Marx uses the term ‘ideology’ in a fairly broad sense, often relating it to idealism and denoting a view of the world specific to certain classes. In the period of Capital, he practically stopped using it;¹ this work offers a strictly sectoral analysis that deals only with the ‘economic base’ of capitalism. If I am discussing the term here despite this, it is because, in my view, there is the same project at work in Capital that was announced for the first time in The German Ideology at the very moment when the concept of mode of production was coined, along with the conceptual couples that are constitutive of it: productive forces and relations of production, dominant and dominated class – a project, however, that Marx could only embark on systematically once he had developed, from 1857 on, the theory of a definite mode of production, the capitalist mode. By constructing the system of socio-economic relations that defined this, he was finally in a position to study the ideological forms that characterised it, and thus to articulate science and ideology. Despite the varying terminology (‘everyday consciousness’, ‘form of appearance’, ‘fetishism’ etc.), Marx remains, in my

view, within the unity of this problematic, and, from this point on, possesses the means of developing it in a more rigorous manner, if, at the same time, a more restricted one.

These questions have given rise to a copious literature in the last fifty years, and a very uneven one. Many of its inadequacies derive from the fact that too little attention has been paid to the logical constraints bound up with the architecture of the development and the specific character of the concepts whose nature I have explained in the previous chapters. The interpretation I propose here is based on these clarifications. It evidently goes together with a definite conception of the maturation of Marx’s theory: it is the distance he takes from certain aspects of Hegelian logic that makes possible the constitution of an approach that is not simply one of a critique of ideology, but, rather, what I shall call a theory of ideology, meaning a discourse that sets out to establish, in Marx’s terms, ‘the rationale of these forms of appearance’, the necessary link between social structures and forms of representation.

1. The place of everyday consciousness: Volume 3

1.1 Why Capital has to be read backwards

Capital must be read in the order presented. Yet, it is only at the end, and by way of conclusion, that it offers a specific theory of ideology. Volume 3 brings us to the ‘concrete’ level at which, according to the author, ideology belongs. In Volumes 1 and 2, the question is posed in an external fashion and as something incidental, most often in the form of a critique of ideology or even a mere indication of the difference between the reality of the structures that have been displayed and the spontaneous representation that their agents have of these. In Volume 3, on the contrary, ideology seems to have its proper place, in the sense of the place of its proper theorisation: not simply its description or its critique, but a theory that accounts for its forms. We are thus offered a problematic from which it is then possible to retrace the course of the work to Volume One and its opening chapter.

This is already announced in the first paragraph of Volume 3, where Marx recalls his overall project and expressly positions the question that I refer to as that of ideology: