Althusser and Foucault: Characters of the Authorless Theater. On the Imaginary, the Scenic and the Phantasmatic.

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Some of Althusser's ideas, such as his theory of symptomatic reading or his characterization of Marxism as a finite theory, allow us to understand that a theoretical body is *constitutively* incomplete.[1] Yet, it is in reading Warren Montag's *Althusser and His Contemporaries* that we realize, in the best way possible in a practical way, that the condition of theory implies a certain paradox: theoretical readings are at the same time endless but limited (determined).

Althusser and His Contemporaries is a book that moves forward, tracing internal borders within Althusser's writings and those borders mark the way in which it has been understood or discussed. And yet, it is also a book that opens up to new fields in countless directions and in profound ways, a book in which contemporaneity explodes in heterogeneous genealogies and resonances. We will not stop reading it and neither

[1] On this specific question, I may say that Althusser is closer to Bachelard than in other ideas. In Bachelard we find an understanding of the concept as fragmentary and limited (Bachelard, 1984), in contrast to his approach to the image as continuity (1999). In this sense, we can see a certain connection with the Althusserian emphasis on the limited condition of any theoretical corpus against the empiricist assumptions oriented by a notion of knowledge as a continuous image of the real.

will those who come after us. *Althusser and His Contemporaries* gave us a point from which an intellectual community can be created. Since there is no love for the true without an ethics of intellectual creation based on the effective exercise of horizontal bonds that defy extra-theoretical barriers (be they institutional, geopolitical, utilitarian or narcissistic, etc.), it is only from this ethical position that this book has been possible, and it is from this ethic that it also challenges us.

There are numerous discussions that can be reopened when reading such a complex and erudite book and each of them deserves a new book, or several. I would, therefore, focus on one specific question regarding chapters VII and VIII of *Althusser and His contemporaries*, among other writings, concerning what can be called "a materialism of the imaginary." As it is certainly not possible to address the issue from every angle here, I will underline a less explored side, one that can be read in the conceptual space that both unites and separates Althusser and Foucault, following the trail of the semantics of staging and optics, as well as theatrical metaphors.

I should say that the question exceeds the contributions of Althusser and Foucault; it is rather a matter of staging the way in which many later readings lost sight of the critical force of the polemical movement that opens up *between* the developments of these two great philosophers. Moreover, the theoretical (and political) vitality of this controversy consists in the fact that it remains unresolved.

I. Foucault beyond Althusser

The point of convergence between Althusser and Foucault that interests Montag regards the radical exteriority of interpellation, against the images of subjectivity as an interior space, in which the figures of the *causa sui* Subject and the formulas of intersubjectivity converge. It may be possible to follow the gravitation of Pascal and Spinoza through Althusser to Foucault within these developments. In this sense, as Montag proposes, Foucault could be thought of as a great reader of Althusser beyond Althusser:

> Foucault opens an entire dimension that Althusser's essay unwittingly presupposes: a history of the body, the history of the individual itself. He allows us to see the regime of individualization (or at least the descending individualization that particularizes and identifies those on whom power is exercised) as a *strategy*.[2]

In what sense is a history of the body "presupposed," but not fully developed by Althusser? Montag answers afterwords. Foucault has already described the material conditions of the possibility of interpellation in his approach to disciplinary power.

[2] Montag, *Althusser*, 166.

> …Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise." The fantasy immanent in the practices of discipline is to abolish "the crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multitude exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect" and replace it with "a collection of separated individualities." Foucault has thus described the material conditions of the possibility of interpellation, of which he proceeds to offer his own account: the individual thus abstracted from the mutual entanglements and dependencies, from the "coagulations" proper to social existence, is endowed with a soul or, depending upon the domain of knowledge and the nature of its apparatuses, a "psyche, subjectivity, personality, or consciousness."[3]

Carefully abandoning any spiritualist semantics, Foucault's approach, radically immanent to corporeal materiality, is intended to be "both more materialist (in that it rejects the idea of subjectivity as illusion or false appearance) and more historical (the subject form varies throughout history)."[4] Because, of course, the configuration of power as a discipline has a history.

A number of questions arise here. If, as Montag claims, Foucault achieves – going a step further than Althusser – the material conditions of the possibility of interpellation, it is necessary to ask what kind of materiality this is. In other words, in what sense can the materiality of the individuated body be considered a differentiated level of materiality with respect to that of ideological practices – which could be identified as a kind of *ritual* materiality?[5] And finally, in what areas of Althusserian thought can we find the level of the *individuated body* as material condition of the possibility of interpellation?

To understand this, we can turn to *Sur la reproduction*, where Althusser places material individuation within production, reading what Marx calls the *Träger*-function, as the active operation of a structural gap, produced by the division of labor. This means that the *individuated "body"* has a historical existence which does not seem to be the very history of "individuals" but the history of *class struggle*.[6] In this sense, Althusser's history

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 167.

[5] "…the ideas that are the actions of an individual no longer transcend physical existence insofar as they are always already 'inserted' into practices, which are in turn governed by the rituals of an apparatus" (Montag, *Althusser*, p.154).

