Art between Knowledge and Ideology
The Place of Ideology in Materialist Histories and Theories of Art

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Abstract: This essay deals with the art and ideology relation theoretically and historically. It considers how the relation was conceived in the work of Marxist scholars of art and culture and in Althusserian Marxism. The focus is the theorisation of this relation and this relation as the foundation for a political aesthetics and a critique of discipline of art history. This paper addresses the specificity of the art history that emerged from this relation as a methodological approach and the claim that its foregrounding enables us to see artworks differently and "better". It is suggested that as a foundation for a political aesthetics the art/ideology relation operates akin to strategies of Brechtian practice and theory.

Keywords: Louis Althusser; Pierre Macherey; T. J. Clark; Ideology; Politics of Aesthetics; Method.

Ideology is what the picture is, and what the picture is not.
Clark, 'On the Conditions of Artistic Creation'

The concept of ideology and the analysis of art as an ideological practice was at the heart of the renewal of a social history of art in the 1970s. With the publication in 1973 of *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* and its companion volume, *The Absolute Bourgeois,* T. J. Clark is identifiable as one of the most significant art historians of the post-war period in initiating this renewal[1]. However, although it differentiates this project, the relation of art to ideology or the relationship between ideological and aesthetic discourses remains a complex and largely unresolved problem. It is posed, for example, by Marx in his brief comments on Greek art and its foundation in mythology and the persistence of aesthetic

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1 Day (2011, 25).

pleasure long after social development has swept away the mythological[2]. I reconsider this relationship in the context of a disciplinary engagement with historical materialism and Marxist theory. I discuss writers from two related traditions: the interwar generation of art historians that included Frederick Antal and Arnold Hauser, Hungarian émigrés to Britain because of the rise of continental fascism, and a subsequent tradition associated with the transformation of Marxism by the cultural politics of an emerging New Left, focussing on Clark's early work[3].

1. A "Dismal Methodological Change of Gear": The Social History of Art as an Alternative Model

Ideology (in conjunction with concepts of mediation and negation) plays a pivotal role in how the social history of art considers the relationship between the socio-historical and creating art. The social history of art identifies the elisions and silences in a discursive field typically formed by the reviews, reports, and caricatures of art critics and commentators. These elisions symptomatically reveal an artwork's relationship to ideology. Clark's analysis of Manet's *Olympia* (1863) is generated out of a careful symptomatic reading of the absences in the "catalogue of insults" that greeted *Olympia's* exhibition[4]. He considers the painting's unhappy and recalcitrant encounter with related discourses of aesthetics and sexual identity of the 1860s, focussing on the definitions of legitimacy and illegitimacy, the fixing of norms, exclusions, and choices made[5].

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2 Marx (1973, 110).

3 Carter (2013, 14). The interwar generation included Meyer Schapiro, Max Raphael, Francis Klingender, Arnold Hauser and Frederick Antal. Hauser wrote the majority of his texts on art and aesthetics in exile in England and found employment as a part-time lecturer at the University of Leeds; his *The Social History of Art* was published in 1951; he had left Vienna in 1938. See Roberts (2006). As Hemmingway (2006, 175) comments, the art history which emerged from the New Left was international with groupings in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States. My focus, however, is the development of Marxist art history in Britain under the rubric of the social history of art most closely associated with Clark.

4 See Clark (1980). Manet was critically supported by writers he knew personally: Baudelaire, Zola, and Mallarmé. The critic Jean Ravenel wrote positively. His response to the Salon of 1865 and *Olympia,* "the scapegoat of the Salon", stands out. His review, which appeared in the left-wing *L'Epoque,* recognises *Olympia* as a "Painting of the school of Baudelaire, freely executed by a pupil of Goya; the vicious strangeness of the little *faubourienne,* a woman of the night from Paul Niquet's, from the mysteries of Paris and the nightmares of Edgar Poe". See Ravenel (2001).

5 Foucault (1980, 199).

The social history of art developed in an antagonistic but productive dialogue with modernist criticism that had become an obstacle to understanding art as "a material practice in history, in ideology"[6]. "To see a system of beliefs [about art] as ideological is to see it as grounded in the existence of a particular contingent form of class society, and as serving the interests of a system of false consciousness intrinsic to it"[7]. Modernism functions as a system of beliefs in this sense, involving its own closures and illusions which obscure the material history of practice: illusions of innovation and continuity function to mask moments of genuine historical rupture and transformation in the history of art. An *ideology* of modern art projects a chronical of constant experimental and technical innovation independent of history proper. The social history of art challenges this separation to discover the concrete transactions between art and history[8], it emphasises the ideological determinants of art located "in the complex surface, the figures, but also the very colours and brush strokes of a work"[9].

Clark outlines his approach in a series of texts with a methodological focus: "On the Social History of Art", the introduction to *Image of the People,* "On the Conditions of Artistic Creation" (1974), and "Preliminary arguments: work of art and ideology", a conference paper of eight theses (1976). Their arguments are directed against the discipline itself and an earlier radical tradition. If for Nicos Hadjinicolaou, a "reappraisal of this tradition [was] long overdue"[10], for Clark, this tradition simplified the dialectical complexity of the relationship between art and history. 'Form' did not merely reflect the ideologies of a period: this barren and mechanical formulation was reconfigured as conversion in his writing to explain how content *becomes* form. It was convenient to assume that arti-

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6 Orton and Pollock (1980, 318).

