expected is an analysis of our present situation with some general guidelines for the transition to socialism. Dialectical change provides us with ever new situations which for an understanding demand that a wide range of experience be drawn upon from within and without the revolutionary core.

This in turn requires a respect for the opinions and efforts of others although of course not necessarily all. To be able to do this necessitates once more a distinction between real enemies and those that can be brought into alliance or tolerated as non-conformists. There is, as we remarked earlier, a need to distinguish between what could be called the positively reactionary, those forces directed against the very heart of socialism, and those forces which are hindrances of a non-fatal variety. A socialist ethic depends very heavily on the success of drawing this distinction and repression must be directed only to those in the former category. Such an ethic is based on the conception of human beings as re/producers of their own and not a class reality and as such is universalistic. But it is universalism with a difference, being historically specific it recognizes the existence of class struggle and hence the necessity of excluding some from the realm of autonomy. Because this exclusion threatens the objective validation by all of one's moral ideology - albeit a Marxist one - it must be done with care in some of the ways I have just mentioned so as not to be forever exclusivist. That is, the ideal of the classless society must be maintained and made the place where all can develop and construct their own reality to a degree hitherto unattained in any previous historical epoch.

On Materialisms

Kate Soper

Hitherto, Sebastiano Timpanaro's work has been known to English readers only through the occasional extract from his books published in New Left Review. Now, with the publication in full of what are perhaps his most controversial works - On Materialism, and more recently The Freudian Slip - we are given a much more substantial basis for assessing his contribution.

Timpanaro writes in an aggressive style that elicits and even invites peremptory and dismissive judgements on his work. But it would only be to ape the cruder aspects of his own polemic to dismiss him straightforwardly as a 'vulgar materialist', 'Popperian', 'crude empiricist' etc. Even though such labels may not be wholly inappropriate, they must fail to do justice to the sensitivity which informs Timpanaro's work. His contribution to debate on the problems relating to the materialism/idealism distinction, the science/ideology couple, the relations between synchrony/diachrony, theory and practice etc cannot easily be neglected. Even if at times his formulation of these issues is incomplete and dogmatic, it is nonetheless true that at other times he reveals an unnerving ability to touch to the heart of matters that must be the concern of anyone, whatever his or her particular philosophical alignment, who has not simply opted for a credo, whether of empiricist or non-empiricist, humanist or anti-humanist form, but is still prepared to admit and discuss the unresolved nature of the problems around which the contemporary oppositional formulae of Marxist studies have been erected. Moreover, Timpanaro's no-nonsense approach makes a refreshing change from more soft-pedalling incursions into these areas and from ultra-sophisticated and jargonised discussions of the issues involved. Timpanaro may lose some of the trees, but at least we keep the wood in sight.

On Materialism, which first appeared in Italian in 1970, comprises a collection of essays which were originally published in the journal Quaderni Piacentini, and evoked a good deal of response in Italy (1) - where Timpanaro is widely known and respected, not only for his contribution to Marxist study and his political activity, but also as a philologist, Leopardi scholar and student of nineteenth-century culture (2). Only the fourth chapter on 'Structuralism and its Successors' was written for the book. Despite its piecemeal formation the book reads as a coherent whole since its first four chapters represent the development of Timpanaro's main theme: the construction of a hedonist-pessimist-Marxism and the recognition of the relevance of Engels in this respect. Only the last chapter, which is a study of Korsch's critique of Lenin's philosophy, can be said to stand apart from the rest of the book, though it too continues the idealism-materialism theme.

On re-thinking Marxism

Timpanaro's starting point has become something of a cliche: a need to re-think Marxism in the light of what has happened in the capitalist West, in Russia, in China and in the Third World. More polemically, he proceeds immediately to reject the respective contributions of both the two main 'schools' of 20th century Marxism. The Frankfurt school and its various offspring on the one hand, and Althusserianism, on the other, "allow very little of Marxism to survive"; moreover, they "represent in many respects a step backwards". The former is retrogressive because it ignores the need to found a 'scientific socialism' and sees in science only bourgeois false objectivity; the latter because, although it insists on the scientific character of Marxism, it adopts from current epistemology what Timpanaro refers to as a 'Platonist conception of science', which, he claims, makes it impossible to pose correctly the question of the relations between theory and practice.

Marxism, he argues, if it is to avoid becoming merely a 'revolutionary sociology', must refer itself again to the fundamental question posed by Marx and Engels of the 'real liberation' of mankind. For Timpanaro, this is a question of reconfirming and developing materialism, through the provision of a 'theory of needs' which is not "as so often, reduced to a compromise between Marx and Freud, but which confronts on a wider basis the problem of the relation between nature and society". We must recognize nature's continued conditioning of man, not in a way which reduces the social to the biological, but in a way that asserts the autonomy of the biological relation to the demand for happiness".

