

A CRITIQUE OF ASPECTS OF
LOUIS ALTHUSSER'S EPISTEMOLOGY
AS EMPLOYED BY MANUEL CASTELLS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an assessment of Castells' claim to have used Althusserian epistemology both as a theoretical basis for a critique of empiricist urban sociology, and in the establishment of a Marxist scientific alternative. To this end, Castells employed the Althusserian conception of the social totality, which was characterized by a complex structured unity of relatively autonomous instances with their own laws of development. This was intended to establish the last-instance determination by the economy, and to avoid the empiricist portrayal of the relationship between base and superstructure as one of essence and phenomena. According to Althusser, theory, like the other relatively autonomous practices, has its own specific raw material, labour and product, and was thus separate from and irreducible to any of the other practices.

Each chapter of this thesis outlines an aspect of Althusser's work that can explicitly or implicitly be identified in Castells' writings. The critical responses to Althusserianism are then examined in order to disclose the unresolved and contradictory elements of his position, and the extent to which these have led to problems in Castells' work. More importantly, it is argued that Castells' theoretical allegiance to Althusser is deliberately inconsistent: he has significantly altered every controversial tenet of the latter, while neglecting to acknowledge that these changes are in fact distortions which directly oppose the character of Althusserianism. Castells wavers between contradictory epistemologies, and this results in his analyses

being stranded between Althusserian theoreticism and empiricism.

It is my contention that Castells wished to use the ready-made Althusserian system without falling prey to its unpalatable implications, especially Althusser's conclusion that Marxism is a science that produces ideology for the masses, who are never able to achieve a genuine cognitive appropriation of reality, and are thus unable to participate in the development of theory. This reduction of individual consciousness to ideology undermined the significance of class consciousness and political practice, which are commonly regarded as the fundamental principles of revolutionary Marxist practice.

INTRODUCTION

It was in 1977, as a student of City and Regional Planning that I first encountered the work of Manuel Castells. While I found it dense and abstruse, I was impressed by the copious use of Marxist terminology, and the claims that it possessed a theoretical basis for the analysis of urban issues; unlike the prolific but conceptually barren studies in urban sociology that I had encountered. Certainly, his dismissal of these 'theories' as ideological was an appealing argument, but the unfamiliarity of the terminology and the impenetrability of his style of writing at that time dampened by enthusiasm for further investigation of his work.

Intrigued by the acclaim with which The Urban Question was met, when faced with the choice of a topic for my Master's thesis in Sociology, I decided to undertake an analysis of Castells' work. After having read, and re-read it, my confusion only increased; and, seeing that Castells acknowledged Louis Althusser as his theoretical source, I decided to read the latter in the original. It was then that I noticed that Castells was far from consistent in his application of Althusserian concepts; and, after reading critical analyses of Althusser's work, I became aware how significant Castells' (frequently unacknowledged) departures were, and how they invariably occurred in the areas in which Althusser was being heavily criticized. This thesis, then, sets out to isolate the epistemological dimension of Castells' work, to compare it with Althusserian epistemology, and to suggest possible

reasons for and the theoretical implications of these epistemological shifts.

A Brief History of Urban Sociology

The interwar period saw the beginning of urban sociology in a cross-fertilization between Social Darwinism and pragmatism, and the sociology of Tonnies, Simmel, Weber and Durkheim. These ideas took root in Chicago, where Burgess, Park and Wirth, amongst others, were responsible for the establishment of a prolific school of urban sociology. The Chicago School, as it came to be known, regarded urbanization as an independent process and source of social change, while urbanism was seen as the manifestation of modern culture. The Chicago School considered urban and rural life as entirely dissimilar, and posited a rural-urban dichotomy. Furthermore, the conceptualization of the city was as an externally organized unit in space produced by laws of its own. In effect, changes in the urban environment, a context so governing individual experience as to set the pace and direction of change in society, were explained by the process of urbanization itself.

Park and Burgess employed the term 'natural community' to describe the way in which the growth of the city's residential areas is based on independent personal decisions concerning morality, politics, ecology and economics (Suttles, 1972:13). Gradually, 'natural community' came to denote a universal solidarity which could not be attributed to culture or administration, a view that did not take into account the fact

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that this type of 'natural community' was not a universal phenomenon, and ignored the relationship between residential groups and society as a whole: "the word natural seems to have left the impression of a primordial social solidarity which existed apart from social convention in somewhat the same way as the social categories of male and female, young and old, are presented in popular discussion" (Ibid.: 8). The natural community was also seen in terms of the sentimental ties of its inhabitants. This led to a focus on mutual social characteristics as the foundation of shared emotions and values, and a failure to consider those public housing projects where shared social attributes did not lead to a strong sense of interpersonal loyalty and identification.

The fundamental tenets of the Chicago School have been revealed to possess very limited predictive capacity: the lessening of ethnic differentiation did not inevitably culminate in the disappearance of the community concerned, and the sense of community was not always negatively affected by increasing heterogeneity. The autonomous suburb did not precipitate an abundance of local social networks, and was frequently unable to establish local representation and identity (Ibid.: 15).

It is widely agreed that urban sociology has not done much to justify its existence since its inception a half-century ago. As Harloe points out, if it was not for the obvious presence of social problems in urban areas, public concern about them, and the demand for policies to ameliorate

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them, urban sociology might not have endured as a specific branch of sociology (Harloe, 1977: 1). It must not, however, be thought that during this period urban sociology languished in a state of decline: indeed the accelerating crises were occurring globally, and the intervention required precipitated a massive increase in research concerned with 'urban issues', financed by governments of diverse political inclinations. Cities had to accommodate the economic requirements of mass consumption, the influence of immigration and the immense influx from the countryside, and the resultant competition for increasingly scarce resources.

Public concern with the urban crisis led to its pivotal significance on the political platform, and urban sociology responded by relinquishing general sociological concerns and concentrating on urban policy and administration, community planning and the intricate statistical description of urban areas (Mellor, 1975: 278). "Urban sociologists have been frequently turned into the handmaidens of those practical professions concerned with making physical changes to the built environment. As a result many urban sociologists have become more concerned with the human relations of the city rather than the sociology of the city: it is as if industrial sociologists had turned themselves into personnel officers" (Harloe, 1977: 2). Harloe goes on to remark that the level of urban sociology has sunk to the banal level of attempting to predict the room in which members of a particular socio-economic group like to eat their dinner, and that in many instances the discipline is no more than market research (Ibid.). The perspective of conventional urban sociology was

imbued with ideological implications that were unacceptable above all to Marxist sociologists. Part of its ideological load derived from the empiricism of classical sociology, which gave rise to Small's concentration on definitely bounded units of experience and Simmel's study of the city as the immediately observable site of individual association, the context for the examination of 'the actuality of concrete life' (Mellor, 1975: 281). These seemingly innocuous concerns implied, however, that cities themselves were a sufficient object of study, and that the process of urbanization could be understood without reference to capitalism as a productive system.

As early as 1955, Glass pointed to the necessity of urban sociology taking into account the fact that the city showed evidence of the abstract forces of history, class structure and culture. As 'the handmaidens of the practical professions', urban sociologists failed to do so, and their studies were therefore regarded as particularly suspect. This re-evaluation was part of a widespread rejection of positivism which occurred when sociologists began to question the scientific status of the knowledge they produced. It became generally accepted that inductivism and the positivist postulate of phenomenalism do not guarantee scientificity, that knowledge is not the inevitable product of immediate experience, and that theory is essential in the determination of 'facts' (Saunders, 1981b: 38).

The publication in 1967 of Rex and Moore's book Race, Community and Conflict was seen as the first significant

move away from the theoretically unfruitful state of urban sociology in Britain (Harloe, 1978: 12; and Mellor, 1975: 282). Their characterization of housing classes had been influenced by the differential provision of housing and educational resources to immigrant and local workers. While the labour status of these two groups were identical, housing policies discriminated against immigrants in favour of established and local households. This induced Rex and Moore to distinguish between the class struggle generated by relations in the workplace, and that created by the conflict over urban housing resources. It was found that the local working class had access to housing of a standard incompatible with their control over the means of production, whereas the immigrants were largely denied access to community resources. This study made the politically controversial claim that the class struggle over housing constituted a fundamental urban process (Harloe, 1977: 4).

Rex and Moore's themes of the distribution of scarce urban resources and the constraints operating in this context, were taken up by Pahl, for whom the fundamental framework of urban sociology was the pattern of constraints at work in different localities (Pahl, 1970a; 1970b). Pahl was concerned with the way in which unequal claims over investment into community resources resulted in unevenness of resource distribution; a differential access to facilities that was exacerbated by factors such as distance and low incomes. Pahl illustrated the significance in this situation of the

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behaviour and decisions of the 'urban managers', the local technocrats and 'social gatekeepers' who mediate in the distribution of urban resources. Pahl's work achieved greater importance when he later altered his managerialist position and acknowledged that these urban managers were themselves imprisoned in general political and economic circumstances (Harloe, 1978: 12).

In France, a major impetus for urban study was provided by the government's concern over the events of 1968. The French urban sociologists were not satisfied merely to concern themselves with pragmatic issues, and their theoretical orientation was due primarily to the prolific philosophical tradition in French sociology. This school of urban sociology attempted to establish urban sociology's epistemological status, as well as a theoretical method of situating urban issues within a general historical materialist context. The journal "Espaces et Société" and the group of researchers associated with it became of primary importance in the application of Marxist theory to the analysis of the city (Lambert, 1979: 241).

The most celebrated of these writers was Manuel Castells, who set out to provide an extensive critique of the bourgeois ideological assumptions at the base of urban sociology, and a Marxist alternative. These themes were first discussed in "Y a-t-il une Sociologie Urbaine" (Castells, 1968), in which he asked whether urban sociology had a specifically 'urban' scientific object. In his next article "Theorie et Ideologie en Sociologie Urbaine" (Idem, 1969), Castells inquired

whether it is possible for urban sociology to study urban real objects. These concerns were elaborated in La Question Urbaine (Idem, 1972), which attempted to apply them in the analysis of empirical situations.

While Castells' work had a wide influence on urban sociology in France and a number of francophone Third World countries, it had only a small following in Britain, consisting of a few radical geographers who established the journal "Antipode", and C G Pickvance, who provided the initial translations of Castells' early articles into English. Their information on Castells and French urban sociology was restricted to mimeographed versions of working translations of individual chapters, articles and conference papers (Lambert, 1979: 243).

The 1975 Conference on Urban Change and Conflict, organized by the Centre for Environmental Studies in London, was the first major meeting ground for English and French sociology, and this rapprochement was facilitated by the publication in 1976 of Pickvance's Urban Sociology: Critical Essays (1976), Harloe's Captive Cities (1977), and the English translation of The Urban Question (1977a).

At first, the reaction to Castells' writings was largely favourable due to a widespread disenchantment with the ideological focus of urban sociology and the paucity of its theoretical content. Alongside the government-sponsored research which was intended to solve urban problems during the 1960s, there occurred in French and American universities a growth of radical social theory. Here, the most significant

development was the 'renaissance' of Marxism as an approach to the study of society (Clarke, 1977:1; and Duncan, 1981: 231). In the radical political and intellectual context of black power movements and student unrest, the basic assumptions and modes of explanation of many areas of sociology were reinterrogated. "Perhaps in no other subfield of sociology was this questioning so imperative as in urban sociology, where a deep chasm had developed between the theoretical premises laid down by the Chicago School (and the empirical focus that followed from these premises) and their impotence to explain the deepening urban 'crisis' which seemingly grew worse with every attempt to ameliorate it (Abu-Lughod, 1979: 192-3). Urban sociologists were criticized for "fruitless attempts to get theoretical yields from the now overworked ground of the Chicago ecologists" (Pahl, 1978, 309), while the Chicago School was rejected on the grounds that it studied cities without reference to capitalism.

While traditional urban sociology was regarded as "providing at best questionable answers to relatively trivial questions" (Dickens, 1978, cited by Duncan, 1971, 231), it was thought that Marxist urban sociology would do away with the myopic concentration on superficial appearances. The Marxist approach held that it was necessary for science to go beyond mere appearances in order to reveal the essential relations underlying them. It became widely accepted that "any theory ... that remains at the level of appearances ... and attempts to explain reality in terms of the categories of everyday

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experience ... will inevitably fail to provide scientific explanations ..., but will simply formalize and legitimate existing ideological modes of thought" (Saunders, 1979: 112).

Marxism's offer of a scientific analysis of the totality, and its insistence on the necessity of relating parts to the whole, seemed very appealing after the dispersed, untheoretical studies of empiricist urban sociology, which had separated the study of the city from its political and economic context. Structuralist Marxism in particular appeared to provide answers to some of the questions that traditional sociology did not even ask: "It promised rigorous and systematic theory, which we found lacking in modern sociology, and offered an interdisciplinary outlook, which did not carve up the social world into preconceived areas and corresponding academic disciplines or hypostatise the 'social' as an autonomous and reified level of reality. More importantly, it was anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ... and seemed to provide a potential link between theory and practice - which contemporary structural-functionalism certainly did not - by enabling a strategy for transforming society to be based on a scientific analysis of the ongoing social formation" (M. Glucksmann, 1974a: 230).

Castells

At first glance, Castells appeared to provide both a cogent appraisal of the deficiencies of urban sociology and an acceptable redirection; on closer inspection, however, a growing number

of critics saw through the emperor's new suit. Castells' claims were found to be extravagant, his observations unoriginal and his contradictions abundant.

Pahl stated it would be wrong to suggest that Castells' writing is "clear and straightforward" (Pahl, 1978:53), and for Lambert The Urban Question will win no prizes for readability, cogency and clarity due to its mystification, length and pretentiousness (Lambert, 1979: 243). Elliott in turn describes The Urban Question as profoundly irritating, and dismisses the 'new theoretical tools' as "a box of blunt instruments" (Elliott, 1980: 153). One of the most scathing attacks came from Glass, who systematically castigated Castells' magnum opus as a slovenly, fatty concoction, intentionally written in "cryptic hideous verbiage", and "obscurantist lingo" (Glass, 1977:667). Glass concedes that many of Castells' criticisms of urban sociology are correct, but denies that these observations are startling new discoveries, or that his work resolves these difficulties (Ibid.: 667). Elliott agrees: "Castells, in the early articles, was attacking some real weaknesses, but these were not new targets, and indeed in some of its particulars - the attack on the Chicago School, for example - it seemed crude and unappealing" (Elliott, 1980: 151). Glass illustrates the absurdity of Castells' rejection of the terms 'urban', city, 'region' and 'space' as ideological, in the face of his continued use of them in the same 'ideological' manner that he denounced (Glass, 1977: 667). This view is corroborated by Elliott: "Just as we

think we have grasped his argument and temporarily at least are willing to foreswear their use, Castells throws us into confusion by employing these same terms in gay disregard of his own conventions" (Elliott, 1980: 152). Glass attributes Castells' theoretical 'lapses' to a deliberate muddle, serving as an effective camouflage for the lack of proper theory: "The 'new urban sociology' has a special line of 'double-speak': non-questions are put forward in the name of a new 'problematic', fogginess is called 'precision'; gibberish is presented as profundity; obtuse phrasemongering is less trouble than the humdrum jobs which research and/or political activities entail" (Glass, 1977: p. 667). While Lebas states that "in a sense it is left up to the individual reader to formulate a working shorthand of it in order to have a full understanding of the implications of the processes described" (Lebas, 1977: 164); Glass denies this possibility: "And indeed his soliloquy cannot be translated into, or paraphrased in, ordinary language ... Such a translation would be bound to endow it with a clarity which it does not possess" (Glass, 1977: 669). In response to Castells admission that some of his conceptions were confused, but that rectifications must not take the form of a rewriting of the text, Glass asks "Why not?" (Ibid.); while Lebas mordantly suggests that, as an exercise in theoretical practice, Castells' text "can become the object of its own transformation" (Lebas, 1977:163).

Thus, Castells' assertion that he has taken care to achieve clarity and avoid ambiguity, and that this aspect of

his work is in contrast to "the vague rhetoric sometimes deliberately employed in epistemology" (Castells, 1976d:113), has been found to be particularly ironic in the light of his own obscure style. Glass concludes that *The Urban Question* should be dismissed as "a load of humbug" (Glass, 1977: 669); while Elliott cynically remarks that it should be left to moulder on the shelf rather than bringing profit to the publishers and very little to the readers (Elliott, 1980: 158).

In my own reading of his works, I do not feel that Castells' subject matter is so inherently complex that it can not be more accessibly presented. A full explanation of the problems of his work, however, must go beyond the view that it is a deliberate exercise in obfuscation. It is my contention that Castells' attempt to use Althusser as his theoretical base is largely responsible for the impenetrability and contradictions of his writings.

Castells has explicitly acknowledged his affiliation with Althusserian philosophy. In the Preface to *The Urban Question*, he states that his work derives from the intellectual context of Althusser's reading of Marx (Castells, 1977a: ix). A year and a half after starting this thesis, I had been unable to find a single reviewer who did not take for granted this claim by Castells that his work is based on Althusser's structuralism. Their relationship has been assumed to be one of direct theoretical derivation: Pickvance claims that Castells follows Althusser's interpretation of Marx (Pickvance, 1974: 203), as does Abu-Lughod (1979:193)

and Harloe (1977: 12). The difference in emphasis between Castells and Althusser in their use of the terms 'science' and 'ideology' was noted by Pickvance (1976a: 203), but he does not spell out the full extent of the divergences, nor does he give any indication of why they occurred.

Elliott observes that Castells' critique of urban sociology "came in elaborate Althusserian wrappings", and argues that the mentor's flaws are responsible for Castells' theoretical inadequacies (Elliott, 1980: 152). This assertion is, in my view, at least partly accurate, and the extent to which Castells' confusion is attributable to inconsistencies within the Althusserian system will be examined in this thesis. The chief problem in Castells' work, however, lies elsewhere, and is implicitly recognized in Elliott's observation that Castells' "analysis floats very freely above its empirical moorings", and that there is a frequent "gap between empirical base and general argument" (Ibid.: 153); and in Duncan's remark that Castells' analysis "remains stranded between abstract and concrete" (Duncan, 1981: 247).

I believe that Lebas is correct when she attributes Castells' confusion to his "extremely innovative and at times very selective use of a variety of theoretical origins" (Lebas, 1977: 164). The precise demarcation of the cause of theoretical inconsistency is offered by Garnier: "Castells oscillates between Althusserian theoreticism and concrete studies which depart considerably from this framework" (Garnier, 1973, cited by Harloe, 1977: 19).

Determined to transcend the ideologically unsavoury aspects of urban sociology, Castells attempted to use Althusserian philosophy as a ready-made theoretical structure with which to purge from urban sociology its ideological misrepresentations.

Althusser

Louis Althusser was, at the time that Castells wrote The Urban Question, the most eminent Marxist philosopher in France, and he achieved his renown through an extensive theoretical clarification and reformulation of Marx's works. In Anderson's description of the advent of Western Marxism (Anderson, 1976), he discusses the complex relationship that major leftist theorists such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Lefebvre had with the PCF. In many instances, the latter conflicted openly with the ideas of the former, to the extent that theorists frequently broke with the party or were expelled from it. The 1960s, however, saw a gradual diminution of the repression of intellectual Marxism, and it was Louis Althusser who initiated and was largely responsible for the rise of intellectual debate within the PCF. Nevertheless, Althusser did not simply toe the party line: "the paradox of this ascendancy has been its development against the grain of the political evolution of the PCF itself ..., Althusser's work ... defined itself as explicitly anti-humanist at a time when the official French party doctrine extolled the virtues of humanism as a common bond ... in the building of an advanced democracy (Ibid.: 39).

By the late 1970s, there was already a growing resistance

to his ideas. Persuasive criticisms involving every facet of his work were levelled by critics from various currents of Marxism, as well as from positions outside this theoretical domain. A. Glucksmann, unlike most of Althusser's critics, does not approach his work from within the bounds of the classical position on revolutionary Marxism, but is located instead within the tradition of European philosophy that pre-dates Marx. This enabled him "to show how close Althusser's affinities are with his pre-Marxist predecessors, and how intimately his system is related to the 'high' tradition of philosophical discourse" (Anon., *New Left Review*, 72: 62).

Within the Marxist tradition, Althusser's commentators take up a variety of positions, from structuralism (Collier, Hindess and Hirst) to overt humanism (Keat and Urry, Sayer, McDonnel and Robins, and Seidler); while other are ranged at various points along this continuum (Geras, Saunders and Callinicos).

It is not the aim of this thesis to pronounce a conclusive judgement on the ultimate validity of either Althusser's work or that of his critics. The latter are dealt with primarily in order to uncover those criticisms that Castells was attempting to deflect by changes in his approach. It is these changes which will be subjected to detailed evaluation, in terms of their degree of consistency with and correspondence to the Althusserian system that Castells supposedly espoused. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that the debate concerning Althusser's epistemology has a multitude of levels, and that his opponents did not always have a common epistemological

approach, neither did they suspend these differences in order to dispatch Althusser into theoretical disrepute.

Althusser's repudiation was also far from absolute and universal. He had, and still has, a number of distinguished and scholarly apologists who have frequently and effectively impugned certain accusations made against him; and often levelled countercharges against the critics. Not only did Althusser's opponents have to defend their statements from his protagonists, but even when unified in the desire to discredit him, theoretical divergences led them to break ranks and assail each other.

Perhaps the loneliest voice in the *mêlée* was Thompson's, for the vitriol of his rejection of Althusser led even a number of Althusser's critics to temper his grandiose and peremptory accusations by acknowledging aspects of Althusserian epistemology that were positive and should be retained.

While it is hard not to admire the glittering virtuosity of Thompson's acerbic turn of phrase, the wordy warfare he conducts against Althusser does not always work to his own advantage. Nield and Seed, who are sympathetic to the gist of Thompson's critique, nevertheless find it necessary to qualify their support (Nield and Seed, 1979). For them, Thompson has neglected the "essential provisionality" of any debate: "This has the effect of inflating the 'exchange' beyond its proper sphere, of transforming sharply articulated and contrary polemics into a final, absolute struggle for the same space - possession of the Marxist tradition" (Ibid.: 386).

They also point to Thompson's omission to outline the debilitated nature of pre-Althusserian leftist theoretical discourse, which made it particularly susceptible to Althusser's epistemological assertions. The desire to rout Althusserian trends once and for all inclines Thompson to replace dialectical critique with an attack redolent of religious and moral fervour. More specifically, Thompson "remains too much at a distance for a close analytical distinction among various Althusserian positions and refuses analytically to disarticulate the Althusserian system ... Yet, paradoxically, in this as in other ways, this uncompromising stance reproduced the very technique of closure which Thompson so rightly resents in Althusser's method. (Ibid.: 397).

Many of Nield and Seed's criticisms have been supported by Anderson (1980). He too discusses Thompson's neglect of the historical and conjunctural circumstances in which Althusser wrote, and the influence these had on the nature and impact of his work (Ibid.: 105). Like Nield and Seed, Anderson objects to the polemical style of Thompson's work, claiming that the latter was so incensed by the imagined conclusions of Reading Capital that he failed to "engage intellectually" with it: "Defeating his own intention, his pages remain more abstract and declaratory than those he is attacking" (Ibid.: 66).

Anderson also finds fault with the way in which Thompson has misread Althusser, and exemplifies this by referring to Thompson's claim that Althusser has incorrectly identified the mode of production with the social formation. Here, Anderson

provides a timely reminder that it was Althusser and Balibar who invented this very distinction (Ibid.: 67). Another misreading, according to Anderson, is Thompson's equation of Althusser and Stalin, which occurs "at the most generic levels of abstraction: mechanism, dogmatism, anti-humanism, elitism, irrationalism" (Ibid.: 105). Thompson, he says, has failed to back up this allegation; in fact, the only quotation of Stalin that Thompson examines is one with which Althusser clearly does not concur (Ibid.).

Thompson's attempt to restore validity to human experience after the Althusserian 'onslaught', is itself far from unproblematic: he overlooks the fact that agency/knowledge is subject to the limitation that it does not frequently uncover social relations as such (Ibid.:27); and further does not provide the means to distinguish between valid and invalid experience, for he identifies experience with wisdom and perception. (Ibid.)

