrégation* seminars *Theory and Practice* which he delivered at the ENS and which were framed by the broader political aims of GREPH. In the seminars Derrida offers a sustained engagement with Althusser's body of work using the end of philosophy motif in Marx as a framework. Close reading of these lectures provides a unique insight into Derrida's relationship to the Marxist and Marxian corpus and offers a corrective to accounts that claim Derrida's sole encounter with Marx was in his late *Specters of Marx* (1993).<sup>46</sup> They also offer a deeper understanding of a number of conceptual references that run through *Specters* and show that the end of philosophy motif in Marx was a long held preoccupation for Derrida. There is also a shortage of critical commentary over the role of Maurice Blanchot's work in *Specters*, and no attention at all has been given to the place of his essay 'The End of Philosophy' (1959) which appears prominently in the text. In the last chapter of this thesis I will explore the salience of this essay which explicitly thematises the life and work of Lefebvre around the end of philosophy problem in Marx.

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<sup>45</sup> For example see Étienne Balibar, 'Eschatology versus Teleology: The Suspended Dialogue between Derrida and Althusser,' Eds Pheng Cheah & Suzanne Guerlec, *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, (California: Duke University Press, 2009) and Benoît Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*. (London: Polity Press, 2014).

<sup>46</sup> The myth of Derrida's belated engagement with Marx was instilled by Michael Sprinker's framing of the 1993 conference and would be taken up by respondents in the 1999 symposium *Ghostly Demarcations*. See Michael Sprinker, *Ghostly Demarcations A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, (London: Verso, 1999).

## 1.2 The End of Philosophy in Marx

In this section, I will summarise the theoretical, textual and political provenance of the conceptual framework I will be using to interrogate the works of Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida. The phrase ‘the end of philosophy’ itself operates at a number of overlapping levels in this thesis and is used interchangeably with the phrase ‘the death of philosophy’, notwithstanding the historical peculiarity of the latter expression. While the phrase ‘the death of philosophy’ is regularly used as a stand-in to designate the end of philosophy motif in Marx,<sup>47</sup> it also takes on peculiar inflections at different historical moments. One trajectory comes out of Benedetto Croce’s 1905 text *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel* in which the Italian idealist philosopher appraised the salience of Hegelian philosophy on the basis of the aspects which were germane to the (living) present and those which were outmoded and irrelevant (dead).<sup>48</sup> These were terms that also had significance within Hegelian thought itself; Hegel used them to discriminate between thought determinations that were finite and abstract and dialectical thought that caught the concrete in its living aspect.<sup>49</sup> This dividing of a theoretical corpus on the basis of living and dead elements was then revived to distinguish – in the use of Marxian concepts, methods and vocabulary – dogmatic adherence to doctrinal interpretation and the application of concepts and methods to a concrete reality. This sense was advanced by Lenin in his *Letters on Tactics* (1917) where he made the distinction between “a living Marxism” that based its conclusions on an analysis of living reality and a Marxism based on the “dead letter” of “formulas senselessly learned by rote.”<sup>50</sup> This distinction would then be skewed by Stalin in his

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<sup>47</sup> Althusser will use the phrase ‘the death of philosophy’ interchangeably with ‘the end of philosophy’ in his introduction to *For Marx*. Althusser, *For Marx*, 28 – 29.

<sup>48</sup> Croce, Benedetto. *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*. Russell & Russell: New York. 1915. The title of Croce’s text would be reprised in 1993 by the organisers of the conference at which Derrida would present *Specters of Marx*: “What is living and what is dead in Marxism” in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, (New York, London: Routledge, 1994), ix.

<sup>49</sup> “Accordingly, logic was defined as the science of pure thought – the science that has pure knowledge for its principle and is a unity which is not abstract but living and concrete... not abstract, dead and inert, but concrete.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

<sup>50</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Volume 24 April – June 1917*, (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1964), 43. This distinction contained certain echoes of Lenin’s commentary on Hegel’s dialectic which he described as

*Foundations of Leninism* (1924) where living revolutionary thought was specified as that which affirmed the practice of self-criticism.<sup>51</sup> This version would then be levelled at theoretical works that deviated from the Stalinist orthodoxy during the Cold War and instrumentalised by Communist Parties to force intellectuals who did not follow the line to submit their writing to self-criticism. Lefebvre recounts facing such tactics in the French context where he was told during the Stalinist period: “‘Dead Marxism, that is you!’ Stalin was ‘the living Marxism, the creator.’”<sup>52</sup> Another version of the phrase ‘the death of Marxism’ developed in the post-war French context as a pejorative designation for the irredeemable status of Marxism given its totalitarian associations.<sup>53</sup>

In this thesis, the phrase ‘the end of philosophy’, will refer, on one level, to specific claims Marx and Engels made in their writing about philosophy and its end. Within his body of work, Marx ascribed to the domain of philosophy as such and German Idealism specifically a number of functions and meanings. Indeed, the contexts in which he engaged with philosophy, either within its discursive register or as an object of inquiry, spanned a range of problematics. These engagements corresponded to a specific set of intellectual, political and methodological ambitions and comprised distinct sets of disciplinary reference points at given moments in his scholarly and political career. At certain moments Marx would transpose a given critique of philosophy into different contexts for particular ends – as when his critique of Hegelian philosophy becomes a foil for his methodological supersession of political economy in the *1857 Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.<sup>54</sup> At other moments he would re-inscribe something like an idealist dialectical movement in his “method of presentation”<sup>55</sup> – the question of the historical emergence of exchange value in relation to Marx’s presentation in *Capital* is a case in point, where exchange value seems to arise dialectically as the transcendental

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“living, many-sided knowledge (with the number of sides eternally increasing), with an infinite number of shades of every approach and approximation to reality.” V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Volume 38 Philosophical Notebooks*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1961), 360.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 11 –18.

<sup>52</sup> Henri Lefebvre, ‘Marxism Exploded’, *Review IV*, 1, (1980), 20.

<sup>53</sup> The archetypal case was Benoist, *Marx est Mort*.

<sup>54</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 84 – 111

<sup>55</sup> ‘Afterword to the Second German Edition (Marx 1873)’ Marx, *Capital*, 12.

mediator of the contradiction between the quality and measure of a product.<sup>56</sup> On yet other occasions, Marx would renounce altogether his intellectual fidelity to the “conceit of philosophy”<sup>57</sup> that considered itself foundational to all other knowledges – here the standard reference is to the eleventh of his theses on Feuerbach as it appears in the *German Ideology*.

No less discontinuous and shaped by the problematics in which he was writing was the motif of the end of philosophy that appeared at various moments in his writing. In the following I will briefly outline at least four distinct formulations of the end of philosophy that appear in Marx and Engels’ writing that will form the textual reference for the hermeneutic legacy I will be dealing with. I will go on to trace the development of Marxist interpretations of these motifs during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The first end of philosophy motifs appears in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1843 – 4) and is later reformulated in a slightly different context in the *Paris Manuscripts*, also known as the, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.<sup>58</sup> In Marx’s *Critique*, the German proletariat is presented as the negating force of the bourgeois world. On the basis of its universal suffering and social power, it is conferred the historical task of overthrowing the present state of things. This it is to do as a material fulfilment of history’s intrinsic dialectical movement as laid-down, albeit only speculatively, by Hegelian philosophy. To that effect, Marx concludes:

As philosophy finds its *material* weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapon in philosophy. And once the lightning of thought has squarely struck this ingenuous soil of the people, the emancipation of the *Germans* into *human beings* will be accomplished... The *emancipation of the German* is the *emancipation of the human being*. The *head* of this emancipation is *philosophy*, its *heart* the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot realize itself without the

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<sup>56</sup> See Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> J. Moufawad-Paul, *Demarcation and Demystification Philosophy and Its Limits*, (Hampshire, Zero Books, 2019), 19

<sup>58</sup> The conceptual demands to which this end of philosophy was a response are pre-figured as far back as Marx’s 1841 dissertation thesis *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. For a full account of Marx’s broader trajectory toward this point see Strathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution From Kant to Marx*, (London: Verso, 2018), 238 – 332.

transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of philosophy.<sup>59</sup>

This particular formulation of the end of philosophy is the main reference for what has been termed elsewhere the ‘realisation’ thesis.<sup>60</sup> The idea here is that the aspirations of Hegelian philosophy to deliver consciousness from estrangement – to dis-alienate man by ascending dialectically to a rational thought that aligns with the essence of reality rather than a normative judgement – is an end that can be realised only as and by a real force in the world. Only a social force such as the one embodied by the desire for social change intrinsic to the historical condition of the proletariat would alleviate the *real* conditions of estrangement that precede the estrangement of consciousness.<sup>61</sup> Such a real force would thereby transcend the limits of Hegelian philosophy that is only able to conceive of this dis-alienation in the form of advancing and increasing conceptual adequacy but not according to a transformation of the material conditions that generate alienation as such.

Yet, in the so-called ‘realisation thesis’, Marx does not suggest abandoning philosophy as a reference point for thinking about emancipation from alienation. Rather he alludes to the coincidence of philosophy’s ambition, to construct a non-normative concept which is adequate to what is, on the one hand, and the realisation of the destiny of the proletariat, on the other. The encounter is given in the form “of the mutual ‘abolition’ of the two protagonists.”<sup>62</sup> Marx therefore welds the enterprise of philosophy to the fate of the proletariat by conferring upon the latter a set of properties that draw their significance from the former.

It is in this sense that Marx also argues that the “weapon of criticism”<sup>63</sup> plays a

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<sup>59</sup> Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 3 Karl Marx March 1843 – August 1844*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 187

<sup>60</sup> Adam Freenberg formulates early Lukács’ Marxism in terms of ‘The Realization of Philosophy’ in Andrew Freenberg, *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School*, (London: Verso, 2014). In his 1955 lecture on Lukács, Lefebvre situates Lukács’ *History and Class Consciousness* within the framework of Marx’s realisation thesis. He again refers to the realisation thesis in his *Metaphilosophy* (1965). Althusser also enumerates this end of philosophy in his introduction of *For Marx* (1965).

<sup>61</sup> Lucio Colletti shows that beginning in his *Critique*, Marx specifies not only that Hegel’s philosophy was ‘upside-down’ by making mind primary, but in addition that abstractions had taken root within the concrete reality that Hegel’s philosophy attempted to reflect in Lucio Colletti ‘Introduction by Lucio Colletti’, Karl Marx. *Early Writings*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 32–3.

<sup>62</sup> Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution From Kant to Marx*, 332.

<sup>63</sup> Marx & Engels, *Collected Vol. 3*, 182

supplementary role to that material force necessary to the realisation of philosophy. Marx here insists that philosophy is in fact a material force – a sentiment that goes back to an article published a year before in which he claimed: “Philosophy does not exist outside the world, any more than the brain exists outside man because it is not situated in the stomach. But philosophy, of course, exists in the world through the brain before it stands with its feet on the ground.”<sup>64</sup> Even if philosophy professes understandings of the world that ascribes a transcendental status to thought, it occupies minds that exist in the real world. And, insofar as it retains a real existence, alongside its ideal one, it does not disappear by a simple refusal or by “muttering a few trite and angry phrases about it.”<sup>65</sup> In that sense philosophy cannot be abolished without making that abolition a reality. Accordingly, the supersession pursued within philosophy is necessary to, even if ultimately dependent upon, the proletariat.

The second end of philosophy is the one we encounter in the eleventh of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*. These short aphoristic sentences were composed in the spring of 1845 and later published by Engels in his 1888 *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, where the text was first given its title prior to its inclusion in the *German Ideology*, first published in 1932. Given this peculiar publication history,<sup>66</sup> and the aphoristic quality of all eleven theses, it is difficult to extract a univocal meaning from the eleventh thesis, either from the text alone or its context. The common understanding of the eleventh thesis is that it simply advances an imperative to change the world in actions over mere discursive interpretation. Beyond this, one might infer from the association Marx makes between the limitations of philosophical interpretation and the affirmation of change, that Marx is also putting forward a claim about his own position in contrast to what philosophers have done so far – that is, his own position exceeds the limits of mere interpretation. Read as a continuation of the thrust of the realisation thesis, the eleventh thesis can scan as an injunction for political revolution – one with which Marx affiliated his own position – by contrast with a revolution in philosophy alone.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Rheinische Zeitung No. 191, July 10, 1842, Supplement’, *ibid*, 184

<sup>65</sup> ‘*Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*’, *ibid*, 180

<sup>66</sup> See Terrell Carver & Daniel Blank, *A Political History of the Editions of Marx and Engels’s “German Ideology Manuscripts”*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

The *Theses* would be invested with a somewhat different semantic charge by a number of periodisations appearing in Marx and Engels's later prefatory remarks. In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx would say that his and Engel's intention "in the spring of 1845" was "to set forth together our conception as opposed to the ideological one of German philosophy, in fact to settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience." This is one of the few definitive periodising indications that Marx gives of his position regarding philosophy following the manuscripts from which the *German Ideology* would be culled. It is one that retroactively ties the content of eleventh thesis, as regards its inference of having established a position beyond philosophy, to the content of his mature critique of political economy. It therefore implicitly marked a discontinuity with the realisation thesis. The status of the 1845 manuscripts is inflected somewhat differently later in the same text. Marx says: "We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose – self-clarification."<sup>67</sup> In other words, the texts comprising the *German Ideology* did not record a definitive settling of accounts with post-Hegelian philosophy but had the merit of allowing Marx and Engels to work out how to move beyond philosophy even if the results of this clarification would be demonstrated elsewhere.

Some forty years after the *Theses* were drafted, Engels would consecrate the legacy of the eleventh thesis for a generation of Marxist commentators in his foreword to *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888). There, Engels explained that the purpose of the text was precisely to carry out the work that had been left unfinished in the *German Ideology* – that is, to produce "a short, coherent account of our relation to the Hegelian philosophy, of how we proceeded, as well as of how we separated, from it". Reflecting on the status of the 1845 manuscripts in the light of this ambition he says:

I have once again ferreted out and looked over the old manuscript of 1845–46 [*The German Ideology*].

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<sup>67</sup> 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works in three volumes Volume One*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 505

The section dealing with Feuerbach is not completed. The finished portion consists of an exposition of the materialist conception of history which proves only how incomplete our knowledge of economic history still was at that time. It contains no criticism of Feuerbach's doctrine itself; for the present purposes, therefore, it was unusable. On the other hand, in an old notebook of Marx's I have found the 11 Theses on Feuerbach, printed here as an appendix.

These are notes hurriedly scribbled down for later elaboration, absolutely not intended for publication, but invaluable as the first document in which is deposited the brilliant germ of the new world outlook.<sup>68</sup>

The philological significance that Engels attached to the *Theses on Feuerbach* not only reinforced the idea that the *Theses* recorded a significant threshold as regards the division between Marx and Engels's philosophical conscience and the new world outlook of a materialist conception of history (as he would go on to elucidate in the final chapter); it also framed the significance of this new world outlook in terms of an 'end of classical German philosophy'.

At the close of the text, Engels claimed that Marx's "conception [of history] puts an end to philosophy in the realm of history, just as the dialectical conception of nature makes all natural philosophy both unnecessary and impossible"<sup>69</sup>. The implication was that Marx's conception of historical development, based upon a scientific investigation of the laws that shape material processes and individual motives, had rendered obsolete a philosophical conception of history. However, Engels placed this conceptual advancement in a line with the philosophical overtaking of materialist philosophy carried out by Hegelian dialectics. In that sense, Engels revised the realisation thesis to some degree. The "German working-class movement" remained the "the inheritor of German classical philosophy". Now, however, this encounter would be composed of the will of the working class to act upon history and a scientific theory that aims to produce an objective account of the interconnected material processes that comprise the movement of history. Engels concludes:

...the more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds the more it finds itself in harmony with the interest and aspirations of the workers. The new tendency, which recognized that the key to the

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<sup>68</sup> Fredrick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical Philosophy*, (London: Union Books, 2009), 1.

<sup>69</sup> Engels, *Feuerbach*, 60 – 61.



understanding of the whole history of society lies in the history of the development of labor, from the outset addressed itself by preference to the working class and here found the response which it neither sought nor expected from officially recognized science.<sup>70</sup>

This reading represents yet another inflection of the eleventh thesis. According to the framework of the opposition between ruminative philosophical interpretation and change, Engels posits a necessary theoretical component to the revolutionary impulse of the proletariat. Unlike the reading of the eleventh thesis that takes at face value the injunction for political struggle over discursive interpretation, Engels's reading confers to theory a supplementary but necessary role in this dynamic.

Engels's revision brings together arguments that Marx put forward about the epistemological superiority of a dialectical and materialist conception of history over philosophy, on the one hand, with earlier arguments he made about the role of the proletariat as the bearer of philosophy's destiny, on the other. Echoes of the former can be traced back to the *German Ideology*, where Marx refers to the inadequacies of philosophy on specifically epistemological grounds:

Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty phrases about consciousness end, and real knowledge has to take their place. When the reality is described, a self-sufficient philosophy [*die selbständige Philosophie*] loses its medium of existence. At the best its place can only be taken by a summing-up of the most general results, abstractions which are derived from the observation of the historical development of men. These abstractions in themselves, divorced from real history, have no value whatsoever.<sup>71</sup>

Here the end of philosophy results from the revelation of philosophy's erroneous departure point (the mind as primary) on the basis of a new departure point (matter as primary). In this formulation, Marx argues that the chief defect of (Hegelian) philosophy is its assumption that the criterion of objectivity is accessible by way of an application of a dialectical method to speculative propositions. In this sense philosophy comes to an end, not according to its own theoretical parameters, but

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<sup>70</sup> 62.

<sup>71</sup> Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 5 Marx and Engels 1945 – 47*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010).

because a sounder theoretical enterprise has proven the limitations of philosophy's epistemological aspirations. But in Engels's elucidation of this theoretical advancement, the proletariat, whose historical destiny continues to derive from and correspond to the realisation of philosophy, is assisted in its mission by a theoretical enterprise that has in fact outstripped philosophy.

The last formulation of the end of philosophy that is of relevance to this thesis is one in which Engels appears to assign philosophy a posthumous vocation. In *On Dialectics* (1878) and *Dialectics of Nature* (1883), philosophy is described as returning to life for the sole purpose of exacting revenge over the natural sciences "posthumously" for the "latter having deserted it." In *On Dialectics*, Engels registered that the desertion of Hegel in favour of positivistic natural science reflected the epistemological exigencies of a socio-economic reality more than a genuine theoretical development. As such, "dialectics too was thrown overboard...and so there was a helpless relapse into the old metaphysics"<sup>72</sup> in scientific theoretical discourses. With this turn, long-refuted philosophical reflexes and abstractions returned in new theoretical guises – especially as regards the conceptual ordering of results furnished by empirical science.<sup>73</sup> Engels would make the point most vividly in *Dialectics of Nature*:

Natural scientists believe that they free themselves from philosophy by ignoring it or abusing it. They cannot, however, make any headway without thought, and for thought they need thought determinations. But they take these categories unreflectingly.... from uncritical and unsystematic reading of philosophical writings of all kinds. Hence they are no less in bondage to philosophy but unfortunately in most cases to the worst philosophy, and those who abuse philosophy most are slaves to precisely the worst vulgarized relics of the worst philosophies... they are still under the domination of philosophy. It is only a question whether they want to be dominated by a bad, fashionable philosophy or by a form of theoretical thought which rests on acquaintance with the history of thought and its achievements.<sup>74</sup>

For Engels the only way of countering such philosophical impulses from diminishing the genuine achievements of positive knowledge was to "return, in one form or

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<sup>72</sup> 'Old Preface to *Anti-Dühring On Dialectics*' in Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1959), 456.

<sup>73</sup> Helena Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science A Critical History The First Hundred Years*, (London Verso: London, 2017), 43.

<sup>74</sup> Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1934), 210.

another, from metaphysical to dialectical thinking.”<sup>75</sup> This, Engels claimed, was the objective of *Capital*, wherein Marx applied the dialectical method “to the facts of an empirical science, political economy.”<sup>76</sup>

For Engels, therefore, all that survived of philosophy’s previous incarnation was its unique capacity to assist the conceptual arrangement and development of scientific understanding. According to the Engels of *Anti-Dühring* (1877), what remained of philosophy in Marx was a “science of thought and its laws – formal logic and dialectics.”<sup>77</sup> Marx echoed this sentiment in his postface to the Second Edition (1873) of *Capital, Vol 1*. where, against his contemporaries who treated Hegel as a “dead dog”, he avowed the direct inheritance of the latter’s dialectical method. In *Capital*, Marx admitted, one finds a rational application of the dialectical method in the presentation of scientific material. The dialectic, Marx added, “does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary”<sup>78</sup>; for that reason, it served the purpose of lifting conclusions made within bourgeois science out of their state of abstraction. In this light, the afterlife of Hegelian philosophy appeared in the persistence of the negative as a critical heuristic in Marx’s treatment of one-sided thought determinations in bourgeois political economy. But the precise nature of the relationship between Marx and Hegel’s dialectical method was never explicitly dealt with by Marx. Even while he acknowledged taking cues from Hegel’s *Logic* while drafting the *Grundrisse* (1857-8) and engaged directly, if very briefly, with the question of his method in the notes that make up the introduction to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1857-58)<sup>79</sup>, Marx never managed to write those “2 or 3 sheets” that were intended to make “accessible to the common reader the *rational* aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified.”<sup>80</sup> On that basis, the writings of Engels dealing with this question in a more sustained manner would become an influential stand-in for interpreters of the following generation.

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<sup>75</sup> Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 457.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 460.

<sup>77</sup> 40.

<sup>78</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 102.

<sup>79</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 81 – 109.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Marx to Engels in Manchester 16 January 1858’ in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works Volume 40 Letters 1856 – 59*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 249.

This is not an exhaustive account of the end of philosophy motif in Marx and Engels but serves to present the main threads of their thinking which will form the textual basis of the distinct formulations of the end of philosophy problematic that appear in the work of Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida. The late twentieth and early twenty-first century has seen no shortage of intellectual efforts to reconstruct a unifying logic from Marx's theoretical corpus against the ideological misgivings of the 'tradition'.<sup>81</sup> Many of these undertakings presume themselves correctives to faulty readings of the Marxian corpus,<sup>82</sup> insist on a separation between the thought of Marx and the posthumous commentary of Engels,<sup>83</sup> or take for granted the epistemological standing of the mature works over the early writings. My concern, however, is to do with the development of interpretative norms that evolved in step with how the Marxian corpus gradually spread across the world. This means I am concerned with the distinct socio-political and epistemological contexts that shaped its gradual reception and adoption by self-described political organs of the working-class movement.

The other dimension of the phrase 'end of philosophy' that will play an important role in the formulations of my three thinkers, involves the interpretative accounts of Marx and Engels's writing that immediately followed their deaths. Tracing this history will allow me to parse out the theoretical makeup of the so-called Marxist orthodoxy that would inspire early critical efforts to problematise the end of philosophy motif in Marx. The subsequent dismissal of these interrogations by leading thinkers of the Third International and the ideological coding of writers associated with them would form the basis of efforts such as Lefebvre's to contest the philistinism of Stalinism in the post-war French context. The purpose of drawing on this longer pre-history is to show that the problem field and the conceptual vocabulary that I trace are not purely

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<sup>81</sup> Notable examples: Patrick Murray, *Marx's Theory of Scientific Knowledge*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988), Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Roberto Finelli, *A Failed Parricide Hegel and the Young Marx*. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), Arthur, *The new dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), Eds Fred Moseley & Tony Smith, *Marx's Capital and Hegel's Logic: A Reexamination*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015).

<sup>82</sup> In 1962, Mario Tronti would speak of a "Marxian purification of Marxism" against a prevalence of vulgarisers in Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital*. London: Verso, 2019), 9.

<sup>83</sup> Especially in the "Neue Marx-Lektüre" ("new reading of Marx") school and the role played by Hans-Georg Backhaus. See Ingo Elbe, 'Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms - Ways of Reading Marx's Theory' *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 21 2013. Available at: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2013/10/21/between-marx-marxism-and-marxisms-ways-of-reading-marxs-theory> [Accessed 23 July 2020].

provincial idiosyncrasies of the post-war French context but are partly inherited from the broader international sweep of the history of Marxist thought and practice.

By the turn of the century, Marxism had survived the crisis of the First International (1864-1876) as the dominant ideology of the working-class movement. A new generation of Marxists faced an unprecedented reality: political parties affiliated with Marxist theory were gaining mass support and a new International purified of its non-Marxist elements was on the horizon. This formed the new terrain out of which interpretations, commentaries and applications of Marx's thought developed.<sup>84</sup> The emergence of the Second International (1889-1914) as a really existing international federation of social democratic parties bound by socialist aspirations and as a dispersed network of intellectuals who together – in spite of their theoretical differences – established an enduring framework for reading and understanding Marxism on the basis of an incomplete corpus.<sup>85</sup> Certain critics of the period would go on to describe the sustained afterlife of the interpretative norms that developed in this period as the 'orthodoxy'.<sup>86</sup>

While the Second International was riven by practical questions concerning political strategy and analytic differences around interpretations of a capitalistic economy,<sup>87</sup> the main thinkers of the organisation attached less significance to philosophical divisions. Karl Korsch was among the first Marxist thinkers to raise a polemic against the philosophical incoherence of the orthodoxy according to the conceptual

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<sup>84</sup> Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*, 67-69.

<sup>85</sup> Leszek Kolakowski notes that "After Engels's death the German socialists published many of Marx's works that were not previously known – such as *The Theory of Surplus Value*, part of *The German Ideology*, correspondence with Engels and others, and the doctoral dissertation – but other texts of great philosophical value remained unpublished, for instance the Paris Manuscripts of 1844, the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and the *Grundrisse*." In Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution. Volume II The Golden Age*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Althusser would famously explain the Stalinist deviation from Leninism as "*a form ... of the posthumous revenge of the Second International: as a revival of its main tendency*", that of economism and therefore humanism. In 'Reply to John Lewis (Self-Criticism)' in Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 89.

<sup>87</sup> Eduard Bernstein's revisions of some of the central tenets of Marx's critique of political economy was the catalyst for a series of debates between 1896-1898 around the accuracy of Marx's characterisation of the capitalist economy. The so-called 'Revisionist Debate' culminated in 1898 at the Stuttgart Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), where the German wing of the Second International (including Rosa Luxemburg, August Bebel, Clara Zetkin, Alexander Parvus, Karl Liebknecht and Kautsky) issued sharp rebukes against the reformist conclusions drawn by Bernstein from his economist correctives of Marx. Criticism of Bernstein's revisionism also came from non-German affiliates of the Second International including Antonio Labriola, Jean Jaurès, Georgi Plekhanov and Lenin. See Ed(s) H. Tudor & J.M. Tudor, *Marxism and Social Democracy The Revisionist Debate 1896 - 1898*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

framework of the end of philosophy in his *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923).<sup>88</sup> There, and in his addendum to the text, *The Present State of the Problem of 'Marxism and Philosophy'* (1930), Korsch described the interpretative norms that had hardened around the question of philosophy in Marxism within and outside the Second International. These norms, which had distinct theoretical constituencies – mainly of the neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian variety – corresponded to a front that had discreetly formed around the question of the specificity of Marx's philosophy, resulting in the end, as in the terminus point, of philosophical development. He counselled against the pervasive philosophical eclecticism characterising the Second International:

Any thorough elucidation of the relationship between 'Marxism and philosophy' must start from the unambiguous statements of Marx and Engels themselves that a necessary result of their dialectical-materialist standpoint was the supersession, not only of bourgeois idealist philosophy, but *simultaneously* of all philosophy *as such*.<sup>89</sup>

In Korsch's view, the lack of attention paid to these statements reflected the continued hold of bourgeois conceptions of philosophy over the intended practical purchase of Marx's philosophical intervention. Such conceptions obscured from view the central problems for Marxist philosophy:

The problem is...how we should understand the abolition of philosophy of which Marx and Engels spoke – mainly in the 1840s, but on many later occasions as well. *How* should this process be accomplished, or has it already been accomplished...Should this abolition of philosophy be regarded as accomplished so to speak once and for all by a single intellectual deed of Marx and Engels? Should it be regarded as accomplished only for Marxists, or for the whole proletariat, or for the whole of humanity...what is the relationship of Marxism to philosophy so long as this arduous process has not yet attained its final goal, the abolition of philosophy?<sup>90</sup>

In Korsch's view, the philosophical inertia that led to a revival of pre-Marxist philosophical positions to supplement a Marxist position in politics was a reflection

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<sup>88</sup> Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, (London: Verso, 2012), 49/51-52.

<sup>89</sup> Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

and a reinforcement of the limits reached in the course of the concrete historical development of bourgeois society. In his elaboration of the makeup of this front, he argued that most of the major thinkers associated with the Second International had resolved that philosophical questions were unimportant in view of the new political reality that faced Marxist thought: Marxist ideology had found favour with the masses. In Korsch's assessment, if the orthodoxy did not uphold this tolerant indifference to philosophical questions, thinkers of the Second International accepted that Marxism was a coherent scientific system that surpassed the explanatory power of philosophy as such, that it consisted of a fully-fledged philosophical doctrine embracing all philosophical questions or that it was a theoretical discourse that required philosophical supplementation from another metaphysical system. All these cases represented a general philosophical blockage that had its counterpart in the forestalling of a truly revolutionary social practice.

Following the Marx of the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Korsch insisted on the necessity of grasping "philosophies and other ideological systems in theory as realities, and to treat them in practice as such."<sup>91</sup> This meant neither rejecting ideological systems in favour of pure science or political praxis shorn of theoretical principal, nor reverting to prior bourgeois philosophy systems. Instead, it meant linking philosophical inquiry to the requisites of revolutionary practice, mindful of the fact that practice is itself encumbered by the reality of ideological systems including philosophy. Korsch, therefore, stressed the dialectical relationship between intellectual activity, social consciousness and social practice as part of the total movement of revolutionary practice. From that perspective Korsch viewed Marx's critique of political economy as a continuation of his critique of ideological realities carried into the system of bourgeois economics. It was thus aimed at demystifying the specific forms of social consciousness corresponding to bourgeois economics in order to usher in the practical disintegration of its ideological hold over reality.

The second of the trajectories of the orthodoxy identified in Korsch's polemic represented an outgrowth of Engels later writings that stressed the relationship

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<sup>91</sup> 72.

between historical materialism and natural history.<sup>92</sup> The major representative of this school was Karl Kautsky. He pursued the scientific and positivistic version of Marxism contrived by Engels, detecting in Marx's conceptualisation of historical development an extension of evolutionist inquiries into the realm of social phenomena and technological development. The resulting theoretical program was a technologically-determinist account of the forces of economic and social transformation. Though his conception of historical transformation certainly bore the mark of a Hegelian dialectic,<sup>93</sup> Kautsky inherited a disregard for the theoretical relevance of philosophy, which in view of political priorities, carried a separate explanatory function than historical materialism.<sup>94</sup> His disregard however did not extend to a firmly held antipathy toward philosophers of particular stripes – hence he published various types of positivists and empirio-critics in *Die Neue Zeit*.<sup>95</sup> Kautsky was of the belief that while “Marx proclaimed no philosophy, but the end of all philosophy” that the philosophical positions taken up by Marxists was their own business which had little bearing on political concerns.<sup>96</sup> This disregard was given sharper expression by other figures of the German wing of the Second International, including Franz Mehring who pushed an anti-philosophy reading of Marx and Engels's avowed break from Classical German Philosophy in a number of authoritative biographical texts. For Mehring “the rejection of all philosophic fantasies” was “the precondition for the masters' (Marx and Engels') immortal accomplishments”<sup>97</sup> which had proven “the fact that all of this philosophy of the past has died and cannot be resurrected again.”<sup>98</sup>

Meanwhile figures of the Austro-Marxist contingency of the Second International such as Rudolph Hilferding and Max Adler were on the forefront of a campaign to graft Kantian philosophy onto Marxist scientific theory. In the preface to his *Finance*

<sup>92</sup> Especially *Anti-Dühring* (1878), *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) and *Dialectics of Nature* (1883)

<sup>93</sup> As compared to Eduard Bernstein who was far more assertive in his acceptance of a neo-Kantian interpretation of Marxism. Bernstein once famously proclaimed “Under this banner – Kant, not Hegel – the working class fights its emancipation today.” His gradualist reformist revisions of Marx's conception of history of explosive development were consistent with his subscription to a Kantian division of reason and ethics. However, Helena Sheehan makes clear that Bernstein's engagement with Kantian philosophy was quite superficial. Sheehan, *Marxism and Philosophy of Science*, 75.

<sup>94</sup> Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism II*, 40 – 43.

<sup>95</sup> See Evald Ilyenkov, *Leninist Dialectics and the Metaphysics of Positivism* (London New Park Publications, 1982).

<sup>96</sup> Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*, 78.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 31.

<sup>98</sup> Franz Mehring, ‘Philosophy and Philosophizing’ (1909) in *Marxist Quarterly*, (April-June 1937), 293-297.



*Capital* (1910), Hilferding made the case that Marxism should be treated as a pure scientific theory, shorn of any normative judgements, applicable exclusively within the field of economics.<sup>99</sup> The implication of this position was that Marxism contained no ready-made solutions to ethical judgments and if they were required, they should be sought elsewhere. Adler, on the other hand, took up the neo-Kantianism of his day but pushed his interpretation of Marx in a somewhat different direction through Hegel. Instead of taking ethics from the Kantian system as many other neo-Kantians had done, Adler took his critique of knowledge and read it through the dialectical method of Hegel, which in his interpretation, Marx had applied to a science of society and thereby completed critical idealism.<sup>100</sup>

Explicitly poised against this revival of Kantian philosophy was Georgi Plekhanov.<sup>101</sup> At the turn of the century he was known as the chief spokesperson of Marxist philosophy of the Russian contingent of the Second International. Like Kautsky, he also popularised a technologically determinist variant of historical materialism heavily inflected by the evolutionary science of the day. Unlike Kautsky, however, Plekhanov insisted that Marxism contained a comprehensive worldview, the conceptual basis of which constituted a complete philosophical system. Plekhanov was the first to advance the claim that Marxism consisted of a philosophical system, dialectical materialism, and an application of that system to social phenomena, historical materialism, which was integral to the philosophical system itself. Plekhanov's formulation of dialectical materialism was also informed by the later writings of Engels. But where Engels had assigned philosophy a limited role in the full scope of Marxist theory, Plekhanov extended the philosophical implications of Marx's new conception of history into a philosophical system. What marked dialectical materialism out from conventional materialism was that it moved beyond the fundamental principle of materialism – that the laws of matter could explain the nature of being – by advancing the claim that dialectical thought derived from the

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<sup>99</sup> "Considered logically, as a scientific system alone, apart, that is, from the viewpoint of its historical affectivity, Marxism is only a theory of the laws of motion of society.... To recognise the validity of Marxism ... is by no means a task for value judgements, let alone a pointer to a practical line of conduct." Quoted in Sheehan, *Marxism and Philosophy of Science*, 89.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 83 – 87.

<sup>101</sup> "Kantianism is not a fighting philosophy, it is not the philosophy of men of action. It is a philosophy of persons who, when all is said and done, stop half way; it is a philosophy of compromise." Georgi Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, (London: Martin Lawrence, 1929), 94.

dialectical properties of matter.<sup>102</sup> Plekhanov was led to understand that Marx's materialist dialectic referred to a hypostatisation of Hegel's speculative dialectic – a conception that had been aided by certain equivocal passages in Marx and Engels where they attempted to distinguish their own use of dialectics from Hegel's.<sup>103</sup>

Plekhanov's philosophical version of Marxism had far-reaching influence in the Russian context, paving the way for Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909) which would serve as the definitive interpretation of Marxist philosophy for the Third International (1919-43). However, prior to Lenin's decisive entry into the fray of philosophical debates he had a far more diplomatic perspective over the role of philosophy in Marxism. In his exchanges with Maxim Gorky, who in 1908 was in exile with Alexander Bogdanov,<sup>104</sup> Lenin took up a conciliatory response to the philosophical eclecticism that then characterised Marxist theory. In view of political exigencies, he observed a tolerant attitude toward positions in Marxist philosophy informed by Ernst Mach's Empirio-Criticism<sup>105</sup>. Lenin's priority during this period was to cohere support around the underground activities of Bolshevik Party in spite of the cooperation that had opened up between the Mensheviks and the Tsarist regime via the newly established pseudo-constitutional Duma. Keen to avoid philosophical differences spilling over into political factionalism, Lenin wrote to Gorky throughout 1908 insisting that the main theoretical organ of the underground activities of the Bolsheviks, *Proletary* (1906-09), must uphold a neutral position as regards these

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<sup>102</sup> 'Translator's Preface to the Second Edition of Engels' Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy' in Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works, Volume 3*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 64-83.

<sup>103</sup> For example in his letter to Kugelmann from 6 March 1868: "my method of development is not Hegelian, since I am a materialist and Hegel is an idealist. Hegel's dialectic is the basic form of all dialectic, but only after it has been stripped of its mystical form, and it is precisely this which distinguishes my method." In Karl Marx, *Letters to Dr. Kugelmann*, (London: Martin Lawrence, 1964), 63. Engels would push the interpretive inflection further toward a materialised dialectic: "Hegel's dialectic is upside down because it is supposed to be the "self-development of thought," of which the dialectic of facts therefore is only a reflection, whereas really the dialectic in our heads is only the reflection of the actual development which is fulfilled in the world of nature and of human history in obedience to dialectical forms." In Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works Volume 49 Engels: 1890 – 92*, (New York: International Publisher, 2001), 285.

<sup>104</sup> A prominent Russian Marxist philosopher of the Machist school which opposed the Marxism of Plekhanov and left wing member of the Bolshevik Party.

<sup>105</sup> Ernst Mach's school of thought returned to the thought of Berkeley and Hume to posit a monism based on experience in order to contest the Kantian concept of a thing-in-itself (the unknown outside of subjective determination) and to ground scientific knowledge against the epistemological category of matter. Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*, 122 – 124.

philosophical disputes.<sup>106</sup> Following the publication of *Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism* (1908)<sup>107</sup> – a text that recorded a seminar involving a number of Machist-Marxists and represented an explicit attempt to constitute a philosophical bloc against the dominance of Plekhanov – an embittered Lenin wrote to Gorky to say:

*Proletary* must remain absolutely neutral towards all our divergencies in philosophy and not give the reader the slightest grounds for associating the Bolsheviks, as a trend, as a tactical line of the revolutionary wing of the Russian Social-Democrats, with empirio-criticism or empirio-monism... We ought to fight over philosophy in such a way that *Proletary* and the Bolsheviks, as a faction of the party, would not be affected by it. And that is quite possible.<sup>108</sup>

In the end, Lenin's willingness to maintain the co-existence of political work and philosophical debate within two separate realms broke down, resulting in the publication of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. From this perspective, the text was as much about pushing the latent factionalism into the open as it was about attending the more general task of demarcating a philosophical position proper to Marx.<sup>109</sup> The shift toward a more explicit politicization of philosophical positions in the name of Marx represented a narrowing of Lenin's broader conception of the "Partisanship [*Partijnost'*] of philosophy"<sup>110</sup>, which up until that point had paradoxically involved a strategic separation of philosophy from politics for political ends.<sup>111</sup>

Both Plekhanov and Lenin's philosophical Marxism would ultimately feed into the version of Marxist philosophy that would appear in Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (1938), which itself would become consecrated as the official version of

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<sup>106</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works Volume 34 Letters: November 1895 – November 1911*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1966), 372 – 396.

<sup>107</sup> Contributions came from Vladimir Bazarov, Alexander Bogdanov, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Jakov Berman, Osip Gelfond, Pavel Yushkevich and Sergey Suvorov.

<sup>108</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Lenin Collected Works Volume 13*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 448-454.

<sup>109</sup> The political side of these events revolved around Lenin's attempt to appease the left-wing of the Bolshevik Party around their position in favour of boycotting the Duma. Many of the Machist were part of this left-wing faction. In the same year as *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was published, Lenin engineered the expulsion of Bogdanov from the Bolshevik Central Committee. This resulted in the departure of Bogdanov and virtually all of the left Bolsheviks from the faction itself. See K. M. Jensen, *Beyond Marx and Mach Aleksandr Bogdanov's Philosophy of Living Experience*, (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company: Dordrecht, 1978), 1 – 10.

<sup>110</sup> Assen Ignatow translates the Russian term as "party-minded-ness" or "partisanship" in Assen Ignatow, 'The Principle of "Partijnost" and the Development of Soviet Philosophy,' *Studies in Soviet Thought* 36, No. 1/2 (Jul. - Aug., 1988), 63-78. While K.M. Jensen translates the term as "partyness" in Jensen, *Beyond Marx and Mach*, 5.

<sup>111</sup> 'Lenin and the Partyness of Philosophy' in David Joravsky, *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science: 1917-1932*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 24 – 47.

Marxist philosophy and science ratified by the Soviet state. Plekhanov's materialised dialectic would form the basis of Stalin's philosophical system, while Lenin's 'partyiness of philosophy' would be mobilised as a pretext to subordinate all intellectual activities which strayed from official Marxism or the political priorities of the Party. The course of the politicization of the field of philosophy would reach its extremes in the cultural policy advanced by the Central Committee Secretary and Commissar of Culture Andrei Zhdanov in the mid-forties. Zhdanov's famous speech at the Central Committee in 1946 on the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* resolved that literary authors who did not subordinate their creative ambitions to the interests of party work would be rectified by the Soviet state. In the speech, Zhdanov extrapolated from the proposals put forward by Lenin in *Party Organisation and Party Literature* (1905). In the context, Lenin's culturally conservative position over the political function of literature had been formed in the wake of the quashed Russian revolution of 1905 where the ideological work of the Bolshevik Party had been severely censured in Russia and elsewhere. In Zhdanov's speech, Lenin's words were run together with Stalin's famous pronouncement that "writers are the engineers of the human soul"<sup>112</sup> to form a continuous line on cultural policy that had been passed down by the masters. This papered over the highly contingent geopolitical confrontation that led Zhdanov to claim the existence of two hostile camps with two fundamentally opposing ideological ambitions on the world stage.<sup>113</sup> In Zhdanov's conception of the two hostile camps there was: the West, with its decadent bourgeois culture, the products of which perpetuated imperialist domination in the ideological field; and the Soviet Republic, with its disciplined proletarian culture, the products of which promoted the material, cultural and moral superiority of Soviet society. In this schema, it was incumbent upon cultural producers to choose a side in the ideological struggle.<sup>114</sup>

Zhdanov supplemented the introduction of these repressive measures over literary works with another speech in 1947 specifically addressing the responsibilities of

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<sup>112</sup> Taken from his 1932 speech at the home of Maxim Gorky in J.V. Stalin, *Works Volume 13 July 1930 - January 1934*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 415.

<sup>113</sup> It had been the introduction of the Truman Doctrine in early 1947 that had catalysed Zhdanov's propaganda campaign.

<sup>114</sup> Taken from published version (1947) of 'Report on the Journals "Zvenda" and "Leningrad"' in A. A. Zhdanov, *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1950), 19 - 52.

philosophers. There, Zhdanov re-capitulated Stalin's interpretation of Marxist philosophy using the interpretive framework of the end of philosophy to justify further repressive measures: "The discovery of Marx and Engels represents the end of the old philosophy, i.e., the end of that philosophy which claimed to give a universal explanation of the world" and constitutes "a completely new period in the history of philosophy – philosophy which for the first time has become science."<sup>115</sup> This supplanting of old philosophical systematising in the form of speculative explanation with a new era of philosophical systematising in the form of scientific explanation justified a rejection of all philosophy deemed to be of the former type. This gave Zhdanov cause to declare the question of Hegel's role in Marxism settled long ago; there remained "no reason whatsoever to pose it anew."<sup>116</sup> Zhdanov resolved that instead of individual philosophers expending energy on questions deriving from old philosophy, what was necessary was the formation of a philosophical front comprising "an organised detachment of militant philosophers, perfectly equipped with Marxist theory, waging a determined offensive against hostile ideology abroad and against the survivals of bourgeois ideology in the consciousness of Soviet people within our country." The primary responsibility of this front was to lead the struggle in the ideological field by disseminating and defending the unimpeachable position of Marxism-Leninism (in the Stalinist mould) in the realm of philosophy. Beyond this, it was charged with providing scientific grounds to the "correctness" of the path taken by the Communists and the "ultimate victory of [their] cause."<sup>117</sup>

Zhdanovism would go on to profoundly shape the intellectual culture of political parties affiliated with the Communist International, none more so than in the French context where debates around Marxist philosophy within the French Communist Party were thoroughly marked by the influence of Soviet cultural policy.<sup>118</sup> The Party's firm adherence to Zhdanovist diktat in 1947 was spurned by two domestic events: the integration of France into a Western bloc against its Soviet alliance, signalled by the French government's decision to give up its claim on the Ruhr and informally enter

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<sup>115</sup> 'On Philosophy Speech at a Conference of Soviet Philosophical Workers, 1947' in Zhdanov, *On Literature*, 83.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>117</sup> 103.

<sup>118</sup> "Discipline could go no further in a non-communist country" in David Caute, *Communism and the Intellectuals 1914 – 1960*, (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 55.

into Truman's Marshall Plan,<sup>119</sup> and the expulsion of the PCF from the Tripartite government of the Fourth Republic<sup>120</sup> by the French Prime Minister, Paul Ramadier.<sup>121</sup> On June 1947, Zhdanov's cultural policy was adopted by the PCF at its 11<sup>th</sup> Congress and Laurent Casanova became the leader in charge of intellectuals and culture. In a report prescribing the 'Responsibilities of the Communist Intellectual' Casanova amplified the ideological restrictions over intellectuals and artists. According to the report, the role of the intellectual in the party was:

To espouse all the ideological and political positions of the working class, to defend in all circumstance, and with the utmost determination, all the positions of the Party ... to cultivate in ourselves the love of the Party and the spirit of the Party in its most conscious form, to give the proletariat any additional arguments and justifications that you can.<sup>122</sup>

The following year, the journal *La Nouvelle Critique* was founded, and Jean Kanapa, another Zhdanov loyalist, was appointed its editor-in-chief. In the first seven years of its life, the journal became the theoretical mouthpiece of Soviet orthodoxy and Kanapa was charged with vetting the ideological consistency of its content. It is within this context that I begin to trace the trajectory of the end of philosophy problematic as it develops from Lefebvre's embattled attempts to reconfigure conceptions of philosophy in Marx under the constraints of Zhdanovist repression within the PCF.

The end of philosophy had already become an explicitly acknowledged interpretive problem in readings of Marx, especially those committed to a critique of the legacy of 'official' interpretations, following the decline of the Second International and in the midst of the consolidation of the Third International. It emerged when a number of philosophers from across Europe, studied in Hegel, either through sustained direct engagement or through the work of interpretive mediators, found their way toward

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<sup>119</sup> The Marshall Plan, otherwise known as the European Recovery Programme, was America's provision of economic assistance to European countries after the war to support infrastructural modernisation domestically and continentally. Harry Truman's Secretary of State, George Marshall, put forward the offer to European countries on 5 June 1947. In the context of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan was guided from the outset by American foreign policy against Soviet expansion and toward Western integration.

<sup>120</sup> The post-war French government was formed from a coalition between the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO), Popular Republican Movement and Communists.

<sup>121</sup> Adereth, *The French Communist Party*, 144 - 145.

<sup>122</sup> Cyrille Guiat, *The French and Italian Communist Parties: Comrades and Culture*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 60.

Marx and the Communist Party of their own countries. Arriving at Marx and the Communist movement in this way, they came with an awareness of the motifs of the end that ran through Hegel's body of work; the end of religion, the end of ethical life, the end of art and the end of philosophy itself in absolute knowledge.<sup>123</sup> Of this grouping of dissident Marxists, the most prominent figures were Lefebvre, Korsch, Antonio Gramsci and György Lukács.<sup>124</sup> In each case these thinkers would reintegrate the full scope of the philosophical perspective and ambitions of the Hegelian project into their readings of Marx to get the root of what distinguished his philosophical intervention and in particular the nature of his injunction to end or realise philosophy.<sup>125</sup> In this sense they brought interpretative perspectives over the Marxian corpus that formed around the discontinuity of the motif of the end of philosophy in Marx's writing. This was pitched against the unreflected understandings of the orthodoxy over what Marx had meant by his various formulations of the end of philosophy and in that regard the way philosophy had been 'shoved unceremoniously aside'.<sup>126</sup>

The connection between these figures extends beyond comparable theoretical trajectories. Korsch and Lukács participated in the transnational philological and theoretical discussions surrounding the initial publication of Marx and Engels writings in Carl Grünberg's periodical *Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung* (Archive for the history of socialism and the Workers' Movement). Most of Marx and Engels' writings had been held in the archive of the German Social Democratic Party but it was in the Marx-Engels Institute, founded in June 1922 by the Soviet state, that the complete editions of Marx and Engels' body of work (the 'MEGA' editions) would be published under the stewardship of David Riazanov who had been a student of Grünberg in Vienna. Once Grünberg became the director of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt am Main in 1924,

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<sup>123</sup> See Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, (London: Athlone, 1995).

<sup>124</sup> See Carvel & Blank, *A Political History* and Bud Burkhard, 'The "Revue marxiste" Affair: French Marxism and Communism in Transition Between the Wars,' *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 20, No. 1, (Winter 1994), 141-164 and Bud Burkhard, 'D. B. Rjazanov and the Marx-Engels Institute: Notes toward Further Research,' *Studies in Soviet Thought* 30, No. 1 (Jul., 1985), 39-54.

<sup>125</sup> Two qualifications should be made of this list: Lefebvre was of a slightly younger generation than the others notwithstanding the overlaps in their intellectual and political activity and unlike the others, Gramsci's engagement with Hegel was significantly informed by a slightly earlier generation of Italian Hegelian philosophers including Benedetto Croce, Antonio Croce, Rodolfo Mondolfo and Giovanni Gentile.

<sup>126</sup> Korsch uses Engels description of the way Feuerbach treated Hegel to condemn his contemporaries in their dealing with philosophy in Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 31.

Riazanov established the institution as a partner of the Marx-Engels Institute. The Frankfurt School became a crucial node in the publication project of the MEGA edition. Riazanov used the Institute to photograph the manuscripts from the German Social Democratic Party's archive without removing the originals from Germany and sent the copies to the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow for publication. Grünberg's periodical was an arm of this collaboration and was also where Korsch first published *Marxism and Philosophy* (1925) and Lukács published many early texts. From 1928 onward Riazanov sent a number of packages to the office of *Editions Les Revues* in Paris – a publication house run by a small group of philosophers who were members of the French Communist Party. The packages contained various copies of recent Soviet journals, literary and philosophic publications, and issues of *Arkiv K, Marksa i F. Engel'sa*, the major house periodical of the Marx-Engels Institute. Among the group of philosophers involved in *Editions Les Revues*, was Henri Lefebvre who, with his closest collaborator in the group Norbert Guterman, translated and published the cache of Marxian and Marxist texts that arrived from Moscow in the periodical *Les Revue Marxiste*. Among the material that the *Revue Marxiste* group received from Riazanov were portions of Marx's Third 1844 Manuscript, the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Engels' *On the Dialectic*, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* and *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*.

These figures of the so-called “Western Marxist” camp explicitly contested the orthodoxy according to the framework of the end of philosophy problematic. Here, I am using the term “Western Marxism” in the sense that Korsch initially intended it, which was to mark out a pre-Stalinist left-wing faction within the International. The idiosyncratic development of the meanings ascribed to the term “Western Marxism” is worth briefly recounting here to avoid confusion. In his 1930 ‘The Present State of the Problem of ‘Marxism and Philosophy – An Anti-Critique’ Korsch draws the distinction between the philosophical unity that had formed across the theoretical representatives of the German Social Democratic camp (Kautsky and Bernstein found philosophical concordance beyond their seemingly opposed political perspectives) and Russian or Bolshevik Marxism (the theoretical offshoot of Plakhanovian Marxism consecrated by Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*) and the “works of



Lukács, myself and other ‘Western’ Communists which formed an *antagonistic philosophical tendency within the Communist International* itself.”<sup>127</sup> In 1955 Maurice Merleau-Ponty would reprise Korsch’s account of this episode in a chapter entitled “‘Western’ Marxism” in his *Adventures of the Dialectic*.<sup>128</sup> Here, the term had started to take on a unilaterally anti-Soviet inflection which was not there in the original. Later, the label would gradually lose its historical specificity, becoming a blanket term for the peculiar characteristics of European and American Marxist thought confronted with the post-Stalinist malaise; Perry Anderson’s 1976 *Considerations on Western Marxism* is the canonical case here.<sup>129</sup> The conjunctural designation of this antagonism is detached from its historical mooring entirely in Harry Harootunian’s ‘Deprovincialising Marxism’ where the reference is to Merleau-Ponty but the term is used pejoratively to describe the fact that a theoretical trajectory reflecting a Western geopolitical reality came to dominate Marxist theory as such in the late twentieth century thereby overshadowing all non-Western (in the geographical sense) variations.<sup>130</sup> Bearing in mind this distinction, therefore, I am positing a preoccupation with the end of philosophy motif in Marx as a feature peculiar to pre-Stalinist Western Marxism.

In his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) Lukács problematized and re-instantiated Marx and Engel’s realization thesis.<sup>131</sup> His book raised deeper questions concerning Marx’s relationship with the philosophical tradition and on that basis probed the connection between the proletariat, philosophy and its realization.<sup>132</sup> The resultant inquiry offered a profoundly revised account of the end of philosophy in Marx by linking together insights from Marx’s *Critique of the Philosophy of Right*, contemporaneous theories of reification,<sup>133</sup> the Hegelian conception of totality and an elucidation of the material and social abstractions described in *Capital*. In Lukács’s version of the end of philosophy, the discrete reified practices constitutive of the

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<sup>127</sup> Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 119.

<sup>128</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, (London: Heinmann, 1974), 30 – 59.

<sup>129</sup> Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, (London: Verso, 1976).

<sup>130</sup> Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 1 - 21

<sup>131</sup> “The author of these pages...believes that today it is of *practical* importance to return in this respect to the traditions of Marx-interpretation founded by Engels (who regarded the ‘German workers’ movement as the ‘heir to classical German philosophy’)”. From ‘Preface (1922)’ in Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, (London: Merlin Press, 1990), xlv.

<sup>132</sup> Freenberg, *The Philosophy of Praxis*, 91 – 121

<sup>133</sup> Especially Max Weber’s *Economy and Society* (1922) and Georg Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money* (1900).

totality of capitalist social relations, and by extension the antinomies of philosophy, (i.e. the gulf between subject and object, freedom and necessity, value and fact etc.) were to be overcome in the coincidence of a knowledge of that totality and the praxis of the proletarian class-subject.

Meanwhile, Gramsci's departure point for his 'philosophy of praxis' was likewise informed by the realisation thesis. In a similar vein to Lukács, he asked how "the statement that the German proletariat is the heir of classical German philosophy [is] to be understood?"<sup>134</sup> His response: that "everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies...and the only 'philosophy' is history in action, life itself."<sup>135</sup> On another occasion he pitched his conception of a philosophy of praxis against the contrasting interpretations of the *Theses on Feuerbach*<sup>136</sup> taken up by his intellectual interlocutors Benedetto Croce and Antonio Labriola. For Gramsci the meaning of the eleventh thesis was "that philosophy must become 'politics' or 'practice' in order for it to continue to be philosophy"<sup>137</sup> as opposed to Croce's practicist interpretation, that "what Marx proposed was, precisely, to turn philosophy upside down – not just Hegel's philosophy but philosophy as a whole – and to replace philosophizing with practical activity."<sup>138</sup> The distinction Gramsci was putting forward was that Marx had not called for the denial of philosophy as such but for a repudiation of an understanding of philosophy limited to that of works by philosophical experts. For Gramsci the opposition posed in the eleventh thesis was between the contemplative philosophy of individual intellectuals and a philosophy that takes up living form in the practical-critical relationship that real individuals establish with the conceptual formations presiding over their lives. Marx had not asked for the rejection of purely theoretical philosophy, but had asked "for a philosophy that produces a morality in conformity with it, a will to realize with which [the theoretical ambitions of

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<sup>134</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 711.

<sup>135</sup> Full quote: "In this way we arrive...at a philosophy of praxis. Everything is political, even philosophy or philosophies and the only "philosophy" is history in action, that is, life itself. It is in this sense that one can interpret the thesis of the German proletariat as the heir of classical German philosophy—and one can affirm that the theorisation and realisation of hegemony carried out by Ilich [Lenin] was also a great "metaphysical" event." Gramsci, *Selections*, 676.

<sup>136</sup> Between 1930-31, Gramsci translated the *Theses on Feuerbach* in Notebook Seven of his *Prison Notebooks* which also contains *Notes on Philosophy Materialism and Idealism*. There appears the text 'Benedetto Croce and historical materialism' in which the philosophy of praxis is presented as a response to the end of philosophy problematic of the eleventh thesis. Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 246.

<sup>137</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks Volume III*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 311.

<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Gramsci, *Notebooks III*, 348.

philosophy] identifies.” In this sense, the realisation of philosophy corresponded to its “absolute terrestriality”<sup>139</sup>, of its permeation of social reality.

I have already mentioned Korsch’s intellectual negotiation with the end of philosophy in Marx and in the course of this thesis I will outline the specificity of Lefebvre’s engagement with the same problem. These efforts to reckon with the end of philosophy problem in Marx in the first quarter of the twentieth century would serve as the intellectual sources for some of the most significant strands of Marxist theory in the following decades. It is well known that Korsch and Lukács’s formulations of the end of philosophy in Marx were central to the diverse theoretical developments that emerged from the Frankfurt School. In passing, one can acknowledge the role that Lukács’ reconfiguration of the realisation thesis played for Theodor W. Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics* (1966): “Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgment that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried.”<sup>140</sup> While Korsch’s challenge to the evolutionism of the orthodoxy of the Second International via the problem of philosophy in Marx would inform Walter Benjamin’s conceptualization of a non-linear historical materialism.<sup>141</sup> And Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis would represent the cornerstone of post-war Italian Marxism for a generation Party intellectuals, which would resultantly inspire the various theoretical detractions from the dominance of the Gramscian-Togliattian model of the *Partito Comunista Italiano*. Thinkers such as Lucio Colletti, Galvano Della Volpe, Sebastiano Timpanaro and Mario Tronti would all go on to profoundly shape the Italian trajectory.<sup>142</sup> In this thesis I focus specifically on the course that develops out of Lefebvre’s role in this theoretical genealogy. I take his role in establishing the problem of the end of philosophy in Marx within the PCF during the Stalin years as foundational to a conceptual lineage that takes on distinct expressions across peculiarly French institutions at different junctures.

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<sup>139</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni Del Carcere II Quaderni 6 - 11*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 1270-71.

<sup>140</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (London: Routledge, 1973), 3.

<sup>141</sup> Michael Löwy, ‘Walter Benjamin and Marxism,’ *Monthly Review* 46, No. 9, (February, 1995), 11-20.

<sup>142</sup> Andrew Anastasi, ‘A Living Unity in the Marxist: Introduction to Tronti’s Early Writings,’ *Viewpoint Magazine*, October 3, 2016. Available at: <<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2016/10/03/a-living-unity-in-the-marxist-introduction-to-trontis-early-writings>> [Accessed 8 May 2020].

Lefebvre's engagement with Marx and his involvement in the PCF will be a central concern for my own inquiry. Despite being a member of the PCF for thirty years (1928 – 1958), a highly depoliticized picture of Lefebvre emerged in Anglo-American scholarship following the English publication of *The Production of Space* in 1992. There was a marked reticence regarding Lefebvre's philosophical and militant past in many of the commentaries that first appeared. Indeed to this day, few – if any – have properly dealt with his rapprochement with the PCF during the 1978 election. Stuart Elden has drawn attention to the narrow focus through which Lefebvre's writing was received in Anglo-American scholarship immediately after his nineties renaissance.<sup>143</sup> A severe lack of attention has been paid to the political and philosophical dimensions of his writing. This absence is especially regrettable given that political militancy and the question of philosophy in Marx were central aspects of Lefebvre's life and work.

