BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE IN MARX AND LATER: TOWARDS RECONSTRUCTION OF AN ORIGINALPARADIGM

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This is to certify that I, E. Dileep, have carried out the research embodied in the present dissertation for the full period under Ph. D. ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this dissertation was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any university.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> Marxism is still very young, almost in its infancy; it has scarcely begun to develop. It remains, therefore, the philosophy of our time. We cannot go beyond it because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it. Our thoughts, whatever they may be, can be formed only upon this humus.—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for Method*.[1]
>
> Of the many problems which perforce Marx left in an 'undeveloped' state, none is more crucial than that of 'base-and-superstructure'.
>
> —Stuart Hall, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor"[2]

For a number of people whose understanding of Marxism is complacently free from the awareness of the passionate debates within and about Marxism, Sartre's opinion might seem strange. For a majority of these people, Marxism is dead and gone, at the most a harmless nightmare of the past and thus does not deserve any new debate. For another considerable species of this population, which is rapidly undergoing the process of extinction, Marxism is too sacrosanct to be questioned, almost synonymous with official orthodoxy.

But somewhere in the middle of the spectrum— whose extremes are populated, on the one side by those who take Marxism for a mere placebo, and on the other side, by those who take it for a panacea— lies the rational approach towards Marxism. For such an approach, Marxism is a vibrant theoretical enterprise to come to grips with the pathologically alienated social reality and a guiding torch in the transformative endeavour towards a more humane society. For such an approach, Marxism cannot be a finished product only waiting to be appreciated, appropriated, and implemented, but something dynamic and verifiable through a constant process of examination and re-examination, right from the very foundations, and gets enriched in this

process. From this perspective, Sartre's view about the infantile stage of development of Marxism is not much more than a truism.

This unorthodox approach towards Marxism has its origin in Marx himself, whose intellectual iconoclasm takes the form of a paradoxical statement wherein he states that all he knew was that he was not a Marxist[3]. That Marx's formulations are potentially provisional and have faced the threat of relentless revision and reformulation by him is too well known to be dealt with in detail.[4] When Stephen W. Hawking says, "Any physical theory is always provisional, in the sense that it is only a hypothesis: you can never prove it,"[5] isn't it more true about the social theories where the reality always changes before the very eyes of the theorists? As can be explicitly seen from a well-known letter, Marx's views are ingrained with a scientific skepticism, especially in the later years.[6]

He never hesitated to make his theories the objects of scientific scrutiny. And the objective of my present research is to make a seemingly settled and well-established aspect of Marxism, the object of systematic scrutiny. That aspect is the theory of the Base and Superstructure. Before getting into the details of the subject at hand, some remarks about the position of Marxism in modern academia may contribute to the contextualization of the study.

Marxism and the Modern Academia

Another apparent oddity about Sartre's remark is its insistence on the nascent state of Marxism that seems anachronistic at a time when the decay and the eventual demise of Marxism are taken to be a matter of common knowledge. It is widely believed that the collapse of the so-called communist regimes is the indisputable *coup de grace* delivered to Marxism. But what is not so widely appreciated is the fact that this collapse of communism as an external political threat to the developed capitalist countries also contributed to the development of an intellectual

environment that is more conducive to take a fairly balanced view of Marxism. The circulation and popularity of the comparatively recent theoretical trends that are generally designated rather derogatorily as Academic Marxism and Western Marxism has a lot to do with these favourable conditions.[7]

Remarkably, Bertell Ollman, and Edward Vernoff, the editors of a book with the unusual title *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, published in 1982, give an interesting description of the academic situation in America:

> A Marxist Cultural Revolution is taking place today in American universities. More and more students and faculty are being introduced to Marx's interpretation of how capitalism works (for whom it works better, for whom worse), how it arose, and where it is tending. It is a peaceful and democratic revolution, fought chiefly with books and lectures, with most of the action taking place on the fringes of the established disciplines. . . .
>
> In political science, for example, four Marxist-inspired textbooks on American government have been published since 1970, whereas before that there were none. In the same period, Cambridge, Oxford, and Princeton University Presses, the three most prestigious university publishers, have among them brought out over fifteen books on Marx and Marxism, almost all of them quite sympathetic. There are over 400 courses given today in Marxist philosophy, whereas hardly any were given in the 1960s. As part of this trend, Marxism— viewed as a serious alternative approach— is finding its way into the courses of an increasing number of non-Marxists in practically every discipline.[8]

Of course, this description is not induced by any undue optimism of the writers as shown by their remark that reads like a rejoinder: “A renewal of McCarthyism, of which there are already some signs, is, of course, always a danger. The new Marxism is partly protected from an all-out attack by its nonparty, nonRussian, non subversive (sic) character”[9]; this demonstrates their awareness of the socio-political backdrop which made the uncommon condition possible.

An article from *The Economist* of December 2002, with a thought provoking title “Marx after Communism” that is manifestly unsympathetic to Marx and Marxism, still writes:

> In 1999 the BBC conducted a series of polls, asking people to name the greatest men and women of the millennium. In October of that year, within a few weeks of the tenth anniversary of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the BBC declared the people's choice for ‘greatest thinker’. It was Karl Marx. Einstein was runner-up, Newton and Darwin third and fourth, respectively. ‘Although dictatorships throughout the 20th century have distorted [Marx's] original ideas,’ the state-financed broadcaster noted, ‘his work as a philosopher, social scientist, historian and a revolutionary is respected by academics today.’[10]

In fact the responsiveness of the modern academia to Marxism is never an arcanum. Still, one should not expect that response to be consistent, either in attitude or in extent, for reasons that are obvious, like the socio-political conditions for instance. But, in spite of all the inconsistencies, the academia never seemed to have resorted to reticence, or to what Marx complained in some other context as the conspiracy of silence. In fact this responsiveness to Marxism is a major stimulus that spurred the intellectual trajectory of the modern academia. Thus, Robert J. Antonio, the editor of the collection *Marx and Modernity* writes:

> Starting with Max Weber, diverse thinkers have seen Marx as a pole star of modern social theory— his challenge to capitalist modernity is so fundamental that later generations of theorists, such as today's postmodernists and other new cultural theorists, have felt compelled to situate themselves vis-à-vis his views in debates over the historical direction and ethical or aesthetic worth of Modern culture.[11]

Against this backdrop it is not difficult to understand the academic scenario even in America, about which Lyn Marcus writes in a book published in 1975: "Few universities in the United States do not offer appreciation— or depreciation— of Marx, in their curricula, and there is no liberal-arts specialty which does not have a professedly 'Marxist' faction."[12] But notwithstanding these historical facts, for a majority of scholars in the present day Indian academia, even the mention of Marxism evokes vague recollections of antiquarian intellectual interests.

To some extent this particular indifference is the manifestation of a wider problem of lack of interest towards all subjects that are commonly designated as humanities which are not much career-oriented in India now, at least in a relative sense. The dismissal of the importance of humanities is no more an accidental declaration based on any private whim. It even finds a lofty official expression in the solemn speech of the governor of Andhra Pradesh, on the eve of the republic day, 2008.[13] Seen in this light, it is not strange that some universities do not have a *de facto* philosophy department at all, due to the active apathy of the government. This presents a tragic contrast with the picture of India, generally depicted through western eyes, in which even ordinary people are philosophical in their daily life. But, fortunately, this has not been the case in all the countries, at least in the countries in which the BBC survey is conducted, as shown by

the conspicuously greater importance given to a social thinker— Marx. Given the importance of Marxism, it still needs to be explained why the thesis of base and superstructure is singled out for a closer study among the other methodological tools found in its intellectual inventory. And this cannot be done without getting into our zone of engagement.

The Centrality of Base and Superstructure in Marxism

Professor Erik Olin Wright, University of Wisconsin, writes in a course book of sociology of that university, entitled *Class, State and Ideology: An Introduction to Social Science in the Marxist Tradition*:

> Marxism has always been easier for non-Marxists to define than for Marxists themselves. Non-Marxists generally define Marxism as a doctrine (or worse, dogma) that defends a set of propositions about society based on the work of Karl Marx. Marxism = Marx's-ism. Marxists, on the other hand, have engaged in endless debates over precisely what constitutes the irreducible core of that doctrine, what is essential and what is not, what aspects of Marx's work should be retained and what aspects discarded or revised, whether Marxism is primarily a "method" or a set of substantive propositions, whether Marxism is a general theory of society and history, or just a specific theory of certain properties of societies. Such debates are complex and often opaque. We will encounter them in many different guises throughout the course.[14]

This mention of theoretical controversies even in an introductory course book may seem to be a symptom of over-scrupulousness. Indeed, in the case of Marxism, it is inevitable because of the ubiquitous debates about almost every aspect of Marxism. But, in spite of these all-pervading debates, there is a sort of appreciable basic consensus about the central contribution of

Marxism. One can see this central contribution in the changed status of the economic sphere (or the sphere of material production) from something extraneous or exogenous to the social phenomenon to something essential or endogenous. Then, what exactly is the thesis that embodies this crucial idea?

For anyone who is faintly familiar with Marxism, the idea of the base and superstructure thesis will strike immediately. Thus, "Marx's Historical materialism", writes S.H.Rigby in his *Marxism and History* "is often seen as consisting of little more than the claim that society's relations of production are the 'base', upon which is built a 'superstructure' of law, politics and Ideology."[15]

It is because of this central conceptual position that, whenever there is a discussion about the fundamental problems of Marxism it touches the theory of base and superstructure. Historically, Marxism has been vulnerable to the repeated accusations of reductionism and determinism. Almost invariably, these accusations touch the theory of base and superstructure and result in some modifications or attempted refinements, beginning from the times of Engels, as can be seen in his widely-cited letter of September 21, 1890 where he explains at length:

> . . . According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all

> these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible), the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself. [16]

This classic statement is not an occasional instance, but one of the earliest results of a clearly felt need for enhancement. And the tradition of the unceasing efforts of enhancement it sets up continues to this day without appreciable success. In fact, whenever a new theoretical trend emerges within Marxism through criticism of the old, the theory of the base and superstructure generally provides the theatre of war. When Raymond Williams, the pioneer of Cultural Materialism, writes, "a persistent dissatisfaction, within Marxism, about the proposition of 'base and superstructure', has been most often expressed by an attempted refinement and revaluation of 'the superstructure'"[17]it is something of an intellectual confession. Thus Leonard Jackson rightly observes: "Literary cultural materialists do not see it as their first priority to explain cultural practices in economic terms; they try to distance themselves from what they see as the Marxist base-superstructure metaphor."[18] This is another acknowledgement of the centrality of the base-superstructure theory, though in a negative form.

No wonder that the tremendously influential Althusserian Marxism has a lot to do with the base and superstructure theory. As Jackson writes again, in connection with Althusser's theory:

> What the theory does is to give much more theoretical scope to the superstructure than the Stalinist theory it superseded— almost as much as the humanist European Marxisms with which it was competing— and to encourage the development of a much more elaborate theory of the superstructure itself.[19]

Jackson's recounting of the influential role of Althusser's Marxism in determining the trajectory of the theory from Raymond Williams to Terry Eagleton is also worth quoting in view of the interesting delineation it offers to the present day reader:

> Possibly the most savage criticism Raymond Williams encountered during his lifetime came from a student and longtime admirer of his, Terry Eagleton, in *Criticism and Ideology* . . . There was much more to this savagery than a mere Oedipal attempt to overthrow an admired intellectual father, acknowledged as such within that very book. Eagleton was at that moment a passionate Althusserian, and arguing from the point of view of a rigorously theoretical Marxism. His rebuke of Williams was more than personal; it was generational, and representative.[20]

Thus in any genuine exposition of Marxism, the base and superstructure theory occupies the most strategic position either in a positive or in a negative way. The relevance of this theory of base and superstructure continues even with the modern theoretical trends, in the era of fashionable post-isms such as post-Marxism, albeit in a negative sense. As Stuart Sim observes in his *Post-Marxism*:

> Western Marxism is in general characterized by a greater interest in philosophical and aesthetic matters than political and economic . . . . and this shift can be seen to have post-Marxist implications. For a start, it calls into question the dominance

> of the base over the superstructure (more or less an article of faith in classical Marxism) and even reverses this on occasion.[21]

Thus the theory of the base and superstructure occupies a central place not only in Marxism but also in the later theoretical reactions in it.

A Persistent Ambivalence in Marxism

There has been a deep-rooted and a longstanding ambivalence in Marxism about the concept of the base and superstructure in spite of its evident centrality. For instance, S. H. Rigby, whose words cited earlier refer to the importance of the concept of base and superstructure, writes a few lines after those words, in the same book, *Marxism and History*:

> Base and superstructure is an architectural metaphor which Marx uses in order to persuade the reader that a certain perspective is useful. Unfortunately it has become a dead metaphor, so that Marxists sometimes ask which elements are included in each, as if the two actually existed. In fact the superstructure does not exist.[22]

On the one hand, the concept of base and superstructure is acknowledged as central to Marxism, but on the other hand the very existence of superstructure is denied. This ambivalence in Marxism is symptomatic with regard to the concept of superstructure.

The first sentence in the chapter "Base and Superstructure", in Raymond Williams' *Marxism and Literature* reads: "Any modern approach to a Marxist theory of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure." [23] Paradoxically, the conclusion of that chapter says:

> Thus, contrary to a development in Marxism, it is not 'the base' and 'the superstructure' that need to be studied, but specific and indissoluble real

> processes, within which the decisive relationship, from a Marxist point of view, is that expressed by the complex idea of 'determination'.[24]

This is another characteristic manifestation of the same persistent ambivalence. The acknowledged centrality is simultaneously counteracted by reluctance towards the concept of superstructure; that sometimes borders on repugnance. Though it seems bizarre, this ambivalence is not baseless, in a way. Some perceivable reasons for this persistent theoretical repulsion are:

1. The Metaphor of base and superstructure is obviously structural or, to use Edward Thompson's expression "constructional". And the intriguing question is to explain how this constructional metaphor is compatible with the organic model that Marx often uses when analyzing the social phenomenon.

2. An all-encompassing category as it was, (excepting the economic base) the concept of superstructure presents many problems with its obvious implications of wholesale reductionism and determinism that defies any attempts for theoretical sophistication or diversification.

3. By referring to issues like law and politics that inform the essential features of the state in the same breath, along with the predominantly cultural fields like art, morals etc., the concept of superstructure tends to blur their defining differences and runs counter to any analysis worth the name.

4. This crude reductionism can lead to grossly grotesque conclusions when applied to the delicately intricate issues such as literature, philosophy and morality, the discussions of which are intrinsically more nuanced and complex.

5. An attendant problem with the concept of all-encompassing superstructure is the question of the mutual positions of its motley constituents. This mutual positioning is not even hinted by Marx (as the very question does not arise with his version of superstructure). As a result, this

mutual alignment is derived from elaborate exegetical exercises that are based more on the creative visualizations of the theorists than on the analysis of Marx's texts.

6. As it traditionally holds a central position in the organically linked theoretical framework of Marxism, the base and superstructure thesis, with its inherent lapses in its present distorted form will affect other aspects of Marxist theory. For instance, as it is often taken as a variant formulation of the materialistic thesis, the conceptual confusions endemic to the base and superstructure theory can prove epidemic by contaminating the propositions of Marxist materialism.

I have enumerated only half a dozen conceptual problems attendant with the base and superstructure thesis, and these are by no means exhaustive. The chequered history of Marxism is interspersed with an array of such complaints regarding "this now universally reviled paradigm"[25], to borrow the words of Terry Eagleton. And these complaints understandably result in attempts at refinement. Thus the base and superstructure thesis that is so central to Marxism has become highly vulnerable to the whimsical visualizations of different theorists and when one starts investigating what the base or superstructure is, Marxism(s) offer(s) explanations that are not only copious but capricious as well.

The Necessity of Systematic Research

As everybody knows, Marxism is a theory with great practical implications that are political and economic. And the way it has changed the trajectory of world politics is too well known and too broad a subject to be dealt with in detail. In contrast, the predominant interest in Marxism, in the modern times, is mainly cultural. The explanatory link between these seemingly dichotomous aspects of Marxism has been the base and superstructure paradigm, which apparently defines a theoretical nexus between the two contending facets. Thus it occupies a

unique and central role in the Marxian body of thought. As we have seen above, this central status has never rescued that concept from being the object of the most haphazard surmises. Consequently, if there is any concept in Marxism that allows umpteen ways of formulation, it is the concept of superstructure. Everything about the concept of superstructure is inchoate and chaotic—regarding both what elements constitute superstructure and how (in what way) they constitute it.

The very first words of Chris Harman's essay "Base and Superstructure" are remarkable in this respect as they elaborately ponder upon the perplexing laxity of the views on this subject:

> There is a confusion at the very centre of Marxism. . . . Every pronouncement of the 'death of Marxism' by bourgeois ideologues has been proved wrong within a decade or so by a new range of Marxist studies of society, the economy and history. Yet when it has come to spelling out what exactly is the Marxist approach there has been enormous confusion, with 'Marxists' saying apparently contradictory things.
>
> The confusion centres around the couplet 'base' and 'superstructure'. . . . What is the 'base'? The economy? The forces of production? Technology? The relations of production? What is included in the superstructure? Obviously the state. But what about ideology (and revolutionary theory)? The family? The state when it owns industry?
>
> Finally, what is the relation between the 'base' and the 'superstructure'? Does the base determine the superstructure? If so, what exactly is the nature of the determination? And does the superstructure have a degree of 'autonomy'— and if

> so, how can this be reconciled with talk of 'determination' (even if it is only 'determination in the last resort')?[26]

Such troubled territory is obviously a fertile ground for an inquisitive researcher. This desperate disparity is to be found not only between the views of different writers but even between the views of one and the same writer. Lenin, for instance, whose views are generally marked for their clarity and incisiveness, writes, "Their [i.e. Marx's and Engel's] basic idea . . . was that social relations are divided into material and ideological. The latter merely constitute a superstructure on the former,"[27] as if the base and the superstructure thesis is a mere paraphrase of the materialist theory. But this does not stop him from writing incisively as follows: "Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern European states serve to fortify the rule of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat."[28] Still he does not seem to be conscious of any discrepancy between the two versions.

The endemic persistence of vagueness and vagaries of formulating the concepts of the base and the superstructure is further evinced by the fact that even the modern, analytically oriented attempts are not much comforting when it comes to this chronically confounded issue. G. A. Cohen, in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History* that is celebrated as a path-breaking study for the standards of rigorousness it has set itself in formulating Marx's theories, writes concisely: "Marx gave no definite demarcation of the superstructure. Does it include ideology? We shall suppose that it does not . . . We take the superstructure to be a set of non-economic institutions, notably the legal system and the state."[29] But again this does not prevent him from writing elsewhere in the same book, "The superstructure consists of legal, political, religious, and other

non-economic institutions,"[30] inexorably extending his concise, first version of superstructure with only two elements in its conceptual compass.

The example of Cohen is not any random choice, but intended as a representative case in the best sense of the word, because he genuinely represents the best-known attempt at a rigorous formulation of Marx's theories. If even that attempt is not very comforting, the root of the chronic confusion has more to do with a deep-rooted presumption about the theory of the base and the superstructure, than with any inherent weakness of his approach. That presumption, at least partly, lies in the established belief that the thesis of the base and the superstructure is an all-encompassing theory of society. This belief is so deep rooted and so widely accepted that even the need for explicitly formulating it is never felt, as it happens in the case of the things that are too obvious to be explicitly stated.[31] The central concern of the present research is to problematise this presumption and to dismantle the notions based on this unfounded idea and thus to dissolve a historically constructed dogma that has gained an axiomatic status, by bringing out the specific significance of base and superstructure thesis as a theory that conceptualizes the relation between production relations and the state.

This concisely defined view of the thesis runs against the popularly held notion of it as an all-encompassing theory, which, understandably, is inherently extendable in proportion to the breadth of the conceptual span of a commentator in whose hands it happens to find itself. Such precarious position tends to result in notional inconsistencies. And the inconsistencies could be found not only between the ideas of different critics but also between different versions of the same critic which is not so common in other areas of academic activity.

This demonstrates the extent of theoretical laxity that is traditionally tolerated in the studies of Marxism, especially in this regard, as if what matters in formulating the twin concepts

is only the exegetical fecundity of the commentators and not the analytical fidelity to the basic texts as Marx originally formulated them, and not as how he is thought to have formulated them. The basic principle that Marx's view of these concepts should be derived primarily from the study and analysis of his own writings in a systematic way is ignored in practice[32]. In this connection I envisage my research not as another commentatory endeavour that enriches the existing cornucopia of interpretations, but as an exploratory effort to find out the meaning of Marx based on a rigorous study of his own works, to borrow Raymond Williams' expression "the long, massive, unfinished, often contradictory work which we now call Marx."[33]

A typical example for the near ubiquitous practice of confounding Marx with the later writers is provided by S. B. Smith, in his article bearing an apparently pertinent title for my project "Considerations on Marx's Base and Superstructure". Despite the title that speaks of "Marx's Base and Superstructure", the very first lines confess that "this paper will be devoted to examining the character of various second-order accounts of Marx's base and superstructure model of society". Here, he studies three versions of this thesis 1) Fundamentalist Thesis 2) Internal Relatedness Thesis 3) Overdetermination Thesis.[34] But it is only in the first version that he tries to substantiate his arguments with the statements of Marx, though, here also, he mentions Plekhanov, Kautsky, and Bukharin as the principal proponents, later considering the "sophisticated defense"[35] of this position by G. A. Cohen, which he has managed to digest only partly.[36] After considering Lukács and Ollman as regards the second version and Althusser in the case of the third, he states in his "Conclusion", that "all three variations on this theme exist side by side within Marx's writings and sometimes even within the same text"[37]. But, to assert this, he doesn't see any need to go beyond the self-avowed "second-order accounts". Thus he

concludes his “Considerations on Marx’s Base and Superstructure” without troubling himself with any direct engagement with Marx.

In fact, more than a few writers setting out on a study of Marx would indulge in such analyses of versions when it comes to the base and superstructure thesis. For Melvin Rader, to take a fairly reasonable example, there are three such versions as shown in his *Marx’s Interpretation of History*: 1) fundamentalist version 2) dialectical version and 3) organic version. In fact, a central concern of his book is to argue for the organic version. [38] Though Rader deploys more than usual care to analyse the mutual merits of these alternative versions, the problem with such a procedure is that it has an unmistakable subjective ring to it, making it seem that the whole issue is the facility of the critic in choosing the best version among the available, facile alternatives. Evidently, such a method has no room for any trace of scholarly rigour, especially when the purpose is the study and appraisal of the specific thesis of a theorist— Marx, in the present case.

But this malleable intellectual milieu will be an ideal breeding ground for the mushrooming of secondary scholarship. As a result, the commentatory output on Marx has grown so overwhelmingly massive and pervasively popular that it now seems rather rude and drab to deal with Marx directly and to take him for what he says[39], thus reaching beyond the sedimentary sclerosis of exegetical accretions. Such disinterring interrogation informs the central core of my engagement with Marx that takes his concise, restricted formulation of base and superstructure at its face value, with its unique potential to do away with the deplorable, undue dependency on the interpretive conjectures, as the very necessity does not arise in its case.

<u>The Departure My Work Proposes</u>

The simple but precise departure proposed here is that the theory of the base and the superstructure is not an all-encompassing paradigm that explains away all the social spheres in reference to the economy, as it is widely believed to have done; but a conceptual model to explicate the inextricable connection between the production relations (the base) and politics and law (superstructure). This proposal is based on the undeniable fact that Marx explicitly speaks only about the "legal and political superstructure", in the 1859 preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the preface regarding which, G. A. Cohen aptly observes: "In attending to the 'Preface,' we are not looking at just one text among many, but at that text which gives the clearest statement of the theory of historical materialism."[40] Though Marx mentioned "definite forms of social consciousness" in the same breath here, he excluded them explicitly from the label of superstructure and stated that they only "correspond" to the base.[41]

Though the importance of this preface is widely accepted and copiously written about, this restricted use of the concept of superstructure is never acknowledged properly, let alone explored in its theoretical implications. Initially, I too had ignored this obvious restricted use until I fortuitously faced the fact that Marx's use betrays a flagrant contrast with the prevalent panoramic version of the superstructure. And when I took up the same problem as the object of my research, what looked initially like a serendipitous, strange deviation of Marx from what he is customarily supposed to have said had assumed the proportions of a nagging intellectual dilemma awaiting solution in the course of research. The research, when completed (if researches could ever be completed in a sense) has yielded the view that Marx's restricted use of base and superstructure thesis is found not only in the 1859 preface, but in many of his works written thereafter and published during his lifetime, with a remarkable consistency, demanding critical consideration and analytical attention.

The importance of this resulting position can be properly appreciated, when we remember that some major theorists[42] have observed the restricted use of Marx in the first instance of the preface, but wrongly thought that Marx later generalized the concept of superstructure in the same preface. This notion is refuted in my analysis of Marx's preface, which unequivocally unveils the restricted use of superstructure in the preface and stresses its unacknowledged rigour.

If a perceptive reader notes the ambiguity that is patent in the title of this proposal, caused by the semantic contradictoriness[43] inherent in the word "original", between the sense of "something that is there from the very beginning" and the sense of "something that is propounded newly"; it would not take much clairvoyance to realise further that indeed the dialecticity of the word is intentionally exploited, as the objective of my project is to excavate the original restricted version of Marx, that may seem novel when surfaced, as it lies buried under the predominant all-inclusive version so far.

Of course, it is possible to argue that the concept of superstructure also includes ideology by interpreting superstructure as a conglomeration of all the elements that could be derived from the writings of Marx, written at different times, irrespective of their mutual incongruities. This, in fact, is the way the modern all-inclusive superstructure came to be maintained. But the tacit methodological commitment betrayed by this sort of argument is hardly tenable, as it endeavours apologetically and reverentially to retain all the formulations of Marx intact, disregarding their apparent disparity, instead of analyzing and sorting out the differences between these formulations, both conceptually and chronologically, and embarking on a critical estimation of the relative validity of these formulations as the indispensable stages of Marx's intellectual

evolution. Considering Marx's proclivity for relentlessly revising and reformulating his theories, this indiscriminately agglomerating methodology is scarcely plausible.

The uniqueness of my approach lies in considering Marx's apparently anomalous but consistently restricted use of superstructure as a deliberate deviation and not as a fortuitous aberration. The latter approach constitutes the unacknowledged methodological basis of many critics who observed Marx's restricted use fortuitously, but never thought it could be worthy of sustained critical attention. In fact, this approach itself is fortuitous and unfortunate in spite of its unchallenged popularity. The salient feature of my approach lies in the simple and highly probable understanding that Marx's restriction is the result of his desire to bring out a nuanced discrimination in the concept of superstructure by confining it to politics and law, which have a close nexus with the production relations (i.e. the base) and by leaving out other spheres which are not so intrinsically connected with the base, so as to make the concept of superstructure more rigorous and compact. Only a rationale like this, I believe, can explain why Marx maintained his restricted version consistently in the writings published in his lifetime, after his preface.

Though it is patently different from the widely believed panoramic superstructure, the restricted version is not difficult to appreciate, for the simple reason that the close nexus of politics and law (which form the most essential organs of the state) with the production relations (which are mostly class relations) is a well-known idea in Marxism. Engels— in whom I found the first, elementary source of the popularly believed, panoramic superstructure— is also well aware of this intrinsic connection and he offered one of the most lucid explanations for this connection in his *Housing Question* [44]. This implies that in the base and superstructure thesis Marx offers a formal theoretical model, to define these twin social aspects (politics and law), with their well-known dependence on the production relations in terms of a metaphor that is

strikingly suggestive of such a relation. Thus, despite the semblance of conceptual deviation, Marx's restricted superstructure has a great potential for bringing out immense rigour to his conceptual framework and could to do away once for all with the endless array of exegetical acrobatics. In a way, Marxism has been groping for satisfying answers for the questions which are already solved by Marx long ago.

However unconventional this proposal may seem, the central argument that Marx mentions only a restricted superstructure in his 1859 preface is not actually unknown in the Marxist tradition. On the contrary, it is well-known that both in his preface and in the first volume of *Capital*, his *Magnum opus*, Marx mentioned only the "legal and political superstructure". But these "purloined letters" of Marx are never taken at their face value, not because they are unknown, but because they are well-known in their unusual form that is apparently incongruent with his own other statements of superstructure, as well as with the versions of Engels and the later successors.

There is another aspect to the issue. When the concept of superstructure is thus dethroned from the over-arching, all-inclusive status, a struggle for paradigmatic primacy ensues from it: What thesis of Marx holds the overall central place now? My analysis of the preface, leads me to the conclusion that the mode of production thesis is to be enthroned in this coveted status. This brings about a paradigm shift, in the literal sense of the phrase, in the popular view of Marxism. Besides being not easily susceptible to reductionism, the mode of production thesis, with its conspicuous emphasis on the centrality of human activity has many advantages in theorizing the totality of social reality without entailing stultifying, unilateral determinism. But, again, the received understanding of the concept of mode of production in Marxism is not free from its own problems. Clearing these inherited confusions and figuring out its notional specificity and tracing

out the theoretical consequences of this paradigm shift in Marxism inform the course of my research.

A Note on Chapterisation

A sketchy explanation of the structure of the study will help easy comprehension of the central thrust of its argument. The study takes off in the second chapter (the present "Introduction" being the first chapter) entitled "The Concepts of *Base* and *Superstructure* in Contemporary Academic Discourses: A Precursory Excursion", with a consideration of the pragmatics of the terms "base" and "superstructure" as they are used in the present day academic articles. In this attempt to take stock of the current use of the concepts, no discernible regularity is observed in the deployment of the concepts in overwhelmingly varied fields of study in these articles. Then the arena of inspection is shifted to reference works like dictionaries and encyclopaedias, which generally enjoy a reverential status in the academic world, in the third chapter "The Oracles of Reference: A Solemn Consultation". Though the use of the said concepts in this solemn realm is not so facile, as in the previous case, it doesn't exhibit the usual rigour we generally expect in reference works.

After noticing the commonly held conceptual coverage of base and superstructure, in a wide range of reference works that included some specifically devoted to Marxism and communism, as well as taking cognizance of the repeated reference these tomes make to the 1859 preface of Marx, the study proceeds to the analysis of the preface, in the chapter "What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface", where, among other things, the restricted version of base and superstructure and the importance of "mode of production" as the holistic thesis of Marx are emphasized. The task of a comparative study of this restricted formulation, with the various other statements of Marx at different instances, and the appreciation and appraisal of

their mutual deviations and uniformities is taken up in the chapter “Archeology of Restricted Superstructure”, in which the restricted base and superstructure thesis emerges as the view of Marx, endorsed in the works published after 1859 and during his life time, with remarkable consistency.

Upholding this radically different version of base and superstructure, as the view of Marx, entails the responsibility of tracing the transformation of the thesis into its present heterogeneous form; and this is attempted in the chapter titled “Genealogy of Heterogeneity”. The last chapter, “Base and Superstructure & Mode of Production: A Paradigmatic Dilemma”, concerns itself with a discussion of the theoretical complications and implications involved in disinheriting the holistic status to the base and superstructure thesis and reinstating the mode of production thesis as the legitimate claimant for that position.

An inquisitive reader may be interested in knowing the chronological order of the above-mentioned chapters. The actual beginning happened to be in one of the middle chapters (chapter 4),[45] analysing 1859 preface of Marx, the text in which the research problem presented itself to me initially, when I squarely faced the glaring discrepancy between what is actually present in the preface and what it is generally purported to have presented (with due apologies to the most-modern-minded post-modernists). The next chapter that gropes to gather together the other instances of Marx's fertile formulations and venture to make a critical comparison of them is also the next in the order of time.

Then I started working on the next chapter with the aim of tracing back the contemporary distorted version of the thesis, but this was interrupted in the middle due to the suffocating suspicions regarding the contemporary status of my topic. Chances are that a study of the contemporary discussions about my subject may pose problems of relevance for the whole

research project, if the present position of the subject is more advanced than the departures I propose; on the other hand, I could not dispel the vague apprehensions about the unenviable prospect of redundantly rediscovering a well-known thing —the only common point between these dreaded possibilities is that I could not say which is worse.

The second and the third chapters are the result of the work undertaken to settle accounts with these nagging anxieties about the contemporary status of my topic, only after completing which, I could finish my retracing chapter, "Genealogy of Heterogeneity", which was decelerated in the middle. After the precarious period of the present and retrospective comparisons and counter-checking are over, at least in a relative sense, the last chapter that was actually written is the last chapter, "'Base and Superstructure' and 'Mode of Production': A Paradigmatic Dilemma", as an exception to the exceptions.

Toward Situating the Study

Any study of this kind will have some inevitable limitations. To begin with, treating Marxism as an academic subject is itself a limitation, as it involves an abstraction from its programmatic aspect. Thus Terry Eagleton remarks in his *Marxism and Literary Criticism* that is intended only as an introduction to the subject:

> I have spoken of Marxism as a 'subject', and there is a real danger that books of this sort may contribute to precisely that kind of academics. No doubt we shall soon see Marxist criticism comfortably wedged between Freudian and mythological approaches to literature, as yet one more stimulating academic 'approach', one more well-tilled field of inquiry for students to tramp. Before this happens, it is worth reminding ourselves of a simple fact. Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them; and what that

> means rather more concretely, is that the narrative Marxism has to deliver the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression. There is nothing academic about those struggles, and we forget this at our cost.[46]

This passage rightly warns us against a possible misunderstanding about the subject at hand. But from the researcher's point of view the political tone and tenor of a majority of Marxist writings present a problem of a different type. Unlike the speculative thinking, in which, according to Hegel "the interests which move the lives of races and individuals are hushed"[47] Marx's thoughts have mobilized the actions of humanity on a world scale. As a thinker, Marx is extremely sensitive to the contemporary social problems and consequently we find his theory in the form of a passionate polemic striving to develop a liberative theory based on a down-to-earth understanding of the social reality and not in the form of a dispassionately dressed academic discourse. This passionate tone may be hard to cope with for an academic, especially so when the researcher does not share the concerns of the subject pursued or when the researcher's interests are not consonant with the subject of study. This study, in its earnest concern to make out the original sense of Marx, has never treated his political sympathies as extraneous to the subject of study, though a deliberate restraint is observed diligently, not to indulge in those aspects when the issues examined do not call for them.

On the negative side of the political passions, we can say that, ironically, it is not only a prejudice against Marxism that impedes an objective research of it but also its enormous influence and popularity. Raymond Aron's statement that "It is really no more difficult to present Marx's leading ideas than those of Montesquieu or Comte; if only there were not so many

millions of Marxists",[48] may sound paradoxical but not altogether unfounded. Again, it should not be ignored that the predominant reason for this is frequently political.

The seamy side of political tendentiousness presented itself starkly, when I discovered to my dismay, that a book with a title, remarkably pertinent to my topic, *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure* is actually a hopeless apology for Stalin's theory of base and superstructure, besides being uniquely uninformative either about Marx or about Lenin.[49] Another book-length study with a strikingly pertinent title *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, by Franz Jakubowski[50] need to be mentioned here. The parallels between my project and Jakubowski's are apparent even in the titles. For one thing, the keyword "Superstructure" is common in both titles. For another, Jakubowski's book, his only major work, is also based on his doctoral thesis, though it is published in Poland in 1936, and republished in English in 1970. But there ends the similarities.

The overwhelming concern for Jakubowski is not the focused analysis of the twin concepts his title announces, but to defend the then subversive theories of Lukács, presented in his *History and Class Consciousness* and of Karl Korsch, in his *Marxism and Philosophy*. A personal friend of Korsch, and an active Trotskyite, as the few details posted by the hosting website for his book say about him, he is intent on accentuating the centrality of humanist element in Marx. Indeed, this takes a major part of his book. The chief themes of both Lukács and Korsch figure in his work prominently. When it comes to the theory of base and superstructure, he doesn't differ essentially, with the views of other critics. His idea of base and superstructure encompasses all the traditional items. In fact, his very title betrays his view that ideology forms a part of superstructure, whereas, to do away with the superstructural status of ideology forms one of my central concerns, to restrict the concept of superstructure to the

politico-legal aspects thereby. Thus, the difference between the titles we used is also indicative of the differences of content at a deeper level.

That Poland happens to be the land from which Jakubowski hailed may not be altogether accidental, because the most animated and versatile discussion of the base and superstructure thesis has taken place among the sociologists of that country. Ray Taras has offered an interesting account of the contending perspectives, in his article "Polish Sociology and the Base-Superstructure Debate". The strength and the limitations of the article lie precisely at the same point: the writer is concerned with giving an account of the variety of views that surfaced during the discussion and is less interested in appraising their mutual merits.[51] Even a meticulous reading of the article did not yield the slightest hint of a critic who tended to argue on the lines I have hinted at so far. This is not at all meant to undermine the originality and variety of the views discussed in that essay. Though many European writers have spilt a lot of critical ink on this subject—including Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, G. A. Cohen, Jon Elster, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Althusser, Norah Carlin, Chris Harman, Duncan Hallas, Tom O'Lincoln, Alex Callinicos, to name a few— the variety and novelty found in the Polish debates is not commonly seen here.

A few remarks about the state of Marxist scholarship in India, where it has been a predominant intellectual force, are understandably appropriate here, in view of the location of the research, if not for anything else. An overwhelming preoccupation with the programmatic aspect of Marxism is a prominent feature here, so much so that any general theoretical discussion of Marxism is usually dubbed as academic Marxism, in a derogatory sense. A considerable body of commentatory literature produced both by Marxists and others in the West, on Marx and his theories, is conspicuous by its absence in India; whereas, sustained arguments on the application

of Marxism to different concrete issues are quite common. This practically results in a situation in which, in spite of the recognition of the significance of Marxism for the analysis of social questions, its general theory is usually imported, much like a ready-made product, suitable for immediate consumption by applying it to specific problems. In a way, the distaste for the commentatory work ends up making us commentators of the commentators.

Dipankar Gupta's article "Caste, Infrastructure and Superstructure: A Critique", published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, in 1981, presents an example that is remarkably relevant to my work. Here, the writer says, "incomplete as the works of earlier Marxists have been they have all quite unambiguously placed caste at the level of the superstructure and have not considered it to be a primordial reality of Indian society."[52] Later he critically considers the views of Maurice Godelier and Gail Omvedt which locate caste in the infrastructure. In the course of his arguments, *inter alia*, he also rightly criticizes the equivocation in Althusserian arguments about base and superstructure; but nowhere does he even attempt a general formulation of the concepts on his own, and in spite of his criticism of other versions of this theory, he seems to consider it well-established, as a general theory, by his not recognizing the need for its formulation. This sort of reluctance for general formulations and as a result, relinquishing those debates to the west is typical in the Indian context, on the whole.

The conditions in Telugu (my mother tongue) literary criticism are also not much different. B. Tirupati Rao, a well-known critic of Telugu literature, echoes the prevalent view of the west, when he says that "since its inception, Marxism has acknowledged literature as a superstructural element". But then he glibly extends this argument to Marx and Engels and says, "However much we deny that, there is no specific definition for base and superstructure in Marxism. Marx and Engels also did not write anything, demarcating these concepts in a definite

way. Therefore, this constructional metaphor has continued to be very controversial"[53]. Notwithstanding the difference in the tone, the resulting position is essentially the same as in the above case: evading direct confrontation with the classics of Marxism. But here the reason for evading engagement with the primary sources is not taking the concepts for granted, but taking their absence for granted. In his *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton observes pensively that "any English Marxist who tries now to construct a materialist aesthetics must . . . feel acutely bereft of a tradition, as a tolerated house-guest of Europe, a precocious but parasitic alien".[54] An Indian writing on the theoretical issues of Marxism would be in a much more inopportune position.

Another work I would like to relate my project to, toward situating my work, is *Marx's Theory of History*, by William H. Shaw, a student and friend of G. A. Cohen as mentioned in his acknowledgements to the book. Here the similarities and affinities are not so apparent, but on reading the book, I felt that there are some surprising similarities at a deeper methodological level, though not in the subject matters of our respective studies. In Shaw's case also, the book is based on his dissertation, *Productive forces and Relations of Production* submitted to the London School of Economics and Political Science. Thus, his work focuses on one crucial aspect of Marx's theory, which he studies by closely following the texts of Marx himself. In this focused analysis, he deliberately puts aside other aspects of the theory, including the topic of my study:

> If Marx is then attempting to occupy the middle ground between a facile interactionism and a crude economic materialism—by presenting a picture of the social world in which, amongst various factors, the socioeconomic factor predominates—this moots the whole issue, which has troubled Marxists since Engels, of the precise connection between the base and superstructure. A

> satisfactory reconnoitering of this labyrinthine terrain is beyond the scope of this essay[55].

Traversing that troubled territory is the task my project takes up. Despite this self-evident difference, there is some significant affinity between our mutual analytical ventures in that the departures from the prevalent versions of Marxism we propose do not involve moving away from Marx but do involve heading near him, to invoke some dialectical imagery. Again, on the side of differences, we could mention that, essentially, Shaw's arguments revive with renewed rigour, the so-called fundamentalist version of Marxism which mistakenly came to be considered outmoded, whereas in my case, it is difficult to conceive of my project in revivalist terms, unless it is understood as the revival and rehabilitation of Marx's version of base and superstructure that remained persistently unappreciated and unexplored since the later years of Engels himself.

Lastly, a word about my style of citation may not be out of place. In choosing to give the bibliographical references in the end note, I followed the sixth edition of *MLA Handbook for writers of Research Papers*, which was predominantly in use at the time I registered for the Ph. D. course, and which recognises this style as an alternative way of giving references. By the time I finished my thesis almost after six years, the seventh edition of the handbook became the more commonly followed standard of reference; and this edition has done away with the end note as a way of giving bibliographical information. As changing the style of all the references will be a tedious task that could not contribute even an iota to the conceptual wealth of the thesis, I preferred to retain the original style with two modifications to prevent the thesis from looking outmoded: 1) the titles are not underlined, but italicized, 2) URLs for the web-based references are not given. Both of these changes are consonant with the seventh edition, although, in other respects the citation style follows the sixth edition.

Another aspect of my way of quoting that may call for explanation is the length of quotations and the number of quotations I liberally used in my thesis, especially in the two last chapters. Besides the fact that direct, lengthy quotations fell out of fashion and are often replaced by citations by way of paraphrasing, it is undeniable that frequent interpolation of other's words will considerably affect the readability of the text. Still, I preferred this style of quoting because, for one thing, citing by paraphrasing is a frequent source of academic controversies in the debates on Marxism, and, generally speaking, as it is well recognized[56], these disagreements are reasonably legitimate. Moreover, when one embarks upon studying a topic that is chronically left unsurveyed and unanalyzed, one cannot do away with the basic requirement of dealing with a number of writers across time and place, as these writers should not be denied a say, just because they fell out of favour in the fleeting intellectual fashions.

Notes

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963) 30.

[2] Stuart Hall, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor", *The Communist University of London: Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977) 43.

[3] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 393.

[4] I have discussed this aspect of Marx in greater detail in the chapter titled "What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface".

[5] Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1982) 11.

[6] This is a letter dated 9th April 1863, where he writes to Engels in a poignantly nostalgic mood: "Re-reading your book has made me regretfully aware of our increasing age. How freshly and passionately, with what bold anticipations and no learned and scientific doubts, matters are treated here! And the very illusion that the result too will leap into the daylight of history tomorrow or the day after gives the whole thing a warmth and high-spirited humour– compared with which the later 'gray in gray' makes a damned unpleasant contrast" [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 131].

[7] Terry Eagleton makes a similar point, though not in a similar tone, when he writes: ". . . today, in the turbulent aftermath of all that, it is possible for some to find virtue in Marxist thought exactly because it can be easily enough sidelined in political reality" [Terry Eagleton and Dew Milne, eds., Introduction, Part 1, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996) 1].

[8] Bertell Ollman, and Edward Vernoff, eds., Introduction, *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982) 1.

[9] Ollman, and Vernoff 3.

[10] "Marx after Communism", *Economist*, 365.8304 (2002), n. pag, *The Economist, economist.com*, 2002, web, 20 Mar. 2011. < http://www.economist.com/node/1489165>

[11] Robert J. Antonio, "Rethinking Class and Class Politics after Communism", *Marx and Modernity: Key Readings and Commentary*, ed. Robert J. Antonio. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 367.

[12] Lyn Marcus, *Dialectical Economics* (Massachusetts: D. C. Heath and Company, 1975) 3.

[13] "Gnāna Bhūmigā Mārāli". *Eenadu* 27 Jan. 2008.

[14] Erik Olin Wright, *Class, State and Ideology: An Introduction to Social Science in the Marxist Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2008) 2. This course book can be accessed at the URL: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/621-syllabus-2008.pdf.

[15] S.H.Rigby, *Marxism and History: A Critical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998) 177.

[16] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 394–5.

[17] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1986) 81.

[18] Leonard Jackson, *The Dematerialization of Karl Marx* (London: Longman, 1994) 246.

[19] Jackson 178.

[20] Jackson 217.

[21] Stuart Sim, Ed., *Post-Marxism: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P, 1998) 4.

[22] S.H.Rigby, *Marxism and history: A critical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998) 178.

[23] Williams, *Marxism* 75.

[24] Williams, *Marxism* 82.

[25] Terry Eagleton, "Base and Superstructure Revisited", *New Literary History*, 31.2 (2000): 237, *JSTOR*, web, 27 Mar. 2009.

[26] Chris Harman, "Base and Superstructure", *International Socialism, 2:32 (1986): 3-44, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2003, n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[27] V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 151.

[28] V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 46.

[29] G.A.Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) 216.

[30]Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory* 45.

[31] Bukharin, Stalin and Terry Eagleton are exceptions to this. The first two are discussed in the chapter "Genealogy of Heterogeneity". Regarding Terry Eagleton, John Dupré rightly observes: "One important consequence of this [Eagleton's] definition is that it clearly does not constitute base and superstructure as exhaustive categories. Eagleton notes that a literary work can be studied infrastructurally, as part of material production, or superstructurally, as collusive with dominant power. And there is also the possibility of reading it neither way. . ." [John Dupré, "Comments on Terry Eagleton's 'Base and Superstructure Revisited'", *New Literary History*, 31.2 (2000): 241-5]. However, all the three of them did not pursue this line of reasoning consistently to reach the restricted version of base and superstructure for reasons that differ in each individual case.

[32] William H. Shaw made a similar point when he wrote, ". . . While the study of Marx has grown more sophisticated over the years, high standards of scholarship have not always been maintained, and a slackness persists which one imagines would not be tolerated in other fields. The complex causes of this need not be sought here, but Marx has clearly been difficult to examine dispassionately. The requirements of the book trade have, in addition, encouraged rather one-sided, 'novel' treatments of Marx. In any case, where patient examination has been required, individual flights of fancy have been indulged; where reasoned and close exegesis has been needed, textual infidelity has triumphed" [William H. Shaw, Introduction, *Marx's Theory of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) 2].

[33] Raymond Williams, *Marx on Culture* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1989) 6.

[34] See S.B. Smith, "Considerations on Marx's Base and Superstructure", *Karl Marx's Economics: Critical Assessments*, ed. John Cunningham Wood, vol. IV (London: Croom Helm, 1988) 315.

[35] Smith 317.

[36] For, Smith says that "Cohen's argument ends by giving more weight to the technological base than it can be made to bear" (page 318). His statements about Cohen betray that he did not properly appreciate Cohen's rigorous exclusion of technology and productive forces from the concept of base. In fact, Cohen offers a long list of critics, in a footnote to his book, who wrongly include productive forces in the base. See G. A Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 29. Smith seems to be bent on unwittingly extending the list further by including Cohen himself.

[37] Smith 327.

[38] See Melvin Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History* (New York: OUP, 1979) xix-xxiii.

[39] Thus Shaw's statement about his own work may sound like a platitude, but is in fact

indispensable in this backdrop: “A principle underlying this essay is that, generally speaking, Marx means what he says: there is no need to explain this in terms of some alleged ‘underlying’ philosophy or a unique use of words”. [Shaw 9].

[40] G. A. Cohen, “Reply to Elster on ‘Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory’**”,** *Theory and Society*, 11.4 (1982): 484.

[41] References for Marx’s passage and an elaborate discussion of it could be found in my chapter titled “What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface”.

[42] See G. A. Cohen, Footnote, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) 216; and Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (oxford: OUP, 1986) 76.

[43] Incidentally, it will be interesting to know that Hegel is delighted by such words with opposite meanings, and writes “…German has many advantages over other modern languages; some of its words even possess the further peculiarity of having not only different but opposite meanings so that one cannot fail to recognize a speculative spirit of the language in them: it can delight a thinker to come across such words and to find the union of opposites naively shown in the dictionary as one word with opposite meanings, although this result of speculative thinking is nonsensical to the understanding” [G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1969) 32].

[44] See Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979) 88. The text could also be found in the chapter “Genealogy of Heterogeneity”, where I discussed the views of Engels’ elaborately.

[45] The fact that “the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry” is well known to Marx and he has some interesting things to tell about this. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 28.

[46] Terry Eagleton, Preface, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) vii.

[47] G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1969) 34.

[48] Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 145.

[49] At the very beginning of his book, Chesnokov mentions Stalin's booklet on Linguistics, Marxism and Problems of Linguistics, and says that it "…is one of the most important events in the ideological life of the party. Comrade Stalin's work enriches and further develops Marxist-Leninist theory. Comrade Stalin has given in his work a complete and finished Marxist theory concerning language and has worked out most important principles of Marxism on the question of Basis and Superstructure" [D.I.Chesnokov, *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure* (Bombay: PPH, 1952) 1].It doesn't need a great flair for imagination to surmise what Marx, the ruthless critic, would think of this sort of according a "finished" status to his theories.

[50] Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, 1970, *Libcom.org*, web, 20 Mar 2011. <http://libcom.org/library/ideology-superstructure-historical-materialism-franz-jakubowski-1936>

[51] A paragraph from his "conclusion" will give an idea of his approach: "The debate has been animated and disagreement often fundamental. One writer could argue that there had to be congruency between social consciousness and the material base (Lange), another could claim that even under socialism the two could be at odds with each other (Wiatr). One could propose that the political structure had become the most influential factor shaping social formation (Brus), another could state that economic forces were regaining their ascendency (Szczepanski). The constituent elements making up the classic model were defined, weighted and combined

differently too. For one theorist the productive or non-productive nature of activity determined its place in the model (Kozyr-Kowalski). For another the categories of socio-economic base and political-legal superstructure were grouped together to constitute social existence (Rainko). For two sociologists, class structure was the key variable in the model (Hochfeld, Ossowski), for another it was the internal equilibrium of productive forces, relations of production and superstructure (Bodnar). Where there was general agreement on the model, it was to do with its intrinsic importance as a still valid (if considerably modified) framework of analysis for social formations, and as a utopian thrust (Bauman). To this extent Polish social scientists either remained faithful to the methodological approach of Marxism, or they ceased to be social scientists in Poland" [Ray Taras, "Polish Sociology and the Base-Superstructure Debate", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 13 (1983): 323, *SAGE*, web, 23 May 2010].

[52] Dipankar Gupta, "Caste, Infrastructure and Superstructure: A Critique", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16.51 (1981): 2094. Certain ambivalence towards base and superstructure thesis is seen among the Indian Marxists also. D. D. Kosambi, a remarkably versatile Indian historian expresses the standard opinion when he writes, "to state the matter as a definition: history is the development in chronological order of basic changes in the means and relation of production. Any other type of history deals only with the superstructure, not with essentials" [D. D. Kosambi, "What Constitutes Indian History?", *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2005) 794].

But, in the Indian context, Kosambi seems to be suggesting that superstructural changes also matter considerably, and thus he says: "Though the individual village appeared changeless, virtually self-sufficient, and of a fixed pattern with almost closed production, the increasing density of village settlement inevitably brought about successive transformations of the

superstructure. We know that in spite of caste division of labour within the village, its production was not of commodities except as regards a small part of the surplus reaching the hands of the state. The methods for extracting this surplus would necessarily differ in the same district according as to whether it had two villages or two thousand. These changes in the state mechanism, and in the class of people who received the surplus, must be regarded as material for history, even when no episodes and chronological details or king-names are known. [D. D. Kosambi, "The Basis of Ancient Indian History (I)", *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2005) 308].

It is interesting to note that after an elaborate description of the same Indian village communities, Marx uses a metaphor of storm-clouds with reference to the political sphere, in contrast with his usual metaphor of superstructure: "The simplicity of the organisation for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the spot and with the same name this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky" [Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 338-9].

[53] B. Tirupati Rao, "Saahithya Bhouthikavaadi Tripuraneni", *Saahithyamlo Vasthu Shilpalu*, by Tripuraneni Madhusudhana Rao (Hyderabad: Perspectives, 1997) n. pag. I have given my own translation of the text in Telugu. Tirupati Rao uses the word "uparithalamu" for superstructure. Though this is the most commonly used word, in Telugu, for superstructure, literally translated, it means only "outer surface"; and so it reduces the three-dimensional metaphor of superstructure

into a two-dimensional metaphor. A less frequent but more accurate term “uparinirmaanamu” is also used in Telugu by other writers.

[54] Terry Eagleton, “Preface”, *Criticism and Ideology*: *A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1992) 7.

[55] William H. Shaw, Introduction, *Marx’s Theory of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) 68.

[56] The words of August H. Nimtz that are taken as the epigraph to the 5th chapter of my thesis express this scepticism towards paraphrasing in the Marxist studies. Also, see the end note number 32 above wherein William H. Shaw laments the lack of academic standards in Marxist studies and pleads for textual fidelity.

CHAPTER 2

The Concepts of *Base* and *Superstructure* in Contemporary Academic Discourses: A Precursory Excursion

> Terms like social formation are frequently used, even by non-Marxists, where traditional terms would be adequate, and often simply to indicate that the author is up-to-date. At the same time, many of those most passionately involved in Marxist analysis of pre-capitalist social formations have retreated from earlier enthusiasms.
>
> —Martin A. Klein, "The Use of Mode of Production in Historical Analysis". [1]

For a research project on the Marxist concepts of base and superstructure, it needs no special justification to set out— at the very outset— on a cursory survey of the concepts of base and superstructure as they are used in the contemporary academic discourses, as a preliminary move towards figuring out the popularity or the lack of it, of the chosen topic and thus to take stock of its present status. But it may seem rather unusual when the researcher swerves a bit from the standard research practices, to mention, as I do now, that initially the survey was begun with a vague premonition of embarking on a wild goose chase, in view of the contemporary academic ethos, marked by an almost unassailable covenant about the obsolescence of Marxism and its various theoretical components.

The words of Martin A. Klein are taken as the epigraph here, because his pertinent observation about the terminological laxity in the authorial praxis of the writers is remarkably consonant with the findings of the present survey. Thus, contrary to the initial apprehensions, when the survey came to an end, the accompanying feeling was simultaneously fulfilling and baffling. Fulfilling, because instead of the feared dearth of occurrence of the terms in question, what is actually found is an overabundance. Baffling, because the range of subjects in which the

concept is invoked is so bewilderingly variegated that one need to be a veritable omniscient if one has to have a say in all these subjects. For us, however, this is no cause for concern, as our aim here is to get a birds-eye-view of the pragmatics of the terms *base* and *superstructure* in the contemporary academic articles, and not to engage with these articles thematically. An initial survey such as this would presumably give some idea of the relevance, range, and rigour (or the lack of these qualities) in regard to the usage of the twin terms in the contemporary articles, thereby enabling us to go forward, toward a closer scrutiny of the twin terms, as the study progresses.

In spite of the inevitable stodginess of this trans-disciplinary journey that switches among diverse disciplines, the survey provides us with a sort of warming up exercise, before we enter the congenitally interdisciplinary zone of engagement called Marxism. Terrell Carver, the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Marx,* rightly says about the nature of Marx's writings: "As Marx knew no disciplinary boundaries to his research, it is a rich text that touches on virtually all the sciences and subjects we could enumerate from anthropology to zoology."[2]

Before entering the survey, it would be fair to state some of the underlying assumptions, without which some words in the very title may remain imprecise. The word *contemporary* in the title is justified, or at least I thought it would be so, by the fact that most of the texts cited here are from academic journals that are published not before 1999. The fact that only articles from journals are taken as the sources, instead of books, is another self-imposed constraint based on the presupposition that journals provide the territory for contemporaneous academic discourses more than anything else. Another admission of the limited nature of the survey is indicated by the word *precursory* in the title of this chapter, which is meant to convey that the modest aim of the survey is to take note of the general usage of the twin metaphorical terms and not to delve

deep into the thematic concerns of the respective articles, let alone critically engaging with those concerns.

One more tacit presupposition to be stated is that, though my research title mentions both the *base* and the *superstructure*, in a customary way, the concept of superstructure is privileged here. One reason for this is, the word *base* is very common even in day to day life and for the same reason, taken alone, it may not be suggestive of any Marxian connection, in however tenuous a form. Secondly, the concept of superstructure itself connotes the presence of a base implicitly, unless one's imagination is incorrigibly infected by the prevalence of present day graphics. Lastly, the concept of superstructure has more significance to my work, as it could be seen clearly while we progress along the trajectory of our research.

A Note on the Range of Areas Surveyed

If variety is the spice of life, there is a lot of spice to be relished as we delve deep into the survey. Even before entering the thick of the matter, a foretaste of this variety could be sniffed from the very sources themselves– I mean the variety of journals in which the articles we survey occur. From *Diogenes* to *Gazette*, from *Thesis Eleven* to *Tourist Studies, from Race & Class to Gender & Society,* From *Social Compass* to *Current Sociology,* from *Journal of Black Studies* to *Journal of Travel Research,* from *Studies in Christian Ethics* to *Journal of Business Communication,* from *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* to *Medical Decision Making,* one's surveying sensibilities should shift without any potential damage to the analytical sanity.

If one's appetite for variety is aroused by this foretaste and is not gratified still, hopefully they could get it by taking a look at the *Notes* at the end of the survey, where they could find the details of all the sources. In stead, if anyone is bewildered by the mutually incongruous, heterogeneity of the application of base and superstructure concepts that attained an enviable/

unenviable ubiquity, from its unassuming inception in Marx's oeuvre, I for one, could at least empathize with their predicament and limit the discussion, in this chapter, by keeping aside the writings directly related to Marxism, the birth place of the twin metaphors, but only to take up this task later, at a more appropriate juncture.

The bewildering proliferation of the metaphor of superstructure into unimaginably remote realms, from its motherland of Marxism, may be taken as a sign of its thriving academic status, but the concomitant disfigurement of the metaphor, which is almost always proportional to its supple adaptability, is too striking a fact to be ignored as a harmless byproduct. Majid H. Siddiqi's article reviewing the book *Champaran and Gandhi: Planters, Peasants and Gandhian Politics*, by Jacques Pouchepadass, is remarkable because of its confessional admission, where he says that he is "taking liberties with the phrase—the base-superstructure model."[3] He continues, in a way that is reminiscent of the real spirit of this model in Marx, "Every writer must describe and explain the material conditions of the everyday life of a peasantry in a historical setting and, with reference to such a setting, identify the causes that prompted a peasantry to launch into resistance. The book under review does just that." This responsible and scrupulous handling of the twin terms, and the underlying concept is remarkable not in itself but in the backdrop of a multitude of examples, which we are going to see, that presume an indiscriminate applicability of the model and thus make it amorphous, eventually ending up obfuscating the obviously straightforward model.

The *Base* and the Baseless

Nothing is certain— is the only possible conclusion, if we should go by the discursive practices observed in these articles. What is base? What is superstructure? What is the nature of the relation between the two? What is the significance of the metaphor? Every aspect of the

model seems inchoate and capable of assuming endless forms. Let's start with the base. Even the utterly simplified popular version of base and superstructure model tells us, base is economics and superstructure comprises other social realms. But Donna Perry writes with reference to Doran and Lonergan's work, that it "discusses the relationship between the infrastructure and the superstructure of society. The infrastructure consists of economic, political, and technological enterprises, whereas the superstructure is the reflexive level that critiques and guides the infrastructure."[4]

When this version includes the political and technological enterprises in the base, other versions include even the economic realm in the superstructure. Liz Fekete, for instance, refers to "a new legal and economic superstructure for the world economy"[5] and Dave Renton says about the efforts of international organizations that "these efforts are building a new legal and economic superstructure for the world economy".[6] E. Ike Udogu, addressing the problem of ethnicity and democratization in Africa, states categorically: "Central to Marx's analysis of human society is the economic superstructure." [7] Also, Casper Sylvest cites in his notes to an article that "Brailsford says: 'In the economic superstructure of society.' "[8] lies the reason for the war.

Superabundance of the Superstructures

In a way, this labelling of economics, as a superstructural component, should not come as a surprise. Indeed, there seems to be an unstated consensus that anything under the sun could be enlisted into the endlessly expandable cluster of superstructural components. In an article interestingly titled "Capitalism and Metaphysics", Scott Lash remarks that the concept of superstructure has metaphysical quality in some forms of Marxism.[9] We can safely venture to supplement that statement, by observing that, in its facile usage outside Marxism, it has even

acquired a religious aura of omnipresence. Things as different as kinship system[10] and mass media [11] could be thought of as the facile items of superstructure. Disparate sociological concepts like the Chaturvarna system[12] or the hegemonic masculinity[13] are discussed as the issues of superstructure.

In an article about political sociology Kate Nash expounds superstructure: "[t]he superstructural forms of capitalism, including the family, are determined by the exigencies of the capitalist economy"[14] thus implying the family as a superstructural component. This should not lead to the culmination of exclamation as even more subtle things are in store for the concept of superstructure. In their article, Kimiko Tanaka and Nan E. Johnson announce: "The goal of this article is to show that the cultural superstructure defining the proper organization of elder care is not immutable"[15] with the implication that the matter of elder care is a superstructural concern.

In a similar vein, Martin E. Spencer declares in his article: "In effect, I propose to excavate the theoretical 'base' upon which the journalistic 'superstructure' is erected."[16] Peter Thaler in his article about national identities, says that "[b]oth the constitutional nation and the class nation can be viewed as ideologically superstructured political nations." In the same page he also speaks about a "mythical superstructure that frequently surrounds the national self-image. . ."[17] In an article entitled "Langston Hughes– Patternmaster", by Jonathan Scott, we come across the remarkable subheading: "Establishing the Black Superstructure".[18] A review essay entitled "Entanglements: Barbed Wire and Sociology", by Steve Matthewman also has a subheading, "Barbed Wire: Symbolic Superstructure".[19] Almost anything can assume the title of superstructure, if the context suits it. Thus Irwin Wall writes in the article "France in the Cold War" that general De Gaulle considered *communism* itself, a term that masked national interests, or "a superstructure to borrow a Marxist term"[20] And Susan Boyd presents a discussion of

homosexuality in terms of the superstructure in the 13th point of the endnotes, in the article "Family, Law and Sexuality: Feminist Engagements".[21]

The endless capacity of a concept that encompasses a haphazard assortment of ingredients that could range from communism to homosexuality or mythology, may seem to be irreconcilable with any analytical rigour, but may be quite acceptable in case of a handy concept, or term, or metaphor that need not have any notional precision, save the flexibility of boundless applicability. In fact, that is how the concept of superstructure is treated in the articles we deal with here. Writing about the contemporary university curricula, in a review article, Donald M. MacRaild remarks critically, ". . . the question of what actually explains historical change seems less important in university curricula today than to expose students to colourful bits of the cultural superstructure."[22] "Superstructure includes patterns of psychology, value and belief systems, and local knowledge," writes R. Brian Ferguson in his article "Materialist, cultural and biological theories on why Yanomami make war", and again, he adds later in the same page "Similarly, the realm of ideas and dispositions that is superstructure…."[23] Such sloppy but handy use of concepts is not confined to superstructure alone. Both *base* and *superstructure* are used as if they are potentially multi-referential.

Some Unusual and Modern Superstructures

In an article about the cultural change in Africa, Paul T. Cocks cites the words of Malinowski where the latter speaks about the native Swazi culture: " '[B]etter course would appear to be to use their own [Swazi] culture as a foundation and erect the superstructure of European education upon it, and so bring out what is best in both' "[24]. Here, native culture assumed the status of base and European education, that of superstructure. Richard Grusin, in his article related to the World Wide Web, opines by way of citing from *Knowbotic Research*,

"'what is referred to as the global is, in most cases, based on a technological infrastructure rather than on real-life experiences. The electronic networks form a communication superstructure…' "[25] In the "Notes Toward Refining the Postcolonial Optic," Fernando F. Segovia avers, "From the Marxist perspective, postcolonial critics are accused of dealing with the superstructure of imperialism, while bypassing the question of its material base,"[26] thus, implying that imperialism itself is a superstructure. In an article in the journal, *Animation*, Lev Manovich writes, "So we can say at present our visual culture is characterized by a new computer 'base' and an old photographic 'superstructure'."[27] Technical items like electronic networks or photography can comfortably fit in the category of superstructure. Rita Lauria, in an article pertaining to virtual reality, mentions an "electronic superstructure," and a "superstructure of information," along with a "superstructure of the human body"[28]

On the other hand, Jerry Harris offers an example of an enormously inclusive superstructure when he writes:

> The superstructure that regulates the explosion of new financial markets and global corporations consists of a number of important international institutions. These are the Administration of International Commercial Disputes, Chamber of Commerce in Paris, American Arbitration Association, London Court of International Commercial Arbitration and bond rating agencies, such as Moody's and Standard and Poor's. In addition, there are the agreements reached in NAFTA, GATT and the World Trade Organization (WTO)[29]

In this way, some of the most powerful international financial organizations could be relegated to the superstructure. Remarkably, in an article related to the approaches to urban history, William Sites asks, ". . . was the City Beautiful movement that furnished this 'aesthetic

superstructure' in fact a characteristically American innovation?"[30]

If we switch over to medicine, for a change, we come across Dennis Hanseman writing in the review of the book *The Economic Evolution of American Health Care: From Marcus Welby to Managed Care*, ". . . potential readers should be aware that this is a book about the organizational and financial superstructure of health care delivery."[31] If we could further manage a gigantic leap from medicine to mathematics, we find in the article "Benchmarking to the World's Best in Mathematics: Quality Control in Curriculum and Instruction among the Top Performers in the TIMSS", a reference to " . . . the process to better understand the superstructure of other countries' curriculum and instruction systems and the 'glue' that holds that superstructure together, to better understand how other countries see to it that the curriculum they intend is attained."[32] Taking another intellectual leap from mathematics to languages, we read that African American English ". . . has evolved during its history of colonial existence into a language strongly determined by English superstructures while maintaining much in every aspect of African home language and styles of discourse."[33]

Hyper-elastic Superstructures

The only principle for discerning the range of base and superstructure seems to be the lack of any principle; what matters is only the sleight of hand, the alchemy of phraseology that could make any matter sound scientific with the magical metaphors. Peter C.Y. Chow's article "China's Sustainable Development in Global Perspective" mentions his handy phrase "sociopolitical superstructure"[34] six times, within the span of a few pages. Michael Kearney and Bernadete Beserra say, "*Value* includes material and energetic forms (land, nutrients, fuel, technology, labor power, etc.) and immaterial forms present in the superstructure of a community (money, intellectual and symbolic capital, etc.)"[35], endorsing an immaterialist hermeneutics of

superstructure. For Craig Paterson, our personal life itself is a superstructure, and the base is biological life. One must listen to him for elucidation:

> Biological life is a base to support the higher order functions or properties of personal life . . . it is personal life that we truly value, not biological life, considered apart from the superstructure of functions or properties that it sustains. Biological life, in other words, is a necessary condition of the possibility of personal life. It has no inherent value on its own account. Sufficiency as to the worth of human life is supplied by the superstructure of personal life.[36]

No wonder that Yoel Mansfeld speaks about "tourism infra- and superstructure"[37]; Marina Taloyan et al. speak of the "political and ethnic superstructure"[38] of Kurds, and Rainier Spencer theorizes a "racial superstructure."[39] In the article "Secularization as a Property of Action", Isacco Turina writes about the "Marxist perspective that regards religion as an ideological superstructure of real (political and economic) interests"; [40]and Richard Almond remarks, discussing the theory of the psychoanalyst Lewis Aron, "His theory provides him an intellectual superstructure that both enables and limits his use of countertransference disclosure."[41] Peter Gowan devotes a whole article to what he considers to be an imperial superstructure, with the title: "Empire as Superstructure"[42].

Designation as Denigration

Paradoxically, this inexhaustible exuberance for expanding the concept of superstructure beyond any imaginable limits is not due to any peculiar predilection for that concept. But, once the concepts of base and superstructure are taken to be exhaustive concepts that are burdened with the duty of covering all the social spheres, the concept of an all-inclusive superstructure follows as an inevitable corollary, as the other pole of the duality (i.e., the base) has a

determining prerogative that is exclusive for a single realm, a prerogative which by its very nature is not extendable to other unfortunate realms. In fact, instead of a predilection, a customary discomfiture about the concept of superstructure could be observed among the critics, a discomfiture that manifests mostly while dealing with the innate deterministic suggestiveness of the concept. This established discomfiture with the category of superstructure betrays itself in many ways. To begin with, the very expression of superstructure is taken as a synonym for "secondary" or even as a mild substitute for "insignificant", and designating something as superstructure is seen as a way of denigrating that to a secondary status.

In the words of Ruth Fletcher, according to Marx, "political superstructure… is a secondary element of the production relations."[43] In an article that concerns itself with sporting space, Alan Tomlinson, Andrei S. Markovits, and Christopher Young write in protest of what they believe to be a Marxist position:

> It is no longer worth asking what sport means, represents, or symbolizes. The answer comes ready-made, generated by the theory itself. This kind of radical work—broadly culturally Marxist— expresses the worst extremes of meta-theory: Sport is just the superstructure, a predictable reflection of the determining infrastructure of the economic, and the more significant elements of the superstructure such as the sphere of the political.[44]

Thus, with many writers, stating that something is not merely a superstructure is a way of emphasizing the significance of that something. Allen Guttmann writes that for Neo-Marxist writers, "Modern sports . . . are not merely the 'superstructure' of the economic 'basis' "[45] Richard H. Roberts, in his article related to Managerialism, tells in the abstract itself "Managerialism is not mere ideology, a concatenation of ideas subsisting in an epiphenomenal

superstructure (Überbau) that mirrors economic relations (Base) and masks interests."[46] Writing about a related topic, Eric H. Shaw and D. G. Brian plead that "[i]t appears obvious that any attempt to synthesize schools of marketing thought, or develop a general theory of marketing, must include systems thinking at least as a superstructure," and later they add, "[m]arketing systems provides a hierarchical superstructure to integrate firms and households . . ."[47]

Edward R. Swenson in an article about urbanization in the Andes writes, "Anthropologists must approach the consumptive-reproductive politics of the Andes . . . not simply as an interesting facet of superstructure. . . " again, we are told, in the notes, with reference to the Marxist theorists: "Thus ritual violence is often understood as epiphenomenal, a facet of superstructure that arises *a posteriori* in response to initial shifts in the economic infrastructure."[48] Speaking about jurisprudence and lawyers, Susanne Karstedt observes, "Neither were they inclined to see law as driven by wider and forceful social processes like power, nor as an epiphenomenon reduced to the superstructure of society."[49]

This distaste for the base-superstructure metaphor, sometimes takes more explicit forms. Griselda Pollock, who appreciates the analysis of base and superstructure by Raymond Williams, still writes, "In terms of the relation between Sociology and Art History, I am, therefore, arguing against homology, reductionism, base/superstructure-type hierarchies." [50] For Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale and Peter McLaren, the base and superstructure metaphor "has plagued some strands of Marxist theory."[51] Satoshi Kanazawa writes critically of cultural materialism: "Relying as it does on infrastructural determinism (how ecological and environmental conditions determine social structure and ideational superstructure), cultural materialism tends to overemphasize cultural variations and has difficulty explaining cultural universals beyond the tripartite sectors of infrastructure, structure, and superstructure."[52] Evidently, the suggestion of

determinism and hierarchy involved in the metaphor of base and superstructure is the overriding cause of the aversion the metaphor couldn't help provoking.

With the same streak, Tobias Garde Hagens writes, ". . . the materialist explanatory model must be expanded so as to reach beyond the relation between productive forces and modes of production, material basis and ideological superstructure."[53] Tiziana Terranova feels that the Gramscian concept of hegemony ". . . allows for a final exit from the Marxist metaphor of infrastructure and superstructure."[54] Marcel Gauchet also refers to "[t]he base axiom: the superstructure cannot be altered without proceeding via the infrastructure. . ." and remarks that "Things proved to be more subtle, however."[55] And Nick Knight says at the very beginning of his article about China, "The initial theoretical preoccupation of theorists to the early Chinese Communist movement (that is, before 1923) was with the materialist conception of history and in particular the issue of the problematic relationship between the economic base and the politico-ideological superstructure."[56] Similarly, H. T. Wilson derogatorily refers to ". . . the static distinction between base and superstructure."[57] And Pau Obrador Pons, in the article entitled "Being-on-Holiday: Tourist Dwelling, Bodies and Place", asserts solemnly that "[o]bjects are not fetishes of some social superstructures, but inevitable parts of each other's tourist experience."[58] Dominique Bouchet also refers to the base and superstructure paradigm as a "tangled hierarchy".[59]

Toward Summing Up

The articles we have surveyed so for are neither exhaustive nor is it needed to claim that they are so. It is quite likely that anyone working in any area of humanities may come across instances that show a typical antipathy towards the metaphor of base and superstructure as we have seen. And as a result, some of them also suggest some curative measures such as reversing

the priorities of the metaphor or combining the metaphor with some other approach like psychoanalysis. But these things do not concern us here as our survey has the modest aim of finding out how the metaphor is used in the present day academic practices and what attitude the practitioners have towards it. It may not be hasty to hope that, what we have already seen is enough to come to the following conclusions:

- From the mother land of Marxism the metaphor of base and superstructure has traversed several alien lands where it serves as a docile hand maid, and by the current academic practices, this is not taken as trespassing but only as a corroboration of the metaphor's acknowledged flexibility.
- The concept of superstructure—and sometimes even the concept of base—has no constitutional constraints. One may make it endlessly elastic depending on the contextual exigencies. Hereafter, we will be using the expression panoramic superstructure/panoptic Superstructure/all-inclusive superstructure to designate this elastic concept.
- Considering the overwhelming coverage of *base* and *superstructure* that runs against any basic requirements of rigour, it seems that there is a general tendency to take the twin expressions as facile and fashionable metaphors, and not as theoretical concepts that need to be deployed with some mutual consistency.
- In spite of the common enthusiasm for extending the concepts to cover an assortment of novel regions, the concepts of base and superstructure suffer an instinctive disfavour at the hands of those who make use of them so glibly. This repulsion is mostly due to the deterministic and/or hierarchical overtones of the metaphor and that is the inescapable paradox of the concepts/metaphor.

Notes

[1] Martin A. Klein, "The Use of Mode of Production in Historical Analysis", *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 19.1 (1985): 9, *JSTOR*, web, 17 Nov. 2007.

[2] Terrell Carver, "Reading Marx: Life and works," *The Cambridge Companion to Marx,* ed. Terrell Carver (New York: CUP, 1991) 14.

[3] Majid H. Siddiqi, rev. of *Champaran and Gandhi: Planters, Peasants and Gandhian Politics*, by Jacques Pouchepadass, *Indian Economic Social History Review* 41 (2004): 363, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

[4] Donna Perry, "Transcendent Pluralism and the Influence of Nursing Testimony on Environmental Justice Legislation," *Policy, Politics, & Nursing Practice* 6 (2005): 63, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

[5] Liz Fekete, "The Emergence of Xeno-Racism," *Race & Class* 43 (2001): 25, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

[6] Dave Renton, "Commentary," *Race & Class* 41 (2000): 60.

[7] E. Ike Udogu, "The Issue of Ethnicity and Democratization in Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 29 (1999): 792, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

[8] Casper Sylvest, "Beyond the State? Pluralism and Internationalism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain," *International Relations* 21 (2007): 83, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

[9] Scott Lash, "Capitalism and Metaphysics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.5 (2007): 2, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

[10] Roland Boer, "Women First? On the Legacy of 'Primitive Communism'," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (2005): 6, *SAGE*, web, 15 Mar. 2008.

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CHAPTER 3

The Oracles of Reference: A Solemn Consultation

> In recent times, many within Marxism have wanted to drop this base-superstructure model. It is criticized as merely metaphorical, as if this made it unscientific. Of course, 'base' and 'superstructure' started life as metaphors. But so did all scientific terms: 'wave' in physics, 'market' in economics, 'follows' in logic, 'square' in mathematics, and so on.
>
> — Andrew Collier, *Marx: A Beginner's Guide*.[1]

We started our investigation of the concepts of base and superstructure, as they are used in the outermost and the most volatile domain of academic discourses that remains subtly sensitive to the changing intellectual fashions and is conspicuously imbued with contemporary scholarly concerns i.e., the domain of academic articles. Now, we can probe further and consult the relatively stable realm of academic discourses that is frequently treated as an oracular authority and as a storehouse of reference that includes solemn tomes such as dictionaries and encyclopedias that are more or less immune to the ever-changing intellectual trends, and offer a reasonably reliable anchorage in the midst of turbulent disputes. Then we can use the results of our consultation as the benchmark to compare and contrast our findings garnered from our investigation of academic articles and for the progress of our interrogation.