[6] "'Society is not *composed of individuals*,' says Marx. He is right: society is not a 'combination,' an "addition" of individuals. What constitutes society is the system of its social relations in which *its* individuals live, work and struggle. He is right: society is not made up of individuals in general, in the abstract, just so many copies of "man." Because each society has *its own* individuals, historically and socially determined. The slave-individual is not the serf-individual nor the proletarian-individual, and the same goes for the individual of each corresponding ruling class. In the same way, we must say that even a class is not "composed" of individuals in general: each class has *its own* individuals, fashioned in their individuality by their conditions of life, of work, of exploitation and of struggle -- by the relations of the class struggle. In their mass, real men are what class conditions make of them. These conditions do not depend on

of individuation must be found around the crucial principle of his *theory of reproduction*: the primacy of class struggle over classes. Which can be translated, as many readers have suggested, as the primacy of relational and contradictory process of individuation over the already individuated terms.[7] In the first place, since from the standpoint of the functioning of the production structure, individuated bodies are supports for the relations of production, *impersonal* relations, abstracted from every qualitative aspect. In other words, bodies are regarded to the extent that they offer their flesh and energy to the *incarnation* of abstract human labor.

So, *individuated bodies* aren't natural materialities *nor are the masses*. Body-form (be it individual or a mass) is historically produced within the relations of production in the form of a transindividual "body"; yet this (trans)*indivuated* body is, in turn, abstract from the standpoint of the concrete *individuals* in which it exists, within a determinate social formation. This pushes us to ask another question. For Althusser, the "individual" is not the individuated body; rather, the individual is the historically concrete entity that is *always-already subjectivized* within a series of Humanist formations.

Therefore, if something can be perceived as an "*individual* body," it would be in the encounter of two temporalities, abstract time and concrete history of humanism. In this sense, individual bodies become an encounter of heterogeneous plexus: individual bodies are at the same time, the concrete supports of abstract labour: its *incarnations,* and the concrete support of a mythical presence of a natural body constitutively lost. This complex entity could be considered an *imaginary body*. In the conjunction of these two meanings (an incarnation of abstract labour and a support of a mythical nature), it could be said that its materiality is *imaginary*.

Imaginary is the *experience of an individual body* that is nothing but the membrane covering a hole, the hole of a decalage between two types of a structure of "alienation": the anonymous non-originary-individual body individuated within production and the individualized/subjectivized *individual*.

Thus, Althusser's conception of overdetermination involves – logically and historically – the articulation of two different levels that seem to be condensed in the expression with which Marx presents the question, in the second chapter of *Capital,* referring to owners as "characters on a stages" embodying *personifications* of capital in the direct process of production.[8] But, the crucial point here is that, in an Althusserian reading, the articulated decalage between the *impersonal* economic relationship and the *personal* relationships between "free persons"—the unequal coexistence between economic (production) and legal (reproduction) temporalities—overdetermine the

bourgeois "human nature": liberty. On the contrary: the liberties of men, including the forms and limits of these liberties, and including their will to struggle, depend on these conditions" Althusser, Louis. "Response to John Lewis" in *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Tr. Grahame Lock. London: NLB, 1976, p. 53.

[7] Cf. Balibar, *Écrits pour Althusser*; Morfino, *Intersoggettività o transindividualità.*

[8] "…the characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations; it is as the bearers of these economic relations that they come into contact with each other" (Marx, *Capital*, 178).

material effectiveness of the "fantastic" (phantasmatic?) form of the commodity.[9] The *phantasmatic* is the appearance with which a temporal split constitutive of the very structure of the historical relations of modern capitalist societies presents itself.

In Chapter V of *Sur la reproduction*, regarding the Law, Althusser poses that when we speak of the owner as *person* we are already in the sphere of the *individual as subject*, that is to say, in the overdetermined complex of *reproduction* which regards always to a concrete social formation where capital social relations exist in their concrete effect. But basically, this means that *in a class society there is not just one class of individuals*.

In other words: for Althusser, the historicity of the individual subject and the historicity of the individuated "body" do not coincide but coexist. And while he seems to have focused on the former, he seems to have abandoned the latter.[10]

Yet, Montag claims, the question of the *individual body* constitutes a necessary "presupposition" in his theory of ideology.

So, where is this to be seen? The question gets increasingly complex. The history of the individual in the Althusserian problematic is, as I have already suggested, the history of the *individual as subject*; in other words, the history of a concrete ideological formation: Humanism. We will return to this point.

But this is not the whole story. As we have just seen, the history of individuals as subjects is not the history of the (transindividual) individuated body, but its overdetermined effect. Then, on which elements of the Althusserian problematic can we rely in order to recognize the premises of a materialist approach to historical individuation?

I dare say that it is outside Althusser´s writings, but within the Althusserian problematic where a proper treatment of the question of the historicity of corporeal individuation can be found: in Étienne Balibar's conceptualization of the *transindividual materiality of the imaginary*, based on the first chapters of *Capital*, and that which he develops widely beyond Althusser, what Althusser calls the "society-effect."[11]

I will put it this way: the history of individuals is the history of the efficacy of the imaginary; in order to understand it, it is therefore necessary to enter into the

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[9] "Personal dependence characterizes the social relations of material production as much as it does the other spheres of life based on that production. But precisely because relations of personal dependence form the given social foundation, there is no need for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality" *Ibid*., p. 170.