To this critical appraisal, one should also add that Lefebvre's importance in establishing the terms of philosophical debate around Marx's writing in the French context has been unduly underemphasised. Bud Burkhard has provided the only full-length historical and theoretical account of Lefebvre's involvement in the *Philosophies* group.<sup>144</sup> Burkhard has done important work in contextualising Lefebvre's intellectual departure point, linking the philosophical tendencies he was working within and against (German romanticism and French vitalism respectively) to the spiritual crisis haunting European intellectual life in the inter-war years. This text provides a very useful historical assessment of Lefebvre's pre-Party philosophical inquiries, his role in an intellectual coterie which included Paul Nizan, Georges Politzer, Norbert Guterman among others and his early engagement with the Surrealist movement. All of these factors played a crucial role in his movement toward Marx, Marxism and the French Communist Party as a resolution to his philosophical journey. Most crucially Burkhard has drawn attention to the hand Lefebvre and Guterman had in introducing French readers to much of Marx's early writings and to markedly philosophical versions of Engels and Lenin. In the late 1920s those revolving around the *Revue Marxiste* (1928-29) received from the

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<sup>143</sup> Elden, *Antipode*, 809-25.

<sup>144</sup> Bud Burkhard, *French Marxism between the wars: Henri Lefebvre and the "Philosophies"*, (New York: Humanity Books, 2000).

director of the Marx and Engels Institute in Moscow, David Riazanov, untranslated versions of the *1844 Manuscripts*, the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Engels' *On Dialectics*, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* and *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*. From the year of the journal's existence up to the establishment of the Vichy government and the institution of the *Otto List* which blacklisted a number of Guterman and Lefebvre's texts,<sup>145</sup> they would translate these texts and provide introductory commentary deeply informed by their pre-Marxist philosophical interrogations of German Idealism.<sup>146</sup> Burkhard therefore locates Lefebvre's initiation into Marxism via Hegel within the pre-history of the existentialist revival of Hegel of the forties and fifties.<sup>147</sup> He thereby provides a broader perspective of Lefebvre's trajectory toward Marxism bringing into relief how his engagement with the problem of philosophy in Marx parted ways from both the Stalinist orthodoxy and the new wave of existentialist Marxism. Lefebvre was part of that initial generation of dissident Marxist philosophers who were contemporaneous with the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution, who played a role in shedding light over unknown dimensions of the Marxian and Marxist corpus and who followed Marx's own trajectory through German Idealism before reaching the end of philosophy in Marxism and political militancy. Indeed, even at height of the Cold War partisanships, Jean Kanapa had to admit that:

at an hour when we seem to be rediscovering Hegel from various sides it is good to remember in particular that it was H. Lefebvre who was *the first in France* to draw attention to the importance of Hegelian philosophy and, more precisely, on the need to understand it to deepen or undertake dialectical materialist studies.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> The Otto List was a list of forbidden books drawn up by the Nazi Party in 1940 following their occupation of France. The list included 934 titles by 706 authors, and included works by Jewish writers, Communist writers, and anti-German books. Certain publishing house including Gallimard and Fayard were hit very hard by these repressive measures. See Jacob S. D. Blakesley, *A Sociological Approach to Poetry Translation: Modern European Poet-Translators*, (New York: Routledge: New York, 2019).

<sup>146</sup> See Henri Lefebvre & Nobert Guterman, *Morceaux choisis de Karl Marx*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1934), G.W.F. Hegel, *Morceaux choisis*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), V.I. Lenin, *Cahiers de Lénine sur la dialectique du Hegel*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1939). In the first chapter of this thesis I will discuss the significance of Lefebvre's early engagement with Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. After May 1940 this version was placed on the "Otto" list of forbidden books and seized by the Nazis. It would not be available again in France until the 1955 edition published by the PCF's publishing house *Éditions sociales*.

<sup>147</sup> Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in postwar France: from Sartre to Althusser*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975).

<sup>148</sup> Jean Kanapa, 'Henri Lefebvre ou la philosophie vivante,' *La Pensée*. No 15 (Nov - Déc 1947) (emphasis added)

This will be my starting point for tracing the lineage of a series of dissident interpretations of the end of philosophy motif in Marx across the work of Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida.



## Chapter 2: Henri Lefebvre (1948 – 78)

### 2.1 Militancy and the Death of Philosophy

This chapter will survey Henri Lefebvre's biographical trajectory from philosophy into political militancy and trace the role of the end of philosophy motif in Marx in shaping his experience of political praxis. It will consider the historically specific conditions that Lefebvre faced as a member of the PCF between the 1940s and 1950s, and how these conditions informed his reinterpretation of the end of philosophy injunction in Marx. The overcoming of philosophy lived by Lefebvre in his commitment to political militancy in the Party was not experienced as a straightforward realisation of philosophy in the philosopher's uptake of praxis. It unfolded instead as a slow recognition and struggle with the afterlife of philosophy within the ideal of political activism. It was a protracted period during which the philosophical inspiration latent in Marx's exhortation was exposed to the historical reality of political experience. This exposure retroactively modified for Lefebvre the meaning instilled in Marx's injunction to put philosophy to an end. Indeed, this was a part of the process of realising the end of philosophy: finding out in practice, not simply in philosophy, what the end of philosophy entailed. In that sense, Lefebvre came to the understanding that the coincidence of practice with the termination of philosophy transformed the terminal point from a philosophical abstraction into an open-ended practical reality. This practical reality, namely the Stalinist Party apparatus, was beset by a kind of philosophical domination, and the task of delivering this practical field from the vestiges of philosophy required an open-ended critical practical activity.

Notwithstanding his hope that joining to the PCF would lead the way to overcoming the limitations of philosophical speculation and its failure to furnish anything other than an abstract and systematic interpretation of existing reality, Lefebvre found that the ideal of renouncing philosophy was not as simple as leaping into an available form of political praxis. This was made apparent through his struggle against the repressive measures presiding over the PCF during the forties and fifties. Lefebvre recognised that the other side of philosophy did not measure up to the depth of Marx's injunction to put philosophy to an end, precisely because philosophy continued to preside over



the political practice that was supposed to replace it. Lefebvre was consequently led to reconfigure his understanding of the end of philosophy motif in Marx.

Looking at the formation of his distinct research itinerary during these years, this chapter will claim that Lefebvre's anti-systematic methodology for empirical research, figured in his own use of the term 'radical critique', was part of the unfolding of his militant commitment to and interpretation of Marx's injunction to put an end to philosophy. Moreover, the chapter will argue that Lefebvre's radical critique was a gesture that aspired toward the de-systematization of political praxis within the Stalinist Party. This de-systematization aimed to unveil the philosophical preconceptions that remained lodged in the common sense of the Party. This primarily concerned conceptualisations of the capitalist mode of production that were generally modelled after the one presented in *Capital*. Lefebvre's radical critique aimed at historicizing abstract models of the capitalist mode of production by exposing them to elements that defied their logic. It did this so as to problematize the equation of a philosophical concept of the proletariat and the revolutionary subject that had taken root in the Stalinised French Communist Party.

The philosophical basis for Lefebvre's entry into the PCF is recounted variously in Lefebvre's writing both during and after the period of his Party involvement. In his 1959 two-volume *autocritique La Somme et le reste*, written shortly after his departure from the Party, Lefebvre gives a particularly sustained account of this trajectory. I will take this version as my point of departure in tracing the philosophical basis on which Lefebvre entered the PCF, the formative political experiences which resurrected his initial philosophical inspiration from its putative death, and the way that the exposure of Lefebvre's activism to the reality of the Stalinist Party forced him to renegotiate his understanding of the end of philosophy injunction in Marx.

*La Somme* fleshes out the two axes constitutive of Lefebvre's political practice while reflexively bringing them into contradiction. The two axes were dialectical critical research of social and material practices and the active transformation of practice. At the moment of *La Somme*'s writing, these two axes had come into what appeared to be irreparable contradiction. Lefebvre had been excluded from the Party for what he considered a fundamental aspect of Marx's injunction to put an end to philosophy; the

enrichment and de-systematization of political practice via materialist dialectical empirical research.

While my reconstruction of Lefebvre's own reflections on this trajectory will be taken primarily from *La Somme*, it will be necessary to supplement some of the biographical elements which are not separated from the conceptual propositions in body of the text. This will be done so as to clarify some of the pivotal concrete and theoretical moments in Lefebvre's experience prior to *La Somme*. Throughout the two volumes of Lefebvre's autobiographical work there is an intentional blending of registers. This makes the task of tracing the logical unfolding of a philosophical system peculiarly difficult. In his 1959 essay 'The End of Philosophy', Maurice Blanchot selected Lefebvre's autocritique out of the many others from the period to meditate upon the unique philosophical perspective of the ex-communist philosopher.<sup>149</sup> His rationale for choosing Lefebvre's work above others was that:

*La Somme et le reste* unites the two movements, [theoretical and concrete explanation]. It is a reflection in which what is at stake is the destiny of philosophy, but also the destiny of the philosopher who writes the book and who, with liberty, turns to himself to put what he was and what he thought under trial.<sup>150</sup>

And indeed in the text Lefebvre brings reflections over lived experience and past theoretical interventions into the register of a particular kind of philosophical investigation.

In *La Somme et le reste* Lefebvre attempted conceptually to register the new moment that his expulsion from the Party signified in relation to his effort to realise the end of philosophy through a commitment to political activism. But insofar as the text represented a continuity rather than a break in this process, another kind of

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<sup>149</sup> In the opening section of *La Fin De La Philosophie* (1959) as it appears in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, Blanchot names the following texts as exemplary "of these suddenly numerous works, in which intellectuals, former communists, explain to us why they have been so, and why they are no longer so": Pierre Fougeyrollas, *Le Marxisme en question* (Seuil); Edgar Morin, *Autorcritique* (Julliard, collection Les Lettres nouvelles); Henri Lefebvre, *La Somme et le reste* (La Nef de Paris), Lucien Goldmann, *Recherches dialectiques* (Gallimard); André Gorz, *La Morale de l'histoire* (Seuil); Kostas Axelos: *Marx, penseur de la technique* (Encre Marine) and François Chatelet, *Logos et Praxis* (Seuil) (286-298). This introductory section is edited out of the later collection in which the essay re-appears *Friendship* (1971).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

presentation was required, one that did not assume the conceptual superiority of the present stand point and thereby defer to a straight-forward philosophical mode of explication as though the end of philosophy had been attained and could be explained in full. In Lefebvre's view, the mode of presentation necessary would have to be one that did not subordinate the historical peculiarity of his lived experience of attempting to overcome philosophy to the frictionless movement of abstract thinking; in other words, one that would not reproduce the teleological logic of an idealist dialectic.

In the text, Lefebvre retrospectively appraises his interpretation of the end of philosophy that led to his predicament in the Stalinist Party. For Lefebvre, the end of philosophy injunction in Marx addressed the philosopher first and foremost. Along with its necessary worldly manifestation, the realisation of the end of philosophy was a task that required the philosopher. In view of this injunction, Lefebvre had anticipated that a philosopher's renunciation of philosophy for the sake of participating practically and theoretically in revolutionary struggle would provide a source of understanding that reached beyond a mode of inquiry that sought to seal knowledge into a complete system. In his commitment to political activism as the path toward realising the end of philosophy, Lefebvre found that the negation of philosophy did not proceed by way of the mediation of two equivalents: philosophy and non-philosophy reconciled by political action. Hence the account of his experience after the fact could not be recounted "only as linear or as cut by discontinuities". It could not take the form a progressive resolution of contradictory categories which eventuate in a superior concept – praxis as such. But, since praxis differs from its philosophical concept, any such account has to "reflect itself like a line in volutes or spirals, like a current in whirlpools and eddies."<sup>151</sup> Hence the 'development' of concepts in *La Somme* does not proceed according to the logical movement of philosophical thought pure and simple, but is qualified, frustrated and modified by the oscillations of Lefebvre's personal experience of political militancy under specific historical conditions. The practical inhabitation of political praxis

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<sup>151</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *La Somme et le reste*, (Paris: La Nef de Paris Editions, 1959), 234. Lefebvre here is riffing on Lenin's words in *On the Question of Dialectics* "Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve, which endlessly approximates a series of circles, a spiral" (Lenin, *Philosophical Notebooks*, 363).

draws to the fore matters that disrupt the frictionless movement of philosophical thought.

This was an especially pointed gesture insofar as the dominant theoretical tendencies in the PCF at the time had taken political praxis as such to be the meaning encoded in Marx's injunction to overcome philosophy. Basing concepts upon the vacillations of political experience was Lefebvre's attempt to avoid supplanting the systematic philosophy of the Party with another. He did not want to hypostatize a concept of political praxis which in *La Somme* remains provisional and historically situated. For these reasons it will be necessary in reconstructing Lefebvre's trajectory from philosophy to political militancy to move between these different registers so as to be faithful to his attempt to historicize his own experience of praxis.

In the opening chapter of *La Somme*, entitled 'Crisis of Philosophy', Lefebvre turns to *The German Ideology* as the site of Marx's definitive formulation of the end of philosophy. This is where Lefebvre locates his own inspiration to overcome philosophy. Like so many others, Lefebvre responded to Marx's injunction by attempting to do away with the philosopher in himself. He entirely rejected speculative thought in favour of militant adherence to the revolutionary project in the form of the PCF. Yet with this total rejection came a lingering uneasiness – an uneasiness that principally arose from the philosophical naivety involved in such a gesture. This paradoxically prompted Lefebvre to return to philosophy, namely that of Marx and his predecessors, in an effort to properly gather what was at stake in the call for an end to philosophy.

Hence, far from imposing a periodizing cut on the Marxian corpus, as Zhdanov and Stalin had (and as Althusser would), Lefebvre would come to foreground the protracted nature of Marx's battle with Hegelian philosophy. As he observed regarding Marx's philosophical break, in words that presumably applied to his own battle against philosophy:

The overturning [of Hegel]? It persists, it spreads throughout Marx's work, from the critique of the Hegel's philosophy of right and the state to *Capital*. The idea of "overturning" implies a project, not a result achieved in a split second. For more than forty years, in his life as a thinker

and a man of action, Marx collided with Hegel, fought against Hegelianism. He looted Hegel, taking his property. He appropriated it. To that end, he began by breaking the system. Only then could he, slowly, seize the riches contained in the system. And first of all the dialectic, not without difficulties, detours and repetitions. The work is not accomplished, so immense was the richness of the system. This "overturning" is not finished.<sup>152</sup>

Meanwhile the dogmatic "parrots" of the Party imagined "that this overturning took place on a certain date, that at a particular hour, Marx went from idealism to materialism, from democratism to the proletarian revolution, from Hegelianism to Marxism"<sup>153</sup> and the end of philosophy was achieved once and for all, paradoxically giving birth to the new and superior philosophy of dialectical materialism. Yet Lefebvre insisted that: "Neither Marx nor Engels (before the end of their life and work) had ever thought about substituting classical philosophy with a new philosophy, which would be called dialectical materialism, even less substituting the Hegelian system with a new finished, accomplished, closed system."<sup>154</sup>

Lefebvre's principal criticism of the orthodox interpretation of Marx's formulation of the end philosophy was that the break that ostensibly determined the virtue of dialectical materialism was absolute. As such, the Party's all-out refusal to engage with the question of philosophy in Marx, meant that its absolute overcoming remained philosophical in essence. Stalin's *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* was the archetypal case of such a philosophical overcoming. There, the dialectic remained in its philosophical guise, not so much the method that it professed to be but a philosophy of natural history that turns political praxis into an abstraction and revolution into an inevitability.<sup>155</sup>

For Lefebvre, the originality of Marxist thought, its revolutionary character with regard to the history of philosophical thought, was that it supplanted the tendency to take a philosophical position (materialism or idealism) about the nature of reality while taking up "a fundamental affirmation concerning *praxis*." Lefebvre elaborated that an "awareness of social practice overcomes speculation and therefore philosophy

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<sup>152</sup> Lefebvre, *La Somme*, 36-37.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>155</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, (Calcutta: Manika Barua Mass Publications, 1975).

as such; materialism and idealism”, before asking “is this not the way to understand the theses on Feuerbach?”<sup>156</sup> Lefebvre’s interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* was that they called for a renunciation of philosophical position taking in favour of an affirmation and an awareness of social practice as a non-philosophical mode of intellectual inquiry. He explained that since Marx aligns ‘all hitherto materialism’ with philosophy, due to its consideration of the object outside of social practice, “the new materialism spoken of in the theses is no longer presented as a philosophy, but as a sociological and historical ‘point of view’.”<sup>157</sup> Such a point of view stems from the notion that social and material practice has a transformative effect on the conditions of existence – but also that thought and praxis are coextensive, not separated as in speculative philosophy.

Where the old materialism succumbed to the weaknesses of philosophical speculation, according to Lefebvre’s reading of Marx, was where it posited truth claims about the nature of reality on the basis of empirical findings about material objects. Materialism, Marx argued, has continued to consider what it tries to distinguish from the product of thought, i.e. matter, in the form of an *object* of knowledge. Meanwhile, and paradoxically, the dynamic side of sensuous activity has been “developed abstractly by idealism.”<sup>158</sup> In other words, the open-ended movement inherent to concrete material reality together with the action of those who are part of that reality, has been better acknowledged by speculative abstract thought – precisely the arena that negatively qualifies materialism’s supposed non-speculative character. Marx’s new materialism, according to Lefebvre, shifted focus toward the on-going transformative material and social activities that directly involve subjectivity. As dynamic sensuous activity, social and material practices do not resolve themselves (come to an end) in the form of an object. In Lefebvre’s reading of Marx, practices that correspond to historical and material processes, which do not resolve themselves timelessly into an objects of knowledge, should be studied with the empirical tools provided by scientific materialism. Since practice does not resolve itself once and for all into a particular form, but demonstrates regularities, patterns, laws and relations at certain conjunctures, a materialist approach to practice should itself be open-ended.

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<sup>156</sup> Lefebvre, *La Somme*, 22.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-4

<sup>158</sup> Marx and Engels, *Selected Works Volume 1*, 15.

Lefebvre explained that “The more Marx (in cooperation with Engels) deepens his thought, the more precise it is with regard to the destiny of philosophy. The texts of the *German Ideology* indicate what will replace philosophy and its interpretation of the world: a new mode of thought ... A new method is required.”<sup>159</sup>

In parallel to this new method, which Lefebvre would go on to describe as an awareness of practice, he posited an accompanying affirmation of practice that should follow from this awareness. If, as Marx argues, “the active side of human practice was developed abstractly by idealism”, the materialist version of contradiction – the figure in Hegelian philosophy that synthesises this active side – is a contradiction that takes place in practice. Its materialist analogue is the product of a constellation of forces peculiar to a historical arrangement of material practices within a social formation. Insofar as praxis is constitutively transformative, in the sense that it is defined by actions that materialise the transformation of the conditions of existence, it is in and through social and material practice that broad conjunctural shifts occur. In Hegel, it is the labour of the negative in thought that frees the mind of its fetters, overcoming seemingly unsurpassable contradictions, such that the conditions of existence can be apprehended in the enriched and ultimately absolute concept. But in Marx it is through social and material practices that the conditions of existence come about, the results of which philosophers merely interpret as *objects* of knowledge.

But just as Marx’s corrective of materialist philosophy involved a rejection of philosophical abstractions, and the introduction of a materialist method sensitive to the historicity of practice, so too did it involve a materialist corrective of the labour of the negative.<sup>160</sup> Concrete struggle between practical forces does not occur in the same way as a dialectical overcoming of an abstract contradiction takes place in thought. Thus, the constitutive elements of concrete struggle, existing within the realm of practice, do not exist as formally equivalent units (thought objects). And so, the reconciliation of such a struggle does not have a necessarily progressive, systematic

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<sup>159</sup> Lefebvre, *La Somme*, 24. Lefebvre quotes this passage from *The German Ideology*: “Where speculation ends – in real life – there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence.” Marx & Engels, *Collected Works Volume 5*, 37.

<sup>160</sup> “The concrete analyses of the proletariat, of its place in global society, its mission and its historical positivity, will replace the pure negativity of philosophy.” *Ibid.*, 21

or predictable telos. But insofar as concrete praxis is understood by Marx to form an interconnected totality – that is a dynamic and interrelated whole that develops over time – transformation through struggle remains possible. But it does not do so solely through the action of a materialist surrogate of the negative in thought. In this regard, Lefebvre would argue that: “The action, the will, the revolutionary practice of the proletariat is not sufficient to realise and overcome philosophy. A new method is required”.<sup>161</sup> He based this claim on the understanding that the concrete totality of praxis, which differs from a systematic understanding of social and material practice, remained inexhaustible to knowledge. In other words, Lefebvre’s interpretation of Marx’s critique of philosophical knowledge stemmed from an understanding that the concrete totality of practices is irreducible to a systematic understanding. Due to the historical nature of the totality of practical relations, it is intrinsically in excess of an absolute knowledge. In this sense, Lefebvre defended the conviction that the destiny of the proletariat, as the supposed material surrogate of the negative in thought, could not be known in advance of an analysis of its historically-specific conditions of existence. Thus, for Lefebvre, overcoming philosophy involved not only the revolutionary action of the working-class, as per the realisation thesis, but also a method of analysis that could expose eternalised categories, such as the proletariat, to the results of an on-going analysis of the concrete material conditions of social formation.

To get a clearer sense of how Lefebvre made his way toward this interpretation of Marx’s materialist method and what its stakes were, it is worth looking at the work he produced shortly before he was excluded from the Party. His text *Pour Connaître la Pensée de Lénine* (1957) is especially significant in this respect. This is where Lefebvre gleaned a theory of knowledge from Lenin’s philosophical studies that developed out of a materialist reading of Hegel’s dialectical idealism. There, Lefebvre makes explicit the connection between Lenin’s theory of knowledge, his economic studies and his political thought. This, I will argue, clarifies how Lefebvre understood Marx’s materialist method but also how he viewed the nature of the relationship between this method and a conception of political practice. The historical context in which this turn took place is also significant in terms of understanding Lefebvre’s

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 24.



reflexive historicization of his own praxis. As I will go on to show, Lefebvre's treatment of Lenin emerged in a discursive and political context where versions of Lenin were being pitted against each other with the aim of delimiting and defending a proper interpretation of Marx's formulation of the end of philosophy. Within this context, Lefebvre took up a position that skirted the various debates and fronts that were forming around the question of the status of philosophy in Marxism. This was a struggle that ostensibly unfolded at the level of philological and theoretical interpretation but which was deeply inflected by (and from Lefebvre's point of view poised against) existing practices and interpretative norms within the PCF. As I will argue in the next section, Lefebvre's interpretation of Lenin's philosophical and theoretical works was political to the extent that it aimed to challenge doctrinal extrapolations from Lenin's political writings that had been used to justify an increasingly entrenched credo of Party discipline. Further, Lefebvre's writing on Lenin from this period can be seen as a theoretical expression of his interpretation of the end of philosophy in Marx that would ultimately guide his approach to empirical research.

## 2.2 Lefebvre's Lenin

Much has been made of Lefebvre's departure from the PCF after 1958 and the role the experience played on the future trajectory of his theoretical and political investments.<sup>162</sup> After 1956 Lefebvre consciously turned to questions of little concern to Party intellectuals of the period – the agrarian question, the sociology of everyday life, philosophy of history, the theory of language, problems of urbanism, criticism of the state, philosophy of knowledge etc. – questions that for Lefebvre were central to the Marxist political movement and which stemmed from a growing dissatisfaction with the dogmatic principles governing the research culture of the Party. If in *La Somme et le reste* a line was drawn under his official Party militancy, it marked at the same time the moment Lefebvre took into his register the dialectical reckoning of a communist philosopher who could no longer *be* a communist or a philosopher in any

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<sup>162</sup> See for examples Arthur Hirsch, *The French Left A History & Overview*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982), 92 – 98.

traditional kind of sense.<sup>163</sup> Important and often overlooked in this regard is the text that Lefebvre wrote during this transition period on the philosophical, political and economic thought of Lenin.<sup>164</sup> This text stands as an important testimony of the influence of Lenin's philosophical and political writings over Lefebvre's thought, particularly in Lenin's attempts to draw from Marx's writing a method of analysis that is tied to the motif of the end of philosophy. Though underrepresented in the Anglophone canon, the period of 1954-56 was among the most productive periods of Lefebvre's career. His writing on Lenin is especially under-researched – this, in spite of the fact that Lenin's philosophical works and his own theoretical trajectory played a fundamental role to the way Lefebvre would go on to establish his own idiosyncratic variant of Marxist social and critical theory.

The timing of Lefebvre's return to Lenin's more philosophical writing between 1955 and 1956 was not without significance. Following Andrei Zhdanov's cultural policy in the Soviet context,<sup>165</sup> the French Party's spokesman on intellectuals Laurent Casanova developed a campaign in the late forties to minimize the initiative of intellectuals and their independence in relation to the Party and its theoretical orientations.<sup>166</sup> Under these circumstances, Lefebvre was forced to carry out a self-criticism in the Party journal that he edited at the time, *La Nouvelle Critique* (NC).<sup>167</sup> The emergence of *NC* in 1948 coincided with the embrace of Zhdanovist cultural policy within the PCF, and for the first seven years of its existence, the journal was the most dogmatic adherent to Soviet theoretical prescriptions. In the confessional, Lefebvre made apologies for his flirtations with non-Marxist philosophy and renounced the notion that dialectical materialism had any relation whatsoever to Hegel's dialectic. Lefebvre parroted Zhdanov's sentiment that “the question of Hegel

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<sup>163</sup> 'Being a Communist (from *La Somme et le reste*, 1959)' in Lefebvre, *Key Writings*, 231-38.

<sup>164</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Pour Connaître la Pensée de Lénine*, (Paris: Bordas, 1957). Significantly, the only occasion when Althusser mentions directly Lefebvre's work is in *Lenin and Philosophy* where he says: “To my knowledge, with the exception of Henri Lefebvre who has devoted an excellent little book to him, French academic philosophy has not deigned to concern itself with the man who led the greatest political revolution in modern history” in Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

<sup>165</sup> Along with his resolutions on cultural policy in 1947, Andrei Zhdanov established the information bureau, the Cominform, located first in Belgrade and then Bucharest to coordinate the Sovietisation of local Communist Parties in the West including France and Italy. The Cominform served as an instrument for the USSR to keep close control over Western Communist parties.

<sup>166</sup> Cauter, *Communism and the Intellectuals*, 55.

<sup>167</sup> Along with Lefebvre, members of the editorial board of *NC* during the fifties included Jean Kanapa, Victor Joannès, Annie Besse, Pierre Daix, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Jean Fréville and Victor Leduc.

was settled long ago”, but deferred to Lenin’s authority on the matter, leaving the question of Hegel in Marx less than resolved: “it seems difficult to understand and assimilate Marx’s dialectic without having studied, understood, and assimilated the Hegelian dialectic.”<sup>168</sup>

Despite this public disavowal, Lefebvre entered the fifties with a renewed determination to fend off a particularly virulent strain of anti-intellectualism that was gathering force among Party militants. He pursued this line throughout the fifties by pushing Lenin of the *Philosophical Notebooks* to the centre of his theoretical arsenal. This was a bold move given the status of Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in the Soviet theoretical canon. But the *Philosophical Notebooks* was a text close to Lefebvre. Norbert Guterman and he had first translated the section on Hegel’s *Logic* back in 1938.<sup>169</sup> So it was with an intimate knowledge of Lenin’s Hegelian phase that Lefebvre confronted the anti-philosophical strain gaining ground in the PCF.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Lefebvre waged this campaign without at the same time toeing the line in many respects. Lefebvre’s complicity with the Party’s ideological requisites was not consistent during this period. Along with a chapter on the *Philosophical Notebooks*, Lefebvre’s Lenin book included a relatively orthodox assessment of Lenin’s more narrowly materialist writing in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.<sup>170</sup> And though no comment was made about the contradiction between the two Lenins presented in the book – the Lenin of a materialist reflection theory and the Lenin of a dialectical theory of knowledge – Lefebvre would nevertheless go on to say the following in *La Somme* after his expulsion from the Party:

[Lenin] did not read or study Hegel seriously until 1914-15. Also, if one considers it objectively,

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<sup>168</sup> Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study*, (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 197. Quotes from Henri Lefebvre, ‘Autocritique. Contribution a l’effort d’eclaircissement ideologique’, *La Nouvelle Critique*, no. 4, (March 1949).

<sup>169</sup> V.I. Lenin. *Cahiers sur la dialectique de Hegel*. ed and trans. from Russian by Henri Lefebvre and Nobert Guterman, (Paris: Gallimard/NRF, 1938).

<sup>170</sup> Though the argument has been made that there are certain continuities between Lefebvre’s treatment of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the *Philosophical Notebooks*. See Toscano, Alberto. ‘With Lenin, Against Hegel?’ *Historical Materialism*, 28 April 2018 Available at: <http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/index.php/blog/with-lenin-against-hegel-materialism-and-empirio-criticism-and-mutations-western-marxism> [Accessed 13 August 2018].

one notices a great difference in tone and content between *Cahiers sur la dialectique* and *Materialisme et Empirio-Criticisme*. Lenin's thought becomes supple, alive...in a word, dialectical. Lenin did not truly understand the dialectic until 1914, after the collapse of the International.<sup>171</sup>

This contrasted significantly with his explicitly sympathetic estimation of Lenin's materialism in his 1954 article 'Lenine Philosophe'<sup>172</sup> giving a sense of Lefebvre's split priorities during these years.

Lefebvre's defence of Lenin's 'Hegelian turn' began in November 1950 when a young Louis Althusser entered the fray of anti-Hegelian polemics among communist intellectuals. Althusser penned an article in *NC* entitled 'The Return to Hegel, the Latest Word in Academic Revisionism' under the nom de guerre 'the Commission for criticism of the circle of Communist philosophers'. The article responded to the excitement generated by both Jean Hyppolite and Alexandre Kojève's readings of Hegel within the French academy. In Althusser's eyes, this great return to Hegel was "simply a desperate attempt to combat Marx, cast in the specific form that revisionism takes in imperialism's final crisis: *a revisionism of a fascist type*."<sup>173</sup> In the following edition of *NC*, Lefebvre directly responded to the anonymous text in an article entitled 'Letter on Hegel'. He stated:

The article in *la N.C.* leaves the impression that a 'return to Hegel' inevitably has a reactionary or fascistic character. Should it not have been made clearer that this 'return' has that character only if it ignores the work of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin? Should the writer not have recalled that Lenin 'returned' to Hegel in the autumn of 1914<sup>174</sup>, at a particularly difficult moment; that he reread Hegel's *Logic* before writing *Against the Current*, and took the notes known as the *Philosophical Notebooks*?...The article creates the impression that the 'Hegel question' (Zhdanov) has been settled by simply relegating Hegel to a

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<sup>171</sup> Observation and quote taken from Anderson, *Lenin*, 216. Anderson adds that Lefebvre footnoted this quote with the comment "Here we see the significance of the profound reticence of the Stalinists toward the Notebooks, who for a long time put them aside in favour of *Materialisme et Empirio-Criticisme*."

<sup>172</sup> Henri Lefebvre, 'Lenine Philosophe' in *La Pensée*, 57 (Sept-Oct. 1954)

<sup>173</sup> Louis Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel Early Writing*, (London: Verso, 2014), 189.

<sup>174</sup> In Althusser's copy of *Pour Connaître la Pensée de Lénine*, the page 185 is folded and there is a line marked along the side of the opening paragraph which reads: "Why is it that in autumn 1914, at the beginning of the world war, exiled, isolated, after the collapse of the Social-Democratic International, that Lenin re-reads the most obscure, the most idealistic of philosophers, and the most abstract work of all, the *Logic*?" and the words 'autumn 1914' are underlined. Book accessed from Althusser's private library held at the L'Institut mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC) Caen.

now closed past. I cannot accept this position, at least not without hearing new arguments; it seems to me incompatible with the texts of all the Marxist classics, from Marx to Stalin.<sup>175</sup>

This early encounter between Lefebvre and Althusser, coded and indirect though it was, already intimated something of the divergent approaches to the end of philosophy in Marx that the two would come to represent. Lefebvre at this stage already defending an approach to Marx that retains the full scope of his trajectory while Althusser insisted on the need for a decisive distinction between the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic. Lenin's return to Hegel's most abstract work in the *Philosophical Notebooks*<sup>176</sup> exemplified for Lefebvre the oversight of certain Party militants in their anti-philosophy preconception of Marx's relationship to Hegel. For Lefebvre, Lenin's itinerary through the different stages of Marx's critical development demonstrated the importance of grasping the full complexity of the philosophical foundations of Marx's materialist dialectic. Indeed, insofar as the Party had latched onto Lenin's political writings without having considered the philosophical grounds on which his method of analysis was based, Lefebvre was also demonstrating the importance of grasping Lenin's own struggle with philosophy in its full movement.<sup>177</sup>

1955 saw two important publications in the field of French Marxist debate. The first of these was Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures of the Dialectic*. This book brought attention to the interpretative centrality of the end of philosophy motif in readings of Marx. Merleau-Ponty cast the repressed legacies of Korsch and Lukács<sup>178</sup>, which had been repressed during the Stalin years, as the prelude to his own effort to definitively establish the philosophical status of Marxism against the anti-philosophical bent of the PCF and the existential Marxism and 'ultra-Bolshevism' of Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>179</sup> With the publication of *Adventures of the Dialectic*, the writers of NC took up the

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<sup>175</sup> Althusser, *Spectre*, xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>176</sup> Among the many areas covered in the notebooks, Lenin took extended notes from Hegel's *Science of Logic* and his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, summary notes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Feuerbach's *Exposition, Analysis and Critique of the Philosophy of Leibnitz*, and varied notes from multiple secondary materials.

<sup>177</sup> In August the same year Lefebvre had been warned that his intellectual variances from official Marxism were causing concern to the party then again in October. See Cauter, *Communism and the Intellectuals*, 272.

<sup>178</sup> *History and Class Consciousness* was not well known outside of Marxist intellectual circles in the fifties in France. Before Merleau-Ponty's thorough commentary of *HACC*, Georges Gurvitch was the first to study the book attentively in Georges Gurvitch, *Le concept des classes sociales de Marx à nos jours*, (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1954).

<sup>179</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures*.

gauntlet thrown down by Zhdanov to form a ‘philosophical front’ against what they saw as bourgeois ideology. The PCF held a conference in which a number of *NC*’s most prominent intellectuals, including Lefebvre, issued ideological rebukes against the text. The publication of the transcript of the conference included a letter written by Lukács in which he distanced himself from *History and Class Consciousness (HACC)* and by extension the aims of Merleau-Ponty in reinstating the urgency of its inquiries.<sup>180</sup>

In the same year, Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* was published in full by the PCF’s publishing house Éditions Sociales. This was the first French translation of all the notebooks after Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman’s *Cahiers de Lénine sur la dialectique de Hegel* from 1938. A lot was at stake for the PCF in maintaining the image of a particular type of philosophical Lenin in the fifties, especially one untainted by Hegelian residues. Principally this was because a new breed of existentialist interpretations of Marx, influenced by Kojève and Hyppolite’s commentaries on Hegel, were beginning to dominate French intellectual culture.<sup>181</sup> But the demands of this ideological struggle became particularly pressing with the publication of Merleau-Ponty’s text. The text had explicitly resurrected critical repudiations of orthodox accounts of the end of philosophy in Marx and included a rehearsal of Korsch’s appraisal of the role of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in skewing understandings of the place of philosophy in Marx. Merleau-Ponty’s profanations – a non-party member claiming to be the defender of the true philosophical legacy of Marx and successor to Lukács, precisely because the latter had disavowed his early writings as deviationist – were intolerable to a party in thrall to Zhdanovism.

The reception of Lenin’s *Philosophical Notebooks* was very much shaped by this historical context. The published text was accompanied by an introduction by Party philosopher and translator Émile Bottigelli, which notably did not mention the

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<sup>180</sup> See Roger Garaudy et al., *Mésaventures de l’anti-Marxisme les malheurs de M. Merleau-Ponty Avec on Lettre de Georg Lukacs*, (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1956). These were proceedings of a PCF conference that took place in 1955. Speakers included: Georges Cogniot, Maurice Caveing, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Jean Kanapa, Victor Leduc, Henri Lefebvre. Lukács’s letter was read out at the conference.

<sup>181</sup> Poster, *Existential Marxism*

existence of Lefebvre and Guterman's 1938 version.<sup>182</sup> Meanwhile, coinciding with the publication, one of the most prominent Party intellectuals of the period, Roger Garaudy, wrote a review article of the text for the party journal *Cahiers du Communisme* (CC). In it he depicted Lenin as a staunch anti-Hegelian man of action, foregrounding Lenin's note on Hegel's concept of the practical idea, that "practice is higher than theoretical knowledge."<sup>183</sup> As we will see, this was one of the main misinterpretations of Lenin prevalent among intellectuals in the party that Lefebvre sought to redress.

Within this context, Lefebvre took up a position that skirted the various debates and fronts that were forming around the publication of Lenin's notebooks and Merleau-Ponty's *Adventures*. Lefebvre's somewhat tendentious manoeuvre in these debates was both to contest Merleau-Ponty's effort to re-establish Marxism as a philosophy, and to avoid rehearsing Lenin's reflection theory as was the common recourse of PCF intellectuals in their dealing with counter-theorisations of subjectivity. Lefebvre did this by advancing Lenin's commentary on Hegel. In a lecture entitled "The Philosopher and His Time", delivered at the Hungarian Institute in Paris in June 1955 to mark Lukács's seventieth birthday, Lefebvre dwelt upon the attention the Hungarian philosopher's 1922 book had gained in contemporaneous French debates.<sup>184</sup> He argued that a philosophical alliance had formed across the ideological fronts represented by "the team of young Marxists" of NC and by Merleau-Ponty, precisely around their shared adherence to young Lukács' interpretation of the realisation thesis in Marx.<sup>185</sup> The unity between these two antagonists, one representing philosophical Marxism in its explicit fidelity to young Lukács and the other representing an anti-philosophical Marxism in its explicit rejection of the young Lukács, was forged in what Lefebvre saw as their shared understanding of the nexus between consciousness, the proletariat and the realization of philosophy. For Lefebvre, the assumption in *HACC* that the consciousness of the proletariat had a

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<sup>182</sup> V.I. Lénine, *Cahiers Philosophiques*. trad Émile Bottigelli, (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1955). This was the first translation of all the notebooks after Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman's *Cahiers de Lénine sur la dialectique de Hegel* from 1938. Bottigelli wrote a response to Althusser's anonymous article in NC entitled 'Disagreement About the "Return to Hegel' in which he agreed with Althusser's general thesis but refuted his alignment of Hegel and the German bourgeoisie. See 'Preface' in Althusser, *Spectre of Hegel*.

<sup>183</sup> Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism*, 212-213.

<sup>184</sup> Henri Lefebvre & Patrick Tort, *Lukács 1955 / Être marxiste aujourd'hui*, (Paris: Aubier, 1985).

<sup>185</sup> Lefebvre, *Lukács*, 31.

privileged historical character grounded in its identity with an absolute knowledge of the historical process, ultimately aligned with the notion of a proletarian science<sup>186</sup> which had been adopted by the writers of *NC*. The idea of a proletarian science had its basis in the assumption that because scientific knowledge was the product of a society divided into classes, science itself, at the level of the concept, carried a class character. Only a science based on the universal subject could challenge its ideological instrumentalisation by a dominant class and move scientific knowledge toward objectivity.<sup>187</sup> This, as far as Lefebvre was concerned, was the argument from *HACC* extracted and heralded by Merleau-Ponty against the Stalinist orthodoxy. The ideological fault lines dividing the two fronts obscured the philosophical consonance that had been reached in their conflation of the consciousness of the proletariat and an absolute (or objective scientific) knowledge of the historical processes. For Lefebvre, if the proletariat had already become the bearer of the destiny of philosophy by dint of the general form that consciousness takes up in the process of proletarianisation, then the coincidence of the subject and the object of the revolution must necessarily have already taken place.

In the same year, Lefebvre restaged this same critique in a debate with Roger Garaudy.<sup>188</sup> Beyond ideologically vetting Lenin's *Notebooks* for the Party, Garaudy was responsible for Lefebvre's turn to Lenin in a more direct way. In the July-August edition of *CC*, Garaudy contributed a text entitled 'La lutte idéologique chez les intellectuels'. In the article he aimed to clarify the role of the intellectual in the Communist Party in light of what he perceived to be a wave of anti-communist ideology seducing Party intellectuals. The reference was to the writings of the so-called 'new left' academics affiliated with journals such as *Les Temps modernes* and *Critique* which, in Garaudy's polemic, were becoming ideologically indistinguishable

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<sup>186</sup> In the French context, the notion of a proletarian science was an aberrant extrapolation from Trofim Lysenko's anti-scientific application of Marxist principles to genetics as a stand-in for ouvrieriste anti-intellectualism. See most notably Desanti, Jean-Toussaint. 'Science bourgeoise, science prolétarienne,' *La Nouvelle critique*, No. 8 (Juillet-août 1949), 32 – 52. Paradoxically, the concept, which had been developed by the philosophical adversary of Lenin and Plekhanov, Alexander Bogdanov, was taken up with great zeal by the Stalinist apparatus during the Cold War. See Dominique Lecourt, 'Le bogdanovisme dans l'idéologie stalinienne' and Bogdanov, 'La science et la classe ouvrière', in Aleksander Bogdanov, *La science, l'art, et la classe ouvrière*, trans. Blanche Grinbaum, ed. Henri Deluy and Dominique Lecourt (Paris: Maspero, 1977), 36–43 and 95–103.

<sup>187</sup> See Dominique Lecourt, *Proletarian Science? The Case of Lysenko*, (London: NLB, 1977).

<sup>188</sup> 'Une lettre de Henri Lefebvre et la réponse de Roger Garaudy sur les fondements idéologiques du Parti et les problèmes de l'unité,' *Cahiers Du Communisme Revue théorique et politique mensuelle Du Comité Du Parti Communiste Français*. No. 10, (October 1955), 1207 – 1225.



from the openly right-wing anti-communist *Le Figaro*.<sup>189</sup> The paragon of this wave was Merleau-Ponty in whom, according to Garaudy, “anticommunism finds its fundamental philosophy”. Speaking of *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Garaudy claimed that in it:

Revolutions must be thought and not made; that is the condition of their purity. The dialectic must be honoured in spirit but must not be incarnated... as soon as the dialectic takes flesh in objective history, as soon as it expresses and situates clearly the historic mission of the working class, the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of founding a strategy and tactic of the communist party, to guide the construction of socialism and communism, then Merleau-Ponty cries dogmatism and terrorism.<sup>190</sup>

Against this apparent idealist turn, under the cover of anti-totalitarianism, Garaudy referred to the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* who spoke of the tendency among intellectuals to waver on their theoretical principles at the very moment the working-class movement received a blow, when it was “in a period of momentary reflux”. As for example when “on the day after the defeat of Russian proletariat in 1905, there was simultaneously a surge in publications which reflected the dominant ideology, that is to say the ideology of the dominant class.”<sup>191</sup> With a starkness characteristic of the Cold War period, Garaudy drew a line between those intellectuals, whose work inhibited the movement, remaining trapped within philosophical speculation, and those who advanced the working-class cause, surmounting their subjectivist qualms in defending the necessity for political action. Where Lefebvre fell in relation to this line was the underlying concern of the article.

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<sup>189</sup> *Les Temps modernes* (1945-2019) was founded by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre and included Merleau-Ponty and Raymond Aron on its original editorial board. Raymond Aron quit in the first year of the journal's existence due to its increasingly open sympathies for the communist cause. Aron would go on to become an editor at *Le Figaro* (1826 - ). In 1955 he published *The Opium of the Intellectuals* – a text that drew anti-communist fault lines from the perspective of the conservative Right, grouping together the existentialist Marxism of *Les Temps modernes* with the Stalinist left. *Critique : revue générale des publications françaises et étrangères* (1946 - ) was founded by Georges Bataille and included Maurice Blanchot and Raymond Aron on its editorial board. During the Cold War, the hard core of Stalinist intellectuals in the PCF rarely discriminated among the variously inclined anti-communist lines that were taken up in the so-called bourgeois press.

<sup>190</sup> Following quotes from Roger Garaudy, ‘La lutte idéologique chez les intellectuels,’ and in *Cahiers Du Communisme Revue théorique et politique mensuelle du Comité du Parti Communiste Français*, No. 7-8, (July – August 1955), 892.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, 891. The blow in this context was the drastic fall in support for the PCF as stories of the atrocities perpetrated in Soviet Russia and elsewhere began to mount. This was ten years after the PCF had gained its largest show of support in 1945.

What prompted this public interrogation was the publication of a dialogue which Lefebvre carried out with Georges Gurvitch on the concept of class in the June edition of *Critique*.<sup>192</sup> In it Lefebvre had critically engaged with Gurvitch's revisions of the definitions of class which appeared in his *Le concept des classes sociales de Marx à nos jours* (1954). There, Gurvitch had explicitly put forward his insistence on an empirical analysis of the concrete conditions of social classes as a corrective to Lukács' *HACC*, which in his estimation dealt "with a philosophy and even more precisely with a metaphysics of the proletarian class".<sup>193</sup> Though not uncritical of Gurvitch's sociology on its own terms, Lefebvre showed sympathy for his criticism of the more dogmatic aspects of the PCF, particularly its piety regarding a "class point of view" and its brutal and mechanistic adherence to a revolutionary teleology. Lefebvre went as far as to ask whether this tendency in the Party was at all "living Marxism"? This was a phrase which in the context concerned the relationship which was hardening around Marxian and Marxist (namely Leninist) writing, the Party apparatus, the formulation of its aims and objectives and the execution of its political actions. To this phrase Garaudy responded with accusations of revisionism and pronouncements of 'dead Marxism'.

What roused Garaudy's disapproval was Lefebvre's positive appraisal of Gurvitch's loose definition of class that emphasised 'supra-functionality'. For Garaudy, Gurvitch's suggestion that the criteria for class inclusion were not synonymous with a restricted range of social functions determined by the capitalist production process, separated the category from concrete historical conditions. It was unscientific to the extent that it did not derive its definition from the conditions of material production and the distribution of positions available under those conditions, both of which were at least measurable. Garaudy cited the Lenin of *A Great Beginning* (1919):

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour,

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<sup>192</sup> 'Le concept de classes sociales: Un dialogue entre G. Gurvitch et H. Lefebvre,' *Critique* 97, No. 11, (June 1955), 559-69. During this period Lefebvre was based at Le Centre national de la recherche scientifique where he conducted empirical research into agro-pastoral rural communities under the patronage of Georges Gurvitch. See Henri Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain*, (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1970), 9.

<sup>193</sup> Lefebvre, *Lukács*, 29. Quote taken from Gurvitch's *Le concept des classes sociales de Marx à nos jours* (1954).

and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.<sup>194</sup>

For Garaudy, any attempts to muddy the clear-sightedness of this definition detracted from Marx's second thesis on class, as was laid down in his letter to Joseph Weydemeyer of 1852: "that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat." It was the job of the intellectual, as no more than a specialist worker whose job it was to theorise, "to serve as a guide not a substitute for the experience of the working class. While [in the intellectual] the unity of theory and practice is realized, and this enables him to give in all fields of thought and action the most just and effective method." He then added that "philosophers, like all specialists, have an important task to the extent that this task fits into the perspectives of thought and action of the working class, as a moment of its class struggle."<sup>195</sup> Here Garaudy was suggesting that conceptual thought should be subordinated to the pre-established goal of expediting revolutionary change in the world via the proletariat. And the validity of this goal was certified by the spontaneous insubordination of workers facing particularised forms of exploitation.

For Garaudy, it was the responsibility of the intellectual in the Party to give 'expression' and strategy to workers at the level of class so as to facilitate revolutionary action at the global scale. In Lefebvre's response,<sup>196</sup> he argued that in claiming that only by "being placed in the point of view of the working class is it possible to accede to an objective conception of the world" Garaudy had reversed the terms of the question. In Lefebvre's view it was only by "studying objectively history and nature with an objective method, that we can arrive at the point of view of the proletariat, its situation in bourgeois society and conceive clearly the interests of the class."<sup>197</sup> The point here was that by assuming the existence of the proletariat and their historic mission, concepts in Marx that were arguably hangovers from speculative philosophy, and that were very much inherited by young Lukács in *HACC*, the Party had accorded itself an epistemological privilege regarding empirical

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<sup>194</sup> Garaudy, 'La lutte idéologique', 895

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 896.

<sup>196</sup> Lefebvre, 'Une lettre de Henri Lefebvre,' 1207 - 1215

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 1207.

workers. From this perspective, it was the Party that would bestow upon real workers an understanding of their ‘class instinct’ and their historic role as bearers of philosophy. According to Lefebvre, Garaudy had assumed a logic of the proletariat, meaning that the contours of the revolutionary class were known in advance of any objective study of the real conditions of their existence and the Party merely spoke on its behalf.<sup>198</sup>

Lefebvre flagged the dangers of this “subjectivism of class” acting as the source of inspiration and guide for philosophical and scientific research as proposed by Garaudy. Garaudy, in Lefebvre’s view, spoke as though the Party had already achieved a thoroughgoing understanding and verification of the existence of the proletariat in its historical specificity, and that the intellectual had merely to occupy that perspective as a theoretical departure point. In fact, as far as Lefebvre was concerned, Garaudy was merely defending, and using as his defence, an unreconstructed version of Marx’s realization thesis in which the triumphant image of a revolutionary subject was presupposed. According to Lefebvre, it was to the extent that philosophers and scientists of the Party advanced knowledge in their own field to clarify the objective conditions of existence that their ‘practice’ could be deemed properly politically impactful. To rebuff Garaudy’s use of the term proletarian science<sup>199</sup> and the associated idea that “revolutionary practice constituted the great crucible of all theoretical thought”<sup>200</sup> Lefebvre cited a number of well-known

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<sup>198</sup> Lefebvre continues this critique of a subjectivism of class following his expulsion from the Party: “The militant intellectuals put their confidence and hope in the working class; they saw the workers as a class and as individuals who possessed the human qualities the bourgeoisie lacked: goodness, generosity, theoretical veracity and practical honesty, accurate critical sense, the sense of justice, liberty and living fraternity, the taste for freedom. Thus, for a large number of non-proletarians the proletariat (in France and Germany) embodied hopes for an imminent renewal of life...[But the] *proletariat is not revolutionary by ontological essence or by absolute structure. It is revolutionary in certain circumstances.*” In Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity Twelve Preludes September 1959 – May 1961*, (London: Verso, 1995), 81-82.

<sup>199</sup> Lefebvre’s writing of this period was informed by a dissatisfaction with the way that Stalin’s ontological conceptualisation of dialectical materialism had provided justification for the coincidence between his authoritarian regime and the application of Trofim Lysenko’s evolutionist-finalist theory of nature and history. Lefebvre confronted this crystallisation on two fronts. Firstly, by contesting philosophically Stalin’s interpretation of Marx which had used the dialectic to explain the evolution of nature. Throughout this period and against Stalin’s philosophy of nature, Lefebvre pushed for a conceptualisation of dialectical materialism as an objective method for knowledge whose aim it was to correct idealist mystifications which tend to fix findings as absolutes. Secondly Lefebvre’s empirical sociological research sought to highlight differences in rural and agricultural contexts, a project which clearly conflicted with Lysenko’s agrobiological universalisms. See Lecourt, *Proletarian Science?*. It was in the context of the Lysenko affair that the PCF censured Lefebvre’s book *Méthodologie des sciences* between 1945-1946. This text was reprinted in French in 2002.

<sup>200</sup> Garaudy, *La lutte idéologique*, 898.

passages from *What Is To Be Done?*<sup>201</sup> But it was to Lenin's *Notebooks on Hegel* that Lefebvre turned to define the relation of conceptual thought to political practice. He quoted from the *Notebooks*:

Thought proceeding from the concrete to the abstract does not get away from the truth but comes closer to it. From living perception to abstract thought, and from this to practice, – such is the dialectical path of cognition of truth, of cognition of objective reality... value is a category which dispenses with the material of sensuousness.<sup>202</sup>

Here, the subtext of Lenin's note on Hegel's theory of knowledge, a theory which in the Bolshevik leader's eyes foreshadowed Marx's conceptualisation of the category of value, was that the deepening of conceptual thought was necessary to qualify political practice. In addition, there was an insinuation that the role of the intellectual in relation to political practice was to study, analyse and deepen understandings of the relations within which social and material practices are embedded so as to more credibly inform political practice. It was not, as Garaudy had suggested, to lean uncritically on Marxian categories and presume a systematic understanding of a capitalist mode of production in order to support a predefined political aim. Rather, it was incumbent upon Marxist intellectuals critically to historicize such eternalised categories – to disclose the historically-specific hierarchy of relations that constituted the totality of class domination and in doing so come to an enriched understanding of the conditions for revolutionary alliances and actions.

For Lefebvre there was a profound difference between practice and concepts which in Party rhetoric was being “concealed by the vague word ‘expression’.”<sup>203</sup> Revolutionary theory and the organisation of the political party of the proletariat were according to Garaudy the highest form of expression of the ‘historic mission’ of the working-class. However, a term like ‘expression’, took for granted precisely what that historic mission was, and that this mission aligned seamlessly with the existing status of the party and its theory. So much was this the case that the promotion of

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<sup>201</sup> “socialism, since it has become a science, demands that it be pursued as a science, i.e., that it be studied” “without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement.” Lefebvre, *Une lettre de Henri Lefebvre*, 1209.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 1210.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

revolutionary action as such, tethered to eternalised categories furnished by Marx's analysis of the capitalist system (exchange value, use value, surplus value, class and the proletariat), was the only theoretical sentiment deemed properly revolutionary. This was the case even when the existing system of relations that governed social and material practices remained only partially grasped by Marx's body of work.

Against this militant adherence to a philosophical conception of the proletariat, Lefebvre argued that the "criterion of practice must not make us forget that knowledge is constituted by concepts, notions, categories (of which one must obviously study the history, the formation and the relations)", and later declared that "[i]f practice is necessary, it is not sufficient."<sup>204</sup> As we will see, inasmuch as abstract thought was able to establish provisional laws to better inform practice, Lefebvre argued that spontaneous practice as such was not sufficient to a coherent mode of transformative praxis. For Lefebvre, categories taken from Marx like the proletariat or class had to be tested out against the concrete conditions within which social classes existed. The timelessness of a term like the proletariat – inclusive of the mission that had been bestowed upon it by philosophy – did not, in Lefebvre's view, provide a coherent theory for revolutionary practice in a particular time or place.

It would be in Lefebvre's book on Lenin, and particularly the chapter on Lenin's *Notebooks*, that he would flesh out what would become his own interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx and the critical method that would grow out of this interpretation. There, Lefebvre explains, via his commentary on Lenin's philosophical writings, the status of philosophy in relation to a specifically Marxist theory of knowledge. My purpose in turning to Lefebvre's writing on Lenin is to establish from one of his more schematic texts how Lefebvre came to conceive of a dialectical theory of knowledge in light of the lack of a definitive exposition of the dialectic in Marx.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> "Not only was Marx unable to write a treatment on logic and the dialectical methodology, as well as the history of philosophy which he projected, but was also unable to finish *Capital*." Lefebvre, *Lénine*, 22. Lefebvre cites Paul Lafargue's *Reminiscences of Marx* from September 1890 in which he says "Marx fostered a lot of plans which were never carried out. Among other works he intended to write a Logic and a History of Philosophy, the latter having been his favourite subject in his younger days." In Paul Lafargue, 'Reminiscences of Marx (September 1890)' in *Marx and Engels Through the Eyes of their Contemporaries*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970). Lefebvre also mentions the letter written to Joseph Dietzgen of 1868 "... When I have cast off the burden of political economy, I shall write a 'Dialectic'. The true laws of dialectics are already contained in Hegel, though in a mystical form. What is needed is to strip away this form..." in

My aim is also to trace the full elaboration of Lefebvre's critique of prevalent interpretations of Marx's realization thesis that was variously staged in his 1955 interventions with particular reference to Lenin's commentary of Hegel.

What then, in the year following his departure from the PCF, was Lefebvre's understanding of the end of philosophy motif in Marx? And what was the role of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* in reaching this understanding? The Lenin book is particularly enlightening in this respect as it was written during a period when Lefebvre's status in the Party was becoming increasingly untenable. As such, his work at this stage was more stridently critical of the dogmatic aspects of the Party. While the book on Lenin was less confrontational than a book like *Problèmes actuels du marxisme* (1958), which resulted in Lefebvre's expulsion from the party, it does make explicit his distance from and criticism of the dominant theoretical tendencies of the moment.

Lefebvre's book opens with the question of whether Lenin should be treated as a man of action or a strategist of the revolution (here referring to Stalin's *Questions of Leninism*)? By way of a response, he cited a Hegelian dictum that was close to Lenin: "Truth is always concrete". The significance of this sentiment for Lefebvre was that it alluded to an underlying principle behind each of Lenin's propositions that had to be grasped according to the complexity of the concrete situations within which they were posed. As much as Lenin embraced the imperative for political action, for Lefebvre his political undertaking was subordinate to his method and not the other way around. "Lenin was also a philosopher," Lefebvre argued, "and his philosophical thought...provides a thread that runs through his work and makes it understandable."<sup>206</sup> Thus Lefebvre's agenda was clear from his introductory chapter:

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Karl Marx, 'Letter: Marx to Joseph Dietzgen in Petersburg; London, 9 May 1868'; in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels, Collected Works, Volume 43: Marx & Engels 1868-70: Letters: April 1868 - July 1870*, (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 31. And of course the famous letter to Engels of 1858 "I am getting some nice developments. For instance, I have thrown over the whole doctrine of profit as it has existed up to now. In the method of treatment the fact that, by mere accident, I have glanced through Hegel's Logic has been of great service to me - Freiligrath found some volumes of Hegel which originally belonged to Bakunin and sent them to me as a present. If there should ever be use for such work again, I should greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence in two or three printer's sheets, what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered but at the same time enveloped in mysticism." Marx & Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Volume 40*, 249.

<sup>206</sup> Lefebvre, *Lénine*, 20.

to link Lenin's theory of knowledge, which had been formulated in his commentary on Hegel, to the method that was a consistent feature of all of his writings.

In the chapter that deals with Lenin's notes on Hegel's *Logic*, Lefebvre indicates the importance of these notes, claiming that they brought "to the Marxist movement what was missing: these notes contain the treatise on the methodology and logic that Marx did not have time to elaborate."<sup>207</sup> Later he claims that an understanding of Lenin's notes on Hegel's *Logic* is fundamental to understanding his political thought in general. This was where Lenin would delineate his dialectical method. This was a method that was deeply self-historicizing and which, according to Lefebvre, had been entirely lost on his adherents, namely those who had extrapolated from his political concepts timeless strategic principles. The subtext of Lefebvre's insistence on the central status of the notes, and the principles for a method appearing therein, was a corrective to official Marxism that took the dialectic to be a property of material nature as opposed to being a constituent element of Marx's theory of knowledge.

In Lefebvre's commentary of Lenin's notebooks he moves through the relations between the different technical terms used by Hegel in the *Logic*, qualifying them through Lenin's materialist critique. Beginning with the terms 'essence' and 'appearance', Lefebvre explains that these two modalities are not exterior to one another but are in a conflictual relation, that is, they are united by way of a contradiction. In Lefebvre's reading of Lenin's notes there is a concordance between the apparent and the immediate (or the mental) appropriation of a phenomenon on the one hand, and the essence and the concrete totality of which the phenomenon is inextricably a part, on the other. Lefebvre quotes Lenin from the notebooks "appearance is the essence in one of its determinations, in one of its relations, in one of its moments". He comments that appearance thereby disguises the essence, while also containing and revealing it. Here it is worth explaining that determination in this context means the determination of the concrete real in the form of a thought, hence something qualitatively distinct from the dynamic phenomena from which a fixed mental abstraction is made.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 186.



