

Marxism and Literature

RAYMOND WILLIAMS

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electronic transmission and recording of speech and of writing for speech, and the chemical and electronic composition and transmission of images, in complex relations with speech and with writing for speech, and including images which can themselves be 'written'. None of these means cancels print, or even diminishes its specific importance, but they are not simple additions to it, or mere alternatives. In their complex connections and interrelations they compose a new substantial practice in social language itself, over a range from public address and manifest representation to 'inner speech' and verbal thought. For they are always more than new technologies, in the limited sense. They are means of production, developed in direct if complex relations with profoundly changing and extending social and cultural relationships: changes elsewhere recognizable as deep political and economic transformations. It is in no way surprising that the specialized concept of 'literature', developed in precise forms of correspondence with a particular social class, a particular organization of learning, and the appropriate particular technology of print, should now be so often invoked in retrospective, nostalgic, or reactionary moods, as a form of opposition to what is correctly seen as a new phase of civilization. The situation is historically comparable to that invocation of the divine and the sacred, and of divine and sacred learning, against the new humanist concept of literature, in the difficult and contested transition from feudal to bourgeois society.

What can then be seen as happening, in each transition, is a historical development of social language itself: finding new means, new forms and then new definitions of a changing practical consciousness. Many of the active values of 'literature' have then to be seen, not as tied to the concept, which came to limit as well as to summarize them, but as elements of a continuing and changing practice which already substantially, and now at the level of theoretical redefinition, is moving beyond its old forms.

4. Ideology

The concept of 'ideology' did not originate in Marxism and is still in no way confined to it. Yet it is evidently an important concept in almost all Marxist thinking about culture, and especially about literature and ideas. The difficulty then is that we have to distinguish three common versions of the concept, which are all common in Marxist writing. These are, broadly:

- (i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group;
- (ii) a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge;
- (iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas.

In one variant of Marxism, senses (i) and (ii) can be effectively combined. In a class society, all beliefs are founded on class position, and the systems of belief of all classes—or, quite commonly, of all classes preceding, and other than, the proletariat, whose formation is the project of the abolition of class society—are then in part or wholly false (illusory). The specific problems in this powerful general proposition have led to intense controversy within Marxist thought. It is not unusual to find some form of the proposition alongside uses of the simple sense (i), as in the characterization, for example by Lenin, of 'socialist ideology'. Another way of broadly retaining but distinguishing senses (i) and (ii) is to use sense (i) for systems of belief founded on class position, including that of the proletariat within class society, and sense (ii) for contrast with (in a broad sense) scientific knowledge of all kinds, which is based on reality rather than illusions. Sense (iii) undercuts most of these associations and distinctions, for the ideological process—the production of meanings and ideas—is then seen as general and universal, and ideology is either this process itself or the area of its study. Positions associated with senses (i) and (ii) are then brought to bear in Marxist ideological studies.

In this situation there can be no question of establishing.

except in polemics, a single 'correct' Marxist definition of ideology. It is more to the point to return the term and its variations to the issues within which it and these were formed; and specifically, first, to the historical development. We can then return to the issues as they now present themselves, and to the important controversies which the term and its variations reveal and conceal.

'Ideology' was coined as a term in the late eighteenth century, by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy. It was intended to be a philosophical term for the 'science of ideas'. Its use depended on a particular understanding of the nature of 'ideas', which was broadly that of Locke and the empiricist tradition. Thus ideas were not to be and could not be understood in any of the older 'metaphysical' or 'idealist' senses. The science of ideas must be a natural science, since all ideas originate in man's experience of the world. Specifically, in Destutt, ideology is part of zoology:

We have only an incomplete knowledge of an animal if we do not know his intellectual faculties. Ideology is a part of Zoology, and it is especially in man that this part is important and deserves to be more deeply understood. (*Éléments d'idéologie*, 1801, Preface)

The description is characteristic of scientific empiricism. The 'real elements' of ideology are 'our intellectual faculties, their principal phenomena and their most evident circumstances'. The critical aspect of this emphasis was at once realized by one kind of opponent, the reactionary de Bonald: 'Ideology has replaced metaphysics . . . because modern philosophy sees no other ideas in the world but those of men'. De Bonald correctly related the scientific sense of ideology to the empiricist tradition which had passed from Locke through Condillac, pointing out its preoccupation with 'signs and their influence on thought' and summarizing its 'sad system' as a reduction of 'our thoughts' to 'transformed sensations'. 'All the characteristics of intelligence', de Bonald added, 'disappeared under the scalpel of this ideological dissection.'

