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décalages

an althusser studies journal

This issue of *Décalages* is dedicated to the memory of Asad Haider (1987-2025), whose work, both as an editor of *Viewpoint Magazine* and political theorist, has contributed greatly not only to the renewed interest in Althusser, but also to the major political and theoretical questions facing us today. The next issue of *Décalages* will include essays that address his thought and legacy.

Warren Montag and Joseph Serrano
Editors, *Décalages*

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La Tâche historique de la philosophie marxiste

Louis Althusser
Texte établi et annoté par G.M. Goshgarian

En cette année 1967, les Communistes du monde entier célèbrent à la fois les cinquante ans de la première révolution socialiste, et les cent ans du premier Livre du *Capital* ; c'est-à-dire, et j'emploie ces termes dans leur sens rigoureux, à la fois la plus grande *révolution politique* et la plus grande *révolution théorique* des temps modernes, deux révolutions qui ont changé le cours de l'Histoire.

À l'occasion de ce double anniversaire, je voudrais proposer quelques réflexions sur la théorie marxiste, son état, ses problèmes, et ses tâches[1].

I
POUR UNE JUSTE UNION DE LA THÉORIE ET DE LA PRATIQUE

Le rapprochement des deux anniversaires fait aussitôt ressortir un fait capital : la révolution théorique de Marx a cent ans d'âge, la révolution soviétique cinquante ans. La révolution accomplie par Marx dans la théorie a donc précédé de cinquante ans la révolution accomplie dans la société russe par les masses populaires, sous la direction du parti bolchevik et de Lénine. Ce décalage n'est pas une énigme pour les marxistes. Marx, Engels et Lénine nous ont en effet fourni dans leurs œuvres la raison de principe qui nous permet de le comprendre. Cette raison tient à la fois à la nature du mouvement ouvrier, à

la nature de la théorie marxiste, et à la nature de l'union du mouvement ouvrier et de la théorie marxiste.

1) « Sans *théorie* révolutionnaire, écrivait Lénine dans *Que faire ?*, pas de mouvement *révolutionnaire*. »

Il faut faire très attention aux termes de cette phrase célèbre. Lénine ne dit pas : « sans théorie révolutionnaire, pas de mouvement *ouvrier* ». En effet, ce n'est pas la théorie marxiste qui a créé le mouvement ouvrier. Le mouvement ouvrier existait avant la théorie marxiste et la théorie marxiste aurait été impossible sans le mouvement ouvrier.

En revanche, ce n'est pas le mouvement ouvrier qui a, par ses propres forces, produit la théorie marxiste. La théorie marxiste est le produit de la conjonction d'éléments théoriques (philosophie allemande, économie politique anglaise, socialisme français) et d'évènements politiques (luttes de classes, premières interventions du mouvement ouvrier, etc.) dans la phase ascendante du capitalisme occidental.

Lénine ne dit nullement que la théorie marxiste est indispensable au mouvement ouvrier, mais au mouvement ouvrier *révolutionnaire*. Il indique par là que, sans la théorie marxiste, le mouvement ouvrier aurait existé, et se serait développé, mais qu'il ne serait pas devenu *révolutionnaire* au sens objectif du terme, c'est-à-dire capable, non de souhaiter ou d'espérer, mais de faire la révolution socialiste.

Cette première thèse de Lénine nous renvoie à une seconde thèse, bien connue, de Lénine, sur les limites objectives du développement du mouvement ouvrier laissé « à ses propres forces ». Ces limites sont celles du socialisme utopique, de l'anarchisme, de l'anarcho-syndicalisme, et en définitive du « trade-unionisme » et du réformisme social-démocrate. Ce sont les limites de l'idéologie « spontanée » du mouvement ouvrier. Lorsque Lénine qualifie cette idéologie de « spontanée », il veut dire qu'elle est en réalité dominée par l'idéologie bourgeoise et petite-bourgeoise.

2) Seule la *théorie* marxiste permet au mouvement ouvrier de se transformer, et de devenir objectivement révolutionnaire, car seule elle permet au mouvement ouvrier de se libérer des effets théoriques et pratiques de l'idéologie « spontanée » anarcho-réformiste.

Pourquoi la théorie marxiste est-elle capable d'assurer cette transformation, et cette libération ? Parce qu'elle n'est pas une « *idéologie* » parmi d'autres, c'est-à-dire une représentation faussée, donc subjective, mais une conception *scientifique*, donc objective, de l'histoire des sociétés.

Le mouvement ouvrier peut ainsi devenir objectivement révolutionnaire, à la double condition 1°) de renoncer aux théories idéologiques « spontanées » qui sont l'effet de l'exploitation économique et de la domination politique et idéologique de la classe ouvrière par la classe bourgeoise, et 2°) d'adopter pour sa propre théorie la science marxiste de l'histoire des sociétés.

C'est cette théorie scientifique qui donne au mouvement ouvrier la connaissance des lois de structure et d'évolution des formations sociales, des classes sociales et de leur lutte, des objectifs, des moyens, des formes d'organisation et d'action propres à assurer le

triomphe de la révolution. Seule cette théorie scientifique peut réaliser la transformation du mouvement ouvrier utopiste ou réformiste en mouvement ouvrier *révolutionnaire*. En toute rigueur il faut donc préciser la formule célèbre de Lénine en disant : « sans théorie (*scientifique*) révolutionnaire, pas de mouvement ouvrier (objectivement) *révolutionnaire*. »

3) Si nous rapprochons ces deux formules : 1) le mouvement ouvrier existait indépendamment de la théorie marxiste et avant elle, et 2) sans théorie scientifique de l'histoire, pas de mouvement ouvrier révolutionnaire, nous comprenons la signification théorique et historique de l'union de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier, qui est le grand évènement des temps modernes.

Sans cette union, la théorie marxiste serait restée lettre morte. Sans cette union, le mouvement ouvrier ne serait pas devenu révolutionnaire.

L'histoire n'a cessé de montrer la justesse de ce principe. Si la révolution n'a pas triomphé partout où cette union a été réalisée, elle n'a triomphé que là où cette union a été vraiment réalisée : pour la première fois au monde en Russie en 1917, pour la seconde fois en Chine en 1949. En revanche, là où le mouvement ouvrier n'a pas adopté la théorie marxiste, et n'a pas été transformé par elle, par exemple en Angleterre (qui donnait pourtant à Marx et Engels de grandes espérances au milieu du XIXe siècle), non seulement la révolution n'a pas eu lieu, mais les perspectives révolutionnaires se sont éloignées. En revanche également, là où le mouvement ouvrier avait adopté la théorie marxiste, mais en avait gravement déformé les principes dans un sens évolutionniste-économiste-réformiste, comme dans le parti social-démocrate de l'Allemagne d'avant 1914, la révolution a été rendue impossible, puis, quand elle a éclaté, au lendemain de la guerre, elle a été écrasée. L'histoire montre donc bien que l'union de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier est la condition nécessaire du triomphe de la révolution.

Mais elle montre aussi que cette condition nécessaire est elle-même soumise à une condition absolue : *cette union ne peut pas être n'importe quelle union*, elle ne peut pas être une union sans principes, ou une union reposant sur des principes déformés ou faussés. *Elle doit être une union juste*, reposant sur des principes justes, c'est-à-dire sur des principes rigoureusement scientifiques, et sur leurs conséquences, théoriques, idéologiques et politiques.

Si les principes de l'union ne sont pas justes, ou si on laisse les principes justes se dégrader sous l'influence de l'idéologie bourgeoise, sous l'influence de l'évolutionnisme, de l'économisme, de l'empirisme, du pragmatisme, de l'idéalisme moral, etc., les conséquences pratiques ne se font pas attendre, et elles sont toujours néfastes, graves, ou très graves.

L'union juste de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier ne peut donc être que le résultat d'une lutte longue et difficile. Elle n'a pas été donnée toute faite dans l'histoire : il a fallu des dizaines et des dizaines d'années de lutte menée sous des formes multiples et complexes pour la proposer et l'imposer au mouvement ouvrier à travers la Ière et la IIe Internationale. Et nous savons comment a fini la IIe Internationale : dans un désastre

historique. Nous savons qu'il a fallu l'intervention décisive de Lénine pour rectifier les graves erreurs théoriques et pratiques de la IIe Internationale, et pour proposer et imposer au mouvement ouvrier une forme juste de son union avec une conception juste de la théorie marxiste.

Cette lutte est donc une lutte sans fin : elle dure aujourd'hui encore, non seulement dans les partis communistes des pays capitalistes, mais aussi dans les pays socialistes. Elle durera demain encore, pendant une très longue période dont on ne peut fixer le terme.

Si l'union de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier n'est pas tombée du ciel dans l'histoire, elle n'est donc pas non plus, pour nous, un *résultat définitif* sur lequel nous pouvons nous reposer. L'expérience de ces trente dernières années le prouve. Cette union est une tâche qu'il faut constamment accomplir, un résultat qu'il faut constamment renforcer et rectifier en le défendant avec la dernière vigilance contre toutes les déviations idéologiques, c'est-à-dire contre toutes les pressions visibles, franches ou sournoises, de l'idéologie bourgeoise et petite-bourgeoise, qui ne cesse de se reproduire, d'assiéger et d'attaquer la théorie marxiste.

4) Or, de quoi dépend la *justesse* de cette union ? Reprenons l'exemple de Lénine, dans sa lutte contre les principes déformés de la IIe Internationale.

Qu'a fait Lénine pour rectifier les formes erronées de l'union réalisée par la IIe Internationale ?

D'une part Lénine a lutté contre les déviations de l'interprétation de la théorie marxiste à la fois dans le matérialisme historique (lutte théorique contre les révisionnistes et les populistes), et dans le matérialisme dialectique (lutte contre les empiriocriticistes et l'idéologie philosophique bourgeoise). Il a ainsi restauré la théorie marxiste dans sa spécificité et sa pureté, et il l'a traitée comme une vraie science, en la développant et en la forçant à produire des découvertes théoriques (par exemple : l'Impérialisme).

Et *d'autre part* Lénine a défini une nouvelle ligne politique. Il a en même temps défini de nouvelles formes d'organisation (le parti bolchevik, la IIIe Internationale), de direction et d'action politique. Cette nouvelle ligne politique, ces nouvelles formes d'organisation et d'action, Lénine les a définies en analysant la situation réelle au moyen des concepts scientifiques de Marx.

Mais ce faisant, Lénine ne s'est pas contenté d'appliquer les concepts marxistes existants. Il a produit, avec rigueur, de *nouveaux concepts* théoriques, scientifiques et philosophiques, pour pouvoir résoudre les problèmes que lui posait l'histoire, et il a fait passer les résultats de ses découvertes théoriques dans la pratique politique. Nous pouvons en tirer d'importantes conclusions.

Première conclusion

Sans l'existence et la force du mouvement ouvrier russe, la lutte théorique et les nouvelles connaissances produites par Lénine seraient restées, au moins pendant une période impossible à fixer, lettre morte. Mais sans la lutte théorique et la production

théorique de Lénine, sans ses découvertes théoriques et leurs conséquences (analyse de la situation politique, définition de nouvelles formes d'organisation et d'action), une union *juste* de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier russe n'aurait pas été réalisée. La révolution prolétarienne aurait peut-être éclaté, mais elle n'aurait pas triomphé.

Deuxième conclusion

L'action de Lénine nous montre clairement quels sont les *objets stratégiques* de la lutte qui a permis à Lénine de réaliser la justesse de cette union, qui a permis le triomphe de la Révolution d'Octobre. Les objets stratégiques de la lutte de Lénine sont constitués par les deux domaines de la théorie marxiste : la *science de l'histoire* (qui commande la science de la ligne politique de l'organisation et de l'action), et la *philosophie marxiste*, ainsi que leur *articulation*.

Lénine a lutté contre les déformations idéologiques bourgeoises de la science et de la philosophie marxiste, pour la reconnaissance, la connaissance, et le respect rigoureux de la science et de la philosophie marxiste, et de leur rapport.

Il a lutté, comme personne ne l'a jamais fait, pour faire reconnaître le caractère théoriquement révolutionnaire (c'est-à-dire révolutionnaire dans la théorie) de la science et de la philosophie marxiste ; pour faire reconnaître le caractère spécifique de la théorie et du travail théorique, et leurs exigences absolues de « pureté », de rigueur, de systématicité et de fécondité ; pour faire reconnaître la nécessité absolue de la théorie et du travail théorique ; pour faire reconnaître enfin, à l'intérieur de la théorie, le rôle décisif de la philosophie marxiste pour l'existence, la justesse, la rigueur et le développement de la science marxiste de l'histoire.

Troisième conclusion

Lénine ne s'est pas contenté de défendre la théorie marxiste, et de la restaurer dans sa « pureté ». Il l'a traitée pratiquement comme on doit traiter une théorie réellement scientifique, vivante et féconde : en la développant, c'est-à-dire en produisant non seulement de nouvelles *connaissances*, mais aussi de nouveaux *concepts théoriques*.

On peut en effet utiliser les concepts scientifiques existants pour obtenir de nouvelles connaissances, et élargir ainsi le domaine des connaissances existantes. C'est ce qui passe lorsque, pour employer une expression consacrée, on « applique » les concepts scientifiques existants à des nouvelles régions de la réalité, ou à de nouveaux objets concrets. On peut ainsi accroître les connaissances existantes, en analysant telle formation sociale concrète, dans telle conjoncture (la Russie tsariste d'avant 1905, les nouveaux rapports de classes après 1905, en 1917, etc., etc.). Si, dans ce cas, on se contente d'utiliser les concepts scientifiques existants, sans en produire de nouveaux, on dira qu'on a seulement augmenté les *connaissances*, mais sans faire progresser la théorie.

Mais on peut aussi, – et c'est effectivement ce qui se passe assez souvent, même quand on ne se propose que de développer les connaissances – faire progresser la théorie, c'est-

à-dire produire de nouveaux concepts théoriques, soit scientifiques, soit philosophiques. Dire que Lénine n'a pas seulement restauré la théorie marxiste, mais aussi fait progresser la théorie marxiste signifie donc qu'il a effectivement produit de nouveaux *concepts théoriques*, dans la science et dans la philosophie marxistes.

Traiter la théorie marxiste comme une théorie scientifique, c'est donc la développer, dans le double sens du mot : augmenter les connaissances qu'elle permet d'obtenir, et faire progresser la théorie elle-même, c'est-à-dire produire de nouveaux concepts théoriques.

Ces résultats, connaissances d'une part, découvertes théoriques d'autre part, sont le résultat d'un travail de critique, d'élaboration, d'abstraction, de combinaison des données empiriques et des principes abstraits, etc., qui est une pratique spécifique, qu'on peut appeler la *pratique théorique*.

La vie d'une théorie scientifique est donc tout autre chose que la simple contemplation de ses principes, même « purs ». Une théorie scientifique n'est scientifique, c'est-à-dire vivante et féconde, que si elle est le lieu d'une véritable pratique théorique. La théorie marxiste n'est donc pas un dogme : elle ne vit qu'à la condition de produire des connaissances nouvelles, et des découvertes théoriques. Son développement est infini, comme est « infini » son objet (Lénine). Une théorie scientifique est ainsi une discipline ouverte. Une idéologie au contraire est un système fermé, qui ne produit rien de nouveau, puisqu'il ne cesse de se répéter, n'ayant qu'un seul but : justifier des préjugés, des résultats ou des objectifs acquis d'avance. La nature de la pratique théorique propre à une discipline scientifique exige au contraire et constamment des *découvertes*.

La vie de la théorie, ce n'est donc pas sa contemplation, ce n'est pas non plus son commentaire, ni sa pure et simple répétition dans des « exemples » qui ne font que l'illustrer sans faire avancer d'un pas la théorie ; ce n'est pas non plus seulement son « application » à de nouveaux objets réels (augmentation des connaissances). La vie de la théorie c'est aussi la production de nouveaux concepts théoriques (progression de la théorie). La vie de la théorie c'est la *pratique théorique, production de connaissances nouvelles par la production de concepts théoriques nouveaux*.

Quatrième conclusion

Lénine n'en est pas resté à la seule pratique théorique, il en a tiré en même temps les conséquences dans la *pratique politique*. Il a mis ainsi la pratique théorique en rapport avec les pratiques réelles (économique, politique, idéologique) qui constituent les conditions de la pratique théorique et lui donnent ses objets réels-concrets, – en rapport avec la pratique du mouvement ouvrier. Mais s'il a pu arracher le mouvement ouvrier aux déviations de son « spontanéisme », qui recoupait certaines déviations de la IIe Internationale, c'est parce qu'il disposait de principes et de connaissances théoriques scientifiques. Lénine a en même temps fourni la démonstration qu'à la condition d'en analyser scientifiquement les résultats, la pratique politique peut, dans des limites définies, non seulement vérifier ou

infirmer des thèses théoriques, mais même produire de véritables *inventions pratiques*, qui sont l'équivalent de *découvertes théoriques*, inventions dont la théorie doit alors penser le contenu, et dont elle doit tirer les conséquences (par exemple l'invention de la dictature du prolétariat par la Commune, l'invention des Soviets par les masses ouvrières pendant la révolution de 1905).

Telles sont les conclusions essentielles qu'on peut tirer de la lutte de Lénine et du parti bolchevik pour réaliser une juste union de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier.

On voit que la *justesse* de cette union est suspendue à une conception juste de la science et de la philosophie marxistes et de leur rapport ; de la théorie comme pratique théorique productrice de connaissances nouvelles ; et du rapport de la pratique théorique et de la pratique politique. On voit également qu'il suffit qu'un de ces éléments ou de ces rapports soit faussé pour que les conséquences s'en fassent sentir sur l'ensemble de ce système complexe, et finalement sur la pratique politique elle-même.

Sans doute certains de ces écarts peuvent produire seulement des effets limités, ou qui restent limités pendant un certain temps, et on dispose alors de ce délai pour les rectifier. Mais on comprend aussi, – et c'est l'explication de certains grands échecs du mouvement ouvrier, comme celui de la IIe Internationale, – que certains de ces écarts puissent être graves, et affecter trop d'éléments de cet ensemble complexe, pour être corrigés et maîtrisés à temps, et qu'ils produisent en fin de compte des catastrophes historiques.

C'est en ce sens, très précis, que nous pouvons dire que le sort de la lutte pour une union juste entre la théorie marxiste et le mouvement ouvrier, c'est-à-dire en définitive le sort de la révolution socialiste elle-même, se joue non seulement dans ce que tout le monde voit, c'est-à-dire *dans la pratique politique,* mais *aussi* et en même temps, et, en certaines conjonctures critiques, de manière absolument *décisive*, dans la lutte pour une conception juste de la théorie marxiste, de la science et de la philosophie, et de leur rapport ; pour une conception juste de la pratique théorique, et pour une conception juste du rapport de la pratique théorique et de la pratique politique.

Nous devrons constamment nous souvenir de ces conclusions dans notre analyse des tâches actuelles de la théorie marxiste. La lutte pour la défense et le développement de la théorie marxiste, la lutte pour sa rigueur et sa fécondité est toujours un élément essentiel de la lutte révolutionnaire. Dans certaines conjonctures critiques elle peut même en être, comme elle l'a été du temps de Lénine, l'élément *déterminant* [a].

[a] Par exemple, en 1902, dans *Que faire ?*, Lénine a exprimé, à un moment critique de l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier russe et international, le caractère absolument *déterminant* de la théorie pour la pratique politique : « Sans théorie révolutionnaire, pas de mouvement révolutionnaire. On ne saurait trop insister sur cette vérité à une époque où l'engouement pour les formes les plus étroites de l'action pratique va de pair avec la propagande à la mode, de l'opportunisme … Ces tout derniers temps, nous assistons … à une recrudescence des tendances révolutionnaires non social-démocrates [c'est-à-dire non-marxistes]. Dans ces conditions une faute 'sans importance' au premier abord peut entraîner les plus déplorables conséquences, et il faut être myope pour considérer comme inopportunes ou superflues les discussions de fraction, *et la*

II
POUR UNE POLITIQUE THÉORIQUE

Comment faire, pour définir, à la lumière de ces principes, les tâches stratégiques qui s'imposent aujourd'hui aux Communistes dans le domaine de la théorie marxiste ?

Définir ces tâches, c'est définir ce que nous devons appeler une *politique théorique*, c'est-à-dire une ligne générale de l'action à mener dans le domaine théorique, fixant les objectifs stratégiques et tactiques, les « maillons décisifs » dans la conjoncture théorique actuelle, et les moyens d'action correspondants.

Comme dans le cas de toute politique, il faut, pour définir les tâches stratégiques et tactiques d'une politique théorique, disposer des résultats d'une double analyse :

1) une analyse de la *conjoncture* politique, idéologique et théorique générale, dans laquelle la théorie marxiste doit lutter pour s'imposer et se développer. Cette analyse doit mettre en évidence la structure de cette conjoncture, ses éléments dominants, et ses éléments subordonnés. Elle doit montrer le rapport organique complexe existant entre les problèmes politiques, les problèmes idéologiques, et les problèmes théoriques. Elle doit étudier le rapport des forces idéologiques et scientifiques qui s'affrontent dans le domaine de la théorie. Cette analyse doit, en fin de compte, définir les problèmes stratégiques de la lutte idéologique et théorique.

2) une analyse de l'*état actuel de la théorie marxiste*, à la fois dans les pays socialistes et dans les pays capitalistes, un bilan de ses forces et de ses faiblesses présentes, un examen critique, historique et théorique, des raisons qui expliquent ses résultats, ses succès, ses échecs et ses lacunes.

En combinant les résultats de ces deux analyses scientifiques, on peut alors définir avec certitude les tâches stratégiques et tactiques d'une politique théorique, ainsi que les moyens de les réaliser.

Il n'est évidemment pas question que j'entreprenne, même très schématiquement, des analyses de cette importance dans les limites de cet article. Je demande donc la permission d'employer une méthode directe, pour attirer l'attention des lecteurs sur le problème que je considère comme le *problème stratégique N° 1* de la théorie marxiste : le problème de la philosophie marxiste ou matérialisme dialectique.

La thèse que je vais essayer d'exposer est simple : *la philosophie marxiste représente aujourd'hui le « maillon décisif », dont dépend l'avenir de la théorie marxiste, et par voie de conséquence, la « justesse » de l'union de la théorie marxiste et du mouvement ouvrier.*

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délimitation rigoureuse des nuances. De la consolidation de telle ou telle 'nuance' peut dépendre l'avenir de la social-démocratie russe pour de longues, de très longues années » (souligné par nous, L. A.).

III
COMBLER LE RETARD DE LA PHILOSOPHIE MARXISTE SUR LA SCIENCE MARXISTE

Je sais que je risque de heurter les convictions d'un certain nombre de camarades, y compris de philosophes communistes, en déclarant, 120 ans après le *Manifeste*, 100 ans après *Le Capital*, 50 ans après Lénine, que la Philosophie marxiste constitue encore objectivement un *problème*. Ces camarades seront assurément d'accord avec moi pour reconnaître, conformément aux thèses de Lénine, l'importance de la *philosophie* marxiste dans la lutte idéologique et dans la lutte théorique. Mais ils ne seront pas forcément d'accord avec moi pour déclarer qu'aujourd'hui la philosophie marxiste constitue le « maillon décisif », donc la tâche stratégique N° 1 de la théorie marxiste. Et surtout ils peuvent trouver paradoxal, surprenant et faux de désigner la philosophie marxiste comme étant *encore* un problème et par-dessus le marché *le problème N° 1*.

Je vais donc m'expliquer, en tenant le plus grand compte des objections possibles.

Je précise aussitôt le sens de ma thèse.

En déclarant que la philosophie marxiste est pour nous le lieu d'un problème tout à fait privilégié, je ne veux évidemment pas dire que nous soyons sans connaissance sur la nature de la philosophie marxiste, au contraire, puisque les textes de Marx, Engels et Lénine nous donnent, à condition de les lire d'une manière juste, les principes fondamentaux de la philosophie marxiste. En réalité, je veux attirer l'attention sur la situation réellement paradoxale de la philosophie marxiste :

l) d'une part, du point de vue de son élaboration théorique, le matérialisme dialectique est objectivement *en retard* sur le matérialisme historique.

2) d'autre part, c'est du *matérialisme dialectique* que dépend aujourd'hui non seulement la solution, mais la position d'un certain nombre de problèmes théoriques très importants, qui appartiennent au domaine du matérialisme historique, et des autres sciences.

Si la philosophie marxiste est le lieu d'un problème, et d'un problème privilégié, c'est à cause de ce *paradoxe objectif*. Disons donc, pour employer une image léniniste : alors que pour jouer son rôle dans la conjoncture théorique, le matérialisme dialectique devrait être « un pas en avant » du matérialisme historique, en fait il se trouve plusieurs pas en arrière.

Examinons d'abord le retard de la philosophie marxiste sur le matérialisme historique.

C'est un fait objectif, qui n'est pas contestable, pour peu qu'on connaisse la théorie marxiste. Pour rendre ce fait sensible aux non spécialistes, on peut d'abord montrer que les classiques nous ont donné infiniment moins de textes de philosophie que de textes de théorie économique, politique, historique, etc. Marx en est l'exemple le plus frappant : en philosophie il n'a rien laissé qui soit, même de très loin, comparable au *Capital*. Mais il ne s'agit pas seulement de la quantité des textes, il s'agit de leur contenu qualitatif.

Or, on peut parfaitement montrer en quoi réside la différence qualitative qui distingue les textes dont nous disposons dans le matérialisme dialectique, des textes dont nous

disposons dans le matérialisme historique : cette différence est une différence d'*élaboration théorique*, très précisément une différence dans la précision et la rigueur conceptuelles, dans la systématicité théorique, bref dans ce que Marx appelle les « formes » abstraites (ou conceptuelles) et « l'ordre d'exposition ». *Le Capital* est d'une précision, d'une rigueur conceptuelle, et d'une systématicité théorique exceptionnelles.

Les textes philosophiques dont nous disposons sont très loin de posséder ces qualités, et d'ailleurs il n'y prétendent nullement. Engels nous prévient, dans sa préface, que l'*Antidühring* est un « ouvrage de polémique » : il n'est donc pas une exposition systématique rigoureuse de la philosophie marxiste. La même remarque vaut pour *Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme* de Lénine. Ce sont des livres de combat idéologique et théorique, et non des expositions rigoureuses et systématiques du matérialisme dialectique, comparables au *Capital*. En dernière instance le retard de la philosophie marxiste sur le matérialisme historique est donc un retard dans la précision et la rigueur conceptuelles et dans la systématicité théorique.

On peut d'abord expliquer ce retard par de multiples raisons *historiques*. Engels dit lui-même que Marx et lui n'ont pas « eu le temps » de développer la philosophie autant que le reste. Et il est vrai que du point de vue pratique le « maillon décisif » pendant longtemps fut représenté par le matérialisme historique, qu'il y avait urgence en ce domaine, en fonction des urgences de la lutte de classes[b]. Justement, si la plupart des textes de philosophie que nous ont laissés les classiques sont des textes de lutte idéologique, c'est qu'il fallait répondre aux agressions de l'adversaire, « les suivre sur leur terrain[c] » et souvent les combattre avec leurs propres armes, simplement *retournées* contre eux. D'où le caractère relativement improvisé et en tous cas limité de l'argumentation et des concepts utilisés, et leur différence de rigueur, quand on les compare aux concepts du *Capital*.

On peut invoquer encore beaucoup d'autres raisons historiques, l'évolutionnisme et l'empirisme de certains théoriciens et dirigeants de la IIe Internationale puis, dans les années 20, l'historicisme des théoriciens « gauchistes », ensuite le pragmatisme et le dogmatisme de la période du « culte de la personnalité ». Évolutionnisme, empirisme, historicisme, pragmatisme et dogmatisme sont des tendances idéologiques qui non seulement s'opposent au développement, mais peuvent aussi s'opposer à l'*existence* même de la philosophie marxiste à la fois par leurs effets théoriques, et aussi par leurs effets pratiques.

Il suffit d'examiner avec un peu de soin ces raisons dites historiques pour découvrir qu'elles sont en réalité non seulement historiques, mais aussi *théoriques*.

Par exemple, les idéologies qu'Engels et Lénine ont dû combattre sur le terrain de la philosophie (idéalisme humaniste de Dühring, empiriocriticisme[2] et subjectivisme historiciste des adversaires de Lénine, etc.) étaient bien des obstacles historiques au

[b] Sur ce point cf. Engels : Lettre à J. Bloch (21-IX-1890), É[ditions] s[ociales], *Études philosophiques*, pp. 128–130 et Lénine : *Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme*, É[ditions] s[ociales], pp. 219, 303.
[c] C'est l'expression d'Engels dans l'*Antidühring*, et de Lénine dans *Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme*.

développement de la philosophie marxiste, mais elles étaient aussi, en même temps, des obstacles théoriques, des interprétations idéologiques révisionnistes du marxisme que la philosophie marxiste devait combattre, c'est-à-dire réfuter théoriquement, pour pouvoir elle-même exister et se développer. De même, l'évolutionnisme, l'empirisme, l'historicisme, le pragmatisme et le dogmatisme ultérieurs n'ont été des obstacles historiques et politiques au développement de la philosophie marxiste que dans la mesure où ils furent en même temps des obstacles théoriques.

Il ne suffit donc pas d'invoquer de simples faits historiques pour expliquer le retard de la philosophie marxiste sur le matérialisme historique. Il faut aussi invoquer, en même temps, des raisons d'ordre *théorique*, qui sont, comme on vient de le voir, en rapport avec la lutte inévitable que la philosophie marxiste a dû mener contre les différentes formes de l'idéologie philosophique bourgeoise, pour conquérir non seulement son droit au développement, mais tout simplement son droit[3] à l'existence. C'est dans cette lutte contre l'idéologie philosophique bourgeoise, pour l'existence et le développement de la philosophie marxiste, que réside l'unité des raisons historiques et théoriques qu'on peut invoquer, donc les raisons du retard de la philosophie marxiste sur le matérialisme historique.

Si cette thèse est juste, nous devons aller encore beaucoup plus loin. Ce n'est pas simplement par « manque de temps » que Marx et Engels n'ont pu porter la philosophie marxiste au niveau théorique du *Capital*. Ce n'est pas par hasard qu'Engels envisagea avec un grand retard la bataille philosophique contre Dühring, qui sévissait dans le parti socialiste depuis une dizaine d'années. Ce n'est pas un hasard si Engels a seulement réagi à l'attaque de l'adversaire qui l'avait devancé, sur le terrain choisi par l'adversaire, celui de la philosophie. D'une certaine manière Marx et Engels ont appris de Dühring quelque chose, dont ils avaient auparavant sous-estimé l'importance : le caractère *vital* de l'existence de la philosophie marxiste pour la science marxiste de l'histoire elle-même.

Il y a donc un retard du matérialisme dialectique sur le matérialisme historique qui remonte beaucoup plus haut que les évènements historiques qu'on vient d'évoquer, et qui, par conséquent, dépasse aussi la personne même de Marx et d'Engels. Ce retard n'est pas seulement l'effet de certains évènements politiques ou idéologiques, ni même l'effet de l'emploi du temps ou des goûts personnels des fondateurs du marxisme : ce retard est, en dernière instance, l'effet d'une loi de l'histoire de la production des connaissances, très précisément de *la loi qui gouverne l'apparition d'une science nouvelle dans son rapport à la philosophie qu'elle exige*.

On peut, en première approximation, formuler cette loi générale de la manière suivante : quand une science radicalement nouvelle est fondée dans un grand « *continent* » encore inexploré par la connaissance scientifique, mais dominé par des formations théoriques de caractère idéologique, la philosophie nouvelle requise par la nouvelle science ne peut naître et se développer *qu'après coup* : elle est donc inévitablement en retard sur la science nouvelle.

Je parle d'une science radicalement nouvelle fondée dans un nouveau « continent » jusque-là scientifiquement inexploré : par exemple la Géométrie fondée par les Grecs (Thalès, etc.), la Physique fondée par Galilée, ou l'Histoire fondée par Marx. Dans ces trois exemples, les nouvelles sciences ouvrent à la connaissance un nouveau « continent » de la réalité, un continent indépendant des autres continents déjà explorés. Une fois ce nouveau « continent » ouvert par la nouvelle science, d'autres sciences peuvent alors y apparaître les unes après les autres : elles explorent des « régions » de ce « continent », elles n'ouvrent pas de nouveau « continent ». Par exemple la chimie expérimentale fondée par Lavoisier est bien une nouvelle science, mais elle n'ouvre pas de nouveau « continent », elle occupe seulement une « région » jusque-là inexplorée par la connaissance scientifique à l'intérieur du « continent » de la nature physique ouvert par la découverte de Galilée. Dans le cas de ces *sciences régionales*, la loi du retard de la philosophie sur la science nouvelle ne joue pas, si la philosophie dont a besoin la nouvelle science régionale a déjà été pour l'essentiel produite depuis la fondation de la science qui ouvrait le nouveau « continent ».

L'histoire empirique des théories vérifie cette loi.

La philosophie requise par l'ouverture du « continent » des Mathématiques par les Grecs, c'est-à-dire la première philosophie au sens strict de l'histoire humaine, est venue *après coup* : elle a commencé avec Platon, puis s'est développée avec Aristote, Épicure, les Stoïciens, etc. La philosophie requise par l'ouverture galiléenne du « continent » de la nature physique est venue *après coup*, elle a commencé avec Descartes, puis s'est développée avec Leibniz, Malebranche, les philosophes du XVIIIe siècle et Kant, etc. En revanche la fondation de la chimie par Lavoisier n'a provoqué la naissance d'aucune philosophie vraiment nouvelle : dans ses principes cette philosophie existait déjà avant la découverte de Lavoisier.

La découverte scientifique de Marx et Engels a été elle aussi soumise à la même loi que les découvertes de Thalès et de Galilée : comme elle ouvrait un nouveau « continent » à la connaissance, la philosophie qu'elle portait en elle et qu'elle exigeait est venue *après coup*, donc en retard sur la science nouvelle.

On peut vérifier empiriquement ce retard[4] dans la séquence historique des œuvres même de Marx. C'est dans *L'Idéologie allemande* qu'apparaît la première formulation, bien qu'encore très équivoque, des principes théoriques de la science de l'histoire. Or, dans *L'Idéologie allemande* Marx déclare en propres termes qu'il faut supprimer la philosophie, non pas pour la « réaliser » comme il le disait dans ses œuvres philosophiques antérieures, mais pour la supprimer purement et simplement pour « se mettre à l'étude des choses positives ». Cela ne signifie nullement qu'il n'y ait pas de philosophie à l'œuvre dans *L'Idéologie allemande*, mais justement la philosophie qu'on y trouve est un empirisme positiviste dialectique, doublé d'une philosophie historiciste du sujet (les individus y sont pensés comme les « sujets » de l'histoire), qui n'a rien à voir avec le matérialisme dialectique ultérieur, et qui disparaîtra complètement dans la suite. En revanche, cela veut dire que le

matérialisme dialectique est absent de *L'Idéologie allemande* : cette absence est consacrée par la thèse empiriste-positiviste de la suppression de la philosophie. Le *retard* du matérialisme dialectique sur le matérialisme historique se manifeste donc dans *L'Idéologie allemande* sous la forme de l'absence du matérialisme dialectique. Mais en même temps cette absence est une présence : la présence de l'idéologie philosophique empiriste-idéaliste encore à l'œuvre dans *L'Idéologie allemande*.

Nous pouvons tirer de cette « absence » et de cette « présence » une conclusion importante : la place de la philosophie n'est jamais *vide*. Si cette place n'est pas occupée par la philosophie nouvelle requise par la science nouvelle, elle est occupée par une philosophie antérieure, étrangère à la fondation de la science nouvelle et, cette fois, beaucoup plus qu'en retard sur elle : en contradiction avec elle. Cette contradiction ne sera résolue que lorsque la philosophie nouvelle commencera d'exister, puis se développera et se renforcera.

Et c'est bien ce que nous pouvons observer dans l'œuvre de Marx. Peu à peu la philosophie idéaliste encore à l'œuvre dans *L'Idéologie allemande* cède la place, à travers les progrès conceptuels de la science nouvelle[d], à une philosophie nouvelle. Mais cette philosophie nouvelle conserve longtemps encore, nécessairement, un certain retard sur l'état théorique de la science nouvelle, non seulement un retard quantitatif, mais un retard qualitatif : ses concepts n'ont pas la précision, la rigueur, et la systématicité des concepts de la science nouvelle.

Ce retard se manifeste par exemple dans l'écart théorique objectif qui subsiste entre 1) la philosophie telle quelle est explicitement reconnue et définie dans *Le Capital*, et 2) la même philosophie telle qu'elle est pratiquée, mise en œuvre par Marx dans les analyses scientifiques du *Capital*, à l'occasion du mode de production capitaliste.

J'ai pu montrer par exemple cet écart entre la formulation et la réalité de la philosophie dans *Le Capital*, c'est-à-dire montrer le retard de la formulation théorique de la philosophie sur la pratique philosophique de Marx dans *Le Capital* à propos de la fameuse formule du « *renversement* » de Hegel. Cette formule est de très grande importance, puisqu'en définissant le rapport de Marx à Hegel comme un rapport de « renversement », elle nous propose ipso facto une définition de la philosophie marxiste. Or, cette formule du « renversement » n'est pas le *concept*, mais la *métaphore* de la solution du problème qu'elle pose. Le « renversement » est bien un concept dans la philosophie de Feuerbach, à qui Marx l'emprunte, c'est le concept du rapport effectif existant entre la philosophie de Feuerbach et la philosophie de Hegel. Mais ce n'est pas le concept du rapport existant entre la philosophie de Marx et la philosophie de Hegel, c'est seulement une métaphore, indiquant seulement qu'entre Hegel et Marx est survenue une révolution théorique. Pour connaître la nature de cette révolution, il faut comparer de façon critique la métaphore du « *renversement* » à la réalité effective de la révolution accomplie par Marx

[d] *Le Manifeste*, *Misère de la philosophie*, *Salaires, prix et profits*, *Contribution à la critique de l'Économie Politique*, *Le Capital*.

dans son œuvre scientifique. On découvre alors que cette révolution ne consiste pas dans un « renversement », mais dans le *remplacement* d'une problématique idéologique par une nouvelle problématique scientifique[e].

Cette conclusion peut nous permettre d'aller encore plus loin, et de poser la question : Quelles raisons peuvent expliquer la loi générale du retard de la philosophie sur la science, dans le cas d'une science ouvrant à la connaissance un « continent » nouveau ? Nous sommes là devant un problème que nous ne sommes pas encore en état de résoudre, ni peut-être même de poser, s'il est vrai qu'il existe une différence capitale entre énoncer l'existence d'une difficulté (c'est notre cas), et poser celle difficulté sous la forme (scientifique) d'un problème. Tentons cependant d'avancer une explication provisoire.

On peut dire que le retard de la philosophie sur la science, dans le type d'exemple que nous considérons, est un « cas particulier » du « retard » de la théorie sur la pratique – en précisant bien que la pratique en question est une pratique théorique, puisqu'il s'agit d'une science. Le retard de la philosophie sur la science serait ainsi un exemple d'un principe fondamental du matérialisme : le primat de la pratique. C'est incontestablement dans cette direction qu'il faut chercher. Mais un principe général ne fournit de connaissance que s'il est spécifié dans les formes requises par son objet singulier. Comment spécifier ce principe général ? Je me contenterai de mettre en évidence un seul aspect des conditions spécifiques de l'efficacité de ce principe.

Lorsqu'une science nouvelle se constitue, ouvrant à la connaissance un « continent » nouveau, il se produit une véritable révolution théorique dans le domaine de son objet. La science nouvelle aborde un « *continent* », c'est-à-dire un objet *absolument nouveau*. Pourtant ce domaine est déjà occupé par des théories idéologiques, qui parlent de cet objet (dans notre cas les « philosophies de l'histoire » antérieures à Marx), mais tiennent sur lui un discours nécessairement et massivement faussé.

La révolution théorique qui intervient dans ce « continent » consiste à rejeter ces théories idéologiques, et à les remplacer par une théorie scientifique. Mais puisqu'elle n'explore pas une région d'un continent déjà connu dans ses grands principes, puisqu'au contraire elle « ouvre » un « continent » nouveau, comment cette nouvelle théorie scientifique peut-elle se constituer ?

Elle ne peut tirer ses concepts théoriques des *idéologies* qui occupent ce « continent », puisqu'elles sont des représentations profondément faussées de la réalité. Elle ne peut non plus simplement « appliquer » à ce nouveau « continent » des concepts théoriques valables pour d'autres « continents », puisque ce « continent » est tout à fait nouveau. Elle ne peut pas enfin extraire directement, immédiatement ses concepts théoriques et leur système de la réalité empirique de son nouvel objet : c'est là une conception empiriste idéologique et donc faussée de la pratique et de l'histoire des sciences.

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[e] Cf. L[ouis] Althusser, *Pour Marx*, F[rançois] Maspero, Paris, [1965] pp. 87*sq.* ; L. Althusser, [Étienne] Balibar, [Roger] Establet, [Pierre] Macherey, [Jacques] Rancière, *Lire le Capital*, F[rançois] Maspero, Paris, 1965, Tome II, pp. 109*sq.*

La science nouvelle résout cette contradiction réelle de la manière suivante : elle *importe* dans son domaine un certain nombre d'éléments théoriques (concepts, catégories, méthodes, etc.) qu'elle emprunte au dehors, à des disciplines scientifiques ou philosophiques existantes. Elle fait travailler ces éléments théoriques ou philosophiques existants[5]. Elle fait travailler ces éléments théoriques sur la réalité de son nouvel objet, et dans ce travail, elle *rectifie* aussi ces éléments théoriques importés, pour les adapter à la réalité de leur nouveau « continent ».

Cette importation est indispensable, mais sa nécessité coûte cher.

Elle se paie d'abord par un écart inévitable entre les concepts importés et leur objet dans le domaine de la science nouvelle. Cet écart se rectifie et se réduit dans la pratique de la science, au cours de son développement : les concepts importés et leur système sont progressivement rectifiés.

Mais la rectification de cet écart dans la science provoque tôt ou tard des contre-courants philosophiques. Quand il s'agit d'une science qui ouvre effectivement un « continent » nouveau, il arrive un moment où la nouveauté radicale de cet objet finit par mettre en cause, non plus les *concepts scientifiques* importés, mais les grandes *catégories philosophiques* sous lesquelles ces concepts étaient jusque-là pensés. Prenons un exemple classique. La science galiléenne n'a pas seulement emprunté et rectifié des concepts importés, pour penser les lois du mouvement physique : un moment est venu où elle a mis en cause les catégories philosophiques existantes, sous lesquelles ces concepts étaient jusque-là pensés, par exemple le concept de *causalité*. C'est le moment de Descartes, c'est alors que se produit, après la révolution scientifique, une révolution philosophique. Elle porte sur des catégories philosophiques de base, ou plus précisément sur le système, ou sur un segment du système des catégories philosophiques existantes, qu'elle remplace par de nouvelles catégories.

Or, l'expérience montre que, outre le temps qu'il faut à la science pour rectifier ses concepts scientifiques importés, il faut aussi du temps, d'abord pour reconnaître le besoin de nouvelles catégories philosophiques, ensuite pour se trouver en état de les produire. Il va en effet de cette révolution philosophique comme de toute révolution ; elle ne se déclenche pas sur un simple décret, dès qu'on en ressent le besoin. Il faut encore en avoir les moyens. Ces moyens ne sont pas donnés n'importe quand. Dans l'histoire des sciences et de la philosophie, comme aussi dans l'histoire des sociétés humaines, il faut parfois attendre très longtemps la conjoncture favorable, qui offrira les moyens théoriques propres à résoudre un problème depuis longtemps en suspens. Quand nous disons qu'il faut attendre ces moyens, cela veut dire : la science en question, ou la philosophie ne peuvent pas les produire toutes seules, il leur faut recevoir un secours du dehors, il leur faut importer des éléments théoriques nouveaux pour résoudre leurs problèmes critiques. Mais ces éléments théoriques ne sont pas fournis sur simple commande ; il faut attendre qu'ils soient produits par le développement propre d'autres disciplines.

Cela vaut pour *les sciences*. Il leur arrive de piétiner très longtemps devant un problème

insoluble : puis les progrès d'une autre science, ou de la philosophie, fournissent tout d'un coup les moyens théoriques qui manquaient. Nous savons que cette loi a également joué dans la fondation de la science marxiste de l'histoire : il a fallu attendre la rencontre de trois disciplines différentes (économie politique anglaise, philosophie allemande, socialisme utopique français) pour assister à sa naissance.

Cette loi vaut encore plus pour la *philosophie nouvelle* dont une science nouvelle ressent le besoin dans sa propre pratique. Le besoin ne suffit pas, il faut les moyens théoriques indispensables pour produire de nouvelles catégories philosophiques. Pendant un certain temps ces moyens peuvent ne pas exister. Il faut alors attendre la conjoncture théorique favorable (progrès dans telle autre science, etc.) qui les fournira. Tant qu'une conjonction favorable ne s'est pas réalisée, la révolution philosophique, exigée objectivement par le développement de la nouvelle science, et la rectification de ses concepts, reste alors en suspens, et en attente : la philosophie retarde sur la science.

Par-delà toutes les difficultés historiques et les luttes idéologiques, c'est le cas du marxisme. À maints indices, on reconnaît dans l'œuvre la plus systématique et la plus rigoureuse du marxisme, *Le Capital*, le besoin pressant de nouvelles catégories philosophiques, adéquates à la pratique théorique de ses analyses scientifiques. En même temps que ce besoin, qui tente de « frayer sa voie » de toutes parts, nous constatons, dans *Le Capital*, l'existence de limites théoriques objectives que ce besoin ne peut, dans l'état de ses moyens, franchir.

On peut montrer par exemple que la science marxiste exige une nouvelle catégorie de la *causalité*, et une nouvelle catégorie de la *dialectique*, et qu'elle exige en même temps une révolution dans le vieil univers des catégories philosophiques de sujet/objet, essence/phénomène, intérieur/extérieur, etc. Mais en même temps, on constate que ce besoin se heurte dans *Le Capital* à des limites théoriques insurmontables : le manque de moyens propres à produire ces catégories philosophiques nouvelles.

C'est la raison profonde pour laquelle, tout en prenant les plus grandes distances possibles à l'égard de Hegel, Marx est, au sens littéral, obligé de se référer à des catégories hégéliennes. C'est pourquoi la métaphore du « renversement » est tellement importante. Ce n'est pas un lapsus, ou une inattention de Marx, une simple faiblesse de langage. C'est le symptôme rigoureux de la situation philosophique contradictoire, et alors nécessairement dépourvue de solution, dans laquelle il se trouvait. Marx ne pouvait penser sa libération totale à l'égard de Hegel qu'en fonction de la philosophie de Hegel. C'est pourquoi il se débarrasse de Hegel seulement par une *métaphore* [f].

On voit aussitôt que ce retard de la philosophie sur la science provoque des effets théoriques et idéologiques qui peuvent être graves, car ce sont des effets de déformation. Il est clair aujourd'hui que toute une série de *déformations* de la théorie marxiste ont reposé et reposent sur cette métaphore du « renversement » de Hegel par Marx, c'est-à-dire sur une idée fausse du rapport entre Marx et Hegel, la déformation « *évolutionniste* » de la II[e]

[f] Cf. *Pour Marx* et *Lire le Capital*, passages cités.

Internationale par exemple, la déformation « *volontariste* » des théoriciens et mouvements gauchistes des années 20, etc. Je ne prétends pas évidemment que la nature et le destin de la II[e] Internationale, ou du gauchisme des années 20, s'expliquent uniquement par des déviations théoriques produites en dernière instance par l'inadéquation de la formule du « renversement ». Ce sont les rapports de classe et les formes de la lutte des classes qui ont été déterminants en dernière instance. Mais justement, puisqu'il s'agit aussi des formes de la lutte des classes, elles dépendaient en très grande partie des organisations social-démocrates puis communistes, de leur idéologie, de leurs méthodes d'organisation et d'action, de leur ligne politique, donc de leur interprétation de la théorie marxiste.

On peut donc dire que pour une part importante, qui dépend de la seule théorie, les déformations évolutionnistes (IIe Internationale) ou volontaristes (années 20) de la théorie marxiste, reposaient sur une conception erronée du rapport de Marx à Hegel[6], conception qui masquait la spécificité révolutionnaire de la théorie marxiste dans la philosophie. Je me limite à ces deux exemples anciens et connus, mais on pourrait en citer un grand nombre d'autres, y compris actuels, pour montrer en quoi et pourquoi le retard de la philosophie sur la science marxiste peut produire des effets de déformation, non seulement théoriques, mais aussi idéologiques, et finalement politiques.

Encore un mot, en ce qui nous concerne. Si, en dernière instance, le retard de la philosophie marxiste sur le matérialisme historique tient bien aux raisons qu'on vient d'indiquer, il s'ensuit deux conséquences.

Première conséquence

Le retard de la philosophie sur la science n'est pas une fatalité. C'est la caractéristique de la première phase d'une révolution scientifique nouvelle. Cette phase peut être plus ou moins longue, mais elle peut être, le moment venu, dépassée. Le retard, inévitable aux commencements, peut donc être comblé dans une phase *ultérieure*. Aujourd'hui nous nous trouvons justement dans cette phase ultérieure, et c'est notre tâche propre de combler ce retard. La loi de l'histoire des théories scientifiques et philosophiques, qui explique la nécessité du retard, nous donne en même temps l'intelligence des conditions qui permettent de le combler. Cette loi ne nous invite donc pas au fatalisme, à la répétition, et à la résignation, mais au contraire au travail, à la recherche et aux découvertes. Ce travail est indispensable pour rectifier les déformations théoriques, idéologiques et pratiques produites par ce retard.

Seconde conséquence

Nous avons tout lieu de croire que les nouveaux moyens dont nous disposons actuellement sont propres à permettre ce travail théorique capital, et urgent.

Je parle d'abord des effets de la nouvelle *conjoncture politique et idéologique*. Non seulement les problèmes posés par cette conjoncture peuvent stimuler la recherche théorique, mais c'est *cette conjoncture elle-même* qui nous permet de poser publiquement, et nettement, le

problème du retard de la philosophie marxiste.

Je parle aussi de la *conjoncture théorique*[7] actuelle. Sous nos yeux, en effet, est en train de se produire une *conjonction* théorique entre plusieurs disciplines extérieures au marxisme, qui mettent en cause, de leur côté, et à leur manière, sous leur angle propre, des problèmes philosophiques incontestablement apparentés aux problèmes philosophiques nouveaux posés par la science marxiste.

Parmi ces disciplines, je mentionne tout particulièrement 1) les débuts d'une véritable histoire des sciences, d'une véritable épistémologie historique, 2) les débuts d'une réflexion critique et théorique sur l'œuvre de Freud, et 3) la linguistique moderne issue de F. de Saussure.

Pour ne prendre qu'un seul exemple : chacune de son côté, et à sa façon, ces disciplines scientifiques posent, elles aussi, le problème de la définition d'une nouvelle catégorie de la *causalité*. Elles le posent dans des termes tels que la conjonction de leur problème avec le problème philosophique marxiste de la causalité peut nous faire faire des pas décisifs en philosophie.

Je ne pense pas me tromper en annonçant que le retard du matérialisme dialectique sur le matérialisme historique est un phénomène que nous allons être en mesure de maîtriser dans les années qui viennent. On peut d'ores et déjà prévoir que ce retard théorique sera bientôt, pour l'essentiel, comblé.

Mais pour le combler, il nous faut sérieusement travailler en philosophie : bien identifier le lieu des problèmes, bien poser ces problèmes, en utilisant judicieusement les moyens théoriques existants à la fois dans les œuvres du marxisme, et dans certaines œuvres importantes, accomplies par des savants ou pionniers non-marxistes, – et parvenir à leur solution.

C'est pour toutes ces raisons que j'ai pu dire que la philosophie marxiste était le lieu d'un *problème*. Non seulement à cause du fait de son retard, mais parce que nous devons traiter ce retard comme un problème à résoudre, justement pour combler ce retard. Finalement traiter la philosophie marxiste aujourd'hui comme un problème, c'est la traiter en marxistes comme une vraie discipline scientifique : c'est tenir compte de sa conjoncture, tenir compte de la loi de développement inégal qui explique son retard, justement pour pouvoir combler ce retard. C'est également identifier avec précision tous les effets de déformation produits par ce retard dans la théorie, l'idéologie et la pratique. C'est donc comprendre la grande leçon que nous ont léguée Marx, Engels et Lénine, et poursuivre leur œuvre, non pas en nous contentant de répéter mécaniquement tout ce qu'ils nous ont donné, mais en reprenant pour le développer tout ce qui est théoriquement avancé, et en rectifiant ce qui est théoriquement encore en retard, pour combler ce retard et corriger les déformations produites par ce retard.

Si la philosophie marxiste est le lieu d'un problème, c'est en ce sens.

IV
LES DEUX TÂCHES STRATÉGIQUES DE LA PHILOSOPHIE MARXISTE

Si la philosophie marxiste est non seulement un problème, mais *le problème N° 1*, c'est avant tout à cause de la conjoncture actuelle, non seulement de la conjoncture politique et idéologique, mais aussi de la conjoncture théorique.

Voici la thèse que je vais exposer.

Si la philosophie marxiste doit, *de toute urgence*, combler son retard théorique, c'est que son retard l'empêche d'intervenir, ou freine son intervention dans des domaines importants de la conjoncture idéologique et théorique, où son intervention est pourtant urgente et décisive. La philosophie marxiste doit donc combler son retard pour être à la hauteur de ses tâches historiques dans trois domaines :

1) Elle doit d'abord lutter contre toutes les *déformations* idéologiques de la théorie marxiste, c'est-à-dire en dernier ressort contre les effets de l'idéologie bourgeoise et petite-bourgeoise sur l'interprétation de la théorie marxiste. La lutte contre ces déformations est aujourd'hui une tâche importante et urgente.

2) Elle doit contribuer au progrès des sciences relevant du *matérialisme historique*. Le développement du matérialisme historique dépend aujourd'hui de la solution de problèmes théoriques cruciaux, scientifiques et philosophiques, qui ne peuvent être posés et résolus qu'avec l'aide, et par l'intervention, du matérialisme dialectique.

3) Elle doit critiquer radicalement et remettre en ordre les disciplines qui se sont développées sous le nom de « Sciences humaines » ou de « Sciences sociales ». Dans leur état présent la plupart de ces disciplines sont aux mains de l'idéologie bourgeoise. Il s'agit de les refondre profondément, et de les asseoir sur leurs seuls principes authentiques : ceux du matérialisme historique et du matérialisme dialectique.

Comme on peut aisément s'en convaincre, la troisième tâche dépend largement de la seconde, puisqu'il s'agit de l'existence du matérialisme historique et de ses conséquences.

Finalement ces trois tâches se réduisent, dans le principe, à deux :

Tâche stratégique N° 1 : défense de la science et de la philosophie marxiste contre l'idéologie bourgeoise.

Tâche stratégique N° 2 : développement du matérialisme historique et des sciences régionales qui en dépendent, par la reconquête et la refonte des disciplines actuellement dominés par l'idéologie bourgeoise.

J'examine maintenant ces deux tâches. Mon analyse sera, de toute évidence, très schématique.

V
TÂCHE STRATÉGIQUE N° 1 : DÉFENSE DE LA THÉORIE MARXISTE CONTRE L'IDÉOLOGIE BOURGEOISE

L'idéologie bourgeoise attaque la théorie marxiste non seulement de l'extérieur, mais aussi *de l'intérieur*, en prenant appui sur les différentes formes du « spontanéisme » de la classe ouvrière, de la petite-bourgeoisie et des intellectuels. Ces formes « spontanées » sont pour l'essentiel *l'idéalisme* moral et juridique petit-bourgeois (l'humanisme quand il est présenté comme constituant le *fondement théorique* du marxisme) ; l'empirisme et le positivisme des savants ; le pragmatisme des praticiens (politiques, techniciens, etc.). Ces formes « spontanées » de l'idéologie interne au mouvement ouvrier font écho aux formes idéologiques bourgeoises extérieures au mouvement ouvrier.

Pour de profondes raisons historiques et théoriques, ces formes idéologiques communes à l'idéologie bourgeoise et au « spontanéisme » du mouvement ouvrier constituent un système dont les éléments sont complémentaires. Le positivisme, l'empirisme et le technicisme vont ainsi très généralement de pair avec l'idéalisme moral. Pour dire l'essentiel, la forme aujourd'hui la plus menaçante pour la théorie marxiste est constituée par le couple « *humanisme/ technicisme* ». Elle apparaît au grand jour dans les pays capitalistes dans la conjonction[8] idéologique dominante de la technocratie et de l'humanisme. Elle se manifeste aussi, à l'intérieur même des partis communistes, en pays capitalistes comme en pays socialistes, par une tendance à interpréter la philosophie marxiste comme un *humanisme théorique*, et par une autre tendance à faire une confiance mécaniste non-critique au développement *des sciences et de la technique*, à sous-estimer le rôle de la politique, de l'idéologie, et de la philosophie.

Pourtant, sur ces questions, il nous faut une fois encore remonter beaucoup plus haut que les phénomènes actuels. On peut en effet en proposer une explication *historique* dans l'actualité du XXe siècle : réaction contre les effets du « culte de la personnalité » (tendance à l'humanisme théorique), ou « développement impétueux des sciences et des techniques[9] » (tendance au technocratisme ou au technicisme). On peut aussi chercher l'origine de ces tentations dans le passé de l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier : le technicisme se rattache en effet à l'économisme mécaniste de la IIe Internationale, l'humanisme théorique à certaines formes du révisionnisme théorique (interprétation morale ou kantienne du marxisme par certains théoriciens de la IIe Internationale). Et on peut expliquer ces formes anciennes elles aussi par l'influence de l'idéologie bourgeoise.

En vérité, il faut en venir également à des raisons *théoriques* qui tiennent à la loi que nous avons énoncée plus haut, qui explique le retard inévitable de la philosophie marxiste sur la science marxiste.

Nous avons vu que la place de la philosophie ne reste jamais vide. La place que n'occupe pas le matérialisme dialectique est donc occupée par une tout autre philosophie, d'abord par une philosophie proprement idéologique, puis par des formes différentes,

dans lesquelles la philosophie nouvelle cherche à exprimer sa spécificité révolutionnaire, mais qui demeurent longtemps soumises aux formes dominantes de la philosophie idéologique bourgeoise. C'est ainsi, nous ne devons pas nous le dissimuler, mais au contraire regarder en face cette réalité, que l'*empirisme* et l'*évolutionnisme* (qui est en quelque sorte la forme vulgaire de l'hégélianisme[10]) ont marqué l'histoire de la philosophie marxiste, surtout sous la IIe Internationale. La philosophie marxiste ne s'en est pas encore vraiment et définitivement libérée. Et les tentatives actuelles qu'elle fait pour s'en libérer risquent de la précipiter dans une autre philosophie idéologique : l'idéalisme représenté par l'*humanisme théorique*.

Ces termes : empirisme, évolutionnisme, humanisme théorique, demandent quelques mots d'explication. Les grands dirigeants marxistes ont toujours lutté contre l'empirisme et le pragmatisme (qui est son effet pratique) : Marx (Introduction de 57, etc.), Engels (*Antidühring*, *Dialectique de la Nature*), Lénine (*Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme*), etc. Ils ont également lutté avec vigueur contre l'interprétation du marxisme comme idéalisme moral : lutte de Marx contre les « vrais socialistes », contre Proudhon, Weitling et Kriege, lutte d'Engels contre le spiritualisme moral de Dühring, lutte de Kautsky contre le Kantisme de Bernstein, de Lénine contre le moralisme des populistes, en France lutte de M. Thorez contre l'humanisme de Léon Blum, etc. La lutte contre l'*évolutionnisme*, en revanche, n'a pas donné lieu à des œuvres philosophiques : elle est restée une lutte pratique d'ordre politique et elle s'est jouée sur des problèmes politiques (conception de la révolution, des formes d'organisation de la lutte des classes, de la ligne politique sur la guerre de 14, sur les problèmes de stratégie et de tactique). Lénine est l'incomparable représentant de cette lutte pratique contre l'évolutionnisme.

On sait en général assez bien, du moins dans le principe, pourquoi l'*empirisme* est une idéologie et donc pourquoi l'interprétation empiriste du marxisme est une déformation théorique du marxisme. L'empirisme, comme théorie de la connaissance, néglige ou sous-estime le rôle des éléments proprement théoriques qui interviennent dans toute connaissance, même dans une connaissance « empirique[g] ». L'empirisme ne tient pas compte de la spécificité et de la nature de la pratique productrice de connaissances : la pratique théorique. Il réduit la pratique théorique à d'autres formes de pratique. Il parle de la pratique en général, sans distinguer les niveaux et les différences spécifiques existants entre les différentes pratiques : pratique économique, pratique politique, pratique idéologique, pratique scientifique et philosophique. C'est pourquoi il se fait à la fois une idée fausse de la théorie, et une idée fausse de la pratique : sa conséquence pratique c'est le practicisme ou le pragmatisme, si nettement condamnés par Lénine.

Une des formes les plus dangereuses de l'empirisme est aujourd'hui *l'historicisme*, c'est-à-dire l'idée que l'on peut connaître la nature de l'histoire directement, immédiatement, sans produire les concepts théoriques indispensables à sa connaissance : une

[g] Sur ce point : *Lire le Capital*, II, pp. 41–47 et « Sur le travail théorique. [Difficultés et ressources] », *La Pensée*, n° 132 [avril 1967, pp. 3–22].

interprétation historiciste du marxisme (sensible par exemple dans certains textes de Gramsci) consiste à dire que Marx a seulement « historicisé » les résultats de l'économie politique classique, a seulement introduit le « devenir » ou la « dialectique » dans les catégories philosophiques anciennes, etc. L'historicisme néglige ce fait théorique fondamental : la découverte par Marx de concepts théoriques absolument nouveaux pour penser la réalité de ce que nous appelons et de ce que nous vivons sous le terme d'histoire.

L'*humanisme théorique*, ou l'interprétation idéaliste-morale des fondements théoriques de la doctrine marxiste, mérite une définition précise. Cette[11] interprétation consiste à substituer aux catégories philosophiques et aux concepts scientifiques servant[12] effectivement de fondement théorique au marxisme, des notions *idéologiques*. La *science* marxiste de l'histoire a pour fondement théorique le système des concepts de mode de production, d'infrastructure (forces productives et rapports de production), de superstructures (juridico-politique et idéologique), de classe sociale, de lutte de classe, etc. L'humanisme théorique substitue à ces concepts scientifiques, qui constituent le fondement théorique de la science de l'histoire, des notions idéologiques : l'homme, l'aliénation, la désaliénation de l'homme, la réappropriation par l'homme de son essence générique, « l'homme total[13] », etc. Dans la *philosophie* marxiste, les concepts théoriques de base sont les concepts de matérialisme et de dialectique, la distinction entre l'être et la pensée, entre l'objet réel et l'objet de pensée, le primat de la pratique, etc., etc. L'humanisme théorique substitue à ces concepts les notions idéologiques de sujet et objet, de conscience, d'activité, d'acte, de création, etc.

