

Toward a Marxist Theory of Transition

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This essay attempts to do two things: 1) to familiarize the reader with certain theoretical concepts (problematic, mode of production, social formation, historical conjuncture, class struggle; 2) to further the process of theorization of these concepts in order that they may be further elaborated and more fruitfully applied to the study and propagation of large scale social change. Such an approach is utilized by the writer as the method of theoretical analysis in the study of colonial social formations. The basic thesis I wish to put forward is that, the elaboration of the concepts mode of production, social formation and class struggle will lead to the building up of an adequate conceptual framework for understanding and changing man's social relations.

The key concepts mode of production and social formation are formulated and utilized in such varied ways that they often have very different meanings. This is not merely a matter of 'semantics' since these varied conceptualizations often lead to radically different theories and practises in determinate concrete situations, rather than being a question of semantics this is a theoretical divergence which at least in the first instance centers on what Althusser calls problematics. That is the underlying structure of knowledge which renders possible the raising of certain questions in a particular form while ruling out certain other questions as unsuitable.¹ To ask questions (even the right ones) is not the same as answering them. Yet one's theoretical perspective is very much a reflection of one's problematic. Following from this, the main questions I wish to raise, concern the theoretical status of the concept mode of production and the manner in which it exists in actu within concrete social formations given, specific conditions of existence (material conditions) and specific class struggle or class struggles, social relations and a specific historical conjuncture. Within the context of modes of production it seems that many of the varying positions and differences of opinion arise precisely from the manner in which the concept is employed and

questions are posed. As Cardoso points out, Marx, from whom the concept mode of production is derived was himself less than instructive since he used "mode of production" ambiguously encompassing at least three distinct meanings (with possible combinations): the first refers in a descriptive way simply to ways of producing; the second to a series of modes of production which become dominant in particular regions and periods and which define "progressive epochs" in the evolution of history (e.g. feudalism and capitalism); and thirdly, secondary modes of production which never become dominant "e.g. petty bourgeois modes, peasant small-holding modes". One can clearly recognize all three tendencies in Marx but I do not agree with Cardoso's conclusion that one must move from such a categorization to the concrete study of the evolutionary process of the totality of the European mediterranean area in order to fathom capitalism as the first universal mode of production which then dissolves previous modes of production.² Rather I believe one must begin with a reading which spells out the relation between the whole and its parts, as Althusser proposes in this case between a dominant and other modes of production.

Before doing so, it is necessary to provide a definition of a mode of production at the most abstract level. I believe that with some modifications the basic problematic proposed by Balibar can be retained. Following the classic Althusserian conception one can discern a pattern of invariants encompassing: 1) labourer (always labour power within the C.M.P.); 2) means of production (the object and instruments [means] of labour) 3) non-labourer (appropriating surplus value in one or more of its component parts). These invariants are held together by two connections (relations), 1) relations of real appropriation, and 2) relations of property. The former refers to the appropriation of nature by man, or the real material appropriation of the means of production by the producer in the labour process, i.e. the production process. This concept approximates the classical Marxist notion of forces of production encompassing raw materials and other subjects of labour, the labour process and object of labour (commodities) but explicitly manifests effects on the other (superstructural) elements. Within the context used relation 1) also refers to the ability and skill of the non-worker appropriating surplus to set the labour process in motion.

The latter (property) relation in the combination, refers to more than legal property, rather it includes use/enjoyment as well as (legal) "property strictly speaking", the process of exploitation of labour within the ensemble of social and technical relations. It approximates relations of production, as used in Capital.³

Balibar then goes on to complete the picture by introducing the concept of determination in the last instance by the economy. Of the three inter-related structures, (otherwise called levels, elements, instances or moments⁴) economic, political-legal, ideological the economy is determinant in that it determines which of the instances of the social structure occupies the dominant place. Dominance refers back to Althusser's definition of over-determination...

"It is the manifestation of the structure in dominance that unifies the whole. This reflection of the conditions of existence of the contradiction within itself, this reflection of the structure articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of the complex whole within each contradiction, this is the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic."⁵

The structure in dominance then provides the main determinant of the effectivity of material conditions and defines the primary conditions of existence of class struggle and other social forms. Determination in the last instance, must be interpreted as determination by 'economic' material conditions, through a dominant instance. As Balibar states in his self criticism.

"The economic aspect (the 'economic' class struggle) is only one of these aspects [of class struggle], unevenly developed, unevenly decisive according to historical conjunctures, and never capable of producing revolutionary effects by itself. Which by no means rules out, but on the contrary demands that in all historical periods, whatever the dominant mode of production and whatever the conjuncture, the ensemble of the class struggle is still determined by the 'economic' material conditions."⁶

That is, the structures, define the conditions of existence of a class struggle which expresses an effectivity at the level of a transformation of the structures. Change is never necessary in a teleological sense but

mutually conditioned and determined by the ongoing process of the structures combined with the specific events of class struggle. As Poulantzas points out each structure operates in its own connected yet distinct 'region' of practise, within a mode of production. The political exists as a specific level but also as the crucial level in which the contradictions of a social formation are reflected and condensed. Political practise has as its specific object the present moment, the nodal point where the contradictions of the various levels of a formation are condensed in the complex relations governed by overdetermination and by their dislocation and uneven development. The problem of state power arises inside the structure of several levels dislocated by uneven development. The state has the particular function of constituting the factor of cohesion between the levels of a social formation. The struggle for control of the state, class struggle, operates along complex lines of development. Following Gramsci, Poulantzas posits dominant classes with specific hegemonic fractions engaged in compromises and power alliances with popular classes and fractions, whose power is reflected in ideological and repressive state apparatuses, generally reflected by the reigning class (upper levels of the state and corporate bureaucratic hierarchy) and manifested in all the structural levels especially ideology. For Poulantzas, unlike Gramsci, agents are tied to the reproduction of the positions occupied by a social class.