1 See 'Il dibattito sul materialismo' that was conducted in Quaderni Piacentini nos. 29, 30 and 32. The main bone of contention related to Timpanaro's assertion of the need to recognize the passive element in experience, and the dispute was conducted to a large extent from the standpoint of a 'philosophy of praxis', of which, to my mind, Timpanaro is rightly critical. The second chapter of his book is a translation of his reply to these critics.

2 His major work in this respect is Classicismo e Illuminismo nell'Ottocento Italiano.

Sebastiano Timpanaro: On Materialism, NLB, 1976, 260pp, £5.75

It is his insistence on the fundamental interconnexion between the struggle for communism and human happiness that leads Timpanaro to align himself with the blend of hedonism and pessimism to be found in the work of the nineteenth-century Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi. Leopardi's theme is that the struggle against nature is a struggle for pleasure, for happiness, but it is also continually and inevitably constrained by the biological frailty of mankind. Timpanaro argues in turn for a revolutionary socialism that both recognizes the impositions and limits attaching to our biological existence and asserts the intimate connexion between emancipation and pleasure.

Timpanaro takes pains to define his particular type of materialism. He is right to do so, for it might be argued that the battle waged by contemporary Marxists to correct reductionist tendencies, whether of economistic or biologistic complexion, has made such good ground that anyone who ventures, as Timpanaro does, even to suggest the prior determination of the biological on the social will automatically be dismissed as 'vulgar' materialist. Hence the care with which he dissociates himself from all forms of reactionary biologism (see the arguments in the Preface to the English edition against Baker and Eysenck, Skinner and certain trends in animal ethology), and from any attempt either to isolate the biological from the social, or to conflate these two. It is rather than his materialism represents a refusal to make a reduction at the level of the social: man has a biological specificity which must not be absorbed entirely within the specificity of his social existence. Hence his quarrel with both Colletti and Seve (3).

Timpanaro's point is that Western Marxism, in its zeal to defend itself against the accusation of materialism, has cast out, together with mechanism and vulgarity, materialism as such. Moreover, he argues, much of the debate within the various Marxist groups revolves on the selection of the best means of safeguarding against materialism, and the alternatives chosen are broadly those of a Hegelianized Marxism with strong existentialist undertones, on the one hand, and a pragmatic scientism, on the other. Timpanaro recognizes the authenticity of the polemic against vulgar materialism, but he also argues that the insistence on the polemic has for a long time now not corresponded to any important influence or even effective presence in Western Marxism (4). Rather, he claims, the struggle today is between two types of idealism - a historicist and humanist idealism and an empirio-criticist and pragmatic idealism. What is at issue, then, is whether his intervention transcends the stasis of the present humanist/anti-humanist confrontation in a way that does not involve regression to the old battle ground of 'vulgar' versus 'Marxist' materialism. I shall argue that Timpanaro does not get us beyond the circle of contemporary dispute since he opts for a brand of Marxism that ultimately reproduces the central deficiencies of the traditional humanist position. I shall discuss firstly Timpanaro's formulation of the biological-social relationship, and secondly the epistemology of his approach to the materialism-idealism distinction.

The social-biological relationship

Timpanaro's formulation of the relationship has the merit of insisting on the specificity of the biological dimension rather than reducing it, as for example L. Seve tends to, wholly to social relations - even if the biological aspect of our existence is always a socialized biology, there is nonetheless something specific to this aspect which allows us to relate to it precisely as the biological (and not, for example, the economic, or the artistic) component of existence. But it has the de-merit of being un-dialectical: on the one hand he places social production with its particular evolutionary pace, and on the other hand, nature, including man as biological entity, which 'also changes as evolutionism has taught us, but at an immensely slower tempo'. We are then told, rather baldly, that the latter has its particular effects on human progress and that account must be taken of these. But this schematic statement of the separate and autonomous progress of the social and biological 'modes' of existence does not, in fact, enlighten us on the crucial problem of their relationship. Our concern is not with charting separate progresses but with the process of interaction of the two historicities, and the problem should be formulated in a way that allows us to concentrate on the specificity of the relations between determinants deriving from the biological and natural order at any given time, and socio-economic factors.