7 Baldwin, Harrison, and Ramsden (1981, 444).

8 Orton and Pollock describe the habits and effects of Modernist art history writing, its separation of art from history: "Modernist art history is constructed of two fetishes. Author or Artist and Chronology. It dare not give them up. It dare not get involved with 'real active men [and women] as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse, corresponding to these …'". "For the Modernist historian", they continue, "all that matters is the immanent process of art seeming to develop out of itself naturally. All he or she has to do is chart the move 'From . . . to . . .' with the emphasis on the Author or Artist and the (Discrete) Object (of Desire). The latter is not dealt with in terms of what it signified, or is of, not in terms of what it meant or was a response to or was caused by. Hence the importance of Chronology and Biographical Data … which are substituted for History". See Orton and Pollock (1982, 342).

9 Alpers (1977, 11).

10 Hadjinicolaou (1978, 1).

stic form reflects ideologies, but it was "certainly wrong"[11]. However, despite the inadequacies of its metaphors ('reflects', 'mirrors', 'expresses'), the interwar generation had at least recognised the transactions, the existing and real continuities between one specific social activity – art – and other social practices. So, Antal writes critically of the neglect of 'content' or 'subject-matter' when art historians think about style, how they devote too much attention to the formal elements of artworks. A style is a constancy of formal elements and qualities in the art of an individual which expresses an artist's personality or the outlook. It cannot be understood only in terms of form – Antal argues – to be understood adequately or fully, style must be rooted within a series of social and political conditions. For Antal, ideologies and the styles corresponding to them change in relation to changes in the structure organisation of a society. Antal describes the exactitude and accuracy of the composition and design of Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784), its combination of classicism and "objective naturalism", as "the most characteristic and striking expression of the outlook of the bourgeoise on the eve of the Revolution"[12]. The painting, then, originates in ideology and the painting is ideological because it expresses the worldview of a (homogeneous) social class. Antal's criticism of purely formal accounts of style that obscure the relationship between a picture and the social class for whom it was created ignores a question that preoccupied Clark, that is, how ideological content *becomes* form.

The renewal of Marxist art history in Britain after 1968 involved a return to Marx rather than the interwar generation of Marxist art historians[13]. It is arguable "that the pre-war generation [of Marxist art historians] was perceived as practising an outmoded and possibly failed version of Marxist art history"[14]; there was little continuity between the social history of art and the earlier generation.

Renewal implies a critique of reductionism and a search for greater complexity in understanding the determining relations between the economic infrastructure and ideological superstructure. Clark's methodological texts avoid proposing a method to be systematically applied or used. However, his approach is arguably not dissimilar to Marxist cultural analysis that conceives art as an ideological form or a form of "social consciousness" continuous with the legal and political superstructure according to the

[11] Clark (1982, 12).
[12] Antal (1966, 4).
[13] See Carter (2013, 21).
[14] Stirton (2006, 65).

base-superstructure metaphor outlined by Marx. Clark looks for evidence in art of a consciousness of the contradictions in material life, he looks for signs of such contradiction: art is one of the ideological forms that can register these material contradictions determined by or which correspond to changes in the economic infrastructure or foundation. Modernist paintings like those made by Manet will show, give pictorial form to, or inscribe within themselves, kinds of contradiction or contradictory experience specific to modernity, Clark describes emptiness and blankness being made visible[15].

Between 1972 and 1979, the journal *Screen* brought into articulation historical materialism, the semiotic project of Christian Metz and Roland Barthes, and the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan for the analysis of film and cinema. *Screen* developed a historical materialist account of film culture which posed the problem of ideology and the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices in the social formation. The argument was that film production happened in neither an economic nor historical void. The definition of film as a signifying practice – which suggests the actual *work* of the production of meanings – and the debates around language, ideology, semiotics, and discourse in relation to cinematic representation was a point of reference for the social history of art, sharing with it, for example, a critique of reflectionism. The cultural theory developed in *Screen* was not characterised by a return to Marx but to Althusserian Marxism. So, indebted to Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation and Lacanian psychoanalysis the focus was not the relation of ideologies to historical formations but the positioning of the subject *in* ideology: Lacan's work returns to the question of ideology in terms of how ideology *positions* the subject through the mechanisms of the unconscious[16]. Althusser had begun to think that the category of the subject was fundamental to ideological discourse as early as 1966; the subject was a central category of ideology and bound up with its "double mirror structure"[17]. The example of *Screen* shows that Althusser was a major influence on film and cultural studies in Britain in the 1970s, although it is difficult to identify any works of specifically Althusserian art history written in English at this time[18]. Clark drew on these theoretical resources but was sceptical of key elements of the *Screen* problematic. It is interesting that Althusser asked similar questions to Clark in his own reflections on aesthetics and literary

15 Open University (1984, 11).
16 This problematic is elaborated in Coward and Ellis (1977) and in Easthope (1983).
17 Althusser (2003a, 38).
18 Roberts (1994, 9).

history. He asked what the conditions of a literary history were and commented on the necessity to account for the "historical reality" of cultural objects; like Clark, Althusser asks what theories could "allow us to think a cultural object that is determinate, that is transmitted, given, in a historical situation determined as literary and therefore as aesthetic"[19]. He comments that the "basics" necessary to "to construct a theory of art as ideology" were found in Marx and suggests that it is possible or Marxist theory makes it possible to write a history of the aesthetic as a "relatively stable stratum"[20].

