THE LEFT HEMISPHERE

Mapping Critical Theory Today

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What distinguishes political defeats from military and sporting defeats is that they are potentially interminable. In an armed confrontation the balance of forces turns in favour of one of the belligerents at some point, and the fighting stops. In sport the scale of the defeat is always limited by the exhaustion of the time allocated to the contest. In the political domain, by contrast, defeat can continue indefinitely, which amounts to saying that the gains of the labour movement – democratic and social rights – are infinitely destroyable. Whatever might be said of the revival in critical thinking, it is only right not to neglect this parameter. The new critical theories remain largely subject to it.

CHAPTER TWO

A Brief History of the 'New Left' (1956–77)

The new critical theories have not been developed by 'new' theorists, if by that is meant biologically young intellectuals. There are, of course, young authors producing innovative critical thinking today, but the critical thinkers recognized in the public sphere are in most cases over 60 years of age and often over 70. The implications of this are not insignificant. However 'contemporary', these authors' analyses are mainly the fruit of political experiences belonging to a previous political cycle – that of the 1960s and 70s. Negri's ideas are more influenced by the Italian 'extended May' and 'years of lead' than by the demonstrations at Genoa and the Mumbai Social Forum. The same is true of those of Badiou or Rancière, which (by their own admission) are to be related much more to May 1968 than to the strikes of December 1995.

The new critical theories thus represent an attempt by intellectuals formed during a previous political cycle to think the beginning of a new cycle – the one initiated sometime between the Zapatista uprising of 1994, the strikes of December 1995 in France and the Seattle demonstrations of 1999. This historical discrepancy is hardly surprising. Prior to his imprisonment in 1926, Gramsci, one of the initiators of Western Marxism, exhibited characteristics similar to those of the classical Marxists – in particular, that of being a leader of the Italian Communist Party. The remark also applies to Lukács, who was education commissar in the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919, and to Korsch, who was a deputy in the Thuringian Diet in 1923. It was only later that thinkers who had gravitated to Marxism in the context of the new cycle emerged. What is valid for Western Marxism also applies to the current period. The new critical theories have been developed by 'veterans' of critical thinking – that is, by thinkers whose sociological characteristics and ideas were originally associated with the previous period.

That is why an understanding of the new critical theories must involve examination of the theoretical traditions from which these authors derive. In other words, it presupposes an analysis of the 'old' critical theories, those which these authors were developing, along with the dominant thinkers of the time who are now dead, during the 1960s and 70s. The distinction between 'old' and 'new' critical theories is certainly not clear-cut. Some of what passes for new today dates back to theoretical problematics that emerged during the 1960s or even earlier. The history of ideas does not necessarily keep the same

time as the history of political events. As a result, there is no reason to suppose that the fall of the Berlin Wall set theoretical counters back to zero. On the other hand, the defeat suffered by the Left from the second half of the 1970s is so profound that there can be no doubt that a break has occurred. The aim of this chapter is to determine the precise relationship between the new critical theories and the old ones.

ALIENATION AND THE CRISIS OF THE SUBJECT OF EMANCIPATION

Western Marxism made many innovations in the Marxist tradition. Some are exogenous, such as those deriving from psychoanalysis, which gave rise to the 'Freudo-Marxism' of Reich, Marcuse and Erich Fromm. Others are endogenous, like Gramsci's development of the concept of 'hegemony', already present in Russian socialists like Plekhanov and Axelrod.[1] The most significant of the changes undergone by Marxism in these years resulted from the publication in the early 1930s of the young Marx's writings – in particular, the 1844 Paris *Manuscripts*. On account of the war it was only from the second half of the 1940s that the theoretical effects of this text made themselves felt. Their impact was at its height during the 1960s and 70s. Several representatives of Western Marxism were influenced by them, especially Lefebvre, Marcuse, Lukács, Della Volpe and Colletti. This influence proved decisive even when the texts were cited only to be rejected. Thus Althusser regarded the *Manuscripts* as 'pre-materialist' – external to the corpus of dialectical materialism.[2] However, they were what enabled the author of *Pour Marx* to advance the hypothesis of the 'epistemological break' which, from *The German Ideology* (1845–6) onwards, separated the 'young Marx' from the scientific Marx.

The interest aroused by the *Manuscripts* was bound up with the crisis Marxism was experiencing. They created the impression that it was possible to contribute to the development of a Marxism adapted to the new conjuncture. The publication during the twentieth century of unpublished writings by Marx – Volumes Two and Three of *Capital*, the *Grundrissse* – prompted original interpretations of his whole oeuvre and a reformulation of the political project underlying it.[3]

1 On the history of this concept, see Perry Anderson, 'The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci', *New Left Review*, I/100, November 1976–January 1977, and Peter D. Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009.

2 See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: Allen Lane, 1969.

3 See André Tosel, 'The Development of Marxism: From the End of Marxism-Leninism to a Thousand Marxisms – France–Italy, 1975–2005', in Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis, eds, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008.

The *Manuscripts* resonated with an experience typical of the period 1945–75: *alienation*. In fact, they placed that concept at the heart of their analysis.[4] As Pierre Nora has shown, alienation was the 'word of the moment' corresponding to this period: 'The moment of alienation was the crystallization of a broad, diffuse and spontaneous social sensibility, corresponding to the massive effects of growth and rapid changes in French society, under the goad of a spearhead of intellectual critique.'[5] What Jean Fourastié was subsequently to dub the *trente glorieuses* – the 'long wave' of economic growth following the Second World War – accelerated the rural exodus, raised living standards, generalized leisure and created a 'new working class', analyzed in particular by Serge Mallet and Alain Touraine. The massification of higher education increased the discrepancy between subjectively perceived social opportunities and real social opportunities. The feeling of 'alienation' lodged in this discrepancy. In 1965 George Perec published *Les Choses*, '*the* novel of alienation' according to Nora. This work gave expression to the growing rupture between individual aspirations to 'authenticity' and the alienating character of society.[6] May 1968, whose protagonists would seek to repair this rupture, was not far off.

The 'diffuse sense' of alienation fuelled, and was nourished by, a series of theoretical elaborations. Among them was Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, whose first volume was published in 1947. A decade earlier, Lefebvre had published *Le Matérialisme dialectique*, in which the influence of the 1844 *Manuscripts* already made itself felt. Over and above their differences, Jean Baudrillard's *La Société de consommation* (1970), Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle* (1967), Jacques Ellul's *Technique ou l'enjeu du siècle* (1954), and Jean-Yves Calvez's *La Pensée de Karl Marx* (1956) formed part of this trend. It originated in Lukács, in particular the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), one of whose central concepts was 'reification'. This concept, proximate to that of 'alienation', had already appeared in Marx, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and then Volume Three of *Capital*. However, it was in the form given it by Lukács in the central chapter of his work – 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' – that it was to exercise most influence.[7]

The importance assumed by the notion of 'alienation' within the Left of the time is also explained by other factors. Within 'standard' Marxism – that taught, for example, in the cadres' schools of the Communist parties ('conformist'

4 On this see Stéphane Haber, *L'Aliénation. Vie sociale et dépossession*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007.

5 Pierre Nora, 'Aliénation', in Anne Simonin and Hélène Clastres, eds, *Les Idées en France, 1945–1988*, Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p. 493.

6 On Perec's *Les Choses*, see also Bernard Pudal's analysis 'Ordre symbolique et système scolaire dans les années 1960', in Dominique Damamme *et al.*, *Mai–juin 68*, Paris: L'Atelier, 2008.

7 On this intellectual tradition, see Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Marxism, in Russell Jacoby's formulation; 'traditional' Marxism, in Moishe Postone's)[8] – the concept of *exploitation* was fundamental. Exploitation is the extraction of surplus-value – that is, the portion of labour performed by wage-labourers for which they are not remunerated by capitalists. It is an economic concept, even if its consequences extend far beyond this sphere as traditionally conceived. This notion, like the representation of the social world that goes with it, tends to assign centrality to economic oppression – that suffered by the industrial working class – and to regard other forms of oppression, like male domination or colonialism, as secondary. This is what Marxists once called the problematic of 'secondary fronts', the 'main' front being the opposition between capital and labour. Contrary to a current but erroneous retrospective view, 'qualitative' themes – this is an important point – were never absent from Marxism and the labour movement. But in it exploitation nevertheless played the role of organizing concept.

The second half of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of 'secondary fronts'. Among them, notably, were women's struggles (so-called second-wave feminism), national liberation movements, homosexual demands and nascent political ecology. Even where these fronts were also conceived as anti-capitalist, this tended to weaken the centrality of economic oppression and indicate the need for a more inclusive concept than 'exploitation'. The notion of 'alienation' was to play this role. The loss of centrality of economic oppression is also attributable to the stabilization of capitalism during the *trente glorieuses*. It contradicted predictions banking on an imminent collapse of the system. Leading to a redistribution of wealth in the developed countries, it also tended to render cultural problematics more visible. That is why critical theories prioritizing analysis of 'superstructures' multiplied during the 1960s and 70s: the 'culturalist' Marxism of Thompson and Hill, the cultural studies of Williams, Hall and Hoggart, the Marxist aesthetics of Jameson and Eagleton, and Bourdieu's sociology of culture. Anderson argues that concentration on the 'superstructures' is typical of Western Marxism.[9] In fact, it is typical of the whole set of critical theories developed in the course of the 1960s and 70s.

The relative importance assumed by cultural themes, it should be noted, varied from country to country. In the United States the absence of mass working-class parties has always contributed to exorbitant importance being ascribed to the 'cultural front' (to use Michael Denning's phrase), from the 1930s to the

8 See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

9 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1976, chapter 4.

counter-culture of the 1960s and 70s.[10] Without the possibility of integrating themselves into specifically political party structures, activists turned to art, culture or the academy. Moreover, this partially explains the persistence of radical currents in the USA after the collapse of such party structures in other regions. Elsewhere, the existence of popular parties created a distinct relationship between culture and politics.[11]

Added to these factors was a growing mistrust of the industrial working class and of the political and trade-union apparatuses supposed to represent it. A number of activists turned away from traditional organizations and began to envisage the emancipatory potential of new social subjects: women, the colonized, students, the insane (see Foucault's works on the history of madness, but also anti-psychiatry and institutional psycho-therapy at the La Borde clinic directed by Jean Oury and Félix Guattari), 'outcasts' (e.g. in Marcuse), or prisoners (once again Foucault with the *Groupe d'information sur les prisons*). Currents also emerged that looked to unorganized sections of the working class, which consequently escaped the grasp of the Communist parties and trade unions, for elements of revolutionary dynamism. In France the discourse developed by the Maoists around the figure of the 'semi-skilled worker', and later the 'immigrant worker', forms part of this trend.[12] In Italy the theory of the 'mass worker' developed by *operaismo* (Tronti, Negri, Romano Alquati) – that is, the worker from the south of the country employed in the factories of the north, who, not being 'organized', can exhibit revolutionary spontaneity – belongs to the same tendency.[13]