To be told that there are general aspects of the 'human condition' which persist beyond changes in the mode of production is not, in fact, to be told very much. Nor is it clear quite what Timpanaro's purpose is in reminding us of our biological frailty. I would have preferred a clear statement of the necessary connexion which he obviously sees between the abandonment of the natural and biological basis of Marxism and the fall into the twin idealisms of a humanist disregard for science, on the one hand and a 'Platonist' conception of science on the other. Or rather, while in the one instance it is clear that a flight from the advances made in the human sciences (and not just in biology, but also in psychology - an area which Timpanaro, as we shall see, fails to deal with adequately, and for significant reasons) goes along with the retention of a merely speculative anthropology that characterizes much humanist Marxism, and is responsible for its utopian deviations, it is not so clear what the necessary connexion is between the lapse into Platonism that Timpanaro insists characterizes Althusserian Marxism and the failure, as he sees it, to come to terms with the biological and natural dimension. It is not enough merely to reiterate dismissive phrases regarding Althusser's epistemology (and structuralism, which he more or less identifies with the former): Timpanaro must submit it to a much more detailed examination - must expose its 'idealism' and relate this to his own 'materialism' in a more forthright way, rather than merely restating the juxtaposition and opposition of the two. Otherwise, one suspects that what is concealed within the attack on the structuralist concept of knowledge is an identification of materialism with empiricism.

What is lacking in Timpanaro's work is a clear recognition of the theoretical problem that lies at the heart of the humanist/anti-humanist debate, and a

3 Against Colletti (who has accused Timpanaro of an ingenuous type of naturalism) Timpanaro argues that "to reduce man to what is specific about him with respect to other animals is just as one sided as to reduce him (as vulgar materialists do) to what he has in common with them." He discusses L. Seve's work (Marxisme et theorie de la personnalite) at some length and accuses him of an excessive anti-biological phobia whose ultimate effect is that the specificity of the biological is wholly absorbed within the social - thus compromising his materialism. At the same time, Timpanaro endorses many of Seve's criticisms of Althusser and psychoanalytic theory.

4 This statement should perhaps be qualified - for while it may be true that the charge of vulgar materialism no longer has any real target within the discourse of Marxists themselves, it is not so obvious that Marxism taken as a whole has definitively convinced its opponents of the inappropriateness of such an accusation. One can become so engrossed in the rarified atmosphere of Marxology, and its internal disputes, that one loses a sense of perspective on the wider issue of the relations of Marxism to bourgeois sociology and philosophy.

clear statement of his alignment within the terms of that debate. Though he might want to reject the terminology, I believe that his emphasis on the biological dimension is an attempt to supply Marxism with the ontology and ethics that are the necessary accompaniment of any non-positivistic social theory. I do not believe that this problem can in any sense be directly resolved, but I do believe that there are certain essential components in any Marxist 'theory of needs': (a) articulation of the general philosophical issue it raises- which is not specific to Marxism but emerges constantly as the axis around which any 'fact'/'value' debate rotates; (b) a self-critical attitude towards essentialist accounts of needs; and (c) the rejection of descriptive and psychological concepts (such as 'alienation', 'fulfilment', 'happiness' etc.) if the aim is to provide a science of human development - the phenomenology of needs thus becomes a study in its own right, but it is separate from an analysis of their production.

Timpanaro clearly recognizes that you abandon all the gains and insights of historical materialism if you simply resort to an essentialist account of human nature in order to combat any positivistic tendencies. His 'theory of needs' is certainly not directly essentialist in this sense since he allows for the historicity even of the biological (despite its much slower evolutionary pace) and would concede the extent to which even our biological existence is a product as much of social relations as of any features inherent in the 'human condition' as such. But he does ultimately opt for an essentialist account in that the entire rationale of his emphasis on the biological is the promotion of what is in fact a quite a-historical conception of 'human happiness'. He remains remarkably blind to the function that this concept of happiness plays in his philosophy, and to his failure to explain its content. If we spell out the hedonist-pessimist theme, what it amounts to is this: the search for happiness is innate in all human beings and provides the dynamic of all social development (even if this development is actually marred and hindered by all sorts of regressive tendencies); but we can never achieve full happiness because the human condition as such (biological frailty, old age, death) is incompatible with perfect happiness; so we should not have any utopian and unrealistic conceptions as to the ability of science, even under communism, to overcome this incompatibility. But at the very point where he would appear to be warning against any metaphysical delusions regarding the realm of freedom, and to be arguing a more healthily pragmatic relationship to existence, Timpanaro himself must surely be said to have opted for an a-historical metaphysic of happiness. For what sense can we make of a concept of human happiness which implies the deficiency of all actual happiness? There is more than a hint in Timpanaro's exposition that we would be 'happier' if we were immortal and perpetually youthful; such a transcendal concept of happiness is scarcely consistent with the profession of realistic materialism. It has more affinity with existentialist themes of necessary loss and angst in face of the bitter reality of the world - themes which Timpanaro himself would of course regard as characterising the most decadent forms of mystico-religious idealism. But the lapse into essentialism is inevitable so long as Timpanaro underpins his Marxism with an unexamined, a-historical conception of happiness, and refuses to explore the extent to which (a) we must relativise the concept of happiness and relate it to the production of different types of individual under the impact of changes in social relations, and to which,(b) if the concept is not totally relative, but has a more universal application to human society, it must in turn be related not just to biological but also to psychological factors. Unless we identify happiness simply with physical comfort, lack of pain etc, then we must recognise that it is a psychological concept referring us to more than our neuro-physiological make-up; and it should also be acknowledged that unless we are in a position to provide an account on the basis of scientific knowledge in biology, psychology etc of human needs, desires, pleasures, pains, that underly our use of the term 'happiness' then the latter must remain an ideological term (i. e. one which is vacuous under the guise of plenitude: it covers only an absence of knowledge of the area of which it purports to supply knowledge). My own position is that the work of the Althusserians, however unsatisfactory it is in some respects, has laid the correct foundation for the provision of this kind of knowledge - for supplementing Marxism with an account of man derived from biology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and the other human sciences, and that such knowledge cannot be provided so long as we remain at the level of concepts such as 'happiness'.