2. Asking New Theoretical Questions and Defining New Concepts for a Method of Art Historical Work; the Work of Art and its Ideology

Renewal depended on importing concepts from historical materialism and Marxist social critique to which Althusser's formulations of ideology were key[21]. For Marx of *The German Ideology,* 'ideology' signifies imaginary and false ideas or conceptions, dogmas, phantasmal and chimerical beings, to which are attributed an independent existence. For Marx, ideas, thoughts, conceptions are to be explained in terms of material practice: they are not self-sufficient and have their origins elsewhere. Culture, language, and knowledge are not independent of life; they do not appear out of thin air and their production is interwoven with other kinds of human activity and intercourse. Individuals actively produce ideas and conceptions but in ideologies, their material practices or social circumstances are mystified, appearing, in Marx's well-known metaphor, "upside down as in a *camera obscura*"[22]. Individuals produce this inversion, it arises from "their historical life-process", but individuals are not entirely responsible for or the intentional agents of their practice: the cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes "decentred" individuals who are never quite the "collective authors" of their actions. [23]

[19] Althusser (2020, 19).

[20] Althusser (2020b, 24–25).

[21] Roberts points to John Tagg's comment that Althusser "made a cultural politics possible because it said: cultural apparatuses are actually extended apparatuses of the state, invested with power relations that reflect relations of class domination in society. It therefore became as valid to be working in a cultural arena as in a parliamentary or an industrial arena or whatever". See Tagg (1992, 80).

[22] Marx and Engels (1991, 47).

[23] Hall (1977, 320).

For Althusser, ideology is a logical system of representations that constitutes an organic and essential part of all human societies, that is secreted by them and is their indispensable atmosphere; he describes ideology, analogously to the Freudian unconscious, as eternal. For Althusser, an ensemble of ideological activities constitutes one of the three 'levels' of society. However, ideological representations do not furnish a knowledge of the world they represent; ideologies (what Althusser calls relatively autonomous regions – religious, moral, legal, political, aesthetic, and philosophical ideologies which can be theoretically systematized) are not simply false but they are integrated into and constitute a system which is at least orientated towards a false conception of the world[24]. Althusser describes ideological representation as a *relation* between individuals and their conditions of existence, their position in the division of labour. Althusser situates ideology within the superstructure and imparts to it a relative autonomy with regard law and the state, but he wants to see it as something that slides or seeps into all parts of the social edifice Marx describes and be understood as a "kind of cement" which assures the cohesion of existing social relations[25]. Individuals are never outside ideology for Althusser, it is present in all of their acts, governing their behaviour, and it is *indistinguishable* from lived experience. Perception of reality is always "impure": an individual's perception is mediated by and given to him "only in the veil of unsuspected forms of ideology"[26]. Ideology is comprised by representations, images and signs but in themselves they do no not *compose* ideology, it is their structure and systematicity that gives them significance. It is the *structure* of ideology that is not immediately visible or perceptible in the same way as the structure of relations of production aren't. Althusser assumes the opacity of the social whole and its mythical representation in ideologies: an ideology is "a *deforming* and *mystifying* representation of the reality in which men and women have to live"[27]. Ideology has an "*allusive-illusory* function": ideological representation makes *allusion* to reality but, at the same time, bestows an *illusion* on it; in ideology, individuals express the way they live their relation to their conditions of existence, so the relation is doubled or overdetermined: "the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation"[28].

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[24] Althusser (2011a, 24).
[25] Althusser (2011a, 25).
[26] Althusser (2011a, 26).
[27] Althusser (2011a, 29).
[28] For example, the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century *lived* in the ideology of freedom the relation between it and its conditions of existence: a real relation, that of the

"I mean by ideologies", Clark writes, "those bodies of beliefs, images, values and techniques of representation by which social classes, in conflict with each other, attempt to 'naturalise' their particular histories"[29]. Clark emphasises that the concept is "indelibly plural". It is "meaningless" to describe "the ideology of a historical epoch" in an undifferentiated way[30], and for Clark, contradicting ideology's rigorous systematicity of Althusser's first definitions, "it is the essence of ideology to be unstable, protean, omnipresent but nowhere, using everything and offering nothing, alternatively a content and a form"[31].

Clark employs Barthes' conception of mythical speech and his discussion of the rhetorical forms and figural language. In a similar way to ideologies, mythical signifiers naturalize and universalize certain meanings, eternalize the present state of the world, in the interests of perpetuating the dominance of a ruling class. For Barthes, myths are inverted reflections of the social world in accordance with the image from *The German Ideology*: "myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the 'natural'"[32]. Myths and ideologies impart to disputable and contingent relations of social production "a quality of inevitably, a seat in human nature"[33]. Their role in naturalising historically contingent social relations is central to this definition: "Every ideology", Clark argues, "tries to give a quality of inevitability to what is in fact a quite specific and disputable relation to the means of production – it pictures the present as 'natural', coherent, eternal" and he is interested in artworks which discover and exploit the *incoherence* of ideology. Clark identifies a "specific relation" between the work of art and ideological materials in terms of the real constraints upon production and the negotiation of historical contradictions. He introduces stylisation to explain this relation; a style becomes the *form* of ideology, and he draws on Freud's conception of the language of dreams and the structure of the dream-work

laws of liberal capitalism, is invested by an "imaginary relation", namely, that all men are free; the concept of freedom is overdetermined; the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class as Marx argues in the *German Ideology*, but the bourgeoise is captive to its own ideology as much as anyone else, its class rule is lived in terms of the ideology of freedom, that all men are free. See Althusser (1996, 234).

29 Clark (1974, 562). His definition of ideology in "Preliminary Arguments" is slightly different: ideologies are "systems of beliefs, images, values and techniques of representation by which particular classes, in conflict with each other, attempt to 'naturalise' their own special place in history".

30 Hauser (1959, 32).

31 Clark (1974, 562).

32 Barthes (1987, 165).

33 Clark (1974, 562).

and Macherey's literary theory. Freud's analysis of processes of condensation and displacement in the dream-work was suggestive in Clark's analysis of ideological representation.