In this context the concept of 'alienation' served as a 'coagulant' making it possible to think the unity of these various struggles. If, in the economic sense of the word, these new social subjects cannot be called 'exploited' (since exploitation as a rule concerns the working class), all can be said to be 'alienated' in one respect or another. The concept of alienations extends to making contact with progressive sections of the Catholic Church. One of the great books devoted to Marx in this period was *La Pensée de Karl Marx* (1956) by the Jesuit Jean-Yves Calvez, who precisely proposed a re-reading of Marx's oeuvre in the light of the concept of 'alienation', in accordance with certain aspects of the

10 See Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, London and New York: Verso, 1998. See also Stathis Kouvelakis, 'Le marxisme au 21e siècle: formes et sens d'une résilience', in Gérald Bronner and Razmig Keucheyan, eds, *La Théorie sociale contemporaine*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011.

11 For the French case, see Frédérique Matonti, 'Arts, culture et intellectuels de gauche au xxe siècle', in Jean-Jacques Becker and Gilles Candar, eds, *Histoire des gauches en France*, vol. 2, Paris: La Découverte, 2005.

12 See Romain Bertrand, 'Mai 68 et l'anticolonialisme', in Damamme *et al.*, *Mai–juin 68*.

13 See Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London: Pluto, 2002.

Church's social doctrine.[14] It can therefore be said of this concept that it brings about a convergence at a theoretical level between scattered social and political struggles. In this sense the two characteristics of the New Left mentioned up to this point – namely, the crisis of the 'subject of emancipation' and the importance of the notion of 'alienation' – are intimately linked. If the latter assumed such significance for it, it was because of the multiplication of subjects of emancipation and the 'coalizing' effects it had on them.

THE QUESTION OF POWER

An important feature distinguishing the New Left from the old involves the question of power. During the first half of the twentieth century, the predominant conception of power in critical theories, and especially Marxism, was inspired by the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917.[15] It assigns paramount importance to the capture, and then withering away, of state power. The state is regarded as an instrument of the domination of the bourgeoisie, which the proletariat must consequently seize through armed insurrection. The way in which the clash between bourgeoisie and working class is conceived is military. The assault on the state is led by the party, which embodies the interests of the proletariat at the point at which a crisis in the existing regime sets in. This crisis is the product of the internal contradictions of the system, but also derives from the power gradually accumulated by the working class. This is the classical Marxist theme of 'dual power'. As Trotsky puts it in his *History of the Russian Revolution*,

> The historic preparation of a revolution brings about, in the pre-revolutionary period, a situation in which the class which is called to realise the new social system, although not yet master of the country, has actually concentrated in its hands a significant share of the state power, while the official apparatus of the government is still in the hands of the old lords. That is the initial dual power in every revolution.[16]

The development of this conception of power during the 1960s and 70s is complex. However, there can be no doubt that a change occurred. From the post-war period the Communist parties were integrated into the political

14 On the relationship between Christianity and Marxism in French thought from the 1950s–70s, see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism: From Sartre to Althusser*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

15 In the case of social democracy the experience of the Popular Front was decisive, just as the Spanish Civil War was in the case of anarchism.

16 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman, London: Pluto, 1977, p. 224. Obviously, the issue of strategy in classical Marxism is not confined to this aspect.

landscape of the western democracies – something that led them to abandon in fact, if not in principle, the idea of taking power via the insurrectionary road. This trend gave rise to 'Eurocommunism', which emerged in France, Spain and Italy during the 1970s. Eurocommunism consisted in a more or less public break by European Communist parties with the Soviet model, both in the field of foreign policy and as regards respect for liberties.[17] Its promoters advocated a gradual, 'democratic' transition to socialism, which authorized a strategy of alliance with social democracy, even with Christian Democracy in Italy. Eurocommunism was to lead to such experiments as the Union of the Left in France and the Historic Compromise in Italy. Although legitimizing itself with certain statements by Lenin, and even if there existed more or less radical versions (like that defended by Nicos Poulantzas),[18] it was clearly distinct from Bolshevism.

The Leninist model remained in force in 'leftist' organizations. We shall leave to one side the question of how far the Leninist self-conception of these groups corresponded to their reality. The *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), one of the main French Trotskyist currents, doubtless experienced the influence of the libertarian spirit of May 1968 more than that of 'democratic centralism'. However, its discourse was strongly imprinted with Leninism. As regards Third Worldist movements, the predominant strategic model, inspired by the Chinese Revolution, was the 'protracted people's war' theorized by Mao or the Algerian and Cuban revolutionary experiences. Maoism allocated a certain role to the peasantry, on account of the weak urbanization of the countries where it was applied. Conceived in a context of prolonged confrontation, it added to dual power a dual territoriality, which takes concrete form in 'liberated zones'. This model was also adopted – in theory, at any rate – by leftist organizations during the 1960s and 70s, for example Maoist or Third Worldist ones.