[10] Many of Althusser's expressions used to be read accordingly. For instance, one of the most famous: "History is an immense *natural-human* system in movement, and the motor of history is class struggle. History is a process, and a *process without a subject*. The question about how '*man* makes history' disappears altogether. Marxist theory rejects it once and for all; it sends it back to its birthplace: bourgeois ideology." (Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, p. 51).

[11] Balibar, *Spinoza, the Transindividual*, 147. As he explains, "I borrow the expression 'society effect' from Louis Althusser, who used it at the end of his Preface to the collective volume *Reding Capital*, to mark the philosophical difference between Marx´s analysis and theories which view society as a collective subject or as an aggregate of individual actions, hence, in an implicit 'transindividualist' way, but without developing this implication. Althusser, moreover, is notoriously hostile to take the theme of the fetishism of commodity in his critical reading of Marx" (Ibid., 185n10).

transindividual and objective mechanism that overdetermines it. But this entails an important consequence: the opening of a task oriented towards the rigorous elaboration of a materialist theory of the imaginary. In many ways, Warren Montag is one of its main promoters.

A detour through this question will allow us to situate the ground on which Montag's intervention reaches a great dimension. Briefly put, it concerns the theoretical richness of the category of the imaginary in the Althusserian problematic insofar as it exceeds the narrower identification between imagination and misrecognition. And this also permits us to understand the importance of a question about the imaginary with which chapter VIII of *Althusser and His Contemporaries* opens, a chapter on Foucault for whom this category does not seem to work as a concept, nor does it seem to identify a specific dimension of social life.

In order to problematize this, it is necessary to proceed step by step, following the path proposed by the mentioned chapter, engaging in an interpretative dialogue with it.

It is well known that Althusser proposes the category of the imaginary in "*Marxisme et Humanisme*" where his approach to ideology is developed in connection with his intervention within the heritage of Marx. In this regard, the reference to the *imaginary* is raised in conjunction with the Spinozist reading of Marxist materialism. Ideology is defined as a system of representations – most of them *images*, Althusser specifies – that are imposed on men as structures. They do not represent a relation to the conditions of existence, but rather to *imaginary* relations with the conditions of existence. It is quite evident that this reference to the imaginary has a resonance which is less that of Lacan's than that of Spinoza's. And although Montag seems to consider this approach to the ideological rather rough, he makes a point of attributing to the Spinozian theory of the imagination a substantive weight in the Althusserian concept of the imaginary.

It is within this framework that the concept must be understood and it is from there that it gravitates on the theory of ideology; where it allows us to account for consciousness as a field of vision that, paradoxically, presupposes an experience of interiority because it is determined in an off-centered way, like a gap in a complex plexus of material relations. Montag recognizes here a conceptual movement of "desubjectification of imagination," which is not mere illusion, nor a faculty of the soul or of a psychological subject but recalling Althusser himself: "imagination is a *world*."[12]

In what sense is imagination a *world*? According to Balibar, who develops this idea rigorously, in two senses that let the notion of imaginary grow in a crucial way. On the one hand, it is the world of subjective experience – *Umwelt* writes Althusser in 1985 – organized in a concentric *topique* of experience continuity; but, in a second sense, imaginary is one of the constitutive dimensions of the transindividual fabric that Marx

[12] Montag, *Althusser*, 129.

identifies with the French term *ensemble* to account for the unstable unity, both subjective/experiential and collective/objective, of a community. At this point Balibar builds his own philosophical intervention within and beyond the Althusserian problematic.[13]

> Marx makes the relations or the relationship (*Verhältnis*) both what 'engenders' or constitutes for each subject its own individuality, lived in a more or less conflictual way, and that makes this individuality immediately 'dependent' on all the other individualities, following the way in which they have been instituted (…) This double constitution is what I have called '*transindividuality*'…[14]

In both levels, the Spinozian theory of imagination does not concern a human faculty but an inter-corporeal structure in which individuals constitute themselves (including self-consciousness, self-recognition and self-affirmation). The images that the body produces, insofar as it is affected by its relations with other bodies, are presentifications of the *vestigia* of those affectations. In this sense, *imaginary* is the field of experience in which a body is perceived as the center of a world of bodies that are perceived as if they were disposed as "objects" of its *environment*. And this means that imagination itself is neither false nor true, but is the first genre of knowledge: that of human finalistic ideas, that of the isolated man who is subject to his own imagination of being individually free.

Balibar focuses on the complexity of the material process that underlies what the more orthodox readings define as *alienation*: "not by problematizing the *alienation of relations* (and therefore, of the 'social') but, on the contrary, *alienation as a relation* (or, if you like, the alienated relation as a positive concept of the 'society effect').[15]

And, here, as Montag shows, the dispute over alienation opposes Feuerbach not so much to Marx but to Spinoza.[16] Althusser, however, barely mentions it in his writings on Feuerbach; it is Balibar who manages to draw from this tension interesting consequences, which have only been made explicit by Montag:

> Spinoza nearly alone among philosophers discusses the subject-Subject relation in a way that deprives its center, grasping it not as a being and its reflection, but as a reflection without an object, or a reflection whose object is always only another reflection. There can be, for him, no inversion of theology into anthropology, or the reverse since neither term is primary over the other, the couple Man-God being nothing more than two sides of a single illusion, although an illusion that possesses a

[13] See, for example, Balibar's *La Philosophie de Marx* and *Spinoza, the Transindividual.*
[14] Balibar, *Spinoza*, 144.
[15] Ibid., 146-147.
[16] Montag, *Althusser*, 135-136.