"We are faced with a series of relations between apparatuses, whose roots are deep in the class struggle. In other words the primary distribution of agents is tied to the primary reproduction of the positions occupied by social classes. According to the stages and phases of the social formation, that primary distribution assigns to a given apparatus or series of apparatuses its own proper role which it is to play in distributing agents."⁷

During a revolutionary conjuncture or period of transition the possibility exists for radical changes in the primary distribution of agents and the role of the various apparatuses in the distribution of agents may in fact be drastically altered or in extreme cases the apparatuses themselves eliminated.

Further elaboration of the concept of mode of production can now be made on the basis of these formulations. Hindess and Hirst very clearly define the structure of the unity of the two relations (property and real appropriation). They define mode of production as an articulated combination of relations of production and forces of production structured by the dominance of relations of production.⁸ Relations of production, define a specific mode of appropriation of surplus labour and the specific form of social distribution of the means of production corresponding to that mode of appropriation of surplus labour. Furthermore the distribution of agents to the positions labourer/non-labourer is seen as a function of the social distribution of the means of production. In fairness to Hindess and Hirst they do not attempt to do this outside of their rather inclusive study of specific modes of production.

Hindess and Hirst specifically define forces of production as the subject of work (raw materials, etc.), the labour process (personal activity of man) and its instruments. This is a vast improvement over the all too prevalent ambiguity in the use of the term production by many Marxists. For example Pierre-Philippe Rey quotes a passage from Marx wherein the term production is used in a context referring to mode of production. This is not clear in Rey's presentation where this term might easily be mistaken for productive forces.

"In all forms of society, it is a determined production and the relations engendered by it which assigns to all other productions and relations engendered by them, their level and their importance."⁹

Similarly Terray even more incorrectly posits that the instruments of labour are determinant in the enumeration and identification of the indices of a mode of production present, i.e. the order of investigation Hindess and Hirst wisely ignore Terray's formulation and extend that of Rey to preclude any definition of forces of relations of production independently of the mode of production in which they are combined. Yet despite their apropos criticisms of certain technicist notions, Hindess and Hirst carry their articulated combination of forces and relations of production too far, i.e. to the point of denying the specific effectivity of forces of production

as a social relation.¹⁰ In their attempt to deduce the productive forces from the concept of mode of appropriation, Hindess and Hirst establish a direct relationship between mode of appropriation, dominant instance and class struggle which bypasses the forces of production subsumed in this articulated combination, and denegates the labour process. In such a formalistic deductive connection the possibility of a contradictory relation between the forces and relations of production virtually disappears in the articulated combination such that it is hard to envisage how such a construct can avoid reproducing its conditions of existence.¹¹ More will be said on this in relation to the question of transition and class struggle.

To avoid possible ambiguities it is necessary to clearly define relations of production. As mentioned such a definition must include appropriation of the product or some portion of it by the labourer and appropriation of the surplus labour by the non-labourer. Following Poulantzas, relations of production in class society, can be viewed as a double relation encompassing man's relations to nature in material production.

"These two relations are relations first between men and other men - class relations, and secondly between the agents of production and the object and means of labour - the productive forces. These two relations thus concern the relation of the non-worker (the owner-director) to the object and means of labour. These relations involve two aspects (a) economic ownership: by this is meant the real economic control of the means of production, i.e. the power to assign the means of production to given uses and so to dispose of the products obtained (b) Possession: by this is meant the capacity to put the means of production into operation."¹²

Ernesto Laclau, posits a similar hierarchical definition of a means of production as an

"integrated complex of social productive forces and relations linked to a determinate type of ownership of the means of production

- ownership of means of production are essential relations among the ensemble of relations of production.
- logically and mutually co-ordinated articulation of
 1. determinate type of ownership of means of production
 2. determinate form of appropriation of economic surplus
 3. determinate degree of development of the division of labour

4. determinate development of productive forces
 ... a totality defined by its mutual interconnections. Within this totality, property in means of production constitutes the decisive element."¹³

I will assume here that property refers both to legal property and the ability to set the labour process into motion (as noted cf. Balibar), not necessarily combined. My main criticism of this formulation and the similar less explicit concept used by Hindess and Hirst is that it's logic is basically economistic. Property in means of production is the key element in the chain of determination which does not leave enough scope for the mutual inter-relation between the economic and its effects on the other levels which are reflected back in the form of the effects of the other levels on the economic as part of the totality of a mode of production or even co-existing modes structured by some form of dominance. If the economy is determinate it is because property in means of production and the other relations of production articulate with forces of production (as a social relation) and all other social relations and their effects at the level of determinant practises.

In other words no hard and fast connection can be assigned to property in the means of production or other relations of production whereby certain productive forces and/or certain political, ideological or economic structures might inevitably be deduced. Rather I prefer to consider these other elements as social relations which act upon and are acted upon by property relations.