The conditions of political struggle in western countries during the second half of the twentieth century obviously had little in common with those that obtained in Russia or China in the first half. Neither the political regime nor the social structure was the same. This led a number of thinkers to develop theories of power adapted to the advanced democracies. Within Marxism this was notably true of Gramsci, Adorno and Althusser. Althusser's 'ideological state

17 See Carl Boggs and David Plotke, *The Politics of Eurocommunism: Socialism in Transition*, Boston: South End Press, 1999.

18 See, for example, Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller, London: New Left Books, 1978. In passing, we may signal that there exists in contemporary Marxism a significant current identified with Poulantzas, of which Bob Jessop is a well-known representative. For example, see the latter's *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach*, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

apparatuses' (family, school, church), distinguished from the 'repressive state apparatus' (police and army), aimed to bring out the diffuse forms of power. The same is true, in a very different context, of Adorno and Horkheimer's 'culture industry'. From the mid-1920s Gramsci elaborated a conception of power that assigns an increasingly important role to its non-state component, therewith anticipating theoretical developments in the 1960s. That is one of the reasons why he figures (as we have said) among the most cited authors in new critical thinking. The famous paragraphs of the *Prison Notebooks* on the relationship between state and civil society attest to it – among them, the following:

> In Russia the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks.[19]

For Gramsci power is not only concentrated in institutions or condensed in the state, but also disseminated throughout the whole social body. This difference in the nature of power between 'East' and 'West' – two concepts which, in the sense given them by Gramsci, are not merely geographical, but specifically political – has important political implications. In particular, it presupposes that in the West a 'war of movement' is insufficient on its own for the overthrow of the socio-political order – that a 'war of position', of which a war of movement is only one aspect, must be conducted. The war of position contains an essential 'cultural' dimension. The author of the *Prison Notebooks* forms the link between the Leninist moment in the theory of power and subsequent approaches to the latter. Lenin was unquestionably aware of the fact that power is not concentrated exclusively in the state; and Gramsci obviously does not deny the importance of state power, as is demonstrated by his concept of 'integral state'.[20] Generally speaking, the most recent Gramscian historiography shows that Gramsci was profoundly Leninist in his own way.[21] But the growing interpenetration of state and 'civil society' during the twentieth century, the ever greater blurring of the boundaries between the two, forced him to take the Marxist theory of power in new directions.

The thinker who accounts most clearly for this changed conception of power is probably Foucault. Within today's critical theories, Foucault's approach

19 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 238.

20 See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State*, trans. David Fernbach, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980.

21 See Thomas, *The Gramscian Moment*.

to power has the influence possessed by the Leninist model during the first half of the twentieth century. Foucault assigns decisive importance to the idea of micro-power. According to him, power is dispersed throughout society, not concentrated in a state from which domination supposedly proceeds unilaterally. This 'ascendant' conception underscores the inscription of power in 'intermediate' institutions like schools, hospitals, the army and prisons, which produce individuals who are always-already integrated into power relations. From this follows the idea – typically structuralist – that, strictly speaking, power has no subject. In the Leninist model the subject of power is the state and, in the last instance, the bourgeois class it represents (in complex fashion).

The strategic implications of this philosophy are significant. Confronting the state only makes sense if the latter concentrates a significant portion of power. Once it is dispersed to the four corners of the social world, the struggle against it necessarily is too. For Foucault the spaces of contestation are multiple, like the actors who invest them. In this kind of approach the struggle is interminable – that is, none of the protagonists conclusively wins the day. Within the labour movement, on the contrary, the dominant idea was that, when the time comes, an ultimate clash decides one way or the other – something illustrated by the phrase 'the final struggle'. The absence of any climax in Foucault's theory of power does not prevent the antagonists developing on contact with one another. Alternatively put, power – and the resistance to it – has a history. The doctrine of power developed by Foucault is therefore relational, not substantive. Most structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers defend approaches of this type. The concept of 'rhizome' developed by Deleuze and Guattari, like the idea of 'societies of control', is an example of it.[22]

Foucault's theory of power is typical of the New Left, even if Foucault was critical of the latter in many respects. As Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey puts it, 'if one believes the conceptions of this New Left, socialism must not so much be achieved by means of political and social revolution, by the seizure of power and the nationalization of the means of production, as aim to liberate man from alienation: in everyday life, in the family, in sexual relations and in relations with others.'[23] Foucault does not employ the notion of 'alienation' and is hesitant about the idea that sexuality should in some way be 'liberated'.[24] He nonetheless

22 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London: Athlone, 1988, and Gilles Deleuze, 'Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle', *Pourparlers*, Paris: Minuit, 1990.

23 Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, 'La contribution des intellectuels de la nouvelle gauche à la définition du sens de Mai 68', in Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, Robert Frank, Marie-Françoise Lévy and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds, *Les Années 68. Le Temps de contestation*, Paris: Complexe, 2000.