> material existence and produces the very material effects of sadness, guilt and pain necessary to a regime of perpetual subjection.[17]

Following this anti-humanist criterion, Balibar radicalizes the Spinozian reading of Marx and argues that Marx's great lesson consists in showing the way in which the imaginary exists as an objective double-structure of social reality, to the same extent that it is structurally inapprehensible for the scope of vision of individual-subjects and their concrete work. This means that the way in which the agents of capitalist society *individually think*, then, is an *objectively imaginary* way. In every term of Marx, such as 'phantasmagoric, 'delirium,' 'confusion,' Balibar finds the condition that "makes it possible to understand (…) in what sense the transindividual must present itself to individuals in an inverted form."[18] Thus, the conception of an *objective imaginary* traverses Balibar's reading of commodity fetishism, against the humanist program of inverting alienation. The imaginary "appearance" is materially woven into economic relationality and this implies that the economic level does not exist as a simple relation nor as a contemporary temporality of production, but overdetermined in and by processes of subjectivation that exceed economic "alienation" and have their relative autonomy.

And this brings us back to Althusser's theory of reproduction and to some of the assumptions underpinning the developments in *Sur la reproduction* regarding concrete social formations.

In the Western capitalist societies *as they exist* – Balibar agues –, economic individuals are subjectivized as *juridical persons*; that is to say, autonomous and differentiated from a regime of 'things':

> In Marx's problematic this means that the juridical forms which liberate the individual for exchange (…) constitute a second level of alienation, at one and the same time original and correlative to the preceding one, into which it is in practice inserted to ensure its realization, The economic informs the juridical and the juridical activates the economic.[19]

Therefore, that is why, according to Balibar, there is a double structured alienation – which is at once, reciprocal and dissymmetrical or *transindividual* – that is irreducible to a simple relation because it is a relation of relationships. This double structure – economic and juridical or impersonal and interpersonal – rejects the idea that there is an original authenticity of human relations between "persons" (whether thought of in the form of a bond between pre-existing individuals or as an original intersubjectivity) which, in a certain sense, would have been lost in their historical alienated forms.

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[17] Ibid., 136.
[18] Balibar, *Spinoza*, 154.
[19] Ibid., 152.

Consequently, it is necessary to reject the assumption of a single temporality (e.g., the progression of alienation to total subsumption), and to realize a plural structuring of temporalities that bring together multiple genealogies in hierarchical, unequal and, above all, contradictory articulation.

This detour into the way in which Balibar suggests a double structure that conjoins heterogeneous genealogies, each of them involving diverse temporalities, allows us to understand the role of Law in the Althusserian theory of reproduction.

Law offers the dominant mechanism of humanist subjectivation, organized around the figure of the *juridical person* of private law. In short, it is within juridical device that we see the completion of the movement described in Marx as the *personification* of the relations of production. It can be said that Chapter V of *Sur la reproduction* is the way in which Althusser unfolds Marx's intuition and makes it the Archimedean point of his theory of interpellation. And this leads us to the history of *individuals - as subjects*.

Much has been written about the concept of ideology, but often overlooked is the concept that Althusser formalizes as interpellation and allows us to understand that the "general" functioning of the ideological is not a pure invention, but the abstraction of a mechanism that in fact functions in particular ideological formations; that is to say, in a series of concrete discursive formations, practices, rituals, institutions, etc. These formations are identified in the already mentioned "*Marxisme et Humanisme*": the *homo oeconomicus* (individual of faculties and needs defined as the subject of classical political economy); the subject of social atomism and ethico-political idealism; the subject of Kantian morality, among others and whose unifying figure is the emanative or expressive causality that connects essentialism of Man and empiricism of human individuals as his epiphenomena.

Ideology is read in the unifying operation that adjusts these discourses to the atemporal functioning of a specific topique with a concrete history. Humanism is not a matter of semantic order or content but a matter of form and syntax, as Michel Pêcheux has shown - it concerns the functioning of discourses.[20] And the concrete discourse on which Althusser relies to think the syntactic functioning of interpellation is the juridical discourse of the modern state, whose syntax reinscribes that of theological discourse.

Chapter V of *Sur la reproduction* allows us a historical entry – according to what Althusser calls the *point of view of reproduction* – into the structure of interpellation. Althusser does not speak in this chapter of "interpellation," but reads its concrete functioning as moral supplement - that is to say in the not written but practical functioning of juridical discourse, on the basis of a series of features: its *saturation*, its *formality*, its *preventive repression*. They all attend to the inscription of a veiled emptiness within juridical discourse itself—an active emptiness.

[20] Pêcheux, *Les vérités da la palice.*

It is by virtue of this absence that juridical discourse encloses itself, shaping a universe of meaning for an experience of interiority. The moral conscience is a device of a double specular relation structured around the category of person or juridical subject. The *topique* of the juridical *persona* (supported by the category of property, the freedom to use and abuse property and the equal capacity to be punishable) is the case that Althusser takes as a matrix for his theory of interpellation.

It is a scene centered around an "eye" (the Person with capital letters) that is not an individual but an abstract Subject of a tautological cut: "*I am who I am.*"

The theological - policing operation of the ideological interpellation is sustained, as I have already mentioned, in the syntax of the juridical and religious discourse: "*everyone who...*" that calls upon everyone, speaking to each one. This grammatical aspect of the theory of ideological interpellation is presented by Pêcheux.[21] According to him, the scheme of ideological interpellation makes us see the functioning of the "*theater* of consciousness" from behind the scenes: discursive and ritual structure that stages a field of "obviousnesses" – as a *scope* or *field of vision* – supporting both the illusion of the Subject and the transparency of immediate access to the world. The matrix of this grammar is juridical discourse, an ideological cipher under whose primacy state power is sustained as a codified system.

After this detour, it can be understood that Law is the hinge that connects, in its *décalage*, the non-subject – the (impersonal) individuated body of production – with the (personified) juridical subject. Hence, it is not by chance that within juridical discourse, Althusser *indistinguishes* what he would seem to separate in his famous article on Ideological State Apparatuses: *ideology* and *force*. He will insist on this continuity on *Que faire?*[22]

Within law (its institutions, discourse and practices) and within the juridical ideology that sustains it, as a moral supplement, ideological apparatuses and the repressive apparatus of the State erase their boundaries. And it is not so clear there that a demarcation between the physical and the psychic, the individual and the social can be reinscribed. I will go a step further and suggest that this realm of indistinction marks the specific action of the *materiality of the imaginary* and that it is there where we can read the red thread that connects Foucault with Althusser.

While the Marxist problematic confers on it the status of a historical *objective imaginary* – to put it in Balibar's terms –, for Foucault, it reaches the form of what could be considered a *regime of visibility*. But in both cases, this materiality of the imaginary concerns the close link between a certain *topique* and a certain optics.

[21] Cf. Montag, "Althusser's Authorless Theater"; Pêcheux, "Remontémonos de Foucault a Spinoza."
[22] "L'idéologie, ça n'est pas 'des idées' mais une certaine matérialité, celle des 'appareils' qui la réalisent, et des qu'on parle et de matérialité et d'appareil, il est trop clair qu'on parle, comme Machiavel, de force" (Althusser, *Que faire?*, 110).

II. Althusser beyond Foucault

In *Scènes de la verité. Michel Foucault et le théâtre*, Arianna Sforzini, recalls a sort of scenic semantics within the course from 1972 to 1973, published under the title *La société punitive*.[23] For Sforzini, two modalities of "utopian projection" can be identified in the architectural metaphors of the societies of spectacle (sovereign power) and modern politics (discipline), that is to say, *two forms of sociability associated with two regimes of visibility, displayed through the organization of spaces, administration and disposition of bodies, with strategic effects.*

In both cases, there is a relationship between a *topique* and an optic. Sovereign power presents a theatrical *topique*: the aim is to make the center of power (the emperor and his sacred *body*) visible to the multitude gathered as a social body in a ritualized practice. We can see that within this *scene*, the imaginary is supported in its existence by a *massive body* unified by the experience of intensity and sensual proximity. In the modern state, instead, it is no longer a question of making power visible to masses, but of making *the individual* visible to power. The "optics" of modern society configures the diagram of visibility of its power relations: the architecture of an "inverted theater." A model that admits that the pinnacle of power is *deindividualized*: or at least, according to Sforzini, unoccupied. It is enough for the individual to know that he can be seen to become the instrument of his own subjection.

It is interesting to recall that the point of passage of what Foucault calls the societies of *spectacle* and *surveillance* can be placed in the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte, with whom the transition to a codified form of law, or the passage to a positivist approach to the natural norm, has as an important milestone: the so-called *Napoleonic Code* of 1804.

The tacit dialogue between Foucault and Althusser unfolds here in new ways. These paths can only be illuminated when we attend to the crucial weight of theatrical semantics in Marxist philosophy. But, at that point, we can rediscover the Althusserian substratum obliterated in Foucault's developments.

In the first place, it is known that the Bonapartist prose is also the occasion for a theatrical investigation of power when Marx, in *"The Eighteenth Brumaire..."* recalls the dramatic variation between tragedy and farce. It is not simply a matter of reading "the great historical tragedy," but, above all, of conceiving politics as a *scene*, in the terms of a specific materiality organized as a theatrical discourse, where the "characters" assume tragic, heroic, comic roles, wear costumes and "masks," or act "behind the scenes." And it is in the theatrical semantic field that the wide range that connects masks, specters and imagination is staged as a theater in which a regime of visibility is set up as a regime of imagination that Sforzini names not casually "utopian projection."

Following the trail of scenic metaphors, we discover Foucault as a (voluntary or involuntary) reader of Marx, by means of research on the materiality of the imaginary.

[23] Sforzini, *Scènes de la vérité.*

This closeness allows me to take a further step to propose the existence of a relationship between the historical passage between what Foucault calls sovereign power and discipline, and the displacement that can be read in Marx, from a use *of theatrical metaphors* to think *the scene of politics*, towards a recourse to *optical terms* in *Capital*, where we find references to a *spectral objectivity*, fantasmagoria, etc., deployed around the notion of commodity fetishism.