The initial bearings of the concept of ideology are then very complex. It was indeed an assertion against metaphysics that there are 'no ideas in the world but those of men'. At the same time, intended as a branch of empirical science, 'ideology' was limited, by its philosophical assumptions, to a version of ideas

as 'transformed sensations' and to a version of language as a 'system of signs' (based, as in Condillac, on an ultimately mathematical model). These limitations, with their characteristic abstraction of 'man' and 'the world', and with their reliance on the passive 'reception' and 'systematic association' of 'sensations', were not only 'scientific' and 'empirical' but were elements of a basically bourgeois view of human existence. The rejection of metaphysics was a characteristic gain, confirmed by the development of precise and systematic empirical enquiry. At the same time the effective exclusion of any social dimension—both the practical exclusion of social relationships implied in the model of 'man' and 'the world', and the characteristic displacement of necessary social relationships to a formal system, whether the 'laws of psychology' or language as a 'system of signs'—was a deep and apparently irrecoverable loss and distortion.

It is significant that the initial objection to the exclusion of any active conception of intelligence was made from generally reactionary positions, which sought to retain the sense of activity in its old metaphysical forms. It is even more significant, in the next stage of the development, that a derogatory sense of 'ideology' as 'impractical theory' or 'abstract illusion', first introduced from an evidently reactionary position by Napoleon, was taken over, though from a new position, by Marx.

Napoleon said:

It is to the doctrine of the ideologues—to this diffuse metaphysics, which in a contrived manner seeks to find the primary causes and on this foundation would erect the legislation of peoples, instead of adapting the laws to a knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history—to which one must attribute all the misfortunes which have befallen our beautiful France.*

Scott (Napoleon, 1827, vi. 251) summarized: 'Ideology, by which nickname the French ruler used to distinguish every species of theory, which, resting in no respect upon the basis of self-interest, could, he thought, prevail with none save hot-brained boys and crazed enthusiasts.'

Each element of this condemnation of 'ideology'—which became very well known and was often repeated in Europe and North America during the first half of the nineteenth century—was taken up and applied by Marx and Engels, in their

* Cited in A. Naess, *Democracy, Ideology, and Objectivity*, Oslo, 1956, 151.

early writings. It is the substantial content of their attack on their German contemporaries in *The German Ideology* (1846). To find 'primary causes' in 'ideas' was seen as the basic error. There is even the same tone of contemptuous practicality in the anecdote in Marx's Preface:

Once upon a time an honest fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity. If they were to knock this idea out of their heads, say by stating it to be a superstition, a religious idea, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water. (GI, 2)

Abstract theories, separated from the 'basis of self-interest', were then beside the point.

Of course the argument could not be left at this stage. In place of Napoleon's conservative (and suitably vague) standard of 'knowledge of the human heart and of the lessons of history', Marx and Engels introduced 'the real ground of history'—the process of production and self-production—from which the 'origins and growth' of 'different theoretical products' could be traced. The simple cynicism of the appeal to 'self-interest' became a critical diagnosis of the real basis of all ideas:

the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. (GI, 39)

Yet already at this stage there were obvious complications.

'Ideology' became a polemical nickname for kinds of thinking which neglected or ignored the material social process of which 'consciousness' was always a part:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. (GI, 14)

The emphasis is clear but the analogy is difficult. The physical processes of the retina cannot reasonably be separated from the physical processes of the brain, which, as a necessarily connected activity, control and 'rectify' the inversion. The camera obscura was a conscious device for discerning proportions; the inversion had in fact been corrected by adding another lens. In one sense the analogies are no more than incidental, but they

probably relate to (though in fact, as examples, they work against) an underlying criterion of 'direct positive knowledge'. They are in a way very like the use of 'the idea of gravity' to refute the notion of the controlling power of ideas. If the idea had been not a practical and scientific understanding of a natural force but, say, an idea of 'racial superiority' or of 'the inferior wisdom of women', the argument might in the end have come out the same way but it would have had to pass through many more significant stages and difficulties.