24 See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley, London: Allen Lane, 1979. In this book Foucault opposes the 'repressive hypothesis' about sexuality, which

shares with the New Left the desire to break with 'statocentrism'. The New Left politicized aspects of existence hitherto regarded as external to the political field. The politicization of sexuality is one example; and we know the significance it was to assume during the 1970s, particularly within feminist and homosexual movements. That is why the 'critique of everyday life' dear to Lefebvre is a central theme of the period. It results in a challenge to traditional forms – social-democratic and democratic-centralist – of organizing the Left, in favour of less hierarchical, more flexible organizations. The reticular, horizontal organization of the '*altermondialiste*' movement of the 1990s, often presented as having emerged with it, actually long predates it, just like the theories of 'anti-power' supposedly peculiar to it.

THE RESONANCE OF STRUCTURALISM

One characteristic of the New Left is the proliferation of currents to which it has given rise. It is probably necessary to go back to the years following the 1830 revolution, described by Rancière in *La Nuit des prolétaires*, to encounter a doctrinal proliferation comparable to that which occurred from the 1960s onwards.[25]

Among the theories that circulated within the New Left, it is appropriate to distinguish between those which were linked to political groups and those which were not directly. Structuralism belongs to the second category, in the sense that there was no party or movement corresponding to this paradigm. The same applies to existentialism or the Frankfurt School, which were not organized political currents. This does not mean that these currents had no 'social base', in the broad sense of the term. The relationship between structuralism and the rise of technocracy in France was classically analyzed by Lefebvre.[26] It simply means that these paradigms did not have the mission of becoming embodied in organizations.

The situation of Communism, Trotskyism, Maoism, *operaismo*, situationism, anarchism, council communism, feminism, political ecology and their numerous variants, is different. Each of these rubrics refers not only to a more or less homogeneous critical theory, but also to parties, associations, trade unions, avant-gardes – in short, organizations identifying with those theories. The organizations in question can vary in size. The militants of the French or

differentiates him from a number of critical thinkers of the period and the general prevailing climate. We shall pass over this point, which is secondary from our point of view here.

25 Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*, trans. John Drury, Philadelphia: Temple University Press. On this period see also David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

26 Henri Lefebvre, *L'Idéologie structuraliste*, Paris: Seuil, 1975.

Italian Communist Party were long numbered in the hundreds of thousands; those of Debord's Situationist International in some dozens at most. Their operating principle can also differ. The Women's Liberation Movement had a decidedly non-centralized structure, at the outset at any rate.[27] By contrast, the Socialist Workers' Party, one of the branches of British Trotskyism, is a hierarchical party, as well as being relatively homogeneous doctrinally. In both cases, however, an interaction has occurred between ideas and a 'social base', which raises the issue of the relationship between critical theories and 'repertoires of action' or activist 'know-how'.

The fact that an intellectual current is not embodied in organizations does not mean it has no influence on the period under consideration. In the case of structuralism this influence was profound. The paradigm was one of the pillars of the theoretical 'moment' of the 1960s and 70s.[28] In subsequent decades it was diffused throughout the world and irrigated the whole set of critical theories. Along with Marxism, structuralism is the sole current to have influenced all sectors of thought and to have been so systematically 'hybridized' with other currents. Thus, just as there exists a Marxist feminism, ecology and literary studies, there are forms of feminism, ecology and literary studies that derive inspiration from structuralism. Accordingly, it is crucial to specify the contours of this paradigm and examine its relations with the political movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Four main theoretical operations underlie structuralism.[29] The first is the importation into the social sciences of models in force in linguistics – more especially, the model of structural linguistics. Saussure is the main initiator of this current. His ideas passed through Roman Jakobson and the Prague School of literary studies to finally reach the founder of French structuralism – namely, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Structural linguistics was first applied by Lévi-Strauss to kinship structures. The author of *Anthropologie structurale* (1958) equated these structures with a language and regarded the exchange of women between groups as a form of communication. Starting from this initial application to a social phenomenon, the linguistic model was set to work by the structuralists in the analysis of the whole range of human phenomena. In *Les Quatre concepts*

27 See Dominique Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, 'Le féminisme des années 1970', in Christine Fauré, ed., *Encyclopédie politique et historique des femmes*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997.

28 On the notion of theoretical 'moment', see Frédéric Worms, 'Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France. De la structure à la différance', *Esprit*, May 2008.

29 See Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, London: New Left Books, 1983, chapter 2. See also François Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, vol. 1, trans. Deborah Glassman, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. It goes without saying that a current as rich as structuralism cannot be reduced to four theoretical operations, however fundamental. However, it would be equally mistaken to claim that nothing unites the different variants of the school.

fondamentaux de la psychanalyse (1964) Lacan defended the notion that the unconscious is structured like a language. The semiology developed by Barthes conceived the social world as a whole as a system of signs, as illustrated by the studies collected in *Mythologies* (1957). The tendency to generalize the linguistic model reached its apogee with the principle stated by Derrida in *De la grammatologie* (1967), and then clarified in *La Dissémination* (1972), that '*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*'. Derrida dismissed the Saussurean hypothesis that language is a stable 'system of differences', therewith marking one of the ways in which the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism was made. From his point of view the signifier is inevitably 'floating'. The transition from the model of structural linguistics to Derridean 'textuality' does not, however, presuppose abandonment of the primacy assigned to language.[30] Within poststructuralism it possesses a centrality to which Foucault's analyses of the 'order of discourse' likewise attest.