The relation between appearance and the essence is one of contradiction; matching the contradiction between part and whole, finite and infinite, here and elsewhere. The establishment of a law – the essence of a phenomenon approximated in the form of a relation between two determinations – is a matter of understanding the unity and the connection, the interdependence and the totality of universal becoming. Importantly in Lenin’s materialist reading of Hegel, the essence as a thought-form is distinct from the concrete totality in reality; hence any approximation of this totality in thought is only ever provisional and can never reach absolute knowledge as in Hegel. As Lefebvre explains: “the law is not absolute. There is no absolute law. Every law is approximate and relative. It has its limits: it has a sphere outside of which it becomes false. It is only part of the phenomenon.”<sup>208</sup> The law then is a mental abstraction taken from the realm of phenomena, a realm that is always richer than the law itself. The phenomenon bears within itself the relation which the law identifies but also a limitless number of other real relations “with the movement of the entire universe.”<sup>209</sup> Lefebvre goes on to explain that neither in nature nor in society are there defined demarcations or limits in the way that thought determinations, such as laws, present them to be. He adds: “All reality is defined as tendency...as transition, as passage from one thing into another thing. Becoming includes the unforeseen. There is never a complete or achieved analysis of the slightest phenomenon.”<sup>210</sup>

But for Lenin the establishment of laws does indeed deepen knowledge, as it overcomes the epistemological limits of immediate perception – not by denying its truth, but by bringing that understanding into relation with an absent determination on whose existence the apparent depends. But crucially this dialectical establishment of relations between distinct determinations must be posed against the “hypostatisation of the concept of the law, against its simplification, against its fetishization.” For Lenin, knowledge is approximate and relative in two senses. In the first place, knowledge coming in the form of laws, categories, concepts, etc., is at any given moment approximate because it abstracts from phenomena. But the stage that knowledge has reached historically is also approximate. The absolute and the relative are in a dialectical relation, as at all times the relative contains an aspect of the

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

absolute, indicating its own relativity by constitutively pointing toward an absolute beyond itself; and the absolute will come ultimately to be cast in the form of the relative, creating the starting point for the dialectical movement out of a former absolute. In other words, the Absolute is a receding horizon for knowledge since material nature, in a state of historical transition antithetical to the way that the mind appropriates the world, is epistemologically inexhaustible.

The other side of Lenin's dialectical theory of knowledge that distinguishes it from Hegel's dialectical idealism but also to some extent brings it closer to a certain Hegel is that laws, concepts and categories are founded on empirical measurements of social and material practices not "situated on a plane of pure abstraction, transcendent of practice and history."<sup>211</sup> Practice in Lenin's view mediates the relations between conceptual thought and the concrete real thereby giving dialectical materialism its fundamental distinction from dialectical idealism. Upon the basis of the approximative knowledge provided by laws themselves based on abstract determinations, it is in and through practice – understood as scientific practice, political practice and everyday social practice – that the provisional laws established in thought reveal their constitutive limitations. Exposing laws abstracted from material and social practice to existing conditions of concrete material reality via practice is the process through which the dialectical unity of the relative and the absolute is put into motion. It is in practice that the individual comes up against existing objective material conditions thereby falsifying a given absolute postulate. Lenin relates this insight to Marx's introduction of the criterion of practice into his theory of knowledge as it appears in the *Theses on Feuerbach*.<sup>212</sup> But he also acknowledges the importance of practice to Hegel's philosophy. Lenin notes from his reading of Hegel that "The result of activity is the test of subjective cognition and the criterion of **OBJECTIVITY WHICH TRULY IS**" and elsewhere "The "objective

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>212</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works* 38, 212. "... in Hegel practice serves as a link in the analysis of the process of cognition, and indeed as the transition to objective ("absolute," according to Hegel) truth. Marx, consequently, clearly sides with Hegel in introducing the criterion of practice in the theory of knowledge: see the *Theses on Feuerbach*." The reference here is the second thesis on Feuerbach: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question." Marx and Engels, *Selected Works Volume 1*, 15.

world” “pursues its own course,” and man’s practice, confronted by this objective world, encounters “obstacles in the realisation” of the End, even “impossibility...”<sup>213</sup>

For Lenin then, subjective theoretical knowledge stands opposed to the objective real or material actuality, and it is through practice as a form of mediation, between the subjective and the objective, that the individual gains partial access to the concrete totality. The one-sidedness of the absolute postulate in the mind – in Hegel ‘the Good’ – is shown in its finiteness when exposed to the infiniteness of concrete actuality via practice. Practice therefore is a fundamental step in Lenin’s theory of knowledge but as Lefebvre had put it to Garaudy, it is not sufficient in itself. Practice plays a mediating role, transforms an absolute into a relative by revealing the limitations of every determined law. But practice in Lenin forms the moment of a determinate negation, meaning that by realising the limits of formal determinations, practical actualisation provides a new starting point for knowledge. This new starting point resolved from the results of a previous attempt to act upon a theory becomes enriched in the process. At one point, Lefebvre describes dialectical materialism as it appears in Lenin of the notebooks as a “theory of consciousness, active reflexion or reflection, penetrated by practice and knowledge in an infinite reality, inexhaustibly vast.”<sup>214</sup>

For Lefebvre, the theory of knowledge that emerges from Lenin’s commentary on Hegel’s *Logic* responded directly to the question of the end of philosophy in Marx. Indeed, in Lefebvre’s view Lenin’s return to Hegel was precisely informed by the question of the continuities and discontinuities between Marx and Hegel’s dialectic. In this sense Lefebvre established his own interpretation of the end of philosophy in Marx by reconstructing a fully-fledged theory of knowledge from Lenin’s commentary on Hegel. This theory proposed that subjective theoretical claims over the absolute were revealed as finite via a process of practical actualisation. Moreover, this dynamic did not deliver the absolute as such but rather furnished subjective thought with a more adequate approximation of it. Since practice was the determinate negation in this process – mediating the movement between the absolute and the relative by way of its link with objective historical reality – the end of philosophy, in

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<sup>213</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works* 38, 212. (Emphasis in the original).

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

Lefebvre's view, was subordinate to this very movement. Since the partiality of the subjective absolute is continually revealed in its exposure to the infinity of objective nature through practice there is no end of philosophy in the sense of reconciling the absolute in thought with objective reality. But since the results of this practical realisation can only ever re-establish an absolute abstracted from historical reality – which has nevertheless become enriched in the process – the course of overcoming the finiteness of a conceptual architectonic must be carried out in practice without end. It was in this sense that Lefebvre considered Marx's effort to overturn Hegelian philosophy an unfinished (and in a sense, interminable) project – precisely because the way this project had been pursued was based on a new theory of knowledge that invested the realm of practice with a dynamic capacity to mediate the contradictory relation between the finite and infinite. According to such a theory, the end, as an absolute claim on a point of resolution, loses its integrity, and is replaced by an ongoing dialectic mediated by critical practice. In his critical engagements with the philosophical vestiges in materialist discourses, his political practice and his empirical research, Marx carried out a sustained but unfinished campaign to overturn the Hegelian system.

Beyond Lenin's theory of knowledge, as it appears in the *Notebooks*, Lefebvre was deeply influenced by the way that Lenin had applied this theory in his lifetime. One of Lefebvre's most original contributions as a Marxist commentator was the link he drew between the conceptualisation of a social-economic formation that appears in Marx's 1857 *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (also known as the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*) and Lenin's own formulation of the same term in his political and economic writings. Indeed, with regard to this connection, Lefebvre would go on to argue that the seed of Lenin's insight about the law of uneven development of social-economic formations already appeared in embryonic form in Marx's preparatory work for *Capital*. According to Lefebvre, Lenin developed this insight far beyond what Marx was able to achieve in his lifetime. In his reading, Lenin's discovery of the law of uneven development was based on the application of a methodology found in Marx's *Introduction* that would only later find its theoretical elaboration in his own *Philosophical Notebooks*. This methodology, which Lefebvre would reconstruct via elements of Lenin and Marx, would be his theoretical guide for his critical empirical studies while in the PCF.

In the following section I will draw out the salient features of Marx's *1857 Introduction* that Lefebvre read alongside Lenin's commentary on Hegel. My aim in doing so is to show how in the background of Lefebvre's radical critique – a formulation that was central to his evolving interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx – was a dialectical theory of knowledge prepared in Marx of the *Introduction*, later deployed in Lenin's economic studies of Russia and theoretically formalised in his critical commentary of Hegel's *Logic*.

### 2.3 From the 1857 Introduction to Uneven Development

The *1857 Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* is one of Marx's most slippery and compact texts, yet it was a central reference for Lefebvre over the years.<sup>215</sup> It is apparent from the various occasions Lefebvre turned to the *Introduction* that his engagement was deeply coloured by Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. This is most apparent in the link that Lefebvre draws between the *Introduction* and Lenin's gradual formulation of the law of uneven development. In this section, I will elucidate two methodological principles that Lefebvre draws from Marx's *Introduction* and show the connection he establishes between these principles and Lenin's discovery of the law of uneven development. I will then show how this methodological link, which Lefebvre claimed was theoretically formalised in Lenin's commentary of Hegel, was the basis on which Lefebvre established his interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx.

Two related propositions that appear in the *Introduction* were important for Lefebvre and in certain respects corresponded with his own reading of Lenin's commentary of Hegel. The first was based on Marx's critique of the methodology used by political economists which he summarily reduced to his own fundamental critique of Hegel's idealist dialectical method. From the *German Ideology* onward, Marx would often

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<sup>215</sup> Aside from *Lénine*, fragments from the *Introduction* can be found in *Karl Marx. Morceaux choisis* (1932), *Pour connaître la pensée de Karl Marx* (1947), *Problèmes actuels du marxisme* (1958), *Marxist Thought and the City* (1972) and *The Production of Space* (1974).

make use of this comparison between the shortcomings of contemporary materialist discourse and the vitiated dynamism of dialectical idealism. In the variant that appears in the *Introduction*, Marx argued that in his dialectical method Hegel had fallen “into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself”<sup>216</sup>, while in fact “the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind.” This was where Marx distinguished his own approach from both Hegel and the political economists. Marx argued that neither of these methods corresponded to “the process by which the concrete itself comes into being” but rather to ways the concrete is appropriated in the mind. Marx cited the example of exchange value, which if taken as a starting point of analysis of a social formation, as the simplest economic category, “can never exist other than as an abstract, one-sided relation within an already given, concrete living whole.” The circumscription of a simple category in the mind – whereby a limited number of elements are fixed into a relation does not correspond to how that category – embedded as it is within a historically specific living whole, exists or has come to exist concretely. The categories that the mind abstracts for itself are in actuality seamlessly imbricated in a living whole, meaning that they necessarily presuppose their own finitude as regards the manifest reality to which they refer. For example, exchange value does not exist in isolation or disconnected from the specific relations of production of which it is a part.

So the concrete real, of which the real subject is a part, “retains an autonomous existence outside the head” and remains as such so long as the method remains “merely speculative, merely theoretical.”<sup>217</sup> What is necessary, Marx suggested, is that the movement from abstract to complex living whole should be based upon “the working-up of observation and conception into concepts”<sup>218</sup> with respect to the real concrete whole – i.e. it should integrate scientific investigation into its theoretical analysis. The parallels with Lenin’s theory of knowledge are clear. Just as Lenin conceived of practice as the site of mediation between finite thought determinations

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<sup>216</sup> All of the following quotes taken from Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, (London: Penguin, 1973), 101.

<sup>217</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 102.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

and the infinite richness of the living whole so as to enrich the concrete real appropriated in the mind, so Marx had posited the same methodological pre-requisites in his critique of the philosophical residues in the work of nineteenth century political economists.

Marx went on to complicate this sketch further by questioning the historicity of the relationship between the abstract categories and the concrete living whole. Primarily Marx asked whether the simple categories are inherited from and therefore tell us something about a less developed concrete living whole? In a sense Marx was shining a material light on Hegel's dialectical understanding of history. The question was: do the categories used to understand social-economic formations and the social-economic formations themselves, which necessarily support these categories, develop progressively, as they do in the dialectical development of concepts outlined by Hegel? Bourgeois society, according to Marx, was the one to which many different social formations would eventually be subordinated in historical reality. But given that in their own time there was nothing inevitable about this development, that capitalist relations of production were not foreseeable from within their own social and economic configuration, it was incorrect to project back onto the past particular categories which gained predominance within bourgeois society. Doing so merely dehistoricized existing categories and denied the specificity of the concrete living whole in which these categories are embedded thereby justifying their timeless and unchangeable nature.<sup>219</sup> And as Marx warns, "bourgeois economy ... supplies the key to the ancient ... [but it does so] not at all in the manner of those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society."<sup>220</sup> Accordingly, the projection of categories specific to the most historically up-to-date conditions onto the past had the effect of smoothing over distinctions among historically specific social-economic formations. For Marx, this was a methodological shortcoming that resulted in the faulty apprehension of the historical

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<sup>219</sup> Marx is clear on this: "If, then, the specific form of capital is abstracted away, and only the content is emphasized, *as which it is a necessary moment of all labour, then of course nothing is easier than to demonstrate that capital is necessary condition for all human production.* The proof of this proceeds precisely by abstraction from the specific aspects which make it the moment of a specifically developed *historic* stage of human production" in Marx, *Grundrisse*, 258. This is directed specifically at the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo. The issue of anachronistic projections in political economy is raised in the first section of the *Introduction* and is a dominant theme throughout.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

determinations of a given formation but also of the existing concrete living whole in its historical specificity.

Therefore, Marx put forward as a methodological prerequisite the historicization of existing categories. He claimed this should be done as part of the movement from the abstract to the concrete whole by way of empirical methods of analysis, i.e. through the mediation of practice. Only in this way would the categories take on the full scope of their meaning, according to which specific concrete living whole they have been abstracted from. An open-ended materialist practice, becomes for Marx crucial to the historicization of finite categories. Without scientific investigation standing as a determinate negation of the eternalised categories of theory, the analysis would fall short of grasping the concrete living whole in its becoming. It would, therefore, stand as systematised philosophical speculation does toward the real world: frozen and abstract.

This brings us back to Marx's critique of Hegelian philosophy. In carrying into itself the recognition that the mind "appropriates the world in the only way that it can" (i.e. in thought) and that "the real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head" under historically specific conditions, Marx's methodology sought to uncover the historicity of existing categories of thought. As Marx explains:

"In the succession of the economic categories, as in any other historical social science, it must not be forgotten that their subject – here, modern bourgeois society – is always what is given, in the head as well as in reality, and that these categories therefore express the forms of being, the characteristics of existence, and often only individual sides of this specific society, this subject, and therefore this society by no means begins only at the point where one can speak of it *as such*"<sup>221</sup>.

The empirical individual exists under particular historical conditions in which a particular kind of production predominates and these conditions stipulate the relations that mediate their experience. Since this peculiar configuration of relations corresponds to what is given, that is, to how the real empirical subject comes to understand existence as such, it is necessary that the economic categories used to

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 106.



express this form of being are historically qualified. Otherwise, economic categories, which give expression to social forms of being (and the implication here is that these forms are historically changeable), will be considered eternal.

For Marx, it is crucial that economic categories and their internal associations are not presumed to be timeless. In the same vein, it is “unfeasible and wrong to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive.” In other words, history should not dictate the order and sequence of the categories employed to comprehend existing conditions of production. Rather, their sequence should be guided “by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development.”<sup>222</sup>

Capital subordinates all former modes of production to its own specific hierarchy of relations. Therefore, it is not sufficient to designate the earliest form of production that appears within it (e.g. agriculture) as its simplest category and trace from there the more complex composite concepts in line with the course of history. Capital defines its own hierarchy of relations distinct from the historical succession of economic categories. Methodologically speaking, capital, therefore “must form the starting-point as well as the finishing-point”<sup>223</sup> and this demands a scientific investigation of the historical specificity of the concrete living whole as exists in the present. Only in this way, according to Marx, do the differences of earlier societies come into relief, and as a consequence the distinctiveness of the current conjuncture become apparent.

Returning to Lefebvre’s writing on Lenin, it is in the chapter looking at Lenin’s economic thought that he turns to the *Introduction*:

This text of Marx, rarely put in its proper place, seems central to us. It contains the blueprint and the plan of *Capital* as the analysis and synthesis of *concrete* capitalist society, including the vestiges that it carries over – that is to say as an exposition of a social-economic formation.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 106.

It is also the blueprint of Lenin's economic work, particularly, but can be traced in his entire body of work. Put before a society (Russian society, but not only it) which is not "purely" capitalist, as feudalism continues to dominate, it will be the "radical" critique of this society which will be necessary in order to overcome the critiques of the bourgeois and petite-bourgeois liberals and democrats.<sup>224</sup>

For Lefebvre, Lenin and Marx come together through the methodological plan sketched out in the *Introduction*. And since, in Lefebvre's view, Lenin's theory of knowledge is the consistent thread throughout all of his work, they also come together via Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, where this theory is formalised. In particular there is a consonance for Lefebvre around the way Marx in the *Introduction* and Lenin in his economic writing register their subject matter as both concrete and in a process of formation. The following elements I have foregrounded in the *Introduction* form the basis of Lenin's radical critique: the working up of observations and empirical abstractions from scientific investigation, the dialectical movement through critical theorisations between finite and absolute determinations toward a concrete whole comprising multiple interacting determinations, and resultantly the provisional historicization of existing categories.

Elaborating on exactly how the *Introduction* had provided the blueprint for *Capital*, Lefebvre explains that the category of value is the cellular form in capitalism, meaning that the category can only be properly explained in relation to the living organism of which it is a part. Carrying on his analogy, Lefebvre says: "Scientific knowledge (anatomic and physiologic) cannot leave to one side the cell, its history, or its dialectical relation to the whole." And so, with the *Introduction* as his blueprint, Lefebvre explains that Lenin confronted such a concrete living whole in his own time, but one radically different to the one Marx confronted at the time of writing *Capital*. Surveying Russian society at the turn of the century, Lenin found before him economic activities and social strata not at all homogenous in appearance. Above all he found an immense petite bourgeoisie (artisans, small producers) and multiple forms of land use, possession and property, ranging from the remains of earlier communities (the "mir", an administrative creation of the eighteenth century on the basis of the ancient peasant community) to traditional feudal practices and the

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<sup>224</sup> Lefebvre, *Lénine*, 213.

exploitation perpetrated by rich capitalist peasants. With such a horizon before him, Lenin enriched the meaning of Marx's notion of social-economic formation. By recognizing that social forms (superstructure) interact with economic forces (base), Lenin presented concrete reality as a formation, not a fixed structure; a reality that developed as a living organism, carrying multiple socio-economic vestiges into a present dominated by a particular mode of production. Lefebvre elaborates:

The social economic formation illustrates a sedimentation, a series of successive levels, dating from every epoch: archaism, feudality and semi-feudality, precapitalist structures (artisan, small producers), modern and heavy industry...The well-defined and therefore discontinuous "social structures", that the analysis discerns...are so to speak embedded in all kinds of transitions and intermediary stages.<sup>225</sup>

If, as Marx put it, capital subordinates all former modes of production to its own specific hierarchy of relations, it is not at all the case that it successfully subsumes them all at once with a homogenous mode of production known as capitalism. Rather capitalism, understood as a mode of production characterised by the extraction of surplus value from wage labour, is the dominant form of production within a global formation. The constituent elements of this living system take a place within the hierarchy of relations determined by capitalist production unevenly. Capitalism at all time comprises transitional and intermediate stages of specific modes of production tending toward a dominant form. Thus Lenin showed in his economic studies of Russia that Russian capitalism circa 1900 was a social-economic formation: a formation, within which specific places, depending upon the specific sedimentation of their diverse socio-economic history, had taken up a place in the hierarchy of relations determined by and constitutive of global capitalism at that moment.

According to the methodological blueprint of the *Introduction*, it would be necessary to take these residual and transitional elements seriously as parts of the living whole, not as mere incidental aberrations. The coexistence of multiple modes of production in parallel with overlapping, residual and transitional social forms within the living whole play a necessary role in historicizing the concept of capital. Indeed, it is in keeping with Marx's guidelines in the *Introduction* that Lenin would want to further

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 218.

specify and historicize a category like capital according to the concrete living whole he was confronted with. A simple category like exchange value or labour, positioned within and multiply determined by empirical findings extracted from the concrete living whole, becomes something quite other than what appears in *Capital* when the formation they are part of comprises coexisting and transitioning modes of production and social forms.

By thus showing that the growth of capitalism does not occur singularly, but is multiform and multilateral, Lenin relativized his own analysis of capitalism. Since all roads leading toward the dominant mode of production (in this case modern imperialist capitalism) are distinct, and the dominant mode toward which they tend is always defined by the specific hierarchy of relations it presides over, this preponderant structure is formulated by Lenin to be in a state of becoming. As such, the real object of the analysis – the concrete social economic formation – will necessarily develop beyond a given examination. This aspect of Lenin's treatment effectively retained the element of historical difference so important to Marx in the *Introduction*. But the exposition also relativized its own categories, and the specific hierarchy of relations through which these categories gained their meaning. In other words, included within Lenin's radical critique, following his theory of knowledge, was the notion that the absolute designated by the term 'capitalism' was a receding horizon for which one could only provide a provisional diagram to be enriched and filled in by practice.

Lenin then, had gone beyond *Capital* by using the methodology elucidated in the 1857 *Introduction*: this would form the basis of the theory of knowledge that would be formalised in his commentary on Hegel's *Logic*. As Lefebvre claims: "in the abstract scheme (an abstraction, let us repeat again, scientific and necessary) of *Capital*, capitalism is considered as a whole, outside of the internal differences between the capitalist countries, although Marx constantly takes into account these differences."<sup>226</sup> The internal differences within capitalism, which appear more pronounced in the *Grundrisse*, fall away by the time of *Capital*. *Capital*, unlike the *Grundrisse*, dialectically traces the laws of development of value under capitalism

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<sup>226</sup> 230.

understood as a system that is wholly contemporaneous with itself. Lenin however would highlight those internal differences, leading him to the discovery of the law of uneven development internal to capitalism itself. Central to this notion was the idea that the structure of capitalism included, and even depended upon, the residues of previous social and economic formations including their forms of exploitation and their pre-capitalist labour processes. This was in fact apparent in volume three of *Capital* where the residual presence of ground rent and landlordism, nominally feudal relations, suggested a coexistence of modes of production or at least a critical insight into the process of formal subsumption Marx described in the unpublished chapter of *Capital*.<sup>227</sup> In Marx's account, ground rent as an ostensibly non-capitalist mode of extracting value persists alongside and within capitalist relations.<sup>228</sup>

The law of uneven development famously led Lenin to his formulation of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, his challenge to Marxist common-sense regarding the stagism of the revolutionary process and the revolutionary capacities of so-called backward countries. As Lefebvre shows, Lenin remained deeply suspicious of revolutionary teleologies, consistent with his theory of knowledge and his method of analysing concrete situations. Lefebvre quotes Lenin at length:

History as a whole, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more multiform, more lively and ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties, the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes. This can readily be understood, because even the finest of vanguards express the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands, whereas at moments of great upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes. Two very important practical conclusions follow from this: first, that in order to accomplish its task the revolutionary class must be able to master *all* forms or aspects of social activity without exception (completing after the capture of political power—sometimes at great risk and with very great danger—what it did not complete before the capture of power); second, that the

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<sup>227</sup> 'Results of the Direct Production Process' in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works: Volume 34 Marx 1861-64*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994), 465.

<sup>228</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *Marxist Thought and the City*. More recently Harry Harootunian has elaborated on the relation between Lenin's economic studies and formal subsumption in Marx. See especially 'Marxism's Eastward Migration' in Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, 73 – 115.

revolutionary class must be prepared for the most rapid and brusque replacement of one form by another.<sup>229</sup>

In Lefebvre's view, the law of uneven development had made apparent to Lenin the multiplicity of social and material activities comprising the capitalist social-economic formation. Just as in Lenin's theory there was nothing uniform about the way capitalism subsumed non-capitalist residues, so a revolutionary political perspective adequate to that reality should not align itself solely with conditions proper to the most advanced conditions of capitalist exploitation. Hence, in Lefebvre's view, Lenin had de-systematised Marx's formal account of capitalism. To do so he had used the dialectical method laid out in the 1857 *Introduction*, which he would theoretically substantiate in his *Notebooks*. In Lefebvre's view, this method corresponded to the theory of knowledge that Marx put into practice over and against philosophical knowledge. Lenin had linked his revolutionary politics to an open-ended examination of the concrete totality of the capitalist socio-economic formation. Crucially, this examination would be sensitive to those intermediary vestiges that fell outside the capitalist mode of production understood as a self-contained and ubiquitous system. According to Lefebvre's reading of Lenin, then, any truly revolutionary political project had to orientate its revolutionary theory and practice around the internal differences that the capitalist formation comprised. This was clearly a direct challenge to the official Marxism of the PCF and of philosophical Marxists for whom the 'class point of view' of the industrial proletariat was synonymous with revolutionary practice as such.

It was out of this reading of Lenin that Lefebvre had retroactively validated the political importance of his own empirical research, which had up until that point been largely ignored or dismissed,<sup>230</sup> produced a Lenin against the orthodoxy, and reconstructed a theory of knowledge that corresponded to Marx's struggle against

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<sup>229</sup> Lefebvre, *Lénine*, 190.

<sup>230</sup> In his preface to the third edition of *Du rural à l'urbain*, Hess recounts Lefebvre's interest in the history of peasant movements, but says that "he found few interlocutors either inside or outside the [French Communist] Party. For example, he wrote a work on ground rent which did not find an editor. In that work, he had studied ground rent but also the sub-soil which ultimately led him to questions of oil" Lefebvre was apparently told that "to look at ground rent is not Marxist. It is Ricardian" In Stuart Elden, "Thinking Past Henri Lefebvre: Introducing "The Theory of Ground Rent and Rural Sociology," *Antipode* 48, No. 1, (15 July 2015), 57-66.

philosophy. In the following section, I will survey Lefebvre's post-war empirical research into the social and economic dynamics of various rural and agropastoral contexts in Europe. I will argue that these were examples of Lefebvre's on-going attempts to realise the end of philosophy based upon a re-construction of Marx's dialectical theory of knowledge from elements of Marx and Lenin. This interpretation became a guide for Lefebvre's political, scientific and critical practice. It involved empirically disclosing intermediary and residual social and economic elements of postwar European capitalism that were denied in systematic accounts of capitalism. It sought also to critically enrich Marxian categories. In Lefebvre's view, philosophy continued to exist in the Party wherever systematising thought took precedence over Marx's plea for an anti-systematic critical theory of knowledge.

## 2.4 Lefebvre's Radical Critique of Systematic Marxism

So far I have introduced Lefebvre's treatment of the end of philosophy motif in Marx as it appeared in *La Somme et le reste*, a treatment that meditates upon the schism between the theoretical and concrete dimensions of Marx's injunction. I have shown how, at the level of theory, Lefebvre came to deepen his understanding of the end of philosophy demanded in Marx by tracing the contours of Lenin's response to that same injunction. I have argued that this turn towards Lenin to rethink the end of philosophy motif in Marx was largely prompted by a number of overlapping theoretical debates that had developed within Party in the early and mid-fifties. Lefebvre was working within a highly constrained discursive and political field in which certain philosophical positions and vocabularies were deemed anti-Marxist and certain scholarly agendas deemed to negatively impact the working-class political movement. The Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* was central to the PCF's campaign to bolster Stalin's dialectical materialism as the definitive interpretation of Marx's break from classical philosophy. Any diversion from this position was seen as subversive, deviationist and revisionist.

Within this constrained field of reference, Lefebvre attempted to disassemble a systematic approach to Marxist philosophy and prevent it from dominating political practice within the Party. Lefebvre repudiated the idea that when Marx spoke of the

end of philosophy he meant: the rejection of speculative philosophy in favour of a new philosophy that certified revolutionary practice at all costs while conceiving revolution as an inevitability based upon a deeply metaphysical conception of the proletarian subject.

In Lefebvre's view, the false death of philosophy typified the Party during its Stalinist years. He would say of the afterlife of philosophy in the PCF:

The official dia-mat offers us this distressing and rather startling spectacle; killing of philosophy, materializing its demise and resuscitating its body in order to use it '*perinde ac cadaver*' in the service of the politics of the moment. In absolute antagonism to the philosophical inspiration of Marxism and its prospects of transcending philosophy, in complete opposition to the fundamental criticism of the System and the State, the System and State Philosophy have been revived. Mephistopheles galloping on a dead horse that he has dug out of the charnel house.<sup>231</sup>

For Lefebvre, the doctrinal dialectical materialism of Stalin, which gave cover to the political pragmatism of the PCF, parodied the death of philosophy. Its practicism was based on Stalin's philosophical apprehension of natural development. In effect, Marx's call for an end to philosophy had been used to substantiate the absolute truth of diamat. By explicitly defining itself against speculative philosophy, of the kind Marx ostensibly rejected, diamat had ascribed to itself the status of a properly non-philosophical transcendental discourse to guide revolutionary action. This, in spite of the fact that its ascension to politics was based upon ontological claims about the nature of matter and teleological claims regarding revolution.<sup>232</sup>

In Lefebvre's view this dissimulated philosophy had been grafted onto the Party apparatus in order to systematise revolutionary political practice. After diamat was taken up by the Soviet Union as the official interpretation of Marxism in the late thirties, politics for the PCF meant aligning the organisational form of the political

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>232</sup> Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. In an interview from the early 80s Althusser would echo Lefebvre's anti-Hegelian critique of diamat; "It seemed to me essential that we rid ourselves of monist materialism and its universal dialectical laws; originating with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, this was a harmful metaphysical conception which substituted 'matter' for the Hegelian 'Mind' or 'Absolute Idea'." Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987: Later Writing, 1978-1987*, (London: Verso, 2006), 254.



party with the philosophical universalisms of Stalin's philosophy. Political practice in this context had become welded to fixed conceptual categories extracted from Marx. The bureaucratic party form, and its systematic and transcendent orchestration of political representation, was undergirded by a metaphysical conception of the revolutionary trajectory that assumed the direct expression of the proletariat. As such, the objective conditions for transformative political practice in the Stalinist Party form had become alien to its adherents. The case of the show trial and execution of Hungarian Communist László Rajk was for Lefebvre indicative of how "Marxists have accepted, in the name of Marxist politics, the *alienations* that Marxism had wanted to reject and does reject as philosophy."<sup>233</sup> This philosophy of the political enshrined in *diamat*,<sup>234</sup> under which the organisational hierarchy of the Party became synonymous with the historic mission of the proletariat, and which allowed it to perpetrate injustices in the name of Marxism, was the primary target of Lefebvre's on-going attempt to put an end to philosophy.

In the introduction of the 1970 essay collection *Du rural à l'urbain*, a text which gathered Lefebvre's empirical work conducted between 1949 and 1969, he spoke of how Stalinism had intentionally confused the spirit of the system with the spirit of the organisation. From this point of view, Lefebvre argued it should be understood that Marxism did not contain a philosophy, "a system, a definitive model of thought and action, but a *way*, that of the realisation of philosophy through its radical critique."<sup>235</sup> For Lefebvre, Marx's imperative was for an on-going radical critique of the ontologising claims of philosophy in its every manifestation. This meant for Lefebvre exposing philosophical conceptions to their non-philosophical outside, showing a systematic and absolutizing thought those elements that were in excess of its logic. In other words, Lefebvre developed and applied a method, in the aim of pursuing Marx's imperative to put philosophy to death, that was consistent with his readings of Marx's *1857 Introduction* and Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. It was a method that

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<sup>233</sup> Lefebvre, *Problèmes*, 9.

<sup>234</sup> "Dialectical materialism is the world outlook of the Marxist-Leninist party...Hence, the party of the proletariat should not guide itself in its practical activity by casual motives, but by the laws of development of society, and by practical deductions from these laws... Hence, if it is not to err in policy, the party of the proletariat must both in drafting its program and in its practical activities proceed primarily from the laws of development of production from the laws of economic development of society." The laws of development here in Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*.

<sup>235</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain*. Éditions, (Paris: Anthropos, 1970), 8.

principally treated concrete material reality as a living formation that exhausted epistemological reduction.

During the high years of Stalinist dominance in the PCF, Lefebvre worked in *Le Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CRNS), working primarily on the question of the peasantry, agricultural production and the industrialisation of this context. This was a research area Lefebvre had come to prior to his involvement in CRNS, having conducted empirical research into the rural communities of the Campan Valley in the Pyrenees during the war. This research was carried out while he was in hiding as a member of the Resistance and was completed under the supervision of ethnographer Georges-Henri Rivière for the Musée national des arts et traditions populaires. Łukasz Stanek provides historical context to Lefebvre's wartime empirical work:

At the time when the question of folklore and its relationship to national identity became a profoundly political issue in pre-war Europe, Rivière's take on ethnography differed from the conservative understanding of Frenchness, which was rooted in rural landscapes and peasantry as the residuum of the nation's culture. Rather, he was convinced of the heterogeneity of preindustrial popular civilizations in France, which he intended to investigate in the course of their transformation under the impact of contemporary processes of urbanization and modernization.<sup>236</sup>

This encouragement to trace the socio-economic and cultural diversity of rural communities from a historical perspective had a lasting impression on how Lefebvre would conceive of the broader dynamics of capitalist development. Significantly, this fieldwork coincided with Lefebvre's theoretical investment in the notion of uneven development and would have been coloured by Lenin's philosophical work. Lefebvre's translation of Lenin's notebooks on Hegel had been published only four years prior (1939) and it is noteworthy that he would return to the notebooks in the late fifties to read Lenin's theory of knowledge into his empirical discovery of uneven development. It is also notable that Lefebvre submitted his doctoral dissertation based

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<sup>236</sup> Łukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*. (Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 5.

on his work on the Campan Valley in 1954<sup>237</sup> at roughly the same time he was honing his own interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx across intellectual debates about the philosophical status of Marxism. Hence at this early stage the overlaps between Lefebvre's philosophical engagements, political commitments and empirical work had forged a new vision of what Marxism meant and how it should be practiced.

*Du rural à l'urbain*, Lefebvre explains in his introduction of the essay collection, “represents a tiny part of the information amassed” during his empirical work on the agrarian question. This is likely a reference to Lefebvre's *Manuel de sociologie rurale* of which Rémi Hess speaks in his biography of Lefebvre.<sup>238</sup> Yet what is retained in *Du rural à l'urbain* gives a strong sense of what Lefebvre's research itinerary looked like in the fifties while working within CRNS. In it we find thick empirical and historical work on the peculiarities of social class formation in countryside of Tuscany and work detailing mixed and combined modes of production in various agricultural contexts:

In a single region, the Pyrenees, one may observe both phenomena side by side: the most archaic cultivation methods using the hoe ('laya' on the Spanish side), the Roman swing-plough, the tractor, remnants of the agrarian community (collective holding and use of pasture), modern cooperatives and large-scale mechanized farming.<sup>239</sup>

In ‘Perspective de la Sociologie Rurale’ (1953), which appears in the collection, Lefebvre defined a three-point methodology for treating the complexity of the problems raised by the heterogeneity of rural contexts:

1. Descriptive. Observation ... In the foreground: participant observation in the field. Careful use of survey techniques (interviews, questionnaires, statistics).
2. Analytic-regressive. Analysis of reality as described. Attempt to give it a precise date ...

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<sup>237</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Les Communautés Paysannes Pyrénéennes: Thèse soutenue en Sorbonne 1954*, (Navarrenx: Cercle Historique de l'Arribère, 2014).

<sup>238</sup> Rémi Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle*, (Paris: A.M. Métallée, 1988), 169.

<sup>239</sup> ‘Perspectives de la Sociologie Rurale’ in Lefebvre, *Du rural à l'urbain*, 65.

3. Historical-genetic. Studies of changes in this or that previously dated structure ... Attempt to reach a genetic classification of formations and structures, in the framework of the overall structure ... an attempt to return to the contemporary as previously described, in order to rediscover the present, but as elucidated, understood: explained.

And he went on to give a particular example:

Take sharecropping as an example. First we need to describe it exactly (rent paid in kind, crops shared with the landowner, obligations in addition to rent, etc.); then to date it (it is contemporary with the creation of the urban market, the bourgeoisie, but where capitalism develops, it gives way to tenant farming; it thus has a semi-feudal origin), then to explain its transformations and preservation (economic backwardness where it is practised, lack of capital, etc.).<sup>240</sup>

Without much modification, Lefebvre had extrapolated into the field of sociology the method which he had gleaned from Marx's 1857 *Introduction* and which he had read into Lenin's philosophical and economical works. Central to Lefebvre's empirical method was the law of uneven development, the movement from abstraction to the living whole, and the critical historicization of the categories. This method, which presumed an on-going process of research, was consistent with Marx's theoretical revolution and a radical critique that was poised against philosophical systematisation. Correspondingly, this was the theoretical method that stood as the essential correlate to political practice in the revolutionary political movement. For Lefebvre, revolutionary political practice had to approximate the concrete real in its inexhaustibility, and the only way of doing so would be through an incessant radical critique, taken in both its theoretical and practical dimensions, of totalising and systematizing thought. In this respect we can view the problems that Lefebvre's empirical work raised as being problems for the PCF.<sup>241</sup> Specifically problems for the way that it conceived of the working-class, the system of capitalist production and the transition from capitalism to socialism.

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>241</sup> "To the extent that he appeared as the "representative" of Marxist thought because of [Lefebvre's] talent and active thought...it was possible for him to maintain an interpretation of Marxist thought that he believed most open to the future, one that brought difficulties to the fore, that clarified questions and showed that truth was not yet settled". Blanchot, *Friendship*, 85.

Lefebvre's work from this period involved tracing the contours of the socio-economic formation that confronted him. It was an effort to enrich existing conceptions of the world situation that had hardened in the PCF, aligned as they were with a Soviet vision of a split world and American imperialism. Little space was given to the decolonisation process that was a defining dynamic during this period of capitalist development and the corresponding subsumption of various peripheral and non-capitalist parts of world to the capitalist centres following the Second World War.<sup>242</sup> The complexity of the processes by which different socio-economic residues or survivals were transitioning toward capitalist relations had been largely ignored by the PCF in view of a political pragmatism that theoretically and politically centred the experiences of the industrial working-class. This, in spite of the fact that the uneven development of the subsumption process that Lefebvre had highlighted was central to the development of the capitalist wage-relation.

In this chapter I have introduced the theme of the end of philosophy as it appeared in Lefebvre's autocritique *La Somme et le reste*. There, Lefebvre recorded a common experience faced by philosophers of his generation who had adhered to official Marxism during the Stalinist years with the hope of overcoming philosophy through political activism. In this trajectory, the domination of the Party by Stalinist dogmatism resurrected philosophical instincts that were supposed to be overcome. Faced with the philosophical vestiges that conditioned understandings of Marx within and outside of the Party, Lefebvre reconstructed a dialectical theory of knowledge from the writings of Marx and Lenin. This was fundamentally an interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx that challenged both the orthodoxy in the Party and the prevailing philosophical Marxisms of the academy. This theory underpinned Lefebvre's formulation of a critical research methodology that he used to pursue the end of philosophy in practice. For Lefebvre, the death of philosophy was not simply its replacement with political praxis – whether through concrete political action, or as an intellectual waging ideological warfare on behalf of the Party. It was a long-term project involving a re-conceptualisation of praxis that demanded both political commitment and the radical critique of philosophy in its every guise. Both Lefebvre's

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<sup>242</sup> Further inquiries in this direction have been made in S. Kipfer and K. Goonewardena, Urban Marxism and the Post-colonial Question: Henri Lefebvre and "Colonisation," *Historical Materialism* 21, No. 2, (2013), 76-116.

critical empirical and his transformative interpretations of Marxist theory were elements of his political practice guided by a commitment to realising the end of philosophy.



## Chapter 3: Louis Althusser (1964 – 84)

### 3.1 Permission from History: An Encounter between Lefebvre and Althusser

5 June 1978

Henri Lefebvre

30 Rue Rambuteau

Dear Louis Althusser,

After returning from a long trip abroad, I just read your articles. I find them remarkable, coming in time and I approve of them. In my opinion, it would suffice to justify a meeting between us which can only be fraternal.

But there is more. In recent times, given on the one hand the enterprises of the Right and the operation of the "new philosophers" - and on the other hand, the possibilities of openness that appear on the inside of the PC, the theoretical situation seems to me modified. The separation between the epistemological tendency and the critical tendency in Marxist thought loses, in my opinion, its *raison d'être*. A rapprochement, a reunification and a work in common would not they come today in their time? I do not believe, as far as I'm concerned, that there are insurmountable obstacles and incompatibilities between what I consider the two complementary aspects of Marxist thought at this time.

It would be a great pleasure for me in many ways to have an appointment with you, and even, if you accept it, to receive you for lunch or dinner at my home.

I live and work with Catherine Régulier, a member of the Party, who joins with greater interest in this invitation.

Not without hopes.

H Lefebvre.

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6 June 1978

Dear H. Lefebvre

I am very touched by your letter. You know, I have always held you in esteem, and also, for the trials that have been inflicted upon you, with fraternal affection.



I would be happy to see you. I am a little surprised that your invitation is accompanied by considerations... of an historical nature, as if we needed permission from history to see each other. For the rest, I'm afraid you'll have some illusions. But in the end, each to his own. For me, I try to perceive mine.

Fraternally,

L. Althusser.<sup>243</sup>

On the 5 June Lefebvre wrote to Louis Althusser requesting a meeting with the proposal of writing together a 'work in common' from within the PCF. This came shortly after the 1978 legislative elections (19 March 1978), before which the Union of the Left (the coalition between the PCF, the *Parti socialiste* PS and the *Parti radical de gauche* PGR), which had momentarily looked capable of toppling the right from power, fell apart. The period leading up to these elections was increasingly strained for left militants, and especially for the communist left. Engagements between the PCF and PS that precluded the election plotted a series of strategic renovations, volte-faces and inconsistencies on the part of the PCF that left many communist adherents at a loss for defence of its leaderships' opportunism. The exchange between Althusser and Lefebvre marks a significant crossroads for the two thinkers in their opposing proximities to the PCF: after twenty years of separation, Lefebvre wrote in *L'Humanité* in March of 1978 an appeal to voters to support the PCF.<sup>244</sup> Following the calamitous activities of the PCF, which ultimately cost the Union of the Left the election, and after thirty years of toeing the line, Althusser wrote in *Le Monde* the article series that would become *What Needs to Change in the Party*.<sup>245</sup> The texts marked a more frontal criticism of the leadership of the PCF and a level of public intransigence that broke with Althusser's usual deference to the Party's integrity.<sup>246</sup> Of Althusser's articles, Perry Anderson would say that they represented

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<sup>243</sup> Letters consulted in the l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), Fonds Althusser: ALT2.A27.04.03 *Correspondance recue par L.A. après la publication des ses articles dans La Monde (juin 1978)*.

<sup>244</sup> Henri Lefebvre, 'Entretien Ne pas rester prisonnier du passé Le philosophe marxiste Henri Lefebvre a rencontré le XXIIe congrès du PCF,' *L'Humanité*, (Jeudi 2 mars 1978).

<sup>245</sup> Louis Althusser, 'What Must Change in the Party,' *New Left Review*, No. 109, (May-June 1978).

<sup>246</sup> Leading up to the election, Althusser reserved most of his more strident criticisms of the party to international audiences (In 1976 Althusser gave a talk on the dictatorship of the proletariat in Barcelona see: Louis Althusser, 'Un texte inédit de Louis Althusser. Conférence sur la dictature du proletariat a

“the most violent oppositional charter ever published within a party in the postwar history of Western Communism.”<sup>247</sup>

In the following, I would like to provide context to this encounter and to clarify the stakes that were at play in this seemingly innocuous interaction. The aim of suspending this moment within the broader trajectory of thesis is twofold. Practically, the chapter serves as a bridge marking the transition from one portrait to the next, focalised around a moment of biographical, conceptual and political engagement. Conceptually, the chapter serves to advance the case that the conversation I am synthesising between the work of Lefebvre and Althusser around their distinct engagements with the end of philosophy thematic in Marx had a biographical dimension. This interaction marks a moment when the ambiance of the end of philosophy problematic in Marx formed a meeting point for these two thinkers.

In economic terms the 1970s in France was the beginning of the end of the *Trente Glorieuses* (thirty years of economic growth and infrastructural and technological re-development driven by the Marshall Plan), embracing as it did the dismantling of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates but not quite covering the 1973 oil crisis: the ultimate punctuation mark on post-war growth in Europe. Politically it was a watershed moment. It was the period during which the Fifth Republic entered its second phase – that of ‘Gaullism without de Gaulle’ as George Pompidou settled into his premiership laying the ground for the sixth national five year plan (1971). Meanwhile for the parliamentary left, the early 70’s were taken up by on-going attempts by both the PCF and the PS to redress the election defeat of ’69 and capitalise upon the anti-establishment energies of the events of May 1968. The remainder of the seventies was a protracted period for the left, largely taken up by strained attempts to reconcile a Common Programme for a popular government of the left. This reconciliation meant that both the PCF and the PS had to reformulate some

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Barcelone (1976),’ *Periode. Revue en ligne de theorie marxiste*. Available at: <<http://revueperiode.net/author/louis-althusser>> [Accessed 4 July 2020]. In November 1977 he gave the talk *The Crisis of Marxism* at the conference *Power and Opposition in Post-revolutionary Societies* organised by the *Il Manifesto* group and gave the interview *Marxism as Finite Theory* in *il Manifesto* in March 1978), to student political groups, (*The Historic Significance of the 22nd Congress* was given in 1976 to the Sorbonne Philosophy Branch of the French Union of Communist Students) or left them unpublished (*Les vaches noires: Interview imaginaire le malaise du XXIIe Congrès Ce qui ne va pas, camarades!* was written in 1976 and is Althusser’s most sustained response to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress but was not published in his lifetime).

<sup>247</sup> Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, (London: Verso, 1980), 113.

of their most fundamental tenets in line with the new reality of French society in the seventies. Likewise their politics had to confront the vivid shifts taking place in the make-up of capital, the re-composition of class affiliations, the state and the voting interests of the electorate. But more essentially, it meant the two parties had to face the difficult task of reconciling their differences with each other at the same time as re-inscribing their own political thresholds, distinctions and agendas.

For much of the non-parliamentary left, shattered into its various rivalling sects following the explosion of '68, the early seventies provided certain unifying themes. Something of a coherent register could be discerned from the questions that '68 threw up. Despite (and arguably because of) the anti-totalitarianism of '68 and the scorn thrown onto representatives of official Marxism for their part in chastising the students, the early seventies marked an uneasy return to Marxian terminology. Principal among the concerns occupying the many thinkers who had witnessed the political energies of May be absorbed in the Grenelle agreements,<sup>248</sup> the re-election of Charles De Gaulle and the subsequent election of George Pompidou, was the means by which capitalism and the Gaullist state continued to fend off crises and revolutionary actions. Coupled with the recuperative role played by the PCF and its union affiliate the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), the consolidation of the state on the other side of '68 drew the veil on many Marxist orthodoxies. Not least its Hegelian dialectical teleology which cast the industrial working-classes as the bearers of the universal emancipatory imperative and the party as its highest expression and strategic guide.

This critique did not simply reflect the failure of the working-class to realise their destiny, or more accurately the failure of their political representatives to effectively condense quantitative demands into an appetite for revolutionary action. Neither was it simply a reflection of the extent to which Marxism had become synonymous with Stalinism (i.e. totalitarianism) in the public imagination. It also responded to the

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<sup>248</sup> Negotiated in 25 and 26 May, the Grenelle Agreements were brokered between the Pompidou government, trade unions representing striking workers and representatives of employers in response to the working day, improved trade union rights and enhanced welfare provisions. See Bruno Astarian, 'The French Strikes of May-June 1968' *Libcom.org*. January 12 2013. Available at <<https://libcom.org/library/french-strikes-may-june-1968-authors-introduction-bruno-astarian>> [Accessed 28 July 2020]

increasing visibility of inchoate social protest movements that did not fit comfortably within traditional conceptualisations of class – formations that during '68 had identified struggles in common, built alliances which cut across class and found new forms of extra-parliamentary political expression. The emergence of these social movements raised questions for Marxist theory and foregrounded the limitations of *Capital* in its explanatory power both in terms of its own analysis and its absences.

During the high point of Common Programme enthusiasm (roughly 72-76) Lefebvre entertained close relations with the radical intellectual fringes of the Socialist Party. Throughout the seventies, Lefebvre was on the editing board of the journal *Socialisme et Autogestion* (1966 - 1977). Following the signing of the Common Programme in 1972, *Socialisme et Autogestion* became one of the main nominally non-partisan forums for theoretical and empirical investigations into the concept of *autogestion* (self-management) – a term that became a central point of tension between the PCF and PS during the lead up to the 1978 elections.<sup>249</sup>

However, while inhabiting the leftist circles forming around the *autogestion* movement – which had not yet resolved into clearly defined political partisanship during the tumult of the Union of Left – Lefebvre remained convinced that the dictatorship of the proletariat was crucial for a robust Marxism and voiced his criticism of the reforms introduced by the PCF in its 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress.<sup>250</sup> Such a defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat marked him out from the anti-totalitarian consensus of the period. Indeed, even while the PCF explicitly distanced itself from aspects of a

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<sup>249</sup> Bernard E. Brown, *Socialism of a Different Kind Reshaping the Left in France*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1982).

<sup>250</sup> "It is worth recalling that for Marx, Engels and Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat goes hand in hand with the withering away of the state: it is the very path toward the withering away of the state. When one abandons the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the French Communist Party has now done, one also abandons the withering away of the State and one eternalizes the State, whether one knows it or not. We become Hegelian and Lassalian rather than Marxist. But when one insists on the dictatorship of the proletariat while "forgetting" the withering away of the state, the result is very much the same." In Lefebvre, *Tribune Socialiste*. Lefebvre gave his definitive statement on the dictatorship of the proletariat in: 'Withering Away of the State' from 1964 in Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World Selected Essays*, (London: University of Minneapolis, 2009), 69-95. Echoes of this statement can be heard in the interview he gave for *Autogestion and Socialisme* in 1976. There he mentions the lack of attention given to the concept of the withering away of the state in discussions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, namely Etienne Balibar's intervention in *L'Humanité*. At the PCF's 22nd Congress in 1976, the party abandoned its commitment to the need for a Dictatorship of the Proletariat and promoted a democratic road to socialism i.e. a transition to Socialism through the parliamentary process. See Ed(s) Carl Boggs & David Plotke, *Politics of Eurocommunism Socialism in Transition*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 32.

Marxist-Leninist vocabulary, precisely to assuage these misgivings, for many this was too little too late: the Party was beyond redemption.

Lefebvre held this anomalous position in common with Althusser. Perhaps better known than Lefebvre's responses to these changes, was Althusser's defence of the status of dictatorship of the proletariat and his condemnation of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress and the broader Eurocommunist turn. It was Étienne Balibar who intervened publicly to establish the Althusserian front against the changes initiated by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress.<sup>251</sup> But Althusser's campaign against the humanist domination of the Party during the sixties precluded many of the issues that would be thrown up in '76. In some of his earliest writings Althusser foresaw the hazards of glibly detaching the Party from its Soviet past by humanising Marxism. Indeed much of Althusser's work of the sixties can be read as an effort to rehabilitate the integrity of Marxist theory against the mounting historical evidence of the failures of Marxism. Moreover, it was an attempt to rehabilitate the very methods of doing so.

Lefebvre and Althusser viewed the prospect of the Party hitching its political horizons to social democracy while ostensibly divesting itself of the statist ambitions of Stalinism, as nothing less than a capitulation to the insuperable reality of the bourgeois state and the renunciation of the revolutionary project. Seeing the Common Programme in general as "simply a schema for accelerated growth" and the PCF's monopoly capitalism policy as symptomatic of the fact that they remained "thinkers of the State", Lefebvre in the mid-seventies saw the construction of "a magnificent State socialism in France in which the State will be all-powerful" on the horizon which would provisionally deliver palliatives to an ailing capitalist mode of production. In renouncing the dictatorship of the proletariat, the PCF had shown itself committed to the durability of the state. In Lefebvre's view this was contrary to the "political break" which distinguished Marx's anti-statist political theory from Hegel's reformist philosophy.<sup>252</sup> Althusser took a similar position inside the Party. In an interview with Spanish newspaper *El Pais* from 1976 he claimed that:

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<sup>251</sup> In Etienne Balibar, *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, (London: NLB, 1977). Extracts of the texts appeared in *L'Humanité* in January 22 1976.

<sup>252</sup> Lefebvre, Henri. *State, Space, World*, 153-67.

The Communist Parties that have revised this point have given in to the blackmail of bourgeois ideology. Bourgeois groups told the Communist Parties: either you are for democracy and freedom, or else you prefer dictatorship and Stalinism. The response was “We are against Stalinism, and as such we are against the dictatorship of the proletariat”. The Communist Parties’ leaderships made a mistake, in offering such a response: dictatorship of the proletariat and Stalinism are not at all synonymous. Stalinism is a monstrous form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>253</sup>

The equivalence that had been drawn by the Party between the state and democracy was conducted over and against the prospect of a revolutionary subject poised to realise the end of philosophy. The absorption of communist politics into the state, with the inauguration of Eurocommunism, represented a return to a Hegelian philosophy of the state – the veritable fusion of absolute knowledge and power, where the state had again become the very condition of possibility for political realisation. In this sense, this ‘revisionist’ social democratic turn dovetailed with the popularisation of polemical and philosophical discourses claiming the death of Marx – a moment which reached fever pitch with the New Philosophers. In this twilight period, during which Althusser and Lefebvre did not shy from occupying an expressly political register, the two also sought refuge in philosophy, wherein the insufficiency of their own interpretations of the end of philosophy was cause for critical re-appraisal.

### **The Limits of Marx**

During the sixties Althusser and Lefebvre accused each other of providing discursive cover to the enemies of the revolutionary movement. More frontally with Lefebvre, both insinuated that the other was an idealist of one stripe or another.<sup>254</sup> Lefebvre, though never named as such, was certainly in mind when Althusser drew up the frontiers of objective allies and enemies of the working class movement within the Marxist camp in his 1966 lecture *The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research*, the year that two journals Lefebvre edited would come onto the

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<sup>253</sup> Louis Althusser, ‘Althusser: The dictatorship of the proletariat is not at all the same thing as Stalinism (1976),’ *Verso Blog*, 22 July 2016. Available at: <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2787-althusser-the-dictatorship-of-the-proletariat-is-not-at-all-the-same-thing-as-stalinism>> [Accessed 2 July, 2020]

<sup>254</sup> Henri See Lefebvre, *Au-delà du structuralisme*, (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1971).

scene: *Autogestion et Socialisme* and *L'Homme et la Société*.<sup>255</sup> Not without reason, Lefebvre had long been grouped with the dissident humanist tendency within the Party. Inside of the Party, Lefebvre had struggled to recuperate Marxist theory against a dominant *ouvriériste* orthodoxy that had buffered Party intellectuals from confronting the theoretical poverty of Stalinist Marxism. Much against the prevailing doxa of the forties and fifties, Lefebvre had defended the early writings of Marx and a particular strain of Hegelian-Leninism within the Party. His work of this period was undoubtedly dissident by the standards of Party authorities but certainly bore hallmarks of a humanist problematic in Althusser's formulation of the term. Ironically, Lefebvre's work of this period would become the intellectual roots of the humanist reformist currents that would later dominate the Party and act as the theoretical basis of the transformations of the 22<sup>nd</sup> congress. Even more peculiarly, it would be Roger Garaudy – once the mouthpiece of Zhdanovist orthodoxy who took Lefebvre to task for his idealist dalliances with Hegel – that would infamously represent the humanist front within the Party against an insurgent Althusserian Marxism.<sup>256</sup>

But while Althusser almost certainly saw Lefebvre as part of the humanist cause in the sixties and seventies, especially in the writing that so vehemently dismissed Althusser out of hand as the structuralist arm of the Marxist camp along with his proximity to the Socialists,<sup>257</sup> Lefebvre's Leninism never sat comfortably with

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<sup>255</sup> Althusser, *Humanist Controversy*, 10.

<sup>256</sup> W. S. Lewis, 'Editorial Introduction' to Louis Althusser's 'Letter to the Central Committee of the PCF, 18 March 1966', *Historical Materialism* 15, No. 2 (2007), 133-151. Garaudy played a further role in the PCF's narrative. His dismissal from the Party following his interventions in the 19<sup>th</sup> congress – in which he criticized the Party's continued adoption of Marxism as its 'official philosophy', rejected any prospect of a union with any other parties of the left, and claimed that the PCF had mishandled '68 and had not gone far enough in explicitly condemning the actions of Soviet Russia in Czechoslovakia – was a significant organisational strategy for the PCF at the time. It made room for Georges Marchais to move into the post of Assistant General Secretary, leading ultimately to the party's adoption of the programme for 'changing course' (*Changer de cap*) in October 1971. The aims of this new course, it was stated in the final section of the document, could only be achieved by a government of 'popular union' across the left. See Adereth, *The French Communist Party*, 200-201.

<sup>257</sup> Lefebvre was also close to the PSU, see: Henri Lefebvre, 'un entretien avec Henri Lefebvre le marxisme l'Etat et son dépérissement' in *Tribune Socialiste*, No. 705, (12 au 18 Juin 1976), 26-28 [Appendix]. Lefebvre's critical commentary of Althusser's writing in *L'Homme et la Société* (1966 – 2000) which was the twin journal of *Autogestion et Socialisme* is highlighted among the anti-Althusserian bent of the editorial, of which Lefebvre was a central part throughout the seventies, in Louis Althusser, *Les Vaches Noires Interview Imaginaire (le malaise du XXIIe Congrès) Ce qui ne va pas, camarades!*, (Paris: PUF, 2016), 66 – 67. He describes the *L'Homme et la Société* tendency as the "social democratic" front in the French context. In spite of such claims it is clear that Althusser engaged with thinkers of the so-called *anthropologie économique* movement, including Maurice Godelier, Claude Meillassoux and Pierre-Philippe Rey, all of whose work appeared in *L'Homme et la Société*. In the mid-seventies, Althusser's philosophical revisions of Marxian

conventional humanist outlooks. It was, at any rate, far from the heavily ecumenical and reformist humanism dominating the intellectual realm of the PCF at the time. In a similar way, Lefebvre was guilty of caricaturing Althusser in his own theoretical battle against structuralism within French intellectual life. For Lefebvre, Althusser was the communist representative of the structuralist turn in theory. Structuralism, with its recourse to transcendental claims about the nature of originary structures was, for Lefebvre, symptomatic of an emerging mode of production that had absorbed scientific research and state administered spatial planning. According to Lefebvre's analysis, this mode of production took the functionalist topographic model as its guiding principle to stave off economic crises and falsify the end of history.<sup>258</sup> Such seemingly eternalising assertions made by those in the structuralist camp clashed with Lefebvre's radical critical methodology. This methodology, as we have seen, was fundamentally guided by a committed critical negation of immobile categories gleaned from existing material and social relations that supported systemised or absolute knowledge claims. Althusser's re-assertion of scientificity into the question of Marxist philosophy and his strict separation of theoretical practice from social practice roused Lefebvre to condemn the whole Althusserian project.<sup>259</sup> In Lefebvre's view, the constitutive insularity of Althusser's theoretical practice, in which the mechanism for falsifying scientificity was internal to mental production and this production was seamless in character with industrial production, had both totalised existing relations of production and absolutised knowledge in the name of Marx.<sup>260</sup>

Yet, while Lefebvre's work identified the novelty of technocratic space management to the changing modalities of capitalism, and that this technocratic rationality found its ideological analogue in structuralism,<sup>261</sup> his dismissals of Althusser on the charge of theoreticism were narrowly focused on his avowedly theoreticist phase. Few of Lefebvre's critical engagements with Althusser followed his trajectory beyond 1968. More profoundly, perhaps, Lefebvre's castigation of Althusser at no point accounted for his struggle within the Party that had clearly informed his re-interpretations of

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conceptions of historical development was paralleled by an engagement with the work of the *anthropologie économique* on non-western modes of production. See Louis Althusser, *Écrits sur l'histoire* (1963 – 1986), (Paris: PUF), 129.

<sup>258</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *La fin l'histoire français : épilégomènes*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1970).

<sup>259</sup> Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, (Delhi, Aakar Books, 2014).

<sup>260</sup> Henri Lefebvre, 'Les paradoxes d'Althusser,' *L'Homme et la société*, No. 13, (1969), 3 – 37.

<sup>261</sup> Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, 176 – 196.



Marx. Althusser's intellectual itinerary had been inflected by the constraints of the Party apparatus under and against which he had aimed to generate transformative effects through the interpretive norms that governed understandings of Marx. And indeed, figuring the relation between the organisational form of the Party and the theoretical practice of intellectuals, both in theory as a philosopher and in practice as a Party member, was central to the Althusserian experience. This was not an experience that was foreign to Lefebvre.

Lefebvre's appeal to Althusser following the 1978 legislative election was, then, a curious intervention. The exchange was of course overdetermined – not least, as the letter makes clear, as Lefebvre's extension was in part prompted by his partner and Party member Catherine Régulier. In their co-authored *La Révolution n'est plus ce qu'elle Était* (1978), Régulier made clear her affiliation with Althusserian current in the PCF.<sup>262</sup> Whatever the motivations may have been, this proposal for a personal and theoretical reconciliation punctuated the intellectual and biographical trajectory of the two thinkers in a unique way. And it did around the historical specificity of the post-'78 malaise leading up to the May 1981 presidential election of François Mitterrand with the PS; a phase that marked both the beginning of the end of the Communist Party in France but also the eclipse of the Party dissident as a figure of influence on the public stage.

