The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Pierre Clastres
French Marxists and Their Anthropology
1977

Retrieved on 1 January 2008 from myweb.tiscali.co.uk
This is a transcription (using OCR software) of pamphlet issued by an unknown publisher in 1982 in Montreal, Canada. The text is incomplete in the original pamphlet, but if anyone can fill in the missing words, please let us know.
According to *Libre*, Pierre Clastres (1934–1977) wrote these pages only days before his death, and for that reason was unable either to revise them or to transcribe illegible portions. They have appeared in Spanish in *Bicicleta* and *El Viejo Topo*, in Italian in *An. Archos*, and in French in *Libre* 3, 1978, under the title, “Les marxistes et leur anthropologie”, basis for this translation.
Libre 9 politique — anthropologie — philosophie) Petite Bibliotheque Payot 106, Boulevard Saint-Germain 75006 Paris France
Available, from C.P.2 82, Succ. “E”, Montreal, P.Q. H2T 3A7

theanarchistlibrary.org

French Marxists and Their Anthropology

Pierre Clastres

1977

Only necessity, and not the desire for entertainment, could bring us to discuss marxist anthropology and its advantages, drawbacks, causes, and effects. For, in spite of the fact that ethnomarxism is still a powerful current in the human sciences, marxist ethnology is of an absolute, or rather, radical nullity — null at the root. It is not necessary to go into a detailed treatment of its arguments, for the abundant production of ethnomarxists can be taken as a unit, a homogeneous unit equal to zero. Let us examine this nothingness that overflows with being — what being is involved shall be seen further on — this marriage of marxist critique with primitive society.

The development of French anthropology over the past twenty years is due firstly to institutional backing of the social sciences, and secondly through creation of ethnology programs in universities and at the National Centre for Scientific Research (C.N.R.S.). But, in addition, French anthropology has followed in the wake of Lévi-Strauss’s extensive and highly original work, and as a result, ethnology in France developed principally along the lines of structuralism. However, about

ten years ago this tendency changed direction, and marxism (what its proponents call marxism, at any rate) began imposing itself, little by little, as the important line of anthropological research, being considered by many non-marxist researchers a legitimate and respectable way of looking at those societies studied by ethnologists. In short, the structuralist outlook has been giving ground to a marxist critique as the dominant viewpoint in anthropology.

The reason behind the structuralist decline is not, however, because certain marxists have talents superior to Lévi-Strauss's. Such a statement could only call forth great mirth, because if marxists have seemed to shine it has scarcely been on account of talent, an attribute in which they are utterly lacking. Lacking almost by definition, for the marxist engine would just not turn over if its mechanics had the slightest talent. On the other hand, to ascribe the downslide of structuralism to the coming and going of fads (as has often been done) seems wholly superficial. Insofar as the structuralist discourse serves as a vehicle for free thinking (thought), it goes beyond a set of circumstances and is oblivious to fads. An empty discourse is soon forgotten, and structuralism will have its Judgement Day. The advance of marxism likewise can no longer be attributed to the coming and going of fads. Marxism was a born natural to fill (though in reality it fills nothing at all, as I will try to show) an enormous gap in the structuralist perspective. This gap, wherein lies the failure of France's major current of social anthropology, is that it does not mention society. Not prepared to speak of concrete primitive societies, how they function, their internal dynamics, economics, and politics, structuralists (in the main Lévi-Strauss himself; for apart from several more-or-less skillful disciples, at best Lévi-Strauss replicas, who are the structuralists?) eliminate these elements from their outlook.