It was suggested above that Timpanaro's silence on psychology was significant. Why isolate the biological facts of death, old age, illness as exemplifying that primary and more universal level of conditioning, and not raise the issue of equally longlasting psychological determinants? I suggest the issue is not raised because once Timpanaro has rejected any psychoanalytic account of human psychology (5), he must have recourse to an empirical psychology whose implications are much more obviously suspect from a political point of view. As a Marxist, Timpanaro cannot afford to extend what he has to say about universal and relatively innate features of our biological existence (a relatively 'neutral' affair!) to psychological features, for this would lead to speculations about innate tendencies to aggression or apathy and so on. There is one point when Timpanaro does venture into this delicate area, though he does not explore its implications. This is when he refers to a comment by Luciano Della Mea, who questions why Timpanaro has always stressed man's physical frailty rather than his not so obviously biological features such as his lack of political educability. Having remarked that the question of the Marxist, and specifically Engelsian association of communism with the complete mastery of nature remains unsettled, Timpanaro goes on to say "also unsettled is the question of the extent to which certain 'apolitical' (as opposed to generically 'egotistical') tendencies on the part of the great majority of men are themselves a part of 'human nature' which is not readily altered - leaving aside those moments of exceptional social tension when the majority becomes politicized - and therefore represent an obstacle to the realisation and maintenance of a communist society which is 'classless' in the broadest sense of the term". But once you have speculated on the more or less inherent nature of political apathy, you might as well speculate on the innateness of aggression, of chauvinist and racist attitudes, of intellectual ability etc - in fact all those factors which Marxism relates to as the effect of the development of social relations on the terrain of class division. I am not suggesting that one is implicated in making such speculations simply by opening the door to them, but only pointing to the unresolved nature of the middle ground that Timpanaro would want to tread between rejection of any reactionary vulgar materialism a la Eysenck and Skinner,

5 See The Freudian Slip (NLB 1976)

on the one hand, and allowing a relative unalterability to certain psychological characteristics, on the other, and deriving this not from human institutions and social relations, but from 'human nature'.

The basic flaws, then, of Timpanaro's position are (a) an a-historical concept of human happiness which it is difficult to relate to what is in other respects a recognition of the essentially historical nature of human development, both biological and social, and which becomes metaphysical in the sense that it is unattainable given the limitations of human capacities; and (b) a tendency to separate the biological and natural from the social and 'unnatural and to relate to them as two autonomous lines of development. This fails to recognize that the whole point of identifying the specificity of these two dimensions is to analyse what then becomes a further specificity: the ongoing process of interaction of these two types and different rates of evolution. The corollary of this tendency is that we are left uncertain as to how much autonomy Timpanaro is ceding to either dimension, and not provided with any clear theoretical definition of the 'alterability' of this or that aspect of human existence. The vagueness of the concept of 'relative alterability' leaves the way open for virtually all aspects to be merged within an essentialism of the 'human condition'.

Materialism and empiricism

The issue of the 'vulgarity' of the materialism which Timpanaro insists upon relates not so much to historicity or reductionism, as to empiricism. That is to say, Timpanaro is not a crass materialist in the sense that he either denies the historical nature of biological and social development or wants to reduce the former to the latter. What really matters is whether he is saying that from a methodological point of view one can only count as material ist if one is also empiricist.