The generational lag between Lefebvre and Althusser informed their divergent direction of travel with regard to the Party in June 1978. Representing two major intellectual currents of dissidence within the PCF during its lifetime, which amidst the intellectual ferment of the sixties had become poised against one another, there was a certain irony to this proposed reconciliation. Lefebvre, who looked with guarded optimism at the changes taking place in the Party after the failure of the election, had exiled himself from the hard core of Socialist thinkers that surrounded him in the early and mid-seventies. By March 1978, Lefebvre would confess not having found a common point of analysis with leftists or the PS, who he would describe as “empiricists without a theory”. His uneasy return to the PCF hinged upon the outcome

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<sup>262</sup> Henri Lefebvre et Catherine Régulier, *La révolution n'est plus ce qu'elle était : essai*. (Paris: Éditions Libres-Hallier, 1978).

of the on-going struggles that were taking place within the Party. All of his sympathies lay with the new currents attempting to dislodge the implacably conservative leadership with which he was so familiar.<sup>263</sup>

Referring to his article series during March and April in *Le Monde*, Lefebvre's approval of his post-election writing, shows that he recognised Althusser's role in this struggle inside the PCF. And indeed the two had moved closer theoretically by this point. Both tentatively welcomed what had become commonly known in the leftist vernacular as the "explosion of Marxism."<sup>264</sup> The explosion had been sparked by the undeniable force of the many anti-Marxist polemics that had forced a rejoinder by the Party and advocates of Marxism to the historic failures of Stalinism. It was also fed by the political backwardness of the PCF leadership, who in their electoral ambitions had completely ignored the new mass social movements, the new features of global capital and the stagnation of Marxist theory in light of the theoretical innovations of the latter part of the twentieth century. Lefebvre had welcomed the explosion of Marxism on the basis of an affirmative estimation of the plurality of localised mass movements emerging all across the planet; in particular those formulating demands around access to and use of space. In their own contexts, these movements had contributed to the deprovincialisation of Marxist theory and practice. Meanwhile, Althusser welcomed it with the view that the finiteness of Marx's theoretical contributions had become overwhelmed by the onrush of history – a reality to which a living Marxism ought to be responsible.<sup>265</sup> The 'explosion of Marxism' was thus a position that developed out of a need to affirm the disintegration of neo-dogmatism

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<sup>263</sup> In his March appeal in *L'Humanité* Lefebvre would name Michel Rocard and Jacques Attali as the Socialist ideologues who had swayed him toward the PCF. In Lefebvre's view, the two represented a symptomatic intellectual wing of the PS who used the fashionable term *autogestion* to cover for their true ambitions to institute a high-tech neoliberalism that would merely renovate an ailing centralised state. Lefebvre, *L'Humanité*, March 1978.

<sup>264</sup> In the French *éclater* means *to explode* as a centrifugal force but carries in the adjectival form the sense of *overwhelming*.

<sup>265</sup> Henri Lefebvre, 'Le marxisme éclaté,' *L'Homme et la société*, No. 41-42, (1976), 3-12 and Louis Althusser, 'Marxism as a Finite Theory (1978),' *Viewpoint Magazine*. 14 December 2017. Available at: <<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/12/14/marxism-finite-theory-1978>> [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019] and Althusser, Louis. *The Crisis of Marxism (1977)* - *Viewpoint Magazine*. 15 December 2017. Available at: <<https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/12/15/crisis-marxism-1977>> [Accessed 11 Mar. 2019]. Althusser's acknowledgement of the limits of Marx in the context of a reflection over the situation of post-revolutionary societies in the seventies had a significant influence on the debate in Italy, particularly among thinkers close to the journal *Il Manifesto*. The journal held a conference in November 1978 based upon the paper Althusser had given in 1977 in Venice at the *Power and Opposition in Post-revolutionary Societies* which focused on the theoretical limitations of Marxism with regard to the State. See Louis Althusser et al., *Discutere lo Stato: posizioni a confronto su una tesi di Louis Althusser*, (Bari: De Donato, 1978).

while confronting the prevalence of an anti-Marxist consensus – monumentalised in the slogan ‘the death of Marx’– without at the same time launching a defence of doctrinal Marxism or regressing to revisionism.

Interesting, then, that this consonance around ushering in a de-systematisation of Marxism would be found, in Lefebvre’s mind at least, in the prospect of fusing together two separated elements of Marx. These elements had been canonised by the two philosophical Lenins and had influenced the separate intellectual trajectories taken by Lefebvre and Althusser – radical critique and epistemology respectively. This was an especially surprising reflex, given the resonances that the ’78 crisis had with the crisis of Marx that Lefebvre had diagnosed in *La somme et le reste* in 1958. That crisis formed around the systematic Marxism of Stalinism in its *ouvriériste*, anti-intellectual variant, which had been certified in the Party with dogmatic reference to Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. Lefebvre’s exclusion from the Party had provided him the opening to fully elaborate his renovation of Marxist theory without censure or intellectual strictures. Lefebvre’s escape from the disciplinary protocols of the Party was central to this development. It had allowed him to carry out the de-systematisation of Marxist theory without having to be accountable to Party ideology. Surprising then, that Lefebvre would view the crisis of Marx of 1978 as the opportune moment to forge a ‘work in common’ with Althusser. Particularly as he was the thinker Lefebvre cited most frequently to demonstrate the theoretical inertia of the Party. Surprising also, that this would be a work in common conducted within the confines of the Party he had left so many years before – a volte-face that would cost him the friendship of some his closest and long-lasting allies.<sup>266</sup>

What Lefebvre appeared to have in mind was forging a dissident front against the unflinching centralism of the leadership. The dysfunctions of the democratic

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<sup>266</sup> Lefebvre’s collaborative partnership with Charlotte Delbo came to an abrupt end when he made his appeal to support the Communist Party in the election in his March interview with *L’Humanité*. Lefebvre had shared the adventure of the century with Delbo; from their entry into the Communist Party in the twenties, their involvement in the Resistance, their departure from the PCF in the late fifties and their working partnership during Lefebvre’s Strasbourg (1961–1965) and Nanterre years (1965–73). In 1978 she would write an obituary for Lefebvre stating “the Communist Party is always wary of intellectuals; with reason...See Henri Lefebvre. We mend broken threads, we heal a wound of twenty years. After times of mistakes [*Le Temps des Meprises*], the time of reprisals” with a picture of tombstone with the words “Here lies H.L. 1901 – 1978” Manuscript consulted in Charlotte Delbo Fonds at La Bibliotheque national de France, 4-COL-208 (48) *Carrière d’Henri Lefèbvre : curriculum vitae, notes et coupures de presse 1961-1978*.

centralism of the Party had been laid bare by the defeat of 1978, especially in the course of actions taken by the General Secretary of the Party, Georges Marchais.<sup>267</sup> Such a faction as the one Lefebvre had in mind could foreseeably detonate the explosion of Marxism from within the Party, reviving Marxist theory from its death throes while at the same time implanting a properly democratic structure into the organisation that would empower the base. This, as Lefebvre indicated, could both countenance attacks coming from the neo-conservative reformists while taking on the right wing of the Party. This line spoke directly to the proposals Althusser had outlined in his *Le Monde* articles – a position he maintained until at least May, when in an interview in the Italian newspaper *Paese Sera* he insisted that militants should not resign from the Party as this “would be the best present one could give the leadership and Marchais.”<sup>268</sup> By June 1978, Marchais had already begun to issue rebukes toward those conspiring factionalism within the Party, implying that such efforts were class collaboration.<sup>269</sup>

In both of their analyses, Lefebvre and Althusser had traced the current crisis, notwithstanding its historical peculiarities, to a kind of constitutive crisis upon which Marxism itself thrived. Marxism, a term that Lefebvre contested the very existence of, already came into contradiction with itself in Marx’s lifetime, with the different readings and movements associated with Bakunin, Lassalle and Marx himself.<sup>270</sup> The idea that Marxist theory ever existed in a pure form, separate from the always overdetermined history that bears it, ought to be an idea foreign to Marxists, as Althusser counselled in *The Crisis of Marx* (1978). Theoretical blockages that suffocated living Marxism, “living from its own contradictions”<sup>271</sup>, had covered over the problems, the blind spots and the limitations of Marxist theory. Yet these limitations were exactly what inspired Marxist theorists to carry out the work that Marx could only ever fail to complete.

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<sup>267</sup> Frédérique Valentin McLean, *Dissidents du Parti Communiste Français: La révolte des intellectuels communistes dans les années 1970*, (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2006).

<sup>268</sup> R.W. Johnson, *The Long March of the French Left*, (London Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), 233.

<sup>269</sup> “The establishment of currents and tendencies in our party [...] would ruin its democratic life [...] it would transform it into narrow fields of personal rivalries and quarrelling clans which would give the adversary of the working class the means, which it has always dreamed to acquire, to manipulate communists against one another and influence our decisions.” Georges Marchais, ‘Mr. Marchais: nous ne souhaitons, nous ne voulons exclure personne’, *Le Monde*, (25 May 1978) and Georges Marchais, ‘Renforcer notre Parti en qualite et en quantite - Les reponses de G. Marchais aux journalistes.’ *L'Humanite*, (22 June 1978).

<sup>270</sup> Lefebvre, ‘Marxism Exploded’, 23.

<sup>271</sup> Althusser, *The Crisis of Marxism*, 230.

The hesitant optimism with which Lefebvre and Althusser wagered on the crisis of Marxism derived from a shared adherence to a particular historical outlook. This outlook was evident when Lefebvre mined the resonances of Lenin's confrontation with the crisis of the Second International to anticipate a necessary theoretical renewal following the '58 crisis of the PCF – which in fact precipitated the New Left.<sup>272</sup> Such an outlook saw in the moments when Marxism came into crisis, overwhelmed by the contingent spasms of history, the always attendant prospect of a resurrection of one or the other or both of its theory and practice. The possibility or inevitability of this resurrection depended very precisely on conjunctural determinations, and whatever was to emerge was never in itself a totalising correction of Marxism as such.

In this respect, how can we read Althusser's response to Lefebvre's invitation, who sensing that Lefebvre's justification for the encounter was somewhat compensatory, queries the need to gain 'permission from history' for the two to meet? On the one hand, we can read this as an acknowledgement that in spite of their perceived intellectual rivalry, behind the scenes there was a knowing camaraderie about this ostensible antagonism – Lefebvre would write on the inside cover of an edition of his *la pensée marxiste et la ville* (1970) which he sent to Althusser: "To my infamous enemy, L Althusser."<sup>273</sup> And there is at least one other recorded meeting, suggesting many others, between the two prior to this exchange. But on the other hand, and this interpretation gains credence when one considers the comradeship with which Althusser meets the invitation and the reference to Lefebvre's illusions, it could be read as an interrogation of the conjunctural necessity on which the meeting was premised.

Faced with Lefebvre's 'illusions' of a timely opening within the Party, Althusser's cautious tone betrays a rather sceptical outlook for such a possibility. And perhaps there was a scepticism too that the theoretical opportunity for a 'work in common',

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<sup>272</sup> From his '56 exclusion onward, Lefebvre became synonymous with the intellectual currents of the French variant of the New Left; an eclectic group of thinkers broadly aligned in their common pursuit of providing theoretical correctives to Stalinist/PCF interpretations of Marxian writings. For the most part the New Left gathered around Edgar Morin and Jean Duvignaud's journal *Arguments* (1956-62), from which one might trace influences of the extra-parliamentary activism of the social movements of the sixties.

<sup>273</sup> Consulted in Althusser's personal library held at IMEC.

one that would truly face up to exigencies of the crisis of Marxism, would be one best achieved in accordance with the sanction of history. Of the illusions that Althusser attempted to perceive, and rid himself, we can infer from other writing of this period that a history punctuated by guaranteed critical renovations of Marxism was one. He would say about the reticence of the Party faced with providing a sufficiently coherent, convincing and restoring explanation of the failures of Marxism in the twentieth century, that behind this silence lay a more serious issue that was: “the extreme difficulty (everyone working seriously on the problem knows this very well) and perhaps even, in the present state of our theoretical knowledge, almost the *impossibility* of providing a really satisfactory Marxist explanation of a history which was, after all, made in the name of Marxism!”<sup>274</sup> Without a thorough clarification of the determinations of its great failures, there was nothing certain for Althusser about what the crisis of Marxism would deliver and how history would move beyond it. Indeed, in this moment, there was a radical uncertainty about the prospect of a rehabilitation of Marxism, the organisational form of the Party and the precipitation of a revolutionary subject.

What then did it mean for Althusser to refuse the toll of history brought to bear on his encounter with Lefebvre? Knowing now that it was during these years that Althusser had resolved to pursue a new course philosophically, we can speculate that his aleatory materialist turn had inflected his engagement with the '78 crisis. Throughout the seventies, an anti-dialectal vision of historical development that conceptually centred chance encounters unfolded in earnest in Althusser's unpublished writing and teaching. In his lectures on Machiavelli and Rousseau, Althusser became concerned with defining the conditionality of “the fact to be accomplished”<sup>275</sup> – a concern that was an outgrowth of his effort to philosophically ground Marx's self-proclaimed break from classical German philosophy. As we will see in the following chapter this turn came at the tail-end of a philosophical trajectory that started with a re-interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx that, in his own estimation, had failed. It was therefore an effort both to redress this failure but also to re-establish the philosophical grounds of an eventual realisation against the tide of anti-Marxism and

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<sup>274</sup> Althusser, *Crisis of Marxism*, 227.

<sup>275</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lessons on Rousseau*, (London: Verso, 2019), 31. Lectures delivered between February – March 1972.

the reformist turn of the Party. In this regard, Althusser's thematisation of philosophies that thought the contingent event can be viewed as an effort to re-charge Marx's realisation thesis. It can also be seen as consistent with his lingering defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat – a road to communism that had to maintain its radical discontinuity with a distinctly bourgeois state form.<sup>276</sup>

It is notable, then, that while Althusser refused the historical necessity that Lefebvre brought to bear on their encounter – the convergence of conditions warranting the formation of a faction against the beleaguered Party leadership and a growing anti-Marxist consensus – a more contingent and underground significance to Lefebvre's untimely extension was registered by Althusser. He says in the first line of his response "I am very touched by your letter. You know, I have always held you in esteem, and also, for the trials that have been inflicted upon you, with fraternal affection." Althusser had revealed<sup>277</sup> a long-standing admiration for Lefebvre but also a warmth that stemmed from a common experience of a particular kind of tribulation. It was on this basis alone that Althusser saw reason enough for the two to meet. It was as though their divergent theoretical outlooks, political partisanship and the conditions of conjuncture made little difference to the openness with which Althusser was always prepared to meet Lefebvre. And we can assume here that the tribulations that bonded them was to do with the vilification the two had suffered, bearing as they did the task of rehabilitating Marxist theory while adhering militantly to an irredeemable and stifling political apparatus. Inured by the fact that the Party remained fully capable of silencing dissident currents, Althusser took on a more pessimistic attitude toward the aims of campaigns such as the one proposed by Lefebvre following the defeat of 1978.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Althusser, 'Conférence sur la dictature du proletariat a Barcelone (1976)'

<sup>277</sup> And presumably this was indeed revelatory to Lefebvre who pinpointed the moment when it was conceivable for him to return to the Party when Régulier referred to him as a Marxist. He said "I was very touched when Catherine Régulier told me that she considered me a Marxist. Coming from a communist, it was the first time that it occurred to me; for me it was an event ... I had already felt that there were indications that the PCF could be overcome as it had been, but for me these indications were realised by this meeting." Lefebvre, *L'Humanité*, 1978.

<sup>278</sup> "I know very well that things have changed and that Marchais had the courage and the political wisdom (but could he do otherwise) to say: "In the party. We no longer exclude." Okay, but a word like that does not erase the past ... [there is still] no question of discussion, no question of rehabilitating anyone." See Louis Althusser, *Projet de livre sur le communisme (c. 1980): A portée de la main peut être le communisme*. Unpublished manuscripts consulted in the l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), Fonds Althusser: ALT2.A28-03.01 to .07

Perhaps, then, Althusser's inclination to see the timeliness of the encounter less in terms of an entrenched dialectic of life and death Marxism and the apparent breaches in the Party apparatus, and more in terms of the inertia of a dissident intellectual in the PCF, tells us something about what such a work in common might have looked like. If after twenty years Lefebvre had fallen back under the illusion that theory could outmanoeuvre history and an intellectual front could explode the Party machinery,<sup>279</sup> Althusser would confront him with the disillusion of his own thirty-year struggle within the Party.<sup>280</sup>

This meeting of illusion and disillusion might allow us to understand the distinct historical juncture to which Althusser's philosophy of the encounter was a response. As it sharpened in the late seventies, the crisis of Marxism had the peculiarity in the French context of telescoping the '56-58 and '76-78 crises – a phenomenon that was uniquely dramatised in the rapprochement of Lefebvre and Althusser.<sup>281</sup> Lefebvre's return to an illusion of historical agency, which the disillusion of thirty years in the Party had once confirmed inescapably subject to the irony of history, was met with the disenchantment of the latter years of Althusser's own thirty year cycle, who by this point had reached an interpretation of the end of philosophy in Marx emptied out of all dialectical vestiges and a vision of the future of the Party that was profoundly marked by pessimism.<sup>282</sup> The collision of these countervailing trajectories pertaining to the prospect of the communist project, postlapsarian sobriety and an optimism of the will, aligned well with a concept of the encounter. Althusser's encounter, and Lefebvre's irony, had both attempted to figure the conditions of possibility of a real discontinuity, without at the same time presupposing its inevitability. The possibility of the advent of a real discontinuity within the circle of philosophical thought and within the Party apparatus was in Lefebvre's words objectively verifiable even if in

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<sup>279</sup> In one of his earliest texts following his exclusion from the Party Lefebvre recognised the ironic results of such an illusion: "...to understand the significance of Marxist irony, we must understand the history of Marxism itself ironically." in 'On Irony, Maieutic and History' in Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity*, 25.

<sup>280</sup> Althusser entered the party in 1948. Lefebvre was a member of the party in the thirty-year period of 1928 – 1958.

<sup>281</sup> And would be the subject of theoretical reflection in Buci-Glucksmann, Christine. 'Brève histoire d'une déstalinisation impossible : sur les « retards » de 56, 68, 78.' In Christine Buci-Glucksmann, éd., *Rencontre de -100 intellectuels communistes à Vitry, 9 et 10 décembre*, (Paris: Maspéro, 1979), 19-27.

<sup>282</sup> See Althusser, Louis. *Sur la mort du PCF (Mort et survie du PCF)*, (198~83). Unpublished manuscripts consulted in the l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), Fonds Althusser: ALT2.A29-01.05.



Althusser's words it was overdetermined by multiple contingent and temporally uneven factors.

Left without any record of this work in common which might have attempted to think this discontinuity into existence, we can only speculate that it might have consisted of a dialectic that registered the uncanny synchronisation of their two paths and the generational lag that crystallised in their encounter. Knowing, however, that the PCF would not change until at least 1994, when George Marchais finally ceded his place as General Secretary to Robert Hue, and that the hold of the 'death of Marxism' motto would continue well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is fair to say that if such a discontinuity was in fact conceived, it would lag behind the worldly concatenation that would be necessary to its realisation for quite some time.

Before reaching this juncture, Althusser had inherited the hermeneutic of the end of philosophy in Marx from Lefebvre and those surrounding *La Nouvelle Critique*. In the sixties Althusser would venture his own interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx that would radically transform the interpretative norms that had been used to read and understand Marx. In this chapter, I will trace the development of Althusser's inheritance of this problem from Lefebvre, elaborate his interpretation and track the vicissitudes that led to fundamental changes in his understanding of Marxist philosophy.

### **3.2 Constructing a Marxist Philosophy After Stalin**

Though rarely framed as such, the question of the end of philosophy in Marx was central to Althusser's intellectual and political trajectory throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. Between 1960 and 1969, Althusser would wedge himself into the foreground of French intellectual life and the currents of Marxist thought internationally with a series of articles published in *Le Nouvelle Critique* and the Party's other major intellectual journal *La Pensée: revue du rationalisme moderne* (1939 - ). These articles would variously bear upon the question of the end of philosophy in Marx: namely, how to discriminate between a specifically Marxist

conception of philosophy and its ideological predecessors and how to locate in Marx's body of work the moment where this break takes place?

The question of the end of philosophy in Marx raised for Althusser the fundamental issue of the epistemological status of Marx's theoretical formation compared to other philosophical systems that, according to the eleventh thesis, had to be supplanted by some kind of world-changing activity.<sup>283</sup> And indeed it would be on the basis of the epistemological question, which in Althusser's eyes had been obscured by the centred status of Stalinist dogmatism within debates on Marxist philosophy,<sup>284</sup> that he would properly figure the necessary components of a strictly Marxist philosophy.

Stalinist dialectical materialism had contaminated the question of philosophy in Marx for several generations of Marxist thinkers. By its consecration of a completed philosophical system in the name of both Marx and the Party, Stalinist ideology had at best skewed and worst foreclosed the project of clarifying the role of philosophy in Marx's theoretical system. In Althusser's eyes, this brought with it certain theoretical biases to the question of the end of philosophy in Marx; namely it left entirely unclear the nature of the break that Marx himself identified between his own theoretical formation and those philosophies from which it departed and from his contemporaries. For Althusser this lack of clarity had grave political consequences.

Althusser's 1966 introduction to *For Marx*, 'Today', would explicitly clarify that the articles included in the text had been concertedly aimed at radically transforming the

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<sup>283</sup> "[The piece on the Young Marx] does contain *the essential question*, irresistibly drawn from us even by our trials, failures and impotence: *What is Marxist philosophy? Has it any theoretical right to existence? And if it does exist in principle, how can its specificity be defined?* This essential question was raised practically by another, apparently historical but really theoretical, question: the question of reading and interpreting Marx's Early Works...The question of Marxist philosophy and of its specificity with respect to Marx's Early Works necessarily implied the question of Marx's relation to the philosophies he had espoused or traversed, those of Hegel and Feuerbach, and therefore the question of where he differed with them." Althusser, *For Marx*, 31.

<sup>284</sup> "Those who impute all our disappointments, all our mistakes and all our disarray *in whatever domain*, to Stalin, along with his crimes and errors, are likely to be disconcerted by having to admit that the end of Stalinist dogmatism has not restored Marxist philosophy to us in its integrity...The end of dogmatism produced a real freedom of investigation...What the end of dogmatism has restored to us is the right to assess exactly what we have, to give both our wealth and our poverty their true names, to think and pose our problems in the open, and to undertake in rigour a true investigation...The end of dogmatism puts us face to face with this reality: that Marxist philosophy, founded by Marx in the very act of founding his theory of history, has still largely to be constituted...that the theoretical difficulties we debated in the dogmatist night were not completely artificial – rather they were largely the result of a meagrely elaborated Marxist philosophy" Ibid., 30 -31.

prism through which the Marxian injunction to put an end to philosophy had been previously understood. Indeed, in the introduction Althusser would trace the roots of his own theoretical interventions to the various failed attempts to carry out the death of philosophy in Marx's name.<sup>285</sup> It is not without significance, therefore, that Althusser would try and fail to have his introduction published in *NC*.<sup>286</sup> It was, after all, the Party journal through whose history and conceptual vocabulary Althusser had chosen to specify the novelty of his own intervention.

The continuity of this problem within French Marxist theory across the different historical conjunctures represented by Lefebvre and Althusser can be partly explained by the different eras the two represented in *NC*. The different moments of prominence of Lefebvre and Althusser within *NC* coincided quite exactly with a series of changes that took place within the editorial board of the journal. This reflected broader changes taking place within the culture of the Party, themselves largely resulting from the shift in the global balance of power triggered by the destalinization process in Soviet Union.

In its first ten years (1948 – 1958) *NC* quickly became synonymous with the hard-line of Cold War partisanships. The journal would forever be associated with the theoretical extremes of the Stalinist period, with its war against reaction in the form of its polemics against bourgeois philosophy and its apologies for Lysenkoist proletarian science.<sup>287</sup> These were extremes distinctly rooted in a conjunctural reception of the end of philosophy question that synthesised radically divergent traditions with little contradiction. These included dogmatic adherence to Stalinist doctrine, ouvrierist suspicions of intellectual classes, Resistance era actionism, French theoretical rationalism and Soviet scientism.

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<sup>285</sup> 21 – 41. Among the deaths of philosophy Althusser mentions is the 'realization' of philosophy in action, the replacement of philosophy with positive science and death in the form of the evanescent life of philosophical negation i.e. critique, safeguarding science from ideological excrescences (where we would probably locate Lefebvre).

<sup>286</sup> In July 1965, *NC*'s editor-in-chief, Jacques Arnault, had agreed to Althusser's proposal of publishing the text in the journal. By the end of September, Arnault would tell Althusser that Henri Krasucki, of the political bureau of the PCF and CGT high command, had prohibited the publication of the text in *NC*. Althusser would claim, that by this manoeuvre "the "umbilical cord" that Arnault and I wanted to maintain between the Party and *For Marx* was severed by the responsible authority." Althusser, *Les Vaches Noires*, 58.

<sup>287</sup> Desanti, *Nouvelle Critique*, 32 – 52.

In November 1957 three members of the editorial board were excluded from *NC*. They were Victor Leduc, Annie Besse and Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre had been dismissed for publishing the article ‘Le Marxisme et la pensée française’ in *France-Observateur* and *Les Temps Modernes* in which he had openly chastised the theoretical poverty of Stalinist dogmatism. By proxy, this was a criticism of the calibre of theoretical debate taking place within *NC*. Consequently, several prominent figures resigned in solidarity or moved away from the journal including Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Lucien Sebag, Emile Bottigelli, Emile Beaulieu and Pierre Gaudibert.

The fallout of this upheaval was that in the space of two years (1958-59), the editorial board of the journal was almost completely overhauled. Jean Kanapa (1948-1959), who had been Lefebvre’s main nemesis while on the editorial board, left his position as editor-in-chief to make way for Jacques Arnault (1959-66). Guy Besse, professor of philosophy, national leader of the Communist Students in 1945, member of the Central Committee of the PCF and director of its publishing house, Éditions sociales (1955-69), became the journal’s political director. He was among those who would initiate, between the opposite poles that were Roger Garaudy and Louis Althusser, a middle path of Marxism as developed in March 1966 at the historic meeting of the central Committee held in Argenteuil. This would provide the theoretical backdrop to the PCF’s failed electoral ambitions throughout the seventies.

The most prominent feature of this editorial shake-up was that where previously Lefebvre and Desanti had been the only professional academics on the editorial board, the second iteration was almost entirely made up of university personnel. This had a substantial influence on the ensuing remit of the journal, radically broadening the range of topics, disciplinary fields and intellectual currents considered suitable for Party intellectuals to be engaging with.<sup>288</sup> For example, in 1965 Althusser would be

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<sup>288</sup> Frédérique Matonti, *Intellectuels communistes Essai sur l’obéissance politique La Nouvelle Critique (1967 – 1980)*. (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2005), 27 – 48.

able to publish his *Freud and Lacan* in a journal that had previously considered psychoanalysis reactionary ideology.<sup>289</sup>

In this regard, the Party's response to the crisis of Marxism of 1956 can be traced in what was brought into the range of theoretical acceptability within the Party publications following the dogmatic blockage of Stalinism – a development that was especially evident in the radically new direction taken by *NC*.<sup>290</sup> What was taking shape in the late fifties was an intellectual configuration that made available new theoretical protocols and resources in the domain of Marxist analysis. This crystallised in Althusser's case around a new urgency to specify Marxist philosophy, and was – if not wholly determined by – at least rooted in the practical consequences of historical processes and the intellectual effervescence of French academia in the late fifties.

It was in this context that Althusser rose to prominence within the Party and beyond. With his theoretical interventions he would radically alter traditions of understanding that had been brought to bear upon the question of philosophy in Marx. Principally, he would depart from those who had been too much prejudiced by Stalin's profanation of Marxist philosophy to take up the task of clarifying the nature of philosophy in Marx. In Althusser's view, anti-systematic reflexes such as Lefebvre's were understandable in view of Stalin's use of Marxist philosophy to justify state repression. But the ideological struggle internal to the intellectual arm of the PCF had set in motion a litany of theoretical paradigms that, though critical of Stalinism, would ultimately muddy the distinction between Marxist philosophy and the philosophy of his predecessors. In the early sixties, this theoretical inheritance showed itself most vividly, in Althusser's view, in the wave of Marxist intellectuals content to bury Marx within a problematic he had broke from more than a century before: philosophical humanism.

The new direction of *NC* therefore reflected a more pervasive loosening of the rigid fault lines that had previously regulated the intellectual arm of the Party. However,

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<sup>289</sup> See for instance *Psychiatres communistes (huit) 'Autocritique : La psychanalyse, idéologie réactionnaire'* *Nouvelle Critique*, No. 7, (juin 1949).

<sup>290</sup> Frédérique Matonti and Daniel Mouchard, 'Théories en crise' in *Raisons politiques* 2, No. 18, (2005), 5-6.

this did not mean that the unrestricted pace of *NC*'s volte-face was kindly looked upon by the Party. Indeed, G.M. Goshgarian makes clear in his introduction of *The Humanist Controversy* that only a year after the publication of the dossier that comprised *Marxism and Humanism* (1965),<sup>291</sup> hastened by the publication of both *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* the same year, the events at Argenteuil<sup>292</sup> had virtually forced *NC* to rein in its theoretical openness. Following Arnault's departure from the journal in June 1966 the new *NC* was, according to its latest editorial director Francis Cohen (1966 - 1980), to contain 'nothing opposed to the Party's political line (nor even anything different)'. Althusser, who intimated his refusal to ever again contribute to the revue in a letter in late 1966, received this message without equivocation.<sup>293</sup>

In his retrospective rationalisation of the articles that comprised *For Marx*, Althusser proposed that the problem that unified them was the "differential specificity"<sup>294</sup> of Marx's philosophy. It is apparent from his letters of the early sixties that while his ambition to stem "the conjunctural significance of the 'Humanist' tide in certain contemporary Marxist circles"<sup>295</sup> was certainly a motivating factor in focalising this problem, Althusser's critical engagement with the *Theses on Feuerbach* was also central. In a letter to his confidant and lover Franca Madonia from November 1962 he said:

today I have just spoken about 3 hours on the *Theses on Feuerbach* of Marx; I could have talked for another three hours, but still, everything must have an end, and we must not drag things too far, even the best... It is true that I am quite astonished by this kind of theoretical fertility that comes to me, with age without doubt, but also through other circumstances (the results acquired on the themes of the work I was conducting during the crisis of the past year) and which are

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<sup>291</sup> Under the title 'Marxisme et Humanisme' texts appear by Louis Althusser, George Semprun and Francis Cohen in *La Nouvelle critique*, No.164, (mars 1965), 1 - 45.

<sup>292</sup> In January 1966, an assembly of Communist philosophers convened a meeting to conduct a debate on humanism and Marxism in Choisy-le-Roi which Althusser was unable to attend due to ill health but that was attended by the entire Political Bureau of the PCF. The focus of the discussion was largely dominated by the pro-humanist tendency represented by Roger Garaudy. In March of the same year, the Central Committee of the Party, which included Garaudy, convened its own debate on humanism in Argenteuil. The meeting concluded with the declaration that Marxist humanism did indeed exist and that there would be no more bureaucratic interference in intellectual debate. See 'The Humanist Controversy' in Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 221 - 307.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, pxxxii.

<sup>294</sup> Althusser uses this phrase in *Reading Capital* but the introduction of *For Marx* makes the same claim in so many words. See Louis Althusser & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, (London: Verso, 2009), 64.

<sup>295</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 226.

given to me like keys: I can open for myself and for others doors hitherto closed to me; and that, I even believe that I can say, nobody had ever opened to me, and yet! how many generations since 1888, when Engels published them following his *Feuerbach*, how many generations have read these 11 theses of Marx on Feuerbach, these enigmatic sentences, which seemed clear from being familiar, but which were enigmatic letters. You cannot know what satisfaction it gives me, the fact of being able to account, unequivocally, with one or two very localized and unimportant exceptions, for each word and of each concept of these few decisive sentences of Marx, and what an extraordinary spectacle it is to witness thus, literally, the birth of Marx. There comes to me a whole series of thoughts of all kinds, which are so many works to be done, and which either will occupy me, or will occupy here some of my young dogs.<sup>296</sup>

Althusser's anti-humanist episode had many more dimensions than its conventional periodization allows us to access. Perceptions of this incredibly generative period of his life tend to be narrowed in light of the periodizations that Althusser was prone to applying to his own work. Yet, as he did indeed pursue the "whole series of thoughts" that were triggered by his close reading of the *Theses*, there is a continuity that can be traced in how these insights occupied Althusser for years to come.

As he mentions in the letter, the interpretive keys that had been revealed by the labour of his close reading of the *Theses* opened a door onto the 'literal' birth of Marx. In this respect, it is not coincidental that Althusser would use the eighth thesis as an epigraph to his 1963 *On the Materialist Dialectic*. This was, after all, a text that precisely framed its rebuttal to critics of the earlier *Contradiction and Overdetermination*<sup>297</sup> around the question of Marx's 'settlement with his erstwhile philosophical conscience'.<sup>298</sup> It was moreover a text that had the task of making intelligible the birth of Marx's philosophy as its aim, precisely so as to carry out the death of his Hegelian predecessors *within* Marx's philosophy. It was explicitly around Marx's own declarations of his break from Hegelian philosophy – a sentiment that

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<sup>296</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca (1961-1973)*, (Paris: Éditions STOCK/IMEC, 1998), 295 – 296.

<sup>297</sup> 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' was first published in *La Pensée* in December 1962 (less than a month after the letter to Madonia) and 'On the Materialist Dialectic' was first published in *La Pensée* in August 1963. They both appeared in *For Marx*.

<sup>298</sup> Althusser recounts the philological legacy of Marx's "settlement" in *On the Materialist Dialectic* with a footnote stating that "this is the very word Marx used in the Preface to the *Contribution* (1958), when, reviewing his past and evoking his meeting with Engels in Brussels, spring 1845, and the drafting of *The German Ideology*, he speaks of *settling accounts* (*Abrechnung*) with 'our erstwhile philosophical conscience'. The Afterword to the second edition of *Capital* openly records this settlement, which, in good accounting style, includes the acknowledgement of a debt: the acknowledgement of the 'rational side' of the Hegelian dialectic." In Althusser, *For Marx*, 165.

even in Marxian parerga is philologically rooted back to the *Theses* – that charged Althusser’s project with the task of establishing the role of philosophy in Marx’s intellectual project theoretically. And the route taken by Althusser was one opened by a re-interpretation of the *Theses* – an interpretation that had shown the ambiguity of what had appeared clear for so many years because it was so familiar. But far from rejecting philosophy outright or pursuing its inexhaustible critique, Althusser sought rather to identify precisely the boundaries of a distinctly Marxist philosophy. He did so without flinching, demanding of himself a definitive solution to a problem that had been posed and answered by Stalin twenty five years previously: the relationship between the Hegelian and the Marxian dialectic.

### 3.3 The *Problem of the Dialectic*

Althusser claimed in the introduction of *For Marx* that the unifying problem underpinning the articles of the collection was the specific nature of Marx’s philosophy. The most direct elucidation that Althusser gave of his reconstruction of Marx’s philosophy can be found between two complimentary texts: ‘The Epistemological Propositions of ‘Capital’’ in *Reading Capital* and ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’ in *For Marx*. In the following, I will use these two texts to clarify in some detail Althusser’s conception of Marx’s philosophy and its role within the broader Marxian theoretical project. I will trace how Althusser’s formulation of Marx’s philosophy is modelled upon the peculiarity of Marx’s scientific theoretical revolution (historical materialism) and will show how, paradoxically, this conception of Marx’s philosophy had to be theoretically practiced using Marx’s writing as its raw materials before it could become intelligible theoretically and therefore properly *known*.

In the opening section of ‘The Epistemological Proposition of ‘Capital’’ Althusser says “...we are absolutely committed to a theoretical destiny: we cannot *read* Marx’s scientific discourse without at the same time writing at his dictation the text of another discourse, inseparable from the first one but distinct from it: the discourse of Marx’s



*philosophy.*”<sup>299</sup> Althusser’s opening propositions therefore spelled out a definite condition upon which the clarification and purification of Marx’s scientific system (the concepts, terms and relations between them) – as scientific – depended: namely the construction of a separate discourse (philosophy) that would nevertheless be guided by Marxian theory. In Althusser’s view it was the job of Marx’s philosophy – one that had yet to be constructed – to theoretically formalise how Marx’s scientific theoretical practice constituted itself as a science (a formulation that would occupy an exterior theoretical domain than the scientific theoretical practice itself). In light of Marx’s own conceptual productions that re-configured pre-existing conceptual elements into a new epistemological field, a philosophical discourse would be necessary to render intelligible this theoretical transformation and the new domain of knowledge into which these pre-existing concepts were inserted and functionally repurposed. All of this would have to be done at the dictation of Marx’s writing itself.

Such a meta-theory of Marx’s scientific theoretical practice was of course not directly available in Marx’s writing. The *Dialectics* that Marx intended to write was never started. It was for that reason, according to Althusser, that it was absolutely necessary to construct such a theory to properly understand the epistemological specificity of Marx’s scientific system. Indeed for Althusser, Marx’s scientific system had been largely misunderstood because the epistemological specificity of its terms had not been clarified but rather read through an anachronistic problematic.<sup>300</sup> The political consequences of such misunderstandings – the specifics of which will become apparent in what Althusser’s epistemological clarification does to conceptions of Marxist political practice – was precisely what was at stake in Althusser’s interventions.

To theoretically identify the epistemological specificity of Marx’s new problematic, therefore, Althusser mined the rare instances that Marx and Engels provided defences of the scientific status of *Capital*. It was to the relatively marginal texts within the

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<sup>299</sup> Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 161.

<sup>300</sup> “Problematic. A word or concept cannot be considered in isolation; it only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which is used; its problematic.” In Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 345 “Without a theory of the history of theoretical formations it would be impossible to grasp and indicate the specific difference that distinguishes two different formations. I thought it possible to borrow for this purpose the concept of a ‘problematic’ from Jacques Martin to designate the particular unity of a theoretical formation and hence the location to be assigned to this specific difference...” in Althusser, *For Marx*, 32.

Marxian canon, *Notes on Adolph Wagner's 'Lehrbuch der politischen Okonomie'*<sup>301</sup> and Engels' Preface to the English edition of *Capital* (1886) and *Volume II* (1885), that Althusser sought theoretical cues for his own absolutely necessary theoretical construction. And these were defences primarily formulated as prescriptions for how to read *Capital*.

The fundamental claim that carries across all of Althusser's citations bears upon the clarification that Marx and Engels made about the distinct frame of terminological reference that inheres to a scientific theoretical discourse. Marx's rebuttal to Wagner's critique draws an analogy between his conflation of the term 'value' in its literal sense and Marx's scientific sense, and the alchemical uses of the terms 'salt' and 'butter' prior to chemical classification instantiated by the inauguration of the scientific system of chemistry. The terms in each case, situated within a wholly new frame reference, correspond to a new theoretical object.

Althusser traces the continuation of this analogy as Engels picks it up again in his two prefaces. In his *Preface* to Volume I, Engels elaborates on the functional specificity of terminology constitutive of a new science. Engels makes the point that while classical political economy had not reached a level of conceptual distance over the concepts and terms used in everyday commercial and industrial life, thereby "entirely failing to see that by so doing, it confined itself within the narrow circle of ideas expressed by those terms",<sup>302</sup> Marx situated pre-existing terms of economic thought within a new epistemological frame of reference. In other words, the terms and concepts of political economy employed by Marx were engendered with new content and corresponded to a new object because they were situated within a completely new system of understanding. Hence the term surplus value, the existence of which had been variously identified by political economy in certain forms and according to a particular arrangement of relations (rent, profit, exploitation), was instantiated by Marx according to a fundamentally new scientific paradigm.

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<sup>301</sup> Written in 1881-82 (or 1879-80) and first published in 1932 as an appendix to the Moscow Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute edition of *Capital*. See John Merrick, 'Reading Marx on Value,' *Verso Blog*. 30 Sept 2015. <[www.versobooks.com/blogs/2259-reading-marx-on-value](http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2259-reading-marx-on-value)> [Accessed 6 July 2019]

<sup>302</sup> Engels quoted in Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 162-63.

The question of the non-novelty of the concept of surplus value leads Althusser to Engel's *Preface* in Volume II in which Engels asked precisely "What is there new in Marx's utterances on surplus value?"<sup>303</sup> Responding to Johann Karl Rodbertus' attempt to claim credit for the discovery of surplus value, Engels returned again to the analogy of chemistry to clarify what was distinct in Marx's use of the term. Engels explains that Priestly and Scheele had each discovered the existence of the element oxygen through scientific experiments that resulted in combustion. However, they had conceived of their results according to the prevailing science of the day: phlogistic chemistry. Remaining "prisoners of the phlogistic categories as they came down to them"<sup>304</sup> Priestly and Scheele negatively identified the anomalous phenomenon that they had discovered against the epistemological parameters of the phlogistic system. Oxygen became 'dephlogistic air' for Priestly and 'fire-air' for Scheele. What distinguished Lavoiser's intervention was that he did not strain his interrogation of the phenomenon to affirm the axioms of phlogistic chemistry by covering over the anomalous status of the new fact. Rather he posed the existence of the new fact as a problem for the phlogistic system itself, a problem that put the whole system of understanding into question. The rationalization of combustion according to pre-existing categories had weak explanatory power with regard to the new fact. By taking this anomaly as a problem concerning the negative attribution of the new fact in accordance with the reaffirmation of the boundaries of an existing system of understanding, Lavoiser pursued the problem toward a whole terrain of understanding illegible to phlogistic science itself. In other words, while not producing oxygen, Lavoiser truly discovered oxygen by posing the findings of Priestly and Scheele as a problem whose solution could not be established under the existing conditions of knowledge of chemical science. Hence, Lavoiser inaugurated a scientific revolution by establishing the field of chemistry – a system of knowledge corresponding to a radically different theoretical object than that of phlogistic chemistry. Each of the elements constituting the new scientific system, defined according to a radically new paradigm of scientific understanding, was attributed a wholly different set of properties. And these properties derived their differential specificity according to the new object underpinning the new scientific system.

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

According to Engels, therefore, Marx stood to classical political economy vis-à-vis the discovery of surplus value as Lavoiser stood to Priestly and Scheele vis-à-vis the discovery of oxygen. Marx had truly discovered surplus value by posing it as an epistemological problem for the field of political economy. He had posed it as a problem and in doing so pursued its solution in the establishment of a new science: historical materialism. Political economists like Rodbertus had variously identified the existence of surplus value – they recognised that profit was made up of the part unpaid to labour – but they had not arrived at a “clear comprehension, either of its origin or nature, or of the laws that regulate the subdivisions of its value.”<sup>305</sup> They had not formulated it in its concept; they had done so according to pre-existing economic categories that delimited the formal conditions under which it could be known. Marx posed the ‘economic fact’ of surplus value not as a fact or a solution but as a problem that raised a whole set of specific questions for each of the existing economic categories, just as oxygen had done for Lavoiser. In posing surplus value as a problem for existing economic categories, the aggregate of questions that were formed in the pursuit of a solution defined a new object of knowledge that no longer corresponded to the object of political economy.

Beyond what the citations of Marx and Engels actually say in ‘The Epistemological Propositions of ‘Capital’ the real locus of significance here is what Althusser does with what they say. In the opening of the text, Althusser had posed as a problem the specificity of Marx’s scientific theory and pursued the problem of its specification by framing the writing of Marx and Engels itself within a new set of concepts and terms (the problematic, the epistemological break etc.). This brought into relief the comparison they made within the history of science to establish the nature of scientific inception so as to clarify the epistemological distinction between the terms and concepts used in *Capital* and classical political economy. At this point, Althusser makes a reflexive turn around the role of Marx’s philosophy and precisely what he himself has just carried out. He says:

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<sup>305</sup> 163.

An understanding of Marx, of the mechanism of his discovery and of the nature of the epistemological break which inaugurated his scientific foundation, leads us therefore to the concepts of a general theory of the history of the sciences, a theory capable of thinking the essence of these *theoretical events*. It is one thing whether this general theory as yet only exists as a project or whether it has already partially materialized; it is another that it is *absolutely indispensable to a study of Marx*. The path Engels designates for us in what he has done is a path we must take at all costs: it is none other than the path of philosophy founded by Marx in the act of founding the science of history.<sup>306</sup>

For Althusser then, in order for the scientificity of historical materialism to be known in its concept, the scientific status of a scientific theoretical practice must be posed as a problem. A new system, comprised of new terms and concepts, for understanding scientific theoretical practice as such would then have to be established. This would mean posing Marx's theoretical scientific practice as a problem for the history of science that if pursued would demand for its solution a new frame of epistemological reference. In that way the philosophical categories presiding over understandings of Marx's theory would be raised to the level of science thereby departing from the existing problematic. The scientificity of Marx's scientific theoretical practice would then be known scientifically. Scientifically, because its scientific status would be put to the scientific test, not according to an existing set of scientific protocols, but exactly through the theoretical revolution that characterises the foundation of a new science. This knowledge, which would guarantee the scientific status of historical materialism, would therefore depend upon establishing a break epistemologically with the existing object of the philosophy of history from which Marx departed. Hence the content of the concept of the scientific, through which Marx's theory would be known, would be radically transformed in accordance with its new object. Moreover the knowledge that would be produced about the specificity of Marx's theory would render intelligible the epistemological transformations that had taken place within Marx's scientific practice but that were not theoretically expressed there. According to Althusser, it is the role of Marx's philosophy (dialectical materialism) to carry out this precise task; a task that the current text 'has already partially materialized'.

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<sup>306</sup> 168.

Besides importing the concept of the ‘epistemological break’ from Gaston Bachelard and the ‘problematic’ from Jacques Martin,<sup>307</sup> Althusser’s effort to theoretically configure this new system of understanding – the conditions of which he plots in its very undertaking – can be glimpsed in his re-instantiation of the term ‘inversion’. This, as we will see, provides a clear link to the objectives of ‘On Dialectical Materialism’. Althusser picks up Engels re-working of the classic image Marx used to clarify the relation of Hegel’s dialectic to his own. Hegel’s dialectic “had stood on its head” until Marx placed it “squarely on its feet.” Engels adapts Marx’s image within the context of his own epistemological clarification: “Thus [Lavoiser] was the first *to place all chemistry, which in its phlogistic form had stood on its head, squarely on its feet.*”<sup>308</sup> What appears like a mere approbative echo of Marx’s original flourish, for Althusser becomes a re-instantiation of Marx’s imagery. Althusser comments:

*‘to put chemistry which had stood on its head squarely on its feet’, means, without any possible ambiguity, in Engel’s text: to change the theoretical base, to change the theoretical problematic of chemistry, replacing the old problematic with a new one. This is the meaning of the famous ‘inversion’: in this image, which is no more than an image and has neither the meaning nor the rigour of a concept, Marx was simply trying to indicate for his part the existence of the mutation of the problematic which inaugurates every scientific foundation.*

It was in this sense that Althusser claimed that one could not “*read Marx’s scientific discourse without at the same time writing...the discourse of Marx’s philosophy*”. The role of Marx’s philosophy was to qualify the conditions of understanding proper to Marx’s science. In other words, philosophy was to produce the problematic appropriate to a science whose terminology remains bound up with the problematic from which it has departed. In that respect, if Marx’s philosophy were to measure up to such a task, it was necessary that it also underwent the same process. The problematic through which the vestiges of Hegelian terminology were to be understood had yet to be produced for Marx’s theory itself. It was necessary then that this new problematic be produced in its concept for Marx’s philosophy itself to be properly legible epistemologically. While Althusser here gave a general indication of the distinction between the Hegelian inversion (dialectical reversal) and the Marxian

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<sup>308</sup> 166.

inversion (epistemological break), he had yet to fully pursue the problem of Marx's dialectic and therefore he had yet to fully elaborate the new problematic required to read Marx's philosophy (dialectical materialism). This he attempted to do in 'On the Materialist Dialectic'.

Taking up the two major criticisms that were raised by his 1962 essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' – his first effort to produce a new epistemological frame of reference for understanding Marx's dialectic – Althusser's principle objective in 'On the Materialist Dialectic' was to produce a theoretical expression for the solution to the *problem* of Marx's dialectic. Consistent with the agenda plotted in 'The Epistemological Propositions of 'Capital'', Althusser opens the text by posing the Marxist dialectic as a problem. It is a problem posed within the domain of understandings of theoretical practices; a problem that demands the production of its own concept to be solved. The problem, as we will see, is Marx's theoretical practice, which is anomalous to the problematic of Hegel's dialectic.

However, Althusser will go on to argue that the solution to the theoretical problem of Marx's dialectic had already discovered its solution in Marx's own theoretical practice. But the solution remained in a "practical state"; it had yet to be expressed theoretically. In other words, in his theoretical practice Marx encountered the problem of the dialectic and pursued its solution within his theoretical practice. This theoretical practice established a new problematic in order to re-instantiate the dialectic within a new frame of epistemological reference. Far from merely applying Hegel's dialectic to materialist science (political economy), the new conceptual framework that Marx produced within *Capital* founded a new epistemological terrain in which a solution to the problem of the dialectic was latent. But the conceptual framework necessary to express precisely this problem and solution in theory had not been produced.

The reason the solution of the theoretical problem of the dialectic existed in a practical state was because Marx's theoretical practice was concerned within its own frame of reference with producing the science of historical materialism with the raw materials of political economy. In order to produce such a theoretical expression, therefore, Althusser would need to produce a language with which to translate this solution out of its practical state. Such a language would not however develop

according to a logic foreign to Marx but would rather use the knowledges of historical materialism as its raw material. Althusser states:

So to pose and resolve our theoretical problem ultimately means to express theoretically the ‘*solution*’ existing in the practical state, that Marxist practice has found for a real difficulty it has encountered in its development, whose existence it has noted, and, according to its own submission, settled...But this simple theoretical *expression* of a solution that exists in the practical state cannot be taken for granted: it requires a real theoretical labour, not only to work out the specific *concept* or *knowledge* of this practical resolution – but also for the real destruction of ideological illusions...<sup>309</sup>

The resolution to the problem of Hegel’s dialectic is not posed directly in Marx’s theoretical practice. Rather Marx’s theoretical practice produces the new problematic that corresponds to his own conception of the dialectic indirectly. So long as the dialectic remains a vital part of the Marxist project it remains necessary to give this solution a theoretical expression. Indeed what appears necessary to Althusser is a full theoretical substantiation of the philosophical settlement that Marx was content merely to declare and thereupon carry out in his theoretical practice.

Althusser’s primary move in this direction was to situate theoretical practice within the conceptual schema used by Marx, to diagram the complex unity of social practices in general within a determinate social formation. This was to radically upset the conceptual presupposition that neatly circumscribed the location of materiality via the opposition between practice and the realm of ideas – a conceptual presupposition that had been largely central to Marxist common sense. It was an innovation to Marx’s conceptual schema itself as theoretical practices were not broached within the arrangement of practices conceptually diagrammed in *Capital*. But it was one that ultimately developed out of an extension of the problematic of historical materialism, bearing as it did upon the discrete and articulated social practices that constitute the social totality. It is precisely upon the basis of the peculiarity of the object revealed by the science of historical materialism (history understood as a hierarchically articulated unity of social practices structured in dominance) that gives to Marxist philosophy, as

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<sup>309</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 165-166.



opposed to previous philosophies, the privileged task of establishing a system for understanding the epochal shifts in scientific theory as such.

Considered against Marx's scientific schematization of social practices, Althusser proposed that theoretical practice bore certain essential features in common with all other social practices hierarchically articulated within the social whole.<sup>310</sup> Like all other practices, theoretical practice carries out a transformation over a set of materials resulting in a product. The transformation that inheres to a theoretical practice was therefore what qualified it as a discrete modality of practice as such. Within the distinct realm of theoretical practices there were further subdivisions just as there were within non-theoretical practices. Significant in this respect was how Althusser defined scientific theoretical practice. Scientific theoretical practice, in Althusser's formulation, was a practice that took as its object (or raw material) for theoretical transformation, empirical observations and technical knowledges deriving from everyday social practices (what Althusser calls "the ideological product of existing 'empirical' practices (the concrete activity of men)").<sup>311</sup> By means of applying to this material its specific theoretical practice, which consisted of a composite of existing knowledges formed into a determinate theoretical system, it produced new knowledge about social practices.<sup>312</sup>

Marxist philosophy (what Althusser calls Theory with a capital T but also the materialist dialectic) would then be that theoretical practice that takes scientific theoretical practices as its object, applies to this object its determinate theoretical system – its epistemological problematic – and produces knowledge about scientific

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<sup>310</sup> Althusser's conceptualisation of a hierarchically articulated unity of social practices structured in dominance is taken from the *1857 Introduction*. His most extensive elaboration can be found in chapter 4 of *Reading Capital*: 'The Errors of Classical Economics: Outline of a Concept of Historical Time.' This was one of the only texts in *Reading Capital* that Althusser had previously published in Louis Althusser, 'Esquisse du concept d'histoire,' *La Pensée*, No. 121 (May-June 1965), 3-21.

<sup>311</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 168.

<sup>312</sup> Consistent with the theoretical pre-requisites gleaned from Marx and Engels' epistemological defences of the scientific status of *Capital*, Althusser spells all of this out using a new set of terms comprising a new system for understanding theoretical practice itself. He calls *theory* (italicised) any scientific theoretical practice; 'theory' (in inverted commas) the determinate *theoretical system* of a real science (i.e. the conceptual means used in the theoretical practice to produce knowledge); Theory (capitalised) the theory of practice in general elaborated on the basis of a Theory of existing scientific theoretical practices. Theory (capitalised) is the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism. *Ibid.*, 162/168. He will later describe similar elements as Generality I (the raw materials of a theoretical practice), Generality II (the theoretical system that is applied to the raw materials of a theoretical practice), Generality III (the product of the work done by applying the theoretical system to the raw materials i.e. knowledge). *Ibid.*, 183-91.

theoretical practices as such. Such knowledge would be distinct from the knowledge produced by particular scientific theoretical practices since they take for their object not theoretical practices but the ideas and concepts produced by empirical practices. Marxist philosophy would then be the Theory that gives theoretical expression to the practices that produce “scientific truths” about empirical practice. It would do this by situating scientific theoretical practice within the same frame of reference as empirical practices, that is, practice in general, as an articulated subset of the domain of historical forces (practice in general). In doing so, the materialist dialectic provides a conceptual framework for theoretically discriminating the nature of that subset of theoretical practices enthroned with the sovereign ability to produce truth claims about empirical practices. By raising scientific theoretical practice to a mode of theoretical expression that is able to render intelligible the essence of its practice in its concept (i.e. according to a problematic appropriate to its specificity as a subset of practice in general), this would in turn provide a theoretical expression for “the essence of practice in general, and through it the essence of the transformations, of the ‘development’ of things in general.”<sup>313</sup>

Returning, then, to the solution to Hegel’s dialectic that can be found in the practical state in Marx’s theoretical practice. As has already been stated, according to Althusser, the Theory of Marx’s scientific theoretical practice had not been written. According to the definition given above, this meant that Marx’s scientific theoretical practice had yet to be subjected to a Theoretical practice – that is, formed into the raw materials of a theoretical practice extraneous to itself – through which a theoretical expression of the specificity of Marx’s dialectic could be established. Thus while Marx’s scientific theoretical practice included the solution to Hegel’s dialectic in the very transformation its practice carried out, an expression of this transformation as solution had yet to be expressed in Theory.

Althusser had begun this Theoretical expression at the point of establishing a conceptual vocabulary to specify elements of a scientific theoretical practice as such. According to the new conceptual framework he provides for understanding theoretical practice (Generalities I - III), Althusser would then begin to draw out fundamental

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<sup>313</sup> 169.

distinctions between Hegel's dialectic and Marx's own. The first bears upon the precise meaning of Marx's designation of the 'the correct scientific method' in the *1857 Introduction* when he advocates beginning with the abstract and moving to the concrete. Principally Althusser clarifies the difference between the concrete-in-thought (knowledge) and the concrete-real (the object of knowledge) in Marx's insights, emphasising the mistake of understanding the term 'abstract' to mean theory in the form of science, and the term 'concrete' to mean the real. In Althusser's conceptual framework there is a real difference between Generalities I (raw materials abstracted from theoretical sources i.e. the abstract in Marx's sense) and Generalities III (knowledge resulting from the application of a determinate theoretical system to conceptual abstractions i.e. the concrete-in-thought in Marx's sense) but a difference that exists in the realm of theoretical practice exclusively. On that basis, Althusser clarified two distinct differences between the dialectic of Marx and the dialectic of Hegel. The first was straightforwardly to do with Hegel's idealist conflation of the genetic development of the idea, in its scientific instantiation, and the historical development of the concrete real. The second, less obvious distinction, was to do with how Hegel's dialectic figured conceptual development. In Hegel's dialectic, conceptual enrichment was the result of the internal contradiction of an abstract thought determination forcing the realisation of conceptual supersession from within itself. In Althusser's new conceptual framework, the self-engendering concept of Hegel's dialectic posed Generalities I (the raw materials of a theoretical practice) as equivalent to Generalities III (the product of scientific theoretical practice: knowledge). It thereby denied the role of Generalities II (the determinate scientific theoretical practice that works upon theoretical raw materials to produce a qualitatively distinct theoretical product: knowledge).

Central to Hegel's misapprehension in Althusser's view was his misconstrual of the real qualitative discontinuities that characterise the transformative interventions of scientific theoretical practices. Further to this was his reduction of scientific labour to the autogenetic labour of the negative in the abstract – a reduction that corresponded to a form of conceptual development, entirely alien to the real history of scientific development, that moved continuously according to the myth of an originary empiricist intuition. What Althusser makes clear is that where Hegel ostensibly makes his abstractions from the concrete real, Marx knowingly abstracts from existing

concepts and ideas produced by other theoretical practices (Generalities I) and subjects them to his differentially specific scientific theoretical practice, composed of a specific arrangement of concepts and terms into a scientific system (Generalities II). In a scientific theoretical practice, abstractions are made from a composite of distinct theoretical practices and the determinate theoretical system that is put to work is not simply the negative in the abstract, but rather a specific problematic determined by the differential historical development of the distinct region of science, out of which a scientific theoretical practice emerges. It is only in the respect that abstractions are taken from existing theoretical practices (whether ideological, scientific, technical etc.), and the concrete real is not assumed to be its object, that a scientific theoretical practice can transform the object that corresponds to a scientific system of understanding. Only in this way, can a scientific system such as chemistry distinguish its object of knowledge from its alchemical predecessors while the two claim understandings about the same concrete real.

It was in light of his pursuit of a scientific theoretical practice, his own protracted engagement with political economy, that Marx exposed Hegel's self-engendering conceptual development to the actual theoretical labour necessary to produce a genuine epochal shift in scientific knowledge. Althusser elaborates, adding that Marx's settlement with his erstwhile philosophical consciousness "consists...of the rejection of an ideological theory foreign to the reality of scientific practice, to substitute for it a qualitatively different theory which, for its part, recognizes the essence of scientific practice...takes seriously its particular characteristics"<sup>314</sup> and that the real meaning of the inversion of Hegel's dialectic meant "abandoning its ideological *problematic*...and going on to establish the activity of the new theory 'in an other element', in a field of a new, scientific, problematic."<sup>315</sup> It was in this sense that the solution to the problem of Hegel's dialectic remained in a practical state. Marx had sought the solution by way of a necessary detour through real scientific theoretical practice. The foundation of a new scientific problematic entailed a theoretical labour that fundamentally differed from the labour of the negative in Hegel's dialectical method.

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<sup>314</sup> 192.

<sup>315</sup> 193.