Bien entendu, l'humanisme théorique retrouve, *après* cette substitution, des concepts classiques du marxisme ; mais comme il les interprète en fonction de ces notions idéologiques qui tiennent lieu de fondement théorique, le sens de ces concepts en est faussé. Par exemple le concept de « rapports sociaux » (rapports de production, rapports politiques, rapports idéologiques) est réduit, par l'humanisme théorique, au sens des « rapports humains » ou « rapports subjectifs ». Par exemple le concept de « pratique » est assimilé à la notion d'activité, ou d'acte d'un sujet, etc. L'humanisme théorique déforme ainsi, plus ou moins, selon les cas, mais toujours, les concepts de la théorie marxiste.

Même lorsque cette interprétation prend ses distances par rapport à l'humanisme « bourgeois », même lorsqu'elle déclare[14] que l'essence de l'homme a été conçue par Marx d'une manière nouvelle (pratique, sociale et historique), elle reste prisonnière de l'idéologie morale. Le concept d'essence humaine, d'homme, a été dénoncé dès *L'Idéologie allemande*, en termes sans aucune équivoque, comme idéologique et religieux. Ce concept est totalement absent du système théorique de base du matérialisme historique et du matérialisme dialectique. La science de l'histoire et la philosophie marxiste sont fondées sur de tout autres concepts, qui n'ont rien à voir avec le concept idéologique d'homme.

Cela ne veut pas dire que les communistes n'aient pas d'« idéal », politique et moral. En luttant pour l'instauration du mode de production socialiste, les communistes luttent pour l'abolition de l'exploitation de la classe ouvrière et de ses effets. Ils luttent à long

terme pour l'instauration du mode de production communiste, c'est-à-dire pour la suppression de toutes les classes, et pour la « libération de tous les hommes ». Leur idéal est inséparable de leur lutte ; mais leur lutte, leur idéal est fondé dans la nécessité historique, nécessité de la révolution, nécessité de l'instauration du mode de production socialiste, etc. Or, cette nécessité de l'histoire n'est pas *intelligible* en fonction des notions qui expriment l'idéal politique et moral des communistes. Cela signifie très précisément que les notions de « libération de tous les hommes », de « liberté » et « d'homme » sont des notions idéologiques, mais ne sont pas les concepts théoriques de base de la théorie marxiste (science et philosophie).

Refuser une interprétation du marxisme comme humanisme théorique ne veut pas dire non plus que les problèmes de « l'individualité » ou de la « subjectivité » ne relèvent pas de la théorie marxiste, ou sont des problèmes imaginaires. Dans la mesure où ils sont des problèmes relevant de la théorie marxiste, ils sont soumis aux concepts (scientifiques) et aux catégories (philosophiques) de la théorie marxiste. Ce sont eux qui sont soumis à la théorie marxiste : ce n'est pas la théorie marxiste qui leur est soumise. Cela signifie simplement que les concepts d'individualité, ou de subjectivité, personne, etc., et à plus forte raison les notions d'homme, de sujet moral, de « travail créateur », de création, de liberté, de liberté créatrice[15], « création de l'homme par l'homme », etc., ne sont à aucun titre les concepts théoriques sur lesquels repose la théorie marxiste. Quand on les présente comme la base théorique du marxisme, on retombe inévitablement dans une idéologie morale ou religieuse petite-bourgeoise, antérieure et étrangère au marxisme : dans l'idéologie même avec laquelle Marx a dû rompre, à partir du « règlement de comptes » de *L'Idéologie allemande*, pour fonder sa théorie.

L'interprétation *évolutionniste* du marxisme est moins connue : elle n'en est pas moins grave[16]. Elle consiste au fond à appliquer à Marx les schémas finalistes, téléologiques, soit de la dialectique hégélienne, soit de la biologie darwinienne, ou de la « philosophie » spencérienne, etc. On en trouve un exemple dans l'interprétation de la philosophie marxiste par Plekhanov, et dans l'interprétation mécaniste, économiste et fataliste du matérialisme historique par certains théoriciens et dirigeants de la IIe Internationale. L'évolutionnisme « marxiste » considère par exemple qu'il y a un ordre nécessaire et immuable de succession des modes de production : on en trouve la trace dans la célèbre énumération de Staline, qui figure dans la brochure *Matérialisme dialectique et matérialisme historique*. L'évolutionnisme considère, comme l'idéalisme hégélien et toutes les philosophies de l'histoire (qui sont en cela religieuses) qu'il existe un « sens » de l'histoire, conçu comme une *finalité* gouvernant l'histoire : on en trouve la trace dans des formules qui assimilent pratiquement la nécessité historique à la fatalité, qui parlent de la « victoire *inévitable* » du socialisme, etc.

L'évolutionnisme « marxiste » est incapable de rendre compte théoriquement de la possibilité et de la nécessité de l'action politique des partis communistes, de la possibilité des échecs du mouvement ouvrier, et même de certains de ses succès, lorsqu'ils sont

inattendus et paradoxaux, lorsqu'ils ne se conforment pas à ses schémas mécanistes, à l'ordre immuable des modes de production (par exemple, la révolution cubaine, les possibilités révolutionnaires dans les pays « attardés »). L'évolutionnisme encourage les illusions technicistes et économistes et la passivité politique, il sous-estime systématiquement les possibilités de réaction de l'adversaire, il sous-estime le rôle de la lutte des classes, de la politique, de l'idéologie et de la philosophie dans la lutte des classes. Quand il passe massivement dans la pratique, il aboutit à des catastrophes historiques, dont il ne tire d'ailleurs aucune « leçon » (« la faillite de la IIe Internationale »). La pratique politique de Lénine représente une lutte exemplaire contre l'évolutionnisme « marxiste ». Mais la lutte contre l'évolutionnisme n'a pas encore été menée au grand jour dans la théorie. Or, il est évident que cette lutte dans la théorie ne peut être menée, tant que le problème des rapports théoriques entre Marx et Hegel n'a pas été définitivement éclairci et réglé.

Je disais que ces déformations idéologiques du marxisme s'expliquent aussi pour une raison d'ordre *théorique*. Du point de vue théorique, en effet, ce qui a longtemps exposé l'interprétation du marxisme à l'influence de l'empirisme, de l'évolutionnisme, ou de l'idéalisme « humaniste », à l'intérieur même du mouvement ouvrier, *c'est le caractère sans précédent de la révolution théorique accomplie par Marx.*

Si Marx lui-même s'est heurté à de grandes difficultés théoriques pour définir les catégories *philosophiques* requises par sa découverte *scientifique*, s'il a dû s'appuyer sur les catégories philosophiques existantes, en l'espèce celles de Hegel, il n'est pas étonnant qu'à plus forte raison des militants marxistes, et même d'excellents théoriciens, se soient trouvés dans la même condition, que dis-je, dans une condition encore plus difficile. S'ils ont souvent donné une interprétation du marxisme entachée d'empirisme et d'évolutionnisme, et aujourd'hui d'idéalisme humaniste, c'est *aussi* parce qu'il fallait bien une philosophie à la science marxiste, et que la philosophie marxiste n'avait pas encore la force théorique de régler leur compte aux philosophies idéologiques dominantes, et de s'imposer sur le plan théorique par sa rigueur et sa systématicité.

Aujourd'hui, nous pouvons considérer tous ces effets avec assez de recul pour en comprendre les causes, et en mesurer les conséquences.

Aujourd'hui[17], nous pouvons et devons dire : ce ne sont pas seulement ses adversaires avérés, les idéologues bourgeois[18], qui déclarent à haute voix que la théorie marxiste (science et philosophie)[19] n'a rien apporté de nouveau, ou bien est « dépassée[20] ». Ce sont aussi ses propres partisans lorsqu'ils lisent les textes de Marx, et lorsqu'ils « interprètent » la théorie marxiste à travers les grandes évidences établies, celles des philosophies idéologiques régnantes[21].

Pour ne prendre que trois exemples[22], les marxistes qui lisent, et interprètent spontanément, sans difficultés, scrupules, ni hésitation, la théorie marxiste dans les schémas de l'empirisme[23], de l'évolutionnisme ou de l'« humanisme », ces marxistes *déclarent en fait que Marx n'a rien apporté de nouveau* dans la philosophie[24] et par contrecoup

dans la science[25]. Ces marxistes réduisent la prodigieuse nouveauté philosophique de la pensée de Marx à des formes de pensée existantes, courantes, « évidentes », c'est-à-dire aux formes de l'idéologie philosophique dominante[26]. Pour bien percevoir et bien concevoir la nouveauté révolutionnaire de la philosophie marxiste et de ses conséquences scientifiques, il faut résister lucidement à cette réduction idéologique, combattre l'idéologie philosophique bourgeoise[27] qui la soutient, et énoncer ce qui distingue en propre la pensée de Marx, ce qui en fait une pensée révolutionnaire non seulement dans la pratique politique[28], mais *aussi dans la théorie*.

C'est là que réside la difficulté dernière. Car il n'est pas facile de se détacher des « évidences » d'idéologies théoriques comme l'empirisme[29], l'évolutionnisme ou « l'humanisme », qui dominent depuis 200 ans toute la pensée occidentale. Il n'est pas facile de dire que Marx n'était pas empiriste[30], que Marx n'était pas hégélien (l'hégélianisme est l'évolutionnisme du « riche[31] ») ou évolutionniste, que Marx n'est pas théoriquement « humaniste » ; il n'est pas facile de montrer positivement en quoi Marx, parce qu'il n'est ni hégélien, ni évolutionniste[32], « humaniste », *est tout autre chose*, qu'il faut alors définir. Et quand on essaie de le montrer, il n'est pas facile de le faire comprendre et admettre, car les « résistances » sont extrêmement fortes[33].

La théorie marxiste, parce que *théoriquement révolutionnaire*[34], comporte inévitablement cette difficulté de fond. À moins de céder aux fausses « évidences », aux idéologies théoriques dominantes (que ce soit l'empirisme[35], l'évolutionnisme ou l'humanisme, ou d'autres formes de l'idéalisme), et donc de trahir le plus précieux de la pensée de Marx, à savoir ce qu'elle a de théoriquement révolutionnaire, nous devons affronter cette difficulté, et lutter contre les idéologies qui ne cessent de menacer la pensée marxiste pour l'étouffer, la réduire et la détruire. Ce n'est pas une difficulté imaginaire, c'est une difficulté objective historique, aussi réelle en son genre que les difficultés de la pratique révolutionnaire. Le monde ne change pas facilement de « base », ni la structure de la société, ni le système de la pensée[36].

Nous savons qu'il faut d'abord une révolution pour que la structure de la société « change de base[37] ». Mais après la révolution, il faut encore une lutte extrêmement longue et dure, dans la politique et l'idéologique, pour établir, consolider et faire triompher la nouvelle société. Il en va de même pour le système de la pensée[38]. Après une révolution théorique, il faut encore une lutte extrêmement longue et dure dans le théorique et l'idéologique pour établir, faire reconnaître et triompher la nouvelle pensée, surtout s'il s'agit d'une pensée qui fonde une nouvelle science et une nouvelle philosophie, servant de base à une nouvelle idéologie[h] et une nouvelle pratique politique[39]. Avant que cette

[h] La théorie scientifique du marxisme (science de l'histoire, philosophie) n'est pas une idéologie. Une idéologie est une représentation *faussée* de la réalité : elle est *nécessairement* faussée parce qu'elle est non une représentation objective, mais une représentation *subjective* de la réalité, disons, pour être bref, une représentation sociale (de classe) de la réalité. La science, au contraire, n'existe qu'à la condition de lutter contre toutes les formes de subjectivité, y compris la subjectivité de classe (voir la lutte de Lénine contre l'idéologie « spontanée » du prolétariat) : la science est objective. La science donne une connaissance de la

longue lutte ne l'emporte, la révolution dans la société comme la révolution dans la pensée court un très grand risque : *celui d'être étouffées sous l'ancien monde, et de retomber, directement ou indirectement, sous sa loi* [40].

On comprendra pourquoi, aujourd'hui encore, il faille un véritable effort pour se représenter vraiment, contre les anciennes idéologies qui tendent constamment à la soumettre à leur propre loi, c'est-à-dire à l'étouffer et à la détruire, la révolution théorique que Marx a réalisée dans la science et dans la philosophie.

La défense de la théorie marxiste incombe en dernier ressort à la *philosophie* marxiste. Cette défense est à la fois une lutte idéologique et une lutte théorique contre les tendances idéologiques bourgeoises, à l'extérieur du marxisme et à l'intérieur du marxisme. Pour que cette lutte théorique triomphe, il ne suffit pas de dénoncer et de critiquer les idéologies adverses et les formes idéologiques qui exercent leur influence sur le marxisme. Il faut aussi, et c'est la condition absolue de la victoire théorique, faire de la théorie marxiste une *forteresse inexpugnable*.

Si nous disposons d'une forteresse théorique inexpugnable, c'est-à-dire d'une théorie rigoureuse, exacte, systématique, et en pleine vie, nous possédons une puissante force de démonstration scientifique positive, capable de balayer les arguments et les concepts fallacieux des idéologies en imposant l'évidence de la vérité. Nous pouvons alors sortir et attaquer nos adversaires sur le terrain de notre choix, avec nos propres armes. La *lutte idéologique* est alors l'effet naturel de la force théorique. Nous pouvons alors définir une

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réalité indépendante des « intérêts » subjectifs de classe. L'idéologie au contraire donne une représentation de la réalité qui n'est pas au sens strict une connaissance, parce qu'elle est soumise à des intérêts de classe.

Pourtant, nous avons le droit de dire que le marxisme a « produit une nouvelle idéologie » dans la classe ouvrière, et que cette idéologie, tout en restant idéologique par sa *forme* (elle n'a pas la forme d'une science), devient de plus en plus scientifique par son *contenu*. Nous avons le droit de parler d'une *idéologie* de caractère scientifique, ou, pour être bref, d'une *idéologie scientifique*.

Mais cette nouvelle idéologie est une *transformation* de l'ancienne idéologie de la classe ouvrière. Cette transformation fait passer l'idéologie (morale, politique, philosophique) de la classe ouvrière à un contenu nouveau, de plus en plus scientifique, car de plus en plus pénétré des principes scientifiques du marxisme, ou, du moins, des résultats de la science marxiste, et de la philosophie marxiste.

Cette transformation est possible car la théorie marxiste, qui est objective, donne à la classe ouvrière la connaissance scientifique de ses *intérêts*, et des moyens de les réaliser : c'est son caractère scientifique, objectif, qui permet à la théorie marxiste de « servir » les intérêts de la classe ouvrière, sans être faussée par la représentation subjective de ces intérêts de classe. C'est donc l'objectivité scientifique de la théorie marxiste qui produit ce résultat, *tout à fait nouveau dans l'histoire* : l'apparition d'une idéologie transformée dans son *contenu*, d'une idéologie de plus en plus *scientifique*.

Mais l'idéologie de la classe ouvrière, bien que transformée dans son contenu dans un sens scientifique, n'en reste pas moins une idéologie dans sa *forme* : par exemple l'idéologie morale, l'idéologie politique et philosophique prolétariennes subsistent dans la forme de l'idéologie.

C'est que l'idéologie possède une *forme propre*, qui relève de la fonction sociale de l'idéologie, du fait qu'elle constitue un niveau de la superstructure de toute société. La *forme* de l'idéologie subsiste donc nécessairement comme niveau constitutif de la société ; la forme de l'idéologie reflète précisément cette fonction sociale de l'idéologie qui la distingue de la science. C'est pourquoi, tout en devenant de plus en plus scientifique, l'idéologie prolétarienne, ou l'idéologie d'une société socialiste, ne peuvent jamais se confondre avec la science. C'est pourquoi, si on donne à ces concepts leur sens rigoureux, on ne peut dire que la théorie marxiste comme science est une « *idéologie scientifique* ». La science marxiste repose non sur une « idéologie scientifique », comme on le dit trop souvent, mais, comme toute science, sur une *théorie scientifique*.

stratégie théorique et idéologique, et remporter la victoire sur l'adversaire. Nous ne sommes plus exposés aux initiatives de l'adversaire, obligés de le « suivre sur son terrain », réduits à la seule « polémique ». C'est nous qui possédons l'initiative idéologique parce que nous possédons la force théorique.

Qu'on m'entende bien : le mot « forteresse » est une *image*. Il ne s'agit pas de *s'enfermer* dans une place forte : ce serait du dogmatisme[41]. La force de la philosophie marxiste consiste à résoudre avec rigueur ses problèmes et à donner à ses solutions la force d'une démonstration scientifique, c'est-à-dire irréfutable. Elle consiste donc à rectifier les concepts inadéquats, à préciser les concepts encore flous, et à produire de nouveaux concepts, là où ils manquent, pour explorer et conquérir les domaines qui lui appartiennent de droit. Elle consiste à donner au système de ses concepts une rigueur capable de s'exprimer dans ce que Marx appelle un « ordre d'exposition » comparable à celui du *Capital* : l'ordre irréfutable d'une *démonstration scientifique*.

Pour donner un simple aperçu des problèmes fondamentaux que la philosophie marxiste doit explorer de toute urgence, je citerai : le problème de la spécificité de la philosophie au regard de la science ; le problème de la nature de la théorie ; le problème de la pratique et de la spécificité des différentes pratiques (économique, politique, théorique) ; le problème de la spécificité de la dialectique marxiste dans sa différence d'avec la dialectique hégélienne ; le problème de la conception marxiste de la « causalité » ; le problème de la nature de l'idéologie, etc., etc. II faudrait tout un développement pour montrer en quoi chacun de ces thèmes constitue encore un problème à explorer exigeant la production ou la rectification de concepts théoriques. Je ne puis l'entreprendre ici[i]. Mais on pourra juger de l'importance et de l'urgence de ce travail à partir de l'examen rapide d'un seul problème, le *problème de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique*.

Ce problème est central dans la philosophie et la pratique marxiste. Or nous ne disposons pas, à ma connaissance, de théorie systématique et rigoureuse de cette question. Nous disposons seulement d'une orientation générale, consignée dans la thèse classique de la nécessité de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique, et du primat de la pratique. Nous disposons aussi de quelques éléments théoriques concernant la pratique comme « critère de la vérité ». Nous disposons surtout d'une quantité impressionnante de textes politiques de Lénine et des autres grands dirigeants politiques du mouvement ouvrier résumant et réfléchissant de façon critique une énorme expérience pratique, qui nous offre des exemples de réalisation de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique. Tout cela est d'une richesse considérable, mais ne constitue pas encore la théorie de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique.

Une orientation générale juste ne fait pas une théorie, des éléments isolés non plus, les protocoles d'expérience pratique les plus[42] riches du monde non plus. Il faut *penser* ce qui existe « à l'état pratique » dans l'expérience de la pratique scientifique et dans l'expérience

[i] Cf. *Pour Marx* et *Lire le Capital*, où quelques-uns de ces thèmes sont abordés.

de la pratique politique. Pour cela il faut produire les concepts requis par la réalité et les organiser en un système rigoureux et démonstratif. C'est un énorme travail théorique, pour lequel le travail que Marx a fourni pour produire les nouveaux concepts et le système théorique du *Capital* peut nous servir d'exemple et de moyen. Tant que nous ne serons pas parvenus à traiter ce problème philosophique fondamental avec une rigueur comparable à celle du *Capital*, nous ne disposerons pas, au sens strict, d'une véritable théorie philosophique du problème de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique.

On a vu pourtant, dans les premières pages de cet article, quelle importance la *juste* conception de ce problème revêt non seulement pour la théorie marxiste, mais aussi pour la pratique des Partis révolutionnaires. On peut dire en revanche, qu'une fois élaborée cette théorie, nous posséderons une force théorique décuplée pour lutter contre l'idéologie bourgeoise (tâche stratégique N° 1 de la philosophie marxiste) et pour élaborer de manière rigoureuse et féconde les problèmes théoriques et pratiques qui relèvent du matérialisme historique.

Je me résume. La *tâche stratégique N° 1* de la philosophie marxiste consiste à devenir au sens fort une *théorie véritable*, pour pouvoir lutter victorieusement contre l'idéologie bourgeoise et son influence dans le mouvement ouvrier révolutionnaire. La philosophie marxiste ne peut devenir la « forteresse théorique » inexpugnable qu'elle doit être qu'au prix d'une élaboration théorique approfondie, qui comble le retard que la philosophie a encore sur la science marxiste, et qui lui donne la précision et la rigueur conceptuelles, ainsi que la systématicité théorique qui lui manquent encore. Les philosophes marxistes doivent, de toute urgence, se mettre au travail en se donnant, avant tout autre, ce but précis.

VI
TÂCHE STRATÉGIQUE N° 2 : DÉVELOPPEMENT DU MATÉRIALISME HISTORIQUE

En accomplissant sa tâche N° 1, la philosophie marxiste se donnera les moyens d'aider à l'accomplissement de la *tâche stratégique* N° 2.

Le plus grand nombre des disciplines scientifiques qui relèvent du matérialisme historique ont en effet aujourd'hui le plus grand besoin du secours de la philosophie marxiste : les disciplines qui s'intitulent « Sciences humaines », mais également la science marxiste de l'histoire dans certaines de ses régions.

1. – Le matérialisme historique.

Là encore, je suis obligé d'être schématique, et, pour me faire comprendre, de me contenter de citer rapidement quelques exemples.

Nous disposons, dans *Le Capital*, d'une théorie du mode de production capitaliste –

mais nous n'avons rien qui soit encore comparable, malgré d'importants travaux[j], pour les autres modes de production, soit précapitalistes, soit socialistes – et pour les phases de transition entre ces modes[k].

En ce qui concerne le mode de production capitaliste lui-même, si nous disposons d'un système conceptuel impressionnant pour penser la réalité de son niveau économique (*Le Capital*), nous ne disposons pas de théorie comparable pour penser la réalité de son niveau politique et de son niveau idéologique.

En ce qui concerne le niveau *politique*, nous disposons certes de thèses générales sur l'État et la lutte de classes, et de leur développement[43], dans les analyses concrètes d'ouvrages historiques ou politiques, et également du trésor de l'expérience de la lutte de classe (par exemple, tous les textes et discours de Lénine), etc. Mais nous n'avons pas de théorie, au sens fort, rigoureuse et développée, ni de la nature des classes sociales, ni de l'État, du pouvoir d'État, de l'appareil d'État, de la bureaucratie, ni des différentes formes que revêt l'État capitaliste ou l'État socialiste, ni de la nature des partis politiques, des alliances de classes du « bloc au pouvoir », de la distinction léniniste d'une classe et de ses représentants, etc.

Cette lacune théorique est encore infiniment plus frappante en ce qui concerne la nature des *idéologies* : du rapport entre le niveau idéologique d'une part, et les niveaux économique et politique, d'autre part ; de la différence entre l'idéologie et la science, de la double détermination, sociale et théorique, des idéologies, etc., etc. Si nous disposions au moins d'une théorie du politique (superstructure juridico-politique) et de l'idéologie pour le mode de production capitaliste, nous pourrions en étendre (en les transformant selon leur objet) les concepts aux autres modes de production, et nous disposerions alors d'une théorie du politique et de l'idéologique propres à ces modes. Mais nous en sommes bien loin, et cette lacune n'a pas que des effets théoriques, elle a aussi des conséquences politiques.

Les historiens, qui travaillent sur le passé (formations sociales esclavagistes, féodales, etc.), ou les ethnographes et ethnologues qui travaillent aujourd'hui sur des formations sociales primitives, subissent dans leur propre travail les effets de cette insuffisance théorique : ils les rencontrent sous la forme de difficultés concernant la nature et le rôle des « institutions » et des idéologies de ces formations sociales et la détermination de l'élément dominant dans la dialectique de leur histoire ou de leur « non-histoire ».

Les hommes politiques et les partis politiques se heurtent, de leur côté, aux conséquences pratiques de cette insuffisance théorique. La solution d'importants

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[j] Sur les modes de production asiatique, esclavagiste, féodal, d'importants travaux sont, depuis la guerre, en cours en Union soviétique, Tchécoslovaquie, Hongrie, Allemagne démocratique, France, etc.

[k] Sur le problème, politiquement très important, des phases de transition, il existe pourtant des textes remarquables sur les premières phases de transition entre le capitalisme et le socialisme (Lénine et Boukharine). Mais la théorie générale de la transition reste à élaborer. Citons, en France, les travaux de Ch[arles] Bettelheim.

problèmes politiques et idéologiques de la construction du socialisme et du passage au communisme dépendent en fait des connaissances théoriques disponibles sur la nature de l'État de la dictature du prolétariat et de l'idéologie d'une formation sociale socialiste. Or, justement, nous n'avons pas à proprement parler de théorie, au sens fort, du politique et de l'idéologique du mode de production socialiste, et des phases de transition conduisant du capitalisme au socialisme.

Cela est encore plus frappant en ce qui concerne le passage au socialisme de formations sociales pré-capitalistes. Si nous disposions d'une théorie du politique et de l'idéologique des modes de production pré-capitalistes, il serait plus facile de poser le problème de la nature de l'État, du Parti politique et des formes d'action politiques propre à assurer ce passage.

Et pour citer un dernier exemple, encore brûlant, c'est sans aucun doute au manque d'une théorie de la superstructure juridico-politique et idéologique que nous devons d'en rester, sur le phénomène du « culte de la personnalité », qui s'est produit dans la superstructure d'une formation sociale dans une phase de la dictature du prolétariat, à des thèses qui sont beaucoup plus descriptives que théoriques. Ces thèses risquent, pour cette raison, d'entraver la solution des problèmes en cause. On peut s'en rendre compte à un simple indice entre dix : parmi les nombreux travaux de la sociologie concrète soviétique, on ne trouve pratiquement pas de recherches consacrées à la sociologie des rapports sociaux politiques et idéologiques[l] [44].

À un niveau encore plus abstrait, et bien que *Le Capital* nous donne tout ce qu'il faut pour la construire, nous ne disposons pas, aussi invraisemblable que cela paraisse, de théorie générale vraiment satisfaisante du mode de production. Je ne signalerai à cet égard qu'un seul point, qui a de grandes conséquences du point de vue pratique : il concerne le concept de *forces productives*. Nous disposons bien de ce concept général, mais comme l'indique d'ailleurs sa formulation (le pluriel de « forces »), il désigne le plus souvent une simple énumération empirique : ressources énergétiques et matérielles, instruments de production, force de travail, et « expérience technique » de la force de travail. C'était la définition donnée par Staline, et à ma connaissance, elle n'a pas été modifiée. Pourtant une énumération empirique ne constitue pas un concept, même si la formulation actuelle de « forces productives » désigne bien une réalité particulière, en la distinguant d'une autre réalité, les rapports de production. Pour posséder vraiment le concept de forces productives, il faut quelque chose de plus : il faut découvrir et énoncer les rapports spécifiques qui, pour chaque mode de production, et pour chacune de ses phases, organisent les éléments empiriques décrits dans l'énumération en unités organiques spécifiques et originales[m]. Il est évident en effet que si, pour définir les forces productives, on en reste à la simple énumération quantitative de leurs éléments, on a toutes les chances

[l] Cf. *La Sociologie en U.R.S.S. : Rapports des membres de la délégation soviétique au Congrès d'Évian* ([Moscou: Éditions du progrès,] 1966), particulièrement l'intervention de [Gennadii Vasilevich] Ossipov[, « Buts et bilan des recherches sociologiques en U.R.S.S. », in *ibid.*, pp. 236–251].

[m] Sur ce point, voir l'importante contribution de Balibar dans *Lire le Capital*, II, pp. 223 et *sq*.

de mettre l'accent, sans discrimination, sur l'élément technique, et de tomber, comme le fit la IIe Internationale, dans l'économisme ou dans ses variantes technicistes contemporaines.

Si au contraire, on fait apparaître les rapports organiques qui relient ces éléments en des unités originales, selon les modes de production et chacune de leurs phases, on s'aperçoit que, selon les modes de production et leurs phases, l'élément dominant peut se déplacer. C'est tantôt la technique au sens étroit (les instruments de production), tantôt l'organisation du travail (les formes de la coopération), tantôt le niveau technique de la main-d'œuvre, qui représentent l'élément dominant dans les unités originales spécifiques constituant l'essence des forces productives données. Ces distinctions sont évidemment importantes, car elles commandent le type d'intervention indispensable, selon les cas, pour faire progresser les forces productives : selon qu'il s'agit d'intervenir sur tel ou tel élément constitutif des forces productives, parce qu'il en est le « maillon décisif » dans la conjoncture, il faut mettre l'accent tantôt sur l'économique, ou tel de ses aspects, tantôt sur le politique et tantôt sur l'idéologique.

Plus profondément encore, nous ne disposons pas de théorie au sens fort de la « *détermination en dernière instance par l'économie* », ni du type de causalité spécifique qui régit les modalités de cette détermination, et qui est donc l'articulation des différents niveaux d'un mode de production (économique, politique, idéologique). Nous ne disposons pas d'une théorie au sens fort qui traite du *déplacement* de la domination entre les différents niveaux, à l'intérieur de la détermination en dernière instance par l'économie. Nous ne disposons pas d'une théorie qui rende compte des *variations de la conjoncture*, alors que la pratique politique quotidienne des partis communistes tient le plus grand compte de ces variations, et que les textes politiques de Lénine, pour ne citer que lui, ne cessent d'invoquer les déplacements de la domination comme constituant le propre de la conjoncture[n 45].

Bien entendu, l'élaboration théorique de toutes ces questions ne relève pas de la seule philosophie marxiste, ni donc des seuls philosophes. Elle relève avant tout des théoriciens qui travaillent dans le domaine du matérialisme historique : théoriciens de l'économie, de la politique, des spécialistes des idéologies, des historiens, etc., etc. Pourtant le travail de ces théoriciens a besoin, aujourd'hui tout particulièrement, du secours de la philosophie marxiste. Je ne prendrai ici encore qu'un seul exemple.

À mon sens, ce n'est pas un hasard, ni même un fait justiciable de seules causes historiques, si nous ne possédons pas encore une véritable théorie, au sens strict, des *classes sociales*, du *politique*, et de l'*idéologique*. Cette lacune a aussi des raisons *théoriques*, très précisément des raisons philosophiques.

Revenons à ce qui a été dit plus haut du retard de la philosophie sur la science dans le

[n] Cette théorie de la conjoncture, du déplacement de la domination entre les niveaux, etc., concerne directement la théorie de la dialectique. La formulation la plus remarquable dont nous disposons figure dans le texte de Mao Tsé-Tung : « De la contradiction ».

cas (qui est celui de Marx) d'une science ouvrant un « continent » nouveau à la connaissance. Le « besoin » de philosophie ressenti par la science nouvelle à la phase ultérieure de son développement n'est pas seulement en rapport avec les attaques ou les déviations idéologiques philosophiques qui la menacent. C'est en même temps aussi, fondamentalement, un besoin intérieur que la science éprouve, pour franchir des limites théoriques auxquelles elle se heurte dans son propre travail et son propre domaine. Or, certaines de ces limites théoriques dépendent en dernier ressort des *catégories philosophiques* sous lesquelles la science doit penser ses objets nouveaux. Un moment vient en effet, où, dans le progrès d'une science, certaines catégories philosophiques anciennes constituent objectivement une entrave théorique à la solution des nouveaux problèmes. C'est cet obstacle, proprement philosophique, qui empêche alors la science de se développer, en l'empêchant de résoudre certains problèmes scientifiques précis. Je suis convaincu que c'est depuis longtemps le cas de la théorie des classes sociales, de la théorie du politique et de la théorie de l'idéologique.

Pour penser la nature d'une classe sociale, il est en effet indispensable de faire intervenir *conjointement* la détermination de la base économique, la détermination de la superstructure juridico-politique, et la détermination de la superstructure idéologique. Il est également indispensable de faire intervenir le « jeu » intérieur à cette détermination conjointe, pour rendre compte des déplacements possibles de la domination entre ces différentes déterminations[o].

Pour penser à la fois la conjonction de plusieurs déterminations différentes, et les variations de leur domination, il est clair que la catégorie philosophique classique de la causalité, et même la catégorie de « causalité réciproque » entre la cause et l'effet, ou la catégorie de « résultante des forces » sont inadéquates. Elles[46] peuvent bien permettre de « décrire » les phénomènes, mais elles ne permettent pas d'en penser le mécanisme. Sur ce point très précis, on peut dire que le concept classique de la causalité, même « améliorée » par les concepts de la causalité réciproque et les concepts cybernétiques, constitue aujourd'hui encore un obstacle philosophique à la solution d'un problème scientifique. C'est la raison pour laquelle la théorie des classes sociales, de la lutte des classes, etc., se trouve actuellement bloquée[p].

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[o] Les analyses historiques de Marx (*18 Brumaire*) et de Lénine (ses grands textes politiques) montrent à l'évidence le « jeu » qui permet des déplacements. On peut dire qu'en dernière instance une classe sociale est déterminée par les rapports de production – mais elle est aussi, et en même temps, déterminée par la structure du politique et de l'idéologique. Elle peut posséder ou ne pas posséder une organisation politique propre ; avoir pour « représentants » politiques les hommes politiques d'une autre classe (par exemple : Napoléon II et les paysans parcellaires), donc être présente en personne ou absente en personne de la lutte de classes politiques ; avoir ou ne pas avoir d'idéologie propre, etc. Il faut rendre théoriquement compte de toutes ces variations possibles. La distinction de la « classe en soi » et de la « classe pour soi », qu'on trouve dans *Misère de la Philosophie* (1847), désigne bien un certain aspect de ce problème ; elle n'en est pas encore la théorie.

[p] Le blocage de la théorie ne provoque pas toujours le blocage de la pratique politique. Nous avons vu que la pratique politique peut, dans certains cas, se trouver en avance sur la théorie. En revanche il est des cas où le blocage de la théorie peut également bloquer ou entraver la pratique politique. La théorie de la

Pour lever cet obstacle, il faut tenter de produire une nouvelle catégorie philosophique, rendant compte de la spécificité d'une réalité dialectique identifiée par la science marxiste : la conjonction de déterminations différentes sur un même objet, et les variations de la dominante entre les déterminations au sein même de leur conjonction.

J'ai pour mon compte tenté de bien reconnaître l'existence de ce problème, et de proposer une esquisse de solution théorique, en avançant deux catégories philosophiques nouvelles : la « *causalité structurale* » et la « *surdétermination* ». Je ne puis entrer dans le détail de leur analyse dans le cadre de cet article[q]. J'indique seulement la raison d'être générale de chacune de ces catégories.

La « *causalité structurale* » est destinée à attirer l'attention sur le fait que la catégorie philosophique classique de causalité (soit la causalité linéaire cartésienne, soit la causalité « expressive » leibnizienne et hégélienne) est insuffisante pour penser les analyses scientifiques du *Capital*, et qu'il faut la remplacer par une catégorie nouvelle. Pour donner une idée de cette nouveauté, on peut dire que dans la causalité structurale on retrouve quelque chose qui ressemble au problème (souvent invoqué par les biologistes) de la causalité du « tout sur les parties » : à cette différence que le « tout » marxiste n'est pas un « tout » biologique, organique, mais une structure complexe comportant elle-même des niveaux structurés (infrastructure, superstructure). La causalité structurale désigne cette causalité très particulière d'une structure sur ses éléments, ou d'une structure sur une autre structure, ou de la structure d'ensemble sur ses niveaux structurels.

Quant à la « *surdétermination* », elle désigne un des effets particuliers de la causalité structurale, très précisément ce dont il vient d'être question à propos de la théorie des classes sociales : la conjonction de déterminations différentes sur un même objet, et les variations de la domination entre les déterminations au sein même de leur conjonction. Pour reprendre l'exemple des classes sociales, on dira qu'elles sont surdéterminées, puisque pour comprendre leur nature il faut faire intervenir la causalité structurale des trois « niveaux » de la société, l'économique, le politique, et l'idéologique – causalité structurale s'exerçant sous la forme d'une conjonction de ces trois déterminations structurales sur un même objet, et dans la variation de l'élément dominant au sein de cette conjonction.

Je ne prétends pas que ces formulations (causalité structurale, surdétermination) soient satisfaisantes. Il faut les mettre à l'épreuve, les développer ou les rectifier. Je prétends seulement qu'elles représentent la reconnaissance de l'existence d'un problème philosophique incontestable, et stratégiquement décisif pour lever l'obstacle proprement philosophique, sur lequel butte aujourd'hui toute théorie véritable des classes sociales, de la lutte des classes, du politique et de l'idéologique.

La théorie de la nature de *l'idéologique* présente en outre une difficulté philosophique particulière, qui a, en fait, empêché, jusqu'ici, son élaboration. Il ne suffit pas en effet de

possibilité de ces variations reste à élaborer.

[q] Cf. *Pour Marx*, pp. 87–116 et 206–224 ; *Lire le Capital*, I, pp. 33*sq.* ; II, pp. 161–177.

dire que l'idéologie est elle aussi soumise à la « causalité structurale » pour rendre compte de sa spécificité. Il ne suffit pas non plus de dire que l'idéologie présente le cas d'une conjonction de deux déterminations différentes : une détermination qui relève de la connaissance (ce qui donne à l'idéologique une valeur représentative) et une détermination qui relève de la division de la société en classes (qui explique que cette représentation soit faussée). Il faut également rendre compte de cette réalité qu'est une « représentation faussée », c'est-à-dire de cette unité paradoxale d'un discours qui énonce le faux tout en prétendant énoncer le vrai. Il ne suffit pas d'invoquer le vieux concept philosophique d'erreur : il ne fait que désigner la difficulté, sans poser ni résoudre le problème. Il ne suffit pas non plus de dire que cette duplicité du discours idéologique est un cas particulier de « surdétermination », il faut encore rendre compte du fait que cette surdétermination est celle « du vrai » et « du faux », parce qu'elle existe dans cet objet spécifique qu'est un *discours*.

Pour lever l'obstacle théorique qui bloque actuellement toute théorie de l'idéologie, on voit donc qu'il faut faire intervenir non seulement les concepts philosophiques nouveaux de « causalité structurale » et de « surdétermination », mais aussi ce que nous pouvons appeler la *théorie des discours*, qui a besoin des apports de la linguistique structurale pour se constituer. Or cette théorie des discours est encore à naître, et elle ne peut être élaborée sans le secours de la philosophie. Là non plus je ne prétends pas apporter des résultats, qui sont encore loin d'être en vue, je prétends seulement poser un problème réel et important. Dans la mesure où la solution de ce problème concerne la science marxiste du niveau idéologique des modes de production, on voit que toute théorie de l'idéologie exige actuellement l'intervention décisive de la philosophie marxiste.

2. – Les « Sciences Humaines »

Ce qui est vrai des régions théoriques intérieures au matérialisme historique est encore plus vrai des disciplines connues sous la dénomination de « *Sciences humaines*[47] ».

Nous vivons au siècle des « Sciences humaines », qui comportent outre l'histoire et l'économie politique, la sociologie, l'ethnologie, la démographie, la psychologie, la psychosociologie, la linguistique, etc. La plupart de ces disciplines se sont développées en dehors du marxisme, et il saute aux yeux qu'elles sont profondément marquées, dans leur « théorie », leur « méthodologie », leurs « techniques » d'investigation, et en définitive dans leur objet, par l'idéologie bourgeoise.

Tout l'appareillage technique et méthodologique qu'elles mettent en œuvre n'est nullement la preuve de leur caractère scientifique. Nous savons qu'il peut exister des disciplines de haute technicité (utilisant par exemple des méthodes mathématiques) qui sont pourtant des « *sciences* » *sans objet*, ou si l'on préfère, des « sciences » qui ont pour objet un objet tout différent de celui qu'elles proclament. Je ne puis entrer dans le détail de cette démonstration, mais on peut soutenir, par des raisons irréfutables, que dans nombre de leurs secteurs, plusieurs des « Sciences humaines » ne sont pas des sciences, donnant la

connaissance théorique d'un objet réel, mais des *techniques* (très élaborées) *d'adaptation ou de réadaptation sociale*. La psychosociologie presque entière, la plus grande partie des travaux de la sociologie empirique, de l'économie politique contemporaine, et même une grande partie de la psychologie, tombent sous cette catégorie.

On peut se rendre compte pratiquement de l'imposture de ces disciplines « sans objet » en constatant qu'elles sont incapables de donner une définition rigoureuse, précise, et non-équivoque de leur objet, et qu'en pratique elles se disputent et se déchirent entre elles un « objet » pour lequel elles ne peuvent fournir de titres de propriété incontestables. On sait que non seulement les « *problèmes de frontière* » entre économie politique, sociologie, psychosociologie et psychologie sont des problèmes brûlants, mais que les disciplines en question sont incapables de les résoudre. Quand une « science » dispute indéfiniment son « objet » à une ou plusieurs « sciences » voisines, il y a de fortes chances que c'est la nature même de cet « objet », et donc la nature de ces prétendues « sciences » qui sont en question. Bien mieux, à l'intérieur d'une seule et même discipline (par exemple l'économie politique, la sociologie, la psychologie et la psychosociologie), on voit proliférer les disciplines (il y a une bonne douzaine de disciplines en économie politique, en psychologie, etc.) et le « problème des frontières » se repose ainsi à l'intérieur de l'économie politique, de la sociologie, de la psychosociologie, de la psychologie, etc. Ces divisions ne correspondent nullement à une division du travail théorique fondée dans leur objet, mais à des conceptions différentes d'un même « objet ».

On peut montrer que ce désordre et cette anarchie dans des « sciences » dotées souvent d'un impressionnant appareil méthodologique et technique dépend en dernière instance d'une équivoque fondamentale sur la nature prétendument « scientifique » de ces « sciences » (qui ne sont bien souvent que de simples *techniques*) et sur la nature de leur « *objet* » (qui est souvent non pas un objet mais un *objectif* : l'adaptation et la réadaptation sociale).

Cette équivoque fondamentale tient sans doute en partie au fait qu'il s'agit de disciplines encore jeunes, mais elle tient en dernière instance à la domination qu'exercent sur ces sciences non seulement l'idéologie bourgeoise, mais aussi, dans certains cas directement, la politique bourgeoise : c'est l'idéologie bourgeoise qui impose à ces sciences les catégories idéologiques faussées dans lesquelles elles pensent définir leur « objet », et qui leur fait ainsi rater les objets réels. C'est en définitive l'idéologie et la politique bourgeoises qui leur imposent les *objectifs*, que ces « sciences », dépendantes de la bourgeoisie, prennent alors « spontanément » pour leurs « *objets* ».

Cette situation est extrêmement grave non seulement pour les marxistes, mais aussi pour tous les chercheurs et techniciens qui travaillent dans le domaine des « Sciences humaines » existantes. Nombreux sont les chercheurs des « sciences humaines » qui ressentent le malaise d'une situation théorique et pratique dont ils subissent, jusque dans leur activité professionnelle, les conséquences déplorables. Ils éprouvent plus ou moins confusément le besoin d'une clarification théorique, qui les libère des contradictions et

des servitudes dans lesquelles ils vivent et travaillent.

Mais le plus grand danger, dans la situation actuelle, est que les marxistes eux-mêmes cèdent aux prestiges apparents de ces « Sciences » et se soumettent à elles, dans l'espoir d'en tirer des connaissances dont ils ont effectivement besoin. À un certain nombre d'exceptions près, on peut formuler la conclusion suivante : *se soumettre aujourd'hui aux « Sciences Humaines » existantes, sans critiquer radicalement leurs théories, leurs méthodes, leurs techniques, et en définitive leur « objet », c'est en fait se soumettre à l'une des formes les plus dangereuses (parce que la moins visible) de l'idéologie bourgeoise.*

Ce danger est particulièrement grand aujourd'hui, où, après des dizaines d'années d'isolement, de stagnation théorique dans certains domaines, les Communistes éprouvent le besoin de résoudre de nouveaux problèmes, « posés par la vie » ; ils risquent, en se précipitant sur les « Sciences Humaines » sans la précaution d'une critique rigoureuse de leurs fondements et de leurs méthodes, de tomber dans l'illusion de « résoudre » leur vrai problème, alors que les « Sciences Humaines » actuelles représentent souvent le plus grand obstacle à leur solution.

Pour aller au fond des choses, nous devons au contraire prendre conscience du fait que la plupart des sciences humaines, si elles se sont développées en dehors du marxisme, relèvent pourtant *en droit* de la théorie marxiste. Il ne peut y avoir d'économie politique, de sociologie et de « psychologie sociale », et même, pour la plus grande partie de ce qu'on appelle la « psychologie », que sur la base théorique des principes du matérialisme historique. Toutes ces disciplines ne sont que des régions du nouveau « continent » (l'histoire des sociétés humaines, et de leurs effets sur les individus qui sont soumis à leurs structures) ouvert à la connaissance par la nouvelle science fondée par Marx. C'est à la condition absolue de situer ces sciences régionales en leur juste lieu dans ce « continent », qu'on peut leur donner un objet véritable (et non un simple objectif), une juste théorie de cet objet, et la méthodologie correcte correspondante. C'est à cette condition qu'on peut mettre fin aux « conflits de frontières », soit extérieurs, soit intérieurs aux disciplines actuelles.

Il y a tout lieu de penser que ce travail de transformation critique et de fondation donnera des résultats importants, dont certains constitueront de véritables découvertes. Par ce travail, les théoriciens marxistes combleront le retard qu'a pris le matérialisme historique[48] au regard de recherches qui relèvent, pour l'essentiel, de ses propres principes. Ils reprendront possession, pour le plus grand bien de la théorie et de la politique marxiste, de régions entières occupées par des sous-produits de l'idéologie bourgeoise. Cette reconquête représente une des formes majeures de la lutte contre l'idéologie bourgeoise.

Bien entendu, ce n'est pas par une simple « application » et, à plus forte raison, par une « déduction » des principes du matérialisme historique, que l'on peut aider à la critique et à la refonte des « Sciences Humaines ». Il faut au contraire un travail considérable de critique, de recherche, et de production théorique pour parvenir à ce résultat. Il faut travailler à la fois sur la méthode marxiste existante, et sur l'état présent des Sciences

humaines, bref, utiliser toutes les ressources théoriques et toute la matière première empirique disponible. Il faut aussi savoir discerner, parmi les Sciences humaines existantes, celles qui donnent déjà des garanties théoriques suffisantes pour qu'on puisse dire d'elles qu'elles ont bien un objet, qui ne leur est pas disputé par une meute d'autres disciplines : par exemple, la linguistique et la psychanalyse. Il faut aussi pouvoir se livrer à un examen critique de l'état actuel de ces dernières disciplines[r] [49] pour savoir à quel degré d'élaboration elles se trouvent, et finalement pour discerner en elles ce qui peut servir de moyen théorique pour résoudre certains des problèmes qui se posent dans d'autres disciplines. C'est donc dire que le matérialisme historique ne suffit pas à lui seul à accomplir cette tâche : il faut le secours du matérialisme dialectique, indispensable non seulement à la critique des effets de l'idéologie bourgeoise dans le domaine des « sciences humaines », mais aussi à la reconnaissance des résultats positifs de certaines d'entre elles et à la redéfinition des régions théoriques du « continent » ouvert par Marx à la connaissance.

Mes lecteurs auront compris qu'en proposant ce programme, je n'invite pas un seul instant à un retour au « dogmatisme ». Il ne s'agit pas de déclarer que tous les problèmes ont d'avance été résolus par la théorie marxiste, et de se « replier » dans Marx. Il existe effectivement des problèmes nouveaux, sur lesquels Marx ne nous a rien dit : des disciplines nouvelles comme la linguistique et la psychanalyse fondées depuis Marx commencent à les aborder. Ces régions ne relèvent pas, soit directement soit exclusivement, du matérialisme historique ; elles semblent relever aussi, au moins en partie, d'autres « continents » ou peut-être d'un autre « continent », la question reste ouverte[50]. En revanche dans toutes les régions qui appartiennent au matérialisme historique, le marxisme a des choses à dire. Et il ne peut les dire qu'à la condition de partir de Marx, du vrai Marx, pour se développer et pour devenir le centre stratégique de la théorie générale dont dépend la recherche dans les Sciences Humaines.

Ouvert à tout ce qui advient de neuf et d'authentiquement scientifique, ouvert à tous les problèmes réels, mais en même temps constamment attentif à ne pas tomber dans les tentations et les pièges de l'idéologie bourgeoise et de ses effets, le marxisme peut accomplir cette tâche historique, dont la portée théorique et pratique, donc politique, saute aux yeux. Mais pour venir à bout de cette tâche, les marxistes doivent se tenir sur les positions de la théorie marxiste, sans retomber, comme on le voit trop souvent chez

[r] Il est en particulier absolument décisif de délivrer la découverte de Freud de toute l'idéologie idéaliste bourgeoise dont elle a été recouverte, non seulement aux U.S.A., mais aussi en Europe, et de distinguer rigoureusement son objet de l'« objet » de la psychologie. Le psychanalyse n'est pas une psychologie ni une branche de la psychologie. Elle a pour objet propre, non le comportement ou la « personnalité », mais l'inconscient et ses effets. Un grand travail est à accomplir pour donner à la découverte de Freud la forme scientifique qu'elle requiert. Ce travail est entrepris par des chercheurs travaillant avant tout sous l'impulsion de l'œuvre de Lacan, qui, seul et le premier, a ouvert la voie. La linguistique moderne pose elle aussi des problèmes critiques du même ordre, mais elle existe, et possède un objet réel : elle a donné lieu à des travaux remarquables (école soviétique, école danoise, américaine, française, etc.).

ceux d'entre eux qui vont chercher dans les *Œuvres de Jeunesse* de Marx la solution des problèmes du « XXe siècle », en deçà de Marx, dans des idéologies idéalistes bourgeoises ou petite-bourgeoises[51].

Développer le matérialisme historique, reconquérir et refondre sur des bases théoriques justes les disciplines qui occupent le domaine des « Sciences Humaines » : *cette tâche stratégique N° 2 dépend aujourd'hui en dernière instance des progrès de la philosophie marxiste, c'est-à-dire de la tâche stratégique N° 1*[52].

VII
CONCLUSION : PHILOSOPHIE ET POLITIQUE

Pour conclure, je voudrais répondre à une dernière objection qui peut venir à l'esprit de mes lecteurs.

En dépit de toutes les explications qui ont été fournies, en dépit même des thèses et des exemples de Marx, Engels et Lénine, on peut éprouver l'impression que l'accent mis sur le rôle décisif de la philosophie dans la conjoncture présente risque de compromettre le grand principe du primat de la pratique, et du *primat de la politique*.

Pour répondre à cette objection, il faut revenir sur la conception marxiste de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique. C'est en effet dans le cadre de l'union de la théorie et de la pratique que la contradiction, soit apparente, soit réelle, entre théorie ou philosophie d'une part, et pratique ou politique d'autre part, peut être résolue.

L'union de la théorie et de la pratique fait que toute pratique politique porte en elle une philosophie, et que toute philosophie porte en elle une signification pratique, une politique. C'est pour cette raison qu'en certaines circonstances il est indispensable de remonter jusqu'aux principes philosophiques pour combattre les déformations idéologiques de la pratique politique, et qu'en d'autres circonstances il peut être vital, non seulement pour la science marxiste de l'histoire, mais aussi pour la pratique des partis révolutionnaires, de rectifier la philosophie existante, et de la faire progresser. C'est la façon dont est réalisée l'union de la théorie et de la pratique, les déformations dont elle est le siège, les menaces qui pèsent sur elle, ou les besoins théoriques ressentis pour résoudre ses propres problèmes (scientifiques ou politiques) qui obligent selon les circonstances à mettre l'accent soit sur la politique, soit sur la théorie, et dans la théorie soit sur le matérialisme historique, soit sur le matérialisme dialectique. Pour des raisons que j'ai très rapidement exposées, je pense qu'il est clair que la conjoncture théorique actuelle, sur le fond de la conjoncture générale, impose de *mettre l'accent sur la philosophie marxiste*.

Pourtant, il faut aller plus loin. L'union de la théorie et de la pratique doit se manifester aussi au sein de la théorie marxiste (ensemble articulé de la science et de la philosophie marxistes), et jusqu'au sein de la philosophie marxiste elle-même. Pour exprimer toute ma pensée, je dirais que le primat de la politique doit s'exprimer, dans les formes propres à la

théorie marxiste, au sein même de la théorie marxiste[53], et que *c'est par définition à la philosophie qu'il appartient d'assurer le primat de la politique dans la théorie*.

Il ne suffit pas de dire que le primat de la politique est assuré par le fait que toute philosophie porte en elle une signification pratique, une politique. Il faut d'abord, bien entendu, que cette politique soit juste. Mais il faut aussi que le primat de la politique dans la théorie se réalise *sous des formes théoriques*, bref, que la politique ait des conséquences visibles, précises au sein même de la théorie. Le primat de la politique se manifeste dans la théorie sous deux formes essentielles, qui dépendent toutes deux de la philosophie.

1) Le primat de la politique se manifeste d'abord dans l'exigence d'une *politique théorique* telle qu'elle a été définie dans la seconde partie de cet article. Cette politique théorique requiert pour sa définition à la fois des connaissances relevant du matérialisme historique (analyse de la conjoncture politique et idéologique) et l'intervention directe du matérialisme dialectique. C'est le matérialisme dialectique seul qui peut en effet désigner les déviations à combattre, les erreurs à corriger, les besoins théoriques à satisfaire, les lacunes à combler dans le domaine théorique. C'est lui seul qui peut définir une stratégie et une tactique théoriques, et fixer des objectifs théoriques dans un ordre hiérarchique correspondant aux urgences de la conjoncture théorique (tâche N° 1, tâche N° 2, etc.).

2) Le primat de la politique dans la théorie se manifeste directement, et de manière décisive, dans *la nature de la philosophie marxiste elle-même*.

Pour bien le comprendre, au moins dans le principe, il faut dire un mot du grand problème théorique en cause dans cette thèse : le problème de la spécificité de la philosophie marxiste, le problème de la *différence entre la science et la philosophie*. Même lorsque nous exigeons d'elle qu'elle possède les caractéristiques formelles d'une science : précision, rigueur conceptuelle et systématicité démonstrative – nous devons déclarer en même temps que la philosophie n'est pas une science. *Ce qui distingue radicalement la philosophie des sciences, y compris de la science de l'histoire, c'est le rapport intérieur, intime, organique, qu'elle entretient avec la politique*.

La science marxiste de l'histoire entretient, comme toute autre science, des rapports *extérieurs* avec la politique. Les conditions politiques font partie de l'ensemble des conditions sociales objectives qui conditionnent l'existence des sciences et de leur développement. Ces conditions politiques se manifestent aussi sous une forme particulière : sous la forme des idéologies qui assiègent constamment toute science, et agissent sur elle de l'extérieur, en prenant appui sur les difficultés philosophiques intérieures à la pratique théorique des sciences. En tant qu'elles expriment des rapports de force à l'intérieur de la lutte des classes, les idéologies renvoient à la science de la lutte des classes, qui est une partie de la science marxiste de l'histoire. En tant que ces idéologies énoncent des thèses philosophiques, représentent des tendances philosophiques, et prennent appui, à l'intérieur des sciences, sur les difficultés de leur pratique théorique, les idéologies renvoient à la philosophie marxiste, pour leur intelligence et leur critique.

Ce qui est intérieur aux sciences, dans l'intervention politique des idéologies, appartient

donc à la *philosophie*, et non pas aux sciences elles-mêmes. Dans la mesure où elle ne met pas en cause la philosophie, l'intervention de l'idéologie dans la vie des sciences peut donc être tenue pour extérieure aux sciences : elle fait partie des conditions sociales objectives de l'existence et du développement des sciences, elle ne fait pas partie de ce qui constitue la scientificité des sciences. Cette conclusion est valable pour toutes les sciences vraiment constituées, donc pour la science marxiste de l'histoire elle aussi.

Mais on dira : il ne faut pas assimiler aussi rapidement la science marxiste de l'histoire aux autres sciences, mathématiques, sciences de la nature, etc. Car la vraie difficulté réside dans le fait que ces sciences dernières ont des objets qui n'ont rien à voir avec la politique, alors que la science marxiste de l'histoire a pour objet la politique. Elle entretient donc, en tant que science, des rapports intimes avec la politique.

Cet argument est important, mais en fait il rate son but. Pour lui répondre, il ne suffit pas de dire que la science marxiste de l'histoire n'a pas seulement pour objet la politique (la lutte des classes), mais aussi d'*autres* objets : le politique (la superstructure juridico-politique, c'est-à-dire le droit et l'État), l'économique, l'idéologique, leur articulation dans les modes de production, la combinaison de plusieurs modes de production dans les formations sociales concrètes, etc., etc. Autrement dit : il ne suffit pas de répondre que la politique n'est qu'un objet de la science marxiste parmi d'autres. Il faut aussi montrer que le fait que la science marxiste ait, entre autres objets, la politique pour objet, distingue bien la science marxiste des autres sciences, mais n'affecte pas intérieurement, intimement, sa nature de science en tant que science, c'est-à-dire la *scientificité* de cette science.

Le rapport de la science de l'histoire à la politique est en effet, dans son principe, identique au rapport de toute science à son objet. Ce rapport est un rapport d'*objectivité* scientifique. Il concerne les formes générales de la scientificité de toute science, le fait qu'une science ne peut connaître son objet propre que par la mise en œuvre d'une théorie et d'une méthode dans une pratique théorique déterminée, y compris, lorsque c'est le cas, dans une pratique expérimentale (la pratique politique des partis communistes fait partie, à condition d'être traitée scientifiquement, de la pratique théorique de la science marxiste). La nature de l'objet d'une science détermine seulement certaines des formes de ce rapport d'objectivité, mais non ce rapport lui-même, qui reste le même quel que soit l'objet qu'étudie une science.

Pour faire percevoir l'objectivité de ce rapport, c'est-à-dire son indépendance par rapport à la nature spécifique de tout objet, on peut dire que les qualités propres de l'objet n'affectent pas sa connaissance scientifique. Spinoza disait déjà que le concept[54] de chien n'aboie pas[55]. On peut dire de la même manière que la connaissance du sucre n'est pas sucrée, que la connaissance des atomes n'est pas atomique, que la connaissance de la vie n'est pas « vivante », que la science de l'histoire n'est pas « historique », etc. On dira de la même manière que la science de la politique n'est pas politique. On exprime par là que la nature qualitative de l'objet d'une science n'affecte pas intérieurement, d'une manière intime et organique, la nature propre d'une science, qui est sa scientificité. La politique ou

« l'idéologie » n'est donc pas le principe déterminant de la science marxiste de l'histoire en tant que science[s] [56].

[s] Ce point est capital. Pourtant il n'est pas toujours clairement saisi par les marxistes, même philosophes, qui s'occupent de disciplines relevant du matérialisme historique, comme l'économie politique, la sociologie, l'histoire, etc. On peut le voir dans les interventions soviétiques consacrées, durant le Congrès d'Évian (1966), au problème des rapports entre la sociologie et l'« idéologie » (interventions de Konstantinov, Kellé, Tchesnikov).

La thèse des représentants soviétiques est que la sociologie ne peut se passer de l'idéologie, non seulement parce qu'elle doit, comme toute science, lutter contre l'idéologie en utilisant les services de la philosophie, mais aussi parce qu'il existerait un lien intime, organique, entre la sociologie et l'« idéologie » à cause de la nature très particulière de l'objet de la sociologie, et de la situation du sociologue. C'est cette nature particulière qui distinguerait la sociologie et les autres sciences sociales des sciences de la nature. Ces dernières ont pour objet les différentes modalités d'existence de la matière, et le savant reste extérieure à son objet, n'est pas conditionné par son objet, il ne fait pas organiquement partie de son objet. Dans les sciences sociales, la situation serait fondamentalement différente : leur objet n'est pas la matière, mais la société humaine et les différentes modalités de l'existence humaine ; et le sociologue est lui-même déterminé par l'objet qu'il étudie, la société humaine, il fait organiquement partie de son objet, il est engagé dans les luttes sociales et dans la transformation de la société. Il doit y prendre idéologiquement parti. Pour toutes ces raisons, il y aurait un lien intime entre la sociologie (et les sciences sociales) et l'idéologie.

Les représentants soviétiques invoquent en faveur de leur thèse les témoignages d'un certain nombre de sociologues américains eux-mêmes, contre d'autres sociologues américains, partisans de la « désidéologisation » de la sociologie.

En fait, les représentants soviétiques désignent par un même concept, le concept d'idéologie, trois réalités fondamentalement différentes :

1) la théorie idéologique qui sert de base à la sociologie bourgeoise (dans ce cas idéologie veut dire « représentation fausse » parce que faussée par des intérêts subjectifs de classe).

2) la théorie scientifique qui doit servir de base à une sociologie scientifique (et dans ce cas le terme idéologie, auquel ils ajoutent l'adjectif « scientifique », désigne tout simplement la théorie scientifique servant de base à une science).

3) la théorie philosophique du matérialisme dialectique (le terme idéologie leur sert aussi à désigner cette troisième théorie).

En bonne théorie, il n'est pas possible de désigner trois réalités objectivement différentes par un seul concept, sans provoquer inévitablement des confusions et des équivoques.

Le terme d'idéologie tout court est à sa place lorsqu'il est question de la théorie idéologique (fausse) de la sociologie bourgeoise. Il désigne alors adéquatement son objet. L'idéologie (ou la politique) fait bien organiquement partie de la philosophie, mais son concept ne suffit pas, très précisément, pour définir la philosophie marxiste. La philosophie marxiste n'est pas une théorie idéologique au sens où la sociologie bourgeoise repose sur une théorie idéologique. Le terme d'idéologie, en revanche, est tout à fait inadéquat pour désigner la théorie d'une science.

Si nous distinguons les trois réalités différentes par trois concepts différents : théorie idéologique, théorie scientifique, théorie philosophique, nous évitons les équivoques et les confusions, et de surcroît, nous supprimons la distinction qui la fonde : la distinction de nature opérée par les représentants soviétiques entre les sciences de la nature d'une part et les sciences sociales d'autre part.

Pour dire le fond de ma pensée, je considère que cette distinction constitue la reprise, atténuée sans doute, mais la reprise incontestable d'une distinction de l'idéologie philosophique idéaliste bourgeoise, entre l'objet des sciences de la nature et l'objet des sciences humaines. Pour l'idéologie bourgeoise, seules les sciences de la nature sont des sciences au sens strict : les « sciences humaines » ou les « sciences sociales » ne sont pas de vraies sciences, car elles relèvent de la philosophie, puisqu'elles parlent de l'homme. Toute l'œuvre scientifique de Marx est une réfutation de cette distinction propre à l'idéologie bourgeoise. Marx a répété sans cesse que *Le Capital* était une œuvre scientifique, et non pas une œuvre idéologique, quelque sens qu'on veuille donner à ce terme, même si, dans ce cas, le terme d'idéologie devait désigner la philosophie marxiste. Car nous savons, par Marx, Engels et Lénine, que la philosophie marxiste est par essence distincte de la science de l'histoire. Comme toute science, la science de l'histoire, et donc aussi la

Il en va tout autrement de la *philosophie* : la politique fait naturellement partie des conditions sociales objectives de l'existence et du développement de la philosophie. Elle agit aussi sur la philosophie sous la forme des idéologies, – mais la *politique* concerne la philosophie d'une manière toute différente, puisqu'*elle fait organiquement et intimement partie de sa nature de philosophie en tant que philosophie*. C'est son rapport organique intime avec la politique qui distingue la philosophie de toute science.

On peut se faire une idée schématique de la nature spécifique de la philosophie au regard de toute science, en remarquant par exemple que la philosophie n'a pas, pour objet, comme toute science, une région de la réalité, ou même l'ensemble des régions qui constituent un « continent » de la réalité, au sens où nous l'avons défini précédemment. La philosophie a au contraire pour objet ce qu'on appelle traditionnellement d'un terme impropre la « totalité » du réel. Pour être plus précis, et pour échapper aux effets religieux-dogmatiques du concept de « totalité », nous dirons que la philosophie a pour objet la loi tendancielle de transformation d'un *ensemble complexe* constitué par l'articulation de deux grands systèmes, eux-mêmes intérieurement complexes et articulés :

1) *le système des pratiques théoriques*, ou système des régions et des continents explorés par la connaissance scientifique : c'est-à-dire le système des sciences, – dans leur rapport avec les idéologies qu'elles doivent combattre pour exister et se développer.

2) *le système des différentes pratiques sociales* (économique, politique[57] et idéologique) qui conditionnent l'existence, la pratique et le développement des sciences.

C'est la nature de cet ensemble complexe, et sa loi tendancielle de transformation, qui constituent l'objet propre de la philosophie. C'est cet objet dont la philosophie nous fournit le savoir, sous la forme de connaissances philosophiques : les catégories philosophiques, distinctes de tous les concepts scientifiques possibles (catégories de matérialisme, de dialectique, et toutes les catégories subordonnées à ces deux grandes catégories fondamentales).

Lorsque nous parlons de cet ensemble complexe, nous n'en excluons pas la philosophie : à chaque moment de la transformation de cet ensemble complexe, la philosophie existante figure *elle aussi* dans cet ensemble complexe : dans le système des pratiques théoriques[58].

Lorsque nous précisons que la philosophie a pour objet non seulement la nature de cet ensemble complexe, mais aussi sa loi tendancielle de transformation, nous n'ajoutons pas un simple détail : nous énonçons une thèse essentielle, à savoir que cet ensemble est en devenir, qu'il s'y produit donc au sens fort des évènements *historiques* qui affectent tantôt le premier système, tantôt le second système, tantôt leur articulation, etc. Nous affirmons donc que la connaissance de cet ensemble est la connaissance de *sa loi historique*.

Pour connaître cet ensemble complexe[59], la philosophie ne peut alors se contenter d'un simple bilan, elle ne peut être, comme certaines formules d'Engels peuvent le faire penser,

sociologie marxiste, a besoin de philosophie, mais en tant que science : elle ne se confond pas avec la philosophie. Cette confusion est une confusion typique de l'idéologie bourgeoise de la science.

une simple *encyclopédie*, la somme des connaissances scientifiques existantes à un moment donné. La philosophie a besoin de ce bilan, mais la philosophie n'est pas seulement la somme des connaissances scientifiques à un moment donné, même pensées sous les lois de la dialectique.

Elle doit tenir compte du fait qu'elle fait elle-même partie de cette somme, et qu'elle en fait partie comme force d'intervention active à l'intérieur de cet ensemble. Elle doit reconnaître ce que signifie sa propre présence dans tout bilan possible : que la présence de la philosophie dans toute somme des connaissances scientifiques est la preuve en acte de la nature déséquilibrée, c'est-à-dire dialectique et historique de cet état des sciences, dont la philosophie ne peut parler qu'en y intervenant, en y prenant parti activement, c'est-à-dire, au sens large du terme, *politiquement*.

Dire que la philosophie doit nous donner la connaissance de la loi tendancielle de transformation de l'ensemble complexe qui constitue son objet, et remarquer que la philosophie fait elle-même partie de cet ensemble, dont elle doit nous fournir la connaissance, c'est donc dire une seule et même chose. C'est dire que cet ensemble complexe ne peut pas être l'objet d'un *Savoir Absolu* ; c'est dire que la philosophie ne peut être la *Science des sciences* ; c'est dire que la loi de transformation de cet ensemble complexe n'est jamais donnée d'avance, ni jamais possédée de manière exhaustive, mais *doit être déchiffrée pas à pas*.

C'est ici que la politique intervient directement dans la philosophie, et d'une façon décisive. Non seulement parce que l'existence de la philosophie[60] consiste, depuis toujours et quelle qu'en soit la forme, à intervenir activement dans l'ensemble complexe, qui est son objet propre, et que cette intervention peut être dite au sens large une intervention politique. Mais aussi parce que c'est *la politique* au sens étroit et strict du terme qui constitue *l'indice pertinent* par excellence, à partir duquel ce déchiffrage est pratiquement possible. Cela pour deux raisons qui tiennent à la place privilégiée de la politique dans chacun des deux systèmes, dont l'ensemble complexe constitue l'objet propre de la philosophie.

1) *Système des pratiques sociales* (économique, politique, idéologique)

La politique est en effet, comme l'ont dit et répété Marx, Engels, Lénine et tous les dirigeants du mouvement ouvrier marxiste, le « *résumé* » et le « *condensé* » des pratiques sociales. L'état de la lutte des classes fournit, en « résumé », une vue théorique et pratique sur l'état des rapports entre les pratiques qui conditionnent le système des sciences, son existence actuelle, et son développement. Toutefois ce rôle d'indice pertinent de la politique dans le système des pratiques sociales n'intéresse pas, sous cette forme, en tant que tel, la philosophie, puisqu'en ce sens la politique est un objet de la science marxiste de l'histoire. Ce qui intéresse en propre la philosophie c'est l'articulation du système des pratiques théoriques sur le système des pratiques sociales. C'est en ce point précis que la politique est, au sens fort, l'indice pertinent de déchiffrement de la loi tendancielle de transformation de l'ensemble complexe.

2) *Système des pratiques théoriques* (sciences, philosophie, idéologies)

La politique y est directement présente sous la forme des *idéologies*. C'est dans les idéologies que la lutte des classes figure en personne dans la conjoncture du système théorique. Les idéologies sont, dans la conjoncture théorique, la forme d'intervention de la lutte des classes, donc de la politique, dans le système théorique. Pas de sciences et de philosophie sans prise de position à l'égard des idéologies, sans contre-intervention théorique (philosophique et idéologique) contre les idéologies. L'état de la *lutte idéologique dans le domaine du système théorique est alors l'indice pertinent fondamental* à partir duquel peut être déchiffré non seulement l'état de la conjoncture théorique, mais aussi, ce qui est déterminant, le rapport existant entre le système théorique et le système social qui représente la forme tendancielle de l'articulation existante entre les deux systèmes.

L'idéologie jouit donc d'un privilège tout à fait particulier, qui lui permet de jouer ce rôle d'indice pertinent. Elle peut jouer ce rôle parce qu'elle appartient à la fois aux deux systèmes : au système des pratiques sociales, en tant qu'expression de la lutte des classes ; au système des pratiques théoriques en tant que cette expression de la lutte des classes prend la forme d'idéologies *théoriques*, faisant organiquement partie du système où vivent les sciences et la philosophie, qui n'existent qu'à condition de se définir et de se battre sans cesse contre les idéologies.

La politique est donc, sous la forme de la *politique* proprement dite, et de son expression *idéologique*, l'indice pertinent par excellence du déchiffrement de la loi tendancielle de l'ensemble complexe, parce qu'elle est l'indice de l'état de l'articulation entre les deux systèmes. C'est donc sur elle que la philosophie doit avant tout se guider, pour déchiffrer cette loi tendancielle, qui constitue son objet propre. Lorsque la philosophie tient compte de la politique dans la position de ses propres problèmes, elle tient vraiment compte de son propre objet. Par là, elle peut assurer, dans son propre domaine, qui est philosophique, et sur le mode philosophique (avec une théorie et une méthode rigoureuses, de caractère scientifique), le primat de la politique. Elle n'a pas à respecter le primat de la politique pour des raisons qui tiennent à la nature de la politique : mais pour des raisons qui tiennent à sa propre nature, à la nature de la philosophie.

C'est là en définitive ce qui distingue la philosophie de toute science, quelle qu'elle soit. Aucune science ne se préoccupe, en tant que science, de l'articulation des deux systèmes (système des pratiques sociales et système des pratiques théoriques) et de sa loi tendancielle ; aucune science ne se préoccupe non plus même de l'état du système théorique dans son ensemble. Ce n'est pas là leur objet : ni l'objet des mathématiques, ni l'objet de la physique, ni l'objet de la biologie, ni même l'objet de la science de l'histoire. En revanche, c'est l'objet propre de la philosophie. Et c'est pour cette raison que la philosophie est directement concernée, dans sa nature, dans sa théorie (le matérialisme), sa méthode (la dialectique) et ses catégories, par la politique.

Je n'avance pas là des thèses inédites. C'est l'extraordinaire mérite philosophique de Lénine que de l'avoir compris et exprimé avec une audace et une netteté stupéfiantes[61] dans *Matérialisme et empiriocriticisme*. Sans doute, on ne trouve pas dans Lénine de théorie

développée de cette thèse, mais on peut trouver chez lui la preuve qu'il tenait cette thèse pour absolument essentielle à la théorie marxiste. Il suffit de penser à son insistance à proclamer que la « *position de parti* » *politique* fait corps avec toute philosophie, et qu'elle doit devenir pour les philosophes communistes une prise de parti consciente, fondée sur une théorie rigoureuse de la philosophie, et de son rapport avec la politique.

Lorsque nous disons que le développement de la philosophie marxiste est une tâche objectivement prioritaire dans la conjoncture présente, nous ne sommes donc pas en contradiction avec le primat de la politique. Nous affirmons au contraire que la philosophie, pour être vraiment la philosophie marxiste, doit être traitée selon sa propre nature : politique. Le primat actuel de la philosophie est donc une forme actuelle du primat de la lutte des classes, au sein de la nature politique de la philosophie.

Il est aussitôt indispensable de préciser les très grandes difficultés et les très grands risques de cette tâche. Bien entendue, comme elle doit l'être, *la thèse de la nature politique de la philosophie est tout le contraire d'une thèse pragmatique*. Pendant des siècles, la philosophie a été, et elle est encore sous les formes de l'idéalisme moderne, la « servante de la religion ». Il n'est pas question un seul instant de prolonger cette tradition idéologique, en faisant de la philosophie la « servante de la politique », même s'il s'agit d'une politique juste, c'est-à-dire de réduire la philosophie au commentaire des décisions politiques de l'heure, ou même d'une ligne politique juste. Ce serait faire de la philosophie une idéologie politique, et réduire la philosophie à l'*idéologie politique* existante. L'idéologie politique a ses droits : elle est indispensable à la lutte politique. Mais la *philosophie n'est pas l'idéologie politique*. Elle est une discipline théorique absolument distincte de l'idéologie politique[62], possédant l'*autonomie* d'une discipline de caractère scientifique, dont le développement est soumis à des exigences propres : précision, rigueur conceptuelles, systématicité démonstrative. Elle obéit à l'exigence fondamentale de toute discipline théorique de caractère scientifique : donner la connaissance de son objet en personne, et non d'un autre objet, qui n'est pas le sien. L'*objet* de la philosophie n'est pas la politique[63], mais la philosophie est *de nature politique*[64]. La philosophie ne peut être fidèle à son objet et à sa nature propres qu'à la condition de penser philosophiquement son objet (la loi tendancielle de l'articulation de l'ensemble complexe pratiques sociales/pratiques théoriques), et d'assumer philosophiquement sa nature : c'est-à-dire *d'assurer le primat de la lutte des classes au sein de la philosophie elle-même, dans des formes proprement et rigoureusement philosophiques*.

Sans la double conscience : 1) du primat de la politique dans la philosophie elle-même, 2) des exigences théoriques proprement philosophiques du traitement philosophique de ce primat, les philosophes marxistes risquent de tomber : *a*) soit dans le théoricisme, qui ignore tout de la lutte des classes, *b*) soit dans le pragmatisme, qui ignore tout de la spécificité de la théorie et de la philosophie, et de ses exigences scientifiques.

Faire progresser la philosophie marxiste est donc une tâche extrêmement ardue, parce qu'elle exige une très grande conscience politique dans le travail philosophique, pour respecter philosophiquement, dans la philosophie, le primat de la lutte des classes, et pour

éviter de tomber soit dans le théoricisme, soit dans le pragmatisme.

Que les tâches de la philosophie marxiste soient rudes, qu'elles exigent à la fois une très grande conscience de la lutte des classes et de ses effets, une très grande lucidité critique, une très grande sûreté scientifique, de grands efforts d'étude, de réflexion, d'analyse, l'union d'une impitoyable rigueur et de la plus grande audace et invention théoriques, voilà ce qui ne saurait nous effrayer, voilà au contraire ce qui nous oblige. Tous les militants politiques qui ont, à un titre ou un autre, y compris au titre politique, l'expérience de la pratique *scientifique* connaissent cette épreuve, sa nécessité et sa fécondité[65]. Cette épreuve attend les philosophes marxistes eux aussi, s'ils veulent mettre la philosophie marxiste à la hauteur de sa tâche historique dans la conjoncture présente.

Qu'ils se rappellent les mots de Marx : « au seuil de la science comme au seuil de l'enfer... », là où « les commencements sont ardus », il faut, comme le dit Dante, « abandonner tout soupçon, et tuer toute crainte[t] ». Il faut ne faire « aucune concession aux préjugés de l'opinion publique », mais accepter comme « bienvenu tout jugement inspiré par une critique vraiment scientifique[u] [66] ». Qu'ils se souviennent aussi du mot de Lénine : « la théorie de Marx est toute-puissante parce qu'elle est vraie[v] ».

Le plus grand hommage que les philosophes marxistes peuvent, cent ans après *Le Capital* et cinquante ans après la Révolution d'Octobre, rendre à Marx et Lénine, la plus grande preuve qu'ils peuvent donner de leur engagement au mouvement ouvrier révolutionnaire, c'est d'accomplir la tâche capitale que l'histoire leur assigne.

Paris, le 18 Mai 1967

[t] Préface de la *Contribution à la critique de l'Économie politique* (1859).
[u] Préface du *Capital* (1867).
[v] *Les trois sources du marxisme* (1913).

NOTES

[1] This sentence in the proofs of the planned book version of *La Tâche historique* (Imec, Fonds Althusser, 20ALT/9/8, formerly ALT2.A9-02.05, hereafter 'the proofs') replaces the following sentence in the typescript of the article that Althusser originally intended for publication in *Voprosy Filosofii* (20ALT/9/5, formerly, ALT2.A9-02.02, hereafter 'the typescript'): 'I would like to respond to the invitation of *Voprosy Filosofii* and our Soviet comrades by proposing, on the occasion of this double anniversary, a few reflections on Marxist theory, its current state, its problems, and its tasks.'

[2] Both the proofs and the typescript read 'empiriocriticiste'.

[3] The words 'son droit au développement, mais tout simplement' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs. This and many similar discrepancies between typescript and proofs are probably due to oversights on the typesetter's part. Other discrepancies are no doubt due to Althusser's decision not to retain a formulation found in the typescript. In some cases, it is not clear whether a discrepancy was the result of a deliberate decision or not.

[4] The words 'sur la science nouvelle. On peut vérifier empiriquement ce retard' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.

[5] The preceding sentence is contained in the proofs, but not the typescript, and may be extraneous.

[6] The proofs read 'rapport de Marx à Engels'. The phrase 'rapport de Marx à Hegel' is taken from the typescript.

[7] See Louis Althusser, 'Conjoncture philosophique et recherche théorique marxiste (26 juin 1966)', in *idem*, *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, ed. François Matheron, t. II (Paris: Stock/Imec, 1995), pp. 393–415.

[8] The proofs read 'conjoncture'; 'conjonction' is taken from the typescript.

[9] This formula was common in Soviet discourse from the 1930s on and in post-War European discourse East and West.

[10] Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Avertissement aux lecteurs du Livre I du *Capital*' (1969), in *Le Capital*, Livre I, Sections I à IV, trans. J. Roy (Paris: Flammarion/Champs, 2024), p. 25: 'l'évolutionnisme [est] l'hégélianisme du pauvre'.

[11] The passage that runs from the sentence beginning 'Cette interprétation...' to the beginning of the sentence 'Même quand cette interprétation tente de prendre ses distances...' replaces a single sentence in the first state of the typescript: 'Cette idéologie consiste à *fonder* la théorie marxiste sur des catégories philosophiques purement idéologiques : l'essence de l'homme, comme créateur de l'histoire.' The new passage was a late intercalation found on a separate, unnumbered sheet in the typescript.

[12] In a handwritten addendum to the passage intercalated in the typescript here (see endnote 11), Althusser replaced the words 'aux concepts servant' with the words 'aux catégories philosophiques et aux concepts scientifiques servant'.

[13] The phrase 'l'homme total' is a handwritten addendum to the typescript. The notion of 'l'homme total/the whole man', which the Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* takes from Ludwig Feuerbach, held a central place in the work of the PCF's unofficial 'official philosopher,' Roger Garaudy. See, for example, Garaudy, *Perspectives de l'homme: Existentialisme, pensée catholique, marxisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), pp. 1, 315 and *passim*; *idem*, *Qu'est-ce que la morale marxiste* ? (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1963), p. 217.

[14] The beginning of this paragraph is taken from the typescript. The proofs read : 'même lorsque cette interprétation prend ses distances par rapport à l'humanisme bourgeois. Même quand cette interprétation tente de prendre ses distances par rapport à l'humanisme "bourgeois", même lorsqu'elle déclare...'.

[15] The phrase 'création, de liberté, de liberté créatrice' is been taken from the typescript. The proofs read 'création, liberté créatrice'.

The Resolution adopted at the PCF's landmark March 1966 Central Committee meeting in Argenteuil celebrated 'le vaste mouvement créateur de l'esprit humain' and declared that 'il y a un humanisme marxiste', thus pointedly rejecting positions Althusser took in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. The text of the Resolution was, for the most part, the handiwork of the Communist poet Louis Aragon. 'Résolution sur les problème idéologiques et culturels,' in Roger Martelli, *Une dispute communiste : Le Comité central d'Argenteuil sur la culture* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 2017), pp. 451–452.

[16] The proofs read: 'elle n'en est pas moins grave'. The typescript originally read: 'elle est moins grave' and was corrected by hand to read 'elle n'en est pas moins grave'. The Hungarian version of *La Tâche historique* has it that the evolutionist 'deformation of Marxism' is 'no less serious' than the humanist deformation.

Louis Althusser, 'A Marxista filozófia történelmi feladata', in *idem*, *Marx–az elmélet forradalma*, trans. Ernő Gerő [Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968], p. 289.

[17] This and the next five paragraphs are a revised version of a passage from a long, unfinished, still unpublished manuscript on the union of theory and practice that Althusser began writing in 1966 and abandoned in 1967. He had included a version of the same passage in 'Sur le travail théorique' (STT), *La Pensée*, 132 (April 1967), pp. 12–13 (cf. footnote g above). The more significant revisions that the passage published in STT underwent before it was incorporated into *La Tâche historique* are indicated in notes below. For an English translation of STT, see Louis Althusser, 'On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources,' trans. James Kavanaugh, in Gregory Elliott, ed., *Spontaneous Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays* [London: Verso, 1990], pp. 43–67 (pp. 55–56 for the passage in question).

[18] The words 'les idéologues bourgeois' are lacking in STT.

[19] The phrase '(science et philosophie)' is lacking in STT.

[20] The phrase 'ou bien est « dépassée »' is lacking in STT.

[21] STT: '...celle des théories idéologiques régnantes'.

[22] STT: 'deux exemples'.

[23] The words 'de l'empirisme' are lacking in STT.

[24] STT: '*de nouveau*, du moins dans la philosophie'.

[25] STT reads, after 'science': 'dans la façon de concevoir les objets théoriques, et donc dans leur structure'.

[26] STT: 'de l'idéologie théorique dominante'.

[27] The words 'philosophique bourgeoise' are lacking in STT.

[28] STT: 'non seulement dans la politique'.

[29] The word 'l'empirisme' is lacking in STT.

[30] The phrase 'que Marx n'était pas empiriste' is lacking in STT.

[31] See endnote 10.

[32] The words 'ni évolutionniste' are lacking in STT.

[33] The phrase 'car les "résistances" sont extrêmement fortes' is lacking in STT.

[34] The preceding seven words replace STT's 'Tout texte théorique, même limité, qui traite des principes marxistes'.

[35] The phrase 'l'empirisme' is lacking in STT.

[36] The preceding six words replace STT's 'ni le monde de la pensée'.

[37] 'Le monde va changer de base' is a line from the first verse of the 'Internationale'. The most common English translation reads: 'The earth shall rise on new foundations'.

[38] STT reads 'the same holds in the world of thought.'

[39] STT reads: 'surtout s'il s'agit d'une pensée qui fonde une nouvelle idéologie et une nouvelle pratique politique'.

[40] The words after 'un très grand risque' are not italicized in STT.

[41] This is a reply to Jorge Semprun's critique of Althusser in 'Marxisme et humanisme', *La Nouvelle critique*, 164 (March 1965), p. 30: 'Ce n'est pas en nous enfermant dans la forteresse assiégée d'un marxisme abstrait, a-historique, que nous imposerons sur le monde notre empreinte, théorique et pratique'.

[42] The words 'éléments isolés non plus, les protocoles d'expérience pratique les plus' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.

[43] Both the proofs and the typescript read 'leur développement incomparable'.

[44] The exact subtitle of the book to which Althusser refers in footnote l is 'Rapports des membres de la délégation soviétique au 6e Congrès international de sociologie'. The Sixth World Congress of Sociology was held from 4 to 11 September 1966 in Évian-les-Bains, France. Some two thousand sociologists and philosophers attended, including Raymond Aron, Pierre Bourdieu, Mark Borisovic Mitin, Jean Piaget, Adam Schaff and Alain Tourraine. See also endnote 56 and footnote s.

[45] In footnote n, the sentence referring to Mao Zedong is a handwritten addendum to the typescript. Footnote n was not included in the Russian version of his article that Althusser submitted to *Voprosy filosofii*.

[46] Both the proofs and the typescript read 'ils'.

[47] Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Philosophie et Sciences humaines', in *idem*, *Solitude de Machiavel*, ed. Yves Sintomer (Paris: Presses universitaires de France/Actuel Marx, 1998 [1963]), pp. 43–58.

[48] The words 'qu'a pris le matérialisme historique' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.

[49] In distinguishing the object of psychoanalysis from the 'personality', Althusser was doubtless thinking of Lucien Sève, who was at work on a project that issued in *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1969). Althusser commented on this work-in-progress in a 1966 letter to Sève: 'Ce que certains

appellent psychologie, en tout cas ce que tu vas traiter sous le nom de théorie du développement de la personnalité avec des *concepts* à 50% garaudyistes (humanisme, individu au sens que tu dis, travail, etc.), je crois que ça relève pour l'essentiel 1) de la psycho-physio-biologie 2) de la *sociologie*..... Le 3e terme, l'inconscient et ses mécanismes ne peut pas relever de ce ce qu'on *appelle la psychologie,* mais de la psychanalyse'. Louis Althusser, Letter of 27 June 1966 to Lucien Sève, in Althusser and Sève, ed. Roger Martelli, *Correspondance 1949–1987 : Deux intellectuels dans le siècle* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 2018), p. 122.

The words in footnote r – 'qui, seul, et le premier' – are a handwritten addendum to the typescript.

[50] Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Trois Notes sur la théorie des discours', in *idem*, *Écrits sur la psychanalyse: Freud et Lacan*, eds. Olivier Corpet and François Matheron (Paris: Stock/Imec, 1993), pp. 123–129.

[51] The target here is Roger Garaudy, *Le Marxisme du XXe siècle* (Paris and Geneva: La Palatine, 1966), which concludes with a sharp attack on Althusserian 'dogmatism'. See endnotes 13 and 15.

[52] This was the beginning of the conclusion of the first draft of *La Tâche historique*. The last two paragraphs of the final version of the text originally comprised the rest of this conclusion, under which Althusser put the date 25 April 1967.

[53] The words 'au sein même de la théorie marxiste' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.

[54] Both the proofs and the typescript read 'ce concept'.

[55] Althusser frequently repeats this Spinozist formula to illustrate the distinction between knowledge and the object of which it is the knowledge. It is, however, nowhere to be found in Spinoza, although the idea it encapsulates is.

[56] Footnote s is an addendum to the typescript found on a pair of separate, unnumbered sheets. The conference papers to which it refers are F. V. Konstantinov, 'Sociologie et idéologie', in *La Sociologie en U.R.S.S. : Rapports des membres de la délégation soviétique au 6e Congrès international de sociologie* , pp. 3–24; V. D. Kellé, 'Rapport entre les fonctions cognitives et idéologiques de la sociologie,' in *ibid.*, pp. 25–35; and D. Tchesnokov, 'La prétendue "désidéologisation" de la sociologie,' in *ibid.*, pp. 36–48. Footnote s was not included in the Russian version of his text that Althusser submitted to *Voprosy filosofii*.

[57] Both the typescript and the proofs read 'pratique'.

[58] The typescript reads, after the colon: 'dans le système théorique'.

[59] The word 'complex' is contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.

[60] Both the proofs and typescript read 'politique'.

[61] The typescript contains the following addendum, written in Althusser's hand and then crossed out: 'quoiqu'exprimé dans des catégories philosophiques dominées par une idéologie matérialiste-*sensualiste*'.

[62] The preceding phrase replaces one crossed out in the typescript: 'Elle est une discipline théorique rigoureuse'.

[63] In the typescript, 'politique' is followed by the phrase 'au sens étroit du terme,' which has been crossed out.

[64] In the typescript, '*de nature politique*' is followed by the phrase 'au sens large du terme', which has been crossed out.

[65] The preceding sentence replaces one in the typescript that reads : 'Tous les militants qui ont ainsi l'expérience de la pratique *scientifique* connaissent cette épreuve, sa nécessité et sa fécondité'.

[66] The German equivalent of the word "vraiment" does not appear here in Marx's German version of the Preface to *Capital*; it was added by Joseph Roy, the author of the first French translation of *Capital*, which Marx corrected before it went to the printer's.

The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy

Louis Althusser
Translated by G.M. Goshgarian

This year, 1967, Communists the world over are celebrating both the fiftieth anniversary of the first socialist revolution and the one hundredth anniversary of the first volume of *Capital*: that is – I am using these words in the strict sense – both the greatest *political revolution* and the greatest *theoretical revolution* of modern times, two revolutions that have changed the course of History.

On the occasion of this double anniversary, I would like to offer a few thoughts on the current state, problems, and tasks of Marxist theory.[1]

I
TOWARD A CORRECT UNION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

Linking these two anniversaries brings out a fact of great importance. Marx's theoretical revolution is one hundred years old; the Soviet revolution is fifty years old. Thus the revolution that Marx carried out in the realm of theory preceded, by fifty years, the revolution in Russian society carried out by the popular masses under Lenin's and the Bolshevik Party's leadership. For Marxists, there is nothing mysterious about this lag [*décalage*]. The works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin provide us with the basic principle that

allows us to understand it. This reason has to do with the nature of the workers' movement, the nature of Marxist theory, and the nature of the union of the workers' movement with Marxist theory.

1) 'Without revolutionary *theory,*' Lenin writes in *What Is To Be Done?*, 'there can be no *revolutionary* movement.'

We should pay very close attention to the wording of this famous phrase. Lenin does not say that 'without revolutionary theory, there can be no *workers'* movement.' For Marxist theory did not create the workers' movement. The workers' movement existed before Marxist theory, which would not have been possible without it.

On the other hand, the workers' movement did not produce Marxist theory by its own devices. Marxist theory is the product of a conjunction of theoretical elements (German philosophy, English political economy, French socialism) and political events (the class struggle, the first interventions of the workers' movement, and so on) in the ascendant phase of Western capitalism.

Lenin by no means affirms that Marxist theory is essential to the workers' movement. He says it is essential to the *revolutionary* workers' movement. He thereby indicates that, without Marxist theory, the workers' movement would have emerged and developed, but would not have become *revolutionary* in the objective sense of the word, that is, capable not merely of wishing or hoping for, but of making the socialist revolution.

This first thesis of Lenin's refers us to a second, well-known Leninist thesis about the objective limits on the development of a workers' movement 'left to its own devices.' They are the limits of utopian socialism, anarchism, and anarcho-syndicalism, and, finally, of 'trade-unionism' and Social-Democratic reformism. They are the limits of the 'spontaneous' ideology of the workers' movement. When Lenin calls this ideology 'spontaneous,' he means that it is in fact dominated by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology.

2) Only Marxist *theory* enables the workers' movement to transform itself and become objectively revolutionary, for this theory alone enables it to free itself of the theoretical and practical effects of 'spontaneous' anarchist-reformist ideology.

Why is Marxist theory capable of ensuring this transformation and this emancipation? The reason is that it is not one '*ideology*' among others, that is, a skewed [*fausse*] and therefore subjective representation of the history of societies, but a *scientific* and therefore objective conception of it.

Thus the workers' movement can become objectively revolutionary on the twofold condition 1) that it give up the 'spontaneous' ideological theories which are an effect of the economic exploitation and the political and ideological domination of the working class by the bourgeois class, and 2) that it adopt, as its own theory, the Marxist science of the history of societies.

It is this scientific theory which provides the workers' movement with knowledge of the laws governing the structure and development of social formations, the social classes and their struggle, and the objectives, means, and forms of organization and action required to ensure the victory of the revolution. Only this scientific theory can bring about the transformation of the utopian or reformist workers' movement into a *revolutionary* workers' movement. Strictly speaking, then, Lenin's celebrated phrase should be amended to read: 'without (*scientific*) revolutionary theory, there can be no (objectively) *revolutionary* workers' movement.'

3) If we bring the following two statements together: 1) the workers' movement existed before Marxist theory and independently of it, and 2) without a scientific theory of history, there can be no revolutionary workers' movement, we will grasp the theoretical and historical significance of the union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement, which is the great event of modern times.

Without this union, Marxist theory would have remained a dead letter. Without this union, the workers' movement would not have become revolutionary.

History has never ceased to show the correctness [*justesse*] of this principle. While the revolution has not triumphed wherever this union was realized, it has triumphed only in places where this union was truly realized: for the first time in the world in 1917 in Russia, for the second time in China in 1949. In contrast, in places where the workers' movement did not adopt Marxist theory and was not transformed by it – for example, England (for which Marx and Engels nevertheless had great expectations in the mid-nineteenth century) – not only has the revolution not taken place, but prospects for revolution have receded. Again, in places where the workers' movement did adopt Marxist theory, but seriously distorted [*déformé*] its principles in an evolutionist-economistic-reformist direction, as in the pre-1914 German Social-Democratic party, the revolution was rendered impossible and, when it did break out in the aftermath of the first World War, was crushed. History thus clearly shows that the union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement is the necessary condition for the victory of the revolution.

Yet it also shows that this necessary condition is itself subject to an absolute precondition: *this union cannot be just any kind of union*, it cannot be an unprincipled union or a union resting on deformed or skewed principles. *It must be a correct union* based on correct principles, that is, on strictly scientific principles and their theoretical, ideological, and political consequences. When the principles governing this union are not correct, or when correct principles are allowed to degenerate under the influence of bourgeois ideology – evolutionism, economism, empiricism, pragmatism, moral idealism, and so on – the practical consequences are never long in coming. They are always harmful, serious, or extremely serious.

The correct union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement can therefore only result from a long, hard struggle. History did not find this union ready-made; decades of

struggle, pursued in multiple, complex forms, were required to propose it to, and impose it on, the workers' movement via the First and Second Internationals. And we know how the Second International ended up: in a historic catastrophe. We know that it took a decisive intervention on Lenin's part to rectify the Second International's grave theoretical and practical errors, and to propose to, and impose on, the workers' movement a correct form of union with a correct conception of Marxist theory.

This struggle is, then, a struggle without end. It is being pursued today too, in the Communist Parties not only of the capitalist countries, but also of the socialist countries. It will be pursued tomorrow too, throughout a very long period whose end cannot be foreseen.

Thus, if the union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement did not fall from the skies of history, neither is it, for us, a *definitive result* that can simply be taken for granted. The experience of these past thirty years is proof. This union is a task that we must always accomplish anew, a result that we must constantly reinforce and rectify, defending it with the utmost vigilance against all ideological deviations, that is, against all the many forms of pressure – visible and invisible, open or surreptitious – exerted by the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology that is constantly reproduced, and that constantly besieges and besets Marxist theory.

4) What does the *correctness* of this union depend on? Let us again take the example of Lenin's struggle against the Second International's distorted principles.

What did Lenin do to rectify the erroneous forms of the union established by the Second International?

Firstly, he struggled against the deviations in the interpretation of Marxist theory in both historical materialism (the theoretical struggle against the revisionists and populists) and dialectical materialism (the struggle against the empirio-criticists and bourgeois philosophical ideology). In this way, he restored the specificity and purity of Marxist theory, and he treated it as a true science, developing it and compelling it to produce theoretical discoveries (for instance, Imperialism).

Secondly, Lenin defined a new political line. At the same time, he defined new forms of organization (the Bolshevik Party, the Third International), leadership, and political action. He defined this new political line and these new forms of organization and action by analyzing the concrete situation using Marx's scientific concepts.

In doing so, Lenin did not content himself with applying already existing Marxist concepts. In rigorous fashion, he produced *new concepts*, theoretical, scientific, and philosophical, in order to solve the problems that history propounded to him; and he translated the results of his theoretical discoveries into political practice. We can draw important conclusions from this.

First conclusion

Without the existence and the force of the Russian workers' movement, the theoretical struggle and the new knowledge produced by Lenin would have remained a dead letter, at least for an indeterminate period. On the other hand, without Lenin's theoretical struggle and theoretical production, without his theoretical discoveries and their consequences (his analysis of the political situation, his definition of new forms of organization and action), a *correct* union of Marxist theory with the Russian workers' movement would not have come about. The proletarian revolution would perhaps have broken out, but it would not have prevailed.

Second conclusion

Lenin's actions clearly show us the *strategic objects* of the struggle that enabled him to bring this correct union about, making the victory of the October Revolution possible. The two domains of Marxist theory comprised the strategic objects of his struggle: the *science of history* (which commands the science of the political line of organization and action) and *Marxist philosophy*, as well as the *articulation* between them.

Lenin struggled against the bourgeois ideological distortions of Marxist philosophy and science, as well as for recognition of, cognition of, and rigorous respect for Marxist philosophy and science and the relationship between them.

He struggled, as no one else ever has, to win recognition for the theoretically revolutionary nature (revolutionary, that is, in the theoretical realm) of Marxist philosophy and science. He struggled to win recognition for the specific nature of theory and theoretical work and their absolute demands for 'purity,' rigor, systematicity, and fertility; to win recognition for the absolute necessity of theory and theoretical work; to win recognition, finally, within theory, for Marxist philosophy's decisive role in ensuring the existence, correctness, rigor, and development of the Marxist science of history.

Third conclusion

Lenin did not content himself with defending Marxist theory and restoring it in its 'purity.' In practice, he treated it the way a truly scientific, living, fertile theory should be treated: by developing it, that is, by producing not just new *knowledge* [*connaissances*], but also new *theoretical concepts*.

One can, of course, utilize existing scientific concepts to obtain new knowledge, and thus extend the domain of existing knowledge. That is what happens when – to use the consecrated expression – one 'applies' existing scientific concepts to new regions of reality or new concrete objects. In this way, it is possible to increase the stock of existing knowledge by analyzing a particular concrete social formation in a particular conjuncture (pre-1905 Czarist Russia, the new class relations after 1905, in 1917, and so on). If, in this case, one contents oneself with utilizing existing scientific concepts without producing

new ones, then one can only be said to have increased the sum of existing *knowledge*, without advancing theory.

But one can also – and this in fact occurs rather often, even when one sets out only to increase the sum of what is known – advance theory, that is, produce new theoretical concepts, scientific or philosophical. To say that Lenin did not simply restore Marxist theory, but also advanced it, means, therefore, that he effectively produced new *theoretical concepts* in Marxist science and Marxist philosophy.

Thus to treat Marxist theory as a scientific theory is to develop it in the double sense of the word. It is to increase the stock of knowledge that it makes it possible to acquire and also to advance the theory itself, that is, to produce new theoretical concepts.

These results – knowledge on the one hand, theoretical discoveries on the other – are the product of the labor of criticism, elaboration, abstraction, combination of empirical facts with abstract principles, and so on. This comprises a specific form of practice, which we may call *theoretical practice*.

The life of a scientific theory is thus something altogether different from mere contemplation of its principles, even when they are 'pure.' A scientific theory is not scientific, that is, living and fruitful, unless it is the site of a genuine theoretical practice. Thus Marxist theory is not a dogma: it is a living theory only if it produces new knowledge and theoretical discoveries. Its development is infinite, just as its object is 'infinite' (Lenin). Thus a scientific theory is an open-ended discipline. An ideology, in contrast, is a closed system that produces nothing new, never ceasing to repeat itself because it has just one goal: to legitimate prejudices, results, or objectives acquired in advance. The kind of theoretical practice characteristic of a scientific discipline, on the other hand, constantly calls for *discoveries*.

The life of a theory does not consist, then, in contemplation of it, or commentary on it, or pure and simple repetition of it in 'examples' that merely illustrate the theory without bringing it even one step forward. Nor is it limited to 'applying' the theory to new concrete objects (increasing the sum of knowledge). The life of a theory also consists in producing new theoretical concepts (in advancing the theory). The life of a theory is *theoretical practice: the production of new knowledge by means of the production of new theoretical concepts.*

Fourth conclusion

Lenin did not merely engage in theoretical practice; at the same time, he drew consequences for *political practice* from it. Thus he brought theoretical practice into relation with the real practices (economic, political, ideological) which constitute its conditions and provide it with its real-concrete objects – he brought it into relation with the practice of the workers' movement. Yet if he was able to tear the workers' movement away from the deviations of its 'spontaneism,' which overlapped with some of the Second International's deviations, it was because he had scientific principles and scientific theoretical knowledge at his disposal. At the same time, he demonstrated that political

practice can – within determinate limits and on condition that its results are scientifically analyzed – not only verify or invalidate theoretical hypotheses, but even produce veritable *practical inventions* that are the equivalent of *theoretical discoveries*, inventions whose content theory then has to think, and from which it has to draw consequences (for example, the invention of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the Paris Commune or the invention of the Soviets by the masses of workers during the 1905 revolution).

Such are the essential conclusions to be drawn from Lenin's and the Bolshevik Party's struggle to bring about a correct union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement.

It can be seen that the *correctness* of this union hinges on a correct conception of Marxist science and philosophy, and of the relationship between them; of theory as a theoretical practice that produces new knowledge; and of the relationship between theoretical practice and political practice. It can also be seen that, if only one of these elements or relationships is skewed, the consequences will make themselves felt in the whole of this complex system, and, ultimately, in political practice itself.

No doubt some of these deviations [*écarts*] have only limited effects, or effects that remain limited for a certain period, so that one has this period in which to rectify them. It is, however, equally apparent – this explains certain major failures of the workers' movement, such as the Second International's – that some of these deviations can be serious, affecting too many elements in this complex whole to be rectified and brought under control in time, so that they end up producing historical catastrophes.

It is in this very precise sense that we can say that the fate of the struggle for a correct union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement – that is, ultimately, the fate of the socialist revolution itself – will be determined not just by something everyone can see, namely, *political practice*, but *also* and at the same time, and in certain critical conjunctures, in absolutely *decisive* fashion, by the struggle for a correct conception of Marxist theory, of science, philosophy, and their relationship; the struggle for a correct conception of theoretical practice, and a correct conception of the relationship between theoretical and political practice.

We should keep these conclusions constantly in mind when analyzing the current tasks of Marxist theory. The struggle for its defense and development, for its rigor and fecundity, is always an essential element in the revolutionary struggle. In certain critical conjunctures, it can even be, as it was in Lenin's day, the *determinant* element.[a]

[a] For example, in 1902, in *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin pointed out, at a critical moment in the history of the Russian and international workers' movement, the absolutely *determinant* character of theory for political practice: 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity.… The very recent past was marked by a revival of non-Social-Democratic [that is, non-Marxist] revolutionary trends. Under these circumstances, what at first sight appears to be an "unimportant" error may lead to most deplorable consequences, and only short-sighted people can consider factional disputes and a *strict differentiation between shades of opinion* inopportune or superfluous. *The fate of Russian Social-Democracy for very many years to come may depend on the*

II
TOWARD A THEORETICAL POLITICS

How should we go about defining, in light of these principles, Communists' imperative strategic tasks in the domain of Marxist theory today?

To define these tasks is to define what we must call a *theoretical politics*, that is, a general line on the action to take in the theoretical domain: a line that establishes tactical and strategic objectives, the 'decisive links' in the present theoretical conjuncture, and the corresponding means of action.

As with any other kind of politics, one must have the results of a twofold analysis at one's disposal in order to define the strategic and tactical tasks of a theoretical politics:

1) An analysis of the general political, ideological, and theoretical *conjuncture* in which Marxist theory must struggle in order to impose itself and develop. Such an analysis has to bring out the structure of this conjuncture, its dominant elements and its subordinate elements. It has to demonstrate the complex organic relationship between political, ideological, and theoretical problems. It has to study the relation between the ideological and scientific forces confronting each other in the theoretical domain. Ultimately, this analysis has to define the strategic problems of the ideological and theoretical struggle.

2) An analysis of the *current state of Marxist theory*, in both the capitalist and socialist countries; a balance-sheet of its present strengths and weaknesses; a critical, historical and theoretical examination of the reasons for its results, its successes, failures, and deficiencies.

By combining the results of these two scientific analyses, one can define with certainty the strategic and tactical tasks of a theoretical politics, as well as the means required to carry them out.

There can obviously be no question of making such extensive analyses, even very schematically, within the narrow limits of this article. I shall therefore take the liberty of using a direct method in order to draw the reader's attention to the problem I consider to be the *strategic problem number 1* of Marxist theory: that of Marxist philosophy or dialectical materialism.

The thesis that I propose to set out is simple: *Marxist philosophy today represents the 'decisive link' on which depend the future of Marxist theory, and, consequently, the 'correctness' of the union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement.*

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strengthening of one or the other "shade."' Vladimir Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), pp. 12–13.

III
OVERCOMING THE LAG BETWEEN MARXIST PHILOSOPHY AND MARXIST SCIENCE

I know that I risk doing violence to the convictions of a number of comrades, communist philosophers included, when I declare that, one hundred twenty years after the *Manifesto*, one hundred years after *Capital*, and fifty years after Lenin, Marxist philosophy still objectively constitutes a *problem*. These comrades will surely join me in acknowledging, in line with Lenin's theses, the importance of Marxist *philosophy* in the ideological and theoretical struggle. They will not necessarily join me, however, in affirming that Marxist philosophy is today the 'decisive link,' and therefore the number 1 strategic task of Marxist theory. Above all, they may find it paradoxical, surprising, and wrong to say that Marxist philosophy *still* constitutes a problem, and *our number 1 problem* at that.

I shall therefore explain what I have in mind, doing my best to take possible objections into account.

Let me indicate the meaning of my thesis straightaway.

In declaring that Marxist philosophy is the site of an especially privileged problem for us, I obviously do not mean that we know nothing about the nature of Marxist philosophy. The opposite is true, since the texts of Marx, Engels, and Lenin provide us, when they are read correctly, with Marxist philosophy's basic principles. I mean, rather, to call attention to the genuinely paradoxical situation of Marxist philosophy today:

1) First, the theoretical elaboration of dialectical materialism objectively *lags behind* [*est en retard sur*] that of historical materialism

2) Second, today not just the solution to a number of very important theoretical problems, but also the way we pose them, depend on *dialectical materialism*. These problems pertain to the domain of historical materialism and other sciences.

If Marxist philosophy is the site of a problem, and an especially privileged problem, it is owing to this *objective paradox*. Let us therefore say, using an image of Lenin's, that although dialectical materialism should be 'one step ahead' of historical materialism in order to play its role in the theoretical conjuncture, it is in fact several steps behind.

Let us first examine the lag between Marxist philosophy and historical materialism [*le retard de la philosophie marxiste sur le matérialisme historique*].

This lag is an objective fact that no one familiar with Marxist theory can contest. To give non-specialists a sense of it, we may begin by pointing out that the classic authors have bequeathed us infinitely fewer texts on philosophy than on economic, political, or historical theory, and so on. Marx is the most striking example: in philosophy, he has left nothing even remotely comparable to *Capital*. It is not, however, just a question of the quantity of the texts available to us. It is also a question of the quality of their contents.

We can perfectly well show where the qualitative difference resides between the texts we have on dialectical materialism and the texts we have on historical materialism. It is a difference in *theoretical elaboration* – to be very precise, a difference in conceptual precision and rigor as well as in theoretical systematicity. In a word, it is a difference in what Marx calls the abstract (or conceptual) 'forms' and the 'order of exposition.' *Capital* displays exceptional precision, conceptual rigor, and theoretical systematicity.

The philosophical texts available to us are very far from possessing these qualities. What is more, they by no means claim to. Engels warns us, in the preface to *Anti-Dühring*, that his book is a 'polemic'; thus it is not a rigorous systematic exposition of Marxist philosophy. The same holds for Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. These are books of ideological and political combat, not rigorous, systematic expositions of dialectical materialism comparable to *Capital*. In the last instance, then, the lag between Marxist philosophy and historical materialism concerns conceptual rigor and precision as well as theoretical systematicity.

We can explain this lag by adducing, first, multiple *historical* reasons. Engels himself says that he and Marx did not 'have the time' to develop philosophy as fully as everything else. And it is true, from a practical standpoint, that historical materialism long represented the 'decisive link,' and that it was urgent that progress be made in this field, given the pressing imperatives of the class struggle.[b] Indeed, if most of the philosophical texts that our classic authors have left us are texts of ideological struggle, the reason is that they had to reply to the enemy's attacks, 'follow him onto his own ground,'[c] and, often, fight him with his own weapons, simply *turning them against* him. This explains the relatively improvised and, at all events, limited nature of the reasoning and concepts deployed, as well as the difference in rigor when they are compared to the concepts deployed in *Capital*.

One can adduce many more historical reasons, such as the evolutionism and empiricism of certain theorists and leaders of the Second International and, in the 1920s, the historicism of the 'ultra-left' theorists, succeeded by the pragmatism and dogmatism of the period of the 'personality cult.' Evolutionism, empiricism, historicism, pragmatism, and dogmatism are ideological tendencies that threaten not just the development of Marxist philosophy, but even, under certain circumstances, its very *existence*, by virtue of both their theoretical and also their practical effects.

We need only examine these so-called historical reasons with a modicum of attention to see that they are not just historical, but also *theoretical*.

For example, the ideologies that Engels and Lenin had to combat on the terrain of philosophy (Dühring's humanist idealism, the empirio-criticism and historicist

[b] On this point see Engels, Letter of 21-22 Sept. 1890 to Joseph Bloch, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, ed. S. W. Ryazannskaya, trans. E. Lasker (Moscow: 1975, pp. 394-396), and Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, trans. anon. (Moscow: 1970), pp. 230, 318-319.

[c] Engels uses this formula in *Anti-Dühring*, as does Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.

subjectivism of Lenin's adversaries, and so on) most certainly were historical obstacles to the development of Marxist philosophy; at the same time, however, they were theoretical obstacles, revisionist ideological interpretations of Marxism that Marxist philosophy had to combat – in other words, to refute theoretically – in order to survive and develop in its turn. Similarly, the evolutionism, empiricism, historicism, pragmatism, and dogmatism of a later period were historical and political obstacles to the development of Marxist philosophy only to the extent that they were simultaneously theoretical obstacles to it.

Thus it is not enough to adduce simple historical facts in order to explain why Marxist philosophy lags behind historical materialism. We must also adduce *theoretical* reasons, involving, as we have just seen, the struggle that Marxist philosophy inevitably had to wage against the different forms of bourgeois philosophical ideology in order to win not just the right to develop, but also, quite simply, the right to exist.[2] The unity of the historical and theoretical reasons that can be adduced in this connection – and thus the reasons for the lag between Marxist philosophy and historical materialism – resides in this struggle *against* bourgeois philosophical ideology, *for* the existence and development of Marxist philosophy.

If this thesis is correct, we must go much further. It was not just 'because they did not have the time' that Marx and Engels failed to raise Marxist philosophy to the theoretical level of *Capital*. It was not purely by accident that Engels only very belatedly saw fit to join philosophical battle with Dühring, who had been wreaking havoc in the socialist party for some ten years. It was no accident that Engels merely reacted to the attack of an adversary who had stolen a march on him, and that he did so on the ground chosen by his adversary, philosophy. In a certain sense, Marx and Engels learned something from Dühring, the importance of which they had previously underestimated: the fact that the existence of Marxist philosophy was *vital* to the Marxist science of history itself.

There is thus a lag between dialectical and historical materialism that goes back much further than the historical events just evoked and, consequently, goes beyond the individuals Marx and Engels. This lag is not just the consequence of certain political or ideological events, nor even of the time constraints or personal predilections of the founders of Marxism. In the last instance, it is the consequence of a law of the history of the production of knowledge. To be very precise, it is the consequence of *the law governing the emergence of a new science in its relationship to the new philosophy called for by the new science*.

We can roughly formulate this general law as follows: when a radically new science is founded in a great 'continent' previously unexplored by scientific knowledge, yet dominated by theoretical formations of an ideological nature, the new philosophy required by the new science can emerge and develop only *belatedly* [*après coup*]. Inevitably, then, it lags behind the new science.

I mean a radically new science founded in a new 'continent' previously unexplored by science: for example, Geometry, founded by the Greeks (Thales and others); Physics,

founded by Galileo; or History, founded by Marx. In these three instances, the new sciences opened up a new 'continent' of reality to knowledge, a continent that was independent of the other already explored continents. Once such a new 'continent' is opened up by a new science, other sciences can appear in it, one after the next. They explore 'regions' of this 'continent'; they do not open up new 'continents.' For example, experimental chemistry, founded by Lavoisier, was clearly a new science, yet it did not open up a new 'continent'; it merely occupied a 'region' within the 'continent' of physical nature opened up by Galileo's discovery, a 'region' hitherto unexplored by scientific knowledge. In the case of these *regional sciences*, the law that philosophy lags behind the new science does not come into play if the essentials of the philosophy needed by the new regional science were produced after the foundation of the science that opened up the new 'continent.'

The empirical history of theories verifies this law.

The philosophy required after the Greeks opened up the 'continent' of mathematics – strictly speaking, the first philosophy in human history – arrived *belatedly*: it began with Plato and was developed by Aristotle, Epicurus, the Stoics, and others. The philosophy required after Galileo opened up the 'continent' of physical nature also arrived *belatedly*: it began with Descartes and was developed by Leibniz, Malebranche, the eighteenth-century philosophers, Kant, and others. In contrast, Lavoisier did not precipitate the emergence of any genuinely new philosophy by founding chemistry: the principles of this philosophy already existed before his discovery.

In its turn, Marx's and Engels's scientific discovery was subject to the same law as Thales' and Galileo's discoveries: since it opened up a new 'continent' to knowledge, the philosophy that it carried within it and called for arrived *belatedly*, that is, lagged behind the new science. The historical sequence of Marx's works itself provides empirical confirmation of this. The first (albeit still highly ambiguous) formulation of the theoretical principles of the science of history appears in *The German Ideology*. Yet, in *The German Ideology*, Marx declares in no uncertain terms that philosophy must be purely and simply abolished, not so that it might be 'realized,' as he had maintained in his previous philosophical works, but to make it possible to 'undertake the study of positive things.' This does not at all mean that there is no philosophy at work in *The German Ideology*. However, the philosophy one finds there is, precisely, a dialectical positivist empiricism, seconded by a historicist philosophy of the subject (individuals are conceived as the 'subjects' of history) that has nothing to do with the dialectical materialism elaborated later, and that, afterwards, completely disappears. Yet this *does* mean that dialectical materialism is absent from *The German Ideology*; its absence is ratified by the positivist-empiricist thesis about the abolition of philosophy. Thus the fact that dialectical materialism *lags behind* historical materialism makes itself felt in *The German Ideology* in the form of the absence of dialectical materialism. This absence, however, is at the same time

a presence: the presence of the idealist-empiricist philosophical ideology still at work in *The German Ideology*.

We can draw an important conclusion from this 'absence' and this 'presence': the place of philosophy is never *empty*. If this place is not occupied by the new philosophy required by the new science, it is occupied by an earlier philosophy foreign to the foundation of that new science, one which, this time, does much more than simply lag behind it; it contradicts it. This contradiction is resolved only when the new philosophy begins to emerge, and is then developed and reinforced.

We can see this very clearly in Marx's *œuvre*. The idealist philosophy still at work in *The German Ideology* gradually yields to a new philosophy as a result of the new science's conceptual advances.[d] This new philosophy, however, necessarily lags some distance behind the theoretical state of the new science for a long time to come, not just quantitatively, but also qualitatively: its concepts lack the precision, rigor, and systematicity of those of the new science.

This lag makes itself felt, for example, in the continuing, objective theoretical divergence between 1) the philosophy explicitly recognized and defined in *Capital*, and 2) the same philosophy as practiced and put to work by Marx in *Capital*'s scientific analyses of the capitalist mode of production.

I have, for example, demonstrated the existence of this divergence between the formulation and the reality of the philosophy in *Capital*. That is, I have demonstrated, with respect to the famous formula about 'inverting' Hegel, that the theoretical definition of philosophy in *Capital* lags behind Marx's own philosophical practice in it. This formula is very important, since, in defining Marx's relation to Hegel as a relation of 'inversion,' it *ipso facto* proposes a definition of Marxist philosophy. The formula of 'inversion,' however, is not the *concept* of the solution to the problem it poses, but a *metaphor for it*. 'Inversion' plainly is a concept in Feuerbach's philosophy, from which Marx borrows it; it is the concept of the actually existing relationship between Feuerbach's philosophy and Hegel's. But it is not the concept of the relationship between Marx's philosophy and Hegel's; it is merely a metaphor, and this metaphor merely indicates that, between Hegel and Marx, a theoretical revolution has taken place. To know what kind of revolution it is, we have to critically compare the metaphor of 'inversion' with the actual reality of the revolution Marx carried out in his scientific work. We then discover that the revolution did not consist in an 'inversion,' but in *replacing* an ideological problematic with a new, scientific problematic.[e]

This conclusion allows us to go still further by asking the following question: What reasons account for the general law according to which philosophy lags behind science in

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[d] *The Communist Manifesto; The Poverty of Philosophy; Wages, Prices, and Profits; A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy; Capital.*

[e] See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1996 [1965]), pp. 87ff.; *idem, "The Object of Capital,"* *in idem* and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979 [1965]), pp. 145ff.

the case of a science that opens up a new 'continent' to knowledge? Here we find ourselves facing a problem that we are not yet in a position to solve, or perhaps even to pose, if it is true that there is a crucial difference between stating the existence of a difficulty (as we have done) and posing this difficulty in the (scientific) form of a problem. Let us nevertheless try to advance a provisional explanation.

It may be said that the lag between philosophy and science is, in the type of example under consideration, a 'special case' of the 'lag' between theory and practice, if it is clearly stipulated that the practice in question is a theoretical practice, inasmuch as what is involved is a science. Philosophy's lag behind science would thus be one instance of a basic principle of materialism: the primacy of practice. Incontestably, we need to search along these lines. A general principle, however, yields knowledge only if it is specified in the forms required by its singular object. How can we specify this general principle? I shall content myself with bringing out just one aspect of the specific conditions under which it takes effect.

When a new science is constituted, opening a new 'continent' up to knowledge, a veritable theoretical revolution occurs in the domain of its object. The new science broaches a 'continent,' that is, an *absolutely new* object. Yet this domain is already occupied by ideological theories which, although they speak about this object (in our case, the 'philosophies of history' that preceded Marx), produce a discourse about it that is necessarily and massively skewed.

The theoretical revolution that intervenes in this 'continent' consists in rejecting these ideological theories and replacing them with a scientific theory. However, as it does not explore one region of a continent whose main principles are already known, but, rather, 'opens up' a new 'continent,' how can this new scientific theory be constituted?

It cannot take its theoretical concepts from the *ideologies* occupying this 'continent,' because they are profoundly skewed representations of reality. Nor can it simply 'apply' to this new 'continent' theoretical concepts valid for other 'continents,' since this 'continent' is completely new. Finally, it cannot directly and immediately extract its theoretical concepts and their system from the empirical reality of its new object: that is an empiricist, ideological, and, therefore, skewed conception of the practice and history of the sciences.

The new science resolves this real contradiction in the following way: it *imports* a number of theoretical elements (concepts, categories, methods, and so on) into its domain, borrowing them from existing scientific or philosophical disciplines outside it. It puts these already existing theoretical or philosophical elements to work.[3] It puts these theoretical elements to work on the reality of its new object and, in performing this labor, it also *rectifies* these imported theoretical elements in order to adapt them to the reality of their new 'continent.'

This importation is indispensable, but the need for it comes at a high price.

To begin with, it comes at the price of an inevitable divergence between the imported concepts and their object in the domain of the new science. This divergence is rectified and reduced in the science's practice in the course of its development: the imported concepts and their system are rectified one step at a time.

The rectification of this divergence in the new science, however, sooner or later generates philosophical counter-currents. When it is a question of a science that in fact opens up a new 'continent,' there eventually comes a moment when the radical novelty of this object ends up calling into question not, this time, the imported *scientific concepts*, but the grand *philosophical categories* in which these concepts had previously been thought. Let us take a classic example. Galilean science did not just borrow and rectify imported concepts in order to think the laws of physical motion: there came a moment in which it questioned the existing philosophical categories, such as the concept of *causality*, in which [*sous lesquelles*] these concepts had previously been thought. This was the Cartesian moment; it was then, after the scientific revolution, that a philosophical revolution came about. It bore on basic philosophical categories, or, more precisely, on the system, or a segment of the system, of the existing philosophical categories, replacing them with new ones.

Experience shows that, besides the time a science needs to rectify its imported scientific concepts, it also needs time, firstly, to perceive the need for new philosophical categories and, secondly, to find itself in a position to produce them. For what holds for all revolutions holds for this philosophical revolution as well: it is not initiated by fiat, as soon as the need for it makes itself felt. One must also have the means to initiate it, and they are not to be had whenever one would like. In the history of philosophy and the sciences, as in the history of human societies, it is sometimes necessary to wait a very long time for a favorable conjuncture to provide the theoretical means adapted to the solution of a problem long left in suspense. To say that it is necessary to wait for them means that the science in question, or the philosophy, cannot produce them all by itself; it needs outside help, it needs to import new theoretical elements to resolve its critical problems. These theoretical elements, however, are not furnished on simple command. It is necessary to wait until they are produced by the development specific to other disciplines.

This holds for *the sciences*. It sometimes happens that one is stymied for a long time in the face of an insoluble problem: then the advances of another science, or of philosophy, suddenly furnish the theoretical means that were lacking. As is well known, this law came into play in the foundation of the Marxist science of history as well: it proved necessary to wait for the encounter of three different disciplines (English political economy, German philosophy, and French utopian socialism) to witness its birth.

This law holds even more emphatically for the *new philosophy* for which a new science feels the need in its own practice. The need is not enough; required as well are the theoretical means indispensable for producing new philosophical categories. These means may not exist for a certain period, in which case one has to wait for a favorable theoretical

conjuncture (progress in some other science, and so on) to furnish them. Until a favorable conjunction comes about, the philosophical revolution objectively called for by the development of a new science is left in suspense, left pending, as is the rectification of its concepts. Philosophy lags behind science.

This is the case for Marxism, over and above all the historical difficulties and ideological struggles. In the most systematic, rigorous Marxist work, *Capital*, there are a great many signs of the pressing need for new philosophical categories adequate to the theoretical practice of its scientific analyses. At the same time as we observe this need, which strives to 'fray its path' from all sides, we observe, in *Capital*, the existence of objective theoretical limits that this need could not overcome, given the state of the means at its disposal.

It can be shown, for example, that Marxist science calls for a new category of *causality* and a new category of the *dialectic*, and that it simultaneously calls for a revolution in the old universe of the philosophical categories of subject/object, essence/phenomenon, inside/outside, and so on. At the same time, however, it is apparent that this need runs up against insurmountable theoretical limits in *Capital*: the fact that the means apt for producing these new philosophical categories are lacking.

That is the underlying reason for which Marx is literally compelled to refer to Hegelian categories, even as he takes the greatest possible distance from Hegel. That is why the metaphor of 'inversion' is so important. It is not a slip or an act of inattention on Marx's part, a mere linguistic failing. It is the rigorous symptom of the contradictory philosophical situation, and, at the time, the necessarily irresolvable contradiction in which Marx found himself. He could think his full emancipation from Hegel's philosophy only as a function of Hegel's philosophy. That is why he could free himself of Hegel only by means of a *metaphor*.[f]

It can readily be seen that this lag between philosophy and science brings on ideological and theoretical effects that can be quite serious, for they are effects of distortion. Today it is clear that a whole series of *distortions* of Marxist theory were and still are based on this metaphor of Marx's 'inversion' of Hegel, that is, on a false notion of the Marx-Hegel relationship: for example, the Second International's 'evolutionist' distortion, the 'voluntarist' distortion of the ultra-left theorists and movements of the 1920s, and so on. Obviously, I am not claiming that the nature and historical destiny of the Second International or the ultra-leftism of the 1920s find their sole explanation in theoretical deviations brought about, in the last instance, by the inadequacy of the formula of 'inversion.' Class relations and the forms of the class struggle were determinant in the last instance. Precisely because it was also a question of the forms of the class struggle, however, these forms were to a great extent dependent on the social-democratic and,

[f] See the passages in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* cited above.

later, communist organizations: on their ideology, their organizational and operative methods, and their political line – and therefore on their interpretation of Marxist theory.

Hence it can be said that, in large measure, a measure dependent on theory alone, the evolutionist (Second International) or voluntarist (the 1920s) distortions of Marxist theory were based on a mistaken conception of Marx's relation to Hegel,[4] a conception that masked the revolutionary specificity of Marxist theory in philosophy. I confine myself to these two old, familiar examples, but it would be possible to cite a great many others, contemporary examples among them, to show how and why the lag between Marxist philosophy and Marxist science can produce effects of distortion that are not merely theoretical, but also ideological, and, ultimately, political.

One more word that is relevant to our own situation. If, in the last instance, Marxist philosophy lags behind historical materialism for the reasons just indicated, two consequences ensue.

First consequence

The lag between philosophy and science is not inevitable. This lag characterizes the first phase of a new scientific revolution. How long this phase lasts varies, but, when the time is ripe, it proves possible to move beyond it. The lag that is inevitable at the outset can, then, be overcome in a *later* phase. Today, precisely, we find ourselves in this later phase, and our specific task is to overcome this lag. The law of the history of scientific and philosophical theories, which explains why this lag is necessary, also provides us with the means of understanding the conditions that make it possible to overcome it. Thus this law encourages not fatalism, repetition, and resignation, but, rather, labor, research, and discovery. Such labor is indispensable if we are to rectify the theoretical, ideological, and practical distortions produced by this lag.

Second consequence

We have every reason to believe that the new means available to us today are suited to carrying out this crucial, urgent theoretical work. I am talking, in the first place, about the effects of the new *political and ideological conjuncture*. Not only can the problems posed by this conjuncture stimulate theoretical research; it is *this conjuncture itself* which allows us to pose, publicly and clearly, the problem of the lag of Marxist philosophy.

I am also talking about the contemporary *theoretical conjuncture*.[5] Emerging before our very eyes is a theoretical *conjunction* of several disciplines external to Marxism that, for their part, in their own way and from their own particular angle of approach, are raising philosophical problems that are undeniably similar in nature to the new philosophical problems posed by Marxist science.

Among these disciplines, let me mention, in particular, 1) the beginnings of a true history of the sciences, a genuinely historical epistemology; 2) the beginnings of a critical

and theoretical reflection on Freud's work; and 3) the modern linguistics deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure.