This is also true even of the more positive definition:

We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. (GI, 14)

That 'ideology' should be deprived of its 'semblance of independence' is entirely reasonable. But the language of 'reflexes', 'echoes', 'phantoms', and 'sublimates' is simplistic, and has in repetition been disastrous. It belongs to the naive dualism of 'mechanical materialism', in which the idealist separation of 'ideas' and 'material reality' had been repeated, but with its priorities reversed. The emphasis on consciousness as inseparable from conscious existence, and then on conscious existence as inseparable from material social processes, is in effect lost in the use of this deliberately degrading vocabulary. The damage can be realized if we compare it for a moment with Marx's description of 'human labour' in *Capital* (I, 185-6):

We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. . . . What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement.

This goes perhaps even too much the other way, but its difference from the world of 'reflexes', 'echoes', 'phantoms', and 'sublimates' hardly needs to be stressed. Consciousness is seen from the beginning as part of the human material social process, and

its products in 'ideas' are then as much part of this process as material products themselves. This, centrally, was the thrust of Marx's whole argument, but the point was lost, in this crucial area, by a temporary surrender to the cynicism of 'practical men' and, even more, to the abstract empiricism of a version of 'natural science'.

What had really been introduced, as a corrective to abstract empiricism, was the sense of material and social history as the real relationship between 'man' and 'nature'. But it is then very curious of Marx and Engels to abstract, in turn, the persuasive 'men in the flesh', at whom we 'arrive'. To begin by presupposing them, as the necessary starting-point, is right while we remember that they are therefore also conscious men. The decision not to set out from 'what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived' is then at best a corrective reminder that there is other and sometimes harder evidence of what they have done. But it is also at its worst an objectivist fantasy: that the whole 'real life-process' can be known independently of language ('what men say') and of its records ('men as narrated'). For the very notion of history would become absurd if we did not look at 'men as narrated' (when, having died, they are hardly likely to be accessible 'in the flesh', and on which, inevitably, Marx and Engels extensively and repeatedly relied) as well as at that 'history of industry . . . as it objectively exists . . . an open book of the human faculties . . . a human psychology which can be directly apprehended' (EPM, 121), which they had decisively introduced against the exclusions of other historians. What they were centrally arguing was a new way of seeing the total relationships between this 'open book' and 'what men say' and 'men as narrated'. In a polemical response to the abstract history of ideas or of consciousness they made their main point but in one decisive area lost it again. This confusion is the source of the naive reduction, in much subsequent Marxist thinking, of consciousness, imagination, art, and ideas to 'reflexes', 'echoes', 'phantoms', and 'sublimates', and then of a profound confusion in the concept of 'ideology'.

We can trace further elements of this failure if we examine those definitions of ideology which gain most of their force by contrast with what is not ideology. The most common of these contrasts is with what is called 'science'. For example:

Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of activity loses its medium of existence. (GI, 17)

There are several difficulties here. The uses of 'consciousness' and 'philosophy' depend almost entirely on the main argument about the futility of separating consciousness and thought from the material social process. It is the separation that makes such consciousness and thought into ideology. But it is easy to see how the point could be taken, and has often been taken, in a quite different way. In a new kind of abstraction, 'consciousness' and 'philosophy' are separated, in their turn, from 'real knowledge' and from the 'practical process'. This is especially easy to do with the available language of 'reflexes', 'echoes', 'phantoms', and 'sublimates'. The result of this separation, against the original conception of an indissoluble process, is the farcical exclusion of consciousness from the 'development of men' and from 'real knowledge' of this development. But the former, at least, is impossible by any standard. All that can then be done to mask its absurdity is elaboration of the familiar two-stage model (the mechanical materialist reversal of the idealist dualism), in which there is first material social life and then, at some temporal or spatial distance, consciousness and 'its' products. This leads directly to simple reductionism: 'consciousness' and 'its' products can be nothing but 'reflections' of what has already occurred in the material social process.

It can of course be said from experience (that experience which produced the later anxious warnings and qualifications) that this is a poor practical way of trying to understand 'consciousness and its products': that these continually escape so simple a reductive equation. But this is a marginal point. The real point is that the separation and abstraction of 'consciousness and its products' as a 'reflective' or 'second-stage' process results in an ironic idealization of 'consciousness and its products' at this secondary level.

For 'consciousness and its products' are always, though in variable forms, parts of the material social process itself: whether as what Marx called the necessary element of 'imagination' in the labour process; or as the necessary conditions of

associated labour, in language and in practical ideas of relationship; or, which is so often and significantly forgotten, in the real processes—all of them physical and material, most of them manifestly so—which are masked and idealized as 'consciousness and its products' but which, when seen without illusions, are themselves necessarily social material activities. What is in fact idealized, in the ordinary reductive view, is 'thinking' or 'imagining', and the only materialization of these abstracted processes is by a general reference back to the whole (and because abstracted then in effect complete) material social process. And what this version of Marxism especially overlooks is that 'thinking' and 'imagining' are from the beginning social processes (of course including that capacity for 'internalization' which is a necessary part of any social process between actual individuals) and that they become accessible only in unarguably physical and material ways: in voices, in sounds made by instruments, in penned or printed writing, in arranged pigments on canvas or plaster, in worked marble or stone. To exclude these material social processes from the material social process is the same error as to reduce all material social processes to mere technical means for some other abstracted 'life'. The 'practical process' of the 'development of man' necessarily includes them from the beginning, and as more than the technical means for some quite separate 'thinking' and 'imagining'.

What can then be said to be 'ideology', in its received negative form? It can of course be said that these processes, or some of them, come in variable forms (which is as undeniable as the variable forms of any production), and that some of these forms are 'ideology' while others are not. This is a tempting path, but it is usually not followed far, because there is a fool's beacon erected just a little way along it. This is the difficult concept of 'science'. We have to notice first a problem of translation. The German *Wissenschaft*, like the French *science*, has a much broader meaning than English *science* has had since the early nineteenth century. The broader meaning is in the area of 'systematic knowledge' or 'organized learning'. In English this has been largely specialized to such knowledge based on observation of the 'real world' (at first, and still persistently, within the categories of 'man' and 'the world') and on the significant distinction (and even opposition) between the formerly interchangeable words *experience* and *experiment*, the latter attract-

ing, in the course of development, new senses of empirical and positive. It is then very difficult for any English reader to take the translated phrase of Marx and Engels—'real, positive science'—in anything other than this specialized sense. But two qualifications have then at once to be made. First, that the Marxist definition of the 'real world', by moving beyond the separated categories of 'man' and 'the world' and including, as central, the active material social process, had made any such simple transfer impossible:

If industry is conceived as an exoteric form of the realization of the essential human faculties, one is able to grasp also the human essence of Nature or the natural essence of man. The natural sciences will then abandon their abstract materialist, or rather, idealist, orientation, and will become the basis of a human science . . . One basis for life and another for science is a priori a falsehood. (EPM, 122)

This is an argument precisely against the categories of the English specialization of 'science'. But then, second, the actual progress of scientific rationality, especially in its rejection of metaphysics and in its triumphant escape from a limitation to observation, experiment, and inquiry within received religious and philosophical systems, was immensely attractive as a model for understanding society. Though the object of inquiry had been radically changed—from 'man' and 'the world' to an active, interactive, and in a key sense self-creating material social process—it was supposed, or rather hoped, that the methods, or at least the mood, could be carried over.

This sense of getting free of the ordinary assumptions of social inquiry, which usually began where it should have ended, with the forms and categories of a particular historical phase of society, is immensely important and was radically demonstrated in most of Marx's work. But it is very different from the uncritical use of 'science' and 'scientific', with deliberate references to and analogies from 'natural science', to describe the essentially critical and historical work which was actually undertaken. Engels, it is true, used these references and analogies much more often than Marx. 'Scientific socialism' became, under his influence, a polemical catchword. In practice it depends almost equally on a (justifiable) sense of systematic knowledge of society, based on observation and analysis of its processes of development (as distinct, say, from 'utopian'

socialism, which projected a desirable future without close consideration of the past and present processes within which it had to be attained); and on a (false) association with the 'fundamental' or 'universal' 'laws' of natural science, which, even when they turned out to be 'laws' rather than effective working generalizations or hypotheses, were of a different kind because their objects of study were radically different.