In his essay on 'Structuralism and its Successors' he places his review of nineteenth-century linguistics in the context of the evolving historicization of the social and natural sciences. From 1850 to 1880, when the historical sciences of nature (geology, biology) were the avant-garde sciences of European culture, what was scientific came to be recognized as what was historical. However, with the emergence towards the end of the century of the physico-mathematical sciences, a split once again arises between historicists and the new epistemology deriving from those sciences: "Both were in agreement in declaring 'Down with materialism'. But the former said 'Down with science, which is materialistic', the latter 'Long live science, which is the best refutation of materialism'." Similarly, these orientations developed opposing viewpoints with regard to history, even though they had a common starting ground in their anti-materialism. Hence (in linguistics and elsewhere) individualising historic - ism, on the one hand, and abandonment of any attempt to incorporate the diachronic dimension into science on the other - this abandonment being regarded by Timpanaro as Platonist-idealist in tendency (i. e. as a dissociation of theory from reality).

Despite his claim that the 'right to abstraction is not at issue' there is a constant tendency (which begins with this sort of 'privileging' of the epistemology associated with the human sciences, and continues throughout the chapter) to identify the 'natural', the 'accidental' and the 'empirical' with the 'material', and to relate to the 'ideational' systems studied by linguists or structuralists or semiologists concerned with other objects, as obviously non-materialist - because 'abstract' and non-empirical. Clearly we are at the heart of a most vexed problem, namely what is meant by 'material'. Somewhere, it would seem, one must put the knife in, and given this, perhaps Timpanaro's identification of materialism with the 'natural' (by which he seems to mean physiological 'matter') is as good as any. But this is only to grant that it would be fruitful to clarify our terminology; it does not imply that all study of ideational systems in themselves is 'idealistic' in the perjorative sense, nor that a non-empirical and theoretical study employing different levels of abstraction is automatically deprived of the ability to provide scientific knowledge of its objects (whether material orideational). It must be granted that ideas are as much components of reality as any other features (I use the word 'components' not to prejudice the issue by referring to their 'materiality'). Is Timpanaro wanting to argue that abstract concepts and theory are necessarily bedevilled by 'idealism' (in the sense of leading to inaccurate knowledge of the concrete and to retrograde political positions) simply because they deal in ideas and relate to non-empirically observable entities? To suggest this would be to place such differing types of abstract concept as 'mass', 'energy', the Hegelian 'Universal Fruit', the Platonic 'Form of the table', the Marxist concept of 'abstract labour' and the concepts employed in a sociology of 'types' all in the same basket. I doubt if Timpanaro would want to do this, nor am I suggesting that there is a ready solution to the problem of the differentiation of the status of abstract categories - but it must be confronted in any discussion of what constitutes materialist science.

Engels

It is consistent with Timpanaro's dismissal of both contemporary schools of Marxism that he should recall us to the work of Engels, who by virtue of the very contradictoriness of his thought, has become a target of both humanist and anti-humanist Marxists. In a very interesting and wide-ranging essay on 'Engels and Free Will', Timpanaro takes issue with the 'anti-Engelsism' which has characterised so much of recent Marxist writings, and attempts to show that despite the archaic-Hegelianism on the one hand, and the vulgar materialism, on the other, that can at times be detected in Engels's work, the latter cannot be regarded simply as a compound of crude determinism and uncritical Hegelianism, nor can Engels be dismissed as a banalizer and distorter of Marx's work.

Timpanaro develops his defence of Engels by arguing that a Marxism deprived of the cosmological perspective and emphasis on the weight of nature on history that Engels brings to it, is a Marxism come adrift from its materialist moorings. Without the Engelsian dimension, Marxism risks becoming either a mere methodology or falls into agnosticism and idealism. Polemically, and in full awareness of the heresy of his position from the standpoint of contemporary Marxism, Timpanaro goes on to acknowledge, and to justify, the presence of a Weltanschauung in Engels's conception. Those who would argue that Marx's great achievement was precisely to have exposed the illegitimacy of any philosophy of 'nature in itself' and that hence Engels's attempt to patch up a 'philosophic odyssey of matter' was in its very essence misconceived, are mistaken both theoretically and historically. They fail to take account of the changed philosophic-scientific setting in post-1850 Germany and Europe in comparison with the era in which the young Marx formulated his

criticisms of Feuerbach. The materialism of Moleschott or Büchner, though philosophically inferior to that of Feuerbach, was actually closer to the natural sciences for they were concerned not only with stating the primacy of the sensuous over the conceptual and with turning theology into anthropology, but also with explaining the material nature of sensuousness. In this perspective, Marx's insistence against Feuerbach on the 'active side' of human history, though valid, remains too vague and generic. The specific quest to which it was to lead was the discovery of what, in scientific terms, constituted this active side. Even if the result was a crude and over-mechanistic reduction of man's cultural, moral and political behaviour to biological activities, the reply to such distortions should, says Timpanaro, "have been given within the framework of materialism, and not with a mere revindication of the subjective element, still conceived in spiritualistic terms as an unconditioned praxis that finds its limit only in the 'objective (external) conditions' and not also in man's own physical and biological nature". This became all the more necessary with the second wave of materialism that followed on Darwin: granted again the risk of reducing human to natural history, it yet remained a danger to which one had to reply in materialistic terms. Thus, Engels's intervention must be placed in the context of a complex of reactions to Darwinian evolutionism - reactions which tended towards the extremes of crude materialism, on the one hand, and a degenerate empiricism of agnostic and religious hue on the other. Engels's cosmological development of Marxism was not 'an impulsive direction' but an 'objective necessity' - the one which fell to him given the division of labour established between Marx and Engels.

