

MARXISM AT WORK

*Ideology, class and French socialism
during the Third Republic*

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CHAPTER I

Ideology, history, and the study of Marxism

Discourses are the complexes of signs and practices which organize social existence and social reproduction. In their structured, material persistence, discourses are what gives differential substance to membership of a social group or class or formation, which mediate an internal sense of belonging, an outward sense of otherness.

R. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, 1985), p. 54.

Ideologies will always need to be comprehended through the analysis of their real functions in the world. There are no general laws about this: it will have to be established by historical investigation of specific cases.

I. Schapiro, 'Realism in the History of Ideas', *History of Political Thought*, vol. 3, 1982.

The historical investigation of socialist and labour ideologies – once, with the institutional history of trade unions and parties, the *via regia* of the 'old social history' – suffered an eclipse throughout the 1960s and 1970s as structuralist theory, quantitative methodologies, and populist politics combined to discredit ideology's supposed abstraction from 'real' history. Labour historians' preoccupation with the rediscovered intricacies of the 'labour process' focused scholarly attention upon workers' immediate subjection to capital rather than upon proletarian ideals and aspirations. Cliometricians' disdain for the unquantifiable relegated doctrinal issues to the professional backwaters. And the 'grass roots' enthusiasms of the 'new social historians', practitioners of 'history from below', diverted research from forgotten meeting halls and vanished editorial rooms towards the 'lived experience' of street-life and the intimacies of domesticity. Belatedly, historians cast their handful of graveyard earth into the pit marked 'end of ideology'. The 1980s, however, witnessed

ideology's resurrection. Innovations in the sociology of knowledge and the history of science, the advance of semiotics and cultural criticism, the vogue for 'post-structuralist' social and political theory – all revived historians' interest in ideological aspects of the past, a revival prefigured by the most stimulating methodological manifestos of the preceding decades.¹ How might these recent reconceptualisations of ideology aid students of Marxism?

Most significantly, a scholarly consensus has crystallised about the meaning of 'ideology'. This accord must be welcomed after decades of confusion and acrimony, decades during which the concept of ideology inflated to denote culture in general (physics or sculpture as 'ideological practices'), contracted to designate 'transcended' political movements (socialism, for 'end of ideology' liberals; liberalism, for Marxist socialists), or degenerated into a pejorative epithet (I have a world view; you have an ideology).² Gross over-expansion of the term proved particularly damaging to historical inquiry: 'ideology' came to mean everything yet nothing.³ By contrast, current reformulations of the concept of ideology generate formidable heuristic power.

These reformulations define ideologies as the canons governing representation of social and political order (and disorder), as social 'paradigms' which constitute understanding of the 'real', the desir-

¹ Seminal theoretical contributions to revival in the study of ideology which have influenced this inquiry included C. Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', in D. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (London, 1964), pp. 47–76; Q. Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, vol. 8, 1969, pp. 3–53; Q. Skinner, 'Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action', *Political Theory*, vol. 2, 1974, pp. 277–303; and, above all, P. Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 222–46. The works of William Sewell and Gareth Stedman Jones are exemplary in their assimilation of these insights into historical practice, however controversial their studies have been within the discipline. See the insightful methodological discussions in W. Sewell, 'État, Corps et Ordre: Some Notes on the Social Vocabulary of the French Old Regime', in H.-U. Wehler (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte Heute: Festschrift für Hans Rosenberg zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 1974), particularly pp. 50–1 and G. Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working-Class History 1832–1982* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 90–178. But see the critique of the latter in J. Foster, 'The Declassing of Language', *New Left Review*, no. 150, 1985, pp. 38–41.

² Good critiques of these vagaries of usage may be found in G. Lichtheim, 'The Concept of Ideology', *History and Theory*, vol. 4, 1965, pp. 164–95; S. Hall, 'The Hinterland of Science: Ideology and the "Sociology of Knowledge"', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *On Ideology* (London, 1978), pp. 9–32; R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 55–71; and J. Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology* (London, 1979), p. 13.