A second characteristic of structuralism is its relativism – that is, the critique of truth in which it engages. Saussurean linguistics is based on an 'internalist' conception of signification. It defends the idea that the signifier acquires its meaning through its position in the structure of the language, by differentiating itself from other signifiers and being contrasted with them. The instance of 'reference' – what the signifiers refer to in reality – is bracketed by Saussure, because it does not enter into the determination of 'linguistic value'. The French structuralists radicalize this evacuation of reality. In their view no simple 'correspondence' governs the relations between language and reality. Derrida's idea that 'there is nothing outside-text' signifies precisely that, as does Foucault's notion that the link between 'words and things' is mediated by an *episteme*.[31] Structuralism's subversion of truth is part of a more general trend, typical of the 1960s and 70s, critical of modern science and its presuppositions. This tendency is itself the expression of the hypothesis of the end of 'metanarratives' prophesied by Lyotard in *La Condition postmoderne* in 1979.[32]

The third element underlying structuralism is its relationship to causality and the progressive insistence of its representatives on the contingent character of history. In 1960s structuralism – that of such classical works as *Anthropologie structurale*, *Mythologies*, *Les Mots et les choses* and *Lire le Capital* – a form of historical determinism and objectivism was predominant. It was expressed in the attention devoted to analyzing the *longue durée* and the 'structural

30 Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, p. 42.

31 See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, London: Tavistock, 1970.

32 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. On the social critique of science, see Michel Dubois, *La Nouvelle Sociologie des sciences*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001.

invariants' constitutive of the social world. In many respects, structuralism is the inheritor of the French positivist (Comte, Durkheim) and Saint-Simonian traditions. Obviously, Marxism also influenced structuralism in this regard.

Over time, however, contingency became ever more salient in structuralist theory. May 1968, which none of the authors concerned had anticipated, and whose irruption contradicted its theses outright, was not irrelevant to this development.[33] Thus, the event ended up occupying an increasingly decisive place in their analyses. In 'vitalist' vein, one of the emblematic authors of the years after May 1968, Deleuze, stressed the unbounded creativity of desire. In this respect the appearance of *Anti-Oedipus* in 1972 constitutes a moment of transition to poststructuralism. In Althusser an initial implacable structuralism gradually gave way to an 'aleatory materialism' or 'materialism of the encounter'. In an interview with Glucksmann and Maurice Clavel, Foucault adopted the latter's idea that the philosopher should become a 'transcendental journalist'. The original determinism of structuralism thus gradually made way for a philosophy of history placed under the sign of contingency and the event. Today's theorists of the 'event' – Badiou, Žižek and Rancière – are inheritors of this problematic.

The fourth theoretical operation characteristic of structuralism is its critique of the 'subject', which results in its famous 'anti-humanism'. In the conclusion to *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), Foucault announced the death of man 'like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea': 'man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge . . . As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.'[34] For his part, Althusser employed the phrase 'theoretical anti-humanism', notably during a debate with the 'humanist' Roger Garaudy prior to the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party at Argenteuil in 1966.[35] For Althusser, history is a 'process without a subject or goal'. While there is indeed a class struggle, there is no subject of emancipation who serves as the conscious motor of it. In *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss refers to the subject as 'that intolerable spoilt brat who for too long has occupied the philosophical stage and prevented any serious work by demanding undivided attention'.[36] The target of the 'anti-humanism' of Foucault, Althusser and Lévi-Strauss was humanism in general, but more particularly Sartrean existentialism. Sartre was the

33 As perceived by Lefebvre in *L'Idéologie structuraliste*. See also Kristin Ross, *May 68 and Its Afterlives*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

34 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 386–7.

35 See Matonti, 'Arts, culture et intellectuels de gauche au XXe siècle', in Becker and Candar, eds, *Histoire des gauches en France*.

36 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *L'Homme nu*, Paris: Plon, 1971, pp. 614–15.

rival from the previous philosophical generation with whom the structuralists constantly clashed in these years.

It is interesting to note that a critique of humanism, with different presuppositions and conclusions, was developed at the same time by another current of thought – namely, the Frankfurt School. In the late 1940s, Adorno and Horkheimer conducted a problematization of the emancipatory potential of reason and universalism, which they called 'dialectic of Enlightenment'.[37] The thesis they proposed is that the founding values of the Enlightenment – progress, liberty, individual autonomy – gradually came to backfire on themselves. While they were emancipatory when compared with the *ancien régime* and obscurantism, they had made themselves complicit with the worst atrocities in the twentieth century. In particular, the extermination camps were presented by Adorno and Horkheimer as the product of the degeneration of reason into sheer 'instrumental' rationality.

'1968 THOUGHT' REVISITED

The relationship between structuralism and the New Left has been much debated. It involves the question of to what extent the political movements of the 1960s and 70s were 'on the same wavelength' as that intellectual school. Two hypotheses clash on this score. The first is that of '1968 thought', formulated in the book of that name by Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, whose subtitle is 'Essay on Contemporary Anti-Humanism'. For Ferry and Renaut, structuralism – Lacan, Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida, in particular – is '1968 thought'. In other words, this doctrine has an affinity with the political moment of the 1960s and 70s, in the sense that they are the 'symptom of the same cultural phenomenon'.[38] The operator that creates the link between the two is 'anti-humanism'. According to Ferry and Renaut, slogans such as *jouir sans entraves* (whatever turns you on), or *il est interdit d'interdire* (it is forbidden to forbid), which are among the most celebrated of 1968, are expressions of this critique of the classical 'subject'. Their main argument consists in distinguishing classical humanism from contemporary individualism: 1968 was an individualistic event, but not a humanist one. This is because in their view 'the subject dies with the advent of the individual'.[39] Whatever their intentions, the protagonists of 1968 were thus supposedly working for the emergence of an 'era of the void', to use Gilles Lipovetsky's phrase.