One must logically begin with real appropriation or the the forces of production. What does it mean to say that the forces of production consitute a social relation? I believe that this problem has for the most part been inadequately dealt with as a problem within Marxist theory. Despite these large gaps and silences I should like to offer some tentative hypotheses.¹⁴

If one considers first of all the subject of labour (raw materials etc.) one sees that they are almost inseparable from the overall dominant relations of production. The distribution, exchange, circulation and consumption of the subject of labour are moments in the overall totality

of social relations which may involve a whole chain of agents in an extended series of social relations. If one considers the capitalist mode of production (C.M.P.) it is undeniable that it expands the scale and scope of operations to secure a regular and cheap supply of raw materials often from pre capitalist modes of production which may subsequently become part of a world capitalist system of trade relations. Much debate has gone on as to the need for the C.M.P. to expand into all parts of the globe. Colonization and imperialism are often said to arise by necessity from the inherent tendency of the C.M.P. to expand. While a detailed review of such debates are beyond the scope of this essay, I would like to put forward the position (in essence that of Bukharin) that capitalism profits from the super exploitation of non-capitalist areas but does not need them in an absolute sense to continue as a system.

That is the appropriation of raw materials is not determined by the dominant relations of production but is rather a discrete moment in the totality of interdependent social relations structured by the economic instance in a complex fashion (in the sense that theory and the real need not correspond directly). Capitalism may not need to expand outside of its own system but will do so if opportunities for profit (an integral part of the system of capitalist relations) are presented.

Productive forces encompassed within the second level that of the organization of the labour process also constitutes a social relation. This is true in the sense that the form and extent of co-operation among workers and between workers and supervisors often are conditioned if not wholly determined by the level of productive forces as well as by relations of production in the strict sense. Also the part played by the non-labourer may have some direct bearing on the reproduction/non reproduction of a given mode of production.

Finally technology itself is never completely neutral. The tool or machine arises within a certain context and serves certain functions. In the case of military technology it might serve either to defend existing institutions or to overthrow them. Such a role is not simply a function of the level of culture, science, production of commodities, or general affluence,

at least in the short run as the Mongol invasions of China illustrate. Similarly communications networks often manifest an effectivity on the nature of economic organization. In an extremely evolved form, given a determinate mode of production such networks may drastically change the nature of work and types of work needed. An obvious example is automation or cybernetics, in which technology originally developed for use in communications networks have entered and in fact revolutionized production. Similarly energy sources prove more or less efficient and operable over time and the viability of certain types of energy may come to depend on extra costs incurred by resource depletion.

Another factor is that in any given mode of production the organization of the labour process, has certain ideological and political manifestations, as well as reflecting ideology and politics. For example the increasing organic composition of capital can serve to render certain occupations redundant, replacing workers by machines thus changing the nature of the previous social structure. The level of the productive forces is to some extent a reflection of the structure of demand itself conditioned by the totality. Also rhythms of family life and popular culture reflect the nature of the productive forces in a distillation of effects from the totality of practises. Thirdly there is a reciprocal determination (conditioned by the structure) between elements such as: the transfer of the social product; distribution of social labour; levels and amount of consumption and the nature of technical relations; raw materials available; the type and extent of supervision and the scale of production within a given conjuncture, which determines what commodities are producible and in what quantities.

I am not arguing that the forces of production are autonomous, but rather that their intervention with respect to the other practices should never be ignored or underplayed. The relations of production are determinate as Marx points out in the last chapter of Vol. 1 of Capital but specific forces corresponding to those relations are not as simply and unilaterally deducible from the latter as Hindess and Hirst would have it. The two are inseparably tied together as each can and does manifest determination and effectivity upon the other. What is necessary as a precondition is that

Balibar's three invariants (the labourer, means of production, non labourer) be present. In such a case changes in the social relations of production must ensue for the mode of production to change. Generally speaking changes in productive relations will precede changes in productive forces. As Marx pointed out attempts by English systematic colonizers to export capitalist agriculture to virtually uninhabited new lands like Swan River failed to also export English productive relations. Wage workers faced with free land (access to means of production) did not remain workers for long. They quickly became petty bourgeois farmers on their own. In many cases though, the introduction of new productive forces from a more developed mode of production will quickly transform existing productive relations. Witness the rapid transformation of underdeveloped countries today when industrialization takes place.

So as one can see it is sometimes the case that changes in the productive forces precede a transformation of the relations of production and create a new articulated combination of forces and relations encompassing a transformed mode of production. In such cases it is necessary for the old productive relations to change in accordance with new technological possibilities. If such change is not forthcoming then total transformation cannot occur. It is for this reason that despite technological innovations, phenomena such as the "industrial revolution of the sixteenth century" proved chimerical in terms of sustained growth and development.

One must also keep in mind that within any particular social formation various modes of production often co-exist and that the articulated combination of forces and relations of production have to be viewed within the context of a world economy, a complex structure of complex structures which delimits but does not define modes of production. As Bettelheim puts it "the development of the productive forces in every country is to some extent conditioned by world production relations. Furthermore, within social formations social relations of production determine distribution relations (as noted by Terray). Thus attempts to define capitalism in terms of commercial factors alone cannot prove theoretically feasible. It is not the instance of circulation or commerce which is determinate but that of production within a given social

context. That is consumption and circulation, the salto mortale of commodities is determined by what can economically be produced and the historically determined needs and wherewithal available to consumers. In other words the articulated combination relations/forces of production manifests a certain effectivity upon the political and ideological structures which in turn reflect prevalent ideology and superstructural controls or effects upon the moment of production i.e. the economic base.

So to reiterate, it is the totality of the mode of production which is determined in the last instance by the economy and upon which the effects of the practises intervenes generally, mediated by the dominant practise or practises. The conditions of existence of a mode of production must be thought of in terms of the demarcation of that mode of production by the global effect of the structures on social relations. This cannot be equated with the labourer/non-labourer distinction nor even the delimitation of classes with regard to the economic, which Poulantzas defined as,

"... classes with regard to the "economic" includes the following relations:

- relations of production, in the strict sense: producer/owner of the means of production.
 - relations of distribution of social labour: producer/producer.
 - relations of the transfer of the social product: producer/producer.
- These relations are dependent on the combination of the two economic relations, real appropriation and property, and so refer to the organization of the labour process and to the division of labour."¹⁵

Rather the global effect of the structures on social relations must encompass the notion of social classes.