Just the same, one might ask, do myths and kinship not count for something? Certainly; and with the exception of var-

ious marxists, everyone recognizes the decisive importance of Lévi-Strauss's work in his *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*. Moreover, this book has given rise to a tremendous output of kinship studies. Ethnologists can talk inexhaustibly about mothers' brothers and sisters' daughters, and one wonders if they are able to talk about anything else. But the real question is whether a way of viewing kinship is valid for viewing society; does knowledge of the kinship system of a given tribe enlighten us as to its social life? Not in the least: we are still on the threshold; for when a kinship system has been minutely examined, knowledge of the society that makes use of it has barely advanced. The primitive social body is not satisfied with blood ties and alliances; it is not only a machine for manufacturing kinship relations. Kinship is not society, but kinship relations are nevertheless of fundamental and not of secondary importance in the primitive social fabric. Primitive society, less than any other, cannot be thought of without kinship relations; yet those kinship studies conducted up until now, at least, tell us nothing about primitive social being. As to the purpose of kinship relations in primitive societies, structuralism can only give a single massive answer: to codify the prohibition of incest. This specific function of kinship bonds — immanent in primitive society, an undivided society composed of equals — merely explains that people are not animals. It does not explain how a primitive people is a particular people, different from others; how primitive society is irreducible to other societies. Kinship, society, equality, "one and the same struggle" — but that is a story to be told another day.

The second area where Lévi-Strauss had great success was in the domain of mythology. Myth analysis has produced fewer callings than kinship analysis, among other reasons because it is more difficult, and because, surely, no one could equal the master. Myth analysis can only be undertaken provided that the myths under consideration constitute a homogeneous system and if "the thinking process takes

place in myths, in their reflection upon themselves and their interrelation", as Lévi-Strauss himself says. Therefore myths entertain a relationship among themselves, thought takes place in them; but, does a given myth reflect upon its neighbors and their interrelation simply to permit mythologists to reflect upon the group of myths and their interrelation? Surely not; and here, once again, is a particularly obvious example of structuralist conceptions ignoring relationships to social matters; by eliminating the role of society in the production and invention of myths, the relationship that myths have among themselves is inevitably given greater importance. Yes, the thinking process takes place in myths and their structure may be analysed, as Lévi-Strauss proves brilliantly; but in a way that is secondary, for first of all myths are the thinking process of the society that operates in them. There lies their function. Myths constitute the way that primitive society sees itself, they include a socio-political dimension that structural analysis fails, naturally, to take into account for fear of having a breakdown. Structuralism is only operative provided that myths are cut off from society and seized floating wispily a good distance away from their place of origin. It is for just this reason that structuralism is almost never concerned with an experience given favoured priority in primitive social life — the rite. What is more social, in fact more collective, than a ritual? The rite is religious mediation between myth and society. For structural analysis, however, the difficulty comes from the fact that the thinking process does not take place in rites; it is impossible to think in rites. Rites exit stage left, and society with them.

Whether we tackle structuralism on top of the mountain (the work of Lévi-Strauss), or whether we approach this mountaintop by one of its two major slopes (kinship analysis and myth analysis), we cannot fail to notice an absence. This elegant and often very rich viewpoint does not talk about society;

reason to distrust people who applaud the massacres in Cambodia and Ethiopia because the butchers are marxists. If someday Amin Dada proclaims himself a marxist we will hear them cry out, "Hurrah for Dada!"

Here we fall silent, perhaps soon to hear brontosaurs in the distance, bellowing across the stillness of the twilight air.

The Incompleat Clastres:
1972, *Chronique des Indiens Guaycki.*, Paris, Plon.
1974, "De l'ethnocide", *L'Homme*, XIV (3–4).
1974, *La société contre l'État*, Paris, Minuit. [in English: *Society Against the State*, New York, Urizen, 1977].
1974, *Le grand parler: mythes et chants Guaranis*, Paris, Seuil.
1976, "Liberté, malencontre, innomable" in E. de la Boetie, *Le discours de la servitude volontaire*, Paris, Payot.
1976, "La question du pouvoir dans les sociétés primitives", *Interrogations*, 7.
1977, "Archéologie de la violence: la guerre dans les sociétés primitives", *Libre*, 1.
1977, "Malheur du guerrier sauvage", *Libre*, 2.
1982, *Travail fourni bénévolement* remerciements aux Presses Coopératives de Montreal