To some extent, this is suggested by Foucault himself in *Surveiller et punir* since he states that, if the rise of the Western economic system began with the procedures that enabled the accumulation of capital, it can be said that the methods to manage human accumulation have led to a political detachment from the traditional, ritual, costly and violent forms of power, replaced by a whole technology of discipline – and I translate here: a *scenic technology of individualization* that lends its architecture to the materiality of the imaginary *with strategic effects*.

This being so, then, what Foucault describes as the passage from sovereign to disciplinary power is inscribed on the very surface of the juridical discourse as an "inverted theater" linked to a central elision, one which Althusser makes explicit: that of the relations of production operating as an absent cause in juridical discourse.

In other words, the process of transformation in the scenic architecture of power that Foucault studies as the passage from sovereignty to discipline leave its marks in the syntax of juridical discourse that Althusser analyzes as an "inverted theater" (of sovereign power in the free subjection of the juridical person), precisely as a "scene" in which theological moral violence and police individualizing violence are indistinguishable. The point of distance between Foucault and Althusser lies, although, in the absent cause of this displacement, placed by Althusser as a silence within discourse: the material relations of economic exploitation, or, in other words, class struggle. It is *by virtue* of this elision that the imaginary efficacy of the scenic inversion can take place.

So, there is a *plus* in what Althusser "presupposes" but doesn't develop, a *plus* that is developed in the form of an omission (an *active absence*) in Foucault's deployment. At this point, the vector of reading is inverted, and it is Althusser who becomes Foucault's symptomatic reader. Montag smiles from between the lines of his careful text.

In short, I propose that, where Foucault historicizes a discontinuity in the dispositive of subjectivation, Althusser is interested in reading a continuity. By focusing on the underlying continuity between sovereign power and discipline, Althusser highlights without making it explicit – and perhaps without knowing it – the phantasmatic background that concerns the imaginary materiality in which the temporalities of power - proper to regimes of reproduction - and the material and inter-corporal structure of individuation, inherent to capitalist exploitation, are knotted in their *décalage* as their absent cause. Phantasmatic is the agglutination of temporalities

that coalesce into one another forming the membrane that covers the ineliminable *décalage*.[24]

III. Montag beyond Foucault and Althusser

As it can be seen, after having shown what Foucault reads in Althusser beyond Althusser, Montag leads us towards the opposite movement: Althusser returns as a reader of Foucault.

This operation returns with regard to recalling Judith Butler's Foucauldian thought.

As Montag suggests, Judith Butler has pointed towards the centrality of what Althusser himself called "a theoretical *scene*" and "our little theoretical theater": the allegorical figure "in which a subject is hailed, and where the subject turns around and then accepts the terms by which he or she is hailed."[25]

Reading upon reading, Montag lets us see what Foucault shows without being able to see it himself:

> But what is the nature of this instrument that allows the body to be better administered and controlled, and how exactly does it exercise mastery of the body? To answer these questions, Foucault, like Althusser, is compelled to turn to allegory to represent the unrepresentable and to think the unthought. (…). I refer, of course, to the Panopticon, understood not as an actually existing piece of punitive—or merely disciplinary—architecture and therefore part of the means of spatial domination but rather as an "architectural figure."[26]

Montag takes a further step and inaugurates a research program that may be, at the same time, fruitful for revisiting the blanks in Althusser's writing and potent for showing its actuality in our current theoretical conjuncture. That step is the one that connects the irreducible *décalage* of the subject with a materialism of the imaginary. The imaginary is here registered as the force of the Gaze, in the metaphor of the *panopticon*:

> This is what Foucault, in fact, will call "the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate [*le détenu*] a conscious and permanent state of visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." What exactly is "a conscious state of visibility?" The visible

[24] This bizarre materiality enables the reincorporation of historical materialism, not as a theory of the primary nature of economic relations, but as a theory that manages to capture the spectral condition of nature (and of the natural body) in capitalism. In a similar sense, Derrida places the spectral on the terrain of a phenomenology of use-value in Marx, understood as the other of the objectivity of value. This is, as Balibar says, an objectivity of the second order. In this respect, the regime of use-value is an order of thingness that resembles the Freudian *das Ding* more than the Kantian phenomenon.

[25] Montag, *Althusser*, 167.

[26] Ibid., 168-169.

> individual becomes conscious of being visible, being watched, and he watches himself, under surveillance, exercising self-surveillance. This is very different from the action of conscience, in which an individual subjects himself to moral judgment. What Foucault has described is nothing less than the genesis of consciousness, even if this genesis, as in the case of interpellation, cannot be understood in terms of a before and after or of a sequence. The awareness of our visibility becomes "the perception of what passes in a man's own mind," Locke's definition of consciousness.[27]

This is where all the productivity of Montag's operation appears. In the first place, Montag stresses the constitutive relationship between consciousness as a field of vision (what Freud calls the perception-consciousness system) and affection, in this case, fear: "fear of a surveillance that may not be taking place, that may never have taken place."[28] In Foucault's terms, the genesis of subjection is derived mechanically from a *fictitious relation*.

