

*THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SUBJECT
AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE OBJECT
A Materialist Critique of Althusserian
and Post-Althusserian Theories of Ideology*

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PREFACE

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KEY TO TRANSCRIPTS

- [] Background information
- ... Pause
- (...) Material edited out

ABSTRACT

This thesis has examined several of the most recent advances in the theory of ideology. These have developed in the wake of the seminal work of the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser. They have attempted to continue the insights found in Althusser's attack on empiricist epistemology and in his theory of the formation of human subjectivity.

The central argument of this thesis is that the theory of ideology, in terms of the "constitution of the subject", is a valuable breakthrough which allows the concept of ideology to be extended beyond its traditional (class) parameters. However, the anti-empiricist epistemology which has removed the object (ie. the material referent) from the theory of ideology, has been a regressive step since it has rendered the whole enterprise idealist. The standpoint of this thesis is a materialist one which forcefully maintains that the real world is directly implicated in the knowledge produced by social practices. Therefore, the theory of ideology must include a concept of *representations* of that real world if it is to be fully materialist.

This thesis does not explicitly present a materialist theory of ideology. Instead, it examines the theoretical principles of these recent advances and shows how they ultimately degenerate into idealism at crucial points. The thesis then employs some of my empirical interview material and proceeds to show that the concrete application of these theoretical principles also leads to idealist research practices. The thesis concludes by suggesting that there is, nevertheless, something of value in these recent advances which a materialist research practice can incorporate.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following works by Louis Althusser have been abbreviated:

<i>For Marx</i>	<i>FM</i>
<i>Reading Capital</i>	<i>RC</i>
<i>Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays</i>	<i>L&P</i>
<i>Essays in Self Criticism</i>	<i>ESC</i>
"Ideology and Ideological States Appartuses" (in <i>L&P</i> :121-173)	<i>ISAs Essay</i>

A NOTE ON TERMS

Idealism and *materialism* are defined on pages 32-33.

Althusserians and *post-Althusserians* - this distinction is between Althusser (as well as the theorists who have stayed largely within his position) and those theorists who have substantially moved beyond him but acknowledge his seminal work.

Neo-structuralists - include all the post-Althusserians, the Tel Quel group and also Althusser himself in some respects (see Chapter Eight below).

Hindess and Hirst - is used as a general expression for Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst whether both of them are involved (eg. *Mode of Production and Social Formation*) or only one of them. This is legitimate because they share a common epistemological position, a common political strategy and work closely in collaboration. (N.B. Hindess and Hirst are often referred to by other writers as discourse theorists, neo-structuralists, or British post-Althusserians.)

It is evident that there is much overlapping between these terms. The context of the passage should make it clear what is intended since the choice of term depends on the issue under discussion (eg. epistemology or politics, for example).