To take just one example: for their part, and in their own way, all these scientific disciplines are also posing the problem of the definition of a new category of *causality*. They are posing it in terms such that the conjunction of their problem with the Marxist philosophical problem of causality can help us take decisive steps in philosophy.

I do not think I am mistaken in announcing that dialectical materialism's lag with respect to historical materialism is a phenomenon that we will be able to master in the years ahead. It can already be predicted that this theoretical lag will, in its essentials, soon be overcome.

To overcome it, however, we will have to work seriously in philosophy. We will have to clearly identify the problems confronting us, pose them clearly, making judicious use of the theoretical means available in both the works of Marxism and certain important works produced by non-Marxist scholars and pioneers – and arrive at their solution.

It is for all these reasons that I said that Marxist philosophy was the site of a *problem* – not just because of its lag, but also because we must treat this lag as a problem to be solved, precisely in order to surmount it. Finally, to treat Marxist philosophy today as a problem is to treat it, in Marxist perspective, as a genuinely scientific discipline; it is to take its conjuncture into account and to take into account the law of unequal development that explains its lag, precisely in order to be able to surmount it. It is also to identify, with precision, all the effects of distortion produced by this lag in theory, ideology, and practice. Thus it is to understand the great lesson that Marx, Engels, and Lenin have handed down to us, and to continue their work, not by contenting ourselves with mechanically repeating everything they have given us, but by taking up everything that is theoretically advanced with a view to developing it, and by rectifying whatever is theoretically still lagging behind, in order to overcome this lag and correct the distortions produced by it.

If Marxist philosophy is the site of a problem, it is so in this sense.

IV
THE TWO STRATEGIC TASKS OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

If Marxist philosophy is not just a problem, but *the number 1 problem*, the reason is, above all, the present conjuncture – not just the political and ideological conjuncture, but the theoretical conjuncture as well.

That is the thesis I shall now go on to develop.

If it is a matter *of great urgency* that Marxist philosophy overcome its theoretical lag, that is because this lag is blocking or hindering its intervention in important domains of the ideological and theoretical conjuncture, in which it is urgent and crucial that it intervene. Marxist philosophy must consequently overcome its lag in order to measure up to its historical tasks in three domains:

1) It must first of all struggle against all the ideological *distortions* of Marxist theory; that is, in the last resort, against the effects that bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology has on the interpretation of Marxist theory. The struggle against these distortions is today an important, urgent task.

2) It must contribute to the progress of the sciences that fall within the purview of *historical materialism*. The development of historical materialism today depends on solving crucial theoretical problems, both scientific and philosophical, which can only be posed and solved with the help, and through the intervention, of dialectical materialism.

3) It must subject the disciplines that have developed under the rubric of 'Human Sciences' or 'Social Sciences' to a radical critique and set their houses in order. In their present state, a majority of these disciplines are in the hands of bourgeois ideology. They must be thoroughly recast and placed on the basis of their only authentic principles: those of historical materialism and dialectical materialism.

It can be readily seen that the third task largely depends on the second, since it is a question of the existence of historical materialism and its consequences.

Ultimately, these three tasks come down, in principle, to two:

Strategic task number 1: the defense of Marxist philosophy and science against bourgeois ideology.

Strategic task number 2: the development of historical materialism and the regional sciences dependent on it, by way of the reconquest and recasting of the disciplines now dominated by bourgeois ideology.

I shall now proceed to examine these two tasks. Obviously, my analysis will be very schematic.

V

STRATEGIC TASK NUMBER 1: DEFENDING MARXIST THEORY AGAINST BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY

Bourgeois ideology attacks Marxist theory not only from without, but also *from within*, taking advantage of the different forms of 'spontaneism' of the working class, the petty-bourgeoisie, and the intellectuals. These 'spontaneous' forms are, essentially, petty-bourgeois juridical and moral *idealism* (humanism, when it is presented as Marxism's *theoretical foundation*); scientists' and scholars' empiricism and positivism; and the pragmatism of those charged with practical tasks (politicians, technicians, and so on). These 'spontaneous' forms of the ideology internal to the working-class movement reflect bourgeois ideological forms external to the workers' movement.

For deep-seated historical and theoretical reasons, these ideological forms common to bourgeois ideology and the 'spontaneism' of the workers' movement comprise a system whose constituent elements are complementary. Thus, at a very general level, positivism, empiricism, and technicism go hand-in-hand with moral idealism. In short, the ideological

form that today represents the greatest threat to Marxist theory is the pair 'humanism/technicism.' It appears in broad daylight in the capitalist countries in the dominant ideological conjunction[6] of technocracy and humanism. It also makes itself felt, even in the Communist parties of both capitalist and socialist countries, in the form of a tendency to interpret Marxist philosophy as a *theoretical humanism*, as well as a tendency to put uncritical, mechanistic faith in the development of the *sciences and technology*, while underestimating the role of politics, ideology, and philosophy.

On these matters, however, we must once again trace things back to a point that considerably antedates present-day phenomena. We can find a *historical* explanation for these tendencies in contemporary twentieth-century events: a reaction against the effects of the 'personality cult' (the tendency toward theoretical humanism) or the 'rapid, vigorous [*impétueux*] development of the sciences and technology'[7] (the tendency toward technocracy or technicism). We can also look for the source of these temptations in the past history of the workers' movement, for technicism is associated with the Second International's mechanistic economism, while theoretical humanism is associated with certain forms of theoretical revisionism (a moral or Kantian interpretation of Marxism by certain theorists of the Second International). And we can explain these older forms too in terms of the influence of bourgeois ideology.

But the truth is that we must also give *theoretical* reasons that have to do with the law we stated earlier, the one explaining why Marxist philosophy inevitably lags behind Marxist science.

We have seen that the place of philosophy is never empty. Thus the place left unoccupied by historical materialism is occupied by an altogether different philosophy: initially, by an unqualifiedly ideological philosophy, and then by different forms in which the new philosophy strives to express its revolutionary specificity, although these forms long remain subject to the dominant forms of bourgeois ideological philosophy. That is the way – we should not close our eyes to the fact, but, rather, look the reality of the matter straight in the face – that *empiricism* and *evolutionism* (which is, as it were, the vulgar form of Hegelianism)[8] have left their mark on the history of Marxist philosophy, particularly under the Second International. Marxist philosophy has yet to free itself of them, truly and for good and all. There is, moreover, a risk that its current attempts to do so will send it plunging headlong into another ideological philosophy: the idealism represented by *theoretical humanism*.

The terms empiricism, evolutionism, and theoretical humanism call for a few words of explanation. The great Marxist leaders have always struggled against empiricism and pragmatism (the practical effect of empiricism): Marx (the 1857 Introduction, etc.), Engels (*Anti-Dühring, Dialectics of Nature*), Lenin (*Materialism and Empirio-criticism*), and still others. They have also waged a vigorous struggle against the interpretation of Marxism as a form of moral idealism: Marx's struggle against the 'true socialists,' against Proudhon, Weitling, and Kriege; Engels's struggle against Dühring's moral spiritualism; Kautsky's struggle

against Bernstein's Kantianism; Lenin's struggle against the Populists' moralism; in France, Maurice Thorez's struggle against Léon Blum's humanism, and so on. The struggle against *evolutionism*, in contrast, did not give rise to philosophical works; it remained a practical struggle of a political kind and was played out in connection with political problems (the conception of the revolution, of the organizational forms of the class struggle, of the political line to take on the first World War), as well as problems of strategy and tactics. Lenin is the incomparable representative of this *practical* struggle against evolutionism.

Generally speaking, it is rather well known, at least in principle, why *empiricism* is an ideology and, consequently, why the empiricist interpretation of Marxism is a theoretical distortion of it. Empiricism, as a theory of knowledge, neglects or underestimates the role of the properly theoretical elements that come into play in all knowledge, even 'empirical' knowledge.[g] Empiricism does not take into account the specificity and nature of the practice that produces knowledge – theoretical practice. It reduces theoretical practice to other forms of practice. It speaks of practice in general, without distinguishing the specific levels of, and differences between, the different practices: economic practice, political practice, ideological practice, scientific and philosophical practice. That is why it forms both a false idea of theory and a false idea of practice. Its practical consequence is practicism or pragmatism, which Lenin very clearly condemned.

One of the most dangerous forms of empiricism today is *historicism* – that is, the idea that it is possible to know the nature of history directly, immediately, without first producing the theoretical concepts indispensable to acquiring knowledge of it. A historicist interpretation of Marxism (perceptible, for example, in some of Gramsci's writings) consists in affirming that Marx simply 'historicized' the results of classical political economy, that he simply injected 'process' [*le devenir*] or the 'dialectic' into the old philosophical categories, and so on. Historicism neglects a fundamental theoretical fact: Marx's discovery of absolutely new theoretical concepts with which to think the reality of what we call, and experience as, 'history.'

Theoretical humanism, or the moral-idealist interpretation of the theoretical foundations of Marxist doctrine, should be precisely defined. This interpretation[9] consists in substituting *ideological* notions for the philosophical categories and scientific concepts[10] that serve as Marxism's real theoretical foundation. The Marxist *science* of history has a system of concepts as its theoretical foundation: mode of production, infrastructure (productive forces and relations of production), superstructure (juridico-political and ideological), social class, class struggle, and so on. Theoretical humanism replaces these scientific concepts, which constitute the theoretical foundation of the science of history, with ideological notions: man, alienation, the disalienation of man, the emancipation of

[g] On this point, see Althusser, "The Object of *Capital*," pp. 94-100; *idem*, 'On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources,' trans. James Kavanaugh, in Gregory Elliott, ed., *Spontaneous Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 1990 [1967]), pp. 43-67.

man, man's re-appropriation of his species-being, 'the whole man,'[11] and so on. In Marxist *philosophy*, the basic theoretical concepts are the concepts of materialism and the dialectic, the distinction between being and thought, between the real object and the object of thought, the primacy of practice, and so forth. For these concepts, theoretical humanism substitutes the ideological notions of subject and object, consciousness, activity, act, creation, and so on.

Of course, *after* making this substitution, theoretical humanism rediscovers the classic concepts of Marxism. Because it interprets them, however, in the light of these ideological notions that stand in for a theoretical foundation, the meaning of these classical concepts is skewed. For example, theoretical humanism reduces the concept of 'social relations' (relations of production, political relations, ideological relations) to 'human relations' or 'intersubjective relations.' For example, the concept of 'practice' is assimilated to the notion of the activity or act of a subject, and so on. Theoretical humanism thus distorts – to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the case, but without fail – the concepts of Marxist theory.

Even when this interpretation takes its distance from "bourgeois" humanism, even when it declares that Marx conceives the essence of man in a new way (practical, social, and historical), it remains the prisoner of moral ideology. The concept of the human essence, of man, is denounced as ideological and religious as early as *The German Ideology*, in terms devoid of all ambiguity. This concept is altogether absent from the basic theoretical system of historical materialism and dialectical materialism. The science of history and Marxist philosophy are based on completely different concepts that have nothing to do with the ideological concept of man.

This does not mean that communists do not have a political and moral 'ideal.' In struggling to establish the socialist mode of production, communists struggle to abolish the exploitation of the working class and its effects. In the long term, they struggle for the establishment of the communist mode of production – that is, for the suppression of all classes and the 'emancipation of all men.' Their ideal is inseparable from their struggle; but, like their struggle, their ideal is grounded in historical necessity, the necessity of the revolution, the necessity of establishing the socialist mode of production, and so on. This historical necessity is not, however, *intelligible* in terms of the notions that express communists' political and moral ideal. This means, to be very precise, that the notions of 'the emancipation of all men,' of 'freedom,' and of 'man' are ideological *notions*, not the basic theoretical concepts of Marxist theory (science and philosophy).

Again, to reject an interpretation of Marxism as a form of theoretical humanism does not mean that the problems of 'individuality' or 'subjectivity' do not fall within the purview of Marxist theory or that they are imaginary problems. To the extent that they *are* problems of Marxist theory, however, they are subordinate to Marxist theory's (scientific) concepts and (philosophical) categories. *They* are subordinate to Marxist theory; Marxist theory is not subordinate to *them*. This simply means that the concepts of

individuality, or subjectivity, the human person, and so on, and *a fortiori*, the notions of man, moral subject, 'creative labor,' creation, freedom, creative freedom,[12] the 'creation of man by man,' and so forth, are under no circumstances the theoretical concepts on which Marxist theory is based. When one presents them as Marxism's theoretical basis, one inevitably lapses into a petty-bourgeois moral or religious ideology that is anterior and foreign to Marxism – the very ideology with which Marx had to break in order to found his theory, beginning with the 'settling of accounts' he undertook in *The German Ideology*.

The *evolutionist* interpretation of Marxism is less well known; it is no less serious.[13] Basically, it consists in applying to Marx the finalist, teleological schemas of the Hegelian dialectic, or Darwinian biology, or Spencerian 'philosophy,' and so on. It is exemplified by Plekhanov's interpretation of Marxist philosophy, and by the mechanistic, economistic, fatalistic interpretation of historical materialism defended by certain theorists and leaders of the Second International. 'Marxist' evolutionism holds, for example, that the modes of production follow one another in an inevitable, immutable order: it leaves its mark on Stalin's famous list, which figures in his booklet *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. Evolutionism also holds, like Hegelian idealism and all philosophies of history (which are religious in this respect), that there is a 'meaning' to history, conceived as a *finality* governing it: we find its trace in formulas that effectively identify historical necessity with fatality, speak of the '*inevitable* victory' of socialism, and so on.

'Marxist' evolutionism is incapable of accounting theoretically for the possibility and necessity of the Communist parties' political activity, for the possibility of the failures of the workers' movement, and even for some of its successes, whenever they are unexpected and paradoxical in the sense that they fail to conform to its mechanistic schemas or the immutable order of the modes of production (for example, the Cuban revolution, the possibilities of revolution in the 'backward' countries, and so on). Evolutionism encourages technicist and economistic illusions and political passivity; it systematically underestimates the possibilities of reactions by the adversary; it underestimates the role of class struggle, politics, ideology, and philosophy in the class struggle. When it is massively carried over into practice, it culminates in historical catastrophes, from which, moreover, it learns no 'lessons' (the 'bankruptcy of the Second International'). Lenin's political practice represents an exemplary struggle against 'Marxist' evolutionism. The struggle against evolutionism has not, however, been waged openly in theory yet. It is, nevertheless, obvious that this struggle in theory cannot be waged for as long as the problem of the theoretical relations between Marx and Hegel has not been clarified and settled once and for all.

I said a moment ago that there is also a *theoretical* reason for these ideological distortions of Marxism. What has long exposed the interpretation of Marxism to the influence of empiricism, evolutionism, or 'humanist' idealism within the workers'

movement itself is, from a theoretical viewpoint, *the unprecedented nature of the theoretical revolution carried out by Marx*.

If Marx himself ran up against great theoretical difficulties in defining the *philosophical* categories required by his *scientific* discovery, if he had to lean on existing philosophical categories, namely, Hegel's, it is not surprising that, *a fortiori*, Marxist militants – and even excellent theorists – should have found themselves in the same predicament, or, rather, in one still more difficult. If they have often put forward interpretations of Marxism tainted by empiricism and evolutionism, and, today, by humanist idealism, it is *also* because Marxist science clearly needed a philosophy, while Marxist philosophy still lacked the theoretical force to settle accounts with the dominant philosophical ideologies and impose itself at the theoretical level by dint of its rigor and systematicity.

Today, we have gained sufficient perspective on all these effects to be able to understand their causes and measure their consequences.

Today,[14] we can and must say that it is not just the avowed enemies of Marxist theory (science and philosophy),[15] the bourgeois ideologues,[16] who loudly proclaim that it has contributed nothing new or is 'outmoded.'[17] Its partisans do the same thing when they read Marx's texts and 'interpret' Marxist theory through the great, established, self-evident truths, those of the reigning ideological philosophies.[18]

To take only three examples,[19] Marxists who read and spontaneously interpret Marxist theory, without objections, scruples, or hesitation, according to the schemas of empiricism,[20] evolutionism, or 'humanism,' *effectively declare that Marx contributed nothing new* to philosophy[21] and, by implication, to science.[22] These Marxists reduce the prodigious philosophical novelty of Marx's thought to existing, ordinary, 'obvious' forms of thought – that is, forms of the dominant philosophical ideology.[23] In order clearly to perceive and conceive Marxist philosophy's revolutionary novelty and scientific consequences, one has lucidly to resist this ideological reduction, to combat the bourgeois philosophical ideology[24] that sustains it, and to spell out what makes Marx's thought distinctive, what makes it revolutionary not just in political practice,[25] but *also in theory*.

That is where the last difficulty resides. For it is not easy to break with the 'self-evident truths' of theoretical ideologies such as empiricism,[26] evolutionism, or 'humanism,' which have dominated all Western thought for two hundred years. It is not easy to say that Marx was not an empiricist,[27] that Marx was not Hegelian (Hegelianism is the 'rich man's' evolutionism)[28] or evolutionist, that Marx was not theoretically 'humanist.' It is not easy to show positively how Marx, because he is not Hegelian, evolutionist,[29] 'humanist,' or 'empiricist,' *is something else entirely*, something which must then be defined. And when one does try to show this, it is not easy to make it understood and have it acknowledged, for the 'resistances' are extremely strong.[30]

Marxist theory, because it is *theoretically revolutionary*,[31] inevitably involves this fundamental difficulty. Unless we are to cede to the false 'self-evident truths' of the dominant theoretical ideologies (whether empiricism,[32] evolutionism, humanism, or other

forms of idealism) and thus betray what is most precious in Marx's thought – that is, what makes it theoretically revolutionary – we must face up to this difficulty and struggle against the ideologies that continually threaten to suffocate, reduce, and destroy Marxist thought. This is not an imaginary difficulty; it is an objective historical difficulty, as real in its way as the difficulties of revolutionary practice. The earth does not easily rise on new 'foundations,' nor does the structure of society, nor does the system of thought.[33]

We know that it takes a revolution for the social structure to 'rise on new foundations.'[34] After the revolution, however, it takes another extremely long, arduous struggle in politics and ideology to establish, consolidate, and ensure the victory of the new society. The same holds for the system of thought.[35] After a theoretical revolution, it takes another extremely long, arduous struggle in the theoretical and ideological domains to establish the new mode of thought, gain recognition for it, and ensure its victory, especially if it is a mode of thought which founds a new science and a new philosophy that serves as the basis for a new ideology[h] and new political practice.[36] Until this long struggle carries the day, the revolution in society, like the revolution in thought, runs a

[h] The scientific theory of Marxism (science of history, philosophy) is not an ideology. An ideology is a *skewed* representation of reality: it is *necessarily* skewed, because it is not an objective, but a *subjective* representation of reality – let us say, for the sake of brevity, a social (class) representation of reality. Science, in contrast, exists only on condition that it struggle against all forms of subjectivity, class subjectivity included (consider Lenin's struggle against the 'spontaneous' ideology of the proletariat); science is objective. Science provides knowledge of reality independent of 'subjective' class interests. Ideology, in contrast, provides a representation of reality that is not knowledge in the strict sense, because it is subordinate to class interests.

We can, however, legitimately say that Marxism has 'produced a new ideology' in the working class, and that this ideology, even while remaining ideological by virtue of its *form* (it does not take the form of a science), becomes increasingly scientific by virtue of its *content*. We can legitimately speak of an *ideology* of a scientific character, or, for the sake of brevity, of a *scientific ideology*.

Yet this new ideology is a *transformation* of the working class's old ideology. This transformation displaces the working class's ideology (moral, political, philosophical) toward a new content that is more scientific because it is increasingly permeated by the scientific principles of Marxism, or, at least, by the results of Marxist science and philosophy.

This transformation is possible because Marxist theory, which is objective, offers the working class scientific knowledge of its *interests* as well as the means of realizing them. It is Marxist theory's scientific, objective character that allows it to 'serve' the working class's interests without being skewed by the subjective representation of those class interests. Thus it is Marxist theory's scientific objectivity which produces this *historically altogether new* result: the emergence of an ideology whose *content* has been transformed, an increasingly *scientific* ideology.

Yet the working class's ideology, although its content has been transformed in a scientific direction, remains an ideology as far as its *form* is concerned. For example, proletarian moral ideology, proletarian philosophical and political ideology, subsist in the form of ideology.

For ideology has a *form of its own*, deriving from ideology's social function, from the fact that it constitutes one level of the superstructure of any society. Hence the *form* of ideology necessarily subsists as a level constitutive of society; the form of ideology reflects, precisely, this social function of ideology, which distinguishes it from science. That is why, even as it becomes increasingly scientific, proletarian ideology, or the ideology of a socialist society, can never be confused with science. That is why, if we give these concepts a rigorous meaning, it is not possible to say that Marxist theory as science is a '*scientific ideology*.' Marxist science rests not on a 'scientific ideology,' as is too often said, but like any science, on a *scientific theory*.

very great risk: *that of being smothered by the old world and, directly or indirectly, falling back under its sway*.[37]

It will be understood why, today, we still have to make a real effort to accurately picture the theoretical revolution that Marx accomplished in science and philosophy, against the old ideologies that tend constantly to subject this revolution to their own law – that is, to smother and destroy it.

In the last resort, it is incumbent on Marxist *philosophy* to defend Marxist theory. This defense involves an ideological and, simultaneously, a theoretical struggle against bourgeois ideological tendencies both inside and outside Marxism. If this theoretical struggle is to triumph, we cannot content ourselves with denouncing and criticizing the opposed ideologies and ideological forms that exercise an influence on Marxism. We must also – this is the absolute condition for theoretical victory – make Marxist theory an *impregnable fortress*.

If we have an impregnable theoretical fortress at our disposal, that is, a rigorous, exact, systematic theory that is fully alive, we will have a powerful force of positive scientific demonstration, capable of sweeping away the ideologies' fallacious arguments and concepts by compelling recognition of the plain truth. We will then be able to sally forth in order to attack our adversaries on grounds of our own choosing, using our own weapons. *Ideological struggle* will then be a natural consequence of theoretical force. We will then be able to define a theoretical and ideological strategy and carry the day against our adversary. We will no longer be vulnerable to his initiatives, compelled to 'follow him onto his own ground,' and reduced to engaging in mere 'polemics.' We will have the ideological initiative because we will have the requisite theoretical force.

Let there be no mistake: the word 'fortress' is an *image*. The point is not to *shut ourselves up* in a stronghold. That would be dogmatism.[38] The force of Marxist philosophy consists in rigorously solving its problems and endowing its solutions with the force of scientific – that is, irrefutable – demonstration. Thus its force consists in rectifying inadequate concepts, making still vague concepts precise, and producing new concepts where they are lacking, in order to explore and conquer the domains that belong to it by rights. It consists in endowing the system of its concepts with a rigor that can find expression in an 'order of exposition' (Marx) comparable to *Capital's*: the irrefutable order of a *scientific demonstration*.

Simply to provide a glimpse of the fundamental problems that it is urgent for Marxist philosophy to explore, let me mention the following: the problem of the specificity of philosophy vis-à-vis science; the problem of the nature of theory; the problem of practice and the specificity of the different practices (economic, political, theoretical); the problem of the specificity of the Marxist dialectic, in contradistinction to Hegel's; the problem of the Marxist conception of 'causality'; the problem of the nature of ideology, and so forth. A long development would be needed to show in what sense each of these themes still constitutes a problem to explore, calling for the production or rectification of theoretical

concepts. I cannot undertake that task here.[i] We can, however, gain some sense of its importance and urgency from a rapid examination of just one problem, *the problem of the union of theory and practice*.

This problem is central to Marxist philosophy and practice. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, we do not have a systematic, rigorous theory of this question, but only a general orientation, inscribed in the classic thesis about the need for the union of theory and practice and the primacy of practice. We also have a few theoretical elements concerning practice as the 'criterion of truth.' Above all, we have an impressive quantity of political texts, by both Lenin and other great leaders of the workers' movement, that sum up and critically reflect on a vast range of practical experience exemplifying the realization of the union of theory and practice. All this is quite rich, but it does not yet constitute the theory of the union of theory and practice.

A correct general orientation does not make a theory; nor do isolated elements, nor even the richest imaginable records of practical experience. We have to *think* what exists 'in the practical state' in the experience of scientific practice and the experience of political practice. To that end, we have to produce the concepts required by reality, organizing them in a rigorous demonstrative system. This is an immense theoretical task. We can find a model and resource for it in the work Marx did to produce the new concepts and theoretical system of *Capital*. Until we have treated this fundamental philosophical problem with a rigor comparable to *Capital's*, we will not, strictly speaking, possess a true philosophical theory of the problem of the union of theory and practice.

Yet we saw, in the present article's opening pages, how important the *correct* conception of this problem is not just for Marxist theory, but also for the practice of the revolutionary Parties. On the other hand, it may be said that once this theory has been elaborated, we will have vastly increased theoretical force with which to struggle against bourgeois ideology (Marxist philosophy's number 1 strategic task), and to elaborate, in a rigorous, productive way, the practical and theoretical problems falling within historical materialism's ambit.

In sum, Marxist philosophy's *number 1 strategic task* is to become a *genuine theory*, in the strong sense, in order to struggle and prevail against bourgeois ideology and its influence on the revolutionary workers' movement. Marxist philosophy can become the impregnable 'theoretical fortress' that it must be only at the price of the in-depth theoretical elaboration that will overcome the still extant lag between Marxist philosophy and Marxist science, endowing Marxist philosophy with the conceptual precision and rigor as well as the theoretical systematicity that it still lacks. It is imperative, and a matter of great urgency, that Marxist philosophers go to work, setting themselves this specific goal before all others.

[i] See *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, which broach some of these themes.

VI
STRATEGIC TASK NUMBER 2: DEVELOPING HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

In carrying out strategic task number 1, Marxist philosophy will provide itself with the means to help it carry out *strategic task number 2*.

Most of the scientific disciplines that fall within historical materialism's domain are in very great need of Marxist philosophy's help today. This holds not only for the disciplines that call themselves 'Human Sciences,' but also for certain regions of the Marxist science of history.

1. Historical Materialism

Here too, I must be schematic, contenting myself with rapidly adducing a handful of examples in order to make myself understood.

We have, in *Capital*, a theory of the capitalist mode of production. Yet we still have nothing comparable for the other modes of production, pre-capitalist or socialist (even if important work has been done on them),[j] or for the phases of transition between these modes.[k]

As far as the capitalist mode of production itself is concerned, although we have an impressive conceptual system for thinking the reality of its economic level (*Capital*), we have no comparable theory for thinking the reality of its political and ideological levels.

As far as the *political* level is concerned, we do, it is true, have general theses on the state, the class struggle, and their evolution in the concrete analyses of historical and political works. We also have a rich record of the experience of class struggle (for example, all of Lenin's texts and speeches, etc.). We have, however, no rigorous, developed theory, in the strong sense of the word, of the nature of social classes, the state and state power, the state apparatus and bureaucracy, the different forms taken by the capitalist and socialist state, the nature of political parties, the class alliances of the 'bloc in power,' the Leninist distinction between a class and its representatives, and so on.

This theoretical deficiency is infinitely more striking where the nature of *ideologies* is concerned: the relationship between, on the one hand, the ideological level, and, on the other, the economic and political levels; the difference between ideology and science; the double – social and theoretical – determination of the ideologies, and so forth. If we had a theory of the political (the juridico-political superstructure) and of ideology for the capitalist mode of production, at least, we could extend its concepts (transforming them

[j] On the Asiatic, slave, and feudal modes of production, important work has been underway since the war in the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Democratic Germany, France, and so on.

[k] On the politically very important problem of transitional phases, there do exist remarkable texts about the first phases of the transition from capitalism to socialism (Lenin and Bukharin). Yet the general theory of the transition has yet to be worked out. Let us mention, in France, the work of Charles Bettelheim.

in accordance with their object) to other modes of production. We should then have a theory of the political and ideological that is specific to these modes of production. We are, however, a long way from possessing such theories. This deficiency has not just theoretical, but also political consequences.

Historians, who work on the past (slave-holding, feudal, and other social formations), like the ethnographers and ethnologists who are today working on primitive social formations, feel the effects of this theoretical deficiency in their own work. They encounter them in the form of difficulties involving the nature and role of these social formations' 'institutions' and ideologies, or the determination of the dominant element in the dialectic of their history or 'non-history.'

Politicians and political parties, for their part, run up against the practical consequences of this theoretical deficiency. The solution of major political and ideological problems in the construction of socialism and the transition to communism in fact depends on the availability of theoretical knowledge about the nature of the state under the dictatorship of the proletariat and the ideology of a socialist social formation. Yet, precisely, we do not have, properly speaking, a theory, in the strong sense, of the political and the ideological in the socialist mode of production, or a theory of the phases of the transition from capitalism to socialism.

This is more striking still where the transition of pre-capitalist social formations to socialism is concerned. If we had a theory of the political and the ideological in pre-capitalist modes of production, it would be easier to pose the problem of the nature of the state, the political party, and the forms of political action apt to ensure the success of this transition.

To mention one last, still highly controversial example, there can be no doubt that it is owing to the lack of a theory of the juridico-political and ideological superstructure that, on the phenomenon of the 'personality cult' which arose in the superstructure of a social formation in one phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat, we have not gone beyond theses that are far more descriptive than theoretical. For that reason, these theses threaten to impede a solution to the problems in question. One simple index among a dozen others should make this clear: of the many works of concrete Soviet sociology, virtually none involves research in the sociology of political or ideological social relations.[1] [39]

At a still more abstract level, we do not have, however improbable this may seem, a truly satisfying general theory of the mode of production, although *Capital* gives us all we need to construct one. In this connection, I will mention just one point, which has major consequences from a practical point of view: it concerns the concept of *productive forces*. We certainly do possess the general concept, but, as its very formulation suggests ('forces' in the plural), it usually designates a mere empirical list: material resources and energy

[1] Cf. *La Sociologie en U.R.S.S.: Rapports des membres de la délégation soviétique au Congrès d'Évian* (Moscow: Éditions du progrès, 1966), especially Gennadii Vasilevich Ossipov, 'Buts et bilan des recherches sociologiques en U.R.S.S.,' in *ibid.*, pp. 236–251.

resources, instruments of production, labor-power, and that labor-power's 'technical experience.' That was Stalin's definition of the term and, to my knowledge, it has not been modified. An empirical list, however, does not constitute a concept, even if the current expression 'productive forces' does indeed designate one specific reality while distinguishing it from another, the relations of production. Truly to possess the concept of productive forces, we need something more: we need to discover and state the specific relations that, for each mode of production and each of its phases, organize the empirical elements described on the list into specific, distinctive organic unities.[m] For it is obvious that if, in defining the productive forces, we do not go beyond drawing up a simple quantitative list of their elements, there is every chance that we will put the accent, indiscriminately, on the technical element, and thus lapse into economism, as the Second International did, or into its contemporary technicist variants.

If, in contrast, we bring out the organic relations that bind these elements in distinctive unities corresponding to the different modes of production and each of their phases, we will see that, depending on the modes of production and their phases, the dominant element can be displaced. Sometimes technology in the narrow sense (the instruments of production) comprises the dominant element in the specific original unities constituting the essence of a given set of productive forces; at other times, the organization of labor (the forms of co-operation) or the technical level of the labor-force does. These distinctions are obviously important, because they dictate the type of action required to develop the productive forces in a given instance. Depending on whether one should act on this or that constitutive element of the productive forces, because it is, in the conjuncture, the 'decisive link,' one must put the accent on the economic (or on one or another aspect of it), or the political, or the ideological.

At a still deeper level, we do not have a theory, in the strong sense, of either *'determination in the last instance by the economy*' or of the specific type of causality that governs the modalities of this determination and thus comprises the articulation of the different levels of a mode of production (economic, political, and ideological). We do not have a theory, in the strong sense, of the *displacement* of dominance among the various levels within determination in the last instance by the economy. We do not have a theory to account for the *variations of the conjuncture*, although the everyday political practice of the Communist parties takes them into very close account, while Lenin's writings (to cite only Lenin) constantly point to the displacement of dominance as that which constitutes the defining feature of a conjuncture.[n] [40]

Of course, it does not fall to Marxist philosophy alone, or, consequently, to philosophers alone, to elaborate all these questions theoretically. It falls, first and

[m] On this point, see Balibar's important contribution to *Reading Capital*, pp. 225ff.

[n] This theory of the conjuncture, of the displacement of dominance between the various levels, and so on, is directly relevant to the theory of the dialectic. The most remarkable formulation we have of it is to be found in Mao Zedong, 'On Contradiction.'

foremost, to the theorists working in the domain of historical materialism: theorists of the economy and politics, theorists specializing in the ideologies, historians, and so on. Yet the work of these theorists needs helps from Marxist philosophy, especially today. Here too I shall take just one example.

In my view, it is no accident, nor even a fact explicable in terms of historical causes alone, that we still do not have a true theory, in the strict sense, of *social classes, the political,* or *the ideological*. There are, as well, *theoretical* reasons for this deficiency; to be quite precise, philosophical reasons.

Let us go back to what was said earlier about the lag between philosophy and science in the case of a science that opens up a new 'continent' to knowledge (as in Marx's case). The 'need' for philosophy that the new science feels at a later stage of its development does not have to do only with the attacks or philosophical ideological deviations that threaten it. It is also, fundamentally, an inner need that the science feels when it tries to overcome the theoretical limits it runs up against in its own work and domain. Some of these theoretical limits depend, in the last resort, on the *philosophical categories* in which the science must think its new objects. For there comes a moment in the progress of a science when certain old philosophical categories objectively constitute a theoretical obstacle to solving new problems. It is this properly philosophical obstacle which then prevents the science from developing, by preventing it from solving certain precisely identifiable scientific problems. I am convinced that this has long been the case for the theory of social classes, the theory of the political, and the theory of the ideological.

In order to think the nature of a social class, it is indispensable to take *conjointly* into account the determination of the economic base, the determination of the juridico-political superstructure, and the determination of the ideological superstructure. It is also indispensable to take into account the 'play' that occurs within this joint determination, in order to explain the possible displacements of dominance among these different determinations.[o]

In order to think the conjunction of several different determinations and, at the same time, the variations of their dominance, the classic philosophical category of 'causality' is plainly inadequate - as is even the category of 'reciprocal causality' between cause and effect, or the category of the 'resultant of forces.' These categories may well allow us to 'describe' phenomena, but they do not allow us to think their mechanism. On this very precise point, it may be said that the classic concept of causality, even 'improved' by the

[o] Lenin's and Marx's historical analyses (Lenin's great political texts, Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire*) clearly point to the 'play' that makes displacements possible. We may say that a social class is determined in the last instance by the relations of production – but it is also determined, and at the same time, by the structure of the political and ideological. It may possess its own political organization or find its political 'representatives' among politicians of another class (for example, Napoleon II and the small peasants). In other words, it may be either present in person in the political class struggle or be absent in person there; it may possess its own ideology or not, and so on. We must account theoretically for all these possible variations. The distinction between the 'class in itself' and the 'class for itself' found in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847) nicely designates one aspect of this problem, but it is not yet the theory of it.

concept of reciprocal causality or by cybernetic concepts, today constitutes a philosophical obstacle to the solution of a scientific problem. That is why the theory of social classes, the class struggle, and so on has now reached a dead end.[p]

To remove this obstacle, we must try to produce a new philosophical category capable of accounting for the specificity of a dialectical reality that has been identified by Marxist science: the conjunction of different determinations on the same object, and the variations in the dominant determination among them, at the very heart of their conjunction.

I have, for my part, tried to clearly identify [*bien reconnaître*] the existence of this problem and to sketch a theoretical solution to it by proposing two new philosophical categories: 'structural causality' and 'overdetermination.' I cannot analyze them in detail in the framework of this article.[q] Let me simply indicate the general *raison d'être* of each of them.

'Structural causality' is intended to draw attention to the fact that the classic philosophical category of causality (whether Cartesian linear causality or Leibnizian 'expressive' causality) is inadequate for thinking *Capital's* scientific analyses and must be replaced by a new category. To give some idea of this innovation, we may say that, in structural causality, we find something resembling the problem (often invoked by biologists) of the causality of the 'whole upon its parts,' with the difference that the Marxist 'whole' is not a biological, organic 'whole,' but a complex structure that itself contains structured levels (the infrastructure, the superstructure). Structural causality designates this very particular causality of a structure upon its elements, or of a structure upon another structure, or of the structure of the ensemble upon its structural levels.

As for 'overdetermination,' it designates one particular effect of structural causality – very precisely, the one evoked a moment ago in connection with the theory of social classes: the conjunction of different determinations on the same object, and the variations in dominance among these determinations at the very heart of the conjunction. To return to the example of social classes, we may say that they are overdetermined because, to grasp their nature, we have to bring into play the structural causality of three 'levels' of society, economic, political, and ideological – with structural causality operating in the form of a conjunction of these three structural determinations on the same object, and in the variation of the dominant element within this conjunction.

I do not claim that these formulations (structural causality, overdetermination) are satisfactory. They have to be tested, developed, or rectified. My only claim is that they acknowledge [*représente la reconnaissance de*] the existence of an undeniable philosophical problem that is of decisive strategic importance when it comes to removing the properly

[p] The impasse of theory does not always lead to an impasse in political practice. As we have seen, political practice can be in advance of theory in certain cases. On the other hand, there are cases in which the impasse of theory also blocks or impedes political practice. The theory of the possibility of these variations has yet to be worked out.

[q] See *For Marx*, pp. 87-116, 200-218 and *Reading Capital*, pp. 29ff., 182-193.

philosophical obstacle that all genuine theories of social classes, class struggle, the political, and the ideological are encountering today.

The theory of the nature of the *ideological* presents, moreover, a special philosophical problem that has so far impeded its elaboration. To account for ideology's specificity, it is not enough to say that ideology too is subject to 'structural causality.' Nor is it enough to say that ideology presents the case of a conjunction of two different determinations: one involving knowledge [*connaissance*] (which confers representational value on the ideological) and the other involving the division of society into classes (which explains why ideological representation is skewed [*faussé*]). We must also account for the reality we are calling a 'skewed representation'; that is, we must account for the paradoxical unity of a discourse that states something false [*qui énonce le faux*] while claiming to state the truth. It is not enough to invoke the old philosophical concept of error: it merely designates the difficulty, without posing or solving the problem. Nor is it enough to say that this duplicity of ideological discourse is a special case of 'overdetermination'; we must also account for the fact that this overdetermination is that of 'the true' and 'the false,' by virtue of the fact that it exists in the specific object known as a '*discourse*.'

It can be seen, then, that to remove the theoretical obstacle currently blocking all theories of ideology, we have to bring into play not just new philosophical concepts of 'structural causality' and 'overdetermination,' but also what may be called the *theory of discourses*, which can only be constituted with the help of structural linguistics. This theory of discourses has yet to emerge, and it cannot be worked out without assistance from philosophy. I do not pretend to be able to offer results here, either: it will be a long time before any are in sight. I only claim to have posed a real, important problem. Insofar as the solution of this problem concerns the Marxist science of the ideological level of modes of production, it is easy to see that any theory of ideology today calls for the decisive intervention of Marxist philosophy.

2. The 'Human Sciences'

What holds for the theoretical regions internal to historical materialism holds still more emphatically for the disciplines that go by the name of 'Human Sciences.'[41]

We are living in the age of the 'Human Sciences,' which include, besides history and political economy, sociology, ethnology, demography, psychology, psycho-sociology, linguistics, and so on. Most of these disciplines have developed outside Marxism, and it leaps to the eye that they have been profoundly marked, in their 'theory,' 'methodology,' research 'techniques,' and, finally, their object, by bourgeois ideology.

The extensive methodological and technical apparatus that these disciplines put to work is by no means proof of their scientific character. It is well known that there can exist highly technical disciplines (utilizing, for example, mathematical methods) that are nevertheless '*sciences' without an object*, or, if one prefers, 'sciences' whose object is altogether

different from the one they proclaim to be theirs. I cannot provide a detailed demonstration of this here, but there are irrefutable reasons for maintaining that, in a good many of their subdivisions, several 'Human Sciences' are not sciences providing theoretical knowledge of a real object, but (highly elaborate) *techniques of social adaptation or readaptation*. Almost all of psycho-sociology as well as most works of empirical sociology and contemporary political economy, and even much of psychology, fall into this category.

A practical way of discerning the imposture of these disciplines 'without an object' is to observe that they are incapable of providing a rigorous, precise, unequivocal definition of their object, and that, in practice, they all fight over, and tear apart, an 'object' to which none holds an incontestable claim. It is common knowledge not only that the 'problems of the borders' between political economy, sociology, psycho-sociology, and psychology are burning issues, but also that the disciplines in question are incapable of resolving them. When a 'science' fights interminably over its 'object' with one or more neighboring 'sciences,' chances are good that what is at stake is the nature of this 'object' itself, and, therefore, the nature of these supposed 'sciences.' Indeed, within one and the same discipline (for example, political economy, sociology, psychology, or psycho-sociology), disciplines are mushrooming before our very eyes (a good dozen disciplines exist within political economy, psychology, and so on), so that the 'border problem' is posed anew within political economy and sociology, psycho-sociology, psychology, and so on. These divisions by no means correspond to a theoretical division of labor grounded in their object, but reflect different conceptions of the same 'object.'

It can be shown that this disorder, this anarchy in 'sciences' that often boast an impressive methodological and technical apparatus, derives in the last instance from the fundamental ambiguity marking the supposedly 'scientific' nature of these 'sciences' (which are quite often mere 'techniques') and their '*object*' (which is often not an object, but an *objective*: social adaptation or readaptation).

Part of the reason for this fundamental ambiguity is, no doubt, that these disciplines are still new. In the last instance, however, it is due to their domination not just by bourgeois ideology, but also, and in some cases directly, by bourgeois politics. It is bourgeois ideology which imposes on these 'sciences' the skewed ideological categories in which they set out to define their 'object,' with the result that they miss real objects. Ultimately, it is also bourgeois ideology and politics which impose on them the *objectives* that these sciences dependent on the bourgeoisie then 'spontaneously' take for their '*objects*.'

This situation is extremely serious not just for Marxists, but for all the scholars and technicians working in the domain of the existing 'Human Sciences.' Many scholars in the 'human sciences' are troubled by a practical and theoretical situation whose deplorable consequences they have to face even in their day-to-day professional activity. More or less

confusedly, they feel the need for a theoretical clarification that would free them from the contradictions and dependencies in which they live and work.

The biggest danger in our present situation, however, is that the Marxists themselves may yield to the deceptive allure of these 'Sciences,' submitting to them in hopes of obtaining from them the knowledge that they in fact need. With a few exceptions, the following conclusion holds: *to submit to the existing 'Human Sciences' today, without subjecting their theories, methods, techniques, and, finally, their 'object' to a radical critique, is in fact to submit to one of the most dangerous (because least conspicuous) forms of bourgeois ideology.*

This is an especially big danger today, when, after decades of isolation and theoretical stagnation in certain domains, Communists feel the need to resolve new problems 'posed by life.' In rushing into the 'Human Sciences' without taking the precaution of subjecting their foundations and methods to a rigorous critique, they risk falling prey to the illusion that their real problems are being 'solved,' when, in fact, the contemporary 'Human Sciences' often represent the biggest obstacles to their solution.

To go to the bottom of things, we must, on the contrary, come to understand that most human sciences, although they have developed outside Marxism, fall *by rights* within the purview of Marxist theory. Political economy, sociology and 'social psychology,' and even, for the most part, what is called 'psychology' can exist only on the theoretical basis of the principles of historical materialism. All these disciplines are simply regions of the new 'continent' opened up to knowledge by the new science founded by Marx (the history of human societies and their effects on the individuals subject to their structures). Only on the absolute condition that these regional sciences are situated where they rightfully belong [*en leur juste lieu*] – in this 'continent' – can they be endowed with a true object (as opposed to a mere objective), a correct theory of that object, and the correct methodology corresponding to it. It is on this condition that it will become possible to put an end to the 'border disputes' raging both outside and inside the contemporary disciplines.

There is every reason to suppose that this labor of critical transformation and foundation will yield significant results, some of which will constitute true discoveries. By dint of this labor, Marxist theorists will overcome historical materialism's lag[42] in fields of research that, for the most part, fall under its own principles. They will take back entire regions occupied by by-products of bourgeois ideology, for the greater good of Marxist theory and politics. This reconquest represents one of the major forms of struggle against bourgeois ideology.

Of course, we cannot contribute to a critique and a thoroughgoing reorganization of the 'Human Sciences' by straightforwardly 'applying' the principles of historical materialism or, *a fortiori*, by 'making deductions' from them. Quite the contrary: we will arrive at this result only through a significant effort of criticism, research, and theoretical production. We have to work on both existing Marxist method and the Human Sciences in their present state. In short, we have to make use of all the theoretical resources and empirical raw material at our disposal. We must also learn to distinguish, among the

existing Human Sciences, those which already provide theoretical guarantees strong enough for us to say that they have an object, and that their title to it is not disputed by a horde of other disciplines; linguistics and psychoanalysis are examples. We must also undertake a critical examination of the present state of the last-named disciplines[r] [43] in order to determine their stage of development, and, finally, to discern what they contain that might serve as a theoretical resource for resolving some of the problems posed in other disciplines. This means that historical materialism cannot accomplish this task all by itself: it will need help from dialectical materialism, indispensable not only for criticizing bourgeois ideology's effects in the domain of the 'human sciences,' but also for recognizing the positive results achieved by some of them, and for redefining the theoretical regions of the 'continent' that Marx opened up to knowledge.

The reader will have understood that, in proposing this program, I am by no means calling for a return to 'dogmatism.' The point is not that all problems have been solved in advance by Marxist theory, so that we can 'retreat' back to Marx. There do indeed exist new problems about which Marx has told us nothing. New disciplines founded after Marx's day, such as linguistics and psychoanalysis, have begun to broach them. These regions do not fall, either directly or exclusively, within the purview of historical materialism. They also seem to belong, at least in part, to other 'continents' or, perhaps, to just one other 'continent'; the question is still open.[44] On the other hand, in all the regions belonging to historical materialism, Marxism has things to say. It cannot say them unless it sets out from Marx, the true Marx, in order to develop, and to become the strategic center of, the general theory on which research in the Human Sciences depends.

If Marxism remains open to all that is new and authentically scientific, open to all real problems, while at the same time remaining constantly alert to the danger represented by the temptations and traps of bourgeois ideology and its effects, it will prove able to perform this historical task, whose theoretical and practical and, therefore, political importance leaps to the eye. To perform this task, however, Marxists have to stick to the positions of Marxist theory, without falling back behind Marx into bourgeois or petty-bourgeois idealist ideologies, as all too often happens to those of them who go hunting for the solution to the problems of the 'Twentieth Century' in the *works of the early Marx*.[45]

To develop historical materialism while reconquering and recasting the disciplines occupying the domain of the 'Human Sciences': *this strategic task number 2 today depends, in the last instance, on the progress of Marxist philosophy, that is, on strategic task number 1*.[46]

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[r] In particular, it is crucial that we liberate Freud's discovery from all the idealist bourgeois ideology that has covered it over not only in the United States, but also in Europe, and rigorously distinguish its object from the 'object' of psychology. Psychoanalysis is neither a psychology nor a branch of psychology. Its specific object is not behavior or the 'personality,' but the unconscious and its effects. A great deal of work must be carried out in order to give Freud's discovery the scientific form it requires. This task has been undertaken by researchers working, above all, under the impetus provided by the *œuvre* of Lacan, who, all alone, was the first to open this path. Modern linguistics poses similar critical problems, but it exists, and has a real object: it has produced remarkable results (the Soviet school, Danish school, American and French schools, etc.)

VII
CONCLUSION: PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

To conclude, I would like to reply to a final objection that may occur to my readers.

In spite of all the explanations that I have provided, and even Marx's, Engels's, and Lenin's theses and examples, the reader may get the impression that the accent I have put on philosophy's decisive role in the present conjuncture threatens to compromise the grand principle of the primacy of practice and the *primacy of politics*.

To reply to this objection, we have to go back to the Marxist conception of the union of theory and practice. For it is in the framework of the union of theory and practice that it becomes possible to resolve the contradiction, apparent or real, between theory or philosophy on the one hand and practice or politics on the other.

The union of theory and practice implies that every political practice contains a philosophy, and that every philosophy contains a practical signification, a politics. That is why it is essential, under certain circumstances, to go all the way back to philosophical principles in order to combat the ideological distortions of political practice, and why it may be crucial under other circumstances – not only for the Marxist science of history, but also for the practice of the revolutionary parties – to rectify and develop existing philosophy. The way the union of theory and practice is realized, the distortions of which it is the locus, the threats facing it, and the theoretical needs that make themselves felt when we try to solve its problems (whether scientific or political) require that we put the accent on either politics or theory, depending on the circumstances, and, within theory, on either historical or dialectical materialism. For the reasons that I have very rapidly set out, I think it is clear that the present theoretical conjuncture, considered against the background of the general conjuncture, calls for *putting the accent on Marxist philosophy*.

One must, however, go further. The union of theory and practice must also appear at the heart of Marxist theory (the articulated ensemble of Marxist science and Marxist philosophy) and even at the heart of Marxist philosophy itself. Fully to explain what I mean, I would say that the primacy of politics must be expressed, in forms specific to Marxist theory, at the heart of Marxist theory itself, and that *it falls by definition to philosophy to ensure the primacy of politics in theory*.

It is not enough to say that the primacy of politics is ensured by the fact that every philosophy contains a practical signification, a politics. Of course, this politics must first be correct. The primacy of politics in theory, however, must also be realized *in theoretical forms*. Politics must, in short, have perceptible, precise consequences at the heart of theory itself. The primacy of politics manifests itself in theory in two essential forms, both of which depend on philosophy.

1) The primacy of politics manifests itself, first, as a demand for the kind of *theoretical politics* defined in Part II of the present article. Both knowledge of the kind pertaining to historical materialism (analysis of the ideological and political conjuncture) and the direct intervention of dialectical materialism are required to define this theoretical politics. For only dialectical materialism can identify the deviations to be fought, the errors to be corrected, the theoretical needs to be satisfied, and the deficiencies to be overcome in the theoretical domain. Only dialectical materialism can define a theoretical strategy and tactics, and set out theoretical objectives in a hierarchical order reflecting the urgent imperatives of the theoretical conjuncture (task number 1, task number 2, etc.).

2) The primacy of politics in theory makes itself felt directly and decisively in *the nature of Marxist philosophy itself*.

To grasp this, at least in principle, we have to say a word about the big theoretical problem at stake in this thesis: the problem of the specificity of Marxist philosophy, the problem of *the difference between science and philosophy*. Even when we demand that philosophy exhibit the formal characteristics of a science, namely, precision, conceptual rigor, and demonstrative systematicity, we must simultaneously affirm that it is not a science. *What radically distinguishes philosophy from the sciences, the science of history included, is the internal, intimate, organic relation that it maintains with politics.*

The Marxist science of history, like every other science, maintains an *external* relation to politics. Political conditions are part of the ensemble of objective social conditions that condition both the existence of the sciences and their development. These political conditions also make themselves felt in a particular form: that of the ideologies which constantly besiege every science, acting on it from without by taking advantage of the philosophical difficulties internal to the theoretical practice of the sciences. Insofar as they express relations of force within the class struggle, the ideologies refer us to the science of the class struggle, which is a part of the Marxist science of history. Insofar as the ideologies state philosophical theses, represent philosophical tendencies, and take advantage, within the sciences, of the difficulties that the sciences encounter in their theoretical practice, they refer us to the Marxist philosophy that can provide an understanding and a critique of the ideologies.

Thus that which is internal to the sciences in the political intervention of the ideologies pertains to *philosophy*, not to the sciences themselves. To the extent to which ideology's interference in the life of the sciences does not involve philosophy, this interference may be considered external to the sciences; it is part of the objective social conditions for the existence and development of the sciences, not part of what constitutes the scientificity of the sciences. This conclusion holds for all the genuinely constituted sciences, and thus for the Marxist science of history too.

It will be objected that the Marxist science of history should not be so hastily lumped together with the other sciences: mathematics, the natural sciences, and so on. For the real difficulty, it will be said, resides in the fact that the objects of these sciences have

nothing to do with politics, whereas the Marxist science of history takes politics as its object, and consequently maintains, as a science, an intimate relation with politics.

This argument is important, but, in fact, goes wide of the mark. To reply to it, it is not enough to say that the Marxist science of history takes as its object not just politics (the class struggle), but *other* objects as well: the political (the juridico-political superstructure, that is, law [*le droit*] and the state), the economic, the ideological, their articulation in the different modes of production, the combination of several modes of production in concrete social formations, and so on. In other words, it is not enough to say that politics is just one object of Marxist science among others. It must also be shown that the fact that Marxist science takes politics as one object among others clearly distinguishes Marxist science from the other sciences, but does not affect, internally and intimately, its scientific character as such, that is, the *scientificity* of this science.

The science of history's relationship to politics is, in principle, identical to any other science's relationship to its object. This relationship is one of scientific *objectivity*. It concerns the general forms of the scientificity of any science, the fact that a science can only produce knowledge of its specific object by putting a theory and a method to work in a determinate theoretical practice, including, in some cases, an experimental practice (the Communist parties' political practice is part of the theoretical practice of Marxist science, on condition that it is treated scientifically). The nature of a science's object only determines certain forms of this relationship of objectivity, but not this relationship itself, which is the same no matter what object a science studies.

To bring out the objectivity of this relationship – that is, its independence of the specific nature of any particular object – we may say that an object's specific properties do not affect scientific knowledge of it. Spinoza observed that the concept of a dog does not bark;[47] similarly, we might say that the concept of sugar is not sweet, that the knowledge of atoms is not atomic, that the knowledge of life is not 'alive,' that the science of history is not 'historical,' and so on. In the same way, it may be said that the science of politics is not political. This is a way of saying that the qualitative nature of the object of a science does not affect – internally, in an intimate, organic way – a science's intrinsic nature, which is its scientificity. Politics or 'ideology' is therefore not the determining principle of the Marxist history of science *qua* science.[s] [48]

[s] This point is crucial. Yet it is not always clearly understood by Marxists, philosophers included, working in the disciplines that fall within historical materialism's ambit, such as political economy, sociology, history, and so on. This can be seen in the Soviet representatives' papers on the problem of the relations between sociology and 'ideology' at the 1966 Conference in Évian (see the papers by Konstantinov, Kellé, and Tchesnokov.)

The Soviet representatives' thesis is that sociology cannot do without ideology – not only because it must, like any science, avail itself of philosophy's services in struggling against ideology, but also because there is an intimate, organic link between sociology and 'ideology' by virtue of the very special nature of sociology's object and the sociologist's situation. Sociology's special nature, according to this argument, distinguishes it and the other social sciences from the natural sciences. The object of the natural sciences is the different modes of existence of matter; natural scientists stand in an external relation to their object, are

It is a very different matter when it comes to *philosophy*. Politics is naturally part of the objective social conditions for the existence and development of philosophy, and politics, in the form of ideologies, also acts on philosophy – but *politics* concerns philosophy in a wholly different way, because *it is an organic, intimate part of the nature of philosophy* qua *philosophy*. It is philosophy's intimate, organic relationship with politics that distinguishes it from all the sciences.

One can form a schematic idea of the specific nature of philosophy vis-à-vis every science by noting, for example, that philosophy does not take one region of reality as its object, as every science does, or even the whole set of regions comprising a 'continent' of reality, in the sense we gave that word earlier. Philosophy takes as its object, rather, what

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not conditioned by their object, are not an organic part of their object. In the social sciences, the Soviets argue, the situation is fundamentally different: the object of these sciences is not matter, but human societies and the different modalities of human existence. Sociologists themselves are determined by the object they study, human society; they are an organic part of their object, are involved in social struggles and the transformation of society, and must, ideologically, take sides in them. For all these reasons, it is argued, there is an intimate link between sociology (and the social sciences) and ideology.

In support of their thesis, the Soviet representatives cite arguments that certain American sociologists direct against others who are partisans of the 'de-ideologization' of sociology.

In fact, the Soviet representatives use a single concept, the concept of ideology, to designate three fundamentally different realities:

1) the ideological theory that serves as the basis for bourgeois sociology (here, ideology means 'a representation that is false' because it has been skewed by subjective class interests);

2) the scientific theory on which a scientific sociology should be based (here, the term 'ideology,' to which the Soviets attach the adjective 'scientific,' simply designates the scientific theory that serves as the basis for a science);

3) the philosophical theory of dialectical materialism (they use the term 'ideology' to designate this third theory as well).

Using a single concept to designate three objectively different realities is not sound theoretical method, for it inevitably gives rise to confusion and ambiguities.

The term 'ideology' *tout court* is appropriate when what is in question is the ideological (false) theory of bourgeois sociology. In this case it adequately designates its object. Ideology (or politics) is clearly an organic part of philosophy, but the concept of ideology does not suffice, precisely, to define Marxist philosophy. Marxist philosophy is not an ideological theory in the sense in which bourgeois sociology is based on an ideological theory. As for the theory of a science, the term 'ideology' is an altogether inadequate designation for it.

If we distinguish these three different realities using three different concepts – ideological theory, scientific theory, and philosophical theory – we avoid ambiguity and confusion. What is more, we do away with the distinction that is their source: the distinction in kind that the Soviet representatives make between the natural and the social sciences.

To be perfectly frank, I think that this distinction represents the revival – doubtless in attenuated form, yet, undeniably, the revival – of a distinction that idealist bourgeois philosophical ideology draws between the objects of the natural and the human sciences. For bourgeois ideology, only the natural sciences are sciences in the strong sense; the 'human' or 'social' sciences are not true sciences, because they derive from philosophy and talk about man. Marx's whole scientific *œuvre* is a refutation of this characteristic distinction of bourgeois ideology. Marx endlessly repeated that *Capital* is a scientific, not an ideological work, whatever meaning one attaches to the term – even if, in this case, the term 'ideology' designated Marxist philosophy. For we know, thanks to Marx, Engels, and Lenin, that Marxist philosophy is by its nature distinct from the science of history. Like any science, the science of history, and therefore Marxist sociology as well, need philosophy. It is, however, as a science that science needs philosophy: it is not conflated with philosophy. This confusion is a confusion typical of the bourgeois ideology of science.

is traditionally and improperly called the 'totality' of the real. To be more precise, and to escape the religious-dogmatic effects of the concept of 'totality,' we shall say that philosophy takes as its object the tendential law of the transformation of a *complex ensemble* constituted by the articulation of two grand systems that are themselves articulated:

1) *The system of theoretical practices*, or the system of the regions and continents explored by scientific knowledge: in other words, the system of the sciences in their relation to the ideologies that they have to combat in order to exist and develop;

2) *The system of the different social practices* (economic, political,[49] and ideological), which condition the existence, practice, and development of the sciences.

The nature of this complex ensemble and the tendential law of transformation governing it constitute philosophy's specific object. This is the object of which it provides knowledge [*savoir*] in the form of philosophical knowledges [*connaissances*]: the philosophical categories, which are distinct from all possible scientific concepts (the categories of materialism and the dialectic, together with all the categories subordinate to these two big, fundamental categories).

When we talk about this complex ensemble, we do not exclude philosophy from it. At every moment in the transformation of this ensemble, the existing philosophy *itself also* figures in it – in the system of theoretical practices.[50]

In stipulating that philosophy takes as its object not only the nature of this complex ensemble, but also the tendential law of its transformation, we are not adding a mere detail; we are stating an essential thesis, namely, that this ensemble is caught up in a process of development [*est en devenir*] and that *historical* events in the strong sense occur in it, affecting sometimes the first system, at other times the second, and, at still other times, their articulation, etc. Thus we affirm that knowledge [*connaissance*] of this ensemble is knowledge of *its historical law*.

To produce knowledge of this complex[51] ensemble, therefore, philosophy cannot just draw up a balance sheet. It cannot be a mere *encyclopedia*, as certain of Engels's formulations might lead us to suppose – the summa of the scientific knowledges [*connaissances*] existing at a given moment, even if they are thought in terms of the laws of the dialectic.

Philosophy must take into consideration the fact that it too is included in this summa, and that it is included in it as an active force of intervention within this ensemble. It must recognize the significance of its own presence in any possible balance sheet – the fact that the presence of philosophy in any summa of scientific knowledge is the proof *in actu* of the unstable or, in other words, historical and dialectical nature of this state of the sciences, which philosophy can talk about only by intervening in it, by taking an active part in it: that is, by intervening in it *politically*, in the broad sense of that term.

To say that philosophy should provide us knowledge of the tendential law governing the transformation of the complex ensemble that comprises its object, and to observe that philosophy itself makes up part of the ensemble of which it must provide us

knowledge, is therefore to say one and the same thing. It is to say that this complex ensemble cannot be the object of an *Absolute Knowledge*; that philosophy cannot be the *Science of the sciences*; in other words, that the law of the transformation of this complex ensemble is never given in advance and never exhaustively possessed, but *must be deciphered step by step*.

It is here that politics intervenes directly in philosophy, and decisively so. Not just because the existence of philosophy has always, in whatever form it takes, consisted in intervening actively in the complex ensemble that constitutes its specific object, or because this intervention can be called, in the broad sense, a political intervention; but also because it is *politics* in the narrow, strong sense of the term that constitutes, as the *pertinent index* par excellence, the starting point from which this deciphering is possible at the practical level. There are two reasons for this; they have to do with the privileged place that politics holds in each of the two systems whose complex ensemble comprises philosophy's specific object.

1) *The system of social practices* (economic, political, and ideological).

Politics is indeed, as Marx, Engels, Lenin, and all the leaders of the Marxist workers' movement have repeatedly observed, a '*summary*' and a '*synthesis*' of the social practices. The state of the class struggle provides a 'summary' or a theoretical and practical view of the state of the relations between the practices that condition the system of the sciences, its current existence, and its development. Yet the role of pertinent index that politics plays in the system of social practices does not interest philosophy, in this form, as such, because politics in this sense is the object of the Marxist science of history. What specifically interests philosophy is the articulation of the system of theoretical practices with the system of social practices. It is at this precise point that philosophy is, in the strong sense, the pertinent index for deciphering this complex ensemble's tendential law of transformation.

2) *The system of theoretical practices* (science, philosophy, ideologies).

Here, politics is directly present in the form of the *ideologies*. It is in the ideologies that the class struggle figures in person in the conjuncture of the theoretical system. The ideologies are, in the theoretical conjuncture, the form in which the class struggle, and therefore politics, intervene in the theoretical system. There can be no sciences and no philosophy in the absence of the staking-out of a position with respect to the ideologies, without theoretical (scientific and philosophical) counter-interventions against the ideologies. Consequently, the state of the *ideological struggle in the domain of the theoretical system is the basic pertinent index* from which one can set out to decipher not only the state of the theoretical conjuncture, but also – and this is determinant – the relationship between the theoretical system and the social system, which represents the tendential form of the articulation between the two systems.

Ideology thus enjoys an altogether special privilege that *allows it to play this role of pertinent index*. It can play this role because it belongs to the two systems at once. As an expression of

the class struggle, it belongs to the system of the social practices; but it belongs to the system of the theoretical practices insofar as this expression of the class struggle takes the form of *theoretical* ideologies comprising an organic part of the system in which the sciences and philosophy live. They can exist only on condition that they define themselves against the ideologies and constantly combat them.