Timpanaro therefore sees the fundamental value of Engels's writing as contained in its polemic against the negative sides of positivism. He was not simply rejecting modern science in the name of the Hegelian dialectic, but attempting to expose the dangers inherent in that science's rejection of philosophy. Timpanaro would thus seem to regard Engels as a defender of a conception of philosophy whereby the latter takes on the role of 'reminder' to science of its epistemological and social responsibilities. This is a conception that one not infrequently hears voiced today - philosophy as the exposure of ideology within 'scientific' activity itself. In Engels's day, the particular object for exposure was social Darwinism, and Timpanaro would argue that the importance of Engels's philosophy must be related to his sustained critique of this - which, he claims, was, if anything, more sophisticated than that of Marx himself. For whereas the latter only argued against the movement from the biological world to human society in general, while accepting - if only because the irony pleased him - the analogy between the war of all against all of Darwinian theory and the feral state of bourgeois society, Engels warns against the dangers of such an analogy, however appealing it might be: in the Dialectics of Nature he argues that once Darwinian theory has achieved the transference of Hobbesian theory from the social to the organic world, it is all too easy to transfer the theory back again from natural to social history, and to see it proved in the latter as the eternal natural laws of society. Although Marx recognized the illegitimacy of confusing the struggle for life in capitalist society with the struggle for life in the natural world, it was left to Engels to develop the theme.

This is a point which Timpanaro clearly thinks can be given more general application: it could be argued that Marx without Engels goes no further than to state the specificity of human as opposed to animal institutions, of the animal as opposed to human world; but having made the point he does not pursue the subject of the relationship between the two. Engels, on the other hand, 'was not satisfied with a mere recognition of the difference between the animal world and the human world. The problem which he regarded as uniquely his own - and which places him in the position at once of ally and critic of contemporary scientific culture - concerns the fusion of the two worlds and two different kinds of historicity'. Moreover, Timpanaro would argue that Engels posed the problem of the fusion between the two historicities in the correct terms, neither superimposing extraneous evolutionary models on either natural or human history, nor neglecting the persistence of the 'natural' within the 'human'.

But this is a very large claim to make on the basis of what are only rather generalised and still embryonic statements in Engels's work. It is a big leap from recognising the natural and biological context of all social production and of its specific determinants upon human history - from allowing that the world may well come to an end and that 'for the history of mankind, too, there is not only an ascending but also a descending branch (6) - to giving a precise theoretical formulation of the two 'histories', their particular rates of progress and the effects of their conjunction in giving us that object whose study would provide the desired account of human development. It is not a leap that Engels can be said to have fully made, and if at times Timpanaro is ready to admit the confusions, contradictions and incompleteness of Engels's formulations in this respect (7), at other times he would seem implicitly to find in Engels all the alleged correctness of vision of the hedonist-pessimist-materialist Marxism that he himself embraces.

Despite these criticisms, I find the essay on Engels possibly the most illuminating and interesting section of the book. From the specific discussion of Engels's work it develops into an intricate and wide-ranging assessment of the various currents of reaction to science that have permeated 20th century thought and find their reflection in the theoretical alignment and politics adopted within Marxism. The chapter also includes a useful discussion of the ambiguity of the concept of 'dialectic', and, to my mind, a not so useful discussion of the old chestnut, 'The role of the individual in history'. Indeed, it is an essay which at least touches on almost all of the traditional (and hitherto unresolved) problems of Marxist studies, and it, together with the chapter on materialism, provide an excellent example of the range of Timpanaro's interests and scholarship, of his remarkable dexterity in deploying these and of his ability to make his arguments directly accessible to the reader.