³ For the need to separate ideology from other cultural regimes, if only to understand how distinct discursive practices interpenetrate, see G. Therborn, *The Power of Ideology and the Ideology of Power* (London, 1980), pp. 2–3 and pp. 70–1.

able, and the possible – paradigms which condition perception of a society, evaluate both the status quo and its alternatives, and assess the possibility of alternative social orders.⁴ Ideologies, according to this definition, constitute ‘problematics’ which edit the infinite number of possible perceptions and statements about a social order into finite (and therefore intelligible) discourses, discourses which necessarily highlight some features of a society while obscuring others.⁵ Alternative patterns of emphasis and evaluation define alternative ideologies, embodying ‘a process by which different kinds of meaning are produced and reproduced by the establishment of a mental set towards the world in which certain sign systems are privileged as necessary, as natural, ways of recognising a “meaning” in things and others are suppressed, ignored, or hidden in the very process of representing a world to consciousness’.⁶ Ideologists, warriors on the battlefields of discourse, struggle against each other for dominance over the grammar and vocabulary of social representation.

This linguistic terminology – description of an ideology as ‘the language [individuals] use as an instrument to wrest order from their experience and to present it, in a compelling fashion, to their fellows’⁷ – potentially reduces ideological practice to nothing but language, and implies an ontological distinction between ‘experience’ and its ideological ‘signification’. ‘Materialists’ (by no means all of them Marxists) have exploited this false dichotomy to reduce ideologies to epiphenomenal reflections of social order. Today, the

⁴ For application of the Kuhnian concept of ‘paradigm’ to the study of ideology, see S. Wolin, ‘Paradigms and Political Theories’, in P. King and B. Parekh (eds.), *Politics and Experience: Essays Presented to Professor Michael Oakshott on the Occasion of His Retirement* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 131–52. The concept of ‘paradigm’ is analysed in relation to the history of ideas by J. Pocock in ‘The Reconstruction of Discourse: Towards the Historiography of Political Thought’, *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 96, 1981, pp. 964–965 and in ‘Languages and their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought’, in J. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London, 1971), p. 18.

⁵ The concept of a ‘prolematic’, by Althusser out of Bachelard, has been widely used in recent ‘structuralist’ studies of ideology. See, for discussion, J. Rancière, ‘On the Theory of Ideology: The Politics of Althusser’, *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 7, 1974, pp. 2–14 and P. Hirst, ‘Althusser’s Theory of Ideology’, *Economy and Society*, vol. 5, 1976, pp. 385–412.

⁶ H. White, ‘The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History’, in H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987), p. 192. For an application of this insight to the study of Marxism, see S. Hall, ‘The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantees’, in B. Matthews (ed.), *Marx: A Hundred Years On* (London, 1983), p. 59.

⁷ R. Nichols, ‘Rebels, Beginners and Buffoons: Politics as Action’, in T. Ball (ed.), *Political Theory and Practice: New Perspectives* (Minneapolis, 1977), pp. 180–1.

more extreme exponents of 'discourse theory' and 'deconstruction', rebelling against discredited reductionisms, proclaim the triumph of text over context, the exorcism of the referent by the signifier, the anarchic reign of intertextuality over the vanquished realm of social causality. Scholars should resist this linguistic extremism, a reductionism quite as tyrannical as the *passé* imagery of 'material bases' and 'cultural superstructures'.⁸ Despite its admirable aspirations, the 'linguistic turn' taken by contemporary social thought risks perpetuation of the fruitless conflict between 'idealism' and 'materialism' by merely inverting the epistemological fanaticism of 'vulgar Marxism'.⁹ Categorical distinctions between, on the one hand, ideas and language and, on the other, society and experience – whatever their respective priorities, however related to each other – result in historical absurdities, as with the scholar who identifies Christianity as the idea and feudalism as the society of twelfth-century Europe, thereby occluding the institutional ramifications of medieval Christianity and dismissing the ideological discourse of feudalism.¹⁰

Ideology is indeed language, but not only language. The production, distribution, and consumption of social representation in pamphlets, editorials, and public meetings constitute realms of 'experience' no different in essence from economic practices within factories and bazaars, the deployment of political power within parliaments and party congresses, or reproductive practices pursued within bedchambers and crèches – none reducible to linguistic 'texts'

⁸ For a particularly extreme manifesto of linguistic imperialism, see R. Robin, 'Langage et Idéologie', in J. Guilhaumou et al., *Langage et Idéologies: Le Discours comme Objet de l'Histoire* (Paris, 1974). A fascinating debate over this issue with particular relevance to labour history has been provoked by Joan Scott's stimulating 'On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 31, 1987, pp. 1–13. See, in particular, the 'Response' by Bryan Palmer, *ibid.*, pp. 14–23 and Professor Scott's 'A Reply to Criticism' in no. 32 of *ILWCH*, pp. 39–45.

⁹ See the superb polemic against this tendency in P. Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Chicago, 1984), chapter 2. There is discussion of similar critiques of Pocock and Skinner in P. Janssen, 'Political Thought as Traditionary Action: The Critical Response to Skinner and Pocock', *History and Theory*, vol. 24, 1985, pp. 115–46. For a strong argument that Marx himself rejected the base/superstructure metaphor in his actual analyses of history and society, see G. Markus, 'Political-Social Rationality in Marx: A Dialectical Critique', *Dialectical Anthropology*, vol. 4, 1979, p. 256 and J. Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology* (London, 1983), pp. 173–80.

¹⁰ See T. Thoifsen, *Ideology and Revolution in Modern Europe: An Essay on the Role of Ideas in History* (New York, 1984) for a study which repeatedly falls into this confusion – the Christianity-feudalism example occurring on pp. 166–7.

and none explicable by 'intertextuality' alone.¹¹ A newspaper such as *Le Socialiste* was no more (and no less) 'linguistic' than the steelworks at Le Creusot, although the one produced social rhetoric and the other armour plate. Both socialist journalism and industrial metallurgy in *fin-de-siècle* France deployed complex, distinctive, and indispensable linguistic codes, and both derived from, embodied, and engendered social structures and social experiences irreducible to language. As a consequence, study of Marxist ideology during the *Belle Époque* (not to mention study of Burgundian steelmaking) requires both the 'deconstructionist' sensitivity of contemporary cultural studies and the 'contextualist' insights of social history. Hence the utility of an expansive concept of 'discourse', which explicitly embodies language in experience, systematically synthesises 'ideas' and 'society', self-consciously 'transcend[s] the conceptual prison of "intellectual" versus "social" phenomena'.¹²

The critical procedures which articulate cultural studies, the 'scientific' discipline which disciplines social theory, and the empathic aspirations which animate social history impose reflexivity upon students of ideology: cultural criticism, social science, and historical studies are themselves ideological; scholars study ideology ideologically. Critics, social theorists and historians, however, understandably resist assertions that every system of cultural and social representation, including their own, constitutes an ideological discourse, a systematisation of perspectival partiality and social bias. This instinctive resistance to ideological self-incrimination constitutes the last redoubt of beleaguered positivism, which has traditionally distinguished between ideology, 'partial' and therefore

¹¹ This is one of the most important (and most neglected) points made in Althusser's influential 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London, 1971), pp. 121–73. Althusser's insight is further developed in Maurice Godelier's impressive 'The Ideal in the Real', in R. Samuels and G. Stedman Jones (eds.), *Culture, Ideology, and Politics* (London, 1982), pp. 12–38. See also, R. Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 28–43.

¹² D. Hollinger, 'Historians and the Discourse of Intellectuals', in J. Higham and P. Conkin (eds.), *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), p. 58. Similar points are made in P. Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', p. 237; J. Pocock, 'Introduction: The State of the Art', in *Essays on Political Thought and History* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 12; C. Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man', *Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 25, 1971, p. 24; R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 20–44 and 61–2; and J. Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience', *American Historical Review*, vol. 92, 1987, p. 882. For an excellent analysis of 'discourse' as a field of social conflict, see Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, pp. 25–43.

incapable of 'evaluating information on its own intrinsic merits',¹³ and social science (and 'scientific' history), 'objective' and therefore capable of constituting knowledge 'acknowledged as correct even by a Chinese'.¹⁴ Today, few scholars unquestioningly accept this positivist faith; but even fewer abjure the rhetorical constructions 'in fact' and 'in reality'.