Politics is, therefore, in the form of *politics* in the proper sense, and in that of its *ideological* expression, the pertinent index par excellence when it comes to deciphering the tendential law governing the complex ensemble, because politics is the index of the state of the articulation between the two systems. Philosophy must accordingly be guided by politics above all in deciphering this tendential law, which constitutes its specific object. When philosophy takes politics into account in posing its own problems, it truly takes its own object into account. It can thereby ensure – in its own domain, which is philosophical, and in the philosophical mode (with a rigorous theory and method of a scientific kind) – the primacy of politics. It has to respect the primacy of politics not for reasons stemming from the nature of politics, but for reasons stemming from its own nature, the nature of philosophy.

Ultimately, that which distinguishes philosophy from any science whatsoever is found here. No science concerns itself, as a science, with the articulation of the two systems (the system of social practices and the system of theoretical practices) and its tendential law; nor does any science concern itself with even the state of the theoretical system as a whole. That is not the object of any science, be it mathematics, physics, biology, or even the science of history. It is, however, philosophy's specific object. And it is for this reason that philosophy is directly concerned with politics, in its nature, its theory (materialism), its method (the dialectic), and its categories.

I am not putting forward unprecedented theses. It is Lenin's extraordinary philosophical merit to have understood this and to have stated it with astounding clarity and boldness in *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*.[52] No doubt we do not find a developed theory of this hypothesis in Lenin, but we do find in him proof that he considered this thesis to be absolutely essential to Marxist theory. It is enough to recall the insistence with which he proclaimed that *political* '*partisanship*' is an integral part of any philosophy, and that this partisan position must become, for communist philosophers, a conscious taking of sides, based on a rigorous theory of philosophy and its relationship with politics.

When we say, consequently, that the development of Marxist philosophy is a task that, objectively, has priority in the prevailing conjuncture, we are not contradicting the principle of the primacy of the political. We affirm, on the contrary, that philosophy, if it is to be truly Marxist philosophy, must be treated according to its own nature, which is political. The contemporary primacy of philosophy is, therefore, a contemporary form of the primacy of the class struggle at the heart of the political nature of philosophy.

It is imperative to point out, straightaway, the very great difficulties and risks entailed by this task. Of course, *the thesis of the political nature of philosophy is the very opposite of a pragmatic*

thesis, as it must be. For centuries, philosophy was the 'handmaid of religion,' and, in the forms of modern idealism, it still is. There can be no question whatsoever of perpetuating this ideological tradition by making philosophy the 'handmaid of politics,' even if it is a question of correct politics. There can, that is, be no question of reducing philosophy to the rank of a commentary on the political decisions of the moment, or even of a correct political line. That would be to make philosophy a political ideology, and to reduce it to the existing *political ideology*. Political ideology has its rightful claims: it is indispensable in the political struggle. But *philosophy is not political ideology*. It is a theoretical discipline that is absolutely distinct from political ideology,[53] and it has *the autonomy* of a discipline of a scientific character; its development is subject to specific imperatives – precision, conceptual rigor, and demonstrative systematicity. It meets a requirement fundamental to any theoretical discipline of a scientific character: providing knowledge of its object in person, not of another object that is not its own. *The object* of philosophy is not politics,[54] but philosophy is *political in nature*.[55] Philosophy cannot be faithful to its object and nature unless it thinks its object (the tendential law governing the articulation of the complex ensemble social practices/theoretical practices) philosophically, and assumes its nature philosophically: by, that is, *ensuring the primacy of the class struggle at the heart of philosophy itself, in forms that are properly and rigorously philosophical.*

Without a twofold awareness of 1) of the primacy of the political in philosophy itself, and 2) the properly philosophical theoretical requirements that this primacy be treated philosophically, Marxist philosophers run the risk of lapsing into either a) theoreticism, which completely ignores the class struggle, or b) pragmatism, which completely ignores the specificity of theory and philosophy, and of its scientific requirements.

To develop Marxist philosophy is therefore an extremely arduous task, because it calls for a very high level of political consciousness in philosophical work, in order to respect philosophically, in philosophy, the primacy of the class struggle, while avoiding the pitfalls of theoreticism on the one hand and pragmatism on the other.

That the tasks of Marxist philosophy are demanding, that they call, all at the same time, for great awareness of the class struggle and its effects, great critical lucidity, great scientific sureness of touch, great efforts of study, reflection, and analysis, and unyielding rigor combined with the greatest possible theoretical inventiveness and audacity – none of this can intimidate us. On the contrary, it shows us what is incumbent upon us. Every political activist who has, in one capacity or another, a political capacity included, experience of *scientific* practice is aware of this challenge, of its necessity and fecundity.[56] This challenge awaits Marxist philosophers as well, if they wish to elevate Marxist philosophy to the level of its historical task in the present conjuncture.

They would do well to recall Marx's words: 'at the entrance to science as at the entrance to hell,' where 'every beginning is difficult,' one must, as Dante says, 'abandon

all suspicion and fear."[t] One can make no 'concession to the prejudice of public opinion,' but must 'welcome every judgment based on genuinely scientific criticism.'[u] [57] They also would do well to remember Lenin's phrase: 'Marx's theory is all-powerful because it is true.'[v]

One hundred years after *Capital* and fifty years after the October Revolution, the greatest tribute that Marxist philosophers can pay Marx and Lenin, the greatest proof that they can provide of their commitment to the revolutionary workers' movement, is to carry out the crucial task that history has assigned them.

Paris, 18 May 1967

[t] Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).
[u] Preface to *Capital* (1867).
[v] 'The Three Sources and the Three Component Parts of Marxism' (1913).

NOTES

[1] This sentence in the proofs of the planned book version of *La Tâche historique* (IMEC, Fonds Althusser, 20ALT/9/8, hereafter 'the proofs') replaces the following sentence in the typescript of the article that Althusser originally intended for publication in *Voprosy Filosofii* (20ALT/9/5, hereafter 'the typescript'): 'I would like to respond to the invitation of *Voprosy Filosofii* and our Soviet comrades by proposing, on the occasion of this double anniversary, a few reflections on Marxist theory, its current state, problems, and tasks.'

[2] The words 'the right to develop, but also, quite simply, the right to exist' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs. This and many similar discrepancies between typescript and proofs are probably due to oversights on the typesetter's part. Other discrepancies are no doubt due to Althusser's decision not to retain a formulation found in the typescript. In some cases, it is not clear whether a discrepancy was the result of a deliberate decision or not.

[3] The preceding sentence is contained in the proofs, but not the typescript. It may be extraneous.

[4] The proofs read 'Marx's relation to Engels.' The phrase 'Marx's relation to Hegel' is taken from the typescript.

[5] Cf. Louis Althusser, 'The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research (26 June 1966),' in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 1-18.

[6] The proofs read 'conjuncture'; 'conjunction' is taken from the typescript.

[7] This formula was common in Soviet discourse from the 1930s on and in post-War European discourse East and West.

[8] Cf. Louis Althusser, "Preface to *Capital* Volume One" (1969) in *idem, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 96: "Evolutionism [is] the poor man's Hegelianism."

[9] The long passage that begins with 'This interpretation' and ends just before the words 'Even when this interpretation takes its distance' replaces a single sentence in the first state of the typescript: 'This ideology consists in founding Marxist theory on purely ideological philosophical categories: the essence of man as the creator of history.' The intercalated passage was a late addendum to the typescript.

[10] In a handwritten addendum to the passage intercalated in the typescript (see endnote 9), Althusser replaced 'to the concepts that serve as' with 'to the philosophical categories and scientific concepts that serve as.'

[11] The phrase 'the whole man' is a handwritten addendum to the typescript. The notion of 'the whole man,' which the Marx of the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* takes from Ludwig Feuerbach, held a central place in the work of Roger Garaudy, long the PCF's unofficial 'official philosopher.' See, for example, Garaudy, *Perspectives de l'homme: Existentialisme, pensée catholique, marxisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1959), pp. 1, 315 and *passim; idem, Qu'est-ce que la morale marxiste?* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1963), p. 217.

[12] The Resolution adopted at the PCF's landmark March 1966 Central Committee meeting in Argenteuil celebrated 'the vast creative movement of the human mind' and declared that 'there is a Marxist humanism,' thus pointedly rejecting positions Althusser took in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. The text of the Resolution was, for the most part, the handiwork of the Communist poet Louis Aragon. 'Résolution sur les problème idéologiques et culturels,' in Roger Martelli, *Une dispute communiste: Le Comité central d'Argenteuil sur la culture* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 2017), pp. 451–452.

[13] The proofs read: 'elle n'en est pas moins grave'/it is no less serious. The typescript originally read: 'elle est moins grave / it is less serious' and was corrected by hand to read 'elle n'en est pas moins grave' / it is no less serious. The Hungarian version of *La Tâche historique* has it that the evolutionist 'deformation of Marxism' is 'no less serious' than the humanist deformation. Louis Althusser, 'A Marxista filozófia történelmi feladata,' in *idem, Marx-az elmélet forradalma,* trans. Ernő Gerő [Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968], p. 289.

[14] This and the next five paragraphs are a revised version of a passage from a long, unfinished, still unpublished manuscript on the union of theory and practice that Althusser began writing in 1966 and abandoned in 1967. He included a version of the same passage in an article published in *La Pensée* in April 1967, 'On Theoretical Work,' pp. 55-56 (cf. footnote g above). The more significant revisions that the

passage published in STT underwent when it was incorporated into *La Tâche historique* are indicated in notes below.

[15] The words '(science and philosophy)' are lacking in STT.
[16] The words 'the bourgeois ideologues' are lacking in STT.
[17] The words 'or is outmoded' are lacking in STT.
[18] STT: '…those of the reigning ideological theories.'
[19] STT: 'two examples.'
[20] The word 'empiricism' is lacking in STT.
[21] STT: 'nothing new, at least in philosophy.'
[22] STT reads, after 'science': 'in the way of conceiving theoretical objects, and, therefore, in their structure.'
[23] STT: 'the dominant ideological theory.'
[24] The words 'bourgeois philosophical' are lacking in STT.
[25] STT: 'not just in politics.'
[26] The word 'empiricism' is lacking in STT.
[27] The phrase 'that Marx was not an empiricist' is lacking in STT.
[28] See endnote 8.
[29] The word 'evolutionist' is lacking in STT.
[30] The phrase 'for the "resistances" are extremely powerful' is lacking in STT.
[31] The preceding seven words replace STT's 'Every theoretical text, even if it is limited, which deals with Marxist principles'
[32] The word 'empiricism' is lacking in STT.
[33] The preceding six words replace STT's 'nor does the world of thought.'
[34] The allusion is to a line from the first verse of the 'Internationale' that reads, translated literally, 'the world is going to change its basis.' The equivalent in the most popular English version of the song is 'the earth shall rise on new foundations.'
[35] STT reads 'the same holds in the world of thought.'
[36] The corresponding phrase in STT reads 'especially if it is a mode of thought that founds a new ideology and a new political practice.'
[37] The words after 'a very great risk' are not italicized in STT.
[38] This is a reply to Jorge Semprun's critique of Althusser in 'Marxisme et humanisme,' *La Nouvelle critique*, 164 (March 1965), p. 30: 'It is not by shutting ourselves up in the besieged fortress of an abstract, ahistorical Marxism that we will impose our theoretical and practical mark on the world.'
[39] The exact subtitle of the book to which Althusser refers in footnote l is 'Rapports des membres de la délégation soviétique au 6e Congrès international de sociologie.' The Sixth World Congress of Sociology was held from 4 to 11 September 1966 in Évian-les-Bains, France. Some two thousand sociologists and philosophers attended, including Raymond Aron, Pierre Bourdieu, Mark Borisovic Mitin, Jean Piaget, Adam Schaff and Alain Tourraine. See also endnote 48 and footnote s.
[40] In footnote n, the sentence referring to Mao Zedong is a handwritten addendum to the typescript. Footnote n was not included in the Russian version of his article that Althusser submitted to *Voprosy filosofii*.
[41] Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Philosophie et Sciences humaines,' in *idem, Solitude de Machiavel*, ed. Yves Sintomer (Paris: Presses universitaires de France/Actuel Marx, 1998 [1963]), pp. 43-58.
[42] The words 'historical materialism's' are contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.
[43] In distinguishing the object of psychoanalysis from the 'personality,' Althusser was doubtless thinking of Lucien Sève, who was working on a project that would issue, two years later, in *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1969). An augmented edition of Sève's book is available in English: *Marxism and the Theory of Human Personality*, trans. David Pavett (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975). Althusser commented on this project in a 27 June 1966 letter to Sève: 'What some people *call psychology*, or, in any case, what you are going to discuss under the rubric 'theory of the development of the personality,' using *concepts* that are 50% Garaudyist (humanism, the individual in your sense of the word, labor, etc.), essentially falls within the purview of 1) psycho-physio-biology, and 2) *sociology*… The third term, the unconscious and its mechanisms, falls within the purview not of what *goes by the name of psychology*, but of psychoanalysis.' Louis Althusser, Letter of 27 June 1966 to Lucien Sève, in Althusser and Sève, ed. Roger Martelli, *Correspondance 1949-1987: Deux intellectuels dans le siècle* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 2018), p. 122.

The words 'who, setting out alone, was the first to open up this path' in footnote r are a handwritten addendum to the typescript.

[44] Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses,' in *The Humanist Controversy*, pp. 41–47.
[45] The target here is Roger Garaudy, *Marxism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. René Hague (London: Harper Collins, 1970), which concludes with a sharp attack on Althusserian 'dogmatism.' See endnote 11.
[46] This was the beginning of the conclusion of the first draft of *La Tâche historique*. The last two paragraphs of the final version of the text originally comprised the rest of this conclusion, under which Althusser put the date 25 April 1967.
[47] Althusser frequently repeats this Spinozist formula to illustrate the distinction between knowledge and the object of which it is the knowledge. The formula, however, is nowhere to be found in Spinoza, although the idea it encapsulates is.
[48] Footnote s is an addendum to the typescript that is found on two unnumbered pages separate from the rest of it. The conference papers to which it refers are F. V. Konstantinov, 'Sociologie et idéologie,' in *Rapports des membres de la délegation soviétique au 6e Congrès international de sociologie,* pp. 3–24; V. D. Kellé, 'Rapport entre les fonctions cognitives et idéologiques de la sociologie,' in *ibid*., pp. 25–35; and D. Tchesnokov, 'La prétendu "désidéologisation" de la sociologie,' in *ibid*., pp. 36–48. For an English translation of Konstantinov's paper, see 'Sociology and Ideology,' in *Transactions of the Sixth World Congress of Sociology / Actes du sixième Congrès mondial de sociologie*, vol. I (Geneva: International Sociological Association / Association internationale de sociologie, 1966), pp. 3–20 <https://www.isa-sociology.org/sites/default/files/uploads/files/Transactions%20of%20the%20Sixth%20World%20Congress%20of%20Sociology.%20Evian_1966.%20Vol.%20I.pdf>.
[49] Both the proofs and the typescript read 'practical.'
[50] The typescript reads, after the dash: 'in the theoretical system.'
[51] The word 'complex' is contained in the typescript, but not the proofs.'
[52] The typescript contains the following addendum, written in Althusser's hand and then crossed out: 'albeit in philosophical categories dominated by a *sensualist*-materialist ideology.'
[53] The preceding phrase replaces one crossed out in the typescript: 'It is a rigorous theoretical discipline.'
[54] In the typescript, '*politics*' is followed by the phrase 'in the narrow sense of the word,' which has been crossed out.
[55] In the typescript, '*political in nature*' is followed by the phrase 'in the broad sense of the word,' which has been crossed out.
[56] The preceding sentence replaces one in the typescript that reads: 'Every political activist who has experience of *scientific* practice is aware of this challenge, of its necessity and fecundity.'
[57] The German equivalent of the word "genuinely" does not appear here in Marx's German version of the Preface to *Capital*; it was added by Joseph Roy, the author of the first French translation of *Capital*, which Marx corrected before it went to the printer's.

Is Jameson's Theory Althusser's Philosophy?

Eleanor Kaufman

From the perspective of the twenty-first century field that studies twentieth-century French thought, there would seem to be little reason for calling that field anything other than twentieth-century French philosophy, or modern French philosophy.[1] To call such a field French theory, or, perhaps worse, poststructuralist theory, or, still worse, postmodern theory, would be to adopt wholesale the purported misnomers that are the result of the Anglophone and predominantly US based appropriation of that thought, dating back at least to the late 1960s. In other words, why would those who work concertedly on this field wish to credence it with a nomination—theory—that is now so oft abused and maligned? For all the baggage that a term like philosophy brings with it, and certainly many if not most of the twentieth-century French thinkers in question interrogate this matter directly, isn't philosophy still a much preferable and more accurate nomination than theory, at least at this twilight moment of the now decades-long "theory wars"? After all, most of the thinkers at issue were professional philosophers (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Louis Althusser, and many others). Not to mention that they are the product of a remarkably homogeneous and centralized education system in which they continued their professional work, having studied the

[1] A slightly truncated version of this essay was published in *The Future of Totality: Fredric Jameson and the Prospects of Critical Theory*, eds. Nicholas Brown, Maria Elisa Cevasco, Fabio Akcelrud Durão, and Robert T. Tally Jr. (Duke University Press, 2026).

same things, with the same teachers, in the same place.[2] Why wouldn't one want to study this material as the philosophical ensemble that it is, rather than as an oddly displaced and dispersed sequence of arrivals on the American theory stage (Foucault and Derrida in the 1960s and 1970s, Deleuze in the 1990s, Badiou in the 2000s), belying the fact that those in the most celebrated group are a mere dozen years apart in age? Why should anyone who takes this thought seriously call it anything but philosophy? If there is a rebuttal to the above, an argument for why we would still want to insist on preserving the term theory, it is staged nowhere more emphatically if not audaciously than in the work of Fredric Jameson and Louis Althusser. Jameson will advocate for theory in strong distinction from philosophy, whereas Althusser will position the two terms in an intricate and variable relation that could almost be called dialectical.

Before attempting to parse the valences of "theory" and "philosophy" in Jameson and Althusser, it is incumbent to situate such a project within the distinctive set of alignments and displacements between these thinkers. On the one hand, these Marxist fellow travelers share a desire for abstraction, for unearthing contradictions if not antimonies, that at times sets them apart from Marxist orthodoxy, and certainly Marxist humanisms. They both affirm the necessary alliance between theory and practice, and in this regard consider psychoanalysis as an intriguing realm with certain parallels to Marxism. Whereas for Jameson the dialectic's preeminence never falters, Althusser employs the term more cautiously and generally only in the late Marx's sense of dialectical materialism. Still, their respective methodologies might be considered preeminently dialectical. On the other hand, Jameson affirms a Hegelianism that Althusser is at nearly all points (except, perhaps, when considering Feuerbach[3]) at pains to extirpate, even denouncing Marx's earlier writings—up to and including the first part of *Capital* Volume One—as being mired in a Hegelian language of humanism and alienation that, starting in small steps with the works of 1844, Marx was slowly able to overcome if not articulate in fully philosophical form. While Jameson emphasizes the question of totality, Althusser dismisses a Hegelian movement where the whole is reflected in its parts, considering this a form of "expressive causality," and one that is necessarily subordinate to his preferred model of "structural causality," in which a cause is only readable and derivable through its effects.[4] Furthermore, while Jameson appeals to the framework of utopia, Althusser if

[2] See the discussion of the French education system's reliance on mimetic logic in Davide Panagia, *Sentimental Empiricism: Politics, Philosophy, and Criticism in Postwar France* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2024).

[3] See Louis Althusser, "On Feuerbach," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), 85-154.

[4] See Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey, and Jacques Rancière, *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 15, 342, 346; and Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23-50. For a helpful overview of Jameson's well-known reframing (if not sidestepping) of Althusser's structural causality, see Ian Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2006), 7-10; and Sean Homer, "Narratives of History, Narratives of Time," in *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalization*, eds. Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 71-91, esp. 73-75. Jameson's recent lectures on Althusser in *The*

anything appeals to a salutary but backwards-looking solitude—one he finds in such sundry spaces as Machiavelli, Rousseau's notion of origin, Freud, and certainly in his own life, magnified in the exile of his last decade.[5] In short, the disjunctions between Althusser and Jameson arguably exceed the alignments. It's notable that Jameson will evoke Althusser with a respectful distance, often including turns of phrase that highlight distinctions even when expressing the potential for alliance.[6]

As a first approach to this slightly uneasy juxtaposition of Jameson and Althusser on the question of theory and philosophy (or theory versus philosophy), it is worth noting the consistency of Jameson's approach to this question. Although Jameson produced a notable constellation of (often occasional) "apologias" for theory in the first decade of the twenty-first century, some of which will be taken up in what follows, these formulations are not substantially distinct, except perhaps in tone, from earlier ones dating back at least to *The Political Unconscious*. Indeed, the two most considered accounts of the creation of "French theory" in the wake of its Anglophone reception—by François Cusset and Johannes Angermuller—cite Jameson as a fundamental actor in this process,[7] highlighting that his support for "theory" has not wavered, even when others uphold this thought by calling it "philosophy," so as to distinguish it from the much maligned "theory" which Jameson's writings from the early 2000s explicitly and implicitly defend. Such an allegiance might be compared to Alain Badiou's adherence to Maoist thought

Years of Theory: *Postwar French Thought to the Present* (London: Verso, 2024), delve a bit more into Althusser's structural causality, linking it to Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* and noting that "the present, the symptom, reactivates the cause for Freud. It's a very funny kind of temporality. Look out for this kind of inversion of time, because it's characteristic of a lot of our people from now on, and certainly you will find it in Lacan as well" (224).

[5] See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007); *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (London: Verso, 2016); and Louis Althusser, "Machiavelli's Solitude," trans. Ben Brewster, in *Machiavelli and Us* (London: Verso, 1999), 115-130; *Lessons on Rousseau*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2019); "Freud and Lacan" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 129-150, esp. 134; and *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, trans. Richard Veasey (New York: The New Press, 1993).

[6] For example, in "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 403-408, Jameson will define "theory" as "the coming to terms with materialist language," commenting further that "all truths are at best momentary, situational, and marked by a history in the process of change and transformation. You will have already recognized deconstruction in my description, and some will wish to associate Althusserianism with it as well" (403). Jameson is characteristically reticent to pinpoint his own relation to this "Althusserianism." In an extraordinary course on the dialectic from 1996, Jameson discussed how different formulations of mode of production from *Reading Capital* "disappear without a trace in the de-Marxification of the late 70s and early 80s," adding that we should "take as our motto anti-anti-Althusserianism" (author's notes, p. 82). The awkward double-negative rather than a simple positive perfectly captures this respectful distance toward Althusser, one that tends to keep him at arm's length. For more on this lecture class, see Andrew Cole, "The Rebus in Fredric Jameson's *The Hegel Variations*," *Verso* (blog), June 24, 2024: https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/the-rebus-in-fredric-jameson-s-em-data-mce-fragment-1-the-hegel-variations-em

[7] See François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 32,78, 211-15, 282; and Johannes Angermuller, *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France: The Making of an Intellectual Generation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 16, 19.

when many around him jumped ship, or to an allegiance Jameson himself has eloquently highlighted, which is Freud's insistence on the primacy of the sexual even in the wake of his many followers who sought to "dilute" it.[8] This essay considers the entity called "theory" that Jameson holds on to, asking if it aligns with what Althusser calls "philosophy," which for the latter is not theory's opponent, as it is for Jameson, but rather theory's minor and belated—yet nonetheless indispensable—companion.

In "Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate," a response to a collection of essays emphasizing "peripheral realisms," Jameson makes an appeal for realism as a term that, importantly, problematizes itself:

> We ourselves are… drowning in abstractions of all kinds, the accumulation of centuries of philosophizing, of thinking, defining, and naming, and we face the problem of mapping navigable paths through them…. This means that every use of the generic term will involve contested terrain and needs by definition to be problematized; every analysis of a realistic work needs to be theoretical as well as critical. We may even wonder whether the most useful 'definition' of *realism* may not lie in the capacity of a text to raise the issue of realism as such within its own structure, no matter what answer it decides to give. In that case, we might call realist any literary work which raises the question of realism, whether to problematize it or to attempt to reinvent it.[9]

It would seem that, for Jameson, the term "theory" does similar work to "realism" as it is outlined here. That is, in somewhat recursive fashion, a theoretical and critical problematizing of "theory" would itself count as theoretical. This is not far removed from what Paul de Man famously pronounced in the concluding line of "The Resistance to Theory": "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance."[10] Jameson and de Man might be claimed as theory's most stellar and intransigent defenders, and also the ones who delineate most insistently theory's intrinsic relation to the literary, to narrative for the former and poetics for the latter. This is all well and good, except that for most of the major thinkers in the modern French tradition, it is philosophy itself that serves this problematizing role, it is philosophy itself that so approximates literature as to be at times indistinguishable from it.[11]

A cursory summary will not do justice to the richness and range of problematizations of "French philosophy" by its actual practitioners, not to mention

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[8] See Fredric Jameson, "Lenin and Revisionism," in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, eds. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 65-66.

[9] Fredric Jameson, "Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no.3 (September 2012): 478.

[10] Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20 (19).

[11] See my "Literature and Modern French Philosophy" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern French Philosophy*, eds. Mark Sinclair and Daniel Whistler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 663-679.

many volumes of secondary literature related to this question.[12] At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in "The Adventure of French Philosophy" (later expanded to a book-length engagement), Badiou succinctly outlines his vision of modern French philosophy's key concepts and engagements, including a relation to the political, to practice and to militancy, as well as its "long-running conversation with psychoanalysis" and proximity to the literary.[13] He writes, "One could even say that one of the goals of French philosophy has been to construct a new space from which to write, one where literature and philosophy would be indistinguishable."[14] All of this is quite proximate to claims often made for "theory," a term Badiou does not engage. Similarly Deleuze and especially Deleuze and Félix Guattari rarely take up "theory" as such, but in their valedictory *What is Philosophy?* outline about two dozen expansive definitions of the term "philosophy"— including its relation to language and literature, psychoanalysis and the unconscious, politics, and modernity—and consider it as a new style, a mode of creating concepts, a form of encounter, resistance, and utopia.[15] In his earlier work, Deleuze writes empathically about philosophy as a posing of problems (rather than solutions).[16] Derrida, for all his touted critiques of Western metaphysics, will consistently defend the function and especially the importance of teaching philosophy. We now have access to Foucault's extraordinary treatise on philosophical discourse from 1966, in which philosophy is considered as "diagnostic," among other things.[17] Even thinkers like François Laruelle and Badiou who espouse varying notions of "non-philosophy" do so on the terrain and with the methodology of philosophy.

So, to return to Jameson's sense above that we are "drowning in [the] abstractions" of "centuries of philosophizing," we might counterpose that much of modern French philosophy is similarly contesting the hegemony of the term it is gathered under, while still adhering to that term. What would be a reason, then, to insist on the use of "theory" over "philosophy," at least in the French instance, when most of the "theorists" themselves engage with a remarkable range of problematizations of philosophy, barely mentioning theory? Jameson gives us several good reasons for retaining theory, and, as we shall see in what follows, Althusser gives us reasons for retaining both terms in complex relation to one another. Together, Jameson and

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[12] The latter ranges from Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) to Stephen Gaukroger and Knox Peden, *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For an extension of this lineage back to the nineteenth century, see Pierre Macherey, *Études de philosophie "française": de Sieyès à Barni* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013) and Mark Sinclair and Daniel Whistler, "Introduction" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern French Philosophy*, 1-24.

[13] Alain Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," *New Left Review* 35 (Sept-Oct 2005): 67-77 (74).

[14] Alain Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," 73.

[15] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[16] See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[17] Michael Foucault, *Le discours philosophique* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2023).

Althusser (alongside de Man, who will be left aside) are the shining exceptions to the otherwise well-advised practice of calling this material "French philosophy." This is especially evident in their deep engagement with the theory/philosophy problem's dialectical dimensions, an engagement which is outlined in very different terms in the two thinkers but arguably shares more common ground than Jameson would generally concede.

Philosophy ≠ Theory

In the introduction to *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson defends the use of theory in magisterial fashion—at a moment (2009) when it needs defending more than ever—as that enterprise which attempts to resist the reifications of philosophy:

> It is no doubt always amusing to observe the compulsion offered by professional philosophers from Hegel to Althusser to Deleuze to waste their vital energies in the philosophical defense and apologia of philosophy as such. No doubt—and the work of Pierre Bourdieu is there to remind us of it—those of us in other institutional disciplines are driven in much the same way to our own analogous institutional self-justifications; but the emergence of theory in the past years has seemed to offer a space outside the institutions and outside the rehearsal of such compulsory rationalizations, and it is the claims of theory (if not its achieved realities) which allow us to grasp the limits of philosophy as such, very much including dialectical philosophy. I believe that theory is to be grasped as the perpetual and impossible attempt to dereify the language of thought, and to preempt all the systems and ideologies which inevitably result from the establishment of this or that fixed terminology. Deconstruction is thus the very paradigm of a theoretical process of undoing terminologies which, by virtue of the elaboration of the terminology that very process requires, becomes a philosophy and an ideology in its own turn and congeals into the very type of system it sought to undermine. The persistence of the proper name in theory, indeed—as when we identity various texts as Derridean, Althusserian, or Habermasian—only serves to betray the hopelessness of the nonetheless unavoidable aim of theoretical writing to escape the reifications of philosophy as well as the commodifications of the intellectual marketplace today.[18]

If not exactly realized, theory has an aspirational aspect that for Jameson comes from an emplacement outside institutions and beyond the proper name, thus serving to "dereify the language of thought" in a fashion not possible for philosophy. Of course Jameson himself recognizes the impossibility of such an attempt, and also the way in which theory

[18] Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 8-9.

can become an ideology-laden philosophy which itself is reified in the form of a proper name, Derridianism and Althusserianism being two of Jameson's examples. Interestingly, theory's fall from grace back into the reified philosophy it sought to escape engages in a contrarian, even antinomous, movement that seems to approximate Jameson's privileged dialectic, though here ironically and in negative fashion.

In "How Not to Historicize Theory" (2008), Jameson gives another fall from grace example in which theory slides back into philosophy despite its best efforts, here citing a thinker who elicits more ambivalence than Althusser: "But Pierre Bourdieu's work—the most complex rationale for anti-intellectualism available today—is as theoretical as it is philosophical. It seeks, in other words, to undermine and discredit all the ideologies in play in the intellectual market today (such is its theoretical vocation) at the same time that it finds itself fatally rationalizing its own disciplinary position as a place of truth—an attempt to square this circle that surely betrays a philosophical commitment to system rather than a theoretical refusal of it."[19] While Derrida and Althusser are arguably reified by their reception—by others— in spite of their best efforts, Bourdieu's commitment to system brings it on himself, as it were, clearly a more damnable instance of theory's negative reification as philosophy, or as philosophical system. At different points, Jameson expresses suspicion for systems, sometimes also evoking Althusser's penchant for them. Jameson clearly isn't aiming for a unified philosophical system, whereas Althusser's structural inclinations arguably put him more in the camp of Bourdieu, as odd as that sounds**.** Rather than pursue this difference between Jameson and Althusser on the terrain of system— that is, whether Althusser, if not Jameson himself, betrays a philosophical commitment to system—I would like to reorient the focus (as Fred Jameson would put it) to our "old friend" the dialectic.

Theory = Dialectic?

As noted above, the stance on the dialectic might be considered a line of demarcation between Althusser and Jameson, to use a formulation of the former. While Althusser certainly recognizes the import of dialectical materialism, as will be considered below, he—like most of his French contemporaries, in particular Deleuze and Derrida—will treat the dialectic as such with some wariness. Is this the same wariness with which Derrida will treat Althusser's notion of "Theory," if not theory as such?[20] Or, alternatively,

[19] Fredric Jameson, "How Not to Historicize Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Spring 2008): 575. This essay is also published in Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), 286-301. In what follows, I will cite the original journal publication for relevant works that were later published in collected volumes.

[20] A more comprehensive version of this argument would need to consider Derrida's formidable reading of Althusser's notion of theory in his course lectures from 1976-77, collected as *Theory and Practice*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019). Focusing in particular on Althusser's "On the Materialist Dialectic" in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), Derrida traces the trajectory of Althusser's notion of philosophy, from "a regional dependency of theory in general" (46) to a rather different—and quite dialectical—"Marxist philosophy," denoted by Althusser as capital "t" Theory. Derrida thus deduces: "Indeed, if Theory (uppercase) is dialectical materialism, another name for Marxist

is French philosophy's wariness toward the dialectic the same wariness it has toward theory, insofar as it thinks about theory, which often it doesn't? Althusser will be addressed as an exception to this provisional rule, for his wariness toward the dialectic is distinctly separate from his sense of theory. Jameson, by contrast, while minimally wary of theory at best,[21] is the one who gives us the series of equivalences for a possible alliance of theory and dialectics.

There is a wonderful note at the end of Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* where he considers whether his concept of "inexistence" could be equated with Derrida's concept of *différance*: "In homage to Derrida, I write here 'inexistence', just as he created, a long time ago, the word 'différance'. Will we say that $\emptyset_A$ = inexistence = différance? Why not?"[22] The equation of theory and dialectics for Jameson is nowhere so blithely stated, perhaps because both are for him mediated by an antagonistic relation to philosophy itself, and complicated by a necessary relation with praxis, something exemplified in the Marxian as well as the psychoanalytic traditions. Jameson writes in *Valences of the Dialectic* that "I've said enough to suggest that it will be unwise to identify the dialectic as a unified philosophical system…also because we are no longer tempted, in the age of theory, by the traditional rhetoric of philosophy itself and its philosophical self-justifications."[23] For Jameson, Badiou's use of "anti-philosophy" to describe the work of thinkers like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan is still too close to the philosophy it seeks to distance itself from.[24] Rather, the Marxist notion of the unity of theory and practice conveys the way both Marxism and psychanalysis require a connection to praxis distinct from the purported autonomy of philosophy.[25] I say purported because the idea that philosophy is not itself in fundamental relation to theory and to practice will be interrogated and largely

philosophy in its specificity, it is also, and I am quoting, "the Theory of practice in general' [168], that is to say the Theory of all those definitions" (66). Effectively, if philosophy is a subordinate category to theory, one still needs the very terms of philosophy to maintain that subordination; or, you need the language of philosophy, which comes at a later stage than theory, to properly describe the earlier stage. As Derrida's analysis implies, this is a thoroughly dialectical conundrum. Derrida concludes that "[n]othing is more philosophical than the act of defining or situating the philosophical within the general field of what is, of being this or that, here production or practice" (72).

[21] Jameson does express occasional moments of reservation or disappointment with theory: "Theory, which once eagerly fed on these new sources of thought [rivalry of communism, fascism and capitalism in Benjamin], has itself become a purely aesthetic and consumerist process." See Fredric Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* (London: Verso, 2020), 207.

[22] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 545.

[23] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 10.

[24] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 10. "I'm not particularly tempted by Alain Badiou's notion of anti-philosophy, a term he deploys for Lacan, as well as for seemingly non-systematic or fragmentary thinkers like Pascal and Nietzsche. One sees what he means, but the formulation tends to restore a certain centrality to that very philosophy of which such thinking was alleged to have been the critique or the negation."

[25] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 11. Jameson writes that "the conceptualities of psychoanalysis are ultimately fully meaningful only by way of the analytic situation itself…while in Marxism significance is finally only achieved by way of our concrete class situation…. These unities of theory and practice are therefore distinct from the implied autonomy of the philosophical concept and cannot in any sense be completed by philosophy but only by praxis."

dismissed by Althusser. In some sense, philosophy for Jameson is not unlike the monologic viewpoint that distinguishes Flaubert from the earlier range of "heterogenous narrative registers" visible in Balzac, according to the well-known argument of *The Political Unconscious*.[26] By this logic, Althusser's notion of philosophy would align with the mobile, de-centered, desiring subject of Jameson's Balzac, and Jameson's notion of philosophy with the reified moment of Flaubert, in which the Balzacian Real and fantasy structure are erased, and "tension or inconsistency between levels" is absent.[27] What is incongruous or hopeful about philosophy in Althusser is simply a bad reification for Jameson.

Dialectic ≠ Philosophy

For Jameson, theory works in almost inverse relation to philosophy, the former having many of the dialectical complexities that the latter lacks. In a 1995 interview with Xudong Zhang entitled "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory," Jameson expresses the disconnection between dialectic and philosophy in particularly strong terms: "That is another reason why it is wrong to think of the dialectic as a philosophy. Because presumably in a philosophy you can write down your truth once you have found it. Hegel thought he was doing that (or at least pretended to think so). Capitalism is a much more complicated thing than ontology."[28] There is a lot to criticize in this formulation, on behalf of philosophy and ontology, and Jameson's own qualifications—"presumably," "or at least pretended to think so"—already point us in that direction. That most of twentieth-century French philosophy—with the interesting and important exception of Badiou—follows Nietzsche in questioning the very possibility of finding your truth is yet another indication of the problem this formulation raises. But to keep to the task at hand, the more simple observation is that, while theory and dialectic go together for Jameson, philosophy and dialectic clearly do not.[29]

What, then, does dialectic do that so exceeds the philosophical? For Jameson, it does a lot, as a number of excellent studies of his work have argued.[30] I will limit my response to two things, both of which put Jameson in close proximity to Althusser in terms of what these two thinkers seem to be *doing*, if not exactly *saying* with respect to theory, philosophy, and dialectic. The first matter regards causality. As noted above,

[26] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 179.
[27] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 184, 159.
[28] Fredric Jameson and Xudong Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *New Literary History* 29, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 353-383 (377).
[29] Jameson comments in the same interview that "Marxism is not an ontology, and should be neither an ontology nor a philosophy…. What is very peculiar about both Marx and Freud is that they are this thing which in the Marxist tradition is called a unity of theory and practice" (Ibid., 363-364). Notably, Jameson says this à propos of Derrida's just published *Specters of Marx*, that it "reminds us insistently that Marxism is not an ontology" (363). I would regard Derrida's juxtaposition of Marx with Hamlet's "out of joint" time as insistently ontological, even if those are not the words Derrida uses.
[30] See especially Robert T. Tally Jr., *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014); and Phillip E. Wegner, *Periodizing Jameson: Dialectics, the University, and the Desire for Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

Jameson famously defends a Hegelian expressive causality, in which the desired totality would be contained in its parts, over and against Althusser's notion of structural causality, in which a cause is only readable in its effects. Despite the different positions on Hegel, both notions of causality entail a similar kind of retrospective reading and narrative reconstitution or rectification.[31] In the interview cited above, Jameson affirms that "I think that narrative and causality go together, and that narrative logic is causal logic. But the dialectic would be an undermining of the received forms of narrative and historical causality."[32] Thus for Jameson, the dialectic, compatible with theory but not with philosophy, undermines received forms of causality, if not Althusserian structural causality. Just before this remark, Jameson presents the example of theory itself to illustrate this causal undermining, proposing a counterargument—three decades in advance—to those of us who might wish to call it philosophy:

> Another question is what to do with theory today. A complicated answer, a Hegelian answer to that is: what we often observe in the dialectic or opposition between subject and object is that the subject is part of the object, the subject is being produced by the object. I would say the same thing about theory: that theory did not just come from nowhere, then people liked these disembodied abstractions and took it over and did awful things with them. Theory came out of the situation. Theory is an integral product of this whole new late capitalist situation. So it is itself a newly emerging content and then, as an objective reality of the world, it undergoes its own autonomous development and reacts back on reality, makes changes in thought, in the university system, in the role of the intellectuals, in the production of culture, and so forth.
>
> If one sees theory as just something subjectively willful over and against this subjective cultural, historical, and social reality that we know, then one is not thinking about theory historically. But theory is part of that historical situation. Therefore, the emergence of theory itself becomes a crucial cultural and historical question to be looked at. And I think this is being done more today than in the early period when all this was new. But there is a reason why it came into being, why, if you associate theory with poststructuralism, structuralism emerged.[33]

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[31] In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson suggests that both Althusser and Hegel oppose an "unreflected" or "premature" immediacy, claiming that "Althusserian structural causality is therefore just as fundamentally a practice of mediation as is the 'expressive causality' to which it is opposed" (41). For a critique of a Jamesonian position that would similarly conflate dialectic and structuralism, see A. Kiarina Kordela, "Dialectics, or Valences of Structuralism" in *Epistemontology in Spinoza-Marx-Freud-Lacan: The (Bio)Power of Structure* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[32] Jameson and Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory," 375.

[33] Jameson and Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory," 370.

This meditation deftly anticipates the problematic aspect of harboring a bad-faith nostalgia for theory's non-existent origin (as philosophy), which would disavow the particular situation or conjuncture that produced the thing called theory in the first place.

Leaving aside the question of subject and object for the moment, theory features in Jameson's response as both product and producer, a product of its late capitalist moment but also something that transforms intellectual life—much as Jameson's work itself has done—and something to be considered historically and culturally. Perhaps we could call this theory's expressive causality. But then there is the enigmatic reference to the emergence of structuralism: "why, if you associate theory with postructuralism, structuralism emerged." The latter formulation appears, and perhaps inadvertently, as a remarkable illustration of Althusserian structural causality, insofar as it suggests that structuralism itself only fully emerges with the phenomenon of poststructuralism, a notion coined by theory's Anglophone reception and not in France. One might say France had a thought of "structure," which later morphed into the much-denounced "structuralism," something that had not quite existed until it was produced retroactively by a "poststructuralism" that also never existed in France.[34] We could alternately denounce theory for provoking this mess, or celebrate the counterintuitive causalities it helps us to perceive. (Jameson does the latter when he argues at different points that the attendant instabilities of the modern/postmodern distinction in fact allow us to put their antecedent realism in sharper focus.) Such a logic is very close to Althusser's model of structural causality and epistemological break, except that Althusser will leave Hegel out of the picture and make the relation between theory and philosophy central to it.

Before examining Althusser's distinctions between theory and philosophy, there is a final dimension of Jamesonian dialectics to address, one that may help pinpoint what philosophy does for Althusser that it doesn't do for Jameson. This is the relationship between subject and object, which like the Hegelian lord and bondsman, is eminently reversible. The subject is in the object and vice versa.[35] As Jameson writes in "How Not to Historicize Theory," "[t]he only truly original solution, which does not claim to resolve anything but rather to incorporate the dilemma of oppositions and binaries into its very structure and method, remains the dialectic, which posits a permanent gap between subject and object within all our thoughts as well as in reality itself (herein lies its kinship with Lacanian analysis as well as its foundational and inextricable relationship with Marxism itself)."[36] For Jameson, the subject and object appear in some sense inextricable *and* in a relation of permanent gap, a situation condoned and enabled by both the dialectic and the general category of theory, which, as we have seen, converge on each other. While

[34] See my "Do Dual Structures Exist? Deleuze and Lacan in the Wake of Lévi-Strauss," *Yale French Studies* 123 (2013): 83-99.
[35] For a discussion of the lord and bondsman dynamic that upholds the centrality of Medieval logic in conjunction with Hegel (and rather differently than the Althusserian model presented here) as a necessary precursor to "theory," see Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[36] Jameson, "How Not to Historicize Theory," 574-575.

it is not my concern here to question this logic,[37] it is hard to deny, in the spirit of the Balzac-Flaubert distinction inherited from Lukács, that Jameson has a singularly polyvocal sense of theory and dialectic, and a singularly monologic one of philosophy. By contrast, it is philosophy's relation to its *object* (which it must find), in conjunction with its specific lag with respect to theory, that is crucially different for Althusser, allowing philosophy to star in a belated but innovative role replete with precarious pivots and quasi-causal leaps,[38] one which for Jameson is exclusively reserved for theory and the dialectic.

Many Theories

If Jameson continues to evoke theory in a strikingly consistent and positive fashion, even in the wake of other possible periodizations and appellations, Althusser's approach raises an almost diametrically different set of problems. In the first place, Althusser's vast posthumous archive is indispensable to the formulation of the problem at hand, which is occluded by the outsized reputation of the "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" essay (1970) and the events and work of Althusser's last decade (1980-1990), including his notion of aleatory materialism and his late autobiographical writings.[39] In *The Years of Theory*, Jameson will identify Althusser's two crucial points of intervention in terms of the categories of ideology and modes of production.[40] Although these are undeniably important terms for Althusser, they don't quite capture the unrepentant scholasticism of Althusserian mereology and causality, in conjunction with the extraordinary compilation of unpublished work during the two years following the publication of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (both 1965). Althusser attempts and reattempts formulations of the relation between theory and practice—which formulations also hinge on the relation between science and ideology, if not always mode of production—in a remarkable set of writings predominantly from 1966 and 1967.[41] This is not to say Althusser doesn't continue to reflect on similar issues in later work, but more nearly that there is a particular condensation in the work from these two years, insofar as it retains the earlier structural causality logic and uses this to investigate the relation of philosophy to the theory-practice nexus. As with Freud's model of the dream work, there is a constantly shifting set of terms and frameworks, and a resulting overdetermination that makes Althusser's use of

[37] For a critique of Jameson's "anti-political formulation of the dialectic" (738), from the perspective of the field of political theory, see Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, "Fredric Jameson: Dialectical Criticism and the Politics of Theory," *Polity* 55:4 (October 2023): 720-744.

[38] While Althusser's interests put him in real proximity with the quasi-causality outlined in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), Jameson's first book on Sartre considers wonderful quasi-causal examples of objects "leap[ing] into their opposite to be presented." See *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 109.

[39] See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," trans. Ben Brewster, in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), 232-272; and *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987* (London: Verso, 2006).

[40] Jameson, *The Years of Theory*, 214-217, 236.

[41] See Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings, 1966-67*; and *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster et al. (London: Verso, 1990).

"theory" in particular quite challenging to parse. In other words, and in contrast to Jameson's consistent appeal to a notion of theory at once dialectical, utopian, and distinct from philosophy, Althusser employs "theory" into different systems of categorization.[42] While there is a logical consistency across most of these arguments—in particular, the idea that Marx produced advances in the practical state that had yet to be derived (by someone like Althusser) in the dialectical or philosophical state—the terms theory, philosophy, science, and dialectical materialism are sometimes organized on the same level and sometimes in a relation of subordination to one of the other terms.

Thus, while Althusser's terminology, and especially his use of "theory," is strikingly non-homogeneous even between essays composed in the same year, the problem of the highest term's *décalage*, or lag, with respect to historical materialism or praxis, is basically rehearsed over and again, whether that term is called Marxist philosophy, Theory, or dialectical materialism. Therefore, in singling out one essay from 1967 to illustrate my argument with respect to theory and philosophy, I do so with a small disclaimer: while the specific terminologies are not exactly replicated in other of

[42] See "On Theoretical Work," in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 43-67; "The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research" in *The Humanist Controversy*, 1-18; and the earlier essay from 1963, "On the Materialist Dialectic," in *For Marx*, 161-218. To give a very cursory overview, in "The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research" (June, 1966), Althusser specifies the *object* of Marxist theory as the distinction between Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism) and Marxist science (historical materialism), each containing multiple sub-categories that include, for example, the theory of structural causality and the theory of theoretical practice for the former (*The Humanist Controversy*, see esp. 10-13). In "On Theoretical Work," published as an essay in *La Pensée* in April 1967, Althusser distinguishes between "theoretical concepts" which bear on "abstract-formal determinations of objects," such as the capitalist mode of production (*Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 47) and "empirical concepts," which bear on "concrete-real objects," such as the 1966 French social formation that Althusser uses as an example (49). Althusser notes that "[t]he difficulty of a theory in the strong sense derives, then, from the abstract and formal character not just of its concepts, but of its *objects*" (51). Althusser then gives a whole list of properly abstract objects, including historical materialism, dialectical materialism, science, philosophy, dialectic, and mode of production (51). In this schema, philosophy is, along with both historical and dialectical materialism, one of theory's abstract objects. Moreover, the French social formation in 1966 which will effectively become known as "French theory" is itself a more basic real-concrete object and not the more encompassing formal-abstract one. So we have one kind of theory that is global on the level of capitalism and another kind that is local on the level of France in 1966.

As discussed in note 19, Althusser himself makes a specific distinction between variants of "theory" in an earlier essay collected in *For Marx*, "On the Materialist Dialectic" (1963), op. cit. Here, Althusser posits "Theory (with a capital T), general theory, that is, the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences)…. This Theory is the materialist *dialectic* which is none other than dialectical materialism" (168). This is contrasted with the italicized *theory*, which is defined as "any theoretical practice of a *scientific* character" (168). There are further sub-categories of theory elaborated, but the crucial insight, anticipating the controversial argument of *Reading Capital*, is precisely that Marx himself did not give us a capital T notion of the dialectic in the theoretical state, but rather the small t dialectic in the practical state (175). Althusser writes: "Look at Marx. He wrote ten books as well as the monument that is *Capital* without ever writing a *Dialectics*. He talked of writing it, but never started. He never found the time. Which means that he never took the time, for at that period the Theory of his own theoretical practice was not *essential* to the development of his theory, that is, to the fruitfulness of his own practice" (174).

Althusser's essays, the problems presented here, namely, of 1) the whole and the parts (mereology) and 2) philosophy's lag behind theory/science/historical materialism (in effect, structural causality) are, for the most part, consistent across Althusser's work from this period. We may wonder if the non-publication of some of this work was due to its not having arrived at a fully replicable naming of terms (Althusser's ultimate realism being thus at the mercy of his fluctuating nominalisms). In any case, if Jameson's notion of theory is built on resistance to the reifications of a Goliath-like philosophy that looms rather monolithically over the landscape, Althusser seems to be aiming for the reification of a belatedly comprehensive concept (comprehensive for its very belatedness) called sometimes Theory, sometimes philosophy, sometimes dialectical materialism, or sometimes even science. This reification is identified with the austerity and rigor of medieval transcendentals, but unlike truth, unity, or goodness (or even *res* or *aliquid*), it is always imperfectly named. While Jameson and Althusser are coming at the thing from wholly different sides, Althusser from a drive toward system and Jameson with a resistance to it, it is my claim that they meet clandestinely at a middle point—a middle which is also always focused on Marx—that is improbably well aligned.

Philosophy = Theory

In conclusion, I will try to illustrate this proximity between Jameson's "theory" and Althusser's "philosophy" through an analysis of Althusser's formulations about philosophy in "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," an essay written in 1967 upon solicitation from a leading Soviet philosophy journal. The conclusion on "Philosophy and Politics" that Althusser added belatedly is particularly notable, G. M. Goshgarian even maintaining that the "dense" ten page conclusion makes this essay "one of the pivotal texts in the Althusserian corpus."[43] I concur with this assessment and propose using this text for a continuation of the opening thought experiment, which substituted the term "theory" for "realism" in Jameson's formulation. Instead, we might here substitute "theory" for "philosophy" in Althusser's formulations and consider what further rapprochement of the thinkers in question such a substitution would allow. As noted above, there are two critical logical operations that come to the forefront in Althusser's largely unpublished work from 1966-1967: the relation of parts and wholes (mereology), and what Althusser terms structural causality, or the belatedness inherent in a cause only being discernible in its effects. In both dynamics, philosophy appears as either the narrower or more belated term. However, although it is seemingly the minor player next to theory, it turns out in the end to be the crucial support for the whole framework.

In the concluding "Philosophy and Politics" section, Althusser discusses how the desired union of theory and practice necessarily entails an attendant philosophy, and in doing so provides a parenthetical definition of "Marxist theory" in which the separation

[43] Goshgarian, introduction to "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," in *The Humanist Controversy*, 156.

between whole and parts is clearly designated.[44] He writes: "But we must go further still. The union of theory and practice must also appear within Marxist theory (the articulated ensemble of Marxist science and Marxist philosophy), and even within Marxist philosophy itself. To make my meaning absolutely clear, I would say that the primacy of politics must be expressed in forms that are specific to Marxist theory, and that *it is by definition the responsibility of philosophy to ensure the primacy of politics in theory*."[45] The second part of Althusser's italicized phrase,[46] "the primacy of politics in theory," is an oft-cited Althusserianism about which there is more to be said, but to stick to the argument at hand, this memorable slogan itself tends to eclipse the confounding and perhaps shifting relations of parts and wholes from which it proceeds, and which in fact seems anything but "absolutely clear." What is clear is the parenthetical definition in which "Marxist theory" encompasses both "Marxist science" (what Althusser will consistently define as "historical materialism") and "Marxist philosophy" (what Althusser will consistently define as "dialectical materialism"). In no uncertain terms, then, Marxist philosophy is a subset of Marxist theory. Except, wait: this union of theory and practice that appears within the umbrella term theory *also appears already* within Marxist philosophy. Is this an instance of something like expressive causality in which the whole is readable in the part? Perhaps Althusser veers closer to Hegel than he would aver. Yet it seems we are dealing with something more recursive, as highlighted in the other part of Althusser's italicized definition: "*it is by definition the responsibility of philosophy to ensure the primacy of politics in theory*." If philosophy is a part of the larger theory, it is also indispensable to the functioning of said theory, so much so that without it, it's not clear if theory would be theory.

Philosophy's *nachträglichkeit*-function with respect to theory—if we can apply such a term to the more spatialized mereology above—is even more evident when presented temporally, which Althusser does with particular force in this essay. He highlights (with italics) the "*objective paradox*" of Marxist philosophy, which is that it lags behind Marxist theory's other half, historical materialism, but does so for theoretical reasons: "In the last instance, then, the lag between Marxist philosophy and historical materialism is a

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[44] Although this merelogical relation is not absolutely consistent in Althusser's archive, we see variants of theory serving as the umbrella term for philosophy in a range of other writings, including "On Theoretical Work" in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*; *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) (esp. 206, n.6); the 1975 "Soutenance d'Amiens" entitled "Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?" in *Essays in Self Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976), 163-207; and a project Althusser spearheaded for a new journal, to be called *"Théorie*," but later abandoned. See Matheron, "L'Impossible revue *Théorie* de Louis Althusser," *La Revue des revues*, no. 32 (2003): 33-51.

[45] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 208.

[46] Jameson presents a tellingly amusing caricature of Althusser's italics in *The Years of Theory*: "If you look at Althusser's text, you will see that, every so often, you get a word in italics. It's as though Althusser were saying, 'Here, this is really an important word. Keep your eye on this one.' And, in all these cases, when you see a word in italics in Althusser, you know that a fundamental distinction is being established, and you're being alerted to a whole set of phrases and terms which replace the ones you must not use any longer because they are irredeemably idealistic" (219).

difference in conceptual rigour and precision as well as theoretical sy[s]tematicity."[47] This passage expresses Althusser's controversial assessment of Marx's oeuvre, namely the break, starting in 1844 but only realized in *Capital*, between the Hegelian Marx of alienation and the rigorous, systematic, and scientific Marx of *Capital*. This leads to an easy elision, which Jameson makes in the otherwise stunning *Representing 'Capital'*, which is the idea that Althusser is renouncing philosophy insofar as he is rejecting the earlier Marx, whose writings were more steeped in philosophy than the Marx of *Capital*.[48] Althusser's concern, expressed emphatically in "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," is more nearly with the leftover philosophical language Marx had no choice but to employ in the earlier work, itself the baggage or remnant of the old epistemological obstacles that it is the task of Marxist philosophy proper to overcome. We could say that there is a "bad" philosophy (the obstacle, Marx's Hegelianism) that is slowly controverted by the enabling practice (historical materialism) which leads to systematic theory (*Capital*), its precision and rigor in turn allowing for the delayed theoretical overcoming of the bad philosophical obstacles; this theory, with the help of "good" philosophy as both its subordinate and enabler, eventually becomes the true Marxist philosophy; however, even Marx did not fully articulate Marxist philosophy, which must be derived by someone like Althusser. Like the problem of parts and wholes above, philosophy comes in the wake of theory but also alongside it, and is confusingly contrasted with Marx's earlier work which appears to most readers as more philosophical but, for Althusser, was merely philosophical in a retrograde way, perhaps not unlike all philosophy seems to be for Jameson.

Now, we might take issue with this interpretation of Marx, as Jameson not infrequently does, in remarks scattered throughout his work, but the more complicated question is whether this Althusserian logic, crowned by the acrobatics of "philosophy," is not itself more proximate to Jameson's crowning of "theory" and "dialectic" than Jameson would admit, some significant differences notwithstanding (e.g. the favoring of the political for Althusser versus the economic for Jameson, as well as the obvious differences regarding Hegel). Indeed, it is the consistency of Althusser's logic that is the rather breathtaking unifier of an otherwise unruly set of published and unpublished materials from this period. Philosophy at its best—not unlike Jameson's aspirational notion of theory—is able to avoid certain reifications precisely because of its capacity for a retroactive perception that is not outside of but *integrated into* the very problem it is investigating. It is Althusser's brilliance to find this dynamic in various and sundry surprising places.[49]

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[47] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 170.

[48] See Fredric Jameson, *Representing 'Capital'* (London: Verso, 2014), 2-4, 11-12.

[49] This is what Althusser and his students will elaborate in *Reading Capital* as the break effected by Marx vis-à-vis Smith and Ricardo. While employing the same constructs of value, labor and wages as the British political economists, Marx was able to derive what was fully present in their work but not yet articulable. Althusser employs a similar logic for Rousseau versus Hobbes and Locke in *Politique et histoire, de Machiavel*

In the conclusion to "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," Althusser elaborates on the *object* proper to philosophy, as distinct from other domains. Here, in particular, the hypothesis is that a substitution of Jameson's "theory" for Althusser's "philosophy" in the passage that follows does not substantially change the import: "One can form a schematic idea of the specific nature of philosophy as opposed to all the sciences by noting, for example, that it does not take as its object, as all the sciences do, a region of reality…. Quite the contrary: philosophy takes as its object what is traditionally, and improperly, called the 'totality' of the real."[50] Just as theory for Jameson has the potential for innovation and critique precisely because it is not sutured to the ideology of disciplines, so too philosophy here has the capacity to pronounce on the totality, admittedly a Jamesonian term that Althusser generally disfavors.[51]

Moreover, and this is the other crucial connection—for it explains why philosophy for Althusser is at once a subset of theory and its enabler—philosophy's very systematicity is grounded, paradoxically, in its capacity to enable transformation. This transformation entails replacing older "bad" philosophical language that has become an epistemological obstacle: "in stipulating that philosophy takes as its object not only the nature of this complex ensemble [*the system of theoretical practices* and *the system of the different social practices*] but also the tendential law of transformation governing it, we are not merely adding a detail; we are stating an essential thesis."[52] It seems that this essential thesis—of philosophy's shape-shifting role in articulating the transformation of ensembles, and through this capacity for articulation actually assisting in that transformation as the retrospectively crucial link—is not at far remove from the operation of what Jameson will designate and enact as "dialectic," and also "theory."

Admittedly, for Althusser this process is specifically not Hegelian, as he makes clear in his concluding summary: "To say that philosophy has to provide us knowledge of the tendential law governing the transformation of the complex ensemble that comprises its object, and to observe that philosophy itself makes up part of the ensemble of which it must provide knowledge, is therefore to say one and the same thing. It is to say that this complex ensemble cannot be the object of an *Absolute Knowledge*; that philosophy cannot be the *Science of the sciences*; that the law of the transformation of this complex ensemble is never given in advance, *but has to be deciphered step by step*."[53] However, if the renounced Hegelianism (that "this complex ensemble cannot be the object of an

à Marx: Cours à L'École normale supérieure de 1955 à 1972 (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2006), 303. See also "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 172.

[50] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 212.

[51] See Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 216: "no science concerns itself with the state of the theoretical system as a whole. That is not the object of any science, whether it be mathematics, physics, biology or even the science of history. It is, however, the specific object of philosophy. This is because philosophy is directly concerned with politics, by virtue of its nature, theory (materialism), method (the dialectic) and categories."

[52] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 213.

[53] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 214.

Absolute Knowledge") would seem to set Althusser and Jameson apart, we might then question whether this is even an Hegelianism Jameson adheres to.[54] Wouldn't Jameson's critique of a tendency to form systems, something he frowns upon in Althusser, be an even greater problem in Hegel, for Jameson's Hegelianism is itself a bit wary of the *Absolute*? And maybe Althusser's "good" philosophy is also a tad more Hegelian than he would concede? These points are certainly debatable, and undeniably there are some very real differences between Jameson and Althusser, but Jameson's practice of "theory" (if not always his theory of theory) seems remarkably resonant with Althusser's outsider "philosophy" that both lags behind and transforms the historical materialist theory that precedes it. Could we return to Badiou's equation of his notion of inexistence and Derrida's *différance*, and here, substituting Jameson's "theory" and Althusser's "philosophy," say: why not?

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[54] See Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On "The Phenomenology of Spirit"* (London: Verso, 2010).

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A Note on Heinrich and Althusser

Vittorio Morfino
Translated by Dave Mesing

Even upon an initial and quick reading, *The Science of Value* stands out as an extraordinary book – as one of those books which mark a leap forward within the context in which it intervenes. It is not only a book of exemplary clarity in outlining Marx's theoretical path, but also one that is extremely rich in terms of the massive bibliography Heinrich discusses in the footnotes, which give rise to a kind of critical counterpart to his own argument. The breadth of references and originality of the claims he presents clearly enable the possibility to trace different genealogies. At the suggestion of Riccardo Bellofiore, I will explore here, for the benefit of the reader, the question of Heinrich's relation with the thought of Louis Althusser.

1. Althusser in *The Science of Value*

If we examine the places where Michael Heinrich discusses Althusser's reading of Marx, we cannot fail to notice a certain ambivalence: decisive praise alternates with critical considerations. Let us briefly turn to both kinds of cases. In the first section of the introduction (Critique of Political Economy: Reconstruction and Ambivalences), Althusser appears among the authors who contributed to rekindling interest in *Capital* during the 1960s. In the second section (Science and the History of Science), Heinrich references Althusser in conjunction with two concepts which as we will see are strategically important in Heinrich's epistemology, namely the concepts of theoretical field and problematic. Heinrich writes:

> Althusser uses the terms 'problematic' and 'theoretical field' as synonyms, also understanding them as instances which organize a discourse. However, he too hastily links his conception to a dichotomy between science and ideology, or between science and non-science. He defines 'epistemological breaks' (referring back to Bachelard) in the transition from one theoretical field to another as the 'discovery' of the continent of science at hand, or as the break with ideology. It is true that in his 'self-criticism' [...] he abandons the dichotomization of science and ideology, but at that point he also abandons his high level of epistemological reflection for a dubious 'viewpoint logic.'[1]

In the third section of the first chapter (Smith as Theorist of Surplus Value) which is dedicated to classical political economy, when Heinrich discusses Marx's relation with the classics, he concludes that "even Althusser, who emphasizes how Marx's difference from the classics lies in having produced a new theoretical object, essentially connects back to Engels' representation,"[2] ultimately flattening "the difference between the *empiricist* theoretical conception of classical political economy and the *non-empirical* character of the theory of surplus value."[3]

And then, in the first section of the third chapter (Marx and the Young Hegelians), which is dedicated to the theoretical understanding of the young Marx, when addressing the question of the continuity or discontinuity of the development of Marx's thought, Heinrich summarizes Althusser's position as follows:

> The question of the relation between the early and late Marx was posed in a more radical way by Althusser [...]. Although for a long time, different authors focused exclusively on evaluating the 'true Marx,' based on subjective preferences, Althusser instead posed the question of the characteristics of a specifically Marxist science (considering the adjectives 'materialistic,' 'dialectical,' etc., which traditionally answered this question, more as definitions of the problem than its solution). According to Althusser, Marx discovered a new 'continent' of science, the science of history, and in doing so radically broke with the earlier scientific problematic, that of political economy and idealist philosophy. This 'epistemological break,' [*wissenschaftstheoretischen Einschnitt*] however, would also exist between the writings of the early Marx and the late Marx,

[1] Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore: La critica marxiana dell'economia politica tra rivoluzione scientifica e tradizione classica*, trans. Stefano Breda, ed. Riccardo Bellofiore and Stefano Breda (Milan: PGreco Edizioni, 2023), 107. Note: Morfino's text originally appears within prefatory material for Stefano Breda's Italian translation of Heinrich's *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert: Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaflicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*. An English translation of Heinrich's book is in preparation, but here all page numbers correspond to Morfino's citation of the Italian translation. The Heinrich excerpts have also been translated by using Breda's Italian translation.