In implicit support of Althusser, Collier discusses problems involved in the wholesale rejection of epistemology evident in recent critiques of Althusser. For Collier, Callinicos exemplifies this trend, by "unwittingly appealing to the attractiveness of ... historicist confusion" and thereby "opening the floodgates of idealism" (Collier, 1979:57). Collier emphasizes that the mere fact that a political practice may spawn theory is not in itself a sufficient validation of the latter: It may be necessary to challenge spontaneous theorization with a scientific theory, in order to transform

practice from a mystified to a clear-sighted one" (Ibid.: 56). While Collier charges that Callinicos has misinterpreted aspects of Althusser's epistemology, or read into it elements which it does not in fact contain, Collier's criticism of Callinicos is itself open to the allegation that, in his defence of Althusser, his interpretation of the latter is particularly forgiving, and has glossed over some of the more unpalatable and unequivocal statements by Althusser concerning theoretical autonomy and the role of the class struggle.

Conclusions

The criticisms directed at Althusser left Castells with three alternatives: abandon the attempt to elevate urban sociology from an ideology to the status of a science (as defined by Althusser); accept the criticisms of the implications of Althusser's position; or develop a stance that does not have the disadvantages of either of these approaches. Castells doesn't make the choice, he expediently affiliates himself both with the critics and with Althusser, embracing principles and then repudiating them, in an attempt to cream off the theoretical advantages and then decamp before the price of that position becomes too high.

I shall further argue that Castells' use of Althusserian concepts is far from consistent: he has significantly altered almost every controversial tenet of the latter, while neglecting to acknowledge that these changes are in fact distortions which are in direct opposition to the character and

theoretical intentions of Althusserianism.

Thus it is not, as Castells suggests, the epistemological dimension which makes his writings difficult to grasp (Castells, 1977a: vii), it is rather the way in which he wavers between contradictory epistemological worlds: if he wishes to retain anthropological, humanistic and empiricist assumptions, he will have to dispense with far more of the Althusserian position than he appears willing to.

He attempts to qualify his allegiance to Althusser, but only in the most tentative manner, for to dismiss Althusserianism in any significant way would be tantamount to stripping his own work of any theoretical status. He concedes only that "certain discussions" around the concepts employed by Althusser were superfluous, and corrects himself as to the "degree" of formalism in his own construction. Even this qualification is qualified: "The excesses of the Althusserian language do not undermine the relevance of the concepts advanced (Ibid.: ix). Couched in such a vague and generalistic fashion, these concessions are hardly helpful. Castells does not elaborate on which conceptual discussions were superfluous, nor does he identify the locations of "excess" in the Althusserian language. In order to determine the extent to which criticisms of the Althusserian schema apply to Castells, it would be useful to know precisely which concepts Castells has dispensed with, which he retained, the criteria on which these choices were made, and the implications of these for theoretical consistency.

Thus, this thesis sets out to:

1. identify those aspects of Castells' work which are based on Althusser's writings;
2. outline Althusser's position on each of these aspects, and determine whether Castells was able to employ Althusser's epistemological concepts - in other words, whether Castells' work achieves scientificity in Althusserian terms;
3. assess the theoretical compatibility between the Althusserian method and Castells' frequent emphasis on empirical research;
4. determine the extent to which Castells contradicts both himself and Althusser, and evaluate the way in which this undermines his claim to have provided a theoretical alternative to the ideology of urban sociology;
5. describe certain unresolved and theoretically inconsistent aspects of the original Althusserian texts, which may provide at least partial justification for Castells' difficulties; and
6. examine Castells' subsequent epistemological amendments in order to ascertain the theoretical implications of these for the validity of his early work.

THE SOCIAL FORMATION

Castells has explicitly chosen as his analytical framework the set of concepts formulated by Althusser concerning the nature of the social totality: "We shall take as our point of departure, at a very general level, the set of concepts developed by Louis Althusser ... The central concept is that of mode of production. By mode of production is meant not the economic but a specific form of articulation of the fundamental elements (instances) of the social structure, namely the economic, political-legal, ideological and possibly other 'systems'. In every mode of production one system, which varies in identity, is dominant, and the place of this system in the structure characterizes the mode of production in question. In every mode of production one system is determinant in the last instance. This system is invariant; it is always the economic. It is the type of economic system ... which explains which system is dominant in each mode of production ... A particular historical society (social formation) is the particular mix of several modes of production, one of which is dominant" (Castells, 1976: 149-50).

Althusser's concept of the mode of production attempts to establish both the significance of the superstructure and the primacy of the economy. The social totality cannot be seen in terms of the base/superstructure image which implies the idea of a determinant base; nor as an expressive totality, which is the expression of a single element; nor as composed

of interacting and more or less equal factors.

He describes the specific structure of the Marxist whole as a complex structured unity of distinct, relatively autonomous instances with distinct types of development. While the hierarchy of these instances is determined by the economy, the economy is never 'pure', it has to be examined in conjunction with the political and ideological superstructures. Similarly, ideology and politics are not mere expressions of the economy, for they possess their own laws of development (Althusser & Balibar 1970: 99-100). Relative autonomy enables all the instances to develop in different ways, thus they are not part of a homogeneous sequence in which all instances simultaneously have identical forms. The unity of the Althusserian totality is the unity of a complex of instances at uneven levels of development. He uses the term 'conjuncture' to describe the fact that an analysis of a social formation at any point in time will show a specific complex unity - the necessary co-existence of of necessarily uneven instances (Ibid.)

Althusser's conception of the social formation was intended to oppose the assertion that Marx had simply inverted Hegel's dialectic. While Hegel and Marx had in common the idea of history as a process motored by its internal contradictions, they did not share the same view on the nature of these contradictions. For Hegel, the totality was an expressive one: each of the parts expressed all the others as well as the social totality: the totality was thus present and could

be discerned in each of its components. The unity of the Hegelian whole is determined by the identity of opposites. The structure of the dialectic in this system is determined by its function: the resumption of material existence into the ideal. Hegel's dialectic is a theodicy, setting out to explain the unity of God and the world. The Althusserian dialectic, however, insists on the materiality of the world, the distinctiveness of its elements, and their unity in the necessary relations of subordination and dominance. Marxist history develops according to the relations of its distinct instances, none of which are reducible to any of the others. That the social whole is composed of a complex set of structures, partly autonomous, partly conditions of existence for each other, does not mean that the social whole consists of any combination of elements in any order: it has a 'structure-in-dominance' (Ibid.: 98-99). The contradiction between the social relations of production and the forces of production within the economic instance gives rise to the character of the social totality, for it establishes which of all the instances is to be dominant. However, this does not mean that Althusser underestimates the influence of the superstructure: "in History, these instances, the superstructures, are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or when the time comes" (Althusser, 1969: 113).

Althusser's social totality attempted to establish the last-instance determination of the economy without reverting

to crude material reductionism, while simultaneously avoiding the empiricist version of the social formation which portrays the relationship between base and superstructure as one of essence and phenomena.

Structural causality is based on Marx's concept of the 'Darstellung' which described the structure as nothing but its effects (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 188-9). It refers to the determination of the regional structures by the global structure, and the determination of the regional structures by the constituent elements. The structure is a specific combination of its elements, and its unity consists of a specific complexity of levels or instances which are articulated with each other according to fixed determinations while possessing a degree of relative autonomy from each other (Ibid.: p. 97). In this sense, the superstructure has a relative autonomy with respect to the base: it has a certain independence, the extent of which is nevertheless fixed. The unity of the structured whole is thus to be found in the specific complexity of levels or instances such as the economic, the political or the ideological. These levels are not empirically determined, they are not visible entities, but are sites within the structure of a mode of production. An instance must be seen in terms of its articulation with other instances, and the internal articulation of the elements of which it is comprised. It is this which characterizes the structuralist approach.

Causation cannot be understood outside of process: this

type of causation is described by Althusser as an "immense machine", or "play without an author", since the structure and process of the social formation are not contingent upon human volition. It is thus the internal relations of production which must be analyzed, rather than any external structural determination. It is in this sense that Althusser talks of an "absent cause", or the existence of a structure through its effects, which he refers to as "metonymic causality" (Ibid.: 188).

The superstructure is separate from the economic structure although they are mutually dependent on each other. They both have specific effectivity (they are determined as well as determining), and every instance has its own part to play in determining the characteristics of the whole as well as being determined by it (Ibid.: 99-100). In the Althusserian system, the superstructure consists of two practices: politics and ideology. Theoretical practice, it should be noted, is separate from and irreducible to the superstructural instances of the social formation. Science is not regarded as a practice in simply a descriptive sense: its homology with the other practices is the basis with which to differentiate it from them, in spite of the similarity of the elements of their respective problematics (Ibid.: 58-9). As a practice, science transforms, by means of labour, a raw material into a product. As with the other practices, this is a genuine transformation, and can be exemplified by

science's break from ideology, which entails the creation of a new product from ideological raw materials.

While science, politics and ideology have the same structure, Althusser maintains that science's object is the superstructural practices. By making the distinction in this way, Althusser is separating science from society, and giving it a history separate from social history. According to Althusser, each mode of production has its own time and history, influenced in a particular way by the development of the productive forces (Ibid.: 108-9). While science may be generated by an ideology, it breaks away from it in order to attain its status as a science, and thus has a relatively autonomous history, a peculiar form of temporality which marks it off from the history of the ideological, politico-legal and economic superstructures (Ibid.: 99).

As the social totality is comprised of relatively autonomous instances, each with its own historical time, it follows that the superstructure has a different time and history from scientific formations, and it would thus be impossible for theoretical answers to emerge from political practice.

The term 'overdetermination' was originally employed by Freud to describe how one dream image consists of various dream thoughts or unconscious desires, or how various phenomena or symptoms can be combined into one (M. Glucksmann, 1974a: 237). Althusser adapts its usage to express the social formations's intricate structure of contradictions, unlike

the expressive totality in which contradictions necessarily occur at all levels of the social formation at the same time, or permeate all the levels simultaneously from some 'principal contradiction' to be found in the economic base (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 111). Althusser's theory of overdetermination is in opposition to the Hegelian totality which expresses itself through all the spheres of life as the 'spirit of the time' or the spiritual essence organizing the historical moment.

For Althusser there is never an original or single cause: there is inevitably a complex of determinations and levels. He uses the concept of overdetermination to deny that the relationship between the economic base and the political and ideological superstructure is a simple relation between an essence and its phenomena: economic production exists within a regional complex of instances which are the conditions of existence of the economic base just as that base is itself the condition of existence of the other instances (Ibid.: 188). Non-economic instances have their own effectivity: they are determining as well as determined, and each contributes to the shaping of the overall mode of production of which they are constituent elements. There is no single contradiction which determines everything: instead determination is complex, and involves a multiplicity of contradictions, each with differential effectivities within the social formation. The existence of a number of relatively autonomous levels results in an accumulation of effective determinations in what is

termed an overdetermined contradiction: at each stage of the historical process there is one primary overdetermining contradiction which fuses all the contradictions into a structure-in-dominance (Ibid.:108). Here Althusser is rejecting the identification of the last instance contradiction with the dominant contradiction. Determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy and the superstructural instances. The economic instance is only determinant in that it assigns the dominant role from one instance to another (Ibid.: 58).

Thus, a distinction is made between determinance in the last instance by the economy, and the dominant role which may be taken by any level in the social formation. That the existence of a social formation need not necessarily be economic, is illustrated by the case of Ancient social formations, where the dominant level was the political one. As opposed to an expressive totality, then, there is no simple primacy of the economic level: a social formation always exists as a structured complex whole whose elements and contradictions are maintained in determinate relations of domination and subordination. The levels of the social formation are different not only because they refer to separate practices, but also because each of them differs in its 'index of effectivity', or its ability to determine the others. Their unity is based on a hierarchical relationship

between the levels; in which the economic determines, in the last instance, the political and ideological levels, but is simultaneously overdetermined by each of them (Ibid.: 106-7).

The Althusserian conception of overdetermined contradictions can be seen in Castells' work: "Every fundamental contradiction which is not regulated by the system results in an overdetermined contradiction within the political system ... contradictions become organized among the places of the different systems according to a content defined by the relation(s) which characterize the function of the system in the social structure (Castells, 1976c: 167). He also claims that the terms of a Marxist analysis must not confine itself to a simple contradiction between capital and labour (Idem, 1977a:2).

This structuralist conception of the contradictory nature of the social formation does away with the explanation of social change in terms of individuals, for their actions are thought to be determined by their specific place in the structure. Structural effects are not generated by individual consciousness but by a particular combination of the practices as determined by the structure. Furthermore, the relations between the social classes of a particular society are the effect on social relations of the complex combination of modes of production articulated within it (Idem, 1976c: 150). Thus the capacity for societal modification exists only within structural bounds.

Unlike many aspects of Althusser's work which Castells has merely interpolated in his own writings without any thematic consistency or integration, Althusser's conception of the social formation has been directly applied in Castells' formulation of the urban.

For Castells, the urban structure is the territorial expression of the capitalist mode of production, hence "the rules of the urban system are easy to determine since they are simply specifications of the general rules of the mode of production" (Ibid.: 168). He further states that "Each system is made up of interrelated elements. The way in which these structural elements are articulated in certain types of relations defined by the state of the system, itself dependent on the general matrix of the mode of production" (Ibid.: 150).

All society and therefore all social forms such as space are based on the historical articulation of a number of modes of production. Space expresses the social structure and is arranged by elements of the economic, political and ideological instances, by their combination and by the social practices from which they proceed. The real forces of urbanization are therefore located in the economic, political and ideological levels of the historically specific mode of production.

Castells' complexly articulated structure is divided into three instances, which are in turn divided into a number of sub-elements. The empirical objects, institutions and processes of the urban system can be classified in terms of

this matrix. The urban system is a means of conceptualizing the relations of production and of consumption which sustain the mode of production; hence each agglomeration will possess economic structures (e.g. housing, transport and the organization of space for production); politico-juridical structures (institutions of law and government) which reflect and sustain the economic relations; and ideological structures which legitimize those relations.

The economic instance is divided into production, consumption and exchange; and production, for example, comprises elements internal to the work process (e.g. factories and raw materials), relations between the work process and the economic instance as a whole (e.g. the industrial environment), and relations between the work process and the other instances (e.g. administration, information) (Castells, 1977a: 235, 238-9; 1976c: 154-5). Thus Castells claims that space can be analyzed in terms of "the structural and conjunctural laws that govern its existence and transformation, and the specificity of its articulation with the other elements of historical reality" (Idem, 1977a: 115).

There is, however, a serious problem with Castells' application of the Althusserian social totality. He concentrates solely on the 'pure' capitalist mode of production, while ignoring the Althusserian insistence that any social formation contains a number of different modes of production in complex combination. Harloe points out that "the lack of

an answer by Castells to this problem casts doubt on the validity and usefulness of the elaboration of the urban system as it is presented, in his work, as a preliminary stage for the examination of urban practices" (Harloe, 1977: 20). For Garnier too, the separation of the capitalist mode of production from its structural determinations, renders Castells' analysis incapable of comprehending the complex nature of reality (Ibid.: 21).

Further problems involved in Castells' interpretation of the social totality will be discussed in terms of the concept of relative autonomy.

Castells and Relative Autonomy

It has been seen that Althusser's conception of the social totality was intended to recognize the last-instance determination by the economy, without reverting to either material reductionism or the empiricist version of the social formation which portrays the relationship between base and superstructure as one of essence and phenomena. His solution is largely based on the notion of relative autonomy. While the instances of the social formation are complexly ordered into a hierarchy whose levels of subordination are determined, in the last instance, by the chief contradiction in the economic level, each instance possesses a degree of relative autonomy; which means that instances do not, at any time, find themselves at the same level of development. The complex whole of reciprocally dependent and yet diversely developed instances

exhibits a concrete state of relationships at every moment in history (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 98-100).

The unity of the social formation is not an homogeneous one, it is the unity of essentially uneven instances, and manifests the relative autonomy of the different instances and the differential historical time scales according to which they develop. The degree of autonomy should always be seen as relative: while the mode of production consists of structures which are partly independent, they are also inextricably related; for example, there is never a time when the economy is 'pure', for it has to be seen in conjunction with the political and ideological structures (Ibid.).

Althusser's concept of relative autonomy is a departure from the idea of a determinant base which is fundamental to the base/superstructure metaphor. The political implications of economic reductionism became apparent in the Marxism of the Second International. In this interpretation, natural laws governed the economy and the superstructure, social change took place according to fixed principles, and the capitalist mode of production would inevitably culminate in socialism. There was thus no need to intervene in the class struggle, and reformist practices were justified. What this approach failed to consider was that Marxism was not simply or even at all an economic theory, but set out to theorize the social totality, and the relations between the economy and the other instances of the whole. The Marxist depiction of the economy is as a social and historical entity,

unified by the social relations of production and the productive forces, rather than by the technological conditions of material production. Marx did not regard the technological development of the productive forces as the motor for the development of capitalism, which was seen instead as a result of the emergence of capitalist social relations of production (Callinicos, 1976: 41).

Another view of the totality that Althusser wishes to avoid is that it is composed of interacting and equal elements. The concept of relative autonomy also disputed the historicist interpretation which stripped theoretical practice of its specificity, assimilated it to the other practices, and grouped them all under a solitary notion of practice in general: historical practice or, simply, praxis. In this approach, theory relinquishes its relative autonomy in order to merge with the unique real history of the social totality, and Marxism can no longer be seen as a specific scientific practice developing on its own site, for it is produced by the experience and activity of the proletariat. The history of science would be evaluated only by the criterion of class.

Althusser's conception of the social totality rejects the historicity of the conditions and processes of knowledge, which becomes absolutely autonomous. This ambiguity in the concept of relative autonomy has resulted in confusion concerning the relationship between the base and the superstructure, and the role of consciousness in political practice. This problem of politics is specific to a dehistoricized totality like

Althusser's, because for many others there is no rupture between theory and politics, and thus no problem of their fusion in a revolutionary situation (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 131). While Althusser has argued that science is relatively independent, organically related to the other social practices, he does not elaborate the nature of this relationship, and we are left with a gesture rather than a substantive theory (Geras, 1972a: 80-1).

Fraser maintains that in Althusser's conception of relative autonomy, the productive structure ceased to have a primary causal, and hence explanatory role for the capitalist mode of production. Thus, the structures of society, thought to be propelled by material production in the last instance, are primarily self-explanatory and self-moving. In repudiating the notion of society as an expressive totality, Althusser does not take into account the fact that capitalism is a contradictory totality whose contradictions develop historically. Capitalist production is thus replaced by an interplay of structural functions, and structure ultimately replaces Marx's distinction of structure from superstructure. The economic becomes an 'instance', a logical moment, not real and ever and co-present: "The solidity and material character of the mode of production is lost in the play of relatively autonomous elements (Fraser, 1976: 449). Althusser's vague statement about determination in the last instance has no meaning as long as we are not able to define the limits of

the relative autonomy granted to other domains of social life, especially those of the superstructure (Ibid.).

Castells saw in the concept of relative autonomy the potential for resolving the two primary problems he faced in his development of urban theory: the dichotomies between determinism/voluntarism, and political autonomy/economism. Firstly, he wished to go beyond the Althusserian limitation on the role of the individual as that of 'bearer' of the social structure, but he did not want to replace this with the Weberian notion of the effectivity of individual action. Furthermore, while he did not want to attribute total autonomy to the political instance, he also wished to refrain from the view that the state, or the political instance, is determined in some simple way by the economic instance (Saunders, 1979: 200).

Another problem that Castells had to overcome was urban sociology's overemphasis on spatial determinants of social behaviour, to the exclusion of social determinants such as class. Examining mainstream urban sociology, Castells finds this "urban ideology" in Wirth's assumption that the city gives rise to urbanism; and in Lefebvre's argument that urban density has the potential of generating a new utopian urban society; and in the empirical studies which posit a causal link between city form and modes of urban existence.

The concept of relative autonomy that Castells employed to counter the urban ideology had its explicit origin in the Althusserian conception of the social formation, which was

divided into instances or levels, each with their own specific effectivity.

The application of the concept of relative autonomy in the critique of urban sociology is exemplified by Castells' rebuttal of Wirth's stress on the effects of settlement characteristics such as size and density on urbanism as a way of life. Castells argues that urbanism is culturally determined: it is a cultural system characteristic of capitalist industrial society (Castells, 1977a: 77). By failing to acknowledge the influence of the capitalist mode of production on spatial forms, Wirth is granting spatial forms total autonomy with regard to the production of the urban way of life. It has been suggested in this regard that Castells is substituting an autonomous emphasis on societal characteristics (e.g. the capitalist mode of production) for Wirth's thesis concerning the effects of settlement characteristics, but Pickvance points out that Castells' statement that both spatial forms and urbanism depend on the capitalist mode of production does not exclude a relationship between spatial form and urbanism, for the theory of relative autonomy would not permit the total determination of spatial forms by the capitalist mode of production: spatial forms would have their own relative autonomy and specific effectivity in terms of both the mode of production and urbanism (Pickvance, 1974a: 213).

articulated structure. On the basis of a convoluted and problematic process of elimination (which will be discussed in the section on collective consumption), Castells argues that the urban is not to be defined in the politico-judicial instance, nor in the economic instance, because neither of them adequately contain recognized urban phenomena. He then concludes that the urban system is to be defined as the particular way in which the elements of the economic system are articulated within a unit of collective consumption.

The social structure on which social processes in units of collective consumption are based, is defined by the set of relations between the two fundamental elements of the economic system and the two elements which derive from them. The economic instance is comprised of four elements: production, consumption, exchange and management. Taking the structuralist line, Castells argues that it is through the combination and interrelationships between these elements that space is structured (Ibid.: 442). The urban unity, he says, has to define the city in economic terms, and the role of production is concerned with reproducing the means of production, and this concerns regional issues. The 'urban', then, is held to refer to the processes relating to labour power, and the study of the urban is thus the study of the reproduction of labour power. The concept of relative autonomy is incorporated in this definition of the urban by an acknowledgement that while urban problems are partly structurally defined by their

places in the conjuncture of a particular urban system, they are also defined by their places in the general social structure, in the systems and elements of the overall ideological and politico-legal instances (Idem, 1976c: 154-5).

The relative autonomy of the political instance is used by Castells as the means of subscribing to the notion of effective class struggle while maintaining the Althusserian conception of the social totality. Castells here employs the concepts developed by Poulantzas (1973), who was attempting to go beyond the functionalist aspect of the Althusserian system, in which class struggle is relegated to the ideological instance rather than being permitted any political effectivity. Poulantzas set out to incorporate the idea that the class struggle is the motor of history, with Althusser's structural-functionalist conception of society: "The theory of class is inserted between the structure and the state, so that the state is subject to a double determination. In the first place, it is determined directly by the structure as a specific functional level of that structure. Secondly, its functioning in practice, within limits determined by its place in the structure, is subject to the conditions of the class struggle, which are in turn determined, at least partially, by the structure (Clarke, 1977: 11).

Poulantzas attributed to the political instance (equated with the state) a relative autonomy, which means in this context that there is no simple relation of causation between

the economic instance and the actions of the state (Poulantzas, 1973: 29). The relative autonomy of the state from the economic instance enables the state to pursue certain policies which run counter to the economic interests of the dominant class in order to ensure its political stability (Ibid.: 282). For Poulantzas, the primary role of the state is political. It functions to organize the political interests of the dominant class (the different fractions of capital under the hegemony of monopoly capital) and fragments the interests of the dominated classes (Ibid.,: 130-7). State power has to achieve relative autonomy in order that it is not immediately identifiable with a single fraction of the conjuncture. This formulation also discounts any long-term action simply to the benefit of a single fraction of capital, and allows an explanation of situations in which state power is even employed against dominant classes (Ibid.: 191-4).

Castells applies this notion of relative autonomy to develop a conception of the role of the state as that of system regulator: while the state can exercise its relative autonomy by making economic concessions to the dominated classes, its autonomy is confined to fulfilling the eventual interests of monopoly capital (Castells, 1976c: 166, and 1977a: Ch. 13). The class struggle is employed by the state in its regulative function, in that its intervention, exhibiting as it does the conjuncture's balance of class forces, diminishes the class struggle in the interests of monopoly capital. Castells refers to this role of the state

as "bi-polar", by which he means that the state apparatus not only exercises class domination, but also attempts to regulate the crises of the system in order to preserve it. State reforms "aim to preserve and extend the existing context, thus consolidating the long-term interests of the dominant classes, even if it involves invoking their privileges to some extent in a particular conjuncture" (Ibid.: 208).