Students of ideology should question this attenuated positivism, if only because pretensions to 'scientific objectivity' have underpinned ideological polemics throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, serving liberal political economy, socialist historical materialism, or Nazi racism as the modern equivalent of the religious sanction which legitimised ancient and medieval ideologies. Instead of constructing secure platforms from which to demolish ideological edifices, 'objective' social science erects an 'ideology in the worst sense of the word, that is to say a dogmatic system of eternal and absolute truths'.¹⁵ Social representation, including 'second order' or 'metalinguistic' discourse on discourse such as the History of Ideas, always manifests systematic partiality: partiality in the sense of limitation (historians necessarily represent the past from a temporal and social perspective which accentuates certain 'realities' while diminishing or obscuring others), and partiality in the sense of bias (histories necessarily represent particular interests, if only those of historians).¹⁶ Nor should scholars regret their partiality: only their grounding in time, place, and interest endows their representations with substance and force.¹⁷ Impartiality is not only impossible, but

¹³ G. Sartori, 'Politics, Ideology, and Belief Systems', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 63, 1969, p. 401.

¹⁴ The quotation is from Max Weber, cited (without exact attribution) in B. Parekh, 'Social and Political Thought and the Problem of Ideology', in R. Benewick et al. (eds.), *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problem of Ideology* (London, 1973), p. 78. For critique of the ideology/social science dichotomy in its positivist form, see A. Schaff, 'La Définition Fonctionnelle de l'Idéologie et le Problème de la "Fin du Siècle de l'Idéologie"', *Le Homme et la Société*, vol. 4, 1967, pp. 51-2 and Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', pp. 231-9.

¹⁵ A. Gramsci, 'Problems of Marxism', in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London, 1971), pp. 406-7. And see the discussion in Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 62-4.

¹⁶ J. Hyppolite, 'Le Scientifique et l'Idéologique dans une Perspective Marxiste', in J. Hyppolite, *Figures de la Pensée Philosophique* (Paris, 1971), vol. 1, pp. 360-1 and I. Meszaros, 'Ideology and Social Science', in *Philosophy, Ideology and Social Science: Essays in Negation and Affirmation* (Brighton, 1986), p. 32 and pp. 52-3.

¹⁷ For recognition (from radically contrasting ideological and methodological perspectives) of the fertility of bias, see J. Schumpeter, 'Science and Ideology', *American Economic Review*, vol. 39, 1949, p. 359; L. Althusser, 'Elements of Self-Criticism', in *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London, 1976), p. 121; and Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', p. 241.

undesirable – a formula for conceptual impotence and discursive sterility.

Does this conclusion reduce the study of ideology to a game of circus mirrors, to a frustrating or hypocritical exercise whereby the historian's ideological biases reflect, occlude, distort, or exaggerate the ideological biases of the past? Not necessarily. Self-conscious cultural critique, critical social theory, and critically informed historical practice, although fully as ideological as the most unself-critical social polemic, systematically address their own partiality. Theorists, unlike polemicists, search out cases which challenge their own assumptions; criticise their own ambiguities, contradictions, and limitations; and recognise the strengths as well as the weaknesses of rival problematics.¹⁸ Self-criticism, reflection upon the game of mirrors itself, limits and controls the unthinking ideological distortions and occlusions characteristic of polemic. Of themselves, these distinctions need not imply the inherent superiority of theoretical self-awareness over polemical single-mindedness. Self-awareness enhances analytical sophistication, disciplinary openness, and conceptual scope, but precludes polemical efficacy, the efficacy conferred by assertive self-identity and absolute self-certainty. In 'the real world of ideology', defence of social order and advocacy of alternative social orders has required, presently requires, and will always require, polemicists. The necessity or desirability of critical theorists is considerably less obvious.¹⁹

In principle, however, a self-critical approach to the scholarly study of ideology is necessary and desirable, although hardly inevitable in practice. Too many studies of ideology have been thinly-disguised ideological polemics, polemics limited and limiting in their

¹⁸ For the methodological consequences of the recognition that interpretive strategies in the study of ideology are themselves ideological, see White, 'The Context in the Text', p. 191 and p. 194; Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', pp. 242–4; and A. Naess, 'Ideology and Rationality', in M. Cranston and P. Mair (eds.), *Ideology and Politics* (Florence, 1980), pp. 137–8. For the application of this insight to Marxist studies of Marxism, see R. Berki, 'The Marxian Concept of Bourgeois Ideology: Some Aspects and Perspectives', in R. Benewick et al. (eds.), *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problem of Ideology* (London, 1973), pp. 88–114.