So, ideologies are defined as systems of representation which function to naturalize social relations of class, imparting to them qualities of inevitability and indisputability, of coherence and permanence. What does it mean to reveal the artwork "*as* ideology", which Clark claims a Marxist art history should do? He is not just saying an artwork *is* ideological – it involves an expectation to see the artwork differently as a real object with a purpose in history, made at a particular historical conjuncture: Clark describes the collusion between visual form and complex tasks that arise historically. This way of seeing is not commonsensical, as Althusser remarks, our relationship to art is usually non-historical, it is experienced directly, without relation to history[34]. Clark, then, wants a materialist account of art production that accounts for the concrete circumstances of a specific practice. As such, he approaches art as a responsive articulation and appropriation of ideologies rather than their immediate expression. This is a distinctly materialist approach to art history because it accounts for "the concrete, historical circumstances in which a work was made, by someone, for someone". Clark writes: "To reveal the work of art as ideology is to see it as a real object, produced by real people in real historical circumstances, produced to do a certain job, to validate a particular order of things; or sometimes, more interestingly, produced to paper over the cracks between two different orders, two liturgies, two concepts of nobility, two classes, two ideologies"[35].

3. Art and Ideology in the tradition of Marxist Art History

Marxist approaches to visual culture were characteristically suspicious of the presumed autonomy and aesthetic neutrality of art to expose its thoroughly and unavoidably partisan character. Hauser formulates this relationship of art and ideology in the physical metaphor of reflection: art reflects the interests of a socially dominant class. His formulation echoes those of *The German Ideology.* Hauser distinguishes ideology from mere deceit or lies but conceives ideology as 'false consciousness', as a "false image of reality", which defends the interests of a ruling class[36]. He elaborates

[34] Althusser (2020, 20).
[35] Clark (1976).
[36] Hauser (1971, 134).

the disputed concept of false consciousness in Marxist theory as a confusion of psychological and historical motivations[37]. The psychological complexity of ideologies means that they cannot entirely be understood by historical materialism alone and although Hauser is convinced of the relationship between art and ideology, he does not believe that works of art are merely "ideological creations". For Hauser, "Scientific theories and artistic creations are more than ideological artefacts. They may be pregnant with, limited by, or originate in ideology, but they contain description, interpretation, invention and insight which lie outside the realm of material interest"[38].

So, Hauser differentiates aesthetic and ideological discourse; art's dependent representation of ideologies can be indecisive or half-hearted; there are moments when a fragmented ideology is represented as coherent and whole. An important objection to art's ideological determination is its evolution according to autonomous "inner laws" demonstrated by the flourishing of diverse styles under the same social and historical conditions (Marx makes a similar observation in his comments on Greek art in the *Grundrisse* where he suggests that artistic perfection has been realised in the historical past in the forms of Greek art). Hauser disputes this conclusion: different genres have different audiences, they respond to different social needs and desires, they evolve at different speeds, new social classes and groups emerge and become dominant with particular and specific aesthetic demands and tastes. He points to the intimacy of artistic forms with social classes and factions and the complexity and diversity these different relations produce within culture. As such, "the idea of a homogenous art or of the continuity of art history are mere fictions"[39].

Hauser disputes the assumption that art possesses a separate history of its own history modelled on organic ideas of growth and decay that assumes inevitable stylistic change, and that the aesthetic constitutes an autonomous sphere. Hauser's critique echoes Marx's argument on the dependence of ideologies which challenges how art history was traditionally conceived. In that one, ideologies are interwoven with other social practices they have no autonomous history of their own: their development is always external to them, in the material production of concrete individuals[40]. Hauser, and the different generations of Marxist historians, took

[37] Hauser remarks that however irreconcilable they are in other respects, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are contemporaries in their conviction that what individuals consciously think and believe disguise or distort their real motivations.

[38] Hauser (1971, 136).

[39] Hauser (1971, 149).

[40] Marx and Engels (1991, 47).

art to be historically and socially contingent: the meaning or significance of an artwork was inseparable from the conditions under which it was made and produced and, for Clark, art production involves actions not just in history but *on* history[41].

4. Style and Visual Ideology

Clark's *Image of the People* was published the same year as Hadjinicolaou's *Art History and Class Struggle.* Hadjinicolaou's book analyses the "bourgeois ideology of 'art'" by which Hadjinicolaou means the discipline of art history, for him, "one of the last outposts of reactionary thought"[42]. The term "visual ideology" is broadly synonymous with the concept of style. His formulation of visual ideology is akin to the formulation in Antal's writings. Antal's *Florentine Painting and its Social Background* (1948) is an essential but largely unappreciated text for the development of committed art history informed by historical materialism and Hadjinicolaou distinguishes Antal from the "vulgar version of Marxism which flourishes in art history"[43]. Antal criticises the conception of style as form that developed in a vacuum. In contrast, he considers style as a combination of form and content, and it is the "thematic elements" of an artwork that offers a transition to the ideologies from which a picture derives. This approach reconnects art with history so the art historian can touch on "something deeper", a whole conception of life. The formal elements of a picture depend on ideologies, but it is a theme that shows how much a picture is "part of the outlook, the ideas, of the public". Antal doesn't consider the public – which is another name for society – as homogenous or somehow unanimous in its outlook and the divergences and differences in ideology explain differences or divergences in styles or what Hadjinicolaou names as visual ideologies[44].