[2] Ibid., 131.

[3] Ibid.

> because the early Marx, in the structure of his discourse, was still entangled in the old problematic.[4]

A few pages later, in the first section of the fourth chapter (The Separation from Feuerbach's Anthropology), entitled The Break With the Theoretical Field of Political Economy, in taking up the literature on the relation between Marx-Feuerbach and the theoretical transition from *The Holy Family* to the *Theses* and *The German Ideology*, Heinrich presents Althusser's interpretive position, highlighting its inadequacy: "Althusser, for example, emphasizes how Marx's theoretical development was determined by the 'discovery' of a 'radically new reality,' the working class and the class struggle [...]. This one-dimensional explanation, however, is insufficient, since in 1844, Feuerbach's philosophy was precisely the decisive instrument for attempting to grasp this new reality."[5]

In the fourth section of the same chapter (Continuity of the Alienation Thematic [*Entfremdungsproblematik*]), Heinrich substantially agrees with Althusser about the discontinuity between the *Manuscripts* and the later works:

> In this sense, it seems to me that Althusser, despite some exaggerated formulations, is still who best interprets the 'break' [*Bruch*] between the problematic of the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*, when he sees at the center of this break the 'philosophy of man,' which Marx would have recognized as ideological. Althusser identifies an 'epistemological break' [*wissenschaftstheoretischen Einschnitt*] which simultaneously takes place in *science* and *philosophy* [...]. The task of Marxist philosophy would now mainly be to reflect the break [*Bruch*] carried out by Marx and in this way draw 'a line of demarcation between Marxism and bourgeois ideology."[6]

In the sixth section of the same chapter (Historical Dynamic or Philosophy of History), Heinrich again explicitly denies that history can have a subject, citing a famous concept that Althusser develops in his essay "Marx's Relation to Hegel": "History does not have [...] a 'subject': there is no subject of history in 'men' nor in 'classes' (as one might perhaps

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[4] Ibid., 176.

[5] Ibid., 216.

[6] Ibid., 238. Heinrich adds: "However, this program was only partially realized by Althusser: in his 'self-critical' essays of the 1970s, he falls back into an elaborate logic of positioning, where a 'shift towards absolutely new, proletarian theoretical class positions' is a condition for the epistemological break [...] These 'theoretical class positions' represent true philosophy, which is now no longer the *result* but the *precondition* of the break. The fact that these class positions cannot coincide with the proletarian perception, which is also subject to the mystifications of capitalism, is something Althusser acknowledges, as he attributes the adjective 'theoretical' to them. However, this means that these positions cannot simply be 'taken' as though from an observation perch, as Althusser apparently supposes; rather, they must be the result of a theoretical effort. In other words, nothing is obtained by means of a simple 'position taken'." (Ibid.)

think when reading *The Communist Manifesto*, where history is described as the history of class struggles). It is a 'process without subject' [...]."[7]

In the section titled Interpretation of Marxian Dialectics, which opens the fifth chapter on the Architectonic of the Critique of Political Economy, while remarking on the famous passages about dialectics in the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, Heinrich again refers to Althusser's position:

> Despite the many attempts to reconstruct Marx's methodological conception and his relation with Hegel based on these abstract observations [...], it is necessary to agree with Althusser at least about the fact that these statements only indicate that Marx believed he had clarified his relation with Hegel, but that these observations are very far from containing such this clarification [...].[8]

Finally, in the second section of the sixth chapter on the Monetary Theory of Value (The Theory of Value Between Naturalism and the Theory of History), Heinrich sharply distances himself from Althusser's reading of commodity fetishism:

> The concept of fetishism is not at all a harmful Hegelian residue, as Althusser thought [...]. Moreover, fetishism is not limited to the fetish of commodities and money, but rather encompasses the bourgeois relations of production in their entirety.[9]

Clearly, we only have a handful of passages here, a few lines to which another handful of notes could be added that the reader of *The Science of Value* will have no difficulty in identifying. It would not make sense to reconstruct a sort of Heinrichian image of Althusser on the basis of these few elements: Heinrich takes what he needs from Althusser for his work on Marx, and in this sense it is undeniable that his preference is for the Althusser of the 1960s, notwithstanding what Heinrich calls "exaggerations," and he finds the Althusser of the self-critical writings far less interesting. However, remaining at this level of analysis would give a misleading idea of Althusser's presence in *The Science of Value* – merely as one critic cited among others, whose importance resides in specific clarifications of individual texts. Instead, it seems to me that several of Althusser's intuitions, those at the heart of his two great "theoreticist" books, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, constitute a quite important inspiration for Heinrich's text (though certainly not the only one), particularly for two fundamental and strictly related implications: 1) the reconstruction of Marx's theoretical path; 2) the identification of the specificity of Marx's scientific revolution.

[7] Ibid., 247.
[8] Ibid., 263.
[9] Ibid., 307.

2. The reconstruction of Marx's theoretical path

Althusser writes the following about the art of historical criticism in the essay "On the Young Marx: Theoretical Questions," originally published in *La pensée* in 1961 and then again in 1965 in *For Marx*:

> Of course, we now know that the Young Marx *did become* Marx, but we should not want to live faster than he did, we should not want to live in his place, reject for him or discover for him. We shall not be waiting for him at the end of the course to throw round him as round a runner the mantle of repose, for at last it is over, he has arrived. Rousseau remarked that with children and adolescents the whole art of education consists of knowing how to *lose time*. The art of historical criticism also consists of knowing how to lose time so that young authors can grow up. This lost time is simply the time we give them to live. We *scan* the necessity of their lives in our understanding of its nodal points, its reversals and mutations. In this area there is perhaps no greater joy than to be able to witness in an emerging life, once the Gods of Origins and Goals have been dethroned, the birth of necessity.[10]

As is well known, Althusser proposes to designate four phases in Marx's work, which he summarizes in the introduction to *For Marx* as follows:

> 1840-45: the Early Works
> 1845: the Works of the Break
> 1845-57: the Transitional Works
> 1857-83: the Mature Works[11]

It is no exaggeration to say that this array forms the basis of Heinrich's analysis of the development of Marx's thought contained in the third (Anthropology as Critique: The Theoretical Understanding of the Young Marx) and fourth (The Break with the Field of Political Economy) chapters. It is precisely in the separation from Feuerbach's anthropology that Marx becomes Marx: according to Althusser (and Heinrich follows him here), for this reason there is a discontinuity between the *1844 Manuscripts* and *Capital*. Indeed, in the *Manuscripts*, the anthropologism which characterizes Feuerbachian thought and political economy is not questioned: Marx does not conduct a critique of anthropology, but, criticizing "the hypostatization of the commodity producer as a human *tout court,*"[12] he simply opposes it to man as *Gattungswesen*, denouncing it as an alienated figure, i.e., he opposes one anthropology to another. However, if Althusser's analysis is

[10] Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 31.
[11] Ibid., xxxiii.
[12] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, 202.

focused on Marx's early writings in particular and only in a fragmentary way on the later works (these analyses are often found in unedited texts published posthumously), Heinrich offers us an important contribution not only in clarifying several passages which are enormously important in the early period (the key role played by Stirner in the separation from Feuerbach and the importance of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*), but above all in demonstrating how the works of Marx's maturity do not at all constitute a unitary and homogenous culmination. Drawing on the results of the extraordinary work of the critical edition undertaken with MEGA2, Heinrich shows the shift in level between the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* with great clarity, highlighting for example the theoretical reasons for Marx's abandonment of the concept "capital in general,"[13] but also showing with equal clarity the weight of Engels' interventions in the second and third volumes, returning to Marx's manuscripts that formed the basis of his work (now published in MEGA2), without, however, ever giving into the temptation to find a definitive answer within them: Engels often intervenes precisely where the elaboration is lacking, where the direction is not clear.

3. Marx's Scientific Revolution

However, Althusser's influence on *The Science of Value* is not limited to historiographic hypotheses: although the name "Althusser" appears sparingly and always with critical restraint, the same cannot be said for three Althusserian concepts which are ubiquitous within the text: we find 59 references to the term *Bruch* (break[14]), 78 to *theoretisches Feld* (theoretical field), and 48 to *Problematik* (problematic). These concepts are fundamental theoretical instruments that Heinrich uses to understand not only the array of Marx's work, but also the revolution he brought about with respect to the tradition of classical political economy, opening a new theoretical field. It is useful to return to the places where these concepts were formulated in order to explain them.

Let's therefore return to *For Marx*, particularly the introduction. Wishing to offer an overall sense of the volume, Althusser here dwells on the two concepts that he needed to introduce—externally, so to speak, from the Marxist tradition—in order to conceive the array of Marx's work:

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[13] As Heinrich writes with typical clarity: "in place of the old concept of 'capital in general', what appears in *Capital* is the consideration of individual capital and the constitution of overall social capital at three levels of exposition which are based on each other: the immediate process of production, the circulation process, and the overall process (unity of production and circulation." Ibid., 290.

[14] The French term Althusser uses is *coupure*, which is perhaps more accurately rendered with the term "cut" [*taglio*] (it is not by chance that when Heinrich refers to Althusser, he uses the phrase *wissenschaftstheoretische Einschnitt* on a pair of occasions). However, the established Italian translation is *rottura* ("break") and Heinrich himself, with reference to Bachelard, translates *coupure* with *Bruch*. As is well known, Althusser will introduce the term *rupture* in his self-critical writings in order to distance himself from the so-called "theoreticism" of his writings in the 1960s.

> It was the study of the works of Marx's youth that first led me to a reading of Feuerbach, and to the publications of the most important of his theoretical writings in the period from 1839 to 1845 [...] The same reason quite naturally led me to begin studying the nature of the relation of Hegel's philosophy to Marx's in the detail of their respective concepts. The question of the specific difference of Marxist philosophy thus assumed the form of the question as to whether or not there was an *epistemological break* [*coupure epistemologique*] in Marx's intellectual development indicating the emergence of a new conception of philosophy – and the related question of the precise *location* of this break. Within the field defined by this question the study of Marx's Early Works acquired a decisive theoretical importance (does this break exist?) as well as a historical importance (where is it located?).
>
> Of course, the quotation in which Marx himself attests to and locates this break ('we resolved ... to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience') in 1845 at the level of *The German Ideology* can only be treated as a declaration to be examined, and falsified or confirmed, not as a proof of the existence of the break and a definition of its location. The examination of the status of this declaration called for a theory and a method – the Marxist *theoretical concepts* in which the reality of theoretical formations in general (philosophical ideologies and science) can be considered must be applied to Marx himself. Without a theory of the history of theoretical formations it would be impossible to grasp and indicate the specific difference that distinguishes two different theoretical formations. I thought it possible to borrow for this purpose the concept of a 'problematic' from Jacques Martin to designate the particular unity of a theoretical formation and hence the location to be assigned to this specific difference, and the concept of an 'epistemological break' from Gaston Bachelard to designate the mutation in the theoretical problematic contemporary with the foundation of a scientific discipline. That one of these concepts had to be constructed and the other borrowed does not imply at all that either is arbitrary or foreign to Marx; on the contrary, it can be shown that both are present and active in Marx's scientific thought, even if this presence is most often in the practical state.[15]

Bachelard's concept of the *coupure épistémologique* and the concept of the problematic which Althusser attributes to Jacques Martin, a close friend from the École Normale Supérieure who died prematurely, are the two fundamental theoretical instruments that Althusser uses in order to conceive the array of Marx's work and the foundation of a new science – in Heinrich's terms, the scientific revolution that he produces. They are two concepts which have an essentially anti-empiricist function: while it is perhaps superfluous to recall that the concept of the epistemological break strikes at the idea of science as continuous progress and linear development, as an indefinite accumulation of knowledge/experience,

[15] Althusser, *For Marx*, xxx-xxxi.

it is worth examining it briefly through a passage in "On the Young Marx," given the enormous importance of the concept of problematic for Heinrich. In this essay, in fact, Althusser proposes the concept for the first time, tracing its meaning back to a famous passage in *The German Ideology* where Marx and Engels state that concerning Hegelianism, the mystification takes place not only in the answers, but already in the questions:

> [I]t would be very rash to reduce Feuerbach's presence in Marx's writings between 1841 and 1844 to explicit *references* alone. For many passages directly reproduce or paraphrase Feuerbachian arguments without his name ever being mentioned. [...] Why should Marx have referred to Feuerbach when everyone knew his work, and above all, when he had appreciated Feuerbach's thought and was thinking in his thoughts as if they were his own? But as we shall see in a moment, we must go further than the unmentioned presence of the thoughts of a living author to the presence of his potential thoughts, to his problematic, that is, to the constitutive unity of the effective thoughts that make up the domain of the existing ideological field with which a particular author must settle accounts in his own thought.[16]

This is a key point in Althusser's argument: the question that should be posed is not so much the use of individual Feuerbachian arguments without mention of the author, but rather the possible application of Feuerbach's thought to different objects, in this way arriving at "the basic unity of a text, the internal essence of an ideological thought."[17] The example that Althusser proposes is extremely clear:

> Take a specific example: Marx's 1843 Manuscript (*The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*). According to commentators, this contains a series of Feuerbachian themes (the subject-predicate inversion, the critique of speculative philosophy, the theory of the species-man, etc.), but also some analyses which are not to be found in Feuerbach (the interrelation of politics, the State and private property, the reality of social classes, etc.). To remain at the level of elements would be to fall into the impasse of analytico-teleological critique [...]. We must go further and ask whether the presence in Marx of analyses and objects about which Feuerbach says little or nothing is a sufficient justification for this division into Feuerbachian and non-Feuerbachian (that is, already Marxist) elements. But no answer can be hoped for from *the elements themselves*. For the object discussed does not directly qualify the thought. [...] It is not the material reflected on that characterizes and qualifies a reflection, but, at this level the modality of the reflection, the actual relation the reflection has with its objects, that is, the *basic problematic* that is the starting-point for the reflection of the objects of the thought. [...] So anyone who still wants to

[16] Ibid., 26.
[17] Ibid., 27.

> pose the problem of elements in this perspective must recognize that everything depends on a question which must have priority over them: the question of the nature of the problematic which is the starting-point for actually thinking them, in a given text. In our example, the question takes the following form: in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, has Marx's reflection on his new objects, social class, the private property/State relation, etc., swept aside Feuerbach's theoretical presuppositions, has it reduced them to the level of mere phrases? Or are these new objects thought from the same starting-point of the same presuppositions? This question is possible precisely because the problematic of a thought is not limited to the domain of the objects considered by its author, because it is not an abstraction for the thought as a totality, but the concrete determinate structure of a thought and of all the thoughts possible within this thought. Thus Feuerbach's anthropology can become the problematic not only of religion (*The Essence of Christianity*), but also of politics (*On the Jewish Question*, the 1843 Manuscript), or even of history and economics (the *1844 Manuscripts*) without ever ceasing to be in its essentials an *anthropological problematic*, even if the 'letter' of Feuerbach is itself abandoned or superseded. It is, of course, possible to regard it as politically important to have moved from a religious anthropology to a political anthropology, and finally to an economic anthropology, and I would agree completely that in Germany in 1843 anthropology represented an advanced ideological form. But to make this judgment presupposes that the nature of the ideology under consideration is already familiar, that is, that is effective problematic has been defined.[18]

Thus, it is not the immediate content of the object on which reflection is carried out, but the way of posing questions that characterizes a determinate thought. Althusser adds a further element to this which allows for understanding the importance of the concept of problematic and at the same time the reason why the historian never encounters a problematic as an empirical object: the problematic acts behind the back of the individual thinker. Althusser writes:

> In general a philosopher *thinks in [this problematic] rather than thinking of it*, and his 'order of reasons' does not coincide with the 'order of reasons' of his philosophy. An ideology [...] can be regarded as characterized in this particular respect by the fact that *its own problematic is not conscious of itself*. When Marx tells us (and he continually repeats it) not to take an ideology's consciousness of itself for its essence, he also means that before it is unconscious of the real problems it is a response (or non-response) to, an ideology is already unconscious of its 'theoretical presuppositions', that is, the active but unavowed problematic which fixes for it the meaning and

[18] Ibid., 28-29.

> movement of its *problems* and thereby of their solutions. So a problematic cannot generally be read like an open book, it must be dragged up from the depths of the ideology in which it is buried but active, and usually despite the ideology itself, its own statements and proclamations.[19]

Heinrich is not wrong in emphasizing a substantial identity in Althusser's discourse between problematic and theoretical field, with the latter concept widely used in *Reading Capital*. Here is its definition:

> If we wish to preserve the spatial metaphor, the paradox of the theoretical field is that it is an *infinite* because *definite* space, i.e., it has no limits, no external frontiers separating it from nothing, precisely because it is *defined* and limited within itself, carrying in itself the finitude of its definition, which, by excluding what it is not, makes it what it is. Its *definition* (a scientific operation *par excellence*), then, is what makes it both *infinite in its kind*, and marked inside itself, in all its determinations, by what is excluded from it *in it* by its very definition.[20]

It is precisely these concepts, along with the epistemological break, that are decisive in *Reading Capital* for defining Marx's relation to political economy:

> If the view I have put forward is correct, 'to criticize' Political Economy cannot mean to criticize or correct certain inaccuracies or points of detail in an existing discipline – nor even to fill in its gaps, its blanks, pursuing further an already largely initiated movement of exploration. 'To criticize Political Economy' means to *confront* it with a new problematic and a new object: i.e., to question the very *object* of Political Economy. [21]

The entirety of "The Object of *Capital*" is dedicated to the construction of this new object that Marx confronts political economy with, a construction that presupposes the identification of the theoretical structure of the object of political economy: "*The peculiar theoretical structure of Political Economy depends on immediately and directly relating together a*

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[19] Ibid., 30.

[20] Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 25. It should be noted that while theoretical field and problematic are substantially identical, the same is not true for the concept of "ideological field" that is evoked in *For Marx*. This is rather the unity in which different problematics are articulated, as is clearly shown by this passage: "Understanding an ideological argument implies, at the level of the ideology itself, simultaneous, conjoint knowledge of the *ideological field* in which a thought emerges and grows; and the exposure of the internal unity of this thought: its *problematic*. Knowledge of the ideological field itself presupposes knowledge of the particular problematic compounded or opposed in it. This interrelation of the particular problematic of the thought of the individual under consideration with the particular problematics of the thoughts belonging to the ideological field allows of a decision as to its author's specific difference, i.e., *whether a new meaning has emerged*. Of course, this complex process is all haunted by real history. But everything cannot be said at once." Althusser, *For Marx*, 30-31.

[21] Ibid., *Reading Capital*, 310.

homogenous space of given phenomena and an ideological anthropology which bases the economic character of the phenomena and its space on man as the subject of needs (the givenness of homo oeconomicus)."[22]

Of course, Althusser's entire argument presupposes the distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge, which he considers the fundamental contribution of the *1857 Introduction*, a distinction that allows him to take distance from both idealism and empiricism, as well as historicism and positivism.

Perhaps it could be said that it is precisely this family of closely linked concepts (epistemological break, problematic, theoretical field, real object, object of knowledge) which constitutes the starting point of Heinrich's work, and which allows him to identify a theoretical field common to classical and neoclassical economics (anthropologism/essentialism, individualism, ahistoricity, and empiricism[23]), as well as, at the same time, to grasp all of the power of Marx's break with this field, a break that establishes what Heinrich calls "Marx's scientific revolution."[24] However, Heinrich adds:

> By examining the critique of political economy, I have arrived at the conclusion that even in Marx's most developed economic theory, namely *Capital* and its preparatory works, two different discourses permanently interweave. On the one hand, Marx carries out a break with classical political economy – he does not criticize individual theories, but an entire science; Marx is not simply the creator of a new theory, but the protagonist of a scientific revolution that opens up a radically new field. On the other hand, the discourse of the classics continues to be present in central passages of his work. Althusser had already observed that 'Marx did not effectively think the concept of difference that distinguishes him from classical economics.'[25]

The presence of the discourse of classical economics in Marx opens a new way of using an Althusserian concept, one that leads Heinrich to identify the ambivalence of the categories of the critique of political economy, to which the entire third part of the book is dedicated.

4. Symptomatic reading

Despite a certain philosophical fame (both positive and negative), the term "symptomatic reading," which is coined by Althusser, is almost a *hapax*: there are extremely few mentions of it, all concentrated within *Reading Capital*. However, it could

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[22] Ibid., 315.

[23] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, 162-171.

[24] It should be emphasized here that Althusser and Heinrich are in agreement, against the incommensurability of Kuhnian paradigms, that Marx's scientific revolution is not only a break with the preceding theoretical field, but also its explication. Cfr. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 311; for Heinrich, see *La scienza del valore*, 422.

[25] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, 99.

be said that the whole meaning of Althusser's introduction, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy," lies precisely in a movement that identifies a practice of symptomatic reading in Marx and then applies a symptomatic reading to Marx himself (it goes without saying that unless one wants to make an entirely arbitrary use of the concept, then it must be conceived together with the concepts of problematic, theoretical field, and epistemological break). Althusser writes the following in presenting the interpretive method of the entire work:

> In the papers you are about to read, and which do not escape the law I have pronounced – assuming that they have some claim to be treated, for the time being at least, as discourses with a theoretical meaning – we have simply tried to apply to Marx's reading the '*symptomatic*' reading with which Marx managed to read the illegible in Smith, by measuring the problematic initially visible in his writings against the invisible problematic contained in the paradox of *an answer which does not correspond to any question posed*. You will also find that the infinite distance which separates Marx from Smith and in consequence our relation to Marx from Marx's relation to Smith, is the following radical difference: whereas in his text Smith produces an answer which not only does not answer any of the immediately preceding questions, but does not even answer any other question he ever posed anywhere in his work; with Marx, on the contrary, when he does happen to formulate *an answer without a question*, with a little patience and perspicacity we can find *the question* itself *elsewhere*, twenty or one hundred pages further on, with respect to some other object, enveloped in some other matter, or, on occasion, in Engels's immediate comments on Marx, for Engels has flashes of profound inspiration.[26]

Again, he adds a few pages later:

> I merely proposed a *'symptomatic' reading* of the works of Marx and of Marxism, one with another, i.e., the progressive and systematic production of a reflection of the problematic on its objects such as to make them *visible*, and the illumination, the production of the deepest-lying problematic which will allow us to *see* what could otherwise have existed only allusively or practically.[27]

On the one hand, there is thus a sharp distancing from a religious reading of Marx, from a Talmudic hermeneutic, while on the other, there is the claim of nevertheless finding answers within the corpus of the Marxist tradition. In some ways Heinrich reprises this reading practice and pushes it to its extreme consequences, constantly measuring Marx's

[26] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 27.
[27] Ibid., 31.

claims against his "deepest-lying problematic," at the summit of the scientific revolution that he produced.

The three sections titled For a Critique of the Marx's Receptions of Classical Economics in the first part of the work concentrate precisely on Marx's relation to Smith, Ricardo, and the so-called vulgar economists, which means Marx's relation to the theoretical field of political economy. Heinrich first discusses Marx's claim that Smith conceived surplus value as a general category, without distinguishing it as a particular category from the forms that it assumes in profit and ground rent:

> [Marx] attributes to Smith the determination of the value of commodities through the labor time necessary for their production (as assumption that does not apply to capitalist relations for Smith) and in this way arrives at the conclusion that the profit of the business owner must be the expression in value of a part of the labor time added by the worker. However, this profit cannot be identical to the average profit; it is therefore necessary to introduce a new category which is non-empirical: *surplus value*. Instead of noting the absence of this *category* in Smith, Marx notes only the absence of the *word*, which is in turn traced to the lack of a distinction: Smith does not separate surplus value from its phenomenal forms (profit, rent, etc.); but what is essential in the category of surplus value is precisely its distinction from its phenomenal forms. Surplus value is a category that has no immediate empirical correspondent: it cannot be located at the pseudo-empirical level of an empirico-speculative model (such as the 'primitive and backward stage of society' for which Smith postulates an exchange regulated by the labor time necessary for production), nor at the level of immediate observation. However, Smith does not recognize other levels. The lack of a distinction between surplus value and its phenomenal forms, then, is not merely a defect – it is the absence of the category itself. *Smith cannot possess the category of surplus value at all (not even 'in substance') because he lacks the theoretical level at which this category is found*.[28]

In the section dedicated to Marx's interpretation of Ricardo, Heinrich discusses the attribution of a value theory of labor to Ricardo in the absence of an adequate understanding of the nexus between value and money, which thereby leads to an incoherence or inconsistency in his theory:

> Marx reproaches Ricardo for confusing values and prices of production. However, this criticism would only be on point if in his first chapter, Ricardo had understood value as determined solely and exclusively by the quantity of labor necessary for production. As we have seen, Ricardo does not understand it in this way: he always presupposes the existence of an

[28] Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, 130.

> average rate of profit, or in other words, *he has the prices of production in mind from the beginning*, even when he speaks of 'values.' However, this means that *Ricardo does not develop a labor theory of value at the beginning of his chapter on value which he later abandons*. Instead, he investigates, without sufficiently explaining, the exchange relations *in a situation where the capital employed has the same composition and same turnover time*. Only under these conditions are the relations of exchange proportional to the relative quantities of labor necessary for production; if these conditions are not met, then the relations of exchange no longer depend solely on the relative quantities of labor. Marx's reproach, therefore, that Ricardo confuses value and production prices, is not justified: Ricardo is not an inconsistent labor theorist of value as Marx maintained.[29]

As in the case with the reading of Smith, the problem in reading Ricardo lies in the fact that Marx attributes a non-empirical theoretical level which they do not actually possess. Of course, in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx constructs "a history of precursors" *après coup*, as Heinrich puts it. However, what is crucial about this reading, about the identification of these oversights by Marx, is that they are symptoms of "determinate deficits in Marx's conception":

> Certainly, Marx succeeded in breaking with the theoretical field of political economy, and his insistence on the fact that he was not doing political economy but the *critique* of political economy demonstrates that what was important to him was precisely this break. However, he fails to develop the concept of this theoretical field sufficiently, which conversely means that he could not have complete clarity even about the status of his own theory, which, as already shown in the last chapter, is particularly true with regard to the non-empirical content of his theory of value and surplus value. This insufficient clarity about the status of his own theory also makes it possible for determinate elements of classical discourse to penetrate Marx's discourse.[30]

It is precisely this thesis of Heinrich's, in its extraordinary radicality, that opens up some of the most interesting and original conclusions of the third part of *The Science of Value*, The Ambivalences of the Fundamental Categories of the Critique of Political Economy: these ambivalences are the effect of insufficient clarity about the status of Marx's own theory, of the radicality of the scientific revolution carried out in relation to classical economics. First, he does so with respect to the theory of value that allows him to break with the field of classical economics, understanding it in a monetary sense, while

[29] Ibid., 140.
[30] Ibid., 171.

sometimes falling back into a pre-monetary conception – which earns him an entire series of criticisms that share "the fact of situating Marx's argument within an *empiricist problematic*"[31] – from which the insoluble question of the transformation of values into prices arises. But this is not all. With respect to the theory of absolute rent, the theory/theories of crisis, and the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, Heinrich's analysis – which I repeat, is exemplary in its clarity from both a historiographical and theoretical perspective – has the merit of demonstrating where the discourse of classical economics and the empiricist problematic which dominates it seep into Marx's theory, distorting its meaning. However, the clarity that Heinrich brings to the structure of Marx's theoretical field never leads him to certain Althusserian exaggerations ("Marx's theory is omnipotent because it is true"): it is not only the question of liberating Marx's discourse from the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that prevent us from grasping its radical novelty (misinterpretations from which Marx himself is not exempt), but also of measuring its insufficiency and limits where these present themselves. A good example in this sense is the treatment of interest-bearing capital and credit, which Heinrich points out is on the one hand an insufficient theoretical elaboration by Marx, and on the other is due the fact that the capitalist mode of production as it appeared for him "was not yet so developed in terms of the monetary and credit system as to render possible an investigation at the level of abstraction to which Marx aspired."[32] It is precisely from these limitations, within the theoretical field opened by Marx, that the work must be taken back up.

[31] Ibid., 304.
[32] Ibid., 396.

Which Science of Value?

Massimiliano Tomba

Twenty years ago, a German newspaper asked me to review a text by Michael Heinrich that was in its third edition.[1] I began my review by questioning the reasons for the book's success. The publication's context was the revival of the critical edition of the works of Marx and Engels (MEGA^2). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Marx's critical edition passed from the hands of the SED in Berlin to the more 'respectable' oversight of the Internationale Marx-Engels-Stiftung (IMES) in Amsterdam. Young and senior academics alike saw the critical edition as an opportunity to approach Marx as a subject of philological, scholarly, and de-ideologized study—one that was, eventually, also de-politicized. My 2005 review attributed the success of Heinrich's book to three interconnected elements: first, the monetary theory of value, which emphasized exchange over production; second, the bracketing of classes and class struggle; and third, the framing of the core issue of capitalism as its "intrinsic logic," in which everything becomes subordinated to the limitless production of surplus value, culminating in "environmental destruction."[2] In other words, the problem of capital, if one still wants to speak of a problem of capital, would consist in its "immanent power of destruction."[3] What is to be done? We need only to become aware of it. Politically vague conclusions like these have found, and continue to find, easy acceptance in a social and political climate marked by

[1] Michael Heinrich, *Zur Kritik der politichen Oekonomie*, Stuttgart, Schmetterling Verlag, 2005; English translation: *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2012.
[2] Heinrich, *An introduction*, 117.
[3] Ibid., 36.

the perceived disappearance of classes and class struggle, the marginalization of industrial labor, and the pressing urgency of ecological catastrophe.

In *Wissenschaft vom Wert*, Michael Heinrich sketches a particular image of Marx, highlighting what is consistent and what is less so in *Capital*. In doing so, Heinrich excludes everything that is deemed superfluous to the science of value. The reader must wait nearly four hundred pages to find any mention of workers in the flesh in Heinrich's book. *Wissenschaft* does not concern itself with bodies. Only a few pages from the end of the book does Heinrich include a few quotes from Marx on the exploitation of the producers and the "systematic robbery of what is necessary for the life of the worker while he is at work".[4] Heinrich cuts out the quote from Marx's text, which instead specifies what the robbery is about: "space, light, air and protection against the dangerous or the unhealthy concomitants of the production process."[5] Heinrich considered this Marxian specification unimportant. However, if the theft regards "space, light, air," it shows that the theft is not only about the surplus value produced by the worker, but also about the worker's life itself. This point warrants further exploration.

Throughout his book, Heinrich repeatedly emphasizes that these Marxian remarks should not be interpreted as a moral critique, a problem of justice, or a demand for the right to an unimpaired life. From the perspective of Heinrich's *Wissenschaft*, the purpose of these passages is solely to illustrate the destructive nature of the capitalist system. This should also explain why Marx would "sometimes (*zuweilen*)" use "drastic terms" such as "exploitation" or even evoke the image of the labor-sucking vampire.[6] Sometimes? *Zuweilen*? What about the hundreds of pages in which Marx describes the conditions of the laborers in modern factories? What about the pages detailing the past and present history of the capitalist mode of production? When Marx describes the revolution that took place in the production process in Lancashire at the expense of the workers, he writes that "*experimenta in corpore vili*, like those of anatomists on frogs, were actually being made here."[7] But these "drastic terms" hold little significance for the *Wissenschaft*. According to Heinrich, "the historical passages," which "come after the (theoretical) depictions [...] complement the theoretical account, but they don't constitute the theoretical account."[8] Heinrich does not acknowledge the theory and politics intrinsic to the hundreds of pages of ethnography on the condition of workers in modern capitalist production.

This limitation is not unique to Heinrich but is shared by much of academic Marxism. Similarly, Chris Arthur described the historical-ethnographic pages of *Capital* as

[4] Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert. Die Marxsche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, Münster, Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006, 384.
[5] Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy,* London and New York, Penguin, 1990, 553.
[6] Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 384.
[7] Marx, *Capital*, 586.
[8] Heinrich, *An introduction*, 32.

"strictly illustrative."[9] For Arthur, the chapter on the working day "can be deduced from the concept of the capital relation that there must be struggles over the length of the working day, but it was by no means necessary for Marx to illustrate it at such length."[10] If *Capital* is read as a book of logic, then the long fourth part, where the intensity of excerpts from *Factory Reports* is greater, becomes on the one hand purely "illustrative," and on the other, serves only to introduce the concept of relative surplus value and real subsumption, which is "logically implicit in the concept of capital."[11] This is as far as the Hegelianization, scientification, and logicization of Marx's *Capital* goes: "The appearance shows nothing that is not in the essence and there is nothing in the essence that is not manifested."[12] It seems that Marx wrote the so-called historical parts for the dumb reader, whereas the smart, academically trained one can understand everything by reading the first part and from there grasp the whole logic of capital.

To preserve the purity of his *Wissenschaft*, Heinrich points out that Marx not only talks about the theft of surplus value from the worker, but also makes remarks of the opposite nature—for example, when he notes that "the worker 'steals' from capitalists when he consumes for himself the labor power purchased by the capitalists."[13] This analogy is 'so wrong it's not even wrong,' as Wolfgang Pauli would have said. Marx writes that "if the free worker rests for an instant, the base and petty management which watches over him with wary eyes claims he is stealing from it."[14] This statement is a paraphrase from *Théorie des lois civiles*, a work by the French lawyer Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet.[15] Marx adopts the capitalist's perspective not to draw a comparison between so-called worker theft and capitalist theft, as Heinrich suggests, but to underscore the fundamental incommensurability of these two positions. Instead, Heinrich's scientific perspective aligns with what Linguet himself critically calls "sordid economics (*économie sordide*)," which Marx translates as *schmutzige Ökonomie*. In that text, Linguet questioned the 'freedom' of the wage-worker in comparison to slavery, highlighting the worsening living conditions of the former. The theft Marx refers to is not about money—that is the capitalist's perspective. From the worker's perspective, the capitalist's denial of air, space,

[9] Christopher John Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, 75.
[10] Arthur, *The New Dialectic*, 75.
[11] Ibid., 76.
[12] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline*, Part 1, *Science of Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, par. 139, 207.
[13] Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 384 fn. 12.
[14] Marx, *Capital*, 542.
[15] When the laborer is needed, writes Linguet, he "is hired at the lowest price possible. The meager wage he is promised barely covers the cost of his subsistence for the day he has to surrender in exchange. He is given overseers to force him to complete his task promptly; he is hurried along; he is prodded for fear that an industrious and excusable idleness might hide half his vigor. They fear that the hope of remaining longer occupied with the same work will stop his arms and dull his tools. The sordid economy, which follows him with anxious eyes, accosts him with reproaches for the slightest rest he appears to take; if he takes even a moment of respite, it claims he is stealing from it." Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet, *Théorie des lois civiles, ou principes fondamentaux de la société,* Vol. 2, London, 1767, 466.

and light constitutes a theft of life itself, ultimately leading to injury, harm, and death. But *Wissenschaft* does not deal with such miseries.

What is science from the worker's point of view? During the Revolution of 1830, *L'Artisan: Journal de la classe ouvrière* published a piece stating that "higher wages and restrictions on machines could never change the basic condition of the worker, which is to be exploited by a master".[16] One would do better to focus on this theory in action within working-class practices, as it holds greater significance than a lengthy paragraph from *The Science of Logic*. Similarly, from the perspective of the working class and the critique of political economy, the *Factory Reports* compiled by Leonard Horner are no less significant than Hegel's philosophy. However, one must learn to recognize theory in action as it emerges through working-class practices.

For Heinrich, instead, the functioning of capital can be deduced from the science of value: "the *end* of capitalist production has nothing to do with human beings, but only with the valorization of value."[17] This statement may seem plausible from a conceptual perspective, but the price of remaining at this level of abstraction is the severing of analysis from the concreteness of context. Heinrich is primarily concerned with value as an automatic subject. Like Postone and other 'critical thinkers,' the focus remains on "impersonal domination" [18]—the domination of abstract time and commodity value that transform human beings into mere functions of exchange and reduces social relations to interactions between things. "In a commodity-producing society," Heinrich writes, "people (all of them!) are under the control of things, and the decisive relations of domination (*Herrschaftsverhältnisse*) are not personal but 'objective' (*sachlich*)."[19] This is how reality appears from the perspective of circulation: all human beings ("und zwar alle!" as the *Wissenschaft* emphasizes) are subordinated to the control of things, equally subject to impersonal and thing-like relations of domination.

Heinrich's analysis should be read as a symptom of the present, and that is what needs to be discussed: how Marx's critique is received in the present. The subtitle of *Capital*, often overlooked on the covers of many publications, is *A Critique of Political Economy*. One aspect of this critique focuses on the economic categories of capital and how individuals function as personified categories. This is where both Hegelian-Marxian readings and the science of value tend to stop. However, Marx's critique has another dimension: it addresses the pre-categorial. Accessing this domain requires historical inquiry, which is precisely what value-science interpretations tend to avoid. The pre-categorial reveals that the world is not populated solely by personified categories, formal equality, and abstract freedom. The critique of political economy is critical because it

[16] Bernard H. Moss, "Producers' Associations and the Origins of French Socialism: Ideology from Below" in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 48 (1976), 73.
[17] Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 326.
[18] Postone, *Time, labor, and social domination. A reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 125.
[19] Heinrich, *An introduction*, 75.

examines the labor of the worker not in the abstract, but from the perspective of the body of the worker who carries the labor power; it examines the relationship between the consumption of labor power and the consumption of workers' lives and bodies in production; it examines the unfreedom imposed by forced, unnatural postures. It scrutinizes the inequality that arises from asymmetrical, and at times outright despotic, relations of domination.

These relations are not merely characterized by "impersonal" or "thing-like relations of domination," as in the circulation of commodities. They are hybrid in nature. Human material is subjected to the "direct and indirect domination"[20] of the capitalist. This is an important addition. It is, as one can read in the French edition, "personal domination (*domination personelle*)."[21] This personal, despotic form of domination is recalled by Marx not to emphasize the brutality of the master, but to demonstrate that what occurs in production negates the basic principles of political modernity and its celebrated self-representation. It constitutes a denial of formal equality, individual freedom, autonomy, and even the very life of the worker in conditions that reveal a continuity between wage labor and slavery. Marx's *Capital* shows that domination is not evenly distributed across all individuals in society and that this disparity is not merely quantitative but fundamentally qualitative. The specific commodity called labor-power is inseparable from the workers' bodies—their corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*)—and their living personality (*lebendige Persönlichkeit*),[22] which is consumed in the process of production.

But there is no trace of this in Heinrich. The descent into the relations of production reveals something that cannot be deduced from concepts: it shows that personal relations of despotic domination exist alongside impersonal forms of domination; it shows that a radical asymmetry in labor relations exists alongside the formal equality of the sphere of circulation; it shows that the despotic domination of capital over the lives of workers exists alongside the formal freedom of subjects who exchange commodities; it shows that the wear and tear on workers' bodies cannot be compensated by a mere wage increase or access to public healthcare to mend a broken body, as French workers stated in 1830 in *L'Artisan*. While Heinrich does not address the body, Marx uses the *Factory Reports* to politically address the living corporeality of the workers: "These experiments were not made just at the expense of the worker's means of subsistence. His five senses also had to pay the penalty. 'The people who are employed in making up Surat cotton complain very much. They inform me, on opening the bales of cotton there is an intolerable smell, which causes sickness ... In the mixing, scribbling and carding rooms, the dust and dirt which are disengaged, irritate the air passages, and give rise to cough and difficulty of breathing. A disease of the skin, no doubt from the irritation of the dirt contained in the Surat cotton, also prevails ... Bronchitis is more

[20] Marx, *Capital*, 740.
[21] Karl Marx, *Le Capital* (Paris, 1872/1875), in *MEGA* II,7, 514.
[22] Marx, *Capital*, 270.

prevalent owing to the dust. Inflammatory sore throat is common, from the same cause. Sickness and dyspepsia are produced by the frequent breaking of the weft, when the weaver sucks the weft through the eye of the shuttle.'"[23]

The *Blue Books* cited by Marx are not illustrations. They constitute the theoretical and political foundation of Marxian critique. The critique begins with the descent into the hidden abodes of production, where the sign "No admittance except on business" is to be found. That is why half of *Capital* is devoted to the genetic history of the capitalist mode of production and, in the hundreds of pages of ethnography of factory workers' conditions, to its history of the present. The long chapter on "Machinery and Modern Industry" consists almost half of quotations from *Factory Reports*, *Health Reports*, and *Children's Reports*. These are not casual remarks that would *follow* the theoretical chapters and add nothing to the theory. These parts stand at the *core*. A core that Heinrich's *Wissenschaft* deactivates. Not by a minor omission, but as a method.

Heinrich wants to distinguish his *scientific* method, which is nonpartisan and not driven by special interests, from the *political* critique of capitalist relations.[24] At this point, all that remains is to ask: What is the *Wissenschaft* that Heinrich celebrates? What does it enable us to see better, and what does it conceal? Or rather, what does his *Wissenschaft* have to conceal in order to see what he sees? It is not a question of pointing out to Heinrich what he has not sufficiently considered. I do not expect another volume on value or a new biography of Marx. The question is political, and it arises from a confrontation with the way Marx understands critique.

In the "Afterword" to the second edition of *Capital* (1873), Marx speaks of the scientific character of political economy, which "can remain a science only so long as the class struggle is latent or manifests itself in isolated and sporadic phenomena."[25] Thus, wrote Marx, political economy emerged in England when "the class struggle was yet underdeveloped." It was not until the 1830s that the class struggle between capital and labor "sounded the death knell for scientific bourgeois economics."[26] This means that political economy became a weapon to defend partisan interests in the conflict with the proletariat. From this point of view, bourgeois economic categories must be understood as weaponized categories, born and reconfigured in a concrete historical conflict. These conflicts, such as the Lyon riots of 1831–34, must be investigated historically. "The hour of vulgar economics"[27] arrives when "the urban proletariat sounded the tocsin of revolution at Lyons, and the rural proletariat began to set fire to farmyards and hayricks in England."[28] It is at this point that classical economics is forced to intervene. "The learned dispute between the industrial capitalist and the wealthy landowning idler as to

[23] Marx, *Capital*, 586.
[24] Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 384.
[25] Marx, *Capital*, 96.
[26] Ibid., 97.
[27] Ibid., 744.
[28] Ibid., 743.

how the booty pumped out of the workers may most advantageously be divided for the purposes of accumulation had to fall silent in the face of the July Revolution."[29] The *Critique of Political Economy*, its *scientific* task, is to show how the "booty" is "pumped out of the workers."

1830 was a turning point. Workers' struggles produced a new theory that Marx took up and developed. Heinrich retorts instead that the correlation Marx established between the "intensification of class struggles since 1830 and the impossibility of scientific economy" constitutes a problem because there were scientific economic treatises even after 1830.[30] What Heinrich misses is that a weaponized science is no less scientific. A technological invention is no less technological or scientific because it is used by capital as "a weapon against working-class revolt."[31] Science and technology became weapons in the struggle. Machinery "is the most powerful weapon for suppressing strikes, those periodic revolts of the working class against the autocracy of capital."[32] Ure noticed this when he stated that the self-acting mule was a "creation destined to restore order among the industrious classes."[33] Marx understands that the intensification of class struggle is reflected in new technologies and applied sciences: "It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working class revolt."[34] This is what Heinrich fails to grasp: from 1820 to 1830, the class struggle between capital and labor constitutes the new background of economic debates, an increasingly weaponized political economy, and, one might add, a weaponized *Weltbild*. Scientific categories are forged in the clash and operate polemically to conceal or delegitimize opposing practical and theoretical positions. Heinrich fails to see any of this because he disregards history.

Instead of dismissing the nexus between class struggle and science, it would be better to question the significance of that nexus for Heinrich's *Wissenschaft* and its partisan character, particularly when he remains deliberately silent on working conditions in production, workers' bodies, and their struggles. One could argue that his book reflects the times, geographical contexts, and perspectives in which class struggle is nearly absent, allowing Marx to be reinterpreted as an ecological prophet of degrowth in a world captivated by the dream of the end of work and total automation. In this context, Marx's concept of impersonal domination could be replaced by Weber's analysis of rationalization and the iron cage, while the apocalyptic scenario of environmental and planetary destruction might be more aptly explored through Heidegger. These positions represent different facets of the same erasure of the perspective of production—and of class struggle. For the absence of class struggle is itself a manifestation of class struggle.

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[29] Marx, *Capital*, 743.
[30] Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 79 fn 33.
[31] Marx, *Capital*, 563.
[32] Ibid., 562.
[33] Ibid., 563.
[34] Ibid., 563.

Introduction to "Lines of Force: Symposium on *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*"

Dylan Fagan and Joseph Serrano

In a review article on several works dedicated to Althusser published nearly two decades after his death, Warren Montag noted that Althusser's death in 1990 had the paradoxical effect of bringing the philosopher, so to speak, back to life. Althusser's burial, Montag observed, would simultaneously be "an uncovering," for it would soon be revealed that Althusser

> had produced an enormous body of work over a period of more than four decades that he, for various and often-complicated reasons, had never published. It included not only a thesis on Hegel but a number of book-length manuscripts, essays, course-notes, as well as an astonishing number of letters, many touching on philosophical and political themes.[1]

If the recovery of these unpublished and private materials, above all, the writings on aleatory materialism, allowed for a "reopening of the Althusser case," it also had the effect of periodizing his thought according to distinct and self-enclosed phases or stages: an early, "structuralist" Althusser and a late, aleatory one. Such a periodization, of course, could not but impose limits on how the early and late Althusser could and should be read.

[1] Montag, "Spectres of Althusser," *Historical Materialism*, 19, no. 3 (2011): 148.

What becomes clear in Montag's review, however, is that the problem was not simply that readers had read an "epistemological break" into Althusser's oeuvre when they should have discerned a continuity or culmination; rather, the issue was simply that the most glaring or obvious contradiction between the early and late work became something like an epistemological obstacle in itself, one that blocked the path to a genuine, or better, concrete knowledge of Althusser's work insofar as it caused readers to overlook the smaller tensions, discrepancies, indeed, the "irreducible complexity," that shaped his work "from beginning to end."[2]

This review article, "Spectres of Althusser," appeared in the journal *Historical Materialism* in 2011, two years before Montag would publish *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophies Perpetual War*, and can be read as a preface to the latter. Indeed, Montag's study of a philosopher who once seemed (and perhaps still does) to so many as "a nearly perfect specimen of that now extinct species, the structuralist," takes as its starting point the questions opened by the studies under review—questions, it is worth adding, Montag has explored since his first publication in the 1984:[3] what are the décalages and conflicts that endowed not only Althusser's works with meaning and force, but, above all, the theoretical and political conjuncture(s) in which he and his contemporaries intervened? How does the theoretical conjuncture itself allow certain meanings and effects of these texts to come to light while concealing others within the inner darkness of exclusion? What was the constellation of forces that made an essay such as "Marxism and Humanism" necessarily read in such a way that "obscured the extent to which Althusser's essay remained haunted by the humanism it sought to analyze"?[4]

The initial interest to convene the symposium, "Lines of Force," came out of a certain shared inclination to re-read *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War* ten years after its original publication in 2013. The conveners felt that there was a way to make this return in order to learn again from the book's novel critical interventions into the questions posed above as well as to engage again and anew with its eponymous questions: "Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's perpetual war."

The contributors and contributions to the symposium constitute a particular topography of national situations – from USA, Georgia, Greece, Argentina, and Italy – that itself articulates a certain important thesis regarding this 'contemporaneity': while there is an essential unevenness and plurality inhering in and to the globality of the capitalist mode of production as well as the histories of historical and dialectical materialism, there are certain common lines of force traversing the struggles within "Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's perpetual war." Although the contributions employ sundry modes of engagement with the book, the essays advance a

[2] Ibid., 149.
[3] Montag, "Marxism and Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Encounter," *Minnesota Review*, no. 23 (Fall 1984): 70-85.
[4] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 117.

certain practice-theory in common. This is an effort in κρίνω; it is 'drawing lines of demarcation.'

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The contributions show that the concepts and questions of "Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's perpetual war" animate even the thinking and writing that sets out to oppose theses developed under the name Althusser. In the writing known in English as "The Current Situation on the Philosophical Front" from 1977,[5] attributed to Alain Badiou and signed collectively by the Yenan Philosophy Group, the text opens:

> I. So Many Motley Soldiers on One Front
>
> Philosophy as partisanship. Philosophy as concentration of antagonism, in terms of worldview. Philosophy thoroughly summoned by history. The servant not of the sciences but of weaponry. Not the reign of the eternal, much less of wisdom, but the trenchant figure of the actual, of the divided, of class. Not heaven and air, the place of contemplative transparency. Not at all the nocturnal waters of reconciliation. But the resilient earth of production, the weight of interestedness, the fire of the historical ordeal.[6]

This text does not aim to safeguard the name of Louis Althusser. On the contrary, one can see Badiou/Yenan Philosophy Group here already working to interrupt any kind of hagiography:

> Here we are going to place a few names, three notable names on the whole apparent surface: Lacan, Deleuze, and Althusser. Does this not say it all? No, because our philosophical times, since the revolt spread, no longer finds an emblem in a name. Every list of notables is foreclosed. We will explain why these names are at best masking and misleading the philosophical novelty that is at stake. What they tell us about the forces of the real is foreign to these names themselves.[7]

These statements bear an important if also curious relation to *Althusser and His Contemporaries* and the contributions to the symposium. For it is not a mute identity, a rote repetition of a dogma, that binds these statements to Montag's book or the symposium's contributions. On the contrary, the contributions show how *Althusser and His Contemporaries* demonstrates the many ways that Althusser's writings do not tend to lend

[5] The text serves as the introduction to the book *La Situation actuelle sur le front de la philosophie* (Maspero, 1977).
[6] Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (Verso, 2012), 1.
[7] Ibid.

themselves to such sloganeering as we can find here in this 1977 writing ('Philosophy thoroughly summoned by history'). And yet we can also affirm how this text is in tune with the tactics and strategies animating many of the theses of *Althusser and His Contemporaries*. This 1977 text says, in essence, almost nothing besides: 'Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's perpetual war.'

With this we can see that *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War* points to a certain 'paradigmatic' conceptual problematic – What is 'Althusser'? What is the meaning and effect of 'his contemporaries'? What is 'philosophy's perpetual war'? – that 'lasts a long time.' For while the statements of Yenan Philosophy Group/Badiou are neither entirely identical nor antithetical to the ones elucidated in *Althusser and His Contemporaries* as well as the contributions to this symposium, they are instructive for orienting this introduction, for they indicate a certain ongoing-ness to the problematic of 'Althusser and his contemporaries' and 'philosophy's perpetual war.' In particular, the phrase 'the weight of interestedness' serves as a particularly useful clause to orient the aforementioned 'drawing lines of demarcation' that animates the symposium's contributions.

Montag concluded his review article cited at the opening of this introduction with the following observation:

> To take these recent studies seriously is to see Althusser, not as a ghostly presence hovering at the margins of the world, haunting it like a bad memory, but rather as an indispensable part of the process by which the present may become intelligible to itself, his work in its unevenness and its conflictuality returning upon the present to furrow a hole in its walls, a hole through which something new, a future, may pass.[8]

The essays gathered here attest to the role *Althusser and His Contemporaries* has played in helping us to reread and rethink, that is, to trace in Althusser's writings the emptiness of distance taken, the lines of force that prevent from present from closing in on itself.

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Natalia Romé's essay, "Althusser and Foucault: Characters of the Authorless Theater. On the Imaginary, the Scenic, and the Phantasmatic," examines "a materialism of the imaginary" that is developed in the seventh and eighth chapters of *Althusser and His Contemporaries*. In order to chart a path through the "conceptual space that both unites Althusser and Foucault," who, along with Lacan, are the focus of these chapters, Romé attends to the visual and theatrical metaphors, and the "semantics of staging and optics," that permit us to return to "the critical force that *opens* up between the developments of these two great philosophers." Beginning with Montag's suggestion that Foucault, in

[8] Montag, "Spectres," 155.

Discipline and Punish, develops that which is only intimated—that is, the body and its individualization—in Althusser's ISAs essay, Romé argues that the individual body is ultimately an imaginary body, insofar as the body is nothing other than the "encounter of a heterogeneous plexus." As Romé suggests, such a reading of the body entails a turn towards Balibar's conceptualization of the transindividual, which is what permits us to grasp "the history of individuals" as "the history of the efficacy of the imaginary." Further, this turn to the imaginary, or rather the materialism of the imaginary, makes it necessary to take seriously the theoretical metaphors that appear across the texts of Althusser, Foucault, and, of course, Marx. And it is here that, if it is the case that this reading is possible on the basis of Foucault's oblique development of certain Althusserian themes, Romé also shows the instances of an Althusser "beyond" Foucault. For Romé, Althusser's metaphors, such as that of the authorless theater, as read by Montag, have a profoundly epistemological function: the author who "discovers" that he or she is "nothing but the character of another scene" will encounter "the solitude of the real."

Davit Galashvili's essay, "Mind, Body, and Politics: Spinoza contra Liberalism," articulates how Spinoza's philosophy develops a materialist philosophy or materialist practice of philosophy that specifically differs from sundry idealisms and idealist practices of philosophy at the level of concepts and categories. Against a liberal notion of a transcendent equality of individuals beyond the material world which determines the political interaction of 'individuals,' Galashvili's essay shows how Spinoza articulates concepts of bodies, minds, and politics without recourse to the dualism of an idealist "constitutional illusion." Galashvili shows that Spinoza's notion of right and power is concerned with the category of necessity rather than the formalization of possibility. Galashvili writes, "Right for Spinoza is always actualized; it exists in the ability of an individual to act." The essay shows how Montag's work demonstrates the particular antecedence and significance of Spinoza for Althusser, for Althusser can be said to develop the materialist practice-theory of Spinoza such that the question of politics is not of liberal speculation regarding possibility, but rather the necessity of minds and bodies.

Banu Bargu's essay, "Underneath Harlequin's Cloak: Reflections on Aleatory Materialism," elucidates the theoretical discrepancies and conceptual struggles *within* the writings of Althusser, particularly regarding the notions of materialism and the void (*le vide*). Bargu shows how Montag's symptomatic reading of Althusser demonstrates that these discrepancies are "inner conflictualities," not facile, at-hand concepts or slogans that can be deployed to "defend a rigorous Marxism." Bargu's essay distinguishes between an "ontological" notion of the void, of an original nothingness against the notion of an end or origin, whereby the "*object*" of this materialist philosophy is such void, and what she calls the void that is an act, "a practice of 'intervention,'" a "*philosophy that voids*." The 'ontological' thesis of the void leads to the question of a deviation, of the world as a result of encounter, rather than the dissemination of an originary form. Bargu shows that

Montag outlines a shift from this 'ontological' conception of (the) void to one that is an intervention, the '*philosophy that voids*' and can facilitate the emergence of a new theoretical practice. Bargu's elucidation of the inner conflict regarding (the) void bears particular and significant consequences for 'Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's perpetual war.' For as Bargu writes, "In Montag's acute formulation, Deleuze presents 'a philosophy of the encounter without the void.'" Bargu's essay thus identifies that the materialist practice of philosophy for Althusser constitutes a conjuncture of (the) void: ontology sive intervention, structure sive encounter.

Panagiotis Sotiris' essay tracks the relationship between the notions of structure and encounter in Althusser's work. Taking up the issues raised by critics of Althusser (above all, E. P. Thompson and Ted Benton) as well as Althusser's self-criticism, Sotiris argues against the idea that Althusser was in fact the structuralist that he would later come to renounce. As Sotiris argues, it is possible to "revisit the Althusser of 'High Althusserianism'" as "a way of thinking that was already beyond structuralism." Such a reading is possible, Sotiris argues, on the basis of Montag's intervention into the "structuralist moment," which highlights the "complexity" of this moment: this complexity is registered in the relationship between the concepts of structure and genesis as well as structuralism's incorporation of "a conception of continuous historical time that had more affinity with a Hegelian conception of time than was generally acknowledged." Following Montag, Sotiris shows how the most powerful critique of Althusser's "flirtation" with structuralism came from a theorist within the Althusser camp itself, Pierre Macherey, whose forceful critique of structuralist literary theory produced effects within Althusser's own work. But this critique did not simply cause Althusser to abandon structuralism; rather it allows us to see the critique of structuralism already present in texts like "Contradiction and Overdetermination" and *Reading Capital*. Sotiris' article thus demonstrates that Althusser's self-criticism is not simply a single moment in Althusser's work, but "a constant tension" that appears throughout his work.

In "The Adventures of Interpellation: on Montag's Materialist Reading of Althusser's Theory of Ideology," Stefano Pippa reconstructs Montag's intervention in what the former calls the "second reception" of Althusser. According to Pippa, this second reception allowed for both the reposing of "old questions in an entirely new way" and the recognition that Althusser was a philosopher who "still had much to say in our present conjuncture." After reconstructing what he calls the three steps of Montag's retheorization of Althusser's theory of ideology (a critical and "non-teleological" reading of the relationship between "Marxism and Humanism" and the ISAs essay; the role of Spinoza in the theory of ideology; the division within the very concept of interpellation), Stefano investigates the problem of the individual and individualization by turning to a theorist whose name does not appear in *Althusser and His Contemporaries*: Nicos Poulantzas. For Poulantzas, notwithstanding certain of his misreadings of Althusser's theory of ideology and the imaginary, "makes individualization a strategy *of the State*," and thus his

work "could be fruitfully used to develop Althusser's (or, more precisely, Montag's) theory." In a final movement, Pippa explores the problems of the subject raised by Montag's reading of interpellation, problems that touch on and, in some sense, complicate the functionalism of the ISAs essay: Pippa here refers above all to Montag's allusion to the potential for "a rigorously anti-humanist" form of "resistance and revolt *within* ideology and the ideological state apparatuses." For Pippa such a theory of resistance and revolt remains an "important field of investigation, both theoretically and politically."

Giorgos Fourtounis's essay, "The 'Last Instance' as Deconstruction? Revisiting the Derridean Critique of Althusser's Early Structuralism via Spinozist Immanence," proposes a "Derridean critique of Derrida's critique" of Althusser's structuralist moment. Following a suggestive line of argumentation developed by Montag in *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, which challenges the received idea that Althusser and Derrida, even if they asked and in a sense responded to strikingly similar questions, nevertheless carried out their respective philosophical operations "in a way that was fundamentally incompatible," Fourtounis argues that Althusser's philosophical protocol in his texts on structure "anticipate [Derrida's] own deconstructive strategy, a fact that eluded Derrida himself as well as many others following him." Fourtounis constructs his argument by attending to the place of Spinoza, that is, Spinozan immanence, in Althusser's structuralist writings; such an orientation allows Fourtounis to show that Althusser's famous declaration at the end of "Contradiction and Overdetermination" that the "lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes" can thus be read as "retroactively anticipating Derrida's lesson of *difference*": by reading Althusser *in* Derrida and Derrida *in* Althusser, Fourtounis illustrates the necessary task proposed by Montag of thinking and acting from within the interior of a given "conceptual order" precisely in order to "undermine and destabilize" it.

In the essay "Is Materialist Philosophy an Anti-Philosophy? Althusser on Philosophy's Perpetual War and the Desire for Understanding," Aurelio Sainz Pezonaga asks whether Althusser's materialist philosophy can be considered an anti-philosophy. Taking as his starting point Badiou's contradictory remarks on Althusser's relation to philosophy and anti-philosophy, Pezonaga discerns anti-philosophical moments across Althusser's oeuvre, for "[i]n philosophy's perpetual war, there can be no philosophy that does not entail a specter of anti-philosophy. Therefore, there cannot be a materialist philosophy that does not entail the specter of anti-philosophy." Even if there are such instances of anti-philosophy across Althusser's writings, however, his materialist philosophy is not reducible to anti-philosophy; rather, as Pezonaga argues, materialism is "the philosophy of the desire for understanding, of the philosophy of the communism of understanding." The question of the desire for understanding and its relationship to philosophy as perpetual war and philosophy as class struggle in theory leads Pezonaga to consider the question of liberation in the current conjuncture via Spinoza. As Pezonaga concludes, Althusser's self-critical turn invites us, today, "to propose an additional shift that pluralizes both historical materialism and revolutionary practices." The pluralization

of historical materialism and revolutionary practice coincides with a Spinozist conception according to which heterogeneous and singular desires for understanding can "combine to overcome domination."

In "Co-Operation and Overdetermination: Humor in the Critique of Political Economy," Dylan Fagan teases out the implications of one of Althusser's characteristically humorous lines as quoted by Montag in the third chapter of *Althusser and His Contemporaries*: "Reality has a little more imagination." This litotic formulation is deployed by Althusser to show the "paradoxical" manner in which "non-scientific ideologies" may, under specific configurations or "encounters, give birth to true discoveries – just as one sees fire leap from the impact of foreign bodies." The joke is thus on those who, due precisely to lack of imagination, cannot fathom that "the entire complex reality of history … enters into play in the intelligence of the scientific community itself." According to Fagan, the importance of humor thus lies in its ability to interrupt and displace the "dominations and commandings spoken by the capitalist character-masks, including its so-called scientists," not, to be sure "in the form of a guarantee, but rather as a test or attempt." In the critique of political economy, humor interrupts so that "another form of social relation can take hold."

In "'The Disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin': Montag's Althusser," Joseph Serrano identifies and develops the particular significance of the concept of conjuncture in Althusser's thinking and writing as well as how it impacts Montag's reading of Althusser and the notion of a 'disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin.' Serrano shows that this is a concept for Althusser that does not set out a "pragmatist conception" of a totalized set of finite elements; rather, this concept, conjuncture, is that which brings together that in and for which it acts. This is, Serrano notes, an "activity" in Althusser's readings of Machiavelli and Lenin; it is moreover not a specularly centered process, but rather one which subjects those who are thinking it to certain "abrupt turns." This is not therefore a re-duplication of an at-hand totality, but rather an occasional and inconstant shaking up of prevailing configurations and tendencies of sets and elements. Conjuncture, Serrano articulates, is therefore not a pragmatic object of knowledge for Althusser but rather a theoretical practice and technique – a concept – that names an acting on and by the class struggle.

The symposium concludes with a response from Warren Montag to the contributions and his preface to the Korean translation of *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, as well as his unpublished (in English) essay "Marxism and the Spinozist Turn," in which Montag discusses the importance of Spinoza for Marxists at certain turning points in the perpetual war of philosophy. Taken with the contributions, the publication of this "Lines of Force" symposium constitutes what Montag recalls was for Althusser an 'overriding need,' that is, 'to think and write as closely as possible with others, that is, collectively, producing shared ideas and engaging in a shared evaluation of these ideas on the basis of their effects.'

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

Natalia Romé

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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Mind, Body and Politics: Spinoza contra Liberalism

Davit Galashvili

Spinoza's philosophy, unlike the meta-narratives of the liberal tradition, describes in detail the political relations of individuals at the level of bodies and seeks to explain the course of history, not concerning the free will of individual or collective subjects, but to composite bodies moved according to the order and necessity of nature. For Louis Althusser, Spinoza's significance is represented by a conceptual revolution grounded in rejecting the subject-object, and spirit-nature oppositions. It offers an alternative to the direction of thought in which truth pertains to a subject individual or collective, immanent or transcendental, perpetually progressing towards absolute knowledge. Contrary to the idealist or liberal tradition of philosophy, the motor of history in Spinoza's philosophy is not the subject conscious of itself, but the necessity that emerges from perpetual encounters between singular things, in which bodies meet, unite, separate and go on to form new singularities, within what might be understood as an unbounded, infinite whole, a nature that has no telos, does not aspire to something outside of or lacking to itself because it is already perfect and infinite. Spinoza's substance is a space of corporeal networks, in which bodies encounter and affect each other.