The notion of 'science' has had a crucial effect, negatively, on the concept of 'ideology'. If 'ideology' is contrasted with 'real, positive science', in the sense of detailed and connected knowledge of 'the practical process of development of men', then the distinction may have significance as an indication of the received assumptions, concepts, and points of view which can be shown to prevent or distort such detailed and connected knowledge. We can often feel that this is all that was really intended. But the contrast is of course less simple than it may look, since its confident application depends on a knowable distinction between 'detailed and connected knowledge of the practical process of development' and other kinds of 'knowledge' which may often closely resemble it. One way of applying the distinguishing criterion would be by examining the 'assumptions, concepts, and points of view', whether received or not, by which any knowledge has been gained and organized. But it is just this kind of analysis which is prevented by the a priori assumption of a 'positive' method which is not subject to such scrutiny: an assumption based in fact on the received (and unexamined) assumptions of 'positive, scientific knowledge', freed of the 'ideological bias' of all other observers. This position, which has been often repeated in orthodox Marxism, is either a circular demonstration or a familiar partisan claim (of the kind made by almost all parties) that others are biased but that, by definition, we are not.

That indeed was the fool's way out of the very difficult problem which was now being confronted, within historical materialism. Its symptomatic importance at the level of dogma has to be noted and then set aside if we are to see, clearly, a very different and much more interesting proposition, which leads to a quite different (though not often theoretically distinguished) definition of ideology. This begins from the main point of the attack on the Young Hegelians, who were said to "consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of con-

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sciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men". Social liberation would then come through a 'change of consciousness'. Everything then turns, of course, on the definition of 'consciousness'. The definition adopted, polemically, by Marx and Engels, is in effect their definition of ideology: not 'practical consciousness' but 'self-dependent theory'. Hence 'really it is only a question of explaining this theoretical talk from the actual existing conditions. The real, practical dissolution of these phrases, the removal of these notions from the consciousness of men, will . . . be effected by altered circumstances, not by theoretical deductions' (GI, 15). In this task the proletariat has an advantage, since 'for the mass of men . . . these theoretical notions do not exist'.

If we can take this seriously we are left with a much more limited and in that respect more plausible definition of ideology. Since 'consciousness', including 'conceptions, thoughts, ideas', can hardly be asserted to be non-existent in the 'mass of men', the definition falls back to a kind of consciousness, and certain kinds of conceptions, thoughts, and ideas, which are specifically 'ideological'. Engels later sought to clarify this position:

Every ideology . . . once it has arisen, develops in connection with the given concept-material, and develops this material further; otherwise it would cease to be ideology, that is, occupation with thoughts as with independent entities, developing independently and subject only to their own laws. That the material life conditions of the persons inside whose heads this thought process goes on, in the last resort determines the course of this process, remains of necessity unknown to these persons, for otherwise there would be an end to all ideology. (Feuerbach, 65-6)

Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker, consciously indeed but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives. Because it is a process of thought he derives both its form and its content from pure thought, either his own or that of his predecessors.*

Taken on their own, these statements can appear virtually psychological. They are structurally very similar to the Freudian concept of 'rationalization' in such phrases as 'inside whose heads'; 'real motives . . . unknown to him'; 'imagines false or

* Letter to F. Mehring, 14 July 1893 (Marx and Engels: Selected Correspondence, New York, 1935).

apparent motives'. In this form a version of 'ideology' is readily accepted in modern bourgeois thought, which has its own concepts of the 'real'—material or psychological—to undercut either ideology or rationalization. But it had once been a more serious position. Ideology was specifically identified as a consequence of the division of labour:

Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears . . . From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. (Gl, 51)

Ideology is then 'separated theory', and its analysis must involve restoration of its 'real' connections.

The division of labour . . . manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood) while the other's attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves. (Gl, 39-40)

This is shrewd enough, as is the later observation that

each new class . . . is compelled . . . to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, put in an ideal form; it will give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. (Gl, 40-1)

But 'ideology' then hovers between 'a system of beliefs characteristic of a certain class' and 'a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge'.

This uncertainty was never really resolved. Ideology as 'separated theory'—the natural home of illusions and false consciousness—is itself separated from the (intrinsically limited) 'practical consciousness of a class'. This separation, however, is very much easier to carry out in theory than in practice. The immense body of direct class-consciousness, directly expressed and again and again directly imposed, can appear to escape the taint of 'ideology', which would be limited to the 'universaliz-

ing' philosophers. But then what name is to be found for these powerful direct systems? Surely not 'true' or 'scientific' knowledge, except by an extraordinary sleight-of-hand with the description 'practical'. For most ruling classes have not needed to be 'unmasked'; they have usually proclaimed their existence and the 'conceptions, thoughts, ideas' which ratify it. To overthrow them is ordinarily to overthrow their conscious practice, and this is always very much harder than overthrowing their 'abstract' and 'universalizing' ideas, which also, in real terms, have a much more complicated and interactive relationship with the dominant 'practical consciousness' than any merely dependent or illusory concepts could ever have. Or again, 'the existence of revolutionary ideas in a particular period presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class'. But this may or may not be true, since all the difficult questions are about the development of a pre-revolutionary or potentially revolutionary or briefly revolutionary into a sustained revolutionary class, and the same difficult questions necessarily arise about pre-revolutionary, potentially revolutionary, or briefly revolutionary ideas. Marx and Engels's own complicated relations to the (in itself very complicated) revolutionary character of the European proletariat is an intensely practical example of just this difficulty, as is also their complicated and acknowledged relationship (including the relationship implied by critique) to their intellectual predecessors.

What really happened, in temporary but influential substitution for just this detailed and connected knowledge, was, first, an abstraction of 'ideology', as a category of illusions and false consciousness (an abstraction which as they had best reason to know would prevent examination, not of the abstracted ideas, which is relatively easy, but of the material social process in which 'conceptions, thoughts, ideas', of course in different degrees, become practical). Second, in relation to this, the abstraction was given a categorical rigidity, an epochal rather than a genuinely historical consciousness of ideas, which could then be mechanically separated into forms of successive and unified stages of—but which?—both knowledge and illusion. Each stage of the abstraction is radically different, in both theory and practice, from Marx's emphasis on a necessary conflict of real interests, in the material social process, and on the 'legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophical—in short

ideological—forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out'. The infection from categorical argument against specialists in categories has here been burned out, by a practical recognition of the whole and indissoluble material and social process. 'Ideology' then reverts to a specific and practical dimension: the complicated process within which men 'become' (are) conscious of their interests and their conflicts. The categorical short-cut to an (abstract) distinction between 'true' and 'false' consciousness is then effectively abandoned, as in all practice it has to be.

All these varying uses of 'ideology' have persisted within the general development of Marxism. There has been a convenient dogmatic retention, at some levels, of ideology as 'false consciousness'. This has often prevented the more specific analysis of operative distinctions of 'true' and 'false' consciousness at the practical level, which is always that of social relationships, and of the part played in these relationships by conceptions, thoughts, ideas. There was a late attempt, by Lukács, to clarify this analysis by a distinction between 'actual consciousness' and 'imputed' or 'potential' consciousness (a full and 'true' understanding of a real social position). This has the merit of avoiding the reduction of all 'actual consciousness' to ideology, but the category is speculative, and indeed as a category cannot easily be sustained. In *History and Class-Consciousness* it depended on a last abstract attempt to identify truth with the idea of the proletariat, but in this Hegelian form it is no more convincing than the earlier positivist identification of a category of 'scientific knowledge'. A more interesting but equally difficult attempt to define 'true' consciousness was the elaboration of Marx's point about changing the world rather than interpreting it. What became known as the 'test of practice' was offered as a criterion of truth and as the essential distinction from ideology. In certain general ways this is a wholly consistent projection from the idea of 'practical consciousness', but it is easy to see how its application to specific theories, formulations, and programmes can result either in a vulgar 'success' ethic, masquerading as 'historical truth', or in numbness or confusion when there are practical defeats and deformations. The 'test of practice', that is to say, cannot be applied to 'scientific theory' and 'ideology' taken as abstract categories. The real point of the definition of 'practical consciousness' was indeed to undercut

these abstractions, which nevertheless have continued to be reproduced as 'Marxist theory'.

Three other tendencies in twentieth-century concepts of ideology may be briefly noted. First, the concept has been commonly used, within Marxism and outside it, in the relatively neutral sense of 'a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group' (without implications of 'truth' or 'illusion' but with positive reference to a social situation and interest and its defining or constitutive system of meanings and values). It is thus possible to speak neutrally or even approvingly of 'socialist ideology'. A curious example here is that of Lenin:

Socialism, in so far as it is the ideology of struggle of the proletarian class, undergoes the general conditions of birth, development and consolidation of any ideology, that is to say it is founded on all the material of human knowledge, it presupposes a high level of science, scientific work, etc. . . . In the class struggle of the proletariat which develops spontaneously, as an elemental force, on the basis of capitalist relations, socialism is introduced by the ideologists.*

Obviously 'ideology' here is not intended as 'false consciousness'. The distinction between a class and its ideologists can be related to the distinction made by Marx and Engels, but one crucial clause of this—'active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood'—has then to be tacitly dropped, unless the reference to a 'ruling class' can be dressed up as a saving clause. More significantly, perhaps, 'ideology' in its now neutral or approving sense is seen as 'introduced' on the foundation of all . . . human knowledge. . . . science . . . etc', of course brought to bear from a class point of view. The position is clearly that ideology is theory and that theory is at once secondary and necessary: 'practical consciousness', as here of the proletariat, will not itself produce it. This is radically different from Marx's thinking, where all 'separate' theory is ideology, and where genuine theory—'real, positive knowledge'—is, by contrast, the articulation of 'practical consciousness'. But Lenin's model corresponds to one orthodox sociological formulation, in which there is 'social situation' and there is also 'ideology', their relations variable but certainly neither dependent nor 'determined', thus allowing both their separate and their comparative history

*Letter to the Federation of the North, *Collected Works*, Moscow, 1961: 6, 163.

and analysis. Lenin's formulation also echoes, from a quite opposite political position, Napoleon's identification of 'the ideologists', who bring ideas to 'the people', for their liberation or destruction according to point of view. The Napoleonic definition, in an unaltered form, has of course also persisted, as a popular form of criticism of political struggles which are defined by ideas or even by principles. 'Ideology' (the product of 'doctrinaires') is then contrasted with 'practical experience', 'practical politics', and what is known as pragmatism. This general sense of 'ideology' as not only 'doctrinaire' and 'dogmatic' but as a priori and abstract has co-existed uneasily with the equally general (neutral or approving) descriptive sense.

Finally there is an obvious need for a general term to describe not only the products but the processes of all signification, including the signification of values. It is interesting that 'ideology' and 'ideological' have been widely used in this sense. Volosinov, for example, uses 'ideological' to describe the process of the production of meaning through signs, and 'ideology' is taken as the dimension of social experience in which meanings and values are produced. The difficult relation of so wide a sense to the other senses which we have seen to be active hardly needs stressing. Yet, however far the term itself may be compromised, some form of this emphasis on signification as a central social process is necessary. In Marx, in Engels, and in much of the Marxist tradition the central argument about 'practical consciousness' was limited and frequently distorted by failures to see that the fundamental processes of social signification are intrinsic to 'practical consciousness' and intrinsic also to the conceptions, thoughts, and ideas which are recognizable as its products. The limiting condition within 'ideology' as a concept, from its beginning in Destutt, was the tendency to limit processes of meaning and valuation to formed, separable 'ideas' or 'theories'. To attempt to take these back to 'a world of sensations' or, on the other hand, to a 'practical consciousness' or a 'material social process' which has been so defined as to exclude these fundamental signifying processes, or to make them essentially secondary, is the persistent thread of error. For the practical links between 'ideas' and 'theories' and the 'production of real life' are all in this material social process of signification itself.

Moreover, when this is realized, those 'products' which are

not ideas or theories, but which are the very different works we call 'art' and 'literature', and which are normal elements of the very general processes we call 'culture' and 'language', can be approached in ways other than reduction, abstraction, or assimilation. This is the argument that has now to be taken into cultural and literary studies, and especially into the Marxist contribution to them, which, in spite of appearances, is then likely to be even more controversial than hitherto. But it is then an open question whether 'ideology' and 'ideological', with their senses of 'abstraction' and 'illusion', or their senses of 'ideas' and 'theories', or even their senses of a 'system' of beliefs or of meanings and values, are sufficiently precise and practicable terms for so far-reaching and radical a redefinition.