The concept of relative autonomy can also be seen in the second regulative function of the state, which is the undermining of any possible unity between the dominated classes. This goal is accomplished in two ways. Firstly, by supporting the notion of individual volition, the state encourages members of classes to exist as separate individuals rather than as agents of classes (Ibid.: 250-1). Secondly, because the state is relatively autonomous, it is able to give concessions to dominated classes at the economic level, provided this does not endanger the domination of capital at the political level (Ibid.: 209).

This interpretation of relative autonomy is used by Castells to explain how the state can meet the demands of the working class to finance social items that are not in the short-term interests of the dominant class (since, for example, it raises taxation), and yet continue to fulfil the long-term interests of the capitalist classes by fostering social cohesion.

In this conception of the role of the state, Castells is

drawing heavily on Poulantzas' theoretical approach, which was intended to counter the view of the state as the neutral agent of political administration, as well as the economistic Marxist portrayal of the state as the instrument of a particular class (Poulantzas, 1973). In Poulantzas' schema, class struggles are precipitated by contradictions within the social totality, and these class struggles determine the way in which the state deals with these contradictions. Although the general role of the state is to preserve dominant class interests (Castells, 1977a: 137-41), its type of response inevitably takes into account the political equilibrium of class forces at that particular conjuncture. Thus, the state's actions are determined by the demands of the working as well as the ruling classes (Ibid.: 256-7, 282-8).

For Poulantzas, state power is a function of class relations, and can be discerned through class practices: the state manifests the distribution of power between the various classes at that time (Poulantzas, 1973: 51, 54, 115). In opposition to the traditional Marxist distinction between classes in and for themselves, Poulantzas holds that classes are constituted by their practices, which develop simultaneously through economic, political and ideological struggles. Classes are not mere economic groupings which get involved with political struggles as a secondary activity: they are the result of an ensemble of structures and of their relations (Ibid.: 63). Political struggles are an integral part of

class practices, and these practices occur in all three levels of the social formation. Due to the relative autonomy between the levels, political groupings are not mere expressions of economic categories.

For Castells, it is possible to approach the study of politics in two ways: through the study of urban planning (the intervention of the political instance on the urban system to ensure the reproduction of the dominant mode of production), or through the study of urban social movements (Castells, 1976c: 149; 1977a: 260-1). Castells defines urban planning with reference to the relatively autonomous role of the state: urban planning consists of state intervention in the field of consumption (reproduction of labour power) with the aim of ensuring the continued reproduction of capitalism. An urban social movement is defined as an organization of the system of actors (conjuncture of class relations) leading to the production of a qualitatively new effect on the social structure. The new effect can refer to either of two situations: a change, at the structural level, in the law of the dominant system (which in the capitalist mode of production is the economic system); or a change at the level of practices, which involves a modification in the balance of forces in a direction counter to institutionalized social domination. The most characteristic index of the latter change is a substantial transformation in the system of

authority (i.e. in the political-legal apparatus) or in the strengthening of class organisations (Idem, 1976c: 151).

The relative roles of the state, urban planning and urban social movements in the production of urban effects are spelled out by Castells in the following way: "If it is true that the State expresses, in the last instance and through the necessary mediations, the overall interests of the dominant classes, then urban planning cannot be an instrument of social change, but only one of domination, integration and regulation of contradictions" (Castells, 1973, cited by Pickvance, 1975: 203). In urban social movements, however, widespread mobilization occurs; social requirements are provided with political expression; and different forms of organization of collective consumption, in opposition to capitalism, are established. Thus, Castells argues, it is urban social movements and not planning institutions which are the genuine sources of urban transformation.

The concept of relative autonomy is applied to urban social movements to contradict the Althusserian limitation on the role of the class struggle. Castells claims that it is the urban system that one must examine in order to detect the basic contradictions of capital accumulation. These appear to be contested by an urban base, which, in certain circumstances, can transform itself into movements of resistance and struggle. Castells does not only employ relative autonomy

to establish the relative autonomy of the political from the economic, but also posits a relative autonomy between the levels of the structure and the corresponding practices. Structural changes take place according to the "mediation of social practices": human actions, while determined by the location of human actors within the structure, are nevertheless inherently contradictory, and inevitably give rise to "dislocations", which have the capacity of effecting structural changes (Idem: 1977a: 125). Thus, while structural contradictions generate practices, these practices create new effects within the system in terms of how they articulate the contradictions. Following Poulantzas, Castells says that political practice "is not simply a vehicle of structured effects: it produces new effects" (Ibid.), and argues that any concrete situation consists of systems of practices, defined by their position in the structure, but whose secondary effects express a relative autonomy, capable of redefining the situation beyond their structural charge (Ibid.: 126). While the state mediates in the realm of collective consumption in a way that functionally assists the dominant class, Castells claims that it also gives rise to a new set of system contradictions. Briefly, he asserts that the concentration of capital in advanced monopoly capitalism depends on a concentration of the workforce in urban units (residential units, geared to consumption practices), and so the worker's consumption becomes prone to increasing socialization.

Castells maintains that this entails means of consumption which need large-scale provision which cannot or will not be provided by private enterprise, and that this leads to growing state intervention. In terms of his earlier definition of urban politics as referring to state intervention and urban social movements, its specific subject matter is collective consumption.

Castells' use of the concept of relative autonomy appears to create more problems than it dispels. For Saunders, it has been unable to explain the relationship between structures and practices on the one hand, and economics and politics on the other; for the tension it is supposed to remove is in fact merely reproduced within the concept itself (Saunders, 1979: 201).

Castells has tried to show that structural contradictions (urban crises) give rise to urban social movements, but the development of the latter and their consequences for system change is influenced by political practice: "Since the structures exist only in practices; the specific organization of these practices produces autonomous (thought determined) effects that are not all contained simply in the deployment of structural laws"(Castells 1977a:244). Saunders suggests that if structural contradictions do not in themselves determine class practices, then there must be another causal agency at work. If the same structural contradictions can give rise to different forms of political struggle, and if these in turn result in different political effects,

then the theory of structures has not been able to account for class practices (Saunders, 1979, 201). Castells appears to be unaware of the fact that Althusserian structuralism is limited to a deterministic interpretation of class practices. While Castells wishes to connect class struggle to contradictions in the system, this interrelationship is expressly excluded by his chosen theoretical system. This point is taken up by Garnier, who objects to Castells' 'structuralism' on the grounds that it is unable to relate the contradictions of social practice with the urban structure: "The dynamics of urban transformation are not explained by the a posteriori introduction of social relations and political class practices, as these latter embody the relations between certain structural effects. The social contradictions which define the class struggle are not therefore exterior to the structural logic" (Garnier, 1973; cited by Harloe, 1977: 18-19). While Castells insists that structures and practices are not separable, his inability to relate the two can be seen in his analytical treatment of them. This consists of an "abstract series of taxonomies" (Harloe, 1977: 18) of the urban structure and urban politics. The latter is then divided into urban planning and urban social movements, and although he stresses that these are inextricably related, he does not relate his structural analyses of urban planning policies to his analyses of practices in the form of urban social movements (Idem: 1979: 130). Furthermore, "his claim that one can analyze urban politics from two perspectives, depending on whether 'the analysis

bears on a modification of the relations between the instances of the logic of the social formation or the processes of its transformation' shows that he does indeed again operationalize the structures/practices distinction" (Ibid.: 131). This problem in Castells' work leads Lojkine to comment that class practices are tacked on to Castells' analysis in an attempt to provide an explanation for social transformation in what is really a functionalist, self-regulatory system (Lojkine, 1976, cited by Harloe, 1977: 132). Structures and practices cannot be combined in the way Castells wants to, without bringing in the idea of the effectivity of individual action, which would of course fly in the face of Althusser's conception of the individual as a mere 'bearer' of the social structure, and as such incapable of emerging from ideological mystification. The connection between structures and practices can only be explained by showing how class practices mediate structural contradictions, and how members of different classes come to grasp their objective situations. Thus it is essential to incorporate the idea of human actors, with their own goals, beliefs and values, in order to elucidate the way in which particular groups generate different types of political practices. "The theory, in other words, necessarily entails a notion of conscious human subjects who act, for while the system is apparently riven with contradictions, these count for nothing unless people act upon them. Castells,

however, remains implacably opposed to the 'ideological' analysis of 'actors', and as a result his theory stops at the crucial point regarding the explanation of class 'practices'. By attempting to avoid both structural determinism and an action frame of reference, Castells' theory falls between the two" (Saunders, 1979: 202). Thus, for many of Castells' critics, his application of the methodology of relatively autonomous levels has resulted in a deadlock in his work, and has prevented an analysis of the interdependent interaction of political and class relations (Duncan, 1981: 248), and this has resulted in the accusation that he has been unable to overcome the problems he was trying to correct in Althusser's work.

Castells' insistence that the class struggle is the motor of state regulation diminishes the capability of the former to precipitate any substantial system modification. This portrayal of the class struggle is a functionalist one, and does not tie in with Castells' description of urban social movements as capable of effecting social change. For Saunders, this problem in Castells' work explains why he found so little evidence for urban social movements in his study of Dunkerque, for his theory of the state leads him to dismiss most kinds of political protest as being ineffective and employed by the state in its role as system regulator (Saunders, 1979: 205). This problem also occurs in Castells' examination of urban renewal in Paris, grassroots movements for urban reform in

Montreal, and squatter settlements in Chile before and during the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. "His evidence shows that neither the Canadian nor the Parisian movements achieved the qualitative changes that Castells uses as the basis of the definition of an urban social movement, although he claims that in Chile some of the squatter settlements, by linking up with the broader conflict between labour and capital then occurring, did help to achieve such a change. But it is unclear from the evidence that he presents that this urban movement really had any major effect; rather it looks as if the revolutionary nature of the squatter settlement derived from the fact that they were dominated by Popular Unity" (Harloe, 1979: 134-5).

An additional problem with Castells' application of relative autonomy concerns the relation of the economy to the state, or how the interests of the dominant class become manifested in the political regulation of the system. His depiction of the role of the state in this regard is said to be tautologous. For Elliott, Castells' theory has the character of a double-headed coin: "Where the public officials can be shown to act in support of big business then the classic Marxist views about the role of the state are confirmed, where they act counter to the interests of capital, they do so because they enjoy 'relative autonomy' " (Elliott, 1980: 155). Saunders echoes this allegation, arguing that reforms on behalf of the working class are explained in terms of

relative autonomy, while policies in support of capitalist interests are explained by the fact that this autonomy is only relative: "In other words, whether we collect evidence of the state acting in the interests of capital or against the interests of capital, the result is always the same: the theory stands" (Saunders, 1981b: 206). In summing up Castells' application of the concept of relative autonomy, Saunders argues that it is necessary to dismiss Castells' earlier structural theory of the relative autonomy of the state and the structurally imposed limits on its intervention, in favour of an approach that takes into account the historical nature of state intervention: "While there are signs in his later work of his willingness to move in this direction ... it is clear that he has yet to develop a theoretical perspective consistent with his new political strategy" (Idem, 1979: 206).

THEORY AND REALITY

One of Althusser's fundamental principles is a distinction between theory and reality. This position arises from Marx's statement in the Grundrisse that the real "survives in its independence, after as before, outside the head"; and that "The whole, as it appears in the mind as a thought-whole, is a product of the thinking mind" (Marx, 1953: 22).

Marx allegedly developed this distinction in his mature writings: in his earlier work he attempted to deal directly with the real, to abstract knowledge from its concrete existence. For Althusser, Marx's subsequent assertion that knowledge deals with the real concrete is a demonstration that he had broken with empiricism and its assumptions. Althusser develops this into an attack on empiricism, arguing that scientificity can only be achieved once one dispenses with any pretence that science deals with reality itself.

The question arises as to why Althusser made such a sharp distinction between theory and reality, between the object of knowledge and the real object. After all, as will become apparent in the criticisms of this distinction, Marx's position on this issue was at best ambiguous: many of his statements, even within his 'mature' writings, qualified and often contradicted this interpretation of the relation between theory and reality.

The answer can be seen in the context of Althusser's rebuttal of empiricism, which, it is held, gives the real

object, the concrete, as the starting point of knowledge. In this interpretation of empiricism, the process of knowledge production lies in an operation of the subject called abstraction. To know consists of abstracting from the real object its essence, the possession of which by the subject is then referred to as knowledge. Empiricism, with its opposition of subject and object, abstract and concrete, suggests that reality can be directly apprehended. This, in Althusser's view, entails a specific characterization of both the real and the knowledge of it. The real object is held to consist of two distinct parts, the essential and the inessential (the inessential is the visible exterior of the real object, while the essential is its invisible kernel). Thus both knowledge and the operation of knowledge (abstraction) are regarded as part of the essential/inessential structure of the real object (Althusser and Balibar: 36).

Althusser maintains that when empiricism appoints the essence as the object of knowledge, it concedes that the object of knowledge is not identical to the real object, for it is only one of the two parts of the real object. The difference between the object of knowledge and the real object is reduced to a simple distinction between the parts of the real object. By claiming that it is dealing with reality, knowledge is made dependant on the concrete living original. This model relies on the myth of the origin, an original unity between subject and object, between the real and the knowledge of it. Althusser counters that "we are never dealing with

a 'pure' sensuous intuition or representation, but with an ever-already complex raw material .. therefore knowledge never, as empiricism desperately demands that it should, confronts a pure object which is then identical to the real object" (Ibid.: 43). For Althusser, the theoretical object is completely separate from reality, and comprises the pre-existing concepts and theories which are transformed by science in its development of knowledge. Althusser is differentiating between our conceptual grasp of the real, and reality itself; between the thought process and the process of the real. For him, the object of knowledge is a product of thought which produces it in itself as a thought-concrete, a thought object; distinct from the real object, the real-concrete. Thought, like production in general, has a specific type of raw material on which it works with the theoretical means of production available (its theory, method and its technique, experimental or otherwise) in order to produce a theoretical product (Ibid.: 41). Althusser is also here distinguishing between reality and the scientific description of it. Facts do not present themselves accurately, thus observation of reality does not result in knowledge. The theoretical object does not correspond to the basic structural elements of reality (Ibid.: 42-3).

The distinction between real the theoretical objects is theoretically underpinned by Althusser's conception of practice (production). Economic practice, in which a raw material is transformed by labour into a product, is analogically extended to

politics, ideology and science. Each of these, while similar in structure, deals with its own particular raw material or object. This supposedly warrants the assertion that theory applies itself to a theoretical object, and is also held to provide the basis for the subsequent distinction between theory and metatheory: the 'society effect' is the object of historical materialism, while for dialectical materialism is reserved the object of the 'knowledge effect' (Ibid.,: 65-7). Most importantly for this discussion, the existence of separate objects or raw materials enables Althusser to separate 'genuine' theory from empiricism, which he places in the sphere of ideological practice because of its illusion that it is processing reality itself.

Althusser argues against any supposed connection between thought and the real, even if it is suggested that knowledge does not deal directly with the real object, but indirectly through an infinite series of mediations. In Althusser's opinion, mediation represents an ineffectual endeavour to fill the empty space between theoretical principles and reality. "These concepts, which have even flourished in the works of Marxist specialists, are tailor-made for the ideological functions expected of them ... In every case, the functions are those of masks and theoretical impostures - functions which may witness both to a real embarrassment and a real good will, but even in the best of cases, these functions are more or less dangerous theoretical fictions" (Ibid., 63).

Castells on Theory and Reality

This criticism can be directly applied to Castells, who displays confusion and inconsistency in his reluctance to make the absolute distinction between theory and reality; while attempting, nevertheless, to retain the phraseology of the Althusserian theoretical approach.

In the 'Epistemological Introduction' to The Urban Question, Castells voices his desire to repudiate the urban ideology and to replace it with a Marxist theoretical analysis. The manner in which he proposes to accomplish this, although unreferenced, is manifestly Althusserian: "Such an undertaking requires the use of certain theoretical tools in order to transform, through a process of labour, a raw material, both theoretical and ideological, and to obtain a product" (Castells, 1977a: 2). This definition of raw material is identical to Althusser's, but Castells abruptly accomplishes a theoretical volte-face by maintaining that knowledge is produced only by analyzing a concrete situation, and that the raw material of theoretical work consists of theory, ideology, and the specificity of concrete situations (Ibid.: 3, my italics). He further dismisses as redundant any theoretical position that is not based on concrete analysis (Ibid.).

In the first view, theoretical raw material consists of theory and ideology, with no mention of concrete reality; in the last two, the inclusion of reality as part of theory defeats the purpose of Althusser's portrayal of theory as a practice, which was developed precisely to dismiss reality

from the production of theory. Here, Castells is portraying concrete reality as the raw material on which theory works: a conception that is part of the empiricist claim that the scientificity of a theory depends on a supposed homology between theory and reality. Scientific knowledge is thus thought to be the result of a pre-existing harmony between thought and its real object. This position is impossible to align with the one Castells expressed when he stated that truth has no prior existence in the order of reality (Idem, 1976c: 121).

It appears that Castells is ineffectually attempting to paper over the rift between these two mutually exclusive epistemological traditions. If he wishes theory to deal directly with reality, he will have to dispense with any adherence to Althusser's entire system, for the latter is unequivocal in its attack on this conception of theoretical raw material, which he refers to as "The perpetual play on the words 'real' and 'concrete' on which is based a whole series of ambiguities whose delayed effects we are suffering from today" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 39).

Castells has claimed that a discipline may achieve scientificity if it possesses either a real or a theoretical object. It will be remembered that Althusser has characterized as empiricist the belief that a science applies itself to the study of a real object: in a genuine scientific process, theory is produced through the operation of the problematic on theoretical raw material, from which reality is explicitly

excluded. Puzzled by the flagrant departure from the Althusserian system, Saunders discusses the possibility that Castells was in fact referring to Generalities I (the theoretical raw materials); in which case, Castells' 'real object' would not refer to concrete reality itself, but to the existing representations of the imaginary relation to the concrete. A consequence of this argument would be that the spatial units of collective consumption delineated by Castells are merely categories by means of which urban sociologists have conceptualized the real world, and that science will supersede these categories. "Clearly this is not what Castells intends, for he claims to have identified both a theoretical and a real object for his new scientific approach. His aim is not to transcend the real object but to study it" (Saunders, 1981a: 172). Castells' use of the existence of a specific real object as a criterion of scientificity has no foundation in Althusserian philosophy, which rejects as empiricist any claim that a science deals (directly or indirectly) with reality. His criticism of urban sociology for its failure to establish an urban real object is thus itself subject to the empiricist preconceptions he disclaims; while his subsequent attempt to find a correspondence between theory and the real object of collective consumption comes in line for the same criticism. The suggestion that units of collective consumption coincide and can be identified with spatial units is in fact an assertion that there must be a correspondence between some aspect of

reality termed 'urban' and the theory that relates to it. By depicting science in terms of the relation between theory and reality, he is posing what Althusser has dismissed as the ideological question of classical philosophy.

Thus Castells' use of the terms 'real object' and 'theoretical object', while taken from Althusser's critique of empiricism, are employed in such a way that their meaning is significantly distorted. According to Castells, a scientific discipline is established by its possession of either a theoretical object (a conceptual cutting up of reality), or a real object (a specific field of observation). A discipline which has neither a theoretical object nor a real object cannot be called a science: such a discipline is urban sociology.

Castells' underlying empiricism can be exemplified through an analysis of his examination of the theories of urbanism (behavioural patterns in the city) and urbanization (the process of city growth), in order to assess whether these theoretical orientations to the city possess either real or theoretical objects.

Castells argues that his theoretical position does not derive from fidelity to principles, but from the "nature of things". This is an astonishing claim for a so-called Althusserian to make. To talk of theory stemming from the nature of things is to embody the empiricist conception of knowledge, in which to know is to abstract from the real object its essential nature, the possession of which by the subject is then called knowledge.

Knowledge is the essential nature of the real, and is contained in the real as one of its parts. This conception of knowledge contradicts Castells' own statement that "there is no evidence which is not constructed" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 124).

The search for the true nature of the real object is used by Althusser as the basis for interrogating the theoretical status of empiricism; for when empiricism regards the essence as the object of knowledge, it admits that the latter is not the same as the real object, since it is only part of it. Thus Castells, by referring to the "nature of things", employs the conception of the structure of the real object which constitutes the specific index of empiricism: "he fails to see that the socially constructed categories of historical materialism are not privy to the intrinsic 'nature' or objective laws of 'things'. Things have no nature or objectivity except that conferred upon them. This is the unalterable admission that, epistemologically speaking, all 'things' are ideational. It may be worth recalling, as an intuitive rejoinder to Castells' argument, that the gods of Homer were also regarded as part of the nature of things" (McKeown, 1980: 31).

In the light of the above vacillation concerning real and theoretical objects, the following statement by Castells is particularly ironic: he points to the need to constitute a coherent theoretical and methodological framework which has

resulted from the failure of each of the social sciences to specify its object with any precision (Castells, 1976a: 55, and 1976b: 73).

Castells has not managed to achieve a theoretical approach to the urban; instead his work is condemned as ideological by the same system that he attempted to use to identify the presence of ideology in urban sociology. It is abundantly evident that Castells, far from having attained any precision on the specification on scientific objects, has only succeeded in further obfuscation.

One of the problems with Althusser's evaluation of empiricism is that he uses the term to cover a wide range of epistemological positions. Like Castells, Althusser has been criticized for a representation of empiricism that fails to distinguish between positivist and realist approaches. While they have some common features, and both have been developed within a broadly empiricist philosophical tradition, it is essential to distinguish between these two positions.

While the positivist sets out to explain real phenomena, Althusser denies that the real object is the object of knowledge: "Knowledge working on its 'object', then, does not work on the real object but on the peculiar raw material, which constitutes, in the strict sense of the term, its 'object' (of knowledge), and which, even in the most rudimentary forms of knowledge, is distinct from the real object" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 43). Consequently, Althusser also rejects the positivist assertion that facts and phenomena are subject

to immediate observation. This, for Althusser, reduces knowledge to a mere relation of the subject's vision, a notion that must be replaced by the conception of knowledge as a production that operates in terms of its problematic: "the sighting is thus no longer the act of an individual subject, endowed with the faculty of 'vision' which he exercises either attentively or distractedly; the sighting is the act of its structural conditions, it is the relation of immanent reflection between the field of the problematic and its objects and its problems" (Ibid.: 25).

One of the most fundamental differences between positivism and Althusserianism concern the former's postulate that there are no hidden or systemic causes, and thus that statements of empirical reality constitute the logical basis of explanation. Althusser's rebuttal of the view is related to his rejection of a conception of knowledge as 'sight'. An invisible connection, he says, exists between the field of the visible and the field of the invisible (Ibid.: 21). It is through the operation of the problematic that the invisible is defined as excluded: "excluded from the field of visibility ... objects and problems are necessarily invisible in the field of the existing theory, because they are not objects of this theory, because they are forbidden by it ... the whole function of the field is not to see them" (Ibid.: 26). The positivist problematic then determined that it will not 'see' the hidden systemic causes whose existence it denies, that it will be unable to discern the structure of the social formation as a complex structured

unity of distinct, relatively autonomous instances.

Althusser explicitly rejects the realist postulate that scientific theories enable us to give explanations of observable phenomena and that theoretical abstractions must be linked to empirical controls. He refers to the question of how one guarantees that knowledge is true - the classical problem of knowledge - as ideological insofar as it is a problem that had to be posed if the desired ideological solution was to be its solution. Althusser claims to replace this 'problem of knowledge' with the question "by what mechanism does the process of knowledge, which takes place entirely in thought, produce the cognitive appropriation of its real object, which exists outside thought in the real world" (Ibid.: 56). Althusser's solution is the "knowledge effect", which operates in terms of criteria internal to the process of knowledge. He asserts (cryptically) that "the validity of a scientific proposition as a knowledge was ensured in a determinate scientific practice by the action of particular forms which ensure the presence of scientificity in the production of knowledge" (Ibid.: 67). It has been suggested that Althusser has not managed to achieve the 'inwardness' of the 'criterion of practice' to scientific practice: his solution to the central problem of structuralist epistemology is widely regarded as a mere verbal solution, an attempt to cover up an underlying correspondence between the order of the world and the order of thought (Veltmeyer, 1975: 390). Althusser's conception of knowledge,

it is held, does not in fact provide the separation he would like to achieve between his position and the realist one which claims that empirical controls are required for the proper development of theory (Keat and Urry, 1975: 135).