¹⁹ P. King, 'An Ideological Fallacy', in P. King and B. Parekh (eds.), *Politics and Experience: Essays Presented to Professor Michael Oakeshott on the Occasion of His Retirement* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 341–94. For the tension between self-critical impotence and polemical efficacy within Marxism, see F. Jameson, 'Science versus Ideology', *Humanities in Society*, vol. 6, 1983, pp. 283–302. And see E. Wright, 'Reflections on Classes', in E. Wright et al., *The Debate on Classes* (London, 1989), pp. 69–70, with the critique of his distinction between theory and polemic in M. Burawoy, 'The Limits of Wright's Analytical Marxism and an Alternative', in *ibid.*, pp. 78–99.

naive lack of theoretical self-awareness and self-criticism. By contrast, theoretically informed studies of past ideological polemics offer not only histories 'of change in the employment of paradigms' but self-conscious and explicit 'employment of paradigms for the exploration of paradigms'.²⁰ If historians of ideology hope to produce such studies, they require 'theories about theories' which will propose 'criteria for assessing the... merits [of ideologies] and situating [them] historically'.²¹ By this measure, students of Marxism enjoy a formidable advantage over analysts of other ideological traditions. No social paradigm has undergone such intense scrutiny from theoretically informed antagonists as has Marxism, and the adherents of no other ideology have criticised themselves as ruthlessly as have Marxists: 'second order' languages of critique, theory's primary resource and theory's ultimate product, have assailed Marxist discourse from every side, while proliferating within Marxism itself, at least within the 'Western Marxist' tradition. Marxism, the focus of our epoch's ideological consciousness, has endured a century-long interrogation which has pitilessly exposed its affirmations and lacunae, its coherence and contradictions, its certainties and vacillations. This lavish legacy of criticism and self-criticism furnishes historians of Marxism and Marxist historians with elaborate, sophisticated, and rigorous questions about every conceivable aspect of Marxist ideology.²²

Criticism empowered by social theory illuminates the internal rationality (and irrationality) of ideological discourses, discourses thereby comprehended as 'texts' with their own inherent logic (and illogic).²³ Yet, just as critics decode literary texts with references to other literary texts, so historians must decipher an ideology by reading it within the matrix of social practices which conditioned and was conditioned by its development. Above all, scholars must locate an ideology in relation to other ideologies, since ideologies exist and evolve primarily through conflict and congress with

²⁰ Pocock, 'Languages and Their Implications', p. 23.

²¹ A. Swingewood, *Marx and Modern Social Theory* (London, 1975), pp. 70-1.

²² For 'second order languages', their utility, and their problems, see Pocock, 'Introduction: The State of the Art', p. 15. There is a superb discussion of the methodological dilemmas faced by a Marxist studying Marxism, of 'second order language' within Marxism, in L. Goldmann, 'Pour une Approche Marxiste des Études sur le Marxisme', in *Marxisme et Sciences Humaines* (Paris, 1967), pp. 220-6.

²³ For the metaphor of the text, see J. Donzelot, 'The Poverty of Political Culture', *Ideology and Consciousness*, no. 5, 1979, p. 74.

alternative ideological discourses. In other words, historians must master not only an ideology's 'problematic', the realm of theory, but its 'conditions of existence', the domain of history.²⁴ However vital the understanding of an ideology's semantics and syntactics, its distinguishing concepts and their characteristic articulation, historians should also study its pragmatics – its meaning in various historical circumstances, its representative usage.²⁵ The lapses, vacillations, and ambiguities of an ideological discourse may indicate inherent inadequacies in its fundamental paradigm: lacunae in its social lexicon, contradictions within its order of concepts, discordance between its lexical content and its conceptual form. But the perturbations of ideological practice may also disclose unmastered complexities, even unmasterable contradictions, in the social order addressed by the ideology's 'pragmatics'.²⁶ Even the most rigorously coherent ideologies engender diverse and contradictory versions of themselves in dissimilar social and historical circumstances. In this sense, ideologies evolve as 'travelling theories', their 'meaning' metamorphosing with their propagation.²⁷ Once aware of these contingencies, historians must interpret an ideology as an aspect of a particular historical totality, as a part in a particular social whole.²⁸

Familiar perils bedevil this 'contextual' method: structuralist determinism and social reductionism have repeatedly ravaged interpretations of past ideological discourses – in some instances, virtually defining ideologies out of existence, and in most cases radically devaluing their social autonomy, internal integrity, and causal

²⁴ A. Callinicos, *Is There a Future for Marxism?* (London, 1982), p. 189. For a brilliant analysis of the need to comprehend the constitution of an ideological discourse through its contact and conflict with alternative ideologies, see K. Baker, 'On the Problem of the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution', in D. LaCapra (ed.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca, 1982), pp. 200–3.