Structuralism

It will be felt by many, I think, that Timpanaro fails to display the same scrupulousness and fairness in his exposition of the various currents of 20th century structuralism and structuralist oriented thought (the two should be distinguished - it has

6 See Engels, Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy in Marx-Engels, Selected Works, pp588-9

7 He acknowledges, for example, that Engels is torn between a tendency to develop physical-biological materialism and a tendency to oppose the last great 'classical' philosophy of Hegelianism to the eclectic soup of positivist professors; that opposed to the 'realism' of Engels' cosmological perspective, there is a continued celebration of socialism as the passage from necessity to freedom, and an insistence that human unhappiness derives from economic and social causes.

been claimed with as much truth as irony that there are as many structuralisms as there are structuralists) as he brings to his decipherment of the involutions of 19th century science and philosophy. It is difficult, for example, to accept his immediate identification of Althusserianism and/or psychoanalysis with structuralism, and his direct association of these three bodies of thought as if there was some school of Marxism within whose problematic they had been harmoniously amalgamated. And is it mere pedantry to want to quarrel with his constant references to Levi-Strauss, Foucault and Lacan as to an indissociable trinity of thought representative of everything most unwholesome in 20th century epistemology? They are repeatedly lumped together and tarred with the brush of 'charlatanism', but only in the case of Levi-Strauss does Timpanaro attempt to justify his polemic; Foucault is dismissed in a few phrases, and the only separate treatment accorded Lacan is in a footnote deploring his ignorance of linguistics.

Still, it might be argued that such wholesale assimilations of thinkers who do share much in philosophical perspective and in style is not really the point at issue: we can intuit well enough why anyone who regards Levi-Strauss as a poseur will feel the same about Foucault, Lacan and all the other currently modish figures of contemporary French culture. Moreover, in that Timpanaro's attack is directed not just at structuralism but at all structuralist tainted thinking, quibbles as to whether it is fair to regard Althusser and Freud as structuralists might be said to be irrelevant. So let us accept Timpanaro's categorisation of the situation at face value and confront it as such. The main point, after all, is to assess Timpanaro's overall relationship to structuralism and the adequacy of his resolution of the problems to which he finds the structuralist solution so deficient.

'Structuralism and its Successors' is an attempt to clarify'in what sense and what limits' his earlier remarks to the effect that structuralism 'represents a relatively unitary movement' and 'relates to its systems as to Cuvierian closed systems' still seem to him to be valid. It is a wide-ranging and at times extremely penetrating and witty exposure of what he regards as the basic tendential flaw of structuralist thinking: its anti-materialism. He traces the genesis of this tendency, which he considers reaches its apotheosis in the 'platonic-idealism' of Althusser, Levi-Strauss, Foucault et alii, to Saussure's intervention in the crisis of late 19th-century linguistics. Saussure's resolution of the conflicting claims to attention of the individual, innovatory, 'creative' aspect of language (and, relatedly, its diachronic study) on the one hand, and of its collective, universal-necessary character (and synchronic study) on the other, was an uncompromising separation of the two and a privileging of the latter (the study of langue as synchronic system) as the only proper object of science over the study of parole (the diachronic, empirical fortuitous element), which he refused to acknowledge was amenable to scientific study.

In Saussure, the Platonism remains embryonic, since it is counterposed to a realist insistence on the 'concreteness' of langue, a refusal to grant any spiritual status to its psychological character, and a recognition of the communicative function of language and its distinctness from other human institutions and activities. Thus, Timpanaro would regard Saussure as remaining at least alive to the dangers of the lapse into formalistic study of closed systems, and of maintaining a self-critical stance in this respect. In other words, better to retain the relations between synchrony and diachrony, between abstract and concrete, in precarious equilibrium than to magic the problem of their connexion out of existence with a straightforward rejection of the diachronic and concrete aspect - which is what has happened with much of post-Saussurian linguistics, in semiological studies and most of all with the ultra-formalistic applications of structuralism to Marxism, psychoanalysis, anthropology, literature etc. Best of all, however, according to Timpanaro, is to realise that the problem resolves itself if we are only prepared to recognize the materialist/naturalist basis to all science and its essentially historical nature - for then we shall give up the futile and misguided search for a-temporal systems and our excavations of 'Other Realities' concealed beneath empirical data.

Now I would not dispute Timpanaro's claims that there have been 'structuralist parodies of Marxism that approach the grotesque', that too little caution has been exercised in the extension of structuralist methodology to all possible objects and that many structuralist studies involve a non-materialist isolation of systems from their socio-economic context. His indictment of the more bizarre excesses of structuralist zeal to be found, for example, in the work of Levi-Strauss, is also compelling - even if the self-indulgence of the Ciceronian invective is at times offensive and the compliments on the serious and genial aspects of Levi-Strauss's work are delivered too backhandedly for one to regard them as honest acknowledgements of worth rather than as placatory gestures. But for all that, Timpanaro's critique of structuralist idealism is well-founded. More problematic is the epistemology and attitude to science from which it is conducted - particularly where it is a question of his treatment of Marxism and assessment of Althusser.