### 3.4 Althusser's Lenin

On 24 February 1968 Althusser would deliver his presentation 'Lenin and Philosophy' to the *French Society of Philosophy*.<sup>316</sup> This text, which would later be published in an essay collection of the same name, considerably recast Althusser's existing theses regarding the status of philosophy in Marx. Althusser had been reading Lenin closely throughout the early sixties as he worked toward his formulation of philosophy as the Theory of theoretical practice. A month after his close reading of the *Theses* in 1962, which had released the interpretive keys that allowed him to witness the 'literal birth of Marx', Althusser records in a letter to Madonia his return to Lenin's philosophical texts. In it he describes the weak philosophical abilities he finds next to the aptitudes that Lenin demonstrated as a political tactician. Indeed, Althusser at this point would conceive of Lenin's philosophical practice as a kind of theoretical "close-combat" in which philosophical concepts were produced for immediate ends in the struggle of ideas, as opposed to true theory that "supposes something other than these tactical concepts, perspectives properly theoretical, and 'strategic'".<sup>317</sup>

But even by the early sixties, to express directly such misgivings of the philosophical calibre of Lenin within the Party was not straightforward. It risked, in Althusser's view, rousing the theoretical reflexes of the Party apparatus thereby skewing the intended outcomes of such interventions. By '62, the largely positive role that Lenin's theoretical 'close-combat' had played in the philosophical struggles of the interwar years and the immediate post-war period for the PCF had tipped over into a largely negative one. In Althusser's view, Lenin's philosophical discourse had become something like a totalising signifying system with which Party intellectuals were forced to negotiate in order to advance Marxist philosophy. The conceptual shibboleths of Lenin's philosophy continued to play a central role in providing a non-religious grounding to the Party faithful. The discourse, which was regularly

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<sup>316</sup> In attendance at the presentation were Jean Wahl, Paul Ricoeur, Maurice Blanchard, Jean Hyppolite, Pierre-Maxime Schuhl and Jean-Pierre Faye among others.

<sup>317</sup> Althusser, *Lettres à Franca*, 306.

mobilised to subordinate philosophical intervention to the immediate practical aims of political struggle, constituted the institutionalisation of theoretical conduct within the Party. In this light, Althusser would state: “There is thus a theoretical ‘highway code’ that basically channels philosophical passers-by. To say that this code is no longer valid is to risk causing serious traffic jams! This poses very difficult political problems.”<sup>318</sup>

Althusser could therefore anticipate the effects of a transparent effort to escape Party discourse and knew well enough that if the code were to change it would have to take place within Leninist philosophy itself. As far as affecting change in the culture of the Party was concerned, Althusser was cognizant that candidly moving beyond the stultifying effects of Lenin’s philosophy was a tactical mistake. As such, Althusser began working on what would become ‘Lenin and Philosophy’ behind the scenes. And he did so at the very same moment he discovered in his reading of the *Theses* the necessary steps to reconstruct Marx’s philosophy.

Later in the month of his close reading of the *Theses* he intimated again to Madonia that his re-reading of Lenin had been enlivened by his reconceptualization of Marx’s philosophy – an exegesis that had gone “beyond ... simple explanations of texts.”<sup>319</sup> And since Lenin’s philosophical questions continued to dictate the terms of philosophical debate among party intellectuals, he had to confront Lenin’s philosophical system with his new conceptual productions (he says “I had to confront his words and thoughts with my own”). But while Althusser produced a text recording this confrontation, he believed the time was not right for its publication. He would say of the prematurity of the text that:

...we cannot say things when people are not yet ready to hear them. You have to go step by step ... and I even wonder if my last paper in *La Pensée*, (which you will have received, I hope, as well as *Esprit*, address all this) is not in this respect too adventurous, too early, too "in the air"... Anyway it will serve me as a point of reference, point of undisclosed arrival, and it is very

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> 309, Letter from 25 December 1962.

important to know where you are going, in an enterprise of this kind, to design the intermediate steps (the articles that I will publish) according to the end of the journey...<sup>320</sup>

If we take Althusser at his word here, it is possible to imagine that as part of his larger theoretico-political project of the sixties was a calculated effort to prepare the ground for a re-instantiation of the Leninist philosophical code within the Party. And this would have been carried out in an effort to countenance the ‘difficult political problems’ that the Leninist philosophical orthodoxy posed to the Party. If this was indeed the case, we can see the work that Althusser produced leading up to ‘Lenin and Philosophy’ in a new light, one that makes his volte-face there somewhat less dramatic. We can see across *Reading Capital* and *For Marx* an effort to equip readers with a radically new conceptual prism with which to approach the Marxian canon; this had the ultimate intention of dislodging the ideological obstacle represented by Lenin from the Party apparatus. And it would be by gradually unfolding an extraneous system of thought, smuggled in via the circumscribed pool of references of the orthodoxy, that Althusser would aim to do this.

As it transpired and as the reception of Althusser’s two major texts had it, this theoretico-political scheme mutated considerably as it unfolded. The ensuing years between Althusser’s initial registration of the need to renovate the interpretive norms surrounding the end of philosophy motif in Marx and his effort to undertake this renovation, along with his collaborators, were incredibly eventful. Not least as his attempt to carefully plot a new conceptual framework for approaching Marxist philosophy roused exactly the theoretico-political reflexes from the Party apparatus and beyond that he had sought to avoid. As he records in his posthumously published autocritique of the mid-seventies, *Les Vaches Noires*, *Reading Capital* and *For Marx* incited a wave of reproach from all sides of the political and intellectual spectrum. Meanwhile, when the Party was not actively stage-managing the marginalisation of the Althusserian tendency (most transparently during the events of Choisy-le-Roi and

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<sup>320</sup> 312, letter from 26 December 1962. The text in *La Pensée* was ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’, published in December 1962; the other one in *Esprit* was ‘Notes on a Materialist Theatre’ also published in December of that year.

Argenteuil), it met with almost complete silence the critical bombardment Althusser received from non-Party sources.<sup>321</sup>

If Althusser's private correspondence is anything to go by, it is apparent that his relationship with Lenin had shifted considerably just prior to writing 'Lenin and Philosophy'. This had a lot, if not everything, to do with the effects of the reception of his major published works. In a letter to Madonia from 6 December 1967, Althusser speaks about a "turn" that the new conclusion to his unpublished essay 'The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy'<sup>322</sup> had marked – a turn that had been conceptually connected to the relationship between philosophy and politics that had clarified "the reactions provoked by the published books, in the different environments they had reached." Significantly, this was a turn that prompted Althusser to read Lenin systematically so as to "get some idea of what politics is."

In his return to Lenin, Althusser noted with genuine anguish an encounter with himself in the damning portrait that Lenin gave of the intellectual, "dominated by petite bourgeois ideology".<sup>323</sup> The personal malady<sup>324</sup> that this encounter brought on for Althusser, echoing the same turmoil unearthed by previous efforts to conceptualise the link between theory and political practice, had thrown into question the conceptual framework he had previously produced to define Marxist philosophy. And yet in this persecutory and semi-revelatory encounter with Lenin, through which he met himself as disavowed intellectual,<sup>325</sup> he had come properly to understand the "objective

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<sup>321</sup> Althusser, *Les Vaches Noire*, 66 – 67.

<sup>322</sup> 'The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy' was a text that Althusser drafted upon the request of Soviet philosopher Mark Borisovich Mittin to submit an article for the Soviet journal *Voprosy filosofi* [Questions of Philosophy] in April 1967. Initially drafting a 12,000-word summative elaboration of his recent research, by the end of May he had added a conclusion entitled 'Philosophy and Politics' that had gone beyond his theoretical conclusions to date, building on the question of Marxist philosophy and politics. The text was never published in the Soviet journal but many of the new positions that would be first introduced to a French public in 'Lenin and Philosophy' had been worked out there and especially its conclusion. We find the working out of the articulation between science and politics via philosophy in 'Lenin and Philosophy' and in his two major texts of 1967: 'The Historical Task' and 'Philosophy and The Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists.' See Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 155-59 and Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*. (London: Verso, 2011) 69-67

<sup>323</sup> Althusser, *Lettres à Franca*, 754.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, "An extremely unpleasant meeting, I beg you to believe it, and I do not exaggerate by saying that I have been literally ill."

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, "It finally took this very personal 'turn' to see what we are when we recognize, in the portrait that Lenin gives you, that after all one is an 'intellectual' like all the others (including the point of honor that allows one to think, in petto [deep within the breast], that one is "not like the others", which is an integral part of the intellectual in his viscera)." This revelation would play a central role in Althusser's conceptualisation of philosophical 'denegation' in 'Lenin and Philosophy'.



meaning” of the formulas he had produced to define Marxist philosophy; from their meaning he “then could understand, clear as the day, their objective effects (the enigmatic reactions of readers).”<sup>326</sup> The impression made by this encounter with Lenin would be formalised in an interview Althusser gave for the Italian Communist Party newspaper *L’Unità* conducted by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi in February 1967.<sup>327</sup>

Althusser would go on to state that reduced to its principal formula, “philosophy is the Theory of theoretical practice”, his reconstruction of Marxist philosophy had fallen short, not on the basis of the truth claims it made, but on the basis of not having said explicitly what it had done. Althusser noted that one of the common readings of the formula was that by acquiring a capital ‘T’, Theory had become indistinguishable from science itself. In other words, philosophy had ascribed to its knowledge of the theoretical practices the status of transcendental knowledge i.e. Absolute Knowledge.<sup>328</sup>

While correct to identify the privileged relation philosophy has with science, Althusser recognised that he had done so while remaining silent on the organic link philosophy also bears with ideologies and thus with politics – thereby remaining silent on precisely the element that distinguishes philosophy from science. He would state in the new conclusion of ‘The Historical Task’: “*What radically distinguishes philosophy from the sciences, the science of history included, is the internal, intimate, organic relation that philosophy maintains with politics.*”<sup>329</sup> In Althusser’s view, the unique object of knowledge of philosophy was the articulation between theoretical practices and social practices, which was precisely what distinguished it from every science.<sup>330</sup> According to this definition, philosophy made discriminations between theoretical practices whose articulation with social practice was scientific and those

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<sup>326</sup> 755.

<sup>327</sup> “As a mass, the intellectuals, including many Communist and Marxist intellectuals, are, *with exceptions*, dominated in their theories by bourgeois ideology.” ‘Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon’ *Lenin and Philosophy*, 5.

<sup>328</sup> Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 214.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 209. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>330</sup> 216

whose articulation with social practice was ideological.<sup>331</sup> Consequently, Marxist philosophy is understood to be political not because it permits one ideology among others to bias its philosophical judgements, but precisely because it makes philosophical discriminations between an ideological theoretical practice and a scientific theoretical practice on the basis of a materialist position in philosophy.<sup>332</sup> By undertaking to discriminate between two types of knowledge, each of which has a distinct role vis-à-vis the class struggle, philosophy intervenes in the ensemble it diagrams by re-inscribing the demarcation according to which existing ideologies and sciences are divided and articulated to social practices. These were the conclusions that Althusser was reaching prior to ‘Lenin and Philosophy’.

And so, while Althusser had conceived of Marxist philosophy as that *sui generis* discourse that produces a conceptual frame of reference to guarantee the scientificity of historical materialism, he had disavowed the political character of his own philosophical interventions. Again, in the conclusion of ‘The Historical Task’, he declared that:

To produce knowledge of this ensemble, then, philosophy cannot...be a mere...*summa* of the scientific knowledges existing at a given moment...Philosophy has to take into consideration the fact that it, too, is included in this *summa*, included in the guise of an active force of intervention within this ensemble...the fact that the presence of philosophy in any *summa* of scientific knowledge is the proof *in actu* of the unstable – that is, historical and dialectical – nature of this state of the sciences, of which philosophy can speak only by intervening in it, by taking an active part in it – that is, in the broad sense of the term, by intervening in it *politically*.<sup>333</sup>

For Althusser, the political character of his own re-instantiation of the division between scientific and ideological theoretical practice explained “99% of the reactions of readers, including the singular conduct of the leaders of the French party, and other political figures.”<sup>334</sup> Althusser’s seemingly insular philosophical enterprise, concerned above all with the theoretical specificity of Marxist philosophy, had tangible political

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<sup>331</sup> These distinctions can also be made within a single discourse. See ‘On Jacques Monod’ in Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy*, 145-67.

<sup>332</sup> Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 217.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 213 – 214 .

<sup>334</sup> Althusser, *Lettres à Franca*, 755.

effects insofar as the line it traced between the scientific and the ideological in Marx placed certain existing Marxist positions within the ideological camp and others in the scientific camp. The result was of course the critical onslaught that his published work underwent and the manoeuvring of the Party to minimize his voice and the dissident tendency that had formed around his philosophy.

Many of the insights that would eventually appear in ‘Lenin and Philosophy’ thus had their roots both in the political character of the “enigmatic reactions of readers”<sup>335</sup> to Althusser’s major published works and in his re-encounter with Lenin. But such insights would be thoroughly condensed in Althusser’s ventriloquy of Lenin. In another letter to Madonia shortly before his presentation of ‘Lenin and Philosophy’, a more strident Althusser appeared to indicate the continuation of his long-term strategy of overturning the ideological dominance of Lenin’s philosophy within the Party. Now, however, it would be an overturning that played out among philosophers and not within the context of the intellectual culture of the Party. Again Althusser speaks here of holding-back and of the prematurity of putting certain things forward while referring expressly to his initial plan: “That’s part of what I was announcing some time ago in a letter about the ‘future’”.<sup>336</sup> At the same time, Althusser had a confident sense of what his intervention would do, namely how it would touch his philosophical peers: “I’m ‘itching’ to tell them some things that would simply prevent them from speaking (of the type: encircling cities by the countryside, completely changing the traditional ‘rules’ of ‘war’ and philosophical strategy) because they would have nothing more to say...”.<sup>337</sup> Althusser would proceed to re-inscribe the realm of philosophical discourse as a crucial site for political intervention and therefore for class struggle itself – a gesture that would aim to change the rules of war for his nominally non-partisan and partisan philosophical peers alike.

‘Lenin and Philosophy’ is an important milestone in the trajectory that has been traced so far, beginning as it did with Althusser’s assertions of having established an

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 758, letter from 24 February 1968.

<sup>337</sup> 759, Althusser repeats the same Maoist sentiment in the letter that followed his presentation, then referring to the fact that half of the members of the Society of Philosophy were unable to enter to lecture theatre due the attendance of his student followers: “It was the encirclement of the philosophical academic authorities by the student “masses””.

interpretive prism to understand the birth of Marx from a close reading of the *Theses of Feuerbach*. Indeed, where Althusser had been hesitant to attach hermeneutical significance to the *Theses* directly in either *For Marx*<sup>338</sup> or *Reading Capital*, in ‘Lenin and Philosophy’ and its predecessor ‘The Historical Task’, Althusser gives a more direct indication of how the eleventh thesis in particular figured in his new conception of Marxist philosophy. In ‘Lenin and Philosophy’, Althusser diverts his initial exposition of what distinguishes Lenin’s “‘practice’ of philosophy” from conventional philosophical rumination<sup>339</sup> toward a necessary clarification of the ambiguity of the eleventh thesis. Here Althusser raises the problem of a proclamation that announces the abolishment of merely interpretive philosophy as a prelude to one that changes the world but which in fact is followed by “a long philosophical silence” in Marx. The explanation Althusser gives for this anomaly has striking resonances with his argument in ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’. He says:

The philosophical emptiness which followed the proclamation of Thesis XI was thus the fullness of a science, the fullness of the intense, arduous and protracted labour which put an unprecedented science on to the stocks, a science to which Marx was to devote all his life, down to the last drafts for *Capital*, which he was never able to complete. It is this scientific fullness which represents the first and most profound reason why, even if Thesis XI did prophetically announce an event which was to make its mark on philosophy, it could not give rise to philosophy, or rather *had* to proclaim the radical suppression of all existing philosophy in order to give priority to the work needed for the theoretical gestation of Marx’s scientific discovery.<sup>340</sup>

In Althusser’s view, Marx could not write the philosophy that was announced in the eleventh thesis before first making the necessary detour through science so as to inaugurate the new scientific problematic that would necessitate a true reorganisation of philosophy. This, in Althusser’s view, was the only way to carry out a true revolution in philosophy. By establishing a wholly new scientific frame of reference (historical materialism), philosophy would be forced to undergo a reconfiguration of an entirely distinct order from the radical modifications that arise from within philosophy itself i.e. ‘interpretations’. The new scientific frame of reference would

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<sup>338</sup> In his periodization of Marx’s body of work in the introduction of *For Marx*, Althusser locates the *Theses* exactly at the frontier between philosophy and science, marking but not bearing the epistemological break via “necessarily ambiguous and unbalanced concepts” Althusser, *For Marx*, 33.

<sup>339</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 17.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

call into existence the revolution in philosophy from outside of its own internal dynamics – its own dialectic – thereby producing an event that would make its mark on philosophy according to the dynamics of real scientific practice in history. The pronouncement of the abolition of all existing philosophy, which could be announced only without providing a corresponding philosophical interpretation, was therefore the placeholder for what would be inaugurated only after the real scientific theoretical work that Marx went on to carry out in practice.

The results of what Althusser calls the “retrospective philosophical illusion”<sup>341</sup> of the eleventh thesis are not stipulated in ‘Lenin and Philosophy’. In ‘The Historical Task’ however, Althusser makes it clear that although the eleventh marked the moment Marx settled his accounts with existing philosophy in advance of his scientific journey, the placeholder of the abolishment of philosophy would be filled by the idealist philosophy contained in *The German Ideology*. The “dialectical positivist empiricism” and the “historicist philosophy of the subject” that appear in *The German Ideology*, were in Althusser’s view, posited in lieu of dialectical materialism because “the place of philosophy is never *empty*.” The void that occupies the place of philosophy in Marx’s announcement did not remain empty in anticipation of the reorganisation of philosophy induced by a new science but was, during the period in which the science worked itself out and developed its own conceptual vocabulary, “occupied by an earlier philosophy foreign to that science – one that, in this case, does much more than simply lag behind it; it contradicts it.”<sup>342</sup> Therefore, in Althusser’s estimation the revolution in philosophy induced by the new scientific problematic not only lagged behind the gestation of a new science, but its lag was characterised by ideological screening. Thus, the categories from former philosophical frameworks enveloped the new scientific problematic thereby inhibiting its proper elaboration. In this light, Althusser accounted for the theoretical deviations associated with the Marxist workers’ movement (“economism, evolutionism, voluntarism, humanism, empiricism, dogmatism, etc”) as various ideological excrescences “in some way inevitable, precisely as a function of the necessary *lag* of Marxist philosophy”.<sup>343</sup> And he would give further basis to why these deviations were inevitable by emphasising

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>342</sup> Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 174.

<sup>343</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 26.

the temporal unevenness of the articulation of different theoretical domains within a given theoretical conjuncture, a formulation that can be seen in its embryonic form in ‘An Outline for a Concept of Historical Time’. He says:

Experience shows, however, that if science needs time to rectify the scientific concepts it imports, we also need time: first, to perceive the need for new philosophical categories, and, second, to produce them. Indeed, what holds for all revolutions holds for this philosophical revolution as well: it does not begin by fiat, as soon as the need for it makes itself felt. The tools for accomplishing it must also be available. But they are not always available. In the history of philosophy and the sciences, as in the history of human societies, it is sometimes necessary to wait a very long time for a favourable conjuncture to offer the theoretical tools adapted to the solution of a long-pending problem. To say that it is necessary to wait for these tools is to say that the science or philosophy in question cannot produce them all by itself; it needs outside help, needs to import new theoretical elements to solve its critical problems. But these elements are not delivered by fiat: it is necessary to wait until they are produced by developments internal to other disciplines...Until a favourable conjuncture comes about, the philosophical revolution objectively called for by the development of a new science is left pending, as is the rectification of its concepts: philosophy lags behind science.<sup>344</sup>

In this context, Althusser accounted for the forestalled arrival of Marxist philosophy. But he also appears to provide a post hoc alibi for the conceptual importations that comprised his own reconstruction of Marxist philosophy. In order for Althusser to construct a sufficiently new conceptual framework to make the distinct nature of Marxist philosophy intelligible it was necessary for him to introduce concepts from the existing theoretical conjuncture – conceptual tools that were available but external to the Marxist canon.

With this in mind, it is possible to explain Althusser’s temporizing in his personal correspondences as so many efforts to measure up his interventions against this potentially inescapable lag. If this was indeed the case, this would suggest that he had taken on the theoretico-political responsibility of purifying the space between Marxist philosophy and historical materialism, but remained acutely vigilant with regard to the adequacy of the conceptual tools available within his own theoretical conjuncture. What remains unclear at this point is whether Althusser believed the theoretical

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<sup>344</sup> Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy*, 177-78.

conjuncture had indeed delivered the conceptual tools necessary to construct Marxist philosophy in the way that he had claimed to do in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. In a more suggestive remark, Althusser claimed in 'Lenin and Philosophy' that philosophy could not be anything other than the lag, essentially implying that the moment of adequation may in fact never arrive: "No one is ever born too soon for philosophy. If philosophy lags behind, if this lag is what makes it philosophy, how is it ever possible to lag behind a lag, which has no history?"<sup>345</sup>

Notwithstanding this question, which will remain open for the moment, Althusser had certainly moved on from his previous formulations of Marxist philosophy in 'Lenin and Philosophy'. He had proposed that there was a temporal lag between the inauguration of Marx's new science and the reorganisation of philosophy that it would potentially induce and that ideologies would tend to plug the gap between the two by donning the appearance of an adequate philosophy that provides sufficient categories for understanding the new science. From there, Althusser would proceed to enumerate a number of Lenin's philosophical theses that built upon this manifest philosophical lag.

The first of these theses was that philosophical categories are fundamentally distinct from scientific concepts. Echoing Lefebvre's reading of *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, Althusser foregrounded Lenin's proposition that there was a fundamental distinction between the philosophical category of matter, which as an absolute category remains unchanged, and the scientific concept of matter which "defines knowledges, relative to the historical state of the sciences, about the objects of those sciences."<sup>346</sup> In response to a question asked by Jean Wahl following his presentation, Althusser clarified that the "philosophical category of matter is never touched with the fingers, it doesn't materially exist, it is a thesis that *functions* philosophically in a certain way; and the problem is to study its *philosophical* functioning."<sup>347</sup> We will return to the significance of the philosophical function of the category of matter later.

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<sup>345</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 27.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>347</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Lénine et la philosophie' (with the ensuing discussion), *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*. LXIII, (October-December 1968), 161-81.

This first thesis led onto the second. If these two theoretical domains are indeed distinct, philosophy and science are however articulated. They occupy a distinct relationship via the materialist thesis of the objectivity of science. The materialist position in philosophy fundamentally affirms the objectivity of all scientific knowledge of an object as it corresponds to its fundamental philosophical stake: the objective reality of an external world existing and developing independently of the mind i.e. the materiality of existence. The materialist position in philosophy then consists of an ontological affirmation of the primacy of matter with regard to the source of objective knowledge.

Philosophy has a privileged link to science in two ways. Firstly, in the sense that Althusser had already proposed after Engels: transformations in the field of science determine a reorganisation in philosophy. Within philosophy the conceptual building blocks for consolidating the materialist position are overturned by the enrichment of scientific knowledge. The materialist position within philosophy – the philosophical defence of its categories: matter and objectivity – cannot remain satisfied with an unchanging line of reasoning. Its philosophical integrity is beholden to the reconfigurations in the field of knowledge opened up by new scientific problematics which constantly release new epistemological challenges to existing philosophical reasoning.

Despite the distinction between the unchanging *philosophical category* of matter and the limitless enrichment of *scientific concepts* of matter, new scientific systems fundamentally change the conceptual terrain out of which a philosophical position can be constructed and defended. In *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Lenin re-forged a materialist position within philosophy by showing that the proclamations of the ‘disappearance of matter’ elicited by molecular science were symptomatic of precisely such a conflation between the philosophical category of matter and the scientific concept of matter. New scientific properties that surpass the limits of what previously had been thought irreducible in matter represent not the disappearance of the philosophical category of matter, but rather the enrichment of the scientific concept of matter. In order to re-establish the materialist position within philosophy it was therefore necessary for Lenin to reformulate its fundamental theses according to



the new conceptual paradigm cast by the discoveries of molecular science. In a more concise formulation, Lenin reduced this position to the following thesis: “nature is infinite, but it infinitely exists.”<sup>348</sup> The implication here was that the richness of the material world was inexhaustible to scientific knowledge while the fact of its existence was the absolute claim of materialist philosophy.

Between the idealist theories of knowledge that exploited the implications of molecular science, Lenin defended an ‘anti-spontaneist’ approach to scientific practice as a materialist position within philosophy. According to Althusser, this meant that Lenin bolstered the role of theoretical abstraction and conceptual systematicity within scientific practice i.e. against empiricism, a position that was relegated to the status of idealism. But simultaneous with the unfolding of his own conjunctural defence of a materialist position within philosophy, Althusser highlighted that Lenin positioned his own philosophical intervention within the circumscribed limits of the age-old tendency struggle between materialism and idealism. In Althusser’s rendition, philosophy can be nothing other than the defence of one or other of the two tendencies and is therefore ultimately guided by the ideological, i.e. the political. But the conceptual terrain in which this struggle takes place is conditioned by the state of scientific knowledge within a given conjuncture. In that light, Lenin’s intervention into a conjuncture in which Marxist theory was increasingly dominated by empirio-criticists, was the “installation in power” of a philosophical system within the hierarchic order of the struggle between idealist and materialist positions. But where philosophies tend to disavow their partisanal underpinnings, ascribing to themselves the status of ideological neutrality, Lenin explicitly acknowledged the fundamentally political character of such an intervention. In other words, Lenin had accompanied his re-establishment of the materialist position within philosophy with a specification regarding the modality of philosophical practice as such.

For Althusser then, philosophy gained its distinctiveness as a theoretical level in Lenin precisely in terms of how it articulated science and politics. He states that Lenin “is convinced that philosophy exists somewhere as a third instance between the two

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<sup>348</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works Volume 14 1908*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 262.

major instances which constitute it as itself, an instance: the class struggle and the sciences.”<sup>349</sup> This articulation forms in the way that philosophy re-defines categories according to the conceptual constraints formed by a given scientific problematic so as to affirm a claim on the nature of existence. The ontological affirmation of the materialist position – the existence of a world exterior to the human mind of which science produces objective knowledge – is formulated according to a series of categorical dissections that discriminate between true and false ideas. It is precisely on the basis that its conceptual “line-drawing” is guided foremost by the pursuit of defending scientific practices – an aim that is imported from outside the internal logic of philosophy itself – that the materialist position upholds its partisanship.

The demarcations carried out in philosophy are done in view of the practical effects they will produce on scientific practices, which materialist philosophy seeks above all to assist. Materialist philosophy supports scientific practices by defending them from ideological contamination in a struggle that takes place in the philosophical realm – a struggle that, insofar as it plays out according to absolute position taking vis-à-vis historically specific forms of scientific knowledge, is potentially interminable.

Althusser’s specification of Lenin’s “philosophical practice” then detracts from pragmatist understandings of his partisanship in philosophy or ‘partyiness’ (*partiinnost*, партийность) of philosophy. In Althusser’s formulation of the phrase, it did not refer to the subordination of philosophy to political ideology. The political stake of the materialist position within philosophy was not a position determined by the requirements of a localised political conflict but rather the defence of scientific practices. Accordingly, Althusser presented the notion of partisanship as being mediated by definite discursive protocols specific to philosophy and beholden to the conceptual reorganisation inaugurated by scientific development.

Even though philosophy is by its nature inflected by the struggle between tendencies, it remains bound by specific discursive procedures that reflect its specific historical development. In that light, Althusser asserted in ‘The Historical Task’ that philosophy is “a discipline which, at the theoretical level, is absolutely distinct from political

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<sup>349</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 40.

ideology, and it has the autonomy of a discipline of a scientific character; its development is subject to specific imperatives - precision, conceptual rigour and demonstrative systematicity.”<sup>350</sup>

Althusser went to great lengths to stress the danger of Marxist philosophy becoming directly enmeshed in the political struggle, of it becoming “the handmaiden of politics” – a reality that was not unfamiliar to the PCF. In Althusser’s interpretation of Lenin, philosophy was political or bore upon the class struggle via its effects upon scientific practice. In Althusser’s idiom, its bearing upon the class struggle was mediated by the scientific instance. And indeed, one of Althusser’s principal claims in ‘Lenin and Philosophy’ was that Lenin denied the existence of a philosophy that unfolds according to an objective internal logic – i.e. that the inflection of philosophical argumentation by one of the two elemental ontological positions was inescapable. This was a significant volte-face on how he had previously characterised Marxist philosophy in ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’.<sup>351</sup> According to this new understanding, a ruminative philosophy that denies or disavows its political nature under the cover of mere interpretation of the world was nevertheless political.

For Althusser, therefore, this was how “Lenin responded to the prophecy in the XIth Thesis” – according to a new philosophical practice “which has renounced denegation, and, knowing what it does, *acts according to what it is*.”<sup>352</sup> Knowing the endless struggle to which philosophy is bound, Lenin recognised that the apparent suppression of philosophy merely reflected a particular manoeuvre in the movement of this struggle. In that light, Althusser argued that Lenin did not conceive of the eleventh thesis as the initiation of a new philosophy or the death-knell of philosophy as such. In fact, Althusser claimed, “What is new in Marxism’s contribution to philosophy is a new *practice of philosophy*. *Marxism is not a (new) philosophy of praxis, but a (new) practice of philosophy*.”<sup>353</sup> The novelty of this practice consisted

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<sup>350</sup> Althusser, *Humanist Controversy*, 217.

<sup>351</sup> In ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’ Althusser makes a clear distinction between a technical practice and a theoretical practice around the notion of an externally imported end for which that practice is a means. He says, “In every case, the relation between technique and knowledge is an *external*, unreflected relation, radically different from the internal, reflected relation between science and knowledges.” Althusser, *For Marx*, 171.

<sup>352</sup> Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 41.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

in the way that it re-instantiated the materialist position within philosophy against the backdrop of a given theoretical conjuncture at the same time as it disclosed the relationship between philosophical partisanship and the class struggle.

In light of his principal claim that scientific development induced a reorganisation in philosophy, it was Althusser's contention that Lenin's new practice of philosophy had at its root the discoveries of historical materialism – namely the scientific elucidation of the forms of existence of surplus value and the mechanisms of class domination. Like his political practice, Lenin's new practice of philosophy was fundamentally guided by locating philosophical practice as such within the epistemological frame of reference granted by historical materialism. Historical materialism had established a scientific frame of reference that clarified the tendential laws that govern class society outside of individual consciousness. It provided “scientific knowledge of the mechanisms of class rule and all their effects”.<sup>354</sup> Accordingly, Lenin located philosophical practice within the dynamic field of practical and social relations of which historical materialism provides objective knowledge – that is, one constituted by the on-going, mobile and scalar processes of surplus value extraction and social reproduction.

Insofar as historical materialism produces knowledge of the reality of these processes, it can affect how these very processes play out. When a scientific understanding of the mechanisms of class domination is translated into political action, the reality underpinning such understandings can be altered. Hence, according to Althusser, historical materialism can be used for political ends; it can be used to orientate interventions in the real world, but as a theoretical level it is not as such political. That being the case, scientific knowledge in general, but historical materialism specifically, was, in Althusser's view, exposed to ideological abuse, especially from within the Marxist camp. The misrecognition of the scientific ambitions of historical materialism and its exploitation by existing class ideological positions fell within the purview of such abuses. In that respect, and only in that respect, did a materialist philosophy play a practical and theoretical role in the class struggle – namely vis-à-vis its defence of scientific practices from such ideological abuses. Philosophy was political to Lenin, in

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<sup>354</sup> 41.

Althusser's reading, because when situated within the scientific frame of reference provided by historical materialism, philosophy's practico-theoretico function concerning scientific practices fell within, and not outside, the web of forces constitutive of class struggle. By diagramming the tendential laws and mechanisms of class reproduction, historical materialism however took a perspective from without.

So what of philosophy's lag? In 'Lenin and Philosophy' Althusser leaves us to connect the dots on this point. Does Lenin's philosophical practice, as reconstructed by Althusser, represent the anticipated reorganisation of philosophy that was supposed to be inaugurated by historical materialism? Or does this new practice of philosophy not in fact enjoin philosophy to the lag, positing it as its inherent mode of existence? In fact, Althusser appears to claim both of these positions. If Lenin's philosophical practice was a major milestone in philosophical efforts to measure up to historical materialism, it was, in Althusser's view, because it carried no illusions about the boundless horizon that philosophy treads. Accepting the perpetual war that plays out within philosophy, Lenin *practiced* philosophy rather than resolving a new philosophy in the name of Marx. He did so according to the objective knowledge furnished by historical materialism. The salience of practice in this context was that it gave primacy to a historical materialist understanding of the social totality of practices. And yet it was out of this same philosophical practice, which gives primacy to the findings of historical materialism, that the scientific status of historical materialism itself was defended and guaranteed. Via the prism of historical materialism, philosophy for Althusser became an open-ended practice linked to the class struggle exclusively by way of its reflexive determination by and of the sciences.

### 3.5 Althusser's Knots

If in February 1968, Althusser had encircled the philosophical citadel by the countryside at the time of delivering 'Lenin and Philosophy',<sup>355</sup> the following he had gained among the "student masses" would die on the barricades three months later.

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<sup>355</sup> He writes to Madonia: "It was the encirclement of the philosophical academic authorities by the student masses" in Althusser, *Lettres*, 758.

Following the student uprisings and workers' strikes of May 1968, Althusser would be on the receiving end of accusations of political conservatism and academic elitism. These would come from the very students who had crowded out his lectures at the *École normale supérieure* some years before. The most vociferous and stinging of these denials would come from his "young dogs" – the students with whom Althusser had collaborated in political and academic work. Jacques Rancière's patricidal retaliation in the texts that made up *Althusser's Lesson* (1974) remains the paradigmatic case of this generational repudiation of Althusserian Marxism.

In Rancière's retrospective narration of Althusser's post-'68 decline, he roots the discontent that would eventually overwhelm the hold of Althusserianism to his January 1964 essay published in *NC*, 'Student Problems.' Written during the productive period that resulted in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, this lesser-known text fell into the background of the Althusserian canon due to its relatively provincial concerns. The essay aimed at stemming the tide of the actions of the syndicalist student arm of the PCF, the Union des Étudiants Communistes (UEC), so as to prevent them from establishing political and organisational autonomy from the Party. According to Rancière, the stakes that drove Althusser's uncharacteristically polemical intervention was the real threat that the initiatives of the UEC posed to the foundations of the Althusserian theoretical project.<sup>356</sup>

The UEC had turned their critical and political attention to the university system feeling the need, after the Algerian war, to shift the locus of their inquiry and political responsibility to their own situation i.e. the educational apparatus within which they functioned. Seen through the prism of class struggle, this brought into question the material and social ends of academic knowledge and the function played by the pedagogical relation in maintaining the social relations of production.

For a post-'68 Rancière and others, Althusser's response to these activities in 'Student Problems' demonstrated a reflex of self-preservation that would resurface in its theoretical manifestation in his celebrated '65 works. Indeed, in Rancière's view, it

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<sup>356</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Student problems (1964) (with an introduction by Warren Montag)', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 170 (Nov/Dec 2011), 8–15.

would provide the fundamental principles of his reconstruction of Marxist philosophy; namely, the transcendental status closely tied to science and the theorist in his philosophical system. This, he would argue, had conveniently lent itself to a self-sustaining defence of the status of the expert within the academic institution and the intellectual within the party. He would conclude that in its essence Althusserianism was a theory of education, and “every theory of education is committed to preserving the power it seeks to bring to light.”<sup>357</sup>

In the essay itself Althusser did indeed defend the irreducibility of the organisational structures integral to the two institutions that provided him his own unique role within the revolutionary struggle (the party and the university). He did so under the pretext that such hierarchies stemmed from a necessary technical, rather than a social, division of labour. He put forward this position in the name of prioritising the ongoing struggle between science and ideology that could only be waged by accepting the basic “technical” division through which knowledge transmission occurred i.e. pedagogical inequality.

It is clear from Althusser’s liberal use of the word ‘dangerous’ to characterise the conflation of scientific practice with bourgeois individualism that the history of Lysenkoism and the two sciences was not far from his mind here. In this light, Althusser remained convinced that the technical forms of scientific or pedagogical practices under capitalism were not necessarily a simple reflection of the social relations of production. The use of scientific knowledge and the function of the pedagogical relation were not as such preordained to reproduce the social relations of production under capitalism, even though they certainly did do so. And as the case of Lysenko had shown, the politicization of the technical form of scientific practice on the basis of results taken from a social, or worse, philosophical, analysis led to unforgivable conclusions. It was in this sense that Althusser argued that the: “number one strategic point where class domination over the minds of researchers, teachers and students is at stake is the nature of the knowledge taught, knowledge which a class division cuts into two: science on the one hand and ideology on the other.”<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Althusser’s Lessons*, (London: Continuum, 2011), 52.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Rancière along with the UEC acquiesced to the Althusserian line until May '68. They subordinated their 'spontaneous' student syndicalism to the priority of the class struggle in theory. They took up the task of defending Marxist science from within the ideologically pernicious currents of French academia. But in the years leading up to<sup>359</sup> and following '68, anti-institutional critique gained hegemonic status among student activists and the academic left. Power had become the watchword of the new social movements and decentralisation and self-management the horizon of its ambitions. The result: Althusserian philosophy fell from grace.

This decline within the academic realm had been occasioned by his engineered isolation within the Party. Beyond '68, Althusser's position had become increasingly difficult to map onto to left/right splits within the left at large. On the one hand, he was convinced that he was taking on the PCF from the left, against its embrace of the electoral ambitions of the PS, but he was doing so with – what many viewed to be – an unreconstructed commitment to Stalinist precepts. His commitment to working within the Party and his Leninist conviction that revolutionary politics required the discipline of theory seemed entirely out of step with the currents of anti-authoritarian leftism of the moment. Yet, throughout the turbulent seventies two questions continued to animate his thought: the question of philosophy in Marx and the question of the transformation of the Party.

Following '68, the latter question had been cast in a new light. 'How Can Something Substantial Change?'<sup>360</sup> Althusser asked in the title of an unpublished text from April 1970. Here the question was specifically to do with making a qualitative change in the PCF. The reality, as it presented itself to Althusser, was that neither breaking away from the Party to found Trotskyist or Maoist groupuscules to attack it from without (as the students had tried to do), nor working from within the Party to transform the consciousness of its base (as Althusser had tried to do), had been able to

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<sup>359</sup> Part of the backdrop of the split among Althusser's students was precipitated by the PCF's retaliation against the 'Cercle d'Ulm' to dissolve the cell of the UEC at the ENS. In response, former Ulmards including Rancière, Robert Linhart and Dominique Lecourt formed a breakaway Maoist groupuscule, the Union des Jeunes Communistes (Marxistes-Léninistes) (UJC (M-L)). Balibar and others, who would continue to work with Althusser during the seventies, remained in the Party for longer. Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution*, 108.

<sup>360</sup> 'Comment quelque chose de substantiel peut-il changer?' in Althusser, *Écrits sur l'histoire*, 87–92.



truly affect the substance (its political line, leadership and organisational form) of the Party. The Party had been able to absorb internal and external critiques by coding them according to the reproductive logic of its apparatus. But where an event like May '68 had not substantially altered the force and direction of the Party, a “more serious event”<sup>361</sup> like the 1956 crisis of the Soviet Union had fundamentally transformed the French Party in its substance. It had put into question its theoretical references and the principles of its political line such that the internal consistency of the organisation could no longer hold. However, in locating the threshold of a qualitative change at the point where an unforeseeable external event caused an internal disruption proper, the question of what to do in the meantime remained as pressing, how can the Party be substantially changed? Althusser bemoaned the situation: “We will not be able change the Party from the outside: it can only be changed from within. But at the same time, we have seen that it has not been possible to change from within...so, is there no way out?”<sup>362</sup>

In the meanwhile, the question of philosophy in Marx was equally fraught. In a letter written to his wife H el ene Rytman in early 1971, he described the situation at the  cole. Since '68, he lamented, students no longer knew “on what foot to dance ... philosophically speaking.”<sup>363</sup> Very few of them were concerned with the stakes of philosophical intervention, he added, having now had a taste for politics. And they had, in Althusser’s view, convinced themselves of having solved “the problem of philosophy by throwing themselves into, or entrusting it (out of confidence, blindness and without arguments) to “modernity”, to a certain number of ideas or attitudes which are in the air...”.<sup>364</sup> In a new, but altogether familiar, sense Althusser was again witness to the supposed end of philosophy. This time the lacuna left by the suppression of philosophy was being filled by a repertoire of theoretical reflexes that, beyond their radical pretensions, complemented the ideological requisites of an emergent centre-left political hegemony and early neoliberal capital.

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<sup>361</sup> Althusser, * crits sur l’histoire*, 89.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Letter from June 1971 in Louis Althusser, *Lettres   H el ene 1947 – 1980*, (Paris: Bernard Grasset/IMEC, 2011), 596.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

Between publishing what would turn out to be one of his major texts, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (June 1970) and the publication of *Essays in Self-Criticism* (1972) – another significant marker in his official theoretical trajectory – Althusser reached an intellectual and political impasse. This phase was marked by a certain withdrawal from public life. According to his private correspondences of this period, this blockage was, beyond the post-'68 malaise, the direct result of having lost favour with his former students. Between the 15/16 February 1971, Althusser detailed the episode to Franca Madonia. This came shortly after a letter on the 5<sup>th</sup> in which Althusser enfolded one of his earliest renditions of his philosophy of the *encounter* in a reflection over his psychic difficulties in coping with a strike held by students at the ENS.<sup>365</sup>

In the letter from the 5<sup>th</sup>, Althusser said that at that juncture in his personal history the *encounter* carried a unique and profound significance. It was a theoretical vantage that was entirely against nostalgia – which was, contrary to all appearances, a headlong rush into the future. In the context, Althusser was musing over the failures of his own theoretico-political project, manifested most immediately in phantasms of loss and attachment regarding his renegade students. In this sense, the *encounter* formed as a philosophical figure for Althusser out of his efforts to find ways of restoring his relation to the present ostensibly beset by political and theoretical foreclosure. The major preoccupation during this period was the question of how to push thought through a present that was by all accounts indicative of the failures of the past.

The *encounter* was his way of thinking himself out of this impasse. And it was primarily in the Freudian idiom and during a period of sustained self-administered analytical work<sup>366</sup> that the figure would be fashioned. This was before it would be

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<sup>365</sup> It was in 1972 that his courses on Machiavelli and Rousseau would be revised with the marked inclusion of the term *encounter* and *aleatory*. Indication of these additions from '72 are noted in both published versions of these courses: see Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, (London: Verso, 1999) and Louis Althusser, *Cours sur Rousseau*, (Paris: Le Temps des cerises, 2012).

<sup>366</sup> In the letter from the 5 February 1971 Althusser used the metaphor of an imperilled mountaineer to clarify his definition of the *encounter*. He explained that sometimes in order to find the safest route out of a hazardous position mountaineers will assess that it is safer to scale up the wall than it is to retreat back down from where they have come. In a letter to Rytman from September 1973, he gave a similar account of the Freudian term *Durcharbeitung* (in English approximately: the work of processing through elaboration). Althusser defined the term as “the work of going through something, of going through a test, the work of producing something through a *crossing-of*, active crossing = transformation.” And he added that as phantasms are relations, they are therefore comparable to relations of production and “we know that it

transposed into the Marxian register wherein it would gather its theoretical relevance to the question of change in the Party.

But this was also a complex that included the question of philosophy. Indeed, the state of philosophy, the state of the institution and role of philosophy, but above all the role of Marxist philosophy in the revolutionary movement – the apex of the party-university-philosophy nexus – was what was ultimately at stake in the gestation of the philosophy of the *encounter*. The importance of the *encounter* to a certain renewal of the Althusserian philosophical project cannot be underestimated: both at the level of his actual teaching – where we see the *encounter* reformulated and finding further dimension in the non-Marxian political philosophies he was teaching at the ENS during the same period – but also in his sustained concern for the question of philosophy in Marx.

In order to supplement the significance of the conceptual breakthroughs that were to take place in these exchanges it is first necessary to move forward slightly in time to where Althusser provided a more elaborated definition of the term ‘phantasm’. The term appears to be doing a lot of work throughout these exchanges so it is necessary to get a sense of its function in the Althusserian conceptual schema. In his 1976 text *The Discovery of Dr. Freud*<sup>367</sup> Althusser closed the article with a direct reflection on the term. He said:

*The concept of the phantasm is nothing other, in Freud, than the concept of the unconscious in all its extension and all its comprehension. We are obliged to observe that in the phantasm Freud designates something extremely precise, an existent though non material reality, concerning which no misunderstanding is possible, and a material reality that is the very existence of its object: the unconscious.*<sup>368</sup>

Earlier in the text we are told that the phantasm in Freud’s sense is the psychic realm opened up by the originary interdiction of wish fulfilment, within which the wish can

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takes ‘work’ to ‘transform’ them by going ‘through’ them.” Althusser believed that only by passing through the work of processing in solitude could a properly transformative affect be achieved. In Althusser, *Lettres à Hélène*, 642.

<sup>367</sup> Louis Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 79 – 125.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

be phantasmatically fulfilled without actually materialising – without, as it were, being realised. The realisation of the desire takes place in the realm of the ‘imaginary’ and this is the realm through which individuals relate to the ‘real’. The phantasm thus refers to the constituted imaginary relationship individuals occupy with the real world. In Althusser’s conceptual system, the imaginary and the real are not opposed, but as Balibar explains: “encroach upon one another: they do not belong to separate worlds, but produce together what we actually perceive as a coherent or a conflictual ‘world.’”<sup>369</sup> The determination of the imaginary relationships that one occupies with the real world therefore forms unconsciously. It is an outcome of conditions beyond one’s ability to master the real world. In the quote above, Althusser claims that the phantasm conceptually articulates a non-material reality (the locus within which the banned desire is displaced, i.e the imaginary) to a material reality wherein real material effects present themselves to observation providing determinate cues to such an absent (non-material) existent. For Althusser, the concept of the phantasm was a “limit concept” not only in the sense of figuring a third realm in which two distinct realms are articulated; it was a limit concept also because it was a metaphor (i.e a non-scientific concept) designating the site of a scientific problem in lieu of the science that would bring its object into knowledge. He would add that, as such, the phantasm could “be *for us* the concept *of the limit* that separates a theoretical formation that has not yet become a science from the science to come.” In other words, according to the function of the term in Freud’s system, as opposed to its intended meaning in the context, the phantasm for Althusser named the status of a concept between a pre-scientific theoretical formation and a scientific formation. The fact that the concept was the marker of a liminal status between a pre-scientific and scientific theoretical formation in the course of its function was for Althusser’s purposes the more important aspect of the term. His conclusion makes his affirmation of this liminal status clear: “For, thank God, between that theoretical formation and science there is at least a little phantasm, the illusion of having attained science, and, since the phantasm is contradictory, a bit of genuine desire to finally reach it.”<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Etienne Balibar, ‘The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser’ in Springer & Kaplan, *The Althusser Legacy*, 10.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

In the letter series from February 1971, Althusser would principally use the term in the Freudian sense. However, in the process of his introspective inquiries, which tend to overlap with his philosophical musings, Althusser reaches the idea of the limit concept via an explanation of the term phantasm. And this recognition of the status of the limit concept forms at the same moment as his thinking of the *encounter*.

In the letter from the 5<sup>th</sup>, Althusser remarks about the *encounter* that it is a kind of “physics” that he lives by, “which *displaces* the causes of *absence* (the *phantasies*: in the Freudian terminology a phantom is anything but a ghost) in causes of presence.” In the first place then, Althusser used the term *encounter* to name an explanatory method that refracted the phantasmal (the effects of a determinate absence within subjectivity) through the departure point of a materialist explanation (‘physics’) of the cause of what is present. Here it is important to register the role of displacement in Althusser’s formulation. It is not that Althusser seeks to repress the phantasies that condition the present making it indicative of an absence, of a non-material reality. Rather, he seeks to trace the determinate absence causing his blockage from the effectivity registered in his phantasmal narrativity via a materialist explanation. And it was this formulation of the encounter, raised from its immediate context to a level of conceptual abstraction, that Althusser would ultimately “reserve for philosophical interventions ... over the dialectic”<sup>371</sup> i.e. over Marxist philosophy.

By the letter of the 15 February 1971, Althusser would again take up the Freudian idiom, but this time to convey the extent of his mental paralysis – once again rooted in the strike actions at the university:

With this strike, these phantasies have resumed all their virulence, to the point of preventing me from "living", from having the least freedom of mind and movement to read or do anything. They literally *tracked* me down (the phantasms: the students, they left me perfectly in peace, and besides I did what I could to support them by suggesting a positive way to go). To live like a hunted man, that's what I have found myself reduced to, without freedom of movement (at the very moment when I needed it as much as possible).<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Althusser, *Lettres*, 784.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 786. [See Appendix for full letter].

If this was a period of gestation for the conceptualisation of the encounter, wherein the durability of the concept was tested against its ability to transform Althusser's psychic relation to the present, it had not yet found adequate expression. However, in the letter that appeared the following day (16 February), Althusser had reached something like a breakthrough with this conceptual work. There the Freudian terminology begins to coincide with a Marxian problematic and the production of the concept is at a particularly crucial stage of its development. Indeed, this letter would germinate lines of inquiry that would later occupy texts such as *Essays in Self-Criticism* (1973), *How to be a Marxist in Philosophy* (1976), *On Freud and Marx* (1978) and others.

What sets this letter apart from the others is that it is the first to register a self-critical turn over the theoretical interventions of the sixties. He says:

I must say that writing also confronts me (outside of my fantasies that block me) with my theoretical past if I dare say, and that I feel very uncomfortable with regard to this fucking theoretical past (this discomfort naturally must also go through some phantasmatic configurations): that means that I do not know what to say today to speak to the people, meaning I obviously have the feeling of having nothing to say (which after all is the normal state of the vast majority of well-constituted people who do not feel the duty to write), that people (because of this fucking theoretical past) expect of me (as a known "character" ...).<sup>373</sup>

In the context, this theoretical past had been roused by a request by Althusser's former student Marta Harnecker, to produce an updated Preface for the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of her *Elementary Concepts of Historical Materialism* – a Marxist textbook that had been well circulated in Allende's Chile. As Althusser's comments intimate, his own theoretical past had fallen into the field of signification of his phantasmal narrativity. The discomforts with which his theoretical past had come to be associated, reflected the determinate absence that had come to hold sway over his ability to countenance the present. It was in Althusser's view the effectivity of this determinate absence that prevented him from writing. The difficulty, then, was in establishing a concept that could relate this theoretical past with the present in a consistent way, to establish a concept that figured affirmatively this discontinuity, all the while conscious that this

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 787-88.

theoretical past represented a pronounced theoretical miscarriage. Only in this way, could Althusser have anything to say.

To that end, Althusser reflected on the fact that in his best efforts to draft the text for Harnecker's preface he could not find the words because his "heart is not in *the right place*." [le cœur n'est pas à sa place]<sup>374</sup> Musing on the way that this spatial metaphor of the dislocated heart brought into intelligibility a non-perceptible reality, Althusser came to the realisation that "in these stories of the unconscious (whose discomforts are only the effects) the stories of places are decisive: the heart is not in its right place, as the saying goes (the heart does not mean anything: but not in its right place, means something)".<sup>375</sup> Here the point of interest was the way that the spatial figuration was crucial to bringing into the field of representability a relation of effectivity that would be otherwise imperceptible. Althusser went on to add:

You know one day (one day ...) I will talk about this *topography* [*topique*], the fact that Marx (like Freud) presents the reality of which he speaks by arranging it in places (topoi), in *distinct/unmistakable* [*inconfondables*] places: here, is not the same as there. How to mark the difference, but not difference (as our friend Derrida does by baptizing *différance*) as dispersion, as "dissemination" (a notion that D. borrows from Mallarmé) but as a distinction of the instances, that is to say to say places occupied by powers, powers in the strong sense of the word, that is to say, "realities" exerting an influence, an efficiency, a power (nodal differences which are active, efficient).<sup>376</sup>

A consistent thread of thought links Althusser's efforts to clarify the conceptual specificity of the *encounter* in the letter from the 5 February letter to the privileged role ascribed to the topographic in the quote above. In both cases, what seems to be at stake is locating lacunary efficacies. Here, thinking through the peculiarities of his lassitude, Althusser reached the problem of representation, namely, how is one to

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 788. For the purposes of the discussion that follows, this is an approximation of the literal translation of the French saying "The heart is not in its place". The English equivalent would be "The heart is not in it."

<sup>375</sup> In Althusser's lectures on Rousseau the following year the figure of the heart is used in a different context to the same effect as Lenin's knot. In the second lecture, Althusser describes the function of the 'heart' in Rousseau as carrying out a "displacement inside [the] structure of interiority" 38, as a "philosophical demarcation, that is, of a critical distance taken" 59, that brings off "the impossible feat of escaping from the circle without leaving it – since one cannot leave it – by, quite simply, going back into the self to find, in the heart...an escape by way of the inside; *one leaves the circle by way of the inside*" 59. In Althusser, *Lessons on Rousseau*

<sup>376</sup> Althusser, *Lettres*, 788.

register the existence of real powers that defy representability? This was a slightly adjusted formulation of the question that the figure of the *encounter* was supposed to answer – how to conceptualise a relation to the present beset by political and theoretical foreclosure. How, in other words, to conceive of the “fact to be accomplished” and the conditions for its realisation while at the same time accounting for the fact that the determination for its realisation can only take place outside of philosophy?

As the quote above makes evident, this question had been sharpened by Jacques Derrida’s philosophical interventions. In his major texts of the mid-sixties, Derrida had thrown into question the adequacy of representational signifying systems by foregrounding the structure of opposition and semantic deferral that underpinned the relational totality of the field of representation – a philosophical gesture that he indexed with the term *différance*.<sup>377</sup> The question for Althusser then was how to locate real sources of efficacy given this representational deficiency? In this regard, Althusser explicitly distinguished his theory of difference from Derrida’s *différance*. Difference for Althusser meant that the ‘identity’ of the power that absented itself from the sightline of representation was simultaneous with its effectuation. It was therefore in excess of the semantic play of *différance* but nonetheless existed.

Within this line of questioning, Althusser interrupted himself to invoke the Lenin of the *Philosophical Notebooks*. He noted: “Lenin reading Hegel stops (like a hunting dog smelling game) before an expression of Hegel: *the web and the strong knot*.”<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> See for example *Writing and Difference* (1967) and *Of Grammatology* (1967).

<sup>378</sup> Althusser, *Lettres*, 788. The reference in the *Philosophical Notebooks* is the following: ““In this web strong knots are formed now and then, which are foci of the arrest and direction of its” [the spirit’s, or the subject’s] “life and consciousness ....” (18)” and the annotation of Hegel’s *Logic* is: “How is this to be understood? Man is confronted by a *web* of natural phenomena. Instinctive man, the savage, does not distinguish himself from nature. Conscious man does distinguish, categories are stages of distinguishing, i.e. of cognising the world, focal points in the web, which assist in cognising and mastering it” in *Lenin, Collected Works Vol. 38*, 93. The original reference in Hegel’s *Logic* is: “The broad distinction between instinctive act and act which is intelligent and free is that the latter is performed consciously; when the content that motivates a subject to action is drawn out of its immediate unity with the subject and is made to stand before it as an object, then it is that the freedom of spirit begins, the same spirit who, when thought is an instinctive activity, is caught up in the web of its categories and is splintered into a material of infinite variety. Here and there on this web there are knots, more firmly tied than others, which give stability and direction to the life and consciousness of spirit; they owe their firmness and power simply to the fact that, having been brought before consciousness, they stand as independent concepts of its essential nature... As impulses the categories do their work only instinctively; they are brought to consciousness one by one and so are variable and mutually confusing, thus affording to spirit only fragmentary and uncertain actuality. To



For Althusser, the metaphor of the knot in Lenin's "materialist reading of Hegel"<sup>379</sup> provided a conceptual figure that captured the topological peculiarities<sup>380</sup> of the reality he was pointing toward. In the context, the citation from Lenin, who transcribed and annotated from Hegel's *Logic*, was to do with the distinction between instinctual and conscious cognition of the manifold. In Hegel's use of the metaphor, the founding act of the subject was when conscious cognition separates itself from the web of natural phenomena within which it is embedded by seizing upon tightly-held knots in the web.<sup>381</sup> These knots referred to those thought determinations that "stand as independent concepts" and cognise the limitation of the finite categories that are the result of an instinctive cognition. These knots therefore represented developmental stages in the reflexive objectification of the essence of consciousness.

Althusser's 1969 addendum to 'Lenin and Philosophy', and his only published text to deal with the *Philosophical Notebooks*, 'Lenin Before Hegel', provides clarity on how Althusser was mobilizing Lenin in this moment. In 'Lenin Before Hegel', Althusser's central conclusion was that what Lenin found in Hegel, after having read *Capital*, was an understanding that the dialectic at work in history was an absolute process without a Subject. In other words, Lenin conceived of the path traced by the dialectic of history to be simultaneous with its own engendering, i.e. the immediate and total reconciliation of knowledge and the real process of history never reached fulfilment. In other words, there was no transcendental realm in which the path of history simultaneously inscribed and recognised itself, as it did with Hegel's Spirit.

In relation to Lenin's accented transcription of Hegel's knot, this meant that Althusser was casting Hegel's original sense of the knot – the representation of a stage in the

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purify these categories and in them to elevate spirit to truth and freedom, this is therefore the loftier business of logic." Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 17.

<sup>379</sup> See 'Lenin Before Hegel' [April 1969] in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 71 – 85.

<sup>380</sup> While the knot was raised here in the Lenin-Hegel nexus, Althusser doubtless also had in mind certain developments that Jacques Lacan had made in his psychoanalytical work of the same period. In his seminars of the early seventies, Lacan had made use of the figure of the Borromean knot precisely to represent the axial extension of the linkage within his tripartite topography of the unconscious. See: Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire : Livre XIX ...Ou Pire et La Savoir du Psychanalyste 1971 – 72*, (Paris: Seuil, 2011). However, the term was also peculiar to Althusser's own theoretical vocabulary. The knot [*noeud*] can be viewed as a particular iteration of a series of textile images that Althusser used to express the uneven overlapping character of levels within the hierarchically organised social totality, such as 'entanglement' [*enchevêtrement*] and 'intertwining' [*entrelacement*].

<sup>381</sup> One of the few Marxists to give a sustained treatment of Hegel's knot metaphor was C.L.R. James in his 1969 *Notes on Dialectics*. See C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics Hegel, Marx, Lenin*, (Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1981), 1-20.

ascending exteriorisation of conceptual comprehension of the elementary-originary forms of consciousness – against Lenin’s understanding of the dialectic as a process without a Subject. This comes out in Althusser’s continued comparison with Derrida. Unlike Derrida, whose propensity is to un-weave and re-weave the web of textuality, foregrounding the structuring absence of all representational aspirations to access immediate self-presence, Lenin (along with Marx and Freud) was concerned with the “crucial points where the threads of the texture, instead of playing the game of warp and weft, are tied to together into strong knots in distinct places”. Lenin aimed to establish a conceptual comprehension of the determining instance that lay outside the immediate given of the tissue – which we could align with the ideological. These were the broader stakes of his interest in Hegel’s image of the knot. But, as Althusser went on to stress, unlike Hegel’s knot, Lenin conceived of the knot as having no preordained location in the tissue prior to its taking its place. He said, “the knot is not an effect of place...on the contrary, it is the knot which makes the place that it occupies a place, its place from which it acts on the other places.”<sup>382</sup> The knot therefore places itself (constitutes itself as a distinct place), has no prior determination, and establishes the relational specificities of the tissue simultaneously to its taking this place.

For Althusser, therefore, the knot was a limit concept that figured the receding horizon of the absent determining instance, relative to an ascending conceptual comprehension – a conception that was informed by his earlier dictum “the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes.”<sup>383</sup> Yet, the knot also spatially represented this very relation: a determinate absence corresponding to a *sui generis* power that eluded the grasp of a conceptual system of which it was an exterior determination. It was the spatialisation of this relationship that Althusser prized in Marx and Freud’s topographic models. It was this, Althusser added, that was “special about Marx and Freud’s theory...the way they relate (quite differently than other sciences) theory and their practice (practice as if in advance drawn from the topographic)”. In this sense, it was possible to understand “why all philosophy was part of a topography (which

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<sup>382</sup> Althusser, *Lettres*, 788.