²⁵ J. Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas', in *Political Obligation in its Historical Context: Essays in Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 13–58.

²⁶ This study assumes that society as well as thought may be self-contradictory. See the debate over this issue in L. Coletti, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', *New Left Review*, no. 93, 1975, pp. 3–29 and R. Edgley, 'Dialectics: The Contradictions of Coletti', *Critique*, no. 7, 1976–7, pp. 47–52. For exemplary discussion of the relationship between conceptual contradiction and social contradiction, see W. Sewell, *Work and Revolution: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 277–84 and W. Reddy, *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe: A Critique of Historical Understanding* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 45.

²⁷ E. Said, 'Travelling Theory', *Raritan*, vol. 1, 1982, pp. 41–67.

²⁸ This is the methodology suggested by Lucien Goldmann's *Sciences Humaines et Philosophie: Pour un Structuralisme Génétique* (Paris, 1966). See also J. Merquior, 'The Veil and the Mask: On Ideology, Power and Legitimacy', in *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (London, 1979), p. 32.

efficacy. No wonder many scholars have renounced the 'scientific' search for structures of determination, venturing forth instead upon the hermeneutic quest for patterns of meaning. Nevertheless, hermeneutics itself, sovereign protection against the iron hand of scientific abstraction, requires exploration of both text *and* context: hermeneutic reconstitution of 'meaning' and revelation of 'intentionality' depend upon interpretation of the reception of discourse, and the study of reception necessarily returns full (hermeneutic) circle to the task of situating an ideology within its textual and social field.²⁹ Thus, illumination of an ideology's milieu, whether interpreted as deterministic cause or hermeneutic horizon, indicates the only road leading to historical comprehension of ideological discourse. Marxists themselves, the pioneers and most fervent proponents of contextual analysis . . . of others' ideologies, may not exempt Marxism from this discipline.³⁰

Contextualisation classically reveals relationships between an ideology and its characteristic bearers, thereby embodying the ideology's texts in its bearers' experience. In pursuing this strategy, historians endeavour to view a society as it once was viewed by an ideology's adherents, to 'think' the social order of the past as it once was thought. Deciphering the past of the past, historians ascertain the historical traditions which moulded ideologists' comprehension of their present and evoked their fears and hopes of the future. And historians, fortunately deaf to post-Althusserian exhortation, delineate both the interests which governed the creation, reception, and comprehension of ideological discourse and the interests engendered by ideological practices. Yet the intricate nexus between an ideology and its advocates and audience will remain problematical: historians should abjure facile answers to questions of contextualisation.

Unfortunately, facile answers abound. Historians have too often assumed that an ideology produced and consumed in a distinctive 'social location' necessarily serves the interests of those located there, that the ideological discourse characteristic of a distinct social category necessarily 'reflects' that category's interests. This *a priori* assumption violates every serious disciplinary protocol in the study

²⁹ Q. Skinner, 'Hermeneutics and the Role of History', *New Literary History*, vol. 7, 1975, pp. 209–32. There is a good critique of the failure of this dialectic in much social history in T. Judt, 'On the Syntax of the History of Socialism', *Historical Journal*, vol. 22, 1979, p. 1025.