Hadjinicolaou follows Althusser to define ideology as those ideas, beliefs and values through which people express their relation to their lived conditions and considers art practice as an allusive-illusory process. He writes positively on Antal's conception of style, but a concept of visual ideology has distinct advantages: visual ideology mediates ideology and style,

41 Clark (1982, 13).
42 Hadjinicolaou (1978, 3).
43 Hadjinicolaou (1978, 80). He writes that, "It would be useful to write a book on the methods he used, to appreciate the scientific rigour of his insights".
44 Antal (1947, 4).

it acknowledges the autonomy of artistic production and the irreducibility of art and politics. The difficulty is in identifying a visual ideology as a class ideology without collapsing their differences. A picture belongs to a collective visual ideology and is equally a "unique concretisation" and can inaugurate a new visual ideology[45]. Hadjinicolaou differentiates positive visual ideology – collective visual ideologies are predominantly positive – which decorates, affirms, or glorifies reality, from pictures which manifest a critical visual ideology that depends on how a subject is depicted. For Hadjinicolaou, the production of pictures is an autonomous part of the ideological superstructure, thus what can be said about ideology in generally applies to visual ideology: the visual ideology of the dominated classes is strongly permeated by the visual ideologies of the dominant classes, and the history of art is the history of ruling class visual ideologies.

5. Art Between Ideology and Science

Hadjinicolaou aims to develop a science of art history on foundations laid by Antal. An important emphasis of Althusser's account of ideology is epistemological. The philosophy of science was the essential part of philosophy and Althusser affirms the capacity of science to question and break with "the immediate givens of everyday experience and practice"[46]. Althusser's approach is grounded in a French philosophical tradition which considers the epistemological obstacles to the development of theoretical knowledge and scientific culture. Philosophers such as Gaston Bachelard and Alexandre Koyré in the 1930s and 1940s consider obstacles to be surmounted, opinion, an investment in the primary experience of nature; in contrast to experiment, common-sense or experience plays a largely negative role in the foundation of modern science. Writing on Galileo's scientific revolution, Koyré emphasises theory over experience, "pure unadulterated thought" rather than "sense-perception", as the basis of a new or modern science[47]. Scientific knowledge had nothing to do with the immediate experience "of the obvious facts of everyday life, which are gi-

[45] Hadjinicolaou (1978, 99).

[46] Althusser (2011a, 15).

[47] Koyré (1992, 13). Althusser writes that "Galileo's foundation of the science of physics … represents the great scientific event of the modern period, comparable in importance to only two other great discoveries known to us: the discovery that led to the foundation of mathematics in the fifth century and the discovery, due to Marx, that laid the foundation for a science of history in the mid-nineteenth century". See Althusser (2014, 16).

ven and imbued with the self-evidence of ideology"[48] and came into being when it constitutes or produces its own theoretical object. As Althusser writes of scientific practices in *Reading Capital* (1965), "once they are truly constituted and developed they have no need for verification from *external* practices to declare the knowledges they produce to be 'true', i.e., to be *knowledges*"[49].

The distinction between science and ideology is a "cardinal principle" of Althusserianism and establishing "the specificity of Marxism as a science"[50]. Althusser affirms science politically, arguing a "revolutionary cause" is "always indissolubly linked with knowledge, in other words, science"[51]. Althusser is emphatic on the difference between art and science in terms of feeling and knowledge. A science does not spontaneously reflect everyday experience and emerges through "an immense, specific theoretical labour"[52]. Their structural differences allow Althusser to differentiate ideological from scientific discourse: he is concerned with a specific difference that *can* distinguish these discourses. What they have in common (ideological, scientific, and also aesthetic discourse) is that they produce a "subjectivity effect"[53]. "Every discourse has as its necessary correlate, a subject, which is one of its effects, if not the major effect, of its functioning"[54]. The decisive difference between ideological and scientific discourse is that whereas the subject "in person" is absent from scientific discourse the subject is fully present in ideological discourse because the subject is a "determinate signifier" of ideological discourse, whereas no signifier designates a scientific discourse. The difference between scientific and ideological discourses is a difference of structure: scientific discourse is decentred, "it possesses a decentred structure", whereas ideological discourse possesses a structure of "speculary centring"[55]. An ideology, Althusser argues, is a subjective and subordinate to class interests and is therefore a *necessarily distorted* representation of reality; science, however, is objective, it "exists only on the condition that it struggles against all forms of subjectivity.

48 Althusser (2003b, 276).
49 Althusser and Balibar (1977, 59).
50 Althusser (2011a, 42).
51 Althusser (2011b, 15).
52 Althusser (2011a, 14).
53 Althusser (2003a, 48).
54 Althusser (2003a, 48).
55 Althusser (2003a, 50).

… Science provides knowledge of reality independent of 'subjective' class interests"[56].

Art appears to hesitate between ideology and science: writing on pedagogy and the character of knowledge that universities impart, Althusser refers to "half-knowledge", a kind of state in which a "reactionary bourgeois" or students remain stuck. Althusser approaches art as a kind of incomplete knowledge that inconclusively or unconfidently hesitates between and cannot ultimately commit to either ideology or science. A relatively straightforward formulation of the art and ideology relation appears in his "A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre"[57]. Althusser acknowledges that his earlier statement on ideology (in 'Marxism and Humanism') was silent on the question of art's relation to ideology. This question, he writes, very complex and very difficult, but his research leads him not to rank "true art" among the ideologies. In distinguishing art from ideology, Althusser's text is not obviously compatible with Clark's formulation that "art and ideology are one and same thing"[58]. Althusser establishes the unique modality of authentic art in relation to ideological and scientific discourses: like Hadjinicolaou, he distinguishes art (Hadjinicolaou refers to the less emotive term "the production of pictures") from scientific knowledge, but both writers claim that art or this production allows us to 'know', it reveals, ideologies[59]. Althusser writes: "the peculiarity of art is to 'make us see' (*nous donner à voir*), 'make us perceive', 'make us feel' something which *alludes* to reality. … What art makes us see, and therefore gives to us in the form of '*seeing*', '*perceiving*', and '*feeling*' (which is not the form of knowing), is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*"[60].