A View of the Soviet Version

To begin with, the all-embracing use of the concept of superstructure as found in the articles in the previous chapter seems to be corroborated *tout ensemble*, by these reference works, or at least they seem to offer a *prima facie* justification to such an inclusive use by their own multivariate explications of the concept of superstructure. Let us start with the Encyclopedia titled awe-inspiringly as *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, originally published in the Russian

language, in the land of erstwhile official Marxism; later translated into English and published in New York by the Macmillan. In its entry of “Superstructure”, in volume 17, it explains that superstructure is “a concept within historical materialism that signifies the totality of ideological relationships, views and institutions in a given society. The superstructure embraces the state, the political and legal forms of consciousness, and the corresponding institutions, as well as morals, religion, philosophy and art.” [2]

This clearly endorses a totalizing concept of superstructure. Again, this view is reiterated in volume 21, in the entry of “Production relations”, which are explained as “. . . the base for the superstructure of society— ideology, ideological relations, and institutions.”[3] As a matter of fact, in volume 2 itself we find the most significant entry “Base and Superstructure”, where we read that the

> [b]ase and superstructure designate the social relations of a historically determined society as a total system in which the material relations represent the real base, the foundation of society, and the political and ideological relations represent the superstructure, which rises upon the given base and is determined by it. The base of a society is the totality of the historically determined relations of production. The superstructure is the totality of the ideological relations, views, and institutions; it includes law and the state, as well as morality, religion, philosophy, art, and the political and legal forms of consciousness and the institutions corresponding to them.[4]

Later, in the same entry, we will find out the significance of these concepts, when we read that “the ideas of base and superstructure serve as fundamental methodological concepts for

the analysis of any specific society."[5] Thus the panoramic view of the base and superstructure is hailed as fundamental methodological concept that could embrace any specific society.

A Glance at the Rival View

Now, let's turn to the traditional counterpart of erstwhile Soviet Russia, and consult *The Encyclopedia Americana*, where its entry of "Marxism" goes on to say that: "The basic propositions of Marxism are that the economic forces of production determine the basic form of the class structure, the state, and the religious and intellectual superstructure of society . . ."[6] and then we find the categorical declaration after a few paragraphs: "Marxism is thus a form of economic determinism, in which the economic circumstances are regarded as the 'base' of the social system, and the political, legal, and religious institutions are the 'superstructure', whose nature is substantially governed by the form of the base."[7]

Evidently, this is, in the main, consonant with the convictions of its counterpart. Notwithstanding slight differences in phrasing, it includes the same constituents as elements of superstructure— political, legal, and other ideological elements like religion and intellectual spheres. To be sure, this entry also offers a good dose of criticism against the so-called official Marxism:

> Stalin held that the political and ideological superstructure of society could have a decisive effect in waging class war and in promoting development of the economic base. Similarly, the individual was held responsible for his own conduct and achievements; these were not to be viewed as the product of social conditioning. All this was nearly the reverse of Marx's sociology, but Stalin's views were enforced in the name of orthodox Marxism.[8]

But, these critical remarks confined themselves to a particular distortion of superstructure and when it comes to the general signification of the concept of superstructure this entry concurs essentially with the counterpart. In view of the fact that these two encyclopedias are published in the 1970s— the crucial time of the era metaphorically christened by the political taxonomists as the Cold War — the essential consensus shared by the counterparts sounds like a historical anomaly.

An Engagement with *Encyclopædia Britannica*

But for now, we can ignore the political and historical dimensions and limit our concern to the academic dimension and consult one of the most respected monuments of reference, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, which copiously dealt with the concept of superstructure. For instance, the entry of "Philosophy of History" written by Patrick Lancaster Gardiner, speaks in connection with Marx's view of history:

> The productive relations, in which men stood to one another . . . were the factors fundamental to historical movement. What he [Marx] termed the superstructure of society—which covered such things as political institutions and systems of law, ethics, and religion—was in the last analysis dependent upon the shape taken by the "material production" and the "material intercourse" of human beings. . . [9]

The same familiar denizens of superstructure. In another instance, writing about "Hegelianism", Mario Rossi mentions that: "The historical Materialism that Marx counterposed against Idealism expressed the conviction that the basis comprising the relations of production, both economic and social, conditions the superstructure of political, juridical, and cultural institutions".[10]

Culture seems to be a convenient shorthand for ideological elements other than the political and legal aspects. Indeed, one cannot miss the essential agreement about the constituents of superstructure even when it is mentioned as an allied issue when discussing a topic. The article on "Cultural Anthropology", penned by Paul Mercier, says ". . . the Marxist theory laid stress on the causes of human evolution. A society was defined by its mode of production, on which its political, juridical, and ideological superstructures were allegedly based." [11] Similarly, William Form's entry "social structure**"** informs:

> Karl Marx used construction as a metaphor when he spoke of "the economic structure [*Struktur*] of society, the real basis on which is erected a legal and political superstructure [*Überbau*] and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond." Thus, according to Marx, the basic structure of society is economic, or material, and this structure influences the rest of social life, which is defined as nonmaterial, spiritual, or ideological. [12]

Moving to nearer venues like "Socialism**",** we find the author Lewis A. Coser writing:

> Marx, like Hegel and Montesquieu, considered societies as structured wholes; all aspects of a society—its legal code, its system of education, its religion, its art—are related with one another and with the mode of economic production. . . .The relations of production, he held, constitute the foundation upon which is erected the whole cultural superstructure of society.[13]

But the most pertinent entry, "Marxism", is written by two marxologists: Rev. Henri Chambre and S. J. David T. McLellan. After the well-known quotation from the1859 preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the authors argue:

> If one takes the text literally, social reality is structured in the following way:

> 1. Underlying everything as the real basis of society is the economic structure (what in late 20th-century language is sometimes called the infrastructure). This structure includes (a) the "material forces of production," that is, the labour and means of production, and (b) the overall "relations of production," or the social and political arrangements that regulate production and distribution. . . .
>
> 2. Above the economic structure rises the superstructure consisting of legal and political "forms of social consciousness" that correspond to the economic structure. [14]

Political, legal, and cultural/ideological/intellectual/spiritual elements— that is how, on the whole we can sum up the superstructural elements; which are based on/determined by/dependent upon/ governed by/ in correspondence with the base of production relations. In spite of the catholicity of its composition, this is more specific in comparison to the floating and flexible signification of the concept of superstructure we witnessed in the survey of articles in the second chapter. To this extent, we can say, the references are more specific and less contingent upon the contexts of academic disputes. But, in principle, they too seem to have no objection to the heterogeneous signification of the concept of superstructure.

Some Other Monumental Reference Works

We shall resume our consultation and refer to the *Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*; in its entry of "Marxism", where it notes the differences between various versions of Marxism and says that a common feature

> . . . consists in according some privilege to the economic factor over other factors in accounting for social change and development. More specifically, prime importance is given to the forces of production . . . and the relations of production

> (the way in which human beings organize themselves in order to use the same forces of production) as shaping the political and cultural arrangements in any given society. This view, known as 'historical materialism', is often jejunely formulated in the proposition that the economic base determines the political and ideological superstructure. [15]

Except for some attempt at simplification, one cannot find much difference in these lines from what we have already seen. In another stimulating title, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, we read in the article "Marxism":

> Marx identifies the economic structure of society (the forces and relations of production) as the key factor that constrains and impels historical transformation across large historical epochs (the slave mode of production, feudalism, capitalism). And he regards other institutions, including institutions of politics and culture, as part of the superstructure of society. These "superstructural" institutions are social arrangements that serve to support and stabilize the development of the economic structure.[16]

In another similarly titled *Encyclopedia of Sociology* we could glean some well-worn remarks about Marxism, made on the authority of Weber, in the article "Economic Determinism": "In Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Marx's analysis is called a ''onesided materialistic'' interpretation. Marx provides evidence for Weber's contention when he argues that the economic base determines the ideological superstructure."[17]

In the same vein, rather unexpectedly, we could read in the article "Literature and society": "Marxist thought defines literature as part of the ideological superstructure within

which the literatures of elites are the ruling ideas since culture serves to legitimate the interests of the ruling class."[18]

But the full-fledged unfolding of the concept of superstructure comes in the entry of "Marxist Sociology", where we see that the

> . . . mode of production directly shapes the specific structures of the class system and the manner in which the economic base determines the cultural superstructure composed of the state and various ideological institutions such as the mass media, education, law, religion, political ideologies, and so forth.[19]

The scholarly titled *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Thought* has an article on "Historiography and the Idea of Progress" in which it devoted a special section to "Marx and the Materialist Conception of History" where it declares that Marx and Engels offered an "economic, determinist model of historical development" and elaborates that

> The model focuses on describing the economic basis, or mode of production, in any society, which is defined by the system of property ownership, classes and the division of labour. From this basis there emerges a superstructure, which includes law, religion, the state and other social institutions, which reflect the existing distribution of property and are in many respects 'caused' by it.[20]

What we have seen so far is enough, I believe, to vindicate what we already felt about the concept of superstructure as explained in the encyclopedias i.e., it consists of political, legal, and the ideological spheres predominantly. This view is maintained in common, if we could ignore minor stylistic and terminological differences.

Now we shall move on to consult some dictionaries and check if there would be any difference in this stance, starting with the Dictionary of iconic status *The Oxford English*

Dictionary, which deals with the concept of superstructure in its volume XVII, where we find among other things: "In Marxist theory, the institutions and culture which are considered to result from or reflect the economic system on which a society is based."[21] This is followed by the quotation from Marx's 1859 preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which is generally considered an indispensable passage of reference for any discussion of the concepts of base and superstructure.

As this does not show any considerable deviation from what we have already seen, we shall move on to the dictionaries devoted for more specialized studies; for instance, *Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought* which has a separate entry for "base and superstructure" and says:

> According to Marx it is necessary to distinguish the economic base of the social order from the legal, political and cultural superstructure which rests upon it. The base consists of . . . the production relations, through which productive forces operate. The superstructure consists in legal, political and social institutions that express, enforce and consolidate the relations of economic power that pertain to the base. Marxists believe that changes in the base explain corresponding changes in the superstructure . . .[22]

Including the idea of superstructure reinforcing the relations in the base, this elaboration only amounts to a reiteration of what we have already seen. Let's turn to *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought* that has an entry "base and superstructure," which tersely states at the very beginning that "these are Marxist metaphors to describe the relations between the economy (production relations) and government, politics and ideology."[23] In an entry with

the same title, *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* endorses this opinion with slight differences of terminology where it speaks about culture instead of ideology:

> The metaphor of the base and superstructure derives from Marxism and is a way of explaining the relationship between the economy and culture. As such it forms the basis of a perspective known as cultural materialism. Broadly speaking, it is argued that the cultural superstructure is shaped and determined by the economic base or mode of production.[24]

Instead of using specific words like "culture" or "ideology", if we say "other parts of the society" except economics, we have, in essence, what *Collins Dictionary of Sociology* has to say for the same entry "base and superstructure", which it explains as "Marx's metaphor to express the relationship between the economy, as the foundation and determining influence of society (the *base*), and the other parts of society (the *superstructure*)."[25] All this is not much different from the common version that boils down to the statement that the base is economics and superstructural constituents are "Political, legal, and cultural/ideological/intellectual/spiritual" aspects of social life.

So, we shall move our consultation to the next degree of specialization and consider those reference works that specially deal with Marxism itself. Understandably, we cannot expect many such references at that level of specialization, but there are some, for instance, *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism* which explains "superstructure" as "one of the fundamental Marxian concepts denoting the totality of philosophical, ethical, cultural, political and legal ideas, attitudes and the associated network of institutions and organizations in society."[26] It doesn't need exceptional clairvoyance to hear the echoes in this, of what we are already told.

Another similar work is *Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia*, which quotes the above mentioned Marx's 1859 preface, in its article "Basis and Superstructure", and goes on to say that "the superstructure (e.g. law, politics, religion, morality, philosophy and art) is consequently a form of social consciousness and it is linked to certain institutions (e.g., the state, parties, churches, educational establishments, etc.)"[27] In spite of the seeming difference that this statement makes by its slightly different listing of items in the second bracket, this is not anything different essentially, because the elements of superstructure are more or less the same and the items in the second bracket cannot be taken as the *basis*, as the article makes clear at the very outset that the basis signifies production relations. The status of the items listed in the second bracket is left unspecified.

Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia, which enjoys wide popularity in the modern, internet-connected world, and thus plays a vital role in forming and informing the common opinion— although the site does not claim to be authentic on account of the easy accessibility of its content for modification—says in its entry for "Base and superstructure":

> In Marxist theory, human society consists of two parts: the **base and superstructure**; the base comprehends the forces and relations of production — employer-employee work conditions, the technical division of labour, and property relations— into which people enter to produce the necessities and amenities of life. These relations determine society's other relationships and ideas, which are described as its superstructure. The superstructure of a society includes its culture, institutions, political power structures, roles, rituals, and state. The base determines (conditions) the superstructure, yet their relation is not

> strictly causal, because the superstructure often influences the base; the influence of the base, however, predominates.[28]

Thus it epitomizes the most important aspects of the popular opinion about the base and superstructure thesis, in a simple and concise style, but essentially conveys the same understanding as the other versions.

The Metaphor in its Motherland

There are some reference works exclusively dealing with Marxism, the motherland of the base and superstructure metaphor. Among them, *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, edited by Tom Bottomore, is a work that any study relating to Marxism cannot ignore. Here, we read in the article "base and superstructure" written by Jorge Larrain of the university of Birmingham:

> The building-like metaphor of base and superstructure is used by Marx and Engels to propound the idea that the economic structure of society (the base) conditions the existence and forms of the state and social consciousness (the superstructure) . . . most of the time the metaphor is used to explain the relationship between three general levels of society, whereby the two levels of the superstructure [the state and social consciousness] are determined by the base.[29]

Besides having the advantage of reducing the chaotic catalogue of the contents of superstructure to a two-tier version, this statement does not demarcate itself substantially from the previous ones. But, recently, another dictionary has been published that concerns itself exclusively with Marxism; that is the *Historical Dictionary of Marxism*, published in 2007. Its entry of "Base and superstructure" elaborates:

> In describing his materialist conception of history Karl Marx suggests that a society is like a building consisting of a foundation on which is erected the more

> visible structure. The foundation is the economic mode of production, that is the organization and process of economic production. On top of this sits the social and political system. Marx labels these two elements the economic base and the superstructure. The economic base consists of the forces and relations of production and Marx's theory of historical materialism identifies these as being crucial in conditioning the superstructure. The superstructure consists of the noneconomic aspects of society and includes laws, political and legal institutions, philosophy, religion, morals, culture, and the dominant or prevailing ideas more generally which Marx calls the "social consciousness."[30]

The length of the quotation does not owe its existence to any perceived merit or distinction of the content, but to the formal facts like the contemporaniety of its time of publication and its exclusive concern with Marxism. So far as the content is concerned, this statement reverts to the hotchpotch version of superstructure that agrees well with the endlessly extendable signification of superstructure that we observed in its use in the academic articles, in the second chapter.

In fact, we started our investigation at this level that is nearer to the present and delved deeper into the relatively stable realms of references. Here we find an essential agreement about the concepts of base and superstructure among almost all of the reference works with some negligible terminological, stylistic and tonal differences. We can, I believe, venture to formulate these points of concurrence, as something like this:

1. Base and superstructure are the twin compartments of metaphorical nomenclature marshalled by Marx to explicate the social totality as the conceptual embodiment of his idea of economic predomination.

2. Base signifies relations of production/means of production/mode of production, in a nutshell, something that has to do with economics or production; consequently, all the noneconomic spheres of society are captured in the concept of superstructure, whose description is inexorably constrained by the complexity of ones awareness of noneconomic elements of the society, but, mostly it is thought of as containing the political and legal spheres, plus the cultural/ ideological/intellectual/spiritual elements— depending on one's verbal preferences. Needless to say that one can embark on further elaboration of this latter superstructural element with details like morality and religion.

This view of the metaphor as containing totalizing social concepts, and the associated view of superstructure as the all-inclusive concept (except, of course, economics) have a time-honoured taken for granted status that could be traced back to the times of Marx— via Marxist theories of different denominations that were influential at different junctures of history— from its present prevalence in the academic discourses, where its conceptual expansion gets a new lease of life. Our task, now, is to probe into the roots of this intellectual trajectory, and to problematize its legitimacy, as well as trace its genealogy.

Here, I should confess a deliberate silence in which I bypassed a crucial passage of Marx that occurred repeatedly in some of these references, i.e., the quotation from Marx's 1859 preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.* We did not discuss this quotation in any detail, except underscoring its indispensability in any discussion of the concepts of base and superstructure. In fact, this silence is not motivated by any unwillingness to confront the crucial issue, but the exact opposite of that: to take up the crucial issue in a full-fledged way, at the right context. Such a task can only be fulfilled by a decisive, critical confrontation with Marx's passage which forms the chief concern of our next chapter.

Notes

[1] Andrew Collier, *Marx: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008) 52.

[2] "Superstructure", *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, trans. of the 3rd ed, Vol. 17, 1978.

[3] "Production Relations", *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, trans. of the 3rd ed, Vol. 21, 1978

[4] "Base and Superstructure", *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, trans. of the 3rd ed, Vol.2, 1973.

[5] "Base and Superstructure", *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, trans. of the 3rd ed, Vol.2, 1973.

[6] "Marxism", *The Encyclopedia Americana,* 1976 ed.

[7] "Marxism", *The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1976 ed.

[8] "Marxism", *The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1976 ed.

[9] "History, philosophy of", *Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Deluxe Edition*, 2009.

[10] "Hegelianism", *Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Deluxe Edition*, 2009.

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CHAPTER 4

What Marx Meant? Revisiting the 1859 Preface

> Least of all must a philosophy be accepted as a philosophy by virtue of an authority or of good faith, be the authority even that of a people and the faith that of centuries.
>
> —Marx, *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy*.[1]

Our initial exploration, in the form of a preliminary survey of contemporary academic articles that deploy the concepts of base and superstructure has taken us into several alien territories but eventually landed us with the conclusion that the concept of base and, more importantly, the concept of superstructure are used in an extremely elastic fashion in terms of what these concepts encompass and theorize thereby. From this impression of baffling collage we moved on to another survey of the time-honored tomes of reference in search of some certainty, but what we found instead of a stable anchorage is an endorsement of the panoptic version of superstructure which, in turn, is determined by the base, read economics.

We also noted, *inter alia*, a certain discomfiture — implicit or explicit — with the crude, wholesale determinism that these metaphors entail. Taking the cue from the recurring references to the 1859 preface of Marx to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, as the acknowledged authentic formulation of these concepts, we have decided to settle the accounts at the very source. So, here, we set out on a meticulous analysis of Marx's statement in question, to arrive at a reasonably— at least in a relative sense — accurate view of what Marx originally meant by these well-worn concepts. But, let there be no misunderstanding that this is going to be an easy enterprise.

> [A]ny account of Marx's ideas is bound to be controversial. His writings are surrounded by such a mass of conflicting interpretations that to explain what they say is to walk through a minefield. Moreover, Marx, being human, was sometimes ambiguous and inconsistent, and changed his mind on matters both large and small. In picking one's way through these difficulties, one has to tread a narrow path. It is easy to slip from 'What Marx really meant to say . . .' to 'What Marx should have said, but didn't' . . .[2]

In his book on Marx's thought, Alex Callinicos writes these words — a book which he doesn't even intend to be a theoretical polemic but only as a popular introduction. It is not rare that one comes across analogous passages about the possible misunderstandings regarding Marxism in almost all writings on Marx or Marxism. And most of these writers succeed in figuring out or sometimes even rectifying this or that aspect of this misunderstanding.

But, in spite of the collective illuminations carried out by these corrective efforts, still there prevails a grave misunderstanding about some aspect(s) of Marx's critical canon. And this is true not only in the case of any peripheral aspects of his thought but also about the concepts that are crucial to his worldview. The concepts of base and superstructure which are certainly among the central concepts are a case in point. The present chapter is an attempt at analyzing this theoretical lacuna by approaching Marx afresh, unalloyed by any tacit interpretive traditions, by rigorously confining our analytical purview to the statements of Marx and relentlessly ignoring everything else except for ancillary purposes such as citing as examples of popular opinion.

Raymond Williams, whose estimation of the base and superstructure paradigm couldn't be characterized as a complimentary one, still writes, "Any modern approach to a Marxist theory

of culture must begin by considering the proposition of a determining base and a determined superstructure."[3] If we bring together the statements of various writers about the importance of the base and superstructure paradigm they will themselves run into the length of a small book. Ironically, the rigour and profundity of the analysis that was applied to these concepts have been inversely proportional to the recognition of their importance. Hence an original analysis of the paradigm is mandatory for any genuine understanding of Marx.

Some Remarks about the Nature of Inquiry

It would be a mere reiteration of a stereotype to say that Marx's sporadic statements about art or literature are scattered over his writings and consequently any comprehensive presentation of his theory of literature demands extensive reading and research. But the temptation to extend the same argument indiscriminately to all aspects of Marxism should be restrained. When Isaiah Berlin, for instance, says, "No formal exposition of Historical Materialism was ever published by Marx himself. It occurs in a fragmentary form in all his early work written during the years 1843-8, and is taken for granted in his later thought",[4] he succumbed to such a temptation. Of course it is true that even some of the central concepts in historical materialism are taken for granted and the present chapter itself aims at analyzing such a deep-rooted assumption. But the alleged lack of formal statement from Marx, only serves to justify these assumptions by making them seem inevitable in the absence of any authentic statement. In fact there is a strikingly obvious authentic statement given by Marx, and consistently endorsed by him later. That is the 1859 preface of Marx, the subject of our study here.

Hence, Leonard Jackson rightly says that, "The clearest and most convincing statement ever made about the materialist conception of history is that by Marx himself, in his preface of 1859 to ***A contribution to the critique of political economy*** . . . The ***preface*** therefore has the highest possible authority as a statement of Marx's lifelong position."[5] This testifies the fact that the authentic text for the analysis of Marx's comprehensive theory of history, does not exist as scattered statements but as the statement given at one place, in a few lines. So, the mode of inquiry needed here is not extensive but intensive. We can really appreciate the degree of intensive treatment that Marx's Preface demands, only when we consider the highly condensed nature of this statement.

Understandably, Jackson writes in this connection, "The ***preface*** is a masterpiece of clarity and intellectual power; but it is very concise. In this it resembles nothing so much as one of those computer applications, which is distributed on a single floppy disk, and expands on installation. One puts the disk in; file upon file springs into existence and installs itself on the hard disk of the machine, megabytes of data"[6].

<u>What is so Unique about this Statement?</u>

Before we take up the analysis of Marx's 1859 statement, it would be appropriate to consider the reasons that account for its uniqueness:

1. Firstly, this is perhaps the only place Marx purports to give a general statement of his theory of history in a comprehensive way; in spite of his well-known distaste for general statements.[7] Marx's introductory sentence to this passage testifies this fact: "The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarized as follows."

2. Notwithstanding his propensity for revising and improving his writings, (enough to recall that Marx says, "That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today" about the second section of *The Communist Manifesto*; and "No one can feel the literary shortcomings in 'Das Kapital' more strongly than I myself"[8] about his *Capital*; — both are his pivotal works. Moreover, rereading *Holy Family*, which he co-authored along with Engels, he says, "it is self evident that an author, if he pursues his research, cannot literally publish what he has written six months previously"[9]) Marx simply referred to this statement, in the afterword to the second German edition of ***Capital,*** as the instance where he discussed his materialist theory of history and in another instance he reiterated the same statement in reported speech in a footnote to his *Capital*.[10]

3. Unlike the scattered statements in Marx's early writings, which were mostly unpublished in his lifetime, this statement occurs in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* which is published during his lifetime in the period of his intellectual maturity and he consistently endorsed this statement by citing it intact in his later writings.

4. Lastly, the canonical status of this statement is so well recognized that, to my knowledge, there are at least half a dozen writers — Melvin Rader, Hans G. Ehrbar, Leonard Jackson, Raymond Williams, G. A. Cohen, and M. M. Bober— who attempted a very meticulous analysis of this statement.

I believe these reasons are fairly adequate to conclude that any serious inquiry into Marx's theory must be ready for a rigorous analysis of this statement. Obviously, to do this properly, there is no alternative except for a close reading of the statement in question. And in analyzing this well-recognized and often-investigated passage, our primary focus is to verify the

constitutional plurality and the resulting referential elasticity of the concept of base, and more importantly the concept of superstructure that has undergone a wholesale extension to accommodate almost all non-economic spheres of the society. The previous investigations neither problematized this plurality nor studied the resulting notional elasticity systematically.

Discussing the reasons and repercussions of this conceptual extension without analyzing the statement at issue would be premature and presumptuous. So, reserving the cognate issues for a later treatment we should proceed with the analysis of the statement, which is cited below. In citing the statement, I made the following changes in it to enhance clarity and convenience in reference and analysis:

1. Some words are underlined for emphasis. All underlinings are mine.

2. The whole statement is divided to facilitate a focused reading, without changing the order of the sentences. It should be noted that all these sentences belong to a single paragraph.

3. These isolated sentences are numbered for the ease of reference.

These changes are carried out keeping in view the extremely condensed nature of the passage, which, if cited without these changes, may either not receive the meticulous attention it deserves, or be susceptible to receive a cursory reading that results in a blurring of distinct aspects and relations that the passage presents in a highly dense language. I believe that these changes do not offend the norms of citation as they are clearly stated beforehand. Here is the passage:

> 1. The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarized as follows.

2. In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production.

3. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

4. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.

5. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

6. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or— this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms— with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.

7. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

8. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic

or philosophic— in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

9. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production.

10. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.[11]

I am afraid I have cited a very long passage, but considering the importance of the passage and the volume of interpretive writings it has given rise to, it is a relatively simple passage; moreover, there is no alternative for a careful reading of this text, which could serve as a legitimate beginning for any analysis worth the name. Here follows a discussion of the text point-by-point, correspondingly numbered just as with the text.

1) The 1st sentence tells us that what Marx attempting to offer here is a summary of his general conclusions and these conclusions served him as his guiding principles. This sentence is an indisputable evidence of the fact that what Marx embarks on here is a well-considered, avowedly general statement of his guiding principles.

2) This sentence characterizes the relations of production as definite, inevitable and independent. Some translations have “necessary” in the place of “inevitable” and “determinate” instead of “definite”.[12] “Determinate”, I think, might be a better word because it carries the

connotation of being connected with something else and Marx suggests such a relation here with the level of productive forces. And the inevitability and independence (from will) of these relations are because these relations are formed in correspondence with the forces of production. Also some translations have “corresponding” instead of “appropriate”. Here too, “corresponding” might be a better word because these relations are not always “appropriate” according to Marx as can be seen from the 7th sentence. The normative suggestion vaguely carried by the word “appropriate” is another reason for this. We could conclude this discussion of discrepancies in translation with the point made by Hans Ehrbar, Professor at the University of Utah, whose alternative translations have already been discussed: “In the German, the three attributes: (1) determinate, (2) necessary, (3) independent of their will are given in parallel. In English, such a parallel construction cannot be given in front of ‘relations,’ but one would have to say: relations which are determinate, necessary, and independent of their will. This sounds awkward. The translation given above [this is about Ehrbar’s own translation] is a compromise.”[13]

The central idea of the passage, which is about how people enter into certain relations of production according to the available forces of production, will be clear enough if we consider the mediating role of division of labour relations in the production relations. This idea clearly occurs in Marx’s writings as early as in his *Poverty of Philosophy*, where we read that “Labor is organized, is divided differently according to the instruments it disposes over. The hand-mill presupposes a different division of labor from the steam-mill”[14]. And these different divisions of labour are also the source for different relations of property, because, as Marx and Engels say in *The German Ideology*: “Division of labour and private property are, after all, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the

other with reference to the product of the activity".[15] William H. Shaw rightly divides the relations of production as "work" relations of production and "ownership" relations of production.[16] As the above two quotations explicate, Marx maintains that the two types of relations are influenced by the forces of production. Thus this sentence defines the relation between production relations and forces of production.[17]

3) This is perhaps the most important and also— unfortunately for those who are not used to the terseness of Marx's style— the most epigrammatic sentence in the passage. Important, because this is the only place where Marx defines what constitutes superstructure. Epigrammatic, because it comprises two other crucial concepts besides that of the superstructure — all in one sentence. I venture to restate this sentence in the following formulaic paraphrase:

A). the foundation = economic structure of society = the totality of production relations.

B). what arises on this foundation = A legal and political superstructure.

C). what corresponds to this foundation = Definite forms of social consciousness.

The first point defines the foundation; the second point is about its relation with the superstructure; and the third point is about another sort of relation, viz., the relation of "correspondence" with another entity i.e., "definite forms of social consciousness". All the three aspects frequently suffered misreading and misinterpretation. So, we shall consider them one by one.

A). Marx precisely says here that the foundation (or the base) is the totality of production relations. This sentence doesn't even allow any ambiguity. But misreading is so prevalent that G. A. Cohen, in his famous book *Karl Marx's Theory of History* cites a whole list of eleven sources

that include productive forces in the base[18]. This testifies to the consummate misreading of this passage. Williams, for instance, writes among other explanations of the term "the base"; that it is "a mode of production"; an expression that Marx actually used in the next sentence without any apparent relation to the base. Also, Williams wrongly thinks that Marx's emphasis is on productive activities in the base;[19] whereas for Marx, the base (production relations) doesn't even comprise this activity but it acts as the framework for this activity as can be seen from the 6th sentence. We can share Williams' objection to consider "the base" as an object. But I think that "the base" should be thought of as a structure instead; not only because of the conceptual affinity of the idea of "production relations" with a structure than with an object, but also because a few sentences before this passage, referring to the economy, Marx used the word "anatomy"— a word with obvious structural connotations. Williams' observation about the translation of the word "the base", that in French it is usually translated as "infrastructure" and as "struttura" in Italian is also conducive to interpret the base as a structure. Thus, I believe, the Althusserian expression "structural causality" can be safely used here, so far as it is restricted to the relation of the base with the superstructure (the superstructure itself being a sort of structure). But the analysis of superstructure, as we have already seen, is even more important than this.

B). The fragment of the sentence relating to the superstructure: ". . . the real foundation, on which <u>arises</u> a legal and political superstructure. . ." comes like a shock to anyone who gives it a careful reading, because, when people read this passage, they generally have the preconceived notion, that the superstructure is a category that embraces various social constituents like Art, Literature, Philosophy, Morality and what not (perhaps anything except economy); and this makes them already predisposed to read all these familiar figments into this particular fragment. If this shock leads to any genuine intellectual searching, the reader will scan

the whole passage, looking for the other missing motley items, generally lumped together under the concept of superstructure. But this only reinforces the shock, as the reader finds that Marx did not include any other items in the superstructure anywhere in the passage. Moreover, Marx obviously excludes “forms of social consciousness” from the superstructure by mentioning them separately as something that only “corresponds” to the base, unlike the superstructure.

In fact, even a cursory reading of the passage is enough to realize that the word superstructure occurs only two times in the whole passage and what constitutes the superstructure is mentioned only in the first instance i.e., the present instance, the second mention of the word superstructure (in the 7th fragment) does not say anything about its contents, but uses the modifiers “whole, immense” to modify the noun, superstructure. These modifiers cannot have any special signification except to denote the magnitude of the superstructure. Also, these modifiers can be applied to any constituent items equally well, whether it is to the Marx’s version of “legal and political” superstructure or to the widely believed all-inclusive version. So, the second mention of superstructure in the passage, does not contribute to the understanding of what constitutes superstructure. Moreover, it would be only naïve to think that only “legal and political” aspects of society cannot be designated “immense”, unless one has a thoroughly simplistic and superficial idea of the state and the legal system[20].

Consequently, Marx’s first mention of the term superstructure is the only instance where he defines what constitutes it, viz., “legal and political” systems. Furthermore, it is not difficult to see why these two systems are mentioned together, as legality is not much more than the official manual of the political state. This makes it crystal clear that Marx used the metaphor of base and superstructure to elucidate the relation between economics and politics alone. Ironically, this restricted use of the base and superstructure metaphor in Marx is consistently

overlooked. For one thing, the whole passage is read with an idea of the all-inclusive superstructure lingering in one's mind, and as a result whatever Marx says about any social aspect is simply taken to be the explanation of some aspect of the base and superstructure. This persistent misreading— that takes the whole passage as if it is talking about some or other aspect of the base and superstructure, whereas the metaphor itself is clearly presented as one of the aspects of the passage— ends up in a reinforced belief in the all-inclusive, panoptic base and superstructure. Thus the all-inclusive version gained axiomatic status. I refer to this widely believed version as the panoptic version hereafter. (Potpourri superstructure would perhaps be a better word, but I avoid this, as it does not suit the seriousness of the problem).

Now, it must be admitted that, when I cited the passage in a piece meal fashion with numbered sentences, it is also to discourage this wholesale misreading, besides facilitating reference.[21] It should also be mentioned that Marx's restricted use is sometimes recognized, which inevitably happens whenever the theorist in question shows at least a superficial fidelity to the text. Even then, the meaning of this restriction is never explored nor its implications ever analyzed. Williams, for instance, perceptively observes this restricted use in Marx and writes, "The first use of the term 'superstructure' is explicitly qualified as 'legal and political'"[22]. He even writes against the popular mistranslation that originated from the belief in the panoptic version: "it should incidentally be noted that the English translation in most common use has a plural—'legal and political superstructures' for Marx's singular 'juristicher und politisher uberbau'"[23]. But he later confuses his valuable observations, while considering the second mention of the term superstructure, which we have already discussed above. How, different theorists (in spite of their analytical acumen and theoretical sophistication) missed this restricted use of Marx does not enter our purview now. But here we shall try to analyze what difference

could be made by the recognition of Marx's restricted use and consider some repercussions of ignoring it.

Firstly, the panoptic version contains or suggests ways of thinking that are quite alien to Marx, sometimes those even opposed to him: Marx, for instance, writes in his *Poverty of Philosophy*:

> In constructing the edifice of an ideological system by means of the categories of political economy, the limbs of the social system are dislocated. The different limbs of society are converted into so many separate societies, following one upon the other. How, indeed, could the single logical formula of movement, of sequence, of time, explain the structure of society, in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another?[24]

It is not difficult to see that the panoptic version has such unilinear character that Marx criticizes here. Williams was quite right when he observes:

> It is then ironic to remember that the force of Marx's original criticism had been mainly directed against the separation of 'areas' of thought and activity [as in the separation of consciousness from material production] and against the related evacuation of specific content — real human activities — by the imposition of abstract categories. The common abstraction of 'the base 'and 'the superstructure' is thus a radical persistence of the modes of thought which he attacked.[25]

Obviously, the source of the problem is not in Marx, but in taking the category of superstructure as if it includes the areas of thought and consciousness.

Rader also writes, “In recognizing that philosophy, science, morality, and art often transcend the relativities of class and economic period, Marx shows that he is not entrapped by the base – Superstructure model.”[26] Paradoxically, this valuable observation only amounts to an unwitting suggestion of inconsistency between Marx’s general theory and his actual analytical practice; again because the panoptic version of base and superstructure is taken to be Marx’s version.

It is crudely misleading to visualize the total social complex as a simple base and superstructure metaphor, unless it is only for the elucidation of a particular facet of that complex. Marx’s version of base and superstructure is such a metaphor whose elucidatory purpose is restricted to the relation of the economic base with the political superstructure. When a metaphor that explains a single aspect of the whole theory is magnified to the proportion of a complete theory, the original theory itself becomes inescapably one-sided, and the elucidatory device becomes an imposter that parades like an all-encompassing theory. What originally is a partial metaphor has turned into a procrustean schema whereby the real analysis might be replaced by the excision of everything into these neatly trimmed compartments. We have a classic example of the deep-seated persistence of this compartmentalized thinking when Stalin was asked the following question: “Is it true that language is a superstructure on the base?”[27] No wonder that Williams writes, “A persistent dissatisfaction, within Marxism, about the proposition of ‘base and superstructure’, has been most often expressed by an attempted refinement and revaluation of ‘the superstructure’”. [28]

Some Theoretical Repercussions

Firstly, this misinterpretation resulted in the metamorphosis of an elucidatory metaphor into an analytical model. Williams shows an inkling of this fact when he writes "[M]ost of the difficulty still lies in the original extension of metaphorical terms for a relationship into abstract categories or concrete areas between which connections are looked for and complexities or relative autonomies emphasized." [29]

Secondly, as is well-known, all metaphors are partial. When this problem is aggravated by the wholesale extension of the metaphor, the whole theory itself is confused. Williams could not figure out this unwarranted extension as he thinks that Marx himself is inconsistent in the signification of the term superstructure.

Lastly, the base and superstructure metaphor itself bears the brunt of this grotesque extension when it is magnified to subsume all the heterogeneous non-economic elements of the society and becomes amorphous as any other misused device. But the idea of an amorphous metaphor offends human reason and consequently different theorists visualize this amorphous entity in different ways.

Some possible objections

It could be argued that Marx's qualification of the superstructure as "legal and political" is only restrictive and not defining. Let us see this objection in detail: by "defining" qualification, I mean qualifying something by way of defining it. In this sense "legal and political superstructure" is equal to superstructure that consists of legal and political systems. I maintain that this is what Marx meant. By "restrictive" qualification, I mean mentioning only some

restricted aspects of a thing, though we know that there may be other aspects also. This is not the case with Marx's statement here, for the following reasons:

1). Marx did not include any other item in the superstructure, throughout the passage. There is not even a slight suggestion in the passage of a wider variety of superstructure.

2). Ideology or forms of social consciousness, which are the most important ingredients commonly lumped together in the panoptic superstructure, are rigorously excluded by Marx from his version of superstructure and their relation with the base is defined by another term i.e., "Correspond".

Still, when Williams observes, "The first use of the term 'superstructure' is explicitly qualified as 'legal and political'" as we have already seen, it is clear that he has taken this qualification as a restrictive qualification. The most skeptical reasoning against our argument is possible through doubting the validity of Marx's statement here, by suspecting it as a careless oversight or as some other form of fortuitous formulation. But even this argument is not admissible, because, as we have already seen, Marx referred to this passage in an *afterword* to his *Capital* as one where he discussed his materialist theory of history and also gave the same passage in reported speech in a foot note to the same book. In both the cases, he faithfully endorsed his 1859 statement. Also, a few lines before introducing this passage Marx writes in the same 1859 preface, "My inquiry led me to the conclusion that . . . legal relations [and] . . . political forms . . . originate in the material conditions of life". The same elements: "legal . . . political". No doubt, this is the most authentic statement from Marx when he says that the superstructure consists of legal and political systems. Enough with the superstructure, for now.

C). The fragment left over in the 3rd sentence is ". . . and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." Here Marx says that these forms of consciousness only "correspond" to the base, unlike the superstructure, which "arises" from the base. Obviously, in this passage, Marx offers the analysis of a multi-dimensional reality, with its elements having different sorts of mutual relations. So, Marx's passage is interspersed with various relational words that express different degrees and kinds of influence. I have underlined these relational words for emphasis, because, often these variegated connections expressed in nuanced relational words are not properly appreciated, and paradoxically it is Marx who is generally criticized for not clearly defining the relation between the base and the superstructure. The source of the mistake is the familiar one: reducing Marx's multidimensional passage to one of its aspects, the base and superstructure. Typical of this is the view of Rader:

> Marx's theory is not free from ambiguities. The kinds of relations between the base and superstructure are not precisely defined. Marx uses such diverse terms as 'determination,' 'correspondence,' 'reflection,' 'dependence,' 'condition,' and 'outgrowth,' to indicate these relations, leaving the nature of the connections open to various interpretations.[30]

Another aspect usually overlooked is that Marx is not speaking about all forms of consciousness here. Firstly he qualifies them as "social", thus leaving out the consciousness of nature. Engels rightly explains this when he writes that ". . . all branches of science which are not natural sciences are historical".[31] Secondly, Marx qualifies them as "definite" forms of social consciousness, which is to say that only certain forms of consciousness correspond to this base. So, what Marx says is how the production relations have certain corresponding forms of social consciousness. Not that all forms of consciousness correspond to these relations.

4). Another crucial sentence. One can see here that Marx offers a really all–inclusive analysis in this sentence: “The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.” This is actually the place where he attempts a panoramic formulation. But the significance of this sentence is largely overshadowed by the panoptic understanding of the base and superstructure, as that kind of understanding predisposes the readers to read this sentence as an explanatory statement about base and superstructure. This confusion is a reason why a number of modern writers like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton mistakenly identify “the base” with the mode of production, contrary to what Marx says.

But, it is not difficult to see that there is nothing that suggests any overt connection with the base and superstructure formulation. Moreover, the conceptual incongruity between them is self-evident. The base and superstructure metaphor, as we have seen, is a structural metaphor; whereas this statement views all the “social, political and intellectual” domains as “life-processes” . . . i.e., as activities. It states that all these activities are “conditioned” by “the mode of production of material life”, which itself is an activity. Perhaps, we can safely designate the mode of production thesis as a praxological paradigm, since the concept of praxis informs the thesis, in a crucial way. Nevertheless, we are not going to dwell on this thesis any further, in spite of its importance, as this demands much space and also because our main preoccupation here is with the base and superstructure.

5). This is the sentence where the strongest word “determines” occurs. Also, this is the sentence in which Marx speaks about consciousness without any qualifications, about consciousness in general. He says that this consciousness is “determined” by “social existence”. Though Marx used the strongest word of determinism here, there was not considerable

controversy about this determinism in the commentatory literature because what determines consciousness here is the social existence — a phrase of very broad signification.

In this context, Rader's comment is illuminating, "Social being is broad enough to cover family ties, political relations, and other social connections and activities". [32] Thus, contrary to the popular view of consciousness as a constituent of superstructure; Marx formulates its determination using the concept of widest coverage.

This is the last of the sentences that gives a general description of social mechanism. What follows is Marx's theorization of the why and how of the social revolution.

6). This sentence is about the contradiction between the production relations and the productive forces. Besides, Marx explains that property relations are nothing but the production relations expressed in legal terms. Here again, we see Marx stating an inextricable relation between the legal system (which he designated as a part of the superstructure in the previous sentences) and the production relations, i.e., the base. He also expounds the origin of the contradiction between the production relations and the productive forces.

7). Marx clearly states that the changes in the economic foundation lead to the transformation of the superstructure, though the pace of the transformation may vary greatly. This sentence contains the second mention of the term "superstructure". But, there is nothing that signifies what constitutes it. One should not be mislead by the phrase "immense superstructure". That, superstructure with its legal and political systems— the two important aspects of the state — is already an immense structure is self-evident.[33] When one mistakenly thinks that ideology is also a part of superstructure then — as it is clear that it is only through ideology that people become aware of the contradiction and fight it out — one inevitably is misled to think, like

Rader, that superstructure determines the base in a revolutionary period[34]. No need to say that Marx says the exact opposite of that: "The changes in the economic foundation lead . . . to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure." (emphasis added)

8). This is not a complicated sentence in itself, but has produced considerable complications. We see the "religious, artistic or philosophic" ideological forms mentioned along with the legal and political forms — the constituents of the superstructure. This could be easily construed as a statement suggestive of the panoptic version. But, if one observes carefully, it will be puzzling to realize that when Marx has spoken about the legal and political aspects as superstructure he has not characterized them as forms of ideology.

This is not something accidental, because the legal and political aspects as ideology are different from the legal and political aspects as superstructure. In fact, the legal and political systems have a two-fold existence: 1) as ideologies 2) as huge powerful social institutions. The first aspect allows them to be mentioned along with other ideological forms. The second aspect differentiates them from other ideologies. In the first aspect they resist being labelled as structures or superstructure. In the second aspect it is not difficult to visualize them as structures or superstructure. Thus, Marx's mention of the legal and political ideologies along with other ideologies should not be allowed to mislead us into ignoring the institutional aspect of the former, the aspect that prompted Marx to call them superstructure. G. A. Cohen has clearly noted this institutional nature of the superstructural elements when he writes, "The superstructure consists of legal, political, religious, and other non-economic *institutions*. It probably includes universities, but it does not include knowledge, for knowledge is not an institution."[35] Although, he still thinks about superstructure in the customary unrestricted terms of signification as consisting of "non-economic *institutions*".

The significance of this sentence also consists in the multidimensional version of class struggle it presents when Marx mentions, "the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic — in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out." Ironically enough, an incisive theorist of Perry Anderson's stature seems to imply that there is no room for class struggle, for subjective forces, in this passage of Marx's. [36] Anderson's critical remark seems unreasonably unsympathetic when we consider the problems posed by the then Prussian censorship to the writers, as rightly pointed out by A. Prinz in his article "Background and ulterior motive of Marx's 'Preface' of *1859*".[37]

9). This sentence reiterates the predominance of conditions or existence over consciousness just as in the 5th sentence. But this sentence is remarkable, as Marx seems to suggest here that consciousness transcends even the base, i.e., the production relations, because if consciousness is something that simply confines or corresponds to the production relations — whether these relations comply with the productive forces or not— how can people ever become conscious of the contradiction of what determines their consciousness (production relations) with reference to something else (production forces) and fight it out? Understandably, Marx says here that the (revolutionary) consciousness should be explained from this contradiction and this entails that consciousness is not something that springs from the production relations (the base) alone and that the purview of consciousness transcends production relations, at least to the extent of including production forces.

In fact, consciousness seems to have a ubiquitous status in Marx that pervades and mediates all the divisions of social reality. It is an inherent component even in the material production. Thus, he writes in *Capital*:

> We pre-suppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. [38]

Can we subsume complacently this productive imagination as a part of the superstructure? Now, one can imagine the weird distortion involved in relegating consciousness to one of the heterogeneous elements of the panoptic superstructure.

10). This concluding sentence concerns itself with the historical time before which any social revolution is not possible but it does not say anything about the maximum time limit beyond which that revolution could not be delayed, as it was misread sometimes. So, what is offered here is not a teleological formulation that predestines the trajectory of history in a mystical way, but a formulation of the material constraints that lie behind the subjective initiative.

Concluding remarks

In contrast to the pre-Marxist historical outlook which, at best, had seen the source of historical changes in the legal and political transformations, Marx searches for a deeper root. In view of his Hegelian intellectual background which idealized state as the hypostatization of Geist, and against which Marx formulates his new outlook, it is not difficult to appreciate the crucial importance given to the analysis of the state in Marx's thought even in his formative period. In fact, Marx writes, a few lines before the passage we analyzed,

> The first work which I undertook to dispel the doubts assailing me was a critical re-examination of the Hegelian philosophy of law . . . My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life . . .[39](emphasis added)

This new conclusion that Marx arrived at, is no less an intellectual revolution, and it radically changed the previous historical thinking. Marx formulated this radical conclusion with his base and superstructure metaphor. He finds the source for the existence of state in the class relations or the production relations. These relations are the base and the state arises on them. Both the words originate and arises signify a relation of genesis, where "the base" is the source for the very being of the superstructure. This is not difficult to understand when we remember that, for Marx the state even withers away along with the class differences. But such a genetic relation is unthinkable in the case of elements like art, philosophy, and other forms of consciousness, which are traditionally yoked together under the all-inclusive category of superstructure. In Marx the case of consciousness is quite a different case. In the general theorization of consciousness (in the 5th sentence) it is said to be determined by the social being and in the particular theorization (in the 3rd sentence) only definite forms of social consciousness are said to correspond to the production relations. Both the words "determined" and "correspond" do not suggest any nexus of genesis with the counterpart. They do not deny the separate existence of the counterpart, on the contrary, they presuppose that separate existence.

As we have seen, Marx's passage presents a highly nuanced exposition of a complex organic system with its multidimensional relations defined by words of different degrees and

types of influence and determination. I underlined these words for emphasis. We can see that Marx himself is very particular about these differences when he writes arguing against the economists that ". . . every form of production creates its own legal relations, form of government, etc. In bringing things, which are organically related, into an accidental relation, into a merely reflective connection, they display their crudity and lack of conceptual understanding."[40] Again the same theme: legal and political systems and their organic relation with the form of production, and how this relation should be differentiated from other types of relations.

When all this complexity in Marx's theorization is distortingly reduced to the patently simplistic base and superstructure metaphor, it has grotesque theoretical consequences — both for the theory and for the metaphor. The theory suffered the reduction into a unilinear metaphor and the metaphor suffered an indiscriminate heterogeneous expansion, which made it amorphous. Any genuine exposition of the Marxist theory should settle accounts with this inherited confusion.

Notes

[1] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975) 506.

[2] Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx* (London: Bookmarks, 2004) 12.

[3] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (oxford: OUP, 1986) 75.

[4] Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (New York: OUP, 1959) 121.

[5] Leonard Jackson, *The Dematerialization of Karl Marx* (London: Longman, 1994) 84.

[6] Jackson 84.

[7] Richard Marsden writes, for instance, that "Marx wrote next to nothing on method because he opposed in principle all *a priori*, preconstituted methods—dialectical or otherwise—and would have opposed attempts to extrapolate from his work a method of general applicability" [Richard Marsden, "The Unknown Masterpiece: Marx's Model of Capital", *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 22 (1998): 309].

[8] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 26.

[9] Cited in David McLellan, *Marx's Grundrisse* (Great Britain: Paladin, 1971) 25.

[10] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 86.

[11] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987) 262-63.

[12] Hans G. Ehrbar, *Annotations to Karl Marx's 'Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'*, 18 August 2009, page xv,web, 31 March 2010.

[13] Hans G. Ehrbar, *Annotations to Karl Marx's 'Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy'*, 18 August 2009, page xxii, web, 31 March 2010.

[14] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 183.

[15] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 52.

[16] William H. Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) 28.

[17] Though this relation has a central significance for Marx's theory of history, we are not going to be detained here by a detailed consideration of this aspect, as this task forms the overwhelming concern, both for Shaw, in his book cited above, and also for Cohen, in his book cited below. As both these works have received considerable critical attention and appreciation, I refrain from belabouring the issue again.

[18] G. A Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, (oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 29.

[19] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (oxford: OUP, 1986) 81.

[20] Marx incidentally offers an illuminating explication of the intricate connection between the law and the economic system, when he writes that "always it is in the interest of the ruling section of society to sanction the existing order as law and to legally establish its limits given through usage and tradition. Apart from all else, this, by the way, comes about of itself as soon as the constant reproduction of the basis of the existing order and its fundamental relations assumes a regulated and orderly form in course of time. And such regulation and order are themselves indispensable elements of any mode of production, if it is to assume social stability and independence from mere chance and arbitrariness. These are precisely the form of its social stability and therefore its relative freedom from mere arbitrariness and mere chance. Under backward conditions of the production process as well as the corresponding social relations, it achieves this form by mere repetition of their very reproduction. If this has continued on for

some time, it entrenches itself as custom and tradition and is finally sanctioned as an explicit law" [Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 793].

[21] In his otherwise influential study of Marx's alienation, carried away by his endeavour to emphasise the essentially correct observation about the fluidity of concepts in Marx, Bertell Ollman says: "But if Marx often uses the same expression to refer to different things, he is equally capable of using different expressions to refer to what appears to be the same thing. In the passage in his Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* where he speaks of the mode of production determining 'the social, political, and intellectual life process in general', the same role is attributed to 'relations of production', 'forces of production', 'economic structure of society', 'social existence', and the 'economic foundation'" [Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996) 6].

[22] Williams 76.

[23] Williams 76.

[24] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol.6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 166-67.

[25] Williams 78.

[26] Melvin Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History* (New York: OUP, 1979) 53.

[27] J.V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (Peking: FLP, 1976) 3.

[28] Williams 81.

[29] Williams 81.

[30] Rader 14.

[31] Williams 81.

[32] Rader 16.

[33] Bukharin, thus misled by the adjective indicating the enormousness of the superstructure, writes after quoting the 1859 preface, “The huge ‘superstructure’ that rises over the economic basis of society is of rather intricate internal ‘structure’. It includes material things (tools, instruments, etc.), the most various human organizations, furthermore, strictly coordinated systems of ideas and forms; furthermore, vague, non-coordinated thoughts and feelings; finally, an ideology "of the second degree", sciences of sciences, sciences of arts, etc”. But, a few lines before this passage, he writes that “the state, furthermore, is a huge organization embracing an entire nation and ruling many millions of men. This organization needs a whole army of employees, officials, soldiers, officers, legislators, jurists, ministers, judges, generals, etc., etc., and embraces great layers of human beings, one superimposed on the other” [Nikolai Bukharin, “The Equilibrium between the Elements of Society”, *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology*, International Publishers, 1925, n. *pag, Marxists’ Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2002, web, 3 Mar 2009]. This clearly indicates that the politico-legal superstructure alone could take the modifier of immenseness, and it does not necessarily indicate other constituent elements in superstructure, by this immenseness— a point not recognised by Bukharin himself.

[34] Rader 38.

[35] Cohen 45. Prior to Cohen, M. M. Bober has given some emphasis to the institutional aspect of superstructure, in his book *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History*, which was awarded the David A. Wells Prize for the year 1925—26. For instance, here he writes, “[T]he productive forces continue to grow and with them the mode of production and the institutional superstructure” [M. M. Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950) 39]. But Bober is not consistent in maintaining the institutional nature of superstructure, because he also endorses the ideological superstructure.

[36] See: Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1988) 34.

[37] Prinz also remarks here convincingly that "censorship had produced the art of reading between the lines and this induced authors to practice the art of writing between the lines" [A. Prinz, "Background and Ulterior Motive of Marx's 'Preface' of *1859*", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 30.3 (1969): 439]. But the way Prinz interprets the importance of his factual observation in this article is not very convincing and seems to be far-fetched on the whole.

[38] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 174.

[39] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 29 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987) 262.

[40] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol.28 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 26.

CHAPTER 5

Archeology of Restricted Superstructure

> Exactly because of the long history of bowdlerization and misrepresentation of what Marx and Engels actually said, a practice that began even before Marx died in1883 . . . I make my case by extensive quotation of what they said rather than, as is so often done, relying on snippets and paraphrasing. For this reason and the fact that I draw on their published record in its entirety, not just the usually cited canonical "texts"— which make up at most about one-tenth of their total output — I beg the reader's indulgence.
>
> —August H. Nimtz. Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough*.[1]

Of course, the context of Nimtz's argument is evidently different— making a compelling case for the democratic credentials of Marx and Engels— but what is remarkable is the felt need to make an apology and an appeal for indulgence regarding the extensive citation from their writings. Perhaps any sustained engagement with the writings of Marx and Marxism may need a similar gesture and appeal for indulgence, more so in the present academic scenario where the obsolescence of Marxism is almost an article of faith. In the words of Terry Eagleton:

> . . . it is not as though anyone actually *disproved* the doctrine. It is not as though they needed to. In the new ambience of political cynicism, cultural philistinism, and economic self-interest, Marxism was less and less even *in question*, as quaintly antiquarian a pursuit for some as Ptolemaic cosmology or the scholasticism of Duns Scotus. One no more needed to refute it than one would waste time in refuting a fakir or a flat-earther.[2]

In such a bleak backdrop, I borrow Nimtz's words to speak for me, because I am about to embark on a similar expedition.

Focussing on the pivotal statement of Marx in his 1859 preface, the previous chapter — so far as it is successful in hitting the nail on the head— made a case for a restricted version of the superstructure, in contrast to the widely believed panoptic version. In doing so, it ignored — albeit consciously — a comparative and historical study of the concept of superstructure as an integral part of Marx's intellectual maturation. The present chapter attempts that study now by considering the whole corpus of Marx's writings, of course, within the limits of their accessibility to me.

Astonishingly, the two book-length studies devoted to this topic: 1. *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure* by D. I. Chesnokov[3] and 2. *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism* by Franz Jakubowski[4], do not even attempt anything like this, thus making this enterprise absolutely imperative. But, let it be clear that, even if the studies had embarked upon such a task, they are not a substitute to our project since our study has the unique focus of unearthing Marx's restricted superstructure. I envision this project as a conceptual excavation because this original restricted version is buried so deeply that nobody could even sense its existence even as one likely version of base and superstructure among the variety of the avatars that we have been encountering. Thus this chapter is titled only to suggest this excavatory visualization and not to suggest any Foucauldian associations.

Obviously, the fact that Marx rigorously maintained a restricted version of superstructure in the texts which he himself thought to be central to his stance, doesn't imply in any way that he had done that from the beginning. Understandably, the most probable presumption is the converse one, considering the prolific and fertile theoretical career of Marx that spanned around half a century of tumultuous times. Consequently our task now is to put the results of our previous analysis in proper intellectual and historical setting and to see to what extent the restricted superstructure as formulated by Marx in his 1859 preface

could retain its rigour and consistency, when analyzed against the various and varied statements gleaned from his huge oeuvre. This involves probing into the conceptual and chronological variations with a view to the ensuing confusions and clarifications.

To be precise, the previous analysis contained three interrelated aspects of conclusion.

1) Marx's use of the category of superstructure is restricted to the political and legal spheres only. He uses the base and superstructure metaphor to conceptualize the intricate connection between the production relations and the politico-legal spheres.

2) Marx's holistic view of society as an inherently articulated organism of different spheres of life is to be found in his theory of Mode of production and not in the base and superstructure metaphor.

3) Ideology and consciousness (philosophy, ethics, art, etc.,) which are by common consent believed to be the constituents of the superstructure— perhaps as the most important constituents at that—are excluded from the category of superstructure in Marx's 1859 preface. On the contrary, they have a sort of ubiquitous status in Marx's conceptual network.

These are not to be seen as mutually autonomous observations but as inextricably related aspects of the base and superstructure thesis: the first point dethrones the thesis from the status of an all-inclusive echelon; the second point enthrones the concept of Mode of production in a similar status; the third point deals with one of the most important items in Marx's conceptual horizon whose status is greatly affected by these paradigmatic manoeuvres and attempts to restore it in its rightful place. Our study takes all these aspects into account. But, before attempting a historical study, a few remarks on different trends in this field of study may be interesting and illuminating and even be usful in avoiding some potential pitfalls.

Some observations on the historiography of Marx's intellectual itinerary

The history of Marx's intellectual itinerary is as controversial as Marxism itself. The publication of Marx's early writings and the debate it provoked is too well known to be given a detailed treatment. Like all aspects of Marxism, its history is also a battleground imbued with implications that are not only theoretical but also political. Thus, for instance, T. I. Oizerman, a Russian Marxist, writes caustically that "when the clerical Marxologist Erich Thier solemnly exclaims: 'the young Marx is a discovery of our day', one may well ask what sort of discovery he has in mind. Is it the discovery of Marxism? But its founders published their principal works over a century ago. So this is an effort to discover in Marxism something that is alien to it."[5]

As usual, dispassionate research is a rarity and even extremely implausible ideas are in common currency. One such extreme stance manifests itself as an endeavour to trace the ideas of Marx at his intellectual maturity even in his very early writings. Marx's German composition, entitled "Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of Career", which he wrote as a student, is a case in point. Here, writing about the best choice of career, Marx makes the observation that "…we cannot always attain the position to which we believe we are called; our social relations in society have to some extent already begun to be established before we are in a position to determine them"[6].

This otherwise remarkable observation sounds inflated when extolled as full-fledged historical materialism. "It is nothing less than historical materialism that wakes in that short sentence and opens its eyes for the first time. It is a light whose brightness grew from year to year until finally it shone with a blinding brightness,"[7] writes Lewin-Dorsch.

One can appreciate the objection raised by David McLellan against Lewin-Dorsch: ". . . that human activity is continually limited by the prestructured environment is an idea at

least as old as the enlightenment and the encyclopedists." But it is difficult to say categorically along with McLellan that "[i]t would indeed be surprising if even the germ of historical materialism had already been present in the mind of a seventeen-year-old schoolboy".[8]

Evidently, it will be too much to find in these lines the germ of historical materialism as an intricately articulated theory, but, at the same time, it is not altogether preposterous to sense a tenuous affinity here with historical materialism as a theory that says, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."[9] In spite of its seeming incontrovertibility McLellan's argument is crudely based on the biological age of Marx, whereas a more careful reading of the lines evinces a precocious youth for Marx's age. In fact McLellan himself speaks about the originality of this composition a few pages earlier.[10]

Althusser, with his notion of "epistemological break", represents the opposite extreme. As Robert Paul Resch puts it

> Althusser argues that between the *1844 Manuscripts* and *Capital* there exists a radical break in Marx's thought, a break announced in the 'Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach' (1845), which identifies human nature with the ensemble of social relations, thereby rejecting Feuerbach's ahistorical, abstract, and passively contemplative concept of 'species being.'[11]

No one can deny the manifest centrality of social relations in Marx's conceptual network. But Althusser's argument of radical rupture turns untenable when he goes to the extent of claiming that Marxism is "theoretical anti-humanism".[12] In the light of recent critical work[13] however, nobody can maintain such an extreme position now, without reverting to the grotesquely antiquated ideas.

Understandably, Althusser's concept — a concept that he avowedly barrowed from Gaston Bachelard — of the "epistemological break" between the young Marx and the mature Marx became popular, as it seemed to represent the legitimate endeavour to demarcate the intellectual pre-history of Marxism from Marxism proper. Strangely enough, the self same Althusser with all his commitment to locating the differentiating features of Marxism proper from its own formative phase and with all his resolute resistance to obviating this intellectual and chronological difference can still write about Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* that " . . . These are all, or *nearly all*, categories we shall meet again in *Capital*, and on this basis we might accept them as anticipations of *Capital*, or better, as a project for *Capital*, or even as *Capital* crayoned, already outlined, but only as a sketch, which, if it has the genius of the completed work, has not yet been filled in as it is in the latter."[14]

It is not difficult to see the absurdity of Althusser's claim. In fact, the central concept of *Capital* — Surplus value — cannot be seen in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, either as a law or even as a category or at least as a word. The same is the case with the concept of "two-fold nature of labour" which has a great organizing function in the theoretical framework of *Capital*. But still Althusser, with his subtle strategy of "symptomatic reading" and the awareness of "epistemological break" cannot resist completely, the temptation of finding the chicken itself in the egg instead of a chick. This, of course, does not show any inherent discrepancy in Althusser's methodology. In fact, one of the strengths of his methodology is the resistance it offers to such teleological reading about which Althusser himself ironically remarks: "It is as if Marx's necessity to *escape from his beginnings* . . ."[15] On the other hand, it is an indisputable testimony to the afflicting influence of an interpretive tradition, and to the almost inescapable thrust exerted even on a

nonconformist like Althusser, by an established hermeneutic praxis that is endemic to the historiography of Marxism.

These sketchy observations inform us against some of the prevalent erroneous trends in the historiography of Marxist thought which tend to ignore the diachronic differences or to exaggerate them beyond reason. These extremes could be avoided by a rigorous adherence to the texts in question and by a relentless conscious effort to be free from such predisposed readings of the texts. An awareness of these trends can be illuminating, in a negative sense, throughout our study.

Also, our study would be more useful and more focused if we take up this study not as a formal chronological survey but as a time-specific conceptual analysis. The first passage I am going to analyze is a remarkable passage from Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*, volume 1 published in 1867.

The Concept of Superstructure in Marx's *Capital*

In the previous chapter, incidentally, I mentioned how Marx endorsed his restricted version of superstructure in his *Capital.* This occurs in a footnote to the first volume of his *Capital*, where Marx answers the objections of a German paper.

> I seize this opportunity of shortly answering an objection taken by a German paper in America, to my work, "Zur Kritik der Pol. Oekonomie, 1859." In the estimation of that paper, my view that each special mode of production and the social relations corresponding to it, in short, that the economic structure of society, is the real basis on which the juridical and political superstructure is raised and to which definite social forms of thought correspond; that the mode of production determines the character of the social, political, and intellectual

> life generally, all this is very true for our own times, in which material interests preponderate, but not for the middle ages, in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics, reigned supreme.[16]

This passage from the first volume of *Capital*, the only volume to be published in Marx's lifetime, is unique in many ways. Firstly, it unequivocally endorses the restricted version of superstructure, by categorically mentioning it as "the juridical and political superstructure", the same components mentioned in the 1859 preface. Secondly, it doesn't do this by a word-to-word repetition, in the form of a quotation, but by giving the words in the reported speech, which allows some freedom of reformulation, and still, the restricted version of superstructure is rigorously maintained. Thirdly, "definite social forms of thought" are again said to "correspond" and are mentioned separately from the superstructure. Fourthly, the overall determining role is again given to the *mode of production*: "the mode of production determines the character of the social, political, and intellectual life generally". Last but not the least significant is the fact that this passage betrays some differences or deviations from the 1859 preface.

But this difference can be a source of clarification than of confusion. In fact, it overcomes a conceptual lacuna that is implicit in the 1859 preface. It can be seen in the relation (or the lack of relation) between the *mode of production* and *the base* i.e., the relations of production. In the 1859 preface, the base and superstructure paradigm doesn't seem to have any explicit relation with the concept of *mode of production.* A look at the fragment concerned, from the 1859 preface will reveal this:

> The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

> The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness[17]

The concept of *mode of production* has no apparent relation with the base i.e., with the relations of production. The passage from *Capital* is strikingly different: "my view that each special mode of production and the social relations corresponding to it, in short, that the economic structure of society, is the real basis. . .". This suggests that the *mode of production* is more fundamental and foundational than the concept of base or the production relations and that the production relations, in fact, correspond to the *mode of production*. This reformulation in *Capital* effects two changes: 1) it formulates the relation between the *mode of production* and the *relations of production*; 2) in consonance with the idea of the overriding importance of the concept of *mode of production*, which is derived from the previous analysis of Marx's preface, it establishes the primacy of the *mode of production* even in connection with the *relations of production.*

Besides this clarification, this passage from *Capital* can also pose a new question. In the preface of 1859, Marx says that the relations of production are ". . . appropriate to a given stage in the development of . . . material forces of production." But in *Capital* Marx says that these relations correspond to the *mode of production.* How these two formulations are logically reconciled in Marx? Or is there a logical discrepancy here? The answer can be found in *Capital* itself; to the effect that *means of production* constitute the basis for the *mode of production* to which correspond the social *production relations* in turn. The following passage is especially revealing from *Capital*:

> In the paper industry generally, we may advantageously study in detail not only the distinctions between modes of production based on different means of

> production, but also the connexion of the social conditions of production with those modes: for the old German paper-making furnishes us with a sample of handicraft production; that of Holland in the 17th and of France in the 18th century with a sample of manufacturing in the strict sense; and that of modern England with a sample of automatic fabrication of this article. Besides these, there still exist, in India and China, two distinct antique Asiatic forms of the same industry.[18]

This passage clearly shows with interesting historical examples, that Marx regards the *means of production* as foundational or central to the concept of *mode of production* and that the *social relations (conditions)* correspond to the *mode of production*. But, can we take all these clarifications as the improvements on an earlier theory that Marx could carry out between 1859 and1867? The answer, most probably is "no", because the concept of *mode of production* can be found in the 1859 preface itself, as a concept of overriding importance. Moreover, Marx's intention here is only to report his own formulation given in the1859 preface, for the sake of some related argument, even though he seemed to have amended it further. So, the amendments we find in the passage from *Capital* should be taken as the original ideas in the 1859 preface itself but not expressed properly in it.

In conclusion, we can say that, in his *Capital*, Marx reiterates the restricted version of superstructure on the one hand, and reinforces the predominant role of the concept of *mode of production* on the other. This clearly shows that the idea of *mode of production* is not only an overriding concept, dynamically interlinked with all spheres of life-activity but also the source from which the Base and Superstructure paradigm emerges as an explanatory model for the politico-legal spheres of life. But even this reiteration of the restricted superstructure does not rule out the possibility of maintaining a different version of superstructure in the

earlier writings of Marx. To analyze this, we should go to the birthplace of the concepts of base and superstructure i.e., *The German Ideology*.

Superstructure in *The German Ideology*

Co-authored by Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* is the first major work, which contains the concept of superstructure. The relevant passage reads as follows:

> The word “civil society” [*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*] emerged in the eighteenth century, when property relationships had already extricated themselves from the ancient and medieval communal society. Civil society as such only develops with the bourgeoisie; the social organisation evolving directly out of production and commerce, which in all ages forms the basis of the *State and of the rest of the idealistic superstructure*, has, however, always been designated by the same name.[19] (Emphasis Added.)

Here “superstructure" figures as an inclusive category comprising both the state and the idealistic aspects. This version of superstructure is evidently different from the version we have seen in the 1859 preface, where the forms of consciousness are clearly kept away from the superstructure. This directly brings us to the relation of ideology to the superstructure. The first question to be considered is what constitutes this idealistic sphere in this context? i.e., does it comprise of all mental activity, which seems to have a ubiquitous status in the 1859 preface? The second question is to determine how consistent Marx is in maintaining this idealistic sphere as a part of the superstructure.

Superstructure and Consciousness

I think the first question about the nature of consciousness as a part of superstructure can be better discussed with reference to the 1859 preface where Marx says about “the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond

definite forms of *social* consciousness" (Emphasis Added). Here Marx mentions consciousness in the same sentence along with the superstructure though separately from the superstructure. The most important word here that usually received the least attention from the commentators is the word "definite", which should not be taken as a casual way of avoiding vague generalized meaning but as a word used to specify a definite kind of consciousness. This is not properly appreciated by most of the critics. Engels, for his part, observed the specifying role of the adjective "social" as we have seen in the previous chapter. But the word "definite" has been elusive enough to escape his explanatory consideration.

What are the definite forms of consciousness that Marx speaks about here? The answer, I suppose, lies at some other instance, which is as illuminating as it is confounding—in Marx's historical work of 1852, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

Superstructure in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

This passage is also often observed by the critics, but not analysed properly with reference to Marx's 1859 preface. Here, Marx discusses the formation of class ideologies:

> Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought, and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations. The single individual, who derives them through tradition and upbringing, may imagine that they form the real motives and the starting point of his activity (Emphasis Added).[20]

The comparisons and contrasts this passage presents in relation to the wording in the 1859 preface is a matter of great interest. The "distinct and peculiarly" formed ideological elements of life presumably explain what Marx mentioned as the "definite" forms of consciousness in the 1859 preface. They are the ideological creations of a class built upon the

basis of their material existence. So, the ideological elements that Marx refers to here are what we call as class-consciousness in common parlance. It is not extendable to all sorts of consciousness.

But the individual may not be aware of the class origin of his ideas, leave alone its specific material basis. This lack of awareness constitutes or results in the idealistic notions of people about their own existence. It should not be forgotten that even in *The German Ideology* Marx spoke about the "idealistic superstructure" and not about all forms of consciousness.[21] The editors of the book, not content with this, explain in the footnote that "idealistic" means "ideal, ideological" which tends to extend the original idea, to make matters worse.

Thus, this passage is illuminating, about the kind of consciousness that Marx has in mind. But it is also confounding because, here Marx speaks of this consciousness as the superstructure itself whereas in the 1859 preface he clearly mentioned it separately from the superstructure and maintained the same in his *Capital*. How should this be understood? Obviously, what we have here is a change of mind that Marx has undergone by the time he wrote the 1859 preface, a change that he consistently maintained until his last published works. There is another work of importance written by Marx after his *Capital* i.e., from July 1870 to May 1871 and published in the same year. That is *The Civil War in France*, which presents a very interesting case because its present edition contains the two preparatory drafts that Marx had written before he wrote the final draft. That is perhaps the last major work to be published in Marx's life time which makes use of the concept of superstructure prominently.

But before we grapple with that work, let's take a look at a pamphlet written by Marx in 1869, titled *The Right of Inheritance* which forms part of the *Report of the General*

Council of the International Workingmen's Association. This pamphlet embodies some succinct remarks on legality — an element of Marx's restricted superstructure:

> Like all other civil legislation, the laws of inheritance are not the cause, but the effect, the juridical consequence of the existing economical organization of society, based upon private property in the means of production; that is to say, in land, raw material, machinery, etc. In the same way, the right of inheritance in the slave is not the cause of slavery, but on the contrary, slavery is the cause of inheritance in slaves.
>
> What we have to grapple with is the cause and not the effect — the economical basis, not the juridical superstructure.[22]

The echoes of what Marx says about law in his 1859 preface are unmistakable. Also remarkable is the concise way in which Marx regards legality as superstructure based on the "economical organization of society". Another noteworthy feature is the strong terms of determination (cause and effect relation) that Marx deploys to define the relation between the base and the legal superstructure. As all these observations unequivocally reinforce our conclusions derived in the previous chapter we can move on to the consideration of the next work that is already announced.

Superstructure in *The Civil War in France*

In the two drafts available for the text, one (the second draft) is compatible with the restricted version of the superstructure whereas the other (the first) draft tends to suggest an inclusive superstructure but in the final draft, only the restricted version is retained, in line

with the 1859 preface. The final text of *The Civil War in France* incorporates the concept of superstructure, restricted to the state:

> The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the 18th century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hindrances to the superstructure of the modern state edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the offspring of the coalition wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France.[23]

The passage clearly speaks of the modern state as the superstructure. This is evidently compatible with the politico-legal superstructure found in the 1859 preface. We find a similar passage in the second draft of the book:

> The first French Revolution with its task to give full scope to the free development of modern middle-class society had to sweep away all the local, territorial, townish and provincial strongholds of feudalism, prepared the social soil for the superstructure of a centralized State power, with omnipresent organs ramified after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labour.[24]

This version is also compatible with the restricted version of superstructure and is strikingly similar to the final text. But there is another draft to the text i.e., the first draft, which seems to suggest an ideological superstructure:

> What the proletariat has to do is to transform the present capitalist character of that organized labour and those centralized means of labour, to transform them from the means of class rule and class exploitation into forms of free associated labour and social means of production. On the other hand, the labour of the peasant is insulated and the means of production are parcelled, dispersed. On

> these economical differences rests superconstructed* a whole world of different social and political views.[25]

Of course this passage doesn't have the word "superstructure" at all, but the word "superconstructed" is superscripted with an asterisk indicating a note. The footnote reads: "superconstructed: as superstructure", suggesting perhaps that Marx thought of using the word superstructure here. In any case, a certain hesitation in using the word *superstructure* to signify "views" is evident here. But, eventually, this use of superstructure has not found its way in the final draft. In view of Marx's consistent adherence to the restricted version of superstructure in the works published in his lifetime, after the 1859 preface, it is not difficult to understand the fact that this ideological version of superstructure could not find its way in the final draft, as well as the obvious hesitation in using the word superstructure.

But what is intriguing is the question why Marx resorts to the ideological superstructure again even in a draft or in the preparatory manuscript, even in a hesitant way. Before attempting any solution to the problem it is mandatory to be acquainted with the problem in its entirety and its multiplicity, because the problem posed by the concept of superstructure in the unpublished writings of Marx, has a much wider dimension than the ideological superstructure. So, I think, this problem could be genuinely encountered only in its entirety, when we consider the other variable accounts of superstructure given in Marx's posthumously published writings. Indeed, Marx's works, which are not published in his lifetime, present a striking contrast with those that are published in his lifetime especially after the 1859 preface.

The former are bafflingly mottled with motley versions of superstructure. Though these versions of superstructure are never in vogue in the Marxist tradition, an awareness of them is indispensable to analyze Marx's typical use of superstructure. These variegated versions of superstructure signify a range of things from the specific economic categories to the broad idea of society itself.