Social classes must be seen as "the result of the ensemble of the structures of a mode of production and a social formation, and to the relations which are maintained there by the different levels - 1. economic - 2. political - 3. ideological."¹⁶ Social classes thus manifest themselves (not inside the structure) but entirely as the "global effect of the structures in the field of social relations". Poulantzas then goes on to define social relations of production as,

"- relations among agents of production distributed in social classes, i.e. class relations. In other words, the "social" relations of production, class relations, manifest themselves at the economic level, as an effect of this specific combination: agents of production/material-technical conditions of labour (real appropriation, C.S.) constituted by the relations of production."17

Now Polantzas posits social relations, the distribution of supports (agents) to social classes as distinct from structures,

"In social relations, the relations of production correspond to the social relations of production: but we can also speak in all strictness of political "social" relations and of ideological "social" relations. These social relations, as class relations, isolated here with respect to the instances of the political and the ideological, manifest themselves as the effect of the political and ideological structures on social relations. The different instances therefore mark levels and degrees in structures and at the same time in social relations."18

I believe all this can be interpreted to mean that the conditions of existence of a mode of production are delimited by social classes and other social relations, (political and ideological) themselves the result of the global effect of the structures. Thus before a mode of production can be transformed, its conditions of existence must cease to be operable. At this point I believe one must reject Poulantzas' structural causality and posit at least the possibility of historical agents playing a direct autonomous and unpredetermined role in their conditions of life within the context of a given class struggle acted out within a specific set of historically determined parameters with differing degrees of freedom at the level of structures and the institutions. Take for example the institution of the family. Here one generally finds hierarchically ordered social relations which display a definite character or effectivity conditioned by the ideological, political and economic structures. The family, the school, the peer group, the community etc all play a role in structuring social relations i.e. socialization, and other such mechanism for the placement of agents into differing structural positions. Yet all these institutions operate with a certain degree of relative autonomy and their exact nature can never be equivocally deduced from the structures. One might then argue that

it is not whether a particular agent occupies a particular structure that is the most important issue, but rather the limitations imposed upon any agent occupying a particular position are fundamentally more important. I would agree with this given the important exception of transitional conjunctures where fundamental changes often of a revolutionary nature become possible.

These issues, of course, can not be resolved at the level of modes of production but must be theorized within additional concepts providing further approximations of the real. At a slightly less ethereal level I should like to introduce the concept of a social formation. A social formation closely corresponds with the ideological notion of a society, but since a society has no rigorous, clearly defined generally accepted theoretical position, the term is of dubious conceptual value. Thus, I prefer to use the term social formation defined as the articulated combination of structures within co-existing modes of production or more specifically,

"The social formation itself constitutes a complex unity in which a certain mode of production dominates the others which compose it... The dominance of one mode of production over the others in a social formation causes the matrix of this mode of production (i.e. the particular reflection of determination by the economic element in the last instance by which it is specified) to mark the whole of the formation. In this way a historically determined social formation is specified by a particular articulation (through an index of dominance and over-determination) of its different economic, political ideological and theoretical levels or instances. As a general rule, taking account of the dislocations which will be encountered, this articulation is that of the dominant mode of production."¹⁹

A significantly different definition is offered by Hindess and Hirst. For them,

"'Social formation'... designates a complex structure of social relations, a unity of economic, ideological and in certain cases, political structural levels in which the role of the economy is determinant. It is determinant in the sense that the conditions of existence of the dominant relations of production assign to each of the levels a certain form of effectivity and a mode of intervention with regard to the other levels. If the dominant relations of production are antagonistic, involving a social division of labour between a class of labourers and a class of non-labourers, then the social formation contains a state and a political level as the necessary space of representation of the antagonistic classes."²⁰

They also specify that,

"... the structure of the social formation is not deducible from the concept of its determinant mode of production. The conditions of existence of a particular mode of production prescribe the limits of variation in the structures of the economic, political and ideological levels if the mode of production is to survive. Thus the structure of the economic level of a particular social formation must be governed by a variant or set of variants of a determinate mode of production but it may also include certain elements of other modes - provided only that the presence of these elements does not contradict the conditions of existence of the dominant relations of production. ...the presence of a particular mode of production is not sufficient to secure the reproduction of its conditions of existence. ...The economic, political and ideological conditions of existence of the mode of production are secured, modified, or transformed as the outcome of specific class struggles conducted under the particular conditions of the economic, political and ideological levels of the social formation. The particular structure of economic political and ideological conditions in the social formation determines the possible outcomes of the class struggle conducted under such conditions."21

Both Poulantzas and Hindess and Hirst seem to be in basic agreement that a social formation operates under a particular articulation conditioned by dominance and overdetermination originating at the economic level of the dominant mode of production. But more importantly the relations between conditions of existence, dominant mode of production and the possible outcome of class struggle (conjuncture) are not adequately theorized. Hindess and Hirst seem to move further in this respect than anyone else I know of, but there are still problems. For if the conditions of existence prescribe the limits of variation in the structures and the reproduction of the conditions of existence are secured, modified or transformed by the outcome of class struggles conducted under the particular economic, political and ideological levels of the social formation then we seem to have at least the hint of a vicious circle. Crudely speaking the formula seems to go like this

Class struggle (conditioned by the structures) secures, modifies or transforms conditions of existence, prescribes limits of variation in the structure.