The relations posited by realism identify empirical effects and conditions (Ibid.: 75), thus it acknowledges that empirical evidence has an independent existence, and calls for empirical controls in the process of knowledge production. Realism differs from positivism, however, in that it insists on the theoretical moment in science. Theoretical abstraction is essential for concrete phenomena do not in themselves have any privileged status: they are explained by causal and other sets of propositions (Ibid.: 32). The realist rejects the positivist notion that a regular relationship between two kinds of phenomena is sufficient evidence for a causal connection. There must be some intervening mechanism which links them together, and it is the role of the scientist to discern and examine the characteristics of these mechanisms. This relation between evidence and meaning implies a denial of the 'verificationist' theory in positivism, which asserts that the meaning of any empirical statement is given by its actual or possible means of verification - that is, by observational evidence.

In realism, it is necessary to have knowledge of underlying mechanisms and structures, and of the manner in which they give rise to concrete phenomena. In describing these mechanisms

and structures, the realist attempts to characterize the 'nature' or 'essence' of these phenomena. The primary purpose of scientific theories is to facilitate causal explanations of observable phenomena, and to establish relations between them, making reference to the underlying structures and mechanisms which are inevitably a part of the causal process.

Realism denies that theories are generated by an inductive procedure, in which one moves from specific observations to generalizations about them; and also disputes the hypothetico-deductivist assertion that hypotheses are merely conjunctures: the realist recognizes that some form of analogical argument, from source to model, may be employed.

The realist may acknowledge the existence of entities that cannot be immediately discerned. Scientific theories enable us to give causal explanations of observable phenomena by their description of structures and mechanisms that cannot be directly observed. The confinement of a scientific theory to observational statements is repudiated, for the question of what exists must be separated from that of what we can observe, or know with a high degree of certainty.

The essential aim of positivism is to establish general laws which are able to explain particular events by revealing them to be examples of these laws. These laws must have the form of universal conditionals; must not be limited in their application to any circumscribed domain of space and time; and cannot allude only to particular items (Ibid.: 10).

Positivist empiricism holds that all knowledge can be reduced to atomic theorems that correspond to discrete impressions and sensory information. As propositions of empirical reality constitute the logical foundation of explanation, there are no concealed causes of empirical phenomena (McLennan, 1981: 30). For the positivist, to say that one occurrence causes another, signifies that the first precedes the second, and that whenever an event of the same character as the first occurs, it will inevitably be followed by one of the same character as the second. In positivism, observation is the only basis for scientific theorizing: a statement is only scientific if it is possible to ascertain its truth or falsity by means of direct observation. Facts and phenomena have an objective material existence, thus it is possible for the senses to grasp them. (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 144).

There are two procedures within positivism of using evidence to assess theoretical adequacy. In the confirmationist approach, the more frequent the instances which are in accordance with the predictions that can be deduced from a theory, the more that theory is substantiated. Competing theories can be appraised in terms of their degree of empirical corroboration. For the falsificationist, in evaluating scientific theories by means of observation, we can only use the latter to falsify, and not to verify, the former. This is associated with Popper's hypothetico-deductive method, in which the scientist does not start from observations and then induce theory from these; instead a theory is formulated and subsequently tested

by means of falsifying observations (Keat and Urry, 1975: 15-16).

In their discussion of positivist empiricism, Keat and Urry distinguish between the deductive-nomological and the inductive-statistical models of scientific explanation. In the former, the propositions and antecedent conditions can function either as a basis for explaining phenomena or for predicting it. Inductive-statistical positivism holds that the relation between premisses and conclusions is one of inductive probability instead of deductive necessity. An event is explained by showing that a statement describing it is upheld with a substantial measure of inductive probability by a set of premisses, at least one of which is a statement of the statistical probability that an event of one kind will be succeeded by, or accompanied by, an event of another kind (Ibid.: 12).

It will be remembered that Castells' approach to empiricism is complicated by the fact that he does not provide a satisfactory description of it: he confuses positivism with empiricism, and fails to examine those types of empiricism that do not involve elementary positivist assumptions. While he purports to have based his rejection of it on Althusser's work, both his portrayal of empiricism and his alternative to it are far from internally coherent or consistently Althusserian.

Those views of Castells that are influenced by Althusser display a strong anti-positivist stance. This can be seen in Castells' description of theory as a practice; the statement that "There is no such a thing as an ahistorical truth which

has a prior existence in the order of reality. It cannot be extracted, it has to be produced" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 121); and that empiricism was unable to answer questions because it tried to go straight to the facts and this resulted in this approach becoming "the prisoner of intellectual frameworks that had distorting effects at the level of research operations" (Idem, 1977a, : vii). In other areas of his texts, however, Castells implicitly supports the positive postulates that scientificity is established by direct observation, and that it is possible for the subject to regard facts of phenomena directly: he holds that "observations of concrete situations can help us to track down themes" (Ibid.: 4), and states that he does not wish to question the importance of observation in sociology (Castells, 1970, cited by McKeown 1980: 28).

Althusser of course denies categorically that the individual subject is capable of theoretical observation: for him it is the field of the problematic which sees and defines theoretical objects and problems. Individuals are merely the agents for thought, and it is the system of theoretical production which "defines the roles and functions of the 'thought' of particular individuals, who can only 'think' the 'problems' already actually or potentially posed" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 42). This process is obviously quite unlike the positivist supposition that external reality can be apprehended by the subject, and that the scientificity of a theory can only be ascertained through direct observation.

Logically entailed in Castells' self-proclaimed role as the subject 'observing' concrete reality, is the positivist conception of the production of knowledge as an operation of abstraction carried out by the subject on the real object: the separation of the essential kernel from the inessential dross of this real object. The corollary of this distinction between 'essential' and 'inessential' is located in the empiricism of the economistic 'Marxist' conception of the social formation, in which "the theoretical (and the 'abstract') is surreptitiously substituted for the economy ... and the empirical for the non-economic" (Ibid.: 111). Here the role of the essence/phenomena opposition is used to posit that the non-economic is a phenomenon of the economic, of which it is the essence. Althusser wished to replace this expressive totality with his conception of a social formation which is not organized merely in terms of a single contradiction (between base and superstructure), but one which shows a complexity of contradictions between the relatively autonomous instances. It will be seen that Castells hopes to subscribe to the Althusserian view of complex contradictions (Castells, 1976c: 167), and that of a structuralist conception of the complex social formation (Idem, 1977a: 2). For the reasons outlined above, however, Castells cannot consistently support positivist notions as well as the Althusserian social formation, which was specifically established in opposition to positivism with the latter's denial of causes concealed from direct observation.

The positivist preoccupation with the establishment of universally applicable laws derived from observed phenomena, is another aspect of empiricism that is evident in Castells' work. For Duncan, Castells has repeated the faults in positivist Weberian work, which was marred by an incapacity to relate abstract to concrete without involving deterministic, unicausal explanations and the disproportionate fragmentation of real historical change (Duncan, 1981: 239). Duncan points out that Castells attempts to find a relationship between abstract and concrete by referring to particular historical changes which have been generalized as ever-present phenomenal relations.

Castells further states that The Urban Question "aims at deducing theoretical tools of observation from concrete situations" (Castells, 1977a: 5); and goes on to say that these are "situations which I have observed myself" (Ibid.). Castells is thereby putting himself fairly and squarely in the role of the subject observing concrete reality - the most fundamental postulate of inductive positivism and the concept most antithetical to Althusser. Clearly reluctant to leave any theoretical stone unturned, on the next page Castells places himself in the camp of deductive positivism by arguing that he wishes to reverse the procedure of deducing theoretical tools of observation from concrete situations, by setting out from theory to know situations (Ibid.: 6). Like the positivists, Castells is accepting that society presents

itself accurately to the subject/observer. He is also clearly positivist in that he seeks to dissolve the general abstract into the particular concrete and vice versa (most positivists are satisfied with just one of these methods). It is thus startling that in his very next sentence, Castells points to the importance of theoretical work if one wishes to avoid empiricism, and claims that this aim is directly reflected in the organization of his work (Ibid.: 6). In the space of five pages, Castells has gone from an Althusserian position, to inductive empiricism, to deductive empiricism, and finally back to Althusserianism.

As in positivist empiricism, Castells has generalized particular historical patterns as universal laws, buttressed by the use of selected historical examples. Specific forms are used to construct elaborate classification systems, which are impossible to relate to historical practice. This replication of the problems of positivism is ironic in the light of the anti-empiricism of Althusserian Marxism. Duncan says of Castells: "he ends up doing much the same as in abstract empiricism, with similar results. The concepts employed, such as the urban question, the housing crisis, the state, are at once ahistorical generalizations and highly specific historically. The results are reminiscent of positivist 'modelling' and especially of Weber's ideal types. As such, they do not allow an adequate explanation of historical changes; rather

particular moments are frozen as generalities" (Duncan, 1981: 239).

Castells' theoretical approach does not enable a sufficient explanation of historical change, and does not take into account the fact that capitalist social formations are not static. This ahistoricity can be seen in his box and arrow diagrams (Castells 1976c: 156, 164, and 1977a: 264, 267), which are unable to explain process. State intervention and social claims are granted only a peripheral role in these diagrams, as is the labour process. In short, the class struggle as the motor of change is not included as a central explanatory variable. Furthermore, Castells generalizes the French housing system of the 1960s as typical of capitalism in general, and the validity of this generalization is demonstrated by case studies of primarily French examples. Thus, "references are drawn in to support the abstracted conclusions advanced, rather than as conceptually informed historical research in their own right. When Castells does extend his treatment to the social-democratic capitalist countries (e.g. consideration of British new towns) this results in the imposition of generalized categories on historical reality" (Duncan, 1981: 240-1).

Castells' claims about reality are based on an internal abstract analysis. These claims are regarded as empirical tendencies which can be discerned in any particular situation. There is a similarity of this system to the Weberian method of ideal types: the production of a best possible, supposedly typical generalization to fit approximately as many empirical

situations as possible. Duncan points out that this is not, as Castells asserts, an analysis that moves from abstract to concrete, it is rather one that universalizes empirical appearances.

By taking a positivist stance, Castells lays himself open to the most serious Marxist charge against positivism, concerning its pernicious philosophical implications. As it accepts society in its immediate form, and positive determination as an unchallenged, functional system of relations, positivism reproduces in thought the fetishism of social relations in capitalist society. This is done by reducing immediate reality either by fragmentation or holistic abstraction, and seeing only its functional determination: "Reifying social relations as abstract laws and values as functions, empirico-positivism reproduces in thought the actual domination of men by abstract laws (which have become socially concrete) and produces a science of the positive existence of those laws ... it reproduces the abstract laws governing fetishized social relations of capitalism as a functional system, or it constructs models (through empiricist abstraction) divorced from conditions of material and social life" (Veltmeyer, 1975: 408)

Problems in the Althusserian System

Castells' vacillation can, at least partially, be understood in terms of the fact that Althusser himself had not treated the separation between real and theoretical objects with complete

consistency. While he indicates the ideological implications of concrete reality, and classifies it as part of the pre-scientific aspects of Marx's early work, he later argues that the science of political economy studies a raw material provided in the last resort by the practices of real concrete history (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 109-110). He argues that the real object known by science is not the object of knowledge, yet the real object is held to be the 'absolute reference point' of knowledge (Althusser, 1969: 198). He recognizes the givenness of the complex structure of any concrete object, and that this structure governs both the development of the object and the development of the practice which produces the knowledge of it.

It has been argued that Althusser is positing a one-to-one correspondence between thought and reality that is simply assumed by him as a matter of philosophical principle. "Having admitted a philosophical structure that admits nature as part of its 'absolute reference point', yet being unable to theorize nature directly himself, Althusser allows this theoretical gap to be filled ideologically" (Nield and Seed, 1979: 290).

Glucksmann takes up this point, suggesting that the structure of the real could be the reference point for theory without being its object of knowledge only by presupposing some concealed correspondence between a theory and its object, between the order of the world and the nature of thought founded on their mutual essence as productions. The kinship

of thought and being is thus not to be found in the direct relation of theory and its object, but indirectly, between the categories of thought and the components of reality. If the logic of all types of production can be perceived through theoretical production, it is because Althusser is implicitly suggesting a kinship between them which should be apparent in theoretical production (A. Glucksmann, 1977: 72).

Tristram disputes the accuracy of Althusser's interpretation of Marx's distinction between real and theoretical objects: while the interpretation is useful because it reveals the significance of the object of knowledge in Marx's work, it inaccurately depicts Marx's distinction between these totalities as an absolute one. This assertion is contradicted by Marx's view that the knowledge relation had to be accompanied by a relation in reality, that there must be a perceptible link between the object of knowledge and reality, and that the validity of theory must be evaluated in terms of the analysis of concrete history (Tristram, 1975: 772).

Another important objection to Althusser's description of the production of theory, is that it does not outline the particular character of the scientific procedures that are supposed to provide knowledge of the real without the real being a component of their raw material (Niield and Seed, 1979: 389).

By far the most significant criticism of Althusser's separation of theory and reality has to do with its implications for the study of history. Althusser's metaphysical suspicion

of appearances have had incapacitating consequences for the application of his theoretical framework to concrete historical analysis: "Althusser's concepts are de-historicized, drained of specificity: the categories 'economics', 'politics', 'ideology', and so on, are quite arbitrary and abstract notions. Crucial concepts of Marxism - the state, class, power, consciousness - are all absent (Ibid.: 391-2).

In Thompson's view, by declaring that it is impossible to know the real, Althusser has stripped from reality its determinant characteristics, thus diminishing the real to theory. Against Althusser, Thompson argues that one should be able to assume that one is dealing with materials that show evidence of genuine historical process. He holds that while the object of historical knowledge is real, this does not imply that the historian is theoretically naive: "Of course historians (or at least some of them) know that facts do not speak directly, that you do not get answers without first asking questions, and they know that 'facts' have their own ideological loads"(Thompson, 1978: 220-1).

It is clear that the relationship of theory to reality has considerable consequences for any critique of Althusser's work, and the political implications that follow from the exclusion of concrete reality from the raw material of theoretical practice will be examined in greater detail in the sections in this thesis on the knowledge effect, theoretical guarantees, the autonomy of theory, and social and political change.

THEORY

Theory as a Practice

Althusser uses the word 'practice' to denote the process of transformation of raw material into a product: "By practice in general I shall mean any process of transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production') (Althusser, 1969: 166).

The structure of material production (in which labour power and means of material production are put to work in order to transform raw materials into socially useful products) is clearly the prototype for this conception of theoretical production. He claims that production of a real object takes place entirely in the real and is carried out according to the real order of the real genesis, while the production process of the object of knowledge takes place entirely in knowledge, and is carried out according to its own order. Hence: "It is perfectly legitimate to say that the production of knowledge which is peculiar to theoretical practice constitutes a process that takes place entirely in thought, just as we can say, *mutatis mutandis*, that the process of economic production takes place entirely in the economy" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 42). The raw materials of existing concepts on which it works are abstract, and are not to be found in concrete reality. Its labour consists of describing its own scientific facts by examining the ideological

"facts" of an antecedent ideological mode of practice, using as its means of theoretical labour its own theoretical concepts and method. Political practice has the raw materials of given social relations to produce its own type of product: new social relations; and ideological practice transforms the types of representation and perception in which the bearers/agents of a social formation 'live' their relations with their world.

The primacy of practice is established for Althusser in that all levels of social existence are the sites of distinct practices, and he emphasizes that the distance between the various practices must on no account be negated or reduced: "we must recognize that there is no practice in general, but only distinct practices ... there can be no scientific conception of practice without a precise distinction between the distinct practices" (Ibid.: 52). Here he is proposing an 'essence of practice' in terms of the homology of the different practices, as well as a dissimilarity of content in that individual practices have different raw materials, type and means of labour, and products.

The identification of knowledge as a type of practice is an attempt on Althusser's part to establish a definition of science that would be untainted by empiricist assumptions: he particularly wished to eliminate the notion that scientificity depends on a direct relation between theory and reality, which in turn implies that a science is capable of examining reality itself.

In opposition to this "ideological illusion", Althusser asserts that a science is established only if the idea that one is dealing with reality is relinquished. A science never works on immediate essences, on givens. To support this contention, he quotes Marx's observation that any process of scientific knowledge does not start from the real concrete, but from the abstract (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 190).

Althusser's problem was to create a conception of science that would explain the real without attempting to observe it. His solution depends on the concept of theoretical practice, which is of pivotal importance for the structure of his exposition.

Castells conforms to the Althusserian characterization of theory, claiming that its production requires the use of certain theoretical tools in order to transform, through a process of labour, a theoretico-ideological raw material in order to obtain a theoretical product (Castells 1977a: 2-3). He echoes this concept in his essay written with de Ipola, where he outlines the process of the production of knowledge as "the transformation of a given raw material (scientific knowledge and/or prescientific representation) into a given product (new scientific knowledge); thus transformation would take place by the application of definite scientific agents of production using definite means of labour (concepts, theories, methods) in definite production conditions (both material and social) (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 113-4). He asks "what then defines a process of the production of

knowledge?", and "what are the material conditions of such a process of production?" (Ibid.: 138). Like Althusser, he believes in "the possibility of a production of knowledge beyond the subjective grasp of a historical situation", rejects "those criteria which are exterior to scientific practice", and concludes that "our answer can only be based on a materialist analysis of its conditions of production" (Ibid.)

The influence of Althusser's conception of the production of knowledge as following the form of economic production is clearly visible in Castells' texts: the conditions of the production of knowledge, he says, "correspond essentially to what one means in economic production" (Ibid.: 114), and claims that "knowledge is, by definition, inseparable from the productive system" (Ibid.).

The Althusserian terminology that accompanies the raw material-labour and means of production-product schema is employed liberally by Castells. Joining Althusser in his rejection of the empiricist raw material of concrete reality, Castells says that theoretical raw material consists of theory and ideology (Ibid.), and refers to the "elementary epistemological postulate" that any theoretical or ideological object of analysis must necessarily be constructed (Ibid.). As for the labour and means of production that are used in the production of the theoretical product, Castells argues that a genuine theory is "one bearing on the production of

tools of knowledge" (Idem, 1977a: 5); that we must "transform our understanding with the help of advanced theoretical instruments" (Ibid.); and that knowledge proceeds "through the creation of a series of theoretical tools" (Ibid.). He also calls these means of theoretical production "conceptual tools" (Ibid.: viii), tools of intellectual work (Ibid.), "tools of research" (Ibid.: ix), and so on.

Notwithstanding the use of these Althusserian phrases, Castells' treatment of theory as a practice is far from consistent. Bearing in mind that both Althusser and Castells have described theoretical raw material as being composed of theoretical and ideological concepts, it is clear that Castells is falling prey to empiricism when he subsequently claims that raw material is made up of three elements: "ideological representations, knowledge already acquired, (and) the specificity of concrete situations" (Ibid.: 3, my italics); and that his book aims at the theoretical transformation of empirical raw material (Ibid.: 5). It is interesting to note that he does not draw attention to the fact that this inclusion of concrete reality inevitably entails the idea that knowledge is vision, and that it occurs when the subject examines the object: the hallmarks of positivist empiricism. That this conception of the direct examination of reality by the subject was precisely the one that Althusser was attempting to avoid by depicting theory as a type of production, does not seem to deter Castells at all: he continues to portray theory as

a practice (Ibid.: 74, 429), and even changes theoretical camps yet again by reverting to the Althusserian system and limiting raw material to scientific knowledge and pre-scientific representation (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 114).

I feel that these frequent inconsistencies are not the result of simple confusion on Castells' part, but evince his profound discomfort arising from the growing criticism concerning both the internal logic and the political implications of a theoretical practice that explicitly excludes any reference to concrete historical reality.

It is thought that Althusser does not give an adequate justification for his definition of theory as a practice, nor for his assertion that each of the practices is identical to that of material production. While he has outlined a model of the procedure of theory, this has remained inconclusive, with insufficient examination of the way in which it takes place (Niell and Seed, 1979: 389). It is alleged that Althusser is using a mere analogy as the basis for the view that the theoretical product emerges after the processing of raw materials by the means of theoretical labour (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 135). Glucksmann attacks the claims of this concept of production to explicate theory and the structure of the real: "The basis for the whole tripartite Althusserian architecture thus arises fully armed from the simple but forced use of a dictionary. It 'happens' that everything is production,

it 'happens' that every production is divided into three. That is how it is. This conceptual empiricism is never questioned in the Althusserian reflection" (A. Glucksmann, 1977: 71). He suggests that the concept of production is the same as the concept of Being in traditional philosophy, which shifts Althusser's project from 'science' into metaphysics.

The characterization of theory as a practice presupposes an implicit correspondence between theory and reality, a correlation which is transcendental: the kinship of thought and Being is conceived between the categories of thought and the elements of reality. Theoretical practice can only achieve validity if it shares ontological conditions with the other productions that provide the reference point for its object of knowledge. This notion, Glucksmann suggests, is a modification of Kant's transcendental epistemology, for it assumes that there is a mysterious relation between the categories of thought and the elements of reality, and relies on a metaphysical view that these unities are transcendently correlated (Ibid.: 74).

The concept of production is not confined to portraying all productions in terms of the tripartite demarcation of the 'general essence of all production':

1. It also enables a double unification of the set of productions. Theoretical production contains the essence of all productions, for through it one can perceive the essence of practice in general. Conversely, if material production in the final analysis determines the form

of the other productions, this can be attributed to the material kinship of productions.

2. In addition, it unifies these two unities in a transcendental correlation, for the elementary categories of theoretical production are simultaneously the categorical elements of real production; the concepts of thought are held to be the same as the 'conditions of existence' of the real.

This is referred to as part of Althusser's endeavour to establish a system that is displaced from the real to the theory of the real, a classically metaphysical displacement in which a 'primary' philosophy develops the first concepts (a priori transcendentals) that permit us to think the real as real. "Production - first and last thought of Althusserianism - is the being that is both the positing of the copula in the proposition ... and of the object in reality ... That a thing is and that it is thus: the double face traditionally represented by metaphysics as existentia et essentia" (Ibid.: 89).

Thompson, takes up this point (although explicitly from a humanist position), arguing that the notion of theory as a practice creates an "idealistic epistemological circle", in that it is a "self-generating conceptual universe" which asserts its own identity upon the phenomena of material and social existence. "This procedure is entirely self-confirming, self-perpetuating and self-elaborating. Concepts constantly

circulate within this sealed system, and Althusser mistakes this repetitious introversion for a science, and claims that Marx's scientific procedures were of the same order" (Thompson, 1978: 205).

Perhaps the most serious allegation against theory as a practice concerns the fact that, by excluding reality from its raw material and denying that the individual is the subject of this process, Althusser is effectively preventing the possibility of individuals or social classes employing their experience in the production of theory. By stating that the relation of theory to the other social practices depends solely on their common structure, Althusser has devised a philosophy whose only relation beyond itself is with the sciences. For Callinicos, this is a position that must be rejected by Marxists, in order to avoid Marxism becoming a theory without any relation to life and the struggle of the proletariat (Callinicos, 1976: 77). The revolution in the schema is "entrusted to the immense theoretical labour of the scholar-hero, not to the supporting cast of millions, and must wait on the specific 'temporality' of theoretical practice" (Clarke, 1980: 37-8). According to others, this is precisely the bourgeois materialist conception which Marx criticized in the third thesis on Feuerbach. The final result of Althusser's theoretical practice is that "Theory is no longer related to social reality, but hovers in its own asocial realm, a spectre haunting the academy. The concept of 'theoretical practice' represents a grotesque

rationalism within Marxist theory, of the separation of mental from manual labour in the real world" (McDonnell and Robins, 1980: 223).

Castells' reluctance to accept these consequences can be seen in his statements that theoretical reformulation "requires a point of departure that is historically bound up with the working-class movement and its practice" (Castells, 1977a: 6); that the production of knowledge must be governed by "social practice" (Ibid.: viii); that "there is no purely theoretical possibility of resolving (or superseding) the contradictions that are at the base of the urban question; this supersession can only come from social practice, that is to say, from political practice" (Ibid.: 6); and that "theoretical work does not take place in a social void; it must be articulated ... with the practices observed" (Ibid.: viii).