Superstructure Signifying Economic Categories

Marx's use of superstructure for denoting economic concepts in the works not published in his lifetime doesn't seem to have followed any single signification strictly. Speaking about Ricardo's theory of rent, for instance, in the *Theories of Surplus Value,* written between 1862 and 1863 and never published in his lifetime, Marx writes:

> Modified in this way, the proposition is correct. It explains the *existence of rent*, whereas Ricardo only explains the *existence of differential rents* and actually does not credit the *ownership of land* with any *economic* effect. Furthermore, it does away with the superstructure, which with Ricardo himself was anyhow only arbitrary and not necessary for his presentation, namely, that the agricultural industry becomes gradually less productive[26]

Another instance of the use of superstructure in the economic sense occurs while discussing money, credit system etc. In a letter written to J B Schweizer on January 24, 1865, Marx writes:

> My book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Part I, Berlin, 1859* (pp. 59-64) contains the proof that the theoretical basis of his (i.e. Proudhon's) idea arises from a misunderstanding of the basic elements of bourgeois "political economy", namely of the relation between *commodities* and *money*, while the practical superstructure was simply a reproduction of much older and far better developed schemes. That under certain economic and political conditions the credit system can be used to accelerate the emancipation of the working class . . . is quite unquestionable and self-evident.[27]

The use of superstructure for denoting "credit" occurs, also in the third volume of *Capital,* that was written between 1863 and 1867 along with the second volume, but published in 1894, eleven years after Marx's death, in Engel's editing. This reads as follows:

> . . . credit offers to the individual capitalist; or to one who is regarded a capitalist, absolute control within certain limits over the capital and property of others, and thereby over the labour of others. The control over social capital, not the individual capital of his own, gives him control of social labour. The capital itself, which a man really owns or is supposed to own in the opinion of the public, becomes purely a basis for the superstructure of credit. [28]

A similar use of superstructure in the context of economic matters can be seen in a letter from Marx to Nikolai Danielson written as late as April 10, 1879.This comes after discussing the relation of railways with the joint stock companies and the banking companies:

> On the other hand, the appearance of the railway system in the leading countries of capitalism allowed, and even forced, states where capitalism was confined to a few summits of society, to suddenly create and enlarge their capitalistic superstructure in dimensions altogether disproportionate to the bulk of the social body, carrying on the great work of production in the traditional modes.[29]

Here capitalism itself is spoken of as a superstructure. Together, all these instances give a fair idea of the use of superstructure in the works that are not published in Marx's lifetime. In fact, the difference regarding the use of superstructure between the writings published in Marx's lifetime and the writings that are never published in his lifetime is not only a qualitative one but also quantitative. We have seen that *The German Ideology* is the first major work, which contains the concept of superstructure. But this is not published in Marx's lifetime. And in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, about which Marx says in his 1859 preface: "The salient points of our conception were first outlined in an academic, although polemical, form in my *Misere de la philosophie*"; the very term "superstructure" is conspicuous by its absence whereas the concept of *Mode of production* figures prominently. The same is the case with *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and many other works of Marx, published in his lifetime.

The frequency and multi-referentiality of the concept of superstructure in the works of Marx not published in his lifetime, strangely contrasts with the infrequency and referential consistency of the concept of superstructure in the writings published during his life. This contrast is both perplexing and glaringly demands explanation. The most plausible explanation for this, in my view, is to understand superstructure as a handy metaphor for Marx, which he uses loosely and conveniently in the preparatory stage of his writings— the stage that demands conceptual fecundity rather than terminological fidelity— but justifiably sorts out and presumably narrows down the concept's referential purview when a text reaches the publication stage. *The Civil War in France*, which we have seen already, supplies a living example of this. The two preparatory drafts of this text contain two different versions of superstructure but in the final draft only one version is retained: the version that agrees with the restricted version of superstructure.

It is also quite possible that Marx might have been influenced by contemporary economic writings, in his use of "superstructure" for economic categories. It is remarkable that we find such an instance quoted by Marx himself in the third volume of *Capital*:

> W. Leatham (banker of Yorkshire) writes in his *Letters on the Currency*, 2nd ed., London, 1840: . . . 'This enormous superstructure of bills of exchange rests (!) upon the base formed by the amount of bank-notes and gold, and when, by events, this base becomes too much narrowed, its solidity and very existence is endangered'. [30]

Such significatory practice might have some bearing on Marx in the deployment of the concept of superstructure, at least so far as its use for economic categories are concerned. At another instance, writing about William Petty and his discovery of measurement of value of commodities by equal labour, Marx quotes William Petty: " 'This' (estimation by equal labour) 'I say, to be the foundation of equalizing and balancing of values; yet in the superstructures and

practices hereupon, I confess there is much variety, and intricacy.'"[31] This passage occurs, as a matter of fact, in the tenth chapter of *Anti-Dühring* written by Engels. But, as Engels explains in the Preface to this book, this chapter is written by Marx as they ". . . had always been accustomed to help each other out in special subjects"[32]. J. S. Mill, one of the economists studied by young Marx, also uses the metaphor, commenting on the philosophers of Bentham School: "there is little chance of making due amends in the superstructure of a theory for the want of sufficient breadth in its foundations".[33] It is highly probable that this frequent use of concepts of base and superstructure by contemporary economists might have influenced Marx.

Besides the use of superstructure to denote specific economic categories, we also find it being used to broadly refer to the society itself; again in the work not published in his lifetime: in his *Economic Manuscripts*, written between 1861 and 1863. I would quote this at length, adding my own emphasis, because it exemplifies a crucial analytical practice observable in Marx that touches upon the purport of superstructure as a metaphor, i.e., as something based on some other crucial phenomenon:

> Once there exists a society in which some people live without working (without participating directly in the production of use values), it is clear that the surplus labour of the workers is the condition of existence of *the whole superstructure of the society*. They [the non-workers] receive two things from this surplus labour. Firstly: the material conditions of life, because they share in, and subsist on and from, the product which the workers provide over and above the product required for the reproduction of their own labour capacity. Secondly: The free time they have at their disposal, whether for idleness or for the performance of activities which are not directly productive (as e.g., war, affairs of state) or for the development of human abilities and social potentialities (art, etc., science) which have no directly practical purpose, has as its prerequisite the surplus labour of the

> mass of workers, i.e., the fact that they have to spend more time in material production than is required for the production of their own material life.[34](Emphasis added)

Evidently, superstructure has the widest scope of signification here, referring to the whole elitist society. But this facile use of superstructure is not to be found in the later works published in Marx's life time. As we have observed in the case of the texts that were published even at a later period like *Capital* published in 1867, and *The Civil War in France* written between 1870 and 1871, Marx stuck to the restricted version of superstructure in print.

Interestingly, we find a similar use of superstructure in a celebrated book by Engels, published after the death of Marx. This is *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first published in 1884: "simultaneous with this division of the citizens into classes according to wealth there was an enormous increase, particularly in Greece, in the number of slaves, whose forced labor was the foundation on which the superstructure of the entire society was reared."[35]

But such broad use of superstructure is not found in Marx's works published after the 1859 preface, though we find in his posthumously published works, superstructure being used as a handy metaphor referring to different things in different contexts, including ideology sometimes. Thus we find in the *Theories of Surplus Value*: ". . . the contradictions in material production make necessary a superstructure of ideological strata, whose activity— whether good or bad—is good, because it is necessary[36]

However, this referential multiplicity of superstructure is limited to the posthumously published writings of Marx, which present a contrast with the restricted version found in the works published during his life time. Oddly enough, this restricted version that Marx maintained in all the works published in his life time, after the 1859 preface, is never acknowledged or explored in its own right, in the annals of Marxism, as it is abysmally eclipsed by the eclectic

version. But Marx's writings offer a living testimony for this restricted politico-legal superstructure. One cannot help wondering, in this context, why there has not been any editorial intervention bringing out and sorting out this discrepancy in the case of posthumously published works of Marx. One presumable source for this lacuna, I suppose, has to do with Engels, the literary executor of Marx after his death, who does not seem to have any inkling of Marx's restricted version.

Furthermore, the close nexus between the politico-legal institutions and the production relations is a predominant motif in Marx, even when he does not invoke the base and superstructure metaphor. In one of his last works, *The Ethnological Note Books of Karl Marx* posthumously published, based on his manuscripts of the period 1880 to 1882, we find: "It is impossible to overestimate the *influence of property* in the civilization of mankind. It was the power that brought the Aryan and Semitic nations out of barbarism into civilization . . . . *Governments and laws* are *instituted* with primary reference to its creation, protection and enjoyment"[37].

This methodological principle disclosing the connection between the production relations, and political and legal relations is consistently observable in Marx; and his articles published in *Neue Rheinische Zeitung,* exemplify this principle in its application to the contemporary social conditions. Thus Marx analyses the contemporary German politics:

> The Diet represented primarily big landed property. Big landed property was indeed the foundation of medieval, *feudal society. Modern bourgeois society, our* own society, on the other hand, is based on industry and commerce. Landed property itself has lost all its former conditions of existence, it has become dependent on commerce and industry. Agriculture, therefore, is carried on nowadays on industrial lines, and the old feudal lords have now sunk to the level of producers of cattle, wool, corn, beetroots, spirits etc., i.e., people who trade in

> industrial products just as any other merchant: However much they may cling to their old prejudices, they are in fact being turned into bourgeois, who manufacture as much as possible and as cheaply as possible, who buy where they can get goods at the lowest price and sell where they can obtain the greatest price. The mode of living, production and income of these gentlemen therefore gives the lie to their traditional pompous notions. Landed property, as the predominant social factor, presupposes a *mediaeval mode of production and commerce*. The United Diet represents this mediaeval mode of production and commerce which had long since ceased to exist, and whose representatives, though they clung to the old privileges, likewise enjoyed and exploited the advantages of the new society. The new bourgeois society, grounded on an entirely different foundation, on a changed mode of production, was bound to seize also political power, which had to be wrenched from the hands of those who represented the interests of the declining society, a political power, whose whole structure has arisen out of entirely different material conditions of society. *Hence the revolution.*[38]

Remarkably, the whole passage reads like an exemplification of the principles later formulated by Marx, in his 1859 Preface, where he envisions the social revolution in terms of the base and superstructure. After thus presenting the United Diet as the retrograde element of the society, Marx goes on to question, "how then was the idea conceived to allow the United Diet, the representative of the old society, to dictate laws to the new society which asserted its rights to the revolution?" Marx's line of reasoning is interesting again:

> Allegedly in order to maintain the legal basis. But, gentlemen, what do you understand by maintaining the legal basis? The maintenance of laws belonging to a bygone social era and framed by representatives of vanished or vanishing social interests, who consequently give the force of law only to those interests which run

> counter to the public needs. But society is not founded upon the law; that is a legal fiction. On the contrary, the law must be founded upon the society, it must express the common interests and needs of society— as distinct from the caprice of the individuals— which arise from the material mode of production prevailing at the given time. This *Code Napoleon*, which I am holding in my hand, has not created modern bourgeois society. On the contrary, bourgeois society, which emerged in the eighteenth century and developed further in the nineteenth, merely finds its legal expression in this Code. As soon as it ceases to fit the social relations, it becomes simply a bundle of paper. You cannot make the old laws the foundation of the new social development, any more than these old laws created the old social conditions.[39]

That precisely is the idea encapsulated by the expression "legal superstructure". And a similar idea could be found embodied in the "political superstructure" also. Thus Marx writes in his manuscripts of the period 1857-61, generally known as the *Grundrisse*, "with the development of wealth— and hence also of new [productive] forces and expanded intercourse among individuals the economic conditions upon which the community was based were dissolved, as were the corresponding political relations between the various component parts of the community".[40]

Thus Marx's politico-legal superstructure encapsulates an essential dimension of his thought, in its restricted form. But the case of Engels' use of superstructure is different, as we have already glimpsed. This point actually needs further attention, for its role and responsibility in the development of the popular heterogeneous version of superstructure and so we shall take up this in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] August H. Nimtz, Jr., *Marx and Engels: Their Contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000) x.

[2] Terry Eagleton, Introduction, *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 2.

[3] D. I. Chesnokov, *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1952).

[4] Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism* (London: Pluto Press, 1990). This book is also available at http://libcom.org/ideology-superstructure-historical-materialism-franz-jakubowski-1936

[5] T. I. Oizerman, *The Making of the Marxist Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981) 17.

[6] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975) 4.

[7] Cited in: David McLellan, *Marx before Marxism* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 37.

[8] David McLellan, *Marx before Marxism* (London: Macmillan, 1980) 37.

[9] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* **(**Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989) 25.

[10]David McLellan 35.

[11] Robert Paul Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 170.

[12] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: New Left, 1969) 229.

[13] See for instance: Norman Geras, *Marx & Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* (London: Verso, 1969). Also: Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[14] Althusser 158.

[15] Althusser 84.

[16] Karl Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 86.

[17] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* **(**Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1989) 25.

[18] Karl Marx, *Capital,* vol.1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 360.

[19] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 98.

[20] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in one volume (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 117. Among the modern writers, Karl Mannheim expresses a similar opinion, though in a rather critical style: "If one were to trace in detail, in each individual case, the origin and the radius of diffusion of a certain thought-model, one would discover the peculiar affinity it has to the social position of given groups and their manner of interpreting the world. By these groups we mean not merely classes, as a dogmatic type of Marxism would have it, but also generations, status groups, sects, occupational groups, schools, etc. Unless careful attention is paid to highly differentiated social groupings of this sort and to the corresponding differentiations in concepts, categories, and thought-models, i.e., unless the problem of the relation between super- and sub-structure is refined, it would be impossible to demonstrate that corresponding to the wealth of types of knowledge and perspectives which have appeared in the course of history there are similar differentiations in the substructure of society. Of course we do not intend to deny that of all the above-mentioned social groupings and units class stratification is the most significant, since in the final analysis all the other social groups arise from and are transformed as parts of the more basic conditions of production and domination. None the less the investigator who, in the face of the variety of types of thought, attempts to place them correctly can no longer be content with the

undifferentiated class concept, but must reckon with the existing social units and factors that condition social position, aside from those of class" [Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 247-8].

[21] An imperfect appreciation of this fact will lead one to think in the lines of Derek Sayer: "Marx qualifies the 'superstructure' in the Preface as 'legal and political'. He also refers, independently, to 'definite forms of social consciousness'. He fails to make clear whether the latter are part of the superstructure, though his language in this instance suggests otherwise. This is what has led Cohen to argue they are not. Elsewhere, however, Marx— like Engels in the letters . . . frequently describes the entire superstructure as 'ideal' or 'ideological', and explicitly includes forms of consciousness within it" [Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 16]. Except with regard to *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the claim about Marx's 'frequent' inclusion of ideas in the superstructure is a pure myth sustained in Marx studies due to an unchallenged academic inertia.

[22] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 21 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985) 65-67, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2010.

[23] Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 67.

[24] Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* 236.

[25] Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* 183.

[26] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol.2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) 94.

[27] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 146-147.

[28] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 438-439.

[29] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 298.

[30] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 401.

[31] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Pecking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976) 296.

[32] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Pecking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976) 9.

[33] Quoted in M. M. Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950) 319-20.

[34] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 30 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) 190. D. D. Kosambi makes a similar observation, in the Indian context, when he writes that "the sudra was the essential producer; what groups imposed themselves upon him as part of the class superstructure became progressively less material to production". [D. D. Kosambi, *History and Society*, 58, *Arvindguptatoys.com*, web, 20 Mar. 2011. This book is available in pdf format at < http://arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/ddkbomuniv.pdf>].

[35] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in one Volume (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 574.

[36] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) 287.

[37] Lawrence Krader, *The Ethnological Note Books of Karl Marx*, (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1972) 126.

[38] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 8 (New York: International Publishers, 1977) 326-7.

[39] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 8 (New York: International Publishers, 1977) 327.

[40] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986) 464.

CHAPTER 6

Genealogy of Heterogeneity

> Few doctrines of classical Marxism have fallen into greater disrepute than the 'base/superstructure' model. However much the model may be refined and sophisticated, and however much mediation and dialectical interaction may be inserted between its twin terms, this whole binary opposition would seem to remain stubbornly reductive and mechanistic.
>
> —Terry Eagleton. "Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams"[1]

Our archaeological endeavour into Marx's *Oeuvre* has unearthed compelling evidence that unequivocally endorses the restricted superstructure in Marx that is more compact, comprising only the political and legal institutions with their intricate relation with the production relations alias the *base*. From this excavated finding we will take a U-turn now, and trace the genealogy of the panoptic superstructure that has assumed an axiomatic status in the studies of Marx and Marxism. Thus, in the present chapter we have to embark on the issues we left in abeyance earlier, beginning with Engel's pronouncements on base and superstructure and trace the genesis and consolidation of the virtually all-inclusive superstructure. Throughout this chapter, I will quote liberally from different authors, because my purpose here is to document the theoretical treatment given to the concepts of base and superstructure historically, which eventually consolidated the contemporary panoptic version. Also, I think that these writers deserve to be given ample opportunity to express their ideas in their own words— an opportunity that most of them do not get due to the vicissitudes of intellectual fashions.

At the outset, let it be clear again that the word *genealogy* in the title is not intended to carry any Foucauldian connotations. What is more important perhaps is to disclaim any affiliations with the fashionable intellectual trends in Marxological exegesis regarding the

position of Engels with reference to Marx and Marxism. Since we are going to start our analysis with the writings of Engels, an awareness of these trends is imperative, as they always tend to exercise some influence as prevalent practices or even as intellectual conventions on the studies touching upon this area.

The Contested Position of Engels in Marxism

To be sure, the position of Engels in the theoretical edifice of Marxism is an issue that is continually contested. Again two extremities present themselves to the researcher. One is to overlook the separate identities and personalities of Marx and Engels and to equate them wholesale. The other is the opposite extreme of juxtaposing them, sometimes to the extent of declaring them as diametrically opposite poles despite their avowed affiliations. And the problem of avoiding the Scylla of wholesale equalization along with the Charybdis of crude juxtaposition is not always as easy as it may seem on the surface.

The practice of indiscriminately equating Marx and Engels has a long-standing history so much so that, in a letter written in 1856 to Engels, Marx himself disapprovingly referred to the uncanny usage "Marx and Engels says"[2], as if both of them together form a singular subject. However, this tradition continued unabated in blatant infringement of the norms of research. In a book that is alphabetically organised like a lexicon, bearing the typical title *Marx and Engels: A Conceptual Concordance*, the entry of "materialist concept of history" gives only two passages: one from *Anti-Dühring* written by Engels and the other from a letter written by him in 1894 (which we shall see shortly), whereas the crucial passage from Marx's 1859 preface does not find any place. Remarkably, the original French title of the book is *Vocabulaire du Marxisme* and the translation is done by Terrell Carver who is also, incidentally, the editor of *Cambridge Companion to Marx.*

Let us take a glance at an excerpt from *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, volume 1, by Raymond Aron:

> . . . most of . . . [Marx's historical studies of classes] are admirable; for example, his study of the German Revolution of 1848 or his study of Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état* of the Eighteenth Brumaire. In his historical studies, Marx utilised the notion of class, but without making it into a systematic theory. . . .
>
> For example, in *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, Marx distinguished the following classes . . .[3]

This may seem to be a casual, innocuous passage for anyone; but for a researcher working on Marx, this would come like a shock. She or he might have never come across the work of Marx mentioned in the second paragraph. In case the researcher is fairly acquainted with the works of Marx, it wouldn't take long to figure out that Aron is mistakenly imputing the work of Engels to Marx; and later when Aron presumably compares the class analysis presented in this work with some other works of Marx, he is actually comparing Engels with Marx— of course, without knowing what he is doing.

Still, if the researcher takes the trouble of browsing the relevant chapter endnotes, it would be no less shocking to find references for the works mentioned earlier and for the works mentioned after, but absolutely no references for the title in question: *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*. If the perturbed researcher closes the book in dismay there is every chance that he may be comforted by the confident comment of Robert L. Perkins on the blurb: "This book will make a valuable contribution to the knowledge of the history of sociology . . . The chapter on Marx is the best and may well become a standard summary."[4] But blurbs— as is well known— are not meant to be read after closing the books.

To some extent, the collaborative nature of the writings of Marx and Engels is a potential source of confusion, demanding the conscientiousness of the researcher to evade the pitfall. As an example, I may refer to the details of the portion written by Marx in Engels's

Anti-Dühring, cited at the end of the previous chapter. Even in the case of *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany*, the publisher's endnotes to the edition published in Peking say that it ". . . first appeared from October 25, 1851 to October 23, 1852 as a series in the *New York Daily Tribune* over Marx's signature. Only in 1913, upon the publication of the correspondence between Marx and Engels, did it become known that it had been written by Engels."[5] But Aron's *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, volume 1, is published in 1965 and still it discusses the work as if it is written by Marx.

Gramsci makes some very pertinent remarks in his "Problems of Marxism", published in his *Prison Notebooks*, about the authenticity of Marx's works, with reference to the concerted authorship of Marx and Engels:

> Even the fact that one of them has written some chapters for a book written by the other is not an absolute reason why the book should be considered the result of a perfect agreement. There is no need to underrate the contributions of the second [Engels] but there is no need either to identify the second with the first [Engels with Marx] nor should one think that everything attributed by [Engels] to [Marx] is absolutely authentic and free from infiltration. It is certain that [Engels] demonstrates a disinterest and a lack of personal vanity which are unique in the history of literature, but this is not the point: nor is it a question of doubting [Engels's] absolute scientific honesty. The point is that [Engels] is not [Marx], and that if one wants to know [Marx] one must look for him above all in his authentic works, those published under his direct responsibility.[6]

In principle, these methodological statements are self-explanatory, beyond any reasonable doubt. But the paradoxical fact that Gramsci himself discusses the statement of Engels, about the German proletariat, as the heir of classical German philosophy, as if it is Marx's opinion,

in the self same essay, though he knows perfectly well about the real source of the view, indicates more about the deep-rootedness of this obsessive practice than about the exigencies of Gramsci's writings either internal or external.[7]

On the other hand, the hermeneutics of juxtaposing Marx and Engels is no less a solemn tradition. Maximilien Rubel, a reputed French Marx scholar offers a specimen for us when he writes: "Marxism is not an original product of the Marxian way of thought but was conceived in the mind of Friedrich Engels. Insofar as the term 'Marxism' embraces a theoretically apprehensible subject matter, the responsibility lies not with Marx but with Engels".[8]

Similar overtones could be witnessed in the provocatively titled *Marx After Marxism: the Philosophy of Karl Marx,* by Tom Rockmore who says "Marxism, which derives from Engels, turns on its account of the relation of Marx to Hegel, which in turn determines a view of Marx as leaving Hegel behind. I believe the Marxist view of Marx is . . . substantially inaccurate. . . ."[9] He explicates it like this: "How does materialism relate to Marx's position? Materialism is a doctrine that is clear in Engels, but certainly less clear in Marx. It is surprising, since the term is routinely used in reference to his thought, that he is not a materialist at all in any of the usual senses".[10] Further ". . . the reflection theory of knowledge, which was later adopted by a long line of Marxists, has no basis in Marx's writings. Marx also never refers to the distinction between materialism and idealism as the central, or even as a central, philosophical theme".[11]

As many theorists of this fashionable trend resort to similar arguments, I take the liberty of quoting some lines of Marx which defy this juxtaposition of Marx against Engels. The first is a well-known passage from *Capital* where Marx echoes reflectionist views:

> To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent

> subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.[12]

Frequently, the advocates of this trend present Marx as if he has nothing to do with the *dialectic of matter;* and Engels, in contrast, is held responsible for it as its originator. Here, I take the liberty of quoting two not so well-known passages from the selfsame *Capital,* volume 1, the only volume published in Marx's life time, where Marx obviously refers to the dialectic of Nature:

> We saw in a former chapter that the exchange of commodities implies contradictory and mutually exclusive conditions. The differentiation of commodities into commodities and money does not sweep away these inconsistencies, but develops a *modus vivendi,* a form in which they can exist side by side. This is generally the way in which real contradictions are reconciled. For instance, it is a contradiction to depict one body as constantly falling towards another, and as, at the same time, constantly flying away from it. The ellipse is a form of motion which, while allowing this contradiction to go on, at the same time reconciles it. [13]

The law of quantitative changes turning into qualitative changes— a law of the supposedly notorious dialectic of Nature— is also endorsed by Marx in the same volume:

> The possessor of money or commodities actually turns into a capitalist in such cases only where the minimum sum advanced for production greatly exceeds the maximum of the middle ages. Here, as in natural science, is shown the correctness of the law discovered by Hegel (in his 'Logic'), that merely quantitative differences beyond a certain point pass into qualitative changes.[14]

I hope these digressions will be excused, as it is highly probable that researchers working in this area might come under the influence of these trends or of the epigones of these trends and there is no alternative to citing Marx in refuting these trends. Moreover, the only means of resisting such fashionable influences is possible not by being ignorant of them but by being aware of them. With this vigilance we shall set out to consider the works of Engels and his treatment of the concepts of base and superstructure.

Engels and the Emergence of the Heterogeneous Superstructure

The most striking thing about Engels' works is the constant absence of the restricted superstructure. Indeed, the referential flexibility of the concept of superstructure generally found in the posthumously published works of Marx is to be found in the works of Engels published during his life time. Accordingly, we find an ideological version of superstructure which became the widely accepted and the most-celebrated version now, in Engel's *Anti-Dühring*, published in1878, and attained popularity as the only comprehensive account of Marxism:

> But eternal truths are in an even worse plight in . . . the historical group of sciences, which study in their historical sequence and in their present resultant state the conditions of human life, social relationships, forms of law and government, with their ideological superstructure in the shape of philosophy, religion, art, etc.[15]

The peculiarity of this account is that, unlike the politico-legal superstructure of the 1859 preface, which sets aside the ideological aspects, this version sets aside both the law and the government from the superstructure. We can also find a version of superstructure that includes the legal and political institutions along with other aspects in the same book where Engels writes that: ". . . the economic structure of society always forms the real basis, from which, in the last

analysis, the whole superstructure of legal and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period is to be explained"[16]

This all-comprising version of superstructure is to be found again, in another very popular work, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* written in 1880 by Engels, which he himself describes[17] as a work derived from *Anti-Dühring*: ". . . the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period."[18] Understandably, these accounts given by Engels are extremely well-known and canonical in the Marxist tradition, as they come from the works that are greatly accessible to the lay reader and thus are widely read.

This free use of *superstructure*, coupled with a persistent lack of a restricted version of superstructure is evidently not in line with the 1859 preface of Marx. It will be interesting to note in this connection that Engels actually expressed his discomfort about the intelligibility of the text in which the 1859 preface of Marx appears. This is found in a letter written to Marx on 9th April 1858: "The study of your abstract of the first half-instalment [*Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*] has greatly exercised me; it is a very abstract abstract indeed — inevitably so, in view of its brevity. . ."[19]

It is highly probable that Engels, with his expressed unease about Marx's formulation, might have missed the restriction carried out by Marx in his use of the concept of superstructure. Considering this, one may understand the disparity existing between Marx's version of superstructure and the version found in Engels. It is discernible that Engels' use of the concept of superstructure is susceptible to the heterogeneous version of superstructure. Plekhanov also expresses a similar view about the 1859 preface when he writes that ". . . the Preface is couched

in more abstract language"[20] and this view of Engels and Plekhanov presents a contrast to the more persuasive modern views that tend to underscore the precision of the Preface.

Stuart Hall rightly observes that Engels's attempts at refinement are based on the formulations of the base and superstructure thesis, as found in the *German Ideology*. This is quite understandable, when considered against the backdrop of Engels's unawareness of the changes carried out by Marx, in the thesis, at a later period. Thus Hall writes:

> One of the best ways of seeing what the problems were for Marxism of the 'German Ideology' way of conceptualising the base/superstructure question, is to watch Engels wrestle with its consequences in his lengthy correspondence with a number of Marxist veterans of his and the next generation, in the two decades after Marx's death.[21]

Because of the trajectory that Marxism came to pursue after the death of Marx, as observed by Hall again, the task that Engels sets himself was not an easy one:

> . . . since Marxism was fast becoming absorbed into the dominant field of 'positive science', which reduced it to a simple economic determinism in which the superstructures were a pale and automatic reflex of the base— a tendency which was destined to be disastrously installed as the official version in the Second International. Engels struggled vainly to combat this reductionism. But he struggled to do so on the ground, essentially, on his and Marx's formulations of the *German Ideology* period.[22]

Thus, it will be unjust to hold Engels solely responsible for the fateful intellectual legacy of the emergence of the heterogeneous version of superstructure. More importantly, it is the irony of the chequered intellectual history of Marxism that is more responsible for the deep-rooted

heterogeneous version. This historical irony has built itself on the so-called corrective efforts of Engels mostly found in his letters, and has resulted in the undesirable byproduct of the heterogeneous superstructure. The corrective efforts I am referring to are embodied in Engels' endeavour to mend what he takes as an over-emphasis on the economic aspect. These efforts are to be found in some of the letters that Engels wrote to different people, at a later stage of his life. Again I should quote extensively, because these letters have had a decisive influence on the popular notions of Marxism.

In the letter written to J.Bloch In Königsberg, on 21st September 1890, Engels argues that the determining role of the base is true only ultimately:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, *but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas*— also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible), the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself.[23] (Emphasis added)

In his eager attempt at giving a more "sophisticated" account of the relation between the base and the superstructure, Engels lumps together an assortment of non-economic spheres of life under the category of superstructure. Thus his attempt at overcoming the crude misunderstanding about the relation between the base and the superstructure apparently slips into subscribing to and positively suggesting an even cruder version of the heterogeneous superstructure as a byproduct. Again in a letter written to W. Borgius on 25th January 1894, Engels' writes the following lines:

> Political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the *cause and alone active,* while everything else only has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which *ultimately* always asserts itself . . . . So it is not, as people try here and there conveniently to imagine, that the economic position produces an automatic effect. Men make their history themselves, only in given surroundings which condition it and on the basis of actual relations already existing, among which the economic relations, however much they may be influenced by the other political and ideological ones, are still ultimately the decisive ones, forming the keynote which alone leads to understanding.[24]

Of course these lines do not even mention the term superstructure. But, when Engels mentions all the non-economic spheres together, they are routinely taken to be the parts of the superstructure. Maynard Solomon, for instance, in his collection entitled *Marxism and Art* gives this passage under the heading "Base and Superstructure".[25] A careful reader could easily figure out that in these letters, Engels introduced a chronological qualification by his introduction of "ultimately" determining role. Again, this qualification has played a vital role in the Marxist tradition, for instance, in the Althusserian Structuralist Marxism.[26] Plekhanov also subscribes to

the introduction of this qualification, but with his propensity for equating Marx and Engels, he ascribes this practice to Marx in his influential work *Fundamental Problems of Marxism,* as in the following words : ". . . though he explains any social movement as the outcome of the economic development of society, Marx very often thus explains that movement only as the *ultimate outcome*, i.e., he takes it for granted that a number of various other 'factors' will operate in the interim."[27] Thus an interim-ultimate binary is established by Plekhanov as an explanatory strategy.

In the previously quoted letter also, one could observe the content-form differentiation as a means of articulating a nuanced account of the relative effectivity of the economic sphere and the other non-economic factors. A discussion of the relative merits or validity of such attempts at explicatory sophistication does not concern us here. For our purpose now, it is enough to note that the felt need for such sophisticated attempts has its root in the unquestioned certainty regarding the multiform superstructure with its deterministic relation with the relatively uniform economic base. Also noteworthy is the fact that the constitutional extension of the concept of superstructure and the consequent efforts of sophistication leads inevitably, though unintentionally, to toning down the rigorously formulated relation of the superstructure with the base in the 1859 preface.

Indeed, the history of Marxist theory is profusely studded with such attempts at conceptual refinement explicating the relation between the economic base and the assorted superstructure or superstructures. Such attempts usually end up with different degrees of success depending on the theoretical fecundity of different thinkers— a fecundity that, more often than not, draws upon the un-Marxist intellectual influences on a particular thinker, for instance, Structuralism in the case of Althusser, psychoanalysis in the case of Fromm and Marcuse, and so on so forth. A study of the history of these strategies of sophistication forms a subject deserving a full-fledged research. For us, however, it is enough to note that these attempts at sophistication

are the ineluctable concomitant of the unsophisticated extension of the concept of superstructure by the intellectual heirs of Marx beginning with Engels.

Other passages from these letters of Engels written in a similar vein are traditionally taken to be the explanations of superstructure. Engels' letter written to Conrad Schmidt on 27th October 1890, contains the following lines: ". . . it seems to me obvious that . . . what we call *ideological outlook,* reacts in its turn upon the economic basis and may, within certain limits, modify it." [28] Passages like this are actually intended to give a rather reciprocal orientation for the relation between the economic and the non-economic aspects of the society, but, as an unconscious corollary of these attempts at refining, the heterogeneous version of superstructure seems to have ultimately consolidated itself.[29]

The more the concept of superstructure undergoes this extension, the more its deterministic relation with the economic base is stymied, and the more urgent seems the need for revision. And when the revision came, it came in the form of repentance, again in the same letters of Engels. Engels's letter to J. Bloch, which we have already seen, also contains such a confessional note:

> Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle *vis-à-vis* our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction. But when it came to presenting a section of history, that is, to making a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error was permissible.[30]

In spite of the awareness of the root cause of this moderating afterthought of Engels in the extended version of the superstructure, one cannot help appreciating the intellectual sincerity of

Engels, as well as his light-hearted gaiety which is also seen in his facility for reformulations. In fact, this remorseful disposition with reference to the erstwhile unqualified determinism seemed a recurrent motif in Engels. Again in a letter written to Mehring on 14th July 1893, Engels writes as if admitting the responsibility for the overemphasis of the economic aspect:

> Otherwise there is only one other point . . . Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. That is to say, we all laid, and *were bound to lay*, the main emphasis, in the first place, on the *derivation* of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side — the ways and means by which these notions, etc., come about — for the sake of the content. This has given our adversaries a welcome opportunity for misunderstandings, of which Paul Barth is a striking example.[31]

The remarkable similarity of this passage in tone and tenor with the previous one cannot be missed. So are Engels's sincerity and faithfulness to his lifelong friend and comrade on whose behalf also he writes in an apologizing tone. All the same, it is difficult to ignore the disservice done by these confessional statements in consolidating the panoptic superstructure and the resulting loss of rigour. Engels, who never seems to have an inkling of Marx's restricted superstructure, never entertains the possibility that Marx might have already settled accounts with this unidirectional, all-explaining determinism by rigorously restricting the concept of superstructure to the politico-juridical institutions which are obviously rooted in the production relations. Thus Engels declares Marx as an accomplice and confesses on his behalf also. More ironically, there is not a trace of conceit on the part of Engels in all this. In fact his self-estimation regarding his relation with Marx is quite unassuming and objective. The passage that comes just before this statement shows this clearly:

> If I find anything to object to it [Mehring's account of Historical Materialism] is that you give me more credit than I deserve, even if I count everything which I might perhaps have found out for myself— in time — but which Marx with his more rapid *coup d'oeil* and wider vision discovered much more quickly. When one has the good fortune to work for forty years with a man like Marx, one usually does not during his lifetime get the recognition one thinks one deserves. Then, when the greater man dies, the lesser easily gets overrated, and this seems to me to be just my case at present; history will set all this right in the end and by that time one has managed to kick the bucket and does no longer know anything about anything.[32]

This passage is remarkable for its ruthlessly objective estimation which is strikingly superior, both intellectually and ethically, to most of the modern, tendentious accounts of Engels's place in Marxism. Coming back to the issue of the restricted superstructure, when we say that Engels has no inkling of the restricted superstructure, as a matter of fact, that does not mean that Engels is not aware of the close connection between the production relations and the politico-legal institutions. In fact, a very sober and lucid account of this close nexus is to be found in Engels, in his *Housing Question*:

> At a certain, very primitive stage of the development of society, the need arises to co-ordinate under a common regulation the daily recurring acts of production, distribution and exchange of products, to see to it that the individual subordinates himself to the common conditions of production and exchange. This regulation, which is at first custom, soon becomes law. With law, organs necessarily arise which are entrusted with its maintenance— public authority, the state. With further social development, law develops into a more or less comprehensive legal system. The more complicated this legal

> system becomes, the more its terminology becomes removed from that in which the usual economic conditions of the life of society are expressed. It appears as an independent element which derives the justification for its existence and the reason for its further development not out of the existing economic conditions, but out of its own inner logic, or, if you like, out of 'the concept of will.' People forget the derivation of their legal system from their economic conditions of life, just as they have forgotten their own derivation from the animal world.[33]

In his introduction to Marx's work *The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850*, Engels gives an explanation that is also lucid and enlightening about the other superstructural element i.e., politics, in its connection with the class relations (the base):

> the materialist method has here quite often to limit itself to tracing political conflicts back to the struggles between the interests of the existing social classes and fractions of classes created by the economic development, and to prove the particular political parties to be the more or less adequate political expression of these same classes and fractions of classes.[34]

But this conceptual lucidity in Engels is not matched by an awareness of Marx's restricted superstructure that is confined only to these political and legal institutions. Consequently, in the last years of his life Engels tried his best to ameliorate the distorting effects of the heterogeneous superstructure by refining and redefining the nature of relation between the base and the superstructure and not by a reconsideration and restriction of the components of superstructure. Thus paradoxically, his corrective efforts contributed to the consolidation of the heterogeneous superstructure along with the legacy of pseudo-sophisticated attempts to solve the self-posed problem of one-dimensional determination in

relation with the multifarious superstructural factors. And this double legacy has found favour with the later Marxists to this day.

German Socialism: Consolidation and Canonisation of the Heterogeneity after Engels

Among the Marxists influential after the death of Engels, we shall consider Mehring, Kautsky, and Bernstein all of whom were central figures in the German socialist movement and were personally acquainted with Engels and actively corresponded with him. Mehring seems to have adopted Engels's idea of ultimate determinism or "determinism in the final analysis". In his essay "on Historical Materialism", a polemic against Paul Barth which has got the approving remark from Engels as we have just seen, Mehring apparently echoes Engels's view here:

> [H]istorical materialism, . . . as we have seen, in no way denies the presence of ideal motive forces, such as ambition, revenge or religious fervour, but only claims that these motive forces are determined in the last analysis through other, economic, motive forces. And insofar as Herr Barth even considers bringing a proof, a single proof for his claims, the materialist conception of history immediately comes into its own. As the only evidence of the thirst for revenge as a motive for wars between savages he adduces the English anthropologist Taylor, who also discusses the not unknown fact of blood revenge among barbarian tribes. If Herr Barth had not excluded Engels' work The Origin of the Family from his consideration as being too "popular", he would quickly have discovered that blood revenge is also part of the "legal superstructure" of gentile society, just as the death penalty is part of the legal superstructure of civilized society.[35]

The final lines are rather misleading in that they make us think that Engels might have conceptualised emotions like blood revenge as part of the legal superstructure. On the contrary, in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that has a lot of details about the emergence of the state and law— which are precisely designated as superstructure by Marx— Engels never deploys the term *superstructure*. To be sure, he once uses the term *superstructure* in this book, but then the term designates the "entire society"[36], as we have seen at the end of the previous chapter.

Karl Kautsky, for his part, continued this legacy of loosely designating anything non-economic by the concept of superstructure. For instance, in his biographical essay *Frederick Engels: His Life, His Work and His Writings*, originally published in 1887, he describes the Hegelian philosophy itself as a superstructure:

> The Hegelian philosophy, like the greater part of the German philosophy, was ideological. It took for granted that ideas are not images of real conditions, but have an independent existence, and that their development forms a foundation for the development of things. Marx and Engels protested against this. They held fast to the *dialectic* method of Hegel, but not to the dogmatic superstructure of his philosophy.[37]

But, we can also see him following Marx's restricted superstructure closely, in his essay written in 1908, *The Social Revolution and on the Day After the Social Revolution*:

> Marx, in his introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, defines social revolution as a more or less rapid transformation of the foundations of the juridical and political superstructure of society arising from a change in its economic foundations. If we hold close to this definition we at once eliminate from the idea of social revolution "changes in the economic foundations," as,

> for example, those which proceeded from the steam engine or the discovery of America. These alterations are the causes of revolution, not the revolution itself.[38]

Here, closely following Marx's theorization of the changes in the juridical and political superstructure that follow the changes in the economic base, Kautsky theorizes the difference between reform and revolution succinctly in terms of base and superstructure:

> Measures which seek to adjust the juridical and political superstructure of society, to changed economic conditions, are reforms if they proceed from the class which is the political and economic ruler of society. . . . On the contrary, those measures are the results of revolution if they proceed from the class which has been economically and politically oppressed and who have now captured political power and who must in their own interest more or less rapidly transform the political and juridical superstructure and create new forms of social co-operation.

Throughout this part, Kautsky consistently maintains the restricted version, and mentions *superstructure* six times and always as "political and juridical superstructure". But this practice does not preclude the possibility of his subscribing to the ideological superstructure also. His book written in 1906, *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History* has a sub-heading "The System of Production and its Superstructure", in chapter V. Here, Kautsky grapples with a chronic problem that is commonly known in the Marxist tradition as the "relative autonomy" of the superstructure. Strangely enough, he considers this nothing short of a discovery:

> It is with the principles of morality as with the rest of the complicated sociological superstructure which raises itself on the method of production. It can break away from its foundation and lead an independent life for a time.
>
> The discovery of this fact has overjoyed all those elements who could not escape the influence of the Marxian thought, but to whom nevertheless the consequences of the economic development are extremely awkward, who in the manner of Kant would like to smuggle in the spirit as an independent driving power in the development of the social organism. To these the discovery of the fact that the intellectual factors of society can temporarily work independently in it was very convenient. With that they hoped to have finally found the wished for reciprocal action—the economic factor works on the spirit and this on the economic factor, both were to rule the social development, either so that at one period the economic factor, at another again the spiritual force drives the society forwards, or in the manner that both together and side by side produce a common result, that in other words our will and wishes can at least occasionally break through the hard economic necessity of their own strength and can change it.
>
> Undoubtedly there is a reciprocal action between the economic basis and its spiritual superstructure —morality, religion, art, etc. . . .[39]

In spite of the length, these lines are worth quoting because they lay bare some salient points about the ideological or— as Kautsky calls a few lines after this passage— "intellectual superstructure". Firstly, if the independence of the superstructure is a discovery, who discovered that? Obviously Engels. Though Engels's reformulations are honoured with a similar prestige, they are never explicitly extolled like this. When we remember Engels's

letter to Bloch, where he says that they had to emphasise economic determinism against their adversaries who do not appreciate its importance, this admission of superstructural independence sounds like something of a concession. Paradoxically, in the later days, this concession came to be considered a significant improvement as Kautsky's passage testifies, and passages like this prompt us to think that Engels's complaint about the later day leaders' overestimating his contribution is not entirely unfounded. Another remarkable thing here is that in spite of his adulatory approval of this concession, Kautsky acknowledges the vulnerability of this independence-cum-interaction version, in the second paragraph. Finally, instead of a climax, an anti-climax awaits us in the last paragraph, where Kautsky simply reiterates the version of interaction[40], notwithstanding his own remarks about the vulnerability inherent in that version. This ambivalence voiced by Kautsky is endemic to Marxism and its roots are indelibly installed in the heterogeneous superstructure.

As for Kautsky, in spite of his awareness of the restricted version of superstructure, he thoroughly subscribes to the heterogeneous ideological superstructure at other instances also. In his book written in 1908, *Foundations of Christianity,* book three, which deals with the Jews, he often deploys the concept of superstructure, but always as "ideological superstructure".[41]

Eduard Bernstein, the literary executor of Engels[42] and later the arch-revisionist, presents an interesting case. His *magnum opus* and also the most controversial essay *Evolutionary Socialism,* written in 1899, is unique in that it sharply underscores the discrepancy between the later formulations of Engels and the earlier formulations of Marx; and again he presents this to the credit of Engels. In the first chapter we find his view of Marx's 1859 preface:

> In the preface just mentioned Marx presents the general features of his philosophy of history and society in such concise and decisive sentences, so free from all reference to special phenomena and special forms, as has never been found elsewhere with equal clearness. No important thought concerning the Marxist philosophy of history is wanting there. [43]

Later, he goes on to say: "The dependence of men on the conditions of production appears much more qualified in the explanation Friedrich Engels gives of historical materialism . . ."[44]. Then he extends his argument in the same vein, "in his later works Engels has limited still further the determining force of the conditions of production – most of all in two letters reprinted in the Sozialistischen Akademiker of October, 1895, the one written in the year 1890, the other in the year 1894"[45]. Then come the quotations from Engels's letters that we have already seen, followed by the comment: "It must be confessed that this sounds somewhat differently from the passage from Marx quoted above"[46].

This recognition of the evident difference between the accounts of Engels and Marx is remarkable at that time. But for Bernstein, this is not an observation that goes against Engels. Quite on the contrary, this embodies the contribution of Engels for the advancement of Marxism:

> Thus we see the materialist conception of history to-day in another form than it was presented at first by its founders. It has gone through a development already, it has suffered limitations in absolutist interpretation. That is, as has been shown, the history of every theory. It would be the greatest retrogression to go back from the ripe form which Engels has given it in the letters to Conrad Schmidt to the first definitions . . .[47]

The reasons for Bernstein's favouring the later eclectic formulations of Engels could be found in the following passage:

> . . . in any case the multiplicity of the factors remains, and it is by no means always easy to lay bare the relations which exist among them so exactly that it can be determined with certainty where in given cases the strongest motive power is to be sought. The purely economic causes create, first of all, only a disposition for the reception of certain ideas, but how these then arise and spread and what form they take, depend on the co-operation of a whole series of influences. More harm than good is done to historical materialism if at the outset one rejects as eclecticism an accentuation of the influences other than those of a purely economic kind, and a consideration of other economic factors than the techniques of production and their foreseen development. Eclecticism – the selecting from different explanations and ways of dealing with phenomena – is often only the natural reaction from the doctrinaire desire to deduce everything from one thing and to treat everything according to one and the same method.[48]

Thus, by Bernstein's own admission, the theory of factors is an inevitable, eclectic reaction to the determination of the superstructural multiplicity by the unilateral economic necessity. So, the all-inclusive base and superstructure theory and the theory of multiple factors are like the two sides of the same coin. This eclectic theory of factors was quite popular during the Second International period, and we have a lot to see about this theory later when discussing Italian Marxism. Coming to Bernstein's arguments, we see that they are not entirely based on methodological and philosophical considerations. He also refers to the historical changes and basing his arguments on them he pleads for the importance of the various non-economic factors in history:

> [B]ecause men pay ever greater attention to economic factors it easily appears as though these played a greater part to-day than formerly. That, however, is not the case. The deception is only caused because in many cases the economic motive appears freely to-day where formerly it was concealed by conditions of government and symbols of all kinds. Modern society is much richer than earlier societies in ideologies which are not determined by economics and by nature working as an economic force. Sciences, arts, a whole series of social relations are to-day much less dependent on economics than formerly, or, in order to give no room for misconception, the point of economic development attained to-day leaves the ideological, and especially the ethical, factors greater space for independent activity than was formerly the case. In consequence of this the interdependency of cause and effect between technical, economic evolution, and the evolution of other social tendencies is becoming always more indirect, and from that the necessities of the first are losing much of their power of dictating the form of the latter.[49]

The whole passage seems to be a defence of the content-form differentiation that we have already seen, which Engels proposes as a refinement to account for the efficacy of the non-economic factors. Paradoxically, Bernstein's arguments are relegated to apostasy by the Marxist writers of the later generations but the formulations of Engels which he so passionately advocated are elevated to canonical status. Lucio Colletti remarks in this connection:

> [The] . . . self-critical observations of Engels were regarded by Bernstein as a substantial innovation compared to the original 'determinism' of the materialist conception of history, as formulated by Marx in the 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859. It is notable that a similar

> judgement (though without the critical reference to the 1859 text) has for some time been prevalent in contemporary Marxism.[50]

Evidently such a theoretical stance cannot be dispensed with, without rigorously analysing the base and superstructure paradigm, in its present heterogeneous form. After a few lines, Colletti offers his critical remarks, in a footnote, on the unwholesome legacy bequeathed by these letters of Engels:

> [Considering the economy as one isolated factor, as something prior to any human mediation] . . . in my view, is the danger that arises from the theory of 'factors', suggested by Engels in his letters. Precisely to the extent that he emphasizes the decisive role, not only of the 'economic base' but also of the 'superstructure', his account encourages the interpretation of the 'economic base' as a 'purely material' or 'technical-economic' domain, not including social relations and hence inter-subjective communication. . . . The distinction between 'structure' and 'superstructure' rarely occurs in Marx and is little more than a metaphor for him; in later Marxism it has acquired an inordinate importance. On the other hand, it is also true that at least part of the blame for these later developments must fall to Marx's famous 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), in which formulations like: 'The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general' would suggest, if taken literally, a 'material production' which is not at the same time a 'social process'.[51]

Of course, we cannot concede that Marx’s statement in the last lines can be the source of Engels’s fallacy, even partly. Even if we take these lines of Marx “literally” as Colletti says, they do not suggest purely material phenomenon, unless one has a wrong notion of the

concept of mode of production. Moreover, our earlier study of Marx's writings cannot admit any view based on downplaying the "distinction between 'structure' and 'superstructure'" in Marx's conceptualization. Anyway, Colletti's observations about the influence of the views expressed in the letters of Engels are a fact of the history of Marxism as we have seen already. So, we shall resume our genealogical study and see how things stand (or rather fall) with the international strands of Marxism.

Superstructural Heterogeneity and the Theory of Factors: A Note on Italian Marxism

Mehring, Kautsky, and Bernstein, all are the central figures of German Socialism. But Marxism has an unmistakable international presence that transcends national specificities. When dealing with such colossal proliferation of Marxism, our study becomes inevitably selective and sketchy. Among the international strands of Marxism we shall be dealing with the Italian and Russian trends. Among the international leaders, we shall consider chiefly Antonio Labriola, father of Italian Marxism; and Georgi Plekhanov, father of Russian Marxism— arguably, the most prominent trend outside Germany. Let's start with the Italian Marxism, where we consider along with Labriola, both Croce and Sorel.

The first part of Labriola's *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History*, contains a persuasively presented account of the materialist view of history that sounds like an eloquent commentary to Marx's 1859 preface:

> . . . in the doctrine of critical communism [Labriola's phrase for Marxism], it is society as a whole which at a moment of its general process discovers the cause of its destined course and at a critical point asserts itself to proclaim the laws of its movement. The foresight indicated by the Manifesto was not chronological, it was not a prophecy nor a promise, but a morphological prevision.

> Beneath the noise of the passions over which our daily conversation extends itself, beyond the visible movements of the persons who formed the material at which the historians stop, beyond the juridical and political apparel of our civil society, far enough from the meanings which religion and art give to life, there remains, grows and develops the elementary structure of society which supports all the rest. The anatomical study of this underlying structure is economics. And as human society has several times changed, partially or entirely, in its most visible exterior form, or in its ideological, religious or artistic manifestations, we must first find the cause and the reason of these changes, the only ones which historians relate, in the transformations more hidden, and at first less visible, of the economic processes of this structure. We must set ourselves to the study of the differences which exist between the various forms of production when we have to deal with historic epochs clearly distinct and properly designated; and when we have to explain the succession of these forms, the replacing of one by the other, we must study the causes of erosion, and of the destruction of the form which disappears; and finally when we wish to understand the historic fact determined and concrete, we must study the frictions and the contrasts which take their rise from the different currents, that is to say, classes, their subdivisions and their intersections which characterize a given society.[52]

Among other things, remarkable here is the way he presents the "juridical and political apparel" as an entity that deserves a focus of its own. After a few pages, in another cogently argued passage, we see the reason for this privileging i.e., these aspects are what precisely result in the State:

> A certain definite nation, that is to say, not a certain mass of individuals, but a plexus of men organized . . . this nation, on a certain circumscribed and limited territory, having such and such fertility, productive in such and such a manner acquired through certain definite forms by continuous labor; — this nation, thus distributed over this territory and thus divided and articulated by the effect of a definite division of labor which is scarcely beginning to give birth to or which has already developed and ripened such and such a division of classes, or which has already disintegrated or transformed a whole series of classes; — this nation which possesses such and such instruments from the flint stone to the electric light and from the bow and arrow to the repeating rifle, which produces according to a certain fashion and shares its products conformably to its way of producing; — this nation, which by all these relations constitutes a society in which either by habits of mutual accommodation or by explicit conventions, or by acts of violence suffered and endured, has already given birth, or is on the point of giving birth to legal-political relations which result in the formation of the state; — this nation, which by the organization of the state, which is only a means for fixing, defending and perpetuating inequalities, by reason of the antagonisms which it bears within itself, renders continuously unstable the organization itself, whence result the political movements and revolutions, and therefore the reasons for progress and retrogression; — there is the sum of what is at the bottom of all history. And there is the victory of realistic prose over all the fantastic and ideological combinations.[53]

It is this acute awareness of the unique importance of the "legal-political relations"[54] as resulting in the formation of state that underlies his attempts to differentiate them from the

other motley factors. This he achieves by way of discriminating between what he calls the first and the second stage derivation where the latter conceptualizes the connection of the factors other than the “legal-political”:

> I said some pages back, in my statement of formulas, that the economic structure determines in the second place the direction, and in great part and indirectly, the objects of imagination and of thought in the production of art, of religion and of science. To express this otherwise, or to go further, would be to put one's self voluntarily on the road toward the absurd.
>
> . . . By this formula, it is desired to assert, moreover, the necessary connection, through which every fact of art and of religion is the exponent, sentimental, fantastic and thus derived, of definite social conditions. If I say in the second place, it is to distinguish these products from the facts of legal-political order which are a true and proper projection of economic conditions.[55]

In fact, the whole of the Chapter VIII is devoted to the exposition of the relation the “legal-political” order has with the economic relations. At the very beginning of the chapter he makes the reason clear:

> . . . it is necessary that we speak further . . . in order to explain better and more in detail for what reasons two of the so-called factors, the state and the law, have been and are still considered as the principal and exclusive subject of history.
>
> Historians have indeed for centuries placed in these forms of social life the essence of development. Moreover, they have perceived this development only in the modification of these forms. History has for centuries been treated as a

> discipline relative to the juridico-political movement and even to the political movement principally. The substitution of society for politics is a recent thing, and much more recent still is the reduction of society to the elements of historical materialism.[56]

Besides emphasizing this often overlooked differentiation of the "juridico-political" factors, he again presents himself as an honourable exception in his penetrating critique of the theory of factors, which has got some elbow room in Engels's letters and an imperial crown in Bernstein:

> This belief [in factors], this current opinion, has become for reasoning historians, or even for rationalists, a semi-doctrine, which has recently been urged several times, as a decisive argument, against the unitary theory of the materialistic conception. And indeed, this belief is so deeply rooted and this opinion so widespread, of history being only intelligible as the juncture and the meeting of various factors, that, in consequence, many of those who speak of social materialism, whether they be its partisans or adversaries, believe that they save themselves from embarrassment by affirming that this whole doctrine consists in the fact that it attributes the preponderance or the decisive action to the economic factor.[57]

He rigorously opposes the hypostatization of the so-called factors in their isolation, having their own dynamic, disregarding social conditions or class realities and categorically states that the real concrete actors behind the abstract factors are the classes themselves:

> The products of the first and of the second stage, in consequence of the interests which they create, the habits which they engender, the persons whom they group and whose spirit and inclinations they specify, tend to fix

> themselves and isolate themselves as independent entities; and thence comes that empirical view, according to which different independent factors, having an efficacy and a rhythmic movement of their own, contribute to form the historic processes and the social configurations which successively result from it. It is the social classes, in so far as they consist in differentiations of interests, which unfold in definite ways and in forms of opposition (whence come the friction, the movement, the process and the progress), which have been the factors — if it was ever necessary to employ this expression — the real, proper and positive factors of history, from the disappearance of primitive communism until to-day.[58]

We can properly appreciate the importance of this insight when we remember that even a contemporary Marxist like Terry Eagleton offers a refined variant of the specific rhythms of the factors argument when he writes: “Each element of a society’s superstructure — art, law, politics, religion— has its own tempo of development, its own internal evolution, which is not reducible to a mere expression of the class struggle or the state of the economy.”[59] In granting the allowance for autonomy, though a relative autonomy, formulations like this may be simply continuing and extending the tradition initiated by Engels. But in their pronouncements of specific dynamics for different social spheres in a supra-social sense, disregarding the mode of production and the specific way social agents articulate themselves and the resulting social structure in which different spheres situate themselves differently at different epochs and in different social formations and have different tempos that are definable only with reference to the social totality, (think of defining a common tempo for religion in the middle ages and the modern times, or for art comprising, for instance, religious paintings and films based on virtual reality , or even for the politics in

the modern and ancient times, to understand the implausibility of this view) these formulations are profoundly at odds with the spirit of Marx's outlook.

Resuming our survey, we shall consult another pioneering Italian intellectual, Benedetto Croce, who — along with Labriola and Sorel— introduced the study of Marxism in the Italian Intellectual climate. In his *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx,* his remarks on Labriola's criticism of factors theory deserve our attention:

> That section of Labriola's book which discusses this [materialistic theory of history] appears to me excellent and sufficient. Labriola points out how historical narration in the course of its development, might have arrived at the theory of historical-factors; i.e., the notion that the sequence of history is the result of a number of forces, known as physical conditions, social organizations, political institutions, personal influences. Historical materialism goes beyond, to investigate the interaction of these factors; or rather it studies them all together as parts of a single process. According to this theory — as is now well known, and as Marx expressed it in a classical passage — the foundations of history are the methods of production, i.e., the economic conditions which give rise to class distinctions, to the constitution of rank and of law, and to those beliefs which make up social and moral customs and sentiments, the reflection whereof is found in art, science and religion.
>
> To understand this point of view accurately is not easy, and it is misunderstood by all those who, rather than take it in the concrete, state it absolutely after the manner of an absolute philosophical truth. The theory cannot be maintained in the abstract without destroying it, i.e., without turning it into the theory of the factors, which is according to my view, the final word

> in abstract analysis. Some have supposed that historical materialism asserts that history is nothing more than economic history, and all the rest is simply a mask, an appearance without reality.[60]

As the passage shows, Croce is an adherent of the factors theory. In spite of this he sounds appreciative when he speaks of the anti-factorial exposition of Labriola. Then he summarises Marx's theory as expressed in a "classical passage", which could be nothing else than the 1859 preface. Here, Croce's exposition is clearly in line with the heterogeneous superstructure in which he also included "science" that does not even figure in 1859 preface. But the most important observation for us would be his statement in the second paragraph where he hits upon the inextricable connection between what he takes as Marx's derivation of heterogeneous superstructural items from the economic conditions and the theory of factors.

Croce also polemises with Stammler's claim that for the believers in historical materialism: "the economic factor dominates the other factors of social life", and "the economic factor is fundamental and the others are dependent"[61]; and remarks convincingly that the "social life appears as a single fact: to separate its two constituent factors means either to destroy it, or to reduce it to empty form. The law governing changes within society cannot be found in something which is extra social; not in technique and discovery, nor in the workings of supposed natural laws, nor in the influence of great men, of mysterious racial and national spirit; but it must be sought in the very centre of the social fact itself.[62]

In fact, it does not need profound contemplation to sense the close connection between the heterogeneous superstructure and the factors theory. Their thematic concern — the relative effectivity of the economic and other factors— is the same essentially, only the terms of conceptualization and the emphasis differs. The theory of factors as discussed in the Marxist tradition, as we have seen so far is a problematic that resulted from the two-fold distortion: the extension of the superstructure on the one hand, and the replacement of the

concept of mode of production which Marx uses when he considers the overall social life process with the concept of economic relations (or *economy* in short) which are actually only one aspect of the mode of production (we shall discuss this relation in detail in the next chapter). Once this simultaneous distortion of expansion and narrowing reduces Marx's central thesis into the over-simplified, and blatantly superficial terms of theory of factors, it follows naturally, that Marxism seems a theory that stresses the economic factor; and this unilateral emphasis, in turn, seems very crude and rude and the attempts of redemption follow equally naturally giving room for the multi-factor reciprocity in the garb of pseudo-theoretical jargon. No wonder that a pseudo-problematic demands a pseudo-solution. Seen in this light, the significance of Labriola's devastating criticism that debunks the very root of factors theory cannot be exaggerated.

In spite of his incisive insights that are highly conducive for a proper appreciation of the restricted superstructure of Marx, Labriola could not realize Marx's restricted version, and thus he subscribes to the eclectic view of superstructure, only more so, because his vision of the so-called superstructural factors is considerably richer than the conventional catalogues. In his *Socialism and Philosophy*, discussing the problem of the relations between state and church he says: ". . . it is understood that creeds, dogmas, symbols, legends, liturgies, and other things of a similar nature, are matters of secondary consideration, the same as every other superstructure of ideas."[63] Still, his account of the determinism of the base with respect to the various social factors is relatively intricate and more nuanced. In the second part of his *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History*, discussing the reasonable orientation to history, he says:

> We should not imagine, in fact, that the unitary principle so well established, at which we have arrived in the general conception of history, may, like a talisman, act always and at first sight, as an infallible method of

> resolving into simple elements the immense area and the complicated gearing of society. The underlying economic structure, which determines all the rest, is not a simple mechanism whence emerge, as immediate, automatic and mechanical effects, institutions, laws, customs, thoughts, sentiments, ideologies. From this substructure to all the rest, the process of derivation and of mediation is very complicated, often subtle, tortuous and not always legible.[64]

But all these subtleties are of no avail, as the very question of heterogeneous superstructure is posed as a pseudo-problematic, and in Chapter X of this book, where he discusses the relation of the so-called superstructural factors with economy, we find him in his least rigorous moments, allowing the effectivity of economy, in relation with ethics, of course, "in the last analysis".[65]

The vexed question of "multiple factors" seemed to have attained ubiquitous presence in this period of the Second International. Georges Sorel writes in the Preface to the French translation of this book:

> Marx gives a very good view of the multiplicity of causes which have produced modern capitalism. Nothing proves that these causes must appear together at a determined date. Their fortuitous co-existence engenders the transformation of industry and changes all social relations.
>
> But some insist and say that, according to Marx, all political, moral, esthetic phenomena are determined (in the strict meaning of the word) by economic phenomena. What can such a formula signify? To say that one thing is determined by another without at the same time giving a precise description

> of the way in which they join is to utter one of those absurdities, which have made the vulgarisers of vulgar materialism so ridiculous.
>
> Marx is not responsible for this caricature of his historical materialism. The fact that all sociological manifestations, in order to be made clear, must be placed upon their economic basis does not imply that an understanding of the basis obviates an understanding of the superstructure. The connections between the economic underpinning and the products resting upon it are very variable and cannot be translated into any general formula. This cannot be called determinism, since there is nothing to be determined.[66]

After thus witnessing how the intellectual history of Italian Marxism, since its inception, wrestled with the multi-factor theory, which is genetically and conceptually related to the heterogeneous superstructure and has thrown some critical light by debunking the theory of factors, we shall turn our attention to the Russian counterpart, beginning our interrogation with the father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov.

Plekhanov and the Prominence of the Artistic and Literary Superstructure

The conspicuous feature of Plekhanov's versatile genius, besides his wide philosophical knowledge, is his acute awareness of the richness and specificity of artistic and literary matters, a feature that found expression even in the portrayal of the profiles of Russian revolutionaries in *Revolutionary Silhouettes,* by Lunacharsky, first Commissar of Education in soviet Russia, where he recollects:

> Georgii Valentinovich was then writing his foreword to the *Communist Manifesto* and had become very interested in art. I had always been passionately interested in it and consequently the chief theme of our talks was

> the dependence of the cultural superstructure on the economic base of society, especially where art was concerned. I used to meet him in his study in the rue de Candole and sometimes in the Cafe Landolt where we would spend hours over many a mug of beer.[67]

In his theoretical expositions, Plekhanov subscribes to the all-inclusive version of ideological superstructure, and writes in his *Fundamental Problems of Marxism,* that "with a change in the economic basis of society, the ideological superstructure changes too".[68] In his article entitled "For the Sixtieth Anniversary of Hegel's Death", he speaks of this in plural as "ideological superstructures"[69] endorsing the practice of substituting the plural for Marx's evidently singular expression, a practice that continued to our times as a refinement, in view of the constitutionally incongruous factors covered by the term superstructure. In spite of his nuanced understanding of art, he maintains the established view that art belongs to the superstructure, but says that it is ". . . important to remember that far from all parts of the 'superstructure' derive *directly* from the *economic basis*. Art's link with the latter is only *mediated*. That is why, in any discussion on art, the intermediate items should be taken into account".[70]

The concept of mediation as a means of a nuanced explanation is quite frequent in Plekhanov, so much so that we can say that it is his strategy of sophistication in explaining the relation between base and superstructure. Again, it is unmistakable that the necessity of introducing the concept of mediation is largely due to his inclusion of the factors, other than the legal and political aspects of the society, in the conceptual coverage of superstructure. Thus he writes in his essay "On the Materialist Understanding of History": ". . . law, the State structure and the morality of any given people are *immediately* and *directly* conditioned by their economic relations. It is the same relations that condition — but now *indirectly* and

mediately — everything that is created by thought and imagination: art, science and the like."[71]

In general, Plekhanov's formulations betray the influence of Engels and frequently resort to the ideological superstructure at the cost of the restricted version. In his very influential book *The Development of the Monist View of History*, he thus states the Marxist view of history:

> The development of the productive forces places men in such relations of production that the personal appropriation of certain objects proves to be more convenient for the process of production. In keeping with this the legal conceptions of primitive man change. The *psychology* of society adapts itself to its *economy*. On the given *economic foundation* there rises up fatally the *ideological superstructure* appropriate to it.[72]

The way Plekhanov sets off the legal conceptions from superstructure that is now defined as ideological is in line with the theoretical tradition the rudimentary beginnings of which could be observed in Engels, and which pursued a course of development that is diametrically opposed to Marx's version where the concept of superstructure is confined to the politico-legal institutions and excludes the ideological elements from the deterministically defined notional coverage of superstructure. This does not entail that Plekhanov is unaware of the significance of legal and political institutions — just as in the case of Engels.

In his article, "On the 'Economic Factor'", his account of the materialist theory of history is noteworthy for its close stylistic semblances with the 1859 Preface: "A definite economic structure of society is determined by the state of the productive forces. On that structure arise certain legal and political relations. The sum of all those relations is reflected in people's minds, and determines their behavior".[73] The first sentence precisely states the

relation between productive forces and production relations which are nothing but the economic structure of society. The second sentence is an equally precise paraphrase of the relation between base and superstructure as defined by Marx in the 1859 preface, but without using those exact terms. Even the term “arise”, suggestive of a genetic relation in the 1859 preface, is also faithfully reproduced. Notwithstanding this theoretical fidelity, it is highly probable that the sentence Plekhanov actually intended as the paraphrase of base and superstructure thesis might be the third sentence. We can recognize this irony when we consider the fact that the superstructure Plekhanov frequently mentions is an ideological superstructure and never the restricted one. As we shall see later, this tendency to accentuate the ideological superstructure, in the history of Russian Marxism, has reached its culmination in Stalin.

Just as in the case of Engels, in spite of his awareness of the close connection of the legal and political relations with the economic structure of society, Plekhanov does not realize that the same relations are what Marx called superstructure. But Plekhanov had reasons of his own for this selective ignorance. One prominent reason for this has a lot to do with Plekhanov’s stance regarding Engels’s letters and Bernstein’s interpretation of their significance. Plekhanov polemicises with Bernstein's apostasy more than once. In his *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, for instance, he introduces this theme like this: “There was a time when Herr Bernstein made much of these letters which, he thought, contained plain testimony of the evolution that had taken place in the course of time in the views of Marx’s friend and collaborator.”[74]

As it could be construed from the tone and tenor of this passage, Plekhanov is a die-hard opponent to any suggestion of discrepancy between Marx and Engels. Thus he continues in his derisive tone: “Herr Bernstein finds that ‘this sounds somewhat different’ than the preface to *zur kritik der politischen oekonomie*, [1859 preface] which speaks of the links

between the economic ‘basis’ and the ‘superstructure’ that rises above it.”[75] Plekhanov’s polemical strategy in refuting Bernstein’s assertion of discrepancy is to deny any novelty to the multifactorial, interactionist version found in Engels’s letters, by maintaining that both Marx and Engels, at all periods of their career, took account of the multiplicity of different factors; and thus there is absolutely nothing new in the later day letters of Engels. At a crucial polemical juncture, in some other essay, in his engagement with Bernstein’s views, Plekhanov dramatically entertains the possibility of Marx’s departure from the eclectic version, in his 1859 preface:

> Let us try to construct another hypothesis: in the beginning of their activities, Marx and Engels regarded ‘factors’ in the same light as they were seen in by Engels in the nineties. Midway through those activities, at about the time of the publications of *Zur kritik*, Marx — alone, or together with Engels — changed this view point for some reason, and fell into the extreme discovered by Herr Bernstein in the preface to this book.
>
> But even this hypothesis will not stand up to any criticism, because the Preface just mentioned contains that very view of ‘factors’ which , in Herr Bernstein’s opinion, arose only in consequence of the evolution of Marx’s historical theory. The reader will have no difficulty in agreeing with us if he goes to the trouble of scrutinizing the quotation that our profoundly thinking ‘critic’ makes reference to: ‘The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life’, which means that social, political and intellectual ‘factors’ grow on economic soil.[76]

In spite of the intellectual proximity offered by this argumentative context, to get an understanding of Marx’s restricted version, Plekhanov missed that opportunity, because his

purpose has been to prove the presence of multiple factors in Marx; and in his impatience to prove this, he leaps from the base and superstructure theory that is the issue at stake for Bernstein, to the mode of production thesis where Marx attempts an overall theorization. Thus it never occurs to Plekhanov to question the glorification of eclecticism effected by Bernstein that is incompatible with any degree of scientific rigour. Conversely, he concedes that glory, and only attempts to prove that it is already there in Marx. Amidst all these debates on multiplicity, Marx's original endeavour to bring out rigour with his compact, restricted and rigorously defined superstructure is constantly ignored.

Against this backdrop, it seems ironical that Bakunin, the Russian anarchist and a fierce contemporary adversary of Marx, pronounces one of the early, clear statements of the concept of politico-legal superstructure; what is even more ironic is that he makes this approving pronouncement about Marx, vis-à-vis another arch-anarchist, Proudhon:

> Proudhon was a perpetual contradiction: a vigorous genius, a revolutionary thinker arguing against idealistic phantoms, and yet never able to surmount them himself . . . Marx as a thinker is on the right path. He has established the principle that juridical evolution in history is not the cause but the effect of economic development, and this is a great and fruitful concept. Though he did not originate it— it was to a greater or lesser extent formulated before him by many others— to Marx belongs the credit for solidly establishing it as the basis for an economic system.[77]

we can appreciate properly, how difficult it is, in the modern intellectual climate, to consistently maintain this understanding of politico-legal superstructure; when we observe that in the "Introduction" to the *Selected Works* of Bakunin, from which the above quotation is taken, the editor, Sam Dolgoff refers to the so-called "ideological superstructure" in a

disapproving tone, testifying the ubiquitousness of the modern belief in this version of superstructure: "The dogma that science, philosophy, ethics, and democratic institutions are mere reflections (an 'ideological superstructure' in Marxist jargon) of the economic mode of production is equally losing ground to the conviction that these phenomena have an independent share in shaping human history".[78]

Resuming our analysis of Plekhanov, it should be borne in mind that Plekhanov is not alone in confounding the base and superstructure theory with the mode of production thesis. In fact this arbitrary interchangeability enjoys wide subscription in the Marxian tradition and we shall confront this issue in the next chapter. For now, it suffices to note that Plekhanov eventually evades tackling the restricted version of superstructure, though he announces his readiness for such confrontation and then he conveniently resorts to the mode of production thesis. In conclusion, this position can only consolidate the heterogeneous version of superstructure, as well as glorifying that heterogeneity.

When Plekhanov thus argues that various factors are present in Marx's 1859 preface, he actually gives some concession later and says: ". . . the 'factor' of mentality? Perhaps, the Preface does not say about it . . . . Very little is said about it in the Preface".[79] This concession would be surprising for the reader as it does not even fall in line with the assertive tone that Plekhanov assumes in his polemics. The reason for this is the fact that mentality or psychology has a central place in Plekhanov's version of base and superstructure as could be seen in his elaborate formulation in *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*:

> If we wanted to express in a nutshell the view held by Marx and Engels with regard to the relation between the now celebrated '*basis*' and the no less celebrated '*superstructure*', we would get something like the following:
>
> 1) *the state of the productive forces*;

2) the *economic relations* these forces condition;

3) the *socio-political system* that has developed on the given economic 'basis';

4) the *mentality of social man* , which is determined in part directly by the economic conditions obtaining , and in part by the entire socio-political system that has arisen on that foundation;

5) the *various ideologies* that reflect the properties of that mentality.[80]

Evidently, Plekhanov's intent here is to give the gist of Marx's theory of history, but he assumes and subsumes all this as the explication of the relation between base and superstructure. Once the superstructure is thought of as comprising all the non-economic spheres of society (which is precisely what we call the heterogeneous superstructure), no wonder it could represent the whole social system when considered along with the base, the economic structure of the society[81]. If we could concede this as the view held by Marx, expressed "in a nutshell" or rather in the shell of base and superstructure, Plekhanov tries to substantiate his inclusion of mentality in this account, just a few lines after this wherein he says: "that all ideologies have one common root — *the psychology of the epoch in question*— is not hard to understand; anyone who makes even the slightest study of the facts will realize that"[82]. How far the emerging theories of psychology have inspired this view of Plekhanov is an interesting point to ponder. However what is certain is that this inclusion of social psychology is quite frequent in Plekhanov and seems to have been ratified by later writers.

Lenin and the Rehabilitation of the Politico-legal Superstructure

Plekhanov's influence and prestige among the Russian Marxists is so pervasive that many writers regard Lenin as one of the disciples of Plekhanov. However Lenin's work differs from Plekhanov's, apparently on account of the predominance of practical, political concerns in the former vis-à-vis the predominance of theoretical, and literary concerns in the latter; a similar difference can also be seen in their use of the concept of superstructure. Quite frequently, the concept of superstructure figures in the works of Lenin, to analyze and theorize the political institutions in their close nexus with the economic structure. It would seem pedantic and ponderous to list out all such instances as they are numerous and are intricately connected with the political issues that frequently find their polemical expression in Lenin. His essay *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* provides a typical example, in a context that is free from immediate political concerns:

> Just as man's knowledge reflects nature (i.e., developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man's social knowledge (i.e., his various views and doctrines—philosophical, religious, political and so forth) reflects the economic system of society. Political institutions are a superstructure on the economic foundation. We see, for example, that the various political forms of the modern European states serve to strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. . . .
>
> Having recognised that the economic system is the foundation on which the political superstructure is erected, Marx devoted his greatest attention to the study of this economic system. Marx's principal work, Capital, is devoted to a study of the economic system of modern, i.e., capitalist, society.[83]

Both paragraphs liken the superstructure with the political institutions and this use is markedly frequent in Lenin continuing the ill-appreciated legacy of Marx. But a perceptive reader would not miss an attendant concern here, embodied in the first three lines that sound like an allusion to the materialist thesis of Marx. This conceptual tangle between the base and superstructure thesis and the materialist thesis is restricted here to the "social knowledge" and may be seen as a relic of Lenin's earlier position, because a more assertive form of this confounding position can be seen in his earlier essay written in 1894, *What the "Friends of the People" are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*:

> Their [Marx's and Engel's] basic idea . . . was that social relations are divided into material and ideological. The latter merely constitute a superstructure on the former, which take shape independent of the will and consciousness of man as (the result) the form of man's activity to maintain his existence. The explanation of political and legal forms . . . must be sought in 'the material conditions of life.'[84]

This conceptual confounding may be rather outlandish, but not entirely outdated even in the modern times. When Raymond Williams writes in one of his last writings that "the material activities all occur in the 'base': the mental activities all in the 'superstructure'"[85] he is attesting to this fact. Though he subscribes to this view as a general theory, Lenin's analytical acumen is hardly ever contaminated by this confusion and in his influential essay *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, written at a crucial juncture (1905), he conceptualizes the historical Russian revolution, precisely in terms of the political superstructure:

> Indeed, what is revolution from the Marxist point of view? The violent break-up of the obsolete political superstructure, the contradiction between

> which and the new relations of production caused its collapse at a certain moment. The contradiction between the autocracy and the entire structure of capitalist Russia, all the requirements of her bourgeois-democratic development, has now caused its collapse, all the more severe owing to the lengthy period in which this contradiction was artificially sustained. The superstructure is cracking at every joint, it is yielding to pressure, it is growing weaker. The people, through the representatives of the most diverse classes and groups, must now, by its own efforts, build a new superstructure for itself. At a certain stage of development the uselessness of the old superstructure becomes obvious to all. The revolution is recognised by all. The task now is to define which classes must build the new superstructure, and how they are to build it. If this is not defined, the slogan revolution is empty and meaningless at the present time . . . . This definition is given in the slogan: the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. This slogan defines the classes upon which the new "builders" of the new superstructure can and must rely, the character of the new superstructure (a "democratic" as distinct from a socialist dictatorship), and how it is to be built (dictatorship, i.e., the violent suppression of violent resistance, arming the revolutionary classes of the people).[86]

This theme recurs in Lenin and seems to have been the major preoccupation for him in this crucial year. In an essay written in the same year, with a shorter title, *Two Tactics,* he voiced a similar view:

> This revolution began in Russia with the abolition of serfdom, and it is the backwardness of our political superstructure as compared with the accomplished revolution in social relations that makes the collapse of the

> superstructure inevitable; an immediate collapse as the result of a single blow is quite possible, since "the people's revolution" in Russia has already dealt tsarism a hundred blows, and whether the hundred and first or the hundred and tenth will finish it off is really a matter of conjecture.[87]

Of course, all this cannot be taken to mean that the Bolsheviks were happily ignorant of the distorting interpretations of superstructure. A converse surmise is much more plausible that highlights the significance of Lenin's views by offering a contrasting backdrop. In her *Reminiscences of Lenin*, Krupskaya relates an interesting incident, writing about the period "After the Second Congress" when there was a split between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks: "I remember another man, a member of the Kiev Committee, who was anxious to know what changes in technique had led to the split at the Congress. I just stared at him— baffled by such a primitive understanding of the correlation between 'basis' and 'superstructure.' I never thought it could exist."[88]

This incident exemplifies the typical exaggerated extension of the base and superstructure thesis— though within the political sphere— rightly questioned by Krupskaya. As for Lenin, in spite of his predominant use of superstructure to signify and analyze politics, the ideological version of superstructure is not completely alien. We find this even in his seminal study *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, where he writes that "the non-economic superstructure which grows up on the basis of finance capital, its politics and its ideology, stimulates the striving for colonial conquest".[89]

Lenin's discussion with Clara Zetkin, offers an interesting example of how the concepts of base and superstructure are used to analyse and discuss different social issues. Responding to Lenin's observation that the discussions of issues like marriage and sex, at that

turbulent time, are undesirable and untimely, Clara Zetkin, a prominent German communist leader known for her work among women workers, holds a different view:

> Knowledge of the modifications of the forms of marriage and family that took place in the course of history, and of their dependence on economics, would serve to rid the minds of working women of their preconceived idea of the eternity of bourgeois society. A critical, historical attitude to those problems must lead to a ruthless examination of bourgeois society, to a disclosure of its real nature and effects, including condemnation of its sexual morality and falseness. All roads lead to Rome. And every real Marxist analysis of any important section of the ideological superstructure of society, of a predominating social phenomenon, must lead to an analysis of bourgeois society and of its property basis, must end in the realisation, 'this must be destroyed'.[90]

During the course of the discussion that ensued between the two leaders, Lenin argues rather sarcastically:

> You must be aware of the famous theory that in communist society the satisfaction of sexual desires, of love, will be as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water. This glass of water theory has made our young people mad, quite mad. It has proved fatal to many young boys and girls. Its adherents maintain that it is Marxist. But thanks for such Marxism which directly and immediately attributes all phenomena and changes in the ideological superstructure of society to its economic basis! Matters aren’t quite as simple as that. A certain Frederick Engels pointed that out a long time ago with regard to historical materialism.[91]

Obviously, Clara Zetkin and Lenin do not share much common ground on the significance of the issues raised here. But, remarkably enough, both of them seem to believe that marriage and sex are matters belonging to the superstructure and they try to drive home their contending views, with the aid of the popular concept of ideological superstructure.