Althusser's own meditation on aesthetics is political but appears hesitant. He notes the provisional nature of his interventions: he is "embarrassed to address the Piccolo Teatro"; he is "ignorant in all questions concerning theatre", he knows "a little about Marx and Lenin - that's all"[61]. However, in saying that he enjoyed the production of Carlo Bertolazzi's, *El Nost Milan* which is the subject of his essay, 'The "Piccolo Teatro": Berto-

[56] Althusser (2003c, 191).

[57] Written in response to an open letter from Daspre and published with it under the heading "*Deux lettres sur la connaissance de l'art*" in the April 1966 issue of *La Nouvelle Critique*, the cultural journal of the French Communist Party.

[58] Althusser (1972, 221).

[59] Hadjinicolaou (1978, 148).

[60] Althusser (1972, 222).

[61] Althusser (2003, 221).

lazzi and Brecht', Althusser asserts the importance of aesthetics to his philosophical project and focuses on the relationship of aesthetics and politics rather than scientific knowledge. Discussing Giorgio Strehler's production of *El Nost Milan* and Brecht's "revolution in theatrical practice" Althusser clearly sees aesthetics as a political practice critical of mystification and "culinary entertainment".

In his unfinished 1968 text 'On Brecht and Marx', Althusser insists on but twists the notion of aesthetic illusion: art is not merely catharsis, but provocatively and critically reflects upon ideology. The themes of classical theatre, Althusser argues, are ideological, although this goes unrecognised and uncriticised, it finds its meanings in consciousness. Ideologies are the "transparent myths" in which a society recognises itself; Althusser uses the metaphor of the mirror and the reflection in the mirror to conceive the familiar, uncriticised ideology of traditional art. This art mirrors ideologies rather than the complexity of history and begins and is centred in terms of the ideological consciousness and the "time" of the hero. The mirror, in which a society spontaneously finds a familiar image, must be broken if that society is to know itself and Brecht's aim "is to produce a critique of the spontaneous ideology in which men live"[62]. Althusser's engagement with Brechtian aesthetics brings him closer to Clark: the concept and technique of turning an ordinary thing into something peculiar, of alienating or distancing it, describes what happens to ideologies when they become the raw material for art[63]: the artwork produces an "internal distance" in the ideologies they 'reflect', in which they are held. Brecht's strategies and techniques distance and render strange the mechanisms involved in representation to make them visible and therefore questionable. Brecht repositions the spectator to take a critical perspective upon the performance and an active part in the production of meaning – he introduces a negative and productive critical attitude into art[64]. The "latent" asymmetrical and decentred structure of Brecht's plays and strategies of distanciation fascinates Althusser: "an internal dissociation, an unresolved alterity", which as Warren Montag indicates, can represent the complexity of historical reality as the basis of a materialist critique of aesthetic ideology[65]. Clark, referring to Macherey, describes Courbet's realism in a similar way, Courbet devises a structure or composition which refuses to impart an (ideological) unity

[62] Althusser (1990, 144).
[63] Brecht (1988, 143).
[64] Brecht (1988, 146).
[65] Montag (2003, 33).

to nineteenth century French rural society, representing instead its (real) disunity and disharmony[66].

For Pierre Macherey, art and scientific knowledge are united in their distance from ideology, but whereas science "does away with ideology, obliterates it; literature challenges ideology by using it"[67]. It is obvious to Macherey that literature is not the same as theoretical or scientific knowledge, but it is irreducible to ideology. Macherey considers the confrontation of literariness and ideology and an uncomfortable juxtaposition between ideological and fictional utterances, but he rejects the notion that the text contains "data" or "elements of the real": this is impossible because the text is not directly rooted in or spontaneously reflect the real but only through the mediation of ideologies[68].

Macherey's "Lenin, Critic of Tolstoy" (1965) analyses an example of Lenin's political and conjunctural contribution to Marxist aesthetics – a series of articles Lenin wrote on Leo Tolstoy between 1908 and 1911. For Macherey, these writings, which he reads as one text, represent a rare moment of comprehensive engagement with literary problems in classical Marxism; they are not a mere "digression", but are an exceptional correspondence of aesthetics and politics. Lenin's criticism identifies a necessary and reciprocal relationship between literature and history, but Macherey considers its theoretical weaknesses. Lenin assumes that a "great artist" like Tolstoy will necessarily reflect – a term that Macherey only provisionally retains at the beginning of his essay – at least some of the historical events, the revolution which confronts him, however much he misunderstands it personally or stands aloof from it: the "glaring" contradictions in Tolstoy's personal beliefs mirror the contradictions of contemporary Russian society and politics[69]. Lenin wants to show that Tolstoy does not have a transhistorical and therefore ideological value: "Belonging as he did, primarily to the era of 1861-1904, Tolstoy in his works – both as an artist and as a thinker and preacher embodied in amazingly bold relief the specific historical features of the entire first Russian Revolution, its strength and its weakness"[70].