<sup>383</sup> Althusser, *For Marx*, 113.

throws light on the modality of philosophical theses: deeply practical, even when they are conservative or reactionary.)”<sup>384</sup>

As he forewarned in the letter to Madonia, none of what Althusser spoke about regarding the knot would appear in the text submitted to Harnecker for the preface. Yet, there are unmistakable echoes of what Althusser put forward in the letter within the contents of the preface published the following year. In the short text, entitled ‘Marxism-Leninism and the Class Struggle’,<sup>385</sup> Althusser distinguished two ways of reading *Capital*: the first, the bourgeois economic reading, discovered the existence of the social classes and the class struggle at the end of *Capital*. In this reading the production of class positions become intelligible only at the end of the account of a capitalist political economy; class division is its ultimate product. The other way of reading *Capital*, the revolutionary reading, was to witness the presence of the class struggle at every stage of the account given of the capitalist mode of production and therefore not as a result. In this reading, the antagonism between the classes is the driving force of production. In terms markedly close to those used to describe the knot in the letter, Althusser stated: “the class struggle is not an effect derived of the existence of social classes: the class struggle and the existence of classes are one and the same thing.”<sup>386</sup> Althusser’s words in the letter are: “the knot is not an effect of the place...on the contrary, it is the knot which makes the place that it occupies a place, its place from which it acts on the other places.”<sup>387</sup> Thus, Althusser had transposed the concept of the knot – which in Hegel marked the founding act of the subject – into a reading of *Capital* and a characterisation of class struggle.

In the account given in the preface, the antagonism of the classes was simultaneous with the concrete conditioning and forming of the classes. What this proposition meant was that all spheres of social life were embedded within a class-based antagonism that eluded political or ideological expression. In another unpublished text drafted in 1973, Althusser spelled this out clearly:

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<sup>384</sup> Althusser, *Lettres*, 789.

<sup>385</sup> Louis Althusser ‘Marxism-Leninism and Class Struggle’ *Theoretical Review* 3, (January-February 1978). Original published as a preface to the second edition of Marta Harnecker’s *Principes Elementaires du Materialisme Historique* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1972). Text drafted from January 1971 onward.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>387</sup> Althusser, *Lettres*, 788.

For it is a one hundred percent bourgeois conception of the class struggle, the capitalists' class struggle no less than the workers' class struggle, to imagine this struggle as the struggle of conscious 'subjects' acting on a battlefield...The class are not 'subjects'; although they act in their confrontation, they are 'acted' as much as, and even more than, they act – they are 'acted' by the laws of the class struggle, which is never reducible to the decisions of the struggling classes...The reason is simple: the working class does not, any more than the capitalist class, exist as a subject capable of taking wrong 'decisions' or of 'choosing' to follow an aberrant line.<sup>388</sup>

This revision of how class struggle is conventionally understood had as its underlying conceptual impetus, the displacement of Hegel's knot. Althusser had transposed the conceptual figure of the knot, which in Hegel represented the process of an active and determining subjectivity, into the Marxian problematic. In doing so, Althusser had come to the understanding that class struggle was the preponderant determination of the historical process and was without pre-figured subjects. In such a definition, the class antagonism takes on the trait instilled in Hegel's metaphor of an active determining force but is deprived of its quality of subjecthood. Class struggle thus becomes the determining force of history, exceeding ideological and political expression even where it is nevertheless practically affected by them. In Althusser's reading, Marx described this preponderant antagonism without consciousness in *Capital*: it is the relation of production that is structurally endemic to the capitalist mode of production which empirical individuals, on both sides of this antagonism, must bear.<sup>389</sup>

However, a definition of class struggle that rejects the existence of coherent subjects appears to forfeit a measure for judging the status of that conflict. On the basis of what criteria can we ascribe significance to a given manoeuvre in this struggle? Indeed, how can we judge a bourgeois conception of class struggle from a proletarian conception of class struggle, such as the one Althusser so vehemently posits above, if

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<sup>388</sup> 'Book on Imperialism' in Louis Althusser, *History and Imperialism*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 118-19.

<sup>389</sup> On a number of occasions, Althusser foreground the fact that Marx uses the German word *Träger* (bearer of a function, support of a relation) to describe the role of individuals in *Capital*. He says "That is why Marx takes care on numerous occasions in *Capital* to specify that individuals must be considered as supports (Träger) of functions, those functions being themselves determined and fixed by (economic, political, ideological) relations of class struggle that move the entire social structure, even when it does no more than reproduce itself." Althusser, *Writing on Psychoanalysis*, 118.

we cannot attribute such conceptions to subjects and therefore we cannot judge how such conceptions weaken or strengthen such subject positions? To answer this we need to pursue the notion that the classes comprising the class struggle are not synonymous with subjects but are nonetheless conditioned by ('acted' by) an antagonism of which they are unconsciously part and product. What we are left with in this account is a predominating conflictual dynamic that produces and is produced by two distinct sites of internal struggle – the oppressed and the dominant classes. Althusser clarifies:

[Class struggle] is the struggle between two struggles, the confrontation of two bodies both of which are in struggle, each struggling with its own weapons, which are absolutely not the same in the case we are examining, since the proletarian class struggle's weapons have absolutely nothing to do with the bourgeois class struggle's weapons<sup>390</sup>

Here the term 'class' does not refer to a surrogate of consciousness but rather the conditioning effects registered by two antagonistic bodies, each comprising a multiplicity of individuals struggling interminably with the outcomes of those effects. Consequently, the measure of the success and failure of an intervention into the struggle cannot be that of a pre-conceived subject. Any intervention, whether political or ideological, must be judged on the basis of its practical outcome vis-à-vis the class struggle – an outcome that the class antagonism determines over and above the intentionality of the intervention. This, in Althusser's view, was the diagnosis of Marx's topography that had established a new practice of philosophy.

Althusser had given a rendition of this argument about the role of topography in Marx as far back as 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'. There, the preponderance of the economic instance was always overdetermined by superstructural instances. The economic contradiction was never accessible in a pure state, it could only ever be known in its superstructural displacements. This text did not, however, have anything to say about philosophy vis-à-vis the topography. In a series of unpublished notes, written shortly after the February 1971 letters, Althusser returned to the eleventh

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<sup>390</sup> Althusser, *History and Imperialism*, 119.

thesis to elaborate on what the topography in Marx meant for philosophy. There, Althusser maintained that the eleventh thesis was the site of a rupture in Marx, an unbalanced one, but a rupture nonetheless. The ambiguity of the eleventh thesis was in its subject address: who exactly was the agent of change cast against the ruminative philosophers? Althusser answered, “It does not say who must transform it, it does not say that it will be the philosophers.”<sup>391</sup> Further confusion came from what appeared to Althusser to be the inaccuracy of the opening proposition: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world.” For, in Althusser’s view, they had in fact “not stopped acting on it practically, from a distance, by the apparatus of their philosophy, sometimes to conserve its form against the course of things (cf. Plato) sometimes to change its form, against the resistance of the masters of power.” The question, then, for Althusser in relation to the eleventh thesis was: what was to be expected from philosophers in this rupture announced by Marx?

To this question, Althusser responded, “If we want to take a little more seriously what is happening in the half-light of the Theses, it is necessary to register something like a rupture.” As, for instance, when Benedetto Croce, after Antonio Labriola, says that “after the Theses, we can longer philosophize as before” all the while continuing to do precisely that. However, Althusser queried, how can we think this type of observation and explain what followed? How can an affirmation of the rupture claimed by Marx’s end of philosophy hold when it undermines its very purchase by doing so? This brought him again to the issue of an exterior determination, of its comprehension and affirmation: “Basically, what the Theses would like to say is that regardless of the form that philosophy has donned in the past...something is always lacking [manque].” In other words, the problem that the eleventh thesis indexed in its semantic ambiguity, was the aporia of a philosophical thesis that seeks to affirm by itself a determination that is exterior to itself. To elaborate, Althusser offered the example of the Marxist thesis of the primacy of practice over theory – an affirmation of the primary status of the non-theoretical that was paradoxically theoretical. Althusser explained that when the non-theoretical is affirmed and “I try to think philosophically the primacy of practice over theory, I construct a theory which develops, thus which envelops, and

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<sup>391</sup> All quotes from non-paginated notes consulted in the IMEC, Fonds Althusser: ALT2.A29-03.04 20 – ‘Fragments de *Les Thèses sur Feuerbach*’

therefore which contains in its space defined by philosophemes that it involves, the idea of the primacy of practice over theory.” And so, philosophical affirmation is caught in the aporia of having to think in philosophical theory the primacy of practice over theory, i.e. the primacy of some other modality than the one that affirms it. The philosophical mode internalises its exteriority by assigning a place to the unassignable place. It therefore cannot think its outside in its exteriority but only by ascribing it a place within philosophy.

The crucial question then that this aporia posed to a philosophy that aims to affirm the primacy of its own outside is “of knowing what can be the place of philosophy in the apparatus which thinks the primacy of practice over theory, what can be, in this case the place, that philosophy must give to itself in this apparatus for it not to belie itself, and in fact to submit to itself?” How is the role of philosophy to be thought, what conditions have to be satisfied in order that it can reach the true affirmation, and not the denial of that affirmation, of the philosophical thesis of the primacy of practice over theory? On this question, the eleventh thesis “responds with silence.” And, in Althusser’s view, this was a necessary silence that betrayed the impossibility of thinking the absent determination of philosophy within philosophy itself.

However, for Althusser there was a response that came in Marx’s non-philosophical works. It was in Marx’s “theoretical texts” (Althusser mentions the *Communist Manifesto* [1848] and the *Preface to the Contribution of Political Economy* [1859]) that theory was given a determined place within a demonstration of the principles of historical materialism. And it was via the prism of the topography that Marx theoretically situated theory. Marx’s topographic structure made up of two floors – on the ground, the base (unity of the forces of production and relations of production) and on the first floor, the superstructural instances (the state, law, ideologies) – was not, in Althusser’s view, a mechanistic model, as it had been traditionally portrayed. It was rather a “composition of positions of relative efficacy, and these were the relations of determination and domination which are figured by the topographical layout of these elements.” And theory, in its distinct instantiations (ideology, philosophy, science) was located on the level of the superstructure, where, to varying degrees, it exercises a practical influence over the present, albeit one that is brought into a relation of determination with the base, i.e. class struggle. In other words,

theory was situated within a hierarchical relay of agencies wherein the ultimate locus of determination was decentred from philosophical consciousness. But, at the same time, theory accorded philosophy a place within the functioning of this relay of agencies. Althusser would later say of this topographical model that it was without a centre and that, according to the relations that it mapped between the various instances, the model had “no unity other than *the unity of their conflictual functioning*.”<sup>392</sup> Unlike the ascending conceptual comprehension of Hegel’s dialectic that concentrates the determination of meaning in a single site, the subject of philosophy, the topographic model instead situates philosophy in a dynamic field of social effectivity. As regards the locus of interpretive priority, therefore, the affirmations of philosophy become secondary to the functioning whole that is comprised of multiple simultaneous efficacies within the living social process.

In this light, it was not philosophy that carried out this topographical inscription, “but another theoretical discipline [which] inscribes itself and inscribes philosophy in the topography that it deploys, not directly, but indirectly, in the form of their social effectivity, under the ideological form.”<sup>393</sup> Accordingly, philosophy, in Althusser’s view, was only able to affirm the primacy of practice over theory via its relation to the scientific theory that indicates the possible social effects, as opposed to the truth content, of its theses. Only by situating philosophy in a dynamic field of practices where it is judged not on the veracity of its truth claims, but on the basis of its practical effects, can one reach the proper affirmation, and not the denial of that affirmation, of the philosophical thesis of the primacy of practice over theory.

It was in this sense that Althusser conceived of a transformation in the practice of philosophy. In this new philosophical practice, philosophy is given a place within the philosophical apparatus that affirms the primacy of practice over theory within the topography of another theory. And this is a theory that reveals what philosophy is by fundamentally displacing the point of view of philosophy.<sup>394</sup> Namely it displaces the

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<sup>392</sup> Althusser, *Writing on Psychoanalysis*, 121.

<sup>393</sup> Althusser, ‘Fragments de *Les Thèses sur Feuerbach*’

<sup>394</sup> In *On Brecht and Marx* (1968) written some months after *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser claimed that the transformation Marx carried out in philosophy was of the same kind Brecht had carried out in his theatrical practice. Principally this link was established in the way they both affected a displacement in the



point of view of philosophy by relocating philosophy within a topographic model that radically decentres the status of philosophy vis-à-vis how philosophy tends to understand itself. Traditionally, philosophy centres its own status regarding the locus of meaning – meaning unfolds in philosophy and not elsewhere or if it issues from elsewhere, this issuing is brought into the fold of philosophy. But in the displacement of the point of view, the locus of meaning resides elsewhere, no longer simply in what philosophy says, but also in what philosophy does and what determines what it does. The spatial metaphor, as a limit concept between ideology and science, ascribes philosophy a place within a topography where the complete picture of its meaning, its determinant instance, is situated elsewhere. The topography therefore locates philosophy within an articulated hierarchy of instances which corresponds to a total field of determining relations. The full meaning of philosophy is to be garnered according to what it does, its effectivity, which occurs beyond its own semantic centre. Its own effectivity cannot be registered within philosophy alone.

The displacement of the point of view prompted by the topography corresponds to a particular effect vis-à-vis the ideological recognition underpinning the philosophical mode of address. The understanding that corresponds to this displaced point of view over the modality of philosophy constitutes a new subject address in the sense of the subject of an interpellation<sup>395</sup> – Althusser regularly describes his own and others' theoretical systems as an apparatus. Philosophy, in Althusser's view, had practical effects only in the form of its subject address. One might understand the shift that underlies Althusser's philosophical practice, therefore, by paraphrasing the eleventh thesis in the following way: *Hitherto philosophy has been understood according to its interpretation of the world, the point however is that it changes it.* This is also how we can understand Althusser's critical appraisal of the eleventh thesis when he says that philosophers have “not stopped acting on [the world] practically, from a distance, by the apparatus of their philosophy.” Philosophy is practical in the effects that it produces in the real world. The way that it produces these effects is by constituting subjects. But, according to the topographic model, it does not constitute subjects as it

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point of view within their respective domains. See Louis Althusser, 'On Brecht and Marx' in Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 136-50.

<sup>395</sup> Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, (London: Verso, 2014), 190.

intends or strictly according to the truth claims it makes but rather according to a relation of determination to other instances – in the last instance the determination of the class antagonism that eludes the grasp of ideological expression. By situating philosophy within a topography that spatially represents its subordinate relation to other determining instances – instances that defy its own peculiar mode of expression and which, for that reason, can only be posited as a relation of absent determination – those absent determinations become apparent in the practical effects that philosophy produces in the world by way of interpellated subjects. These practical effects are in the last instance the outcome of the class struggle that is irreducible to the ideological expression of a class-subject.

Thus, what marked out Althusser's philosophical practice from previous philosophies, was that through Marx's topographic model, it affirmed the practical status of philosophy and on that basis attempted to displace the point of view of philosophy toward its own absent determination. By assigning a space to an exterior determination within philosophy and defining it as radically separate from its discursive content, hence one beyond the realms of consciousness, Althusser's philosophical practice attempted to breach the unified status of meaning in philosophy. It thereby aimed at undermining the hold of bourgeois ideology that explained the development of history on the basis of an abstract universal subject reflecting the teleological inevitability of bourgeois society. Only by positing a determination beyond the realm of the philosophical subject was it possible for philosophy to posit the conditions of existence of "the fact to be accomplished"<sup>397</sup>, that is, to overcome an ideological interpretation of historical change correlated to a bourgeois subject, and thereby avoid presupposing the nature of the fact or the path and the agent of its accomplishment.

This was the germ seed of what would come to be Althusser's philosophy of aleatory materialism, which Antonio Negri claims "offers us history as historicity, it

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<sup>397</sup> Althusser uses the phrase in his lecture series on Machiavelli and Rousseau which he gave in 1972. It refers to thinking the conditions of an event beyond the terms of the given. See Althusser, *Lessons on Rousseau*, 139.

reproposes man ‘man’ himself, not as subject of history but as a subject in history.”<sup>398</sup> This was Althusser’s ultimate gesture in his efforts to reinvest the end of philosophy motif in Marx with a truly revolutionary charge and re-articulate the link between philosophy and politics. By integrating a radically absent determination into philosophy Althusser had attempted to diminish the explanatory purchase of a dialectic wedded to a unified subject – the correlate to bourgeois ideology. This philosophical manoeuvre was at the basis of his conception of class struggle as a determining antagonism without a subject and likewise at the basis of his effort to think the conditions of existence of a radical historical discontinuity through the “void”.<sup>399</sup>

This was a gesture that stemmed from his personal and intellectual confrontation with the practical outcomes of his own theoretical past. In Althusser’s private correspondences, the mingling of personal and conceptual complexes gives an insight into the many idioms he was thinking across during this period. The figure of the knot which critically condenses the Hegelian dialectic, Lenin’s materialistic reading of Hegel’s dialectic, Marx’s topography and a psychoanalytic topography became a figure that could account for the negative practical effects that his philosophy appeared to produce in his personal life, the Party and beyond. At one level, these effects were experienced principally as phantasms that prevented him from thinking beyond a psychological impasse. At another level, it was experienced in the negative outcomes that his work generated in the working-class movement – not so much in the errors of his previous writings but in the way that his interventions had elicited counteracting theoretical positions within the Party that ultimately weakened the political strength of the working-class movement. The figure that he found to respond to both of these realities came from reading Lenin’s commentary on Hegel through Marx’s spatial topography. The image of Lenin’s knot paired with Marx’s topography provided ways of spatially representing a nonrepresentational but existent determination. This, in turn, supplied Althusser with a prompt to reconsider the nature of class struggle which profoundly shifted his conception of a philosophical practice.

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<sup>398</sup> Antonio Negri, ‘Notes on the Evolution of the Thought of Late Althusser,’ *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory: Essays in the Marxist Tradition*, ed. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 62.

<sup>399</sup> See Stefano Pippa, ‘Void for a Subject: Althusser’s Machiavelli and the Concept of the “Political Interpellation,”’ *Rethinking Marxism* 31, No. 3, (August 2019), 363-379.

According to notes from this period, Althusser perceived this shift to properly fulfil the conditionality of Marx's eleventh thesis – that is, to realise the end of bourgeois philosophy by way of a philosophical practice that drives out the bourgeois subject from workers movement's "political line of struggle, its organizations, its theory and ideology"<sup>400</sup> in the class struggle. It is in this sense that the philosophical practice of aleatory materialism amounts to Althusser's contribution to the "class struggle in the field of theory."<sup>401</sup>

In this chapter I have framed Althusser's intellectual enterprise around a sustained engagement with the end of philosophy motif in Marx. Althusser inherited this problem field from his proximity to the PCF journal *NC* where the question of the end of philosophy in Marx was initially brought to the attention of French communist intellectuals in the Cold War context. The basis of Althusser's re-interpretation of the role of philosophy in Marx began in the early sixties when he carried out a sustained close reading of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. The elaboration of this re-interpretation, which was posed as a corrective to failed attempts to respond to the end of philosophy motif in Marx under Stalinism, consisted of an attempt to theoretically discriminate Marx's dialectic from its Hegelian predecessor. This brought Althusser to prioritise the question of the epistemological status of Marx's philosophy. Recognising the theoreticist aspects of this approach, primarily through his engagement with Lenin, Althusser would reformulate his interpretation of the end of philosophy in two phases: one which was public, the other less so. This reformulation consisted in a shift from establishing a Marxist philosophy to establishing a Marxist practice of philosophy. The first phase of this shift occurred in his 'Lenin and Philosophy' and other contiguous published works. The second phase of this shift, which significantly altered his definition of a Marxist philosophical practice, and which precluded his so-called aleatory materialist turn, can be traced in the theoretical explorations of his private correspondences, unpublished fragments and in his teaching at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS) from this period. There, Lenin's accented transcription of Hegel's image of the knot led Althusser to reconceive the nature of class struggle and in turn to once again re-interpret Marx's end of philosophy motif.

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<sup>400</sup> Althusser, *History and Imperialism*, 117.

<sup>401</sup> Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 58.

## Chapter 4: Jacques Derrida (1974 – 99)

### 4.1 Althusser and Derrida: Between the Suppression of Philosophy and the Defence of the Philosophy Class

The passing of the end of philosophy theme from Althusser to Derrida in the mid-seventies went through a significant contextual shift. Althusser's engagement with the theme was narrowly focused on the issue of the suppression and ossification of Marxist philosophy in the French Communist party. The theme of the end of philosophy in Marx was, for Althusser, reflective of an interpretative tradition surrounding the existence or non-existence of a philosophy in Marx that in its every incarnation had failed to sufficiently clarify, or had only partially revealed the role of philosophy for Marxist theory and practice. In a general sense, what was at stake for Althusser was the philosophical culture of the Party. This was an issue that had its basis both in the organisational strictures of the Party, which were able to deal with subversive philosophies/philosophers in a practical way (i.e. Argenteuil or following the defeat of '78), but also and relatedly, at the level of philosophical content. In the mid-seventies, Derrida would take up the language of the end of philosophy explicitly, but would transfer it to the context of a critical practice concerning the educational system in France and the modality of philosophy teaching. This recoding of a problem ostensibly internal to the nexus of Marxism, philosophy and the political party can be traced in the intellectual, biographical and political proximities of Derrida and Althusser during these years. In the following, I will outline this contextual shift, drawing out the institutional and conceptual overlaps that underpinned this transmission.

Like Lefebvre and Althusser, the theoretical overlaps between Althusser and Derrida have until relatively recently seemed oblique. The two thinkers remain associated with irreconcilable intellectual and political traditions. Together their names evoke bounded phases within an entrenched periodization of post-war French theory. Regrettably such periodizations instantiate the 'post' in post-structuralism with its most progressivist significance and orient Althusser and Derrida around a Marxist

reference that is welded to the fate and doctrine of the Marxist Party. This is all the more regrettable since, as Warren Montag has shown, Derrida and Althusser came very close in their respective approaches to reading philosophy – precisely around their shared rejection of a history of philosophy that proceeds according to a “succession of closed systems, each of which could be identified with an author who would serve as its center and principle of unity”.<sup>402</sup> In Montag’s re-evaluation of the period, philosophical germination took place within the fullness of a theoretical conjuncture within which Althusser and Derrida dovetailed through a shared strategy of disclosing the conceptually composite makeup of philosophical systems while inhabiting the institution of philosophy itself.

Efforts such as Montag’s to bring the work of Althusser and Derrida together via contact points from the problem field of post-war French theory have brought to light the latent theoretical conjuncture of which the two were necessarily a part. Yet, other than Althusser’s allusion to Derrida in his designation of the “objective allies” of Marxist philosophy in his 1966 talk ‘Philosophical Conjuncture & Marxist Research’, there are few indications in the published works of where one might directly locate a shared problematic.<sup>403</sup>

The biographical coincidence is far easier to trace. Althusser and Derrida first encountered one another at the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) in 1952. Derrida arrived to the ENS as a student and Althusser was acting as Director of Studies in Philosophy, dedicating most of his time there to preparing students for the *agrégation*.<sup>404</sup> On Althusser’s recommendation, Derrida received a permanent teaching position at the ENS in 1964 and for the better part of twenty years shared the

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<sup>402</sup> Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 5.

<sup>403</sup> In light of posthumous publications of Althusser’s unpublished writings, it would certainly be possible to pursue Althusser’s attributing the source of the “non-originary nature of the origin” to Derrida, a conceptual frame that reappears in his lectures on Rousseau and which led him to the conclusion that Marx’s dialectic understood history as a “process without a subject” – a reading of the dialectic he also attributes to Lenin’s materialist reading of Hegel. This philosophical lineage is then telescoped in Althusser’s late unpublished text, ‘Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter’ where Derrida is located within a radical remapping of the history of philosophy. See Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 167 and Althusser, *Lessons on Rousseau*, 71.

<sup>404</sup> 1948-80 Althusser held the role of ‘Caïman’ in philosophy at the ENS. Between 1964-84 Derrida shared this role with Althusser. Caïman is a colloquial term designating a supervisory teaching position [*agrégés-répétiteurs*] specialising in preparing students for the *agrégation*. The *agrégation* is a competitive examination for the recruitment of professors for secondary education in the French public education system. See Etienne Balibar, ‘Althusser and Rue D’Ulm,’ *New Left Review* 58, (July – Aug 2009).

responsibility of preparing candidates for the *agrégation* [*agrégatifs*] with Althusser. In an interview about his relationship with Althusser from 1989, Derrida described the nature of their relations during these years, explaining that they rarely spoke about their own work together, preferring instead to maintain the warmth of their companionship, unassailed by philosophical differences. The role that this friendship played for Althusser, though not apparent in Derrida's retrospective testimony, was at times vital. On occasions Althusser had shown a deep gratitude to Derrida for the patience with which he had carried the burden of his illness. This referred to the work that Derrida had taken over in the periods of Althusser's absence from the ENS. But in their correspondences, there is a sense that the role that Derrida came to play in Althusser's life was more than collegial: "Save me your friendship. It is among the few reasons to believe that life (even through its dramas) is worth living."<sup>405</sup>

The overlapping political and theoretical activities of Althusser and Derrida in the ENS remain overlooked in studies of their work. Here, I aim to trace the transmission of Althusser's concern with the end of philosophy motif in Marx into Derrida's intellectual itinerary through their proximity within the ENS.

Following the events of '68 the articulation between politics and the university had realigned itself significantly. Principally the student activism of May 1968 had shifted the axis of political alliances of the left from the classic triad of party, union and workers, to an unformalised array of coalitions – the most disruptive of which was between university students and workers. For those involved in these coalitions, this raised the question of the relationship between the struggles within the site of work and the struggles within the university. The theoretical analogue to this shift was marked by a turn toward the question of social reproduction. The early seventies witnessed the publication of a number of titles and articles dealing with the question of reproduction and in particular the role of the education system in reproducing the social conditions of material production. The two major texts that precipitated this theoretical turn were Althusser's 'Ideology and the State Apparatus'<sup>406</sup> essay and

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<sup>405</sup> Benoît Peeters, 'Althusser et Derrida, politique et affection,' *IMEC Archives Papiers Althusser*. Available at: < <https://www.imec-archives.com/papiers/benoit-peeters> > [Accessed 8 July 2020]

<sup>406</sup> Althusser, Louis. *Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d'État (Notes pour une recherche)* revue *La Pensée*, no 151, juin 1970

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's *Reproduction*.<sup>407</sup> The events of '68 and the subsequent reflexes of the state had shown that the university was not separate from the nexus of capital and state but was in fact among the most important sites where the two overlapped.

After the events of 1968, Althusser reconceived the political nature of the university. As a result, this analytical shift reframed the political role Althusser would ascribe to philosophy during these years. In 'Student Problems' (1962) Althusser had conceived the university as best served in its "special situation which shelters it to some extent from government enterprises" to allow teachers and students to carry out freely their immediate political task; that was, the demystification of bourgeois ideology via counter-knowledges that would allow the university to take on a "relatively healthy" political function.<sup>408</sup> By the time of 'Ideology and the State Apparatus' (1970) Althusser conceived of the educational institution as an integral arm of the state apparatus that played a central role in reproducing the social and technical stratifications necessary for the continuation of the capitalist production process. In this conceptualisation, the educational institution monopolised the conditions of social acculturation, thereby conferring the means of producing subjects of ideology as such to the state. Thereupon, it was poised to perpetuate dominant ideas and regularise behavioural norms while differentiating the labour force according to the technical knowledges and social discipline required by capitalist enterprises. From this perspective, the university was directly embedded within the broader production process and was an arena in which the state played a supplementary role for capital.

The theoretical background of this shift, and a central element in the development of the ideology essay, was a collective research project that Althusser initiated some time in 1967.<sup>409</sup> Althusser had sought, as an extension of his activities with *Groupe*

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<sup>407</sup> Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron, *La reproduction : éléments pour une théorie du système d'enseignement*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit: 1970). Lefebvre's response to the two texts in the years after their publication would be published in 1973. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976).

<sup>408</sup> See 100-01 above for further elaboration on the context and argument of 'Student Problems.'

<sup>409</sup> Although, Althusser was revising his attitudes toward the political nature of the education system and specifically higher education throughout the sixties.



*Spinoza*,<sup>410</sup> to analyse the existing conditions of the education system in France and its relationship with the capitalist production process. The intended outcome of the project was a collectively authored text in the same vein as *Reading Capital* where each author would contribute separate chapters. Althusser had envisaged using an unfinished text of his own entitled ‘Grandes illusions de l’École’ as the methodological guide for the analyses. The text largely dwelt on the methodological question of the epistemological pre-requisites of conducting research on the educational institution: namely how to produce scientific knowledge about the School (understood as the French education system broadly). On that basis, Althusser enumerated a number of ‘great illusions’ that were necessary to the functioning of the educational apparatus and which a researcher would first have to theoretically dispel. Chief among these was the myth of a unified academic trajectory that was held together by its apotheosis i.e. the full assimilation to Knowledge and Culture at the summit of the academic journey within the *École Supérieure*. In this process, the real determinations of academia remained obscured to analysis by the illusion of a unified academic trajectory. This unity existed in practice for those who made it to higher education but the different branches which funnel students toward certain kinds of vocation do not reflect this unified path, rather they reflect the division of labour underlying this illusory unity. Education in this case does not realise its myth of unity – of dispensing Knowledge and Culture – but divides people up into specialised professions. This obfuscation therefore put epistemological limits on using the seemingly transparent practices within the educational institution as the basis for real knowledge.<sup>411</sup> This was the methodological starting point for the text that was eventually to move toward a working definition of the academic apparatus. It was a

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<sup>410</sup> Members of this research collective included Etienne Balibar, Renée Balibar (mother of Etienne), Christian Baudelot, Alain Badiou (though he did not play a role in the *École* project), Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey and Michel Tort. In 1967 the group had intended on establishing a philosophical Revue called *Théorie* with the singular intention of theoretically establishing the relationship between philosophy and politics. See IMEC Fonds: 20ALT. A11-03.01-13/04.01-09/05.01-10 *Groupe Spinoza (1967 – 1969)*.

For the *École* project each member had planned to write one to two chapters for a prospective publication. According to notes in Balibar’s archive, the project collapsed around 1970, following the group’s visit to teach a summer school at the University of Havana, Cuba. Taken from collection description of Etienne Balibar papers MSC.023 G.M. box 1 “École” project Series 2. 1968-1971 held at Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries. Goshgarian periodizes the formation of the *Groupe Spinoza* in the context of Althusser’s involvement in the Humanist debate in the introduction to Althusser, *Humanist Controversy*, xxxvii – xxxviii.

<sup>411</sup> See IMEC, Fonds Althusser 20ALT2.A14.8 *Sur les “Grandes illusions de l’École”. Texte de Louis Althusser*. Here Althusser extrapolates from Marx’s critical analysis of the transparency of the legal form of economic practices which is necessary in disguising the determining role of the relations of production. Althusser makes the qualification that the university is not the economy, and that the comparison with Marx only goes so far in explaining the ideological forms and the determining relations behind the School.

text that re-affirmed Althusser's commitment to the role of theory in working against the ideologically problematic status of the empirically given.

While a large mass of material was collected for the project and the research stage seemed to carry on well into the latter part of 1969, in the end, many of the lengthier texts produced by the various authors went unpublished. *L'école capitaliste en France* appeared in 1970 under the authorship of Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet.<sup>412</sup> While the text was nominally credited to Baudelot and Establet, it mobilised Althusser's methodological blueprint and mined much of the intellectual work that was generated by the *Groupe Spinoza* during this period.<sup>413</sup> Though the publication of the book was the only record of the group's research, the *École* project was not a fleeting preoccupation for Althusser. Althusser's insistence on the political importance of carrying out a 'concrete analysis of the concrete situation' of the education system sustained well into the middle of the seventies. Indeed, according to Althusser, it was precisely the absence of such a materialist account of the existing conditions of the education system and its relationship with the class struggle that explained the Party's loss of touch with the emerging alliances of '68. In a text published in *La Pensée* in 1969, Althusser responded to Michel Verret's criticisms of the student movement. Verret's text was one of the few theoretical analyses to emerge in the wake of May '68 to represent the PCF's version of the events. In his response, Althusser concluded:

I believe I can maintain, all things considered, that this absence of an overall analysis, both systematic and detailed, of the causes for the loss of contact between the Party and educated youth in May on the one hand, and this insufficiency of detailed analyses of the actions of the

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<sup>412</sup> Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, *L'école capitaliste en France*. (Paris: Maspero, 1970). Baudelot and Establet mention all members of the *Groupe Spinoza* apart from Althusser in the Preface of the text, but the co-authorship of the collective work seems to have created a lasting rift in the group. See Althusser, *Franca*, 783. However, Althusser provided extensive critical feedback to Baudelot and Establet about the book between December 1968 – January 1969. See IMEC Fonds Althusser, Louis. 20 ALT 14.9 *Notes de Louis Althusser à propos des textes sur L' École (décembre 1968 – janvier 1969)*. Here Althusser makes the argument that the educational apparatus marks a stage in the historical development of capital where the outlay for qualifying labour-power is externalised onto the state, meaning that "The process of generalised education is the form proper to the MPC [Capitalist Mode of Production] which reproduces one of the elements of the process of production: the labour force."

<sup>413</sup> The chapter outline of Baudelot and Establet's book corresponds almost exactly to the outline that Althusser drew up after conversations with the members of the *Groupe Spinoza* on 30th December 1968. See IMEC Fonds Althusser ALT.2. A14-01.09 *Notes de L.A. à propos des textes sur l'École (déc. 1968-janv. 1969)*. The opening chapter of the book entitled 'Les illusions de l'unité de l'école' is a minorly adapted version of Althusser's text.

working class in May, on the other, contributed to abandoning the actions of the educated and intellectual youth to themselves, in May and since May, and quite particularly, contributed to casting them head first – both in May and since then – into the archaic illusions of anarchist or anarchisant ideology that are currently dominant.<sup>414</sup>

Building on this analysis of how the Party had strayed from the direction of class alliances, Althusser would go further in this direction to bring the workplace and political struggles of the university to the attention of a PCF readership. In two of the Party's main daily newspapers, Althusser posed the issue of the existing conditions of philosophical teaching in higher education as a political concern of particular relevance to the Communist Party. In 1972 between July and August, Althusser published a two-part article in *France Nouvelle* on the subject of the working conditions and class political status of student-workers studying for the *agrégation*. Before its publication, Althusser had presented the text to his cell of the PCF at the ENS (Paul-Langevin) along with students in the Union des Étudiants Communistes and *Maîtres Auxiliaires* asking for their comments, additions and formal approval. The text was officially approved with a number of amendments by the cell on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 1972 with the express justification that an absence of a comprehensive political analysis of the forms of struggle in the student and teaching milieu since 1968 had made such an article entirely necessary for a Party readership.<sup>415</sup>

According to Althusser's private correspondences, the article, which was entitled 'On a Political Error: Teaching Assistants, Student-Workers, and The Agrégation of Philosophy' had taken "a month of negotiations at knife point to get published".<sup>416</sup> The controversy of the piece for PCF authorities lay partly in the fact that it raised student politics in a Party journal, but even more so, in its description of a burgeoning constituency of precariously employed academics in terms of its class status and made an appeal to the Party to think seriously about the potential alliance, rooted in

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<sup>414</sup> Louis Althusser & Warren. Montag, 'Louis Althusser – 'Michel Verret's Article on the "Student May,"' *Verso Blog*. December 18, 2018. Available at: <<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4187-louis-althusser-michel-verret-s-article-on-the-student-may>> [Accessed 8 July 2020]

<sup>415</sup> See IMEC, Fonds Althusser: ALT19.03.28.06 *Resolution de la cellule Paul Langevin (École normale supérieure Ulm)*. 14 juin 1972 and ALT2.A19-04.04 *Notes prises par L.A. au cours d'une réunion de la cellule Paul Langevin (E.N.S. Ulm) sur les Maîtres Auxiliaires*.

<sup>416</sup> Althusser, *Lettres à Franca*, 806.

comparable material situations, between manual workers and student-teachers.<sup>417</sup> In one of the more striking paragraphs of the article, the transgressive quality of the text is laid bare:

The imperialist system, not only in France but in the whole world (and in third world countries, the effects are dramatic) is entering a phase where unemployment of intellectuals is generated on an increasing scale. The reserve army of workers is growing by a contingent of unemployed intellectuals, some of who live on the edge of the condition of a veritable intellectual under-class. The precarious and sometimes tragic situation of many students trampling on top of one another for a ridiculous number of posts, testifies to this (agrégation of philosophy in 1972: 1,200 candidates for ... 50 positions!). This is a fact.

At the same time, in France, 50% of students are student workers and thus exploited workers. In secondary education 25% of teachers are teaching assistants. This is another fact.

It does not scratch the surface to say: all union and political action taken in a student and intellectual milieu, which does not recognize the existence and importance of these two facts; which does not undertake to become aware of them, from within, (by listening to the people explain their conditions of life, work and exploitation and their demands, etc., by making thorough inquiries) and from outside (to locate this phenomenon in the system of class exploitation); who do not bind them to the masses to help them liberate their forces, and to lead them into the struggle alongside the proletariat - runs the risk of not taking hold of reality and falling into "democratic" adventurism as was the case here.<sup>418</sup>

The democratic adventurism here referred to a culture of assessment boycotts that lingered beyond 1968, especially among certain students studying for the *agrégation*.<sup>419</sup> The *agrégation* – the assessment through which philosophy teachers were recruited to secondary education – was a highly politicized issue at the height of the student rebellion. And, indeed, many former and newly converted Communist students had been and remained highly instrumental in organising these actions. But while the collective abstentions had been partially successful in highlighting the rigid

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<sup>417</sup> IMEC, Fonds Althusser: ALT2.19.04.01 *Correspondance préparant la publication de l'article de Louis Althusser dans France-Nouvelle*. In a letter to Jacques Arnault requesting the article be published in *L'humanité* Althusser said "If I am hated [as a result of the article], it is because the affair is so urgent. Naturally the comrades responsible at *L'Humanite* are liable to be a little surprised by the importance of our depiction of the affair. But it is understandable: they are not "on the ground"...This affair is urgent." And later asked Arnault to "judge the text as a communist not as a friend."

<sup>418</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Sur une erreur politique. Les maîtres auxiliaires, les étudiants travailleurs et l'agrégation de philosophie' in *France Nouvelle: Hedomaire central du Parti communiste français*, No. 1393 (25 - 31 July 1972) and No. 1394 (1 - 7 August 1972)

<sup>419</sup> Althusser would write that the term democratic adventurism applied equally to the opportunism without analysis that led the PCF to make its revisions in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress. Althusser, *Les Vaches Noires*, 148.

and elitist system by which teaching staff were selected and students assessed, the radical spirit of the actions, limited as their demands were to the out-datedness of the course material, had been easily recuperated by the state. The '68 boycotts had been answered by a series of reforms brought about by the then Minister of Education, Edgar Fraure, under the Orientation Act of Higher Education. In relation to philosophy teaching in the *grandes écoles*, these had the sum effect of minor adjustments to the oral and written assessments in the philosophy *agrégation*.

In Althusser's eyes, it was correct to take action over the archaic norms that had prevailed for so long over the French education system. However, since the students of '68-'69 had no counter-plan to the policy strategies of the government, it was left to Fraure to decide exactly what modernisation meant. The 'political error' of the title of Althusser's article referred to the lack of attention paid by the boycotting students to the peculiar situation faced by student-workers. In Althusser's view, teaching assistants (the *maîtres auxiliaires*) were distinctly deprived of political resources; no union representation or legal guarantees of work, while hedging their professional futures on a scarcity of positions in the extreme. Their involvement in boycotts over the so-called 'democratisation' of course material was therefore distinctly hampered by their material situation. At the same time, however, they were granted a unique perspective over the concrete situation of the educational institution. In the superimposition of the view of the student and the worker, the teaching assistant was provided a double consciousness of the university as a condition of work and of learning – both of which depended on quite distinct ideological subject addresses to function. In Althusser's view, this perspective alone served as the measure for what was objectively possible and necessary in transforming the education system. It was singularly qualified by ideological and material conditions to see through the great illusions of the academic apparatus.

This was the prelude to a phase during which state authorities would make increasingly candid interventions in educational policy. This was epitomised by the 'Haby' Reform in 1975.<sup>420</sup> This reform aimed at system-wide modernisation of

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<sup>420</sup> Named after René Haby, Minister of Education in the cabinet of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the act, which was announced in February 1975 and adopted on July 11, was to be implemented progressively

primary and secondary education in France with the principle objectives of improving routes for social mobility and providing a less rigid academic trajectory through optional specialisms. Immediate backlash met the initial formulation of the reform.<sup>421</sup> Coming mainly from trade unions of teachers, this condemnation criticised the technocratic and vocationalist bent of its emphasis on specialisations and highlighted the fiscal austerity that guided its so-called modernising vision and democratic pretensions.<sup>422</sup> For philosophical education, the reform meant the marginalisation of its teaching in the curriculum of secondary education, demoted now to an optional choice where it had previously been obligatory, in favour of subjects that, in Haby's words, corresponded 'to what French society currently is.' Even though the full extent of the reform had yet to be elaborated on its initial announcement, it was clear to many that the hours reserved for philosophy in the final years of lycée instruction before the baccalauréat would be significantly reduced. The fears of those teaching and studying philosophy was that this nationwide change would primarily impact the recruitment of teachers and teaching assistants in secondary school philosophy courses, and more generally curtail the development of philosophical culture at large.<sup>423</sup>

In this context, Althusser published a second article entitled 'Les communistes et la philosophie' in *L'Humanité* on the 5 July 1975. Here, Althusser primarily rehearsed his official position on the role of philosophy for communists: philosophy was a perpetual struggle and in the last instance represented the class struggle in theory and therefore Marxist theory required a living philosophy to develop and defend it against ossification from within its own ranks and the external forces of bourgeois philosophy. But in relation to the Giscard-Haby reforms, Althusser maintained that the episode demonstrated more clearly than ever the fact that philosophy "never

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over a four-year period beginning in 1976. The criticisms that immediately emanated from the various personnel of the ENS were in response to Haby's text and public presentation of his "proposals for a modernization of the French education system" on February 12<sup>th</sup>. See 'Les propositions de M. Haby pour une modernisation du système scolaire' *La Monde Archives*. February 14, 1975. Available at: <[https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1975/02/14/les-propositions-de-m-haby-pour-une-modernisation-du-systeme-scolaire\\_2599452\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1975/02/14/les-propositions-de-m-haby-pour-une-modernisation-du-systeme-scolaire_2599452_1819218.html)> [viewed 14 October 2019]

<sup>421</sup> For the reactions of trade unions to the reform see 'Annexe III: réaction syndicales' in René Haby, *René Haby par lui-même : un engagement pour la jeunesse, 1919-2003*, (Lyon: INRP, 2008), 163-69.

<sup>422</sup> See Michalina Vaughan, 'French Post-Primary Education: What Is Left of the Haby Reform.' *Comparative Education* 17, No. 1 (Mar., 1981), 5-13.

<sup>423</sup> See René Haby, *Propositions pour une modernisation du système éducatif 1975*, (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1975).

comes to an end". This was especially the case in moments when dominant political forces summon every illusion to the contrary; philosophy, understood as class struggle in theory, and therefore not simply the province of the individual specialist, was in Althusser's account a perpetual struggle in which any manoeuvre was possible. Such manoeuvres were therefore well within the remit of state intervention, especially through its monopoly over educational policy. In that regard, the Giscard offensive performed a sleight-of-hand whereby scholastic philosophy was "put out to pasture"<sup>424</sup> as a vestige of an antiquated educational system while an invisible philosophy (neo-positivism) was advanced in its place under the cover of the politically neutral forces of social modernisation.

For Althusser, it was crucial that the Party defended the space of philosophy teaching against this encroachment by the Giscardian government. Not in order for Communists to impose their own philosophy through the educational apparatus, but rather so that the site for theoretical struggle remained open. Underlying Althusser's argument here was the idea that there was a political stake in the struggle over the education system for the Communist Party, i.e. over the conditions of the ideological state apparatus. But for Althusser what distinguished the Communist position vis-à-vis the ideological state apparatus was that: unlike the bourgeois state, which monopolises control over its ideological apparatuses, the Communist position had to be to transform the conditions of the ideological apparatus only insofar as it would free education from the domination of state ideology. It was necessary, in Althusser's view, that the Party defend the extension of the teaching of philosophy both before and beyond higher education against the objectives of the Haby reform.

Althusser's broader position on the Haby reform, and in particular on the expansion of philosophical education across the academic system, was a perspective that had been formed amidst the political-theoretical work that had been developing within the ENS during the mid-seventies. Althusser's intervention in the PCF press came some months after the formal establishment of *Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement de a philosophe* (GREPH) at the ENS. The first general assembly of the organisation was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1975 at the ENS and included in attendance philosophy

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<sup>424</sup> Louis Althusser, 'Les communistes et la philosophie', in *L'Humanité*, (5 July 1975).

professors, teaching assistants and students from ENS and elsewhere. Notably, however, Althusser himself was not present. In the first internal bulletin of GREPH, which minuted the events of the first two general assemblies, the aim of GREPH was stated as undertaking a vast critical analysis of the conditions of philosophy teaching within the current education system. This research would interrogate the forms in which philosophy had thought and determined its own teaching within its own discourse and, based on this, would elaborate an offensive programme that would attend the urgent political problems that touched the teaching of philosophy in the present. Here, explicit reference was made to the Haby reform as the most pressing political issue of the day; a political occurrence that had in fact consolidated the group but which did not mark the limit of its ambitions.<sup>425</sup>

An early iteration of GREPH had formed in April 1974 as an immediate response to a report produced by the jury of CAPES<sup>426</sup> on the teaching of philosophy. According to a call for protest issued by GREPH immediately after its publication in March, the report in no way reflected the “catastrophic conditions under which the system of recruitment of teachers was functioning” and played down the deterioration of philosophical education with the constant reduction in available posts being competed for in the *agrégation* examination.<sup>427</sup> On that occasion GREPH composed the text *Avant-projet pour la constitution d'un Groupe de Recherches sur l'Enseignement Philosophique*. This was a text that outlined GREPH's broader intellectual and political ambitions around the dual inquiry into the ‘didactico-philosophical’ figure and form of philosophy within the history of philosophy itself as well as the forces at play that maintained the practices that corresponded to this pedagogical institution within the educational apparatus. The text also foregrounded that such a project would necessarily traverse the traditional theory and practice divide; both the practice of teaching philosophy and the political practice that aimed to change the conditions of teaching philosophy would have to undergo a transformation in relation to the critical

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<sup>425</sup> Consulted in IMEC Fond Althusser: ALT2.E2.-03.05 *Documentation sur la réforme Haby*

<sup>426</sup> Dating from 1950 the Certificate of Aptitude for the Professorship of Secondary Education [Certificat d'Aptitude au Professorat de l'Enseignement du Second degré] is the examination for the recruitment of public secondary school teachers. A laureate of CAPES is a certified professor. The Jury of CAPES is the body that regulates the criteria for the examination.

<sup>427</sup> Groupe de recherches sur l'enseignement philosophique, *Qui A Peur De La Philosophie?* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977), 439. At the time 1.8% of candidates received the CAPES.



practice the group sought to establish. This text would be read and formally adopted as a provisional manifesto at its first general assembly.<sup>428</sup>

From the beginning, Derrida had been central to the work of GREPH and determining its theoretical drift. In the second general assembly in February 1975, he was voted the provisional secretary of the organisation and in the same meeting an article of his was read out, discussed and approved as a public statement on behalf of GREPH to be published in *L'Monde*. The text, which was initially titled 'Philosophy and its Classes' and then 'Philosophy Repressed', was published in a special issue of *Le Monde de l'éducation* in March 1975 on the Haby reform alongside a lengthy interview with Haby himself defending the reform package.<sup>429</sup> The text spelled out the implications of the proposed reform programme for philosophical education. It argued that at each stage, such reforms would diminish the opportunities and incentives for students to pursue the study of philosophy thereby concocting conditions that would accelerate the seemingly organic withering of philosophical education. Here the text precluded much of what Althusser would go on to raise to a PCF readership in his July article.

Notwithstanding his absence from the recorded activities of GREPH, Althusser did in fact follow the group's development closely. He also worked with Derrida in his professional capacity to make localised contestations of the Haby reform from within the ENS. These were consistent with the political demands of GREPH and largely corresponded to the aims Althusser himself had attempted to carry out in the ENS throughout the sixties.<sup>430</sup> GREPH repaid these actions by issuing a condemnation of

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>429</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'La Philosophie Refoulée,' *Le Monde de l'éducation* (La Réforme Haby), No 4, (mars 1975).

<sup>430</sup> Althusser's archive holds copies of the first two Interior Bulletins of GREPH. He also had a pre-printed draft of Derrida's 'Philosophy and Its Classes', possibly the version that was circulated at GREPH's second assembly which he annotated. See Fonds Althusser, Documentation sur le G.R.E.P.H. 1974. On 9<sup>th</sup> June 1975 Althusser wrote to the Director of the ENS Jean Bousquet to explain the problems with the Haby reform and put forward a detailed plan of how to reform the existing entry examination for the ENS to properly expand accessibility. See IMEC Fonds Althusser, ALT2.E2-03.04 *Comptes-rendues divers. Projets de Programmes concernant la réforme du concours d'entrée à l'E.N.S. dans le cadre de la réforme Haby*. On 20<sup>th</sup> of June the three Caiman of the ENS (Althusser, Derrida and Bernard Pautrat) met to carry on this discussion about reforming the entry examination for the ENS, with the aim of broadening the social makeup of students, and how to restructure the delivery of course material in the humanities (*lettres*) division. A document signed by the three came from this meeting, stressing the need for the delivery of material outwith the core material for the *agrégation* preparation. Althusser would continue to pursue this localised reform of the entry examination for the ENS throughout the seventies. See Fonds Althusser, ALT2.E2-03.05 *Documentation sur la réforme Haby*.

the decision taken by the *Comité Consultatif des Universités*<sup>431</sup> to refuse Althusser the position of *maîtres de conférences*. To GREPH, this decision represented – more clearly than anything – the discriminatory system that operated within French higher education to maintain a hierarchy of academic personnel on purely political grounds.

In this context, it is very likely that the text in *L'humanité* of '75 was an effort to orientate the Party around the position developing within GREPH against the Haby reform – one that contested the politically motivated suppression of philosophy by the state but that did not revert to a conservative defence of philosophical traditionalism and academic elitism. Moreover, that the conditions of recruitment and the perspective of teaching assistants were from the beginning high on GREPH's political radar, suggests that Althusser's formalised appeal to the Party to theorise the political situation of the educational apparatus had more purchase with members of GREPH than it ever had with the PCF.<sup>432</sup> And indeed, situating philosophical discourse within and orientating philosophical practice toward an analysis of the broader material, social and political conditions determining knowledge transfer and production was a theoretical pre-requisite shared by both GREPH and Althusser. Derrida's GREPH article in *Le Monde* made the similarities clear:

Thus an offensive that had proceeded, in recent years, more prudently and deceitfully is openly accelerated: the accentuated dissociation of the scientific and the philosophical, the actively selective orientation of the “best” students toward sections giving less room to philosophy, the reduction of teaching hours, coefficients, teaching positions, and so forth. This time the plan seems clearly adopted... A machine has therefore been put in place or, rather, has been perfected and finally put on display, a machine that would quickly lead in practice to the evacuation of all philosophy in “general and technical lycées,” that would lead to its progressive extinction in the universities.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> The C.C.U. (*Le Conseil national des universités*) is a consultative and decision-making body made up of appointed and elected teachers and researchers responsible for granting faculty positions in higher education in France.

<sup>432</sup> The politicization of *maîtres auxiliaires* was felt very strongly in the GREPH general assemblies. In the third general assembly on 19<sup>th</sup> April amendments were made to a petition in response to the Haby reform. Attached to a primary demand for philosophy courses to be obligatory for all students in the premier and the *terminale* of the *lycée* was the amendment that such changes could only come about by giving tenure to existing teaching assistants.

<sup>433</sup> See 'Philosophy and Its Classes' in Jacques Derrida, *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 159. The version of this text that was published in *Le Monde de l'éducation* has a slightly different introduction but is otherwise the same version as appears in GREPH's *Qui a peur de la philosophie* from which the version in Derrida's text is taken.

By 1976 and with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress (February 1976), Althusser would turn his attention toward the organisational structure of the Party as the most pressing issue of the moment. In his unpublished text *Les Vaches Noires*, written in response to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, Althusser lamented that in parallel to the illusions of social and political crisis that the Party had mobilised to justify its modernising shift toward its pact with the PS, the crisis in education was a conspired illusion of similar intention. It was an illusion that had allowed the establishment to push through its reforms unscathed by protests that had been “fearfully (if one may say so) supported by political parties as much by trade unions.”<sup>434</sup>

In light of Althusser’s proclivity towards such collective theoretico-political projects at the ENS, it is likely that his lack of involvement in any formal respect with GREPH was due to his fidelity to the Party. The foundation of non-parliamentary organisations with critical-political concerns for institutional apparatuses beyond the factory-wage dyad was not unusual during the Common Programme years. The PCF maintained their distance from such enterprises, suspicious that they were in fact entryway organisations to the PS, which, in many cases, they were. The intellectual arm of the PCF did however provide a platform to Derrida and GREPH in an interview published in *NC* in May 1975.<sup>435</sup> Here, Derrida put forward much the same argument as Althusser would in *L’Humanité*; he argued that the Haby reform represented a calculated enterprise to “maintain a type of philosophy, a force or an ensemble of philosophical forces, in a dominant position” and that Haby’s text (*For a Modernisation of the Educational System*) was “a philosophical text that must *also* be interpreted as such.”<sup>436</sup> Meanwhile, the defensive reflexes that sought to conserve philosophy in a pure state and repress the contradiction internal to philosophy teaching which had been unleashed by the Haby reform – namely the domestication of philosophical education for the purposes of bourgeois cultivation – was one side of a balance of forces intent on keeping philosophical inquiry in a neutered state. Both the forces aiming to retrench philosophy in a state of apolitical timelessness, in the

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<sup>434</sup> Althusser, *Les Vaches Noires*, 412.

<sup>435</sup> The interview appeared alongside similar interviews given by non-party members such as Georges Canguilhem, Vladimir Jankélévitch, Michel Serres and party members such as Lucien Sève. See ‘Pour la Philosophie’ in *La Nouvelle Critique* 84, No 5, (May 1975), 23 – 32.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

service of class reproduction, and the forces of modernity that would have philosophy rendered socially obsolete, structured this conjunctural iteration of the death of philosophy stalemate: “This defense of a pure questioning power, as crucial as it is destitute, crucial because occupying the shotgun seat [place du mort], finds its objective reinforcement in the partisans of the death-of-philosophy.”<sup>437</sup>

This was the political context and conceptual terrain out of which Derrida would reformulate the death/end of philosophy motif in Marx – a conceptual figure that would return again in his 1993 *Specters of Marx*. This was a conceptual reconfiguration that he had directly inherited from Althusser’s problematic. Derrida said in words that came increasingly close to Althusser’s conceptualisation of philosophical practice:

If philosophy in fact has an “irreplaceable function,” is it because nothing could replace it were it to die? I believe instead that it is always replaced: such would be the form of its irreplaceability. That is why the fight is never simply for or against Philosophy, the life or death, the presence or absence, in teaching, of Philosophy, but between forces and their philosophical instances, inside and outside of the academic institution.<sup>438</sup>

Not without significance in this respect, were the lectures Derrida delivered during these years in his capacity as *agrégés-répétiteur* at the ENS. During the high point of GREPH’s activities (1974 – 1977), Derrida gave a series of seminars focused on the Marxian and Marxist problematic within the politico-theoretical framing of the pedagogical praxis outlined in the *avant-project* manifesto. The full extent of Derrida’s negotiation with the Althusserian problematic, explicitly in relation to the end of philosophy theme, would unfold in the lectures he gave on the *agrégation* topic of *Theory and Practice* in the 1976-77 academic year.

These political and conceptual transmissions between Althusser and Derrida are only traceable in certain calculated omissions. Althusser had to maintain his own strategic silence vis-à-vis GREPH under the weight of the political conjuncture. His support for the broader aims of the campaign, the role that he played in forming the intellectual

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<sup>437</sup> 27.

<sup>438</sup> 28.

and political terrain that precipitated the formation of GREPH, and the actions he carried out to support their demands can be plotted in the documentation available in his archive and his marginal articles of the period. However, if Derrida had to cloak his philosophical divergences from Althusserianism in a language that could not be read as an attack of his political campaign in the Party,<sup>439</sup> Althusser had also to shroud his political support for GREPH's efforts to transform the edifice of philosophical education in a language that spoke to the objectives of Communist Party. Yet, cast against the activities of GREPH, and the influence of Derrida during these years, the broader stakes behind one of Althusser's more orthodox formulations, that philosophy is – in the last instance – class struggle in theory, comes into relief. For Althusser the educational apparatus was traversed by class struggle, whether by policy interventions, by its function in ideological and social reproduction, or by the class dynamics operating within the academic workforce. The role of philosophical practice linked to theory, where philosophy indexed not simply its own discourse but also the broader arrangement of forces that comprised the conditions of the discourse and its teaching, remained important for both Derrida and Althusser during these years in carrying out their political activities. One of the central questions that would preoccupy both of these thinkers during this period was the precise function of the *agrégés-répétiteur* in the life and death of the philosophical institution. For Althusser this question pertained principally to the responsibility of communist/Marxist militants who were also philosophy teachers. A questionnaire drawn up some time between the late sixties and early seventies to be circulated to PCF members working within the education system makes clear his desire to get a concrete sense of exactly how this strata reconciled this contradictory status:

1. Today, how does one teach philosophy as a communist? What according to you are the terms of this problem?
  - a. What is the nature of your responsibility as a professional?...
  - b. How do you envisage the responsibilities you have to your position in the Party? (Is it necessary to make students communists? To teach a philosophy of Marxist inspiration? To make

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<sup>439</sup> In the interview conducted in 1989, just a year before Althusser's death, Derrida would speak of adopting a strategic silence that was taken as a way of avoiding a "head-on" criticism of Althusserian Marxism. He said: "I didn't wish to attack, in a conventionally coded, utilizable, and manipulable way, a Marxist discourse that seemed, rightly or wrongly, positive inside the Party, more intelligent and refined than what one usually heard." Kaplan & Sprinker, *The Althusserian Legacy*, 193.

a resolute effort to revert all problems to the current content of the class struggle?...  
c. How do you reconcile your professional responsibilities and your responsibilities as a Party member? ....

3. What are the subjects that lend themselves most readily to teaching Marxist philosophy?

6. ... Do you help in the industrial action of your students to allow them to establish their own instruments of labour? Do you struggle against official choices? ....

9...Do you appeal to the help of your Party in order to fight the political battles of reactionary interventions in education?<sup>440</sup>

Many of the questions that appeared in the questionnaire had a direct bearing upon Althusser's own activities during this period. Thus, contrary to the caricature drawn by his former student Jacques Rancière, Althusser had in fact committed himself to the task of remaining vigilant over the various overlapping and contradicting demands of being a Marxist and a communist in philosophy and its teaching. And the organic relation between these demands and his ambition to attend them clearly shaped the course of his output during this period. In the ensuing years, such questions would grip Derrida, particularly around the political responsibilities of the *agrégés-répétiteur* and the relationship these responsibilities had with philosophy and its teaching. This was the backdrop to Derrida's inheritance of the end of philosophy motif in Marx.

## 4.2 Derrida's Lenin

Jason Smith's text 'Jacques Derrida, 'Crypto-Communist?'' was one of the first to illuminate the broader trajectory of Derrida's direct engagement with Marxist philosophy and communist politics. In contrast to much of the earlier Derridean scholarship, Smith more thoroughly locates Derrida's better-known late intervention into the Marxist fray with *Specters of Marx* (1993) within an intellectual and political course that spanned the last thirty years of the century. In particular, Smith highlights

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<sup>440</sup> IMEC Fonds Althusser: ALT2. A49-01.07 *Enquête interne au P.C.F. sur l'enseignement de la philosophie*

the intellectual and biographical connections that tied Derrida to a cadre of PCF intellectuals (especially those surrounding the PCF-aligned journals *Les Lettres françaises*, *Digraphe* and *La Nouvelle Critique*) and a particular Marxian philosophical heritage in the early seventies. In this regard, he stresses the importance of Derrida's turn toward explicitly Marxian and Marxist reference points in his teaching between '72-77; that is, precisely during his GREPH years. Smith also convincingly portrays the shared enterprise that Althusser and Derrida undertook in establishing, in distinct ways, a "new Marxist problematic" via Husserl.<sup>441</sup>

However, two cues raised in Smith's text remain underexplored. These are: the role played by the political-theoretical ambitions of GREPH, especially regarding philosophy and its teaching, in shaping Derrida's engagement with Marxism in his mid-seventies seminar series; and the broader significance of Derrida's use of Lenin to narrativise his inheritance from Marxism following the publication of *Specters*. Regarding both these questions, it is instructive to bring Vivienne Orchard's detailed historical account of the political objectives and philosophical orientations of GREPH<sup>442</sup> to bear on Smith's outline of the trajectory of Derrida's engagement with Marxism between 1972 and 1993.<sup>443</sup> In this section, I will pursue these avenues in order to establish the deeper roots of what was at stake in the continuation of the end of philosophy theme across his seminar series *Theory and Practice* from 1976 and his 1993 text, *Specters of Marx*, which I will consider in detail in the following two sections of this chapter.