If class struggle which is conditioned by the structures secures or transforms the conditions of existence of a M.P. or S.F. which prescribes limits to the structures, then the structures are both determined and determinate. Or from another angle, is it possible for class struggle to secure the conditions of existence of a M.P. and thus prescribe limits of variation to the structures if it is itself 'conditioned' by the structures? Clearly the outcome of any given class struggle cannot be pre-determined by the nature of the structures. Ample demonstration of this is expressed by the varied nature of revolutionary conjunctures as well as the lack of success by historians and sociologists in finding universal causal variables to explain revolutions. Nevertheless class struggle does take place within limits set by the social formation and its conditions of existence. For example it is necessary to posit capitalist productive forces or post capitalist ones (even if they must be rapidly developed) before the socialist mode of production could exist. That is, an adequate surplus to satisfy the needs of all including those not directly engaged in production must exist. Theoretically one is left in a position where it is class struggle which determines the reproduction, non-reproduction of a social formation but it is the economic, political and ideological conditions in the social formation which determines the possible outcome of class struggle conducted under these conditions (conjuncture) and yet class struggle itself indirectly prescribes limits of variation upon the structures. How then do class struggles come about? Even when the conditions of class struggle i.e. non-reproduction of the conditions of existence of a mode of production are met, what is the spark which sets off the powder keg? Or even, is such a revolutionary catalyst (the spark) necessary? If so what is the role of the party, the intellectual, trade unions etc within the conjuncture? Also what of the premature revolutionary attempt? Perhaps it is unfair to pose these questions outside of a specific conjuncture but the point is, what theoretical tools are available for an analysis of these questions. The best answers available are contingent upon some notion of social classes. That is, given Hindess and Hirst's guidelines concerning class antagonism as the representation of

antagonistic relations of production at the political level, then class struggle becomes crystallized within the state which exemplifies the political level in all modes of production they deal with, (except primitive communism before the gentile constitution). At the level of social formations and conjunctures if not even at the level of modes of production one must also incorporate civil society into the political moment. It is at this broadly political level that transition takes place. The role of the party is to channel revolutionary energy, to organize to provide the spark at the right time etc. I do not see this as a zero sum total game but rather as an ongoing revolutionary process where the party must not only direct but also learn from and reflect the energies of the labouring class. At the level of the social formation one finds a multiplicity of class and status groups or fractions of class and the necessity for coalitions against the hegemonic bloc arises. It is any mention of such a revolutionary process which is missing in Hindess and Hirst, Poulantzas and Balibar and it is at this level that the work of Pierre-Philippe Rey provides a useful counterpoint.²² It is also at this level the role of the individual and specific institutions are most relevant and least pre-determined.

There still remains the problem of how one conceptualizes a social formation. It is one thing to define social formation as "historically determined as a particular object" or as a real concrete object as Poulantzas does.²³ It is quite another thing to formulate immanent tendencies with the social formation of a particularly constituted object. If Bismarck's Germany, France under Louis Bonaparte, England during the industrial revolution²⁴ and infinite other possibilities constitute a social formation then what if any is their common denominator? The presence of a state in class societies seems to be one very loose indicator but clearly the conception social formation does not imply the necessity of a state. Similarly the "ideological" notion of a society does not really explain anything but merely gives a name to some kind of loosely knit social organisation.

One is then left with a choice, determination by the dominant mode of production which structures the articulation (Poulantzas) or determination by the dominant economic structure within the dominant mode more specifically

dominant relations of production/possession separation from the means of production) (Hindess and Hirst). If one chooses the dominance of one mode of production which produces complex effects of dissolution or conservation on the other M.P.'s which give these societies their character as does Poulantzas then one cannot also posit a social formation as a concrete society at a given moment of time;²⁵ since articulation of M.P.'s is itself a theoretical concept which has not as yet approximated the level of the concrete.

My preference is to posit as Hindess and Hirst do a combination of reciprocally determined and determining elements of possibly more than one M.P. structured by the determinate nature of the economic level of the dominant variant or set of variants of a determinate mode of production. The presence of some or even all of the elements of a mode of production does not in any way necessitate that this M.P. will reproduce itself. In my view it is possible that not all the elements of a particular M.P. even the dominant one in a social formation need be present in some sort of necessary unity. One might sometimes find a feudal political level articulated with a capitalist economic level and perhaps some sort of mixed ideological level. It is not my intention to specify such combinations but I merely want to specify the possibility of such combinations within a social formation.

This brings one back to the question of transition. Is it possible to have more than one ruling class within the same social formation? Is there an especially unstable period within the conjuncture where a dominant M.P. no longer exists and one can discern a 'transitional' mode of production? This is an area which has often been left untheorized in the literature on social formations. For example, take the third step in Godelier's definition of a social formation.

"3) define the exact form and content of the articulation and combination of these various modes of production in a hierarchical order, insofar as one mode of production dominates the others, and in some way subjects them to the needs and logic of its own mode of functioning, and integrates them, more or less, in the mechanism of its own reproduction." (italics C.S.)²⁶

The silence expressed here by the more or less speaks volumes. Clearly if the dominant M.P. structured the social formation in a rigid hierarchical determination then the effectivity of class struggle within the social formation would become problematic, except as a reflection of the antagonistic nature of the labourer/non-labourer classes within the dominant M.P. Such a notion would exclude class alliances, obfuscate fractions, in short become a practical absurdity.