Macherey distinguishes an author's lived experience from the historical period to which a text belongs: this bracketing of subjective experience is characteristic of the scientific criticism Macherey wants and is consistent with the science–ideology distinction elaborated by Althusser. So, the first

66 Clark (1982, 120).
67 Macherey (1989, 133).
68 See Macherey (1989, 118).
69 See Lenin (1967).
70 Lenin (1967b, 53).

question a scientific criticism tries to answer is that of the situation of the author, the relation of an author to the age, his or her involvement in it, and what might inhibit a complete account of it. Macherey argues, suggesting the hesitation of art between ideology and science, that a writer gives us only a "privileged glimpse" of the historical conjuncture[71]. Tolstoy's relation to history is oblique because it is ideologically mediated: a writer is not here to construct ideologies but *encounters* ideologies which are always independently constituted and "is only the apparent author of the ideology contained in his work"[72]. Macherey therefore suggests ways of thinking the processes of transaction and conversion between art and ideology that earlier Marxist art histories had not adequately addressed. The notion of borrowing ideological materials recasts materially the idealist notion that artworks reflect ideologies and begins to answer how art can be critical when a writer's perception is, at best, an ideological knowledge.

So, a scientific criticism involves a "double perspective": a literary work's relation to history is one of misrecognition–recognition or allusion–illusion in that it 'reflects' history and an ideological version of the same history. However, although a literary work is determined by its relationship to a specific ideology, it is irreducible to its ideologies that are *realised* by specifically *literary* means. A literary work can, in some ways, be distinguished from its ideological content: the writer gives form to ideology and the writer's unique perception is realised in their creation of form. However, although a unique and individual perception of reality might be the writer's "gift" or the mark of a "great writer", it should not be confused with theoretical knowledge or scientific analysis. Macherey does not think that elements of ideologies can be easily stripped away by an attentively or observant reader to leave a scientific knowledge. Tolstoy's writing does not, then, spontaneously reflect ideologies, conceptualised by Lenin's key metaphors and analogies of mirror, reflection, and expression, a vocabulary which Macherey criticises as untheorized and undeveloped. Marxist criticism seemed conceptually "poorly equipped" to register the "literariness of the text" which it had seemed to abolish[73]. He comments, "The writer *embodies, expresses,*

[71] Macherey (1989, 113).

[72] Macherey (1989, 115).

[73] Macherey quotes Engels writing to the novelist Minna Kautsky to exemplify the inadequacy of Marxist criticism in addressing literariness. Engels values socialist fiction because in its "conscientiously describing the real mutual relations, it breaks down the conventionalized illusions dominating them, shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world, causes doubt about the existing order". Engels (1973, 114).

translates, reflects, renders; all of these terms, of equal inadequacy, constitute our problem"[74].

The metaphor that occupies Macherey is the mirror and mirroring in relation to ideological contradictions which it grasps. The introduction of ideology into the work begins its "internal contradiction" which is the focus of Lenin's articles. Lenin had in mind a contradictory ideological content when he writes about Tolstoy, but ideology can easily sustain and efface contradiction: as a *false* resolution ideology is always adequate to the questions it poses and answers. The weakness of ideology is that it cannot recognise its own limits or conditions[75]. Ideology, while constituting the "support" for kinds of expression, is silent: Macherey employs the terminology of psychoanalysis to suggest that ideology is present or is the effect of its repressions[76]. To know the limits of an ideology, to know what an ideology means, it is necessary to give its inherent formlessness form. Ideology loses its confidence when its qualities are given visible and determinate form: a "text constructs a determinate image of the ideological, revealing it as an object rather than living it from within as though it were an inner conscience"[77]. Macherey describes a relation of doubling and displacement between literature and ideology which is not quite the same as traditional relationship between form and content. The subject – a key vector of ideology for Althusser – is captured and crystallised in writing – this is what the written word does – and by means of the text, it "becomes possible to escape from the domain of spontaneous ideology, to escape from the false consciousness of self, of history, and of time"[78]. So, the relationship of art to ideology is one of mirroring that is destructively critical. "The spontaneous ideology in which men live", Macherey argues, "is not simply reflected by the mirror of the book; ideology is broken and turned inside out in so far as it is transformed in the text from being a state of consciousness. Art … establishes myth and illusion as *visible objects*"[79].

Badiou responds critically to Macherey's analysis of the art–ideology relation, addressing the implications that art is neither ideology nor science

[74] Macherey (1989, 119).

[75] Discussing ideology as one of the conditions of artistic production with regards the work of Manet and the French Impressionists, Clark writes that an ideology "presents its limits and incoherencies for possible use". See Clark (2003, 260).

[76] Macherey writes, 'Like a planet revolving round an absent sun, an ideology is made of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of". See Macherey (1989, 133).

[77] Macherey (1989, 132).

[78] Macherey (1989, 132).

[79] Macherey (1989, 132).

and is in between but is ultimately closer to the latter. Badiou comments that in a tradition of Marxist aesthetics, art is classified as superstructural, as one of the ideological forms and yet is evaluated according to a criterion of truth. Badiou takes from Lenin's articles on Tolstoy and the "peasant bourgeois revolution" that art is a "real reflection" of ideology but that its truth is "*veiled* by an ideological existence"[80]. He argues that Marxist aesthetics have induced a kind of hybridity into art which becomes both ideological and theoretical with falsity becoming an almost inevitable condition or quality of any critical art and has failed to solve the problem is the *ambiguous* relation art has to the binary opposition of science and ideology. So, Lenin decentres Tolstoy in explaining his writings as the mirror of revolution but takes discrepancies as regrettable: a theoretical essence must be found inside "an ideological appearance"[81]. In contrast, Macherey posits the irreducibility of the aesthetic process and Badiou quotes approvingly Macherey's argument that a work breaks or reverses a spontaneous ideology in giving it a specific form: as *art* ideology can reveal what it can't as ideology, namely, its limits and contours. The metaphor of the visible establishes the autonomy of the aesthetic process and its proximity to science: this informs Clark's theorisation of the relation. Badiou's explanation of the aesthetic process challenges Macherey's argument of the subversion of ideology in the aesthetic. "We must conceive of the aesthetic process", Badiou writes, "not as a redoubling but as a reversal [*retournement*]. If ideology produces an imaginary reflection of reality, then the aesthetic effect produces in return [*en retour*] ideology as imaginary reality"[82]. Badiou correctly explains that for Macherey art is heterogenous, marked by an internal difference, that it figures ideologies. However, Badiou questions heterogeneity or difference: the relationship between art and ideology understandable in terms of distanciation does not happen according to Badiou – the aesthetic process does not produce the presence, it does not make visible, of a process of signification, but merely produces a self-sufficient reality for ideology or its own imaginary reality.