In the face of Castells' continued use of the concept of theory as a practice, these frequent interpolations do not amount to much, as this portrayal of theory cannot be sundered from its political implications.

THEORY

The Epistemological Break

The epistemological break is a concept originated by Bachelard (1967), for whom a genuine science is not tied to explanations derived from direct perceptions of reality. The orders of perception and reality must be kept distinct, for abstraction founded on observation constitutes an epistemological impediment. Empiricist science is false, and cannot transcend initial experience and external appearances; instead of producing knowledge, it provides the illusion of comprehension, an illusion which can only be dispelled by a conclusive break with this approach.

Althusser uses the concept of the epistemological break to describe the transformation of ideology into a science through the construction of a new problematic. He points to a break that Marx made with his own 'theoretical prehistory' and with other philosophies of history, asserting that Marx's work does not form a coherent unity, for his later writings contained a problematic that permitted the foundation of a science. Prior to 1845, Marx regarded history and politics as the study of the essence of man, who was the subject of history. In this philosophical humanism, strongly influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx employed the ideological categories of need, alienation, theft, injustice and species being; assuming the existence of a universal nature which constitutes the human essence, and which is an attribute of each

individual. After 1845, the precepts of philosophical humanism were denounced as ideology: a break which, for Althusser, was essential in the development of a scientific Marxism. The terms of the ideological problematic of the subject were replaced by concepts such as production, productive forces, relations of production, social formation, etc. An epistemological rupture separated the humanism of the young Marx from the writings of the mature Marx, who was able to achieve a scientific, structural description of economic reality. Human nature was no longer regarded as an abstraction inherent in each individual, but rather as an ensemble of social relations. The epistemological break thus involved a conceptual transformation of the category of the subject, a departure from the ideological field defined by the socio-practical interests of subjects. Also rejected were the previous concepts of political economy, history and philosophy, which shared empiricist and idealist assumptions.

This interpretation of Marxism is a radical departure from the views of the humanist Marxists such as Lukačs and Marcuse, who posit a continuity in Marx's work based on the concepts of alienation, praxis and negation.

Castells explicitly states his adherence to Althusser's concept of the epistemological break in Marx's work, as well as supporting the more general use of the concept to distinguish between ideological and scientific modes of discourse

(Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 112). He defines the epistemological break as "the specific effect of the irruption into the ideological formation of a process of production of scientific knowledge" (Ibid.). Like Althusser, Castells traces the development of this concept to Bachelard, and argues that division and rupture are characteristic of the contradictions inherent in any epistemological intervention; He uses this concept to posit an epistemological break between the ideological raw materials of traditional urban sociology and a new, properly scientific urban sociology.

Castells criticizes Bachelard for failing to elaborate the way in which obstacles to the epistemological process occur, and for referring to the subjective 'scientific spirit' as an explanation for epistemological ruptures. These problems, he assures, have been overcome by Althusser, who has "given a new value to Bachelard's epistemology, chiefly by attempting to understand certain of his theses in the light of dialectical materialism" (Ibid.: 116). He also commends Althusser for distinguishing between science and ideology in terms of its "historico-social conditions of realization ... In this way the processes whereby epistemological obstacles are formed, together with the mechanisms on which the science/ideology split is based, began to be explained rather than simply described" (Ibid.)

While Castells rejects Althusser's abstract and general thesis of an absolute and universal opposition between science and ideology, and the consequences such a distinction

entails (Ibid.: 117), he reiterates his desire to retain Althusser's concept of the epistemological break (Ibid.: 114). As Saunders points out, the Castells and de Ipola paper is ambivalent towards Althusser's position, and it is not at all apparent how the epistemological break can be employed outside of a general theory of science and ideology (Saunders, 1981a: 176).

In Castells' study with Godard, the difficulty of conducting empirical work within the Althusserian epistemological framework became increasingly clear, and Castells was led to remark ruefully that "To fix a certain mode of theoretical analysis and to hold on to its internal logic and to the validity of the social laws already established by the general theoretical framework from which this mode of analysis derives is a considerable risk, or, if you like, a gamble on its applicability" (Castells, 1974, cited by Saunders, 1981a: 176).

In spite of these increasing doubts, Castells restates his belief in the significance of Althusser's concepts in the Preface to The Urban Question (written one year after the study with Godard), and does not at any stage call into question the usefulness of the concept of the epistemological break.

Castells' ambivalence towards this concept, however, can be seen in his frequent use of the term "supersession". In the Glossary of For Marx (Brewster, 1969: 255), this is defined as a Hegelian concept popular among Marxist humanists, which "denotes the process of historical development by the des-

truction and retention at a higher level of an old historically determined situation in a new historically determined situation - e.g. socialism is the supersession of capitalism, Marxism is a supersession of Hegelianism" (Ibid.). Althusser rejects supersession as an ideological concept, declaring that the application of the idea of supersession in the development of a science and of history must be replaced by the concept of the epistemological break (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 44, 93-7),

Althusser, it will be remembered, emphasized that there was an epistemological break which separated Marx's mature works from Hegel's philosophy of history and the latter's assumption that history took place in terms of the Idea, which reveals its hidden truth through a successive process of self-alienations and self-negations. In this schema, the various domains of social existence express the identical fundamental reality. In opposition to this, Althusser argues that every social situation has to be conceived as a global structure, where the meaning and the importance of elements are defined by the whole in terms of structural causality. While Althusser maintains that science develops by an epistemological rupture with its ideological past, the Marxist historicists who were influenced by Hegel regard the development of knowledge as being cumulative, with past ideology being preserved in a superseded form in the present (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 105).

Castells criticizes the Commissariat Général au Plan for its reliance on Hegelian supersession, claiming that it regarded the production of social, spatial and cultural forms "simply on the basis of an organic phenomenon of growth - as if it were a question of a sort of upwards, linear movement of matter towards spirit" (Castells, 1977a: 84), and for holding that society develops "in an organic way, producing universal types" (Ibid.). The social efficacy of this ideology, he says, derives from its description of "the everyday problems experienced by people, while offering an interpretation of them in terms of natural evolution, from which the division of antagonistic classes is absent" (Ibid.: 88). Lefebvre, in turn, is reprimanded for arguing that the historical process is one of sequence, and for defining human history in terms of the overlapping succession of three eras: the agrarian, the industrial and the urban: "The political city of the first phase gives place to the mercantile city, which is itself swept away by the movement of industrialization, which negates the city; but, at the end of the process, generalized urbanization, created by industry, reconstitutes the city at a higher level: thus the urban supersedes the city that contains it in seed form" (Ibid.: 88).

Notwithstanding the anti-Hegelian stance of his criticism of Lefebvre, Castells undermines the importance of the epistemological break by repeatedly employing the Hegelian concept of supersession. Instead of the Althusserian concept of the epistemological break as an entirely theoretical revolution

unrelated to external political events, Castells claims that the essential problem is to link "conceptual development with concrete historical practices in such a way as to establish social laws that account for the phenomena observed, while superseding purely formal constructions" (Ibid.: 44). "There is no purely theoretical possibility of superseding the contradictions that are at the base of the urban question", he says; "this supersession can come only from social practice, that is to say, from political practice" (Ibid.: 6). He acknowledges that "the social conditions for such a reformulation are extremely complex", but states that "their point of departure is historically bound up with the working-class and its practice" (Ibid.). He clearly thinks that this convoluted argument covers all eventualities and blocks any criticism that might pertain to his use of Althusserian concepts: "This excludes all the 'avant gardist' claims of any 'individual theory'; but it does not deny the usefulness of certain work of reflection, documentation and inquiry, inasmuch as such work forms part of a theoretico-practical practice" (Ibid.).

In an unsurpassed feat of conceptual juggling, Castells forms an idiosyncratic hotchpotch of Althusserian and Hegelian concepts in his statement that "the supersession of the (urban) discourse ... requires a theoretical analysis of the question of social practice it connotes ... an ideological misunderstanding/recognition can be superseded and therefore interpreted, only by a theoretical analysis" (Ibid.: 2). He further

contends that his theoretical work makes possible "a reformulation of the questions posed in a perspective that should help us to create the conditions for their scientific treatment and their social supersession by means of a correct political practice" (Ibid.: 429). Even The Urban Question itself is not immune to this supersession: Castells insists that "My main aim is to make this book obsolete through its supersession in practice" (Ibid.).

These remarks by Castells are in complete opposition to Althusser's concept of the epistemological break, which was intended to eradicate this Hegelian concept of supersession. For Althusser, the history of reason that supersession entails is a linear history of continuous development, a history of the progressive manifestation or emergence into consciousness of a Reason which is completely present in its origins, and which history simply reveals. "We know that this type of history and rationality is merely the effect of the retrospective illusion of a given historical result which writes its history in the 'future anterior', and which therefore thinks its origin as the anticipation of its end" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 44). Against this view, Althusser posits a history of knowledge as "punctured by radical discontinuities (e.g. when a new science detaches itself from the background of earlier ideological formulations), profound reorganizations which ... inaugurate with their rupture the reign of a new logic, which, far from being a mere development, the 'truth'

or 'inversion' of the old one, literally takes its place" (Ibid.).

It is clear that Castells' use of the Hegelian notion of supersession carries with it the very philosophical assumptions that Althusser had set out to uproot from Marxism. Once again, Castells is unable to achieve theoretical consistency, and has merely juxtaposed theoretical concepts which are mutually exclusive.

For Fraser, Althusser's notion of the epistemological break requires an apology for the inadequacies of Marx's major work: "Questions of the purpose of Marx's various modes of 'flirtation' with Hegelian formulations are concealed by the Master's (Althusser's) irony. Thus Marx made the decisive break with Hegel - but failed to map the new continent he discovered" (Fraser, 1976: 447). Kolakowski dismisses as absurd Althusser's assertion that after 1845 Marx no longer analyzed society in the old 'ideological' categories of 'alienation', 'negation', 'generic human nature' etc.: "Indeed, the whole theory of man who objectifies but also alienates himself in products that afterwards govern over him as foreign powers, is repeated in the Grundrisse alongside the idea of the future return to man's generic nature and free universality" (Kolakowski, 1971: 117). Bottomore contends, against the epistemological break, that it is more plausible to say that Marx initially made a general delination of his theory, and then started a more specific study of

capitalist society in terms of an overall process of social development (Bottomore and Nisbet, 1978: 112). Althusser's comparison of the young Marx to the Marx, his statement that a certain moment the young Marx became Marx, and his question as to whether the young Marx was already and wholly Marx; are, for Kolakowski, indicative of religious thinking, and entail the assumption that some texts must, a priori, be the fountainhead of truth. That Marx during his life changed in some respects is exactly what happens to everybody: to say that his writings changed from ideological to scientific is not very useful because Althusser neglects to give an adequate definition of ideology or science (Kolakowski, 1971: 121).

Geras takes up this point, arguing that the character of Althusser's pronouncements on the epistemological break are "purely programmatic ... the conditions and mechanisms of its occurrence are 'taken for a fact', not analyzed, though such an analysis is declared to be an indispensable project" (Geras, 1972a: 83).

It has been alleged that the epistemological break is possibly too complete: "This way of theorizing the founding of a science ... makes any conception of continuity through scientific revolutions impossible. It becomes entirely problematic in what sense any theoretical ideology, or combination of them, can be regarded as the pre-history of any particular science" (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 185). As the epistemological break implies a change in problematics and

theoretical objects, there is no way in which it would be possible for ideology to constitute the pre-history of science, or to play a part in the development of science. It is impossible for a scientific problematic to supplant an ideological problematic. as the latter involves a new object, rather than improved knowledge of the same object (Ibid.). Furthermore, Althusser's epistemological break is not confined to the establishment of a new science, but results in the expulsion of scientific practice from the social formation: "Science, alone of all the practices of a social formation, is exempt from determination-in-the-last-instance by economic practice. This notion of what amounts to the absolute autonomy of science seems to justify the claim that Althusser's theory of scientific knowledge is in certain respects idealist" (Benton, 1977: 184).

THEORY

The Problematic

The concept of the problematic was developed by Althusser to distinguish Marx's mature work from his earlier writings by positing a change in problematics; as well as to differentiate Marx's work from other theories. Althusser regarded Marx's mature work as being scientific, and the concept of the problematic was designed to confer this status upon it; while simultaneously grouping the young Marx's humanism and related theories (particularly empiricism) in the category of ideology.

The problematic is one of the most important elements in the entire Althusserian system, for upon it is founded the characterization of knowledge as a practice, the related notions of symptomatic reading and vision, the relationship between subject and object, the internal structure of particular sciences, the epistemological break, as well as the norms of scientific validity. For Althusser, the problematic is the 'buried but active' framework which arranges and connects the fundamental concepts of a discourse. It describes the unity of the concepts of a theoretical system: every theory is based on a problematic which defines its boundaries and potential. The concepts of a theory are interdependent in that each concept has to be defined in terms of the other concepts of the theory: to disengage a

concept from its theoretical discourse inevitably involves a transformation in its meaning.

As the conceptual framework of a theory, the problematic determines which questions are to be posed, the form these questions must take, as well as defining internal limits on what is examined, by excluding objects and phenomena which do not have necessary links with its field (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 24-5):

The concept of the problematic is inextricably linked to that of the epistemological break, which separates ideology from science. The development of scientific knowledge is not merely a question of the detection or disclosure of new evidence, or of conceptual advancements: the transition from ideology to science takes place in terms of a major epistemological 'rupture' or 'transformation' - namely, a change in problematics.

Althusser's concept of the problematic has been referred to as "the centre-piece of an anti-empiricist study of discourses (Therborn, 1976: 59). By describing the problematic (the process in the production of knowledge in which raw material is transformed into product) as taking place entirely within thought, Althusser is distinguishing what he believes to be the proper scientific approach from the empiricist 'ideology' which conflates an object outside knowledge (the real object) with an object that is constituted or represented in knowledge in the form of determinate

tools' can be traced back to Althusser's portrayal of the problematic as the 'means of production' of knowledge, a process that entails the means of theoretical production acting on the raw materials of theory in order to produce a theoretical product. This depiction of the problematic was intended by Althusser to overcome the empiricist idea that it is the individual who acts upon the raw material of empirical data in the production of theory. This role of the problematic can be seen in Castells' writing. He claims to be working "in the direction of a reformulation of the ideological problematic" (Ibid.: 4), and says that a properly theoretical work is one bearing on the production of tools of knowledge, and not on the production of knowledge relative to concrete situations" (Ibid.: 5). In these anti-empiricist versions of the role of the problematic, Castells is completely consistent with the Althusserian texts. It is thus surprising to note that in his study of Dunkerque, he states that proof is specific to each concrete analysis. Here, the role of the problematic as the 'means of production' of scientific thought, is being replaced by the empiricist notion that scientificity is to be established by referring to concrete reality. In spite of his earlier declaration that every study "must start from a clearly defined theoretical framework" (Idem, 1976a: 52), Castells claims that he has chosen ideological analyses as his starting point, rather

than "aiming at the coherence and correctness of the text itself", or "setting out from theory" (Idem, 19771: 5).

Althusser's conception of the problematic as a 'buried but active framework' which relates to each other the basic concepts of theoretical discourse, is nowhere to be found in Castells' statement that "theoretical tools are not validated by their coherence, but by their fruitfulness in the analysis of concrete situations" (Ibid.). Castells' epistemological confusion is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his claim that his project aims, on the one hand, at deducing theoretical tools (the problematic) from concrete situations, and on the other hand, reversing this approach and setting out from theoretical tools to know situations (Ibid.) In terms of the conceptual system Castells has chosen, these two aims are entirely incompatible. It is interesting to note that he is here suggesting that the observation of concrete situations can be the source of the problematic, a point he repeats elsewhere: "There is production of knowledge, in the strict sense of the term, only in connection with the analysis of a concrete situation" (Ibid.: 2-3).

A contradiction becomes immediately apparent when one compares this quote with his statement that 'proper' theory is not produced with reference to concrete reality (Ibid. 5). While this contradiction has to be rejected on logical grounds, it evinces Castells' inability to choose between empiricism and the anti-empiricist stance of Althusser, By maintaining that reality is the object of theory, Castells is assuming the

one-to-one correspondence between theory and reality that for Althusser epitomizes empiricism: "This investment of knowledge, conceived as a real part of the real object, in the real structure of the real object, is what constitutes the specific problematic of the empiricist conception of knowledge" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 38).

The Posing of Problems

Castells' inability to decide between the Althusserian and empiricist modes of analysis has resulted in a fluctuation of his opinion concerning the problematic's role in the posing of problems. For Althusser, a theory may be identified by its structure, in the way that its problems are posed; and the problematic is the system of questions which determines the answers. "This introduces us to a fact peculiar to the very existence of a science: it can only pose problems on the terrain and within the horizon of a definite theoretical structure, its problematic, which constitutes its absolute determination of the forms in which all problems must be posed, at any given moment in the science" (Ibid.: 25).

The structure of a theory, or the way in which it poses its problems, provides the means to identify it as a science or an ideology. In empiricism, questions are asked purely to give rise to the predetermined answers it has to provide. Thus, the questions are not genuine, they are simply the ones that had to be asked in order for the ideological solutions to be

the answers: solutions which are previously imposed by the practical, religious, ethical and political considerations of ideology.

Entirely consistent with the Althusserian conception of the problematic is Castells' statement that his theoretical work sets out to enable "a reformulation of the questions posed in a perspective that should help us to create the conditions for their scientific treatment" (Castells, 1977a: 5). Similarly, Althusser's account of the empiricist 'ideological' method of posing questions can be discerned in Castells' remark that the unmasking of an ideology "requires the development of each of the questions that are fused, and confused, in this problematic" (Ibid.: 43).

So far so good. Yet in spite of all these statements which concur with the Althusserian stance on the problematic's role in the posing of problems, there are as many which contradict the spirit and letter of this characterization. Although Castells has condemned the fact that social concerns underlie the way in which ideology asks its questions, he justifies this approach for himself, declaring that the type of questions he wishes to ask emerged from and were governed by social practice (Ibid.: 6), and that the development of theory must be linked to the historical recognition of the new problems posed by everyday experience (Ibid.: 3).

Referring back to Althusser's criticism that empiricism's questions are not authentic, because they are questions that

were determined and prejudged by their answers; it can be seen that by allowing social practice, or everyday experience, autonomy over the posing of problems, Castells is stripping this function from the problematic, and undermining the epistemological status of theory that the concept of the problematic was intended to establish. As far as Althusser is concerned, social practice plays no part whatsoever in the development of theory: "We are told: practice is the touch-stone, the practice of scientific experiment! Economic, political, technical practice, concrete practice! Or else, to convince us of the 'Marxist' character of the answer: social practice! ... this type of pragmatist answer leaves us hungry as far as our theoretical question is concerned ... These concepts, which have even flourished in the works of Marxist specialists, are tailor-made for the ideological functions expected of them" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 57-61). Ironically, Castells has taken up this point himself, condemning urban sociology as ideological for defining its problems in terms of "practico-social" interests (Castells, 1976b: 60, 62, 64-6).

If Castells had followed his own repeated injunctions to make a theoretical analysis of ideological questions and to make the distinction between perception and theoretical concepts, he never would have proposed that the first epistemological task consists of identifying the problems experienced by people in their everyday practice, and only then bringing in theory to treat these problems with an adequate set of theoretical

tools (Idem, 1977a, viii). His confusion can also be seen in his seemingly innocuous statement that the work of scientific research occurs between the questions and the answers (Ibid.). Anyone who employs the concept of the problematic should be aware that science is not merely the sandwich-filling between pre-given questions and resultant answers; for the most fundamental aspect of the Althusserian system is that a science's status depends on the way its problematic sets up those very questions. If the questions dealt with by science were to be ideologically defined, there would be no way in which the work of scientific research could achieve the position of relative autonomy that distinguished it from ideology.

Vision

An integral component of the problematic is a theory of vision. For Althusser, the idea of theoretical sight and oversight are part of a conception of knowledge in which weaknesses in the system of concepts that constitute knowledge are attributed to a weakness of vision, thereby reducing knowledge itself to a simple relation of vision (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 19). The nature of the object of vision is reduced to the condition of a given, with knowledge being the vision of a given object or the reading of an established text. In the Althusserian system, however, sighting is not the act of the individual subject endowed with the faculty of vision: the structural condition of sighting is the relation

between the field of the problematic and its objects and problems. As the problematic is the determinant element in the process of knowledge production, the human subject ceases to be the subject of the process.

Between sightings and oversights is an invisible underlying connection between the field of the visible and the field of the invisible. Particular problems have to be invisible because they are forbidden by the theory: they are necessarily without any necessary relation to the field of the visible as set out by the terms of the problematic. The invisible is not external to the visible: the limits of the problematic are internal; in Althusser's words, "it carries its outside inside it" (Ibid.: 27). It is the problematic that defines and structures the invisible as the defined excluded: excluded from the field of visibility by the peculiar structure of the field of the problematic. "The invisible is the theoretical problematic's non-vision of its non-objects, the invisible is the darkness, the blinded eye of the theoretical problematic's self-reflection when it scans its non-objects, its non-problems without seeing them, in order not to look at them" (Ibid.: 26).

This is quite unlike the empiricist epistemology, in which knowledge is believed to be immediately present in the phenomena we observe, if we separate the essence from the phenomena by a process of abstraction. To know consists of the subject abstracting the essence from the real object. "The

empiricist conception may be thought of as a variant of the conception of vision, with the mere difference that transparency is not given from the beginning, but is separated from itself by the veil, the dross of impurities, of the inessential which steals the essence from us, and which abstraction, by its techniques of separation and scouring, sets aside, in order to give us the real presence of the pure naked essence, knowledge of which is then merely sight" (Ibid.: 37).

With reference to the problematic's relation to vision, Castells comes down yet again on the empiricist side of the fence. This is evident in his statement that he aims at deducing theoretical tools of observation from concrete situations (situations that I have observed myself)" (Castells, 1977a: 5), and desires to show "the contradictions between the observations at one's disposal and the ideological discourses that were juxtaposed with them" (Castells, 1970a:5). Castells is thus placing himself in the role of the 'subject' possessing the faculty of vision, and thus capable of a direct examination of reality. This is an unexpected position for him to take, given his characterization as an "epistemological obstacle" the "imaginary relation" of the scientist to his or her own practice. Here, the idea that it is the individual scientist (rather than the problematic) that has a direct relation to his or her own discipline, is said to constitute an "intellectual resistance" which hinders or perverts the production of scientific knowledge (Idem, 1976d: 115). Furthermore, in his

critique of empiricism, Castells denounces as idealist the assumption that knowledge takes place between subject and object (Ibid.: 121), and rejects the assumption that truth has a prior existence in the order of reality.

Thus, in the treatment of the problematic's role in 'vision' and 'non-vision', not only is Castells theoretically incompatible with Althusser (for whom individual observation is necessarily ideological), but he is also revealing a fundamental and unresolved tension in his own work between empiricism and structuralism.

The Autonomy of Theory

Pointing out that Marx, in his later writings, did not include science in the superstructure, Althusser attempts to establish the autonomy of theory from the other practices in order for it to be distinguished from ideology, which is contaminated with the interests of particular classes. Theoretical practice is thus characterized as being separate from and irreducible to the superstructural instances of the social formation, where its status would be reduced to that of an organic ideology. Althusser has rejected as empiricist the assertion that science is a superstructural practice, for this implies that the scientificity of a theory depends on its relation to reality. This would confine theory to the confirmation of assumptions determined by external social criteria.

For Althusser, in order for sciences to achieve autonomy, the process of the production of knowledge about the real would have to take place completely in thought. To this end, Althusser employs the operation of theory as a practice, whereby knowledge is 'produced' in the same way as other products. Here he is not defining science as a practice in simply a descriptive sense, for its homology with the other practices is the very means with which to distinguish it from them. Like every type of production, theory is an autonomous and articulated practice, having its own particular raw material, labour and product. The raw material of

theoretical practice is not reality itself, and the labour in the process of production occurs only within thought. Furthermore, the theoretical product is distinguished from the products of other practices in that there is never an identity of essence between raw material and product, for a complete transformation has been effected. Althusser stresses that while the raw material of a science may include ideology, the process of knowledge production allows an autonomous science to develop, with its own form of temporality which separates it from the history of the ideological, politico-legal and economic practices. Scientificity can no longer be determined through the use of external guarantees, for this criterion would be derived from practices external to the science in question, and would be based on a fundamental complicity between theory and reality. Knowledge would be seen as a direct relation between real and thought objects, between subject and object. This of course simply will not do for Althusser, for whom theory has to be open to development in order to attain what he refers to as a genuine cognitive appropriation of the real rather than a mystical reflection of conditions anterior to theory as do the ideologies that masquerade as science (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 59).