³⁰ See D. LaCapra, 'Marxism and Intellectual History', in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (London, 1983), pp. 325–46.

of the association between social interests and ideological expressions. Restricted social perspective or the iron logic of domination have often (usually?) precluded self-interested representation of society, at least by society's most restricted and dominated subjects.³¹ On the other hand, pervasive ideologies do not necessarily serve the interests of society's rulers, as presupposed by disillusioned Marxists, for whom even the most revolutionary ideologies (including their own) inevitably degenerate into the ruling ideas of ruling classes.³² Despite subjection to 'ideological hegemony', subaltern groups have regularly manipulated dominant political ideas and hegemonic social ideals to their own advantage. The calculus relating historical circumstance, social interest and ideological representation is too complex to allow *a priori* supposition, but not so complex as to preclude its application in scholarly inquiry.³³

Mention of ideology evokes the imagery of class and class conflict – so completely has assertively Marxist, implicitly Marxisant, or explicitly anti-Marxist scholarship pervaded the study of ideology throughout the twentieth century. Within these limiting parameters, contextualisation of ideological discourse has implied the simple (and sometimes simplistic) reduction of an ideology's social context to class structure, with ideologies equated with varieties of class consciousness. According to this Marxist paradigm, the archetypal 'class for itself' signals its autonomy and manifests its force through the elaboration and deployment of a unique ideology – simultaneously product of its class interest (a class consciousness) and assertion of that interest (an ideological programme).³⁴ Some of the best recent work on the history of ideologies has invoked the legacy of Antonio Gramsci, the twentieth century's Marxist Machiavelli, subtle theorist of hegemony. The fundamental Gramscian thesis that

³¹ I. Balbus, 'The Concept of Interest in Pluralist and Marxian Analysis', *Politics and Society*, vol. 1, 1971, pp. 151–79.

³² For an excellent elaboration of this association of ideology with the 'ruling ideas of ruling classes', or at least with those of dominant social groups in general, see J. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 73–147. But see the critique of this tradition in N. Abercrombie et al., *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London, 1980) and P. Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', p. 223.

³³ This vital point is made by J. Elster in 'Belief, Bias and Ideology', in M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 123–45 and by J. McCarney in *The Real World of Ideology* (Brighton, 1980), pp. 32–3 and chapter 2.

³⁴ See the useful discussion of this problematic in D. MacRae, 'Class Relationships and Ideology', *The Sociological Review*, vol. 6, 1958, pp. 261–72 and L. Dion, 'An Hypothesis Concerning the Structure and Function of Ideology', in R. Cox (ed.), *Ideology, Politics, and Political Theory* (Belmont, 1969), pp. 319–21.

social order and social protest have always depended to some extent upon the (class) struggle for control of social consciousness, that ideological hegemony and counter-hegemony increasingly articulate class conflict in modern society, has stimulated and validated sophisticated and insightful Marxist studies of culture and class.³⁵ And, more than two generations after its initial publication, Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* retains its magnetic influence over Left Hegelians throughout the western world. The Lukácsian assimilation of authentic proletarian class consciousness to revolutionary socialist ideology, by origin an idealist Leninism, has survived slashing Leninist condemnation and the wounding disavowal of its author, living on to inspire the more militant strands of 'Western Marxism'.³⁶

But, however fertile these Marxist traditions, historians (including Marxist historians) of socialist ideology, of Marxism, and of working-class cultural expression should resist uncritical conflation of class and consciousness. The Marxist project which historians interrogate has assumed equivalence between class consciousness and social consciousness, between class programme and ideology: Marxist socialism has derived much of its cultural influence and polemical force from the reductionist or relativist implications of these assimilations. Scholars, however, may not perpetrate *a priori* equation of class consciousness and ideological discourse without abandoning an all-important critical perspective. For historians, if not for socialist militants, the relationship between class and ideology must begin (but not necessarily end) as a question, not as an answer.³⁷

None the less, social conflict more generally conceived undoubtedly conditions the production, distribution, and consumption of all ideologies.³⁸ However consensual in their rhetoric, ideologies embody and beget patterns of domination and resistance: they reflect and reflect upon the chronic tensions which pervade social relations and the momentous ruptures which characterise historical mutations. Ideological 'consensus' is as inconceivable as its two

³⁵ For analysis of the Gramscian tradition in the conception of ideology, see S. Hall, B. Lumley, and G. McLennan, 'Politics and Ideology: Gramsci', in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *On Ideology* (London, 1978), pp. 33-44.

³⁶ R. McDonough, 'Ideology as False Consciousness: Lukács', in *ibid.*, pp. 33-44.

³⁷ Ricoeur, 'Science and Ideology', p. 223 and Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology', pp. 77-84.

³⁸ A point emphasised in Pocock, 'The Reconstruction of Discourse', p. 961, and Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', pp. 39-48.