Trotsky's Continuation of the Double Legacy

An overwhelming concern for cultural and literary issues is to be seen again in Trotsky after Plekhanov. But, he is also aware of the significance of the political superstructure that is rightly stressed by Lenin. This double legacy is pursued by Trotsky parallel to each other. Thus, a vehement condemnation of the caricatured application of the base and superstructure theory, especially in the literary and cultural matters, is to be found in him:

> On the question as to how the economic "base" determines the political, juridical, philosophical, artistic and so on "superstructure" there exists a rich Marxist literature. The opinion that economics presumably determines directly and immediately the creativeness of a composer or even the verdict of a judge, represents a hoary caricature of Marxism which the bourgeois professordom of all countries has circulated time out of end to mask their intellectual impotence.[92]

With his passionate desire to defend the cultural and literary production from the crude deductive applications of materialism, he also advocated the concept of deflection in place of the usual theory of reflection. In spite of his belief in the heterogeneous superstructure, as stated in the first lines of the above passage, he argues that everything cannot be deduced from economics:

> It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions. But neither is the need for food created by economics. On the contrary, the need for food and warmth creates economics. It is very true that one cannot always go by the principles of Marxism in deciding whether to reject or to accept a work of art. A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history.[93]

Such bold rejection of clichéd principles that later assumed the stature of unquestionable dogmas is refreshingly common in Trotsky[94] and this applies to the base and superstructure theory also, as he unconditionally says that "with the exception of architecture, art is based on technique only in its last analysis, that is, only to the extent to which technique is the basis of all cultural superstructures. The practical dependence of art, especially of the art of words, upon material technique, is insignificant".[95]

Trotsky's version of the relationship between the base and superstructure is also a much original and nuanced one. In his letter known as *The Curve of Capitalist Development (A Letter to the Editors in Place of the Promised Article)* which is commended by the editors as a letter comparable to the letters of Engels that we have already seen, he says that "the parallelism of political events and economic changes is of course very relative. As a general rule, the 'superstructure' registers and reflects new formations in the economic sphere only after considerable delay".[96] In this letter he also reiterates Engels's view that economics is decisive only in the last analysis.

In his influential analysis in *Literature and Revolution*, we see his application of this Marxist thesis, in a form that is complex enough to accommodate psychological, individual,

racial, and social aspects in an intricate vision of artistic change which he explicates elaborately:

> A new artistic form, taken in a large historic way, is born in reply to new needs. To take an example from intimate lyric poetry, one may say that between the physiology of sex and a poem about love there lies a complex system of psychological transmitting mechanisms in which there are individual, racial and social elements. The racial foundation, that is, the sexual basis of man, changes slowly. The social forms of love change more rapidly. They affect the psychologic superstructure of love, they produce new shadings and intonations, new spiritual demands, a need of a new vocabulary, and so they present new demands on poetry.[97]

But his deployment of the concept of superstructure is in no way restricted to the artistic and cultural issues. With his inclusive view of superstructure witnessed above, he speaks of the party and even its central leadership as superstructures:

> It is a typical Menshevist dodge to shift responsibility for the mistakes of the leaders on the "masses" or to minimize the importance of leadership *in general*, in order thus to diminish its guilt. It arises from the total incapacity to arrive at the dialectic understanding of the "superstructure" in general, of the superstructure of the class which is the party, and the superstructure of the party in the shape of its central leadership.[98]

With his laxity and hyper-flexibility in using the concepts of base and superstructure, Trotsky seems to be continuing the tradition whose intellectual roots are traceable to the letters of Engels. Thus his use of superstructure can signify even economic categories, as seen in his article *The New Constitution of the USSR*, where he says that "The sphere of

distribution is, of course, only a "superstructure" in relation to the sphere of production."[99] Again, discussing the importance of the development of aviation for the nascent Soviet Russia he describes aviation as "technical-cultural superstructure"[100]

Notwithstanding such grotesque significatory practices, Trotsky is not blind to the real conceptual merit of the base and superstructure thesis in theorising the relation between politics and the class structure. In a remarkable passage that strikingly shows his flair for literary expressions, he gives expression to this crucial Marxist insight:

> Revolutionary epochs, the epochs of social landslides, turn the whole inside of society outwards. When you go past a mountain ridge you can see layers which have accumulated over the course of millennia. One had been deposited on the next. From above they were invisible. But these layers were raised up with a volcanic force, faults were created, mountains and gorges formed and you can see in the cross-section of the mountain the layers of the different rock-forms. That's what happens with society too. In normal times class lies on top of class, and on the base stands the superstructure made up of diverse ideological formations and even the most refined forms of philosophy. The roots and causes of the inner structure cannot be seen with the unaided eye. But the revolution explodes all this, slices it through and lays it bare. And of course those of us who took part in the revolution practically and in deed learnt best of all from this.[101]

He resists a straightjacketing, simplistic explanation even in the case of politics and rightly suggests its intricate relation with the economic base, in an essay on the history of the International:

> We Marxists have said more than once that the bourgeoisie has exhausted its historical mission. Meanwhile it still retains power in its hands to this very day. This means that the interrelation between the economic foundation and the political superstructure by no means proceeds along a straight line. We observe a class régime maintaining itself for a number of decades after it had come into an obvious conflict with the needs of economic progress.[102]

A contributing factor for his nuanced understanding of the relation between the base and superstructure springs from his acute awareness of the pressure of superstructural formations of the bygone times, as we see in his *Terrorism and Communism:*

> If, beginning with the productive bases of society, we ascend the stages of the superstructure – classes, the State, laws, parties, and so on – it may be established that the weight of each additional part of the superstructure is not simply to be added to, but in many cases to be multiplied by, the weight of all the preceding stages. As a result, the political consciousness of groups which long imagined themselves to be among the most advanced, displays itself, at a moment of change, as a colossal obstacle in the path of historical development.[103]

Among other things, Trotsky's inordinate inclusion of classes among the superstructural stages makes us stop to deliberate further. If we remember Trotsky's discussion of the relation of art with the material technique invoking the base and superstructure concepts, we can spell out the root cause of his erroneous extension. In his view, base includes technique. His expression in the above passage “productive bases of society” is also compatible with such a view. Thus, we can say that for Trotsky, base and superstructure thesis is almost the same as what is usually labelled as technological

determinism in the contemporary critical idiom; just as for Lenin it is, sometimes, the same as the materialist thesis. But this inclusion may not seem abnormal from the perspective of even some modern Marxists like Terry Eagleton who include productive forces also in the concept of base, in flagrant deviation from Marx.[104]

Ironically, Trotsky himself succumbs to the weight of theoretical inheritance and makes his refinements sound like a variant of the clichéd determinism of the economic base in the last analysis, in its relation to the heterogeneous superstructure. In a speech delivered at the 5th All-Union Congress of Medical and Veterinary Workers in 1924, Trotsky says:

> We know that superstructures—state, law, politics, parties and so on—arise on an economic basis, are nourished and determined by this basis. Consequently, basis and superstructure have to correspond. And this happens in fact, only not simply but in a very complicated way. A powerful development of one superstructure (the bourgeois state, bourgeois parties, bourgeois culture) sometimes holds back for a long time the development of other superstructures (the revolutionary proletarian party), but in the last analysis—in the *last* analysis, not immediately—the basis reveals itself nevertheless as the decisive force.[105]

In spite of the prevalence of the political and legal superstructure in Lenin, and later in Trotsky, the cultural and ideological superstructure attained collateral popularity, especially through the views of Trotsky himself after Plekhanov. The extent of this influence could be seen even in the camp that Trotsky criticises in his *Literature and Revolution*, i.e., the Russian Formalist School. Plekhanov, the father of Russian Marxism, with his predilection for cultural and artistic matters might have been the father of the prominent ideological superstructure in the Russian Marxist Tradition.

The Less Appreciated Contributions of the So-called Russian Formalists

The views of the writers, generally subsumed wholesale, under the common collective title of Russian Formalists, regarding the concepts of base and superstructure, are as much interesting as they are less known. As an instance testifying the popularity of the concept of superstructure at this time, I may refer to one of the most famous Russian formalists, Roman Jakobson, who is known for his exceptional studies of both language and literature; in both the fields he wields this concept. Thus he says that "'free verse' *(verslibre)* . . . is a complex superstructure based on the co-presence of both poetry and prose for its existence and definition"[106]; and that "the verb is a marked category, a superstructure in relation to the noun, and both the acquisition and disruption of language confirm this"[107] and in some other context discussing the aphasics he even says that the "passive is a superstructure upon the active".[108]

Surprisingly, Jakobson's use of superstructure is merely metaphorical and does not show any affiliations *per se* with Marxism proper. But the one who boldly confronted the concepts of base and superstructure in their own ground, Marxism, among the so-called Russian formalists is V. N. Volosinov. Though often unjustly branded— together with the selfsame people against whom he marshalled his most acerbic arguments — as a formalist[109], his work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is remarkable for its underappreciated landmark contributions to Marxist materialist semiotics and the problem of the relation between base and superstructure.[110] He devotes a whole chapter in this book to the analysis of that relation because, as he says at the very beginning of the chapter, this "fundamental" problem of Marxism ". . . is closely linked with questions of philosophy of language at a number of crucial points and could benefit considerably from a solution to those questions or even just from treatment of them to some appreciable extent and depth".[111]

In his pioneering debate of this much-discussed relationship, indeed he argues for a paradigm shift in the time-honoured legacy of deriving the ideological factors (acknowledged tenants of superstructure) from psychology. This psychologistic tradition with its obvious susceptibility to the idealist exegesis, and unquestionable popularity as evinced by later Marxists, is traceable to Plekhanov at least. As Volosinov puts it succinctly: "The study of ideologies does not depend on psychology to any extent and need not be grounded in it . . . it is rather the reverse: objective psychology must be grounded in the study of ideologies.[112]

We can appreciate the importance of this radical reformulation only when we realise that for him "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. . . Everything ideological possesses semiotic value".[113] But Volosinov's semiotics presents a striking contrast with the Saussurian variety. For him, "Signs can arise only on *interindividual territory*".[114] In contrast to what he dubbed as "abstract objectivism", which took "the utterance — as something individual", he maintained unequivocally that "*The utterance is a social phenomenon*"[115] and "Marxist philosophy of language should and must stand squarely on the utterance as the real phenomenon of language-speech and as a socioideological structure"[116]. And this reorientation gives him the intellectual vigour and rigour to problematise the psychologistic version of the relationship between base and superstructure:

> That which has been termed 'social psychology' and is considered, according to Plexanov's theory and by the majority of Marxists, as the transitional link between the sociopolitical order and ideology in the narrow sense (science, art, and the like), is, in its actual, material existence, *verbal interaction.* Removed from this actual process of verbal comunication and interaction . . . social psychology would assume the guise of a metaphysical or mythic concept — the 'collective soul' or 'collective inner psyche', the 'spirit

of the people', etc.[117]

In fact, his radical re-examination does not confine to the relation between base and superstructure and extends to the problem of consciousness as such:

> The only possible objective definition of consciousness is a sociological one. . . Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group. . . .
>
> The reality of ideological phenomenon is the objective reality of social signs. The laws of this reality are the laws of semiotic communication and are directly determined by the total aggregate of social and economic laws. Ideological reality is the immediate superstructure over the economic basis. Individual consciousness is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs.[118]

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the popular (mis)belief, Volosinov's semiotic reorientation does not intend to moderate or subdue the patent determinism suggested by the base and superstructure concepts. In fact the semiotic interactions also undergo this determinism: "Production relations and the sociopolitical order shaped by those relations determine the full range of verbal contacts between people, all the forms and means of their verbal communication— at work , in political life , in ideological creativity".[119] As a matter of fact, from this socio-political determinism he draws some conclusions that are central to his philosophy of language:

> [Forms of verbal communication] are entirely determined by production relations and the sociopolitical order. Were we to apply a more detailed analysis, we would see, what enormous significance belongs to the herarchical factor in the processes of verbal interchange and what a powerful influence is exerted on forms of utterance by the hierarchical organization of comunication. Language etiquette, speech tact, and other forms of adjusting an utterance to the hierarchical organization of society have tremendous importance in the process of devising the basic behavioural genres.[120]

Societal semiotic interaction as a vehicle of hierarchical relations is a prominent theme in Volosinov's sociological semiotics. Evidently, this view is intrinsically influenced by the base and superstructure thesis. It is with reference to this hierarchical factor in communication that we can rightly appreciate the significance of Bakhtin's influential concept, Carnival, as a social phenomenon that defies the ecclesiastically sanctified hierarchical barriers and protocols.[121] Volosinov, a close collaborator of Bakhtin, is not satisfied with a perfunctory subscription to the preponderating role of production relations but derives important implications thereof, which form integral part of his semiotic system.

Though Volosinov adhered to the heterogeneous version of superstructure to the extent of preferring to mention it in plural as *superstructures*, he tried to bring out some unity in the heterogeneity by subsuming it under the common denominator of *ideology* which, in his view, is coexistent with the semiotic system and occupies a position of primacy even with respect to social psychology. Another important member of what came to be known as *Bakhtin School* later, Medvedev, also held a similar opinion on the intricate problem of unity and specificity of superstructural domains:

> What is lacking is a properly worked out sociological study of the specific properties of the material, forms and goals belonging to each of the domains of ideological creativity. Each of them, after all, commands its own 'language,' with its own forms and operations, and its own specific laws for the refraction of the unitary reality of existence. The specificity of art , science, ethics, and religion must not, of course, obscure their ideological unity as superstructures over the one, common, basis, each of them infused with unitary socioeconomic coherency; but neither ought their specificity be effaced for the sake of general formulations of that coherency.[122]

Thus, two remarkable members of the *Bakhtin School*, Volosinov and Medvedev, have taken avowedly Marxist positions with regard to base and superstructure thesis.[123] Another remarkable scholar, generally found in the modern textbooks, close to the same flock of Russian Formalists, but again, not properly appreciating the colour of his feathers, is Vladimir Propp, whose *Morphology of the Folktale* is much appreciated while his later work is relatively left in oblivion, especially in the west. In his work, the base and superstructure thesis is assigned an explanatory significance that is integral to his path-breaking research. In fact one of his headings reads “The Wondertale as a Phenomenon of the Superstructure”, where he tries to analyse the Wondertale in terms of the base and superstructure. The significance of this could be properly appreciated when we bear in mind that the original title he thought of giving to his *Morphology of the Folktale* is *Morphology of the Wondertale*. For him, the explanation for the phenomenon like the wondertale should be sought in this thesis: “Genuinely historical scholarship requires not only the establishment of the fact of development but also its *explanation.* Poetical art is a phenomenon of the superstructure. To explain a phenomenon means to trace it to its causes, and these causes lie in the economic and social life of the people”.[124]

In a remarkable contrast with the historical trajectory of his folkloristic studies, which became an important source for the Structuralist tradition, he himself elaborates a methodology for the study of folklore, closely following the heuristic principles of Marxism:

> The folktale is an ideological phenomenon, a reflection of the world in men's minds. It is not a reflection of itself. We know what calls forth phenomena of the superstructure and what causes them: there is no need to go into the theory of basis and superstructure. If the folktale reflects the forms of production that existed at very early stages, one may speak about the paleontological analysis of a folktale motif. Each motif must be listed and examined in terms of socio-economic stages and of the changes in the motif that correspond to them, rather than in terms of territorial distribution and formal differences ("variants"). Many folktales have preserved such unambiguous traces of tribal organization, hunting, and early forms of agriculture as the basic form of production, together with traces of the social institutions that went with them, early forms of thought, family relations and marriage, etc., that a careful comparison of the folktale and the past leaves no doubts about the historical roots of most folktale motifs.[125]

A real pioneer, as he was, he hopes that future research could get greater insights, pursuing in the track of this methodology. Interestingly, he expresses his hope that the value of such research would be in transcending the formalist confines:

> It is quite probable that further searches will give a clearer, more precise, and better substantiated picture for each type of laughter and uncover whole layers of material that I have missed. Nevertheless, this work can begin, even if its

> only value is an attempt to go beyond the limits of formalist comparativism and look at folklore as a type of ideological superstructure.[126]

But the most important insight of Propp is the clear-cut distinction between the synchronic and diachronic modes of understanding, with reference to the relation between base and superstructure. He expounds categorically that this relation should be understood as a diachronic sort and one should not be always looking for synchronic similarities. He also explores the methodological implications of this understanding.

> Just as at one time there was 'naive realism,' we now have a trend that can be called 'naive Marxism' and that postulates an *immediate, mechanical* correspondence between the basis and superstructure. . . . The correspondence between the basis and superstructure is understood as a *synchronic* one, whereas it is *historical,* and the synchronization is not always necessary. . . . We should discover the social-economic formation, the stage in the development of this or that formation within whose framework the plot arose because it *had* to arise. Consequently, in order to grasp any literary phenomenon (and the wondertale is a case in point), we should turn to material culture, economy, and the social phenomena connected with them. It follows that in the comparative study of the wondertale we cannot only compare one wondertale with another. Elements of the wondertale must be compared with elements of production, with the social life, rites, rituals, and beliefs of the people among which the wondertale is current, and of the peoples which stand at the same level of economic and cultural development.[127]

Propp's distinction between synchronic and diachronic aspects in the relation between base and superstructure is remarkably subtler than the pseudo-sophisticated ways of refining

the thesis. An aspect of the vicissitudes of the Marxist intellectual tradition is that this version did not seem to have received the attention it deserved, in the west.[128] More ironically, the significant theoretical heritage of the scholars now generally discussed under the heading of "Russian Formalists" does not seem to have any appreciable influence on mainstream Marxism in Soviet Russia itself and remained an unexplored oasis in the ossified desert of official Marxism.[129] Noting this, we have to resume now, our survey of this mainstream Marxism, which we left with Trotsky.

The intellectual legacy of multifarious superstructural components is upheld unabated, since Plekhanov, in this mainstream Marxist tradition. But we have seen, in Plekhanov himself, a certain awareness of the significance of state and law in contrast to other ideological elements — an awareness he shows by stating that the former are directly and immediately conditioned by the economic base, whereas the latter are conditioned indirectly and through mediation. And this awareness of the distinction between the politico-legal aspects and other ideological aspects is also observed by other Russian Marxists, which is shown by their predominant preoccupation with either the former or the latter aspects, as well as by their attempts at formulating this difference.

Bukharin's Sustained Engagement with the Base and Superstructure Thesis

Among the younger contemporaries of Lenin and Trotsky, Bukharin is noteworthy for his more or less successful attempt at a systematic general exposition of Marxism as a revolutionary sociological theory. This brilliant Russian revolutionary who is regarded by Lenin (in his letter dated December 25, 1922, that is sometimes called— rather awkwardly— Lenin's testament) "as a most valuable and major theorist of the Party"[130] and who eventually became the victim of Stalinist purges, is remarkable for his attempts at rigorous exposition of Marxism and especially the concepts of base and superstructure.

In his work, we find the most elaborate theory of base and superstructure, with the widest conceptual coverage, presented as a general theory, in contrast to the occasional and situational application, to which the theory is put by others. We could see his boldly rigorous formulations when he discusses the theory of factors, where he works towards cutting the Gordian knot by analysing that theory with reference to the significance of superstructure:

> This conception represents historical materialism as stating the existence of various factors in history: economy, politics, art, etc., some of which are very important, others unimportant, with the economic 'factor' as the only real 'factor', all the others being a sort of fifth wheel of the wagon. . . . but it would be erroneous to interpret our view of ideology in this way; the superstructure is not 'child's play'. We have shown that a destruction of the capitalist state would make capitalist production impossible, that a destruction of modern science would involve also that of large-scale production and technology; that an elimination of the means of human intercourse, language and literature, would cause society to disintegrate. The theory of historical materialism does not deny the importance of the superstructure in general and of the ideologies, in particular, but explains them.[131]

In his essay *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance,* he rightly presents historical materialism as a social theory in which the one-sided geographical materialism as well as the biological materialism are rejected. After thus juxtaposing Marx's materialistic concept of history with the cruder varieties of materialism, Bukharin goes on to present his version of the concepts of base and superstructure:

> The material fact of the process of the development of productive forces (or their decline) in its social-historical form, that is the changes in the

> productivity of social labour and in human relations in the process of that labour (productive relations), these are the main determinants which in the last resort, either directly or indirectly, immediately or through a number of intermediate links, condition the changes in the whole sphere of superstructures, political, juridical, moral, scientific, aesthetic, philosophical. The morphological unity of society . . . is conditioned precisely by the fact that it has a single material basis.[132]

Obviously, Bukharin believes that productive forces are part of the base, and his concept of superstructure is also a conglomerate of the items traditionally handed down since the times of classical Marxism, as presented by Engels. But what is remarkable is his perception of the base and superstructure model in the light of his view of morphological unity of societal elements. Before we get into the details of his unique understanding of this model, let us dwell for a while on his definition of superstructure first. After citing the 1859 preface of Marx which he comments as "the brilliant and monumental introduction to *The Critique of Political Economy"*[133] he offers one:

> We shall interpret the word "superstructure" as meaning any type of social phenomenon erected on the economic basis: this will include, for instance, social psychology, the social-political order, with all its material parts (for example, cannons), the organization of persons (official hierarchy), as well as such phenomena as language and thought. The conception of the superstructure is therefore the widest possible conception.[134]

In spite of this highly inclusive understanding of the concept of superstructure, he shows a distinction between political and other superstructural items. In the section entitled "The Outlines of the Superstructure" in his essay *Historical Materialism,* he lists out different

aspects of social life and states that "These phenomena, excepting the social and political system, are frequently referred to as our 'mental' or 'spiritual culture'". Then he adds that "A useful transition to a consideration of this 'mental culture' is a study, in broad outline, of the *social and political structure of* society, which is directly determined, as we shall see, by its economic structure".[135]

Thus, he also makes a distinction between the direct deterministic influence and the indirect sort, as Plekhanov has done before him:

> Certain of these elements are directly dependent on technology ("the art of war"); others depend on the class character of society (its economy), as well as on the technology of the superstructure itself ("army management"). All the elements of the superstructure are therefore directly or indirectly based on the stage that has been reached by the social productive forces.[136]

Besides his consistent inclusion of productive forces in the base, Bukharin's stringent assertion of the determined status of superstructure in all its variety makes him stand out among the Russian Marxists. His acute awareness of the theoretical advancement that Marxism represented is one of the reasons behind this. Thus, he explicates this advancement in the case of the institution of the state:

> The idea of the 'eternity' of this institution, its obligatory character for every form of human community, its universality and extra-historical nature, has been and still is prevalent as the main dogma of the majority of bourgeois theories of the state and of the law, independently of whether we are faced with the elaborations of 'sociology' or specific 'juridical formalism', which looks upon the state and law as an autonomous sphere developing according to its own laws and in no way fundamentally determined by other aspects of

> social development. With Marx and Engels the state is above all an historical category, and furthermore, historical in the dual sense of the word. That is, in the first place it only arises in accordance with definite social and historical conditions, together with the rise of private property and the division of society into classes. It 'dies out' together with the disappearance of classes. So it has its historical beginning and its historical end. Its existence does not coincide with the existence of society as such. It is not an indispensable attribute. In the second place, it is also historical in the sense that it really only exists in its concrete historical form of an adequate, historical-concrete, social-economic formation.[137]

Despite this insight into the contingent nature of the state and the law, the nature which precisely marks them as superstructural elements in the usage of Marx, Bukharin never confines his concept of superstructure to these elements alone. After his illuminating explanation, he juxtaposes Marxist theory of the state with the modern theories, by taking issue with the propositions of Kelsen, as Bukharin takes them as the “most important tendency in modern bourgeois state science". Here, his critical remarks are directly related to the theory of base and superstructure:

> Kelsen's treatment of the state as a quantity having only an 'ideal' existence, while the author here appeals to Marx who put the state in the superstructure, is based on the confusion of ideology and superstructure. The latter conception is the broader one. The state is a social-political superstructure, but the 'material attributes' (arms, the whole material and technical basis of the apparatus of compulsion, prisons, etc.) and the human organisation (army, bureaucracy) can only be declared to be phenomena with 'merely an ideal existence' from an obviously stupid standpoint.[138]

Conspicuously, Bukharin squarely confronts here, the problem of conceptual incongruity of superstructural elements resulting from the heterogeneity of superstructure. Ironically, Bukharin accuses Kelsen of not seeing the difference between the dissimilar elements lumped together in the concept of superstructure, but he himself does not allow this critical insight to penetrate further, to the point of problematising the established understanding of the concept of superstructure. If we do not expect such radical departures from him, Bukharin, with his scientific bent of mind, has a wealth of details to offer, showing how both the state and the cultural phenomena are related to the base. Often, he conceptualises the cultural phenomena associated with a particular mode of production as the "mode of representation", and presents that as the theory of Marx:

> Marx thought further that each 'mode of production ' (*produktionsweise*) had a corresponding 'mode of representation',one that was adequate and fitting to that mode of production. This he called *vorstellungsweise*, that is, a special way of thinking, a special type of ideology with all sorts of shapes and forms in the 'superstructure' of society [as distinct from its economic base].In other words a special type of 'spiritual culture'.[139]

This theorisation is notable in that it attempts to formulate culture with reference to the mode of production. Reserving the discussion of the merits of this formulation to the next chapter, we can say that, whatever the terms of his conceptual scheme, Bukharin has a remarkably rich understanding of the intimate connection between the psychological and material aspects of the societal change:

> parallel with the growth of the capitalist "body" proceeded a growth of the capitalist "spirit". All the fundamental traits of the economic psychology are reversed: in the pre-capitalist era, the basic economic notion of the nobility

> was that of a "decent" life, "according to station". "Money exists in order to be spent," wrote Thomas Aquinas; things were managed poorly, irrationally, without proper bookkeeping; tradition and routine predominated; the tempo of life was slow (almost every other day a holiday) initiative and energy were lacking. On the other hand, the capitalist psychology, which replaced the feudal-chivalrous psychology, is based on initiative, energy, briskness, rejection of routine, rational calculation and reflection, love of accumulating riches, etc. The complete upheaval in men's minds proceeded simultaneously with the complete upheaval in the production relations".[140]

But this dialectic of the spiritual and the material is not conceived on the lines of hierarchised compartments of different priorities, in the case of Bukharin. On the contrary, he visualises this relation in the light of his idea of equilibrium of social organs, which is consonant with the concept of morphological unity. This understanding has an inherent merit in the resistance it offers to simplistic interpretations of compartmental thinking, and in its intrinsic conceptual affinity to an organic model of society. The superiority of this heuristic model manifests itself in the relative sophistication of his expositions that are worthy of our sustained attention:

> As there is a certain equilibrium between the various forms of material labour (these various forms tend to equilibrium, as Marx puts it), so there must be a certain modicum of such equilibrium between the branches of ideological work, in fact, of the "superstructural" work in general. The coordination of these ideological "branches of production" is ultimately determined by the economic structure of society. Why, for instance, was so vast a quantity of national labor in ancient Egypt devoted to the construction of the huge pyramids, great Pharaonic statues, and other monuments of feudal art? For the

> simple reason that Egyptian society could not have maintained itself without constantly impressing upon the slaves and peasants the sublimity and the divine power of their rulers. In the absence of newspapers and telegraph agencies, art served as the ideological bond; it was therefore a *sine qua non* for this society and took an enormous share of the country's labor budget. . . . Art is but feebly developed in the United States of America of our day, while the same country is a pioneer in the study and application of the science of organized production as a whole (the Taylor system, vocational psychology, psycho-physiology of labor, etc.), because American capitalism does not need to resort to art in order to mould the minds of the people; this task is excellently performed by a capitalist newspaper press that has been perfected to the point of virtuosity; the question of a national production, a "scientific management", is of immense importance in the life of such a system.[141]

This awareness of the equilibrium of the social totality, in Bukharin is not conceived in a mechanical way. As we have already noted, in the case of Trotsky, Bukharin also advocates what could be called the theory of differential development of the superstructural elements, which clearly runs against the mechanical understanding of the social equilibrium:

> Certain forms of production usually develop much faster than others; in fact some such forms may be entirely absent, for certain reasons. The "superstructure" shows the same conditions: in Athens, in the Fifth Century B.C., technology fared badly, while speculative philosophy flourished. In America, in the Twentieth Century, technology is supreme and philosophy is neglected. Church hymns (a branch of the general field of music) were once universal, but it would be difficult to find many persons today - except a few moldy old men and pious old women - who are fond of the conventional

> hymns. The mental "shoots" of society are the highest outgrowth of the superstructure, and we naturally expect that shoot to burgeon that happens to receive the most generous supply of sap.[142]

These general remarks of Bukharin give us a foretaste of his unique understanding of the base and superstructure concepts. Notwithstanding the originality of his understanding, he firmly believes in the deterministic role of the base in its relation to various social institutions. And the way he explains this relation with reference to the various social institutions stands as a singular contribution in the Marxist tradition. Family, sex, science and even music and other creative productions come under his explanatory purview. To see how the institution of family is related to the economic base

> we need only to compare the peasant family, the workers' family, and the modern bourgeois family. The peasant family is a firm unit, for it is based directly on production. "There must be a woman in the house," for who else would milk the cows, feed the pigs, cook the food, tidy the rooms, wash, take care of the children, etc.? The economic significance of the family is so great that marriages are dictated by specific economic calculation: "there is no woman in the house". Economically considered, the members of the family are "workers" and "eaters". Built up on this comparatively rigid basis, the peasant family is itself characterized by patriarchal rigidity, when untouched by the "corrupting" influence of the city. The workers' family is different. The worker has no economy of his own. His "household" is a consumption economy only; it consumes its wages. Simultaneously, the city, with its saloons, restaurants, laundries, etc., makes the household largely superfluous. Finally, large-scale industry disintegrates the family, forcing the proletarian woman to work in a factory. More mobile, less stable forms of family relations arise from these

> circumstances. In the upper middle class, private property requires the preservation of the family. But the increasing parasitism of the bourgeoisie, and the growth of entire strata who live by cutting coupons, transform the wife into a thing, into a bedizened but very stupid plaything, a boudoir appurtenance. The various forms of marriage (monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, etc.) are likewise dependent on the conditions of economic evolution.[143]

This view of family as something determined by the economic base seems to be quite prevalent among the Russian Marxists of this time; so much so that some women activists with unconventional ideas, like Alexandra Kollontai, have also subscribed to this view without any reservation:

> Family and marriage are historical categories, phenomena which develop in accordance with the economic relations that exist at the given level of production. The form of marriage and of the family is thus determined by the economic system of the given epoch, and it changes as the economic base of society changes. The family, in the same way as government, religion, science, morals, law and customs, is part of the superstructure which derives from the economic system of society.[144]

As to Bukharin, he maintains the same deterministic stance, in the case of sexual relations also, which are obviously not reducible to the bonds sanctified by marriage:

> Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that sexual intercourse has practically never been limited to the family. The forms of prostitution, and their distribution, are again connected with the economy of society; we need only to point out the role of prostitution in the capitalist system. It seems reasonable to

> assume that communist society, which will definitely abolish private property and the enslavement of women, will witness the disappearance both of prostitution and the family.[145]

He subscribes to a similar determined character of other institutions like customs, morals, law and standards, but adds that they come into being as a result of human social existence:

> The other phases of the "superstructure" are a result of man's living in society, or in individual sections of society, in a condition either of outright conflict or of incomplete harmony. The expression of this condition is the social necessity of social norms, including customs, morals, law, and a great number of other standards ("rules of decent behavior", "etiquette", ceremonial, etc.; also the constitutions of the various societies, organizations, brotherhoods, etc.), all of which are produced by the accumulation of contradictions in a mature and complicated society.[146]

Even the holy realm of gods and religion could not escape his caustic comments that are always illuminated by the social milieu in question:

> The gods (the individual God also) have not always been disembodied spirits; they were fond of eating and drinking, they cohabited with women, assuming the form of a dove for the purpose, in the case of the "Holy Ghost". (In Greece, where homosexual practices were frequent, Zeus adopted the shape of an eagle in his intercourse with the boy Ganymede.) But the economic evolution which brought about an economy based on exchange and undermined the feudal political system, not only plucked from the god his eagle's and dove's feathers, but deprived him of his beard, his mustaches, and the other attributes of his

> previous incarnations. The pious bourgeois now believes in God as an unknown, unknowable, divine power on which all things depend, but with no external relation with man: the divinity is a spirit, not a crude aboriginal form.[147]

What applies to religion also holds true of the soul that was accorded a special status in all varieties of idealist philosophy:

> The religious superstructure is thus determined by the material conditions of human existence; its nucleus is the reflection of the social-political order of society. Other ideas group themselves about this nucleus, but their simple axis remains the social structure as transferred to the invisible world, and furthermore, as viewed from a specific class standpoint. "Soul" is here also a function of social "matter".[148]

In fact, more than the soul, science poses an intellectual challenge as a superstructural element, for a Marxist. Because relegating science to superstructure can have implications of diminishing the importance of science. Whereas, on the other hand, Marxism traditionally accorded a solemn place for science. But Bukharin could somehow manage this challenge as his understanding of the base includes productive forces:

> The content of science is determined in the last analysis by the technical and economic phase of society; these are the "practical roots", which explain why an identical scientific discovery, invention, or study, may be achieved simultaneously in different places, perhaps quite "independently". The "ideas" are said to be in the air, meaning that they grow out of the existing stage of life. That has been produced by the level of the productive forces.[149]

But the class relations that clearly form the base could not be satisfyingly explained in their relation to science by merely indicating the relation of science with productive forces. For this, Bukharin turns to the concept of mode of thought: "The *class characteristics* in the various branches of science also present themselves, reflecting either the *mode of thought* characteristic of the specific class, or the *interests of* the class. Mode of thought, interests, etc., are, in their turn, determined by the economic structure of society".[150]

Bukharin's deterministic stance is not confined to the institution of science, but envelops the finer realms of society also. The function of music in society is a case in point, which, in his view, depends ". . . on the state of the latter [i.e., society], on society's mood, means, views, feelings, etc. The explanation of the latter is found in the class alignment and the class psychology, which are ultimately based on the social economy and the conditions of its growth". He doesn't stop at relegating music to superstructure, but extends his line of thought to the point of introducing a new concept of superstructure *of the superstructure*: "as a 'superstructure of the superstructure', we may also include, in music, *the theory of musical technique*".[151] Sometimes, interestingly, he christens a similar idea as *superstructural technology*.

His frequent preoccupation with technology and the means of production as parts of the base — an idea that is not surprising in the light of the legacy bequeathed since the origins of Russian Marxism— does not preclude his appreciation of the role of production relations even in determining the creative process of artistic production. In fact, he recognises these relations as the integral component of artistic production:

> . . . in the case of the creative process, we also find a number of forms for the human relations involved, the oldest of which is the impersonal stage (individual names are not handed down), the so called "folk songs". Here the

> art work is produced in an elemental manner by thousands of nameless artists. Quite different is the case when the individual artist works "on order", by the command of a prince, king or wealthy man. The case is again different when the artist works as an artisan for an unknown market, on whose caprices he depends. An artistic production may also result when the latter assumes the form of a social service, etc. These forms of human relations are obviously based directly on the economic structure. In the slaveholding system, the musicians were slaves; not so long ago, we still had serf musicians in Russia, performing and composing not to satisfy a market requirement, but at the command of a feudal magnate.[152]

But, to understand the intensity and depth of Bukharin's determinism, we should turn to his critical engagement with Lunacharsky's ideas regarding art, which accorded some concession to the immanent psychological laws as determining the form, whereas the content is thought to be given by the social milieu:

> This point of view seems to us to be at least insufficient, if not wrong. As a matter of fact, if we consider the evolution of those elements that we regard as formal, we shall find that this evolution has by no means proceeded at a uniform rate. The music of the savage, the number of harmonious tones produced by him, was very poor; yet, the social evolution itself was not characterized by great speed; manifestly the musical supply lasted for a long time, did not produce "boredom" for a long time. . . . the formal elements become more complicated as a consequence of the *more complicated structure of life* for *an increasing intricacy of life alters the psycho-physiological "nature" of man.* The "crude" hearing of the savage is as much a function of social evolution as is the "fine" hearing of the inhabitants of the great capitalist

> cities with their extremely delicate nervous organization. The "immanent laws" therefore, are merely another phase of the social evolution. And since the social evolution is conditioned by the evolution of the productive forces, they constitute "in the last analysis" a function of these productive forces.[153]

He deploys a similar argument to show how the style of music is also determined by the productive forces:

> The religious music of the ancient Hindoo hymns (the *Vedas*) have not the same "style" or construction as— let us say — a French music-hall song or the battle-song of the revolution, the Marseillaise. These productions are the outgrowth of different environments, different social soils, and their form is consequently different; the religious hymn, the battle-song, the vaudeville song, cannot be composed or constructed in the same way; even their form expresses different feelings, thoughts, and views. This difference is a result of the difference in the situation of the societies or classes involved, and this difference is conditioned by the economic development and consequently, by the state of the productive forces.[154]

In spite of the overwhelming variety of superstructural elements we have seen so far, the most abstract kind of them is yet to be seen according to Bukharin. He gives that status to language and thought, about which we have already seen some thought-provoking observations made by Volosinov. Bukharin was unequivocally assertive about their superstructural status:

> *Language* and *thought,* the most abstract ideological categories of the superstructure, are also functions of social evolution. It has sometimes been fashionable among Marxists or pseudo-Marxists to declare that the origin of

> these phenomena has no relation with historical materialism. Kautsky, for example, went so far as to claim that the powers of human thought are almost unchanging. Such is not the case, however; these ideological forms, so extraordinarily important in the life of society, constitute no exception to the other ideological forms of the superstructure in their own origin and evolution.[155]

Bukharin's assertiveness is rather atypical, especially when we keep in mind that language was perhaps the most controversial element when regarded as part of the superstructure in the Russian Marxist tradition, and this is understandable against the backdrop of the studies and debates initiated by the Formalists among others. But, Bukharin's view is not wanting in substantiating arguments:

> The "fullness of life" results in the "richness" of language. As some shepherd tribes ("pure cattle breeders") have no subject of conversation but their cattle, owing to the fact that the low level of their productive forces restricts their entire life to the sphere of production, and their language therefore remains directly connected with the process of production. If, as a result of enhanced productive forces, a huge and complicated ideological superstructure has been erected, language will of course embrace this superstructure also, *i.e.*, the connection of language with the process of production is more and more indirect; the dependence of language on the technique of production is now an indirect dependence; the causal chain now runs *through* the dependence of the various superstructural forms on the process of production, and even the latter dependence may no longer be a direct one.[156]

A discernible reader of the passage may be struck by the fact that Bukharin's treatment of language is unique in that it speaks of language as if it is connected with both the

production and the superstructure. But, instead of acknowledging and investigating the complexity of the problem, he tries to do away with that by relegating these incongruous associations to different phases of the development of production. He finds it more convenient to explicate the style of language with his conceptual tools, and so he continues:

> . . . the character, the *style* of a language also changes with the conditions of the social life; but it is worthwhile to mention that the division of society into classes, groups, and occupations also impresses its mark on a language; the city-dweller has not the same language as the villager; the "literary language" is different from "common" speech. This difference may become so great as to prevent men from understanding each other; in many countries there are popular "dialects" that can hardly be understood by the cultured and wealthy classes; this is a striking example of the class cleavage in language. And the various occupations have their special languages; learned philosophers, accustomed to dwell in a world of subtle distinctions, write — and sometimes even speak — a language that only their fellows can understand. The desire to indulge in such forms of expression is partly due to the same cause that produces fashions in dress; namely, to distinguish these persons from "everyday mortals". Thus, a Russian noble landowner would show his "class" by bringing back with him from Paris, clothes of foreign design, an expensive mistress, and an accentuated pronunciation of the letter *r*. Wundt shows that the peculiar intonation of the Puritans also had this social character.[157]

With this class-specific understanding of language, Bukharin manages to categorise conveniently, language as a superstructural element and even an ideological element at that:

> [language] grows out of production, develops under the influence of the social evolution, *i.e.,* its evolution is determined by the natural law of social

> evolution. The function of language is to coordinate man's actions, for mutual understanding is the simplest form of adaptation, coordination, in relations, actions, even — to a certain extent — in feelings, etc. The fundamental import of the distinction between material production and ideological labor — or any other "superstructural" labor — should now be clear: Their mutual relation is in the fact that ideological labor is a derived quantity, also constituting a regulating principle.[158]

Here again, Bukharin's recognition of the coordinating function of language could easily run against the class-bound categorisations of the same. But again, he complacently preserves his conventional version of language as a superstructural element and never even attempts to take his potentially recalcitrant observations to their logical conclusion. This iconoclastic job, ironically, is left to be done by Stalin. By extending this line of reasoning on essentially the same aspects of language: 1) the relation of language with both production and superstructure 2) its relation with classes 3) the coordinating function of language even between classes, Stalin arrives at diametrically opposite conclusion— language is not a superstructure. His booklet *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* is significant for its sustained engagement with language in its relation with the concepts of base and superstructure.

The Hypertrophy of the Ideological Superstructure: Stalin's "Finishing" Touch

In an endnote, in my "Introduction", I have already cited D. I. Chesnokov's words, from his *Marxism-Leninism on Basis and Superstructure*, where he says that "Comrade Stalin has given in his work a complete and finished Marxist theory". I use the same expression in my title, though not in the same sense, to show how Stalin has finished off the original spirit of the base and superstructure thesis by his peculiarly mutilated formulations. This will be

done by a critical consideration of the booklet mentioned above.

In an unusual gesture that seems unimaginable in Stalinist Russia, Stalin himself comes to the rescue of language in this book, by exempting language from the common conceptual fate of getting relegated to the omnivorous superstructure. After an elaborate discussion of the uniqueness of language, he makes two statements in conclusion, in his categorical style: "a) A Marxist cannot regard language as a superstructure on the base; b) To confuse language and superstructure is to commit a serious error."[159] This is definitely the most astonishing conclusion; more so against the backdrop of the petrified, Soviet official Marxism.[160] One reason that drove Stalin to this conclusion is the co-ordinating role of language in all spheres of life:

> What then are the specific features of language, distinguishing it from other social phenomena? They consist in that language serves society as a means of intercourse between people, as a means for exchanging thoughts in society, as a means enabling people to understand one another and to co-ordinate joint work in all spheres of human activity, both in the sphere of production and in the sphere of economic relations, both in the sphere of politics and in the sphere of culture, both in social life and in everyday life. These specific features are characteristic only of language, and precisely because they are characteristic only of language, language is the object of study by an independent science— linguistics. If there were no such specific features of language, linguistics would lose its right to independent existence.[161]

This awareness of the specificity of language extends to its relation with the classes in the society. Here, Stalin goes so far as to say that language serves both the exploited and the exploiters:

> Language is not a product of one or another base, old or new, within the given society, but of the whole course of the history of the society and of the history of the bases for many centuries. It was created not by some one class, but by the entire society, by all the classes of the society, by the efforts of hundreds of generations. It was created for the satisfaction of the needs not of one particular class, but of the entire society, of all the classes of the society. Precisely for this reason it was created as a single language for the society, common to all members of that society, as the common language of the whole people. Hence the functional role of language, as a means of intercourse between people, consists not in serving one class to the detriment of other classes, but in equally serving the entire society, all the classes of society. This in fact explains why a language may equally serve both the old, moribund system and the new, rising system; both the old base and the new base; both the exploiters and the exploited.[162]

With this conviction about the all-serving role of language that transcends class barriers, Stalin sarcastically argues with his comrades who maintained that language is class-bound:

> Do these comrades think that the English feudal lords "for centuries" held intercourse with the English people through interpreters, that they did not use the English language, that there was no language common to all the English at that time, and that the French language in England was then anything more than the language of high society, current only in the restricted circle of the upper English aristocracy? How can one possibly deny the existence and the necessity of a language common to the whole people on the basis of anecdote "arguments" like these?[163]

The source of such grotesque misconceptions lies, according to Stalin, in confusing language for a superstructure and Stalin maintains that this view is alien to Marxism:

> The first mistake is that they confuse language with superstructure. They think that since the superstructure has a class character, language too must be a class language, and not a language common to the whole people. But I have already said that language and superstructure are two different concepts, and that a Marxist must not confuse them.[164]

Thus, again in his emphatic style, Stalin concludes, "The 'class character' of language formula is erroneous and non-Marxist."[165] But there are still more valid reasons for Stalin's exclusion of language from superstructure. His idea of superstructure as a short-lived and radically rebuilt social aspect following the changes in the base, also led him to this unconventional idea. Thus he says, ". . . the superstructure is the product of one epoch, the epoch in which the given economic base exists and operates. The superstructure is therefore short-lived; it is eliminated and disappears with the elimination and disappearance of the given base."[166] And the case of language is evidently different. In his words:

> In the course of the past thirty years the old, capitalist base has been eliminated in Russia and a new, socialist base has been built. Correspondingly, the superstructure on the capitalist base has been eliminated and a new superstructure created corresponding to the socialist base. The old political, legal and other institutions, consequently, have been supplanted by new, socialist institutions. But in spite of this the Russian language has remained basically what it was before the October Revolution.[167]

At some point of his argument, Stalin tries to liken language with the productive forces.[168] Still, he maintains conclusively that language is neither base nor superstructure.

This was possible partly because his view of the base does not include productive forces. Thus, for him, any superstructural element can have only indirect relation with productive forces i.e., through the production relations which constitute the base. Given the established, illegitimate legacy of including productive forces in the base, this is remarkable, and it has contributed towards appreciating the complexities involved in language:

> Unlike the superstructure, which is connected with production not directly, but through the economy, language is directly connected with man's productive activity, as well as with all his other activity in all his spheres of work without exception. That is why the vocabulary of a language, being the most sensitive to change, is in a state of almost constant change, and, unlike the superstructure, language does not have to wait until the base is eliminated, but makes changes in its vocabulary before the base is eliminated and irrespective of the state of the base.[169]

This awareness of the complexities involved in categorising language in terms of base and superstructure, did not lead to a different categorisation of language or to a re-evaluation of the concepts of base and superstructure. On the contrary, Stalin's engagement with these complexities ends up in a sort of destabilisation of the established categorising practice, without resulting in any novel illumination or clarification. When one of his comrades, Krasheninnikova, puts the question, "Your article convincingly shows that language is neither the base nor the superstructure. Would it be right to regard language as a phenomenon characteristic of both the base and the superstructure, or would it be more correct to regard language as an intermediate phenomenon?" Stalin's answer was elaborate, but remarkably inconclusive and sceptical:

> In brief: language cannot be included either in the category of bases or in the category of superstructures.

> Nor can it be included in the category of "intermediate" phenomena between the base and the superstructure, for such "intermediate" phenomena do not exist.
>
> But perhaps language could be included in the category of the productive forces of society, in the category, say, of instruments of production? Indeed, there does exist a certain analogy between language and instruments of production: instruments of production manifest, just as language does, a kind of indifference towards classes and can serve equally different classes of society, both old and new. Does this circumstance provide ground for including language in the category of instruments of production? No, it does not. . . .
>
> The point is that the similarity between language and instruments of production ends with the analogy I have just mentioned. But, on the other hand, there is a radical difference between language and instruments of production. This difference lies in the fact that whereas instruments of production produce material wealth, language produces nothing or "produces" words only. To put it more plainly, people possessing instruments of production can produce material wealth, but those very same people, if they possess a language but not instruments of production, cannot produce material wealth. It is not difficult to see that were language capable of producing material wealth, wind-bags would be the richest men on earth.[170]

In this way, Stalin finds the aspects of the base and the superstructure, and even the productive forces in language, and eventually his answer concludes in a gingerly open-ended way. He maintained a similar double-counting strategy, at least on one more occasion, during a meeting held in 1952, when he was questioned whether the Soviet state finance is part of

the base or the state-political superstructure. Here again, after some consideration of the issues involved, Stalin finds both the elements:

> ANSWER [Stalin:] Is it superstructure or base? /he laughs/. In general a lot has been said about the question of base and superstructure. There are people who even understand Soviet power as part of the base. In this question, if we avoid the abstract characteristics of the base and superstructure then it is necessary to begin with socialist property. The budget in fundamental ways differs from a capitalist budget. . . . This budget is for the whole economy. Therefore elements of the base predominate in our finances. But there are also elements of the superstructure in them, for example the administration of expenditures relates to the superstructure. Our state is the leader of the economy, here the budget includes not only profit of the administrative apparatus, but also the expenditures of the whole economy. The budget has elements of the superstructure, but economic elements prevail.[171]

These instances testify a fairly flexible and open-minded intellectual ambience in the discussions of base and superstructure, of this period, whatever the historical reasons behind that. In a foot note affixed to the above-mentioned question, Ethan Pollock says that: "Discussions of 'base and superstructure' were ubiquitous in the late Stalin period after the publication of *Marxism and Questions of Linguistics* in which Stalin declared that language was neither part of the economic base nor the superstructure."[172] Even Bukharin, with his most deterministic and wide-ranging version of base and superstructure, concedes in his essay written as early as 1933: "'economic structures' and their superstructures cannot express all the fullness of the concrete historical stream of full life in all its variety."[173] As strikingly expressed here, this observation has the potential to encourage an awareness of the restricted superstructure, by accentuating the fact that the thesis is not exhaustive. As a matter

of fact, Stalin's essay on language, which first appeared in *Pravda* in 1950, convincingly exemplifies Bukharin's uncommon observation, in the case of language. But the fact that Bukharin himself never interrogates whether these concepts are originally intended at all, to cover all the social spheres— though he squarely faces sometimes, the theoretical problems resulting from the established version of base and superstructure— indicates the intensity of authentication that the all-inclusive version of base and superstructure received by that time.

Stalin's theoretical position, when he exempted language from the procrustean practice of relegating an issue either to the base or to the superstructure, seems to represent a radical rupture with the traditional theorising. But a deeper gaze could reveal underlying continuities, although, of course, with some new insights and idiosyncrasies. Even from its spectacular beginnings in Plekhanov, we can observe in Russian Marxism, an ingrained ambivalence, in the difference between the attitudes taken towards the state as superstructure, and cultural factors as the superstructure. A more or less flexible attitude towards culture is always evidenced, though the manner in which this is achieved is specific to very individual theorist.

In his own way, Stalin extended this tradition innovatively to the case of language. On the other hand, he is equally assertive and inflexible about the status of state superstructure, as could be seen in his last cited lines. When it comes to the state, he is absolutely positive, and describes it as something that controls even economy. Thus, he faithfully follows and even extends the dual legacy bestowed by classical Russian Marxism. Indeed, state as superstructure is no less prominent in Stalin, though his statements about language are better-known for obvious reasons.

In his reply to Pokrovsky, speaking about Russia, he describes "monarchy", as "the political superstructure of landlordism".[174] Writing about "Revolution in China and Tasks of

the Comintern", Stalin says that it is "precisely because feudal survivals, with their entire militarist-bureaucratic superstructure, are the principal form of oppression in China, China is now passing through an agrarian revolution of gigantic power and scope."[175] So, he criticises the opposition that it "fails to understand that the entire military-bureaucratic machine which today so inhumanly robs and oppresses the Chinese peasantry is essentially a political superstructure on this combination of the *domination* of feudal survivals and feudal methods of exploitation with the existence of merchant capital in the countryside."[176] But the most notable expression of Stalin's views is to be found in a letter he wrote to Lenin on March, 1921, where he describes the Soviet government as a superstructure:

> During the last three days I have had the opportunity to read the symposium: *A Plan for the Electrification of Russia*. . . . An excellent, well-compiled book. A masterly draft of a really *single* and really *state* economic plan, *not in quotation marks*. The only Marxist attempt in our time to place the Soviet superstructure of economically backward Russia on a really practical technical and production basis, the only possible one under present conditions.[177]

What is striking here is not only that the technical and production aspects are spoken of as the basis, but also the suggestion that Marxism prescribes building the suitable technical basis and placing the superstructure over that. Against the backdrop of Stalin's project of building socialism in one country, disregarding the undeveloped state of productive forces, which inevitably implies the exertion of extra-economic forces; this statement is significant for the insight it offers into the theoretical underpinnings of Stalin's practical programme. Comparing this with Bukharin's perception of electrification provides an interesting contrast:

> The productive forces of socialist society constitute, as with the productive forces of any society, a combination of technology, that is, means of

> production, and people. The socialist productive forces are distinguished from all others above all by certain special features. The first such historically determined special feature is the transition to universal application of electric power, which unites everything that has been fragmented, which penetrates everywhere, ensuring technological unity in the many different specialised technological processes and pushing them forward toward their universal combination on the scale of society as a whole.[178]

Besides not ignoring the human element in the category of productive forces, this viewpoint emphasises the role of electricity in uniting the people and counteracting the fragmentation, instead of confining its view to the effects on Soviet state. One cannot help surmising what Bukharin would have said had he known about the internet and the modern communication revolution. Stalin, in his preoccupation with strengthening the state superstructure, calls the electrification plan, "the only Marxist attempt". If we compare this with Marx's statement about the change of superstructure, sooner or later, in the times of contradiction between productive forces and production relations, when the latter become obsolete and obstacles, Stalin's assertion sounds like a deviant version if not a diametrically opposite one.

What really matters here is not the deviation from the classical formulations of Marxism but the political position it entails. Understandably, these positions are not just personal fancies but policies greatly constrained by historical exigencies. It is remarkable to witness that the political outrages are almost always accompanied by theoretical indiscretions. But Stalin's idiosyncratic formulations are neither confined to nor deducible from political issues. His general formulations of the theory of base and superstructure are normally anomalous. In one of his early essays titled "Anarchism or Socialism", he says:

> If we can call the material side, the external conditions, being, and other phenomena of the same kind, the *content*, then we can call the ideal side, consciousness and other phenomena of the same kind, the *form*. Hence arose the well-known materialist proposition: in the process of development content precedes form, form lags behind content.
>
> . . . in Marx's opinion, economic development is the 'material foundation' of social life, its *content*, while legal-political and religious-philosophical development is the 'ideological form' of this content, its 'superstructure,' [179]

Fortunately, even the introductory expositions of Marxism would not resort to such confounding formulations now. Indeed Stalin's own statements of the later period are more refined. In his *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics,* for instance, he states:

> the superstructure is a product of the base, but this by no means implies that it merely reflects the base, that it is passive, neutral, indifferent to the fate of its base, to the fate of the classes, to the character of the system. On the contrary, having come into being, it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its base to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing its utmost to help the new system to finish off and eliminate the old base and the old classes.[180]

Notwithstanding the interpretive refinements of this sort, even in this work that is usually taken as representing his intellectual maturity, Stalin offers a thoroughly idiosyncratic formulation of the concepts of base and superstructure: "The base is the economic structure of society at the given stage of its development. The superstructure is the political, legal, religious, artistic, philosophical views of society and the political, legal and other institutions corresponding to them."[181] For a Marxist, methodologically committed to materialism, it

comes like a shock to learn that the political and legal institutions should correspond to the ideological views of society and not vice versa.

If one is shocked too much to the extent of not believing what is read, or to prepare oneself to take it as a fortuitous but unfortunate formulation, Stalin offers another statement, a few pages after this, which reads like an affirmative paraphrase of the first formulation: "The specific features of the base consist in that it serves society economically. The specific features of the superstructure consist in that it serves society by means of political, legal, aesthetic and other ideas and provides society with corresponding political, legal and other institutions."[182] The message is clear: the ideological views not only constitute superstructure but they also "provide" the "corresponding political, legal and other institutions". This obviously reads like a partial antithesis to Marx, when he says that the production relations are ". . . the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness." For Marx: superstructure is, at least primarily, legal and political institutions; and some ideological forms correspond to it. For Stalin: superstructure is, at least primarily, ideological views; and the political and legal institutions correspond to them.

On the whole, Stalin's version of base and superstructure involves a double inversion: 1) regarding the relation of state superstructure with the economic base, it maintains that it is the state which has to build the suitable economic base; 2) concerning the status of ideology and the superstructural institutions, it states that the institutions should correspond to the ideologies. In both the cases, the infiltration of a peculiarly idealistic mode of thought into Marx's consistently materialist theses is patently noticeable.

Stalin's peculiar idealist twist, given to the base and superstructure thesis, is unprecedented in its explicit idealistic leanings. Notwithstanding its innovative appearance,

this distorting deviation of the original Marxist thesis, with its undue emphasis on ideological aspects as something more primary than the institutions, and even as providers of the institutions, is in fact very much conducive to and compatible with the socio-cultural reconstructive policy pursued by Stalin, i.e., the construction of advanced social institutions, disregarding the material limitations of the then backward Russia, which inevitably leads to resorting to coercive measures. A remarkable revelation of the umbilical association between coercive political policies and idealistic philosophical positions![183]

Still, in a way, Stalin's seemingly transgressive reformulation could be seen as the prolongation and even as a culmination of the established tradition. Because, ideology— for which Marx actually assigned a place outside the superstructure, though characterising it as a phenomenon corresponding to the social relations— is first upgraded to the status of a conceptual colleague alongside the institutional entities of politics and law, long before Stalin. By further upgrading that to a more majestic position in relation to the institutional inhabitants of the superstructure, and by assigning it a solemner task of providing the society with the institutions themselves, which are simultaneously downgraded to a compliantly corresponding role, Stalin has brought the time-honoured ideological-inclusivist tradition to its perfection, though with the result the whole model now stands topsy-turvy vis-à-vis its archetype in Marx. It is far off the point to take all this as mere ideological distortion or conceptual clumsiness, for it is not difficult to see that the new role of ideology as the provider of institutions, corresponds conspicuously with the political exigencies of Stalin as an ideologue in the role of an institution-builder. Ironically, but not unfortunately, this distorted thesis unwittingly offers a spectacular demonstration of the original thesis that ideological issues correspond to socio-economic exigencies.

If Stalin's predominantly ideological superstructure is explicitly anomalous, the

response it has received in Soviet Russia is more so. In the land of official Marxism, the evident divergence of this formulation is not even mentioned, let alone being considered for critical analysis. On the contrary, this conceptual anomaly is consistently canonised and treated as the norm in the literature of the later period. I will cite two entries from the monumental reference work, *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, originally published in Soviet Russia, which has the entries in bold font:

> **BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE**, . . . The base of a society is the totality of the historically determined relations of production. The superstructure is the totality of the ideological relations, views, and institutions; it includes law and the state, as well as morality, religion, philosophy, art, and the political and legal forms of consciousness and the institutions corresponding to them. [184]
>
> **SUPERSTRUCTURE**, a concept within historical materialism that signifies the totality of ideological relationships, views and institutions in a given society. The superstructure embraces the State, the political and legal forms of consciousness, and the corresponding institutions, as well as morals, religion, philosophy, and art.[185]

Thus this version of ideological superstructure has come to prevail over the originally institutional superstructure and has gained currency and acceptance outside Soviet Russia also.[186] As for Stalin, given his belief in the pre-eminently ideological superstructure, it is not strange that he emphatically maintained that culture is class-bound and superstructural, though he excluded language from the same fate. He also warns that they should not be confused:

> The mistake these comrades make . . . is that they identify and confuse language with culture. But culture and language are two different things.

> Culture may be bourgeois or socialist, but language, as a means of intercourse, is always a language common to the whole people and can serve both bourgeois and socialist culture.[187]

With this class-specific view of culture combined with the belief in the creative power of ideology (which greatly overlaps with culture) with respect to institutions, Stalin pursued an instrumentalist policy towards cultural issues, the notoriety of which has been the subject for a considerable body of academic output. Already in his “Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress” dated January 26, 1934, he declares the progress in this direction: "The facts show that we have already laid the foundations of a socialist society in the U.S.S.R., and it only remains for us to erect the superstructures— a task which undoubtedly is much easier than that of laying the foundations of a socialist society."[188] However, an earlier contrastive attitude towards the cultural issues is voiced by Lenin when he writes that:

> A cultural problem cannot be solved as quickly as political and military problems. . . . In a period of acute crisis it is possible to obtain political victory within a few weeks. It is possible to obtain victory in war in a few months. But it is impossible to achieve cultural victory in such a short time. By its very nature it requires a longer period; and we must adapt ourselves to this longer period, plan our work accordingly, and display the maximum of perseverance, persistence and method.[189]

When the leadership of the young revolutionary country changes from Lenin to Stalin, involving dramatic historical ironies which again are a source for a number of studies, the instrumentalist attitude towards culture is crowned as a socialist policy. A. A. Zhdanov, the authorized successor of Stalin's cultural policies, exuberantly asserts in the Soviet Writers Congress, held in 1934, "Our Soviet literature is strong by virtue of the fact that it is serving a

new cause — the cause of socialist construction", and adds devoutly "Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of human souls." And the rest of his speech sounds like an adulatory exegesis of Stalin's bathetic metaphor.[190]

Again this attitude came to be considered paradigmatic, especially in the erstwhile, so-called socialist countries. Thus, Kim Il Sung, the leader of North Korea, reiterates this phrase faithfully, in his talk with writers and artists, on 30th June, 1951:

> Our writers and artists, as the engineers of the human soul, should vividly represent in their works the lofty patriotism and staunch fighting spirit of our people and their unshakable conviction of final victory, and should see that their works serve our fighting people as a powerful weapon and as a great inspiration spurring them on towards ultimate victory.[191]

This sort of propagandist cultural policy, along with the resulting stifled literary growth, is vehemently criticised in the West by both Marxists and others alike. But what is never properly appreciated is that, this practical policy and the theoretical position regarding the base and superstructure thesis are just the two sides of the same coin: one side is the practice; the other is the theoretical justification for the same. Though some methodological refinements are constantly proposed for the interpretation of the concept, the very definition of superstructure is never radically questioned. Given the vociferous disagreements between the dogmatically ossified official Marxism and the critically oriented western Marxism in almost all aspects, this tacit agreement is remarkably unusual. It is time we reconsidered this critically and reconstructed the thesis radically differently from its present historically mutilated form, and as Marx said famously, "to be radical is to grasp the root of the matter",[192] and the root lies in the proper analysis and apprehension of the base and superstructure thesis.

Notes

[1] Terry Eagleton, “Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams”, *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989) 165.

[2] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected works*, vol. 40 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983) 61-3.

[3] Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought,* vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 203-4.

[4] But one must not think that the politics of blurbs and book advertisements should always be in favour of the books. For the case of such politics attacking the book itself, see: Erich Fromm’s review of *Trotzky's Diary in Exile — 1935*, published by the Harvard University Press where he writes: “The gratitude we owe to the Harvard Press for rescuing the picture of Trotzky for the present and for future generations does not, however, prevent me from expressing shock and dismay at the fact that the Harvard University Press advertised the book recently saying: ‘If (the diary) reveals the anguish and loneliness of his exile, often lays *bare his underlying fanaticism and selfishness,* and offers positive, historically important commentary on both local and international politics’ [Fromm’s Italics]. Quite aside from the fact that it is most unusual that a publisher would criticize his own author by derogatory remarks in his advertising copy, this procedure is unforgivable because there is nothing in the diary which 'lays bare' Trotzky's selfishness” [Erich Fromm, *Trotzky’s Diary in Exile — 1935*, *Marxists’ Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2006, n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011].

[5] Frederick Engels, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 205. In his article on Marx's relation with American journalism Shenk writes with reference to the same book: "Technically, though, Marx was not the author.

He was not fluent in English and did not have confidence in his ability to write it. Engels had written the article, which became a twenty-part series, at Marx's request. The two discussed the subject extensively, and the article represented Marx's views accurately. But the true authorship was kept a secret from the editors of the *Tribune*, who ran the article under Marx's byline. Engels and Marx kept the secret so well that the real author was not known until the release of their correspondence well into the twentieth century" [This article, without clear bibliographic details is accessed on 3 Mar. 2011, and is available on the net, at the site *Centre for History and Economics* , 1999, based at Magdalene College and King's College, University of Cambridge, at the URL: http://www-histecon.kings.cam.ac.uk/docs/Shenk_AmericanJournalism-Marx.pdf >].This view is typical of the trend that is predisposed to equate Marx and Engels. What is remarkable here is the tenacity that is not undermined by the awareness of true authorship and of the different linguistic abilities of Marx and Engels.

[6] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks (*New York: International Publishers, 1989) 385.

[7] Gramsci incorrectly mentions this as Marx's view at the very beginning of the above essay, but (in page 402) he mentions this again as the opinion of Engels. However, the conscientious editors Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith have already indicated this in the footnotes.

[8] Joseph O'Malley and Keith Algozin, ed., *Rubel on Karl Marx: Five Essays* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 17.

[9] Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: the Philosophy of Karl Marx* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 1.

[10] Tom Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism: the Philosophy of Karl Marx* 5.

[11] Tom Rockmore, *Marx After Marxism: the Philosophy of Karl Marx* 6.

[12] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 29.

[13] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 106.

[14] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 292.

[15] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) 111.

[16] Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976) 33.

[17] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in one Volume (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 375.

[18] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* 410.

[19] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 40 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) 304.

[20] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 464.

[21] Stuart Hall, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor", *The Communist University of London: Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977) 52.

[22] Stuart Hall 53. In the article "Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy", titled analogous to the title of a book by Engel, Gareth Stedman Jones also writes about the social and intellectual backdrop to the letters of Engels: "The most important political and scientific task that was bequeathed to Engels in 1883 was to provide an explanation of this mechanism

[between the base and superstructure]. It is evident that already by 1880 the task was becoming urgent. The chief threat no longer came from the followers of Lassalle, Bakunin or Proudhon, all of whom had been considerably influenced by Hegel. The new danger came from the positivism of Dühring and Buckle, and the monism of Haeckel—all of which, filtered into historical materialism, tended to reduce it to a mechanistic economic determinism, in which the superstructures became a virtually automatic reflex of the base. The urgency of combating this conception is reflected in virtually every letter and article of Engels concerning historical materialism from the mid 1880s onwards" [Gareth Stedman Jones, "Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy", *New Left Review*, 1.79 (1973): 31].

[23] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 394-395. "Engels's best known 'revisionist' formulations are contained in his letter. . ." is the perceptive comment of Derek Sayer about this letter, though he doesn't mean this regarding the restriction that Marx carried out [Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 6].

[24] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* 441-442.

[25] Maynard Solomon, *Marxism and Art* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979) 33.

[26] It is well-known that Althusser propounds his theory of *overdetermination* with reference to this ultimate determinism: ". . . the economy is determinant, but *in the last instance*, Engels is prepared to say, in the long run, the run of History. But History 'asserts itself' through the multiform world of the superstructures, from local tradition to international circumstance. Leaving aside the *theoretical solution* Engels proposes for the problem of the relation between determination *in the last instance* — the economic — and those determinations

imposed by the superstructures — national traditions and international events — it is sufficient to retain from him what should be called the *accumulation of effective determinations* (deriving from the superstructures and from special national and international circumstances) *on the determination in the last instance by the economic.* It seems to me that this clarifies the expression *overdetermined contradiction,* which I have put forward, *this* specifically because the existence of overdetermination is no longer *a fact* pure and simple, for in its essentials we have related it *to its bases,* even if our exposition has so far been merely gestural. This *overdetermination* is inevitable and thinkable as soon as the real existence of the forms of the superstructure and of the national and international conjuncture has been recognized -- an existence largely specific and autonomous, and therefore irreducible to a pure *phenomenon.* We must carry this through to its conclusion and say that this overdetermination does not just refer to apparently unique and aberrant historical situations (Germany, for example), but is *universal* ; the economic dialectic is never active *in the pure state* ; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc. -- are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes" [Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: New Left, 1969) 112-3].

[27] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works,* in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 162.

[28] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* 441-442.

[29] Derek Sayer puts forward a similar argument when he says that "although Engels argued against outright economic determinism, the way in which he did so . . . inadvertently reinforced an economistic, technologistic conception of the later [i.e. the base]" [Derek Sayer

17]. In fact, the most disastrous consequence of Engels's arguments is the revival, reinforcement, and the renovation of the heterogeneous superstructure that is more in line with the theories found in the *German Ideology* than with the later refinements proposed by Marx. But about this Sayer has nothing to say.

[30] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* 396. In a footnote that discusses this statement of Engels, Lucio Colletti makes some highly pertinent remarks: "It should be pointed out that these 'self-critical' statements by Engels (which, incidentally, seriously perplexed writers as diverse as Plekhanov and Max Adler) are not easy to interpret. Taken literally, they would seem to signify that there is, in Marx's work, an over-emphasis on the 'economic factor'. But Engels himself, later in the letter, excludes this interpretation ('But when it came to presenting a section of history, that is to making a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error was possible'). The fault to which he refers would seem then to apply to general pronouncements on historical materialism. Yet it is notable how rare such pronouncements are in Marx's work and how they (in *Theses on Feuerbach*, Part One of *The German Ideology*, etc.), except perhaps in one case [Colletti has the 1859 preface in mind here], are unscathed by this type of criticism" [Lucio Colletti, *Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974) 64].

[31] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* 433-434.

[32] This overemphasis on the role of Engels continued unabated in the modern times, as could be seen, for instance, in Lichtheim's study of *Marxism*: "Engels is thus in a very real sense the father both of Social-Democratic orthodoxy and of the Leninist faith in industrialisation, He could even be viewed as a distant precursor of Fabian socialism, were it not for his scepticism about the likelihood of a peaceful transition, and his dislike of the pre-1848

'socialists' . . ." [George Lichtheim, *Marxism: An Historical and Critical Study* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) 60].

[33] Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979) 88.

[34] Fredrick Engels, Introduction, *The Class Struggles in France: 1848 to 1850*, by Karl Marx (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983) 8.

[35] Franz Mehring, "Part III", *On Historical Materialism*, London, New Park Press, 1975, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2001, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[36] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works,* in one Volume (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 574.

[37] Karl Kautsky, *Frederick Engels: His Life, His Work and His Writings*, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2002, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[38] Karl Kautsky, "The Social Revolution", *The Social Revolution and on the Day after the Social Revolution*, volume 1, part 1, Charles Kerr & Co., 1903, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[39] Karl Kautsky, "The System of Production and Its Superstructure", *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History, Charles Kerr & Co., 1906, n. pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[40] For Plekhanov also this version of interaction is axiomatic and so he writes that "everything hitherto said by 'critics' of Marx concerning the supposed one-sidedness of Marxism and its alleged disregard of all other 'factors' of social development but the economic, has been prompted by a failure to understand the role assigned by Marx and

Engels to the interaction between 'basis' and 'superstructure'" [Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 155].

[41] Karl Kautsky, "Book Three: The Jews", *Foundations of Christianity,* Russell and Russell, 1953, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[42] About Bernstein's career as the literary executor, the remarks of J. B. S. Haldane in his preface to Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* might be of interest: "It was a great misfortune, not only for Marxism, but for all branches of natural science, that Bernstein, into whose hands the manuscript came when Engels died in 1895, did not publish it. In 1924 he submitted it (or part of it) to Einstein, who, though he did not think it of great interest from the standpoint of modern physics, was on the whole in favour of publication. If, as seems likely, Einstein only saw the essay on electricity, his hesitation can easily be understood, since this deals almost wholly with questions which now seem remote. The manuscript was first edited by Riazanov, and printed in 1927. However, Adoratski's edition of 1935 is more satisfactory, as several passages which made nonsense in the earlier edition have now been deciphered" [J. B. S. Haldane, preface, *Engels' Dialectics of Nature,* 1939, *n. pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011].

[43] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *Evolutionary Socialism***,** 1907, *n. pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[44] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *n. pag*.

[45] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *n. pag*.

[46] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *n. pag*.

[47] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *n. pag*.

[48] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *n. pag*.

[49] Eduard Bernstein, "The Fundamental Doctrines of Marxist Socialism"**,** *n. pag*.

[50] Lucio Colletti, *Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974) 64.

[51] Lucio Colletti, *Bernstein and the Marxism of the Second International* 65. The use of the terms *structure* and *superstructure* instead of base and superstructure seems to be common in the Italian Marxist tradition. Thus Gramsci almost always uses these terms which are not so common in this context in other countries.

[52] Antonio Labriola, "In Memory of the Communist Manifesto",*Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** *n. pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[53] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History*, *n. pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[54] Joseph Dietzgen, a remarkably self-learned man of the working class and a contemporary of Marx and Engels, also shows an awareness of the unique importance of these historical factors and the significance of Marx's theory of base and superstructure that revolutionizes the concept of history with respect to these factors and writes: "The clearing up of speculation helped Feuerbach to give us his wonderful analysis of religion, and enabled Marx to penetrate the deepest recesses of law, politics and history" [Joseph Dietzgen, "Philosophy and Religion for the Masses", *German Essays on Socialism in the Nineteenth Century: Theory, History, and Political Organization, 1844-1914* (New York: Continuum, 1990) 271].

[55] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Part II, Chapter VIII, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[56] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Part II, Chapter VIII, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[57] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Part II, Chapter VI, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[58] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Part II, Chapter IX, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[59] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) 14. The direct theoretical influence on Eagleton might be Althusser, in this respect— an influence that is usually productively manifest in his case. And the critical role of Labriola is effectively assumed by E. P. Thompson, in modern times, when he writes caustically that "Althusser's constructions are actively *wrong* and thoroughly misleading. His notion of 'levels' motoring around in history at different speeds and on different schedules is an academic fiction. For all these 'instances' and 'levels' are in fact human activities, institutions, and ideas. We are talking about men and women, in their material life, in their determinate relationships, in their experience of these, and in their self-consciousness of this experience" [E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory: Or an Orrery of Errors* (London: Merlin Press, 1995) 131].

[60] Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1915) 13-4.

[61] Cited by Benedetto Croce 28-9.

[62] Benedetto Croce 37.

[63] Antonio Labriola, *Socialism and Philosophy,* Section IX, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[64] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Part II, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[65] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Chapter X, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[66] See Antonio Labriola, *Socialism and Philosophy*, Appendixes, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[67] Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov", *Revolutionary Silhouettes*,n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[68] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 163.

[69] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974) 414.

[70] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 272.

[71] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 232.

[72] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974) 618.

[73] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 275.

[74] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 156.

[75] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 157.

[76] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 462-3.

[77] Cited by Lames Guillaume in his essay " A Biographical Sketch" in the book *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, (New York: Vintage Books,1972) 26. As to the claim of Bakunin about the intellectual sources for the concept of politico-legal superstructure, I would like to quote Marx from his *Capital* where he incidentally refers to "Plato's Republic", as a book where "division of labour is treated . . . as the formative principle of the state". Unless we have a memory like a sieve, and forget that the division of labour relations are nothing but the production relations, it is not difficult to realise that Marx is referring to an intellectual source to the base and superstructure thesis here[Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 346].