I do not believe that this is Godelier's intention, in which case the reproduction/non-reproduction of the hierarchically articulated social formation is relegated to the 'in some way' in which the dominant M.P. subjects subordinate M.P.s to its 'needs and logic'. In this case reproduction is not theorized but merely hinted at, which further obfuscates the question of transition.

If the manner in which structures and conditions of existence reproduce themselves is not known then it becomes impossible to specify how this reproduction ceases to operate and transition occurs.

It has become fairly commonplace to criticize Balibar's conceptualization of modes of production as a static inventory where the problems of correspondence or non-correspondence becomes meaningless.²⁷ Yet I believe that a careful reading of Balibar shows that his position is in many ways the most sophisticated one presented to date. I believe that Balibar's problematic concerning his notions of synchrony and diachrony can be used quite fruitfully.

It should be noted that Balibar himself has rejected the idea of a transitional mode of production which he put forward in Reading Capital. In his self criticism Balibar makes it clear that

"transition is not, is never, for reasons of principle, mere supersession, an 'internal' results of 'tendencies' observable in the mode of production itself and responsible for the development of its characteristic relations of production, even if this development is simultaneously a development of contradictions. ...transition requires the analysis of other material conditions and other social forms than those implied in the concept of mode of production alone."²⁸

Balibar then adds

"There is a general problematic... of 'transition' in social formations i.e. of 'revolution in the relations of production'. This pertains to the fact that the concept of 'class societies', resting on mode of production which are of the same time mode of exploitation, cannot be constituted without reference to the historical transformation of modes of exploitation (in other words, there is no such thing as exploitation in general, only determinate forms of exploitation). But for all that there is no such thing as a general theory of transition, in the strong sense of an explanation of the causality of a process. On the contrary, it emerges that each historical 'transition' different, materially and therefore conceptually. ...historical materialism is not only a theory of the necessity of the (revolutionary) transformation of the social relations, but also a theory of the transformation of the mode of transformation of social relations such that two revolutions never have the same concept.²⁹

Earlier within the text of Reading Capital Balibar had elaborated a theory of social change which distinguished between modes of production reproducing themselves (synchrony) and those in a state of transition (diachrony).

"We have seen that the analysis of the relations which appertain to a determinate mode of production and constitute its structure must be thought as the constitution of a theoretical "synchrony": this is reflected with respect to the mode of production by Marx in the concept of reproduction. The analysis of all the peculiar effects of the structure of the mode of production is necessarily part of the synchrony. The concept of diachrony will therefore be reserved for the time of the transition from one mode of production to another, i.e. for the time determined by the replacement and transformation of the relations of production which constitute the double articulation of the structure."³⁰

Balibar then goes on to develop the notion of the complexity of a mode of production defined by the correspondence or non-correspondence of the two connections (productive forces and the relations of production).

"In the form of non-correspondence which is that of the phases of transition such as manufacture, the relationship between the two connections no longer takes the form of a reciprocal limitation, but becomes the transformation of the one by the effect of the other: this is shown by the whole analysis of the manufacture and the industrial revolution, in which the capitalist nature of production (the necessity of creating surplus value in the form of relative surplus value) determines and governs the transition of the productive forces to their specifically capitalist form ... The "reproduction" of this specific complexity is the reproduction of the effect of the one connection on the other... In the one case (correspondence C.S.) we are dealing with the reciprocal limitation of the effectivities of the two connections, in the other (non-correspondence C.S.) with the transformation of one by the effectivity of the other."³¹

The mode of correspondence between the different levels of the social structure (mode of articulation) of these levels can likewise be generalized. This articulation "depends in turn on the form of the internal correspondence of the structure of production". This generalized relationship (correspondence) can be analysed as the "mode of intervention of one practise within limits determined by another" for example the intervention of the class struggle within limits determined by the economic structure.³² The length of the working day and wages are subject to a variation which is not determined by the structure but depends on the balance of forces. But the limits to this variation are set by the structure thus its autonomy is relative. So in this case the result of the intervention of political practise is to transform and fix the limits of the mode of production.

"In the transition period, the forms of law and of State policy are not as hitherto, adopted to the economic structure (articulated with the peculiar limits of the structure of production) but dislocated with respect to it: as well as showing force as an economic agent, the analyses of primitive accumulation also reveal the precession of law and of the forms of the State with respect to the forms of the capitalist economic structure. This dislocation can be translated by saying that the correspondence appears here, too in the form of a "non-correspondence" between the different levels. In

a transition period, there is a "non-correspondence" because the mode of intervention of political practise, instead of conserving limits and producing its effects within their determination, displaces them and transforms them. There is therefore no general form of correspondence between the level, but a variation of forms, which depend on the degree of autonomy of one instance with respect to another (and to the economic instance) and on the mode of their mutual intervention ... the theory of dislocations (within the economic structure, between the instances) and of the forms of non-correspondence is only ever possible by a double reference to the structure of two mode of production ... Periods of transition are therefore characterized by the co-existence of several modes of production, as well as by these forms of non-correspondence."³³

As noted earlier in this paper I would agree with this formulation of synchrony and diachrony only given the proviso that the structure of two modes of production need not be present in toto. This brings us back to Engels' question (one taken up recently by Perry Anderson in his analysis of the absolutist state). Is it possible for more than one ruling class to co-exist in such a way that these antagonistic (warring) classes of non-labourers somehow balance each other and the state acquires a certain amount of independence? This may in fact be a real problem for the study of absolutism or even for the study of certain colonial social formations with dual indigenous and foreign ruling classes. Yet if one accepts that no general theoretical concept of diachrony or transition is possible then I do not believe that one can posit state autonomy in some sort of teleological fashion as an invariant element in transition. This does not solve the problem of whether the state can function independently of the ruling class or classes in some instances which is a question not yet fully worked out. I feel that an independent state is possible and perhaps may have existed in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe and might exist today in certain third world countries, but full periodization of this problem would require a separate work and is not resolvable within the realm of theory abstracted from concrete states, social formations and class struggles.