[80] Badiou (2013, 32).
[81] Badiou (2013, 33).
[82] Badiou (2013, 34).

6. Aesthetics and Politics: defeating ideology on the terrain of ideology

Clark's discussion of the relation, however, continues Macherey's analysis. His *Painting of Modern Life* (1984) considers the encounter between painting and a particular myth of Parisian modernity and how this encounter put myth on trial to discover its insufficiencies. He emphasises this relation's dialectical character: a painting does not actually *picture* ideologies until they alter its "visual economy" and pressure in some way pictorial traditions and conventions. It is only when a painting recasts its own conventions, procedures, and techniques that it can pressure the social structure and the culture at large. A painting can test the limits and powers of a system of representation and subvert "the terrible fictions called "Nature", "the nude", and "the popular"[83]. *Image of the People* discusses the evolution of "a distinct myth of rural society" in France in the 1840s and 1850s, a myth that was crucial to how a certain bourgeois perceived himself, and one of "unity, a one-class society in which peasant and master work in harmony", which the exhibition of Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* (painted between 1849 and 1850) exploded in its representation of "the countryside as a complex whole, with a strange, interleaved class structure of its own".[84] Clark describes the indignation felt towards a representation of the universality of bourgeois rule, the painting's "presentation of a class that ruled in country and in town"[85].

Courbet, in the works he exhibited at the 1851 Salon, came close to creating the conditions for a revolutionary art in the sense of pressuring pictorial traditions. Benjamin's 'The Author as Producer' (1934) suggests what these conditions are. It is the production of an improved apparatus that will lead consumers to production, and which is capable of making co-workers out of spectators and readers. Courbet's paintings altered the cultural apparatus in this way, undermining "the bourgeois sense of what was art and what was bourgeoise"[86].

For Clark, art's political effectiveness is limited to the realm of ideology, although he doesn't think this limitation is necessarily crippling: ideological struggle can assume a "peculiar importance". He considers how an image can be politically effective or significant: "in certain circumstances,

[83] Clark (2003, 24).

[84] See Clark (1982, 150–53).

[85] Clark (1982, 140). The "specifically bourgeois images" of the male mourners in Courbet's painting were subject to *"hysterical, disproportionate rage"*. Clark (1969, 210).

[86] Clark (1999, 180).

works of art can attack, dislocate, even subvert an ideology", a subversion is explored by Macherey which is arguably Brechtian[87]. Thus, an artwork will "have ideology … as its material, but it *works* that material; it gives it a new form and at certain moments that new form is in itself a subversion of ideology"[88]. The techniques and practices, the traditional and inherited forms of picturing, can become effective political tools to alter ideology. This representation can be anodyne as Clark recognises, but labour can create a space for ideology to be appraised: "The business of 'fitting' ideological materials most tightly, most completely into the forms and codes which are appropriate to the technical materials at hand is also a process of revealing the constituents – the historical, separable constituents, normally hidden beneath the veil of naturalness – of these ideological materials. It is a means of testing them, of examining their grounds"[89]. However, in discussing aesthetic discourse in relation to Manet's *Olympia* and its unfixing of the mythical categories of the *courtisane* and the nude, Clark was sceptical of the power of art to disrupt the smooth functioning of ideologies by imparting to them "intolerable" forms. Ideologies, "are not magically dismantled in single works of art; and if paintings try too hard to anticipate social process, they run the risk of ending up speaking to nobody"[90].

So, Clark and Macherey concur that the relation of art to ideologies is distorting and manipulative, but it can be critical: art can appraise the transparency, spontaneity, and the putative coherence of ideologies. The relation is essentially one of demystification for both authors. Once we understand that art reveals ideological or mythical discourse, attempts to supposedly "'demystify' literary works, which are defined precisely by their enterprise of demystification", become absurd[91].

This essay has returned to a relation that occupied philosophical aesthetics and histories and theories of art engaged with Marxism. New Left art histories and theories were characterised by a search for complexity and critique of reductionism and economism which appeared defining of the earlier Marxist tradition; they considered the different modalities and the apparent non-identity of art and ideology with this search in mind. An Althusserian theory of ideology that specifies its difference to scientific discourse informs the discussion of the art–ideology relation in the social history of art and illuminates the politics of representation as a form of or

87 Clark (1999, 180).
88 Clark (1982, 13).
89 Clark (1974, 562).
90 Clark (2003, 117–19).
91 Macherey (1989, 133).

analogous to Brechtian distanciation of ideology through its manipulation through the procedures and practices of art techniques and through the structure of the work of art. The ideological and the aesthetic are not mutually exclusive for the Marxist art histories and theories I have discussed, although authentic art that is Brechtian – a description arguably shared by Althusser and Clark – will transform ideologies as politics. This is a process of making ideology visible that Clark's early essays on modern art and modernism showed taking place and this is what he means when he says that works of art are and are not ideology and an understanding of this modality is why seeing works of art specifically *as,* or at least, in relation to, ideology means seeing them differently and more completely.

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