The question arises that if knowledge takes place entirely in thought, without reference to reality, how does it appropriate the real world? Althusser maintains that the epistemological task is to identify and explain the mechanisms by

means of which the object of knowledge cognitively appropriates the real concrete. He disputes that this is another form of the 'problem of knowledge' for it does not involve a relationship between subject and object: there is no direct correspondence between theory and reality, because these orders are not comparable. Neither is it a question of establishing the conditions necessary from the emergence of specific knowledges, for this approach takes knowledges as already-given products, while Althusser is attempting to find out what is particular to knowledges as knowledges. For Althusser, science is not a process of comparing theory to the real, but has to do with the mechanism whereby a discourse functions as knowledge and not as something else. The problem of the appropriation of the real object by the object of knowledge represents, in fact, a particular case of appropriation of the real work by the different practices, each of which poses the problem of its specific 'effect'. For example, Marx studied the mechanism which makes the result of history's production exist as a society with the property of producing the 'society effect', which makes this result exist as a society and not as something else (Ibid.: 65-7). Every mode of appropriation (theoretical, aesthetic, religious, technical, etc.) poses the problem of its specific 'effect', each of which is produced by a specific mechanism. The production of knowledge is the effect of the conditions of scientific production on theoretical objects, i.e. on systems of concepts. The mechanism of the

production of the knowledge effect is located in the mechanism which underlies the action of the forms of order in the scientific discourse of the proof: "The criterion of the 'truth' of the knowledges produced by Marx's theoretical practice is provided by his theoretical practice itself, i.e. by the proof-value, by the scientific status of the forms which ensured the production of those knowledges" (Ibid.: 59). These forms are revealed as the forms of the order of appearance of concepts in scientific discourse, as a function of other forms which, without themselves being forms of order, are nonetheless the absent principle of the latter (Ibid.: 67).

While the scientific knowledge effect is generated by a problematic which is not present in the theoretical discourse itself but governs the order of exposition of its concepts; the ideological knowledge effect, as exemplified by pragmatism, is defined in terms of the social functions expressed within it.

Althusser's explanation of the mechanism of the knowledge effect manifests his desire to establish the autonomy of theory: the ideological knowledge effect depends on the social functions which are dominant in it; while the mechanism of the scientific knowledge effect is explained by the inwardness of the 'criterion of practice' to scientific practice. Furthermore, the forms that give knowledge its character as true knowledge are separate from the forms in which the knowledge was produced.

Here Althusser is referring to the 'contemporary knowledge effect'; the study of society without reference to its genesis. This is clearly an attack on empiricist history, which studies the forms in which society was produced.

The question of how knowledge appropriates the real world is not to be confused with the 'problem of knowledge', which sees the relation between the object of knowledge and the real object as a problematical one, and regards knowledge itself as a problem. Althusser claims that this is a false question generated by a false answer; whereas what is required is a problematic which will produce the real problem. The effect produced by knowledge is no problem - the real problem is understanding the nature of the mechanism which produces it. The classical problem of knowledge, however, depends on external, a priori guarantees, or on a philosophical consciousness. It presupposes that the objects whose theoretical history it tells are really knowledges: "It treats the knowledge as a fact whose transformations and variations it studies as so many effects of the structure of the theoretical practice which produces them, as so many products which happen to be knowledge - without ever reflecting the fact that these products are not just any products but precisely knowledges. A theory of the history of the production of knowledge therefore does not take into account what I propose to call the 'knowledge effect', which is the peculiarity of those special products which are

knowledges." (Ibid.: 61-2).

Althusser's notions of the autonomy of theory and the mechanism of the knowledge effect pave the way for his coup de grâce: dialectical materialism. His portrayal of the interrelationship between dialectical materialism and historical materialism is extremely complex. The latter, it is held, has the other practices of the social formation as its object (or raw material), thus these practices are subsumed by historical materialism, and the theory of these levels is accommodated within the social formation. "But the theory of dialectical materialism or science has a different status and is regarded as distinct from the social formation ... in this way a distinction is made between the four practices: three of them exist within the social formation, while the fourth (theoretical practice) is independent of it" (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 121).

As the theory of theoretical activity, dialectical materialism is a metatheory explaining theory or science. It is the theory of theory, and stands above it. Althusser distinguishes between historical materialism (the science of history); and dialectical materialism, which is an epistemology of the doctrines of science, the theory of practice in general, and as such has an existence independent of individual sciences.

Althusser attributes particularly grandiose powers to dialectical materialism: as the theory of practice in general, it

is responsible for transforming the "concrete activity of men" into "scientific truths". (Althusser, 1969: 168). It is essential for the proper development of historical materialism in that it identifies the latter's weak points, poses its problems, gives it valid concepts, and prevents it from being invaded by ideology (Geras, 1972a: 59-60). For Althusser, dialectical materialism establishes principles of method pertinent to all sciences and practices: through it is expressed "the essence of practice in general, and through it the essence of the transformations, of the 'development' of things in general" (Althusser, 1969: 168).

Taking into account Castells' explicit adherence to the Althusserian portrayal of theoretical practice (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 113-4), one would anticipate the concomitant assertion that theory does not require the validation of social history, for this would constitute an external guarantee, a "mystical reflection of conditions anterior to theory" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 59). Althusser's model of the production of theory has as its fundamental principle the absolute exclusion of any socio-political components in the theoretical raw material, labour or product. Castells concurs: "we have dismissed as irrelevant those criteria which are exterior to scientific practice and which seek to describe its content" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 138). He defines idealism as the belief that there is such a thing as an ahistorical truth which has a prior existence

in the order of reality (Ibid.: 121); while ideology is characterized by the claim that there are no scientific laws, only explanations which are always contingent, and by the criterion of truth as a reference to social practice conceived as a free and deliberate action performed by human beings (Ibid.: 132). He further emphasizes that the "epistemological distinction between everyday perception and theoretical concepts is more necessary than ever" (Idem, 1977a: 439).

Castells sums up his position on guarantees, maintaining that "There are no methodologically justified general norms which guarantee scientificity ... Those criteria which are exterior to the scientific practice have been dismissed" (Idem, 1976d: 138). He also contends that, in opposition to the theses proposed by empiricism, theory is a means of production of scientific facts, thus there is no possibility of "subordinating it to the evidence without destroying the various stages and the elementary principles of scientific facts" (Idem, 1977a: 432). This denial that there are general exterior criteria of scientificity is entirely in consonance with Althusser's insistence that knowledge has no extra-scientific guarantees, no general epistemological protocols and no supra-scientific forms of proof external to the particular science.

Similarly, Castells complies with the Althusserian notion that each of the practices possess their own specific effects:

any situation, he says, "is made up of systems of practices, defined by their position in the structure, but whose secondary effects express a relative autonomy, capable of redefining the situation beyond their structural charge" (Ibid.).

Althusser's description of the role of dialectical materialism is accepted by Castells, who defines its function as the "exercising of vigilance in the operations of scientificity - the aim of this vigilance being to render ineffective the epistemological obstacles which hinder the production of knowledge" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 113). In this sentence alone, Castells implicitly subscribes to the separation between dialectical and historical materialism, acknowledging the former's privileged epistemological position in the determination of the difference between science and ideology; and recognizes the process of knowledge as a process of production - all definitive traits of Althusserian philosophy.

As in many other areas, however, Castells no sooner swears fealty to Althusser, than he changes sides. He repeatedly undermines the conception of theory as an autonomous practice outside of the social formation by stating that "All intellectual work is highly dependent, whether one wishes or not, on the social context in which it is produced" (Ibid.). Research, he says, cannot proceed in the abstract (Castells, 1977a: vii), for progress in theoretical practice depends in the last resort on social conditions (Ibid.: 8).

He denies the role of dialectical materialism in the posing of historical materialism's problems, which, he asserts, are defined by social and political practice (Ibid.: 2), after having castigated Wright Mills for arguing that scientific practice should hinge upon "the history of political facts and the important problems of the modern world" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 135).

In these and many other instances, Castells evinces his inability to accept Althusser's conception of theory as autonomous from the concrete reality of the other practices of the social formation. Indeed, Saunders comments that Castells' notion of reality "has no reference in Althusser's philosophy of scientific practice. Indeed, despite his protestations to the contrary, it is apparent that the whole thrust of Castells' critique ... is premised upon an epistemology that Althusser himself rejects" (Saunders, 1981a: 172). Ironically, it is Castells himself who inadvertently describes the central theme of his predicament: "One must choose between, on the one hand, the idea of a 'Great Theory' (even a Marxist one) ... and, on the other hand, the proposition of a theoretical work that produces concepts and their historical relations within a process of discovery of the laws of society" (Castells, 1977a: 438).

His frequent shifts between contradictory epistemologies show that Castells has been unwilling to make this choice, and he seems to be unaware of the fact that in this respect his

between those concepts (Hindess, 1977a: 206).

While Althusser analyses sciences in terms of their concepts and the relations between them, empiricist formulations, he says, are to be taken at face value and read as an index of the ideological nature of the process of production of the discourse. It is evident that this difference in the mode of treatment of theoretical discourses can be upheld only if the difference between science and theoretical ideology is known from the outset (Ibid.: 207). This variation in analytical treatment, as well as the requirement of an a priori separation between science and ideology, puts Althusser in the indefensible situation in which predetermined conclusions determine the treatment of theoretical discourses.

Althusser's characterization of the scientific problematic further fails to distinguish Marxist science from other social sciences. Althusser has had to refer to substantive evidence when trying to show what it is about Marxism that vindicates its right to scientific status. On entirely methodological grounds, this prevents him from contesting those social scientific theories that are not narrowly empiricist (Keat and Urry, 1975: 134).

Another objection to the problematic concerns its relationship to its raw material. If the raw material is ideological, it is difficult to comprehend how the problematic can evaluate its ideological impurities: the raw materials are merely taken as established; and no measure of internal

treatment by the problematic "can make silk purses out of these sows' ears" (Thompson, 1978: 36).

While Althusser identifies scientific practice as being specific and irreducible, he has also attributed these qualities to the other practices, so this does not explain why the theory of theoretical practice is located outside of the social formation: "obviously it is impossible to determine the limits and effectivity of one practice on others independent of the investigation of particular social formations, since there is no predetermined relationship between them except determinance by the economy in the last instance" (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 122).

In its role as "the theory of practice in general", dialectical materialism has an existence independent of particular sciences and practices. This depiction is 'substantiated' by a reference to the operation of the mathematical and physical sciences: "No mathematician in the world waits until physics has verified a theorem to declare it proved, although whole areas of mathematics are applied in physics: the truth of his theorem is a hundred per cent provided by criteria purely internal to the practice of mathematical proof" (Althusser and Bailibar: 1970: 59).

Althusser has replaced the Marxist system which uncovers in nature the same dialectical laws that occur in society, with an alternative in which the theory of nature and the theory of society are combined only in terms of epistemology: "There

are no longer two theories that find the same laws in 'reality' but a single theoretical activity subject to laws of its own whose generality can be traced in every domain" (A. Glucksmann, 1977: 71).

Quite apart from the fact that it is, by his own admission, unreasonable to equate sciences with different objects; by stating that the scientific problematic is able to produce its own facts by self-validating protocols without reference to external verification, Althusser is describing a process which incorrectly employs mathematical and logical protocols of proof. Even if Marxism's scientificity could be established once and for all, this would only establish the epistemology of one particular science. Marxism's scientific status does not inevitably explain other types of theoretical practice: Althusser has therefore been unable to support his assertion that dialectical materialism is a general theory (A. Glucksmann, 1977: 73). His refusal to acknowledge the distinction between Marxism and the natural sciences has another serious implication for the status of sciences: "Considered independently of the other instances in the social formation, and of the class interests inscribed therein, they are all indifferently valid knowledges. Althusser's silence about the difference is thus part of a deeper silence: an idealist silence about science's mode of dependence in the social formation (Geras, 1972a: 83).

The concept of the knowledge effect has also come under fire. Althusser's desire to separate the society effect (the real product of the ensemble of productions) from the knowledge effect (the theoretical product of the ensemble of productions), is clearly related to his conception of production. With regard to the society effect it is material production which determines the mode of production; while the knowledge effect is to be understood through theoretical production, in terms of which the essence of all production is to be understood. Here, the articulation of production is responsible for both the order of knowledge and the order of the real: this, according to Glucksmann, is a transcendental correlation which presupposes a secret correspondence between a theory and its object (A. Glucksmann, 1977: 74). Veltmeyer suggests that the knowledge effect is a "mere verbal solution" to the central problem of structuralist thought: "The 'mechanism' of the 'knowledge effect' betrays a 'silence' on an effective presupposition: an underlying correspondence or homology between the order of the world and the nature of thought ... the homology between thought and reality is simply that it just happens to be so" (Veltmeyer, 1975: 389-90).

By stating that the validity of a scientific proposition as a knowledge was ensured by the knowledge effect - the action of forms which establish the presence of scientificity in the production of knowledge, Althusser is merely pronouncing that science is science when it has the form of scien-

tificity (Kolakowski, 1971: 114). For Glucksmann, the problem of the knowledge effect, or what distinguishes science from other forms of discourse, leads Althusser to ask a question that he is unable to answer, and which remains "'in suspense' at the level of epistemological generality at which it was posed" (A. Glucksmann, 1977: 73).

Althusser has defined ideological philosophy as the search for epistemological guarantees, and counters that science does not exist in general, as each science possesses its own criteria of validity. For Callinicos, Althusser's claim that there is no general criterion of scientificity, and that the "radical inwardness" of theoretical practice provides the criterion of scientific validity, does not provide the solution to the problem of scientificity. "The only difference between the analysis of the knowledge effect provided by the theory of theoretical practice and the general criterion of scientificity that Althusser argues we must reject as ideological is that in the case of the former we are offered the promise, if not the reality, of a causal analysis of the foundations of science. But in essence the theory of theoretical practice is a theory of the difference between science and ideology. Since it is responsible for establishing scientificity as such, the theory must involve a general criterion of scientificity" (Callinicos, 1976: 76). It is thus alleged that Althusser has been unable to avoid the problematic of "bourgeois" epistemology by employing the

distinction between science and ideology, between truth and falsehood.

It is not only on epistemological grounds that Althusser's concept of theory has been challenged. The most significant argument against this schema is that, by placing theoretical practice outside of the social formation, Althusser has severed Marxist philosophy from its social context (McLennan, Molina and Peter, 1981: 98), and has thereby rendered the working class unable to participate in the development of theory. The repercussions of this stance are evidently pivotal for Marxism, and the implications of Althusser's position in this regard will be elaborated in the chapter "Ideology, Social Classes and the Role of the Individual".

HISTORICIST HUMANISM

Historicist humanism was essentially a reaction against the Marxism of the Second International, which was pervaded by mechanicism and economism. It was thought that socialism would inevitably replace capitalism, and this 'natural necessity' culminated in fatalism and passivity. In 1914, however, Marxists were obliged to align themselves either with their own capitalist states or with the international worker's movement. "It was clear that the mechanistic treatment of Marxism by Kautsky and others had served to transform it into a rhetorical mask for their reformist practice in the face of capitalism's greatest crises. It was therefore necessary to think the political crisis in philosophy and to effect the necessary reinterpretation of Marxism which could both capture its critical and scientific character and account for the role which ideological and political factors play in determining whether a crisis can become a revolution" (Callinicos, 1976: 16).

The rejection of the tenets of the Second International led to a return to Hegelian philosophy, which gave rise to the view that a theory is only valid if it fulfills the requirements of a particular class at a particular time: "The sciences do not derive their epistemological status from the construction of theories in order to explain reality but from their role in the formation of the world views of particular social

classes" (Ibid.: 18).

Humanism conceives of action as the result of individual will and consciousness. Its fundamental principle is that man is the centre of the universe and of knowledge. Humanism's primary philosophical constructs - human nature, freedom as the essence of man, and the harmony of man with nature - are prescriptive as well as descriptive expressions, expressions of a will, and as such reflect an ideal as well as a real relation between man and nature. Being ideal, this is also an imaginary relation with reality and thus, for Althusser, ideology (Smith, 1980: 60). As humanism tries to disclose human essence, it confuses the real object with the object of knowledge, falling prey to the presuppositions of empiricism. Althusser rejects this philosophical anthropology, claiming that after the epistemological break, Marx developed a theoretical anti-humanism, based on his discontinuity with Hegel (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 119). The suggestion that Marx never departed from his earlier Hegelian humanism is regarded by Althusser as a denial of the significance of Marx's subsequent development of a scientific Marxist theory.

Hegel

Hegel's conception of the totality is that it is an expressive one, in which each part expresses the others as well as the overall totality. It possesses a circular unity of equivalent components whose type of articulation is determined by their interiorization in the Idea, while

social realities are phenomena or exteriorizations of the Idea. In this conception of the social whole, there is a contradiction between essence and phenomena; unlike the Marxist totality, which is a complex unity of separate levels which are relatively autonomous of each other.

In Hegels' view of history, each era has elements which are unified in a totality. History proceeds inexorably towards an inevitable conclusion: the rising of the Absolute to self-consciousness (Hegel, 1956: 82). This is quite different from the Marxist view of history, which is not the expression of a spiritual essence, but a process whose development results from the distinct levels composing it: "it is only on the basis of the irreducible distinctness of the parts of the whole that relations of determination, causal relations, rather than intimations of the Absolute, can be established" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 41).

Hegel regarded the world as a totality based upon an identification of the known object and the knowing subject. For him the world was a secondary symptom, a mere side effect of the Absolute Idea, which was realized in the dialectical process in which the Notion appeared in thought, became alienated from itself in the static world of nature, and finally became conscious of itself in human history. The identification of subject and object occurs when the philosopher becomes aware that the world issues from the Idea, and this could only happen once history is completed. In

the Hegelian formulation of the privileged present, consciousness and science meet, enabling the totality to be discerned in an essential section: "we have, in traversing the past ... only to do with what is present; for philosophy, as occupying itself with the True, has to do with the eternally present. Nothing in the past is lost to it, for the Idea is ever present; Spirit is immortal; with it there is no past, no future, but an essential now. This necessarily implies that the present form of Spirit comprehends within it all earlier steps" (Hegel, 1956: 82). The essential section reflects the continuous development of the Idea, with the study of history involving the periodization of moments of the Idea. As time is homogeneous, the present is history, and it is possible at any time to discern the ensemble of components comprising the totality. If all the elements of the totality always coexist simultaneously, it is possible to make any essential section of history in which all the elements will be shown. This contemporaneity is part of a concept of unity which prevents any element from achieving a role dominance of over the others.

For Hegel, speculative knowledge concerning the Absolute Idea is the most exalted form of reason. If thought remains limited to scientific and common-sense views of phenomenal reality, it is prevented from knowledge of the spiritual reality, and is further unable to apprehend the essence which it is simply an appearance of true reality, and can only be

understood through a knowledge of that of which they are the 'appearances'. "The realm of the finite perceptible, material world, which is the object of 'understanding' with its categories, and traditional logical principles, has no true independent being" (Benton, 1977: 143). The world is fundamentally contradictory: its essence, its reality, is located outside it, in its negation. Only by replacing the idea of the non-contradiction by the dialectical principle of the unity of contradictions in some higher totality, can the restricted nature of scientific thought be overcome.

Hegel regarded dialectical logic and the depiction of the Absolute Idea as the result of the historical growth of religion and philosophy. Dialectical logic is a historical process in which the Absolute Idea achieves self-knowledge, recognizing the final spiritual unity of things as 'elements' of itself: "it may be said of Universal History, that it is the exhibition of Spirit in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially. And as the germ bears in itself the whole nature of the tree, and the taste and form of its fruits, so do the first traces of Spirit virtually contain the whole of that History" (Hegel, 1956: 18). Any developmental process, including the historical process, takes place according to a succession of stages: "The principles of the successive phases of Spirit that animate the Nations in a necessitated gradation, are themselves only steps in the development of the one Universal Spirit,

which through them elevates and completes itself to a self-comprehending totality" (Ibid.: 82).

Althusser's Opposition to Hegelian Marxism

Against Hegel, Althusser insists that the concept of history can be given content only by defining historical time as a specific form of existence of a social totality with structural levels of different temporalities in relations of correspondence and non-correspondence. Different levels of the totality are thus considered to have their own time-scales related to their relative autonomy, and may be related to each other in different ways at different moments. The relationship between one social formation and the one that follows it is to be understood in terms of displacement rather than the gradual unfolding of an innate developmental potential (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 106, 132).

Each element has its own history and time scale, and the resultant structure must be viewed as a more or less conjunctural unity of different and separate histories. There is no general time base or general conception of time which can comprehend this structural history. Marx's structuralist theory of history is based on a new conception of the social totality, which breaks with the Hegelian conception of the totality in its spatial and temporal expression. Whereas the Hegelian totality is a unity expressing a simple essence immanent within its phenomena; Althusser's conception of the totality is that of a decentered structure in dominance:

society is a complex whole that possesses the articulated unity of a structure in dominance (Ibid.: 108). Since the Hegelian conception of historical time reflects its characterization of the structure of the social whole, totalities in the historical process are simply successive expressions of the successive moments of the unfolding of the potentialities of the Idea, in a linear time continuum. Althusser replaces the ideology of simple time and simple history with the notion of complex differential historical time as a function of the complexity (overdetermination) of the social formation. Hegel's continuous and homogeneous historical time was distinguished from Marx's conception of historical time as a specifically determined, complex structural unity.

The Hegelian Marxist approach can be exemplified by Lukács (1923), who was primarily concerned with the relation between consciousness and reality. This in turn depended on the epistemological problem of the relation between a science and reality, as well as the relation between theory and practice. The latter question dealt with the problem of how Marxists move from a scientific analysis of capitalism to a position of mass proletarian support. The inability of the Western European working class to establish a revolutionary perspective made it apparent that a revolutionary consciousness did not simply develop spontaneously, but had to be actively created.

Lukács developed a conception of Marxism as a philosophy of praxis, believing that the Hegelian concepts such as alienation, essence, praxis and negation were central to all of Marx's writings. Man was seen as a self-creating being arising out of the dialectic between labour and the natural world. For Lukács, the basic contradiction of capitalism is the extent to which the bourgeoisie can impose upon particular aspects of society a structure which is rational and therefore amenable to control, and its ability to control the system as a whole. Society is seen as an aggregation of discrete things, bound together by the relations of the market rather than by any sort of conscious control. This reified structure both masks and reflects the real social relations underlying it. False consciousness was produced in the life practices of capitalist society, especially exchange relations and commodity fetishism. "Human beings come to see their relations with other people and people as such, as instruments to ends which become harder and harder to identify. In addition, the sources of knowledge, as well as the reasons and causes of activities become mystified by a veil of thing-like 'objective forces' ... The difference between the working class and the bourgeoisie, in this regard, is that the latter benefits from this mystification and the former suffers from it" (Ibid., cited by Eyerman, 1981: 49-50).

In contrast to Althusser's notion of relative autonomy, in Lukács' formulation the superstructures correspond exactly to the base. This direct correspondence allows for only one principal contradiction, that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; whereas for Althusser, the concept of relative autonomy permits a variety of contradictions which may be unrelated to class. Theory is distinct from class consciousness or political practice: there is thus no objective thought in either individuals or classes.

In Lukács' schema, Marxism is an ideology rather than a scientific social theory. Theory is class consciousness, for it develops out of the proletariat's spontaneous behaviour. Marxism's validity is not established by scientific protocol, for it arises out of a class position: "Marxism expresses proletarian consciousness, and proletarian consciousness is correct because the proletariat is the subject of history, and therefore in a position to grasp theoretically the totality of society just as it grasps it practically and transforms it" (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 131).