On the basis of a quote taken from a 1994 interview (a year after the publication of *Specters*) Smith makes the curious, but convincing, claim that Derrida's avowed

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<sup>441</sup> Jason Smith, 'Jacques Derrida, "Crypto-Communist?"' in Jacques Bidet & Stathis Kouvelakis, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, (Amsterdam: Brill, 2007), 625-45.

<sup>442</sup> Vivienne Orchard, *Jacques Derrida and the Institution of French Philosophy*, (Oxford: Legenda, 2011).

<sup>443</sup> In this section, I will be following Smith's recommendation on how to read the series of seminars that Derrida gave over the course of 1972 to 1976, that is "to take these texts into consideration in order to evaluate the exact relationship Derrida's work maintains with the Marxist tradition". This contrasts with the immediate reception of the first of these seminars (*Theory and Practice*) to be translated into English: "Rather than being a precursor to his later engagement with Marx, one with profound implications for our understanding of Marxism and modern society, *Theory and Practice* is best seen as probing the limitations of the agrégation seminar, ones he had only recently drawn attention to, and which were set in greater relief by his chosen topic." In Edward Baring, 'Theory and Practice Reviewed by Edward Baring,' *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*. August 3 2019. Available at <<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/theory-and-practice>> [Accessed 15 July 2020] In another context, Smith's recommendation has been taken up since by Samuel Solomon in 'L'espacement de la lecture: Althusser, Derrida, and the Theory of Reading,' *Décalages* 1, No. 2. (2012).

adherence to the “*crypto-communist legacy*” of a Leninist critique of spontaneism was consistent with his broader philosophical project. For Smith, Derrida’s mistrust of the idealisation of structureless organisational forms that typified the political horizons of the student movement of 1968 was analogous to the principle philosophical thesis of deconstruction, namely that metaphysics was grounded on the structuring illusion of the retrievability of the self-presence of Being beyond all mediation. In that sense, Derrida foresaw “dangerous consequences” resulting from “the spontaneist eloquence, the call for transparency, for communication without relay or delay” that had been posited as the solution to the moribund institutions on the left. In this direction, he mentions the subsequent election of “the most right-wing Chamber of Deputies we had ever had in France.”<sup>444</sup> Such mistrust for the ideal of self-presence in direct expression was, according to Derrida, derivative of a Leninist inheritance.<sup>445</sup>

Curiously, however, Smith’s citation obscures the broader context that surrounded this declared inheritance. It was in the context of talking about the link between deconstruction and the apparatus of the institution that Derrida aligned his philosophical-political position with Lenin’s critique of spontaneism in *What is to Be Done?* And it was in rereading Lenin at the time “in an altogether different context”<sup>446</sup> that Derrida re-encountered the critique of spontaneism that had secreted itself within his thought and sequenced the internal logic of how he narrated his relation to the institution in 1994.

In the interview, Derrida explicitly periodises the moment when his work became centrally invested in the question of the institution “in terms of both theory and practice”.<sup>447</sup> This periodisation confers a crucial role to a dimension of Lenin’s thought in inflecting Derrida’s response to the events of ’68 and insinuates its continuation in the formation of GREPH. After Smith’s citation ends, Derrida goes on to say in the interview:

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<sup>444</sup> Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste For the Secret*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 49.

<sup>445</sup> Smith, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, 628.

<sup>446</sup> Derrida re-read *What is to be Done?* by Lenin for his 1994 text *The Politics of Friendship*. See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>447</sup> Derrida, *A Taste*, 49.



In abstract and general terms, what remains constant in my thinking on this question is indeed a critique of institutions, but one that sets out not from the utopia of a wild and spontaneous pre- or non-institution, but rather counter-institutions...The idea of a counter-institution, neither spontaneous, wild nor immediate, is the most permanent motif that, in a way, has guided my work.<sup>448</sup>

GREPH developed as a counter-institution to the institution of philosophy and its teaching, and its formation responded specifically to the “‘contingency’ [of] the ‘Haby’ reform programme, which effectively threatened to wipe out the teaching of philosophy in the *lycées*.” The institution of philosophy was, for Derrida, one in which “the subject of the institutionality of the institution ha[d] to remain open and have a future.”<sup>449</sup> Indeed, Derrida’s philosophy during his GREPH years – and here we must include his seminars<sup>450</sup> and the texts that were produced in light of the objectives that the GREPH situation imposed<sup>451</sup> – not only thematised the institutionality of philosophy and its teaching, but recorded a particular occupation of the institution of philosophy in the face of the ever-present forces of institutionalisation. This inhabitation of the institution of philosophy, both in theory and practice, intended to keep a theoretical space open that would permit a reflexive interrogation of institutionality in general but more crucially the institutionality of the site that makes this interrogation possible – namely the institution of philosophy. And this was, Derrida tells us, a relationship to the institution that had, in its mistrust for a spontaneously resolved exteriority to institutionality, been inherited from a Leninist tradition.

On the face of it, the counter-institution of GREPH represented, in its various activities, a determinate iteration of this strategic appropriation of philosophy against the forces of institutionalisation within French academia. On this occasion, the institutionalisation comprised of two faces: the modernising pretensions of the Haby

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> The 1974-75 seminar series “The Concept of Ideology in the French Ideologues” is nominally identified as corresponding to the objectives of GREPH, and publicised in a GREPH bulletin as part of Derrida’s text ‘Where a Teaching Body Begins and How It Ends’, as is the 1976 “Seminar for GREPH on Gramsci”. Of the seminar sessions published in French from the period: “Life Death” (1975-76) and “Theory and Practice” (1976-77) were *agrégation* topics; in both, Derrida directly orients his lectures around questions raised by the GREPH initiative.

<sup>451</sup> Those which are included in GREPH’s *Qui a peur de la philosophie?* and Derrida’s *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1*.

reform that sought to supplant the space of philosophy with a positivistic realism and the defensive reflexes that aimed to preserve the French philosophical establishment in its present state. This dual front was made clear in *Where a Teaching Body Begins*, where Derrida claimed that “deconstruction cannot join in a liquidation of philosophy ... whose political consequences were diagnosed long ago,” yet neither can it “cling to a given ‘defense-of-philosophy’ to a reactionary rearguard struggle to preserve a decomposing body that would only facilitate things for the enterprises of liquidation.”<sup>452</sup> GREPH then represented a facing-up to these institutionalising forces via the institution itself and therefore not by way of a disavowal or an escape, which was, in the Leninist tradition, a concession to spontaneity. Consistent with this crypto-Leninist tradition, crystallised in the activities of GREPH and in deconstruction more broadly, was this critical uncovering of the institutional status of a philosophico-political position that asserted a condition of exteriority vis-à-vis the institution.

At each stage, this counter-position that formed in and against a set of determinate forces, traversed the distinct but articulated levels of the philosophical institution. This meant that it unfolded across the discursive dimension of philosophy as well as the broader apparatus that was its material and political support.<sup>453</sup> Within this framing, the pedagogical institution, or what Derrida called the “didactico-philosophical inscription”,<sup>454</sup> was at the base of the articulation between the different levels of the French philosophical institution. Accordingly, the *agrégé-répétiteur* (the professional and pedagogical position occupied by Derrida) played a significant role in holding together, and reproducing, the whole didactico-philosophical edifice of the educational apparatus. This had become especially clear with the antagonisms mounted against the deeply centralised and elitist *agrégation* system following 1968, where questions of the social function of philosophy teaching, student formation, course content and teacher recruitment had all been raised.

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<sup>452</sup> Derrida, *Right to Philosophy 1*, 74.

<sup>453</sup> Derrida insists on the scope of deconstruction: “If it had remained at a simple semantic or conceptual deconstitution...deconstruction would have formed but a – new – modality of the internal self-critique of philosophy. It would have risked reproducing philosophical properness, philosophy’s self-relation, the economy of traditional putting into question.” Derrida, *Right of Philosophy 1*, 72.

<sup>454</sup> ‘Avant-projet pour la constitution d’un Groupe de Recherches sur L’Enseignement Philosophie’ in GREPH, *Qui á Peur de la Philosophie*, 434.

Derrida's reflexive interrogation of the role of the *agrégé-répétiteur* in 'Where a Teaching Body Begins' indicates that he did not take these questions lightly. Indeed, in both their form and content, Derrida's *agrégation* courses of this period were theoretically and practically marked out by this overarching preoccupation with the socio-political function of the pedagogical institution. Throughout this period, the question of how to circumnavigate the stabilising relation between student and teacher intrinsic to educational knowledge – transfer *by way of* this relation – formed the philosophical and political backdrop to his analyses of course material and his approach to teaching. Significantly, this question was approached by a Leninist counter-institutional inhabitation of the philosophical institution.

At the same time, the Marxist tradition, which indexed for Derrida something like the ultimate frontier within the didactico-philosophical institution, had, above all, to be subject to this critical practice. Marxism represented a key example, within the history of philosophy and its corresponding institutional practices, of an enterprise aimed at destabilising a determinate didactico-philosophical inscription and its material support. In that light, it was consistent with the spirit of this Marxian and Marxist enterprise to subject the institutionalisation of Marxism itself to this specific counter-institutional double strategy so as to root out the vestiges of the didactico-philosophical inscription in its terms, references and conceptual paradigms. Derrida says in 'Where a Teaching Body Begins':

...when I say, in such a trivial formula, that power controls the teaching apparatus, it is not to place power outside the pedagogic scene...Nor is it to make us think or dream of a teaching without power, free from teaching's own power effects or liberated from all power outside of or higher than itself. That would be an idealist or liberalist representation, with which a teaching body blind to power – the power it is subject to, the power at its disposal in the place where it denounces power – effectively reinforces itself.<sup>455</sup>

And before:

... in the work that awaits us, we must be suspicious of all forms of reproduction, all the powerful and subtle resources of reproduction: among them, if one can still say so, that of a

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<sup>455</sup> Derrida, *Right of Philosophy 1*, 79.

concept of reproduction that cannot ("simply") be used here without being "expanded" (Marx), that cannot be expanded without recognizing the contradiction at work in it, and always heterogeneously, that cannot be analyzed in its essential contradiction without posing, in all its magnitude, the problem of contradiction (or dialectics) as philosopheme. Could an effective deconstruction, in the "final instance," proceed with such a philosopheme (with something like a "Marxist philosophy")?<sup>456</sup>

Derrida's double strategy, across the discursive and practical dimensions of the pedagogic-philosophical institution, thus took Marxist theory as one of its primary resources and objects of critical inquiry. He did this in order to parallel the summoning of Lenin against the institution of the *agrégé-répétiteur* with a critical interrogation of the conceptual shibboleths in Marx that underpinned this crypto-Leninist tradition. This meant releasing certain critical terms in Marx from their semantic mooring, particularly those that had inherited and carried on the didactico-philosophical inscription; as in the above example, where the self-evidence of the meaning of the term contradiction inhering to Marx's conceptualisation of production and reproduction is brought into question. From this perspective, such a semantic tethering was not intrinsic to Marx's writing but was the effect of a stabilisation of particular interpretative norms deriving from a pedagogical institution.

In the initial years of GREPH's activities between 1974-75, Derrida would take up the itinerary plotted in 'Where a Teaching Body Begins' in his lectures at the ENS. In his teaching he would deconstruct Marx's conceptualisation of 'reproduction' so as to broach the reproductive logic of the pedagogical institution. In a lecture series entitled 'La Vie La Mort' of that year, Derrida pursued the proposition of posing the problem of the contradiction in Marx as a philosopheme within the context of scientificity of scientific discourse. The lecture series largely focused on the philosophical vestiges in the work of French biologist François Jacob.<sup>457</sup> In the same year, in a lecture series framed as part of GREPH's initiatives, entitled 'GREPH (le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français)', Derrida gave a sustained reading of Althusser's

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>457</sup> "And this philosopheme which at a certain point takes hold of all the foundations ... serves science, of course, but it is also according to the body of this philosopheme that all non-critical operations that we call ideology occur - and in its turn, in the same train, all the impositions we designate in Marxist language, and a Marxist language by the philosopheme "production"." Jacques Derrida, *La vie la mort Séminaire (1975 - 1976)*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2019).

'Ideology' essay. There, Derrida routed his own philosophical-political ambitions with GREPH through Althusser's conceptualisation of the education system as the dominant ideological state apparatus. In Althusser's conceptualisation, the educational apparatus had taken over the religious apparatus in fulfilling the necessary function of reproducing the conditions of material and social production. Derrida pitched his own agenda against the backdrop of Althusser's conceptual schema:

the most precise question becomes now: how the non-reproduction and the process of contradiction-transformation that takes place outside of the ISAs, before it or under it are inscribed in the ISAs by interrupting or cleaving or deforming or transforming the schemes of reproduction, or in any case by making it so that reproduction is quite heterogeneous or contradictory, not the repetition of the same, and by, for example, certain agents of the ISA then turning against ideology, against the system and against the practices in which they are engaged, some weapons that they can find in the history and the knowledge that they teach?<sup>458</sup>

In this framing, Derrida questioned how an external crisis or break might be registered and harnessed by 'agents of the ISA' within and against the reproductive logic of the educational institution. In light of the broader context, the question alluded to the disturbance generated in the reproductive logic of educational apparatus by the Haby Reform – here conceived as a political symptom of a broader crisis of social reproduction – and the subsequent initiation of GREPH and its counter-institutional praxis. The value of such a formulation was that it decentred the status of philosophical critique as the determining force of a transformation in the educational apparatus. But it also gave philosophy its own peculiar agential force. Indeed, from this perspective, it was the disruptive force of the Haby Reform that opened space for the agents of the educational institution to harness the contradictions that had infected the ideological state apparatus in which they functioned, so as to transform the reproductive logic of the pedagogical institution in philosophy and its teaching. It is significant then that Derrida would choose to turn to Marx on an occasion when he considered such a gap to have opened within the educational ISA.

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<sup>458</sup> Notes taken by Samuel Solomon from 'GREPH (le concept de l'idéologie chez les idéologues français)," 1974-1975' in *Jacques Derrida papers* held at the Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries.

Between September and October 1975, some months after the official inauguration of GREPH and in the midst of his ‘institutional turn’, Derrida gave two interviews in *Digraphe*.<sup>459</sup> There, he explained his rationale for this turn toward Marx. In the first, he reflected on the significance for other institutions, including the party – which in the context could only mean the PCF – of the disruptive rifts opening in the educational apparatus that had fermented a particular deconstruction. He said:

I tried to say or do something specific ... only from the moment I thought it possible to articulate together, in a more or less coherent fashion, a certain deconstruction, which had arrived at a certain state, a certain critique, and the project of a certain political transformation of the educational university apparatus. This transformation appeared to me possible and effective (and by effective I mean beginning to transform the scene, the frame, and the relations of forces) only on the condition of this coherence; finally, if possible, it would no longer pour discourses that stem from the revolutionary code or stereotype into the intact forms of teaching, its rhetoric, and its programs. These forms often force one, both within the educational system and outside of it (for example, in corporatist organizations, unions, and parties) to challenge educational reproduction. The difficulty – which needs to be constantly reevaluated – is in marking a distance from these programmatic forms (those of unions and of the parties on the left) without giving comfort to the common enemy. This is a well-known schema, but it is more implacable than ever.<sup>460</sup>

For Derrida, running a revolutionary ideology through the existing organisational form of an ISA did not disrupt its capacity to reproduce the practices and positions constitutive of the apparatus and its knowledge-effect. Indeed, as is indicated in the quote above, at a certain point in its lifespan, usually during periods of crises, these organisational forms actively stimulate and recuperate such ideological resistances. This was principally why Derrida was keen to distinguish deconstruction proper from the self-critical and sublimative propulsion intrinsic to philosophical discourse. Here, Derrida was referring to the invariant which made it so that philosophy, in announcing its own end from inside its own discursive domain, made very little substantial difference to the ‘scene, the frame and the relations of force’ that held in place the

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<sup>459</sup> PCF member Jean Risit was encouraged by Derrida to found *Digraphe*. The agenda of the journal was to form critical connections between the literary/academic avant-garde and communists. The journal capitalised on Derrida’s break with *Tel Quel*, giving Phillippe Sollers, the founder of *Tel Quel* and major left-wing critic of the PCF, more reason to suspect Derrida of having been taken in by the PCF. See Bruno Thibault, *Danièle Sallenave et le don des morts*, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2004), 34.

<sup>460</sup> ‘Between Brackets I’ in Jacques Derrida, *Points... Interviews, 1974 – 1994*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 15 – 16.

broader discursive and practical relations comprising the full scope of the philosophical institution and the didactico-philosophical inscription.<sup>461</sup>

In the theoretical deconstruction that had cohered conjuncturally with the political struggle taking place across the educational apparatus in France, Derrida saw an opening. As is evident in the claims above, he saw this opening as having significance well beyond the educational institution alone. Insofar as this deconstruction took aim at the ‘forms of teaching, its rhetoric and programs’ that supported the ideological apparatus as such, GREPH and Derrida’s work of this period had an indirect bearing on the organisational form of the PCF. In that regard, the question of the coincidence of the initiatives of GREPH around the pedagogical institution and Derrida’s turn toward Marxist texts in his teaching, takes up a peculiar relevance in relation to the broader tendency that has been identified so far in other Marxist philosophers proximate to the PCF: that is, a tendency to revive philosophy through and against Marx’s demand to put it to an end, in order precisely to defend Marxist politics from being supplanted by a dogmatic and dissimulated philosophy.

In the second interview, the question of the coincidence of Derrida’s turn toward Marxian and Marxist texts in his teaching and his counter-institutional praxis was directly raised. In response, Derrida positioned his work between the dogmatic and ‘intimidating’ Marxisms of an Althusserian inspiration (though not Althusser himself), the Party orthodoxy and those thinkers that presumed themselves to have “landed on the continent of post-Marxism.”<sup>462</sup> Between these extremes, Derrida positioned deconstruction, which at this point was neither simply a critique of philosophy nor the critical re-foundation of the origins of a philosophy. As regards Marx’s writing and the Marxist tradition, which were “themselves in constant transformation”, Derrida claimed deconstruction related to these texts, not as writings solely to be critically decoded – as though their proper meaning had been until that moment simply withheld – but as heterogeneous discursive formations maintained in

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<sup>461</sup> He said in the second interview in *Digraphe* entitled ‘Ja or the faux-Bond II’: “a deconstructive practice that had no bearing on “institutional apparatuses and historical processes” (I am using your terms), which was satisfied to work on philosophemes or conceptual signifieds, discourses, and so forth, would not be deconstructive; no matter how original it might be, it would reproduce the auto-critical movement of philosophy in its internal tradition.” In Derrida, *Points*, 72.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

a state of hermeneutic insularity by relations of force that also had to be “taken into account practically and political.”<sup>463</sup> In that sense, therefore, the GREPH initiative, in conjunction with Derrida’s teaching on Marx, was an effort to deconstruct the institution of Marxism via one ISA, the educational apparatus, in order to shift the practices corresponding to the Marxism of another apparatus, the party. This was by way of shifting the pedagogical form that was common to them both and which reproduced a circumscribed set of interpretive positions vis-à-vis Marxian and Marxist texts by maintaining a centralised and hierarchical arrangement of practices. Derrida’s engagement with Marxism thus corresponded as much to the practice of dislodging the pedagogical form – an activity that played out in both his teaching and his involvement in GREPH – as to the discursive heterogeneity that was opened up by these new forms.

The enterprise of practically dislodging the structuring relation supporting the educational apparatus was, for Derrida, fundamental to releasing Marxism from staid interpretive norms. Only in this way could there be a break in the generic conditions delineating a particular knowledge-effect in the name of Marx that preceded Marxist political practice. In his seminar series *Theory and Practice*, Derrida associated this effort to rehabilitate Marx with a broader tradition that, in its treatment and engagement with Marx, was distinctly responsive to the concept of transformation. The invariant in this tradition, which begins in Marx himself – monumentalised in the eleventh thesis – moves through Lenin and is revived again in Althusser, was an understanding that the concept of the *transformative* took up a philosophical instantiation. In each case the concept of the transformative is indexed as philosopheme while at the same time alluding to its own overcoming. It was thus an institutional instantiation that had to be inhabited in order to carry out that very sublation. For Derrida, the common thread connecting these thinkers was their adoption of a double strategy, at a given conjuncture, aimed at dissolving the parameters delimiting the practical and theoretical reality of transformation as a transformative gesture in itself. For Derrida, the starting point for this tradition, as we will see, was the initial dislodging of the semantic grounds of the transformative in

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<sup>463</sup> 73.



the eleventh thesis. There, transformation takes on its meaning through a negative relation to mere interpretation.

In the *Theory and Practice* lectures, it was in Althusser's re-conceptualisation of transformation that Derrida found the raw material for his own transformative gesture. This gesture, which aimed to extricate the concept and reality of transformation from the boundaries holding it in a state of fixity, was synonymous with Derrida's broader challenge to the pedagogical institution. Derrida treated Althusser's theoretical trajectory as emblematic of the current state of the *transformative* in Marxism – one that he would necessarily have to deconstruct in order adequately to respond to the transformative-interpretive tradition he was working within. But Derrida's reconfiguration of the *transformative* in Marx did not depend upon a resolute renunciation of the Althusserian iteration in total. And in that respect, it did not aim to reinvest the *transformative* with a new meaning in a vocabulary shorn of conceptual or semantic vestiges – such as one would expect to find in Althusser himself. Rather, aspects of Althusser's transformative engagement with Marx and the Party that had resulted in certain innovative conceptual offshoots regarding the transformative – including raising the question of the role of reproduction and of ISA's for the conceptualisation of transformation in Marx – were kept alive in Derrida's own conceptual and practical reconfiguration of the transformative in Marx. Indeed, Derrida's reformulation of the transformative in Marx, which moved through a critical engagement with the pedagogical institution, depended crucially upon the conceptual paradigm that Althusser smuggled into the Marxian framework as part of his own transformative trajectory. This was Althusser's instantiation of superstructural forms, especially the educational system, with a particular type of agency over reproduction and therefore transformation.

In that sense, Derrida's early approach to the transformative in Marx pre-figured the motif of spectrality that would later characterise his approach to Marx. Already in his deconstruction of Althusser in the *Theory and Practice* seminars, and other texts of this period, Derrida demonstrated a sensitivity to the difficulty of reviving the transformative in Marx and Marxism – i.e. bringing the transformative into consonance with itself and thereby lifting it from its reified philosophical-didactic form – without a necessary detour through categorical oppositions such as living and

dead, philosophy and non-philosophy, change and repetition etc. In other words, Derrida was aware that he could not dislodge the meanings associated with the transformative such as they had been conceptualised by Althusser nor could he foster a disruption of the pedagogical institution that preceded all understandings of transformation by an outright break from these traditions. Putting an end to the philosophical reification of the transformative in Marx in order to bring it into being depended on moving through the philosophical institution. The realisation of transformation in this sense meant occupying the border between an ossified apparatus, with its staid chain of significations, and its absolute outside. This was the conceptual framework that informed Derrida's seminar series *Theory and Practice* which I will consider in detail in the following section.

#### 4.3 Theory and Practice (École normale supérieure 1976-77)

Theory and practice, then.

Must be done [*Faut le faire*].

When I say *faut le faire*, what am I doing?

Of course, or so it would seem, I am heaving a sigh of discouragement, discouragement tinged with ironic protest at the curriculum that requires us to deal, in one year and in the form of a seminar, with such a question, if that is what it is.<sup>464</sup>

In the previous section of this chapter, I outlined the broader political and conceptual context that surrounded Derrida's turn toward Marxian and Marxist references in his teaching during the mid-seventies and particular his mobilisation of the end of philosophy motif. This was done both to highlight the importance of Derrida's pedagogical practice to his overarching conception and practice of deconstruction – which, during this period, bore a specific set of intertwined political and theoretical ambitions principally concerning the institution of philosophy and its teaching. It was also to provide the conceptual and political background to Derrida's lecture of which

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<sup>464</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Theory & Practice*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 1. Page numbers for quotations will be taken from the English translation but for the French I will be referring to Jacques Derrida, *Théorie et pratique Cours de l'ENS-Ulm 1975 - 1976*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2017). The Éditions Galilée version has wrongly dated the seminar series which took place over the 1976-77 semester.

we have only the transcript to go by. While Derrida was in the practice of thoroughly scripting his lectures, the notes that are available of his 1976-77 course on the *agrégation* topic of Theory and Practice are insufficient in themselves to properly evince the full meaning of this intervention – not least because from the seventh session onward, Derrida intentionally opts to move between an improvised pedagogical practice and a scripted lecture. Mindful of these limitations, I have therefore attempted to qualify my use of lecture notes in this thesis by advancing this supplementary context.

I also argued that within the framework of these political and theoretical ambitions, Derrida had reformulated the end of philosophy motif in Marx to designate the political struggle within the educational apparatus. The range of Derrida's counter-institutional theory and practice (deconstruction) within the education system cut across distinct realms. These included the organisational work of GREPH, its empirical research and critical theory covering the politics and history of the French philosophical institution and the teaching of philosophy, and its political agitation against contemporaneous educational policy reforms. However, considered less in the secondary literature covering Derrida's GREPH years was the actual form and content of Derrida's teaching of this period. It is important to look at this material through the prism of GREPH, not simply because Derrida explicitly advanced GREPH's political priorities in his treatment of course material during this period, but also because the lectures represent a pedagogical practice that sought to account for and transform the role of the *agrégé-répétiteur* within the educational apparatus. Significant in this respect, and indicative of the continuation of the specific conceptual, historical and political trajectory I have traced so far, is Derrida's direct engagement with the end of philosophy motif within a peculiarly French Communist intellectual tradition. For this reason, *Theory and Practice* stands as a particularly pertinent document for this project even though the text represents a pedagogical exercise. It demonstrates that Derrida was not only familiar with the conceptual questions raised by the end of philosophy motif within a Marxian problematic, but was cognizant of the peculiar conjunctural features that had made this a persistent site of inquiry and renovation for Marxist and communist intellectuals in the French context. Moreover, the decision to thematise the role of the end of philosophy in Althusser's trajectory in his teaching, at a time when Derrida was mobilising the same vocabulary to describe GREPH's

struggle in its own context, is not without significance. Indeed, it strengthens the case that Derrida was in fact fully in dialogue with the tradition I have so far been outlining.

With this conceptual backdrop in place, in this section I will carry out a close reading of Derrida's 1976-77 seminar course on the *agrégation* topic: Theory and Practice. In particular, I will be focusing on Derrida's treatment of the end of philosophy motif in relation to Althusser's theoretical trajectory. In the latter seminars of the Theory and Practice course, Derrida drifts toward a Heideggerian problematic. From there he will re-inscribe the theory/practice pair in a course that moves through Marx, Kant and Althusser via the *Theses on Feuerbach*. In what follows, I will not consider in full these lectures on Heidegger even though they play an important role in the full arc of Derrida's pedagogical enterprise.

In the course of the seminar series, Derrida engages Althusser and Heidegger regarding their distinct treatment of the theory/practice pair without drawing them into direct critical confrontation. While this evasion was consistent with what Derrida described as his "philosophical silence"<sup>465</sup> in the late interviews, there were, in the context, political, philosophical and pedagogical justifications for not advancing a resolute philosophical critique against Althusser. Inasmuch as *Theory and Practice* exists as a record of a pedagogical practice that aimed at preparing students for the *agrégation*, at the same time as it sought to re-route the function of the *agrégé-répétiteur*, the conventional features of philosophical argumentation are conspicuously lacking from the text. Such an absence is indicative of Derrida's effort to negotiate with what he claimed in his GREPH writing was the structuring principle of the philosophical institution reproduced in practice via the pedagogical relation: the 'didactico-philosophical inscription'. In *Theory and Practice*, therefore, Derrida refuses to present a clearly resolved and transferrable-repeatable position vis-à-vis the topic of the *agrégation*. This was how Derrida faced up to the responsibility of occupying the position of *agrégé-répétiteur* – a pedagogical role he considered central to the reproductive logic of the French philosophical institution but which he nonetheless refused to vacate.

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<sup>465</sup> Kaplan & Sprinker, *The Althusserian Legacy*, 188.

From this perspective, and bearing in mind his fidelity to Lenin's critique of spontaneity, the refrain with which Derrida opens his seminar "must be done", that serves as the guide for the full movement of his pedagogical itinerary, reads as a subtle modification of Lenin's interrogative "What Is To Be Done?" Among the various inflections attributed to it in the course of *Theory and Practice*, "must be done" can be read as a reprisal of Lenin's critique of spontaneity in terms of Derrida's counter-institutional inhabitation of the philosophical institution qua *agrégé-répétiteur*. At the same time, in its modified form in the imperative and without the determinate 'it', the phrase provides a figure for Derrida's response to the charge of the *agrégé-répétiteur*. That response was an abstention from providing a place for 'it'<sup>466</sup> while nevertheless attending to the political obligation of *doing* something in the space proper to the *agrégé-répétiteur*. 'Must be done' is then also inflected by the sense of an obligation to *do* something other or rather than merely reproducing the philosophical institution qua *agrégé-répétiteur*, an inflection that recalls the sentiment of the eleventh thesis – a fragment that will gain due critical attention in the course of the lectures.<sup>467</sup>

Viewed from this perspective, we can read the text as a record of that other thing that Derrida did do in the space proper to the *agrégé-répétiteur* (or we might say in the space of philosophy). It is a record of the methods he devised that were other than transparent philosophical argumentation, critique and opposition, to undo the didactico-philosophical inscription of the *agrégé-répétiteur* – of the "must be done". Said otherwise, the text records Derrida's response to the problematic of the end of philosophy. That is to say, Derrida's political ambitions to counter the reproductive logic of the philosophical institution fell within a conceptual framework that tries to

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<sup>466</sup> Derrida, *Theory and Practice*, 7. In the context 'it' was an exhaustive account of the *agrégation* topic, *Theory and Practice*, or its reduction to a fundamental philosopheme that presides over all other regionalisations of the theory/practice pairing: "Each time that a domain, a region, a place gets determined...a theory/practice question gets determined, and the philosopher...considers it derivative, regional, dependent, and he basically reasons in the following way: one must first appeal to the most general, the most fundamental conceptual determination of the theory/practice pair, and know first how things stand with theory/practice in general in order to know next how things stand in these particular areas...Whatever the specificity of those usages...they must all gesture toward a common and minimal semantic kernel, toward an implicit philosopheme that the philosopher treats as such."

<sup>467</sup> Derrida expressly registers this inflection on p.8: "one must understand fully what "important" [of the eleventh thesis] means, understand fully the "must be done" implied by it..." He treats the eleventh thesis across 13-14.

think the non-continuity of an existing conception/practice of philosophy and its replacement with something else. But as we will see, in the course of doing so, Derrida will characterise this impulse – to exceed the bounds of an existing modality of philosophy – as a gesture that remained all too philosophical. Indeed, he will argue that this dynamic – of an iterative recourse to a transcendent or external domain beyond the merely philosophical – is structurally integral, not simply to the end of philosophy problematic in Marx, but to Western philosophy as such. What Derrida will call “philosophical edging [*bordure*]”<sup>468</sup> is the propulsive dynamic internal to philosophy whereby a philosophical discourse anticipates its own overcoming in the process of circumscribing the boundaries of what philosophy currently is, and by positing a gesture or identifying itself as the gesture that moves beyond that limit point. Philosophical edging therefore refers to the structuring opposition internal to all philosophy that assumes the nature of the division between itself and its outside is irreducible.

In this direction, as regards his counter-institutional approach to pedagogical practice, Derrida provides a rationale for his unwillingness to stage the overturning of Althusserian Marxism via the Heideggerian problematic. In the first lecture he summarises the path of his pedagogical itinerary. He says:

We’ll compare that genealogical discussion [the morphology of the theory/practice pair in the Marxist tradition], at least with its general type, not in order simply to oppose it, but to relate it to it according to another logic, another discussion, another orientation, another interpretation ... of the theory/practice pair; again, it wouldn’t simply be opposed to or separate from the other but something that exercises it curiously and it is that work (if one can still call it work) that will interest us.<sup>469</sup>

It is not to oppose one resolved body of knowledge against the other, that Derrida brings together these two distinct philosophical traditions that encircle the theory/practice pair. Rather, it is to show how the structure of this philosophical edging that is common to them both “produces effects in the content that are different, but structurally analogous when viewed from another genealogical orientation.”<sup>470</sup> In other words, Derrida’s teaching strategy aims to mark out this structure common to

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<sup>468</sup> 16-17.

<sup>469</sup> 17.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

two distinct philosophical problematics each comprised of a discrete “semantico-philosophical genealogical”<sup>471</sup> sequence. It wants to do this in order to bring into relief mechanisms that repeat themselves across different philosophical languages while remaining inconspicuous within the boundaries of a particular conceptual idiom. In *Theory and Practice*, this is specifically to identify a structure that presides as much over the end of philosophy motif in the Marxist trajectory, as it does over other the end of philosophy motif in other philosophical discourses, including the Heideggerian problematic. Therefore, it is an effort to countenance the problem of the end of philosophy in Marx not solely by way of the circumscribed pool of references associated with the Marxist semantico-philosophical genealogy<sup>472</sup> but to travel away from the Marxist problematic to see it in light of another philosophical itinerary.

But with this shift of tact in addressing the theme of the end of philosophy more generally, Derrida does not assume a transcendental vantage over the foibles of particular conceptualisations of the end of philosophy. Yet neither can he avoid the impulse of assuming to his own discourse a step beyond the philosophical structure he designates, precisely by dint of designating it from without. Indeed, it is by outlining the structural constraints of this trans-philosophical aporia that recurs in distinct philosophical contexts, that Derrida wants to mark the line beyond which we must pass to avoid its repetition. And in doing so, in repeating the repetition by not repeating it, Derrida thereby concedes to the necessary “overflowing”<sup>473</sup> of his own meta-philosophical gesture back into the philosophical as such.<sup>474</sup>

According to this broader conceptual schema, Althusser’s status in *Theory and Practice* is not that of a strictly paradigmatic case in the Marxist semantico-

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<sup>471</sup> 5.

<sup>472</sup> In *Theory and Practice* Althusser’s trajectory is used as the principal stand-in for the Marxist type, although Gramsci’s development is briefly considered.

<sup>473</sup> 71, Derrida uses the French word “*débordement*”; a term that riffs on the word *dépassement* [the French word usually used to translate the German *aufheben*, a term frequently used by Hegel and Marx in relation to philosophy, meaning to overcome, sublimate, transcend, surpass etc.] and expresses the sense of a liquid spilling back over into itself at another level, while containing the word “bord” which in French carries all of the meanings: edge, rim, brink, verge, border, edging, margin etc.

<sup>474</sup> At the beginning of the sixth session as Derrida turns to consider Heidegger he announces:

“We are over the edge. Whence our fatigue. We are truly over the edge...“Truly” means rather that if there is going over the edge [*débordement*], if there is an overflowing effect, it is an effect of truth. It is in the name of truth that it always overflows.” 83. Here the implication is that in overflowing the Althusserian problematic, in Althusser overflowing his own problematic in *Lenin and Philosophy* by re-locating the determinant instance of philosophy in the being of practice, the truth into which Derrida is decanted, beyond the edge (Heidegger), is in fact the truth-effect of the philosophical edging, and in fact a return to philosophy.

philosophical genealogy. Rather, Althusser's trajectory (and Derrida insists that his reference to Althusser is that of a trajectory not a point<sup>475</sup>) is, for Derrida, far more complex than others. It is more complex specifically in view of how it responds to the question raised by the eleventh thesis, namely: "does the last Thesis mark the end of philosophy (which would have been satisfied with interpreting) ... or the end of only the philosophy that is satisfied with interpreting, so that what Marx calls for would still be a philosophy, but a philosophy that transforms the world"<sup>476</sup>? The distinction Derrida intends here is between an injunction that signals the end of philosophy as such – in which case philosophy *in toto* would be equated with mere interpretation – or an injunction that demands a new philosophy that does not repeat the function of philosophy as it currently stands (i.e. one satisfied with only interpreting the world), but instead establishes a new relation with the world, a relation that would be revolutionary.

The question raised by the eleventh thesis is important for Derrida's broader pedagogical inquiry into the theory/practice pair. In his estimation, Marxism is the intellectual tradition that hinges much of its explanatory power upon an investment in the transcendental status of the theory/practice pair. It is the tradition that invests most patently in the explanatory power of a philosophy of the theory/practice pair, conceived as a foundational kernel accessible prior to any of its disciplinary regionalisations. Insofar as this Marxist semantico-philosophical genealogy can be traced back to the event of the 'Theses on Feuerbach',<sup>477</sup> the question of the status of the philosophical edging in the eleventh thesis has important ramifications on exactly how the theory/practice pair is defined. And that definition will serve as the conceptual determination used by Marxist discourse to explain all further subdivisions of the theory/practice pair. It is to this question that Althusser's trajectory represents a particularly complex response, even while it remains determined by the trans-philosophical structure of the philosophical edging that Derrida will come to identify by the end of the course.

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<sup>475</sup> 10.

<sup>476</sup> 14.

<sup>477</sup> An event authorised by Engels as marking the inauguration of a "new world outlook". Derrida quotes Engels on 9.



To begin to elucidate the complexity of Althusser's trajectory, Derrida lays stress on the hermeneutic relationship Althusser establishes between the eighth thesis,<sup>478</sup> which serves as the epigraph of Althusser's 'On the Materialist Dialectic', and the eleventh thesis. Session three of the *Theory and Practice* lectures is the first that considers Althusser's work in detail. Derrida begins by recounting that in the introduction of *For Marx* Althusser specifies the types of approaches that have been taken in the French Marxist tradition to ending philosophy in the name of Marx.<sup>479</sup> According to Althusser, it was the "theoretically ambiguous language"<sup>480</sup> of the eleventh thesis that led all of these approaches astray toward the illusion of an end. This concise characterisation of the eleventh thesis forms the basis of Althusser's philosophical trajectory in relation to the question Derrida associates with the eleventh thesis (whether Marx calls for the end of philosophy as such or the end of a non-revolutionary philosophy). Indeed, for Derrida, this explains Althusser's bias toward the eighth thesis over the eleventh, and in fact clarifies how Althusser reads the eleventh thesis against its theoretically ambiguous language.

In Derrida's reading, the eighth thesis intimates a conceptual continuity between Kant and Marx. This continuity bears upon the principle they share around the status of practical reason as one of the two modalities into which an anterior unified reason is distributed: theoretical and practical.<sup>481</sup> For Kant and Marx, practice is better suited to defending reason that, in its theoretical modality alone, can be led astray into mysticism. In the eighth thesis, it is human practice that provides the rational solution – i.e. returns theory towards this unified rationality – to theoretical mysticism. This, as Derrida points out, is not the same as saying that theory as such is mystical. Rather, it means that the path toward mysticism is cleared by theory alone and only practice returns it toward reason. According to Derrida, it is this conceptual heritage that is summoned by Althusser in his citation of the eighth thesis, and it is this heritage he

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<sup>478</sup> "All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice." Derrida's translation and extended discussion on 22.

<sup>479</sup> See footnote 213.

<sup>480</sup> 40.

<sup>481</sup> Derrida makes reference to the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* in which Kant says: "I require that the critique of a pure practical reason ... be able to present its unity with speculative reason in a common principle; because in the end there can be only one and the same reason, which must differ merely in its application." 24.

will use against the theoretical ambiguity of the eleventh thesis to provide a rational solution to the ‘end of philosophy’. Derrida says about the eighth thesis:

This Thesis, then, seemingly very *practacist*, nevertheless contains this practicism within very rigorous limits, and I suppose that Althusser wanted to draw attention as much to the practicism as to its limits and conditions when he placed this Thesis as the epigraph to a text that, at the time and in that specific situation, must have functioned as a call to theoretical rigor and to the practical imperative of that theoretical rigor for Marxist discourse and Marxist practice.<sup>482</sup>

Here, the practicism that Althusser wanted to foreground is the one that results from a reading of the eleventh thesis that recognises in it a demand for a dogmatic adherence to the practical imperative as such, without theoretically reckoning with the specificities of that practice. This reading, which assumes that Marx is opposing the practical imperative (the transformation of the world) to theoretical interpretation permits the peculiar theoretical mysticism of practicism to go unchecked. It does this by deeming practice in general sufficient to defending reason from the mystificatory force of a profaned theoretical realm rather than from what specifically leads it astray, as per the eighth thesis. In other words, this reading posits that the practical imperative is to change the world practically rather than theorise it as such. Doing it in practice rather than in theory is *the* practical imperative. It thereby blocks the way for the practical imperative to take on the specific content of a recourse to theory that might attend to specifying what the practical imperative ought to be vis-à-vis whatever has led theory to mysticism. For Althusser, therefore, the practical imperative, the human practice that was necessary at that moment to find the solution to what had lead theory to mysticism, (i.e. practicism), was theoretical practice.

In this light, Derrida emphasises what Althusser says in the introduction of *For Marx* about such a misreading: “It was, *and always will be*, only a short step from there to theoretical pragmatism.” It is on the strength of this statement that Derrida proposes the link between Althusser’s condemnation of the death of philosophy reading in the introduction and the intentions behind his use of the eighth thesis as the epigraph of ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’. Derrida glosses the statement, maintaining that it is the eleventh thesis, with its theoretically ambiguous language, “which breaks down even

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<sup>482</sup> 22.

the theoretical or theoreticist guardrails of the eighth thesis” and which “leads to theoretical pragmatism.” Then, a bit later, he notes that:

the pragmatism that is denounced as a deleterious, politically harmful effect of this headlong rush toward death of philosophy, in making a religion of the 11<sup>th</sup> thesis and its theoretically ambiguous content, this pragmatism that is denounced (empiricism, opportunism, tacticism without strategy, improvisation, relativist casuistry etc.)...is a theoretical pragmatism, occurring within theory. Not only *activist* pragmatism.<sup>483</sup>

In the death of philosophy reading of the eleventh thesis, it is a specific theory – one that totalises the conception of the practical imperative by opposing it to theory as such – that leads theory in general astray, and that consequently stifles practice. In this way, practice is theoretically delimited according to a negative attribution of whatever is deemed to be theoretical. And here the theoretical can be made into a storehouse for any and all practices that call into question the practical nature of a practice subordinated to a theoretical pragmatism. For this reason, it was necessary for Althusser “to arm theory against pragmatism”. But at the same time, he had to remain committed to the principle that it is in human practice alone that there is a rational solution to what has led theory astray. Derrida summarises Althusser’s conditions for a satisfactory response to the practicist reading of the eleventh thesis: “one is going to have to arm theoretical practice against theoretical pragmatism and bring out the theoretical and practical conditions of a non-pragmatic practice, a non-pragmatic theoretical practice.”<sup>484</sup> The eighth thesis, therefore, provides these strict conditions that are obscured by the theoretically ambiguous (conditionless) language of the eleventh thesis.

Let us return to the questions that launched Derrida’s appraisal of Althusser’s trajectory. He asked whether in a particular Marxist discourse the event of the eleventh thesis is considered to mark the end of philosophy as such or the end of a particular configuration of philosophy, and on that basis, how the theory/practice pair is made to function. We have seen that, according to Derrida, Althusser did not consider the eleventh thesis to mark the end of philosophy. Responses that took the

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<sup>483</sup> 40/43.

<sup>484</sup> 40.

end of philosophy route were in thrall to an implicit theoretical pragmatism. For that reason Althusser abandoned thinking the death of philosophy as such. Instead he pursued the configuration of a Marxist philosophy that would establish a new relationship to the world, precisely as an enactment of the practical imperative, i.e. as the practical solution to whatever had led theory astray. In Derrida's reading, the peculiar features of Althusser's philosophical construction were conditioned by the imperative to seek recourse to practice in order to find the rational solution to what led theory toward mysticism, as is advanced in the eighth thesis. And Derrida notes how this recourse to practice presided over what appeared to be simply a return to philosophy against the wishes of the eleventh thesis: "Notice that Althusser, underlining the present of the formula "it is always only a short step," indeed intends, at the moment he intervenes, to take a position in a current, determinate situation, in relation to current political effects. That is important if we are to read this text appropriately."<sup>485</sup> The determinate nature of Althusser's intervention – the necessity to reject the end of philosophy reading and confront the challenge of constructing a Marxist philosophy in spite of its Stalinist baggage – was therefore indicative of its practical responsiveness to the demands of reason.

It is on the issue of how Althusser aims to found this new philosophy – this "architectonic project" as Derrida calls it in an effort to foreground the systematising impulse that carries through all efforts to found a conceptual edifice in the name of human reason<sup>486</sup> – that the question of the function of the theory/practice pair is addressed. Derrida cites the final paragraph of the introduction of *For Marx* where Althusser appends a proviso to the advent of this new Marxist philosophy: that it must gain "theoretical consistency". With this, Derrida clarifies the specificity of Althusser's gesture, beyond traditional efforts to found a philosophical system. He says:

To give theoretical consistency to Marxist philosophy doesn't simply mean that there is – or must be – a Marxist philosophy to be constructed or elaborated, that Marxist philosophy is a *constructum* to come; it also means that Marxist philosophical construction must have

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<sup>485</sup> 43. In *For Marx* it appears as "It was, and always will be, [il n'y a toujours qu'un pas] only a short step from there to theoretical pragmatism."

<sup>486</sup> 45 but also 23 – 30 for Derrida on Kant's system of reason.

theoretical consistency, in other words that the theoretical recourse is the principle one, the tribunal of last resort for judging the philosophical character. The theoretical is no longer one aspect, one side, a determination of the philosophical, but the opposite. The philosophical appears before the theoretical tribunal and constitutes a region of the theoretical, of the theoretical in general, or of theoretical practice in general.<sup>487</sup>

What Derrida claims here is that since Althusser has refused to equate the theoretical as such with philosophy, by abandoning the end of philosophy reading of the eleventh thesis, the theoretical domain continues to offer its services to him, even if certain modalities of theory, certain philosophies, do not. And it is on the basis that the theoretical domain is anterior to particular philosophies, that philosophy is merely one of its sub-domains, that theory is able to serve as the judge of whether Marxist philosophy “*has any theoretical right to existence?*”<sup>488</sup>

We saw earlier that Derrida put forward the claim that what distinguished the Marxist semantico-philosophical genealogy was its investment in the explanatory power of a philosophy of the theory/practice pair. What appears to occur in Althusser’s trajectory, however, is a complete reversal of this paradigm. It is no longer philosophy alone that provides access to the ontological status of the theory/practice pair prior to all subsequent disciplinary regionalisations. Rather, it is the domain of theory that presides over philosophy – philosophy becoming one of *its* sub-domains – and which is therefore invested with the explanatory power to judge the sufficiency of a philosophy. But what Derrida detects in this gesture is a reversal that, in spite of its unconventional trajectory, is driven by the same demand for “philosophical self-responsibility”<sup>489</sup> that accompanies all philosophical efforts to authenticate a philosophical system. In this manoeuvre, by which theory is promoted to a transcendental position where it can judge the adequacy of philosophy, Derrida observes a repetition of the “circle of self-foundation ... that defines the philosophical as such.”<sup>490</sup> In other words, every philosophy contains this internal relation of dependency within its own discourse. Derrida adds that every “philosophy puts itself to the test of circular self-responsibility, every philosophy practices or tries to practice

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<sup>487</sup> 45.

<sup>488</sup> Derrida quoting from Althusser on 48.

<sup>489</sup> 49.

<sup>490</sup> 50.

the test of the self-reflexive circle that consists in taking itself for its object.”<sup>491</sup> Yet, even if Althusser was unaware of the continuation of this trait of philosophy into his own enterprise, which Derrida suspects he was not, his insistence that “Marxism is the only philosophy that theoretically faces up to this test”<sup>492</sup> advances a claim on the exceptional status of Marxism regarding this self-responsibility. Althusser considered Marxism as the body of thought that uniquely fulfils the conditions for its own self-foundation. Yet, paradoxically, the conditions that Marx’s philosophy would have to face up to had not been theoretically elaborated until Althusser himself carried this out. How is it possible to attribute such a status to Marxism if this test of self-responsibility has to be applied from without?

As we have seen in chapter 2 of this thesis, Althusser’s proposition was that Marxism faced up to the test according to which a philosophy is judged as having the right to exist. It did this by having already specified its philosophical distinctiveness from Hegelian philosophy. However, this specification remained in a “practical state” and had not gained “theoretical consistency”; it had not undergone the test of theory, such that Marxist philosophy could secure this right to exist. Since theory presided over its theoretical sub-domain, philosophy, it was theory alone that could judge the sufficiency of Marxist philosophy. But no sooner does Althusser constitute the criteria for this theoretical test than he advances a whole series of unquestioned philosophical determinations (production, technique, humanity, labour) as the final recourse of theoretical accountability. In other words, the envelopment of Althusser’s theoretical criteria by certain philosophemes surreptitiously re-replaces philosophy into the dominant position of the dependency relation between theory and philosophy. Derrida follows the consequences of this subtle philosophical envelopment:

What, then, has happened? Well, at least this (another dialectical circle recognised as independently necessary): that producing the definition of Theory, comes back, by the end of this definitional excursus, to the place out of which all of these definitions were produced or emitted, namely to the Theory (uppercase) of dialectical materialism. Indeed if, Theory (uppercase) is dialectical materialism, another name for Marxist philosophy in its specificity, it is also, and I am quoting, “the Theory of practice in general”, that is to say the Theory of all

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<sup>491</sup> 51.

<sup>492</sup> Derrida quoting Althusser, 51.

those definitions. It is defined and defining, the general condition of all those definitions and one defined object among all those definitions.”<sup>493</sup>

By the end of “On the Materialist Dialectic”, Althusser’s theoretical domain, like the domain of philosophy over which it presides, has become subordinate to its own definitional transcendence. Althusser confers upon the theoretical domain, as an object of his discourse, the value of ultimate explanatory recourse but does so within that very theoretical domain. In other words, the theoretical realm that attributes to theory a transcendental status is bestowed its own credentials as a result of its own defining practice. This move is only possible by mobilising philosophical shibboleths. For Derrida, this is a circularity that ascribes an irreducible jurisdiction to a domain whose sovereignty is founded on tautology.<sup>494</sup>

The uncovering of this tautological structure was of course registered within Althusser’s own trajectory. It was the “theoreticist deviation”<sup>495</sup> which was at the heart of his previous definition of philosophy: Theory of theoretical practice. If the practical imperative that initially inspired Althusser’s response had been the need for a theoretical practice that could correct a prevailing practicist deviation, it had unfortunately resulted in a swing towards a new theoreticism. Just as the end of philosophy adherents had observed their absolute rejection of the theoretical domain, necessarily without theoretical grounds – other than those that make practice its own self-reference – so Althusser’s theoretical response to the eleventh thesis made theory its own self-reference by leaning on certain unexamined philosophemes.

I have already outlined the ensuing development of Althusser’s trajectory in light of this self-criticism in the second chapter of this thesis. What Derrida registers in this shift, is that Althusser’s new definition of Marxist philosophy as a ‘new practice of philosophy’<sup>496</sup> continues to posit the place of philosophy from within a philosophical register. But on this occasion the philosophical register “is no longer simply that of

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<sup>493</sup> 67.

<sup>494</sup> A similar critique is levelled at Engels’ effort to transform philosophy into science in *Anti-Düring* in Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 50 n. 24.

<sup>495</sup> Derrida quotes from Althusser’s ‘Elements of Self-Criticism’, 69.

<sup>496</sup> ‘Lenin and Philosophy’ is the reference here.

philosophy defining or situating itself; rather, this defining discourse is itself also an act, a political gesture, a practice, it is no longer a purely theoretical language, nor even an essentially theoretical practice.”<sup>497</sup> In other words, Althusser converts the theoreticist self-reference – the fact that philosophy constitutes itself as subject and object of its own defining – into grounds permitting yet another definition of philosophy as practice. However, unlike his theoreticist definition of philosophy this one places the determining instance beyond its own referential domain. But this altogether new effort to overcome philosophy, this attempt to re-locate the determinant instance outside of its theoretical jurisdiction (class struggle in ‘Lenin and Philosophy’), overflows back into the philosophical, insofar as it remains convinced by the authority of its instantiative power. Derrida explains:

The Althusserian definition of Marxist practice of philosophy intends...to overflow the philosophical as such, once that is defined and even situated in a field (for example class struggle) that it doesn’t control, and which is far from being reduced to its philosophical instance...[But] the utterance proposing that the definition or situation of philosophy is not in itself philosophical is always difficult, unstable. Nothing is more philosophical than the act of defining or situating the philosophical within the general field of what is, of being as this or that, here production or practice.<sup>498</sup>

A theoretical register that re-inscribes the determination of philosophy beyond its own limits while assuming to itself a non-philosophical but nonetheless authoritative value is one that spills back into philosophy. It returns to itself on two accounts. First, it converts the non-philosophical determination of philosophy into a philosopheme, i.e. it brings the determinant instance (being as practice, class struggle, the economy etc.) into the ambit of the known in order then to exteriorise and authenticate its determining force. Second, it accords its own theoretical voice license to define philosophy in this way.

For Derrida, these unintended concessions to the sovereignty of philosophy reflect a symptomatic effect of the structure of the ‘inner edge’ of philosophy. By ‘inner edge’ Derrida means the structuring opposition internal to philosophy which assumes that

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<sup>497</sup> Derrida, *Theory and Practice*, 71

<sup>498</sup> 73.



the division between itself and its outside is irreducible. Derrida will go on to identify this structure in the Heideggerian problematic following his lengthy excursion across Althusser's trajectory which began with his response to the death of philosophy motif in Marx. And indeed, this impasse that plagues philosophies or anti-philosophies predicated on the existence of the inner edge of philosophy (philosophy/non-philosophy, theory/practice, interpretation/change, knowledge/being etc.) will form the principal concern of his teaching in this *agrégation* course on Theory and Practice. In one of the few moments when he reflects on his own pedagogical itinerary in the *Theory and Practice* lectures, Derrida says:

Naturally, the problematic I am proposing here by referring to the inner edge of the philosophical is not, as I see it, meant to produce demarcations, lines of demarcation or reassuring oppositions such as: here you have what is on this side, here you have what goes beyond... On the contrary, this problematic takes aim at the edge, it aims to problematize the security that a border provides, the trait that forms an edge. In the end the question would be... "what is an edge?" why a border? What is the structure of something like an edge?<sup>499</sup>

In the course of his seminars, therefore, Derrida's aim had been to avoid reproducing the symptoms that were common to both Althusser and Heidegger's efforts to overflow the edge of philosophy. The way he had tried to do this was by tracing the irresolvable contradictions that their two problematics ran into to a common structure. This structure corresponded to the line within philosophy that demarcates the existence of two distinct realms: the philosophical and non-philosophical, or inside and outside. Derrida's gesture, then, would be to put this edge, the function of this edge, the fact of its functionality, into question, without necessarily determining a place where this edging would be overcome. This he did in a context where the politico-pedagogical ambitions that the GREPH situation imposed, played a central role in shaping the form and content of Derrida's pedagogical practice. This pedagogical gesture, which demonstrated a profound familiarity with the death of philosophy complex in its Marxist instantiation while enacting at once a refusal and an observance of the conceptual paralysis that punctuated Althusser's trajectory, precluded certain propositions and themes that would re-appear in Derrida's 1993 text *Specters of Marx*. In the next section of this chapter I will trace the continuities and

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<sup>499</sup> 71.

discontinuities of Derrida's pedagogical gesture in *Theory and Practice* around his mobilization of the end of philosophy motif in *Specters of Marx*.

#### 4.4 Spectres of Lefebvre and The Death of Philosophy

In the previous sections of this chapter, I challenged the canonical narrative that considers *Specters of Marx* to be Derrida's first direct engagement with a Marxian and Marxist problematic and with the question of philosophy in Marx. In fact, *Specters of Marx* was a late return to many of the insights, positions and preoccupations that had punctuated Derrida's experience in GREPH and his teaching of the mid-seventies period. These concerns and insights therefore bore the imprint of the specific political context that the activities of GREPH were responding to. But they also inherited a particular problematic that was peculiar to the experience of certain philosophers in the French Communist Party who had at different moments attempted to re-articulate the role of philosophy in Marx against prevailing interpretations of the end of philosophy motif in Marx among the party orthodoxy.

I showed how Derrida recast this problematic, which principally concerned the position of philosophy and the philosopher, within the party apparatus to make it relevant for his own struggles within the educational institution. I also showed that in his teaching practice of this period, he had used Althusser's trajectory in response to the death of philosophy reading of Marx as a pedagogical resource to base his own counter-institutional inhabitation of the *agrégé-répétiteur* role. He did this within the framework of a broader political project that aimed to displace the reproductive logic of the pedagogical relation and by extension the philosophical institution in the French context. Derrida was able to extract from Althusser's trajectory, which was foremost concerned with how to establish the role and content of philosophy in Marx and the party, a set of transferrable problematics that would enable him to disclose the structural constraints surrounding a political and philosophical project concerning the educational institution.

The pragmatist philosophy that underpinned the modernising ambitions of the Haby Reform and the conservatism that drove the defenders of the philosophical institution formed two opposing sides of a structuring dynamic that GREPH sought to address. It is clear from the fact that Derrida repurposed the death of philosophy motif to diagnose this situation that he considered it to be based on an analogous structure to the one that determined the end of philosophy in Marx. On one side, there were the champions of reformism and social modernisation; they saw the outmodedness of a particular philosophical institution as justification for abandoning philosophy altogether in favour of a pragmatist realism. On the other side, the traditionalists and the bastions of academic elitism regarded the realm of ideas and philosophical inquiry immune to all such external developments. What connected these two positions, and brought their opposition into unity, was the function of the edge in maintaining their definitions of philosophy and its outside. In *Theory and Practice*, Derrida illuminated the way that philosophical discourses stage their own overcoming by converting philosophy and its beyond into philosophemes. In a similar vein, the forces that were forming around the question of the philosophical institution in the mid-seventies shared a philosophical conception of the site of philosophy and its outside. From opposing directions, the two discourses conceived of philosophy as a discrete realm of ideas that did not intermingle with the external world: one from an affirmative angle aiming to counteract political infiltration and the other from a pejorative angle aiming to justify its obsolescence.

Derrida's late return to Marx would resume this line of inquiry about the function of the edge in maintaining philosophy in a state of bounded separation from its outside. But the stakes that surrounded the question of the politics of the philosophical institution had radically shifted in the twenty-year period that spanned Derrida's activities in GREPH and his return to Marx in *Specters*. In the context, this return coincided with a radically new political landscape on the world stage.

The presentation of *Specters* was prompted by the question that came from the organisers of the conference at which it was delivered: "What is living and what is

dead in Marxism today?”<sup>500</sup> This was the today of 1993, the today of the “End of History”, which Francis Fukuyama had triumphantly proclaimed just the year before – a motif that, in spite of its polemic, had indeed intimated some hard truths about the prospects of actually-existing Marxist politics on the geopolitical stage. After a pervasive turn by European Communist Parties to social democracy, their inevitable retreat into the shadows of their Socialist counterparts, the splitting up and dissolution of the Soviet Union and the consequent exposure of recently independent nations to the forces of neo-colonialism; the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked, for many, the terminus point of all political aspirations built upon a Marxist framework. The question of the relevance of Marxism to the contemporary moment, therefore, would cast much of what Derrida had resolved in his former engagement with Marx in a wholly new light. The most novel and pressing aspect with which this re-assessment would have to contend was the near total disappearance of an institution that could credibly bare the internationalist political ambitions associated with Marx. This new aspect was acknowledged in the text’s subtitle: ‘The New International’. In a related swing, Derrida’s reappraisal of his seventies position would have to deal with the fact that the political reference in Marx had been all but neutralised in the transnational academic context he was working within.