[78] Sam Dolgoff, introduction, *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, (New York: Vintage Books,1972) 3-4. In contrast, the real significance of the idea of politics and law as superstructure is often seen in the writings of Marx's contemporaries, as demonstrated by Bakunin himself. But it will be a grave mistake to think that Bakunin is appreciative of Marx's theory of the state. In fact the crux of the dispute between Marxism and Anarchism lies precisely here. Let's take a glimpse of the dispute as presented by one of the famous contemporary proponents of Anarchism, Noam Chomsky, who writes about the responsibility of the intellectuals in his article "Philosophers and Public Philosophy":

"Perhaps the most important role of the intellectual since the enlightenment has been that of unmasking ideology, exposing the injustice and repression that exists in every society that we know, and seeking the way to a new and higher form of social life that will extend the possibilities for a free and creative life. We can confidently expect this role to be abandoned as the intellectual becomes the administrator of a new society. These observations are hardly novel. I am simply paraphrasing a classical anarchist critique, of which typical expressions are the following:

Commenting on Marxian doctrine, Bakunin had this to say:

'According to the theory of Mr. Marx, the people not only must not destroy [the state] but must strengthen it and place it at the complete disposal of their benefactors, guardians, and teachers-the leaders of the Communist party, namely Mr. Marx and his friends, who will proceed to liberate [mankind] in their own way. They will concentrate the reins of government in a strong hand, because the ignorant people require an exceedingly firm guardianship; they will establish a single state bank, concentrating in its hands all commercial, industrial, agricultural and even scientific production, and then divide the masses into two armies—industrial and agricultural—under the direct command of the state engineers, who will constitute a new privileged scientific-political estate'" [Noam Chomsky, "Philosophers and Public Philosophy"**,** *Ethic*, 79.1 (1968): 5-6, *JSTOR*, web, 3 Mar. 2011].

Even if Chomsky is just reiterating Bakunin's opinion as he claims, he is only reiterating a gravely distorted opinion. In his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, which is considered one of the mature statements of Marx, he states categorically that real freedom consists in subordinating and restricting the sway of the state: "It is by no means the aim of the workers, who have got rid of the narrow mentality of humble subjects, to set the state free. . . . Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely

subordinate to it; and today, too, the forms of state are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the ‘freedom of the state’” [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in 3 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970) 25].

After a few lines (page 28) we also find Marx writing, “Government and church should rather be equally excluded from any influence on the school. Particularly, indeed, in the Prusso-German Empire (and one should not take refuge in the rotten subterfuge that one is speaking of a 'state of the future'; we have seen how matters stand in this respect) the state has need, on the contrary, of a very stern education by the people”. August H. Nimtz. Jr. has convincingly brought home the democratic credentials of Marx and Engels with copious citations in the book *Marx and Engels: Their contribution to the Democratic Breakthrough* from which the epigraph to the previous chapter is taken.

In fact Marx and Engels formulate the difference between Bakunin and themselves precisely in some other context: “Anarchy, then, is the great war-horse of their master Bakunin, who has taken nothing from the socialist systems except a set of labels. All socialists see anarchy as the following program: once the aim of the proletarian movement, i.e., abolition of classes, is attained, the power of the State, which serves to keep the great majority of producers in bondage to a very small exploiter minority, disappears, and the functions of government become simple administrative functions. The Alliance [lead by Bakunin] reverses the whole process. It proclaims anarchy in proletarian ranks as the most infallible means of breaking the powerful concentration of social and political forces in the hands of the exploiters. Under this pretext, it asks the International, at a time when the old world is seeking a way of crushing it, to replace its organization with anarchy” [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Fictitious Splits in the International", *Collected Works*, vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) 121-2].

Chomsky, whose anti-elitist views about the demystifying role of intellectuals are profoundly inspiring in the above-mentioned article, also writes here (page 8) that “The substantive content of the law is determined, to a significant extent, by the level of intellectual culture and moral perception of the society is [most probably ‘in’ is misprinted as ‘is’ here] general. If philosophers feel that these matters are part of their concern, then they must contribute to shaping the principles and understanding that determine what the interpretation of the law will be in concrete instances.”

In contrast to this essentially elitist view of law, Marx, with his view of law as a dependent on economy, puts forward a demystifying account in his essay on “The Nationalisation of the Land": “In the progress of history the conquerors found it convenient to give to their original titles, derived from brute force, a sort of social standing through the instrumentality of laws imposed by themselves.

At last comes the philosopher and demonstrates that those laws imply and express the universal consent of mankind. If private property in land be indeed founded upon such an universal consent, it will evidently become extinct from the moment the majority of a society dissent from warranting it” [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) 131].

It will be interesting to know, on the other hand, that Jacques Derrida also recognises the intimate and innate connection between law and violence when he writes that “For a critique of violence— that is to say, an interpretive and meaningful evaluation of it— to be possible, one must first recognize meaning in a violence that is not an accident arriving from outside the law. That which threatens law already belongs to it, to the right to law [*au droit au droit*], to the origin of law” [Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: *The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’”, Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (London: Routledge, 1992) 35]. And in the

same essay (page 13) Derrida invokes the metaphor of superstructure and argues for "a desedimentation of the superstructures of law that both hide and reflect the economic and political interests of the dominant forces of society".

[79] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 463.

[80] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 167-8.

[81] This confusion is inherited by and incorporated even in the contemporary Marxism, and thus S. H. Rigby writes in his *Marxism and History* that "Marx's Historical materialism is often seen as consisting of little more than the claim that society's relations of production are the 'base', upon which is built a 'superstructure' of law, politics and Ideology" [S. H. Rigby, *Marxism and History: A critical Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester U P, 1998) 177]. Chris Harman also hints at the fact that the confusion regarding the theory of base and superstructure leads to the confusion of Marx's whole general theory in the passage taken as the epigraph to this chapter.

[82] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 168.

[83] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, in 45 volumes, vol. 19 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963) 25.

[84] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, in 45 volumes, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962) 151. Franz Jakubowski sheds some light in this regard when he says "it is possible to distinguish the contrasting pair 'base and superstructure' from other such pairs. For example, base and superstructure should not be identified with that other

contrasting pair, being and consciousness. Social being is certainly founded in the economy, but it is not restricted to it; social relationships, though essentially they are determined economically, reappear in the various concrete forms of the superstructure, for example in legal, political or religious relations" [Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*, 1970, Libcom.org, web, 2 Mar 2010].

Karl Mannheim also made some illuminating remarks on this issue when he says in some other context: "The hypothesis of the so-called historical materialism is, however, of an entirely different character. While the expression bears the imprint of its polemic origin, it is but another name for the economic interpretation of history. Whatever its merit may be, the insistence on the primacy of the economic 'substructure' over the ideological 'superstructure' does not posit the primacy of matter over ideas, but the priority of one type of social interaction (the economic) over others. Both species of action involve ideation, communication, as well as biological needs and a material apparatus" [Karl Mannheim, "Towards the Sociology of the Mind: An Introduction", *Essays on the Sociology of Culture*, *Collected Works*, vol. 7 (New York: Routledge, 2003) 35].

Shlomo Avineri opines in a similar way when he writes that "the distinction between' material base' and 'superstructure' is not a distinction between 'matter' and 'spirit' (as Engels in his later writings would have had it), but between conscious human activity, aimed at the creation and preservation of the conditions of human life, and human consciousness, which furnishes reasons, rationalizations and modes of legitimation and moral justification for the specific forms that activity takes" [Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (London: Cambridge UP, 1968) 76]. It is remarkable that, even after this injunction, Avineri still implies that superstructure is a sphere pertaining to the "human consciousness".

[85] Raymond Williams, *Marx on Culture* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1990) 20.

[86] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, in 45 volumes, vol. 8 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962) 152.

[87] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, in 45 volumes, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962) 128.

[88] N. K. Krupskaya, "After the Second Congress", *Reminiscences of Lenin*, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[89] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, in 45 volumes, vol. 22 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1964) 262.

[90] Clara Zetkin, "Lenin on the *Women's Question*", International Publishers, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011. Two slightly different translations are available for the same text, on this website, and I have drawn from the two, for this quotation, to facilitate intelligibility.

[91] Clara Zetkin, "Lenin on the *Women's Question*", n. *pag*.

It would be a matter of interest to know that Ranganayakamma, a renowned Marxist writing in Telugu, whose views are fervently critical of the position represented by Zetkin as cited in the above instance, also considers marriage a superstructural issue, although in a different context. Discussing the changes needed for the abolition of caste, she writes that "superstructural changes like intercaste marriages are also part of this change. But intercaste marriage cannot become a generalized phenomenon unless Property relations and Division of Labour are radically transformed" [Ranganayakamma, "Are Marxian categories adequate to understand 'Gender' and 'Caste' questions?", trans. B.R. Bapuji, n. *pag, ranganayakamma.org,* web, 10 Mar. 2012. <http:// ranganayakamma.org/Gender_caste.htm>].

[92] Leon Trotsky, "From a Scratch –To the Danger of Gangrene", *In Defence of Marxism,* Part 1, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[93] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1991) 178.

[94] It is such comments of Trotsky that induced F. R. Leavis to call him "a cultivated as well as an unusually intelligent man" and to surmise that the intelligence had "something to do with his misfortune". In spite of his laudatory tone, Leavis considers wrongly that the views proclaimed by Trotsky are of an "un-Marxian" nature. For references and a criticism of Leavis's view, see the Preface written by Prof. Anand Prakash to the book *Literature and Revolution* cited above.

[95] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1991) 127. Bukharin also makes a similar point when he writes: "Each art has certain special earmarks: for instance, the material objects involved in singing are reduced to a minimum (there are notes, but the 'musical instrument' remains the human voice alone); in architecture the role of the material, the tools, the purpose of the buildings (temple, residence, palace, museum, etc.), is of immense importance; the student must not neglect such distinctions, but we shall always find that the following holds, good: *directly or indirectly, art is ultimately determined in various ways by the economic structure and the stage of the social technology."* [N. I. Bukharin, "The Equilibrium Between the Elements of Society", *Historical Materialism - a System of Sociology,* n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011].

It is worth noting here, that this preoccupation with the technique of architecture is caused, on the one hand, by the inclusion of art in superstructure, and on the other hand, by

the distorted notion of technology as part of the base — a double error unequivocally subscribed by Trotsky and Bukharin.

[96] Leon Trotsky, *The Curve of Capitalist Development (A Letter to the Editors in Place of the Promised Article)*, n. *pag*, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, 2006, web, 3 Mar. 2011. Walter Benjamin makes a similar point with reference to the so-called cultural superstructure in the foreword to his seminal article *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*: "The transformation of the superstructure, which proceeds far more slowly than that of the substructure, has taken more than half a century to bring out the change in the conditions of production in all spheres of civilization" [Walter Benjamin, foreword, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, 2008) 2].

[97] Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1991) 167. Whereas Trotsky speaks about the "sexual basis" of the "superstructure of love", Shulamith Firestone, in her discussion of pregnancy, points to how the cultural superstructures conceal the female sex instinct: "But what if there is an instinct for pregnancy? I doubt it. Once we have sloughed off cultural superstructures, we may uncover a sex instinct, the normal consequences of which *lead* to pregnancy" [Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) 233].

[98] Leon Trotsky, "Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch", *The Third International After Lenin*, , n. *pag*, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[99] Leon Trotsky, *The New Constitution of the USSR*, n. *pag*, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, 2005, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[100] Leon Trotsky, "The International Situation and the Red Army", *The Military Writings of Leon Trotsky*, vol. 5: 1921-1923, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[101] Leon Trotsky, *The Position of the Republic and the Tasks of Young Workers (Report to the 5th All-Russian Congress of the Russian Communist League of Youth 1922),* 1972, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2002, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[102] Leon Trotsky, "The New Economic Policy of Soviet Russia and the Perspectives of the World Revolution", *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 2, Part II, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[103] Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism,* Chapter 1, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[104] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987) 5.

[105] Leon Trotsky, *Through What Stage Are We Passing?,* London, New Park, 1965, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2002, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[106] Roman Jakobson, "Poetic Function and Nature of Language", *Verbal Art,Verbal Sign,Verbal Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 145.

[107] Roman Jakobson, *The Framework of language* (Michigan: Michigan Studies in the Humanities, 1980) 105.

[108] Roman Jakobson,*The Framework of language* (Michigan: Michigan Studies in the Humanities, 1980) 106.

[109] This categorising practice is too common to need any substantiating citation, but what is not commonly known is Volosinov's outright rejection of Formalism when he writes, for

instance: "Formal, systematic thought about language is incompatible with living, historical understanding of language. From the system's point of view, history always seems merely a series of accidental transgressions" [V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1973) 78]. If we bear in mind that Volosinov wrote this at a time when Structuralism had not emerged as a dominant intellectual trend and that the term actually used by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* is "system" only; it does not take much effort to realise that what Volosinov is criticizing here, along with Formalism, is what came to be known as Structuralism later.

On the other hand, equally less known is the fact that Stalin is not much against Formalism as he is often depicted to be. In his *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics*, written in the form of questions and answers, his answer to the last question is remarkable in this respect. Here he criticises not Formalism but its opponent, N. Y. Marr [J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976) 39-40].

Similarly, the widely-held belief about the systematic suppression of all Formalist writings in Soviet Russia is also completely not true. At least two of the writers, whose names are generally associated with the Russian Formalist School, are fortunate enough to be translated into English and published in Moscow, as far as my modest reading of Formalism could cover. See Aleksandr Reformatskij, *Selected Writings* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) and V. M. Zhirmunsky, *Selected Writings* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985). This observation is meant not at all to deny the politics of publication but to underscore the necessity of probing politics in a more nuanced and qualified way.

[110] In one essay among the unusually few attempts at assessing the contributions of Volosinov to the base and superstructure theory, Prof. M. Sridhar, from the University of Hyderabad, made a comparative evaluation of Volosinov's semiotically minded solution to the problem of the

relation between base and superstructure *vis-à-vis* that of Williams' and convincingly confirmed, in conclusion, that Volosinov's theory is "far ahead of its times." M. Sridhar, "Extending or Effacing Boundaries: Base and Superstructure in Raymond Williams and Volosinov", *Revaluations,* 3. 2 (1997): 26.

[111] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 17.

[112] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 13.

[113] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 10. Sartre pursues a similar theme underscoring the relation between language and superstructure when he says, ". . . every supposed superstructure is really already contained in the base, as a structure of the fundamental relation of men to worked matter and to other men. If we then see them appear and posit themselves for themselves as abstract moments and as superstructures, this is because a complex process refracts them through other fields and, particularly, in the field of language" [Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, vol. 1 (London: Verso, 2004) 249]. The use of the concept of refraction also betrays another intellectual connection.

[114] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 12.

[115] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 82. It is a matter of interest, incidentally, that in his *Literary Theory and F. R. Leavis*, a revised version of his Ph. D. thesis, Prof. Sridhar writes "Volosinov's categorization of the two major trends in philosophy of language as 'abstract objectivism' and 'individual subjectivism' is also useful in placing Leavis's conception of language" [M. Sridhar, endnote, *Literary Theory and F. R. Leavis: Language, Criticism and Culture: "Organic Community" in F. R. Leavis* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1999) 59].

[116] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 97. The foundational principles of Marxist linguistics propounded by Volosinov in this book are a real breakthrough. Tony Bennett rightly says in his pioneering study *Formalism and Marxism:* "In subjecting the categories of Saussurian linguistics to critical analysis, Vološinov produced a new, historical approach to the study of language which provides the necessary theoretical back-cloth against which the work of Bakhtin and Medvedev must be viewed" [Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Routledge, 2003) 61].

[117] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 19.

[118] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 13.

[119] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 19.

[120] V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 21.

[121] Thus Bakhtin writes about carnival that "As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" [Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984)10]. As is well known, (Carnival) laughter plays a vital role in Bakhtin's thought. Interestingly, he evokes the metaphor of superstructure to theorize the status of laughter in relation with the serious literature: "There is no need to expand upon the great parodic-travestying literature of the Middle Ages that exists in national folk languages. This literature constituted a fully articulated superstructure of laughter, erected over all serious straightforward genres" [Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*,(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981)79]. Interestingly, Sartre also speaks of laughter as superstructure, and says that "hilarity, like all cultural determinations, has a

history that begins with the appearance of hominids; the acculturation of laughter made it a polyvalent behavior, thus we must regard its different aspects as superstructures that have produced themselves dialectically from an elementary structure, which has survived both as the hidden infrastructure of all kinds of hilarity and, quite independently, as the immediate and collective reaction of social individuals when they are witness to specifically determined events" [Jean-Paul Sartre, foot note, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert 1821-1857,* vol. 1, trans. Carol Cosman (Chicago: The U of Chicago Press, 1987) 154]. But, in case of Bakhtin, his relation with Marxism is mostly a matter of controversies and conjectures. Writing about Bakhtin and Medvedev, Bennett says, "Working *through* the Formalists, they set out to go *beyond* them, to chart a terrain for Marxist criticism that would be unremittingly historical. There takes place in their works a dialogue between the concerns of Formalism and those of Marxism which . . . was nevertheless extraordinarily productive" [Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Routledge, 2003) 61]. After a few pages, Bennet says in a similar vein, "Bakhtin's study of Rabelais would seem fully to exemplify what a Marxist— that is, a historical and materialist—approach to the study of literary texts should look like" [Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Routledge, 2003) 77]. But commentators do not seem to have any perceivable consensus when it comes to such estimates of Bakhtin's work.

On the other hand, it is in view his highlighting of language as a vehicle of power that Eagleton writes "Voloshinov is the father of what has since come to be called 'discourse analysis', which attends to the play of social power within language itself" [Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New Delhi: ABS Publishers, 2007) 195]. This sheds light on the conceptual connection between discourse analysis and base and superstructure thesis.

[122] Cited by I. R. Titunik in the essay "The Formal Method and the Sociological Method (M. M.Baxin, P. N. Medvedev, V. N. Vološinov) in Russian Theory and Study of Literature" that is printed as "Appendix II" to Volosinov's work: V. N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the*

Philosophy of Language 178. Though a translator of this book along with Ladislav Matejka, Titunik tries hard to show that the two trends taken for examination in his essay are "reconcilable methods". Ironically, this essay that concludes Volosinov's book reads like a hardly plausible counter-discourse and unexpected anti-climax. Exasperated by the explicit Marxist avowals of Medvedev, Titunik declares them summarily, in the concluding lines of his essay, as "Medvedev's eclecticism" to be subtracted from the Bakhtin group to equate that conveniently with the Formalist school. A more sensible estimation could be found in Victor Erlich, in his classic study of Russian Formalism: "It was this desire to carry the attack to the 'enemy', by evolving within a broader sociological framework a typology of poetic forms and devices, that provided the impetus behind the most extended and scholarly critique of *Opojaz* ever undertaken by a Marxist— the study of *The Formalist Method in Literary Scholarship* by P. N. Medvedev" [Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History - Doctrine,* 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 114]. However, most of the other appraisals such as the one in the essay “V. N. Voloshinov: A Marriage of Formalism and Marxism”, seem to have been influenced by Titunik’s view; and the essay says that Titunik’s appendix is “important” [William Garrett Walton, Jr., “V. N. Voloshinov: A Marriage of Formalism and Marxism”, *Semiotics and Dialectics: Ideology and the Text* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins B. V., 1981) 40].

[123] The position of Bakhtin himself with respect to Marxism is a matter of considerable dispute that sometimes assumed the form of controversy over the authorship of the avowedly Marxist writings we have seen. Thus, Simon Dentith writes in his book on *Bakhtinian Thought*: "So what is at stake in the dispute about the authorship of these books by Voloshinov and Medvedev? First and most evidently, of course, is the highly charged question of Bakhtin’s relationship to Marxism. If it can be shown that Bakhtin was the author of the disputed texts, it would follow, would it not, that he was therefore ‘really’ a Marxist; if it could be shown

that he was not the author, then the attempt to claim him for Marxism and the left more generally would be that much weaker . . .". His concluding words about this issue are also illuminating: "So it can be seen that the stakes in this dispute are high—no less than the overall direction and emphasis to be given to the writings of Bakhtin and his circle. It has, moreover, generated some not always productive reading practices, in which the overt and primary meanings of the writing have been overlooked in order to decode those writings or to make them fit some constricting model of coherence. Nevertheless, whatever the extent of Bakhtin's responsibility for the disputed texts, there is a substantial convergence between the ideas expressed in them and in those which are indisputably by Bakhtin alone. And finally this is what matters: the content of the arguments far outweighs the interest of the authorship question. So while the resolution of the attribution remains unsettled, and is likely to remain so, the sensible course seems to be to continue to refer to the authors of the various writings by the names which originally appeared over their writing" [Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader,* (London: Routledge, 2005) 9 &10].

[124] Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore,* trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 9.

[125] Propp 125-6.

[126] Propp 128.

[127] Cited by Anatoly Liberman in his introduction to the same book [Anatoly Liberman, Introduction, *Theory and History of Folklore,* by Vladimir Propp, trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) xlviii]. The solemn duty of countering the Marxist affiliations of Propp is taken up by Anatoly Liberman. But unlike in the case of Volosinov's book where the anti-climax awaits up to the end of the book, here it makes its appearance in the "Introduction", at the very beginning. Though

Liberman unwillingly admits that “Propp undoubtedly believed in everything he said about the basis and superstructure. His entire historical conception is informed with this belief” (page: lii), he sets out on an elaborate criticism of the Marxist views in a way devoid of any trace of originality (page: l).

[128] Probably, the Polish debate on base and superstructure is an exception to this, if we go by the words of Ray Taras about it, that the “approaches have changed in time with objective socio-political conditions in Poland. From the controversy surrounding the Stalinist model during the late nineteen fifties, the emphasis shifted to synchronic-diachronic approaches in the next two decades” [Ray Taras, “Polish Sociology and the Base-Superstructure Debate”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 13 (1983): 322, *SAGE*, web, 23 May 2010].

[129] In this sense, Bennett's description of Formalism as “a lost heritage” is fully justified [Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* 77]. Francis Mulhern also characterises the work of Bakhtin School as “a current of ‘post-formalism’ . . . deeply critical of its parent tradition and closer to historical materialism” [Francis Mulhern, Introduction, *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism* (London: Longman, 1992) 8].

[130] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, in 45 volumes, vol. 36 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971) 595.

[131] Nikolai Bukharin, “The Equilibrium between the Elements of Society”, *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,* International Publishers, 1925, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, 2002, web, 3 Mar. 2011. This essay is remarkable for its sustained treatment of the concept of superstructure in sections like "The Outlines of the Superstructure" and "The Significance of the Superstructure". Perhaps, Bukharin represents the most sustained and systematic (if not original to the same extent) attempt at the analysis of superstructure among Russian Marxists.

[132] Nikolai Bukharin, “The Theory of Historical Materialism”, *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance, Marxism and Modern Thought, George Routledge & Sons, 1935,1-90, Marxists’ Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2001, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[133] Nikolai Bukharin, *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance, Marxism and Modern Thought, George Routledge & Sons, 1935,1-90, Marxists’ Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2001, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[134] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,* International Publishers, 1925, n. *pag, Marxists’ Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2002, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[135] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology* n. pag. A few lines after this, Bukharin adds pertinently that “the social and political structure of society is not limited to the state authority. The ruling class, as well as the oppressed classes, present the most varied organizations and forms of common action. Each class usually has its vanguard, consisting of its most 'class-conscious' members, and constituting the political parties competing for domination in society".

[136] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[137] Nikolai Bukharin, *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance, Marxism and Modern Thought, George Routledge & Sons, 1935, 1-90, Marxists’ Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2001, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[138] Nikolai Bukharin, *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[139] Nikolai Bukharin, "The Style of Socialist Culture", *The Prison Manuscripts: Socialism and its Culture,* trans. George Shriver (London: Seagull, 2006)183.

[140] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism - a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[141] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism - a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[142] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism - a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[143] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism - a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011. Gramsci argues in a similar vein, with respect to sexuality: "'Womanising' demands too much leisure. The new type of worker will be repetition, in a different form, of peasants in the villages. The relative stability of sexual unions among the peasants is closely linked to the system of work in the country. The peasant who returns home in the evening after a long and hard day's work wants the '*venerem facilem parabilemque*' ["'Easy and accessible love' Cf. Horace, Satires, I, ii, 119"…reads the footnote] of Horace. . . . The employee who goes to work after a night of 'excess' is no good for his work. The exaltation of passion cannot be reconciled with the timed movements of productive motions connected with the most perfect automatism. This complex of direct and indirect repression and coercion exercised on the masses will undoubtedly produce results and a new form of sexual union will emerge whose fundamental characteristic would apparently have to be monogamy and relative stability" [Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1989) 304-5].

But Sartre, whose serious interest in the subject of sexuality is well known, is not inclined to admit the privileging of the economic aspect in its relation with sexuality, about which his view is more intricate, reciprocal, and integral with other elements: "Sexuality, indeed, is neither cause nor effect; it is the totalization of experience through sex, which means that it summarizes in itself and sexualizes all the structures that characterize a person.

Inversely, every totalization of experience, whatever its meaning, summarizes and totalizes sexual structures by surpassing them toward another end. The situation alone defines the totalizing point of view; each point of view is relative to every other within a reciprocity of perspective, and none is privileged. For example, there is no economic or practical alienation that cannot be and will not be experienced at certain moments as sexual alienation. The order of mediations, of course, is always the same; in other words, there is an objective hierarchy of structures, but this dialectic order does not by itself determine the way it is experienced. This is what Marx helps us to understand when he speaks of the reaction of superstructures on the infrastructures from which they come. Thus he can account for two aspects of the dialectic: hierarchy (the irreducibility of every level of being to the lower level that produced it) and circularity" [Jean-Paul Sartre, foot note, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert 1821-1857* (Chicago: The U of Chicago Press, 1987) 35].

[144] Alexandra Kollontai, "Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations"**,** *Selected Writings,* Allison & Busby, 1977, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* web, 3 Mar. 2011. But Shulamith Firestone suggests that the role of women in the family forms the base for the economics also, "for women have been found exceedingly useful and cheap as a transient, often highly skilled labour supply, not to mention the economic value of their traditional function, the reproduction and rearing of the next generation of children, a job for which they are now patronized (literally and thus figuratively) rather than paid, But whether or not officially recognized, these are essential economic functions. Women, in this present capacity, are the very foundation of the economic superstructure, vital to its existence" [Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) 207].

[145] Nikolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism - a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011. Sex as a superstructural issue is a widely-subscribed idea, even in the later Marxist

currents, though not altogether uncontroversial. For instance, Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist known for his studious engagement with the concept of superstructure, treats it as something related to the base as well as the superstructure: "Medical advance, which has raised the average expectancy of human life, is making the sexual question increasingly important as a fundamental and autonomous aspect of the economic, and this sexual aspect raises, in its turn, complex problems of a 'superstructural' order" [Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1989) 295-6]. Moreover, the idea that the matters relating to sex exhibit considerable variance, with respect to the social and class position of the individuals concerned is also found among non-Marxists. Bronislaw Malinowski, the pioneering anthropologist, writes "I have not . . . found in any psycho-analytic account any direct and consistent reference to the social milieu, still less any discussion of how the nuclear complex and its causes vary with the social stratum in our society. Yet it is obvious that the infantile conflicts will not be the same in the lavish nursery of the wealthy bourgeois as in the cabin of the peasant, or in the one-room tenement of the poor working-man" [Bronislaw Malinowski, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (London: Routledge, 2001) 12]. This is not just a passing comment in his case, and in this book, first published in 1927, he analyses various aspects related to sex and repression, including incest, consistently taking the social position into account.

On the contrary, critics like Foucault take the issue of sex as a test case to refute the idea of economic determinism. Let us take a look at his argument: ". . . it seems to me a naiveté typical of those who aren't historians by profession to assert that an analysis based on changes of economic structure is in itself of explanatory value. It is not obligatory at all. I'll give an example: it was wondered with a certain interest a few years ago why the things that were forbidden in sexual matters during the eighteenth century were concentrated for the

most part on masturbation. Some theorist wished to explain the phenomenon by revealing that, at the time, the marriage age had been raised, and young people were forced to be celibate for a longer time. Now this fact, which is evidently linked to precise economic reasons, no matter how relevant it is, does not explain the origin of the ban — if for no other reason, then because one doesn't begin to masturbate the year before marriage. And then, even admitting that the raising of the age of marriage left great masses of the young celibate for years, one has yet to understand why the response to that phenomenon had to be greater repression, rather than a widening of sexual freedom. It may be too that the question of the marriage age, with all its links to the rise of the new capitalistic mode of production, is useful to our understanding. But when it is a matter of such delicate analyses as the production of a system of knowledge *(savoir)* or of a discourse, with its mechanisms and internal rules, it is necessary to go much deeper. And it is probable that one won't arrive at a single solution or an explanation in terms of necessity" [Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori,* trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) 126-8]. Bukharin, with his consistent emphasis on the development of productive forces as a determining factor constituting base, would have easily offered, at least one plausible answer, to the question of why the raising of the age of marriage resulted in greater repression than in greater freedom by pointing to the development of contraceptive technologies as the crucial factor, and by linking this development with the general development of productive forces.

[146] Nikolai Bukharin, “The Equilibrium between the Elements of Society”, *Historical Materialism— A System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[147] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— A System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[148] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— A System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[149] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— A System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[150] Nikolai Bukharin, *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance, Marxism and Modern Thought, George Routledge & Sons, 1935,1-90, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2001, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[151] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,*n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[152] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,*n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[153] Lev Vygotsky, a soviet psychologist whose theories received considerable appreciation in the recent times (though posthumously) avers his view that is quite close to Trotsky and Lunacharsky: "We shall never be able to understand the laws governing the feelings and emotions in a work of art without proper psychological investigation. It is also remarkable that the sociological studies of art are unable to completely explain the mechanics of a work of art. . . . In the final analysis this is no more than the problem of the complex effect of a superstructure . . ." [L. S. Vygotsky, *The Psychological Problem of Art,* MIT Press, 1971, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2000, web, 3 Mar. 2011].

[154] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,* n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011. Interestingly, Brecht, the great advocate of radical experimentation in theatre, also suggests that the content as well as the form changes with the change of society; and so he continues, after stating that pleasure is the business of theatre: "And different periods' pleasures varied naturally occurring to the system under which people lived in society at the

time. The Greek demos [literally: the demos of the Greek circus] ruled by tyrants had to be entertained differently from the feudal court of Louis XIV. The theatre was required to deliver different representations of men's life together: not just representations of a different life, but also representations of a different sort" [Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", *Approaches in Literary Theory: Marxism*, ed. Anand Prakash (Delhi: Worldview, 2002) 73].

[155] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,*n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[156] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,*n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[157] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,*n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[158] Nikolai Bukharin, . . *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology,*n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[159] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 9.

[160] In his article "Stalin and Linguistics: An Episode from the History of Soviet Science", Roy Medvedev writes: "Whenever Stalin intervened in a scientific or scholarly debate, the results were usually predictable: arrests, the suppression of ideas, and the promotion of careerists, fanatics or blatant charlatans. But there are exceptions to every rule and what took place in the field of linguistics proved to be one of them" [Zhores A. Medvedev and Roy A. Medvedev, *The Unknown Stalin,* trans. Ellen Dahrendorf (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003) 200].

[161] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 34.

[162] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 5-6.

[163] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 15-16. In the article mentioned above, Roy Medvedev offers a first hand account of the excitement produced by Stalin's essay, which may be typical of the general response then: "I still remember the day. Suddenly the examinations that were taking place at the university were interrupted, and teachers and

students were told to go down to the entrance hall of the building where two loudspeakers had been set up. Stalin's article was read aloud by the most famous announcer in the country, Levitan, who had broadcast all the orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief during the war. Students from the philosophy, history and economics faculties listened in total silence, straining to remember as much as possible. It astonished us to hear Stalin say that language was not and never could be part of the superstructure arising out of the economic base, since language exists in a variety of different social and economic contexts without changing all that much over time. Questioning the suitability of a class approach to language, we were amused when he asked: 'Do these comrades believe that English feudal lords communicated with English peasants through a translator, did they not both use the English language?' . . . We started glancing at each other with a sense of elation when Stalin declared that 'no science can progress without a clash of opinions, without freedom of criticism'" [Zhores A. Medvedev and Roy A. Medvedev, *The Unknown Stalin* 208].

[164] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 16.

[165] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 20.

[166] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 7.

[167] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 4.

[168] ". . . while it differs in principle from the superstructure, language does not differ from instruments of production, from machines, let us say, which are as indifferent to classes as is language and may, like it, equally serve a capitalist system and a socialist system" [J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 6-7].

[169] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 23.

[170] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 34-35. Stalin's rejection of categorising language under the terms of base and superstructure does not seem to be recognised well in

the theoretical debates in Telugu. Thus, Chekuri Rama Rao, a notable linguist and critic in Telugu, writes that “the issue of the transformation of language and literature in the class society is worthy of thought, because they have been existing prior to the class divisions. In this context, Marxists analyse different aspects of society through the method of base and superstructure. They believe that a class society is formed on an economic base and the cultural issues are dependent upon that base” [Chekuri Rama Rao, “Mārxistu Vimarsaku parimithulunnāyā?”, ed. Dr. C. Narasimha Rao, *Telugu Samskruthi— Marxism Prabhāvam* (Vijayawada: Jayanthi Publications, 1992) 11]. And in the next page, he likens the primacy of the deep structure over the surface structure in language to the determination of the superstructure by the base.

[171] Ethan Pollock, C*onversations with Stalin on Questions of Political Economy, Working Paper No.33,* Washington, D. C, *Cold War International History Project*, 2001, 52, web, 3 Mar. 2011. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/ACFB07.pdf>.

[172] Ethan Pollock, *Conversations with Stalin on Questions of Political Economy,* 52.

[173] Nikolai Bukharin, "The Theory of Historical Materialism", *Marx's Teaching and its Historical Importance, Marxism and Modern Thought, George Routledge & Sons, 1935,1-90, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, 2001, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[174] J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954) 325.

[175] J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954) 291.

[176] J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 9 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954) 342.

[177] J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953) 50. The imperative of constructing the technical foundation also, instead of only the State political superstructure is unavoidable in the context of the Russian Revolution which is described as “the revolution against *Capital*” by Gramsci [Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader:*

Selected Writings 1916-1935, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York UP, 2000) 32]., and in other revolutions that took place in a similar way. Thus Mao also writes that “only when the productive forces of our society have been fairly adequately developed over a period of ten to fifteen years will it be possible to regard our socialist economic and political system as having obtained a fairly adequate material base (now far from adequate), and will it be possible to regard our state (the superstructure) as fully consolidated and our socialist society as fundamentally built” [Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 479].

[178] Nikolai Bukharin, "The Style of Socialist Culture", *The Prison Manuscripts: Socialism and its Culture,* trans. George Shriver (London: Seagull, 2006)188. A similar concern for the consideration of the people is voiced by Mao when he says that the “socialist transformation is a twofold task, one is to transform the system and the other to transform man. The system embraces not only ownership, it also includes the superstructure, primarily the state apparatus and ideology. For instance, the press comes within the scope of ideology. Some people say that the press has no class nature and is not an instrument of class struggle. They are mistaken. Until at least the extinction of imperialism the press and everything else in the realm of ideology will reflect class relations. School education, literature and art all fall within the scope of ideology, belong to the superstructure and have a class nature. As for the natural sciences, there are two aspects. The natural sciences as such have no class nature, but the question of who studies and makes use of them does” [Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 460].

[179] J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954) 319. One may think that this kind of theorising is too crude and outmoded. Then it will be really intriguing to see a much sophisticated theorist like Fredric Jameson making use of the base

and superstructure concepts to theorise the concepts of content and form, exactly in the reverse gear when he says that ". . . indeed form is itself but the working out of content in the realm of superstructure" [Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974) 329].

[180] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 5.

[181] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 3.

[182] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 34.

[183] The Polish debate on base and superstructure also discussed some sort of inversion in Stalin's theory, especially the renowned sociologist Stanislaw Ossowski, about whom Ray Taras writes: "In effect what Ossowski did was to employ Stalin's inverted model so as to diagnose the failures of the state socialist system. Indeed, Ossowski says, the superstructure can reject its subordinate role, but with what results-the estrangement of the party from the masses? Certainly only those elements of social consciousness, only those institutions, only that ideology which reflect the current economic order may be accepted as legitimate elements in the superstructure. But how greatly do they then distort the 'current' reality? In Ossowski's work the Stalinist model made one last theoretical contribution: it established its own anti-thesis". Taras' remarks about two other critics are also pertinent here: "Leszek Kolakowski began to question the whole determinist concept of historic necessity. Jozef Chalasinski criticized the Stalinist model and concluded that the very principle of a dictatorship of the proletariat was at odds with the Marxian view of the primacy of economic relations" [Ray Taras, "Polish Sociology and the Base-Superstructure Debate", *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 13 (1983): 314, *SAGE*, web, 23 May 2010]. Thus, though the recognition of the inversion is itself commendable in the perceptive debates in Polish sociology, the fact that the inversion is peculiar to Stalin's version, and connected with the policies he pursued doesn't seem to be recognised always properly.

For the Indian researchers, it would be interesting to know that M. N. Roy, an outstanding Indian revolutionary, has also thought in the lines vaguely resembling the Stalinist stance when he maintained that the revolution should not be confined to the superstructural transformations in the Indian context: “the population is so vast that it would be impossible for the modern industries, even if they increase to a hundred-fold their present magnitude, to absorb the mass of unemployed which would come into existence as a result of an extensive introduction of labour-saving machinery in agriculture. Besides, the growth of industry would throw into unemployment another large section of the population — the artisans. Thus nothing short of a radical readjustment of the national economy can improve the situation. There must be a revolution in order to change not only the superstructure, but the very basis of social-economics” [Manabendra Nath Roy with the collaboration of Abani Mukherji, *India in Transition* (Geneve: Edition de la Librairie J. B. Target, 1922) 84].

[184] *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, A translation of the third edition, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1973) 649.

[185] *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, A translation of the third edition, vol. 17 (New York: Macmillan, 1978) 704.

[186] I will cite two entries from reference tomes to demonstrate the influence of this version outside Soviet Russia. One entry for “Superstructure”, says it is “One of the fundamental Marxian concepts denoting the totality of philosophical, ethical, cultural, political and legal ideas, attitudes and the associated network of institutions and organisations in society” [J. Wilczynski, *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981) 576-77].

Another entry for “Basis and Superstructure” tells that “The superstructure (e. g. law,

politics, religion, morality philosophy and art) is consequently a form of social consciousness and it is linked to certain institutions (e. g. the state, parties, churches, educational establishments, etc,)" [*Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia*, ed. C. D. Kernig, in 8 volumes, vol. 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 252].

[187] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and Problems of Linguistics* 18. It may be interesting to note that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o speaks about "a linguistic cultural superstructure", in analysing the social conditions of Africa, in a way that is, I believe, relevant even for the present day India: "an alliance of business, civil service, professional and political elites of each linguistic group feel their positions threatened and jeopardized by their counterparts in other national groups. The top few quickly identify their interests with the interests of the whole cultural linguistic group and cry wolf! The wolf here is another tribe or a supposed combination of other tribes. Yet a cursory glance around would show there are no tribes in Africa— the economic and social forces that give rise to various nations in pre-colonial Africa have collapsed. What is left is only a linguistic cultural superstructure into which Western education aided by the colonial spiritual police (i.e. the missionaries) have made many inroads" [Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Author's note, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1972) xvii].

On the other hand, many intellectuals have taken exception to directly linking culture with politics. Edward Said, for instance, says that "perhaps it is true that most attempts to rub culture's nose in the mud of politics have been crudely iconoclastic; perhaps also the social interpretation of literature in my own field has simply not kept up with the enormous technical advances in detailed textual analysis. But there is no getting away from the fact that literary studies in general, and American Marxist theorists in particular, have avoided the effort

of seriously bridging the gap between the superstructural and the base levels in textual, historical scholarship. . .” [Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003)13].

[188] J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 13 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954) 331. In contrast, a rather sceptical, tentative and self-critical attitude could be seen in Mao, when he says, “when classes are eliminated, there will still be contradictions between the advanced and the backward, there will still be struggles and scuffles among people, and there will still be all sorts of disturbances. What a mess there would be without a court! However, the struggles will then be of a different nature, different from class struggle. The court will be different in nature too. The superstructure may then still go wrong. For instance, people like us may make mistakes, lose out in struggle and be ousted from office, so that a Gomulka may come to power or a Jao Shu-shih be propped up. Would you say such things will not happen? I think they will, even a thousand or ten thousand years from now” [Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 338-9].

Mao also criticises Stalin for neglecting the possibility of these contradictions: “For a long time Stalin denied that contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base exist under the socialist system. Not until the year before his death when he wrote *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* did he hesitantly mention the contradiction between the relations of production and the productive forces under the socialist system and admit that incorrect policies and improper adjustments would lead to trouble. Even then he did not pose the question of the contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base under the socialist system as a question of over-all importance, nor did he realize that they are the basic contradictions which propel socialist society forward. He thought all was secure under his rule. We on our part mustn’t presume that all is secure under our rule; it is secure and yet insecure.

According to dialectics, as surely as a man must die, the socialist system as a historical phenomenon will come to an end some day, to be negated by the communist system. If it is asserted that the socialist system and its relations of production and superstructure will not die out, what kind of Marxism would that be? Wouldn't it be the same as a religious creed or theology that preaches an everlasting God?" [Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 376-7].

[189] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works,* in 45 volumes, vol. 33 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966) 78-9.

[190] A. A. Zhdanov, "Soviet Literature— The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature", *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934, Lawrence & Wishart, 1977, 15-26, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2004, web, 3 Mar. 2011. Tzvetan Todorov writes in this connection: "Stalin was flattering soviet writers when he called them 'engineers of the human soul'. The true creator, forger of new souls and of a new people, was, of course, Stalin himself, with assistance from his inner circle" [Tzvetan Todorov, "Artists and Dictators", *The Limits of Art: Two Essays* (London: Seagull, 2010) 48].

[191] Kim Il Sung, "Some Questions of Our Literature and Art: Talk with Writers and Artists", *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971) 305.

[192] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975) 182.

CHAPTER 7

"Base and Superstructure" and "Mode of Production": A Paradigmatic Dilemma

> There can never be an end to these theoretical debates and practical political delusions and oscillations as long as the 'base/superstructure' model is retained, for the model itself, being unsatisfactory, constantly requires repair jobs of the kind we have noted from Engels to the present day.
>
> …..Peter Worsley, *Marx and Marxism.*[1]

Worsley's words are representative of repeatedly expressed disenchantment with the base and superstructure thesis in the Marxist tradition. On the other hand, a good number of Marxists are for retaining the thesis with some amendments and adaptations, as it is widely believed that the thesis has the authority of Marx. Still, there are a few who maintain that this thesis has no significant place in Marx[2]; this is a difficult position to substantiate in view of what we have seen so far. The present study proposes to resolve this persistently perturbing issue by disposing of the thesis in its present distorted form, but retaining it, at the same time, in the rigorous, original form it is found in Marx. This could be done by sorting out the confusions that surround the thesis in its present form.

When I say that the root of the matter lies in the base and superstructure thesis, it is not a statement that augments the importance of the thesis for Marxism. On the contrary, as it is already suggested in unambiguous terms, the previous investigations impel us to argue for the replacement of base and superstructure thesis from its central position, by the mode of production thesis. This final chapter will concern itself with the different aspects of that paradigm shift: the distortions that necessitated that shift, the dilemmas that thwarted a clear awareness of the mutual positions and significations of these theses and finally the consequences of these systemic changes for Marxism. Thus the conceptual disentanglements

in Marxist theoretical framework hinge on settling accounts with the base and superstructure thesis, which, in its present hypertrophied form, has become the centre of the problem.

This confounding extension of the base and superstructure thesis has resulted in two significant developments: 1) Ideological aspects are (re)introduced into the thesis by Engels and finally elevated to a predominant superstructural status by Stalin, thus essentially giving a finishing touch to a tradition. 2) This malignant growth of the thesis has resulted in a conceptual prolapse, infringing the mode of production thesis, which originally had a much wider scope and thus resulting in a reversal of roles between the two theses (these roles can be roughly identified as part and whole relations).

The first symptom, which has received the most consistent theoretical expression in Stalin, is conspicuous even in the different strands of Western Marxism, which, as Perry Anderson says in his *Considerations on Western Marxism*:

> came to concentrate overwhelmingly on study of superstructures. Moreover, the specific superstructural orders with which it showed the most constant and close concern were those ranking 'highest' in the hierarchy of distance from the economic infrastructure, in Engels's phrase. . .It was culture that held the central focus of its attention.[3]

It is against this backdrop of pervading preoccupation with the so-called superstructural issues in the modern times that Richard Harland coined the word *Superstructuralism,* which also serves as the title of his book.[4] The sixth chapter of Ronaldo Munck's book, *Marxism @ 2000: Late Marxist Perspectives* is also a typical instance in this respect: "Superstructure's Revenge: Marxism and Culture".[5]

Thus, one reason the previous survey closes with the views of Stalin is that, by offering the most-suited theoretical formulations, his ideas have acquired a paradigmatic importance, whether acknowledged so or not, for the later discussions of the base and

superstructure, up to the present time.[6] It is only by being aware of the real gravity of this pervading influence that we can attempt a meaningful reconstruction. The second aspect mentioned above needs still more sustained engagement with Stalin's legacy to see how the problematic of mode of production is overshadowed by that of base and superstructure.

The Paradigmatic Prolapse of Base and Superstructure from Marx to Mao

We have already seen how *The German Ideology* speaks of the base and superstructure in all-inclusive terms, and how Marx later displayed a tendency to make the concept of superstructure concise by mentioning only class ideology as superstructure in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and even later mentioning it as politico-legal superstructure in the Preface, eventually settling for this concept of State superstructure in his works published after the Preface, during his lifetime. We also observed that the case of Engels was different, and he seemed to be continuing the line of thought found in *The German Ideology*. Interestingly, even the essential idea has occurred to Engels, independently from Marx, as he himself relates in his essay *On the History of the Communist League*:

> While I was in Manchester, it was tangibly brought home to me that the economic facts, which have so far played no role or only a contemptible one in the writing of history, are, at least in the modern world, a decisive historical force; that they form the basis of the origination of the present-day class antagonisms; that these class antagonisms, in the countries where they have become fully developed, thanks to large-scale industry, hence especially in England, are in their turn the basis of the formation of political parties and of party struggles, and thus of all political history.[7]

But the problem is that Engels does not confine his use of base and superstructure to this relationship between economics and politics as Marx did in his Preface; instead, his concept of superstructure, as the passages from his *Anti-Dühring*, and the letters demonstrate, is an

admixture of mutually immiscible items, co-mentioned in such a way that is susceptible to obliterating the individual specificities of the superstructural items as well as their specific articulations with the production relations. What is more astonishing is that this conflationist view of base and superstructure is never seriously questioned later, though it is flagrantly at odds with the formulations of Marx. This also applies to the refinements proposed by Engels to his own heterogeneous version (which he believes to be the view of Marx also).

As Derek Sayer rightly observes, "with some exceptions, subsequent Marxists have for the most part accepted the ultimate economic determination/relative superstructural autonomy framework without troubling over much about its theoretical credentials".[8] This continued, according to Sayer, up to the time when Althusser had set out to refurbish Engel's views through his structurally oriented theoretical framework. But what is not usually realised is that even in Althusser's work Engels's all-inclusive scheme is not rejected essentially, but only given a more rigorous form. The most vocal departures of Althusser are essentially nothing more than secondary enhancements to this basically Engelsian version of base and superstructure.[9]

But the immediate inheritors of this version bequeathed by Engels are the leaders of German, Italian and the Russian socialist movements. The survey of these movements in the previous chapter, pointed to the culmination of the increasing prominence of ideological superstructure, as re-inaugurated by Engels, in the theories of Stalin, in consonance with the exigencies of his political project.[10] Again, what is very unusual is the fact that Stalin's inverted formulations of base and superstructure are never really challenged[11] either in the Western Marxist traditions, where his political stance doesn't attract appreciable sympathy, or in some Eastern traditions where the political stands taken towards Stalin's positions are not free from frictions. The case of Mao is particularly worth noting here.

Mao's views, generally less appreciated in the contemporary academic Marxist debates, are indeed remarkable in that they continue the tradition of Stalin in giving paramount importance to the ideological aspects, conceived as part of the superstructure, but at the same time Mao does this so consistently that he would not share the view of Stalin that the cultural changes are relatively easier to bring about. Thus he criticises Stalin for not considering the superstructural aspects properly in his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*:

> Stalin speaks only of the production relations, not of the superstructure, nor of the relationship between superstructure and economic base. Chinese cadres participate in production; workers participate in management. Sending cadres down to lower levels to be tempered, discarding old rules and regulations— all these pertain to the superstructure, to ideology. Stalin mentions economics only, not politics. He may speak of selfless labor, but in reality even an extra hour's labor is begrudged.[12]

In fact, Mao seems to be obsessed with this deficiency in the thought of Stalin that the same critical comment occurs in Mao again and again. He also makes critical comments in a similar vein on the soviet text, *Political Economy*, published under the auspices of Stalin:

> The main object of study in political economy is the production relations. But to study clearly the production relations it is necessary to study concomitantly the productive forces and also the positive and negative effects of the superstructure on the production relations. The text refers to the state but never studies it in depth. This is one omission. Of course, in the process of studying political economy, the study of the productive forces and the superstructure should not become overdeveloped. If the study of the productive forces goes too far it becomes technology and natural science. If the study of the

> superstructure goes too far it becomes nation-state theory, class struggle theory.[13]

In a way, this amounts to questioning Stalin from his own theoretical position of a predominantly ideological superstructure. But in the case of Mao, this prominence of ideological aspects does not eclipse the uniqueness of state as superstructure, as he states clearly that "in all branches of the superstructure ideology, religion, art, law, state power— the central issue is state power. State power means everything, without it, all will be lost. Therefore, no matter how many problems have to be tackled after the conquest of state power, the proletariat must never forget state power, never forget its orientation and never lose sight of the central issue".[14]

It is because of his acute awareness of the complexities involved in the cultural changes and a number of similar social changes that should be taken up after the success of the revolution, for Mao, the social transformation in the post-revolution period is wider in scope and sustained in execution, as he puts it using a typical analogy drawn from agricultural life:

> The socialist revolution came so swiftly that the Party's general line for the transition period has not been fully debated either inside the Party or in society at large. This may be likened to a cow eating grass. It gulps the grass down, stores it in its stomach, then regurgitates it and slowly chews the cud. We have been making socialist revolution in the system, firstly in the ownership of the means of production and secondly in the superstructure, in the political system and the sphere of ideology, but there has never been a full debate on the question. And now we are unfolding the debate through the newspapers, forums, mass rallies and big-character posters.[15]

To capture the theoretical source of this complex understanding, one should have some idea of Mao's concept of contradiction. An all-pervading sense of contradiction characterises the thinking of Mao in all aspects, to the extent that he presents the whole theory of Marxism as the application of the law of contradiction:

> When Marx and Engels applied the law of contradiction in things to the study of the socio-historical process, they discovered the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, they discovered the contradiction between the exploiting and exploited classes and also the resultant contradiction between the economic base and its superstructure (politics, ideology, etc.), and they discovered how these contradictions inevitably lead to different kinds of social revolution in different kinds of class society.[16]

But Mao's logic of contradictions is not something impersonal devoid of human agency; indeed, it is his idea of human initiative as the indispensable mediation which makes his stance seem very much similar to that of Bukharin in this respect. The following passage shows this clearly and, in addition to that, it elaborates Mao's concept of ideology:

> Socialist transformation is a twofold task, one is to transform the system and the other to transform man. The system embraces not only ownership, it also includes the superstructure, primarily the state apparatus and ideology. For instance, the press comes within the scope of ideology. Some people say that the press has no class nature and is not an instrument of class struggle. They are mistaken. Until at least the extinction of imperialism the press and everything else in the realm of ideology will reflect class relations. School education, literature and art all fall within the scope of ideology, belong to the superstructure and have a class nature. As for the natural sciences, there are

> two aspects. The natural sciences as such have no class nature, but the question of who studies and makes use of them does.[17]

Again, as in the case of Bukharin, Mao considers this human factor as a part of productive forces, to be precise, as the active and expressive part of productive forces. This is something rare, because in the debates on Marxism, productive forces are often understood in a supra-human sense and a number of misunderstandings about Marxism revolve around this issue; but in the case of Mao, his humanism is quite consistent with his Marxism:

> When the relations of production become unsuitable, they will have to be overthrown. If the superstructure (ideology and public opinion included) protects the kind of relations of production the people dislike, they will transform it. The superstructure itself constitutes social relations of another kind. It rests on the economic base. By the economic base we mean the relations of production, chiefly ownership. The productive forces are the most revolutionary factor. When the productive forces have developed, there is bound to be a revolution. The productive forces consist of two factors: one is man and the other tools. Tools are made by men. When tools call for a revolution, they will speak through men, through the labourers, who will destroy the old relations of production and the old social relations.[18]

Thus, Mao encapsulates a richer, and wider understanding of social change through his deployment of the concepts of the base and superstructure. Also, in his view, ideological changes that take place as part of the superstructural transformations are more complex and protracted than they seem to be in the view of Stalin. It is this real importance given to the ideological and cultural issues in the perception of Mao[19] that is often found reflected in the Cultural Revolution in China.

But it is noteworthy to observe here that, though Mao takes issue with Stalin, his objections are almost always put forward in terms of base and superstructure. The theoretical battle here is fought on the common battlefield of base and superstructure theory conceived in the inclusive, ideological form; to this extent, they are on common ground. Mao's critique of Stalin is important in that it shows how Stalin's concrete stance on particular issues can be questioned without rejecting his position at the general theoretical level. It should be borne in mind that despite the importance of ideological aspects in his model of base and superstructure, Stalin envisioned cultural changes as secondary, and as the relatively easier part of social transformation. This ambivalence has no room in Mao.

By turning the general theory of Stalin against the defects of his own outlook on culture, by cleansing the theoretical position that ensues from the predominantly ideological version of superstructure from such logical contradictions, Mao has taken this version to perfection. Thus, we find the base and superstructure model, quite frequently, in the writings of Mao, to theorise cultural and ideological issues, whereas the concept of mode of production is seldom deployed to conceptualise such issues. This presents a striking contrast when compared with the writings of Marx.

Though the concept of base and superstructure figures in Marx in some of his writings, it is in no way comparable to the mode of production thesis in importance or even in its occurrence in his writings. This is mostly because the base and superstructure thesis embodies only a particular aspect of Marx's thought; whereas the mode of production thesis embodies the synoptic vision of Marx about any particular society. In a significant number of his works that Marx considered central to his thought, like *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *The Communist Manifesto*, *Wage-Labour and Capital*, *Value, Price and Profit* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, etc., all published in his lifetime, the concepts of base and

superstructure do not figure at all, but almost all these works present the thesis of mode of production as a central concept.

Still, we cannot reject the base and superstructure thesis as having no significant place in Marx, because the idea it encapsulates— the intimate connection of the economic relations with politics and law— occurs quite frequently, with unmistakable significance, in his writings. But if the concept of base and superstructure vies for the status of centrality in Marx's thought with that of mode of production and eventually eclipses and even devours the latter (because, for a majority of Marxists now: base= mode of production) — despite Marx's often-expressed idea that the production relations (=the real base) themselves would take shape corresponding to the mode of production— it could only result in a disastrous distortion of Marx's basic theory. Unfortunately, this is what the trajectory of later developments in Marxist theory resulted in. In the writings of Mao that I have taken as representing the logical perfection of this development, we hardly ever find him analysing cultural or ideological issues through the concept of mode of production. Even the very expression occurs quite infrequently in his writings. Thus, we see the concept of base and superstructure replacing, to a great extent, the central concept of mode of production in Marxism, in its development from Marx to Mao. Though not properly appreciated now as such, Mao's version is influential for the later theoretical developments, for instance, on Althusser, and through him, vicariously on the later generations.

This peculiar paradigmatic prolapse and the eventual eclipsing of the concept of mode of production was made possible in Marxism, because, traditionally, the concept of mode of production was not properly appreciated in its conceptual specificity, and often taken as an optional synonym for the base and superstructure thesis. We have already seen how Plekhanov takes a conceptual leap, from the base and superstructure thesis, to the mode of production thesis, in his discussion of the Preface with Bernstein to prove the consideration

of various factors in Marx. Such treatment of both these theses as mutually substitutable items is quite common even among the modern Marxists.[20] So, unless we embark upon disentangling this conceptual mesh in a sustained way, we cannot meaningfully resolve the bewildering puzzle posed by the obfuscating developments.

Base and Superstructure and *Mode of Production*: Demarcating the Obliterated Lineaments

Since in the hands of old Engels, the concept of superstructure is inflated more and more, with the constant conflation of various ideological items, which are also consigned to the superstructural status, the impression that the base and superstructure is the all-inclusive model of Marxism has increasingly come to be reinforced. When the later generations of Marxists, mostly nourished on the more accessible writings of Engels, approached Marx, they have inevitably read his statements with the conceptual lens supplied by Engels's texts.

Thus, a tradition of reading has set in Marxism, whereby all the different statements in the 1859 Preface are read as if they are aspects, or at least related issues of the base and superstructure model. As the model has already acquired holistic status, this is quite understandable. As a result, the conspicuously compact "politico-legal superstructure" of Marx is read as if it is just the same as the heterogeneous superstructure of Engels, by apprehending what Marx later says about the mode of production and about the ideological forms as various elucidations of base and superstructure thesis, though there is nothing in the Preface that warrants such connection.

The result of this indiscriminate equalisation of the disparate models is the blurred conceptual contours of these models that obliterate their specificities, or the emergence of a queerly hybridised concept, such as the concept of base and superstructure with the mode of production as its base. Against this backdrop of chronically obliterated conceptual identities, a sustained attempt to disentangle and redefine the specificities of these models becomes all the more necessary. This I would like to do here, with the aid of the following tabulated

keywords. Although this has the disadvantage of presenting the matter too schematically, I believe, it has the advantage of clearly demarcating the differences in a concise and striking manner. As the entries are rather cryptic and need explanatory elaboration for proper appreciation and substantiation of the points, I have appended the table with a brief discussion of the entries, point by point.

Demarcating feature	**Base and Superstructure Thesis**	**Mode of Production Thesis**
Polemical Context	Polemical engagement with Hegel	Polemical engagement with Feuerbach.
Conceptual Coverage	Restricted to production relations and politico-legal superstructure	Holistic and Synoptic
Ontological Status of the Elements	Genetically defined	Ontological autonomy
Nature of Determination	Genetic and rooted	Determining the general character
Nature of the Paradigm	Structural and organic	Praxological
The Relations of the Elements	Two-dimensional and asymmetric	Multi-dimensional and interlaced

To begin with, the concepts of base and superstructure, and mode of production are different at the very origins. On the whole, we can say, that the base and superstructure thesis with its emphasis on locating the roots of the state in the civil society, has its origin in Marx's critique of Hegel, whereas the mode of production thesis with its emphasis on human activity, has its intellectual roots in Marx’s critique of Feuerbach.

Thus, Marx says in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* that "property, etc., in short, the entire content of law and the state, is the same in North America as in Prussia, with few modifications. The *republic* there is thus a mere state *form*, just as the monarchy is here. The content of the state lies outside these constitutions"[21]. Here we can see the idea in the form of a germ which later has become the base and superstructure thesis. After a few lines, Marx adds: "[U]p till now the *political constitution* has been the *religious sphere*, the *religion* of national life, the heaven of its generality over against *the earthly existence* of its actuality"[22]. The defetishising idea of locating the roots of this heaven of the State in the earthly reality of civil society has ultimately taken the form of base and superstructure. The idea that the bourgeois society is the *root* of the modern state is so consistently seen in the works of Marx that we find this in one of his prominent mature works, *Critique of the Gotha Programme.*[23]

Similarly, the mode of production thesis also has perceivable and firm intellectual roots in young Marx, evincing a basic continuity in his thought that gave a central place for human activity. This can be clearly seen in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* where the emphasis on human activity is the leitmotif and also in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* where Marx succinctly questions ". . . what is life but activity?"[24] However, when the mature Marx is taken to be a theorist of "structural causality", devoid of human agency, we are not able to see what happens to this earlier activity version. Only a proper appreciation of Marx's mode of production thesis can restore the centrality of human activity in his thought. And this appreciation will remain a far cry as long as the mode of production thesis is confused with the base and superstructure.

Thus, in his *Manuscripts* mentioned above, Marx says that "religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only *particular* modes of production, and fall under its general law".[25] This is obviously one of the first formulations of Marx's mode of production

thesis. But Larry Ceplair writes with reference to this, in the article "The Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party", published in 2008, that "in his first significant text on economics (1844), Marx did not separate base from superstructure. What would later be the components of his superstructure, 'religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc.,' he labeled 'particular modes of production'".[26] This instance demonstrates strikingly, how the mode of production thesis with its emphasis on human activity was eclipsed by the predisposed reading, applied retrospectively from the modern perspective of the heterogeneous base and superstructure thesis.

The second point of the table: even a cursory look at the two theses will make it clear that the conceptual coverage of each of them is clearly different from the other. The base and superstructure metaphor encapsulates the nexus between the production relations and politico-legal spheres alone. The mode of production thesis, on the other hand, endeavours to capture a holistic and synoptic view of the society by speaking of "the general process of social, political and intellectual life" (in the Preface). If we remember that even the production relations that form the base also constitute an aspect of mode of production, we can have a reasonable understanding of the broad scope of the latter. When the mode of production itself is taken to be the base, thus making it a part of base and superstructure thesis, the real relation between the two theses is mutilated beyond recovery.[27] Only the restoration of the mode of production thesis in its proper, central status can check against the inordinate inflation of the base and superstructure thesis, and the resulting intellectual distortions.

The third point relates to the ontological status of the elements conceptualised by the two theses; this is an aspect in which the two theses display a marked difference. On the one side, the relation of the superstructure to the base is genetically defined; the "legal and political superstructure" is not just supported on the base, it "arises" from the base. The

proper appreciation of this point hinges upon the correct understanding of the specific meaning of the word *political* in Marx, in contrast to its too sweeping usage at present. Marx's understanding of the political power is intricately connected with the class structure.

For the Marx of *The Communist Manifesto*: "when, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another"[28]. The final words of Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* are also revealing: "[I]t is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that *social evolutions* will cease to be *political revolutions*".[29] Thus the political aspect of the society is not something eternal or autonomous; its very existence depends upon the existence of the classes. As observed by Barry Hindess, and Paul Q. Hirst rightly:

> The state and the political level emerge as the necessary mechanism of regulation of the class struggle and as the field of representation of class interests. This field of representation of interests constitutes a level of the social formation distinct from the economic and ideological levels. While these latter are present in all social formations the political level appears in class societies only.[30]

This precisely locates the specificity of the political superstructure, though the writers themselves do not recognise the restricted superstructure of Marx that is based precisely on this specific ontological dependence. Unless we recognise the genetically defined, ontological dependence of the restricted superstructure, on the base of production relations, we cannot grasp the intrinsic relation that Marx metaphorically presents here.

On the other hand, the mode of production thesis envisions different aspects of the society, as different life processes. It does not establish any genetic or ontological relations of

dependence between the different spheres of society it encompasses in its conceptual hold. On the contrary, it seems to assume the ontological autonomy of these different aspects, by speaking of them as different life processes. Though the thesis clearly privileges the “mode of production of material life” over other life processes, by speaking of these other aspects also in the same terms of “life processes”, it takes their ontological reality for granted. The sort of relations of existential dependence we have seen in the other case have no room here; and such relations can be postulated here only with disastrously distorting consequences.

The next point concerns itself with the nature of determination embodied by the two theses. In the case of base and superstructure thesis, the mode of relation and determination postulated between the two items, has an obvious genetic connotation, the reasons for which are already clear. The very existence of the superstructure is rooted in the base of production relations. When it comes to the mode of production thesis, the “mode of production of material life” determines only the “general character” of other social processes. Again, confusing the two can only be disastrous.

The penultimate point is about the nature of the two Paradigms. The difference in this respect is so obvious that even a casual glimpse can bring it out, if that glimpse is not predisposed by the established beliefs. The base and superstructure paradigm is clearly a structural one, in which the terms are conceptualised in an organic relation. The mode of production paradigm is praxological equally clearly, in the sense that it takes different social aspects as different activities of socially organised human beings, as different manifestations of their life processes. The concrete, socially organised individuals are central to it.

Last but not the least is the consideration of the nature of relations of the elements encompassed by both the theses. The base and superstructure thesis embodies a two-dimensional relation between the two elements it conceptualises; but this relation is obviously asymmetric because it is the base of production relations which is the site of primary social

change that later necessitates superstructural changes, notwithstanding the implied superstructural interaction. In contrast, the mode of production thesis embodies a multi-dimensional relation where the elements are seen as the interlaced manifestations of the social life. No clear hierarchy is postulated here; but, in a sense, all the aspects are given equal standing as different life processes. The whole social reality is conceived as an articulated totality of different life processes. This is evidently different from the base and superstructure paradigm, both in terms of its constituents and their articulation.

All these differences are emphasised here, not to aver that hard and fast distinctions exist between both the theses, but to bring out their conceptual specificities. Once these specificities are properly appreciated, it is not difficult to ascertain their interconnection as different aspects of Marx's thought. As already mentioned, production relations— which form the base for the superstructure— also constitute an important aspect of the mode of production. Now, as the differences and the interconnections of both the theses are appreciably emphasised, we are in a position to move on to the examination of these specific theses, as they are found in Marx himself. This examination is necessary because the salient aspects of these theses are yet to be recognised properly, notwithstanding the frequent citation of Marx's statements about them, in the contemporary academic literature touching upon Marx and Marxism.

The "Purloined Letters" of Marx and the Ill-appreciated Aspects of the Theses

One of the chief contentions of my work is that some very important aspects of Marx's 1857 Preface are still relatively ill-appreciated in spite of the frequent citation of this passage. I call these succinct statements of Marx as his purloined letters with obvious reference to the much-discussed story, "The Purloined Letter", by Edgar Allan Poe, where the stolen letter is not discovered despite repeated and rigorous search for it, not because it is hidden at some secret corner but because it is kept right in front of everyone's eyes. A similar

paradoxical situation is observable in the case of Marx's well-known Preface, in the backdrop of the established reading practices of seeing Marx through the views of Engels.

For instance, in the essay "God Only Knows", published in 1991, the self-declared post-Marxist, Ernesto Laclau speaks about "Marx's 'determination *in the ultimate instance* by the economy'"[31], which is obviously the hallmark expression of Engels; and what the italics and single quotes of Laclau indicate is something that God only knows. Against this backdrop of persistent misreading, an elaborate consideration of Marx's statements in the Preface is all the more necessary.

I have already pointed out how the restricted "legal and political superstructure" of Marx in the Preface is never properly analysed. Even G. A. Cohen, one of the most rigorous modern defenders of Marx, can only say that "the base, it will be recalled, is the sum total of production relations . . . And the superstructure . . . has more than one part, exactly what its parts are is somewhat uncertain, but certainly one *bona fide* part of it is the legal system".[32] We have also seen, how, elsewhere, he also includes the institutions like religion in the superstructure. Nevertheless, this politico-legal superstructure is neither a conceptual aberration nor something notionally incongruent with the system of Marx's thought. When analysed with careful consideration it indicates some salient features of Marx's thought.

The inherent connection of the State, or politics, and the law with the production relations is an idea that occurs consistently in Marx and Engels, from the *German Ideology* to Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks.* In a less known passage, in the *German Ideology*, for instance, we find an elaborate exposition of this relation:

> In actual history, those theoreticians who regarded might as the basis of right were in direct contradiction to those who looked on will as the basis of right . . . If power is taken as the basis of right, as Hobbes, etc., do, then right, law, etc., are merely the symptom, the expression of *other* relations upon

> which state power rests. The material life of individuals, which by no means depends merely on their 'will', their mode of production and form of intercourse, which mutually determine each other— this is the real basis of the state and remains so at all the stages at which division of labour and private property are still necessary, quite independently of the *will* of individuals. These actual relations are in no way created by the state power; on the contrary they are the power creating it. The individuals who rule in these conditions— leaving aside the fact that their power must assume the form of the *state*— have to give their will, which is determined by these definite conditions, a universal expression as the will of the state, as law, an expression whose content is always determined by the relations of this class, as the civil and criminal law demonstrates in the clearest possible way. . . . Their personal rule must at the same time assume the form of average rule. Their personal power is based on conditions of life which as they develop are common to many individuals, and the continuance of which they, as ruling individuals, have to maintain against others and, at the same time, to maintain that they hold good for everybody. The expression of this will, which is determined by their common interests, is the law. It is precisely because individuals who are independent of one another assert themselves and their own will, and because on this basis their attitude to one another is bound to be egoistical, that self-denial is made necessary in law and right, self-denial in the exceptional case, and self-assertion of their interests in the average case.[33]

Thus, the State and the law are not simply the instruments of power in the hands of the individuals of the ruling class. They represent the interests of the ruling class, only as a class, and in the average case. But this should not be taken to mean that only the will of the ruling

class is represented by the State. Indeed, the same line of thought is applied to the ruled classes also as the passage continues to explain:

> The same applies to the classes which are ruled, whose will plays just as small a part in determining the existence of law and the state. For example, so long as the productive forces are still insufficiently developed to make competition superfluous, and therefore would give rise to competition over and over again, for so long the classes which are ruled would be wanting the impossible if they had the 'will' to abolish competition and with it the state and the law. Incidentally, too, it is only in the imagination of the ideologist that this 'will' arises before relations have developed far enough to make the emergence of such a will possible. After relations have developed sufficiently to produce it, the ideologist is able to imagine this will as being purely arbitrary and therefore as conceivable at all times and under all circumstances.[34]

It is this separation of the 'will' that is at the centre of the political and legal thought, from the production relations, which gave rise to this will, that Marx intends to counteract with his base and superstructure metaphor. It is important to recognise that this logic applies not only to the State, and to the civil law, but to the criminal law as well, as the passage says further:

> Like right, so crime, i.e., the struggle of the isolated individual against the predominant relations, is not the result of pure arbitrariness. On the contrary, it depends on the same conditions as that domination. The same visionaries who see in right and law the domination of some independently existing general will can see in crime the mere violation of right and law. Hence the state does not exist owing to the dominant will, but the state, which arises from the material mode of life of individuals, has also the form of a dominant will. If the latter loses its domination, it means that not only the will has changed but

> also the material existence and life of the individuals, and only for that reason has their will changed. It is possible for rights and laws to be 'inherited', but in that case they are no longer dominant, but nominal, of which striking examples are furnished by the history of ancient Roman law and English law . . . . one can separate right from its real basis, whereby one obtains a 'dominant will' which in different eras undergoes various modifications and has its own, independent history in its creations, the laws. On this account, political and civil history becomes ideologically merged in a history of the domination of successive laws. This is the specific illusion of lawyers and politicians . . .[35]

Marx's restricted version of base and superstructure embodies the de-sublimating thought that demolishes this illusion by emphasising the roots of the state and law in the production relations. We can safely surmise, I believe, that this whole passage from *The German Ideology* is written by Marx, because Engels confesses even in his later work, *Anti-Dühring,* that, "at best", he "can only claim to be a dilettante" in jurisprudence[36], whereas Marx, as is well known, majored in that subject. Marx's assertion of this organic relation between the production relations and the state and law is evidently observable in his later writings also, such as his introduction to the *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy,* where he writes with reference to the economists:

> Regarding . . . safeguarding of what has been acquired, etc. If these trivialities are reduced to their real content, they say more than their preachers realise, namely, that each form of production produces its own legal relations, forms of government, etc. The crudity and lack of comprehension lies precisely in that organically coherent factors are brought into haphazard relation with one another, i.e., into a merely speculative connection.[37]

Another interesting instance of a similar argument could be found in Marx's criticism of Heinzen, where he writes:

> Incidentally, if the bourgeoisie is politically, that is, by its state power, 'maintaining injustice in property relations', it is not *creating* it. The 'injustice in property relations' which is determined by the modern division of labour, the modern form of exchange, competition, concentration, etc., by no means arises from the political rule of the bourgeois class, but vice versa, the political rule of the bourgeois class arises from these modern relations of production which bourgeois economists proclaim to be necessary and eternal laws. If therefore the proletariat overthrows the political rule of the bourgeoisie, its victory will only be temporary, only an element in the service of the *bourgeois revolution* itself, as in the year 1794, . . . Men build a new world for themselves, not from the "treasures of this earth" . . . but from the historical achievements of their declining world. In the course of their development they first have to *produce* the *material conditions* of a new society itself, and no exertion of mind or will can free them from this fate.[38]

This brings us to the core idea encapsulated in the base and superstructure thesis that the state and law cannot be demolished by themselves, unless the production relations, on which they are based, are also demolished. In the later vulgarised versions of base and superstructure thesis, this understanding is not only obfuscated, but, in effect, the very intent of the thesis is reversed; because the thesis is taken to be maintaining that the superstructure is secondary or mere epiphenomenon. As it clearly emerges here, the real intent of the thesis is to maintain that the roots of the superstructure are inbuilt in the production relations, thus emphasising the real strength of the superstructure, and not its weakness. The strength of the building is reinforced by the strength of its foundation. This original intent of the thesis is

consistently misunderstood, as its original organic nature is replaced by a mechanically understood thesis, embodying compartmental thinking that runs against the dialectical spirit of Marx's thought.

Another unfortunate reversal of the original intent of this thesis is seen in taking the thesis as a divisive one that sets out to separate the different elements of society; whereas the thesis originally postulates a derivatorial relation, by showing the intricate connection (not the separation) between the superstructural aspects that are genetically related with the base of production relations. The truth about the base and superstructure thesis is not about separating the elements of the society, to establish thereby the predominance of one over the other, but to emphasise the organic relation between the specific elements it metaphorically speaks of. Again, this misunderstanding is based on the improper appreciation of the words in which Marx presented his thesis.

When the thesis is often described in mechanical terms, as a topographical (Althusser)/ a constructional (Thompson)/ an architectural (Jonathan Wolff) etc., thesis, what is often ignored is its organic nature. This is based on an excessive preoccupation with the terms *base* and *superstructure*, disregarding the nature of their relation as postulated by Marx. When Marx says that a legal and political superstructure "arises" on the foundation, it makes no sense if it is understood purely in the above mentioned structural terms. It is a plant with its genetic, potential roots in the seed, which arises from the seed. Thus the metaphor locates the *roots* of the superstructural *outgrowth* (to use another organic image) in the base of production relations. It is all about asserting an intrinsic, organic relation between the social elements concerned, neither about separating nor (even worse) about juxtaposing them.[39]

But in the later vulgarisations the thesis came to represent all these things that it is originally not. Any metaphor, or comparison, seeks to drive home some specific aspect(s) of

commonality between the terms of comparison. When stretched beyond these intended aspects, the resulting implication of the metaphor is usually distorting. Even in a simple comparison of a pretty face with the moon, the intended aspect of commonality is generally the brightness; when this is stretched to cover, let us say, the roundness or the stains of the moon, the result would be obviously counterproductive. The intended commonality in the case of the base and superstructure metaphor is the genetic connection, not the structural separation; it is about the mutual dependency of the terms, and not about some rigid ascendency posited between the twin terms.

It may be interesting to note here that Marx often displays a proclivity to deploy metaphorical terms in explicating political changes. Thus he writes in the same article seen above, that "the violently reactionary role played by the rule of the princes only proves that in the pores of the old society a new society has taken shape, which furthermore cannot but feel the political shell,— the natural covering of the old society— as an unnatural fetter and blow it sky-high". [40] Similarly, in a passage from *Capital,* writing about the Indian village communities, Marx speaks about "the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, [which is] in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky".[41]

The striking and dramatic nature of the political changes that seem sudden and inexplicable may be a reason behind this proclivity for using figurative terms. Marx's eventual consignment or confinement of the base and superstructure metaphor to the nexus between the production relations and the politico-legal superstructure has the de-mystificatory effect of showing the roots of the spectacular superstructural changes in the not so conspicuous reality of production relations. In effect, this boils down to showing that the

superstructural changes are neither fortuitous nor superficial, but they have their inextricable roots in the more foundational production relations.