For Spinoza, history is not defined by an ideal content or empty abstractions; rather, it is the field of human practical action and interaction between singular things.[1]

[1] Here we avoid using the term individual because Spinoza is not a proponent of "individualism" in the Liberal sense of the concept. Couples, groups, multitude and even state and Natura are individuals in a

The human individual is a finite mode, defined by chains of causes and effects, and he/she maintains his/her existence only through practice, speaking in Spinozist words, by affecting and being affected. For Spinoza, bodies are singular things and the body must be determined not by its idea or form, but by its capacity to affect other singular things and to be affected by them in turn. The common ground between the two modes can be found by analyzing and experiencing the capacity of receiving and transmitting affects. All beings, even if they are of the same species, have different capacities to affect and be affected.

As Marx wrote in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* "Hegel's task is not to discover the truth of empirical existence but to discover the empirical existence of truth, it is very easy to fasten on what lies nearest to hand and prove that it is an actual moment of the Idea."[2] Before Marx, Spinoza in his *Ethics* investigated the causes which condition such a disposition of the individual when "it is very easy to fasten on what lies nearest to hand and prove that it is an actual moment of the Idea."[3] In the Appendix of the first part of the *Ethics*,[4] Spinoza discusses the superstitions from which humanity has long suffered. Spinoza writes that according to popular belief, God governs everything for a specific purpose and does so for the good of man. According to him, due to ignorance of the laws of nature, humans think of events in terms of telos, which turns nature upside down.[5] Spinoza believes that the notion of telos also calls into question the perfection of God, as desire is compensation for the lack of something.[6] However, the fact that the concept of the anthropomorphic telos is irrelevant does not exclude the fact that there are certain orders and objective laws in nature.[7] But Spinoza rejects the idea of order as "harmony" in the case of objective laws, such as the law of gravity, or inertia, for their operation does not lead to order as imagined by human individuals. There are regularities in nature but they cannot be understood or explained by an imaginary universal order. Spinoza's position opposes any notion that things are means to the end of the realization of God's

Spinozist sense: "We shall readily conceive the whole of Nature as one individual whose parts – that is all the constituent bodies – vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as a whole" (Spinoza, *Ethics* II, scholium after Lem. 7).

[2] Marx, *Early Writings*, 98.

[3] Ibid.

[4] "It is in the appendix to part I that Spinoza developed his admirable critique of religious ideology, in which the human subject endowed with finalized desires projects himself into God as the original and final cause of the Universe, as the cause (…) of all meaning, that is, of every finality, of the Universe (…) I saw in it immediately the matrix of every possible theory of ideology and profited from it (…)." (Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition," 7).

[5] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, App.

[6] Ibid.

[7] It should be noted that long before Spinoza, Lucretius in his "On the Nature of Things" criticized the teleological view of nature: "In fact, no part of our body was created to the end that we might use it, but what has been created gives rise to its own function. Sight did not exist before the birth of the eyes, nor speech before the creation of the tongue; rather the tongue came into being long before talking, and the ears were created long before a sound was heard. In short, I maintain that all the organs were in being before there was any function for them to fulfil. They cannot, then, have grown for the purpose of being used" (Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 4.835-840).

will and that God directs all things to an end. Spinoza here as elsewhere is very close to Lucretius. According to the latter, there is no order or limit—only accidental conjunctions[8] that may form a temporary "system" whose persistence is always uncertain.

The critique of the teleological view of nature necessitates a critique of the illusion of free will. Spinoza begins his critique of free will by rejecting the popular view of God (God as the possessor of anthropomorphic intellect and will). In his critique of free will, he also implicitly criticises anthropomorphism, which is the main determinant of the reasoning and conception of God. In proposition XVII of the first part of *Ethics*, Spinoza claims that "God acts solely from the laws of his own nature, constrained by none."[9] Does this mean that God can do anything that he wills? It may seem paradoxical but in the Scholium of the same proposition Spinoza tells us that God is limited by himself, (God cannot be limited by anything else because there is nothing beyond him), by his nature, by the law according to which he acts. Spinoza states directly that God is not free, for example, in choosing to make the nature of a triangle different from what it is: "God does not act from freedom of will."[10] Therefore, God is only free because he acts out of necessity, not because he has the power to change the nature of a triangle: "Others take the view that God is a free cause because (…) he can bring it about that those things which we have said follow from his nature (…) should not come about, that is, they should not be produced by him. But this is as much as to say that God can bring it about that it should not follow from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles, or that from a given cause the effect should not follow, which is absurd."[11] Those who believe that God acts according to his own free will or free decision attribute to God an intelligence and will that are imagined to be characteristic of human beings: "Some imagine God in the likeness of man, consisting of mind and body, and subject to passions. But it is clear from what has already been proved how far they stray from the true knowledge of God."[12] But it is of some interest to note that if it follows from the supreme power of God that the sum of the three angles of a triangle is necessarily equal to two right angles, it cannot be the case that human individuals have the power to act by their free will, to transcend the laws of nature or to make free decisions. In *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that "experience, as well as reason, shows no less

[8] "In this connection, I am anxious that you should grasp a further point: when the atoms are being drawn downward through the void by their property of weight, at absolutely unpredictable times and places they deflect slightly from their straight course to a degree that could be described as no more than a shift of movement. If they were not apt to swerve, all would fall downward through the unfathomable void like drops of rain; no collisions between primary elements would occur, and no blows would be effected, with the result that nature would never have created anything" (Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things,* 2.216-225).
[9] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, P17.
[10] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, Cor.1.
[11] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, P17S.
[12] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, P15S.

clearly that men believe themselves to be free only because they are conscious of their actions, but ignorant of the causes by which they are determined."[13]

Spinoza's understanding of the universe suggests a process without Subject or finality/goal, in which the singular Subject is not the agent of history, but, as Althusser puts it, subjects in the plural. The difference between Subject and subjects is of great importance to Althusser, for while in idealist philosophy the Subject is a free and constructive agent of reality, subjects are conditioned by the social relations of production and reproduction existing in different historical times.[14] The central concept in Spinoza is not the legal subject as it is in traditional metaphysics, but individuality, since only individual or particular things exist in nature. Substance in Spinoza's sense does not precede or transcend the infinite concatenation of finite things but is immanent in them, i.e., in their diversity and variation. The individual in Spinoza does not appear in the role of a subject governed by a certain telos but is simply a mode, an effect produced by a productive nature: "individuals are neither a given matter (a 'subject' in the traditional sense) nor perfect form or telos organizing an amorphous matter."[15] The belief in free will, the notion that the human individual is the cause of his or her actions, arises from ignorance of the true causes of these actions. From this arises an entire theological and political apparatus and the forms of superstition immanent in it.

The source of the argument that man has free will, which allows him to transcend the laws of nature, or make a decision that is determined only by his own will and the ability to carry it out, derives from the separation of body and mind/soul/will. According to popular belief, the human mind or soul can suppress bodily impulses, overcome the chain of physical causes to which the individual is connected and act according to the mind's decisions. Therefore, according to this belief, the soul/mind can govern or "command" the body. These views are well reflected in Spinoza's contemporaries, as well as in his predecessors. Thus, before we proceed to develop our argument about Spinoza's conception of the body, we need to briefly review the philosophical battleground that determined how Spinoza advanced his position concerning the body. Here, Spinoza shows that the relations between body and mind have political and philosophical implications, so the Spinozist revolution in understanding the relationship between body and mind can be understood as both a philosophical and political intervention.

To put it schematically, the practical/political aim of philosophy for Spinoza is to free humans from any superstitions and ideological dogmas. The problem, however, is that superstitions arise from nature and are explicable through its causes. The passive affects are the source of the superstitions that are accepted when we are the partial cause of some event. To adequately perceive nature, one must be free from superstitions, including the belief in the mind's ability to command the body. To adequately conceive

[13] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, App.
[14] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 94.
[15] Balibar, *Spinoza from Individuality to Transindividuality*, 8-9.

nature necessitates a study of the power of the body since according to Spinoza nobody has yet defined the limits of what the body can do: "however, nobody as yet has determined the limits of the body's capabilities: that is, nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and can't do."[16] But for the idealist tradition of philosophy body and mind are two opposing realms one of which necessarily dominates the other. This tradition is obvious in the philosophy of Descartes, in which the confrontation of body and soul is clear. According to its doctrines, the body is the source of sin and animal instincts, while the soul belongs to a realm above and beyond nature. Hence the widespread belief that corporeal substance does not pertain to God's essence. Most writers seek to prove that corporeal substance is unworthy of the divine essence and cannot pertain to it. Spinoza's revolutionary theoretical (and therefore political) intervention consisted of his statement in *Ethics* that "thinking substance and extended substance are the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So, too, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are the same thing, expressed in two ways."[17]

The Cartesian view of the world is based on the assumption that while the body acts the spirit suffers and vice versa. In *The Passions of Soul,* he argues that "we ought to think that what is a Passion in the former is commonly an Action in the latter."[18] In his *Meditations*, Descartes describes the body as a mechanical, godless machine that can perform its typical functions without the interference of a will or mind: "I might consider the body of a man as a kind of machine (…) even if there were no mind in it, it would still perform all the same movements as it now does in those cases where movement is not under the control of the will or, (…) of mind."[19] Descartes does not stop here but take an additional step and argues that the mind can function independently of the body, and indicates in the *Meditations* that "I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it."[20] Thus, Descartes directly claims that 'Man' is non-extended, simply a thinking thing who can think himself without body and perceptions. This bifurcation of the human being, the hostile attitude of soul and body towards each other, creates the danger that the human being will be reduced to an inanimate, mechanical automaton: "the human body belongs to this world[21] and, insofar as it communicates this mechanicity to the mind, constantly threatens to reduce man to a machine."[22] The only way to get rid of the animal realm is to have a will that is capable of overcoming this material, mechanical state of human-animal: "that power is the will itself: it is this alone that allows us to raise ourselves above the corporeal world of automatons."[23] Thus, for Descartes, the body is not only

[16] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P2S.
[17] Spinoza*, Ethics II,* P21S.
[18] Descartes, *Passions of the Soul,* I, 2.
[19] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, V, 85.
[20] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy,* VI, 78.
[21] Here 'world' means animal realm.
[22] Montag, "Commanding the Body: The language of Subjection in Ethics III, P2S," 151.
[23] Montag, ibid.

the external but also the internal enemy of the soul, which pushes the soul to do what it does not want. The separation of body and soul is accompanied by the separation of the order and regularity of these two dimensions. If the body and, at the same time, the soul are capable of acting independently of each other, they are also subject to a different order of action. The authentic victory of the soul is the death and annihilation of the corporeal body, which the body naturally resists in seeking self-preservation. In addition to the theoretical content, Descartes' standpoint also has a political implication. For instance, the soul/mind may aspire to the glorification of the sovereign, and individuals "will not think it humiliating but supremely glorious to spill their blood and sacrifice their lives for the glorification of a single man."[24] But the body resists death and seeks self-preservation. So, as Warren Montag puts it, for Spinoza, the separation of soul and body is not simply an illusion of consciousness even though this notion contains in itself an imaginary view of the order and laws of nature. The theoretical construction of the separation of body and soul has a certain material existence, basis, and effect, which affects the corporeal world through various institutions, laws, and several cultural codes: "the imaginary is inscribed in the corporeal realities of subjection, legal and otherwise, and the apparatuses in which they are realized."[25] Thus, according to Montag, although attributing to the soul the ability to control the body is based on erroneous assumptions, it is by no means an illusion. Granting the individual free will (the individual is free because he can think of himself without a body and independent of material and corporeal existence) makes him responsible for his actions, both causally and legally, and for which he is liable and in case of overstepping the law, punishable. Neither the legal definition of the individual as a subject nor the various means of coercion and punishment that this definition justifies are illusory; even if they are false, they are real and material. The conatus, as the persistence of the body, may conflict with the limits of the law, especially when respecting law and property threatens one's physical existence. For Descartes, the inclination that arises from the body to flee danger and seek safety (as in war) can and must be overcome, and individuals must be trained to allow themselves to be killed in the service of the Sovereign.

These postulates explain the constitutional illusions of the liberal and idealist tradition according to which legal, formal power determines and expresses actual power relations:[26] "An entire philosophical tradition has confused laws of nature which describe what necessarily exists with social laws which prescribe how things ought to, but may not, be and physical power with legal power."[27]

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[24] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise,* Preface.

[25] Montag, "Commanding the Body: The language of Subjection in Ethics III, P2S," 156.

[26] In this sense, Leibniz, who according to Etienne Balibar belongs to the 'liberal' Christian tradition, also differs from Spinoza. Thus, Leibniz recognizes the original freedom of man, which is fully compatible with Divine Providence and Blessing: "And so, God's foreknowledge, and even his preordination, does not eliminate freedom. Furthermore, we must understand that the mind is not determined by something else, but by itself and that there is no other hypothesis which favours human freedom more than ours does" (Leibniz, P*hilosophical Essays*, 102).

[27] Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries*, 37.

Spinoza's contemporary (and, in some sense, predecessor), Thomas Hobbes, rejects Descartes' ontological dualism, but, as Étienne Balibar writes, his work offers a "mere materialist inversion of theological schemes."[28] For instance, when in Chapter XIV of *Leviathan* Hobbes tells us that "each man" has naturally inherited *Liberty* which enables them to use their power according to their will and decision, Hobbes assumes a distinction between an internal world of freedom, determined by the will alone and an external world where the true impediments to the realization of an individual's exist:

> The RIGHT OF NATURE, which Writers commonly call Jus Naturale, is the Liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himselfe, for the preservation of his own Nature; that is to say, of his own Life; and consequently, of doing anything, which in his own Judgement, and Reason, hee shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto (…). By LIBERTY, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a man's power to do what he would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgement, and reason shall dictate to him.[29]

Furthermore, Hobbes' dualism is also situated in the political field. For example, he draws a strict distinction between the so-called *legal subject* and the irrational and disobedient individual, who is the *legal subject's* own other and represents a constant threat to the legal subject.[30]

John Locke, another representative of the liberal tradition, continues Hobbes' line of thought and attributes perfect freedom to the inner world of the individual: "All men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man."[31] The second part of the sentence requires our attention insofar as Locke ignores the effects of a bodily interaction here, he finds the order and regularity of an individual's action as the outcome of 'free will' that is independent of "any other man." In Locke's fragment, even the law of nature, intelligible through human reason, requires an act of will, that is, the will to "consult" reason, which "is that law."[32] Also, we can find here the political implication because the separation of mind and body is necessary to endow individuals with the freedom that allows them to be declared responsible for "their" actions.

It is here, above all, that the conceptual revolution undertaken by Spinoza can be found: "the body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the

[28] Balibar, "What is "Man" in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy? Subject, Individual, Citizen," 221.
[29] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter XIV.
[30] Balibar, "What is "Man" in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy? Subject, Individual, Citizen," 223.
[31] Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapter II.
[32] Ibid.

body to motion or rest, or anything else."[33] According to Spinoza, such an assertion is certain to provoke the question of what determines the body to act, to change its position, to move or rest. Spinoza's response is perhaps even more shocking than the proposition itself: only a body can determine the actions of another body: "now the motion-and-rest of a body must arise from another body, which again has been determined to motion or rest by another body (…)."[34]

The theoretical foundation of these assertions lies in the second part of *Ethics*: "the order and connection of ideas are the same as the order and connection of things."[35] In *Ethics,* he begins to explore the political significance of his conceptual revolution by rejecting any notion of separation and hierarchical relation between body and mind. He excludes the idea that the mind is free from the constraints of the body and capable of free choice. In the scholium of Part III proposition 2, he claims that "mental decisions are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying according to the varying disposition of the body."[36] So, when an individual attributes their political deeds to a free choice founded on their free will, they do so because they are ignorant of the fact that they are determined by material causes that they neither control nor even perceive. This, in turn, compels us to explain the existing arrangement of our political order and the regularity of our political constitution and political life not through the free will of the "legal subject" but through the disposition of bodies and forces.

According to Spinoza, if we want to understand the human mind we should apprehend its object – the body: "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body – i.e. a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else,"[37] and "if the body were not the object of the human mind, the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in God."[38] Thus, the mind is more powerful when the body produces more affects and, at the same time, is affected by other bodies. We can conceive the mind's power through the body, but frequently humans have a very obscure idea about their bodily possibilities: "that is, nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do (…)."[39] So, to perceive the possibilities of the Mind, to define its power, at first, we should apprehend Bodily interactions and relations because "to determine the

[33] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P2.
[34] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P2Pr.
[35] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P7. This Proposition is applied very often to claim that Spinoza invented the conception of parallelism. Montag, notes nowhere "in the Ethics does Spinoza employ the term "parallel" or parallelism to describe the relation between mind and body, and for good reason: such notions separate mind and body even as they link them, rendering them exterior one to the other" (Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries,* 42). Thus, we have to reject the prevalent view that Spinoza uses the term of parallelism to resolve the relation between body and mind.
[36] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P2S.
[37] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P13.
[38] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P13Pr.
[39] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P2S.

difference between the human mind and others and in what way it excels them, we have to know the nature of its object (…) that is, the nature of the human body."[40]

The structure of the body consists of relations to other bodies: "the human body is affected by external bodies in a great many ways and is so structured that it can affect external bodies in a great many ways."[41] As Étienne Balibar has argued, individuals are always constructed and produced by the connections with other individuals (by which we can mean compositions and decompositions between two or more bodies): "since they are not 'given,' individuals are constructed (or produced); (…) their construction, as well as their activity, always involves a previous, originally connexion with other individuals (…)."[42] The same idea is conveyed by Spinoza in his *Ethics* when he says that "every individual thing, i.e. anything whatever which is finite and has a determinate existence, cannot exist or be determined to act unless it is determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and this cause again cannot exist or be determined to act unless it is determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence and so ad infinitum";[43] and also "the human body needs for its preservation a great many other bodies, by which, as it were (quasi), it is continually regenerated."[44]

But it is noteworthy here that in opposition to the linear causal chain of events which Hegel calls bad infinity, Spinoza holds that "the infinite connexion does not take the form of independent linear series or genealogies of causes and effects (…): it typically takes the form of an infinite network of singular Modi, or existences, a dynamic unity of modulating/modulated activities (…)."[45] Balibar addresses the question of the interrelation of individuals and bodies in the same context in another of his texts. Here Balibar emphasizes the fact that the interconnection of individuals forms a specific network so that there is no isolated individual. With this conception, Spinoza puts an end to atomistic theories and the notion of the autonomous individual. The transindividual network necessarily arises from the fact that "the human body needs for its preservation a great many other bodies, by which, as it were (quasi), it is continually regenerated."[46] Hence, the existence of the Body depends on its affecting and being affected; its ability to act derives from its connection with other Bodies. God's absolute, infinite power is conditioned by his infinite power of affection: "God is absolute causal power (potentia): it produces in itself (since nothing is external to it) everything that is not logically contradictory."[47]

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[40] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P13S.
[41] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P14Pr.
[42] Balibar, *Spinoza: from Individuality to Transindividuality*, 9.
[43] Spinoza, *Ethics* I, P28.
[44] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, Post.4.
[45] Balibar, *Spinoza from Individuality to Transindividuality*, 14.
[46] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, Post.4.
[47] Matheron, *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza*, 211.

The body maintains its centrality in Spinoza's political theory. On the one hand, this tendency is noticeable in Spinoza's claim that there is no spiritual dimension peculiar to humans and every creature/mode in nature obeys the same order; on the other hand, Spinoza argues that thought does not have any primacy over the body and cannot be separated from it. As Hasana Sharp writes,

> Spinoza's "parallelism," whereby mind and body do not interact but are determined by the same causal order, sets the stage for a radical naturalism that redefines human existence and agency in several ways: (a) thought is irreducible to matter, and yet does not have a unique spiritual logic that distinguishes it from (other attributes of) nature; (b) mental life is not confined to human, rational, or spiritual beings; and (c) thought and extension, mind and body, are not involved in a struggle for control.[48]

Further, Spinoza's political theory is impersonal since personhood or personal politics is essentially anti-natural. For Spinoza, to be a person (subject with free will) means standing above and being against the natural order. According to Sharp, when political theory is based on the idea of personhood, it is always normative. Conversely, impersonal political theory studies increasing and constraining affects that circulate in the social body: "impersonal forces include those affects that circulate in the social body, enabling and constraining the powers of bodies and minds."[49]

Moreover, for Spinoza the state is a composite individual who has its "body" and "mind": "in Political Order the whole body of the citizens should be conceived similarly as the individual who is in the natural state."[50] Also, it is not accidental that Spinoza shifts from the individual to the state in *Ethics*. We can explain this transition by the fact that reasonable life is impossible outside of society and the state, and as Spinoza brilliantly puts it "no one in solitude is strong enough to defend himself and produce the necessities of life."[51] Also, *Ethics* explicitly states that the human body, to sustain itself, necessarily needs many other bodies: "the human body needs for its preservation a great many other bodies, by which, as it were (quasi), it is continually regenerated."[52] Warren Montag argues that, for Spinoza, "society is not the effect of an act of will on the part of originally autonomous individuals; on the contrary, men are naturally determined to live in a society the existence of which is necessary to their survival."[53]

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[48] Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 3.
[49] Ibid, 13.
[50] Spinoza, *Political Treatise* VII, 22. But in the same place Balibar emphasizes the fact that perceiving the state as an individual is not unequivocal because this point of view "place[s] Spinoza squarely in the line of Hobbes (the Leviathan) and, more generally, of a whole tradition which defines the State as an individual and which runs from the ancient Greeks to the present day. However, we must press this point further, since such an assimilation covers in reality a wide range of different views" (Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 64).
[51] Spinoza, *Political Treatise* VI, 1.
[52] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, Post.4.
[53] Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries*, 68.

Thus, the political regime is always the field of bodily interactions and communications. The collective body (the state) undergoes the same relations as the singular body and the only difference between them is the magnitude of complexity. As Montag puts it, "from this perspective, social existence changes only the relations of power, enabling human individuals to accomplish certain things that alone would be impossible, and, in opposition, limiting their ability to perform other acts that alone or in small numbers they would have the ability to perform."[54] In the political theory of Spinoza, human beings have no right to do anything they cannot do. Right cannot be understood as a possession; it exists only in its exercise. For Spinoza, "the natural right of every individual, is coextensive with its power."[55] Spinoza infers this thesis from his metaphysical theory:

> Now from the fact that the power of things in nature to exist and act is the power of God, we can easily see what the right of nature is. For since God has the right to do everything, and God's right is simply God's power conceived as completely free, it follows that each thing in nature has as much right from nature as it has the power to exist and act; since the power by which it exists and acts is nothing but the completely free power of God.
>
> By the right of nature, then, I mean the actual laws or rules of nature by which all things come to be; that is, the actual power of nature. Hence, the natural right of nature as a whole, and consequently the natural right of each individual, extends as far as its power. Hence, everything a man does by the laws of his nature, he does by the sovereign right of nature, and he has as much right against other things in nature as he has power and strength.[56]

Right for Spinoza is always actualized; it exists in the ability of an individual to act. Whatever an individual cannot do, he has no right to do:

> By the right and order of nature, I merely mean the rules determining the nature of each thing by which we conceive it is determined naturally to exist and to behave in a certain way. For example, fish are determined by nature to swim and big fish to eat little ones; therefore, it is by the sovereign natural right that fish have possession of the water and that big fish eat small fish. For it is certain that nature, considered wholly in itself, has a sovereign right to do everything that it can do, i.e., the right of nature extends as far as its power extends (…) since the universal power of the whole of nature is nothing but the power of all individual things together,

[54] Montag, "Who's Afraid of the Multitude?", 658.
[55] Spinoza, *Political Treatise* II, 4.
[56] Spinoza, *Political Treatise* II, 3, 4.

> it follows that each thing has the sovereign right to do everything that it can do, or the right of each thing extends so far as its determining power extends.[57]

Here, Spinoza argues that no matter what the law says, no matter how absolute the right conferred on the sovereign, not even the worst tyrant can exercise absolute power over his subjects. In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza makes it clear that no one can transfer his power and rights to another in such a way that he/she ceases to be human. And there can never be a sovereign who acts as he pleases. The sovereign must act constantly to ensure the obedience of his subjects, not simply through the law, but through the organization of corporeal life, rituals, and practices. For liberal readers, the fact that despots rely on violence and the fear it instils to ensure the people's obedience, such a mode of subjection must ultimately fail because such rulers still have no control over what people think and feel.[58] For Spinoza, however, thus, the more the body is constrained, the less the mind can think: "whatsoever increases or diminishes, assists or checks, the power of activity of our body, the idea of the said thing increases or diminishes assists or checks the power of thought of our mind."[59] Thought cannot be free while the body is constrained and unable to break out of the ritualized movements of daily life, organization, and disciplinary ordering of bodies that tend to produce obedience or ways of thinking that affirm obedience. Only when the corporeal regimes break down through internal conflict or external events does thinking change. In the fifth chapter of the *TTP*, Spinoza uses the example of the Hebrew state to show the ways the sovereign can achieve a disciplined and obedient society. According to him, certain rites and ceremonies serve precisely to produce a subjected body and mind and prevent revolt: "they were not permitted to plough or sow or reap as they pleased, nor could they eat or dress or shave their heads or beards as they pleased, but all by a fixed and specific ordinance of the law."[60] That is the commandments to act or not to act in specific ways in the smallest activities of everyday existence.

But Spinoza points to an important factor that may have pushed the bodies subjugated by the sovereign into the abyss of social anxiety: "anyone with any experience of the capricious mind of the multitude almost despairs of it, as it is governed not by reason but by passion alone, it is precipitate in everything, and very easily corrupted by greed or good living."[61] But it is precisely the instability of the multitude that restrains even a tyrant who knows that tyrannical regimes cannot last long. Even if the sovereign's violent actions are legally recognized (for example, under the pretext of protecting the safety of the citizens or protecting property), if these actions cause the multitude to rebel,

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[57] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* XVI, 2.
[58] James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theological-Political Treatise*, 309.
[59] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P11.
[60] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* V, 11.
[61] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* XVII, 4.

a tyrant cannot maintain his power anymore.[62] It is also very important that Spinoza does not consider formal institutions, or the sovereign itself, as a centre of power. For him, sovereign power rests on the acquiescence of the multitude and limits the fear of provoking its indignation. Spinoza argues in *TTP*, chapter XVII, that there is no state "that was not in greater danger from its own citizens than from foreign foes, and which was not more fearful of the former than of the latter."[63] Thus, "the king's will has the force of law just as long as he holds the sword of the commonwealth, for the right to rule, is determined by power alone."[64]

Moreover, by the equation of right to power, Spinoza rejects one of the basic fundaments of the liberal tradition: the equality of human rights. As Étienne Balibar comments, the formula "men are born and remain free and equal in their rights" does not correspond to reality or the Spinozist perspective.[65] In practice, individuals are always unequal since the balance of power is not pre-determined but must affirm itself in each separate moment differently. As Karl Marx writes in the "Critique of the Gotha Programme":

> Right, by its very nature, can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard insofar as they are brought under an equal point of view (…). Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby.[66]

Marx's emphasis on the economic structure and condition of society is similar to Spinoza's dichotomy between right and power. In other words, if we don't know what constraints and conditions a body is subject to, talking about equality and rights is meaningless: "Equality of rights itself constitutes a right or a power, which may or may not exist, according to the circumstances; it supposes certain conditions (…) for instance, in the anarchic situation, close to the "state of nature", the equality of individuals exists "in imagination rather than in fact."[67]

The aforementioned conception of Spinoza is directly related to the rejection of the liberal tradition, according to which, despite bodily relations in actuality, individuals are treated as absolutely equal. The error of the liberal tradition, from a Spinozist point of view, is that it seeks beyond the material world the absolute, transcendent beginning, a state of nature, which then determines the political interaction of individuals. Indeed, for the liberal tradition, society derives from the free will of the individual, from a free

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[62] Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries*, 66.
[63] Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* XVII, 4.
[64] Spinoza*, Political Treatis*e VII, 25.
[65] Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 60.
[66] Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 21-22.
[67] Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 62.

mental decision, that allows them through a contract to transcend the material world. The constitutional illusion, or legalism adopted by the liberal tradition, rests on a dualism between body and mind and fact and right. Contrary to this, in the third part of the *Ethics*, Spinoza clearly shows that there is no way out from the material world, from the bodily realm: "Mental decisions are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according to the varying disposition of the body."[68] Thus, politics is a field of interaction between bodies, and modes bounded by material reality, and not a normative field in which a juridical understanding of rights plays a determining role. Without power, right is meaningless. This is the reason why we can equate right with power: "We might sum up Spinoza's Philosophy in the slogans that he directly or indirectly provides: God or nature, and right or power."[69]

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[68] Spinoza, *Ethics* III, P2S.
[69] Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries, 5*.

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Underneath Harlequin's Cloak: Reflections on Aleatory Materialism

Banu Bargu

"The essays submitted to you had to take the position of recognizing openly that struggle is at the heart of every philosophy."[1] This quote, from Althusser's "Is It Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy," opens Warren Montag's magisterial study of Althusser's philosophical thought.[2] Montag's study takes on the difficult task of situating Althusser's contributions in the complex, dense, and shifting theoretical conjunctures that he closely studied, inhabited, and took positions in, conjunctures which Althusser himself viewed as a constant battlefield of different philosophies, whose ascendance or decline vis-à-vis one another had important political ramifications that went beyond any theoretical shifts that their concepts, arguments, and specific formulations may inspire.[3] As Montag forcefully shows, Althusser's theoretical practice, always cognizant of its inherently political quality, was largely driven by engaging his "adversaries" on the field of battle: Althusser studied his contemporaries meticulously, often read them against themselves to weaponize their own contradictions in ways that unraveled their unity and force, when he did not try to enlist and mobilize them toward his own purposes. Althusser reflected on the dominant currents of his day, from structuralism to psychoanalysis and phenomenology to deconstruction in this battlefield, but underlying a dizzying range of interventions concerning questions of "structure," the "subject," and "origin/end," as

[1] Althusser, "Is It Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?"
[2] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries.*
[3] Ibid., 4.

Montag's book organizes Althusser's oeuvre, each a vector of Althusser's complex interventions, one cannot help but detect a singular and enduring commitment; namely, to defend a rigorous Marxism against the attacks and incursions that endeavored to refute, dilute, deflect or discredit it from within and without. Althusser fought to counter the liberalization of Marxism in the wake of de-Stalinization under the banner of "humanism" and argued against the attendant jettisoning of radical political objectives such as the "dictatorship of the proletariat" within a communist politics, which he considered to be definitive and crucial for the political horizon of Marxism. With this commitment, and often against the force of fashion, Althusser was willing to forge unlikely alliances to advance in what he saw to be a philosophical "war of position," and did not fear venturing outside of Marxism, into figures prior to Marx, into non- and even anti-Marxist philosophies.[4] In fact, the bulk of Althusser's writings concern thinkers that predate Marx: Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Spinoza, Hegel, and Feuerbach. What is of great interest in his work, therefore, is how he read these thinkers in heterodox ways that made them plausible allies of the Marxist cause, just as he read Gramsci, Lacan, Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Deleuze and others writing much closer to him in time.

As Montag's epigraph suggests, however, Althusser did not only struggle with "adversaries" in a conflictual field or forge unexpected alliances, but he also embodied that struggle within; in fact, at the very "heart" of his own philosophy. One of the strongest merits of Montag's work is its ability to put on display how Althusser's thought "interiorized" the contradictions it was unable to "master" or "resolve."[5] Indeed, when one reads Althusser's oeuvre, and in spite of the unity and coherence of his political purpose of defending and revitalizing Marxism that permeates it, it is impossible not to be struck by the many Althussers it contains. This is especially so, considering how the posthumously discovered work, which, in Montag's words, "dwarfed the work published during his lifetime and which included over a dozen full-length manuscripts … and perhaps a hundred essays in various stages of completion," has cast doubt on any linear reading or decidedly unitary reconstruction of his work.[6] Especially striking has been the discovery of "another Althusser, an Althusser in every way opposed to the structuralist thinker he was supposed to be, an *aleatory Althusser* ever haunted by the void, the madman whose madness is his truth, a madman for whom truth is itself a kind of madness, a delusion by which we defend against the abyss that surrounds us."[7]

How might one reconcile the many Althussers, especially after what appears to be the anti-Althusserian Althusser? There are different ways to address this challenge and each with distinct consequences. The most obvious way is to analyze Althusser's work as composed of different phases, each accounting for a different Althusser, but where each

[4] Ibid., 5, 9.
[5] Ibid., 7.
[6] Montag, *Louis Althusser*, 12.
[7] Ibid., 13, my emphasis.

of those phases is internally coherent and coalescing around a distinct but evolving set of concerns. The history of his publications enables a productive periodization of Althusser's work.[8] Accordingly, one can read Althusser's explicit moments of self-critique either by way of retractions and restatements or by the silent abandonment of previous arguments as signaling the transitions amongst these periods. At the same time, there is something that remains elusive, something left ungrasped and even misleading in such a perspective, even as it offers coherence at the expense of the contradictions that inhere in each phase, even in each text, and the presence of formulations and gestures that go against the author's stated goals. Similarly countervailing this approach is the history of Althusser's unpublished manuscripts that challenge and contradict the published writings in different ways. Reading the many Althussers as successive rather than contemporaneous with one another risks an overestimation of Althusser's mastery over his own thought, taking him perhaps a bit too much at his own word.

Another way to read the different Althussers is to deploy a Straussian approach and to explain the tensions and contradictions in Althusser's texts by distinguishing how each text might speak differently to the "initiated" from how it might speak to the "non-philosophers."[9] From such a perspective, Althusser's works can be said to contain different layers of meaning that co-exist, that are brought together intentionally, if also somewhat surreptitiously, as if to escape the censure of the Party, to stay under the radar, to intimate without implicating itself, or simply to extend itself beyond the narrow confines of the academy. If that is the case, and regardless of whether it arises out of strategic considerations, cunning, prudence or a lack of courage, it is possible to read the many Althussers together but as speaking differently, which transforms his texts into an endless hieroglyphic for those who are willing and able to read between the obvious signs. Contrapuntal to this approach, however, would be Spinoza's critique of the esoteric readings of Scripture, and his proposal to read Scripture as "it is, its gaps, lacunae, inconsistencies and outright contradictions of doctrine and narrative, as irreducible."[10] While the observation that Althusser's own method of reading was deeply influenced by Spinoza is not a complete barrier against esoteric readings, it does entail a significant tension vis-à-vis this way of reading Althusser.

Montag offers us a third way of approaching the many Althussers, one that is most suited to Althusser's own project of "symptomatic reading," of treating the text as a "mere surface deprived of any depth," such that its silences, gaps, contradictions and discrepancies cannot be explained away but must be confronted.[11] Reading Althusser symptomatically gifts us with a way of understanding the coexistence of contradictory positions, unstable oppositions, and constant reformulations across Althusser's writings

[8] Such a periodization has been most cogently offered by Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*.
[9] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-philosophers*.
[10] Montag, *Louis Althusser*, 48.
[11] Ibid., 82.

as neither a shifting set of concerns, nor a politically motivated concealment of his true ideas but as a decisive feature of Althusser's thought. Thus, Montag suggests, the internal conflictuality of Althusser's thought is not simply the presence of an inconsistency, ambiguity, double speak or the failure of rigor, but a "constitutive" quality that is "necessary to its very unfolding."[12] It is to this internal conflictuality as much as to its polemical force and incisive clarity that we owe the generative power of Althusser's thought, Montag argues, insofar as it stands as an open invitation to new interventions that seek to take Althusser's work as a starting point and proceed by way of pressing on the very contradictions that Althusser could not "master" or "resolve."[13] Just as Althusser approached the *décalages* in Rousseau's work as the very "failures" that moved his philosophy forward,[14] so does Montag approach Althusser's pursuit of "a meaning that seems constantly to elude him, even if this meaning is nothing other than the pursuit itself,"[15] as defining not only the uneven and impassioned mechanics of Althusser's thought but also the novel path he perhaps unwittingly opens for others, precisely through its contradictions and failures. Montag's work encourages us to approach Althusser's oeuvre as open, tumultuous, and expansive, often despite its self-presentation as unitary and coherent, distinguished by a display of self-mastery and assertive closures. Even more significant than the polemical reactions that Althusser's work has provoked (and of those there were quite a few), then, Montag reminds us how the coexistence of the multiplicity of Althussers holds in store a generative capacity to call forth a novel theoretical practice which takes inspiration from the irreconcilable contradictions and tensions that this coexistence makes possible. Althusser's work invites novel interventions to take up what it leaves unfinished, unresolved, and perhaps unwritten.

This calling forth, this open invitation, is not for any kind of philosophizing, however, but specifically for a theoretical practice that considers itself *materialist*. What makes it materialist? Montag tells us that Althusser's thought offers a "new way of inhabiting philosophy," an inhabiting that is itself far from static, that is built on practice, on movement, on a repetition that does not recur to the origin but shifts the starting point further each time.[16] As Montag's work teaches us, this practice is defined by demarcation; it is the "void of a distance taken."[17]

However, because Althusser sometimes sets up the challenge as if he asks us to follow him in the "path" toward a particular destination, it is instructive to think of how he uses the metaphor of paths. When he discusses philosophy as "the falsest of all false paths (*der Holzweg der Holzwege*)," [18] he draws on Heidegger's famous reference:

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[12] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 173.
[13] Ibid., 7, 210.
[14] Althusser, "Rousseau: The Social Contract."
[15] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 210.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy," 62; Matheron, "The Recurrence of the Void in Louis Althusser," 28.
[18] Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy," 30.

> "Wood" is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden. They are called *Holzwege*. Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so. Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*.[19]

However, when Althusser seizes on the metaphor of paths [*Holzwege*] in the forest, he gives it a materialist lineage distinct from Heidegger's use of it, by quoting from Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* where Lenin is quoting Dietzgen, "the German proletarian who Marx and Engels said had discovered 'dialectical materialism' 'all by himself', as an auto-didact, because he was a proletarian militant."[20] Althusser writes:

> Ultimately, philosophy has no history, philosophy is that strange theoretical site where nothing really happens, nothing but this *repetition* of nothing. To say that nothing happens in philosophy is to say that philosophy *leads nowhere because it is going nowhere*: the paths it opens really are, as Dietzgen said, long before Heidegger, '*Holzwege,*' paths that lead nowhere.[21]

It is clear that Althusser saw philosophy for what it is and yet chose to walk in its paths. He was and remained until the end a "philosopher," who approached philosophy as his "vocation."[22] At the same time, he was acutely aware of the limitations of philosophy. As Montag once put it succinctly, the risk of philosophy for Althusser was "the risk of following a false path, a path that leads and can lead nowhere."[23] But one could not go anywhere new without taking that risk. To do justice to the many Althussers, then, is to move with Althusser's contradictions in the path he has trodden. The only way to go beyond the places he got stuck (perhaps "where the wood is untrodden") is to pass through them, or at least, to risk the attempt. And thus we can heed Althusser's warning:

> We need to follow a true path; but in order to follow a true path it is necessary to *study* philosophy, which is '*the falsest of all false paths*' (der Holzweg der Holzwege). Which means, to speak plainly, that there can be no true path (*sc.* in the sciences, but above all in politics) without a study, and eventually a *theory of philosophy as a false path*."[24]

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[19] Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*. Althusser's library contained a copy of the *Holzwege*. See translator's note in Althusser, "The Underground Current," 206, n56.
[20] Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy," 30.
[21] Ibid., 55.
[22] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 166.
[23] Montag, *Louis Althusser*, 16.
[24] Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy," 31.

As in Spinoza's phrase *verum index sui et falsi,* so, for Althusser, materialist practice embodied a truth that is the index of both itself and of what is false. As such, to inhabit in philosophy's ancient and eternal forest, one must have the courage to arrive at a recognition that "nothing happens in philosophy" but that it is nonetheless necessary to follow within it a "true path" – the path of materialism. In this essay, I endeavor to live up to the tall order of the materialist "way of inhabiting philosophy," by following Althusser's contradictions along the path that "comes an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden"—the stop of aleatory materialism. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, I offer these reflections on Althusser's later writings in dialogue with Warren Montag, whose luminous scholarship has not only shaped the way many of us read Althusser today, but has also been, for me, a lasting source of intellectual inspiration and generosity.

A Last Testament

One of the sites in which the internal conflict of Althusser's thought is most pronounced is, undoubtedly, the *locus classicus* of the *aleatory Althusser*, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter."[25] As Montag notes in Chapter 9 of *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, this posthumously published text's strange status as a montage, an "a posteriori construction" by its editors, having been excerpted from a longer manuscript, with countless emendations dating from different revisions, its hastily written nature, with "numerous errors of fact and attribution," and the lack of clarity around what it was intended to become, prevents the possibility of any "dissimulation of coherence and consistency" that Althusser might have been able to give it, had it been written at a different time, by a different Althusser.[26] But the fact remains that it was not, and perhaps could not have been, written at a different time, by a different Althusser, for it would have been impossible for the contradictions that prevent the closure and unity of the text to be articulated as the *final* revelation of a truth that emerges with utmost clarity at the end of one's life, as if he is suspended over an abyss into which he is about to fall. Coming at a time when Althusser had already died in his public capacity and was left in solitude to mourn the lives he had taken, "The Underground Current" is, as Montag puts it, perhaps the "philosophical analogue" of his autobiography, *The Future Lasts Forever*, a "last testament or confession, spoken all at once, as if he were making manifest what was heretofore latent in his published oeuvre or, perhaps more accurately, bringing what had been hidden into the open for all to see."[27] After all, Althusser admits to writing this text after "living through that nameless time that does not pass, unaware of what was going on around [him]," in the aftermath of taking the life of his wife, Hélène Legotien,

[25] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 163-207.
[26] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 174.
[27] Ibid., 174-75.

and after three years spent at various clinics. Once he is allowed to leave, he steps out of the enclave and into life, a new and unknown life, unknown because Althusser has only been in the shelter of the academy, the clinic, and the party for most of his adult life, after his time in a prisoner-of-war camp during the Second World War. Althusser writes of this transition as "returning to this world that is entirely new to me, and, since I had never encountered it before, full of surprises."[28]

In his new home in a "working class neighborhood," Althusser reflects on the manuscript: "I have condensed in it what I believe it is in my power to say in this autumn in which, the other day, the yellowed leaves were falling slowly on to the tombs of Père-Lachaise, near the Wall and elsewhere."[29] As G.M. Goshgarian puts it, his home is near (but not quite in) Père-Lachaise, a cemetery in Paris's Twentieth Arrondissement. What is unique about it is that "in May 1871, it saw a fierce battle that sealed the defeat of the Paris Commune at the hands of the liberal regime headed by Louis Adolphe Thiers. After the fighting, the Communards who had survived it were shot down in cold blood; the *Mur des Fédérés*, in the south-eastern corner of the cemetery, memorializes the massacre. The apartment in which Althusser lived in the 1980s stands not far from this wall."[30]

It may not be a coincidence, then, that to present his thoughts as if they were the revelation of the hidden truth of his life and life's work, Althusser would write from the end and return to the beginning, as it were; in the double sense: politically, to the Commune, and philosophically, to antiquity. Both the Commune and ancient philosophy present primal, originary scenes that inaugurate new worlds; they are what Walter Benjamin would call the *Ur-forms*. In the one case, the communards initiate the institutional form that embodies radical political imaginary of communism, which Marx hailed as the "glorious harbinger of a new society."[31] In the other, we have the eternal rain of atoms in the void initiating, with an unpredictable encounter, the birth of the world and many other worlds to come. Knowing that this is one of Althusser's last writings, it is particularly moving to think of "The Underground Current" as a last testament, as Montag suggests, one that is uttered "all at once," as if it is a race against the impending end of Althusser's life, but also as close as one can be to something that has stood the test of time – to the tombs in the cemetery, but especially to the *Mur des Fédérés*, the mural for the "martyrs" of the Commune "enshrined in the great heart of the working class,"[32] as Marx saluted the fallen Communards; to philosophical antiquity, but especially that ancient form of materialism that becomes a philosophical model, a "seat,"[33] for many other articulations that will follow. Each commands immortality; each speaks beyond their time, and in so doing they blend and merge with one another. Does the image of

[28] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 165.
[29] Ibid., 166.
[30] Ibid., 203, n5, translator's note.
[31] Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 99.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Bourdin, "The Uncertain Materialism of Louis Althusser," 276-77.

"yellowed leaves … falling slowly on to the tombs" in Althusser's Parisian autumn not reenact and merge with the ethereal image of the rain of atoms in the void?

It is in this quality as the "last testament" that Montag encourages us to read "The Underground Current," which allows us to appreciate the emotional valence of the text, distinguished from any other authored by Althusser. What, then, we might ask with Montag, does the philosophical "last testament" of Althusser make manifest? What path does it trod upon? What contradictions does it contain? Althusser calls it the "philosophy of the encounter," and presents it, in a way that sits quite uneasily with his erstwhile pronunciations against a foreknown end, as a *destination*: "It is better that [the reader] know where he is going if he is to follow me, and it is therefore better that he know where I am going – where I would like to go, and, perhaps, am going."[34] This materialism is not just a path among paths but the final path, a finality that was meant to be discovered all along but remained "almost entirely unknown," a kind of hidden *telos*. How strange, then, that Althusser is in the *Holzweg* that will lead to the true materialism, the very "*key* to what we have read of Marx and, as it were, understood of what is thrust upon us" – a world in crisis.[35]

If the text reads like a "last testament," this is because it is overburdened with the revelation of a destination that is also a destiny, something that a different Althusser had forever criticized because it meant that the path was already drawn, that the Origin already contained inside it the End. And yet, the last Althusser announces this materialism as the destination he would like to reach, and would like the reader to follow him on his path while he goes there, though he is not fully certain he may reach it after all, not knowing whether it would be death that prevented him from reaching it or the impossibility of arrival. There is a sense in the text that this destination was also what Althusser meant to reach all along, that in fact, it was not only him, but through him, that a whole current of materialism that traversed the history of philosophy, a current that was "almost completely unknown," but also one that was "repressed" and purposefully misread by the philosophical tradition, which awaited Althusser to excavate and "free [it] from this repression."[36] Althusser asks his readers to be courageous and to have fortitude, because just as the "Underground Current" is the last word of Althusser's oeuvre, it is also a new beginning.

This is the text not of a dying man, but a man already dead and yet still writing, a man who sees his release from the clinic as a "return" to a "world that is entirely *new* to [him],"[37] a man who complains in his autobiography of how the judgment of insanity that declared him unfit to stand trial for murder buried him "under a tombstone of silence,"[38] and yet a man who lives near a cemetery and takes walks around the tombstones, a man

[34] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 166.
[35] Ibid., my emphasis.
[36] Ibid., 168.
[37] Ibid., 163, my emphasis.
[38] Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever*, 22.

both in silent mourning – for his wife, his life, the lives of the Communards, the life of socialism – and somehow still with something to say, for the working class, for the "class position" in philosophy he spent his entire adult life writing for, having finally taken up residence in a working class neighborhood. As such, perhaps the main, inevitable contradiction that traverses the text as a whole is one that is between life and death, between the end and the beginning. One sees this contradiction in its many incarnations and permutations, and in a deeply personal register that suspends the text between the life and death of Althusser, the man, and the life and death of Althusser, the philosopher. The invisible conditions of the text's composition permeate it with its insistence on the void, and the two concepts that emerge from the void, perhaps pointing to its negation, however temporary: the encounter and the swerve. As the text is straddled between truly living versus remaining alive, truly dying versus being declared dead, authoring the death of a loved one versus the inability to author one's own philosophical death, the protracted death of the communist party versus the long and continued life of the principles to whose articulation by Marx Althusser dedicated a lifetime of work, the contradiction between life's plenitude and the many kinds of death Althusser is countenancing animates the text's centripetal force that constantly draws us into the void at its center, while it also continuously reaches for the "lines of flight" that open up new paths to refuse this force. Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, and "*even* Heidegger"[39] make their appearance, as well as Nietzsche, Deleuze, Derrida, and Wittgenstein. Althusser thus assembles a motley crew, and in this strange line-up, some figures are undoubtedly stranger than others.

More theoretically still, a similar contradiction remerges in Althusser's contemplation of the eternity of philosophy and the finitude of the philosopher, the recognition of which burdens the text acutely. Writing with an understanding of the transience of his work that will disappear, or perhaps has already disappeared, into the permanence of the philosophical *Kampfplatz,* as a final contribution to the materialism he so deeply embraced, Althusser asks in advance for liberties from his audience for what is to come. He blames his "long reflections" on his vocation "(one is not a 'philosopher' from the age of twenty-eight for nothing)."[40] Now, as Althusser proceeds some thirty years later, the vicissitudes of the "materialism of the encounter" intwines with the fortunes and misfortunes of Althusser himself. So Althusser can set out to trace the winding path toward this materialism, which is not only the destination but also the path itself, as a kind of destiny that he was meant to enact: the fortunes of materialism in Western philosophy, which, with Heidegger, Althusser calls as having "presided over *our destiny* since the Greeks," lamenting and celebrating in equal measure both how Western philosophy has churned the most subversive current into an "idealism of freedom," distorting its true character with its logocentric reading that has prioritized "necessity and

[39] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 168, my emphasis.
[40] Ibid., 166.

teleology,"[41] and how it has nonetheless managed to survive as an "underground current." How strange it is to see Althusser align himself with Heidegger to talk about "Western philosophy" since the Greeks as shaping "our destiny," leaving us with a deep ambiguity regarding who that collectivity references. It is as if Althusser wants to redeem his own complicity in the logocentrism that has permeated materialism, perhaps despite himself, placing him both as a willing executor of the idealism of the philosophical tradition that permeated materialism and as its simultaneous victim. Althusser's task now is one of deconstruction as much as it is of uncovering: to uncover the "underground current" is simultaneously to deconstruct the "priority of Meaning over all reality,"[42] of "Reason (*Logos*, *Ratio*, *Vernunft*), and therefore of Origin and End – the Origin being nothing more, here, than the anticipation of the End in Reason or primordial order (that is, the anticipation of Order, whether it be rational, moral, religious or aesthetic) – in the interests of a philosophy which, rejecting the Whole and every Order, rejects the Whole and order *in favour of* dispersion (Derrida would say, in his terminology, 'dissemination') and *disorder*."[43] The "materialism of the encounter" stands as a radical opposition to, as well as the product of, the artificial sense of Order, signaling how it is always already deeply permeated by a reality marked by a lack of meaning, of necessity, of telos. Althusser's final act of inversion feels akin to a revelation of how Althusser's own delirium was nested within the semblance of order that marked his life's work.

"The Underground Current" carries both sides of this antagonism, as it is suspended between life and death, between finitude and eternity, between transience and permanence, between order and dispersion, between Origin/End and the "process without a subject," and it condenses them into an evocative philosophical image: the rain of atoms in the void. These ethereal particles, infinite and infinitesimal at once, hold in abeyance the "swerve" that promises both the birth of a new world and its coming to an end, both the accomplishment of the fact and its non-accomplishment, both a piling up [*accrochage*] of atoms in an encounter that holds and a radical instability that permeates everything that exists, suggesting the possibility of an immanent disbanding [*décrochage*], a scattering and dissolution of what exists into the eternal void.

Atoms in the Void

Reading the "Underground Current," one is confronted with the difficulty of deciphering the scene of the rain of atoms in the void, which Althusser borrows from Epicurus and to which he recurs when discussing different thinkers. Is it the statement of an ontological condition, much like the one often attributed to the "state of nature"

[41] Ibid., 168.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 188.

in Hobbes, which functions in the theory as a foundation that will justify the validity of the otherwise highly debatable propositions to come? Is it a contingent historical starting point for a materialist tendency in philosophy to which later thinkers subscribing to that tendency were obliged to allude to without, however, having a substantial commitment to atomistic materialism? Alternatively, is it simply a metaphor for a political logic – the logic of the conjuncture, the logic of contingency – that Althusser had long expressed in a myriad of different formulations and restatements about the necessity to think beyond a teleological narrative? Indeed, part of the enigma and perhaps paradoxical appeal of this text among Althusser's readers can be attributed to the undecidability of this primal scene. This enigma is exacerbated by the heterogeneity of the thinkers in the lineage Althusser constructs, as if each warrants being placed in the tradition Althusser is constructing precisely because they are later examples of the same, or as Montag puts it, "as if the history of 'aleatory materialism' were nothing more than a series of variations on a single theme."[44] This is not entirely correct, Montag suggests, not only because the problems to which this materialism is applied becomes increasingly complex, both historically and politically, but also because, despite the fact that Althusser announces his work as proceeding along a path, the path itself is not exactly a straight line.

Montag rightly puzzles over how Althusser's construction of a "cumulative, remarkably continuous linear time," indicating the unfolding of the history of (Western) philosophy following the Epicurean scene in the text's "movement toward an end," is disrupted in its chronology by the introduction of Heidegger as contemporaneous to Epicurus, as well as by the inversion of Spinoza and Hobbes in the movement from Machiavelli to Marx.[45] These two disruptions, especially with Spinoza, become symptomatic in Montag's hands that direct us to the "unrecognized conflict at the heart of the text"; namely, that it contains "two incompatible notions of the void."[46] One is an ontological conception of the void, which Althusser attributes to Spinoza, expressed as *le néant*, or *le vide*, indicating an originary nothingness that is the *object* of philosophy whereas the other conception makes the void a philosophical performative, a verb, a practice of "intervention."[47] In this latter conception, the void references the activity of making room for the emergence of new theoretical arguments.[48]

An object of philosophy, however much one might conceptualize the void as a non-object, on the one hand, and a philosophy that lacks any object, that can only be conceived as a practice of making demarcations, on the other, these two conceptions of the void mark Althusser's essay in an irreconcilable tension. If, following Montag, we can

[44] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 177.
[45] Ibid., 175.
[46] Ibid., 178.
[47] Ibid., 178-79.
[48] These are not the only occurrences of the void in Althusser's work. As Matheron persuasively argues, there is a proliferation of the "void" across Althusser's works such that "the insistence on the void in his oeuvre [can be read] as the recurring index of theoretical difficulties." See Matheron, "The Recurrence of the Void in Althusser," 24.

agree that Althusser's internal conflictuality is also the generative quality of his thought, which calls forth a theoretical practice that is inspired or instigated by its latent contradictions, it may be apt to characterize "The Underground Current" not only as a "last testament" or "confession," but also as an implicit "philosophical will," a statement of the problems Althusser is leaving behind, of the insights he has been able to arrive at as well as the contradictions he has not been able to settle, for those affiliating themselves with his legacy to take up. We must pursue these two voids, then, to decipher what they signify, i.e., as a sign of what the late Althusser's thought has been unable either to "master" or to "resolve" and thus bequeaths as part of his philosophical estate.

A Tale of Two Materialisms

As Montag reads Althusser's text as one that is at war with itself, he reconstructs how, of the two conceptions of the void, the ontological one dominates the text. Indeed, this conception becomes "the defining characteristic, the specific difference of that 'profound tradition' that led from Epicurus to Marx."[49] Expressed as *le néant*, or *le vide*, indicating an originary nothingness the first modality of the void is a means of challenging the dominant conceptions of Origin and End, which are but the same thing. Thinking this void as the *object* of philosophy, the primal scene of ancient atomism provides us with a theorey of the radical contingency of the world: atoms falling in the void stage random collisions caused by inexplicable swerves that lead some atoms to deviate from their otherwise vertical fall, and through these encounters the piling up of things and the emergence of the world. Atomism thus offers the insight that always in the shadow of the world as it exists are the worlds that have not been accomplished, because encounters that could have led to their accomplishment did not happen or failed to take hold, worlds that have been foreclosed or lie in waiting for other encounters to undo the existing world and bring those alternatives forth. This is a philosophy *of* the void that runs from Epicurus to Marx, which Althusser reads in each instance as emphasizing the emptiness, nothingness or disorder that preceded the world, whether this is the political chaos of Machiavelli's fifteenth century Italy, Rousseau's primeval forest, Spinoza's God, Hobbes's state of nature, or Marx's so-called "primitive" accumulation. This embrace of contingency re-emerges in Althusser's interest in his contemporaries, in Derrida's psychoanalytic reading of Epicurus, informed by Heidegger's "thrownness," and Wittgenstein's radical nominalism that builds the world out of the "case."

In this reading, Epicurus's primal scene is not a historical starting point but essential to the tradition. At its core, aleatory materialism is an atomistic philosophy.[50] "In Democritus, and especially Epicurus," Althusser writes, were the theses of aleatory

[49] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 179.
[50] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 188, and Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 256.

materialism articulated in their "first form, the simplest and purest."[51] In Epicurus, we find a discourse on the beginning of the world, even as Althusser analyzes this scene as the absence of an origin, an originary cause, a first mover, prefiguration or reason. But this is a paradoxical philosophy because it denies what one might expect to find in a foundational discourse. Instead of a grounding, he tells us, we have the void. Althusser formulates this, in allusion to Deleuze and Derrida, as the "primacy of absence over presence."[52] In slightly different formulations, Althusser writes: "before the formation of the world, there was nothing,"[53] and "before there was a world, there existed absolutely nothing that was *formed*."[54] He thus offers the first materialist thesis: nothing precedes the world. This thesis is materialist because it refuses God. Instead of a new grounding, however, we have no grounds, or a grounding on nothingness. The Epicurean void, with the nothingness it holds, is crucial for Althusser to present aleatory materialism as an anti-foundationalist philosophy. However, starting from the void has the danger of implying that what is to transpire and come into being is the result of a miracle, the consequence of creation *ex nihilo*. Paradoxically, the void as the symbol of Althusser's anti-foundationalism, has the danger of reproducing a new foundation in itself, one that offers itself as the "non-origin" of an origin story.

Althusser finds Epicurus's account to refuse the story of creation *ex nihilo* because it embraces the thesis of the *eternity of the world* ("a materialist thesis *par excellence*"): atoms falling parallel in the void, which because even though there is nothing prior to the beginning of the world, the void is full of elements. As Althusser is keen to emphasize, assuming the absence of matter would take us into idealism. However, these elements are only "abstract" prior to a swerve and an encounter, they are "lacking in all consistency and existence."[55] Althusser writes: "Before the accomplishment of the fact, before the world, there is only *the non-accomplishment of the fact*, the non-world that is merely the *unreal* existence of the atoms."[56] Hence, the image of the void, full of atoms in a phantom state, serves both to assert that nothing lies at the origin, thereby offering a refusal of origin/foundation for materialist thought and to symbolize an openness to futurity since it is replete with the potential of (a) new beginning(s) whose elements are ever present and ready to combine into novel forms and configurations.[57]

The second point that Althusser distills from the Epicurean scene is that it posits the beginning with the swerve of the atoms, their deviation from the straight line and encounter with each other, leading to an aggregation that produces singular entities in form and appearance. This is the second materialist thesis, namely, that "swerve, not

[51] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 190.
[52] Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 262.
[53] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 168.
[54] Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 260.
[55] Ibid., 261.
[56] Althusser, ""The Underground Current," 170.
[57] Ibid., 175.

Reason or Cause, is the origin of the world."[58] Quoting Lucretius, Althusser writes: "an infinitesimal swerve, 'as small as possible'; 'no one knows where, or when, or how' it occurs, or what causes an atom to 'swerve' from its vertical fall in the void."[59] Emphasizing the minute quality of the movement, such that it is almost undetectable, Althusser exacerbates the immensity of its effects. "Breaking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, [to] induce an encounter with the atom next to it, and from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world – that is to say, of the agglomeration of atoms induced, in a chain reaction, by the initial swerve and encounter."[60] With the piling of lasting encounters, "a world is born."[61] For Althusser, Epicurus' conceptual move implies that only an ever so slight change is sufficient to imagine and remake the world otherwise. This invests the swerve with great force; it makes the swerve primary and the "origin" derivative, as it locates the origin as the result of a swerve. Both theses are essentially irreligious: the second thesis supports the first in its rejection of an originary cause and, thus, of God in philosophy.

The third thesis is that the encounter, i.e., the meeting of an atom with another, a collision, "induces the gigantic pile-up and collision-interlocking [*accrochage*] of an infinite number of atoms, from which a world is born."[62] Some encounters are brief and nonlasting, others endure and become the basis of reality. This brings us to the third, and most central thesis of this materialism; namely, that the world is the result of an encounter. The encounter, which has a specific structure due to the way elements come together and interlock, produces *form*, the form of order and the form of beings. In another iteration, Althusser calls the encounter the "event [*événement*]" that turns into "advent [*avènement*]," endowing the ensuing pile-up or "agglomeration" with a particular form.[63] Vittorio Morfino has called this materialist thesis the "primacy of the encounter over the form."[64] What this thesis means is that there is no guarantee of the necessity of the world, nor is there any reason to justify what exists as necessary, especially with reference to divine will. A world may not have happened if the encounters had not taken hold. Or, this world might not have happened had another encounter occurred and taken hold. And in the world that exists, it is the structure that emerges from the encounter provides the form and works to assign elements to their place, establishing relations of necessity.[65] Contingency, therefore, is not an exception from necessity; rather, necessity is a "becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies."[66]

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[58] Ibid., 190, and Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 260.
[59] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 169.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 260.
[62] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 191.
[63] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 191.
[64] Morfino, "'The World by Chance': On Lucretius and Spinoza," 117-31.
[65] Althusser, "The Underground Current,"192.
[66] Ibid., 194.

The Epicurean scene is subversive, then, first because it is a "truly non-religious" philosophy, without room for God.[67] And second, the absence of an origin and telos creates the space to think the arbitrariness of the world (as opposed to any rationality of the real) and history as an open field of possibilities, since even the most enduring forms are radically unstable. Third, being against the eternity of the Forms, it implies a radical nominalism of singularity; thinking about cases, situations, forms, and conjunctures.[68] However, even as Althusser analyzes the primal scene of the atoms in the void as the refusal of the divine, of original meaning, and embraces the negation of teleology, he reads the radical contingency of the world off of how nature really "is." For example, in one recapitulation of Epicurus's philosophy, Althusser describes it as follows: "Epicurus tells us that, before the formation of the world, an infinity of atoms were falling parallel to each other in the void. *They still are*."[69] In a similar way, sometimes Althusser tends to suggest that the materialist quality of the this thought lies in its atomistic basis. For example, he writes that this tradition "sought its materialist anchorage *in a philosophy of the encounter* (and therefore in a more or less atomistic philosophy, the atom, in its 'fall,' being the simplest figure of individuality."[70] It is possible to conclude that the atomistic conception of matter becomes indispensable for all of the political and philosophical implications to follow. The contingency of matter (as its inherent chanciness) is an a priori in order to think the contingency in politics in a materialist way.

Taking this line of thought to its logical conclusions means recognizing that Althusser attempted to invent a new materialist ontology *for* Marxism, one that would be able to account for precisely that which dialectical materialism could not see or think. This move would give the unexpected political "event," standing in for revolution that is impossible to predict and seems to happen out of nowhere, a basis in the workings of nature, thought all the way down to its smallest constituent components: atoms and their movement. A theoretical parallelism between nature and society, where the possibility of breaking the parallel fall by an unpredictable swerve becomes the possibility of interrupting the reproduction of capitalism. Hence, this reading provides the conditions of possibility of re-forging the link between materialist philosophy and a radical politics based not on a philosophy of history but, rather, an ontology that theorizes the unpredictable horizon of eventual irruptions. In short, the corollary of the ontological conception of the void is an ontological materialism.