There has in fact been much debate on the nature of transitional "societies" such as that between Sweezy, Dobb et al on the nature of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe (including a perfunctory comparison with Japan). I believe that the main problems with such debates (e.g. whether to characterize manufacturing as feudal, capitalist or a transitional mode of production) have to be resolved into levels of abstraction to become comprehensible. It is at the most abstract level that the formulations of Hindess and Hirst are most operational. That is, the relations of production are determinate of the structure of the dominant mode of production which characterizes a social formation.

That is, the mode of production as such does not constitute the object of theoretical investigation in this case, but rather the social formation. In the example given i.e. the case of sixteenth century western Europe, I would agree neither with Dobb who posits that the social formation ("economic system") was characterized by capitalism nor with Sweezy who sees it as a transitional conjuncture, but rather with Rodney Hilton who posits a dominant feudal M.P. within the varying social formations, albeit one that was being undermined. That is the economic basis of those who still held commanding positions in the state was still feudal and in the terms of analysis offered here the predominant relations of production were still feudal (or so they seem to me without claiming any special expertise on the period). The point is at the level of abstraction of a social formation one can coherently make such a judgement.

A very important theoretical question remains i.e. at what point in an historical conjuncture do the conditions of existence of the dominant M.P. stop reproducing themselves and therefore the dominant relations of production? Generally speaking I believe that the site of the problem can be identified as the point of intersection of the base (the articulated combination of forces and relations of production replete with ideological effectivities) and the superstructure (the state and political-legal level also replete with ideological effectivities). It is this correspondence which conditions transition. Yet as in the example cited the changing nature of productive forces and relations undermining this correspondance may continue for a

period of say roughly 300 years in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. I do not believe that one can pinpoint the exact moment whence a given social formation is no longer dominated by a particular mode of production. On the contrary, what I wish to achieve is to provide broad parameters for the characterization of given social formations in given conjunctures. Such analysis are not straightforwardly open to empirical prediction based on manipulation of key variables. One cannot specify the exact percentage of separation of direct producers from the means of production which would make capitalism operable for example. Such an exercise would be an absurdity since obviously many other factors are at work and play important roles.

The transition phase provides a difficult problem in theorization. It cannot represent a transitional mode of production but rather an unstable social formation, caveat emptor. For as Bettelheim points out the starting point of analysis is not instability but rather the dislocation or non-homology between formal (property) and real appropriation.

"What marks the transition phase as a whole is not mainly the instability of the new social order, nor is it the absence of domination by the new production-relations, it is the fact that there is still a relatively large degree of non-correspondence between the new production-relations, henceforth dominant, and the nature of the essential production forces."³⁴

As noted I don't agree with Bettelheim or Balibar that this dislocation (diachrony) characterizes a new transitional mode of production. Such a concept would emasculate the theoretical specificity of modes of production into infinite permutations and combinations.

How then does one periodize transition? I will offer three possible modes of analysis corresponding to the degree of complexity of a social formation. At the most general level, formal appropriation (the possession of or separation from the means of production, appropriation of surplus, distribution of surplus labour) determines the economic structure of the dominant practise within a given social formation. In the first case that of a social formation almost completely dominated by one mode of production,

for example primitive communism, it is the immanent contradiction within the economic structure of the single and therefore dominant M.P. which provides the mode of transformation i.e. determines whether reproduction or non-reproduction of the conditions of existence of the M.P. takes place. The tendency toward territorial expansion accompanying population growth under primitive communism could lead to various crises at the level of ideological social relations. As the tribe, phratry or whatever expanded new forms of social control through kinship or religion might be called into existence. Transitional forms of a superstructure (already dislocated in terms of correspondence with the economic base) might arise, such as the gentile constitution. At this point under certain conditions the state itself might come into existence a state once constituted would involve a different system of productive forces and property and this would help to create a new mode of production.

The second type of transitional conjuncture again involves a non-correspondence (in no way complete of course) between productive forces and productive relations, but in this case one will be able to discern quite clearly the presence of essential elements of two distinct modes of production. In such cases the dominant mode of production is demarcated by its more or less hegemonic control of productive property and productive relations albeit often in rather bastardized forms. Such articulated modes may in fact be particularly resilient and long lasting. In the case of domestic manufacture predominating in a social formation one finds predominant capitalist freehold property, bourgeois law combined with artisanal production carried out by direct producers (perhaps cottars) still in possession of most of their own means of production and a situation where merchants and usurers capital fulfills the directive functions and mediates between production and exchange. Such social formations (common in eighteenth century Europe) are not yet entirely capitalist, in fact metayage may still exist in widespread form, but they are for the most part dominated by capitalist institutions (even if sometimes of a perfunctory nature) capitalist relations of production and a capitalist state i.e. one controlled primarily in the interests (if not by) a bourgeoisie. I would characterize

such a conjuncture as capitalist at the point at which the predominant mode of appropriation of surplus takes place within predominantly capitalist relations of exchange and social relations. The actual forms that the transformation of productive and corresponding superstructural relations take depend on specific internal and external contradictions of the the social formation delineating its conditions of existence and the actual course of class struggle within such prescribed limits.