Yet, notwithstanding the conjunctural specificities of this new situation, the triumphant proclamations of the end of Marxism and the end of history that rose during this period had an unmistakably anachronistic ring to them. In *Specters* Derrida said:

Many young people today...probably no longer sufficiently realize it: the eschatological themes of the “end of history,” of the “end of Marxism,” of the “end of philosophy,” of the “ends of man,” of the “last man” and so forth were, in the ’50s, that is 40 years ago, our daily bread. We had this bread of apocalypse in our mouths naturally, already, just as naturally as that which I nicknamed after the fact, in 1980, the “apocalyptic tone in philosophy.”<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Derrida delivered the lectures on which the book *Specters of Marx* was based on April 22 and 23, 1993 at the University of California, Riverside. The lectures opened an international conference entitled “Wither Marxism?”. See ‘Editors’ Introduction’ in Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, ix.

<sup>501</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 15.

For Derrida, the question of what was living and dead in Marxism brought with it a heavy dose of *déjà vu*. For those who had experienced the immediate aftermath of the de-Stalinisation process and observed the subsequent shifts within the theoretical conjuncture, there was something very asynchronous about the philosophical and political themes that were gaining currency toward the end of the century. It was in light of this uncanny repetition that Derrida resurrected the conceptual and political lineage of the end of philosophy in Marx to reconsider the relation between the political and the philosophical in Marx. And in particular, he exhumed that impasse as it pertained precisely to the theoretical and biographical trajectory of Henri Lefebvre.

In what follows, I will look specifically at how Derrida thematises the death of philosophy motif in *Specters of Marx*. I will stick within the conceptual and referential co-ordinates I have drawn from Derrida's early engagement with Marx. In principle, this means tracing the status of eleventh thesis and the conceptual structure that makes the death of philosophy interpellation an inevitability in the text. The way I will treat this concern is by framing my reading of the text around a couple of passages from *Specters* itself, but also from Derrida's 1998 addendum to *Specters; Marx & Sons*. Derrida wrote this text in an effort to respond to the various critical appraisals *Specters* was met with after its publication; particularly by those Marxist intellectuals whose terrain Derrida seemed to be stepping into after so many years of silence. Respondents included Fredric Jameson, Antonio Negri and Terry Eagleton amongst others.<sup>502</sup> As this analysis focuses on tracing the development of this problematic into Derrida's late writing, it will not be an exhaustive account of the contents of *Specters of Marx*.

After spotlighting some areas where Derrida gives a more explicit gloss of what *Specters* is actually about, I will then pursue the significance of a seemingly ancillary reference made to an essay by Maurice Blanchot in the text's opening chapter. The essay from which the fragment is extracted is 'The End of Philosophy', a text that first appeared in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in August 1959 as a critical review essay of Lefebvre's two volume autobiography *La Somme et le reste* published earlier that

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<sup>502</sup> Michael Sprinker Ed., *Ghostly Demarcations A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, (London Verso, 1999).

year.<sup>503</sup> Although Derrida does not mention Lefebvre by name, and in fact manages to cull all indication that the essay he cites pertains to Lefebvre's formulation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx,<sup>504</sup> I would like to follow the ramifications of this citational transmission. In excavating this essay, I am aiming to read back into *Specters* a historically specific case in which the impasse constitutive of the Marxian political and philosophical heritage becomes distinctly apparent in the biography and theory of Lefebvre. And I will show how it is out of impasse formulated by Blanchot which relays Lefebvre's concrete and theoretical negotiations with the end of philosophy motif in Marx, that Derrida extracts a conceptual figure for re-thinking the relation between the political and philosophical via Marx. My rationale for going on this detour rather than dealing exclusively with the text of *Specters* is that, insofar as Derrida claims that in *Specters* he attempted to take a position without presenting a hypothesis in the present in the proper sense – and here the allusion was to his attempt to negotiate with the necessary temporal dislocation of politics – it is pertinent to trace how the textual and conceptual vestiges in the text encounter the present in order to get a sense of what is at stake in Derrida's transformative-performative politics. A politic that Derrida himself will describe as a “heterodox or paradoxical transposition of the 11<sup>th</sup> of the *Theses on Feuerbach*.”<sup>505</sup>

One of the principal considerations that Derrida uses in *Specters* to frame the content of this academic presentation on Marx is the fact that the political reference in Marx, the political charge in the eleventh thesis, has been almost entirely neutralised within the academic sphere. For Derrida, the injunction in Marx to confront the present conditions of the real world in deeds has been supplanted by a veritable neo-theoreticism. As he says early on in *Specters*:

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<sup>503</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. The text was later published as 'lentes funérailles' [literally slow funeral] in the essay collection *L'amitié* from 1971. In Elizabeth Rottenberg's English translation of the same text, the title appears as 'Slow Obsequies' in Blanchot, *Friendship*.

<sup>504</sup> The title of Blanchot's essay riffs on the title of the first part of *La Somme et le reste*: "Crisis of Philosophy." This title itself repeated one used in *Problèmes actuels du Marxisme*: 'Crisis of Marxism and Crisis of Philosophy'. This was the text for which Lefebvre was supposedly expelled from the Party. See Henri Lefebvre, *Problèmes actuels du Marxisme*, (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1958), 5 – 24.

<sup>505</sup> "In *Specters of Marx*, the presentation of the hypothesis does not present *itself*, in the proper sense. The hypothesis or thesis is *not posed*. Even if it did present itself or 'pose itself', it would do so without manifesto or auto-manifestation. Without presenting itself in the present, it nevertheless takes a position, as one says – its 'position' or rather 'supposition', that is the 'responsibility' thus assumes – *as a transformation*, and therefore as a *heterodox or paradoxical transposition* of the 11<sup>th</sup> of the *Theses on Feuerbach*." in Sprinker, *Demarcations*, 218-19.

One can sense a coming fashion or stylishness ... in the university [which] would be destined, whether one wishes it or not, to depoliticize profoundly the Marxist reference ... People would be ready to accept the return of Marx or the return to Marx, on the condition that a silence is maintained about Marx's injunction not just to decipher but to act and to make the deciphering (the interpretation) into a transformation that "changes the world"<sup>506</sup>

The explicit deployment of the eleventh thesis here casts the philosophical-interpretive canonisation of Marx within the university as a turn away from, or simultaneous with, a repression of the political exigency to affect real change in the world. Against this characterisation, Derrida defines his own project:

It is something altogether other that I wish to attempt here as I turn or return to Marx ... it is "something other" to the point that I will have occasion to insist even more on what commands us today, without delay, to do everything we can so as to avoid the neutralizing anesthesia of a new theoreticism, and to prevent a philosophico-philological return to Marx from prevailing. Let us spell things out, let us insist; to do everything we can so that it does not *prevail*, but not to avoid its taking place, because it remains just as necessary.<sup>507</sup>

This "something other" with which Derrida identifies his own project appears to entail a concerted avoidance of the depoliticization of Marx, at the same time that it entails a willingness to accept the eventuality of this very depoliticization because it is somehow unavoidable. In other words, Derrida advocates that we strive for the political in Marx, not to be satisfied with a Marxist discourse that merely interprets the world, even while the assimilation of Marxism into the innocuous realm of academic discourse is in some sense inexorable.

Beyond this tentative outline given in *Specters*, Derrida gives a more fully-fledged account of his position in his essay 'Marx & Sons'. In the opening section of that response to his critics, he foregrounds the questions that *Specters* set out to ask. These were the question of the political, the philosophical and the "topoi all of us believe we can recognize in common beneath these names – particularly the name Marx".<sup>508</sup> Later in the text he fleshes these questions out further, suggesting that they asked how we are to delimit, firstly the phenomenality of the 'political' as such, that is to say,

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<sup>506</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, 32.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>508</sup> Sprinker, *Demarcations*, 317.

what in phenomenal terms distinguishes the political from any other form of experience at any given moment, and how the conditions under which the political becomes available determine its content. This is especially important insofar as the political is, in certain end of philosophy readings, the very thing that demarcates the threshold of philosophy. Secondly, Derrida asks how are we to delimit 'philosophy' as onto-theology. That is, how do we respond to a philosophy that calls for a future state of things on the basis of an ontological claim about the present and according to a kind of faith, where the emergence of this future state enjoins the faith to the event in the future that it promises? How to think an ontology (a determination of being that can serve as a foundational reassurance for thought) in relation to the promised future that is connected to that ontology but that is also in excess of that ontology? And thirdly, how do we think these two questions together through the political and philosophical heritage denoted by the name 'Marx'? The questions then that Derrida claims to raise in *Specters* are: (1) How should we distinguish the actuality of the political? (2) How to respond to a philosophy that has as a constitutive part of its ontology a prospect of its outside or of its overcoming? (3) How to think these two questions together through the heritage of Marxism?

To begin to explore how Derrida responds to these questions, I would like now to turn to the fragment of Blanchot's essay that Derrida cites in the first chapter of *Specters*. Derrida quotes a large fragment from *The End of Philosophy* and meditates on the temporal frictions that run through its portrayal of how philosophy anticipates its end. The quotation arises in the context of a reflection over the resurgence of motifs of the end that, within neo-conservative rhetoric, corresponds to neoliberalism as the resolution of all political antagonisms. The full citation reads as follows:

This promotion of philosophy, which has become the all-powerful force in our world and the shape of our destiny, can only coincide with its *disappearance*, announcing at least the beginning of its *putting in the ground*. This *death of philosophy* would belong, therefore, to our philosophical time. The death does not date from 1917, nor even from 1857, the year in which Marx, as if performing a carnival test of strength, would have overturned the system. For the last century and a half, with his name as with that of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, it is philosophy itself that has been affirming or realizing its own end, whether it understands that end as the accomplishment of absolute knowledge, its theoretical suppression linked to its practical realization, the nihilist movement in which all values are engulfed, or finally by the



culmination of metaphysics, precursor sign of another possibility that does not yet have a name. This then is the sunset that from now on accompanies every thinker, a strange *funeral* moment which the philosophical spirit celebrates in an exaltation that is, moreover, often joyful, leading its slow funeral procession during which it expects, in one way or another, to obtain its *resurrection*. And of course, such an expectation, crisis and feast of negativity, experience pushed as far as it will go to find out what resists, does not touch only on philosophy...<sup>509</sup>

In this, Derrida reconstitutes something like the figure of the ‘philosophical edging’ that had appeared a recursive feature of philosophy in his pedagogical treatment of Althusser and Heidegger. However, here the death of philosophy which is announced from within philosophy and which anticipates the horizon of its own life after death, does not absolutely guarantee an overspilling back into philosophy, but contains the possibility of something like a complete break. In Blanchot’s image, in order for there to be an advancement of philosophy, philosophy must be interred, that is killed-off absolutely; it must come to a complete end. Yet in order to be able to carry this out, the philosophy that commands the death of philosophy must no longer determine what is to come in order for the advancement to take place. In other words, the promise of the advancement of philosophy can only be realised insofar as the gauge that measures the advancement is truly abandoned in the gesture that aims to attain that advancement. This abandonment is the very measure of its development from the vantage point<sup>510</sup> of a philosophy that stipulates its own death as an authentic way forward. What this means is that the certainty of the demand that compels the death of philosophy comes into crisis by the prospect of its very realisation.

For Derrida, this not-knowing whether the expectation of the advancement prefigures what is to come, i.e. whether the certainty of the anticipation would compromise the necessarily contingent status of an event that would both elude and align with that anticipation, is necessary for the future to continue to be a vector of possibilities. Derrida designates this necessary unknowing as a “messianicity without messianism” which he describes as an “active preparation, anticipation against the backdrop of a

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<sup>509</sup> Quoted in Derrida, *Specters*, 36. Emphases in the original.

<sup>510</sup> In the second session of *Theory and Practice* Derrida mobilises one of the senses of the word *bord* to mean ‘verge’, ‘brink’, ‘bank’, to suggest that the internal edge of philosophy pertains to a vantage point or a concern/concerning.

horizon, but also exposure without horizon, and therefore an irreducible amalgam of desire and anguish, affirmation and fear, promise and threat.”<sup>511</sup>

To clarify these quite abstract conceptual claims that Derrida takes from Blanchot’s essay, I want to introduce the broader thematic concerns that ‘The End of Philosophy’ deals with. The fragment from Blanchot’s essay fulfils a variety of functions in *Specters*. It telescopes the ends of 1956 and the return of the ends of 1993 and obliquely draws together many of the major themes of the text; the inheritance of a Marxist injunction primarily from the eleventh thesis, the aporia of bringing justice into presence and the spectrality of a philosopheme that mandates an extra-philosophical gesture. Indeed, it is primarily from this citation that Derrida extracts the conceptual elements that constitute the revenant to figure the relation of politics and philosophy he is attempting to establish in the name of Marx.

The fragment also summons links to a world beyond *Specters*. Though he tells us that the article was devoted to a good half-dozen autocritiques written by former Marxists or communists in the 50’s, Derrida tells us nothing about the philosophical spirit that bears itself to its resting place and why. Yet following the ellipses at the end of its citation by Derrida, Blanchot goes on to say:

Henri Lefebvre, who has seen his way down all the paths of this critical time, is a witness to this disturbance who cannot be challenged. He lives, intensely, as a truly philosophical man who can no longer simply be a philosopher, this enterprise of overcoming and of the end, learning, in the severe figure of the militant, how to write his certificate of death and to make himself his own testamentary executor.<sup>512</sup>

To summarise Blanchot’s very rich essay, it traces Lefebvre’s fraught experience of moving from philosophy to political militancy in order to highlight a historically specific instance of the aporia of Marx’s onto-theology. Blanchot describes how Lefebvre’s attempt to overcome philosophy – by committing himself to political activism in his adherence to the Communist Party – was hindered by the fact that the

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<sup>511</sup> Sprinker, *Demarcations*, 249.

<sup>512</sup> Blanchot, *Friendship*, 88.

real conditions delimiting transformative political action were such that he paradoxically had to remain a philosopher.

The question that Blanchot takes seriously with regard to Lefebvre's adherence to the party was how he was able to "accept a form of suicide consisting in a survival so trite, that of a system in which everything that must be thought and everything that must be known is once again defined dogmatically: Hegel certainly overturned, but into platitude?"<sup>513</sup> How, Blanchot asks, does the thinker who has reached the limit of philosophy and passes beyond the threshold on the basis of the philosophical imperative to put philosophy to death, go without recognizing in the dogmatism of the party a comparably suffocating sterility? In fact, he does, but what is to be done with this reality? Lefebvre has followed the philosophical path to its very end by burying it in joining the party. He cannot philosophize and all the while claim to be a militant. He cannot claim to be alive and demystified and at the same time renounce his resolution to the end. And indeed, does not the contingency of this occurrence, the misalignment between the philosophical anticipation and the reality of life after the death of philosophy, precisely live up to the criteria of sheer contingency of a death of philosophy proper?

Blanchot claims that in the extremity of the demand for an authentic death of philosophy something "more radical is necessarily required by this decision or by this perilous leap of thought, with a view to its overcoming."<sup>514</sup> Yet, having borne philosophy to its resting place in order to attain political life, Lefebvre finds that the political life attained at the other side of philosophy is not freed from philosophy. Political life beyond the death of philosophy is in fact replete with disavowed philosophical abstractions. Since the anticipation that certifies the departure from philosophy exists in an uncertain state beyond the death of philosophy – where its existence remains necessary to judge the validity of the act while its inexistence is necessary to the authentic realisation of the act – this spectral charge is at the basis of what allows Lefebvre to philosophically confront the metaphysics of Stalinism while remaining constant to his commitment to renouncing all philosophical systems.

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 84 – 85.

<sup>514</sup> 89.

Stalinist dogmatism gives flesh to his philosophical spirit, it gives life to the philosopher in Lefebvre who no longer wants to *be* as a philosopher but who is nevertheless instrumentalised by the party to parrot the edicts of diamat. And so, it is by way of a modality of philosophy that has been brought into a state of spectrality – philosophy eradicated but in whose eradication the trace of its anticipation cannot be entirely erased – that Lefebvre disengages Stalinist-Marxism. This is the radical gesture that exceeds the opposition of life under the terror of an actualised philosophy and death under the illusion of life as a metaphysician.

At one point in the essay Blanchot says of Lefebvre:

as a communist, Lefebvre remains a philosopher; he is a philosopher, he is a communist, not, certainly, in a clear separation that would make life easy, but rather a division that he tries to make dialectical but that cannot be dialectical, that is but an acute wrenching, a perpetual confrontation<sup>515</sup>

and elsewhere:

To the extent that he appeared as the “representative” of Marxist thought because of his talent and active thought...it was possible for him to maintain an interpretation of Marxist thought that he believed most open to the future, one that brought difficulties to the fore, that clarified questions and showed that truth was not yet settled...To this extent he had the right to judge that, in the very fact that he was expressing this thought while remaining under the discipline of official Marxism, he was making the latter responsible for it and thereby enriching it with this responsibility.<sup>516</sup>

Here, Blanchot alludes to the idea that Lefebvre was able to remap the structure of the political in the name of Marx. Through a peculiar type of dissident and spectral philosophical gesture, which was paradoxically constant to his commitment to renouncing philosophy, Lefebvre was able to blur the line between philosophy and politics in such a way that the actions of the party were themselves put into question as to their revolutionary efficacy. But as the first quote suggests, the elision of these two identities, philosopher and communist, was not an easy operation. Indeed,

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<sup>515</sup> Blanchot, *Friendship*, 89.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Blanchot goes as far as to say that the extremity of Lefebvre's attempt to overcome philosophy uniquely demonstrates the un-dialectizable structure at the root of Marx's injunction. And only because he confronted the challenge concretely can he clarify that un-dialectizable structure in *La Somme et le reste*.

Blanchot therefore takes from the concrete experience of Lefebvre, as it appears in *La Somme et le reste*, a figuration of the undialectizable feat of the death of philosophy injunction in Marx. And this figuration re-draws the structure of the political in Marx by connecting it neither to an absolutely eradicated philosophy, nor an absolutely self-present ontology, but rather to one that exists in the half-life of a lingering philosophical expectation that continues to have a critical charge and a commitment to the renunciation of all philosophical systems.<sup>517</sup>

This figuration foreshadows Derrida's own gesture and he will go on to thematise the need to take inspiration from a certain spirit of Marxism.<sup>518</sup> But in *Specters* this figure is repurposed as a response to the absolute denial of the political in Marx. In 'Marx & Sons' he clarifies the stakes of this gesture:

What should come after this deconstruction of Marxist 'ontology', in my view, is exactly the opposite of a depoliticization, or a withering away of political effectivity. Rather, the point, as I see it, of radically re-examining the premises subtending the relationship between 'Marx', theory and philosophy is to...effect a different kind of repoliticization of a certain inheritance from Marx. First, by shifting that inheritance toward a dimension of the political divested of everything which – for better but especially for worse, in our modernity – has welded the political to the ontological.<sup>519</sup>

The situation such as it confronts Derrida in 1993 is that Marx must be re-politicized against the neo-theoreticist dominance within the academic establishment. But as we saw, Derrida does not want to disavow the inevitability of the depoliticization of Marx

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<sup>517</sup> In a similar formulation Derrida will say: "...if there is a spirit of Marxism which I will never renounce, it is not only the critical idea or the questioning stance (a consistent deconstruction must insist on them even as it also learns that this is not the last or first word). It is even more a certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise that one can try to liberate from any dogmatics and even from any metaphysico-religious determination, from any *messianism*. And a promise must promise to be kept, that is, not to remain "spiritual" or "abstract," but to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth." 89.

<sup>518</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, 88.

<sup>519</sup> Derrida et al, *Demarcations*, 221.

in the academy. For Derrida, the political neutralisation of Marx in the university turns upon the same structure of the political (the strict separation of the political and the philosophical) that underlies the bad political Marxisms – which assume the attainment of the death of philosophy by suppressing it – which this theoreticism supposedly defines itself against. To call for a return to the political in Marx, by defining it against the wave of philosophico-philological works dominating the university would be nothing less than to re-inscribe the limited structure of the political, upon which this very depoliticization is grounded – that is, to claim the political in an act that reacts against discursive insularity. This limited structure, or the limit that structures the division, Derrida tells us, “is not new; it has always been leaving its mark on anti-Marxist idealism as well as on “dialectical materialism.” It is according to the “logic of the ghost” that Blanchot extracts from Lefebvre’s negotiation with the end of philosophy injunction, that Derrida is able to think the re-politicization of Marx beyond “a binary or dialectical logic, the logic that distinguishes or opposes *effectivity or actuality* (either present, empirical, living – or not) and *ideality* (regulating or absolute non-presence).”<sup>520</sup>

A re-politicization of the Marxian heritage for Derrida therefore means reconfiguring the nature of the political gesture by deconstructing the oppositional unity of philosophical interpretation and effective action. In this direction, Derrida says:

This dimension of performance interpretation, that is, of an interpretation that transforms the very thing it interprets, will play an indispensable role in what I would like to say this evening. ‘An interpretation that transforms what it interprets’ is by definition of the performance as unorthodox with regard to speech act theory as it is with regard to the 11<sup>th</sup> Thesis on Feuerbach.<sup>521</sup>

It is in the dimension of the ‘transformative performance interpretation’ as Derrida describes it that this re-politicization occurs as the political act itself. Derrida’s deconstructive utterance attempts to make the autonomous theoretical realm of philosophy and the realm of political effectivity coincide in actuality. The deconstructive utterance, as we are told, is an interpretation that transforms the very

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<sup>520</sup> Derrida, *Specters*, 63.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

thing it interprets. The transformation of what is interpreted, here the structure of the political in Marx, is at the same time a transformation of its own act of interpretation into a political one. It re-inscribes the act of its own interpretation – a domain that is non-political according to the pre-existing structure – by means of a deconstructive interpretation of that structure, into a political gesture. Holding in abeyance the boundaries between the political and the philosophical by indexing the spectrality of the true affirmation of the death of philosophy injunction, the deconstructive utterance re-politicizes Marx by giving a wholly new complexion to the political. This new complexion consists of not knowing with absolute certainty what the political is and what it promises, but having faith that this not-knowing is precisely what constitutes a re-politicization of Marx.

The longer view of Derrida's engagement with Marxian and Marxist thought sheds light on an on-going preoccupation with the end of philosophy motif. I have traced the transmission of this concern from Althusser to Derrida through their shared residence at the ENS and their joint efforts to shift the institutional constraints presiding over philosophy and its teaching during the seventies. I have shown that contrary to canonical accounts, Derrida thematised Marxian and Marxist references long before the late 90s. He did this within a broader framework formed by the political and philosophical ambitions of GREPH. His only sustained engagement with Althusser's trajectory was pursued in relation to a problem field opened up by a collective response to state interventions into educational policy in the mid-seventies. In this regard, Derrida's approach to Althusser's end of philosophy interpretation was guided by a series of questions that concerned the role of pedagogical practice to the existence of the philosophical institution. Notwithstanding Derrida's familiarity with the philosophical and political lineage that formed Althusser's departure point, his own interests in considering this material were quite distinct. In his seminar series *Theory and Practice*, which formed the preparatory teaching material for that year's *agrégation* examination, Derrida mobilised the Marxist tradition to question not simply the conceptual foundations of the course topic itself but also and by extension the conceptual foundations of a practice that maintains the separation between the philosophical-pedagogical and the political-professional. These early committed interrogations of the end of philosophy motif would form the backdrop to Derrida's more famous encounter with Marx in *Specters of Marx*. There, Derrida would restage

many of the questions that he had originally posed to the Marxian and Marxist problematic in the post-'68 malaise. On the occasion of the *Specters* presentation, these questions were pitched against an entrenched geopolitical consensus that had diminished the possibility of a critique of global capitalism finding institutional infrastructure for its realisation. In this context, Derrida resurrected the figure of the dissident militant within the Stalinist party to conceive an affirmative relation to a present beset by political foreclosure. This was based on Lefebvre's recourse to a spectral occupation of the place of philosophy within the party which consisted of a committed negation of philosophical systematising by means of the critical afterlife of the philosophical inspiration.



## Conclusion

We do, nevertheless, have to recognize that Marxism is an improbable philosophy today. This has to do with the fact that Marx's philosophy is engaged in the long and difficult process of separation from 'historical Marxism', a process in which the obstacles accumulated by a century of ideological utilization have to be surmounted. It cannot, however, be right for that philosophy to seek to return to its starting-point; it must, rather, learn from its own history and transform itself as it surmounts those obstacles. Those who wish today to philosophize in Marx not only come after him, but come after Marxism: they cannot be content merely to register the caesura Marx created, but must also think on the ambivalence of the effects that caesura produced - both in its proponents and its opponents.<sup>522</sup>

In this thesis I have attempted to track the movement of the motif of the end of philosophy across the work of Lefebvre, Althusser and Derrida in their own institutional contexts. I have shown that, the end of philosophy motif in Marx provided each of these thinkers a conceptual figure that enabled them to re-inscribe Marxist discourse in their distinct efforts to alter the nature of the institutional contexts organically linked to their philosophical interventions: the party and the university.

As I described in Chapter 1, for Lefebvre, the end of philosophy motif in Marx was initially interpreted as an address to the philosopher, demanding the denial, in practice, of philosophical rumination and its replacement with political activism and research grounded in the concrete. The institutionalisation of doctrinal Marxism as the philosophy of the Stalinist Party, reinforced by the repressive measures of Zhdanovism, moved Lefebvre to re-conceive the end of philosophy motif in Marx. The reductionist account of Marx's philosophy that had been ideologically grafted onto the party, along with the anti-philosophical polemic that took the place of Marx's supersession of philosophical knowledge, led Lefebvre to establish Marx's theory of knowledge. Lefebvre's interpretation would be formed through a reading of Marx's methodological outline provided in the *1857 Introduction* and Lenin's philosophical elaboration of the dialectical

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<sup>522</sup> Étienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, (London: Verso, 2007), 118.

method that guided his empirical research in his commentary of Hegel's *Logic*. This was the background to Lefebvre's elucidation of Marx's theory of knowledge, which was not posited as a replacement of philosophy per se but as a dialectical method for critically disclosing the ever-present force of philosophical abstractions to the epistemologically inexhaustible phenomena of living socio-economic formations. Lefebvre had defended this theory of knowledge within the intellectual arm of the party and insisted on the political importance of historicising theoretical categories. This was intended to de-systematise the doctrinaire Marxist-Leninism of the PCF which had come to function primarily as an ideology for organisational cohesion.

Lefebvre's recourse to the problem of the end of philosophy in Marx as a way of challenging the political institutionalisation of Marxism paved the way for Althusser's own engagement with a similar problem the following decade, the subject of Chapter 2. Formed during the early phases of the destalinisation process in the mid-sixties, Althusser's interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx was that it signalled the anticipation of a philosophy that had yet to be constructed. Relinquished of their duty to root out dogmatism in the party, the practical imperative facing Marxist philosophers in the sixties, according to Althusser, was to theoretically determine the specificity of Marxist philosophy. Althusser responded to this exigency by attempting to establish the epistemological specificity of the Marxist dialectic from its Hegelian predecessor. By shifting the emphasis away from political practice and toward theoretical practice, Althusser's interpretation of the end of philosophy motif in Marx shifted the institutional locus of Marxist philosophy. By blurring the boundaries of the two institutional contexts of his professional and political life (the university and the Marxist political party), Althusser's enterprise infected the political institution of the PCF with the social efficacy of the philosophical institution and marked the philosophical institution (the *École Normale Supérieure* and beyond) with the social efficacy of the political institution.

The legacy of Althusser's efforts to transform the seat of philosophical discourse and its teaching was taken up by Derrida in his seventies involvement with

GREPH. In Chapter 3, I showed that the ambitions of GREPH were to transform the edifice of the French philosophical institution both by posing the pedagogical relation and the broader infrastructures that hold it in place as an object of philosophical, historical and empirical investigation while campaigning against the orientation of policy reforms in education. Between the persistence of an outmoded institutional form tied to the bourgeois world of a previous century, and the engineered suppression of philosophical education in the interests of capital, GREPH took up a position that sought neither to conserve the existing system nor reject the purchase of philosophy on the basis of its anachronistic status. The collective enterprises of GREPH would form a series of conceptual and political concerns that determined the form and content of Derrida's teaching at the ENS. The function of the *agrégés-répétiteur* was a central node in the modality of the philosophical institution. As such, Derrida's pedagogical and professional position within the ENS was brought into the sightline of his critique of philosophy both in theory and practice. This reflexive gesture played out most prominently in his teaching. In his course on the *agrégation* topic, Theory and Practice, Derrida used the legacy of Althusser's trajectory in responding to the end of philosophy motif in Marx to re-instantiate the pedagogical relation from within. This carried over the problem of the articulation of Marx's philosophy and the political institution into the academic institution and the problem of its articulation with philosophical discourse. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida would reprise many of his insights around the Marxian and Marxist problematic that were originally developed within the counter-institutional enterprise of GREPH. However, in the conjuncture of the early 90s, the waning of actually existing communism, the electoral decline of Communist Parties across the world and the institutional neutralisation of Marxism within the neoliberal university, had all made Marx's philosophy an anachronism. It had become a corpus without an institutional body and thus a spectre. But the dissident heritage that formed around the end of philosophy motif in Marx continued to bear an efficacy even in its residual condition.

With this historical and philosophical lineage behind us, the question that confronts us today, is exactly what it means to dwell upon the vestiges of a

modality of philosophical expression that has largely lost its institutional presence? What is the fate of Marxist philosophy today, having lost its really existing purchase in the world? If *Specters* represents not the end point of this conceptual lineage, but rather marks the withdrawal of the organisational structures that had previously guaranteed the efficacy of Marxist philosophy – the moment when this lineage comes into confrontation with the fact of its own anachronistic existence – what, in such circumstances, has Marxist philosophy become? More precisely, what is the horizon of a dissident occupation of Marxist philosophy that is now bereft of a foothold in the real world?

Given his proximity to the life and thought of the three thinkers I have considered in this thesis, Étienne Balibar is a figure that very much inherits from this legacy. Indeed, in the years that followed the publication of *Specters*, he had occasion to face up to these questions himself. To the second, he responded with the following diagnosis: “Marx's philosophy today cannot be either an organizational doctrine or an academic philosophy. That is to say, it must be out of step with any institution.”<sup>523</sup> It must not re-establish its link to the party or the university, and their state correlate. Nor must it ‘seek to return to its starting point’, which we can assume following Derrida in *Specters*<sup>524</sup>, means not reprising the gesture of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of calling into existence the radically new institution, the institution freed from all anachronisms of previous institutions: i.e. the Communist Party. Marxist philosophy must find a way to thrive outside of the modality of institutionality. This is, as Balibar courageously admits, an improbable prospect.

Given such sobering provisos, where does that leave Marxist philosophy, if not adrift in a world of entrenched institutional forces with no material support to intervene? What is the function of this survival – a practical-critical force that once truly challenged philosophical apologetics of state and capital precisely by taking up residence in this absent counter-institution? Does it simply revert back

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Derrida reads across the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) the problem of Marx's ‘starting-point’ in Derrida, *Specters*, 99 – 119.

to a critical idealism or does it become reducible to the modality of an immanent deconstruction of institutionality as such? In either case, has Marxist philosophy truly escaped the institution or does it not merely valorise the institution of state and academy in a gesture of philosophical de-negation? Is this not ultimately the fate of *Specters*?

The major hurdle with which Marxism must contend today is the fact that the organisational vehicles that have been used historically to realise Marx's philosophy have tended to endure beyond their intended term. The institutionalisation of Marx's philosophy in the Soviet-style regimes was its conversion into a doctrine of the single party state rather than what it was supposed to be: the dissolution of political representation as a separate sphere of existence and the extension of real democracy to the masses. This is the primary reason that grafting Marxist philosophy onto a political institution has become anathema.

It is now clear that the precondition of a scalable revolutionary mass movement is not necessarily that of a political organisation that uses Marxist philosophy as an ideological adhesive. The question of the socio-cultural consistency of the political organisation and its strategic objectives may occupy an independent frame of reference than the pedagogical function of Marxist philosophy and historical materialism. From this perspective, Marxist philosophy need not be considered intrinsic to the content of the political forces that carry out the will of a Marxist philosophy.

Yet, in taking this path we would be forced to deny the Leninist heritage, which has been so central here, in its insistence on the organic link between Marxist theory and the specificity of an effective revolutionary political organisation. In Lefebvre's *Lenin* we are given a dialectical theory of knowledge that is in fact absolutely necessary to the demystification of the abstract categories through which the bourgeois world is empirically given. Without taking this theory into its analysis, the political organisation would be liable to fall short of escaping the abstractions of the bourgeois world in both its theory and its practice. Althusser's *Lenin*, in all of its unorthodoxy, reveals the totalising mechanism of

the apparatus as a starting point for engendering a 'self-conscious' institutionality. Here, the role played by Marxist philosophy is to reveal to the political organisation the conditions of existence of its own ideology, precisely to militate against the ossification of an unconscious institutionality. And Derrida's Lenin reminds us most forcefully of the illusion of the outside: that the spontaneist impulse for institutional exteriority is precisely the seal of institutional enclosure. Trite though it may be, Lenin's maxim does not lose its salience in our situation today: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."<sup>525</sup>

The question, then, becomes the nature of this articulation between the political institution and a non-institutional Marxist philosophy? In the history of Marxism, the end of philosophy problem has been instructive on this point. This problem in Marx and Marxism is the dilemma of trying to think the supersession of the bourgeois standpoint within a theoretical mode conforming to the concrete historical development of bourgeois society. It is thus a concept without a comprehension of the content of the standpoint that follows. As Korsch, in his initial formulation of this problem, puts it:

The peculiarity...that greatly complicates any correct understanding of the problem of 'Marxism and philosophy' is this: it appears as if in the very act of surpassing the limits of a bourgeois position – an act indispensable to grasp the essentially new philosophical content of Marxism – *Marxism itself is at once superseded and annihilated as a philosophical object.*<sup>526</sup>

The end of philosophy motif in Marx, therefore, registers the mixed temporalities of this dilemma. It is an unstable mode of thought that attempts to recognise its own medium as the theoretical form of the truncated revolutionary development of bourgeois society – a form that is therefore seamless with the stasis of this aborted horizon. But it also attempts to recognise this medium as both fetter and

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<sup>525</sup> V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 28.

<sup>526</sup> Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, 47.

vestige: a barrier made old by the countervailing forces induced by bourgeois society.<sup>527</sup> The end of philosophy motif in Marx necessarily depends on the medium of philosophy and the bourgeois world which is its material support to exist. Yet, insofar as this material support is in fact comprised of an array of countervailing forces that splits the bourgeois world into pieces, throwing up the non-contemporaneity of its apparent stasis, Marx's end of philosophy motif, so long as it remains relevant, is borne upon this uneven terrain. In this way, Marx's proleptic address issues from an institution in crisis – destabilised by forces of struggle immanent to the legal forms of domination that guarantee the stability of bourgeois society and its theoretical justifications. It is a mode of thought that therefore originates not at the point of an already consolidated combination institution that is charged with the task of overthrowing the material support of philosophy, but rather at a point when the philosophical institution trembles in view of the possible formalisation of antagonistic social forces. The end of philosophy motif in Marx therefore holds together the temporalities of the disintegration of philosophy's medium of existence, the formalisation of the social forces that will carry out that disintegration and the present in which the material support for this mode of thought is both stable and unstable. The articulation of Marx's intervention in philosophy to both the existing institutional edifices of the bourgeois world and the coming counter-institution is not straightforward. Its reliance on the continued existence of its material support is precisely to sustain an expression of self-negation as an institution. Yet, in the face of the forces which it requires to disassemble the institution of philosophy,

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<sup>527</sup> Though I am referring specifically to the motif as it has developed in the cases I have analysed, Stathis Kouvelakis has detailed the historical backdrop of Marx's initial formulation of the motif in his 1843-4 introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the 1843-4. The spread of the secularising social relations of capitalism and the continued hold over bodies and minds of the antiquated institutions of the Prussian state left Marx's Rhineland in a state of "non-contemporariness". Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* had proposed an approximation of the modern representative state via survivals of the feudal order as the ultimate solution to the destructive character of the privative individualism of bourgeois society. The proposition in Hegel's philosophy that the state dialectically mediates the contradictory finite interests of civil society in the execution of the general interest became for Marx the reflection of a reality in which politics was in fact separated from civil society and realised in the form a generalisation of the abstract universal. For Marx the emergence of the proletariat in the midst of this non-contemporariness represented a class contradiction in bourgeois civil society (as opposed to the abstract contradiction of finite particulars) that had the capacity to abolish a reality in which politics was separated from civil society and its philosophical apologia. Kouvelakis, *Philosophy & Revolution*, 243-246 and Marx, *Early Writings*, 27-35 / 254-257.

including Marx's own, hence abolishing it by realising it, it continues to speak within that theoretical form.

The fissure of this figure is intensified in the case of the Marxist philosopher who speaks through the theoretical vestige of the bourgeois world within the counter-institution that has ostensibly formalised the social forces that would negate the material support of philosophy i.e. the Leninist party-form. In this context, an evocation of the end of philosophy motif which uses the political organisation as its institutional seat does not collapse the social forces formalised by the political organisation into the convergence of forces that would negate the material support of its philosophical existence. The persistence of a theoretical investment in the end of philosophy motif calls out the shortcomings of an institutionalisation of the social forces that were supposed to negate philosophy. The political organisation that boasts of having negated philosophy, by ideologically institutionalising the repression of its theoretical form, is found wanting by the persistence of Marx's exhortation. The end of philosophy motif in Marx remains necessary for the political organisation precisely so that it does not misrecognise the content of the negation of the bourgeois world in the ideology which holds together the institution. The overturning of philosophy, and its material support, depends on a social force that is able to go to the very root of philosophy in its negation. That means annulling the ideological apparatus that has harnessed and consolidated the active negating power. In this direction, Alain Badiou has argued that:

the communists embody the unbound multiplicity of consciousness, its anticipatory aspect, and therefore the precariousness of the bond, rather than its firmness...It is the bond that we must terminate, and what needs to come about is nothing but the affirmative multiplicity of capacities, whose emblem is polyvalent man, who undoes even those secular connections that bring together intellectual workers on the one hand, and manual workers on the other.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, (London: Verso, 2006), 75.



A Marxist philosophy that is 'out of step with any institution' must base itself on a return to this facet of Marx's thought. It is the thread in Marx's writing and Marxist history that delimits the relation between Marx's philosophy and its institutionality as inherently unstable, contradictory and necessarily provisional. The improbability of a Marxist philosophy today does not diminish the efficacy or the crisis of philosophy nor the antagonistic social forces that continue to splinter its material support.

## APPENDIX

### Althusser's letter to Franca Madonia 17<sup>th</sup> February 1971

Date according to the letter held at IMEC.

Dated 16<sup>th</sup> February in *Lettres à Franca (1961 – 1973)*, (Paris: Éditions STOCK/IMEC, 1998), 787-89.

[17-II-1971]

Tuesday Night

vedi come sono ho da scrivere [you see how I am / I have to write] two or three pages for the reissue of a little textbook by Marta [Harnecker] (this Chilean woman I mentioned to you one day, who has a kind of Peasant allure, a tall girl with very beautiful hair, and the few words that you said had great significance, but why would you not be interested in her? and in fact these few words had the effect that without being interested in her I had been very kind to her and helped her a lot. she had - and has - a kind of pedagogical genius, and when she returned to her country she wrote a little manual about historical materialism which went around Latin America with a small preface from me) so she is reissuing (this is the 6th edition!) her little manual with important modification, and asks me for a new preface that takes into account these changes. You realize: three small pages for a book that is very clear and very simple, it is not the end of the world is it?! Well, for many hours I have not succeeded: I write ten lines with great difficulty, then I stop and tear up the page, and I start again, indefinitely. So I thought, shit! To write for the sake of writing, as much as writing for real, as much as "taking the pen" for you, I'll see if I can put together a few words (and maybe in a moment I will be back to square one and you will receive nothing from me because I will not have written anything to you, but I will try anyway). I must say that writing also confronts me (outside of my fantasies that block me) with my theoretical past if I dare say, and that I feel very uncomfortable with regard to this fucking theoretical past (this discomfort naturally must also go through

some phantasmatic configurations): that means that I do not know what to say today to speak to the people, meaning I obviously have the feeling of having nothing to say (which after all is the normal state of the vast majority of well-constituted people who do not feel the duty to write), that people (because of this fucking theoretical past) expect of me (as a known "character" ...). Talk about a situation! And yes, I still have some things to say, but how can I say them by relating them to what I once said? I feel that everything escapes me, that I cannot make the connection, nor provide the necessary explanations for the link. Result: I stay dry and silent. Yes, Marta: she left two years ago or a little more, I do not know, and somehow I miss her, as I miss all my band of "youth" with whom I had relations too narrow not to be equivocal. They were (since, many of them have moved away, some have covered me with insults, have "denied me" as "revisionist" ...) my strength. Marta too, but in another way: she listened, I had things to teach her, she understood very well, she had an amazing sense for organizing, always lived in apartments rented collectively by Latin American groups more or less hunted at home, and in a semi-irregular situation here, she came to see me often, knew how to stay for a short time, she was pretty enough, I had to be flattered that she would come to see me, but she always had her heart elsewhere, with incredible stories of love that always went badly if she did not live them well, she told me quite well; now she has become a rather important (unofficial) figure in the popular action committees that support Allende's action in Chile, and she still makes political pedagogy with the same genius (limited but genius anyway). Why am I talking to you about her? Yes, because of these three pages that I cannot write, then because of these words of yours (which you have probably forgotten) but which were quite decisive for the reception I gave to her and what followed (and what did not follow). Yet I could make some short expositions on Marxist theory, its union with the labor movement, the class point of view, and so on. But the words are not there, and the heart is not in its right place. Really in these stories of the unconscious (whose discomforts are only the effects) the stories of places are decisive: the heart is not in its right place, as the saying goes (the heart does not mean anything: but not in its right place, means something). You know one day (one day ...) I will talk about this topography [topique], the fact that Marx (like Freud) presents the reality of which he speaks by arranging it in places (topoi), in distinct/unmistakable [*inconfondables*] places: here, is not the same as there. How to mark the difference, but not difference (as our friend Derrida does by baptizing *différance*) as dispersion, as "dissemination"

(a notion that D. borrows from Mallarmé) but as a distinction of the instances, that is to say to say places occupied by powers, powers in the strong sense of the word, that is to say, "realities" exerting an influence, an efficiency, a power (nodal differences which are active, efficient). Lenin reading Hegel stops (like a hunting dog smelling game) before an expression of Hegel: the web and the strong knot. Everything is there: in the universal tissue [tissue] (that Derrida and his friends spend their life de-weaving [de-tisser] and re-weaving [re-tisser], de-and-re-composing the texture) what interests Lenin (after Marx) just as Freud, are the knots/nuclei/nodes, the crucial points where the threads, instead of just playing the game of the weft and the warp (= texture [tissue] or = text, since our friends in love with difference write: text = texture), are tied [se nouent] into knots, in certain unconformable places which are constituted by these knots (there is not at first the undifferentiated tissue in its eternal difference, then, in a certain place of the fabric, a knot as an accident, a by-product of the tissue, a knot which is in a certain place of the fabric, the knot is not an effect of the place, an accident of the place, a chance of the place: on the contrary, it is the knot which makes the place that it occupies a place, its place from which it acts on the other places) \* [note in the margin "the knot structures space"]. I do not know if I am making myself understood: first what I confide to you here is "top secret", I do not tell anyone, they are my reserve weapons for a future time ... I ask you to keep it to yourself, - but perhaps reading of our brave Genette (who also gives his way in this literature that I criticize) can probably give you in contrast an idea of what I have behind my thoughts. And if what I tell you stands (I have to check and see), it would have quite significant consequences in a lot of questions, and that would make it possible to understand the incredible insistence of Freud to speak in terms of topography [topique], just as Marx and his followers did, that would also allow us to understand what is special about Marx and Freud's theory, I mean the way they relate (quite differently than other sciences) theory and their practice (practice is as if in advance drawn from the topographic). It would also allow us to understand why all philosophy is also part of a topography [topique] (which throws light on the modality of philosophical theses: deeply practical, even when they are conservative or reactionary). It would perhaps (?) put a little order in the current claims of linguistics, in its disorder and in the abuse that is made of it etc. But why did I tell you all this which is "top secret"? Yes: about these three pages for Marta, I cannot write them. Because I do not want to write publicly all that I just told you, even adapting it and

limiting it to the subject of three small pages for a preface to a small manual. The difficulty of my relationship with my "theoretical" past also occurs (not only unfortunately!): Thereabouts: I have the suspicion of a theoretical present-future, but it is still too weak for me to expose it to the light of day (and even to see it face to face). To see it face to face: writing this I notice that this is the first time I have written any of this (all these pages on the topographic, instances, places, knots and tissue). I also note that the first time I write it, it's for you. I am astonished to have done it, and to have done it for you. Decidedly between the surprise and you, there must be a certain relationship. (I associate and think suddenly of necklaces: in their line, pearls are knots.)

(It does not come as a surprise – this surprise – you like necklaces.) Bless you

### Questionnaire drafted by Louis Althusser

Consulted in the l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), Fonds Althusser 20ALT49.7 *Questionnaire redigé par Louis Althusser*

This questionnaire has been designed for our comrades who are philosophy teachers as an occasion to reflect on the problems of the position of the party over the philosophy education. We hope through this our comrades are able to explain their experiences, their difficulties, their efforts, the lessons they have learned from their successes and their failures and their suggestions for better practice of teaching philosophy by communist professors confronted as we are today with the serious menaces that we are.

Questionnaire:

1. Today, how does one teach philosophy as a communist? What according to you are the terms of this problem?
  - a. What is the nature of your responsibility as a professional? (Curriculum? Success in exams? "Neutrality" Professorial freedom? Respect for the personality of the student? What is your attitude in relation to administration?)
  - b. How do you envisage the responsibilities you have to your position in the Party? (Is that necessary to make students communists? To teach a philosophy of Marxist inspiration? To make a resolute effort to revert all problems to the current content of the class struggle? Clarify any problem that arises – psychological, moral, social – according to the experience and the struggle of the working class?)
  - c. How do you reconcile your professional responsibilities and your responsibilities as a Party member?
  
2. What is the social origins of your students? What are the vital problems of the milieu or social milieus of which your students are a part? What is the moral situation of your students in relation to the issues of their background? Are they profoundly subjected to the influence of their environment or more or less detached from it, even

in revolt from it? For what reasons? What are their preoccupations and their ideas? What ideological resistances and what prejudices do you encounter at present? Must education be conceived as a function of a social milieu and as the diffusion of ideology over students? Can we help students make themselves critical of their prejudices? What guiding ideas appear to you the most appropriate to fighting these prejudices today?

3. What are the subjects that lend themselves most readily to teaching Marxist philosophy? What are the questions that do not lend themselves so well to this task? Can you give a concrete example of the manner in which you organise the teaching of one or another of the following disciplines (Psychology, Logic, Moral, General Philosophy)?

4. Up to what point can you carry out your teaching in the face of the bourgeois philosophy of the curriculum and the prejudices of your students? Is it necessary to critique the notions of bourgeois philosophy? To oppose them to Marxist theory? Reveal the class positions that they represent? Can we question the social milieu of students themselves? Can we, in the face of this critique, show in the international working class, its struggles, its problems, its conduct, the birth of a new science, of new moral values, of a new psychology, of new man? To what extent is this positive effort possible?

5. In what manner do you use history according to its materialist signification in order to critique the traditional concepts of philosophy? ...

6. What are the means of work at the disposal of your students? Do you help in the industrial action of your students to allow them to establish their own instruments of labour? Do you struggle against official choices? Have you helped a student become aware of the material foundations of teaching a class?

7. In what manner would you reform of the curriculum [*programme*]?

What is your opinion on the reform envisaged by the Association of Professors of philosophy?

8....Do you appeal to the help of your Party in order to fight the political battles of reactionary interventions in education (ministry, administration, organisations of students' parents etc.)?



## An interview with Henri Lefebvre: 'Marxism, the state and its withering away'

From: Henri Lefebvre, 'un entretien avec Henri Lefebvre le marxisme l'Etat et son déperissement' in *Tribune Socialiste*, No. 705, (12 au 18 Juin 1976), 26-28.

Victor Leduc: Continuing the trajectory of the rest of your work, you have undertaken a complete study of the state, a decisive problem in political struggles today, and in doing so you have gathered a vast body of research. Could you explain your definition of the state?

Henri Lefebvre: I would first like to insist on the concept of political break. The notion of epistemological break spread during the last period and its success seems to me fundamental. Between the work of Hegel and Marx's, there is a political break, in the sense that Hegel is an apologist for the state and Marx a critic of the state. In the very interior of Marx's work, there is a political break between the first works where he refutes philosophically the apology Hegel makes for the state, that is to say the apology itself, and the works of the end of his life where he criticizes any state because he adopts, following the Paris Commune, the thesis of the rupture and the withering away of the state.

This is an occasion to say, first, that the worker's movement itself split up on this decisive issue. The movement in France with the Commune is anti-state, no doubt, because the state was already very strong and very centralized in France since the Jacobins and Napoleon I. On the contrary, very quickly and very early, the movement in Germany with Ferdinand Lassalle and the German Social Democrat Party is of the state, probably because Germany was not unified.

In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx, addressing the Germans, explained with a lot of force how for him the state must be absorbed into civil society. In other texts inspired by the Commune, he indicates with no less force how the political revolution breaks the bourgeois state and leads it to wither away, a thesis resumed and developed by Engels, then Lenin. Looking closely, we see that these theses were already implicit in the first works, the so-called works of Marx's youth.

Marx, indeed, introduced from the beginning, in relation to Hegel, the double thesis of philosophical alienation and political alienation, that was not apparent to Hegel.

So for Marx, the state is nothing but the form of politics, a form which presupposes the forms of the commodity, money, capital, which is not superimposed from outside but is inherent to them emerging above them in the course of history. This is, I believe, the definition that can be given of the State: it is the form of political power. There are political breaks in history: between the ancient city-state, the feudal-military state and the modern state. These political breaks do not exactly coincide with the succession of modes of production; ancient, medieval, capitalist but correspond to them globally. The break between the nation-state and its antecedents has been marked by revolutions, including the French Revolution.

V.L. Among the forms of political power, you examine the modern state in its different aspects. And you use in this connection a powerful expression: terricide. Is this a new face of the state?

H.L. I will begin by saying that this question of the state, of which Marx and Lenin already emphasized the importance, has not been examined by the "Marxists" in an adequate manner. At least in my opinion. Gramsci himself raises the question of power within the state, that is to say, hegemony, but not that of the functioning of the state form. Others, like Poulantzas, for example, have constructed an abstract model of the state baptized for the Marxist occasion, but which is only a model of the state in general.

In my opinion, the point of departure for political reflection today is not the state in general, the state in abstracto, nor even the state after Lenin or Stalin. The starting point is the globalization of the state. A staggering phenomenon that has been around us for a few decades, and has remained almost unnoticed: natural for some, and rational for others. So that today, the state covers the world. And the chain of states encloses the planet. I say that it is a staggering phenomenon: no religion has achieved this result. Only sport in the modern world has reached this worldwide diffusion. Sport, the state: perhaps there is a relationship. The phenomena strike me, but I do not pretend to hold the key.

I do not know the exact number of nation-states registered with the United Nations (between 150 and 175, I believe: the most recent, Angola). Defenders of state

rationality would be wrong to be triumphant. Of course, there is the UN, the state system, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and so on. But the elements of irrationality and violence proliferate at the same time as the system of states does. Violence appears everywhere. Many of these nation states are nations only in name. And one may even wonder if the nation is not a political effect, the effect of the state.

Nation-states are in principle equal in the United Nations. And it's not quite a fiction, since there are votes. But at the same time, this equality is only an illusion, since there is a hierarchy of states from the massive powers to the very small, passing through the big and the medium. This shows how the UN generalizes on a global scale the principle of limited democracy that equates the uneven and makes equivalent the non-equivalent.

But here the issue becomes more serious: there is a superimposition of markets; labor, commodities, the means of production, capital itself, an inter-state market that includes weapons and armaments. The seemingly reasonable system of states is accompanied by a colossal production of arms which the advanced states produce for sale. The world organization of states is neither innocent nor rational. The dangers are appalling. From the dangers of the atomic bomb, held by some powerful states, to the dangers of pollution and the destruction of nature, is added that of the armaments of all states, large and small. This danger on a planetary scale, I call it "Terricide". It is nothing less than the destruction of the Earth.

V.L. It is obvious that the modern state does not have this frightening power if it does not operate in silence and mystery. How do you see this problem of the mystery and the mystification of the state, to which you dedicate a chapter?

H.L. The partisans of the state are convinced like Hegel of the higher rationality of the state. This ideology is very important because it is the basis of the idea and practice of public service. This idea and this practice is fading, but remains alive in the state superstructure, particularly in most *énarques* (ENA graduates) who are currently in power in France. I wonder if the great *énarques* still believe in it and have not reached the level of political cynicism. The old notion of *raison d'Etat* is already much more obscure. It is sometimes, if not often, the arbitrariness, the deliberate injustice, or even the formal illegality which is claimed by the *raison d'Etat*.

But the fundamental problem is to understand how it works. This is a problem because the modern state is so complex that no one, not even the heads of state, knows it in all its parts, in all its institutions. The functioning of the bureaucracy escapes the bureaucrats themselves. Think of an institution like Social Security. But analysis cannot be lost in the institutional labyrinth. What should be noted as the main thread of the analysis is that the modern state has two fundamental aspects: management [*gestion*] and violence. It is its double face. On the one hand, it is the manager of the social aggregate. As such, it dominates civil society. It is in charge of economy. It is in charge of growth, whether it is state capitalism or state socialism. But on the other hand, the state and the head of state have the army, the police, and to a large extent the judiciary. The state therefore has an aspect that links it to death, an aspect that can be said to be deadly. Now, these aspects return to one to the other, in an effect that is closer to a shimmer and a mirage than that of a mirror. Management refers to strength, and violence to management. There is a production for death, that of arms. The army itself becomes under certain conditions a productive force.

So the state is elusive. It is always elsewhere. When you think you grab it here, it's always somewhere else. Hence the difficulty of knowing the state. This knowledge is constantly confronted with multiple obstacles, which makes it possible to speak of the mystery of the state. It is a little in the sense that Marx spoke of the mystery of the commodity, at once mysterious and obvious.

The mystery of the state becomes more graspable, more localizable when one realizes that all bureaucracy has its mystery. Every state apparatus and every institution has its backstage. It seems to me that the state maintains its own mystery by occulting itself. And more seriously, it does so by disseminating ideologies, by getting its hands on knowledge via its institutions and ultimately spreading itself as if it were the very light and the shadow of society.

V.L. Can we then talk about ideological state apparatus?

H.L. *I do not think so.* This notion seems to me suspect. It may be appropriate to describe the dominant ruling party in the socialist regime as we know it. It seems that the Communist Party of the USSR operates as an ideological apparatus of the state, manipulating Marxism as it sees fit and according to its needs, as sometimes the Church manipulated scholasticism and Thomism. That of which Louis Althusser has

given us the theory. But in our countries and as we know them, great ideologies are born in civil society. For example, rationalism was born in French and European society as a whole during the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. But it took ideologically defined form only in institutions that did not primarily function to secrete ideology but rather knowledge: the school, the University...

V.L. In your book, you talk about the uncertainties and obscurities of Marx's concept of the transition from capitalism to socialism. In our reflection, on self-management [*autogestion*] we come up against the same problem. And self-management seems to answer certain gaps in Marx's theory of transition.

H.L. This concept of transition is particularly important and particularly obscure. It would be interesting to make an anthology of texts on the transition problem, from Marx to the present day, through Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci. First remark: Is it true that for Marx the transition from capitalism to socialism follows the political revolution, that is, the seizure of power by the working class and its allies? I think so. Second remark: for Marx and even for Lenin, the rise of the productive forces must also follow this revolution, since they considered, at least in a certain number of texts, capitalist relations of production as obstacles to this growth. There is a problem here. Has there been an increase in productive forces in the context of capitalism? Yes. How and why did this accumulation of capital continue in the context of capitalist relations of production? It seems to me that one must appeal to Rosa Luxemburg's work to understand it. To a certain extent and in some ways, we are still in the transition.

My thesis is as follows: (1) this transition tends to be anchored in a mode of production which is neither the socialism envisaged by Marx nor the capitalism of the first half of the twentieth century; this is what I call the state production mode (SMP); 2) to this anchoring by the lofty heights of the state, replies come from movements on the ground, very complex movements which aim at qualitative demands, demands concerning space, but also and especially self-management: sometimes concerning workplaces, sometimes concerning territory. These replies coming from the ground are seeking a path. In this schema, these responses are conceived as the counterpart to the increasingly oppressive role of the state. During this transitional period, there is an

increasingly profound contradiction, a conflict increasingly accentuated between the base and the summit, between the self-managing movements and state powers.

V.L. The transition has led the USSR and a number of similar states toward Stalinism. This is the great problem for contemporary Marxists. With the state mode of production (SMP), are you proposing a new analysis of Stalinism? What precisely is its meaning in this respect?

H.L. I think that the modern state transformed qualitatively from the moment when it took charge of economic growth. I will go so far as to say that there is a certain political disconnect between the state management of growth and the earlier political forms of the state, including the nation-state of the period of competitive capitalism and even monopoly capitalism. The state under these conditions no longer stands above society. It is not simply a class political power, it penetrates the entire society. Stalinism was first of all the state taking charge of the economic growth and development of society. But straight away under Stalinism, development, that is to say, the qualitative enrichment of social relations, was sacrificed to growth. The dates are quite clear: the great period of the Russian Revolution, which left such traces and so contributed to the image of Soviet Russia thereafter, ends between 1925 and 1930, after which we enter the terrible period of Stalinism which coincides with the period of the five-year plans. This is for a long time thereafter, the demise of the Marxist and Leninist thesis of the withering away of the State. The Stalinist State is the prototype and the model for other states, and at first in a caricatural and bloody way the fascist states, which centered growth on imperialist military power. At the same time, other states have followed a similar path, but in a way that can still be said to be progressive: I am thinking, for example, of Mexico and the Institutional Revolutionary Party. But we can also think of Roosevelt's New Deal, which saved capitalism, but introduced regulatory elements into the economy.

I believe that all modern states have embarked on this path, but unequally. The Leninist law of unevenness here takes on an unforeseen meaning. The state mode of production (SMP) reigns over the world, and it is he [Lenin] who has globalized with the state. Everywhere growth has prevailed over development, but very unevenly. The SMP does not prohibit alternations of liberalism and authoritarianism. We can see perfectly in France today, how neo-liberalism uses all the institutions set up during the

authoritarian De Gaulle-Pompidou period. The same is true in all countries. Brutal planning has given way to much finer methods: for example, financial planning, which is exemplary in France, and which is in its way as efficient, but much more flexible, such that one can say that state capitalism and state socialism are two variants or two species of the same kind: the state mode of production (SMP). It is not a question of eliminating the differences, nor of neglecting the analogies. The only obstacle that faces the SMP: the movements of the base.

V.L. Are there other possible variants for a Marxist response to the problems of the state? Is Trotskyism, for example, an alternative to the reality of the transition in the USSR? A parallel, but more concrete, question: what do you think of the relationship between the Cultural Revolution in China and the problem of the State?

H.L. The critiques of Trotsky and Trotskyists against Stalinism remain grounded and relevant. In line with Trotskyist thought there have been after Trotsky many remarkable reflections and works. However, among the various divergent Trotskyist tendencies, they have in common a continued attachment to thoughts that bear their date. And this despite some interesting attempts like those of Pierre Naville, who from his own Trotskyist moment has issued ideas and theses of lasting interest.

But I reproach the Trotskyists for having an exaggerated confidence in the state and for rarely, if ever, recalling Marx's theses on the withering away of the state. It is worth recalling that for Marx, Engels and Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat goes hand in hand with the withering away of the state: it is the very path toward the withering away of the state. When one abandons the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the French Communist Party has now done, one also abandons the withering away of the State and one eternalizes the State, whether one knows it or not. We become Hegelian and Lassalian rather than Marxist. But when one insists on the dictatorship of the proletariat while "forgetting" the withering away of the state, the result is very much the same.

As for the Cultural Revolution, as far as we can say that this has indeed occurred, it seems misnamed. It was a political revolution. It forbade the communist party, the bureaucracy, and the state itself to rise above society. In this sense, we can only approve of it. But I confess I do not know how the state works in China today. There is reason to fear that the Stalinist legacy will weigh heavil

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