37 See T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London and New York: Verso, 1979. (*Dialektik der Aufklärung* first appeared in 1947.)

38 Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La Pensée 68. Essai sur l'antihumanisme contemporain*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985, p. 23.

39 Ibid., p. 123.

The second hypothesis maintains that 1968 was radically opposed to structuralism. This hypothesis is notably defended by Lefebvre, Rancière, Castoriadis and, more recently, Kristin Ross. An amusing cinematic expression of it can be found in Godard's film *La Chinoise*, in which Anne Wiazemsky, playing a Maoist militant, throws tomatoes at Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*. For these authors the movements of the 1960s and 70s were anti-structuralist on two counts. First of all, by virtue of the theme of 'alienation': there is nothing more humanist than this critical theme, which aims to restore – or realize for the first time – an 'essence' peculiar to man, who has been corrupted by capitalism.[40] The second characteristic of 1968 which caught structuralism out was that the latter, stressing the *longue durée* and 'structural invariants', is the converse of a conceptualization of the event. The idea that an event can abruptly change the course of history is foreign to it. As a slogan of the epoch adopted by Goldmann put it, 'structures do not take to the streets'.

Which hypothesis is correct? In favour of Ferry and Renaut's thesis are arguments that attest to a link between structuralism and the movements of the 1960s and 70s. First of all, publishing chronology: Foucault released *Histoire de la folie* in 1961, *Les Mots et les choses* in 1966 and *L'Archéologie du savoir* in 1969. *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital* by Althusser and his pupils both came out in 1965. *Lénine et la philosophie*, originally a lecture given by Althusser at the Sorbonne, appeared in February 1968. Derrida's *L'Écriture et la différance* and *De la grammatologie* were published in 1967, Lacan's *Écrits* in 1966, Bourdieu and Passeron's *Les Héritiers* in 1964. These books were not only published, they were also bought in large quantities. The second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s were a golden age of publishing in the social sciences. Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses* sold 20,000 copies between April and December 1966. Five-thousand copies of Lacan's *Écrits* – not the simplest of texts – sold in less than fifteen days. Obviously, the fact that books are bought does not mean that they are read; and the fact that they are read does not mean that they have a real influence on the way individuals act. We can advance the hypothesis that the content of works of this kind, fairly 'technical', circulated widely among the population, but no doubt it circulated more via press reviews than via direct reading. At the time, certain papers or magazines (for example, *Le Nouvel Observateur* or *L'Express*) made a speciality of addressing the new educated audiences which the massification of higher education and increases in living standards – and hence in cultural consumption – created in western societies after the Second World War.[41]

40 On this see the analysis by Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*, London and New York: Verso, 1983.

41 See Philippe Olivera, 'Les livres de Mai', in Damamme *et al.*, *Mai–juin 68*.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Ferry and Renaut neglect much of the thinking and event of 1968. The years prior to 1968 were equally marked by booming non- or even anti-structuralist publishing activity. In 1967 Debord's *La Société du spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* appeared. Mustapha Khayati's *De la misère en milieu étudiant* was published in 1966. These texts derived from Situationist circles, issuing from the crossing of a libertarian Marxism and the tradition of the French avant-gardes, Dadaist, Surrealist and Lettrist in particular. Sartre and existentialism were also topical in 1968, even though the Sartrean philosophical moment had no doubt passed. When Sartre spoke in the great amphitheatre of the Sorbonne in May 1968, he was heckled by some of the audience, but was also shown great respect by the students. We could multiply the examples of philosophical, sociological, artistic or other currents which had a greater or less impact on 1968: the New Wave, the numerous variants of Marxism, psychoanalysis, left-wing Roman Catholicism, and so on. From a general standpoint, the idea that an event on the scale and of the complexity of May 1968 can be assigned a single, homogeneous 'thought' is methodologically mistaken.

Added to this is the fact that if structuralism was '1968 thought', the development of poststructuralism after 1968 would be unintelligible. We have remarked of the latter that it abandons conceiving language as a stable structure and attributes an ever greater significance to contingency. The structuralism of the 1960s, by contrast, regarded language as an enduring system of differences and defended a determinist approach to history. It was obviously May 1968 that destabilized high structuralism and once again rendered the historically unforeseen conceivable, in the eyes of the very people who had elaborated it. Classical structuralism corresponds to the 1950s and 60s, a period when France was 'modernizing' and when, while social change was definitely occurring, it seemed to be inscribed in fixed frameworks. The thunder clap of May abruptly altered the perception of politics and history, obliging structuralists to reassess their positions. Structuralism is not '1968 thought' because May 1968 compelled it to move towards poststructuralism.