The third transitional conjuncture involves a multiplicity of more than two modes and forms of production which can again be expressed in terms of dominance set by the economic level but where direct state intervention would seem to be necessary to stabilize such a complex articulation in order that the dominant relations of production might reproduce themselves. For example in 1921 Lenin periodized Soviet Russia in terms of five separate modes and forms of production wherein the collective ownership of the means of production provided the determinant level but one which could only structure articulation of the social formation through the state and political practise. Multiple contradictions within the varied elements existed which could have possibly served to undermine socialism of various points, one could in fact argue that this is what happened under Stalin. But at any rate the main, point I wish to make is only that new productive forces were not immediately forthcoming as an inevitable result of changed relations production. Such correspondance can only come about through struggle at the level of all existing social relations which is necessary because the outcome of such struggle while prescribed within certain limits is in no way pre-determined in any strict sense.

In summary then actual transition does not constitute a new separate mode of production but a dislocated state of an articulated combination of modes of production (diachrony) where one mode is dominant. In practise the boundaries can be obscure, capricious and relatively undefined, but I prefer this uncertainty to positing a transitional mode which undermines mode of production as a theoretical concept. In concrete terms the actual transition is defined by a non-inevitable class struggle between the major

classes and fractions so the co-existing modes and forms of production which takes place at different levels and reflects the structural and superstructural totality. The state manifests itself as the region of condensation of the levels, but control of the state does represent a complex and possibly long and arduous accession to power.

A further problem involves the generally contradictory nature of articulation of M.P.'s. Can synchrony as a concept exist outside of tendencies toward transition? The answer I believe does not lie simply within the realm of theory. As I have said transition depends on determinate class struggle within the structural complexity of a mode of production or more generally a social formation. Unique circumstances with their own causal specificity and relative autonomy play an important part at the level of concrete conjunctures. It is at this level that factors such as geography, climate, demography, personality, etc. come into play. They are never isolated from the structural complexity but neither are they simply or unilaterally determined by it or subsumed within it. Thus the concrete conjuncture must be separated from social formation as a theoretical construct and should be seen not merely as possible outcomes predetermined by the structures but also as outcomes derived from the give and take of actual class struggle.

FOOTNOTES

1. Callinicos, N., Althusser's Marxism, p. 34, Pluto Press, London, 1976.
2. Cardoso, C.F.S., "Colonial Modes of Production", Critique of Anthropology, Nos. 4 and 5, Autumn, 1975.
3. Balibar, Etienne in Reading Capital (B. Brewster, trans), New Left Books, London, 1970. Althusser, Louis, pages 209-253.
4. Another level theoretical is sometimes introduced but for methodological reasons beyond this essay I reject Althusser's distinction between theory and ideology and thus I leave it out for my purposes here. My reasons for doing so are grounded in what I take to be Althusser's fundamental demarcation of scientific work as the activity of generality II, theoretical concepts on generality I ideological representations. For example Marx's concept of mode of production could be applied to the representations of a particular social formation to produce scientific theory. Whether this theory would have a specific effectivity from the ideological instance and thus would constitute a transformative element cannot be posited in a mechanical fashion and would very much depend upon the particular historical conjuncture, and it is the conjuncture which is at issue here. If as Althusser maintains "the knowledge effect is the appropriation of the real object" then the real object of revolutionary theory must be revolutionary politics and the two cannot be separated as Althusser would at times maintain.
5. Balibar, E., op. cit., p. 224. Althusser, L. For Marx, Allen Lane, (B. Brewster, trans), 1969, p. 200.
6. Balibar, Etienne, "Self Criticism: An Answer to Questions from 'Theoretical Practise'" in Theoretical Practise, No. 7/8 January 1973.
7. Poulantzas, Nicos, Political Power and Social Classes (T. O'Hagan, trans), New Left Books, London, 1973, 12, 13, 40, 42, "On Social Classes", New Left Review, p. 54.
8. Hindess, B. Hirst, P.Q., Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975, p. 125.
9. Rey, Pierre-Philippe, Les Alliances de Classes, My translation. p. 22, Maspero, Paris, 1973.
10. Cf. Balibar, E., in Althusser and Balibar, op. cit., 1970, p. 235.
11. Gareth Stedman-Jones, "Modes of Production Workshop", Communist University of Cambridge, April, 25, 1976.
12. Poulantzas, Nicos, "On Social Classes", p. 28, New Left Review, No. 77.
13. Laclau, Ernesto, "Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America", New Left Review, No. 67, May-June, 1971, p. 33.

14. In cases where the technical conditions of existence for a new mode of production come into existence before the social relations of production, this does not necessitate transition but might facilitate such an historical process given a suitable conjuncture. An example of such a conjuncture could be China during the period of the warring states or Tokugawa Japan.
15. Poulantzas, N., op. cit., 1973, p. 63, footnote 8.
16. Ibid., p. 63.
17. Ibid., p. 64.
18. Ibid., p. 66.
19. Ibid., p. 15.
20. Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., p. 31.
21. Ibid., p. 15.
22. Cf. Rey P.P., op. cit., postscript.
23. Poulantzas, N., op. cit., 1973, p. 15.
24. Ibid., p. 15.
25. Poulantzas, N., "On Social Classes" in New Left Review, p. 33.
26. Godelier, Maurice, "On the Definition of a Social Formation" Critique of Anthropology, No. 1, Spring 1974, p. 63.
27. Rey, P.P. "The Linneage Mode of Production", Critique of Anthropology No. 3, Spring 1975.
28. Balibar, E. in Theoretical Practise, op. cit. p. 64.
29. Ibid., p. 69.
30. Balibar, E., op. cit. 1970, p. 297.
31. Ibid., p. 304.
32. Ibid., p. 305
33. Ibid., p. 306-307