The material and foundational nature of production relations is already highlighted in *The German Ideology*, in crystal clear terms:

> [I]t is quite obvious from the start that there exists a materialistic connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production, and which is as old as men themselves. This connection is ever taking on new forms, and thus presents a 'history' irrespective of the existence of any political or religious nonsense which in addition may hold men together.[42]

Thus the production relations occupy a predominant place among the other social relations because of their materiality and indispensability. But the question to be considered here is whether the proposition that the state is the superstructure that arises from the production relations amount**s** to maintaining that the whole form of the state is determined by the production relations automatically. Though Marx's position is often mistaken in this way, there are ample textual evidences to suggest that this is not the case. It should be borne in mind that even in his quotation we have already seen from his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, Marx only says that the *content* of the different forms of the states comes from the outside. Marx has maintained this position consistently even in later times. Thus we see him writing in the third volume of *Capital*:

> The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves,

> thereby simultaneously its specific political form. It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers— a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity— which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis — the same from the standpoint of its main conditions — due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc. from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.[43]

This passage is significant because, first of all, it unmistakably reiterates that the production relations are the basis of the state; and then it goes on to add that this could take different forms in different circumstances. The importance of this understanding comes to light when we think of, for instance, the criticism of M. M. Bober in his prize-winning book, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History*:

> Marx's fundamental thesis asserts that the same mode of production is correlated with the same institutional constellation. The striking fact is, however, that these three sets of countries exhibit pronounced differences in institutions, ideas, and values. On similar economic substructures we see erected divergent superstructures. In America and England there is one type of government, democracy; in Nazi Germany there is another type, dictatorship or tyranny; and in Russia there is a third type, which may be labelled one way or another but which is different from the other two types.[44]

This may sound like formidable criticism, if Marx's position is misunderstood as mentioned above. But Marx is far from maintaining such a rigid principle, and in fact he is so sensitive to the specificities of the state in different countries, that he finds fault with the very expression of the "present-day state ", disregarding the specificities, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*:

> "Present-day society" is capitalist society, which exists in all civilized countries, more or less free from medieval admixture, more or less modified by the particular historical development of each country, more or less developed. On the other hand, the "present-day state" changes with a country's frontier. It is different in the Prusso-German Empire from what it is in Switzerland, and different in England from what it is in the United States. The "present-day state" is therefore a fiction.[45]

Once this misunderstanding is cleared, the way is now paved for the central question: what exactly is meant by the expression that the state superstructure “arises” from the base of production relations? This cannot be answered unless we clear again some conceptual ground regarding Marx’s theory of state. It is widely believed that Marx’s central concern with regard to the state is to highlight its class nature— a belief that is sometimes grotesquely extended to the point of suggesting that Marx ultimately advocated that the proletariat should strengthen the state to serve their purpose.

But Marx’s problematic is a much more complex one where he squarely hits upon the central contradiction in the very nature of the state as an institution of the society on the one hand, but as something that claims supra-social existence on the other. The very existence of a social institution that posits itself as something beyond and above the society is the central problem of the state for Marx. Just as he has done in the case of religious supra-human projection which claims itself as something beyond and above real human beings, by

analysing and dissolving the roots of its otherworldly projection in the tensions and tribulations of this world, Marx collapses the roots of supra-social state in the reality of class-divided society itself. As he writes in an article: “Legislature, magistracy, and armed force, are all of them but the offspring of improper conditions of society, preventing those arrangements among men which would make useless the compulsory intervention of a third supreme power”[46]. There lies the necessity of state, a supreme interventionist between the class interests in clash— a social institution that is above the society!

In spite of its transcendental pretensions, the state is the outcome of the irreconcilable clash of interests; and in spite of its alleged role as an instrument of general interests (that do not exist), it could only express and serve the interests of the dominant class which holds real sway over the society. Here, Marx differentiates between general interests and communal interests. General interest as an abstraction, as stated in the contractual theory of Rousseau, as having only mental existence is not real. But communal interest is the interest that is rooted in the interdependence of the atomised and socially alienated individuals with respect to whom it assumes an independent existence. This is clearly stated in *The German Ideology*:

> the division of labour also implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another. And indeed, this communal interest does not exist merely in the imagination, as the "general interest", but first of all in reality, as the mutual interdependence of the individuals among whom the labour is divided.
>
> Out of this very contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the community the latter assumes an independent form as the State, divorced from the real interests of individual and collective interests, and at the same time as an illusory communal life . . .

> Just because individuals seek only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their communal interest (in fact the general is the illusory form of communal life), the latter will be imposed on them as an interest "alien" to them, and "independent" of them as in its turn a particular, peculiar "general" interest. . .[47]

It is this hypertrophy of the state over the society that Marx's word "arises" tries to express and exorcise. Just as he traces the source of supernatural religion in the stark realities of humans, the supra-social projection of the state is collapsed into the production relations that form the mundane base of the society. This is also related to law and justice:

> Since the State is the form in which the individuals of a ruling class assert their common interests, and in which the whole civil society of an epoch is epitomised, it follows that the State mediates in the formation of all common institutions and that the institutions receive a political form. Hence the illusion that law is based on the will, and indeed on the will divorced from its real basis— on free will. Similarly, justice is in its turn reduced to statute law.[48]

If the view that law is based on will is an illusion, what is the real basis of law? It is in the indispensible production relations that Marx (and Engels) find the real base of law as well as of the state. This is clear from the passages we have already seen from *The German Ideology*. Again, Marx reiterates this view in his *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

> Under the patriarchal system, under the caste system, under the feudal and corporative system, there was division of labor in the whole of society according to fixed rules. Were these rules established by a legislator? No. Originally born of the conditions of material production, they were raised to the status of laws only much later. In this way, these different forms of the division of labor became so many bases of social organization.[49]

All these statements testify how Marx's restricted version of base and superstructure embodies a crucial thought in Marxism that often found expression in the writings of Marx and Engels beyond any reasonable dispute. But this clarity and certainty takes leave of us once this restricted version is replaced by the all-inclusive version that has the most important addition of ideological phenomena in the superstructure. For we find, in the writings of Marx and Engels, unequivocal statements that consider ideological phenomena from a broader perspective than from the perspective of mere production relations. Thus even *The German Ideology* maintains that:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. — real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.[50]

Thus consciousness is seen as an inextricable part of human existence, and the human existence is equated with their life-process. Now the question is: Can this broad perspective of consciousness be captured in the base and superstructure thesis? The answer is clearly a negative one. As the conceptual coverage of the thesis is confined to the relation between the politico-legal superstructure and the base of production relations, this conclusion is inevitable. Then, what thesis of Marxism has the broad conceptual coverage, encompassing

the actual life-process of human existence? Understandably, it is the thesis of the mode of production. So, we can find this perspective in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* also, which conceptualises consciousness, as part of the general production of life:

> Does it require deep intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views, and conception, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?
>
> What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? [51]

This broad view of consciousness will receive a stifling treatment when this is reduced to the base and superstructure thesis. As the base of production relations constitutes only one aspect of the (mode of) production, this will reduce the originally broad view of consciousness into a one-sided thesis. In addition to this, as the production relations play the role of fetters at some stage, in relation to the growth of productive forces, the stifling effect that I have spoken about will be of a more serious kind. If we think that the base and superstructure thesis encompasses consciousness/ideological items, then we will be driven to the conclusion, along with Allen Wood, that "it is the confining production relations, not the expanding productive forces, which in his [Marx's] view are most likely to receive the backing of the society's 'superstructure', its political institutions, its customary morality, its established ideologies". [52] If all these aspects of society are to be based on the confining production relations only (alone) the absurdity of that position is self-evident.

Moreover, as consciousness also includes scientific knowledge, the base and superstructure thesis will have the unfortunate implication that the production relations or the class relations determine scientific thinking.[53] Even in the case of other forms of consciousness, it will be crude to maintain that class relations directly determine them which

will be the possible implication of base and superstructure thesis when extended to ideology. Besides the fact that Marx and Engels never seem to suggest this, it is important to realise that some aspects of Marxism require that this will not be so. For instance, Marxism maintains that even the classes of the ruled people will be under the intellectual influence of the ruling classes. This is not possible if consciousness is the direct result of the class position. [54]

The other pole of ideology, religion is also not unproblematic if taken as a superstructural sphere. Since counting some social elements as superstructural came to be regarded as discounting the elements as secondary or epiphenomenal, the inclusion of religion in the superstructure, which is never done by Marx, has depreciating consequences regarding the power of religion. Thus Victor Kiernan says that "to this day Marxism has scarcely corrected this underestimation, or made sufficient allowance in its general theory for the energy and tenacity of religion— an element of the 'superstructure' but all the same one of the determining forces in human history". [55] What needs to be realised here is that a "general theory" that does not deprecate the effectivity of religion is not possible so far as we do not transcend the influence of the all-inclusive base and superstructure.

The yawning gap between the base and superstructure thesis and the mode of production thesis can be seen, for one thing, in the consideration of humans' relation with Nature. As the base is only the production relations, which are basically social relations, the former thesis does not provide proper room for this relation. Through the concept of productive forces, the latter thesis provides a central place for this relation, as Marx says in a footnote to his *Capital* that "technology reveals the active relation of man to nature".[56] Also, he says in the manuscripts that came to be known as *Grundrisse*, that "both community and religion, in turn, were rooted in a given relationship to nature, into which all productive force resolves itself".[57] When these differences are ignored and religion is configured as

superstructure, the resulting one-sidedness is evidently understandable. This relation with Nature is crucial even in the analysis of art because, as Labriola rightly pointed out:

> [I]n artistic or religious production the mediation from the conditions to the products is very complicated, and again that men, while living in society, do not thereby cease to live alone by themselves in nature, and to receive from it occasion and material for curiosity and for imagination.
>
> After all, this is all reduced to a more general formula; man does not make several histories at the same time, but all these alleged different histories (art, religion, etc.) make up one alone.[58]

As we have seen, such an integral view of society and history is embodied in the mode of production thesis that comprises the different aspects of the society as the various facets of the human life-process or as the forms of human production. This thesis could also rehabilitate the relation of humans to Nature that has a central place in Marx's thought. Thus the rehabilitation of the mode of production thesis backed by an understanding of its original significance is the precondition for the restoration of the aspects of Marx's thought that are eclipsed in the later developments.

But this is not an easy task, because, notwithstanding the countless issues of contention between Western Marxism and the official Soviet version, both of them share an ill-considered view of the mode of production thesis. Essentially, this common view avers that the mode of production is the unity of the productive forces and the production relations. A manual of Soviet Marxism, for instance, titled *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, says that "it is evident that the relations which people enter into in the process of production, and also the productive forces, exist not isolated from one another but in a definite unity. This unity of the productive forces and production relations is expressed by historical materialism in the concept of the *mode of production"*.[59]

I take the view of Hindess and Hirst expressed in their book *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, as representative of the prevalent opinion in Western Marxism: "A mode of production is an articulated combination of relations and forces of production structured by the dominance of the relations of production".[60] Instead of "definite unity", we have the synonymous expression, "articulated combination" here. The additional feature here is the "dominance of the relations of production", whose validity is relative in Marx's version. As the two above definitions show, the concept of mode of production still remains an inadequately explored territory of Marxism. Even William H. Shaw, who has given a central place to the nexus between productive forces and the production relations, says the following about the mode of production:

> although arguably the key notion within historical materialism, nowhere is it formulated with precision. . . . Marx uses 'mode of production,' in a fashion which is more encompassing than 'economic structure,' to refer to the manner of producing which takes place both within and as a result of the given ownership relations of production. . . A 'mode of production' is intended by Marx to signify, rather generally, the system of producing, a distinct and independent way of carrying on social production as this is determined by an economic structure characterised by a specific ownership relation of production.[61]

This elaborate explanation essentially speaks about the same elements: productive forces and the production relations. What is remarkable here is Shaw's recognition that the concept of mode of production is "more encompassing", though he himself does not recognise the real extent it encompasses. The commonly recognised elements of the mode of production, i.e., productive forces and the production relations do not exhaust even the central elements of the concept. A mode of production is, before everything else, a mode of

"production", a form of activity, the life-process. Productive forces and the relations of production are the two crucial aspects of this process, but they themselves cannot imply the process of production that is at the heart of the concept of mode of production.

Even a simple linguistic analysis will bring out this point. In both the productive forces and the production relations, "production" is only the adjective; thus the two expressions speak about "forces" and "relations" respectively; whereas the "mode of production" speaks about "production", an activity, a process. It is important to remember here that in the view of Marx and Engels, human existence is equated with their life-process. This implies that the concept of mode of production defines a way of life. If we go by *The German Ideology*

> [t]his mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce.[62]

Thus the concept of mode of production constitutes the defining feature of social existence. I have already pointed out that the productive forces and the relations of production are only aspects of production. As production takes place, in all social formations, only when accompanied by these aspects, what defines a specific social organisation will also differentiate one social organisation from the other. As Marx says in *Capital*, volume 2, "whatever the social form of production, labourers and means of production always remain factors of it. But in a state of separation from each other either of these factors can be such only potentially. For production to go on at all they must unite. The specific manner in which

this union is accomplished distinguishes the different economic epochs of the structure of society from one another".[63]

Ironically, the concept of mode of production is well-recognised in this differentiating role. But what is often ill-recognised is the fact that what differentiates one social organisation from the other will also define the basic nature of that social organisation, because the general aspects of social formations are common to all of them. The excessive preoccupation with the differential role of the mode of production has eclipsed the referential significance of that concept. In the Marxist tradition, we come across frequent references to the capitalist/feudal/slave modes of production as if these differential concepts are taken for granted; but what the thesis of mode of production signifies is seldom explored in a sustained way. This way of understanding a concept in purely differential terms may seem outrageous to common human reason, but perfectly normal for the Structural, Althusserian tradition which contributed significantly to this kind of understanding; the roots of this tradition in turn are traceable to the methodological principles of Saussurean linguistics in the intellectual aspects like the one manifested here.

Now, with the critical awareness of this defining significance, we can analyse the question further: what does the thesis of mode of production propose? To be more specific, what is meant by Marx when he says in the 1859 preface that "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life"? If this is taken just as a more flexible form of determinism than the one encapsulated in the base and superstructure thesis, we are not going to gain much towards appropriating the central thought of Marx.

Incidentally, it should be mentioned that this statement of Marx has an alternative translation done by N. I. Stone wherein we find that "the mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life".[64] This

rendering construes that it is not the determinism which is of a general character, but what is determined is the general character of these social phenomena. Though this seems to be essentially the same as the first one, it offers a new insight when studied with reference to another significant instance, we have already seen partly, from the first volume of *Capital*, where Marx discusses his statements in the Preface. Here Marx writes with reference to the criticism that his propositions are true only for the modern age where material interests prevail, but not for the middle ages, in which Catholicism, nor for Athens and Rome, where politics, reigned supreme. Marx responds by saying that:

> In the first place it strikes one as an odd thing for any one to suppose that these well-worn phrases about the middle ages and the ancient world are unknown to anyone else. This much, however, is clear, that the middle ages could not live on Catholicism, nor the ancient world on politics. On the contrary, it is the mode in which they gained a livelihood that explains why here politics, and there Catholicism, played the chief part. For the rest, it requires but a slight acquaintance with the history of the Roman republic, for example, to be aware that its secret history is the history of its landed property. On the other hand, Don Quixote long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society.[65]

This "mode in which they gained a livelihood" is what Marx calls the mode of production. It is this mode of production that determines whether politics or Catholicism (i.e., religion) should play the chief role in a particular society. Stated from a different perspective, it is the mode of production that determines the relative significance of various social factors in a particular society. To paraphrase, it is "the mode of production of material life [which] determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life" in a

certain society, as Stone's translation would have it. This is the central contention of Marx's mode of production thesis.[66]

Thus Marx maintains here that the significance of social phenomena like politics, religion, and knight errantry are determined by the mode of production with respect to a particular social organisation. These significances are relative to the social totality and are not applicable as such to other social formations. It is also noteworthy to recognise that with regard to the Roman republic, where politics purportedly predominates, Marx says that its "secret history is the history of its landed property", exemplifying the thesis of base and superstructure in application. This brings to relief how the two theses coexist in Marx as different strains of thought with unequal explanatory scope.[67] Our focus here is, however, on the mode of production thesis.

It is significant to note that the values of different social spheres are defined with respect to the specific social totality. Every mode of production is a uniquely concrete social articulation. But the presently popular heterogeneous version of base and superstructure thesis seems to have supra-social significance by establishing fixed hierarchies among different social spheres without any regard to the specific social formation. In this, it is thoroughly unmarxist in nature. For it is a well-established fact that, for Marx, social laws are specific to a mode of production. This is recognised distinctly even in Marx's lifetime, in the words of a critic that Marx quotes approvingly in an afterword to his *Capital*:

> [For Marx,] most important of all is the rigid analysis of the series of successions, of the sequences and concatenations in which the different stages of . . . [social] evolution present themselves. But it will be said, the general laws of economic life are one and the same, no matter whether they are applied to the present or the past. This Marx directly denies. According to him, such abstract laws do not exist. On the contrary, in his opinion every historical

> period has laws of its own. . . . As soon as society has outlived a given period of development, and is passing over from one given stage to another, it begins to be subject also to other laws. In a word, economic life offers us a phenomenon analogous to the history of evolution in other branches of biology. The old economists misunderstood the nature of economic laws when they likened them to the laws of physics and chemistry. A more thorough analysis of phenomena shows that social organisms differ among themselves as fundamentally as plants or animals. Nay, one and the same phenomenon falls under quite different laws in consequence of the different structure of those organisms as a whole, of the variations of their individual organs, of the different conditions in which those organs function, &c.[68]

All this is quite clear and consistent if we base our analysis on the mode of production thesis as Marx propounds here. Replace this thesis with the other one, understood in the all-inclusive fashion, what we will have is almost the counterstatement of this. But the problem still to be settled is related to the seeming incompatibility of the restricted base and superstructure thesis with the mode of production thesis. For the former seems to be a structural one and the latter seems to be conceived as an organic totality. My previous observations about the much-ignored organic nature of the base and superstructure thesis contribute towards the right understanding of this problem. In fact, even in *The German Ideology*, the thinking represented by these theses is conceived as complementary to one another and not as contradictory:

> This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all

> history; and to show it in its action as State, to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc., and trace their origins and growth from that basis; by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another). [69]

This vision of social totality is embodied in the mode of production thesis and the base and superstructure thesis is conceivable as an aspect of that totality because the base of production relations is clearly one aspect of the mode of production thesis. In the presently popular version of base and superstructure thesis, ironically, mode of production figures as a part, because it is generally counted as the base for the superstructure. The roots of this distorting development could be found in Engels's later writings, as already seen. It could be shown that some of his own arguments run against the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis, and are more conducive to be conceived on the lines of the mode of production thesis. Engels's letter written to Conrad Schmidt on 27th October 1890 is an example:

> [T]e philosophy of every epoch, since it is a definite sphere in the division of labour, has as its presupposition certain definite intellectual material handed down to it by its predecessors, from which it takes its start. And that is why economically backward countries can still play first fiddle in philosophy: France in the eighteenth century compared with England, on whose philosophy the French based themselves, and later Germany in comparison with both. But the philosophy both of France and Germany and the general blossoming of literature at that time were also the result of a rising economic development. I consider the ultimate supremacy of economic development established in these spheres too, but it comes to pass within conditions imposed by the particular sphere itself: in philosophy, for instance, through the

> operation of economic influences (which again generally only act under political, etc., disguises) upon the existing philosophic material handed down by predecessors. Here economy creates nothing absolutely new *(a novo)*, but it determines the way in which the existing material of thought is altered and further developed, and that too for the most part indirectly, for it is the political, legal and moral reflexes which exercise the greatest direct influence upon philosophy.[70]

Let us take Engels's consideration of philosophy in the first few lines as a part of society's division of labour. As a matter of fact, this runs against the relegation of philosophy to the superstructure, as the division of labour relations obviously forms part of the production relations. If we remember that production relations are formed according to the mode of production and are a part of it, we can reconfigure this discussion of philosophy as a part of society's organisation of its activities, but then, the whole discussion hinges upon the thesis of mode of production and not on the base and superstructure. Thus, even if we go by Engels's argument, philosophy would not count as superstructure, but it could be conceived as a part of society's overall mode of production.

But Engels, with his understanding of philosophy as superstructure, struggles to explain both how it is predominated by the economic situation and also its deviations from the general economic development, thus unveiling the tradition of ultimate determination and the relative autonomy. But if this is seen from the mode of production perspective, it becomes clear that the position of philosophy is not a fixed one in a supra-social or trans-social sense but is definable with reference only to a specific society. The very fact of its unequal development in different societies becomes a self-evident phenomenon. Indeed, Engels also recognises the limitations of his view and states that this is applicable "within conditions imposed by the particular sphere itself". The conceptual affinity of this view with the theory

of factors—which was popular during the Second International period that immediately followed— is obvious here. As the manifestations of that reified theory have already been studied, we shall take a glance at the consequences of undoing these counterproductive developments in Marxism, by restoring the mode of production thesis to its original central status, which is the inexorable conclusion our studies lead us to.

A Glance at the Theoretical Consequences

Any paradigm shift like the one argued for here would have far reaching theoretical ramifications. I would neither claim nor even attempt to trace out all those consequences. Instead, I believe, that the future of these proposals would be decided by time and the course of developments that Marxist theory undergoes in times to come. So, here, I would only attempt to outline the general direction of the theoretical consequences that may spring from the recognition of Marx's restricted superstructure and the centrality of the mode of production thesis:

1. First and foremost, this recognition can put an end to the crude conceptual totalitarianism of the category of heterogeneous superstructure in which widely disparate aspects of society are lumped together indiscriminately by grossly obliterating the specificities of all these aspects. This blurring of the conceptual specificities is detrimental to any analytical purposes and hampers every attempt at theoretical sophistication and advancement that is essential for any living theory.

Of course, this does not mean to say that sophisticated alterations are neither proposed for the all-inclusive version of base and superstructure, nor that they have gained general acceptance. Althusser's structurally reconstructed Marxism is the most significant move in this direction. Besides, the fact that any proposal for sophistication that does not properly pay heed to the statements in Marx's Preface cannot be taken as representing his thought; the

exotic phraseology in which Althusser dons his concepts does not seem to me as sensible as it is sensational. As Derek Sayer says:

> I am inclined to agree, at least so far as the theoretical contortions of Althusser and his followers are concerned. Such conceptual acrobatics recall the equants and epicycles of Ptolemaic astronomy in the face of the Copernican challenge, attempts frantically to buttress an outmoded theory in the face of anomalous phenomena.[71]

I would like to only add that Marx's mode of production thesis coupled with his restricted base and superstructure thesis will take the place of Copernican theory here.

2. An inevitable corollary to the all-inclusive superstructure is the wholesale reductionism involved in viewing all the non-economic spheres as more or less derivatives of the economic base. The restricted superstructure can do away with this wholesale reductionism by confining the intrinsic relation only to the state and law, which are frequently acknowledged in Marxism as closely bound with the economic base. Later varieties of Marxism have adopted many theoretical strategies to avoid or at least to ameliorate this reductionism attendant to the all-inclusive superstructure. In this attempt, Marxists of different shades have drawn ideas from different theories. Althusser's concept of overdetermination is one such highly influential concept originally taken from Freud. Apart from the fact that this amounts to the tacit admission of inherent theoretical lapse in Marxism, this will be susceptible to the creation of an indiscriminate conglomeration of Marxism with other theoretical systems. If Marxism gets rid of the all-inclusive base and superstructure model the very necessity for such a patchwork does not arise.

3. As an overarching concept in Marxism, base and superstructure thesis has an explanatory centrality[72] at present. Consequently, any theoretical advancement in Marxism through the base and superstructure thesis is possible in two ways: 1) by broadening the

concept of superstructure to accommodate more and more constituents, 2) by restructuration of the ingredients of the superstructure, as the constituent adjacency of inherently heterogeneous social spheres exasperates any visualization. Thus, both the superstructural constituents and their mutual positions (relations) have become matters of interpretive ingenuity in Marxism. As a result Marxism has fallen prey to the commentatory capriciousness of the theorists, so far as the base and superstructure thesis is concerned. For somebody, superstructure includes language (e.g., Bukharin). For somebody else, religion is included in the superstructure (e.g., Cohen). Even sex is included in the superstructure, according to some (e.g., Gramsci). This endless elasticity of the concept of superstructure precludes any rigorousness or precision. On the contrary, the restricted superstructure is rigorous, precise and compact; and so it could greatly enhance the rigour of Marxist theory by doing away with the conceptual sloppiness.

4. As we have already seen, the enhanced central status of economics is the crucial contribution of Marxism to the social theory. The base and superstructure thesis is generally regarded as the encapsulation of this contribution. But, a majority of thinkers take this thesis as an approximate proxy of the mode of production thesis. Indeed, these two are inherently dissimilar as we have seen so far. When these two theses are treated as mutually substitutable, the resulting paradigmatic distortion is obvious. This false equalization of disparate paradigms to denote the same social law is not allowed in any theory that claims for scientific status. By restricting the concept of the base and superstructure to the relation between the state and law, and the production relations, and by not encompassing all social spheres, the restricted superstructure can settle this problem in favour of the mode of production thesis. On the contrary, the mode of production thesis will take its place as the thesis of Marx that conceptualizes the social totality.

5. The effect of these distortions is compounded and becomes more conspicuous when they are applied to cultural aspects like literature, art, morality etc., which are inherently more complex and demand a more nuanced analysis. The unquestioned tyranny of the all-inclusive superstructure could cause disastrous consequences here. A reconsideration of these questions from the mode of production perspective, unalloyed by the presumption of the all-inclusive base and superstructure, will be more productive and true to Marx's thought.

The discussion of the base and superstructure thesis among the Hollywood screenwriters and communists, in the early 1950s, reviewed by Larry Ceplair is a case in point. This interesting instance unmistakably testifies to the fact that the thesis in its all-inclusive form could only be counterproductive. As the cultural sector is counted as superstructural and not basic by the Hollywood communist leaders in this case, the organisational work among the blacklisted Hollywood screenwriters is considered a matter of secondary importance in spite of the conspicuous activism of these writers.[73] Such a conclusion is quite unlikely from the mode of production thesis, because the thesis takes different aspects of human life-process including the cultural one as ontologically independent of the economic activity. In fact as the aspects of human life-process, they are all spoken of on essentially similar terms in the mode of production thesis.

Similarly, the theoretical implications of the base and superstructure thesis for the central political practice of the communist parties can only be counterproductive because of the rigid, bifurcated vision of society it embodies. As Ajay Gudavarthy argued persuasively in his Ph. D thesis, "Towards Solidarity: Contemporary Naxalite, Dalit and Womens Movements in Andhra Pradesh," submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 2003, the base and superstructure thesis is inherently inadequate to support a view of various social movements based on their mutual solidarity:

> The reason for such a bifurcated practice can be traced in the context of Andhra Pradesh, to the practice of the Communist movement guided by traditional Marxist distinctions between the base and the superstructure. The artificial discontinuities conceptualized in theory are then replicated in the material practice of the Communist movement. Paradoxically, autonomous movements, which are critical of such bifurcation as a reaction themselves 'privilege' those domains undermined by the Communist movement: It is therefore imperative to argue that alternative notions and readings of 'totality' are present within the Marxist trajectory. It is also important to argue that base-superstructure model presents a reductionist model of reality and a more comprehensive reading of social condition is necessary.[74]

The repercussions of base and superstructure thesis even in the domains of art and literature are not desirable. As the base is clearly production relations, which are mainly class relations, the base and superstructure thesis, when applied to art or literature, will entail that they are conditioned by class realities. This makes the whole issue unreasonably one-sided. Thus Herbert Marcuse writes in his controversial book *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* that "Marxist aesthetics assumes that all art is somehow conditioned by the relations of production, class position, and so on. Its first task (but only its first) is the specific analysis of this 'somehow,' that is to say, of the limits and modes of this conditioning".[75] In fact, a few pages before this he sarcastically describes this view as the aesthetic imperative and says that "this aesthetic imperative [that literature should represent social relations of production] follows from the base-superstructure conception. In contrast to the rather dialectical formulations of Marx and Engels, the conception has been made into a rigid schema, a schematization that has had devastating consequences for aesthetics".[76] One finds a number such declarations of disenchantment with the base and superstructure thesis in

Marxist literature because of its evident wholesale reductionism. This could be effectively avoided by the mode of production thesis.

6. As already mentioned clearly, the base and superstructure thesis in its present heterogeneous form embodies a kind of abstract, rigid and reductive thought that is thoroughly alien to the original methodological commitment of Marxism. The present prevalence of the thesis in this unproductive form blunts the originally subversive and critical spirit of the materialist thinking advocated by the founders of Marxism. By getting rid of the conceptual sclerosis caused by this reified thesis, by recognising its real significance in its restricted form, and by replacing it in its all-inclusive form by the mode of production thesis that represents the social totality, the original methodological vitality of Marxism could be recaptured in a theoretically consistent way.

Mode of Production: The Conceptual Unconscious of Marxism

When we maintain that the base and superstructure thesis that holds a central place in Marxism now in its all-inclusive form, is to be replaced by the mode of production thesis that embodies Marx's vision of specific social totality, does this mean that the Marxist theoretical interventions existing so far, in various fields of study, like culture, politics, and sociology etc., are seriously flawed and the whole Marxist analytical and critical enterprise is to be thoroughly revamped. My answer, in brief, is “no”. On the contrary, I maintain, that most of the outstanding Marxists, in their remarkable theoretical contributions, have always tended towards using theoretical concepts that are intrinsically consonant with the mode of production thesis, though this has not been recognised and stated clearly as such most of the times. This does not amount to saying that the importance of the mode of production thesis is never recognised at all. But as long as the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis is retained in Marxism, the real analytical scope of the mode of production thesis would never

be appreciated in a theoretically consistent manner. Thus, I venture to characterise the mode of production thesis as the conceptual unconscious of the Marxist tradition.

This tendency is so deep-rooted in the modern Marxists that it is often imputed to Marx himself to some extent. A number of writers on Marx (Rader, Cohen, Ollman for instance) made the observation with remarkable consistency that in considering issues like culture, art, and literature etc., Marx seldom draws his views by applying the base and superstructure thesis. As he is believed to have advocated the thesis, as a general principle, in the presently popular form, the essentially correct observation about Marx's analytical practice has the unfortunate (and often unintended) implication of betraying the inconsistency between his stated general principles and actual concrete analyses. Our study of Marx's statements about the base and superstructure thesis has shown this view to be unfounded.

But the problem of inconsistency between the general theoretical principles and the actual analytical practice, in reality, has continued to haunt the Marxist tradition, though Marx is free from it. But, what is comparatively worse is the other possibility: maintaining consistency between these two aspects by persistently adhering to the counterproductive base and superstructure thesis in its practical implications also. With a healthy theoretical instinct that is not considerably eclipsed by the tradition of misreading and misplacing the general principles of base and superstructure thesis and the mode of production thesis, Marxism, at least in its most illuminating phases, has avoided this worse alternative and kept up its theoretical vigour in application to a number of vital problems. In this section I would demonstrate some instances of such illuminating moments in Marxism, where the writers' considered views are clearly in consonance with the mode of production thesis, though not necessarily being aware of it.

To take a modern instance, in her talk, *Historical Materialism: Base and Superstructure*, Kate Connolly says that the base is "the way production is organised"; this is

an expression that is clearly synonymous with the mode of production. Then she goes on to add that Marx says "depending on how society was organised economically that would affect all of the other things; for example, like the media, like the judiciary, like the police, like the state, all of these things spring from the way society is economically organised."[77] Connolly's explication of all these issues as inextricably connected with the organisation of society's production seems fairly persuasive. Here, it is important to observe that in her usage "economy" is synonymous with production. In Marx, it clearly denotes the base or production relations alone. Evidently, Connolly's usage here tends to extend the base and superstructure thesis so that it approaches the breadth of the mode of production thesis.

By analysing the passage of Engels, on the above lines, I have shown how the conceptual roots of the theory of factors is already present in that, in a germinal form; and in the previous chapter we have studied a number of statements that attest to the popularity of this theory during the period of the Second International. Furthermore, we have also noted how this theory is remarkably similar to the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis, in its reified treatment of the different aspects of human life-activity. Some of the best theoretical observations of Plekhanov, the father of Russian socialism, and Labriola, who has a similar status with respect to the Italian movement, are made in countering this reifying theory.[78] As Labriola's argument highlighting the concrete human actors behind the abstract factors has already been studied adequately, here we shall see the contributions of Plekhanov, who says that

> the genuine and consistent materialists are indeed not given to always thrusting the economic factor on others. Moreover, the very question of which factor is predominant in social life does not carry much weight with them. . . . The irrelevance of the question as to which factor dominates the social life has become very obvious since Hegel's times. *Hegelian* idealism has precluded the

> very possibility of such questions. The more so has it been precluded by our contemporary dialectical materialism.[79]

When we remember that the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis, in essence, is a theory of the predominance of the economic factor over the other, it is not difficult to sense that this amounts to a criticism of that thesis. What is more remarkable is the way that Plekhanov connects this criticism, after a couple of pages, with the correct view of considering the factors as the aspects of human activity: "[A]fter all, the branches of that [social] science— ethics, politics, law, political economy and so on— all examine one and the same thing: the activities of social man, but do so each from its particular point of view".[80] Then he prolongs his argument to show how this theory of factors is based on the abstraction, the reality of which is to be found in the social totality:

> A socio-historical factor is an *abstraction*, the concept of which emerges from the *process of abstraction*. Thanks to the latter, the various *aspects* of the social *whole* acquire an appearance of particular *categories*, while the various manifestations and expressions of social man's activities— morals, law, economic forms, etc.— turn in our minds into special forces which seem to have evoked and conditioned those activities, and are their ultimate causes.
>
> Since the theory of factors has arisen, disputes are bound to appear as to which particular factor should be recognised as predominant.[81]

After thus demystifying the theory of factors to uncover the reality of social totality, he acknowledges Labriola as the one "who has made a more complete and profound analysis of this theory than any other materialist writer" [82] But the most important argument of Plekhanov is the one in which he likens this view of social totality with the theory of conservation of energy in physics:

> No matter how valid and useful the theory of factors may have been in its time, it does not stand up to any criticism today. It splits up social man's activities, converting their various aspects and manifestations into special forces that allegedly determine society's historical advance. This theory has played the same role in the history of the development of social science as did the theory of individual physical forces in natural science. The successes of natural science have led up to the doctrine of the *unity* of those forces, and to the present-day doctrine of energy. In exactly the same way, the successes scored in social science had to bring about the replacement of the theory of factors, that outcome of social analysis, by the *synthetic view on social life*.[83]

This clearly shows how Plekhanov considers the view of social totality (which is embodied in the mode of production thesis) as superior to the theory of factors. Evidently, his criticism is extendable to the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis, as it is also based on the same factoral mode of thinking. But the fact is that Plekhanov himself does not acknowledge that his argument is in favour of the mode of production thesis. Interestingly, even Bukharin, the most thorough-going proponent of the base and superstructure thesis, also advocates a similar argument in his essay on *Historical Materialism*:

> It would be equally incorrect to consider the various 'factors' from the point of view of their unequal value; to admit the importance of economy, but to belittle that of politics or science. Many misunderstandings result from such an interpretation. Why attempt to set up a scale of the relative importance, of these 'factors' when we recall that capitalist economy could not exist without capitalist politics? It would be difficult to decide whether— in a rifle— the barrel or the trigger was the more important; or— in the human body— the left hand or the right foot; or— in a watch— the spring or the cog-wheel.

> Some things are more important than others; economy is more important than dancing; but in many cases it is absurd to make such a statement. A system may contain sections that are of equal importance for the existence of the whole. The trigger is as important in a rifle as the barrel; a single screw in a piece of mechanism may be as important as any other part, for without it the mechanism might cease to be a mechanism. Similarly, in a consideration of the 'superstructural' labor, as a portion of the total social labor, it would be equally absurd to ask either of the following questions: Which is more important for modern industry, metallurgy or mining? Which is more important, direct material labor, or labor in economic administration? At certain stages in evolution, the two may be inseparable.[84]

It is really strange that Bukharin does not see that this argument runs against the very essence of his all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis. In fact, the common point among all these critical comments of Labriola, Plekhanov and Bukharin is that they do not seem to be aware of the fact that these arguments also contradict the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis and that they are clearly in consonance with the mode of production thesis. Moreover, I have already discussed how Plekhanov polemicises with Bernstein regarding the base and superstructure thesis in his *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*; but in the same essay, when Plekhanov offers concrete examples in support of Marxism, his examples read almost always as the exemplifications of the mode of production thesis.

For instance, discussing the views of Karl von Steinen about the Brazilian hunters, he says that "the condition of their life as hunters have determined not only the world-outlook of these tribes but also their moral concepts, their sentiments, and even, the writer goes on to say, their aesthetic tastes". [85] It is obvious that the hunting conditions of life is a mode of

production and cannot be reduced to the production relations alone. Plekhanov's reference to Bücher's views is also interesting in this context:

> Bücher is of the opinion that the measured and rhythmical movements of the body transmitted the laws of their co-ordination to figurative, poetical speech. This is all the more probable if one recalls that, at the lower stages of development, rhythmical *movements* of the body are usually accompanied by *singing*. But what is the explanation of the co-ordination of bodily movements? It lies in the nature of the process of production. Thus, 'the origin of poetry is to be sought in production activities'.[86]

No need to say that this "process of production" is conceptually captured only by the mode of production thesis. Another similar instance is Plekhanov's approving citation of the words of Wallaschek, about the importance of the goat for the Greeks, the word for which in Greek was also the source for the word "tragedy".[87]All these instances cannot be related to the base and superstructure thesis, if we stick to Marx's definition of the base as production relations. On the other hand, the mode of production thesis, with its multi-dimensional view of the totality of life-activity, including the productive activity, is obviously relevant for all these cases. It is pertinent to recollect here that Bukharin's concept of "morphological unity" of the social organism that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, figures in his above mentioned major work as a concept overriding the base and superstructure thesis in importance, is also based on his unconscious recognition of the significance of the mode of production thesis that embodies Marx's vision of the unity of social organism.

Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci: The Rehabilitation of the Concept of Organic Totality

So far, we have seen how the positivistic and mechanistic thinking that was prominent during the period of the Second International, mostly represented by the theory of factors and the all-inclusive base and superstructure thesis, was countered by the illuminating insights of

some of the best Marxist arguments of that period. It was also emphasised that these illuminating insights are conceptually in line with the mode of production thesis that represents Marx's vision of the social totality. Again, this revealing view of totality was recaptured significantly by Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci among the later Marxists.[88] To begin with Lukács, the centrality of the concept of totality is strikingly conspicuous in him:

> It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. The capitalist separation of the producer from the total process of production, the division of the process of labour into parts at the cost of the individual humanity of the worker, the atomisation of society into individuals who simply go on producing without rhyme or reason, must all have a profound influence on the thought, the science and the philosophy of capitalism. Proletarian science is revolutionary not just by virtue of its revolutionary ideas which it opposes to bourgeois society, but above all because of its method. The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science. [89]

Against the backdrop of the two theses we have been analysing, this amounts to the recognition of the centrality of the mode of production thesis (as representing the view of totality) vis-à-vis the base and superstructure thesis (as representing the primacy of economics). For Lukács, this primacy of the category of totality is the heart of dialectic, and if this is ignored, the various factors of the social totality can be theorised in a supra-social, and isolated fashion that turns them into reified categories:

> [when] the dialectical method was overthrown and with it the methodological supremacy of the totality over the individual aspects; the parts were prevented from finding their definition within the whole and, instead, the whole was dismissed as unscientific or else it degenerated into the mere 'idea' or 'sum' of the parts. With the totality out of the way, the fetishistic relations of the isolated parts appeared as a timeless law valid for every human society.[90]

Another remarkable contribution of Lukács is his underlining the limitations of the concept of interaction that is given an inordinately significant place in the formulations of Engels. For Lukács, mere external interaction is not a substitute for dialectic. To be sure, he does not deny such an interaction:

> But even the category of interaction requires inspection. If by interaction we mean just the reciprocal causal impact of two otherwise unchangeable objects on each other, we shall not have come an inch nearer to an understanding of society. This is the case with the vulgar materialists with their one-way causal sequences (or the Machists with their functional relations). After all, there is e.g. an interaction when a stationary billiard ball is struck by a moving one: the first one moves, the second one is deflected from its original path. The interaction we have in mind must be more than the interaction of *otherwise unchanging objects.* It must go further in its relation to the whole: for this relation determines the objective form of every object of cognition.[91]

Thus, the idea of the social whole or totality has an overriding significance in the thought of Lukács. It is important to realise here that this emphasis is neither one-sided, nor does it imply that the parts are relatively insignificant. What he actually advocates is an intricately interlaced dialectic of the part and whole. Thus he writes in one of his last works that remained unfinished and published later in three parts, *The Ontology of Social Being,* that

"every 'element' and every part, in other words, is just as much a whole; the 'element' is always a complex with concrete and qualitatively specific properties, a complex of various collaborating forces and relations".[92] As every element represents the whole, the generally held dichotomy between the economic and the non-economic factors is baseless; thus

> no matter how bold the abstractions that Marx consistently elaborates within the strictly economic field, the life-giving interaction between the properly economic and the extra-economic reality that is also continuously at work, in the context of the totality of social being, enabling the abstract theory to clarify theoretical questions that would otherwise remain insoluble"[93]

It is this internal interaction conceived against the backdrop of totality that represents the genuine thought of Marx. This understanding does not establish hard and fast divisions between the social whole; instead it maintains that the elements are transmutable into one another. This is what Lukács calls the dialectical method:

> This specific, seldom understood and paradoxically dialectical method is related to the already mentioned insight of Marx's to the effect that economic and extra- economic phenomena in social life continuously transform themselves into one another, and standing in an insuperable relationship of interaction; although, as has already been demonstrated, this leads neither to a lawless once-and-for-all historical development, nor to a mechanically 'law-like' rule of the abstract and purely economic. There is rather an organic unity of social being, with the role of the predominant moment, but no more, falling to the strict laws of economics.[94]

All these statements make it crystal clear that Lukács cannot be a supporter of the base and superstructure thesis in its present compartmentalised form. But, strangely, he does not take issue with the thesis squarely and try to demolish it. The most probable reason for

this is his (mis)understanding of the Preface on the lines that it is commonly understood. In "the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*", Lukács says, "the most important thing . . . is that it is the 'sum total of relations of production' that Marx considers as the 'real foundation' from which forms of consciousness develop; these forms of consciousness are thus conditioned by the process of social, political and intellectual life".[95] Here, the first clause is an extension of what Marx says regarding his base and superstructure thesis, so as to cover consciousness, and the second clause is a misstatement of his words about the mode of production thesis. Notwithstanding this misunderstanding, commonly observed in a number of other writers also, Lukács is not ready to let this be construed on the usual unilateral lines:

> It is only vulgar materialism (from the period of the Second International through to the Stalin period and its consequences) that made this into a unilateral and direct causal relationship between the economy, or even particular aspects of it, and ideology. Marx himself, however . . . says firstly that definite forms of social consciousness 'correspond' to the superstructure, and further that the mode of production of material life 'conditions' social, political and intellectual life in general.[96]

This instance of citation is remarkably more accurate than the previous one. Still, it should not be ignored that, in Marx, the "definite forms of social consciousness", correspond, not to the "superstructure", as Lukács would have it, but to the relations of production, or the base. On the whole, this shows how Lukács was under the sway of the prevalent view of the base and superstructure thesis and how, consequently, he couldn't turn his essentially correct understanding of the category of totality to dismantle the concept of an all-inclusive base and superstructure and to restore the mode of production thesis as the legitimate model of Marx's view of social totality.

Karl Korsch's criticism of the later distortions of Marxism, which he calls "vulgar-Marxism", is similarly aimed at the stratified understanding of totality that is embodied in the all-inclusive base and superstructure model. Even if the unique position of the State and Law are somehow taken into account, this model misrepresents social reality, as Korsch says in his much influential work *Marxism and Philosophy*:

> For this conception, political and legal representatives may have an ideological and unreal character, but they are at least related to something real— the institutions of Law and the State, which comprise the superstructure of the society in question. On the other hand, the 'higher' ideological representations (men's religions, aesthetic and philosophical conceptions) correspond to no real object. This can be formulated concisely, with only a slight caricature, by saying that for vulgar-Marxism there are *three degrees of reality:* (1) the economy, which in the last instance is the only objective and totally non-ideological reality; (2) Law and the State, which are already somewhat less real because clad in ideology, and (3) pure ideology which is objectless and totally unreal ('pure rubbish'). [97]

Korsch consistently argues against such a stratified understanding of reality, which he rightly describes as thoroughly undialectical. But, in his case also, strangely, he did not direct his critical observation against the all-inclusively understood base and superstructure, which is the inexorable source of such a stratified view. Still, he is acutely aware of the fact that the phenomena considered superstructural in the Marxist tradition — in brief, State, and ideology— are greatly misunderstood and less appreciated. Thus he presents Lenin's *State and Revolution*, as a unique theoretical attempt to rehabilitate the original Marxist view of the State; and in his *Marxism and Philosophy*, he embarks on a similar enterprise with regard to the question of ideology: "[T]herefore we must solve in a dialectically materialist fashion not

only ‘the question of the relationship of the State to social revolution and of social revolution to the State’ (Lenin), but also the ‘question of the relationship of ideology to social revolution and of social revolution to ideology’”.[98] And this he solves from the perspective of totality, since Marxism is based essentially on such a view:

> It is a theory of *social development* seen and comprehended as a living totality; or, more precisely, it is a theory of *social revolution* comprehended and practised as a living totality. At this stage there is no question whatever of dividing the economic, political and intellectual moments of this totality into separate branches of knowledge, even while every concrete peculiarity of each separate moment is comprehended, analysed and criticised with historical fidelity. Of course, it is not only economics, politics and ideology, but also the historical process and conscious social action that continue to make up the living unity of ‘revolutionary practice’ *(Theses on Feuerbach*).[99]

Such a view of the unified living totality is obliterated by the compartmentalising base and superstructure theory conceived in the all-encompassing sense. As a result, the most commonly held superstructural items—politics and ideology— have come to be underestimated. This great work of Korsch is a milestone attempt in the Marxist tradition, to re-establish the significance of consciousness, by reorienting it from the perspective of a living totality:

> Even today most Marxist theoreticians conceive of the efficacy of so-called intellectual phenomena in a purely negative, abstract and undialectical sense, when they should analyse this domain of social reality with the materialist and scientific method moulded by Marx and Engels. Intellectual life should be conceived in union with social and political life, and social being and becoming (in the widest sense, as economics, politics or law) should be

> studied in union with social consciousness in its many different manifestations, as a real yet also ideal (or 'ideological') component of the historical process in general. Instead all consciousness is approached with totally abstract and basically metaphysical dualism, and declared to be a reflection of the one really concrete and material developmental process, on which it is completely dependent (even if relatively independent, still dependent in the last instance).[100]

For Korsch, it is this integral view of consciousness which characterises the dialectical view—materialist or otherwise. Without a proper understanding of this, it is not possible to realise the revolutionary significance of Marx's critique of political economy:

> For the *coincidence of consciousness and reality* characterises every dialectic, including Marx's dialectical materialism. Its consequence is that the material relations of production of the capitalist epoch only are what they are in combination with the forms in which they are reflected in the pre-scientific and bourgeois-scientific consciousness of the period; and they could not subsist in reality without these forms of consciousness. Setting aside any philosophical considerations, it is therefore clear that *without this coincidence of consciousness and reality, a critique of political economy could never have become the major component of a theory of social revolution.* The converse follows. Those Marxist theoreticians for whom Marxism was no longer essentially a theory of social revolution could see no need for this dialectical conception of the coincidence of reality and consciousness: it was bound to appear to them as theoretically false and unscientific.[101]

When this integrally conceived understanding of consciousness is the only revolutionary and dialectical understanding, it follows naturally that a converse view is

inherently counter-revolutionary. Thus, Korsch asserts justifiably that "bourgeois consciousness necessarily sees itself as apart from the world and independent of it, as pure critical philosophy and impartial science, just as the bourgeois State and bourgeois Law appear to be above society. This consciousness must be philosophically fought by the revolutionary materialistic dialectic, which is the philosophy of the working class."[102] But the trajectory of Marxist tradition, as we could now say with our unenviable hindsight, has never recovered this lively integral view to any considerable degree. Thus Korsch's caustic remarks against the contemporary state of Marxism are still relevant, even more so now perhaps:

> Thus the materialist conception of history, which in Marx and Engels was essentially a dialectical one, eventually became something quite undialectical in their epigones. For one tendency, it has changed into a kind of heuristic principle of specialised theoretical investigation. For another, the fluid methodology of Marx's materialist dialectic freezes into a number of theoretical formulations about the causal interconnection of historical phenomena in different areas of society— in other words it became something that could best be described as a general systematic sociology.[103]

Once Marxism loses its original revolutionary and dialectical intent, and consolidates itself into yet another frozen theoretical system of sociology, the paradoxical truth becomes understandable and even justifiable that some of the robust thinkers in the Marxist tradition have to reject the well-established tenets of Marxism to re-appropriate its original spirit. The controversial position of Raymond Williams is a case in point. Let him speak for himself:

> Now for my own part I have always opposed the formula of base and superstructure: not primarily because of its methodological weaknesses but because of its rigid, abstract and static character. Further, from my work on the nineteenth century, I came to view it as essentially a bourgeois formula; more

> specifically, a central position of utilitarian thought. I did not want to give up my sense of the commanding importance of economic activity and history. My inquiry in *Culture and Society* had begun from just that sense of a transforming change.[104]

Thus, in spite of his rejection of the base and superstructure thesis, Williams never repudiated the predominance of material, productive activity. But this predominance is to be formulated through a different theoretical framework that could cover the richness of complex social life. As he goes on to say:

> But in theory and practice I came to believe that I had to give up, or at least to leave aside, what I knew as the Marxist tradition: to attempt to develop a theory of social totality; to see the study of culture as the study of relations between elements in a whole way of life; to find ways of studying structure, in particular works and periods, which could stay in touch with and illuminate particular art works and forms, but also forms and relations of more general social life; to replace the formula of base and superstructure with the more active idea of a field of mutually if also unevenly determining forces. That was the project of *The Long Revolution*, and it seems to me extraordinary, looking back, that I did not then know the work of Lukács or of Goldmann, which would have been highly relevant to it, and especially as they were working within a more conscious tradition and in less radical an isolation.[105]

It is not difficult to see the conceptual closeness of the framework Williams was trying to articulate with the mode of production thesis. After taking note of this unusual similarity of Williams's project with that of Lukács or Goldmann, or Korsch, we shall turn our gaze to the Italian Marxist of international importance—Antonio Gramsci.

To begin with, contrary to the commonly held opinion, Gramsci does not reject the

base and superstructure theory as such. For instance, the concept of praxis, which has a central importance in his theory, is conceived in terms of base and superstructure: ". . . What did M. [Marx] mean when, in the Theses on Feuerbach, he talked about 'the education of the educator'— did he not mean to say that the superstructure reacts dialectically to the Structure and modifies it?"[106] Thus, human praxis, man's changing of his own conditions, is conceived as superstructure's reaction on the structure [Gramsci's word for infrastructure]. But, it is in his concept of *historical bloc* that we find his view of totality. In his words:

> Structures and superstructures form a 'historical bloc'. That is to say the complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures is the reflection of the ensemble of the social relations of production. From this, one can conclude: that only a totalitarian system of ideologies gives a rational reflection of the contradiction of the structure and represents the existence of the objective conditions for the revolutionizing of praxis. If a social group is formed which is one hundred per cent homogeneous on the level of ideology, this means that the premises exist one hundred per cent for this revolutionizing: that is that the 'rational' is actively and actually real. This reasoning is based on the necessary reciprocity between structure and superstructures, a reciprocity which is nothing other than the real dialectical process.[107]

Instead of rejecting the base and superstructure thesis, Gramsci argues for an interactionist view of the theses. But this interaction between the structure and superstructure takes place within the articulated totality that he calls the historical bloc.[108] As Texier observes rightly:

> The first [methodological requirement for Gramsci] consists in starting out from the basis of the concept of the 'historical bloc' to reach an understanding

> of the dialectical unity of infrastructure and superstructures, the passage from the economic to the political moment and therefore, the birth of the 'historical movement' and its development up to the moment of the 'overthrow of praxis' and ethico-political expansion. This principle holds good for *all* moments of superstructural activity and is, therefore, applicable to the concepts of hegemony and civil society. In Gramscian terms we would say that *it* is theoretical nonsense to separate quality from quantity, liberty from necessity, ideology from economy.[109]

In formulating this central concept of historical bloc, Gramsci seems to have been influenced by the views of Sorel. Thus he says that “the concept of 'historical bloc' constructed by Sorel grasped precisely in full this unity upheld by the philosophy of praxis”.[110] But, for Gramsci, this concept does not entail the depreciation of the significance of the superstructure. He takes issue with Sorel on this account: “ The concept of the concrete (historical) value of the superstructures in the philosophy of praxis must be enriched by juxtaposing it with Sorel's concept of the 'historical bloc'. If men become conscious of their social position and their tasks on the terrain of the superstructures, this means that between structure and superstructure a necessary and vital connection exists”.[111] In fact, some exquisite passages in Gramsci are devoted to explicating the significance of the superstructural issues. As he went on to explicate:

> The very images and metaphors on which the founders of the philosophy of praxis frequently draw give some clues . . . the argument that the economy is to society what anatomy is to biological sciences one must remember the struggle that went on in the natural sciences to expel from the scientific terrain principles of classification that were based on external and transient elements. If animals were classified according to the colour of their skin, their hair or

> their plumage, everyone nowadays would protest. In the human body it certainly cannot be said that the skin (and also the historically prevalent type of physical beauty) are mere illusions and that the skeleton and anatomy are the only reality. However for a long time something similar to this was said. By highlighting the anatomy and the function of the skeleton nobody was trying to claim that man (still less woman) can live without the skin. Going on with the same metaphor one can say that it is not the skeleton (strictly speaking) which makes one fall in love with a woman, but that one nevertheless realizes how much the skeleton contributes to the grace of her movements etc.[112]

With this awareness of the irreplaceable importance of superstructure, Gramsci resolutely argues against any claim that asserts the epiphenomenal nature of it. The following critique against Croce, who propounded the concept of "dialectic of distincts", is noteworthy:

> In what sense can one speak of the identity of history with politics and say that therefore all of life is politics! How could one conceive of whole system of superstructures as (a system of) political distinctions, thus introducing the notion of distinction into the philosophy of praxis! Can one even speak of a dialectic of distincts? Concept of historical bloc; that is, unity between nature and spirit, unity of opposites and of distincts. If distinction is introduced into the superstructure, does it get introduced into the structure? Critique of Croce's position: for polemical reasons he treats the structure as a 'hidden god,' a 'noumenon,' as opposed to the superstructures as 'appearances', in a metaphorical sense and in a positive sense. . . . one has to take Croce's 'reality' and put it on its feet, etc.[113]

This passage is quite pertinent even today because it records Gramsci's dissent, to

subscribe to a heterogeneous, ubiquitous politics as proposed by the neo-Gramscians, or Post-Marxits such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and others like Cornel West, paradoxically on the authority of Gramsci himself.[114] As to the significance of superstructure in the view of Gramsci, this passage gives clear evidence by offering a critique of taking superstructure as appearance. For Gramsci, the concept of superstructure is as broad ranging as it is important. It encompasses the theory of Marxism also: "the philosophy of praxis [Gramsci's term for Marxism, derived from his predecessor, Labiola] itself is a superstructure, it is the terrain on which determinate social groups become conscious of their own social being, their own strength, their own tasks, their own becoming".[115] With this emphasis on the significance of superstructure, he likens it with the trench systems of war:

> The superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare. In war it would sometimes happen that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy's entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer perimeter; and at the moment of their advance and attack the assailants would find themselves confronted by a line of defence which was still effective. The same thing happens in politics, during great economic crises. A crisis cannot give the attacking forces the ability to organize with lightning speed in time and in space; still less can it endow them with fighting spirit. Similarly, the defenders are not demoralized, nor do they abandon their positions, even among the ruins, nor do they lose faith in their own strength or their own future.[116]

Brilliant comments like this are seen frequently throughout the writings of Gramsci that potentially counteract the effects of the mechanically understood base and superstructure thesis such as economism. But Gramsci's recurrent critique of this mechanical understanding of the thesis should never be mistaken for a total repudiation of the thesis. In fact, all the

unique conceptual contributions of Gramsci such as the role of intellectuals, the concept of civil society, and hegemony are inextricably interwoven with his understanding of the base and superstructure thesis, as the fillowing passage testifies eloquently:

> The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, 'mediated' by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the 'functionaries'. It should be possible both to measure the degree of 'organicism' of the various intellectual strata and their degree of connection with a fundamental social group, and to establish a gradation of their functions and of the superstructures from the bottom to the top (from the structural base upwards). What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the state'.[117]

These two levels correspond to the two aspects of social control that form the crux of Gramscian outlook. To follow his line of thought interrupted above:

> These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the state and government. The functions in question are precisely organizational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise:
>
> 1. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group;

> this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
>
> 2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.[118]

Thus the central contributions of Gramsci can be viewed as superstructural aspects in his framework. It is important to note that this line of thought does not amount to depreciation of the significance of superstructure but the opposite. But, at the same time, he also avoids the opposite pitfall of exaggerating the power of superstructure. Thus, basing himself on the propositions of Croce, Gramsci puts it in slightly sexist wording:

> Literature does not generate Literature, etc.; in other words, ideologies do not create ideologies, superstructures do not generate superstructures other than as a legacy of inertia and passivity. They are not generated through 'parthenogenesis' but through the intervention of the 'masculine' element— history— which is the revolutionary activity that creates the 'new man' (that is, new social relations). [119]

Summing up, it is remarkable to observe that Gramsci, instead of rejecting the base and superstructure theory as often suggested by the commentators, has consistently endorsed it, though he often expresses the felt need for the refinement of that theory and adapts various strategies towards this goal, such as the gradation of the concept of superstructure. But it is in his concept of historical bloc, the embodiment of his view of social totality, that we find his most important idea which has the intrinsic potential to transcend the compartmentalising

base and superstructure theory in its extended form, and it is not difficult to see the conceptual congruence of this key idea with the mode of production thesis.

The Frankfurt School and the Legacy of *Totality*

It is a well-recognised fact that the vision of totality that illuminated the views of such major thinkers, like Lukács, Korsch, or Gramsci has continued its enlightening presence in the thought of the later Marxists who came to be known by the collective title, the Frankfurt School. In the case of the latter, we find a sustained engagement with the effects of technology on the finer aspects of life. Although this is often taken as exemplifying the base and superstructure thesis, the proper theoretical framework for this sort of analysis is the mode of production thesis alone. Let us take the case of Walter Benjamin, who is criticised time and again, for being unsophisticated in tracing the effects of the base on superstructure. In his path-breaking essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", he analyses the unprecedented impact of technology on what he terms as the ritualistic nature of art. Let him explain it himself:

> We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the authentic work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.[120]

Against this general backdrop, for Benjamin, "an all-important insight", about the condition of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, is that

> for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree

> the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense".[121]

Seen from the intellectual ambience dominated by the base and superstructure theory, along with the inevitable additions of mediations and gradations, this seemed to be so straight and unrefined. Thus, Hannah Arendt writes in the introduction to the above cited book:

> The theoretical aspect that was bound to fascinate him was the doctrine of the superstructure, which was only briefly sketched by Marx but then assumed a disproportionate role in the movement as it was joined by a disproportionately large number of intellectuals, hence by people who were interested only in the superstructure. Benjamin used this doctrine only as a heuristic-methodological stimulus and was hardly interested in its historical or philosophical background. What fascinated him about the matter was that the spirit and its material manifestation were so intimately connected . . . a speculation on the stock exchange, a poem, a thought, with the hidden line which holds them together and enables the historian or philologist to recognize that they must all be placed in the same period.[122]

And this kind of direct correlation between different sorts of social aspects seems to pose an intellectual challenge for its comprehension, in Arendt's view. She looks for the answer in the mode of Benjamin's imaginative apprehension of the world:

> Metaphors are the means by which the oneness of the world is poetically brought about. What is so hard to understand about Benjamin is that without being a poet he *thought poetically* and therefore was bound to regard the metaphor as the greatest gift of language. . . . He had no trouble understanding the theory of the superstructure as the final doctrine of

> metaphorical thinking—precisely because without much ado and eschewing all 'mediations‘ he directly related the superstructure to the so-called 'material' substructure, which to him meant the totality of sensually experienced data. He evidently was fascinated by the very thing that the others branded as 'vulgar-Marxist' or 'undialectical' thinking.[123]

What is not properly recognised in such interpretations is that this “oneness of the world”, is theoretically encapsulated, in a better way, in the view of totality, in a relatively simpler and straight forward manner. From this view of totality, and mode of production, it does not need any mediations or other theoretical niceties, but every aspect is taken as a dimension of human activity. But, this appreciation is not possible when all these observations are considered as a rule, from the ubiquitous base and superstructure theory, as Eagleton does, for instance:

> There is, however, an obvious danger inherent in a concern with art’s technological basis. This is the trap of ‘technologism’– the belief that technical forces in themselves, rather than the place they occupy within a whole mode of production, are the determining factor in history. Brecht and Benjamin sometimes fall into this trap; their work leaves open the question of how an analysis of art as a mode of production is to be systematically combined with an analysis of it as a mode of experience. What, in other words, is the relation between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’ *in art itself?* Theodor Adorno, Benjamin’s friend and colleague, correctly criticized him for resorting on occasions to too simple a model of this relationship – for seeking out analogies or resemblances between isolated economic facts and isolated literary facts, in a way which makes the relationship between base and superstructure essentially *metaphorical.*[124]

In most of the cases, accusations against Benjamin such as this have their origin in taking them as the indubitable instances of base and superstructure thesis. Viewed from a different perspective, such as the mode of production perspective, one can do away with the mediations and other external patchwork. In fact, Eagleton himself says a few lines after this that "the question of how to describe this relationship within art between 'base' and 'superstructure', between art as production and art as ideological, seems to me one of the most important questions which Marxist literary criticism has now to confront".[125] He does not see that this task could be better approached from the mode of production thesis, as the mode of production itself forms only the base for him, as for many other modern Marxists. As to the writers of the Frankfurt School, however, what is crucial is art as a piece of production and not as ideology. As Ernst Bloch puts it:

> The 'poetic' never entered the formations of ideology formally or without contents of its own so that it overlaps with mere 'false consciousness'—without 'productive additives' of its own. Ideology has been created by the 'poetic' in the superstructure of former civilisations. The poetic is not just a formal treatment. It is also an objective piece of work with material that leads to its condensation and brings out its essence. It shows itself most clearly in dramatic form through experimental isolation and elucidation of the conflicts, through intensification of the figures so that they capture the role of their characters and reveal their essence only when *driven to the very heights* in a poetic way.[126]

Two central figures of this School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, also made pertinent observations on the impact of technology on the social life. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* for instance, they write that "the step from telephone to radio has clearly distinguished the roles. The former liberally permitted the participant to play the role of

subject. The latter democratically makes everyone equally into listeners, in order to expose them in authoritarian fashion to the same programs"[127]. But for them technology as such cannot play the dominant role. As they already made it clear before this very observation:

> What is not mentioned is that the basis on which technology *is* gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest. Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of a society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs, and films hold the totality together until their leveling element demonstrates its power against the very system of injustice it served. For the present the technology of the culture industry confines itself to standardization and mass production and sacrifices what once distinguished the logic of the work from that of society. These adverse effects, however, should not be attributed to the internal laws of technology itself but to its function within the economy today.[128]

Thus, they explicitly take a position that avoids any scope for technologism. But this position could not be simply taken as imputing the causative role for the economic relations either. As Adorno puts it quite explicitly, in a view based on totality, there are no hard and fast cause and effect distinctions. In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno takes issue with the mode of thought underlying the base and superstructure thesis from the perspective of totality:

> Ultimately there is a level of system—the social keyword is: integration—in which the universal dependence of all moments on all other ones makes the talk of causality obsolete; the search for what inside a monolithic society is supposed to be the cause is in vain. The cause is only this latter itself. Causality has withdrawn as it were into the totality; in the midst of its system it becomes indistinguishable. The more its concept, under scientific mandate,

> dilutes itself to abstraction, the less the simultaneous threads of the universally socialized society, which are condensed to an extreme, permit one condition to be traced back with evidence to others. Each one hangs together horizontally as vertically with all others, tinctures all, is tinctured by all. The latest doctrine in which enlightenment employed causality as a decisive political weapon, the Marxist one of superstructure and infrastructure, lags almost innocently behind a condition, in which the apparatuses of production, distribution and domination, as well as economic and social relations and ideologies are inextricably interwoven, and in which living human beings have turned into bits of ideology. . . . the critique which operates with the unequivocal causal relation of superstructure and infrastructure aims wide of the mark. In the total society everything is equally close to the midpoint [129]

In this view of totality, and in their analysis of the effects of technology on the social life, the members of this School are evidently close to the mode of production thesis and are decidedly against the stratifying base and superstructure thesis. Thus, for Herbert Marcuse, the aesthetic dimension also is something directly interlinked with the mode of production, though he conceives this again as the base which could lead to the implication, if pursued consistently, that the aesthetic dimension belongs to the base. Needless to say that the holistically understood mode of production thesis would not result in such absurdities here:

> The people can become the subject of art only as real *social* subject, that is to say, when alienated labor gradually gives way to creative work in the reproduction of society. This would be the turn from quantitative to qualitative productivity: token of the real socialist revolution. Qualitative productivity: that means not only improving the quantity of wares and services produced, but also producing different things in different ways—by different human

> beings for different human beings. Only in this process could the infrastructure of society, the mode of production become open to the aesthetic dimension, and show its kinship to art. And only in this process could aesthetic needs be rooted in the infrastructure itself. [130]

Thus the mode of thought embodied in the writings of this School is profoundly permeated with an awareness of totality and intrinsically alien to a Structuralist view. Perhaps, Jürgen Habermas, a contemporary member of this School, is an exception to some extent. As he states clearly:

> As regards taking structuralist points of view into consideration, I readily admit to having learned something from Marxists like Godelier. They have rethought the base-superstructure relationship and conceptalized it in such a way that the proper contribution of normative structures can be saved from a reductionistic short-circuiting. To be sure, the concepts of objective spirit and of culture developed in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition from Lukács to Adorno are not in need of this reformulation.[131]

Though he is ready to imbibe the influence of Structural Marxism, in a rather eclectic fashion, he clearly mentions that the Marxism of his fellow researchers like Adorno excludes a Structuralist understanding: “Among Hegelian Marxists like Lukács, Korsch, and Adorno, the concept of the social totality excludes a model of levels. The superstructure theorem here posits a kind of concentric dependency of all social appearances on the economic structure, the latter being conceived dialectically as the essence that comes to existence in the observable appearances”[132].

Here, he also gives his own understanding of the base and superstructure thesis which lacks the subtleties seen in Adorno, for Habermas writes after citing the 1859 Preface of Marx: “[I]n every society the forces and relations of production form—in accordance with

the dominant mode of production— an economic structure by which all other subsystems of the society are determined"[133]. With such a crude understanding of the thesis, it is only natural that he finds the Structuralist refinements palatable and even essential. But for a detailed consideration of the Structuralist views we must deal with Althusser himself.

Althusser and the Restoration of the Engelsian Reformulations

The theory of base and superstructure holds a central position in the very famous reformulations of Marxism by Louis Althusser. Indeed, all the innovative concepts of his system revolve around refining this thesis of Marxism. As Mulhern aptly summarises:

> Althusser's most important substantive intervention in historical materialism was a new analysis of the canonical 'base-superstructure' relation, an abiding crux in literary and other cultural theory. Marx's 'totality' was structurally *complex*, he insisted. It contained no master contradiction to which all social reality could be reduced, whether along a chain of mechanical effects (the positivist error) or as simple expression (the characteristic consumption of left Hegelianism). It was, rather, a dynamic ensemble of 'relatively autonomous' practices, each possessing a 'specific effectivity' and entering with all the others into 'overdetermined' configurations (or 'conjunctures'), which the economic determined only 'in the last instance'.[134]

It is remarkable to observe that the exotic sounding conceptual innovations of Althusser fit neatly into the basically Engelsian problematic of relative autonomy and ultimate determination. Even Gregory Elliott who claims in his book *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* that "Althusser rejected Engels's theoretical solution to the problem of the relationship between 'determination in the last instance' (by the economic) and the 'effectivity' of the superstructures as maladroit", adds immediately, "[b]ut he made Engels's starting-point his own".[135]

Thus the theoretical framework that Althusser works with is essentially the framework of Engels. But Althusser's observations made even from this slippery ground are really appreciable and they essentially endorse the significance of *mode of production* for Marx. For instance, he writes in his book *For Marx*, fulfilling the announcement in his title:

> For him . . . a *new conception* of the relation between *determinant instances* in the structure-superstructure complex . . . constitutes the essence of any social formation. Of course, these specific *relations* between structure and superstructure still deserve theoretical elaboration and investigation. However, Marx has at least given us the 'two ends of the chain', and has told us to find out what goes on between them: on the one hand, *determination in the last instance by the* (*economic*) *mode of production*; on the other, *the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity*.[136]

We have already seen enough to know that this is all actually not "for Marx", but "for Engels", a distinction that Althusser does not care to see. As a matter of fact, Althusser also knows the real source and tries to substantiate his above mentioned claim saying "listen to the old Engels in 1890 . . ." which is followed by the quotation of Engels we have already seen.[137] But, what is remarkable here is that he states it is the mode of production which is the base. This has some curious theoretical repercussions. Most importantly, mode of production, the holistic concept of Marx, turns into a part of the base and superstructure thesis. What is more curious is that, through some interesting theoretical manoeuvres, Althusser recaptures the significance of mode of production thesis, as we shall see later. For now, it is important to see how Althusser defines his problem:

> [I]t has to be said that *the theory of the specific effectivity of the superstructures and other 'circumstances ' largely remains to be elaborated;* and before the theory of their effectivity or simultaneously (for it is by

> formulating their effectivity that their *essence* can be attained) there must be elaboration of *the theory of the particular essence of the specific elements of the superstructure.* Like the map of Africa before the great explorations, this theory remains a realm sketched in outline, with its great mountain chains and rivers, but often unknown in detail beyond a few well-known regions. Who has *really* attempted to follow up the explorations of Marx and Engels? I can only think of Gramsci. But this task is indispensable if we are to be able to express even propositions more precise than these approximations on the character of the *overdetermination* of Marxist contradiction, based primarily on the existence and nature of the superstructures.[138]

In fact, the similarities between Althusser and Gramsci are noteworthy and this passage shows that Althusser is aware of this. In spite of their widely accepted conceptual innovations, they never rejected the base and superstructure thesis, in its all-encompassing form. Instead, they tried to fortify the thesis with their innovations to accrue its significance. In the case of Althusser, he wanted to dismantle what he has taken as the two-fold Stalinist distortions, in the course of this fortification:

> We have said that the "Stalin deviation" may be characterized by the terms *economism* and *humanism*. Why? And what is the link between these two forms of a single deviation? In order to answer these questions we must make use of a number of theoretical concepts of Marxism, including those of the *mode of production* and of the *social formation*. A mode of production is characterized *primarily* by a given system of production relations, and *secondarily* by the "level of the material productive forces. The reproduction of a system of production relations is not a function of the operation of the

> mode of production alone, but of the social formation as a whole, including its "superstructural forms".[139]

Thus, for Althusser, superstructural aspects form an essential part of the mode of production. He underscores the concept of reproduction, to emphasise the indispensability of the superstructural spheres of the society. And it is the misapprehension of the role of these spheres that leads to the already mentioned Stalinist distortions:

> To "forget about" the role of the "superstructure" in the reproduction of production relations, to want to explain everything (for example, crises in capitalism or the transition to communism) by reference to the economic infrastructure alone, is of course *economism*. But to "forget about" the role of the superstructure is also to forget how the super-structure operates. It operates through apparatuses which maintain the domination of the ruling class, but at the cost of continuously reproducing *class struggle*. To fall into economism is therefore also to forget about class struggle and to forget about class struggle is *humanism*. Stalin fell into both economism and humanism when he argued, for example, that the problem of the transition to socialism was primarily a problem of the development of the productive forces.[140]

Once this importance of superstructural aspects is granted, it would be astonishing, even disappointing, to see that Althusser's understanding of the thesis is, to a great extent, still mechanical, and not much different from the official Soviet version that he takes to task, in terms of the constituents and in the way they are perceived:

> Not enough attention has been paid to the figure or metaphor in which Marx presents his conception of a society in the Preface to the 1859 *Contribution.* This figure is that of a *topography*, that is, of a spatial apparatus which assigns positions in space to given realities. The Marxist topography presents society

> in terms of the metaphor of an edifice whose upper floors rest, as the logic of an edifice would have it, on its foundation. The foundation is in German *die Basis* or *die Struktur*, which is traditionally translated as *base* or more often *infrastructure:* it is the economy, the unity of the productive forces and relations of production under the dominance of the relations of production. From the base of the ground floor rise the upper floor or floors of the *Überbau*, in translation the legal-political and ideological superstructure. [141]

Thus, Althusser's superstructure includes ideology and the whole metaphor itself is conceived in a thoroughly mechanical fashion, i.e., in a topographical fashion, divested of the evident organic connotations. Once this mechanical version is taken for granted, all the later day Engelsian amendments become indispensable, and Althusser eventually ends up in the same reformulations, however much he seems to refine them with his exotic ideas.

> It is easy to see that this representation of the structure of every society as an edifice containing a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two 'floors' of the superstructure, is a metaphor, to be quite precise, a spatial metaphor: the metaphor of a topography (*to pique*). Like every metaphor, this metaphor suggests something, makes something visible. What? Precisely this: that the upper floors could not 'stay up' (in the air) alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base. Thus the object of the metaphor of the edifice is to represent above all the 'determination in the last instance' by the economic base. The effect of this spatial metaphor is to endow the base with an index of effectivity known by the famous terms: the determination in the last instance of what happens in the upper 'floors' (of the superstructure) by what happens in the economic base. [142]

All this is not far from the common understanding of the metaphor which is greatly influenced by the Soviet version. Althusser has no essential objection to this version because, for him, this topographical thesis signifies Marx's materialism:

> It is now possible to understand the materialist stamp of the Marxist Topography. The fact that the metaphor of the structure is a metaphor matters little: in philosophy you can only think through metaphors. But through this metaphor we come up against theoretical problems which have nothing metaphorical about them. By the use of his Topography, Marx introduces *real*, distinct spheres, which only fit together through the mediation of the *Aufhebung* : "below" is the economic infrastructure, "above" the superstructure, with its different determinations.[143]

What is remarkable about Althusser is that, despite his subscription to the base and superstructure thesis, his basic thrust is to give a non-reductive interpretation to that. All distinctions in Marx's system of thought share this quality of irreducibility: "Marx only says that you must distinguish, that the distinctions are real, irreducible, that in the order of determination the share of the base and that of the superstructure are unequal, and that this inequality or unevenness in dominance is constitutive of the unity of the whole, which therefore can no longer be the expressive unity of a simple principle"[144].