"Fictitious: it thus appears that Foucault has reproduced Althusser's dilemmas, *including an original fiction underlying material relations* (….) The Panopticon is the figure of an anonymous and unknown subject who creates the subjects, whose souls are born in fear and trembling."[29] The precise status of the relationship (based on not-knowing and affect) with that "figure" can be called *imaginary*.

Materialism of the imaginary is the theory of the material causes and effects of the imagination. On one hand, it refers to the material (libidinal) connection of images and bodies in the category of *Umwelt*, a space of interiority that unfolds as the subject's environment.

This notion of imaginary is close to the psychoanalytic concept of *phantasm*, in one of its meanings. In psychoanalytic theory, the notion of phantasm points towards the psychic procedures where the structuring of experience as a "world" is determined by the unconscious libidinal economy. It is, at the same time, a sort of "veil" that invests the constitutive incompleteness of the subject as a relational being, but also functions as a kind of "window" in which the subject lives his world as a meaningful world, external to himself.[30] In this conception, the specific materiality of the imaginary is not based on the performative force of the signifier, but on the affective (and unconscious) force of the subject's identification with the symbolic order.[31]

Montag does not put it in these terms, but in his approach, it is possible to discover a new fold of materiality, a materiality pertaining to the unconscious affect that we can call *phantasmatic* and that constitutes a fundamental resource in the development

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[27] Ibid., 169.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 170.
[30] Cf. Amigo, *Clínica de los fracasos del fantasma*.
[31] Sosa, "Imaginario y fantasma de Althusser a Lacan."

of a materialism of the imaginary. In Montag's reading of the functioning of the panopticon, imaginary materiality reveals itself as an excess; an excess in which we can trace the deep connection between gaze and libido that sounds like a gap in the Foucauldian reference to the "body" (unless we understand by body a natural – physiological originary matter – in every respect incompatible with Foucault's own thought).

What Montag exposes, instead, is that the panopticon, as a metaphor or better, as a "figure," reveals something that is not identical to the individualized body: the evanescence around which the *subjectivation* is structured. A point of "unpresentability":[32] the inner trace that hosts the singularity of a contingent encounter which is also a struggle (*nâitre ou n'être pas*), irreducible to the constructivist scheme of interpellation understood as a sort of factory of subjectivity.

As Montag has emphasized, Pêcheux worked in his later writings, on this *décalage* between subjection/subjectivation, in terms of an immanent ambivalence that submits the efficacy of the interpellation to a constitutive instability.[33] Pursuing the idea of *lapsus,* Pêcheux discovers that this failure which is inherent to the specific materiality of rituals, joins a certain *equivocity* that points towards *non-sense* in the center of sense and meaning[34]

It can be said that *equivocity* is the name of a *phantasmatic materiality* placed in the gravitational center of the play of identifications that sustain the imperfect conflation between the individuated body and the subject. It is on this plane, of the materialism of the imaginary, that the two axioms that underlie the theory of ideology for Pêcheux are connected: the primacy of struggle over classes and the primacy of the unconscious over consciousness.[35] If in the coincidence between a topic and an optic it is possible to put Althusser and Foucault in dialogue about a material history of the imaginary, it is in connection with such a rigorous understanding of materialism that their paths irremediably diverge, since it is not possible to find in Foucault the principle of the primacy of contradiction that in both cases settles the materialist specificity.[36]

IV. Montag beyond Montag

Finally, the materialism of the imaginary concerns Warren Montag in a more radical way. In the form of questions that haunt him frequently and that have led him to focus especially on one of the images with which Althusser tries to outline structural causality: the image of the *theater without an author*. Briefly, this way of presenting materialist causality aims, if not to resolve, at least to address the great question of the insistence of the imaginary within philosophy, and not in any philosophical theory but

[32] Cf. Balibar, "Structuralism: a Destitution of Subject?"
[33] Montag, "Discourse and Decree."
[34] Pêcheux, "*Il n'y a cause de ce qui cloche*."
[35] Pêcheux, *Les vérités de la palice*.
[36] Cf. Pêcheux, "Remontémonos de Foucault a Spinoza."

in one's own. For instance, and not by chance, this can be read in the "Afterword" of *Althusser and His contemporaries*:

> To move things, to shake things up, to shift the balance of power internal to philosophy, to open the possibility of thinking otherwise required a language of force and provocation. We might recall the concluding paragraph of Althusser's essay on Bertolazzi and Brecht in which he describes himself as being "assailed," by the question of whether the essay itself, far from originating in him or with him, is not rather the play *El Nost Milan* itself : "pursuing in me its incomplete meaning, searching in me, despite myself, now that all the actors and sets have been cleared away, for the advent of this silent discourse." (…) These décalages, according to Althusser, determined its simultaneous regression and flight forward, producing a theoretical order that lives and moves by means of its 'failures,' a philosophy that will not and cannot rest, chasing its contradictions before it until the encounter that leaves it no way out but a fictional triumph – or in Althusser's case, until it seems to disappear over the horizon of the present.[37]

The imaginary is, in this sense, a sort of (phantasmatic?) *trace* in the very materiality of theoretical writing, that indicates or alludes to the ungraspable point of its connection with the *real of history*.[38]

This is, I should say, the central query of *Lire le Capital*.