indeed; but to leave it at that would be both cruel and too easy a response. First of all, by declaiming against the ethnomarxist enterprise, a few addicts can be prevented from going to their deaths in a state of intoxication (this kind of marxism is the opium of the poor-witted). However, it would be happy-go-lucky, almost irresponsible, to limit oneself merely to accentuating — if one may so employ the word — the nullity of a Meillassoux or a Godelier. As is common knowledge, their literary output is not worth the paper it is written on, but we would be remiss to underestimate its significance. In point of fact, its ability to spread an Ideology of the conquest of power is the concealed being that bursts forth from the nothingness of their writings. In contemporary French society, universities are of considerable importance; and in the universities — notably in the field of human sciences (because it seems rougher to be a marxist in mathematics or biology) — the present-day political ideology of marxism is trying to gain a foothold as the dominant ideology.

In the overall plan of action our ethnomarxists play a modest, but not negligible, role. A political division of labour has been established, and they carry out their part of the general work of bringing about the triumph of the ideology they hold in common. One asks oneself, on an impulse, if these are not simply Stalinists aspiring to bureaucratic positions… That would explain why, as we have already seen, they look so far down their noses at primitive societies. For them, primitive societies serve as a pretext for disseminating their blocks of ideological granite and their wooden jargon. Accordingly, more important than poking fun at their stupidity, we must expose their true theatre of activity: political confrontation in its ideological dimension. Stalinists are not just any old bunch out for the conquest of power; what they want is total power; the State of their dreams is a totalitarian State. Like Fascists, they are enemies of intelligence and freedom, and claim to possess total knowledge in order to legitimize the exercise of total power. One has every

structuralism is like theology minus god… sociology minus society.

With the rise of the human sciences, students and researchers began an unyielding and entirely legitimate appeal to take society into consideration. So down came the curtain, the structuralists were politely sent packing, and their gracious minuet gave way to a new ballet produced by marxists (self-designated), featuring the Stomp. They pounded the ground of research with their rugged hobnailed overshoes, and for various political — not scientific — reasons, the sizable audience cheered. Marxism, a theory of society and history, was by its very nature entitled to extend its critique to the field of primitive society. Furthermore, the logic of marxist doctrine could not let it neglect any type of society, for it must perceive the truth in all. the social formations that punctuate history. Thus marxism already had on hand a way of explaining primitive society, immanent in its overall critique.

Marxist ethnologists make up an obscure but substantial phalanx, a disciplined body where outstanding individuals and original minds are to be sought in vain. All are devout before the doctrine, profess the same beliefs, and chant the same credo. When this none-too-angelic choir breaks into song, each member listens to his neighbor to make sure that he strays not from the hymn. Of course, there are resounding clashes among the various tendencies; indeed, each marxist spends his time accusing the others of being pseudomarxist impostors, for each alone possesses the correct interpretation of the Dogma. Far be it from me to award certificates of authentic marxism (let them work it out among themselves), but I can at least try to show (out of duty, not pleasure) that their sectarian quarrels rile up the same parish, and that the marxism of one is not worth more than the marxism of another.

Meillassoux, for example, is said to be one of the great thinkers (thinkers!) of marxist anthropology. In this particular

case I am spared a lot of tedium thanks to the detailed analysis that A. Adler devoted to a recent book by Meillassoux.[1]

Adler's review is serious, concise, and more than attentive (Adler, like Meillassoux — or rather, unlike him — is a specialist on Africa). A marxist thinker should be proud and grateful for so conscientious a reader, but this is not the case. Meillassoux counters the very reasonable objections of Adler (who destroys, as one might expect, the enterprise of the author) with an answer[2] that can be summarized easily: those who do not agree with marxist anthropology are supporters of Pinochet. Секомса.[3]

Brief, but clear: a plague on different shades of opinion, when one is the high and mighty protector of the doctrine! Meillassoux is similar to the traditional integrists[4] in the Catholic Church; deep down inside there is a streak of Monseigneur Lefebvre — same hidebound fanaticism, same incurable allergy to doubt. Harmless puppets are made of the same stuff, to be sure, but when in power and carrying the name Vyshinsky, they can be more than a little disconcerting. Off to the Gulag, unbelievers, where you'll learn how production relations dominate primitive social life! In any event Meillassoux is not alone, and it would be unjust to imply that he has a monopoly on anthropological marxism. For the sake of fairness his colleagues should not be denied the standing they deserve.

[1] Claude Meillassoux, *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* (Paris: Maspero, 1975). Alfred Adler, "L'ethnologie marxiste: vers un nouvel obscurantisme?", *L'Homme*, Oct. — Dec. 1976, XVI (4): 118–128.

[2] Claude Meillassoux, "Sur deux critiques de Femmes, greniers et capitaux ou Fahrenheit 450,5" , *L'Homme.*, Jan. -March 1977, XVII (1): 123–128.

[3] Russianization of "C'est comme ca" ["That's all there is to it"] (translator's note).

[4] Integrism = doctrinal tendency that refuses any adaptation of the apostolate or of social and political action to the conditions of modern society (tr. note).

ences. Their ideological frenzy and their determination to turn ethnology upside down will be carried through to the logical conclusion: the pure and simple suppression of primitive society as a specific society and as an independent social being. According to marxist logic, primitive society just cannot exist, and has no right to an autonomous existence; its being is only determined in terms of what will come long after it, in terms of its obligatory future. Marxists proclaim learnedly that primitive societies are only precapitalist societies. Therefore, the social mode of organization that all of humanity shared for tens of thousands of years is [Illegible in manuscript (tr. note).] for marxists.

For them, primitive society exists only insofar as it is grafted onto the form of society that made its first appearance only at the end of the eighteenth century — capitalism. Before that, nothing counts, everything is precapitalist. These fellows sure do not complicate their own existence; what a breeze being a marxist! Working backwards from capitalism, everything can be explained, because armed with the correct doctrine a marxist holds the key that opens the door to capitalist society, and thus opens the door to all social formations. For marxism in general, economics [measure] society, and for the ethnomarxists who go even further, capitalist society measures primitive society. Секомса. Now compare, on the other hand, Montaigne, La Boétie, or Rousseau, who all pose the question differently and try to judge what came after in terms of what came before. What about postprimitive societies? Why did inequality, social division, separate power, and the State appear?

At this point one might wonder how the whole fishy business is able to keep on attracting customers — which it does, despite a recent decline. One can venture, at least, that these customers (marxist listeners and readers) are not overly particular about the quality of the products they consume. They will have to chew what they have bitten off, an unenviable prospect

marxism discovers will stand for no exceptions. Otherwise, the doctrine, in its entirety, crashes to the ground. Consequently, in order to maintain the coherence and the very existence of marxism, it is imperative for marxists to formulate the marxist conception of primitive society, to establish a marxist anthropology. Without this, the marxist theory of history would only be the analysis of a particular society (nineteenth-century capitalism), elaborated by someone named Marx.

In this way marxists are caught in a trap set by their own marxism, and there is really no other way out — primitive social facts must be submitted to the same rules of operation and transformation as those that govern other social formations. Two systems of weights and measures are out of the question here. If there are laws of history, they must be as lawful at the beginning of history (primitive society) as during the rest of its course: one weight and measure alone. How do marxists measure social facts? — with economics.[8]

Marxism is an economic outlook, it pulls the social body down onto the economic infrastructure. Social is economic, so marxist anthropologists feel obliged to clamp — with forceps, says Adler — the categories that they think work elsewhere onto the primitive social body: production, production relations, development of the productive forces, exploitation, etc. And so it is that elders exploit the young (see Meillassoux), and that kinship relations are production relations (see Godelier) .

Let us not go over and over this nonsense. The important thing is to shed light on the militant obscurantism of marxist anthropologists. Brazenly, they water down the facts, trample them underfoot, grind them up until nothing is left; they substitute ideology for the reality of social facts. Meillassoux, Godelier, and their sort are the Lysenko's of the human sci-

[8] This root of marxism is indeed found in Marx. It would be useless to want to save him from the marxists on this point, for did he not, in fact, allow himself to write in *Capital* that, "[quote missing from manuscript]" (author's note).

Godelier, for example, has acquired a considerable reputation (in lower Rue Tournon) as a marxist thinker. His marxism attracts attention because it seems more ecumenical and rather less coarse than Meillassoux's. The term for Godelier is closet radical-socialist — red on the outside, white on the inside — but… opportunistic? Shame on him! Here is a veritable athlete of the thought, having undertaken the synthesis of structuralism and marxism; and his flitting from Marx to Lévi-Strauss must be seen to be believed (flitting!… as if it were a young bird under discussion and not a lumbering elephant).

Let us thumb through his latest book[5], especially the "Preface to the Second Edition" — a pastime, by the way, that affords little pleasure. Style indeed is the man; this particular style is not exactly Proustian (Godelier clearly is not among those who covet entrance into the French Academy); and to cut a long story short, his conclusion is a bit mixed-up. He explains that (1) Lefort and I probe the origins of the State in our work on La Boétie (we do no such thing) ; (2) Deleuze and Guattari had already dealt with this question in Anti-Oedipus; but (3) their remarks "were probably inspired by Clastres" (note 3, p. 25). Now try to make heads or tails of that. Godelier is in any case honest, as he admits that he understands nothing of what he reads — his quotations are spangled with question marks and exclamation points. Godelier, for example, does not like the category of "desire", which probably, in turn, cares little for the category of "Godelier". It would be a waste of time, because he wouldn't understand, to try and explain to him that what Lefort and I identify under this term has little to do with what Deleuze and Guattari mean by it. But moving on, these ideas are suspect to him anyway because the Bourgeoisie applauds them, and he is doing everything in his power "to ensure that the bourgeoisie remains alone to applaud them".

[5] Maurice Godelier, *Horizon, trajets, marxistes en anthropologie* (Paris: Maspero, 1977 [2nd ed.]).

Godelier, himself, is applauded by the proletariat. What ovations his proud remarks draw from the working-class suburb of Billancourt! Decidedly, there is something touching (and unexpected) in Godelier's ascetic rupture with the universities of the bourgeoisie, their pomp and vanity, careers, opuses, and promotions. A real Saint Paul of the human sciences; amen. Nonetheless, the reader grows impatient for something other than clumsy twaddle — Godelier must have an idea from time to time! But Godelier's ponderous marxist rhetoric makes it very hard to find his ideas; aside from quotations from Marx and the odd platitude that any of us might let slip in a relaxed moment, there is not a whole lot left. It is true that Godelier is willing enough, and in his "Foreword" to the first edition and his "Preface" to the second, this pachyderm invested considerable effort. Setting sail on a real "voyage", as he himself says, our daring navigator covered oceans of concepts. For example, he discovered that the representations of primitive societies (religions, myths, etc.) belong to the field of ideology. At this point we should consult, as Godelier did not, Marx's own writings on the subject. According to Marx, ideology is the discourse of a divided society, structured around social conflict, on itself, whose mission is to mask division and conflict and to give the appearance of social homogeneity. In a word, ideology is lying. Godelier seems not to be aware that for ideology to exist there must be, at the very least, social division. In which case how would he know that, according to Marx, ideology is a modern phenomenon, appearing in the sixteenth century alongside the birth of the modern democratic State? Godelier's head is not encumbered with a knowledge of history — for him, ideology embraces religion, myths, and probably ideas too, and he believes that everyone is of the same opinion.

However, it is not in primitive society that religion is ideology, but more likely in Godelier's own head, where indubitably his religion is marxist ideology. His mention of ideology in connection with primitive societies — undivided, classifying to peruse the works of Meillassoux, Godelier, and Company). Radical: i.e., from the start. Such an outlook is not a scientific outlook — concerned with the truth — but a purely ideological outlook — concerned with political effectiveness. To help clarify this question, we should make a distinction between Marx's thought and marxism; for, along with Bakunin, Marx was the first to criticize marxism. Marx's thought was a grandiose attempt (sometimes successful, sometimes not) to set forth and explain the society of his time (Western capitalism) and the history that brought it up to date.[7]

Contemporary marxism is an ideology at the service of a political line. So much so that marxists have nothing to do with Marx, and they are the first to admit it. When Godelier and Meillassoux call each other pseudomarxist impostors, they are absolutely correct, the one and the other are right.

They take shameless refuge in Marx's beard, the better to unload their wares; a beautiful case of false advertising. However, it will take more than a [Illegible in manuscript (tr. note)] to disgrace Marx.

Post-Marxian marxism has not only become a dominant ideology in the workers' movement, but has become its principal enemy as well, and has set itself up as the most arrogant form of the nineteenth century's worst stupidity: scientism. In other words, contemporary marxism institutes itself as **the** scientific outlook on history and society, as an outlook setting forth laws of historical movement, laws for the transformation of societies — one society begetting another. Thus marxism can have something to say about every type of society because it is acquainted with each one's operating principles beforehand; furthermore, marxism must have something to say about every type of possible or real society, because the universality of the laws that

[7] "La pensée de Marx, c'est un grandiose essai (parfois reussi, parfois rate) de penser la société de son temps (le capitalisme occidental) et l'histoire qui l'avait mise a jour." (tr. Note).

dominated is potitical through and through, for it splits people into Masters of power and Subjects of power. I have shown elsewhere that economy, tribute, debt, and alienated labour appear as the signs and effects of political division when plotted around an axis of power (and Godelier, for example see p. 22, was not long to avail himself of it — without giving credit, the little rascal… As Kant said, there are some who do not like paying their debts). Primitive society is undivided because it does not have a separate organ of political power. Social division leads, first of all, to the separation between society and the [Illegible in manuscript (tr. note).] organ of power. Therefore, every nonprimitive (i.e., divided) society carries the more-or-less developed configuration of the State within it. When there are masters, subjects, and debt, we can say that power and the State exist. Of course, between the minimal configuration of the State as embodied by certain Polynesian, African, or other royalties, and quite statist forms of the State (tied pell-mell to demography, the urban phenomenon, the division of labour, writing, etc.), there exist considerable degrees in the intensity of the power exercised and the oppression suffered, the highest degree being attained by the kind of power that Fascists and Communists put into place, where State power is total and oppression absolute. But there is an irreducible central point to be made here: one cannot conceive of divided society without the presence of the State any more than conceive of undivided society without the absence of the State; and speculation on the origins of inequality, social division, classes, and domination, is speculation in the field of politics, power, and the State, and not in the field of economy, production, etc. Economy is begot from politics, production relations come from power relations, and classes are engendered by the State.

Now, having taken in this clown show, let us tackle the important question: what does the marxist outlook signify in terms of anthropology? At the beginning of this article I spoke of the radical nullity of marxist ethnology (dear reader, it is ed-

less societies whose very nature excludes the possibility of ideology — demonstrates that first, he is unconcerned about getting Marx straight and second, he does not understand a thing about primitive society. Neither marxist nor ethnologist — a master stroke!

Logically, his "ideological" conception of primitive religion should lead him to determine that myths are the opium of the savage; but do not push him, he is doing his best, and he will get there sooner or later. If Godelier's logic is inexistent, then his vocabulary is poverty-stricken. Our vigorous mountaineer went stumbling about the Andes (pp. 21–22) and discovered that the relationship between the dominant caste of the Incas and the ominated peasantry was one of unequal exchange (what's more, it is Godelier who italicizes). Where did he dig that up? So, there is an unequal exchange between Master and Subject, and by extension between capitalist and worker? The name for that is corporatism (Godelier — Salazar, "one and the same struggle"?). Who would have imagined that in Godelier's vocabulary the simple word "theft", or in marxist terminology, "exploitation", would be replaced by the term "unequal exchange"!