Althusser's idea of the irreducibly distinctive levels should not prevent us from appreciating the significance of the whole for him. He presents this notion of the whole in contrast from the Hegelian concept of totality. As he goes on to say:

> . . . I talked about *a whole,* to make it clear that in the Marxist conception of a social formation everything holds together, that the independence of an element is only ever the form of its dependence, and that the interplay of the differences is regulated by the unity of a determination in the last instance; but

> that is why I did not talk about a *totality*, because the Marxist whole is complex and uneven, and stamped with this unevenness by the determination in the last instance. [145]

It is important to understand that the difference between the concept of *totality* and that of the *whole* is precisely what signifies the difference between the views of Hegel and Marx, and this is not an issue of choice of words; it is an idea that takes us right up to Althusser's concept of decentred whole:

> Hegel thought of society as a *totality*, while Marx thought of it as a complex whole, structured in dominance. If I may be allowed to be a little provocative, it seems to me that we can leave to Hegel the category of *totality*, and claim for Marx the category of the *whole.* It might be said that this is a verbal quibble, but I do not think that this is entirely true. If I preferred to reserve for Marx the category of the whole rather than that of the totality, it is because within the totality a double temptation is always present: that of considering it as a pervasive essence which exhaustively embraces all of its manifestations, and— what comes to the same thing— that of discovering in it, as in a circle or a sphere (a metaphor which makes us think of Hegel once again), a centre which would be its essence. . .[146]

But, in Althusser's reading, this concept of whole does not take him to the notion of mode of production as the holistic view of Marx. Instead, it leads to the base and superstructure metaphor:

> For Marx, the differences are real, and they are not only differences in spheres of activity, practices and objects: they are differences in *efficacy*. The last instance operates here in such a way that it explodes the peaceful fiction of the circle or the sphere. It is not an accident that Marx abandons the metaphor of

> the circle for that of the edifice. A circle is closed, and the corresponding notion of totality presupposes that one can grasp all the phenomena, exhaustively, and then reassemble them within the simple unity of its centre. Marx on the other hand presents us with an edifice, a foundation, and one or two upper floor— exactly how many is not stated. Nor does he say that everything must fall into these categories, that everything is either infrastructure or superstructure.[147]

It is definitely a positive contribution to emphasise the inexhaustive nature of the edifice-like metaphor, or what Eagleton described once as "a vertical one",[148] especially so against the backdrop of the popular understanding of it that tends to go in the opposite direction. But, essentially, it is a reiteration of what Stalin—and Bukharin even before Stalin—has done. However, what is more important here is that this idea of a stratified or structured whole that integrates the constituent parts is conceived in terms of the traditional base and superstructure, and not as mode of production:

> On a number of occasions I have insisted on the revolutionary character of the Marxist conception of the 'social whole' insofar as it is distinct from the Hegelian 'totality'. I said (and this thesis only repeats famous propositions of historical materialism) that Marx conceived the structure of every society as constituted by 'levels' or 'instances' articulated by a specific determination : the *infrastructure*, or economic base (the 'unity' of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the *superstructure*, which itself contains two 'levels' or 'instances' : the politico-legal (law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal, political, etc.).[149]

These levels have their autonomous dynamics and even autonomous times and histories, though within the limits of determination in the last instance:

> Each of these different 'levels' does not have the same type of historical existence. On the contrary, we have to assign to each level a *peculiar time*, relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the 'times' of the other levels. We can and must say: for each mode of production there is a peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way by the development of the productive forces; the relations of production have their peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way; the political superstructure has its own history . . . ; philosophy has its own time and history . . . ; aesthetic productions have their own time and history . . . ; scientific formations have their own time and history, etc. Each of these peculiar histories is punctuated with peculiar rhythms and can only be known on condition that we have defined the *concept* of the specificity of its historical temporality and its punctuations (continuous development, revolutions, breaks, etc.). The fact that each of these times and each of these histories is *relatively autonomous* does not make them so many domains which are *independent* of the whole: the specificity of each of these times and of each of these histories—in other words, their relative autonomy and independence—is based on a certain type of articulation in the whole, and therefore on a certain type of *dependence* with respect to the whole.[150]

Althusser's remarkable achievement is that, working through the structuralist methodology, he still recognises that even economic structure is not something autonomous but depends on the more holistic concept of the mode of production. Marx, according to Althusser, "understands *abstract economic reality* . . . as the effect of a deeper, more concrete reality: *the mode of production* of a determinate social formation".[151] As the concept of mode of production represents the articulated totality, even the definition of the economic domain

depends on this totality: “[I]f the structure of the relations of production defines the economic as such, a definition of the concept of the relations of production in a determinate mode of production is necessarily reached via the definition of the concept of the totality of the distinct levels of society and their peculiar type of articulation”.[152]

This clear cut formulation of the economic as a variable that depends on the overall social articulation is quite important, especially for the cognate branches of study like anthropology and ethnology, as Althusser himself goes on to say:

> Anthropologists and ethnologists 'know' what to confine themselves to when, seeking the economic, they come upon kinship relations, religious institutions, etc.; specialists in mediaeval history 'know' what to confine themselves to when, seeking for the dominant determination of history in the 'economy', they find it in politics or religion. In all these cases, there is no *immediate* grasp of the economic, there is no raw economic 'given', any more than there is any immediately 'given' effectivity in any of the levels. In all these cases, the identification of the economic is achieved by *the construction of its concept*, which presupposes a definition of the specific existence and articulation of the different levels of the structure of the whole, as they are necessarily implied by the structure of the mode of production considered. To construct the concept of the economic is to define it rigorously as a level, instance or region of the structure of a mode of production [153]

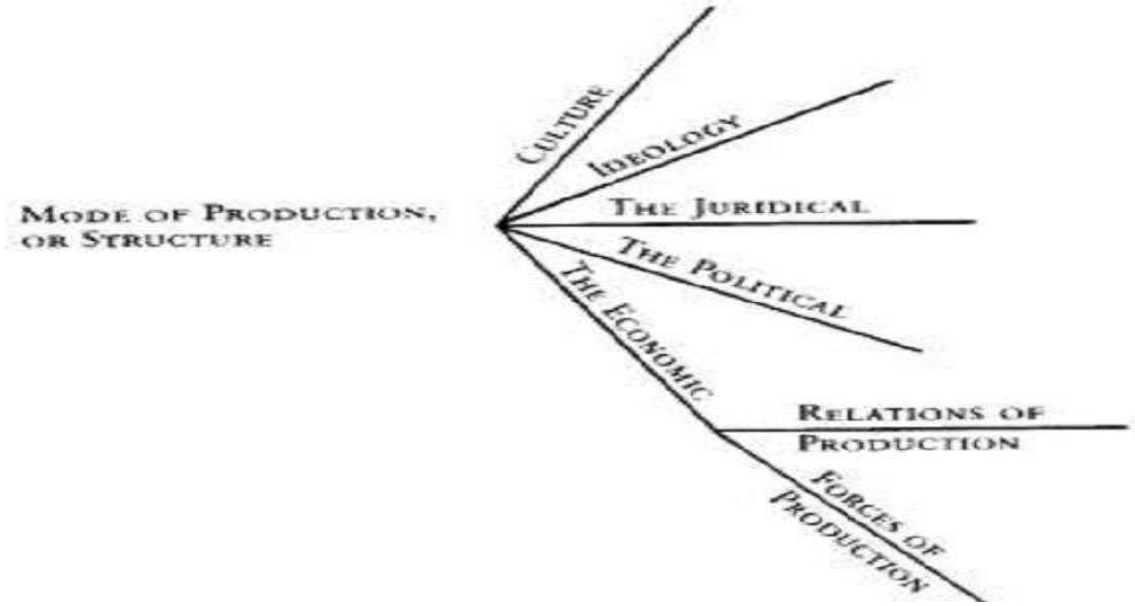
It is through this concept of the mode of production as a structured whole of all the social instances that Althusser reappropriates the significance of the concept of mode of production. Notwithstanding his counting of the mode of production as the base of the topographical thesis—which apparently implies that the mode of production is a part of the thesis—Althusser takes cognizance of the fact that the concept of mode of production is more

basic, even with reference to the base and superstructure thesis, by making the economic instance itself a dependant on the holistic concept of the mode of production.

In his influential work *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,* Fredric Jameson brings out the novelty of this Althusserian alteration through a graphic representation of the altered model. At first, he offers the following representation of the traditional model as a frame of reference for comparision:

	Culture
Superstructures	Ideology (philosophy, religion, etc.)
	The Legal System
	Political Superstructures and the State
……	…….
	Relations of Production (classes)
Base or Infrastructure	The Economic, or Mode of Production
	Forces of Production (technology, ecology, population)[154]

In contrast to this traditional view of the base and superstructure model, the following diagram[155] represents the novel understanding of Althusser:



Jameson also explicates the notional novelty of Althusser's view, in which the concept of mode of production regains its original primacy to a large extent, but through an intricate web of theoretical subtleties, about which Jameson's attitude is evidently appreciative:

> the Althusserian conception of mode of production identifies this concept with the structure as a whole. For Althusser, then, the more narrowly economic. . . is, however privileged, not identical with the mode of production as a whole, which assigns this narrowly "economic" level its particular function and efficiency as it does all the others. If therefore one wishes to characterize Althusser's Marxism as a structuralism, one must complete the characterization with the essential proviso that it is a structuralism for which only one structure exists: namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole. This is the sense in which this "structure" is an absent cause, since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of relationships among those levels.[156]

Despite the merit of appreciating the primal importance of the mode of production, where the Althusserian reworking falls short of is in the standards of rigour, regarding which Althusser sets himself declaredly high goals. This shortage could be felt regarding the relationship between the mode of production thesis and the base and superstructure thesis, and it is seen clearly when Althusser embarks upon dealing with the two theses at once, as in the following words:

> The principle of the articulation of the practices refers to the construction (*Bau*) or mechanism of 'correspondence' in which the social formation is presented as constituted out of different levels (we shall also speak of them as

> instances and practices). Marx lists *three:* the economic base, the legal and political superstructures, and the forms of social consciousness. As for periodization, it distributes history according to the *epochs* of its economic structure. These two principles introduce a double *reduction* of temporal continuity. . . there is, first, a reduction to an absolute invariance in the elements which are found in *every social structure* (an economic base, legal and political forms, and ideological forms); second, there is a division into periods which replaces historical continuity with a discontinuity, a succession of temporarily invariant *states of the structure* . . . These states of the structure are the *modes of production*, and the history of society can be reduced to a discontinuous succession of modes of production.[157]

This kind of exposition takes the base and superstructure thesis as something invariant in all forms of society and the mode of production thesis as a periodising concept, thus suggesting a dichotomy between the two theses. The major stumbling block for conceptual rigour in Althusser is caused by his retaining the base and superstructure thesis in the traditional all-inclusive sense. As long as this thesis is retained in this distorted form, it would only be a wild goose chase to attempt to bring any rigour to Marxism, as Althusser exemplifies strikingly.

<u>British Cultural Marxism and its fall out with Base and Superstructure Thesis</u>

Understandably, it is the field of culture that is affected the most by the reductive implications of the base and superstructure thesis. As a result, it is in this field that we find the disenchantment of the writers with this thesis, a disenchantment that could potentially turn against Marxism itself, when the thesis is wrongly identified as the legitimate central principle of Marxism. For instance, it is precisely regarding the issue of culture that Daniel

Bell, the American sociologist who authored *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* broke with Marxism. To listen to his own words in an interview done by Peter Beilharz:

> Now if you look at culture, this is where I broke with my Marxism. Marx of course had this notion of a mode of production and a substructure determining the superstructure. But if you look at the great historical religions – Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam – they exist over millennia. . . .
>
> I've never understood this notion of base and superstructure. For example, if you look at Germany, from 1870 to 1970, the substructure is capitalism, the economic system. But the political structure is Wilhelmine Germany, Weimar Germany, Nazi Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany, now reunification. How do you have these radical changes if the substructure determines the superstructure? Again, relationships are never given in that respect. This doesn't mean Marxism is wrong or impossible: it's limited in what it can do.[158]

Even when critics do not reject the base and superstructure thesis as a whole, it is quite common that some reformulation or refinement is proposed to it. To cite an example, Arjun Appadurai, a contemporary, eminent social-cultural anthropologist, who proposed a view of cultural activity known as the social imaginary, composed of five dimensions of global cultural flow (ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, ideoscapes), says in an interview with Terhi Rantanen: "I knew that the main alternative to the emerging engagement with world culture was on the Marxist side, wherever it came from. So, as a consequence, in using the scapes I was trying to think about the superstructure/infrastructure in a new way".[159] On the other hand, there are instances when even the avowed Marxists may show scepticism toward the thesis. In his last interview, Sartre says with Benny Levy "All

Marx's distinctions among superstructures are a fine bit of work, but it's utterly false because the primary relationship of individual to individual is something else".[160]

It is remarked time and again that though Marxism proclaimed the thesis, it is not in a well worked out state in his rendering. For instance, in a significant essay "The Psychological Structure of Fascism", Bataille writes:

> Having affirmed that the infrastructure of a society ultimately determines or conditions the superstructure, Marxism did not undertake any general elucidation of the modalities peculiar to the formation of religious and political society. While Marxism did acknowledge possible responses by the superstructure it has not gone from mere assertion to scientific analysis.[161]

With this awareness of the much acknowledged gap, it is also common to see various critics embarking on filling that. In his celebrated book, *The Savage Mind,* "without questioning the undoubted primacy of infrastructures", Claude Lévi-Strauss expresses his "hope to make a contribution" to what he understood as the "theory of superstructures, scarcely touched on by Marx".[162]

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to observe how the early British Marxists, for whom culture is a central concern, present a singular disregard for the base and superstructure thesis. It is also remarkable that they do not extend this inhospitable disposition to the mode of production thesis. The fact that among the early British Marxists, base and superstructure theory fell out of favour, whereas mode of production thesis still retained its validity intact, is something well recognised. For instance, in his article "Problems of Marxist History" that is a review of Harvey J. Kaye's book *The British Marxist Historians,* Victor Kiernan, writes:

> Kaye recognizes that they [Dobb, Hilton, Hill, Hobsbawm, Thompson] have indeed been trying to put behind them the economic determinism characteristic of so much earlier Marxism, and enshrined in Soviet textbooks.

> Marx's casual metaphor of 'base and superstructure' was an unhappy legacy. But he [Kaye] will not have it that they are renouncing the 'mode of production', Marx's division of history into stages distinguished by successive economic structures: in his eyes they have only been trying to 'recompose and historicize it'. He instances the formula put forward by Thompson, of all the five the one most concerned with general theory: rejection of base-and-superstructure, as belonging more to mechanics than to dialectics, and its replacement with a simultaneity of interactions. . .[163]

In fact, even before E. P. Thompson, Christopher Caudwell, a British Marxist, has shown discernible apathy towards the thesis, despite his manifest preoccupation with the literary issues; and this is already observed by Thompson himself, who says that "Caudwell does not often employ the basis/superstructure analogy, and if he does so it is clearly as a figure-of-speech. He is more concerned to close than to force open the gap between social being and social consciousness".[164] In offering this opinion Thompson does not see it as a lacuna in Caudwell, as some modern Marxists would have it. He presents it instead as a fruitful ambiguity:

> Caudwell, in my view, was asking questions which had to be asked, and his ambiguity was a fruitful ambiguity. In refusing the orthodox closures offered by reflection theory, by the basis/superstructure model, and by the allocation of 'economics' to the base and norms, or affective culture, to the superstructure, he was holding open a door to a more creative tradition.[165]

In fact, Thompson himself represents this tradition—along with people like Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall—that consistently resisted the stultifying effects of the base and superstructure thesis in its received form, by having nothing to do with it, in the writings

representative of this tradition. As G. Ajay states clearly in his article, “Reconstructing Marxism: The Thompsonian Framework”:

> Thompson was critical of all Marxists who "adopted modes of analysis which, explicitly treat the economic base and the legal, political and ideological superstructure which reflect or correspond to it as a qualitatively different more or less enclosed and regionally separated spheres". Such epistemological distinctions convert into ontological segregations, thereby capturing historical process not at the moment of unitary co-existence of various human activities within a single material life but in terms of artificial discontinuities.[166]

We have already seen enough to understand that a view of the unitary co-existence of human activities is indigenous to Marxism in the form of mode of production thesis, and the compartmentalising base and superstructure thesis is the result of the conceptual encroachment of Marxism by innately alien modes of thought. But this awareness could not be expected from British Marxism of this time. What is remarkable about this trend is how these theorists defy the baneful influence of this stratifying thesis, though they are under the shared false impression that the thesis has the authority of Marx. To turn to Ajay again:

> One of the most fundamental reformulations of EPT [E. P. Thompson] that has decisively determined the 'foundations' and thereby the direction of Marxist theory, is his rejection of the base - superstructure model. He argued that historical materialism has to be founded not on a segregated notion of reality, represented in the base-superstructure model, but on the model of organic totality . . . According to EPT, most of the mechanistic and teleological formulations of history and social processes by Marxists, had their roots in the base-superstructure metaphor. He in fact argued that Marx, in a sense, was

> himself responsible for reductionist interpretations and the later 'crisis of Marxism'.[167]

It is because of this presumed source of the thesis in Marx that the criticism of these thinkers in relation to the thesis is not effectively extended to the distortions in later versions of Marxism. Still, the very rejection of the thesis is a considerable service to Marxism, though it is conceived as done partly against Marx, by the contributors themselves; and Thompson is unequivocal in this fruitful rejection:

> [T]he analogy of basis and superstructure is radically defective. It cannot be repaired. It has an in-built tendency to lead the mind towards reductionism or a vulgar economic determinism, by sorting out human activities and attributes and placing some (as law, the arts, religion, morality) in a superstructure others (as technology, economic, applied sciences) in a basis, and leaving yet others (as linguistics, work discipline) to float unhappily in between.[168]

This sort of resolute rejection of the stultifying thesis could have been a major influence on the trajectory of Marxism, if it had not been taken as a rejection of the original thesis central to Marxism. Ironically, Marx's profound influence on the later generations has acted as a retarding factor on the later developments of Marxism. Rosa Luxemburg's observation is quite thought-provoking regarding this intriguing issue:

> It is undeniable that Marx has had a somewhat restrictive influence upon the free development of theory in the case of many of his pupils. Both Marx and Engels found it necessary to disclaim responsibility for the utterances of many who chose to call themselves Marxists! The scrupulous endeavor to keep 'within the bounds of Marxism' may at times have been just as disastrous to the integrity of the thought process as has been the other extreme— the

> complete repudiation of the Marxist outlook, and the determination to manifest 'independence of thought' at all hazards.[169]

It is this "integrity of thought" that is really commendable about the British thinkers we are considering. Also interesting is the fact that Thompson is completely aware of the essential similarity of Williams' views and his own views. In his review of Williams' work *The Long Revolution*, for instance, Thompson says that "it is evident that Mr. Williams is critical of its [Marxism's] tendency towards economic and technological reductionism (although it is not always clear whether he is arguing here with Marx or with his vulgarisers), and that he holds—as I do—that the imagery of basis and superstructure is far too mechanical to describe the logic of change".[170] Williams himself was indulged in a sustained engagement with the divisive thesis that intrigued him for a fairly long period. In his words:

> I have had enough experience of trying to discuss two key English Marxist terms—*base* and *superstructure*—not only in relation to their German originals, but in discussions with French, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Swedish friends, in relation to their forms in these other languages, to know not only that the results are fascinating and difficult, but that such comparative analysis is crucially important, not just as philology, but as a central matter of intellectual clarity. It is greatly to be hoped that ways will be found of encouraging and supporting these comparative inquiries, but meanwhile it should be recorded that while some key developments, now of international importance, occurred first in English, many did not and in the end can only be understood when other languages are brought consistently into comparison.[171]

Through this sustained engagement with the twin concepts, Williams could see, to some extent, where the very concepts have undergone sclerosis and he tried to propose a better way of perceiving them. His initial, relative insularity from the continental forms of

Marxism, an insularity often taken as a drawback by the later Marxists like his own student, Eagleton, might have helped him in arriving at these proposals. Thus, he says about the base:

> it seems to me that what has not been looked at with equal care is the received notion of the 'base' *(Basis, Grundlage*). And indeed I would argue that the base is the more important concept to look at if we are to understand the realties of cultural process. In many uses of the proposition of base and superstructure, as a matter of verbal habit, 'the base' has come to be considered virtually as an object, or in less crude cases, it has been considered in essentially uniform and usually static ways. 'The base' is the real social existence of man. 'The base' is the real relations of production corresponding to a stage of development of the material productive forces. 'The base' is a mode of production at a particular stage of its development.[172]

Thus he comes to take the base as mode of production, just like Althusser, but without resorting to the complicated conceptual acrobatics characteristic of the latter. This is an inevitable refinement once the superstructure is understood in the inclusive sense, and for Williams, despite his novel understanding of the thesis, superstructure includes consciousness: “[T]he superstructure is a matter of human consciousness, and this is necessarily very complex, not only because of its diversity, but also because it is always historical: at any time, it includes continuities from the past as well as reactions to the present”.[173] Still, he is uncompromisingly against the usual, topographical understanding of the concept:

> 'Superstructure' *(Uberbau)* has had most attention. In common usage, after Marx, it acquired a main sense of a unitary 'area’, within which all cultural and ideological activities could be placed. But already in Marx himself, in the later correspondence of Engels, and at many points in the subsequent Marxist

> tradition, qualifications were made about the determined character of certain superstructural activities. The first kind of qualification had to do with delays in time, with complications, and with certain indirect or relatively distant relationships.[174]

Even if these qualifications are granted, the thesis wouldn't become convincing for him, as it did for some traditionally: "[T]he difficulty lies, however, in the terms of Marx's original formulation: if one accepts 'structure' and 'superstructure', not as the terms of a suggestive analogy, but as descriptions of reality, the errors naturally follow. Even if the terms are seen as those of an analogy, they need, as I have tried to suggest, amendment".[175]

With a similar vigour he could also condemn the critics of Marxism, who tries to downplay the concept of superstructure: "certainly there has been a quite shocking ignorance of what Marx wrote among those who have been prepared to criticize him, and the term 'superstructure' has been bandied about, as a kind of swearword, with wholly ridiculous implications".[176]

In contrast to this stultifying understanding, Williams proposes to revalue the twin concepts by reconstructing them from a dynamic theoretical stance that ascribes centrality to human practice:

> We have to revalue 'superstructure' towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue 'the base' away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.[177]

This radical reconfiguration of the twin concepts through conceptual terms that are explicitly praxological is not merely a theoretical exercise. This has a direct bearing on Williams' view of culture, which, as perceived by him, is in a crisis: "Now I think the true crisis in cultural theory, in our own time, is between . . . [the] view of the work of art as object and the alternative view of art as a practice".[178] Obviously, Williams' endeavour is to reinstate the latter view of culture:

> [W]e have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions.
>
> Often these two procedures may in part resemble each other, but in many other cases they are of radically different kinds, and I would conclude with an observation on the way this distinction bears on the Marxist tradition of the relation between primary economic and social practices, and cultural practices. If we suppose that what is produced in cultural practice is a series of objects, we shall, as in most current forms of sociological-critical procedure, set about discovering their components. Within a Marxist emphasis these components will be from what we have been in the habit of calling the base. . . .
>
> But I am saying that we should look not for the components of a product but for the conditions of a practice.[179]

And Williams combines this awareness of the centrality of human activity with an emphasis on the concept of the whole as a cornerstone of Marx's thought:

> It has been and is still commonplace to generalise certain human activities as if they were distinct and autonomous, and from this to assert that they can be regarded as having their own independent history. And this had been especially the case in cultural activities . . . The whole thrust of Marx's reading

> of history was then, first, *to insist that all cultural processes were initiated by humans themselves, and, second, to argue that none of them could be fully understood unless they were seen in the context of human activities as a whole*.[180]

Here again, this holistic concept has direct bearing on Williams' view of art and culture. For him, the question is not the relationship of these finer realms with the society. Such relation is not available in a way abstracted from the whole that constitutes society:

> Now if we go back to the cultural question in its most usual form—what are the relations between art and society, or literature and society? . . . we have to say first that there are no relations between literature and society in that abstracted way. The literature is there from the beginning as a practice in the society. Indeed until it and all other practices are present, the society cannot be seen as fully formed. A society is not fully available for analysis until each of its practices is included. But if we make that emphasis we must make a corresponding emphasis: that we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws. They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process.[181]

Once the view of culture is reoriented from this activity-centred standpoint and once it is perceived as an integral aspect of the whole of these activities, another move that Williams proposes, away from the common modes of conceiving culture, is to take the cultural practice as an innately social and material process:

> Thus, at the root of the problem of Marx's contribution to a theory of culture, and with critical effect on the subsequent development of a Marxist tradition, we have to restore the practical activities, which we now generalise as culture

> to the full social material process on which he insisted. Against the tone of some of his formulations, and against much influential subsequent interpretation of these activities as merely reflexive of and secondary to the then abstracted and specialised 'material production', we have to emphasise cultural practice as from the beginning social and material, in ways with which in fact he might have been among the first to agree.[182]

Understandably, this way of conceptualising culture has the effect of dismantling the traditionally accepted dichotomies between material and spiritual processes, commonly taken as embodied in the base and superstructure thesis. Equally understandable is the reaction against Williams, of the later Marxists like Eagleton who imbibed the Althusserian lines of thinking that is for the refinement of the thesis, rather than dismantling it altogether:

> He [Williams] will out-Marxize the Marxists by going the whole hog, extending materialism full-bloodedly to cultural practices too; but in thus pressing Marxist logic to an extreme he will by the same stroke undo the 'base'/'superstructure' distinction and so retain a certain critical distance. That was always Williams's way: he was not only deeply suspicious of orthodoxies, but rarely even quoted another thinker or paused to note an influence.[183]

It is quite possible that this isolation might be a contributing factor for Williams to reject the thesis in its stultifying form, and to adapt a view based on the concept of the whole. From the Althusserian perspective, all this seems an unwanted allowance to idealism. Thus, in his *Criticism and Ideology*, which glaringly shows the influence of Althusser, Terry Eagleton criticises that Williams' "conception of art as 'practice' retains strong residual elements of humanism".[184]

Williams' perceptive reclaiming of the less appreciated aspects of Marx's thought could also be seen in his underscoring of the relation between the productive process and the

social organisation. But, at the same time, he suggests that Marx did not express this idea properly through his metaphor:

> In all his practical analyses, Marx was quite exceptionally aware of the profound, prolonged and intricate interaction between these basic productive processes and the social order to which, in his view, they give rise. His famous or notorious metaphor of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, to express this fundamental relationship, has the effect, it is true, of underemphasising or even hiding the forms of interaction which he characteristically recognised.[185]

It is not difficult to see that Williams’ allegation is unavoidable; as he doesn't recognise properly that it is through the concept of mode of production—which encompasses the forces of production and the process of production, along with the relations of production—that Marx intends to encapsulate this idea. However, what is significant here is that Williams recognises the essential relation that is often not accorded the importance it deserves. And this insight also gives an edge to Williams’s analysis of culture. This is especially the case with his far-reaching analysis of culture in the modern times:

> This is not, moreover, as in the old model, a merely 'superstructural' field. On the contrary, what now happens and can happen in culture and communications is profoundly inseparable from world’s economic and political and perhaps especially military problems. The guidance systems which have already transformed war making, at levels even more fundamental than those of nuclear weapons themselves, have their technically linked counterparts in the unprecedented exposure of most modern societies to versions of the character and intentions of other societies and peoples. The struggle for socialism is now going on at least as intensively in this area of

> information and ideas and images as in directly political, economic and military ways.[186]

In spite of these unique merits, it is characteristic of Williams that he does not present his relatively innovative views through new concepts or models, though, sometimes, he seems to be searching for one. In a moment of groping for a better methodological paradigm, a moment in which he could be found more than once, Williams, contemplates elaborately in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture*:

> [B]ecause of the difficulties of the ordinary proposition of base and superstructure, there was an alternative and very important development, an emphasis primarily associated with Lukács, on a social 'totality'. The totality of social practices was opposed to this layered notion of base and a consequent superstructure. This concept of a totality of practices is compatible with the notion of social being determining consciousness, but it does not necessarily interpret this process in terms of a base and superstructure. Now the language of totality has become common, and it is indeed in many ways more acceptable than the notion of base and superstructure. But with one very important reservation. It is very easy for the notion of totality to empty of its essential content the original Marxist proposition. For if we come to say that society is composed of a large number of social practices which form a concrete social whole, and if give each practice a certain specific recognition, adding only that they interact, relate and combine in very complicated ways, we are at one level much more obviously talking about reality, but we are at another level withdrawing from the claim that there is any process of determination. And this I, for one, would be very unwilling to do. . . [187]

With this reservation for adapting the concept of totality, Williams is seen heading towards the Gramscian concept, hegemony: "[T]his notion of hegemony as deeply saturating the consciousness of a society seems to me to be fundamental. And hegemony has the advantage over general notions of totality, that it at the same time emphasizes the facts of domination".[188] In his article, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor", Stuart Hall, also emphasizes the significance of the concept of hegemony after reproving the base and superstructure thesis in the usually received sense.[189] It is the multidimensionality as well as its inscription of determinism of the concept of hegemony that appealed to Williams, as we could see from his *Keywords*:

> Thus an emphasis on **hegemony** and the **hegemonic** has come to include cultural as well as political and economic factors; it is distinct, in this sense, from the alternative idea of an economic *base* and a political and cultural *superstructure*, whereas the *base* changes the *superstructure* is changed, with whatever degree of indirectness or delay.[190]

In sum, it could be stated that by refuting the base and superstructure thesis in its present distorted form and by resorting to and reinstating the production paradigm, at the centre of his cultural theory, Williams is more true to the legitimate legacy of Marx than he himself had realised. Here, Williams' dilemma regarding the totality view is not unfounded. Indeed it springs from the recognition of the difficulties with the base and superstructure paradigm on the one hand and from his unwillingness to throw away the baby of determinism along with the bath water of the stultifying thesis on the other. This genuine dilemma could find its legitimate solution in the substitution of the base and superstructure dichotomy with the inherently multidimensional mode of production thesis that preserves the determining primacy of the material (productive) activity on the one hand and on the other hand, the totality of social reality as "the totality of social practices".

That Williams resorts to the concept of hegemony to resolve his dilemma need not trouble us here, as it is quite probable in the absence of the properly apprehended concept of mode of production that is readily available in Marx himself. What is exemplary about Williams is that he gives a foretaste of the vigour and vitality of the cultural theory that bases itself on the real spirit of Marx's thought that is insufficiently appropriated in his times. The consistent reincorporation of the contributions of Williams in the Marxist tradition is possible only with the reclaiming of the mode of production thesis in its totalising significance.

Mode of Production and the Methodological Implications

During the above study of the Marxists of various shades and periods, it is often felt that by the restoration of the mode of production thesis at the central position, in the Marxist theory, we can incorporate their crucial contributions, in a way that makes both Marxism and their contributions consistent and fruitful. But, in doing this, it would be rewarding and reasonably mandatory, to consider the position of Marx himself, regarding the reinstatement of the mode of production thesis in a status analogous to the one presently accorded to the base and superstructure thesis.

Precisely, the issue is whether such a reinstatement is consistent not only with Marx's formulation of these theses—as we already have an affirmative answer to this, based on our study of his various theoretical statements—but also with his analytical practice. I would argue here, that Marx, as a matter of fact, has often dealt with the issues that are conventionally designated as superstructural, by deploying his production-oriented paradigm; the implication is that his analytical practice also necessitates the above said reinstatement of the mode of production thesis. Let us delve into the details.

In Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value*, which is an integral part of his monumental study, *Capital*, we often see him grappling with the issue of spiritual production. For instance, he says that:

> In order to examine the connection between spiritual production and material production, it is above all necessary to grasp the latter itself not as a general category but in *definite historical* form. Thus for example different kinds of spiritual production correspond to the capitalist mode of production and to the mode of production of the Middle Ages. If material production itself is not conceived in its *specific historical* form, it is impossible to understand what is specific in the spiritual production corresponding to it and the reciprocal influence of one on the other. Otherwise one cannot get beyond inanities.[191]

This passage explicitly conceptualises the material and spiritual aspects, as corresponding forms of production; and different kinds of spiritual production are spoken of as corresponding to different modes of production. Last but not the least is the fact that in the same breath in which Marx spoke about the correspondence of the two domains, he also mentions their reciprocity. Later, we will also see why this reciprocity is an indispensible aspect of Marx's view of production. For now, my purpose is to show that Marx conceptualises the intellectual production against the backdrop of his theorisation of the societal production as a whole, i.e., through his mode of production thesis. Evidently, he does not even allude to the base and superstructure thesis here, for anyone to mistake his words.

But the force of the tradition of misreading Marx is so persistently deep-rooted, that Jorge Larrain, who penned the entry, "base and superstructure", in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, edited by Tom Bottomore, writes the following about these words, prompting the readers to read the non-existent thesis into Marx's words:

> [I]t is worth noting that although the specificity of the spiritual production is determined by the historical forms of material production, spiritual production is said to be capable of exercising 'reciprocal influence' on material

> production. In other words, the superstructure of ideas is not conceived as a mere passive reflection but it is capable of some effectivity.[192]

For Marx, this historically understood production-centred approach is so crucial that he thinks the lack of this awareness is the major pitfall in some writers, for instance, in Henri Storch:

> Because Storch does not conceive material production itself *historically*—because he conceives it as production of material goods in general, not as a definite historically developed and specific form of this production—he deprives himself of the basis on which alone can be understood partly the ideological component parts of the ruling class, partly the free spiritual production of this particular social formation. He cannot get beyond meaningless general phrases. Consequently, the relation is not so simple as he presupposes. For instance, capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production, for example, art and poetry. If this is left out of account, it opens the way to the illusion of the French in the eighteenth century which has been so beautifully satirised by Lessing. Because we are further ahead than the ancients in mechanics, etc., why shouldn't we be able to make an epic too? And the *Henriade* in place of the *Iliad*![193]

The crux of the argument here is that one should take a historically specific view of production in both the material and ideological aspects. Even the relation between these aspects of production is also specific to every mode of production.[194] This relationship is neither simple nor straightforward, nor is it to be taken in a linear and one-sided way. This relation is so specific that a particular mode of production (capitalist production here) may be even inimical to some aspects (art and poetry here) of spiritual production, so much so that a simple minded anticipation of direct proportionality is absurd. It is noteworthy, in the whole

of the argument that Marx conceives of the spiritual production as an aspect of production whose relative status is to be conceived in a way specific to every mode of production. Any trans-historically defined mode of thinking, such as the one embodied in the base and superstructure thesis, is inherently alien to this line of thought.

Besides the evident historicism (not in the sense of Popper, but in the sense of Lukács or Jameson), another significant dimension of this passage is its emphasis on the specificity of spiritual production which acts against the lumping together of this kind of production with the holistic concept of mode of production. In fact, in this least studied part of *Capital*, when Marx analyses analogous kinds of production, he takes pains to figure out the specificities of this production, based on the conditions of this production (as Williams says), and then the resulting peculiarities of this branch of production in the whole of capitalist production:

> Non-material production, even when it is carried on purely for exchange, that is, when it produces *commodities*, may be of *two* kinds:
>
> 1. It results in *commodities*, use-values, which have a form different from and independent of producers and consumers; these commodities may therefore exist during an interval between production and consumption and may in this interval circulate as *vendible commodities*, such as books, paintings, in a word, all artistic products which are distinct from the artistic performance of the artist performing them. Here capitalist production is applicable only to a very restricted extent: as for example when a writer of a joint work— say an encyclopaedia— exploits a number of others as hacks. In this sphere for the most part a *transitional form* to *capitalist production* remains in existence, in which the various scientific or artistic producers, handicraftsmen or experts work for the collective trading capital of the book-trade—a relation that has

> nothing to do with the capitalist mode of production proper and even formally has not yet been brought under its sway. . .
>
> 2. The production cannot be separated from the act of producing, as is the case with all performing artists, orators, actors, teachers, physicians, priests, etc. Here too the capitalist mode of production is met with only to a small extent, and from the nature of the case can only be applied in a few spheres. For example, teachers in educational establishments may be mere wage-labourers for the entrepreneur of the establishment; many such educational factories exist in England. Although in relation to the pupils these teachers are not *productive labourers*, they are productive labourers in relation to their employer. He exchanges his capital for their labour-power, and enriches himself through this process. It is the same with enterprises such as theatres, places of entertainment, etc. In such cases the actor's relation to the public is that of an artist, but in relation to his employer he is a *productive labourer*.[195]

In both the cases, the criteria Marx applies are the same as he applies in the case of other branches of production. At the same time, he takes the peculiarities of this kind of production into consideration, and thereby explains how capitalism could not completely subsume these braches still (for his time). The later analysis regarding the productive and unproductive labour is especially relevant to the students of English literature, because Marx applies the same logic to the *Magnum opus* of Milton, and says:

> For example Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost* for five pounds, was an *unproductive labourer*. On the other hand, the writer who turns out stuff for his publisher in factory style, is a *productive labourer*. Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It was an activity of *his* nature. Later he sold the product for £5. But the literary

> proletarian of Leipzig, who fabricates books (for example, Compendia of Economics) under the direction of his publisher, is a *productive labourer;* for his product is from the outset subsumed under capital, and comes into being only for the purpose of increasing that capital. A singer who sells her song for her own account is an *unproductive labourer*. But the same singer commissioned by an entrepreneur to sing in order to make money for him is a *productive labourer;* for she produces capital.[196]

The suggestion that *Paradise Lost* is an expression of poet's nature, through the simile of the silk worm, may again seem strange for the minds that came to think about Marx through commentaries. Here again, the real culprit is the received interpretation of Marx that tends to shroud the fact that the human beings and their affairs play a central role in Marx's conception of social production. With the predominance of the Althusserian construal of Marx's theory, this sort of misunderstanding has got a sanctified status as an axiom. In fact, Marx formulates the inexorable possibility of interaction between production and other aspects of human existence, through this centrality of human beings, with respect to all forms of production, in the self-same *Theories of Surplus Value*:

> Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the *subject* of production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth, of commodities. In this respect it can in fact be shown that *all* human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a more or less decisive influence on it.[197]

This may sound quite unMarxian, when viewed from the contemporary theoretical atmosphere that is heavily influenced by the modes of thought traceable to the Althusserian

position; but the fact is that, in spite of the recognition of its inevitable conditionality, human agency has an irreplaceable central status in the outlook of Marx. He even reproved Proudhon for not recognising this central role:

> M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen, or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist.[198]

When the whole thrust of this passage is clearly to emphasise the role of human agency, at every cornerstone of his theory, the last lines (extricated from the context of the whole passage) are often taken to be maintaining technological determinism in a way that precludes the role of human agency. The point here is that Marx's view of a mode of production is far different from what is generally believed of that. This could be seen not only in the centrality of human agency. In Marx, the concept of mode of production is inherently differential, not only from one mode of production to the other, but also among the different branches of the production in the same mode of production. From this kind of perspective, where everything is specific and differential, it is not possible to think of development in a simplistic and linear sense where the evolution of a mode of production is conceived in terms of direct proportionality of its different spheres:

> The unequal development of material production and e.g. art. In general, the concept of progress is not to be taken in the usual abstract form. With regard

> to art, etc., this disproportion is not so important and [not so] difficult to grasp as within practical social relations themselves, e.g. in culture. Relation of the United States to Europe. However, the really difficult point to be discussed here is how the relations of production as legal relations enter into uneven development. For example, the relation of Roman civil law (this applies in smaller measure to criminal and public law) to modern production.[199]

This passage, taken from the unfinished manuscript, commonly known as *Grundrisse*, is evidently fragmentary. But the central idea is quite clear: development is to be taken as an uneven process, where the reciprocal influence of the different aspects on one another is also to be counted. All this is categorically contradictory to the mode of thought that is usually understood by the base and superstructure thesis. Still, this disparity is usually never properly recognised, let alone analysing and theorising that disparity. To make matters worse, these statements that challenge the received understanding of Marxism are ironically taken as the explications of the base and superstructure thesis. Understandably, this results in a disastrously distorted interpretations of Marx, precisely at the instances where he is saying something contrary to the expectations fed upon the received commentaries. Let us take an example that occurs quite near the above quoted passage. It should be informed beforehand that in taking this example, we are going to deal with the most inopportune instance of Marx's statements, as this is regarded, by common consent, as the most notoriously problematic statement of him. This reads as follows:

> As regards art, it is known that certain periods of its florescence by no means correspond to the general development of society, or, therefore, to the material basis, the skeleton as it were of its organisation. For example, the Greeks compared with the moderns, or else Shakespeare. It is even acknowledged that certain forms of art, e.g. epos, can no longer be produced in their epoch-

> making, classic form after artistic production as such has begun; in other words that certain important creations within the compass of art are only possible at an early stage of its development. If this is the case with regard to the different arts within the sphere of art itself, it is not so remarkable that this should also be the case with regard to the entire sphere of art in its relation to the general development of society. The difficulty lies only in the general formulation of these contradictions. As soon as they are specified, they are already explained.[200]

In fact, this only reads like an exemplification of the uneven development, of which we have seen Marx theorising just now. The whole point is to say that artistic development, either in the case of one form of art, or regarding the whole field of art, should not be understood as a matter of even development, in its relation with the general development of the society. The artistic development is to be seen as something specific to a particular form of society, so much so that any generalisation of this relation is counterproductive. Evidently, this line of reasoning runs against the forms of cultural thinking epitomised by the base and superstructure thesis that actually claims to be such a generalisation. Still, Marx is frequently seen as exemplifying that thesis here. Thus, Larry Ceplair writes with obvious reference to these lines in his article, "The Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party": "[I]n his introduction to the 'First Version of Capital', Marx added art to this postulated superstructure, but he cautioned that there was no direct relationship between the developmental level of the material production in a particular society and the quality of the art produced by that society".[201] The fact is that the term *superstructure* does not even occur here, even for polemical purposes. But this is not all; Marx goes on to explicate his complex idea of artistic development here, which deserves to be quoted at length:

Let us take, for example, the relation of Greek art, and that of Shakespeare, to the present time. We know that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art, but also its basis. Is the conception of nature and of social relations which underlies Greek imagination and therefore Greek [art] possible in the age of Self Actors, railways, locomotives and electric telegraphs? What is Vulcan compared with Roberts and Co., Jupiter compared with the lightning conductor, and Hermes compared with the Credit Mobilier? All mythology subdues, dominates and fashions the forces of nature in the imagination and through the imagination; it therefore disappears when real domination over these forces is established. What becomes of Fama beside Printing House Square? Greek art presupposes Greek mythology, in other words, nature and even the social forms have already been worked up in an unconsciously artistic manner by the popular imagination. This is the material of Greek art. Not just any mythology, i.e. not any unconsciously artistic working up of nature (here the term comprises all objective phenomena, including society). Egyptian mythology could never become the basis or material womb of Greek art. But at any rate [it presupposes] a mythology. Hence, on no account a social development which precludes any mythological, [i.e.] any mythologising, attitude towards nature, and therefore demands from the artist an imagination independent of mythology.

Regarded from another angle: is Achilles possible when powder and shot have been invented? And is the Iliad possible at all when the printing press and even printing machines exist? Does not the press bar inevitably spell the end of singing and reciting and the muses, that is, do not the conditions necessary for epic poetry disappear?[202]

The theme is clearly not the relation between the base and superstructure, but the relation of artistic production with the general material production, or mode of production. Notable here is the significance given to the means of production, which does not figure in the base or the superstructure as Marx formulated them. It is only through the mode of production thesis that this line of thought could be conceivably conceptualised. Still, Marx goes on problematizing the artistic issues, on the basis of his uneven development thesis:

> An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does not the naiveté of the child give him pleasure, and must he not himself endeavour to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level? Does not the specific character of every epoch come to life again in its natural veracity in the child's nature? Why should not the historical childhood of humanity, where it attained its most beautiful form, exert an eternal charm as a stage that will never recur? There are unbred children and precocious children. Many of the ancient peoples belong to this category. The Greeks were normal children. The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary, that charm is a consequence of this and is, rather, inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art can never recur.[203]

These lines amply make clear that Marx's view of literature is intricate: on the one hand, it is not possible to create the classical kind of art in the present time. But this does not preclude the possibility of appreciating the classical art. Though it is not possible to create such art now, the time-bound nature of its creation does not hinder its appreciation. And it should be recognised that this modern appreciation/response to the classics is not the same as the appreciation of the contemporaries of that art. Though, as such, there is nothing so abnormal about these lines, an amazingly huge amount of criticism is heaped around these

lines of Marx's. Acton, for instance, sees here, "the confusion of aesthetic appreciation with a sort of nostalgia for what can never be again",[204] ignoring the basic fact that one can feel the charms of childhood without having any nostalgic longing for that. Even when some better things are inferred from these lines, the whole thing is again taken as an issue of the base and superstructure theory, as Leszek Kolakowski did in his *Main Currents of Marxism*:

> The functional character of various elements of the superstructure is not inconsistent, in Marx's view, with the permanence of the creations of human culture. To explain the immortality of Greek art he suggests that humanity, like the individual, returns with pleasure to the imaginations of its childhood, which it knows to be past for ever but for which it still feels affection. From this it would follow that according to Marx cultural activity is not merely accessory to socio-economic development, but contains values independent of its role in subserving a particular order of society.[205]

Even when these lines are seen as embodying "The Idealist Embarrassment", which is actually the title of an article written by Hans Robert Jauss and Peter Heath, it is through the base and superstructure theory that the charge is made by the writers, against these lines, though, again, the terms are nowhere mentioned in the lines:

> It breaches the principle of the prior economic determination of all artistic production and confers on the relation of substructure and superstructure a nonsimultaneity of the necessarily simultaneous, which already foreshadows the later metaphorical monstrosities of an 'activity of the superstructure.' It compels the recognition that the art of a distant past can provide enjoyment independently of the material conditions of its origin as well as of the material needs of its later readers and spectators. And it makes it impossible to overlook the embarrassment that in sum the art of a slave-

> owning society should also still rank as a ‘standard and model beyond attainment’ for an emancipated mankind. Marx's own answer by no means gets rid of these difficulties.[206]

As the base and superstructure thesis suggests that every base has its corresponding superstructure, it seems absurd to maintain that the art of one era is appreciable let alone being a standard at the later times also, when art is taken as a superstructural item. Thus, the real problem here is not much with these lines of Marx as such, but with the difficulties they could engender when seen through the base and superstructure lens, which, as we have already seen, Marx is not wearing when he wrote these lines. If we realise that the concept of mode of production is conceived by Marx as a unique totality, it is not difficult to comprehend Marx's refusal to have a general theory of art, applicable to all modes of production, such as the base and superstructure thesis. So, when Marx says that the undeveloped, ancient mode of production is suitable for the creation of classics and the most developed capitalist production is inimical to the artistic production, both the statements are aspects of Marx's complex view of art’s relation with the mode of production that could not be formulated as a linear relation. The next step, for us, is to explore further the methodological implications of this view of mode of production in Marx.

The most important methodological principle that results from the organic view of mode of production has a lot to do with how Marx sees the interconnections everywhere in the social totality, in a way that presents a striking contrast with the stratifying base and superstructure thesis, as it is understood now. Thus, in his *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx criticises Proudhon for detaching money from the mode of Production:

> He would have realized, on the contrary, that this relation is a link, and, as such, closely connected with a whole chain of other economic relations; that this relation corresponds to a definite mode of production neither more nor

> less than does individual exchange. What does he do? He starts off by detaching money from the actual mode of production as a whole, and then makes it the first member of an imaginary series, of a series to be reconstructed.[207]

In the same work, Marx makes a similar point in the case of property also, and says that it develops differently under different kinds of relations: "[I]n each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production".[208] No need to assert that this mode of holistic reasoning is profoundly alien to the detaching and demarcating logic typified by the base and superstructure thesis, as it is commonly perceived. Even if this thesis is understood as differentiating rigidly between the political and economic power, it goes against the actual intent of Marx, because it is precisely against such a separation that Marx polemicizes against Karl Heinzen, in his essay "Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality":

> How "acquisition of money" turns into "acquisition of power", how "property" turns into "political rule", in other words, how instead of the rigid difference to which Herr Heinzen gives the force of dogma, there are rather effective relations between the two forces up to the point where they merge, of this he may swiftly convince himself by observing how the serfs bought their freedom, how the communes bought their municipal rights, how the townspeople on the one hand, by trade and industry, attracted the money out of the pockets of the feudal lords and vaporised their landed property into bills of exchange, and on the other hand helped the absolute monarchy to its victory over the thus undermined feudal magnates, and bought privileges from it; how they later themselves exploited the financial crises of the absolute monarchy

> itself, . . . how in international relations between peoples, industrial monopoly turns directly into political rule, etc., etc.[209]

This sort of reasoning demolishes the stratifying logic that divides the social totality into compartmentalised factors. Instead, it is argued that every aspect is immanently related with the other aspects. Thus, Marx writes in his *Notes on Indian History* that "Mohammadanism made more rapid progress among the *Persians* than among the *Hindus* because there priest class was lowest and most degraded class, whereas in India it was the most powerful political agent in the Commonwealth",[210] bringing out the intrinsic connection between the religious aspect and the socio-economic status. Another instance of interest relating to India is his comment about the caste, where he says that "the crude form in which the division of labour appears with the Indians and Egyptians calls forth the caste-system in their State and religion", [211] thus considering the effects of State and religion on the social system, even at the relatively early stage of his work.

With this organic logic, Marx also asserts the intrinsic connection between the system of slavery, and the most developed capitalist system in America, which are usually regarded as irreconcilable:

> Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.
>
> Without slavery North America, the most progressive of countries, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Wipe North America off the map of

> the world, and you will have anarchy—the complete decay of modern commerce and civilization.[212]

The most sustained example of this sort of organic logic occurs in the already mentioned *Theories of Surplus Value*, where Marx's reasoning effects a series of subversions of the commonly believed dichotomies; between crime and law, for instance. One should read the entire passage, despite its great length, to get a first-hand feel of how Marx's reasoning differs with the commonplace mode of thinking and uncovers its hypocrisy:

> A philosopher produces ideas, a poet poems, a clergyman sermons, a professor compendia and so on. A criminal produces crimes. If we look a little closer at the connection between this latter branch of production and society as a whole, we shall rid ourselves of many prejudices. The criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law, and with this also the professor who gives lectures on criminal law and in addition to this the inevitable compendium in which this same professor throws his lectures onto the general market as "commodities. . . .The criminal moreover produces the whole of the police and of criminal justice, constables, judges, hangmen, juries, etc.; and all these different lines of business, which form equally many categories of the social division of labour, develop different capacities of the human spirit, create new needs and new ways of satisfying them. Torture alone has given rise to the most ingenious mechanical inventions, and employed many honourable craftsmen in the production of its instruments.
>
> The criminal produces an impression, partly moral and partly tragic, as the case may be, and in this way renders a 'service' by arousing the moral and aesthetic feelings of the public. He produces not only compendia on Criminal Law, not only penal codes and along with them legislators in this field, but

> also art, belles-lettres, novels, and even tragedies, as not only Müllner's *Schuld* and Schiller's *Räuber* show, but also [Sophocles'] *Oedipus* and [Shakespeare's] *Richard the Third* . . . .
>
> The effects of the criminal on the development of productive power can be shown in detail. Would locks ever have reached their present degree of excellence had there been no thieves? Would the making of bank-notes have reached its present perfection had there been no forgers? Would the microscope have found its way into the sphere of ordinary commerce (see Babbage) but for trading frauds? Doesn't practical chemistry owe just as much to adulteration of commodities and the efforts to show it up as to the honest zeal for production? Crime, through its constantly new methods of attack on property, constantly calls into being new methods of defence, and so is as productive as strikes for the invention of machines.[213]

The kind of comprehensive picture of society, portrayed here in its interconnections, with its various professions, division of labour, law, crime, literature, and productive forces, is not a compartmentalised one, but an intrinsically intertwined one. The bifurcating base and superstructure imagery is not only inherently inadequate to bring home such a picture; it actually counteracts such an organic view. I have already dwelt enough upon the point that Marx's base and superstructure thesis, even in its restricted form, is originally a derivatorial, and organic thesis. The examples we have seen so far demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt that only an organically conceived mode of production thesis is the source of Marx's most essential methodological principle that envisions and analyses the social totality as an intrinsically interconnected, unique organism. The recognition of this central methodological commitment would not only root out the incorrigibly metaphysical, isolationist legacy of the base and superstructure thesis, but also restores the powerful intellectual arsenal of dialectical

thinking at the disposal of Marxists, the legitimate successors of that “algebra of revolution”, as Alexander Herzen famously described it once.

Considerations and Comments on the Contemporary Situation

A paradoxical situation is witnessed in Marxism today, regarding the attitude toward the base and superstructure thesis. Now, one hardly finds a Marxist of any stature, who subscribes to the thesis unconditionally as it is generally presented in the text books; on the other hand, one seldom finds any Marxist challenging the legitimacy of the thesis, based on the textual analysis of the writer, after whose name the very theory is titled. This ambivalence is also reflected in the way the thesis is treated. Now, it has become an easy ploy observable in the writings of Marxists, to brandish the thesis as a Marxist, materialist truncheon at their not so materialist opponents; and when it seems too rudely materialistic, stifling real analysis, branding the thesis as a blemish on the theory of Marxism.

The present study proposes a way out from this ambivalence by doing away with the thesis in the present form, from Marxism altogether. In its original, restricted form, the intent of the thesis is restated as a metaphorical device that shows the roots of the political and legal organs in the production relations. Thus, even in this restricted form, the often overlooked organic imagery implicit in the original formulation is highlighted. Another major conceptual repair takes the form of reinstating the mode of production thesis in the status of Marx's holistic paradigm. With these changes, it becomes clear that Marx’s overall view of society is that of an organically interlaced network of practices, encapsulated in his concept of mode of production that inherently resists a merely stratified understanding of the society.

But this sort of enterprise that could greatly accrue consistency of Marxist theory, and thereby enrich the areas such as cultural and literary studies, is still a far cry from contemporary Marxism. The dominant opinion about the base and superstructure thesis is still very rudimentary in the present day Marxist theory. In an article published in 2008, on “the

Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party", Larry Ceplair writes that "it should be noted that in Marx's conception, the base consists of a series of processes (*e.g.*, assembly-line production) and relations (*e.g.*, feudal, mercantilist, capitalist), and the superstructure consists of ideas and sets of institutions based on ideas".[214] Besides its reversion to the duality of the real and ideal, this statement has the additional disadvantage of being warped by the Stalinist reverberations.

In his provocatively titled book, *Why Marx Was Right,* published as recently as in 2011, Terry Eagleton writes that "by the 'economic structure' or 'base,' Marx means the forces and relations of production; by the superstructure, he means institutions like the state, law, politics, religion and culture. In his view, the function of these institutions is to support the 'base,' meaning the prevailing class-system". [215] Such a highly unilateral and lopsided view of the finer realms of society like culture, could only give an unconvincingly reductionist impression both about his own theories and about Marxism, in general. Even, he elaborates this view at length, in the same book, suggesting that this is the reason behind the very existence of superstructures:

> Why should there be a need for superstructures in the first place? This, note, is a different question from asking why we have art or law or religion. There are many answers to that. It is asking, rather, 'Why should so much art, law and religion act to legitimate the present system?' The answer, in a word, is that the 'base' is self-divided. Because it involves exploitation, it gives rise to a good deal of conflict. And the role of superstructures is to regulate and ratify those conflicts. Superstructures are essential because exploitation exists. If it did not, we would still have art, law and perhaps even religion. But they would no longer serve these disreputable functions.[216]

Besides the implausibility of imputing such narrow view of culture to Marx, his highly elastic understanding of superstructure, that seems as imprecise as it is elastic, may appear crude, for all the stylistic sophistication, characteristic of Eagleton. Still, this is not an anomaly when it comes to this troubled area of Marxism, but even a norm, as we have seen throughout this study. G. A. Cohen's work, through a rereading of Marx, represents some noteworthy exception to this abnormal norm, in that, he strikingly brought out the fact that the concept of superstructure as proposed by Marx is remarkably slimmer than its presently inflated shapeless shape; his concept of base is also correspondingly concise:

> The economic structure or base therefore consists of relations of production only: it does not include the productive forces. The 'Preface' describes the superstructure as legal and political. So it at any rate includes the legal and state institutions of society. It is customary to locate other institutions within it too, and it is controversial what its correct demarcation is: my own view is that there are strong textual and systematic reasons for supposing that the superstructure is a lot smaller than many commentators think it is. It is certainly false that every noneconomic social phenomenon is superstructural: artistic creation, for example, is demonstrably not, as such, superstructural for Marx. In these remarks I shall discuss the legal order only, which is uncontroversially a part of the superstructure.[217]

Strangely enough, Cohen could not go much further in dismantling the unwarranted expansion of superstructure, because the conclusive opinion he reached seems to be that superstructure is restricted to the institutional aspects only. Thus, he says that "the superstructure consists of legal, political, religious, and other non-economic *institutions.* It probably includes universities, but it does not include knowledge, for knowledge is not an institution".[218] Though the restriction of the concept to the institutional aspect is definitely a

step forward towards disburdening and disambiguating the concept, its merit is only relative. Sometimes one may even come across a writer carefully trying to follow Marx, as seen in his formulations of the *Preface*, for instance, as Henri Lefebvre does, in the second volume of his *magnum opus, Critique of Everyday Life*:

> Marx defines the production relations which make up the economic structure of society, the 'foundation' on which a legal and political superstructure is built, and to which the forms of social consciousness correspond. Here structure is the essence of a society, capitalist society, defined and determined by certain production relations. Structure and form are not synonymous. Legally elaborated and systematized property relations form part of the superstructures which carry out certain functions in a determined society. Social consciousness adopts 'forms'—of ideas, of ideologies, of civilization—which should be studied in terms of their formation in history.[219]

Still, it is hard to understand that this did not prevent him from working with the concept of "ideological superstructure"[220], which is the most generic denizen of the expanded superstructure. Thus anything similar to the above mentioned solution to the problem of base and superstructure does not seem to be taking shape in contemporary Marxism, and for the same reason, it remains indispensable. Thus, when the organically/dialectically conceived base and superstructure thesis is replaced by the analytically/mechanically conceived divisive thesis, the process of methodological encroachment of Marxism, by the estranged modes of thought has come to a completion. Arguably, this malign development cannot be counteracted until the base and superstructure thesis is abandoned in its divisive, stratifying form. Unfortunately, Marxism has taken an opposite course of development—that of extending the thesis, both in scope and status.

This steady expansion of the thesis, and its consequent encroachment of the mode of production thesis, has eventually resulted in the ameliorating modification of replacing the production relations in the base, with the mode of production. Though this unacknowledged amendment is relatively more plausible than the previous version, it has the inescapable side-effect of collapsing the conceptually more sophisticated, and multidimensional mode of production thesis into the base and superstructure binaries. We have surveyed the tortuous theoretical developments that ended up in this intellectual stalemate.

Beginning with the reformulations of the base and superstructure thesis by Engels himself, the consolidation of the thesis is traced in its extended form, in the writings of the renowned Marxists of the second International, culminating in the greatly influential (though this is not always acknowledged so) work of Stalin. Later, the contributions of the subversive theorists like Lukács and Korsch, with their emphasis on the dialectical spirit of Marx's teaching, is also studied and it is noted, among other things, how these critics could not dismantle the binary thesis, in spite of their effective criticism of the modes of thought analogous to the one represented by that thesis. The continuation of their legacy in the work of the Frankfurt School thinkers has also been noted. But these contributions can only have a very limited effect, because the dualistic thesis is left intact in their work; and the thesis goes on necessitating the modes of thought they endeavoured to dismantle, especially the duality of ideality and reality. Thus, even Poulantzas, with his emphasis on State, which is surely an element of superstructure, still speaks about the "ideality-superstructure and materiality-base", as the "*two* domains of *reality*".[221]

On the other hand, Stalin's version of base and superstructure seems to have rather astonishingly extensive following in later Marxism, along with his paradoxical practice of double counting (i.e., both in the base and in the superstructure) some crucial aspects of

society; language and state budget in his case. Thus, for all his avowed opposition to the views of Stalin, Althusser wrote:

> Paradoxically, it was none other than Stalin, whose contagious and implacable system of government and thought had induced this delirium, who reduced the madness to a little more reason. Reading between the lines of the few simple pages in which he reproached the zeal of those who were making strenuous efforts to prove language a superstructure, we could see that there were limits to the use of the class criterion[222].

Despite the widespread acceptance of its legitimacy as a part of Marxist theory, the divisive thesis is often discounted in the actual practice of the later Marxists, through this double counting that became popular after Stalin. Arguing against Gramsci, Althusser and Étienne Balibar claim a similar status for science, in *Reading Capital*, "[S]cience can no more be ranged within the category 'superstructure' than can language, which as Stalin showed escapes it".[223] Regarding Williams, Eagleton made a similar point: "[W]hat he in some sense perceives, but fails to clarify, is that in capitalist formations above all literature belongs at once to 'base' and 'superstructure'—figures at once within material production and ideological formation".[224] Sayer also has rightly noted this trend when he wrote that "Godelier counts kinship relations both in the base and superstructure, and Meillassoux makes a similar point regarding age and gender relations".[225] Henri Lefebvre's emphasis on the ubiquitous role of information leads to the same road:

> It is, finally, a social practice, a way of communicating, with a usage and even a political application. Information processing can be located neither at the level of the base nor at the level of the superstructure in the usual sense, for it covers the whole of modern society, from the base to the superstructure. This

> is why it is necessary to have a Marxist and critical theory of information systems.[226]

This practice of double counting has become so pervasive in modern Marxism, that ideas, the most familiar inhabitants of superstructure, are also considered to have such double citizenship. In his speech on "Base and Superstructure", delivered at an International Socialist Organisation Educational, in 1990, Tom O'Lincoln says that "[I]deas are an integral part of production. We're not beavers making dams, or bees building hives. In human labour we think about what we're going to do, often we design it. Ideas are part of the economic base. But of course, they are also part of the superstructure",[227] turning what is originally an argument of Marx, into the base-superstructure schematic. In his *Why Marx Was Right*, already referred to above, Eagleton elaborately ponders upon this point:

> There are also a fair number of institutions which might be said to belong to both base and superstructure at the same time. Born-again churches in the United States are powerhouses of ideology but also immensely lucrative businesses. The same is true of publishing, the media and the film industry. Some U.S. universities are massive business enterprises as well as knowledge factories. Or think of Prince Charles, who exists largely to inspire deference in the British public, but who also makes a sizeable profit out of doing so.
>
> But surely the whole of human existence cannot be carved up between base and superstructure? Indeed not. There are countless things that belong neither to material production nor to the so-called superstructure. Language, sexual love, the tibia bone, the planet Venus, bitter remorse, dancing the tango and the North Yorkshire moors are just a few of them. Marxism, as we have seen, is not a Theory of Everything.[228]

Notwithstanding the recognition of the limitations of the base and superstructure thesis in the last paragraph, the items already apportioned in both the realms are considerably significant and varied. Among all such instances of double counting, it is a common failing not to see that the allocation of various social elements to both the conceptual realms problematizes the very *raison d'être* for the base-superstructure divisions, and thereby demands analysis and explanation why and how one should still retain the divisive thesis. From the perspective proposed here, it is not difficult to see that these subversive outcomes are the inevitable results of the uncritical extension of the divisive thesis to the inapplicable realms, where the division could only result in argumentative heat and no analytical light.

Another approach to the dualistic thesis is highly influential in contemporary Marxism, and so it demands our attention here. From this position, on the one hand, the significance of the thesis in Marxism is recognised unequivocally; but, on the other hand, the necessity of refining the thesis is also felt with equal seriousness. Gramsci and Althusser are the most prominent examples of this stance. Often, this refined restatement is attempted by deploying conceptual devices taken from their eclectic intellectual repertoires. Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *historical bloc*, and Althusser's concepts of *overdetermination* and *structural causality* are perhaps the most significant examples of their conceptual innovations employed to renovate the apparently crude thesis.

Though both these writers articulated a concept of the whole, their retaining of the base and superstructure thesis in the inclusive form, as a cornerstone of their respective systems, has only aggravated the problem of misalignment of the concepts, both in their own systems and in the general understanding of Marxism. Thus their innovative concepts have contributed little to enhance the consistency of Marxism that is inescapably disturbed every time a new concept is introduced. But their theories have exercised the most conspicuous influence on the later course of developments that Marxism has undergone, up to the

contemporary times. Although these thinkers are enormously influential on some later writers, we see that the theories of the latter gravitate towards some kind of rejection of the thesis and sometimes towards a concept of articulated whole. Thus, basing their theories on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe try to rehabilitate the political sphere, whose importance is overshadowed by the base and superstructure thesis, when conceived as hierarchized compartments. Regrettably, their critique does not take the form of rejecting this understanding of the thesis, but it goes in the direction of rejecting the superstructural status to politics, and eventually to rejecting the thesis altogether.

Thus, they say: "we conceive of the political not as a superstructure but as having the status of an *ontology of the social*".[229] This is how Laclau explains the idea in his *Emanicipation(s)*: "[P]olitics, far from being confined to a superstructure, occupies the role of what we can call an *ontology of the social.* If politics is the ensemble of the decisions taken in an undecidable terrain—that is a terrain in which power is constitutive—then the social can consist only in the sedimented forms of a power that has blurred the traces of its own contingency".[230] In addition to the point that the idea of the political they work with is clearly different from that of Marx, which he delimits to class rule, it is important to see that their rejection is based on their subscription to the dualistic understanding of the thesis that has overtaken the originally organic, dialectical relation:

> Now, the base/superstructure model affirms that the base not only limits but *determines* the superstructure, in the same way that the movements of a hand determine the movements of its shadow on a wall. When the Marxist tradition affirms that a State is 'capitalist', or that an ideology is 'bourgeois', what is being asserted is not simply that they are in chains or prisoners of a type of economy or a class position, but rather that they *express or represent* the latter at a different level.[231]

Based on a passage from his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* we have already seen, how Marx recognises a number of variations in the forms of States, in spite of their having the common base of capitalist society.[232] But, the writers stubbornly recognise only the rigidly deterministic version of the thesis. Accordingly, their indebtedness to Gramsci is not for his concepts that have the potential to counteract the dualistic understanding like his concept of historical bloc, but for his concept of hegemony that has uncertain relation with class politics:

> We can thus see the central point which demarcates Gramsci from other anti-economistic positions formulated within the communist movement of that period. Both Lukács and Korsch, for instance, also reproportioned the terrain classically attributed to the superstructures; but they did this within the parameters of a class-reductionist perspective which identified the evolutionary subject with the working class, such that hegemony in the sense of articulation was strictly unthinkable. It was precisely Gramsci's introduction of this latter concept which radically subverted the original conditions for the emergence of Second International dualism.[233]

The frequent suggestion found in this book that Gramsci rejected, or intended to reject the base and superstructure thesis is not at all tenable as we have already seen in the study of his writings. Polemicising with the mechanistically conceived base and superstructure model, which seems to be the only model they could conceive of, the writers criticise the artificially isolated understanding of the economic sphere:

> Even those Marxist tendencies which struggled hardest to overcome economism and reductionism maintained, in one way or another, that essentialist conception of the structuring of economic space . . . . Thus, the debate between economist and anti-economist tendencies within Marxism was

> necessarily reduced to the secondary problem of the weight that should be attached to the superstructures in the determination of historical processes. Yet the most 'superstructuralist' of conceptions retained a naturalist vision of the economy— even when it attempted to limit the area of its effects.[234]

In contrast to this abstract view of economy, they propose a perspective in which the class unity itself is immanently political: "the moment of class unity is, thus, a political moment. The constitutive centre of what we might call a society's *relational configuration* or *articulatory form* is displaced towards the field of the superstructures, so that the very distinction between economic base and superstructure becomes blurred and problematic."[235] What is noteworthy among all these arguments is that the organically conceived economic base and political superstructure thesis is greatly insulated from these subversive arguments and a rigid, dualistic understanding of the thesis stands destabilised before them. But, so far as these writers are concerned, the former version of the thesis does not exist at all, and so, the only way out is to relinquish the thesis: "[S]ocialism had to change its terrain and strategy, and the key theoretical moment was the break with the rigid base/superstructure distinction that had prevented any conception of the autonomy of the political".[236]

What is really crucial for the socialist movement, is the implications of this relinquishment for its political practice. They are also made clear by these writers:

> However, once we have abandoned the base/superstructure distinction, and rejected the view that there are privileged points from which an emancipatory political practice can be launched, it is clear that the constitution of a hegemonic left alternative can only come from a complex process of convergence and political construction, to which none of the hegemonic articulations constructed in any area of social reality can be of indifference. Certainly, this sort of theoretical reorientation will have some remedial effect

> on the dualistic and unilateral envisioning of the social reality sponsored by the base and superstructure thesis that could eventually prove a stumbling block even for the political practice.[237]

I have already elaborated how Marx's methodology that is derivable from his actual analysis of various issues based on his concept of mode of production does not support a stratified understanding of society, let alone promote privileges among the different strata. Indeed, what the writers propose here is, in essence, more consonant with Marx's methodological commitments than they themselves recognise. But if this reorientation proposed by the writers degenerates (as it actually did) into disorienting the crucial issue of class politics, to substitute that with the postmodern politics of plurality cult, then the reorientation itself needs the corrective criticism of a Slavoj Žižek , for instance, who says, in his essay "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!" precisely with reference to these kind of arguments: "Laclau definitely renounces the old Marxist problematic of infra-and superstructure, that is, the objective grounding of the 'superstructural' hegemonic struggle in the economic 'infrastructure'"; and then he goes on to add that the. . .

> postmodern politics definitely has the great merit that it 'repoliticizes' a series of domains previously considered 'apolitical' or 'private'; the fact remains, however, that it does not in fact repoliticize capitalism, because the very notion and form of the 'political' within which it operates is grounded in the 'depoliticization' of the economy. If we are to play the postmodern game of plurality of political subjectivizations, it is formally necessary that we do not ask certain questions (about how to subvert capitalism as such, about the constitutive limits of democracy and/or the democratic state as such . . .).[238]

Incidentally, it must be noted that Žižek, an eminent contemporary cultural critic, presents a view of ideology, in his introduction to the anthology *Mapping Ideology,* as a

superstructural entity that relies upon the more real (base), an expression that is allusive of the Lacanian concept of the *real*, for which he is a prominent exponent:

> we encounter the inherent limit of social reality, what has to be foreclosed if the consistent field of reality is to emerge, precisely in the guise of the problematic of ideology, of a 'superstructure', of something that appears to be a mere epiphenomenon, a mirror-reflection, of 'true' social life. We are dealing here with the paradoxical topology in which the surface ('mere ideology') is directly linked to— occupies the place of, stands in for — what is 'deeper than depth itself', more real than reality itself.[239]

Be it as it may, some sort of paradigmatic shift is evident in the recent times, even among those that followed the trajectory of thought mainly inspired by Althusser, such as Balibar and Godelier. Jameson has rightly noted this shift, regarding Balibar, when he wrote:

> In fact, what makes up the difficulty of the Althusserians' rhetoric is the fact that they are fighting a war on two fronts, on the one hand against 'structuralism' (into which their Marxian analyses threaten to be swallowed without a trace), and on the other against the Hegelian dialectic (which they essentially associate with Stalin and with Soviet Marxism). Thus . . . Balibar systematically uses the word 'combination' for the 'structuralist' word 'structure', and his deployment of it as a dialectical totality has the unintended side benefit of revealing the dialectical tendencies within structuralism itself.[240]

This kind of conceptual transition, manifested through the terminological change, is understandably conducive for the paradigmatic shift that has been proposed here, though the consistent completion of this transition demands the formulation of the transition in terms of base and superstructure, and mode of production as is elaborated already.

Also, in the case of Godelier, where the predominant influence of Althusser's ideas is evident, we see a kind of questioning and distancing from the Althusserian position:

> For a Marxist, an enquiry into ideology, the conditions of its formation and transformation, its effects on the motion of societies, should apparently be an enquiry into the relation between infrastructure, superstructures and ideology. Must these realities be baptized 'instances' as Althusser does? Should they be considered as 'levels' of social reality, as distinctions within social reality which are in some sense substantive, as institutional divides in its substance? I think not. For a society does not have a top or a bottom, or in any real sense levels at all. This is because the distinction between infrastructure and superstructures is not a distinction between institutions. It is essentially a distinction between functions.[241]

This functional construal of the base-superstructure divisions is a trend that commands a great following among the modern Marxists including Eagleton. Earlier, we have seen how the emphasis on the institutional nature of superstructure by writers like Cohen has resulted in accentuating the conciseness of the concept to some extent, whereas, this functional view could counteract the rigidly understood base-superstructure distinctions to some extent, as we could see from Godelier's elaboration of the idea:

> From this point on, the distinction between infrastructure, superstructures and ideology appear as a distinction of functions, not institutions, since we have just seen that thought and language can function as components of the infrastructure, in this case as components of the productive forces. The distinction is hence not between material and immaterial, since I cannot see that thought is any less material than the rest of social life. Nor is it a

> distinction between tangible and intangible. It is a locational distinction within those activities necessary for the reproduction of social life.[242]

This envisioning of the base-superstructure distinctions as functional differences could make the model look less rigid, because the same thing could perform different functions in different contexts. This line of thought could provide the theoretical basis for the practice of double counting we have already discussed. But, the analytical flexibility the functional version offers can result in a better appreciation of the role of various issues. Thus, in the essay, "The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism", Wally Secombe argues that the labour of the family has a dual function: "[T]he labour of the family unit reproduces simultaneously components of labour power and the relations of production. It follows from this that the function of the family unit within the capitalist mode of production is a reproductive one, but that this function has both an economic and an ideological aspect".[243]

Again, this line of reasoning apparently leads to the double counting of the labour of the family in both the base and the superstructure. The author goes on to argue rightly that this apparently contradictory categorising practice is justifiable from the functional view:

> If base and superstructure are conceived as discrete institutional realms in the sense that bourgeois social science conceives of the world with clear-cut classificational boundaries, the above description of the family is an unsatisfactory formulation. Conceived in this way, it is illogical to say the family is both a part of the base and superstructure. But the question itself ('is the family in the base or superstructure?') is incorrectly posed and the bind it produces flows from its misconception of Marxist categories.
>
> The terms base and superstructure signify different functional levels or aspects of the social world having a certain defined relationship to one another.[244]

Thus, the functional version predominant among the writers seen here, who manifestly followed the Althusserian trajectory of thought, is conceptually related to the double counting tradition which is also popular with the modern writers. One inherent advantage of this version is that instead of establishing rigid notional boundaries between the twin concepts, it allows their overlapping as a legitimate analytical practice, and makes it possible that the same thing is counted now under one category and now under the other. Understandably, this could partially give back the analytical flexibility that is lost with the oblivion of the original organic version. Accordingly, this overlapping account of the thesis gained some recognition in the contemporary writings. For instance, in his article "Infrastructure and Superstructure: Revisions in Marxist Sociology of Culture", Robert Wuthnow gives a detailed account of the thesis on similar lines:

> Infrastructure consists of historic behavioral patterns that the observer reconstructs from evidence at least partly, if not primarily, separate from the cultural products that arise from these patterns. At the same time, superstructure consists of the behavioral patterns in discourse, texts, and other symbolic-expressive media, which are also reconstructed by the observer according to certain preconceived theoretical categories of analysis. The analyst, then, also reconstructs a certain kind of articulation between infrastructure and superstructure by identifying homologies and noting patterns of covariation. This reconstruction, however, constitutes only the crudest level of analysis in determining the modes of articulation between base and superstructure. Neither category is hermetically sealed from the other. Superstructure becomes a feature of infrastructural relations, as it is said, when life imitates art, or when genres of discourse become, as it were, genres of social interaction. Similarly, and of greater interest in the present literature,

> features of the infrastructure become incorporated into the superstructure, comprising elements of its content and form and gaining textual transformation in the process.[245]

Another tradition that has shown a remarkable bent towards the organic view from the beginning is noteworthy here. In contrast to the colossally influential Gramscian and Althusserian approaches of refining the base and superstructure thesis, it is the tradition of British Marxism that offered remarkable resistance—which often amounted to total rejection—to the dualistic thesis, and thereby made some valuable contributions, to the fields of study such as culture. This tradition did not find much favour with the later generations of Marxists, who are under the sway of continental intellectual influences such as the Gramscian and Althusserian legacies. As these legacies accorded a conspicuous place to the base and superstructure thesis in their respective versions, this generational difference—to paraphrase the expression of Leonard Jackson—has taken the form of a dispute between those that reject the thesis and those that assert that in some form or the other. This is manifest, for instance, in Perry Anderson's recounting of Thompson's disagreement with Tom Nairn and himself:

> His main belief appears to be that Tom Nairn and myself are incorrigible 'reductionists', who invariably explain away 'the autonomy of political or cultural events' by economic processes: everything in our work, it seems, tends towards the reduction of a 'superstructure' to a 'base'. We are, moreover, 'schematic' in our treatment of class, and unhealthily 'obsessed with power'. Against these crude errors, he asserts the 'interlacing of economic and non-economic relations' and the 'immersion of social, cultural and economic phenomena in the same nexus of relationship'[246]

Anderson also explains the intellectual source of this generational disparity when he says: "[T]he theoretical lineage of our work is altogether different from Thompson's image of

it. It comes from the major tradition of Western European Marxism since the First World War—a tradition which has consistently been coeval with new forms of idealism, and a dialectical response to them within the evolution of Marxism itself".[247] The disagreement between Eagleton and Williams is also rooted in the same lineage, where the former has greatly imbibed the Althusserian influence. Thus the consistent rejection of the dualistic thesis has not received proper critical attention it deserves in the writings of the later generations, and still remained as a legacy to be critically appreciated and appropriated.

Eagleton's critical work is still a continuing journey in the field of English literary criticism. Along with Jameson, he is one of the most renowned and prolific Marxist critics contemporarily active in this area. Consequently, his work demands our sustained attention. The most remarkable thing about Eagleton's work regarding the base and superstructure thesis is his recurrent attempts to support the thesis despite its disrepute for conceptual inflexibility. Even in his recent book *Why Marx Was Right* we find this attempt:

> Since the base-superstructure model has been much derided by some of Marx's critics, and even by some of his adherents, I will perversely put in a good word for it here. It is sometimes objected that the model is too static; but all models are static, as well as simplifying. Marx does not mean that there are two entirely distinct slices to social life. On the contrary, there is a good deal of traffic between the two. The base may give rise to the superstructure, but the superstructure is important for the base's continued existence.[248]

In an earlier book, *Ideology: An Introduction,* we find Eagleton engaged with a similar task:

> The base-superstructure doctrine has been widely attacked for being static, hierarchical, dualistic and mechanistic, even in those more sophisticated accounts of it in which the superstructure reacts back dialectically to condition the material base. It might therefore be timely and suitably unfashionable to

> enter a word or two in its defence. Let us be clear first what it is *not* asserting. It is not out to argue that prisons and parliamentary democracy, school rooms and sexual fantasies, are any less *real* than steel mills or sterling. Churches and cinemas are quite as material as coal mines; it is just that, on this argument, they cannot be the ultimate catalysts of revolutionary social change. The point of the base-superstructure doctrine lies in the question of determinations— of what 'level' of social life most powerfully and crucially conditions the others, and therefore of what arena of activity would be most relevant to effecting a thoroughgoing social transformation.[249]

As the two passages testify unmistakably, Eagleton stubbornly upholds the base and superstructure thesis, in striking contrast to the attitude of his teacher, Williams. Of course, this position is quite expected of Eagleton, from the backdrop of the generational fissure I have already referred to. But it is in his essay, "Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature", published in 1988, that we find his most sustained engagement with the thesis:

> 'Superstructural,' . . . designates less a fixed ontological realm of phenomena than a particular standpoint or form of discursive activity. When the bourgeois state takes action to mobilize its emergency services in the event of flood or famine, it is not, generally speaking, behaving as part of the superstructure; when it mobilizes its troops to break a strike, then it is. When American schoolchildren salute the flag, the educational system is a superstructure; when they are taught how to fasten their shoelaces it is not. Superstructural is as superstructural does: some features of a social institution may be superstructural and some not, and these same features may change their status from one situation to another.

> I am suggesting, in other words, that the base/superstructure model is most illuminating if the superstructure is regarded as a set of variable functions rather than as a given realm.[250]

As this functional version of the thesis is already familiar to us, as an amelioration of the inflexibly rigid topographical thesis, what we have to note specifically in Eagleton is the way he goes on from this position to the adjectival use of the term *superstructure*:

> I want to shift the argument, then, from the functional character of the superstructure to the functional character of the term "superstructure"- to effect a slide from the substantive to the adjectival. This position involves a fairly strong revisionist reading of Marx himself, who in at least some of his major formulations of the model would seem to hold to a sort of genetic-functional interpretation of the superstructure. . . .[251]

The recognition of the genetic element in Marx's formulation of the base and superstructure thesis, is noteworthy here, especially from the backdrop of the chronic oblivion it suffered in the times after Marx. But, in Eagleton, this recognition assumes a “genetic-functional” form instead of a genetic-organic form, where it is the functional element that predominates and the recognition of the genetic element hardly results in any theoretical reorientation. From this functional understanding, the concept of superstructure ceases to be ontological, and will have only a contextual applicability for Eagleton:

> But an ontologizing of the superstructure seems to me in the end an impediment to effective political practice, and in any case Marx himself was the first Marxist revisionist. Roughly speaking, a phenomenon is superstructural when and only when it plays some active, reasonably direct role in the power struggles of class society; and to this extent what is and what isn't superstructural at any given point is a matter of political contention, not a

> question of looking up the books. The superstructure is defined precisely by its action on the base: it is, as Marx himself once commented, a relational term, or, as we might say, a contextual one.[252]

The problem with this functional view is that, just as the practice of double counting does, it makes the very division between the dual realms seem redundant, as the functional distinction could be better expressed through the adjectival use, or even through the adverbial inflection of the term *superstructure*, as Eagleton's line of reasoning here demonstrates in the end:

> To examine a phenomenon like literature superstructurally is to contextualize it in a particular way to highlight those aspects of it which act as hegemonic supports. (One might add: as antihegemonic subversions, too. But one would be opening up a different, difficult matter in the theory of ideology.) There thus need be no implication here that the work does not reveal other aspects distinct from or irreconcilable with these specific features; but there is also an implicit claim that any social object, such as rhubarb pie or the size of one's feet, could in some appropriate context begin to behave superstructurally.[253]

The degree of clarity and consistency that this sort of theorisation could bring to the Marxist thought is usually inversely proportional to the degree of innovation and sophistication seen in the turns of phrase; and this is also often the case with Althusser. On the other hand, the problems resulting from such theorisation are more complicated and more confounding, than the ones resolved by it. For instance, if the difference between the superstructural and non-superstructural counts of some entity is only a difference of function, what would be the implications of the proposition that the non-superstructural base determines the superstructural functions? Obviously, these implications could only be unproductively confounding and chaotic, demanding further clarifying exercises.

Again, it is noteworthy here, that this adverbial reformulation in Eagleton is mostly confined to the abstract, theoretical level, that does not find much application in his actual analysis of issues like literature. When he is in the thick of this analysis and examination, it is the concept of mode of production that is actually at work, as we can see, for instance, when he writes in his *Criticism and Ideology*: *A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* that "the handwritten manuscript can only be distributed and consumed on a hand-to-hand basis, within, let us say, a courtly caste; the multiply dictated work (one copied simultaneously by several scribes) is able to achieve wider social consumption; the ballad pedalled by a chapman may be consumed by an even wider audience; the 'yellowback' railway novel is available to a mass public".[254] The nexus established here is between the productive forces and the accessibility of the work, an issue of paramount social significance. As he goes on, the role of the production relations—another important aspect of the mode of production—also plays a crucial part in his detailed account of literature in various social settings:

> Unified with these productive forces, then, are specific social relations of literary production. The tribal bard professionally authorised to produce for his king or chieftain; the 'amateur' mediaeval poet presenting to his patron a personally requested product for private remuneration; the peripatetic minstrel housed and fed by his peasant audience; the ecclesiastically or royally patronised producer, or the author who sells his product to an aristocratic patron for a dedication fee; the 'independent' author who sells his commodity to a bookseller-publisher or to a capitalist publishing firm; the state-patronised producer: all of these forms are familiar enough to the 'sociology of literature'. The point is to analyse the complex articulations of these various LMPs [Eagleton's acronym for literary modes of production] with the 'general' mode of production of a social formation.[255]

Perhaps, it only needs to be added that the paradigmatic shift proposed in this study—through which the mode of production thesis will regain its central importance, even with reference to the cultural and literary issues, untenably designated superstructural so far—will bring about a great deal of rigour and consistency to this kind of analytical undertaking, by supplying a sound theoretical foundation for that. Of course, this is not to forget the fact that for Eagleton, the base and superstructure thesis still commands subscription, even in these issues, especially in analysing the class affiliations of these issues. But the mode of production model could also do this through the aspect of production relations, as Eagleton himself shows in the above passage. In any case, it is a well-known idea in literary studies that what the work of an author actually says is different from what the author intends to say.

Let's turn our gaze to Fredric Jameson and see how things stand with one of the formidably influential Marxist critics of contemporary times, with regard to the thesis in question. To begin with, a dialectically conceived broad, undogmatic understanding of the thesis is presented in his book, *The Cultural Turn,* with regard to the understanding of culture: “[W]e understand that 'base and superstructure' is not really a model, but a starting point and a problem, something as undogmatic as an imperative simultaneously to grasp culture in and for itself, but also in relationship to its outside, its content, its context, and its space of intervention and of effectivity”.[256]

Besides the broad flexibility of this understanding, what is distinct in his view is his construal of the nature of the relationship between the base and superstructure, about whose relevance he is never as assertive as Eagleton, as we could see from his introduction to *The Modernist Papers*: “. . . even if base and superstructure were still relevant, my conception of their relationship or even their interrelationship would not all be one of reflexion or replication. It is rather one of situation and response, and of the creativity of the various superstructures with respect to a national and socio-economic, infrastructural situation which

is "not of their own making".[257] In his consideration of cultural issues like modernism, Jameson never confines his methodological principles to the base-superstructure thesis, but tries to have a holistic view of other statements of Marx touching upon the issue. The dualistic thesis in its reflectionist version is quite inadequte for his purpose :

> Is it still necessary to remind ourselves that when Marx evokes 'the social determination of being' he is speaking of preconditions rather than causes (let alone 'determinisms')? Indeed, to look for the preconditions of cultural and artistic phenomena like modernism is to confront surprises and paradoxes for which the old reflection model of base and superstructure (if it ever existed!) scarcely prepared us.[258]

Even a cursory look at his expressions like “situation and response”, “creativity of the various superstructures”, “preconditions rather than causes” etc., makes it clear that his understanding of the thesis has something special about it. As a matter of fact, the singularity of his work springs from his monumental application of the concept of totality, bequeathed by Lukács, with extremely productive results. Consequently, his idea of mode of production is strikingly close to the dialectically defined concept of Marx, which includes all forms of production, mutually articulated in a way that is specific to every mode of production:

> . . . although the category of the mode of production has sometimes been misunderstood as a narrowly economic or "productionist" one, its adequate solution clearly demands a structural examination and positioning of the superstructural levels of a given social formation and, most urgently, the function and space to be assigned to culture itself: no satisfactory model of a given mode of production can exist without a theory of the historically and dialectically specific and unique role of "culture" within it.[259]

This exerpt taken from Jameson's foreword to Jean-Francois Lyotard's celebrated account of *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, has the great merit of clearly restoring the mode of production thesis in its holistic and unique significance. This is not just an abstract theoretical statement, but a clearly formulated methodological commitment, which he meticulously follows to reap fruitful results. His analysis of religion, in his recent book, *The Hegel Variations*, published in 2010, offers an illuminating example for this:

> religion today is itself, in its myriad forms, but the remnants of a cultural system which once governed all the features and contingencies of a simpler social totality: a system far more immanent to social relations and production than anything characterized as a superstructure or an ideology in the modern world. The fundamentalisms today express the nostalgia for such a seemingly more unified world than our own: yet the very possibility of a concept of religion as a distinct entity betrays the inevitable gap or internal distance within the traditional world which such a fantasy conceals or occults.[260]

Thus the question of the place of religion is answarable only with respect to a definite social totality, which is nothing else than the mode of production, as suggested by our own study, and by Jameson's concept of mode of production as seen in a previous quotation. Jameson follows this holistic view so consistently in this book that even the place of class passions is decided, depending upon the social organisation in question: "[M]y own sense is that these fundamental class passions, driven by hatred and resentment and seething through all earlier literature, only become 'cultural' or superstructure in the narrower sense after caste is replaced by class in the era of industrial capitalism".[261] With this view of the social totality as a unique articulation of different aspects of society, he argues here that Hegel's philosophy of religion is helpful in understanding the performative dimention of modern culture:

> . . . we may note a series of features in Hegel's philosophy of religion which are consonant with issues necessarily addressed by modern studies of culture. First of all, there is what we may call the infrastructure specific to such superstructures, namely the existence of institutions and of intellectuals specific to them: a traditional church and priesthood which has in modern times opened up into a variety of intellectual production fields and the specialists who staff them, from the personnel of the advertising and entertainment industries and the academics and journalists concerned with cultural analysis and dissemination to the curators of museums and the government functionaries in charge of cultural budgets, not to speak of the retailers in the art market and analogous networks in the other arts. It is clear that from this perspective culture today has its performative dimension, something equivalent to Hegels discussion of the rituals of the religious cult.[262]

This passage taken from the tenth chapter, titled "Religion as Cultural Superstructure", of the above mentioned book, tries to establish a homology between Hegel's philosophy of religion and modern culture. What is remarkably discernible here is that his emphasis on the performative dimention of culture, with its focus on personnel and the production processes involved is inherently consonant with the mode of production model. Though Jameson actually deploys only the infrastructure-superstructure thesis, his very consideration of these issues as “intellectual production fields”, shows that the concept at work, at a deeper level, is the mode of production, testifying my claim that this thesis is the conceptual unconscious of modern Marxism.

Although Jameson’s view of mode of production fruitfully captures its salient features, in fact, it is his retaining of the base-superstructure thesis sometimes, besides the

mode of production thesis, which causes some kind of inherent incoherence in his method. Thus, even in his investigation of the contemporary concerns like the postmodern, modernity, and modernization, regarding which his analytical acumen has received widely recognised acclaim, he still employs the topographical thesis, as we could see in his *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

> Indeed, our old friends base and superstructure seem fatally to reimpose themselves: if modernization is something that happens to the base, and modernism the form the superstructure takes in reaction to that ambivalent development, then perhaps modernity characterizes the attempt to make something coherent out of their relationship. Modernity would then in that case describe the way "modern" people feel about themselves; the word would seem to have something to do not with the products (either cultural or industrial) but with the producers and the consumers, and how they feel either producing the products or living among them.[263]

Again, this passage brilliantly exemplifies that inescapable dialectic of reason in Jameson, through the action of which what started as the deployment of the base and superstructure thesis inexorably turns into a consideration of the facets of mode of production such as the products, producers, and the mode of life they imply. Again, the question as to how far this transition is a conscious one does not matter here. But Jameson's employment of the base and superstructure thesis, in his study of culture, should not make us think that he regards the thesis in the usual supra-social sense, disregarding the social formation in question, conceived as a unique articulation of its constituent social aspects, with a unique dynamic of its own that is specific to every formation, with its own specific mode of production. On the contrary, it is his acute sense of this specificity that made it possible for

him to succinctly formulate, in his introduction to the same book, the uniqueness of the postmodern cultural phenomena:

> . . . the expression *late capitalism* carries the other, cultural half of my title within it as well . . . To say that my two terms, the *cultural* and the *economic*, thereby collapse back into one another and say the same thing, in an eclipse of the distinction between base and superstructure that has itself often struck people as significantly characteristic of Postmodernism in the first place, is also to suggest that the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic.[264]

Indeed, Jameson's remarkably comprehensive theory of the postmodern condition is based on the postulates of Ernest Mandel about the new period of capitalism, which he called *late capitalism* that encompasses both the "Third World agriculture and First World culture", to borrow an expression of Jameson himself:

> This new period [1940 to 1965] was characterized, among other things, by the fact that alongside machine-made industrial consumer goods (as from the early 19th century) and machine-made machines (as from the mid-19th century), we now find machine-produced raw materials and foodstuffs. Late capitalism, far from representing a 'post-industrial society,' thus appears as the period in which all branches of the economy are fully industrialized for the first time; to which one could further add the increasing mechanization of the sphere of circulation (with the exception of pure repair services) and the increasing mechanization of the superstructure.[265]

These words of Mandel cited by Jameson in his foreword to Lyotard's book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* are descriptive of a new mode of production, or a new phase of it. The essential link between the above formulation of Mandel

and the viewpoint of Jameson cited right before that is too transparent to elaborate at length. Indeed, Jameson himself is quite vocal about the contributions of Mandel and their significance for his own work, as we gather from his book *The Cultural Turn*:

> Ernest Mandel's book *Late Capitalism* . . . for the first time theorized a third stage of capitalism from a usably Marxian perspective. This is what made my own thoughts on 'postmodernism' possible, which are therefore to be understood as an attempt to theorize the specific logic of the cultural production of that third stage, and not as yet another disembodied culture critique or diagnosis of the spirit of the age.[266]

This passage clearly underscores the necessary connection between the figuring out and formulation of a new phase of mode of production with its unique, immanent dynamics and the ensuing view of cultural production that could be elicited from this. For all these noted achievements of Jameson, it is remarkable that despite his rigorous apprehension of the specificity of each mode of production with its unique dynamic, an apprehension that enabled him to draw persuasive analytical results, it is his sporadic but conspicuous use of the base-superstructure concepts—sometimes only at the terminological level, but sometimes even at the conceptual level—that is not notionally integrated with the former, richer view of mode of production in a convincingly consistent manner, which makes certain logical nodal points in his work that have something to do with the conceptual reconciliation of the two theses look either ill-articulated or as the left over, dangling logical ends.

There is hardly any complication in locating the root of this problem in the indisposability of the cultural-ideological superstructure that could not be exorcised irrevocably from Marxist theory, until and unless the thesis is grasped in its restricted form, to which Marx tended to reduce it, in direct contrast to the unmitigated extension of the thesis in the writings of later Marxists. Thus the recognition and restoration of the original restricted

version of base and superstructure thesis can clear the conceptual ground not only for a consistently defined scope of the mode of production thesis, but also for the precise delimiting of the applicability of the base and superstructure thesis, thus honing both the theses at once.

Since the vitality and utility of the mode of production thesis as a methodological tool in analysing the issues such as culture and literature—usually misconfigured and misconceptualised as superstructural—is already well-recognised in the Marxist tradition, as exemplified by the excerpts of Jameson and Eagleton we have already seen, the eventual recognition and restoration of this holistic thesis at a methodologically central position, even at the general theoretical level, will bring an intrinsic cohesion and conciseness to Marxism.

Of course this is not to claim that these paradigmatic changes will either bring Marxism to a completion or make it infallible, because, as Francis Mulhern has put it succinctly: “Marxism remains what it has always been: incomplete, fallible, a tradition in process—but for all that, as Sartre once wrote, the unsurpassable horizon of thought in our time”.[267]

Notes

[1] Peter Worsley, *Marx and Marxism*, revised ed. (London: Routledge, 2002) 104.

[2] Thus, Fredric Jameson suggested once, that this thesis is, “in any case only mentioned once by Marx”, and even that “in a not very central place”. Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London : Verso, 2002) 77. We have already seen enough of Marx to realise that Jameson is incorrect on both the accounts.

[3] Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1989) 75-6.

[4] See Richard Harland, *Superstructuralism* (London: Methuen, 1988) 1.

[5] See: Ronaldo Munck, *Marxism @ 2000: Late Marxist Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

[6] Another reason could be better expressed with reference to a similar synoptic survey: “The long history of the base-superstructural issue is fairly well known. First there is Engels' appeal to zig-zags, curves and parallelograms— his stress on the relative autonomy and efficacy of certain institutionalized structural forms, his attempt to correct the economistic, mechanistic reductionism that would dominate the Second International. Then there are the post-revolutionary efforts of Gramsci, Bloch, Korsch and, most importantly, Lukács, to "re-Hegelianize" Marxism— and thus move from a stress on the reified dualities such as, base and superstructure to a concept of a structural totality involving the interaction or identity of subject and object, and the emergence of tendency, contradiction and possible praxis. Finally there are the struggles by Marxists in and out of the Communist Party (Lukács, Lefebvre, the Frankfurt School, etc.) to maintain and develop those "superstructural" aspects of Marxist theory adequate to revolutionary setbacks and successes related to the advent of fascism, world war and capitalist re-structuring during the cold war period”. Marc Zimmerman, “Polarities and Contradictions: Theoretical Bases of the Marxist-Structuralist Encounter”, *New German Critique*, 71. In this historical account which Zimmerman rightly says is “fairly

well-known", the Soviet phase is conspicuous by its absence. It is this silence whose profundity is proportional to the extent of its real indebtedness which necessitates my sustained engagement with Soviet Marxism.

[7] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works,* in 3 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970) 178.

[8] Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 9.

[9] This is not to rule out the necessity of such enhancements as such. But the repeated and persistent need for such enhancements indicates that something is wrong with the model itself at a deeper level. Kolakowski, incidentally, points out how such excessive patchwork is an indication of inherent weakness: "Every Marxist, of course, admits that tradition possesses an autonomous force of its own, and there are plenty of passages in Marx to confirm this. But if the objection can be brushed aside in this manner, it merely shows that the doctrine is so imprecise that no historical investigation and no imaginable facts can refute it. Given the variety of factors of all kinds, the 'relative independence of the superstructure', 'reciprocal influence', the role of tradition, secondary causes, and so forth, any fact whatever can be fitted into the schema [Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 367].

[10] The fact that this project involves not only building the (political) superstructure as Lenin often mentioned but building the base as well is well-known to the contemporaries of Stalin; thus Enver Hoxha, first secretary of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania, writes: " [A]t the head of the Bolshevik Party, Stalin organized and ran the Soviet state in a masterly way, further perfected its functioning and, always on the Marxist-Leninist course, developed the structure and superstructure of society on the basis of the internal political situation and economic development, while never losing sight of the external situations, that

is, the rapacious aims and the sinister intrigues concocted by the bourgeois-capitalist states in order to impede the construction of the new state of the proletarians." Enver Hoxha, *With Stalin: Memoirs from my Meetings with Stalin*, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

Eagleton presents the same fact in a different light, in an enchanting style that is his hallmark; and this view, on the whole, could be taken as representative of the modern view: "[T]he militarization of labour in Bolshevik Russia is a case in point. The result, in a grisly irony, will be to undermine the political superstructure of socialism (popular democracy, genuine self-government) in the very attempt to build up its economic base. It would be like being invited to a party only to discover that you had not only to bake the cakes and brew the beer but to dig the foundations and lay the floorboards. There wouldn't be much time to enjoy yourself". Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011) 17.

[11] One may mention Althusser for his developments in the base and superstructure thesis from an avowedly anti-Stalinist stance. But one shouldn't forget that this opposition takes the form of going against the humanist and Hegelian positions ["'Hegel' here is a secret code word for Stalin". Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994) 37], both of which could be identified with the position of Stalin only with gross conceptual mutilations. Moreover, when it comes to the essential point i.e., the prominent position of ideology in superstructure, Althusser is at least as serious an advocate of that as Stalin, though the reasons behind the position are different in each case. I would like to point out once again that the Polish debate on base and superstructure is somewhat unique for the serious criticism it launched against Stalin's model of base and superstructure.

[12] Mao Tse-tung, "Concerning *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. VIII, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[13] Mao Tse-tung, "Reading Notes on the Soviet Text *Political Economy*", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. VIII, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[14] Mao Tse-tung, "Talk at a Meeting of the Central Cultural Revolution Group", *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. IX, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[15] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 464.

[16] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. I (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965) 328. John Holloway's charge against Marx's Preface is noteworthy in this context: "There is a more fundamental criticism of the 1859 Preface— which indeed can be applied even more strongly to many of the critics of the Preface. What is problematic in Marx's formulation is not so much the relation between the different structures, as the absence of antagonism in the base-superstructure metaphor. The only conflict mentioned in the passage is the conflict between the material productive forces of society and the existing relations of production— a conflict which, to judge from this particular passage, runs its course quite independently of human will. To modify Marx's formulation by speaking of the 'relative autonomy' of the superstructure does little to change this: the same lifeless model is simply reproduced in another shape" [John Holloway, "Crisis, Fetishism, Class Composition", *Open Marxism*, vol. 2 (London: Pluto Press, 1992) 149]. In fact, it seems to me, that the point Holloway makes here is helpful to bring out the difference between Mao's and Marx's idea of contradiction. For Mao, the concept of contradiction is omnipresent, and he could consider anything as an individual instance of contradiction, whereas for Marx, with his view of

society as an organic totality, the centre of the radical, systemic change of the society lies in the contradiction between the productive forces and the production relations.

[17] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 460.

[18] Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) 338.

[19] Thus, Nigel Todd rightly argues in the article "Ideological Superstructure in Gramsci and Mao Tse-Tung" that the views of Gramsci and Mao considerably converge on the issue of ideological superstructure, and that both of them ascribed great prominence to this issue. Nigel Todd, "Ideological Superstructure in Gramsci and Mao Tse-Tung", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 35.1 (Jan. - Mar., 1974) 148-156.

[20] Rarely, a writer may get some inkling of the conceptual difference between the two theses discussed here; but this may not contribute to the conceptual clarity, because of the lack of understanding about the mode of production thesis with the centrality it ascribes to human activity. See how Hall observes the different nature of what we can certainly identify as the mode of production thesis, which is not recognised by him as such, and named as a "second template" of Marx in the following passage: "when we leave the terrain of 'determinations', we desert, not just this or that stage in Marx's thought, but his whole problematic. It is worth noting that, though the determinacy of 'the economic' over the superstructures is the prevailing form in which this is expressed here, it is sometimes overlaid by a second template: the tendency to reduce determination, not to 'the economic' but to History itself—to *Praxis*: to an undifferentiated *Praxis* which rolls throughout the whole social formation, as its essential ground. Some passages of the *German Ideology* are not all that far from the more humanist-historicist assertion of the *Holy Family* that 'history is nothing but the activity of men'. Stuart Hall, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor", *The Communist*

University of London: Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977) 52.

[21] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975) 31.

[22] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975) 31.

[23] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in 3 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970) 26.

[24] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 72.

[25] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 97.

[26] Larry Ceplair, "The Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party", *Science and Society*, 72.3 (2008) 321.

[27] Althusser maintains the *mode of production* as the *base* for the *superstructure*, with considerable consistency. Most of the modern writers influenced by him, like Eagleton, maintain the same position as an established tradition. Maurice Godelier, the noted anthropologist with a similar intellectual background also writes that, "we know in fact that Marx was the first to formulate a hypothesis about the presence of essential relations of correspondence and structural compatibility between the forces of production and relations of production, as also between the mode of production and the superstructures, without any intention of reducing the former to being merely epiphenomena of the latter" [Maurice Godelier, "Structuralism and Marxism", excerpt from *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, *Modern Interpretations of Marx*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981) 88].

[28] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in 3 volumes, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 127.

[29] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 212.

[30] Barry Hindess, and Paul Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 35. Poulantzas made a similar point when he writes that "in the transition from socialism to communism, the other domains of the superstructure— art, morality, philosophy, the humanism of religion— will be gradually stripped of their ideological phenomenality and enter into a new process of relations with the base, becoming ever more closely integrated into the fundamental level of history. By contrast, law and the state will wither away. Nicos Poulantzas, *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law And The State*, ed. James Martin (London: Verso, 2008) 26.

Still, this knowledge of the specificity of law and the state does not lead to his recognition of the logical superiority of the superstructure that is restricted to these elements alone. Thus, he complains a few pages after this (page 29) that "what ensued in the Marxist science of the state political level was an identification of the superstructure with the *ideal* and of the base with the *real,* which, formulated on the basis of the Kantian problematic, truncates the very question. It persisted despite the rediscovery of Hegel's thought". But he could not see that this misidentification inevitably results from the heterogeneous superstructure.

[31] Ernesto Laclau, "God Only Knows", *Marxism Today*, (December 1991): 56-7.

[32] G. A. Cohen, "Reply to Elster on 'Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory'", *Theory and Society*, 11.4 (1982): 486. If one recognises properly that the base is production relations but still mistakenly thinks that the superstructure comprises ideological factors also, then one will inevitably arrive at a conclusion similar to the view of Leszek Kolakowski, who says that

"Marx contended that throughout the history of antagonistic societies— i.e., all except primitive classless communities— class divisions were the chief factor determining social change, The whole sphere of the superstructure — political life, wars and conflicts, constitutional and legal systems, and intellectual and artistic production of every kind— was dominated by the class division and its consequences" [Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 357]. This kind of understanding is too crude for the modern Marxists to endorse. Thus, it seems, this sort of theoretically vulnerable implication is a main reason that inhibits most of the modern Marxists from recognising that the base is production relations. What is not properly seen is that this implication can also be avoided by restricting the concept of superstructure as Marx did in his Preface and later writings. It is the recognition of the base as production relations, coupled with the concept of restricted superstructure that could restore great rigour to the Marxist theory. Misrecognition of any of these aspects could lead only to confusion. Jonathan Wolff's view is typical in this respect: "Marx's image of society is architectural. At the most basic, providing society's foundations, are the 'productive forces'; what we have so far called human productive power. At the next level up we have the economic structure (also, confusingly, known as the base), and, above that, the legal and political superstructure. Jonathan Wolff, *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 56.

[33] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 348-9.

[34] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* 349.

[35] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* 350.

[36] Frederick Engels, prefaces to the three editions— I, *Anti-Dühring* (Pecking: Foreign Languages Press, 1976) 6.

[37] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Introduction, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986) 25-6.

[38] Karl Marx, "Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality. A Contribution to German Cultural History. Contra Karl Heinzen", Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 319-20.

[39] J. P. Plamenatz, in his *German Marxism and Russian Socialism*, and H. B. Acton, in his book *The Illusions of the Epoch*, criticised the base and superstructure thesis by stating that the base of production relations are not conceivable in a way that is free from the legal conceptions (that are superstructural). Cohen has already dealt with this argument adequately in his *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, by explicating how the production relations can be conceived excluding the legal and other considerations. G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1979) 234-6 & 218-20.

Steven Lukes reiterates the above criticism of the base and superstructure thesis in his article "Can the Base be Distinguished from the Superstructure?", originally published in 1983, where he concludes that Cohen was not successful in maintaining that the base is distinguishable from the superstructure and adds that "it is irrelevant to the distinctions between material and social factors, between class position and class consciousness, and between economic as against legal, political, and ideological factors (provided that these terms are taken to identify spheres of social life that are not required to be conceivable independently of one another). It is, moreover, a dead, static, architectural metaphor, whose potential for illumination was never very great and which has for too long cast nothing but shadows over Marxist theory and Marxist practice. Is it not now time to consign it to the scrap-heap?" [Steven Lukes, "Can the Base be Distinguished from the Superstructure?", 1982: 172, *stevenlukes.com*, web, 3 Mar. 2011]. I would like to only add that Lukes' arguments eventually amount to showing the conceptual problems involved in the divisively

conceived base and superstructure thesis, and that the base and superstructure thesis as conceived by Marx organically remains immune to this criticism. Needless to say that Lukes' exasperation about the base and superstructure thesis is also based on the chronic distortion to which it has been subjected in the course of the history of Marxism, and came to embody the modes of thinking that are contrary to the spirit of Marxism.

[40] Karl Marx, "Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality ", 327.

[41] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 338-9. With regard to the colonial context, Frantz Fanon rightly argues that "when you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem". Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 40. I would like to add only that Marx himself has displayed such readiness to modify his thesis when he is faced with an Asiatic country, India.

[42] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 49.

[43] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. III (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1986) 791-2.

[44] M. M. Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950) 359.

[45] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in 3 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970) 26.

[46] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 63.

[47] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 52-3.

[48] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 99.

[49] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 184. But this does not mean that laws have no effective role to play in the social process. They could be effective, especially when they are in line with the mode of production. Thus Marx says that "laws may perpetuate an instrument of production, e.g., land, in certain families. These laws acquire economic significance only if large-scale landed property is in harmony with the mode of social production, as for instance in England. In France, agriculture was carried on on a small scale, despite the existence of large estates, which were therefore broken up by the Revolution. But can the small plot system be perpetuated, e.g., by laws? Property concentrates itself again despite these laws. The influence of laws aimed at preserving [existing] relations of distribution, and hence their effect on production, have to be examined specially. Karl Marx, Introduction, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986) 35.

[50] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 42. Adorno likens this de-sublimating view of consciousness in Marxism with psychoanalysis when he says that "as Marxism thinks that it uncovers all spiritual being as Superstructure, psychoanalysis does the same in exposing spiritual being as sublimation of repressed drives". Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern U Press, 1973) 38.

[51] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977) 51.

[52] Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 77.

[53] Sebastiana Timpanaro exposes this unfortunate turn effectively: "[I]t must be remembered that the concept of superstructure historically arose from a critique of religion and law, that is

to say, of constructions which were both eminently devoid of objective validity, and especially profuse in universalistic pretensions, vaunting a divine or 'natural' origin. The concept of superstructure played an extremely important role in demystifying these claims. But transferred without modification to the domain of scientific knowledge, it risks making the latter as relative and subjective a phenomenon as religion or law; that is, it can have an anti-materialist and anthropocentric effect" [Sebastiana Timpanaro, Footnote, *On Materialism*, trans. Lawrence Garner (London: NLB, 1975) 47]. Roy Bhaskar also noted the undesirable consequences of categorising ideology as superstructure: "[E]mploying an undifferentiated concept of ideology, some Marxists have just assigned ideas to the 'superstructure' forgetting at once Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism and the role of scientific and technological ideas in constantly revolutionizing the forces of production" [Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2008) 325].

Similarly, some critics, like Rudolf Schlesinger, argue that a distinction is to be made hence in the concept of ideology: "[A]mongst ideologies in the broader sense of the word, that is, systems of thought which aim at inherent consistency, there is a fundamental distinction between scientific theories which more or less correctly represent reality (to which, of course, also the study of the history of religion, law, philosophy etc., belong) on the one hand, and 'ideologies' in the narrower sense, that is to say, distorted representation of class-antagonism on the other. This second concept of ideologies, as frequently applied by the founders of Marxism, is narrower than the identification of ideologies with 'superstructures' (that is, thought as conditioned by the material facts of social life) to which they kept in other cases. . . . On the other hand, it is broader than the current identification of ideologies (theoretically expressed by Mannheim) with such concepts the social function of which is the defense of the existing social framework" [Rudolf Schlesinger, *Marx: His Time and Ours* (London: Routledge, 2001) 76]. Anyway, it is not difficult to see that the restriction

of the base and superstructure thesis will do away with the very possibility of this reductive problem.

The inclusion of ideology in the base and superstructure thesis is also criticised as devaluing culture: "[O]ne frequently mentioned problem is that the concept of ideology is often constructed in relation to a base-superstructure dichotomy. In such a dichotomy, cultural processes are *not* 'material' or, if material, are not constituent of the base; instead, they function chiefly to reflect or express a primary material (often economic) reality. Culture is reduced to its function as ideology, and ideology— the realm of ideas— always refers to a reality outside of itself. Moreover, ideology reflects that reality in either a 'true' or more often a mystificatory way. Culture, as ideology, becomes the field of mystified discourse, 'falsely' reflecting, even 'inverting,' the 'real' base" [Jack L. Amariglio, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff, "Class, Power, and Culture", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 492]. Obviously, the consideration of culture as a practice will not have a depreciating effect like this. But that view is possible only from the mode of production model. It is remarkable that Raymond Williams often considers culture as a practice.

[54] Varavara Rao, a distinguished Telugu Marxist, recognises this when he asserts that "it is not only the class relations that determine the class consciousness. Whoever controls production, and the means of production (land, factories, and the instruments of labour) among the economic relations will be the ruling classes. These ruling classes reinforce a structure, i.e. the superstructure, to ensure their supremacy over the forces of production. This superstructure includes politics, art, literature, culture, law and all such consequences. Because of their hold on the state machinery, their politics will pass for the politics of the people, their culture will pass for the culture of the people, their law and ideas will pass for the law and ideas of the people. Not only this, because of the influence of the ruling classes, it

is not uncommon that people will also serve the interests of the ruling classes against their own class nature. Thus the ruling classes will create such situations that divide the people and make them riven and fight among themselves, by creating antagonisms among the people on their own issues. Or they depict their own interests as the interests of the people, and exploit the energies and prospects of the people thoroughly, for their own selfish interests, and keep the people under the illusion that these selfish class interests are their own interests, thereby creating cleavages and clashes among the people themselves" (This is my own translation of the original Telugu text) [Varavara Rao, *Telangāna Vimōchanōdyamam, Telugu Navala: Samāja Sāhitya Sambandālu— Oka Visleshana* (Vijayawada: Yuva Printers, 1983) 144].

On the other hand, a sort of connection between the class position and consciousness is also asserted by some non-Marxists. Arundathi Roy, for instance, whose criticism of the CPM party is well-known through her dazzling, debut novel *God of Small Things*, writes: "is globalization about 'eradication of world poverty,' or is it a mutant variety of colonialism, remote-controlled and digitally operated? These are huge, contentious questions. The answers vary depending on whether they come from the villages and fields of rural India, from the slums and shantytowns of urban India, from the living rooms of the burgeoning middle class or from the boardrooms of the big business houses". [Arundathi Roy, "Leave it to Experts", *The Nation Magazine*, February 18, 2002, *Third World Traveler*, n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2010].

[55] Victor Kiernan, "Revolution and Reaction: 1789–1848", *New Left Review,* 1.19 (1963): 75.

[56] Karl Marx, Footnote, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1982) 493.

[57] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986) 464.

[58] Antonio Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History***,** Part II, Chapter VIII, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org*, web, 3 Mar. 2011. In the modern times, it is

again an Italian writer, Timpanaro, who highlights the significance of this aspect following Labriola: “I believe, however, that the reduction of cultural activities to superstructures should be limited in another sense also. It is not only the social relations between men, but also the relations between men and nature that give rise to scientific and philosophical reflection, and to artistic expression. Philosophy, science and art do not draw stimulus and nourishment solely from the 'artificial terrain' of society, but also from the 'natural terrain'” [Sebastiana Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, trans. Lawrence Garner (London: NLB, 1975) 48].

[59] *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism: Manual*, 2nd ed., trans. Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963) 120.

[60] Barry Hindess and Paul Q. Hirst, Introduction, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 9.

[61] William H. Shaw, *Marx’s Theory of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1978) 31-2.

[62] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 37.

[63] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 2 (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1986) 36-7.

[64] Karl Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, eds. T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979) 67.

[65] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 86.

[66] When confronted with this passage of Marx, Althusser, with his predisposition to apprehend this complexity through the base and superstructure concepts, brings out an artificial distinction between superstructural dominance and infrastructural determination, which eventually has the effect of substituting conceptual analysis with verbal jugglery. The later writers mostly followed his argument. For example: “Marx, in recognizing that superstructures could be dominant while the infrastructure was determinant, [did not] see any apparent contradiction to be overcome. On the contrary, he pointed out that it was precisely the infrastructure that determined which superstructure would be dominant” [Raoul

Makarius, “On Godelier on Superstructures and Infrastructure”, *Current Anthropology*, 21.2 (1980): 253]. It should only be remembered that Marx did not evoke the base and superstructure thesis in these lines at all to imply such complex verbal distinctions.

[67] Marx’s letter to Werner von Veltheim, dated 29 September 1847, is significant in this respect, as it shows the distinction between the two paradigms in Marx’s thought expressed at the same instance. Here Marx writes at first: “friends in Germany have drawn my attention to the fact that precisely now, in this state of anarchy, the needs of the day would be exactly met by a comprehensive and regular review which, while maintaining a critical attitude towards all these parties and views would not derive its criticism from preconceived principles, but would rather portray the correlation between Germany's political, religious and social parties and aspirations, and also their literature, on the one hand, and German *economic* conditions, on the other— a review in which, therefore, political economy would play a leading role” [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 38 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 131-2].

After a few lines, Marx continues in this expository vein: “[T]o me it seems beyond dispute that clarity of consciousness can be introduced into the now highly fragmented German movement, as into the modern movement generally, only by elucidating in the first place the relations of production and examining and appraising the other spheres of social existence in connection with them”.The first part reads roughly like a paraphrase of the mode of production thesis, whereas the second is conceptually near to the base and superstructure thesis where Marx speaks only about the “spheres of social existence”.

[68] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 26.

[69] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 61.

[70] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982) 441-2.

[71] Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 10. Let me say, incidentally, that it is common to discuss the thesis of base and superstructure with diagrammatic representations in the writings touching upon Marxism.Perhaps the most elaborate and rigorous discussion of Marxist idea of determination with various graphical representations is to be found in the chapter, "Methodological generalisations" in Eric Olin wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (London: Verso, 1993) 15-29. For a similar discussion in a different context with diagrammatical representation, see Roy Bhaskar, *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 2008) 151. Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 104, also deals with diagrammatic representations. In the last work mentioned, the writer, attempting to offer a graphic representation of different societies, gives the same diagram for all types of societies: base consisting of production forces and relations, and the "political and ideological superstructure" upon that. How far such an all-applicable diagram will be agreeable to Marx, for whom social articulations are specific to the mode of production, is clear from what we have seen so far.

[72] This centrality of the thesis and the attendant theoretical problems are clearly realised by Raymond Williams who says that "it was above all, as I have said, the received formula of base and superstructure which made Marxist accounts of literature and thought so often weak in practice. Yet to many people, still, this formula is near the centre of Marxism, and indicates its appropriate methodology for cultural history and criticism, and then of course for the relation between social and cultural studies. The economic base determines the social relations which determine consciousness which determines actual ideas and works. There can be endless debate about each of these terms, but unless something very like that is believed, Marxism appears to have lost its most specific and challenging position" [Raymond

Williams, “Literature and Sociology: in memory of Lucien Goldmann”, *New Left Review,* 1.67 (1971)10].

[73] Among these discussions reviewed by Ceplair, Lawson’s views expressed in his own report, ‘Further Notes on Base and Superstructure,’ are noteworthy, as “he analyzed, in polemical terms, ‘the main errors’ revealed during the discussions. First of all, the concept of the base had been diluted by those who had stretched it to include all political and ideological relationships in all their various stages of development and conflict. Then, an ‘all-inclusive’ superstructure had been imposed on this ‘all-inclusive’ base. Finally, it had been an error to state that struggle takes place ‘within the base’ as well as ‘within the superstructure’” [Larry Ceplair, “The Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party”, *Science and Society*, 72.3 (2008) 338].

[74] Gudavarthy Ajay, “Towards Solidarity: Contemporary Naxalite, Dalit and Womens Movements in Andhra Pradesh”, Diss. (Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2003) 5. Though Ajay makes an eloquent case for a perspective based on totality in this thesis, he is not able to extend this argument to the point of unveiling the consistent vision of totality in Marx because, as in the case of many other writers, Ajay believes that the base and the superstructure thesis embodies the holistic vision of Marx that includes the concept of mode of production as well: “Marx sought to conceptualise his notion of totality around the building-like metaphor of base and the superstructure, to propound the idea that the economic structure of society conditions the existence of the legal-political, social and cultural spheres. In other words, the nature of the totality is determined by the base or alternatively referred to as the mode of production (combination of productive forces and production relations) and those structures part of the superstructure do not emerge out of themselves automatically, and transform in accordance with the necessities of the economic foundation of the society” [page 13].

Notwithstanding this commonly held opinion about Marx that he subscribed to, Ajay still shows some inkling of the fact that Marx's concept of mode of production inherently embodies a vision of social totality and writes that "Marx argued that *production* is . . . [the] nodal point around which various practices got pulled into. Production is therefore a 'social' practice that structures various other practices according to its own dominant logic. There is no such thing as a 'mode of production' in opposition to the social factors (legal-political, and cultural). In fact it is a specific combination of various social factors. . . Production system, therefore, emerges as a nodal point or a macro system in a given society. It gains the power to relatively centralize various practices into its own logic of accumulating surplus value" [page 95]. But, this insight cannot lead to a consistent recognition of the specific significance of the concept of mode of production in Marx, as Ajay takes the concept as a part of the base and the superstructure thesis. So, he concludes the above discussion of his with the following self defeating statement: "To put it in the base-superstructure language, we need to distinguish the 'basic' and 'superstructural' juridical-political and cultural attributes of the production system" [page 96].

[75] Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon press, 1978) 14.

[76] Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* 2-3.

[77] Kate Connolly, "Historical Materialism: Base and Superstructure", *Bombmp3.me*, web, 2005, Speech.

[78] This is not to say that the criticism of the theory of factors is something completely achieved or is a matter of the past. The criticism of this theory is still relevant as shown by Hindess and Hirst, who say, after citing the 1859 Preface that "nothing could be more misleading than the reading which finds in this passage an economic determinism, that is, a position which asserts the primacy of the economic factor above all others in history. This

reading, beloved by Weberian sociology, finds in Marx a factorialist theory of history and counterposes to Marx's 'one-sided' emphasis on the economic factor the liberal position that other factors too (non-economic, non-material) must have a return" [Barry Hindess, and Paul Q. Hirst, Introduction, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 20].

[79] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 2 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 224.

[80] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, 226.

[81] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, 226-7.

[82] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, 227.

[83] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 2, 227-8. Sartre also argued for such a synthetic view of life and says that "the Marxist . . . shows how the significations of superstructures are produced in terms of substructures. He may go further and show along with their autonomy the symbolic function of certain practices or certain superstructural beliefs. But this cannot suffice for the totalization as a dialectical process of revelation. The superimposed significations are isolated and enumerated by analysis. The movement which has joined them together in life is, on the contrary, synthetic. The conditioning remains the same; therefore neither the importance of the factors nor their order is changed. But we will lose sight of human reality if we do not consider the significations as synthetic, multidimensional, indissoluble objects, which hold in a spacetime dimensions. This is to reduce the lived to the statement which language gives it" [Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963) 108-9].

Though Plekhanov has this "*synthetic view on social life"*, to reiterate his own words, it is the stratified view of society that he presents with reference to the base and superstructure thesis that became influential in the later generations. Thus, Ernesto Laclau

and Chantal Mouffe say that “the principles of Marxist orthodoxy were given a much more rigid formulation in Plekhanov than in Kautsky . It is well known, for example, that he coined the term 'dialectical materialism’. But he was also responsible for the radical naturalism which led to such a strict separation between base and superstructure that the latter was considered to be no more than a combination of necessary expressions of the former. Moreover, Plekhanov's concept of economic base allows for no intervention by social forces: the economic process is completely determined by the productive forces, conceived as technology. This rigid determination enables him to present society as a strict hierarchy of instances, with decreasing degrees of efficacy” [Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001) 24].

[84] Nikolai Bukharin, “The Equilibrium between the Elements of Society”, *Historical Materialism— a System of Sociology*, International Publishers, 1925, n. *pag, Marxists’ Internet Archive*, *marxists.org*, 2002, web, 3 Mar. 2011.

[85] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 150.

[86] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3, 152. In George Thomson’s book, *The Human Essence*, which is a new version of his *Marxism and Poetry*, we find a modernised argument about songs, on similar lines as that of Plekhanov:

> Turning to music, we find that the mimetic doublet [words like see-saw, zig-zag etc.] is an integral feature of the labour-song, which we shall now examine.
>
> A labour-song, or work-song, is a directive accompaniment to some form of manual labour, collective or individual, such as rowing, heaving, hauling, reaping, spinning, etc. It falls into two parts— refrain and improvisation.

> The refrain, or labour-cry, is an inarticulate cry uttered at the actual movements of exertion and repeated without variation. It is essentially nothing more than a reflex action of the vocal organs accompanying the other bodily movements, but charged with the conscious purpose of synchronising the action [George Thomson, *The Human Essence: The Sources of Science and Art* (London: China Policy Study Group, 1974) 26].

This book abounds with such interesting details that could not be appreciated properly except from the mode of production point of view.

[87] Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in 5 volumes, vol. 3, 152-3.

[88] This is not to say that these writers have held similar positions in their overall theoretical outlooks. Perry Anderson's remarks are quite informative here: "the preoccupations and accents of Lukács, Gramsci and Sartre alone differ enormously. Nor is this tradition an unimpeachable one. Far from it: it has suffered immensely by its divorce from political reality and practice. Lukács wrote *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* in exile in Austria after the fall of the Hungarian Commune. Gramsci wrote his *Notebooks* in prison in Italy after the triumph of Mussolini's fascism. Sartre wrote the *Critique* in France, in lonely opposition to the Algerian war before which the whole Left lay supine. Three situations of greater isolation and adversity can hardly be imagined" [Perry Anderson, "Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism", *New Left Review*, 1.35 (1966): 31-32]**.**

[89] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971) 27.

[90] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, 9.

[91] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, 13.

[92] Georg Lukács, *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles, The Ontology of Social Being: Marx*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Merlin Press, 1978) 30.

[93] Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Marx,* 33-4.

[94] Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Marx,* 34.

[95] Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Marx,* 31.

[96] Georg Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being: Marx*, 32.

[97] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, Monthly Review Press, 1970, n. *pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2002, web, 3 Mar 2009. In his response to criticisms, Korsch depicts the socio-political backdrop of this work: "both Georg Lukács's studies on dialectical materialism and the first edition of my own work appeared in 1923. As soon as they became known, they were attacked with extraordinary hostility by the Party press in Russia and everywhere else. This was mainly due to the fact that the leadership of the Russian Party, under the slogan of 'propagating Leninism', had by then begun their campaign to 'Bolshevize' the ideology of all the non-Russian Parties that belonged to the Communist International" [Karl Korsch, *The Present State of the Problem of 'Marxism and Philosophy'— An Anti-Critique*, Monthly Review Press, 1970, *n. pag, Marxists' Internet Archive, marxists.org,* 2004, web, 3 Mar 2009].

[98] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy, n. pag*.

[99] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, *n. pag*. It is precisely in this holistic view that the conceptual root of the innate multidisciplinary nature of Marxism is to be found. As Korsch observes rightly "In the writings of its creators, the Marxist system itself never dissolves into a sum of separate branches of knowledge, in spite of a practical and outward employment of its results that suggests such a conclusion. For example, many bourgeois interpreters of Marx and some later Marxists thought they were able to distinguish between the historical and the theoretico-economic material in Marx's major work *Capital;* but all they proved by this is that they understood nothing of the real method of Marx's critique of political economy. For it is one of the essential signs of his dialectical materialist method that this distinction does

not exist for it; it is indeed precisely a theoretical comprehension of history. Moreover, the unbreakable interconnection of theory and practice, which formed the most characteristic sign of the first communist version of Marx's materialism, was in no way abolished in the later form of his system [Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy, n. pag*].

[100] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy, n. pag*.

[101] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy, n. pag*.

[102] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy, n. pag*. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School also characterised the separation of the mental phenomena, as bourgeois, and says that "in declaring necessity the sole basis of the future and banishing mind in the best idealist fashion, to the far pinnacle of the superstructure, socialism clung all too desperately to the heritage of bourgeois philosophy" [Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 32].

[103] Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy, n. pag*.

[104] Raymond Williams, "Literature and Sociology: in memory of Lucien Goldmann", *New Left Review,* 1.67 (1971)10.

[105] Raymond Williams, "Literature and Sociology: in memory of Lucien Goldmann", 10.

[106] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia UP, 2007) 157. On the contrary, a broader view of praxis could be found in Henri Lefebvre, informing his idea of totality, which is essentially similar to the view of Williams: "If we look at it in its entirety, praxis is the equivalent of totality in action; it encompasses the base and the superstructures, as well as the interactions between them. This view of praxis may be rather too sweeping, but if we substitute it with something more restricted and determined, it will disintegrate into fragmented practices: technology, politics, etc . . ." [Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, vol. 2, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002) 45].

[107] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York UP, 2000) 192-3. James P. Hawley rightly criticises Professor Babbio because his ". . . reading of Gramsci as a theorist of the primacy of superstructure over structure misses Gramsci's essentially historicist unification between an historical bloc and its hegemony over civil society. Bobbio reverts to a dualism between base and superstructure, thereby negating Gramsci's innovative concept of the historical bloc as a dialectical unity and interpenetration" [James P. Hawley, "Antonio Gramsci's Marxism: Class, State and Work", *Social Problems, 27.5(1980)* 589]. But the remarkable thing is that Gramsci himself does not come out of the base and superstructure dualism in a consistent way and his position involves arguing for an interaction between the two terms as an essential aspect of the dialectic.

[108] Jacques Texier remarks unequivocally "without the theory of the 'historical bloc' and the unity of economy and culture and culture and politics which results from it, the Gramscian theory of superstructures would not be Marxist" [Jacques Texier, "Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures: On the concept of civil society", *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 49].

[109] Jacques Texier, "Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures: On the concept of civil society", *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, 50. Laclau and Mouffe also have noted the significance of *historical bloc* in the thought of Gramsci, for instance, when they write about Gramsci's thought that "ideology is not identified with a 'system of ideas' or with the 'false consciousness' of social agents; it is instead an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses, which welds together a historical bloc around a number of basic articulatory principles. This precludes the possibility of a 'superstructuralist' reading of the ideological. In fact, through the concepts of historical bloc and of ideology as organic cement, a new totalizing category takes us beyond the old base/superstructure distinction" [Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical*

Democratic Politics (London: Verso, 2001) 67]. But what is not properly mentioned in comments like this is that Gramsci himself does not make much ado about transcending this distinction, as these comments would lead us to believe.

[110] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935,* ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York UP, 2000) 193-4.

[111] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, 194.

[112] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, 197.

[113] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia UP, 2007) 271-2.

[114] Cornel West, for instance, writes that "the neo-Gramscian rejection of the base/superstructure metaphors of economism (or logocentric Marxism) entails that it is no longer sufficient or desirable to privilege the mode of production and class subjects in an a priori manner and make causal claims (whether crude or refined) about racist ideology owing to simply economic factors. Instead, following Antonio Gramsci the metaphor of a historical bloc replaces those of base/superstructure. This new metaphor eschews the logocentric and a priori dimension of the old metaphors by radically historicizing them, thereby disclosing the complexity and heterogeneity suppressed by logocentric Marxism" [Cornel West, "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 24].

[115] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935,* 196.

[116] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935,* 227.

[117] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935,* 306.

[118] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935,* 306-7. Such a graded/structured approach to superstructure is naturally congenial to the Althusserian view,

though it does not go well with the Hegelian idea of totality, to which Althusser is a self-declared antagonist, who says, "*Lukács* 's attempts, which are limited to the history of literature and philosophy, seem to me to be tainted by a guilty Hegelianism: as if Lukács wanted to absolve through Hegel his upbringing by Simmel and Dilthey. *Gramsci* is of another stature. The jottings and developments in his *Prison Notebooks* touch on all the basic problems of Italian and European history: economic, social, political and cultural. There are also some completely original and in some cases genial insights into the problem, basic today, of the superstructures. Also, as always with true discoveries, there are *new concepts*, for example, *hegemony:* a remarkable example of a theoretical solution in outline to the problems of the interpenetration of the economic and the political. Unfortunately, at least as far as France is concerned, who has taken up and followed through Gramsci's theoretical effort?" [Louis Althusser, Footnote, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: The Penguin Press, 1969) 114].

[119] Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 3, 48.

[120] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007) 223-4.

[121] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", 224.

[122] Hannah Arendt, Introduction, *Illuminations,* by Walter Benjamin, trans. Harry Zohn (Newyork: Schockenbooks, 1969) 10-11.

[123] Hannah Arendt, Introduction, *Illuminations,* by Walter Benjamin, 14. Thus, Theodor Adorno, a friend of Benjamin, criticised him for ignoring the role of mediation: "[T]he reason is that I regard it as methodologically unfortunate to give conspicuous individual features from the realm of the superstructure a 'materialistic' turn by relating them immediately and perhaps even causally to corresponding features of the infrastructure. Materialist determination of cultural traits is only possible if it is mediated through the *total social*

process" [Theodor Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin", *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980) 129].

On the other hand, for Ernest Mandel, this lack of mediations is the general problem of the Frankfurt School: "The real weakness of the Frankfurt School's project was its inability to grasp the crucial mediating links in the dialectic of infrastructure and superstructure which, in the final analysis, determine historical development" [Ernest Mandel, "The Role of the Individual in History: the Case of World War Two", *New Left Review,* 1.157 (1986) 66].

[124] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 2002) 69.

[125] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, 69.

[126] Ernst Bloch, "Marxism and Poetry", *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader,* eds. Terry Eagleton and Drew Miln (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 87-88.

[127] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 95.

[128] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 95.

[129] Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. Dennis Redmond (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001) 264.

[130] Herbert Marcuse, *Art and Liberation, Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse,* vol. 4, ed. Douglas Kellner (London: Routledge, 2007) 188.

[131] Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) 124.

[132] Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 143.

[133] Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society,* 143.

[134] Francis Mulhern, Introduction, *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism* (London: Longman, 1992) 12. Catherine Belsey also offers a compact summary from a slightly

different point of view when she writes that “Althusser analyses the social formation in terms of three *levels* or instances of human practice, the economic, the political and the ideological. Each has its own relative autonomy, its own specific effectivity, its own contradictions. Each instance constitutes the condition of the existence of the others. Any social formation is therefore *overdetermined*, that is, produced by and producing a range of practices, and thus decentred, so that in spite of the principle of determination in the last instance by the economy, economic analysis alone is woefully inadequate” [Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2001) 120].

[135] Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, vol. 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 133.

[136] Louis Althusser, Footnote, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: The Penguin Press, 1969) 111.

[137] Despite his reputation for rigorousness, Althusser’s opinions are not free from such factual errors. For instance, he suggests that Marx included science in the superstructure in his *1844 Manuscripts,* when he writes that “the ideological superstructure (the corresponding 'forms of social consciousness'): except in his Early Works (especially the *1844 Manuscripts)*, Marx *never included scientific knowledge in it.* Science can no more be ranged within the category 'superstructure' than can language, which as Stalin showed escapes it”. [Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Part 1, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970) 133.] In actual fact, *superstructure* does not figure in that work at all, either as a concept, or as a word. Similarly, in his *Essays in Self-Criticism* (trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976) 138), Althusser says, erroneously again, that Marx used the base and superstructure thesis in his *Poverty of Philosophy* also.

[138] Louis Althusser, Footnote, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: The Penguin Press, 1969) 113-14. Like Gramsci, Althusser always maintained that superstructure is an essential

entity and not some insignificant appendage: “The superstructure is not the pure phenomenon of the structure, it is also its condition of existence. This follows from Marx's principle, referred to above, that production without society, that is, without social relations, exists nowhere; that we can go no deeper than the unity that is the unity of a whole in which, if the relations of production do have production itself as their condition of existence, production has as its condition of existence its form: the relations of production” [Louis Althusser, Footnote, *For Marx*, 205].

[139] Louis Althusser, Footnote, *For Marx*, 114.

[140] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976) 14. Thus, it is in the consideration of reproduction that we perceive the significance of the superstructural aspects. It will be interesting to see that Mao also voiced a similar view, when he says that the superstructural aspects become decisive at some specific instances: “[P]roductive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; But. . . . when the superstructure (politics, culture, etc.) obstructs the development of the economic base, political and cultural changes become principal and decisive. Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognize that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also— and indeed must — recognize the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism” [Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. I (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965) 335-6].

In fact, a theory of the principle and secondary aspects, as seen in the above passage, is almost ubiquitous in Mao; and this has influenced the thinking of the people beyond the borders of China. As we have already dealt with Althusser at some length, I would like to

discuss here the theory of base and superstructure as propounded by Ranganayakamma**,** whose contribution to the Marxist thought in Telugu cannot be ignored. I quote her at length here, in view of the significance of the passage, as well as its relevance for my topic:

> The Base consists of 'labour (production) relations' while Superstructure includes politics, art, literature, education, religion, philosophy, culture, ideology, social consciousness etc. It is possible to explain Superstructural relations in accordance with the Base relations. Suppose there is no distinction of Base and Superstructure in society. Let us assume that all aspects (labour relations as well as Superstructural aspects) of society stand side by side and influence each other in the same degree.
>
> To see the consequence of such a situation, let us consider only two aspects of society, namely, A and B. These are able to influence one another in an equal measure. This means, if A could influence B cent percent, B too could influence A cent percent. What will happen then? If B transforms into A due to the influence of A, A transforms into B due to the influence of B. The two interchange. They remain as before after changing their names. This means, when the influences of two things are in the same measure, it amounts to the non-existence of any influence. Even when we assume the level of their influence to be less than 100%, it amounts to the non-existence of any influence if we take their influence in equal measures. It follows that the two things are standing side by side wholly as two different things. But if we understand the materialist principles in a proper manner, phenomena of either nature or society do not exist in isolation and without interrelationships.
>
> Those who talk of mutual influence and interaction too acknowledge this fact. But even among the materialists, we find the following argument: 'We

too acknowledge the fact that there exist mutual connection, influence and interaction among phenomena of society. We don't agree with the assumption that one is Base and the other is Superstructure. We further disagree with your assumption that Base alone influences Superstructure'.

But, when one agrees the fact that there exists 'mutual influence', the argument does not end there itself. One has to arrive at a correct understanding on the question whether the mutual influences would be in equal measure or vary. What would be the result if we combine the two facts: (1) Phenomena influence one another. (2) The influences will not be in equal measure but vary.

The primary aspect would be one that influences most (whatever be that phenomenon). The rest will be inevitably become secondary phenomena that are subsumed under the primary phenomenon. Although all the secondary phenomena too have their own influence, although each of the secondary phenomena show their influence on the primary phenomenon and although these mutual influences move in both the directions, the ultimate result of the totality of these interactions is that all the secondary phenomena will be subsumed under the primary phenomenon.

If we apply this to society, we have to arrive at the conclusion that one particular aspect of society constitutes the Base and the rest of the aspects constitute Superstructure. In case we assume that there is not one but several Bases for society, even then we find the same result which we have already seen. Of all those several Bases, one particular aspect that influences most becomes primary Base and the rest of them become secondary Bases in varying degrees.

[Ranganayakamma, “Are Marxian categories adequate to understand 'Gender' and 'Caste' questions?”, trans. B.R. Bapuji, n. *pag*, *ranganayakamma.org*, web, 10 Mar. 2012. <http://ranganayakamma.org/Gender_caste.htm>].

Though the first paragraph offers a quite common view of the concepts of base and superstructure, what is to be noted here is the felt need to substantiate this all-inclusive theory with mathematical logic that was taken up in the second paragraph. Besides the fact that in this unique attempt the concept of influence is tacitly replaced by the concept of transformation or mistaken as such, the whole logic applied here is untenable. Being influenced by something is different from transforming into that thing. For instance, if I say that Indian economy is 100% influenced by that of the US, that does not entail in any sense that Indian economy is turned into that of the US. The same logic applies the other way round also. The case of influences that are less than 100% is more blatantly erroneous.

If A influences B to the extent of 40%, what we get on the side of B is 60% of B+40% of A, even if we concede and follow the absurd logic of replacing the act of influencing with that of transformation. Similarly, if B influences A to the extent of 40% (to satisfy the mentioned condition that “if we take their influence in equal measures”), what we get on the side of A is 60% of A+40% of B. It does not need great insight to understand that 60% of B+40% of A is not equal to 60% of A+40% of B, unless A and B are already equal, a case that makes this whole exercise in logic redundant.

The same line of argument is continued in the third and fourth paragraphs, which culminates in the theory of primary and secondary aspects in the fifth paragraph, which is quite reminiscent of the theorization of Mao when he speaks about these aspects in his theory of contradiction. Then the following argument presents the Marxist theory of base and superstructure as the application of this general theory to society and declares that a similar theoretical stance is mandatory for anybody to be logical. Clearly, the central weakness of the

whole argument cannot be ascribed to the want of logical thinking skills of any individual. The very ambitious task of justifying the all-inclusive theory of base and superstructure through logical means and tools inescapably carries the seeds of a self-defeating project.

[141] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 175. Poulantzas offers a very lucid presentation of this topographical conception in the following words: "*Starting from* the base, the *particular, specific ensembles* that are the domains of the superstructure are built up, including the state and law— which are in no sense mere 'reflections' of the base, as a gross vulgarization of Marxism would have it. These levels of structuration, these degrees of totalization— to employ Sartrean terms— can only be deciphered in their genesis and specific effectivity within a global type of historically determinate society, a 'type'—for example, capitalist— whose unity is, *in the last instance*, dominated by a scientifically defined 'mode' of production" [Nicos Poulantzas, *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law And The State, ed. James Martin* (London: Verso, 2008) 55].

[142] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 134-5.

[143] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: NLB, 1976) 140. Stuart Hall presents a different point of view when he says that in Althusser's work "there is more than a hint that the topographical metaphor of 'base/superstructure' ought to be superseded altogether. For Althusser conceives a social formation as composed of different practices— essentially the economic, political and ideological" [Stuart Hall, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor", *The Communist University of London: Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977) 68]. Although it is true that an activity version figures prominently in Althusser, the topographically conceived base and superstructure thesis also figures side by side in his works and it is never really rejected.

Ronaldo Munck realises this rightly when says that "in his conception of ideology as 'lived relation' between people and ideology, Althusser moved beyond mechanical Marxism. In his willingness to let art out of the science/ideology binary opposition he was also helpful. Yet, Althusser remained trapped, to a large extent, in the orthodox Marxist architectural analogy of society as base and superstructure" [Ronaldo Munck, *Marxism @ 2000: Late Marxist Perspectives* (London: Macmillan, 2000) 100].

[144] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 183.

[145] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 183.

[146] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 181.

[147] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 182-183.

[148] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011) 156.

[149] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 134. Jean Hyppolite throws some light on the singularity of Althusser's idea of totality when he says that "these totalities are not essences but structures in which, as L. Althusser has shown, the dominant contradiction, for example, between the relations and the forces of production is reflected in its existential conditions, which are no longer contingent superstructures arbitrarily tied to their infrastructure. The dominant contradiction can shift, can appear in various aspects" [Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, Preface to the English edition, trans. John O'neill (New York: Harper & Row, 1969) viii-ix].

[150] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Part 1, 99-100. This mode of thought is the hallmark of all varieties of Marxism with a structural bent. Thus, arguing against what he took as the historicism of Anderson and Nairn, Poulantzas says that "the 'transition' from one mode of production to another must be related not to the unilinear historicist evolution of the class-subject but to the articulation of specific structural levels

with their own historicities" [Nicos Poulantzas, "Marxist Political Theory in Great Britain", *New Left Review,* 1.43 (1967): 65].

The problem with such Structuralist understanding is that it tends to ignore the basic fact, repeatedly voiced by Marx, that it is the men who make history after all. Structuralist Marxism could never appropriate this essentially humanist aspect of Marxism because of the innate inability of its basic theoretical premise. As Marc Zimmerman observes rightly that "the many efforts to integrate these structural histories with Marxism (Althusser's efforts to stress the economic determinations of the *problematiques* and their ruptures; the efforts by Labrousse, Soboul, Vilar and now Wallerstein to undercut the long duration by a reformulation of "conjuncture") seem to fall short. The veering toward Marxism is too mechanistic, because of an initial submission to structuralist assumptions" [Marc Zimmerman, "Polarities and Contradictions: Theoretical Bases of the Marxist-Structuralist Encounter", *New German Critique,* 77].

[151] Louis Althusser, *For Marx,* 110.

[152] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Part 1,178.

[153] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Part 1,178.

[154] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994) 32

[155] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,* 36.

[156] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,* 35-6.

[157] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Part 1, 204.

[158] Peter Beilharz, "Ends and Rebirths: An Interview with Daniel Bell", *Thesis Eleven,* 85.93 (2006): 98, *SAGE,* web, 15 Oct. 2008.

[159] Terhi Rantanen, "A man behind Scapes: An interview with Arjun Appadurai", *Global Media and Communication,* 2.7 (2006): 13, *SAGE,* web, 15 Oct. 2008.

[160] Jean-Paul Sartre and Benny Levy, *Hope Now: The 1980 Interviews*, trans. Adrian van den Hoven (Chicago: The U of Chicago Press, 1996) 86

[161] *The Bataille Reader*, eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 122.

[162] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996) 130.

[163] Victor Kiernan, "Problems of Marxist History", rev. of *The British Marxist Historians*, by Harvey J. Kaye, *New Left Review*, 1.xxx (1973): 107.

[164] E. P. Thompson, "Caudwell", *The Socialist Register*, (1977): 267. It would perhaps be justified to add here that, even when he uses the thesis metaphorically, Caudwell endows it with a dialectical and literary charm: "in fact reality is never the same, for to say that it is the same means that time is at an end. Time is simply an unlikeness in events of a particular inclusive character, such that A is included by B, B by C, and so on. Becoming is intrinsic in reality which is therefore always cracking its skin, not gradually but like a snake, in seasons. The pressure rises until in a crisis the whole skin is cast. The superstructure of society is regrown" [Christopher Caudwell, *Studies in a Dying Culture* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1990) 16].

[165] E. P. Thompson, "Caudwell", *The Socialist Register*, (1977): 270.

[166] G. Ajay, "Reconstructing Marxism: The Thompsonian Framework", *Social Scientist*, 26.7/8 (1998): 65.

[167] G. Ajay, "Reconstructing Marxism: The Thompsonian Framework", 64.

[168] E. P. Thompson, "Folklore, Anthropology, and Social History", *Indian Historical Review*, 111.2 (1988): 262. Quoted from: G. Ajay, "Reconstructing Marxism: The Thompsonian Framework", 66.

[169] Rosa Luxemburg, "Stagnation and Progress of Marxism", *Karl Marx: Man, Thinker and Revolutionist*, ed. D. Ryazanov, New York: International Publishers, 1927, n. pag, *Marxists' Internet Archive*, 2000, *marxists.org*, web, 10 Jan. 2009.

[170] E. P. Thompson, "The Long Revolution ", part 1, rev. of Raymond Williams' *The Long Revolution, New Left Review*, 1.9 (1961): 30.

[171] Raymond Williams, Introduction, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (New York: OUP, 1983) 20.

[172] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 2005) 33.

[173] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Anchor Books, 1960) 284.

[174] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", 32.

[175] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, 301.

[176] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, 293.

[177] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", 34.

[178]Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", 47.

[179] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", 47-8.

[180] Raymond Williams, *Marx on Culture* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1989) 8.

[181] Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory", 44.

[182] Raymond Williams, *Marx on Culture* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1989) 12-13.

[183] Terry Eagleton, "Resources for a Journey of Hope: The Significance of Raymond Williams", *New Left Review*, 1.168 (1988) 8.

[184] Terry Eagleton, preface, *Criticism and Ideology*: *A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1992) 44. Fred Inglis voices a different attitude towards Williams' dissolving the thesis when he writes that "there he took the conventional Marxist distinction between economic base and cultural superstructure which had so provoked Leavis in the 1930s, and dissolved the one into the other. In antique doctrine, the economic base was pictured as the material actuality which determined the superstructure of cultural life, ideas,

the ‘means of mental production’. Capital, in short, produced the political ideas, the novels, and the paintings, as well as the iron and steel. Williams committed to feeling and understanding culture as the place where life was really lived, resisted the notion that that life was merely superstructural to the hard facts underneath” [Fred Inglis, *Raymond Williams* (London: Routledge, 1995) 238].

[185] Raymond Williams, *Marx on Culture* (New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1989) 20.

[186] Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gable (London: Verso, 1989) 311.

[187] Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”, 35-6. Terry Eagleton also expressed a similar view on Lukács’ concept of totality: “properly cautious of 'vulgar' Marxist versions of 'base' and 'superstructure', Lukács wishes to displace attention from this brand of mechanistic determinism to the idea of the social whole; but this social whole then risks becoming a purely 'circular' one, in which each 'level' is granted equal effectivity with each of the others” [Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991) 100].

[188] Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”, 37.

[189] Stuart Hall, “Re-thinking the ‘Base-and-Superstructure’ Metaphor”, *The Communist University of London: Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977) 65-6.

[190] Raymond Williams, “Hegemony”, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (New York: OUP, 1983) 145. Perry Anderson’s comments touching upon Williams’ adaption of the concept of hegemony are noteworthy here: “rejecting the distinction between base and superstructure— not on the usual grounds that the ideal sphere of the latter was indefensibly reduced to its material supports, but rather because if anything the former was wrongly narrowed and abstracted by the exclusion from it of the forces of cultural production—

Williams taxed Marxism with too little, rather than too much, materialism. But in the same movement he also repudiated the distinction between a separate category of literary texts and other practices of writing—the very notion of a canon, central to Leavisite criticism—for captious selection and unselfconscious elitism. In its stead he argued for a democracy of signifying practices, each calling for its own appropriate responses, in a process dissolving aesthetic judgements into a tracing out of the conditions of production of any given piece of writing, and then of its reception by the current reader. Such deliberate, unfussed historical levelling recalls Gramsci, and it is perhaps no accident that Williams should here have taken over his notion of hegemony" [Perry Anderson, "A Culture in Contraflow—II", New *Left Review*, 1.182 (1990): 85-137].

[191] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) 285.

[192] Jorge Larrain, "base and superstructure", *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, second edition, ed. Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 46.

[193] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1, 285.

[194] Benedetto Croce has some inkling of this fact, which is why he says that "it is true that the historian must render exact and definite in each particular instance, that co-ordination and subordination of factors which is indicated by historical materialism, in general, for the greater number of cases, and approximately; herein lies his task and his difficulties, which may sometimes be insurmountable" [Benedetto Croce, *Historical Materialism and the Economics of Karl Marx* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1915) 21].

[195] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1, 410-1.

[196] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1, 401.

[197] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1, 288.

[198] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 165-6.

[199] Marx and Frederick Engels, Introduction, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986) 46. The idea that development is uneven is well recognised by the later Marxists also. For instance, Perry Anderson recognises this about the classical antiquity; but again he thinks of this as a matter of the relation between the base and superstructure: "[T]he civilization of classical Antiquity was defined by the development of superstructures of unexampled sophistication and complexity, over material infrastructures of comparatively invariant crudity and simplicity: there was always a dramatic disproportion in the Graeco-Roman world between the vaulting intellectual and political sky and the cramped economic earth beneath it" [Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: NLB, 1974) 136].

[200] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Introduction, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", *Collected Works*, vol. 28 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 46-47.

[201] Larry Ceplair, "The Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party", *Science and Society*, 72.3 (2008) 322.

[202] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Introduction, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", *Collected Works*, vol. 28, 47. Later, a similar point is made by Vladimir Propp, when he writes that "the most cursory glance at the wondertale will show that capitalism did not bring it forth. This does not mean that the capitalist mode of production is not reflected in the wondertale. The cruel factory owner, the greedy priest, the officer flogging soldiers, the deserter, the landowner oppressing farmhands, and the poverty-stricken, drunken, ruined peasantry—all figure in it, but the genuine wondertale, with its winged horses, firespitting dragons, fabulous kings, princesses, etc., is obviously not determined by capitalism; it is much older. The wondertale is also older than feudalism . . . It does not correspond to the mode of production in which it is current" [Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*,

trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 103].

[203] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Introduction, "Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy", *Collected Works,* vol. 28, 47-48.

[204] H. B. Acton, foot note, *The Illusion of the Epoch: Marxism-Leninism as a Philosophical Creed* (Indianapolis: Amagi Liberty Fund, 1962) 163.

[205] Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Rise, Growth, and Dissolution*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 345.

[206] Hans Robert Jauss and Peter Heath, "The Idealist Embarrassment: Observations on Marxist Aesthetics", *New Literary History*, 7.1 (1975): 192

[207] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 146.

[208] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 197.

[209] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality, A Contribution to German Cultural History, Contra Karl Heinzen", *Collected Works,* vol. 6 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976) 320.

[210] Karl Marx, *Notes on Indian History (664-1858)* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986) 9.

[211] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, 63.

[212] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 167.

[213] Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1(Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978) 387-8.

[214] Larry Ceplair, "The Base and Superstructure Debate in the Hollywood Communist Party", *Science and Society*, 72.3 (2008) 323.

[215] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011) 148.

[216] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*, 155.

[217] G. A. Cohen, "Reply to Elster on 'Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory'", *Debates in Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* (London: Routledge and the Open University, 2003) 43.

[218] G. A Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, (oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 45. Before Cohen, it was M. M. Bober who shows an inkling of the institutional superstructure, but he also writes that "the regime of production and the associated class pattern form together the social substructure. Next in the picture is the superstructure. First of all the exploiters must be secure in their position of privilege. Hence the state and the law, the tiers closest to the economic base. Then rises the ideological realm of religion, ethics, philosophy, social science, literature, and art" [M. M. Bober, *Karl Marx's Interpretation of History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950) 312]. Of course, this is only familiar in its essentials.

[219] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, vol. 2, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2002) 159.

[220] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, vol. 2, 211.

[221] Nicos Poulantzas, *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law And The State*, ed. James Martin (London: Verso, 2008) 38.

[222] Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: New Left, 1969) 22.

[223] Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, Part 1, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1970) 133.

[224] Terry Eagleton, preface, *Criticism and Ideology*: *A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1992) 41.

[225] Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 10

[226] Henri Lefebvre, "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 86.

[227] Tom O'Lincoln, "Base and Superstructure**",** A 1990 talk to an International Socialist Organisation Educational, *redsites.alphalink.com*, n. pag, web, 3 Mar. 2011. <http://redsites.alphalink.com.au/base.htm>.

[228] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right*,150-1.

[229] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Preface to the Second ed., *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001) xiv.

[230] Ernesto Laclau, *Emanicipation(s)* (London: Verso, 2007) 103.

[231] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism without Apologies*"*, *New Left Review*, 1.166 (1987) 92-3.

[232] See foot note number 44.

[233] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 68.

[234] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 76.

[235] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 28.

[236] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 31.

[237] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 174.

[238] Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau And Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000) 98-9.

[239] Slavoj Žižek, Introduction, *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994) 30.

[240] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London : Verso, 2002) 76-7.

[241] Maurice Godelier, "Infrastructures, Societies and History", trans. Alan Freeman, *New Left Review*, 1.112 (1978) 85.

[242] Maurice Godelier, “Infrastructures, Societies and History”, 86.

[243] Wally Secombe, “The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism”, *New Left Review,* 1.83 (1974): 16

[244] Wally Secombe, “The Housewife and Her Labour under Capitalism”, 16

[245] Robert Wuthnow, “Infrastructure and Superstructure: Revisions in Marxist Sociology of Culture”, *Theory of Culture,* eds. Richard Münch and Neil J. Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 166.

[246] Perry Anderson, “Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism“, *New Left Review,* 1.35 (1966): 29.

[247] Perry Anderson, “Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism“, 31.

[248] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right,*149.

[249] Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991) 82.

[250] Terry Eagleton, “Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature”, *Critical Inquiry*, 14.3 (1988): 473.

[251] Terry Eagleton, “Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature”, 473.

[252] Terry Eagleton, “Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature”, 473-4.

[253] Terry Eagleton, “Two Approaches in the Sociology of Literature”, 474.

[254] Terry Eagleton, preface, *Criticism and Ideology*, 47.

[255] Terry Eagleton, preface, *Criticism and Ideology*, 47-8.

[256] Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998) 47.

[257] Fredric Jameson, introduction, *The Modernist Papers* (London: Verso, 2007) x-xi.

[258] Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London : Verso, 2002)102.

[259] Fredric Jameson, Foreword, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* by Jean-Francois Lyotard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) xv.

[260] Fredric Jameson, The Hegel Variations: On the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (London : Verso, 2010) 127.

[261] Fredric Jameson, The Hegel Variations, 91-2.

[262] Fredric Jameson, The Hegel Variations, 128.

[263] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 310.

[264] Fredric Jameson, Introduction, *Postmodernism*, xxi.

[265] Quoted in Fredric Jameson, Foreword, *The Postmodern Condition,* xiv-xv.

[266] Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn,* 35.

[267] Francis Mulhern, Introduction, *Contemporary Marxist Literary Criticism*, 26.

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