> *Capital*, on the contrary, exactly measures a distance and an internal dislocation (*décalage*) in the real, inscribed in its *structure*, a distance and a dislocation such as to make their own effects themselves illegible, and the illusion of an immediate reading of them the ultimate apex of their effects: *fetishism*. It was essential to turn to history to track down this myth of reading to its lair, for it was from the history in which they offered it the cult of their religions and philosophies that men had projected it onto nature, so as not to perish in the daring project of knowing it. Only from history in thought, the theory of history, was it possible to account for the historical religion of reading: by discovering that the truth of history cannot be read in its manifest discourse, because the text of history is not a text in which a voice (the Logos) speaks, but the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures."[39]

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[37] Montag, *Althusser*, 210.

[38] Here is another definition of the imaginary, which concerns the link between discourse and history, developed by Pêcheux and his group: "Dans cette perspective, la mémoire est a référer (...) a un ensemble complexe, préexistant et extérieur a l'organisme, constitue par des séries de tissus, d'indices lisibles, constituant un corps sociohistorique de traces" (Pêcheux, "Lecture et mémoire," 286).

[39] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 17.

Within the inner limit of discourse, regarding its possibility of capturing the unpresentable of the *real*, the force of the imaginary and the fictional opens up as a *spectral materiality*, immanent to the *schismatic* form of theory itself.[40]

Montag enables us to understand the irreducible impossibility of the metatheoretical question – because it connects with a metaphysical concern – that the question of the imaginary (or, better still, the imaginary as the internal border of the philosophical practice) brings with it. A border that consists in confronting theory with something untranslatable in its terms, because it is radically heterogeneous to its internal logic: its historical conditions ciphered in a singular practice of enunciation. At this point, the epistemic question of theory as a field of vision and the question of the subject as a system of perception-consciousness (that is, as a point of view), mutually imply each other, in a sort of moebius.

It is undoubtedly on this question that the tense and perhaps impossible dialogue between Althusser and Foucault opens up to a perpetual controversy that could be contoured in the concepts of the *problematic* and *episteme*.

Thus, we arrive at the unresolvable *impasse* around which the development of a materialism of the imaginary becomes as vital as it is challenging.

> Althusser once made what he called the "simple observation" that in a "conflictual situation [...] one cannot see everything from everywhere." Although the situation in question was class society (and therefore class struggle), Althusser's work as a whole allows, or perhaps compels, us to understand even theoretical texts as conflictual situations, that is, as sites of active antagonism visible only from certain positions in the topography of theory and intelligible only to those who occupy these positions. (…). The very idea of the field of the visible may be understood as a philosophical dramatization (…), a space where something is exhibited or placed in order to be seen. (…) we cannot help but ask ourselves how, with few exceptions, we failed to see the theatricality of Althusser's practice of theory.[41]

The figure of the "authorless theater" leads us to the track of the epistemological relevance of the materialism of the imaginary that allows us to recognize the theoretical and philosophical function of the *phantasm*, no longer as a content of the Althusserian theory of the subject, but as a dimension of his materialist problematization of philosophy.

The Phantasm haunts the materiality of theoretical discourse with the same force that the spectrum of politics besieges the present. This opens a new political fold of the so-called Althusserian "theoreticism," the phantasmatic dimension of knowledge that psychoanalysis tends to locate as the core of clinical practice and that allows us to

[40] See Balibar, *Écrits pour Althusser*; Romé, "Schismatic Theory for a Liminal Time."
[41] Montag, "Althusser's Authorless Theater," 43-44.

capture another resonance of what Althusser left open in his unpublished text of 1985, the condition of Marxism and psychoanalysis as *clinical theories*.

The intervention, the clinical practice of psychoanalysis, is oriented by a desire to know; not so much to *have* a knowledge, but to know how to operate conveniently.[42]

Montag's readings guide us and help us understand that Althusser evokes this knowledge proper to clinical practice in order to indicate a profound epistemological position: that science is the *science of experience*, which implies that the criterion of the true is immanent to theoretical practices and their historical conditions of possibility (material forces behind the scene) and its consequences regarding a delimited field of vision (as a scene).

> The search to complete the incomplete meaning opens onto the unfinishable work of substitution: behind the masks are only other masks; behind the machinery, only the machines that produce the machines; behind Althusser's words, other words; so many traces of a meaning that has never been and never will be present. Althusser, foraging for terms in the space of an absence and surrounded by silence, stumbled upon the fissure that history had opened and through it saw himself: an actor on the stage of the authorless theater, transcribing the words of its silent discourse and reading them aloud, a maker and destroyer of machines, the dramaturge of an unknown world.[43]

When the author discovers that he or she is nothing but the character of another scene, he touches the solitude of the real. That is the price to pay for the exercise of materialism. A price that is assumed at one's own risk, but that has nothing to do with political nihilism because it is oriented towards anticipation of the opportunity for the exercise of a task that finds its reason in transformation. That solitude is a precious heritage.

Montag invites us to assume this, as the task of repairing the broken bridge with previous generations, those who traversed the world of their experiences with a compass that we have lost today: the one that connects truth with Justice, or to put it in anachronistic terms, science with revolution.

[42] Lacan, *Séminaire XXV*.
[43] Montag, *Althusser*, 52.

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