Althusser finds this position untenable in that it reduces theoretical practice by assimilating it to the other practices, subsuming them all under historical practice. Theoretical practice would thus be stripped of its autonomy by being conflated with 'real history'. This historicist collapse of theory into history is, according to Althusser, a 'leftist'

notion which permits political spontaneity while class conflict becomes the means of explaining and evaluating the content and history of science. Marxism could no longer be regarded as a science, but merely as the product of subjective experience. There would no longer be any distinction between historical and dialectical materialism, and no basis for the entirety of Marxist philosophy (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 136).

Against this, Althusser insists that the criterion of class cannot account for the relatively autonomous history of science. For Althusser, Marxist theory is produced by a distinct theoretical practice: concepts and categories are developed to produce a knowledge of the real, rather than merely to express it. Thus, rather than being circumscribed by a relation of direct expression, Marxist theory is a product of thought.

In effect, Althusser is resisting the reduction of science to ideology, for this would render science unable to achieve objectivity. He contends that the process by means of which conceptions of the world are formed reflect the character and requirements of the particular relations of production in which people are placed; rather than the decisions of individuals, whose activity is defined and constrained by the fact that they are simply part of a combination of agents and objects in a structure of relations, places and functions (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 41-2).

In historicism, historical practice (praxis) is regarded as the general practice which subsumes all the other, including

theoretical practice. Science is thus deprived of its autonomy and is assimilated to 'real history', and therefore results from the political and ideological practice of the masses. In rejecting this formulation, Althusser employs the concept of structural causality, in which each practice is a structure determining the combination of its elements, with individuals being the supports of this structure (Ibid.: 186-8). In this schema, science does not require validation by any particular group or historical era.

For Althusser, there is no 'problem of the individual in history', for there are different forms of historical existence of individuality; as the supports or agents of the particular mode of production, individuals are given their positions through the mechanisms that reproduce the social formation. He criticizes history and humanism for seeing philosophy as the product of the activity and experience of the masses, of politico-economic praxis, for this would mean that philosophers would play only a subsidiary role in a 'commonsense' philosophy that has been established without them.

Criticisms of Althusser's Position

In Althusser's analysis of a social formation, he distinguishes between subjective experience and objective knowledge, but he does not give any indication of how it is possible for them to be combined in political activity.

While political practice is separate from theoretical and ideological practice, it must integrate them with each other and with the objective contradictions. His claim that theoretical practice and political practice are distinct but inter-related is valueless in the absence of an explanation of how they combine in political situations. This connection appears to be contingent upon conscious volition, and is thus voluntaristic in that it implies that consciousness is the cardinal element altering a revolutionary situation into a revolution proper. "Thus we return to the same problem: everything and all action ultimately seems to occur at the political level, both the fusion of contradictions, and of practices; and in the absence of a more adequate discussion of politics, this engenders an extreme form of voluntarism, since consciousness is not determined by class, and an over-emphasis on the political arena as the sole locus of activity" (M. Glucksmann, 1974b: 134). This inaugurates a political instrumentalism in which the only efficacious struggle is that against the mode of production, and fails to take cognisance of the significance of struggles in other arenas.

Althusser's controversial notion of levels motoring around in history at different speeds has been rejected by many who remain unconvinced of its validity, and who distrust its theoretical consequence. Thompson refuses to admit that one can posit the 'specific dependence' of levels on each other and then proclaim the relative independence of their

histories. He suggests that the implication of allocating different times and histories to the various levels of the social formation is simply an ideological 'Marxist' legitimisation for persisting with the well-known academic procedures of isolation which disintegrate the ability of historical materialism to comprehend the historical process (Thompson, 1979: 94). For Anderson, however, Thompson's critique on this issue lacks depth and subtlety, for it takes as given Marx's conception of the mode of production, and does not see the necessity of subjecting it to analysis. This leads Thompson to ignore the gain of the notion of differential time for historians.

Anderson takes issue with Althusser by denying that there is anything in the least ideological in the concept that time as a chronology is one homogeneous continuum; for historical temporalities, however differential, are always controvertable into chronological time, which remains identical (Anderson, 1980: 75). In this sense, he concurs with Thompson, who states that while historians may write a history of the parts of the whole, the real object is still an undivided whole: the human past is not a collection of distinct histories, but a combined sum of human behaviour (Thompson, 1978: 40).

Castells and Historicist Humanism

Castells' opposition to the Hegelian conception of history as taking place through an evolutionary succession of stages

is evident in his rejection of urbanistic theories of the structuring of urban space. The urban question as it has been formulated by these theories, he says, has confused the problematic of spatial forms, that which has to do with the process of the reproduction of labour power, and that of the cultural specificity of 'modern' society (Castells, 1977a: 124). With regard to the production of knowledge, these ideological urbanistic theories assign a particular form of the reproduction of labour power to the 'culture' of society in general, and depict the latter as caused by the process of increasing complexification of its territorial setting. In this way, the dominant culture distorts the character of classes by making them appear as though part of an almost essential evolution (Ibid.: 430). Castells argues that in order to discover the articulation of spatial forms in the social structure, it is necessary to "break up the globality of this urban society understood as a true culmination of history in modernity ... 'urban culture', as it is presented, is neither a concept nor a theory. It is a myth since it recounts, ideologically, the history of the human species" (Ibid.: 83, my italics). Theories of urban culture have tried to explain the production of social, spatial and cultural forms, simply on the basis of an organic phenomenon of growth "as if it were a question of matter upwards, linear movement of matter towards spirit" (Ibid.: 84).

These theses on urban society avoid the examination of ideological forms in terms of social contradictions and class division. Society is held to be a unity, developing organically, producing universal types. This ideology interprets everyday problems by "offering an interpretation of them in terms of natural evolution, from which the division into antagonistic classes is absent" (Ibid.: 84-5). The most well-known version of this approach to the city is the Chicago School, which set out to describe urbanism as a particular cultural system. It held that spatial form produced social relations, and assumed that the physical characteristics of human settlements were responsible for cultural behaviour. Urbanization was portrayed as an inevitable consequence of human evolution, and it was further argued that urbanization would invariably result in specific social effects. This depiction of urban history was clearly convenient to the dominant classes, in that it restricted analysis to spatial, technical and biological information, which deflected the focus from social realities. Furthermore, the 'Western' urban form was held up as the cultural prototype, and all other countries were assessed in terms of their degree of correspondence to this model (Idem, 1977b: 62-3).

Castells regards Weber as exemplifying the historicist position, and describes his theories in the following way. For Weber, it was possible to acquire knowledge through the examination of historical realities rather than concepts.

Laws were always regarded as relative to the particular society. As the observer is a part of what he or she is observing, he or she will be unable to achieve the objectivity necessary to analyze the foundation of that society. Weber therefore isolated a concrete historical phenomenon and gave it significance by imputing certain causes to certain effects within a system of historically given social relations. To this end, Weber employed the method of the 'ideal type', which is conceived of as 'concrete reality' in that it originates from something that exists. His analysis, according to Castells, consists of the imputation of certain historical content to an observed reality by way of its degree of proximity to the ideal type which is used as a reference.

Castells uses Wright Mills to sum up the humanist stance, and analyzes the latter's attempt to study the meaning of historical reality for human individuals: "Our aim is to define that reality and those meanings: it is in relation to these definitions that we must formulate the problems of the social sciences. Such a programme demands that we should seek to attain an entirely relative understanding of the social structures which exist and have existed in the history of the world (C. Wright Mills, 2959, cited by Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 131). Castells dismisses Mills' suggestion that the course of scientific practice should be determined by individuals, political realities and contemporary problems.

This view, he says, does not enable the operation of theoretical practice as the transformation of raw material into theoretical products, and as such constitutes an epistemological obstacle which excludes any theoretical examination of social phenomena.

Against historicism, Castells argues that it has "no scientific laws, only explanations which are always contingent" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d" 132), and rejects it as "empiricist" in that it attempted a direct analysis of concrete reality through a process of abstraction. Castells further warns that any Marxist alliances with the humanist trend cannot be based on ideological ambiguity; and that it is essential to investigate the "demarcation of humanist metaphysics and the consequences of such metaphysics" (Ibid.: 136). Marxist humanism is, for Castells, unable to break free from the imposition of the dominant ideology; like historicism, it cannot accommodate the concept of the production of knowledge through theoretical practice; and it is furthermore unable to establish structural and conjunctural laws (Ibid.)

Castells thus takes up Althusser's anti-historicist humanist position by stating that "The concrete consequence of the historicist humanist view of scientific practice restricts the latter to mere descriptive chronicle and historical relativism. This has two effects: (1) On the theoretical level, it causes a constant oscillation between

subjectivism and scientism. (2) On the political level ... (since we have no laws of the production of conjunctural and structural laws), one ends up having no theoretical tools which are capable of orientating a transformation in historically determined social situations" (Ibid.: 138).

Castells is not content to censure mainstream urban theories for these tendencies: he is determined to expose and rout them even when in "'Marxist' disguise" (Ibid.: 117). His primary target in this regard is Lefebvre, whose work Castells attempts to demolish with all the Althusserian means at his disposal. For Lefebvre, any theoretical system that functions to maintain the current order of social relations, the reproduction of the relations of production, is defined as ideological; Marxism is not ideological in that it expedites revolutionary struggles. Lefebvre is not trying to establish the scientificity of Marxism as a science that can distinguish between 'truth' and 'falsehood': all theory, he suggests, is a mixture of truth and error, and there is no sharp distinction between science and ideology, truth and falsity (Saunders, 1981a: 152). Lefebvre thus differs from Castells in that the latter has tried, albeit inconsistently, to formulate a conception of science that corresponds with the Althusserian notion of a theoretical practice with metatheoretical capabilities. Lefebvre, on the other hand, argues that Marxism is a political theory of socialist practice rather than a science; it is in this

context that Lefebvre calls himself a "utopian" and tries to establish a depiction of the urban that will further subversive actions against capitalism. He disputes the claims of urban theory to be a specific objective science, and categorizes it as ideological in that it does not recognize the fundamentally political character of space, and supports the status quo by depoliticising the question of space and its use (Ibid.: 151-3). Lefebvre conceives of the historical process as one of dialectical sequence, in which eras follow each other according to the procedure of Hegelian supersession. In this evolutionary process, there are two primary stages: the first is the subordination of agriculture to industry, while the second is the subordination of industry to urbanization. Urban revolution is regarded as "the ensemble of transformations undergone by contemporary society, in order to pass from the period in which questions of growth and industrialization predominate, to the period in which the urban problematic will decisively triumph" (Lefebvre, 1970a: 88, cited by Castells, 1977a: 88). For Castells, this involves an idea of the urban as the axis of social development, and is Hegelian in that it represents the cultural summit of social development, and as such implies that history proceeds towards an inevitable conclusion (Castells, 1977a: 88). In this view, the urban, the new era of mankind, promises deliverance from the constraints of earlier historical stages (Ibid.); thus Castells remarks that the

term 'urban' is not innocent, as it implies the hypothesis of the production of social content by a "transhistorical" form (Ibid.: 89).

Castells further rejects Lefebvre's argument that space is constructed by social individuals: this is said to be a humanist historicist stance which "indicated that space, like the whole of society, is the ever-original work of that freedom of creation that is the attribute of Man, and the spontaneous expression of his desire. It is only by accepting this absolute of Lefebvrian humanism (a matter of philosophy or religion) that the analysis might be pursued in this direction: it would always be dependent on its metaphysical foundation" (Ibid.: 92). Castells asserts that Lefebvre has substituted social determination with human volition and the ideology of social existence.

Castells' repudiation of this approach is clearly based on Althusser's critique of historicist humanism. Castells' claim that Lefebvre should not have set out from 'men' but from their social and technological relations of production, has its origin in Althusser's statement that "In the reduction of all knowledge to historical social relations a second underhand reduction can be introduced, by treating the relations of production as mere human relations" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 139). Again, following Althusser, Castells says that he wishes to show the realization of a structural law within a social process, the structural determination of

the relations between actors, rather than relying on social practice to furnish the criteria of scientific validation. In dialectical materialism, Castells insists, the 'criterion of practice' refers to a materialist problematic of the production of knowledge: "There is no concern here for moral justification, as is the case with the historicist humanist conception (in which) history ... is merely the meaningful linking of human actions which always involve 'free choice' and are therefore 'unpredictable' (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 138).

Castells maintains that the relationship between the urban system and the system of actors is the specific expression of the relationships between the various global systems of the particular society (Castells, 1976b: 83), and says that human individuals, or "agents", and classes of these agents, are only the supports of these structural relationships (Idem, 1976c: 150).

It can, however, be seen that Castells has taken up a position that is in sharp contrast to his view of individuals as bearers of the social formation when he states that theory is insufficient when one wishes to understand the urban question, for it has to be combined with political practice: "The social conditions for the emergence of such a reformulation are extremely complex, but, in any case, one may be sure that they require a point of departure that is historically bound up with the working class and its practice" (Idem, 1977a: 6). This position directly contradicts Castells'

earlier Althusserian stance: he states that "any theoretical justification must be articulated in terms of a political standpoint (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 139); that only if one starts from a "proletarian position" can science achieve any validity (Ibid.: 140); and that "The frame of reference of a materialist epistemological intervention is the fusion of Marxist theory and the working class movement" (Ibid.: 118).

According to the Althusserian approach, by assimilating theory and practice, Castells is denying science its autonomy, he is reducing it to concrete history and the ideological practice of the masses. Historical practice is subsuming theoretical practice, and Castells comes in line for his own attack on humanist subjectivism, "even in its 'Marxist' disguise" (Ibid.: 117).

Castells' changes in epistemological position in the area of historicist humanism can perhaps be attributed to a reluctance to follow Althusserianism through to its final denial of the possibility of social practice contributing to the formulation of a scientific practice. Althusser's characterization of individual and class consciousness as ideological is regarded by many of his critics as the most unpalatable aspect of his entire schema. Their arguments against his stance will be discussed in the following chapter.

IDEOLOGY, SOCIAL CLASSES AND THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Althusser argues that ideology is characterized by its mystified structure rather than its political implications. It provides a mystical reflection of conditions anterior to theory, instead of achieving a genuine cognitive appropriation of the real.

In Althusser's structuralism, the analysis of the subject's consciousness does not contribute to the understanding of society. He takes up the position of 'theoretical anti-humanism': the conception that it is possible to study structures without taking into account the ability of individuals to make subjective decisions, thereby eliminating that element of consciousness which is generally regarded as germane to revolutionary Marxism (Garaudy, 1977: 205).

The individual nature of experience leads Althusser to classify it as an illusion, as opposed to the conceptual transformations accomplished by science. Individuals simply respond mechanically to objective structural conditions, and class consciousness must be rejected as a historicist concept and replaced by a concept of ideology which is distinct from the levels of theory and politics.

Ideologies cannot be conceived simply as ideas about the world, but must be seen rather as a kind of 'lived relationship' with it: "In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is

people are the bearers of particular functions concerning the reproduction of the relations of production. The structure of the capitalist mode of production is reproduced in a process whose requirements determine the subjective aspirations of the individual as agent/bearer: it is in this way that the relations of production become the subjects of the historical process as a support of this system of production. The role of the individual is defined through the mechanisms which reproduce the social formation - the structure of the relations of production. It is these relations which oust 'real people' from their role as constitutive subjects of the historical process: individuals do not participate in this process other than by embodying it.

Although particular ideologies may change through history, ideology in general remains ever-present. Even in communist society, ideology would be essential as the means whereby individuals live their everyday lives, since reality will never become apparent to them: "People 'live' their ideologies as the Cartesian 'saw' or did not see - if he was not looking at it - the moon two hundred paces away; not at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their 'world' - as their 'world' itself" (Althusser, 1969: 233). Althusser thus rejects those theories that place 'man' in a pivotal position by assuming that the human individual plays an important role in the development of theory: these theories employ ideologically constituted concepts as their

analytical foundation, and in so doing they prevent authentic explanations from being discovered.

Criticisms of Althusser's Position

Seidler argues that Althusser's rationalist critique of human nature leaves one with a flat alternative: either human nature exists as a definite set of qualities, or else it is historically determined (Seidler, 1980: 118). Layder too disputes that there are only two possible epistemological positions with regard to the role of individuals: that they are either bearers; or they constitute a genetic principle of the levels of the social whole, causing the social formation to be what it is. Both of these stances are based on epistemological and ontological confusions and do not adequately distinguish between levels of analysis. It is possible to refer to individuals within wider parameters than merely their functions as agents of economic determinations, without reverting to the reductionist position which incorrectly holds that individual motivation is the basic mechanism underlying the operation or genesis of social structures (Layder, 1979: 118). Thompson takes up this point, claiming that Althusser offers us a false choice between determination by individual volition, or total structural determination. He finds the latter alternative particularly unpalatable: "we are structured by social relations, spoken by pregiven linguistic structures, thought by ideologies, dreamed by

myths, gendered by patriarchal sexual norms, bonded by affective obligations, cultured by mentalités, and acted by history's script. None of these ideas is, in origin, absurd, and some rest upon substantial additions to knowledge. But all slip, at a certain point, from sense to absurdity, and, in their sum, all arrive at a common terminus of unfreedom" (Thompson, 1978: 153).

Keat and Urry dispute that the study of the historical process should confine itself to the social relations of political, ideological and material practice. While they agree that there are parts to play within the state and the ideological superstructure, they question whether it can be said that the role of the individual is entirely defined and distributed by political and ideological social relations of production. Althusser's structuralism has led him to generalize from the analysis of material production to the analysis of other practices: "Instead of seeing Marx as involved in the study of the causal impact of the social relations of material production, Althusser wishes to identify isomorphic structures of social relations of material, political and ideological production" (Keat and Urry, 1975: 137). Subjective interpretations and experiences are not allowed for in this version of structural analysis. While structural aspects do have a degree of influence on human behaviour, Althusser does not allow for the possibility that this behaviour may possess its own effect on the social structure.

Thompson argues that people are able to use their own experiences to convert objective determinations into subjective initiatives, and achieve their historical significance in the transformation of structure into process. While certain conditions are constant, people perceive conflicting interests, and establish class consciousness in such a way that they form their own classes. For Thompson, general experiences may lead to the replacement of previous conceptual system by new problematics, and he censures Althusser's epistemology for not taking into account this imperative presentation of knowledge. While not necessarily autonomous, people experience their situations and relationships, relate this experience to their consciousness and culture, and then act upon situations.

Althusser's conception of the individual as a support agent implies a role of the intellectual that, in spite of their theoretical divergences, his detractors find particularly untenable. For Fraser, Althusser's Marxism makes the proletariat the object of Marxism and Marxism the object of Althusserianism. This paramount role of theory has been developed by excluding the masses, which has resulted in the production of a socialism in which the class that makes the revolution becomes merely the "support" or "object" (Fraser, 1976: 442). There are obviously immense political consequences involved in Althusser's replacement of class

consciousness by a distinction between the masses who are unable to transcend ideology, and the intellectuals who possess knowledge. The intellectual is thereby accorded a privileged position from which to lead and control the directionless masses, and Althusser is establishing the dominance of mental labour over manual labour (Geras, 1972b: 302, and Clarke, 1980: 16, 75).

While the consciousness of the workers and that of the scientist does not always coincide, this is not the complete rupture that Althusser posits in his attempt to define the specificity of theoretical practice. As has been pointed out by Thompson, knowledges have been and still are formed outside of academic procedures. This knowledge has enabled people to "till the fields, to construct houses, to support intricate social organizations, and even on occasion to challenge effectively the conclusions of academic thought" (Thompson, 1979: 8). Althusserian Marxism, however, would have one believe that it is only possible to comprehend the contradictions of capitalist society by remaining detached: "we prove our seriousness through being ready to abstract ourselves from our lived experience, conforming to notions of 'rigour' and 'objectivity', which gives us a sense that we've got 'knowledge' while other simply have experience" (Seidler, 1980: 140).

Althusser thus ignores the fact that structures are not static, but are socially constructed: it is as important to analyze the nature of this construction as it is to study how the structures determine patterns of human action. People are not simply the products of a mode of production, they are human subjects constantly transforming themselves in their confrontation with real conditions. Althusser's external and mechanical characterization of the capitalist mode of production results in the portrayal of people who cannot participate in social change. For Marx the subjects of struggle are organized in social classes. The goal of political activity is to bring class power under conscious direction so that class interests and political goals are served. If this is the case, then this action and its actors must be theorized, rather than invoked in rhetoric in service of a theory in which they have no place (Lovell, 1980: 242).

Castells and Ideology, Social Classes and Individuals

Castells emphatically states his acceptance of the Althusserian conception of individuals as bearers of the social structure. "What is at issue, in fact, is whether studying the production of social structures is equivalent to analyzing their origin in the action of subjects crystallized in institutions ... To identify the production of forms with their origin in action presupposes acceptance of the notion of actor subjects, constructing their history in terms of their own

values and aims and leading, through a cooling process, to society, seen as containing struggles and conflicts between opposites. This requires that one take as starting point actors and combinations of actors, and thus that one accept the existence of primary essences, not deduced from social structures ... The theoretical issue is this: historical actors founding society through their action, or support agents expressing particular combinations of the social structure through their practice. We will take for granted that the first approach belongs to the philosophy of history, and that only the second is capable of founding a science of society" (Castells, 1976b: 77-8). In opting for the second approach, Castells is of necessity dismissing any possibility that the actor/individual constructs history in terms of his or her own abilities; and rejects out of hand the existence of 'human nature' as an independent, effective 'primary essence'.

Throughout his texts, Castells reiterates this Althusserian portrayal of the individual as agent or bearer of the social structure. The action of people, Castells says, is determined by their specific location in the social structure: "New effects proceed not from the consciousness of men, but from the specificity of the combinations of their practices, and this specificity is determined by the state of the structure" (Idem, 1977a: 125). Agents, whose most obvious expression is in social classes, "are only the supports of structural

relations. The relations between the social classes of a particular society are the effect on social relations of the complex combination of modes of production articulated within it" (Idem, 1976c: 150). He refers to the structural determination of the relations between agents: "Our aim is to show the realization of a structural law or set of laws" (Ibid.: 151). Furthermore, progress in theoretical practice, he insists, can never be the result of an individual or class: "It is from the constant resumption and rectification by different 'theoretical subjects' defining themselves in relation to a diversity of situations that new ways may emerge, within the limits of the historical situation of the production of knowledge" (Idem, 1977a: 435, my italics). Castells also applies this notion of agents/bearers in his analysis of the urban: he claims that in the examination of every concrete practice it is essential to take into account "the necessary insertion of urban actors in the system of economic, political and ideological places of the social structure" (Idem, 1976c: 160), and to make reference to places and not individuals (Ibid.: 163).

It has been seen that Althusser rejects the argument that ideology involves the distortion of reality through ideas, since this would be to accept that knowledge is the product of the consciousness of human subjects (idealism), or that reality is reflected in some way in our human ideas about it (empiricism). Because the real relations in which

individuals exist cannot themselves be directly known, individuals relate to their world by means of an imaginary relation (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 37-9, 54-5).

Althusser has emphatically repudiated the pragmatist notion that scientific truth is to be treated by the practical consequences of belief. Marxist theory is not to be seen as a chance hypothesis whose verification is provided by the political practice of history. "Proof by repetition for hundreds or thousands of years: this 'repetition' has produced, for example, 'truths' such as the resurrection of Christ, the Virginity of Mary, all the 'truths' of religion, all the prejudices of human 'spontaneity', i.e. from the most to the least respectable!" (Ibid.: 57).

Castells closely follows Althusser by denying that the criterion of scientific verification depends on social practice: "What social practice or activity are we talking about? If we are referring to the condensed expression of social practice, i.e. political practice, what do we mean by saying that such a criterion cannot be applied to the results achieved by this practice in the short term. But what time-limit should we set then? And who is to judge? The momentary victory (sometimes several decades) of fascism in some countries does not mean that we should consider its criminal theories as proven correct" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 136). Again, Castells criticizes the belief that the criterion of truth is a reference to practice conceived of as a "free

and deliberate action performed by human beings" (Ibid.).

In his application of the Althusserian conception of ideology to the discipline of urban sociology, Castells contends that it is not a science, but an ideological artifact: "That is, its existence is justified less by the effects of the knowledge it produces than by its ideological impact on social relations" (Castells, 1977b: 61). He disputes the very right of this area of study to refer to itself as 'urban', arguing that there is nothing relevant to the cities that cannot also be seen in the countryside: "Of course, we may call 'modern' society an 'urban' society, but this caprice of terminology is not without its consequences, both theoretical and ideological" (Ibid.). The term 'urban', he says, denotes a particular social organization of space which features the concentration of people and their activities. We study this space as an area of sociology because we endow it with specific social characteristics. Castells remarks that to look at space as contributing to social activity is rather like considering "the minerological structure of the land upon which a school is built as influencing its pedagogical system" (Ibid.) It is this so-called 'natural association' between space and society that urban sociology concerns itself with, and it is upon the accuracy of this assumption that the validity of urban sociology must be assessed. Castells examines the Chicago School's attempt to define urbanism as a cultural system produced by spatial

qualities such as density, size and heterogeneity. He rejects this supposition on the grounds that it is based on a spurious correlation: "If we control for the 'social' variables, spatial variables produce different effects, depending on the circumstances" (Ibid.: 63).

The influence of the Althusserian focus on structural rather than individual determination, can be seen in Castells' rejection of that branch of urban sociology that seeks to examine social integration and the adaptation of rural migrants to urban culture. For Castells, these studies are to be dismissed because they concentrate on "the network of strategies among actors" (Ibid.: 64), and have thus failed to account for urban characteristics in terms of their general determinations - the economic, political and ideological instances of the social totality: "one cannot analyze a social or political process independently from its structural context and from the web of structural interests which determine it" (Ibid.: 65).

It is also in Althusserian terms that Castells repudiates the urban managerialist literature: "this perspective ... rests entirely on an ideological base, for it is based on a metaphysical postulate ... that ultimately one must place the accent on the freedom of man who remains, whatever his situation, an autonomous agent capable of negotiating his co-operation" (Idem, 1977a: 250). Against this, Castells maintains that it is the particular social relations into

which people enter which gives space a form, a function and a social signification: "It is a question, then, of establishing the structural and conjunctural laws that govern the existence and transformation (of space), and the specificity of its articulation with the other elements of a historical reality (Ibid.: 115).

Althusser has made it clear that the subject-object unity has not only been employed by bourgeois theorists; it has "flourished nearly everywhere, even in the works of Marxist specialists" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 58). He insists that this "ideological myth" should be eradicated: "Even when this dichotomy is the servant of a revolutionary vision which exalts the worker's cause, their labour, their sufferings, their struggles and their experience in the undifferentiated proclamation of the primacy of practice, it still remains ideological" (Ibid.: 59).

Following Althusser's lead, Castells turns his attention to fellow Marxists, seeking to repudiate them in the terms outlined above. Lefebvre is rejected for indicating that people have the freedom to create space. For Castells, Lefebvre hereby affirms the spontaneity of social action and the dependence of space upon it, refusing to see space as the expression of general social determinations, and using people as a starting point, instead of the social and technological relations of production and domination (Castells, 1977a: 93).

Against the "Utopie" group who saw urban problems solely in terms of class relations and political struggle, Castells argues that they have not embarked on "the long road of theoretical mediations to be traversed" (Ibid.), and suggests that they should have analyzed the capitalist mode of production through the development of appropriate theoretical tools, which would locate the basic components of the social structure in a prior theoretical context. Only in this way, he says, can one interpret social practices, and decipher this "supposed 'autonomy' of 'actors' (Ibid.: 251).

As can be expected, these ideas can be seen in the system that Castells sets up as an alternative to both traditional urban sociology and the Marxist urban theories that place individual action at the centre of their discourses. Castells emphasizes the Leninist argument that a social movement aimed at qualitative transformation cannot be expected to develop spontaneously, but is rather dependent upon organization from the outside. Working class experience has to be explained in terms of Marxist theory before it can provide a basis for radical and effective action: "The role of organization is fundamental, for, although the support-agents make possible the constitution of combinations between the structural elements, it is the organization that is the locus or fusion of articulation with the other social practices. When there is no organization, urban contradictions

are expressed either in a refracted way, through other practices, or in a 'wild' way, a pure contradiction devoid of any structural horizon" (Ibid.: 271-2).

Criticisms of Castells' Position

Castells is here suggesting that, given the correct leadership, those engaged in urban struggles can be led to 'discover' common class interests. This argument lies at the heart of his assumption that urban struggles can help forge a popular alliance of anti-monopoly forces (Saunders, 1979: 118). Castells' critics, however, dispute that a common political situation in the urban system is sufficient to overcome traditional class divisions at the economic level. It is said that Castells has neglected the issue of individual consciousness: "The issues at stake and social base affected are said to be determined by structural contradictions, and the social force appears from the social base at the wave of a magic wand and of organization" (Ibid.: 119).

In a criticism that is reminiscent of those made against the Althusserian system, it is held that the theoretical ellision of practices with structural levels in Castells' work is responsible for a strained relationship between deterministic and voluntaristic explanations of political practice (Ibid.).

Saunders points out that Castells has amended his epistemological position extensively, primarily as a result

of his attempt to apply the Althusserian approach in empirical research. This led him to reconsider his earlier conceptions of science and its relation to ideology: "this reconceptualization has the effect of undermining any attempt at maintaining such a distinction and thus throws into question earlier critique of alternative theories, yet Castells has continued to refer to such theories as ideological despite his rejection of the very epistemology that sustained this critique" (Saunders, 1979: 120).

Another serious criticism must be applied to the fact that, throughout his work, Castells fails to give a consistently Althusserian account of ideology and the position of individuals and social classes. He contradicts Althusser so frequently that one has to concur with Saunders: "There is certainly room for debate over whether Castells ... was ever Althusserian in the first place" (Idem, 1981a: 160).

Castells links theoretical practice to the practice of individuals in precisely the manner that Althusser denounced. He says that any theoretical justification would have to be articulated in terms of a political standpoint: "The principal condition for the production of a theoretical justification of this type is the adoption of a political position" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 139); and that "Only if one starts from a proletarian position can historical materialism come forward as the science which plays the chief role in our conjuncture" (Ibid.: 140). Theory, he argues, has not been

able to make any important discoveries without a "direct link with the political conjuncture of the class-struggle" (Ibid.: 141). Theoretical practice "is determined by the differing forces of the classes which are in struggle" (Ibid.). He insists that "any social science that is not a new metaphysics must establish for itself ... a relation with reality" (Castells, 1977a: viii); and that theoretical work "does not take place in a social void; it must be articulated with the other practices (Ibid.: 441). It is a question, he claims, "of ensuring in a parallel way, the development of certain concepts and the intelligibility of these concepts in relation to everyday experience" (Ibid., my italics.).

It is clear that Castells is unable to follow the Althusserian logic through to the final implications of the separation between theory and reality. While he flies in the face of Althusser's description of theory, Castells is also assuming, along with the empiricists, that science shows us the real while ideology distorts it. This assumption is made explicit in Castells' definition of ideology, which is "a proposition which, being false in relation to the object considered is a symptom of another reality. It tends objectively to produce a misreading of reality, thus serving the interests which determine it" (Idem, 1970, cited by McKeown, 1980: 31). For McKeown, the crude correspondence theory of truth implied by this notion of ideology is not only untenable, but is entirely inconsistent with Castells' alleged rejec-

tion of empiricism: "It is untenable because a misreading of reality is as epistemologically senseless as is the empiricist notion of pure fact" (McKeown, 1980: 31).

If it is Marxism's political efficacy that determines its scientificity, the Althusserian considerations of science are necessarily excluded. Even if one accepts Castells' assertion that theory depicts reality while ideology distorts it, his subsequent (Althusserian) definition of historical materialism as "the revolutionary ideology of the workers" (Castells and de Ipola, 1976d: 119), would mean that historical materialism distorts reality, and hence is not scientific.

When Castells sets out to identify a new real object (the coincidence of units of collective consumption with spatial units), he has first to assume that this can be identified unproblematically through observation before he can show how it can be studied by means of his theoretical object. For Saunders, both his critique of urban theory and the reformulation of it are based on the argument that there must be a correspondence between some aspect of reality termed 'urban' and the theory that relates to it. "Castells, in other words, has effectively re-introduced the knowing subject/object of knowledge dichotomy that Althusser sought to reject" (Saunders, 1981a: 173).

By connecting theory and socio-historical practice, Castells comes in line for Althusser's criticisms of empiricism and historicist humanism. Castells assumes a contemporaneity of the various practices which makes possible a

reading in essential section: "This unleashes a logically necessary chain reaction which tends to reduce and flatten out the Marxist totality into a variation of the Hegelian totality" (Althusser and Balibar, 1970: 132). For Althusser, this collapse of science into history reduces the theoretical object of the science of history to real history, and confuses the object of knowledge with the real object. "This collapse is nothing but a collapse into empiricist ideology, with the roles in the presentation played by philosophy and real history" (Ibid.: 134).

Castells follows historicism in reducing all practice to experimental practice in general, and then assimilating this 'mother-practice' to political practice. In this way, 'real' historical practice is thought to generate all the other practices; dialectical materialism is subsumed by historical materialism, and Marxist philosophy is deprived of its rank as an autonomous discipline, having been reduced to a mere "historical methodology" (Ibid.: 136). Castells' views on 'praxis', then, are exactly those which Althusser reviled: "we are told: practice is the touchstone, the practice of scientific experiment! Economic, political, technical practice, concrete practice. Or else, to convince us of the 'Marxist' character of the answer, social practice!" (Ibid.: 56).

It should be pointed out that, in recent years, Althusser has embarked on an extensive re-examination of ideology, and

the political role of the class struggle. However, as these formulations (Althusser, 1971, 1974, 1976) were published some time after The Urban Question, Castells did not employ them, so I have limited myself here to an examination of those Althusserian texts employed by Castells.

It has been seen that Althusser's portrayal of individual and class consciousness as ideological is undoubtedly the most heavily disputed aspect of his entire oeuvre. It is thus in this area that one can best examine the epistemological shifts and internal contradictions of Castells' position, which are often in direct response to the growing controversiality of his mentor's tenets. As it is, Castells' compromises have led him be be impaled on both horns of the dilemma. Obviously, the ideal solution would have been for him to develop an original approach to the urban that would not have succumbed to either the Althusserian epistemological weaknesses or the assumptions of empiricism. In the light of his failure to do so, one is left with the impression that it would have been a lesser evil had Castells chosen one position, rather than attempting to straddle two mutually exclusive ones and giving an inadequate and inconclusive account of each.

CONCLUSION

This thesis, it will be remembered, set out to identify those aspects of Castells' work which are based on Althusser's writings, and to determine whether Castells manages to achieve scientificity in Althusserian terms. In order to ascertain possible reasons for Castells' evident departures from the Althusserian system, the criticisms of Althusser's stance from a wide variety of theoretical positions were examined.

One of the most controversial aspects of Althusser's interpretation of Marx is his contention that an 'epistemological break' occurred between Marx's early humanist writing up to 1845, and his later "scientific" work. Althusser argues that after the break, Marx relinquished all types of humanism and idealism, founding a new theory of history on concepts such as the social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructures and ideology. Up until the break, Marx allegedly subscribed to the notion of a universal human essence: this, according to Althusser, implied an empiricism of the subject and an idealism of the essence. He rejects empiricism because it suggests that knowledge is obtained by a process of abstraction carried out by the subject on the real object; while idealism is dismissed because it reverses this problematic and claims that reality is no more than the properties of the subject.

Althusser maintains that Marx's break with Hegel was far

more substantial than a mere inversion of Hegel's dialectic, for this would have led Marx to confine the theory of historical change to the development of the economic forces and relations of production and the essential contradiction between them.

Althusser disputes the Marxist version of the Hegelian expressive totality, which holds that contradictions occur in all levels of the social formation simultaneously, due to the principal contradiction located in the economic base. For Althusser, in order to explain historical change, it is necessary to take into account the development of secondary contradictions within the superstructure of political and ideological relations, which develop to some extent independently of economic relations, and create their own effects within the system as a whole. Althusser distinguishes between relations of dominance and relations of determination, and subscribes to the concept of 'determination in the last instance' by the economy, in which the economic base will always determine which domain of that system will be dominant and play the central role in determining the hierarchical order or articulation of all other parts of the whole.

Althusser's rejection of Hegelian Marxism led him to take up an anti-historicist position, in which he opposes the view that modes of production replace each other according to the gradual evolutionary unfolding of innate properties.

Each element of the social formation has its own history, and history in general represents a discontinuous succession of modes of production. Implied in this approach to history is the rejection of any pivotal historical role to individuals or classes as self-constituted historical subjects.

Another fundamental element of Althusserian Marxism is its characterization of theory as a type of production, with its own particular raw material, labour and product. In this way, Althusser hopes to establish a 'relative autonomy' of theory, and thus free it from the empiricist notion that scientificity is dependent on the immediate relation between theory and reality. By describing theory as a relatively autonomous practice, separate from and irreducible to the superstructural instances of the social formation, Althusser is also seeking to differentiate it from ideology, which is subordinated to interests other than those of knowledge.

The supposed autonomy of theory was hotly debated, and this influenced Castells' subsequent attempts to amend his epistemological standpoint. Althusser's depiction of theory as a separate practice involved a complete rejection of the idea of praxis as a criterion of theoretical validity. In response to this position, it has been argued that Althusser has ignored the significance of politics in the production of knowledge, and has made it impossible for theoretical answers to emerge from the practice of the class struggle.

One of the most explicitly acknowledged aspects of Althusser's work employed by Castells was the former's conception of the social totality as a complex structured unity of distinct, relatively autonomous instances with separate types of development. This version of the totality forms the basis of the Althusserian epistemology, and its implications are extensive and fiercely contested. Castells directly applies this concept in his formulation of the urban system, which, he says, is simply a specification of the general rules of the social formation. He thus argues that space can be analyzed in terms of the structural laws that determine its existence and transformation, and the specificity of its articulation with the other elements of historical reality. The relative autonomy which Althusser holds to exist between the levels of the social formation, was employed by Castells to dispute Wirth's assumption that spatial forms have absolute autonomy in the production of urban social existence; as well as that branch of urban sociology which posits that spatial forms have no influence whatever on the urban way of life. For Castells, while the mode of production does have an influence on the social content of spatial forms, the latter possess a degree of autonomy, which results in their ability to exercise 'specificity'.

Initially, Althusser's distinction between theory and reality is upheld by Castells, who defines the raw material of

theoretical practice as consisting of theory and ideology, not concrete reality as specified by positivist empiricism. Those views of Castells that are influenced by Althusser display a strong anti-positivist stance, hence Castells' statement that there is no such thing as an ahistorical truth which exists in the order of reality. He further uses the real object - theoretical object schema to assess the scientificity of urban sociology: according to Castells, a discipline can be said to be scientific if it possesses either a real or a theoretical object. Urban sociology, he says, has neither, and thus cannot be termed a science. Castells suggests that units of collective consumption coincide with spatial units, and can thus constitute a scientifically valid area of study.

Closely related to Althusser's distinction between theory and reality is his insistence that theory is a form of production in which the theoretical product is obtained by the transformation of theoretical and ideological raw materials through a process of theoretical labour. This approach is taken up by Castells, who claims that the production of knowledge corresponds exactly to economic production, and defines this process according to the Althusserian description of theoretical production. Castells also employs Althusser's concept of the epistemological break, which portrays the transformation of ideology into a science as dependent on the construction of a new problematic. This

system is the basis for Castells' assertion that the ideological raw materials of traditional urban sociology could constitute part of the raw material of a new scientific urban sociology, due to the fact that they could undergo a qualitative transformation through the operation of a scientific problematic. The problematic, as the means of theoretical labour, constitutes the conceptual framework of science, and distinguishes it from ideology. The influence of the concept of the problematic can be seen in Castells' work, especially in his description of it as a machine for producing theories. The problematic as a system which determines the problems that a theory will be able to pose, is in evidence in Castells' stated intention to replace the questions posed by ideology with scientific ones, determined by the problematic.

Althusser's rejection of the empiricist idea that knowledge consists of a relation of vision of a given object by a subject endowed with the faculty of vision, has been taken up by Castells, who denies that knowledge takes place between subject and object. For Althusser, theory is separate from the superstructural instances of the social formation, and therefore does not require the validation of external guarantees such as social history. Castells, too, claims that any criteria external to scientific practice have been dismissed as irrelevant.

Turning to Althusser's rejection of the twin Hegelian 'evils' of humanism and historicism, one finds Castells

following Althusser by denouncing the idea that urban society can be understood as the culmination of history, and Castells thus denies that the production of spatial forms takes place according to the Hegelian conception of history as proceeding inexorably towards an inevitable conclusion. The view of urbanization as an inescapable consequence of human evolution, Castells asserts, suits the dominant classes in that it deflects the focus from social realities, and holds up the Western urban form as a cultural prototype. Castells utilizes Althusser's rejection of historicist humanism in his critique of Weber, Wright Mills, and especially Lefebvre's Marxist version of these trends. Both humanism and historicism, Castells warns, are unable to accommodate the concept of the production of knowledge through theoretical practice, and are therefore prevented from establishing structural and conjunctural laws.

Influenced by Althusser, Castells maintains that individual action is structurally determined: human agents and social classes are only the supports of structural relations. Rather than examining individual consciousness, Castells says that his aim is to show the realization of structural laws, and insists that theoretical progress is never the result of individual or class action. Althusser's depiction of ideology as a 'lived relation' with the world, rather than simply a false representation of it, is exemplified by Castells' statement that ideological relations are those

through which individuals live their relation to the real world.

While there is much evidence of Althusserianism in Castells' work, on closer inspection one finds that he deviates from this system in every major respect. In his application of the Althusserian social totality to the urban system, Castells concentrates on the 'pure' capitalist mode of production, ignoring Althusser's insistence that any social formation contains a variety of different modes of production in complex combination. This separation of the capitalist mode of production from its structural context renders Castells' system unable to grasp the complexity of real events. Following Poulantzas, Castells hopes that the concept of relative autonomy will provide the means of incorporating the idea of effective class struggle into the essentially static Althusserian formulation of the social totality. Castells uses the notion of relative autonomy to develop a conception of the state as system regulator, capable of making concessions to the dominated classes on the one hand, while simultaneously undermining the long term unity of these classes on the other. Urban planning is defined as the state's relatively autonomous intervention in the realm of consumption; while urban social movements are defined as the conjuncture of class relations resulting in a qualitatively new effect. Relative autonomy is also held to exist between the levels of the structure and the corresponding

practices, for the latter are capable of creating new system effects in terms of how they articulate contradictions. Castells' conception of relative autonomy not only is incompatible with Althusser's structuralist interpretation of class practices, but it cannot explain the dynamics of urban transformation: he does not relate his structural analysis of urban planning policies to his analysis of practices in the form of urban social movements, for the social contradictions which define the class struggle are not exterior to the structural logic.

Notwithstanding Althusser's forceful attack on the idea that concrete reality is part of the raw material of theoretical practice, Castells claims that a discipline is scientific if it possesses either a theoretical object or a real object. Castells' suggestion that units of collective consumption coincide and can be identified with spatial units implies that there is an underlying correspondence between them that can be identified by observation, and is thus, in Althusser's terms, narrowly empiricist. Castells' distinction between theory and reality is inconsistently applied throughout his work, and it has been suggested that his position is far closer to crude positivist empiricism than to Althusserianism.

Castells frequently asserts that he has employed the Althusserian conception of theory as a practice, separate from the other practices of the social formation. However, the unpalatable consequences of an autonomous theory led

him to dilute this depiction by including concrete reality as part of the raw material of theory, and by judging the theoretical product with reference to historical and political practice - both expressly prohibited by Althusser. By making these modifications, the Althusserian portrayal of theoretical practice loses all meaning. Althusser intends the epistemological break to separate Marx's mature work from his early writings, which were influenced by the Hegelian philosophy of history. As with concrete history, Althusser argues that the history of knowledge is characterized by radical discontinuities and ruptures which inaugurate the reign of a new logic that does not develop from the old logic, but takes its place. Castells departs from this conception by employing the Hegelian concept of supersession, and denies the possibility of the epistemological break in favour of a link between conceptual development and concrete historical practices. Castells' use of the notion of supersession carries with it the very philosophical assumptions that Althusser wished to eradicate from Marxism. Once again, Castells is unable to achieve theoretical consistency, and has merely juxtaposed theoretical concepts which are mutually exclusive.

Althusser's depiction of the problematic as the internal structure of theories, is the basis for his characterization of knowledge as a practice, for it is the process in the production of knowledge in which raw material is transformed

into product. Given that it is held to take place entirely within thought, it is surprising to note that Castells replaces the role of the problematic as the 'means of production' of scientific thought, with the empiricist idea that scientificity is to be established by referring to concrete reality. While for Althusser the problematic is the system of questions which determines the answers a theory can pose, Castells deviates from this by stating that the development of theory must be tied to the problems posed by everyday experience. By allowing social practice the power to determine theoretical questions, Castells is stripping this function from the problematic, and undermining the epistemological status of theory that the problematic was designed to confer. Castells is also contradicting himself, for he has condemned urban sociology as ideological for defining its problems in terms of practico-social interests.

Althusser replaces the empiricist conception of vision as occurring between subject and object, with a structural condition of sighting, which is the relation between the field of the problematic and its objects and problems. Once again Castells comes down on the empiricist side of the fence, for he states that he aims at deducing theoretical tools of observation from concrete situations that he has observed. Thus, in the treatment of the problematic's role in 'vision' and 'non-vision', not only is Castells theoretically incompatible with Althusser (for whom individual observation is necessarily ideological), but he is also revealing a

a fundamental and unresolved tension in his work between empiricism and structuralism.

Castells is also unable to accept Althusser's portrayal of theory as autonomous from the concrete reality of the other practices of the social formation. He undermines this conception by stating that intellectual work is contingent upon the social context in which it is produced, and that progress in theoretical practice depends in the last resort on social conditions. He further claims that scientific practice depends on the history of political facts and the significant problems of modern society.

Castells' opposition to Hegelian Marxism is evident in his rejection of urbanistic theories of the structuring of urban space and theories of urban culture which have tried to explain the production of social forms on the basis of the Hegelian view of history. Following Althusser, Castells denies that space is the ever-original work of spontaneous initiative, and argues that one should not set out from people but from their social and technological relations of production. Castells nevertheless frequently contradicts this Althusserian stance. In his subsequent assimilation of theory and practice, Castells shows his reluctance to stay with the Althusserian approach through to its final denial of the possibility of social practice contributing to the formulation of scientific practice. Against historicist humanism, Castells maintains that the relationship

between the urban system and the system of actors is the specific expression of the relationships between the various global systems of the particular social formation, and says that individuals and classes are only the supports of structural relationships.

Castells regards urban sociology as an ideological artifact, justified less by the effects of its knowledge than by its ideological impact on social relations. The focus of urban sociology on individual strategies has neglected to account for the structural determination of urban characteristics. Marxist theoretician Lefebvre is rejected for indicating that individuals have the freedom to create space, and for failing to see that space is the expression of general social determinations. Castells' problem in the application of the Althusserian approach to historicist humanism only intensify in his discussion of ideology and its political implications for the role of individuals and classes. While Althusser has clearly classified human experience as ideological, and ideology as an inherent feature of any social formation (as opposed to merely a false representation of reality), Castells is clearly reluctant to adhere to Althusser's conclusion that individuals simply respond mechanically to objective structural conditions. His aim to identify a new real object of urban sociology as the coincidence of units of collective consumption with spatial units implicitly assumes that this can be

identified unproblematically through observation, and therefore re-introduces the knowing subject/object of knowledge dichotomy that Althusser rejects.

In Castells' connection of theory to socio-historical practice, he reduces Marxism to real history, and Marxist philosophy thereby loses the status of an autonomous discipline. He further links theoretical practice to individual and class practice in a distinctly unAlthusserian manner, stating that the principal condition for the production of theory is the adoption of a political position, and that theoretical practice is determined by the class struggle.

In the preceding ways, it can be seen that Castells' theoretical allegiance to Althusser is far from consistent, as he has significantly modified every aspect of Althusserian epistemology. Not only does he frequently neglect to identify his departures from this theoretical system, but he fails to acknowledge that his theoretical 'alterations' are in fact distortions which are in direct opposition to Althusser's intentions. It is for this reason that I contend that Castells wavers between contradictory epistemologies, and suggest that if he wishes to retain anthropological, humanistic and empiricist assumptions, he will have to dispense with far more of the Althusserian position than he appears willing to. As his work stands, he contradicts himself if he regards himself an Althusserian.

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