It is, in fact, extremely difficult to pinpoint what exactly is Timpanaro's stance in this respect. This stems from his implicit tendency (discussed above) to identify science with empirical study, the latter with materialism, and this last with natural, physiological 'matter'. Or, more precisely, it stems from his refusal to submit this tendency to examination in the light of his endorsement of certain epistemological principles which would appear to conflict with it. He acknowledges, for example, that although language evolves diachronically it functions synchronically, that scientific study cannot consist in a wholly individualising study of discrete, particular and 'accidental' elements, but must address itself to

systematicity, universality and regularity. He is prepared to cede, too, that science depends on abstraction and that Marxism is directed against the empiricism which stops at the level of appearances. Thus, when he is not offering us a straightforward genetic, evolutionary account of science whose task would be to unpeel the layers of accreted socialization and historicization in order to reveal the naturalistic kernel of any object it studies (matter at last - and our guarantee of scientificity! - separated from its mediations), he is offering us a compromise: some abstraction, but don't overdo it, some delving beneath the surface, but not too far, synchronic study, yes, provided we recognize that the systems studied are themselves transient even if very long-lasting.

The compromise solution is certainly an improvement on the genetic version but in that it is allowed to co-exist with the materialism-empiricism identification it begs the issue of what criteria are being used to delimit the degree to which we can abstract. the degree to which we eschew appearances, the degree to which we can isolate specific objects, levels and ideational systems (eg the psyche, myth, the socio-economic etc) and relate to their study as scientific precisely because conducted with a regard for that specificity - to which the issue of the ultimate neuro-physiological anchorage or explanation of the data studied is wholly irrelevant. What this means, in effect, is that if we spell out the tensions and ambivalences of the 'compromise solution' we are referred again to the classic aporia of the abstract-concrete, synchrony-diachrony, genesis-structure antitheses which it was designed to overcome.

The unsatisfactory nature of the position adopted by Timpanaro to the question of abstraction etc relates in part to the fact that he regards the problems as dissolving provided we historicize science, but never questions the concept of history itself. As far as his approach to Marx's epistemology is concerned, this failure must be related to his summary treatment of the 1857 Introduction and of the methodology of Capital. It also relates to his failure to come to terms with Althusser's 'pseudo-structuralism' (8) and the latter's attempt to elaborate upon the epistemological principles formulated in the 1857 Introduction and applied in Capital and to elicit their implications for the concept of historical time and for historiography.

This is not the place to expound on these themes in any detail, but it must be recognized that Marx explicitly stated (a) that the order of the exposition of knowledge (eg the 'logic' of Capital) is not the order of its real historical development - the categories of thought in scientific analysis do not exist in the same 'time' as the chronology of the events they 'appropriate'; and (b) that the object of thought is not the real object: "The method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is the only way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being." Such a statement immediately forbids any identification of Marx's method either with an idealist-Hegelian resolution of the relation between real object and thought object within thought, or an empiricist approach to the relationship as inhering in the real itself. It also makes it clear that scientific knowledge, as far as Marx is concerned, is non evolutionary - its categories have a mobility and temporality quite other than that of the historical sequence of events that they analyse.

It is true that the problem of the relationship between the real object and the thought object remains. I do not believe this is solved simply by stating the radical separation of the two. Nor am I ready to accept that those passages (eg in the 1857 Introduction) where Marx suggests that there is a correlation between the development of the concrete and the elaboration of categories to their full complexity - such as the connexion between the category of labour in general and the dissolution in fact of particular labours - can be dismissed as 'historicist' deviations in the way that Althusser suggests. Nor do I think it possible to dissociate completely the study of the historical evolution of modes of production from their study as a 'system of "synchronic" connexions obtained by variation', to use Balibar's phrase, even if it is stressed that this is not a 'combinatory', in which only the places of the factors and their relationships change and not their nature - at least not if one is interested in politics, in the effectivity of class struggle, in ideology, in the fact that it is not irrelevant to the forms of the structure that it concerns the social relations of human beings and not relations of some other entities. The level of abstraction employed by the structuralist reading of Marx is clearly inadequate to deal with the study of the social formation as a whole, but it is nonetheless, within its limits, a justifiable attempt to redress the balance against evolutionist and historicist interpretations of Marx.

Though the main burden of this review has been critical, I hope I have also said enough to indicate the importance of Timpanaro's work. I regard it as one of the most interesting, articulate and readable books about Marxism of recent years, and I hope that it is widely read and discussed. As I have said, it is extremely wide-ranging and raises almost every vexed issue in Marxist philosophy and political theory. There is scarcely a topic discussed in the book on which I do not find myself in some agree ment or at least further enlightened as to the nature of my disagreement.

8 See Reading Capital (NLB 1970) pp8-9