TOWARDS NEW CRITICAL THEORIES

These elements of a history of the New Left enable us to frame a hypothesis that is important for understanding the genesis of the new critical theories. As we have seen, two of the main characteristics of the critical thinking of the 1960s and 70s were, on the one hand, the proliferation of subjects of emancipation and, on the other, the gradual abandonment of the 'statocentric' conception of power in favour of a 'decentralized' approach. They derived from the crisis experienced at the time by the traditional political and trade-union organizations of the working class. They also flowed from the multiplication of 'secondary fronts', notably around feminism, anti-colonialism and ecology. Now, these characteristics are also very much present in today's critical theories, which emerged in the second half of the 1990s. Thus, one of the debates within the latter concerns the concept of 'multitude' and whether it has replaced the working class as a new subject of emancipation. The contemporary authors who broach questions of identity, like representatives of queer theory (Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick), theorists of recognition (Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser), or postcolonial thinkers, are themselves in search of new political subjects. Over and above the diversity of their approaches, the problem that unites them is identifying who will be the actors in future social transformations and how their 'identity' will influence the nature of these transformations. For their part, Laclau, Benedict Anderson, Tom Nairn, Balibar and Habermas examine the concept of the 'people' in its relationship to globalization (Nairn), European construction (Balibar and Habermas), and the emergence of antagonisms within nations (Laclau). In their view, as in the modern age, the people remain the principal vector of emancipation. Thinkers of the 'event' such as Badiou and Žižek, for whom the 'subject' is constituted in fidelity to a founding event, also participate in this quest.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is simple. The crisis of the subject of emancipation, and the multiplication of possible subjects of emancipation, does not date from the fall of the Berlin Wall, but from the 1960s. The terms of the debate have certainly changed over the last half-century. The salience once accorded the theme of madness, and the emancipatory potential of the insane, has decreased. The struggles of women and homosexuals have undeniably progressed, which implies that their modalities have changed. However, it is the same debate, about the same crisis of the subject of emancipation. No hegemonic subject having arrived to take the place of the working class, contemporary critical theorists remain in search of potential substitutes or new articulations.

An analogous argument can be made as regards the issue of power. We note a tendency among a number of present-day critical theorists (Holloway, Virno, Negri) to assert that struggle in its various forms – social, trade-union, institutional, armed – must be replaced by exile, defection, nomadization – in short, a set of 'indirect' strategies aimed at keeping the state apparatus at a distance, as opposed to confronting it directly. As asserted in a famous statement by Deleuze, and often adopted by these authors: 'To flee, but in fleeing to seek a weapon.'[42] This body of doctrine is commonly referred to as theories of 'anti-power'. Bartleby, Herman Melville's famous character, is often regarded by it as exemplifying the strategy of circumventing power relations. In Melville's short story,

42 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, Paris: Flammarion, 1977, p. 164.

Bartleby the scrivener systematically answers 'I would prefer not to' to each of his employer's orders, which gradually leads the latter to give up seeking to impose on him.[43] The thinkers who develop theories of anti-power explicitly counterpose it to Leninism, regarded as bankrupt on account of the catastrophic experience of the USSR. Here too the problematic is far from novel. The wall came down, the political movements suffered profound defeats, but the problems posed in the 1960s have survived underground and are re-emerging today, more burning than ever.

43 Bartleby has attracted the interest of a number of contemporary thinkers. Gilles Deleuze devoted a text to him entitled 'Bartleby, or The Formula', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. D.W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, London and New York: Verso, 1998. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Bartleby, ou la création*, Paris: Circé, 1998, and Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2006.

CHAPTER THREE

Contemporary Critical Intellectuals: A Typology

With the decline of oppositional movements in the second half of the 1970s, several reactions occurred in the intellectual field. The set of these reactions forms the outline of a typology of contemporary critical thinkers. Six categories of response by the latter can be identified in this period. I shall name these categories 'converts', 'pessimists', 'resisters', 'innovators', 'leaders' and 'experts'. The 'ideal-typical' character (in Weber's well-known sense) of these rubrics is obvious. Any intellectual will invariably be found straddling several of them. Some of the categories tend to be mutually exclusive – if not logically, then at least in practice. Generally speaking, however, most combinations of them are conceivable.

The determinants influencing critical intellectuals' membership in one or other of the categories vary. The first factor inflecting their trajectory is bound up with the overall development of the intellectual field, especially the academic field, alterations in which have impacted on their political convictions in recent decades. To be a critical thinker – Marxist in a majority of cases – in a French university when Althusser delivered a lecture on *Lénine et la philosophie* at the Sorbonne (February 1968) was one thing. To be one twenty years later, when the neo-liberal counter-revolution was in full swing, and the overall percentage of critical intellectuals had significantly declined, was quite another. The 'realignment' of academia during the 1980s and 90s swept up a number of formerly oppositional theorists, and reduced the likelihood of young theorists becoming such. Once again, this demonstrates that intellectuals are not exempt from the general laws governing the social field in which they operate.

A second factor influencing the course of intellectuals is the fate of the organizations to which they belonged. The self-dissolution in 1973 of the *Gauche prolétarienne*, one of the principal French Maoist organizations, manifestly had an impact on the trajectory of its members, regardless of whether they were intellectuals. The same applies to the Situationist International in 1972 or *Potere operaio* – Negri's organization – in 1973.

The third factor behind the trajectory of critical thinkers in recent decades is doctrinal in kind. The 'new philosophers', who furnish a sizeable contingent for the category of 'converts', were mainly recruited from Maoist ranks, especially those of the *Gauche prolétarienne*. How is this to be explained? As Michael Scott Christofferson has shown, the *Gauche prolétarienne* was distinguished