When one tries to be both structuralist (exchange and reciprocity) and marxist (inequality) at the same time, one ends up being neither. Godelier fastens the category of exchange — which only makes sense in primitive societies, that is, societies of Equals — onto societies divided into classes, structured on inequality. Everything is fouled up, and reactionary (what else?) balderdash is the result: religion crammed into ideology, exchange tacked onto inequality.

For Godelier, everything is in keeping with his ideology. In Australia his discriminating mind noticed that "kinship relations are equally production relations, and constitute the economic structure" p.9, it is again Godelier who italicizes). Wait a minute, production sneaked in there again! Now, the above proposition has no content whatsoever, unless it means that

the production relations in question are established with relatives. Does Godelier want them to be established with enemies perhaps? Any budding ethnologist knows that all social relations, outside of war, are established with relatives; but Godelier the marxist has something more than this triviality to communicate. He would like to sledgehammer the marxist categories of production relations, productive forces, and development of the productive forces into primitive society — where they are meaningless. Mouthing the same tiresome wooden language shared by all marxists, he nevertheless keeps on clinging to structuralism: primitive society = kinship relations = production relations. Секомса.

First a remark on the category of production. More competent and attentive to facts than Godelier (no great feat in itself), specialists in primitive economy concerned more by ethnology than catechisms, such as the American Marshall Sahlins or Jacques Lizot here in France, have established that primitive society functions precisely as a machine of anti-production. They have shown that the domestic mode of production always operates beneath its possibilities and that there are no production relations because there is no production, this latter being a source of little worry to primitive society (cf. "Preface" to M. Sahlins[6]).

Naturally, Godelier — whose marxism is plainly of the same stripe as his Marx Brothers competitor, Meillassoux — cannot give up Holy Production for fear of bankruptcy and unemployment. Still, he is a good-natured fellow, full of vigor, who with all the good-naturedness of a bulldozer flattens ethnographic facts under the doctrine that provides his room and board, and who has the nerve, on top of that, to call others to account for having "a total contempt for any fact that stands in their way" (p. 24). He knows what he is talking about, the wag. Secondly, a

[6] "The Original Affluent Society," in *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972), pp 1–39 (tr. Note).

word on kinship. A marxist, albeit structuralist, cannot comprehend kinship relations. The purpose of a kinship system, pupil Godelier, is to create kin, and the purpose of kin is surely not to produce anything at all; rather, its purpose, until new orders, is to carry the family name. Here lies the principal sociological function of kinship in primitive society, and not in codifying the prohibition of incest. No doubt I could be clearer, but for the sake of suspense I will limit myself to saying that the act of naming, inscribed in kinship, determines the whole sociopolitical being of primitive society. Here is the knot, waiting to be untied, that binds kinship to society, and if Godelier manages to loosen it a little he should receive a free subscription to *Libre*.

Godelier's "Preface to the Second Edition" is a real artist's bouquet, made up of the most exquisite flowers. Let us pick one of them: "Because — and many are unaware of this — there have existed, and still exist, numerous societies divided into orders or castes or classes, into exploiters and exploited, who nonetheless are unacquainted with the State." First off, why be secretive about the little detail of which societies, exactly, he has in mind? Next, what precisely can the State be for Godelier, who plainly sees the existence of social divisions without the State, and for whom the division into dominating and dominated does not in the least imply the State? It is truly heartwarming, though this is no place for emotional demonstrations, to meet such backwoods innocence, in which the State is perceived as ministries, the White House, and the Kremlin. But Godelier forgets something, the thing that marxists do their best to forget when they control the State apparatus — that the State is the exercise of political power. One cannot imagine power without the State, nor the State without power.

In other words, when we see one part of society exercising power over the rest, we stand before a divided society, a State society (even if the [Illegible in manuscript (tr. note).] of the Despot is not very large). Social division into dominating and