Against this ontological conception of the void, Montag asserts, there is another conception that is at fundamental odds with it – one for which the void is not an object of contemplation "external" to philosophy but one that invokes the void as a way to make

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[67] Althusser, "Correspondence about 'Philosophy and Marxism,'" 218.
[68] Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 265. This element is developed further in Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, and Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza," 8. Also see Montag, "Althusser's Nominalism," 64-73.
[69] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 168, my emphasis.
[70] Ibid., 188.

room for different theoretical arguments. Montag explains: "the void that philosophy makes would not be a constatation of the real, as if it were external to that which it represents, but rather one of its effects, a means by which it frees itself of origins and ends in order to become the infinite diversity it is, the indissociable simultaneity of thought and action that Althusser once tried to capture in the phrase 'theoretical practice.'"[71] Accordingly, the void would not be the *a priori* of this radical materialism, but the result of, or better yet, the process that is set into motion by, an encounter that produces the conditions of a void – full of possibilities and yet devoid of what may come -- out of which a new beginning can emerge. This is not a *philosophy of the void*, but a *philosophy that voids*. Althusser's interest in the void, in this reading, is more a function of his interest in the encounter and what it may be able to effect. It reflects the search for a *tabula rasa*, the conditions of a new beginning, in philosophy and politics alike. Here, Althusser's discussions of thinkers such as Machiavelli and Marx (and to a lesser extent Hobbes and Rousseau) in the "Underground Current" have a different tenor than his discussions of Epicurus, Spinoza, and Heidegger, for example, and the movement of atoms become much more metaphorical references for the interventions of political agents and the transformation of social relations. This is a political reading of the void in which the *encounter* takes the center stage and the interest is on its capacity to make room for a new beginning (whether it is the irruption onto the political scene of a new prince, the formation of a new state, or the emergence of a new mode of production, or their failures to take hold). It bears traces of Althusser's theorization of necessity and contingency in two essays from the mid-1960s, "Contradiction and Overdetermination,"[72] especially in its Appendix, as well as "On the Materialist Dialectic,"[73] even though in a markedly different vocabulary which swaps the analysis of "contradictions" in favor of the much more inexplicable moments of the swerve and the effects of the swerve.

According to this reading, and here I want to push Montag's invocation of the alternative conception of the void a bit further, the Epicurean scene is much more of a metaphor that was instrumental in challenging the dominant philosophy and political establishment of its time in order to articulate an opposing perspective. Here, the void is better understood as a non-concept -- instead of being a fully elaborated concept, it is an evocation, a stand-in for what cannot be thought, though what is still necessary for the thought of the totality to function. It is helpful to consider Althusser's remarks from another unpublished manuscript predating the "Underground Current" by only a few years, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, to see how he positions the "void" as a supplement that does not in fact exist but is invented to think totality: "the void in Democritus and Epicurus as the condition of possibility for the encounter of atoms, hence for the

[71] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 188.
[72] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination."
[73] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic."

constitution of the 'whole' of the world (this void is posited as existing, but the thought of it is negative: we can say that it is not thought)."[74]

If the void is primarily a heuristic, Epicurus emerges as a materialist not because he theorized matter in a way that acknowledged its inherently atomistic basis or the random character of the movement of atoms, but because he used it to open up a materialist position in the *Kampfplatz* of ancient philosophy to think the whole by doing so – on terms already defined by the dominant philosophies at the time (Plato and Aristotle). Epicurus created a "void" within philosophy to insert a new "theoretical practice." Epicurus stood for a materialism because the void was the limit of what could not be thought while being necessary for the conditions of thinking otherwise. The non-concept of the void enabled Epicurus to oppose the theory of Being. Even though his philosophy was articulated on an ontological register, its materialism was less in its atomism but, rather, in how it countered the search for Origin or Meaning that came to mark the dominant philosophy of his time. Let us note that Althusser, the other pole of this opposition is marked by Plato's philosophy, which transposed problems of religion to another terrain in order to "ward off the threat of science so as to restore order: religion's order."[75] Since then, philosophy has largely been dominated by idealism, which has enlisted rational discourses in the service of power and claimed for itself knowledge of truth. "Idealism talks about Truth, but, behind Truth, it is power that appears on the horizon, and with power, Order."[76] Against the Platonic Order, then, the Epicurean refusal of the Origin of the world in favor of a theory of its autogenesis, its refusal of meaning, its emphasis on contingency are *heretical gestures* that help "*eliminate meaningless questions*: not just the question of the Origin of the World, but also everything connected with it – the question of God, of his omnipotence, of his incomprehensibility, of time and eternity, and so on."[77] As such, they enact the philosophical voiding to make room for materialism.

The unevenness in the "Underground Current" which Montag identifies as an irreducible antagonism between two conceptions of the void, which Althusser presents "as if they were complementary," as if the ontological assertion of the void is the "foundation of the philosophy that makes a void,"[78] I will venture to suggest permeates the whole text, as well as much of the reception of the text, in the form of two distinct materialist tendencies – at times intermingled with one another or converging, albeit asymptotically, and at times disjunct and/or patently opposed. These two tendencies are united in an uneasy combination under the shifting titles of "aleatory materialism" and the "materialism of the encounter," along with references to the materialism of the "rain,"

[74] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 69.
[75] Ibid., 42.
[76] Ibid., 43.
[77] Ibid., 30.
[78] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 186.

the swerve, the take [*prise*],"[79] which are presented as more or less synonymous. At stake are, I contend, on the one hand, an *atomistic materialism*, understood as an *ontology* for Marxism, derived from the ancient philosophy of Epicurus and its core materialist theses, and, on the other hand, a *counter-hegemonic, contrarian materialism*, that is defined less in reference to a set of core theses about the nature of matter than as a *position* taken within the conflictual field of philosophy in opposition to the dominant position, which, in however muted and mediated form, often functions as the position that strengthens the ruling classes. Accordingly, this contrarian materialism has little to do with atomism as such but much to do with the role of atomism in the *Kampfplatz* of antiquity.

Harlequin's Cloak

One of the difficulties that the "Underground Current" presents is that these two materialisms are intertwined, even fused, in the figure of Epicurus where the ontological content of the materialist theses are inseparable from the heretical, contrarian form that they take vis-à-vis the dominant philosophy of the time. There is another such figure, contemporary with Althusser, who represents a similar problem: Gilles Deleuze. When Althusser discusses the philosophers who could "give up thinking the origin as Reason or End in order to think it as nothingness,"[80] he references a "triumvirate": Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Derrida. Montag is right to elevate Deleuze to centrality in this triumvirate as a symptomatic moment of the internal battle of the text.[81] If the two conceptions of the void seem to be at war in Althusser's reading of Deleuze, this is because Deleuze is the hinge between the two conceptions of materialism that Althusser braids together and often conflates.

Deleuze is no doubt important for Althusser, first as one of his contemporaries whose critique of structuralism helped Althusser clarify his own relation to it, and as Montag puts in Chapter 5, to "finally separate himself from the metaphysical notion of structure" that permeated his work prior to 1967-68. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* offered a non-teleological account of capitalism's emergence, whose echoes can be discerned in Althusser's late writings on alternative ways of thinking about the "mode of production" in Marx.[82] However, Deleuze was especially important in the context of Epicurus, whom Deleuze had interpreted in a powerful essay that dated from the early 1960s.[83]

Briefly stated, Deleuze's reading of Epicurus through Lucretius counteracts the Platonic Being through Becoming. Instead of the principle of identity, it presents differences and resemblances. Instead of the "is," it gives the conjunction of singularities

[79] Althusser, The Underground Current," 167.
[80] Ibid., 188.
[81] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 186.
[82] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 225ff.
[83] Deleuze, "Lucrèce et le naturalisme," which was then incorporated in the appendix of *The Logic of Sense*.

(the "and"). It thus accounts for the diversity in nature that cannot be totalized into a single whole. Deleuze writes:

> Nature is not collective, but rather distributive, to the extent that the laws of Nature (*foedera naturae*, as opposed to the so-called *foedera fati*) distribute parts which cannot be totalized. Nature is not attributive, but rather conjunctive: it expresses itself through 'and,' and not through 'is.' This and that—alternations and entwinings, resemblances and differences, attractions and distractions, nuance and abruptness. Nature is Harlequin's cloak, made entirely of solid patches and empty spaces; she is made of plenitude and void, beings and nonbeings, with each one of the two posing itself as unlimited while limiting the other. Being an addition of indivisibles, sometimes similar and sometimes different, Nature is indeed a sum, but not a whole.[84]

Likening nature to "Harlequin's cloak," Deleuze posits the Lucretian gesture to be against all those philosophies that espouse "Being, the One and the Whole," which he condemns as the "theological forms of a false philosophy."[85] The atomic basis of Epicurean philosophy is not unimportant for Deleuze insofar as atoms are infinite but untotalizable. By inscribing the clinamen, which is the source of atomic collisions, to the movement of atoms itself, as the difference in the direction of the velocity of each atom (rather than treating it as a contingent deviation from the vertical fall), Deleuze offers an alternative ontology that embraces the atomic conatus as a "differential of matter," which confirms "the irreducible plurality of causes or of causal series, and the impossibility of bringing causes together into a whole."[86]

With Deleuze, then, we are drawn into a battle that takes place on the basis of the nature of the atom and its movement. While Deleuze's reading refuses Platonic Being, thereby undoing the unity of the void, it substitutes in its place an equally questionable metaphysics based on Becoming as the patchwork of plenitude and emptiness. Thus, the truth or falsity of the propositions that he advances can only be assumed to rise or fall with the veracity of his metaphysics of naturalism, whose affirmation of multiplicity supports the possibility of demystifying fears and illusions. As a "fellow Spinozist," for Althusser, Deleuze's interpretation of the void was an inspiration and a challenge.[87] Deleuze's inscription of the swerve as a kind of "conatus" of the atom works to emphasize the continuous production of singularities and becoming against the static and totalizing Platonic Being. In Deleuze's hands, the reference to the void is not an originary nothingness, even less a revelation of what dominant philosophies were hiding, but an alternative ontology that celebrates singularity and becoming. In Montag's acute

[84] Deleuze, "Lucretius and the Simulacrum," 267.
[85] Ibid., 267.
[86] Ibid., 270.
[87] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 187.

formulation, Deleuze presents "a philosophy of the encounter without the void,"[88] perhaps taking Althusser's ontological materialism to its logical conclusions.

At the same time, Deleuze's analysis of the significance of Epicurus/Lucretius is tied to his critique of Platonism, a task he continues following Nietzsche's own goal and injunction to "reverse Platonism" as the "task of the philosophy of the future."[89] Thus, we find ourselves in an ancient *Kampfplatz*, in which two tendencies confront each other: Becoming against Being, multiplicity against unity, sum against the whole, patches of plenitude and void against the void as nothingness. In viewing the Lucretian position as a contrarian alternative to Plato, Deleuze and Althusser can therefore be seen as converging. From this perspective, it is Deleuze's attribution to the line of Epicurus-Lucretius a significant role for the "counter-canon in Western philosophy" that he sought to construct as positioned against Platonism that is in the same spirit as the second conception of the void that Montag points out, as much as it is due to the alternative conception of a naturalist materialism that he advances.[90] Lucretius constitutes a continuous point of reference for Deleuze, one that he later situates "at the head of a refashioned canon of empiricists."[91] Deleuze wrote: "I see a secret link between Lucretius, Hume, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, constituted by their critique of negativity, their cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the externality of forces and relations, the denunciation of power … and so on."[92] Thus, the Lucretian reading of the void, in Deleuze's hands, works as a counter-hegemonic, contrarian position that inserts itself in the philosophical void it creates. In this regard, Deleuze's effort to construct this minoritarian tradition as an alternative canon of philosophers based on their distinctive conceptual contributions that challenged the "major" canon may also be seen as a rival for Althusser, who may be read as offering a delayed attempt in the "Underground Current" to do the same. As such, the "Underground Current" brings to fruition (however imperfectly) a goal that Althusser may have inadvertently pursued in his philosophical excursions into a whole range of philosophical figures, ranging from Montesquieu to Machiavelli, Lenin to Rousseau, and Lucretius to Marx, as part of the philosophical battles he was waging, without ever acknowledging that these excursions were also aimed to construct an alternative materialist canon, a counter-canon, as it were, all along.

However, underneath Althusser's convergence with the Deleuzean reading, which positions atomism against the Platonic position, it is possible to detect a fundamental and perhaps irreconcilable difference, which ultimately lies in their respective relation to a Marxist project.[93] Put succinctly, the question is whether it is necessary for the counter-

[88] Ibid., 187.
[89] Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *The Logic of Sense*, 253.
[90] Holmes, "Deleuze, Lucretius, and the Simulacrum of Naturalism," 316.
[91] Ibid., 319.
[92] Deleuze, *Negotiations,* 6.
[93] Much ink has been spilled regarding Deleuze's relationship to Marxism, which I cannot take up in detail here. For an array of positions, see Lecercle, "Deleuze, Guattari and Marxism"; Stolze, "A Marxist

hegemonic, contrarian position to be a *materialist* one (rather than simply a subversive or transgressive one) in the *Kampfplatz,* i.e., that it also correspond to a position that represents the muted voice of the oppressed. At least for the Althusser of "Lenin and Philosophy," the definition of materialism as "class struggle in the field of theory," one cannot simply be considered materialist by occupying a contrarian position to dominant ideology, if that position does not in some capacity represent the oppressed class. Now, Althusser is never too direct about what such representation may mean, and one searches in vain in the "Underground Current" for a rigorous criterion. However, that a commitment to atomism, insofar as atomism is an oppositional current, should automatically reflect or stand in for this position is an argument that neither Althusser nor Deleuze makes at length. In Deleuze, such a consideration, appears to be much more muted, if not altogether absent, and not coincidentally, he sees the axis of confrontation not between idealism and materialism but between idealism and naturalism (or later, empiricism). For Althusser, on the other hand, the opposition of atomism to Platonic idealism is deeply animated by materialism's heretical stance vis-à-vis the essentially religious questions that philosophy asks, its connection with nascent science, and its opposition to idealism's role as the guardian of power. At the same time, Althusser avoids any direct discussion of the connection to Epicurean atomism to the forms of class struggle that essentially take place outside of philosophy, except to salute the heresy: "Democritus' and Epicurus' work, we would note in passing, did not fall victim to the flames by accident, these incendiaries of every philosophical tradition having paid for their sins in kind – the flames, produced by friction, which one sees bursting from the tips of the tallest trees, because they are tall (Lucretius), or from philosophies (the great philosophies)."[94]

In another context, Althusser suggests that idealism assimilates the "social practices of men, who continue to toil and to dwell in darkness," with the violence of the concept, whereas materialism embodies the "irruption of practice" within philosophy.[95] The content of the subversiveness of materialism in this articulation arises from its connection to the outside of philosophy by way of social practices, including class struggle, which "shakes philosophy to its foundations."[96] Since Althusser does not delve deeper into this link, and leaves us suspended between deconstruction and an alternative vision of the link between philosophy and social practices, it is difficult to press the difference with Deleuze much further.[97] Thus the Deleuzean inflection in Althusser's interpretation appears more as a symptom of Althusser's internal struggle or a substitute for an answer he could not develop than a counterpoint, working against which could

Encounter"; Garo, "Deleuze, Marx, and Revolution"; Sotiris, "The Many Encounters of Delueze and Marxism," among others.

[94] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 190.

[95] Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 275-6.

[96] Ibid., 275.

[97] Tosel, "The hazards of aleatory materialism," 21-23.

have propelled Althusser out of his impasse. Thus, as in the Deleuzian case, the two senses of materialism -- materialism as an alternative ontology that corresponds to the inverted version of idealism's ontological claims, and as a theoretical practice that intervenes against the dominant philosophy by making a philosophical void – are folded together, the discourse on the void becomes a precondition of the enactment of a philosophical void. However, it is dubious whether folding the two together offers a compelling answer for Althusser's search for a different materialism that breaks free of idealist residues. It is perhaps this residual idealism in aleatory materialism, if not in content, then, definitely in *form* (of an alternative ontology), that despite all the gestures of disavowal that are scattered in Althusser's text against idealism and idealist materialisms alike, that informs the enigmatic and inconclusive nature of the text.

"Amicus Plato, magis amica Veritas!"

These are the last words that the editors of Althusser's posthumous works have chosen to bring the "Portrait of the Materialist Philosopher," the last piece in the collection of the *Philosophy of the Encounter* to an end.[98] It is a remarkable tribute to end Althusser's oeuvre with a salutation of truth. As a philosopher's last word, it imbues meaning to Althusser's lifelong search for a "true materialism," his belief in materialism as the true path in philosophy, which is "the falsest of all false paths (*der Holzweg der Holzwege*),"[99] and of communism as the truth of materialist politics.

At the same time, the salutation of truth at the end of Althusser's oeuvre meets Althusser's reckoning with the truth of his own life, which he chooses to depict as the life of a materialist philosopher, who is a self-made man, who "started out from nothing," but who, instead of reveling in his success, continued to wander because that is the only way to understand the "true philosophy."[100] This philosopher is an "aleatory materialist," we are told, one who "always catches a moving train, the way they do in American Westerns."[101] He goes different places, continues to learn by studying the people around him and by mastering the great thinkers until he "attains the level of classical wisdom," part of which is to understand that "everything is repeated and exists only through differential repetition."[102] Only then can he bring some idealists "round to his views," and only then, "with great bitterness." One can hear the echoes of Althusser's construction of philosophy as an eternal *Kampfplatz* in this description, where materialism and idealism repeatedly clash forever, each time in a slightly different way. He is there, too, in his transience, making a few dents against idealism, and advancing the cause of materialism, despite the "great bitterness" he effects.

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98 Althusser, "Portrait of the Materialist Philosopher," 291.
99 Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy," 30.
100 Althusser, "Portrait of the Materialist Philosopher," 291.
101 Ibid., 290.
102 Ibid., 291.

Reading from the end of this deeply personal and cryptic text, would it not be accurate to say that Althusser's interest in Epicurus, his return to this ancient philosopher, is not merely to advance the cause of a true materialism? Is it not possible to detect in Althusser's interest in the founder of the "Garden," the advocate of the pursuit of *ataraxia*, a deeper, more personal quest, a last attempt to make meaning of his life and perhaps to reach the tranquility of his troubled soul, an effort to gain wisdom before death as the ancients endeavored to do? Is this precisely not the final turning around of the individual who turns around, as Althusser once said, in a "simple 180-degree physical conversion,"[103] in the gesture to become a subject?

Turning around from the end to the beginning is, as Althusser put it, "not a *going-back-towards*, but as a horizon receding endlessly ahead of the walker who, seeking his path on the plain, never finds anything but another plain stretching out before him (very different from the Cartesian walker who has only to walk straight ahead in a forest in order to get out of it, because the world is made up, alternatively, of virgin forests and forests that have been cleared to create open fields: without *Holzwege*)."[104] Althusser knows that it is impossible to return to the beginning, as the origin is always beyond reach, and must be rejected for the end it predetermines, but neither should one take a straight path to the end, across the forest. I think it will readily be conceded that Althusser's path was far from a straight line. Not unlike Harlequin's Cloak, the horizon ahead is a patchwork of "virgin forests and forests that have been cleared to create open fields." If the path backward is elusive, the path straight ahead is illusory -- its lack of *Holzwege* suggests a false clearing, a clearing already carried out by others. So what should a materialist philosopher do? How to think for oneself and to forge a theoretical practice that is at once one's own and yet belongs to something bigger, more permanent and great, not to those in power but to those "who continue to toil and to dwell in darkness," to the working classes, to the oppressed who find themselves in struggle; in short, not to the "Friends of the Forms," according to Plato, but to the "Friends of the Earth"?[105] Althusser refuses to go back or to go forward; after all, materialism, too, is anything but a straight path. Instead, he chooses to wander, "to think the openness of the world towards the event, the as-yet-unimaginable, and also all living practice, politics included."[106] To think the plenitude of life in the face of death, to offer a glimpse of *amor fati*, the wisdom of embracing one's life – not in the rendition of Wittgenstein as in the world as "everything that is the case," but, rather, in a different form, as "the world is everything that befalls us."[107]

Althusser's last words, the "Althusser after Althusser," as Montag puts it, leaves us with a final void, as the anguish of a void inhabited and the passion of a void still to be

[103] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, 191.
[104] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 190-191.
[105] Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism," 264.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Althusser, "The Underground Current," 190.

made, in the "emptiness of a distance taken,"[108] a distance that keeps reminding of itself not through a promised arrival at a final destination but by its silent, protracted, invisible work on Althusser's readers whom his writings continue to grip and transform. As Althusser fades away in the forest of philosophy, he leaves us with the task of picking up the battle, where true materialism is both a road not taken and yet a path well-trodden by the best of the best, where nothing new ever happens and where eternity is always the receding horizon of the truth of the old to come in ever changing guises.

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Althusser's Self-Criticism About Structuralism Revisited. The Importance of Warren Montag's Reading

Panagiotis Sotiris

One of the most widespread criticisms of Althusser concerns his relation to structuralism. The leitmotiv of this critique is well known: Althusser basically imported into Marxism a conception of an idealism of social structures according to which abstract structures are dominant, creating an inescapable social grammar that eliminates the space of human agency and praxis. In the words of E.P. Thompson:

> If there is a 'Marxism' of the contemporary world which Marx or Engels would have recognised instantly as an idealism, Althusserian structuralism is this. The category has attained to a primacy over its material referent; the conceptual structure hangs above and dominates social being.[1]

For Thompson, Althusser offers a version of structuralism, despite his subsequent clarifications, and consequently a philosophy of *stasis,* a system that leaves no space for actual social and historical movement:

> Very clearly, Althusser's system is more than a "flirtation" with structuralist terms. It does not matter at all whether or not this system qualifies as a structuralism according to certain recent Parisian notations

[1] Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory,* 13.

> in linguistics, anthropology or psycho-analysis. What constitutes a structuralism, in a more general sense, is, (i) that however many variables are introduced, and however complex their permutations, these variables maintain their original fixity as categories: with Smelser, the "value-system", the factors of production, "political arrangements", and (the motor) "structural differentiation"; with Althusser, "the economy", "politics", "ideology", and (the motor) "class struggle." Thus the categories are *categories of stasis,* even if they are then set in motion as moving-parts. (ii) Movement can only take place *within the closed field* of the system or structure; that is, however complex and mutually-reciprocating the motions of the parts, this movement is enclosed within the overall limits and determinations of the pre-given structure.[2]

For his part, Ted Benton offers the canonical version of treating Althusser as structuralist thinker:

> How can Althusser, a self-professed Marxist philosopher, ally with structuralism to the extent of complementing its already effective assault on Marxist positions? By the single tactic of denying that those positions were, all along, Marxist positions. Marxism had been conquered from within by alien ideologies, and so, by implication, the weaponry now on offer from the structuralists justifies a tactical alliance with them to enable a recapture of Marxism for itself.[3]

In a certain way, Althusser's own self-criticism seemed to partly substantiate this critique about the structuralist leanings of his earlier texts. Even though not fully admitting to being a structuralist of course, he stated that he only flirted with a certain structuralist terminology and vocabulary:

> It must be admitted that it thus became tempting to flirt (*kokettieren*), not with the structure and its elements, etc. (because all these concepts are in Marx), but for example with the notion of the "effectivity of an absent cause" -- which is, it must be said, much more Spinozist than structuralist! -- in order to account at one and the same time for Classical Political Economy's "mistakes", for the Relations of Production, and even for fetishism (but I did not do so: the theory of fetishism always seemed to me ideological) -- and to herald, by the term *structural causality* (*cf.* Spinoza), something which is in fact an "immense theoretical discovery" of Marx but which can also, in the Marxist tradition, be termed dialectical *materialist* causality. Provided that their critical effects are kept under control, these notions are not entirely useless -- an example is the notion of the "absent cause". But we were not always able to restrain

[2] Ibid, 83.
[3] Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structuralist Marxism,* 15.

> ourselves, in certain pages of *Reading Capital*, in that Spring of 1965, and our "flirt" with structuralist terminology obviously went beyond acceptable limits, because our critics, with a few exceptions, did not see the irony or parody intended. For we had in mind quite another Personage than the anonymous author of structuralist themes and their vogue![4]

The use of the phrase 'flirt (*kokketiren*)', is an obvious nod to Marx and his description of some of the Hegelian overtones in *Capital*. In a certain manner, Althusser wants to suggest that he used structuralist terminology to some extent, but he avoided the essential aspects of structuralism. This enables him to offer his own definition of structuralism:

> Structuralism is not a completely worked-out philosophy, but a jumble of vague themes which only *realizes* its ultimate tendency under certain definite conditions. According to what you "understand" by structuralism (*e.g.*, anti-psychologism), according to what you see in it when you come up against concepts which it has in fact borrowed, and according to whether you follow the extreme logic which inspires it, either you are not a structuralist or you are one more or less, or you really are one. Now no-one can claim that we ever gave way to the crazy formalist idealism of the idea of producing the real by a combinatory of elements. Marx does speak of the "combination" of elements in the structure of a mode of production. But this combination (*Verbindung*) is not a formal "combinatory": we expressly pointed that out. Purposely. In fact this is where the most important demarcation line is drawn.[5]

This is a criticism of structuralism as formalism that is already present in his 1966 text on Lévi-Strauss. There the anthropologist is accused not of dealing with forms – since Althusser insists that every proper social science deals with forms – but for the absence a theory of the mode of production that makes it impossible for Lévi-Strauss to actually explain kinship structures. Althusser writes:

> One of the most spectacular results of his theory is that it is *totally incapable* of accounting for the fact that kinship structures in primitive societies are neither everywhere nor always the same, but manifest important variations. These variations are for him no more than *variations* of a purely formal, tautological *mode of combination* which explains nothing. When you postulate a mode of combination that permits an infinity of *possible* forms in its combinatory matrix, the pertinent question is not that a given reality (a given observable structure of kinship) is truly included as possible among the variations of the combinatory (for it is tautological to argue

[4] Althusser, *Essays in Self Criticism,* 126-127.
[5] Ibid, 129.

> that the real is *possible*), the pertinent question on the contrary is this: Why is it that this reality and no other that has become and therefore is real?[6]

Althusser insists that when dealing with structuralism and its crucial opposition between form and process, a certain 'Hegelian' structuralism, a formalism of the process was conceivable. But this raises the question of the efficacy of class struggle at the heart of theoretical production. Hence Althusser shifts to the self-criticism of his early theoreticism. And from this comes the crucial reference to Spinozism:

> If we never were structuralists, we can now explain why: why we seemed to be, even though we were not, why there came about this strange misunderstanding on the basis of which books were written. We were guilty of an equally powerful and compromising passion: *we were Spinozists.*'[7]

Moreover, Althusser argues that instead of an idealist structuralist approach it was possible to envisage both a different Marxist topography and a non-idealist conception of the Whole:

> The conclusion is obvious: *the position of the Marxist Topography protects the dialectic against the delirious idealist notion of producing its own material substance* : it imposes on it, on the contrary, a forced recognition of the material conditions of its own efficacy. These conditions are related to the definition of the sites (the "spheres"), to their limits, to their mode of determination in the "totality" of a social formation. If it wants to grasp these realities, the materialist dialectic cannot rest satisfied with the residual forms of the Hegelian dialectic. It needs other forms, which cannot be found in the Hegelian dialectic. It is here that Spinoza served us as a (sometimes direct, sometimes very indirect) reference: in his effort to grasp a "non-eminent" (that is, non-transcendent) not simply transitive (á la Descartes) nor expressive (á la Leibniz) causality, which would account for the action of the Whole on its parts, and of the parts on the Whole -- an unbounded Whole, which is only the active relation between its parts: in this effort Spinoza served us, though indirectly, as a first and almost unique guide.[8]

Interestingly enough, the notion of the *topique*, which plays a role in Althusser's manuscript on *Reproduction*[9] seems like a partial answer to the question of how to conceive of a non-structuralist conception of the social whole, and moreover it seems to be tainted with a certain functionalism, at least in terms of vocabulary.

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[6] Althusser, "On Lévi-Strauss," in *The Humanist Controversy,* 26.
[7] Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism,* 132.
[8] Ibid, 140-141.
[9] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.*

However, one might say that Althusser's real self-criticism is the way the whole conceptual framework of the encounter starts to emerge after 1966-1967 and then in the early 1970s. It seems that Althusser attempts to think of social forms as encounters. This adds a strong sense of anti-teleology and singularity to the very relationality to which the notion of structure pointed, with material rituals and apparatuses adding the element of reproduction and durability of such encounters. We know that the notion of the encounter emerges partly as a way of rethinking questions of historical materialism and that it is already present in the second half of the 1960s for Althusser. In 1967, he would insist that:

> I think Marx's text indicates that capitalism is a result, and that, like any result, it is the result of a *historical process*. In everything that we have written, it has never been a question of anything other than History, which 'They' call, in their language, *genesis*. But capitalism is the result *of a process that does not take the form of a genesis*. The result of what? Marx tells us several times: of the process of an *encounter* of several distinct, definite, indispensable elements, engendered in the previous historical process by different *genealogies* that are independent of each other and can, moreover, be traced back to several possible 'origins': accumulation of money capital, 'free' labour-power, technical inventions, and so forth.[10]

This idea of social relations (and structures) as encounters, and in particular encounters that last, is more evident in the 1969 manuscript *On Reproduction*:

> It is easy to see that, if a mode of production lasts only as long as the system of state apparatuses that guarantees the conditions of reproduction (reproduction = duration) of its base, that is, its relations of production, one has to attack the system of the state apparatuses and seize state power to disrupt the conditions of the reproduction (= duration = existence) of a mode of production and establish new relations of production. They are established under the protection of a new state and new state apparatuses which ensure the reproduction (= duration = existence) of the new relations of production, in other words, the new mode of production.[11]

In a sense, what Althusser suggests is that what we tend to treat as structures are in fact encounters that last by means of the existence of material apparatuses (and the practices and rituals they entail, the forms of misrecognition they induce, and the forms of power they help articulate). This new emphasis on practices, rituals, the material and practical character of ideology, and its effectivity on material apparatuses is necessary to this crucial theoretical shift from structures to encounters. This particularly addresses the question of

[10] Althusser, "The Humanist Controversy," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Essays,* 296.
[11] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* 151.

how the inherently contingent character of the encounter can be combined with the reproduction of relations of productions and social forms.

In this sense, the completion of Althusser's self-criticism lies inthe notion of the 'structure of the encounter,' a syntagm that by itself seems to point to a different and antagonistic problematic:

> Whence the form if order and the form if beings whose birth is induced by this pile-up, determined as they are by the structure of the encounter; whence, once the encounter has been effected (but not before), the primacy of the structure over its elements; whence, finally, what one must call an affinity and a complementarity [*complétude*] of the elements that come into play in the encounter, their 'readiness to collide-interlock' [*accrochabilité*], in order that this encounter 'take hold', that is to say, 'take *form*', *at last give birth to Forms*, *and new Forms* -just as water 'takes hold' when ice is there waiting for it, or milk does when it curdles, or mayonnaise when it emulsifies. Hence the primacy of 'nothing' over all 'form', and *of aleatory materialism over all formalism*. In other words, not just anything can produce just anything, but only elements destined [*voués*] to encounter each other and, by virtue of their affinity, to 'take hold' one upon the other - which is why, in Democritus, and perhaps even in Epicurus, the atoms are, or are described as, 'hooked', that is, susceptible of interlocking one after the other, from all eternity, irrevocably, forever.[12]

This is one way to read Althusser's self-criticism about structuralism, a reading that more or less accepts the idea that Althusser indeed was a structuralist in the 1960s and not simply a Spinozist. We might, however, revisit the Althusser of 'High Althusserianism, considering it a way of thinking that was already beyond structuralism, which was itself more complex than is currently assumed..

And I think that the way in which he offers a much more complex description of both 'structuralism' and Althusser's relation to it is one of the great and important contributions of Warren Montag's book.

Firstly, Montag stresses the complexity of the history of what we now call structuralism, including its dialogue with phenomenology, something often underestimated in the relevant debates.

Secondly, he stresses the fact that the 'schematic' opposition between structure and genesis in fact pointed to a much more complex articulation of theoretical positions.

Thirdly, certain aspects of 'structuralism' tended to incorporate a conception of continuous historical time that had more affinity with a Hegelian conception of time than was generally acknowledged and this was something that Althusser indeed stressed:

[12] Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings 1978-1987*, 191-192.

> The synchronic is contemporaneity itself, the co-presence of the essence with its determinations, the present being readable as a structure in an 'essential section' because the present is the very existence of the essential structure. The synchronic therefore presupposes the ideological conception of a continuous-homogeneous time. It follows that the diachronic is merely the development of this present in the sequence of a temporal continuity in which the 'events' to which 'history' in the strict sense can be reduced (cf. Lévi-Strauss) are merely successive contingent presents in the time continuum. Like the synchronic, which is the primary concept, the diachronic therefore presupposes both of the very two characteristics I have isolated in the Hegelian conception of time: an ideological conception of historical time.[13]

Montag also stresses that Derrida already in 1959 attempted to problematize the opposition between Structure and Genesis:

> In a very important sense, Derrida's text is an intervention, an attempt from within the problematic of Husserl's phenomenology to call into question the two nominally opposing forms in which it was actualized in France: on the one hand, a philosophy of consciousness and, on the other, a formalism.[14]

And as Derrida stressed one could already find in Husserl a critique of a certain structuralism:

> In Husserl's eyes the structuralism of the *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* is a historicism. And despite Dilthey's vehement protests, Husserl will persist in thinking that, like all historicism, and despite its originality, the *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* avoids neither relativism nor skepticism.[15]

But Montag also shows how things were more complex than that. It is also interesting how for example he stresses Cavaillés's critique of the transcendentalism that survived in of phenomenology's emphasis on consciousness. In a sense, it is Cavaillès who offered, for the first time, this combined critique of both a philosophy of consciousness, in the then traditional sense, and the new emerging logical formalism:

> Progress is material or between singular essences, its motor the demand that each of them must be surpassed. It is not a philosophy of consciousness but a philosophy of the concept that can yield a doctrine

[13] Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital,* 96.
[14] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 33.
[15] Derrida, 200.

> of science. The generative necessity is not that of an activity, but of a dialectic.[16]

Montag also examines Althusser's critique of Lévi-Strauss. He indicates that although Althusser obviously distanced himself from that version of structuralism, while acknowledging its importance, he still avoided proceeding with the kind of symptomatic reading that Derrida actually performed on Lévi-Strauss.

However, there is also another important contribution by Warren Montag on what constitutes Althusser's actual "flirting" with structuralism or at least with some form of structuralist ideology. And it is also important that Montag stresses that it was Pierre Macherey who actually criticized Althusser for this "deviation." Montag shows how Macherey actually points to the main problem in Althusser's theorization of the social whole, the notion of the latent structure and the "theatrical metaphors." And indeed, Althusser decided to get rid of some of these phrases in the second edition of *Lire Le Capital*.

And Macherey indeed was a critic of structuralism already in his *Theory of Literary Production*:

> The idea of structure, which seems to come from linguistics, where it is justifiably applied to literary objects, is actually used in literary analysis in a sense remote from its original one. It goes back to the entirely unscientific hypothesis that the work has an intrinsic meaning (though this does not imply that this meaning is explicit); paradoxically, this enables it to be read before it has even been written.[17]

In contrast to structuralism, Macherey points to the possibility of a highly original materialist deconstructionist approach:

> A different hypothesis, more fruitful though hardly ever used, might be offered: the work exists above all by its determinate absences, by what it does not say, in its relation to what it is not. Not that it can conceal anything: this meaning is not buried in its depths, masked or disguised; it is not a question of hunting it down with interpretations. It is not in the work but by its side: on its margins, at that limit where it ceases to be what it claims to be because it has reached back to the very conditions of its possibility. It is then no longer constituted by a factitious necessity, the product of a conscious or unconscious intention.[18]

[16] Cavaillés, *On Logic and the Theory of Science,* 136.
[17] Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production,* 141.
[18] Ibid, 154.

Moreover, Macherey seems to suggest that in contrast to a certain structuralist ideology, we need to think of a different conflictual relationality:

> The disorder that permeates the work is related to the disorder of ideology (which cannot be organised as a system). The work derives its form from this incompleteness which enables us to identify the active presence of a conflict at its borders. In the defect of the work is articulated a new truth: for those who seek to know this truth it establishes an original relation to the real, it establishes the revealing form of a knowledge. [19]

Montag points out how the way that Macherey criticizes a certain version of a structural interiority in the literary text is very similar to the way that Althusser, under Macherey's critique and influence, decides to discard any notion of latent or deeper structures and thus of any conception of the structure as a 'social grammar' or essence or even worse "hidden truth."

Does this mean that we should fully treat early Althusser as 'structuralist'? I strongly disagree. One reason would be that in "Contradiction and Overdetermination" we do have the full development of the thesis that when talking about structure, we are always talking about the structure of a conjuncture in its singularity.

The other is the suggestion made recently by Giorgos Fourtounis[20] about the strong relation of Althusser's initial conceptualization of structures and a strongly Spinozist conception of immanence, with immanence being the limit of any conception of metaphysical dualism, including the one inscribed in the notion of latent structures. Moreover, in a highly original manner, Fourtounis revisits the overdetermination in the last instance question, rejecting the position that 'in the last instance' means a return of dualism and some form of economistic determinism. In contrast, Fourtounis insists that for Althusser over-determination is the last instance, and he suggests that this is exactly the point, i.e., it is this radical conception of immanence that makes Althusser's debt to Spinoza more evident.

In sum, I believe that Montag's work has helped us to understand that Althusser's self-criticism should not be treated as an actual intellectual trajectory but rather as a constant tension running through his work. In light of this, Althusser's earlier work appears less as a simple repetition of classical structuralism but rather as a very original attempt towards a thinking of social relationality in all its conflictuality, contingency, and openness, namely a philosophy that attempts to actually think how social transformation can emerge as a potentiality within a certain always uneven, always original, always overdetermined conjuncture.

This doesn't mean that all of Althusser's self-criticism should be discarded. For example, although the Theory of theoretical practice offers a highly original anti-

[19] Ibid, 155-6.
[20] Fourtounis, *Deconstruction 'in the last instance': Althusser's Spinozist Stucturalism (1960-1969) and early Derrida.*

empiricist and in a certain sense anti-rationalist conception of knowledge as a materialist process of production, Althusser was right to self-critically point to the way this was presented as a 'complete' theory in Marx almost ready made, just waiting to be 'extracted' by means of a symptomatic reading. On this point Althusser's subsequent emphasis that theoretical practice is a productive process traversed by class struggle and a never-ending and never complete break with ideology, in indeed an important elaboration and a necessary correction of his initial position. The same goes for Althusser's highly original rethinking of the very notion of philosophy as not a guarantor of truth but as a very specific, political in the last instance, constant intervention. Here again the self-criticism brings forward important insights.

It is in this sense that we can say that Montag's work helps stress the importance of Althusser especially in the contemporary conjuncture. The contemporary return to pages in the history of Marxism, and the constant re-reading of authors in the Marxist tradition by a younger generation has surely enriched our knowledge. At the same time, it is interesting to see how in certain aspects this also tends towards a defense of 'classical' and supposedly 'dialectical' Marxism against 'post-Marxism,' in a genealogy of which Althusser is also mentioned as a precursor. In this sense, bringing forward the originality of Althusser's materialist practice of philosophy can be considered an urgent task.

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The Adventures of Interpellation: On Montag's Materialist Reading of Althusser's Theory of Ideology

Stefano Pippa

Contrary, at least in part, to a certain practice in academic discourse, and undoubtedly to the rules of "scientific discourse" according to Althusser (for whom, needless to say, it "has no subject"), I would like to begin with a personal and therefore subjective memory of the time when I first encountered the book *Althusser and His Contemporaries.*[1] For in fact this is not, in my own intellectual trajectory, just any book; it is a book on which – I realize this now, several years later – many of my interpretative positions on Althusser were formed, through both affinities and differences (perhaps not always fully acknowledged). This symposium, organized on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its publication, is therefore also an opportunity to retrace the trajectory of my relationship with Althusser – a trajectory of which the book is undoubtedly an integral part.

At the time it appeared, I had only just begun working on a doctoral thesis on Althusser, attempting to orient myself between the "old" interpretations – let's say, those produced in real time, "in the heat of the moment," on the basis of the twin 1965 books (in fact profoundly different from each other, and internally quite uneven) – and the mass of the newly published posthumous materials. I still remember very clearly the sense of excitement I felt when I encountered a new book devoted to the same subject as my dissertation and which – already from the first pages – promised to become a genuine

[1] Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War* (Duke University Press, 2013).

point of reference for the new phase of Althusser studies. This was because, breaking with the interpretative models that had dominated the now outdated yet remarkably persistent debates around the first reception of Althusser's work, it gave decisive impetus to what we might call its "second reception:" on the one hand, it reopened old questions in an entirely new way; on the other, it cleared space for new ones, showing how Althusser – far from being a "dead dog" (as Elliott already lamented in the late 1980s[2]) – still had much to say in our present conjuncture. What struck me immediately was precisely Montag's ability to show how the newly available materials (including many archival documents) could yield a new reading of Althusser; not simply because unexpected texts had come to light (I am thinking, for instance, of the book on Machiavelli, or *The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter*[3]), but because many of these texts – as Montag himself suggested in a 1998 article[4] – could have the effect of changing what is visible also in Althusser's previous production, allowing for a new reading more attentive to the nuances present in his work (and this was always very important to me from a methodological point of view). In short, it became clear that one could not merely add certain parts, elements, or a "phase" to the Althusser we thought we already knew; that would not suffice. It was a question of rethinking Althusser from top to bottom, thereby undoubtedly rethinking our relationship with Marxism, materialism, and critique within a conjuncture that had changed profoundly and that demanded (and still demands) new theoretical weapons.

In my view – which, undoubtedly, is very partial (but do we not agree that there are no innocent readings?) – there are two areas where Montag's reading has contributed to changing what was visible in Althusser's more familiar texts: firstly, Althusser's engagement with and relation to structuralism; secondly, his theory of ideology. These are, of course, true pillars of Althusserianism, on which *Althusser and His Contemporaries* casts a completely new light: a light that is powerful in its overall sweep and extremely meticulous in its attention to the materiality of the texts. Since I cannot examine both aspects in detail here, I have decided to focus on the second one – namely, Montag's rereading of Althusser's theory of ideology; undoubtedly because, for me, this has been the part of the book with which the dialogue has been most intense, and with which I continue to grapple today, in my engagement with Althusser's theory. I would therefore like to take the opportunity of this symposium to try and do, however briefly, two things: to reconstruct what seem to me the strong points of Montag's interpretation, and to raise some questions that this interpretation, developed in the central chapters of the book (6-

[2] Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Brill, 2006 [1987]), xiii.
[3] Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. Gregory Elliot (Verso, 1999); Louis Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter," in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, ed. F. Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2007).
[4] Warren Montag, "Althusser's Nominalism: Structure and Singularity (1962-1966)," *Rethinking Marxism* 10, no. 3 (1998): 64.

7-8), has posed and continues to pose, I believe, for anyone interested in furthering Althusser's theory of ideology.

At the most general level, the innovation introduced by Montag in relation to Althusser's theory of ideology consists above all, in my view, in challenging an interpretative *topos* to be found in much of the earlier literature and still present in many discussions and debates today. Namely, the idea that Althusser's theory of ideology –not its opposition to science, but its social role, that is, its function within the *topique*, and the modes of its efficacy – presents a continuity stretching from the 1964 essay "Marxism and Humanism," included in *For Marx*, all the way to the 1970 essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."

> Although "Marxism and Humanism" and "Ideology," separated by an interval of six years (and not just any years but 1964–70), are often cited together, as if they offer a single notion of ideology, they in fact differ from each other in fundamental ways. In fact, the 1970 text explicitly rejects certain of the key concepts and assumptions of the earlier piece, although without any admission on his part that in 1964 Althusser himself used some of the concepts he subjects to criticism in 1970.[5]

From a conceptual point of view, this asserted continuity implies that another continuity is unproblematically assumed: that between the thesis according to which ideology concerns the "imaginary relation" that men maintain with their conditions of existence, contained in the essay in *For Marx* and later taken up again in the 1970 essay (a question to which we shall return), and the thesis of the interpellation of the individual as subject within the apparatuses in 1970. In contrast to this idea, Montag insists on the internal transformations in Althusser's gradual elaboration, on the gaps and contradictions between as well as within texts—as in the case of his analysis of the ISA essay, which we will examine in detail below.

It seems to me that Montag constructs his interpretation in three major steps, which constitute as many stages in a progressive "extraction" from the Althusser's corpus of what is most original in it and irreducible to both the Marxist canon and philosophical tradition alike. This operation builds decisively on certain posthumous texts (the *Two Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, from 1963–64, and the "Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses," from 1966), which Montag reads together with the two "canonical" texts mentioned above; in this sense, it provides a sample of Montag's general method and his idea that the new materials change the distribution of the visible within the better-known Althusserian corpus.

[5] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 104.

An unstable, contradictory text: "Marxism and Humanism"

The first step consists in a "non-teleological" analysis of the formulation to which Althusser's theory of ideology is usually traced back. Here it is clear that Montag's method consists first of all in applying to the texts Althusser's own principle of "class struggle in theory," which, moreover, programmatically informs the entire book. It should not be forgotten, in fact, that *Althusser and His Contemporaries* is not a historicist analysis of the "context," but, above all, a materialist investigation of the struggles and confrontations with other philosophical tendencies in which Althusser engaged, struggles which sedimented in the very letter of his texts. Althusser's texts therefore are not acts of a consciousness transparent to itself, but unequal and provisional concretions in which one can (indeed must) always read the equally provisional outcome of these debates and struggles, which "overdetermine" them silently.[6]

Analyzing the 1964 essay, Montag shows how the famous thesis on the imaginary nature of ideology mixes contradictory references – from phenomenology to structuralism to Spinoza: here, Montag suggests, Althusser proposes a representational conception of ideology still caught within a problematic of consciousness. On the one hand, drawing on the structuralism then in vogue in linguistics and anthropology, Althusser insists that ideology is a system "with its own logic and its own rigor," thus something that – pace *The German Ideology* – possesses its own consistency; on the other hand, Montag argues that Althusser remains ambiguous in his very innovation with respect to the Marxist tradition. This is both because the "material" of ideology is identified as "images, myths, concepts," that is, as "representations," and ideology itself is said to "represent" something that will therefore necessarily be other than itself and "more real"; and because Althusser still preserves the very vocabulary of consciousness (as the other pole of representation), even while relocating the latter to a derivative and constituted position.

> Thus, consciousness is decentered, devalued, nothing more than an element made use of by a system whose existence remains unknown to it. At the same time, however, it remains, even in its subordinated status, a concept necessary to the theory of ideology insofar as it mediates between individuals in their physical or vital existence and the system of objects that governs them.[7]

[6] Montag clarifies this from the outset when he writes, in a passage that holds true, I think, not just for this one, but for all of his textual analyses: "By refraining from reading 'Marxism and Humanism' as an anticipation of the final theory of ideology, we are permitted to see not only its unresolved internal contradictions but its surprising filiations" (*Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 105).

[7] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 112.

It seems to me that Montag is entirely right to insist that, in these pages, Althusser produces a highly unstable, ambiguous, and certainly provisional definition. And this is undoubtedly not because he lacks the time or the space (as Althusser claims when he writes that "there is no question of undertaking here a comprehensive definition" – a rhetorical device that Montag exposes immediately as a "gesture of deferral"[8]), but simply because this is the beginning of a theoretical trajectory still in the making, still contradictory, and in the midst of a struggle that Althusser is waging on several fronts among his contemporaries.

This is shown perfectly in what I would call the "overdetermination" of the word "imaginary," in which everyone – Montag laments – hastily read a straightforward borrowing from Lacan, whereas what actually converges there is rather a complex confrontation with phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty and Sartre as readers of Husserl, but also Tran-Duc Thao), with Bachelard, and finally, even more tacit and unreadable for contemporary readers, with Spinoza, to whom, argues Montag, the tendency "to conceptualize ideology in material terms", which here already begins to take shape, can be ultimately traced back.[9] It is to the confrontation with phenomenology, very much alive in those years, that one therefore must refer Althusser's insistence on the "lived," on the fact that ideology is an immediately lived imaginary relation, an immediate world on a par with Husserl's notion of *Lebenswelt*.[10]

But the materialist tendency, which, if taken in all its radicality, bars the way to any recuperation of the notion of consciousness, still always inherent in every phenomenology, is revealed for Montag in a small sentence at the end of the essay, to which he draws our attention. Arguing that "it is in ideology that classless society lives the inadequacy/adequacy of the relation between it and the world," Althusser adds: "it is in it and by it that it transforms *men's 'consciousness,' that is, their attitudes and behaviours.*"[11] How can one fail to see, suggests Montag (and yet, so many did!), in that "that is," the mark of a tacit but unmistakable Spinozism, the *sive* which, even as it asserts it, abolishes all dualism, and with which Althusser is already paving his own way toward a materialist, non consciousness-centred, theory of ideology?[12] But the materialist tendency peeks out

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[8] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 106-7.

[9] In the wake of Montag's remarks, I focused on the different meanings in which Althusser uses the term "imaginary" in Stefano Pippa, *Il soggetto surinterpellato* (Mimesis 2022), 30-39.

[10] It should be recalled that in the 1980s, in the writings on the materialism of the encounter, Althusser still refers to *Lebenswelt* as the world of ideology, always linking it to Spinoza's imagination, through which it is completely reinterpreted. It is to Montag's credit to have clarified the sense of Althusser's move by relating it to the context of French phenomenology. See Louis Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza," in *The New Spinoza*, ed. W. Montag and Ted Stolze (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 6-9.

[11] Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism", in *For Marx*, trans. B. Brewster (Verso, 2006), 235.

[12] "[T]he reference to Spinoza is not merely to be found in the form of the statement but also its content. It replaces the stubborn dualism of even those theories most concerned to demonstrate the embodiedness of consciousness with Spinoza's refusal not only to separate mind and body (because even the partisans of embodiment do that) but to declare them distinct and different. Mind and body are not simply parallel, that is, reciprocal, but the same. It was precisely this idea that made Spinoza anathema to existentialists and

within the framework of a still representational and, ultimately, consciousness-based conception of ideology, in which Althusser is still caught at this point. No doubt, Montag was the first to show all the gaps of this essay and to highlight the *intrinsic instability* of the definition of ideology proposed here, *de facto* making it impossible to continue referring to it as if it possessed a "transparent" and univocal meaning.

In the Name of Spinoza

The second step in Montag's interpretation delves deeper into Spinoza's background presence in Althusser's theorization of ideology, starting with an analysis of the *Two Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, given by Althusser in 1963–64 (and therefore contemporary with the writing of "Marxism and Humanism") at the École Normale Supérieure, but published posthumously. As Montag first demonstrated, these two lectures, which focus respectively on the place of psychoanalysis in the human sciences and on the relationship between psychoanalysis and psychology, are a very important document for reconstructing Althusser's relationship with psychoanalysis and his engagement with Lacan. They preceded the publication of the famous *Freud and Lacan*, and are, in fact, quite different in tone, being addressed to his circle of students.

Looking at these lectures and the essay that was later published, Montag insists that Althusser's engagement with psychoanalysis was primarily "negative" in nature, in the sense that what was important for him was above all their alliance in the common opposition to a humanist concept of the subject, whose "myth" both Marxism and psychoanalysis reject. But what makes the *Two Lectures* so important a document is that in these lectures Spinoza's influence is no longer "concealed;" in fact, it comes to full light in the final part of the second lecture, where Althusser's discussion of the relationship between psychoanalysis and psychology gives way to a precise, and in many ways surprising, reconstruction of the material and discursive conditions that made possible the foundation of psychology as a human science within the ensemble of practices and dispositives of early capitalist accumulation.

For Montag, these pages show that the problematic of the "constitution of subjectivity" – that is, the core of Althusser's theory of ideology – is formed not through an engagement with Lacan's notion of the imaginary, but rather on the basis of the Spinozian concept of the "imaginary as world," derived from an interpretation of Spinoza that opposes him to the Cartesian foundation of psychology in *The Passions of the Soul*.[13] With the idea, put forward here for the first time through Spinoza, that the imaginary is neither an illusion, an error, nor something that pertains or belongs to the subject, as in Descartes, but a "world," Althusser proceeds to de-subjectify the imagination. The first

phenomenologists alike: he denied the existence of subjectivity, its grandeur and its freedom." Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 116-7.

[13] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 126.

kind of knowledge is a structure that we may well define as a "material transindividual:" "a nonmental, nonspiritual transindividual element in which images circulate by means of bodies encountering other bodies, immanent in those encounters."[14] It is in these terms that the problem of the constitution of the subject is posed as such; in terms therefore very close, if not identical, to those of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, for which prophets are not the origin of the imaginary, but rather a function of it. At this point, for Montag, the terms of the problem are clear:

> Althusser has not only desubjectified the imaginary […], he has excluded any notion of the ideality of the imaginary, its externality to a material world defined as real. […]. At the same time, the subject is no longer understood as an illusion or fantasy, but now as a form necessarily imposed upon the individual by a social structure that needs to impute free will, responsibility, and guilt upon the individuals that compose it. Althusser has thus posed the problem of the constitution of the subject, that is, of explaining the particular necessity that produces it.[15]

Montag is undoubtedly right to point out that Althusser's theorization remains insufficient here, as shown, for example, by the use of quasi-Hegelian terms such as "world" or "element," sometimes accompanied by "social structure"; clearly, here Althusser did pose the problem with and through Spinoza, but the relationship between ideology–subject on the one hand, and the materiality of ideology on the other is far from fully elaborated.

That this is not a simple or straightforward process is shown by Montag's critique of Althusser's first attempt to address this problem thoroughly in the "Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses," another extraordinary unpublished text, as fascinating as it is complex. It is, as we now know, the birthplace of the concept of "interpellation;" it is here, in the context of a differential theory of discourses and their efficacy, that Althusser for the first time specifies the structure of speculary centering proper to ideological discourse, in which the mechanism of subject production consists.

In terms of Montag's overall argument and his Spinozist direction, one might perhaps say that this text represents a kind of anomaly: here the engagement with psychoanalysis is truly central and substantial, anything but merely negative; the confrontation with Lacan is sustained and, on several levels, both critical and productive; at the same time, Spinoza is not mentioned in relation to the imaginary, nor can one find any reference to the materiality of the imaginary in explicitly Spinozist terms. Here, ideology is a matter of discourses, even if "discourse" absolutely does not mean that we are dealing with purely linguistic signifiers, quite the contrary. I would be inclined to say (as I have suggested elsewhere) that in this text the entire Spinozist problematic "passes

[14] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 129.
[15] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* 131.

through" the psychoanalytic and structuralist prism, in the sense that Lacan's structuralist psychoanalysis offers Althusser the possibility, and in a certain sense compels him, to formalize the structure of ideology and the effect of such structure (namely, the subject).

Indeed, the ideological discourse that Althusser focuses on here possesses a structure of speculary centering of the kind formalized by Lacan in the mirror stage. Certainly, this structure also intrinsically pertains to the first kind of knowledge as is described in that fundamental text for Althusser that is the *Appendix* to *Ethics* I; yet, it seems to me noteworthy that the operation of speculary centering is formalized precisely at the moment when Althusser is engaged in discussion with Lacan, and not in the two lectures on psychoanalysis, where the discourse is truly entirely oriented towards unearthing the Spinozist alternative to Descartes, that is, where the "subject" is assigned to the historico-political sequence of early modernity and the Cartesian *cogito* is read as a philosophical category synthesizing a whole series of historical conditions that had meanwhile established. Likewise, it is true that the category of "speculary centering" is also pivotal in the 1967 study on Feuerbach, as Montag recalls; but this does not seem to me sufficient to suggest that it is to Feuerbach that Althusser owes the elaboration of this concept, later central to interpellation. Feuerbach had always been regarded by Althusser as an "unwitting" theorist of ideology, insofar as his materialism is pre-Marxian and thus non-Marxist; it is therefore not unwarranted to surmise that the 1967 study is an effect, and not the cause, of the formalization (if not of the actual "discovery") of the structure of speculary centering and guarantee s–S (that is: the subject s is produced in its "free" submission to a big S, the center of ideological discourse and its ultimate guarantee), which in the meantime Althusser had worked out in the "Three Notes" as the structure of interpellation, that is, of the production of the subject as such.

Nevertheless, it is true that the concept of subject proposed in the "Three Notes" by Althusser still retains a trace of ambiguity, which Montag imputes to quasi-Cartesian residues constituting a legacy of the "representational" line of "Marxism and Humanism." This ambiguity emerges in particular when Althusser maintains that interpellation is not a "pure and simple injunction," but an act of "conviction–persuasion;" the pertinent question that Montag raises is: who, exactly, must be persuaded? Undoubtedly, the way in which the problem is framed in these pages renders the question entirely legitimate, for it would not be possible to invoke the fact that the subject is always already interpellated and therefore every interpellation is grafted onto a series of other, already present, interpellations; at this point in the development of Althusser's thought, as Montag notes, Althusser speaks of conviction–persuasion as if it referred to a center, to a non-constituted and self-reflexive subject. Thus, Montag is totally justified in his criticism when he notes that

> [t]he subject, according to this strain in Althusser's thought, is no longer "imputed" except in the sense that it imputes to itself in an originary act

> the status of subject which, if successfully "persuaded," will subject itself.[16]

This is why Montag concludes that, at this stage, Althusser remains caught in the "contradiction between a notion of interiority as constituted from the outside and a notion of interiority that precedes and founds the outside."[17] As if, in short, the "transition" from Descartes to Spinoza, the abolition of the Cartesian "space of interiority" understood as that which, insofar as it is totally different – another substance, that is, a substance thinking – is essentially separated from the materiality of the outside, were not yet fully accomplished[18].

Interpellation divided. A materialist reading

The third step in Montag's interpretation is the one that directly confronts the ISA essay, in which Althusser carries through to the end his break with any residue of a theorization of ideology based on interiority and proposes a theorization of ideology radically irreducible to any previous theorization, including his own. Here, Montag's interpretive move could, I think, be summarized as follows: with the thesis of the materiality of ideology, introduced by Althusser in the final part of the essay, Althusser definitively rules out, under the aegis of Spinoza, any interiority; but then the very notion of interpellation, "inherited" from the "Three Notes," splits in two and must therefore be reinterpreted, beyond the letter of Althusser's text.

In fact, Montag once again analyses the essay as an "unstable compound," the result of tendencies that Althusser himself seems unable to harmonize. Crucially, however, the composite, or double, nature of the essay does not concern so much the often noted, almost extrinsic juxtaposition between its two parts, one devoted to reproduction, the other to interpellation; rather, it concerns precisely the very concept of interpellation and the way in which Althusser presents and constructs it in the second part.

On the one hand, in continuity with the "Three Notes" (and, before that, with "Marxism and Humanism," as we saw above), interpellation can be read (as it has been read) as a "drama of recognition," which presupposes an interiority and is compatible

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[16] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 138.

[17] *Ibidem*.

[18] Here Montag seems to be following the same line of thought as V. Morfino, who identified the transition from Descartes to Spinoza as a critical threshold of modern philosophy, insofar as it represents the transition between "invention" and "infringement" of the "space of interiority" of the modern subject. Spinoza's infringement of the Cartesian inner space naturally utterly changes the terms in which the subject can be conceived, inasmuch as it becomes an effect, a backlash. The convergence is not surprising, given that Morfino too considers the pages on Descartes and Spinoza in the *Two Lectures on Psychoanalysis* to be crucial for his perspective. See Vittorio Morfino, "Invenzione e infrazione dello spazio di interiorità", in *Intersoggettività o transindividualità. Materiali per un'alternativa* (Manifestolibri, 2022), 81-110.

with the reduction of ideology to ideality;[19] this is the version that ties in with the thesis that Althusser declares to "take up" from "Marxism and Humanism," whereby ideology represents an "imaginary relationship." On the other hand, Montag argues that it is possible to extract a thoroughly materialist version from Althusser's pages, the foundation of which lies in the Spinozist thesis of the materiality of ideology ("constructed according to the premises of 'ideology has a material existence,'" writes Montag[20]) and presented in the very last part of the essay, for which interiority is the backlash of exteriority, of the functioning of the apparatuses to which ideology is fully immanent, without possessing any existence separate from them.[21] According to this argumentative line in Althusser's text, the subject is an "exterior interiority:"

> The individual is endowed with factitious if not fictitious or imaginary interiority, after the fact of bodily action, a paradoxical interior that, having no place in us, is constructed around us, outside of us. We are so endowed with subjectivity, declared free subjects, originators of our acts, especially the acts of submission and consent, retroactively to demonstrate to us that we have always already consented to authority, which having received our consent enjoys the right legitimately to dominate us. Interiority and consciousness (and the internal acts that supposedly occur within these unconditioned spaces) function as the supplement of servitude, its supplemental origin, the origin of the origin, the mark of a domination that folds back upon itself to add to its superior force the guarantee of its own legitimacy[22].

At this point in Montag's argument, interpellation is divided in two, into its idealist and materialist tendencies, which coexist in the ISA essay without reaching a definitive point of stabilization. But it is clearly only the "materialist" version, conceptually extrapolated through the analysis, that does justice to the innovation of the essay, to what in it is "genuinely new."

Without a doubt, Montag's reading once again has the merit of delving into the details of the text and into its materiality, not retreating in the face of apparent incongruities and contradictions, and of reading in the juxtaposition between the two theses of the second part of the essay (the representational one and that of the materiality of the apparatuses) an unresolved tension in Althusser's theorization. And certainly, his Spinozist interpretation has the merit of "correcting" the dominant tendency within the English-language reception, while also providing an answer to certain supposed difficulties such as those highlighted by the Ljubljana School, for which Althusser would fail to explain the "passage" between the outside and the inside, between the apparatuses

[19] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 145.
[20] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 156.
[21] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 151.
[22] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 157.

and interpellation[23]; a problem that is not, properly speaking, resolved so much as dissolved by the Spinozist framework, in which interiority is not, in any sense, a *primum*.

But the perspective adopted also allows Montag to take a further interpretive step, which takes the form of a reconstruction of a "dialogue" with the only interlocutor who was able, according to Montag, to grasp the radical nature of Althusser's thesis on the materiality of ideology: namely, the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*. Indeed, not only is Foucault's theorization read, against the typical inclination within contemporary scholarship to consider the two perspectives as irreconcilable, in continuity with the materialist side of interpellation; but it also appears to function as a prism (or a magnifying lens) that has made it possible to illuminate the Althusser's text retroactively, bringing to light "its contradictions and unevennesses" precisely insofar as it developed "certain of its theses (notably those concerned with the materiality of ideology) in order to show their stark incompatibility with other elements of Althusser's discussion of ideology"[24].

By staging the Althusser-Foucault dialogue, Montag effectively demonstrates how Foucault was able to develop – more freely, because not bound to a Marxist lexicon – Althusser's Spinozist insights to their fullest extent, maintaining, as he argues in what I consider to be a crucial passage, that "Althusser's central thesis (ideology interpellates individuals as subjects) only takes its full meaning in relation to what we might call Foucault's reading of the materiality of ideology, a notion rewritten as the 'physical order of disciplines.'"[25]

In my opinion, the reading proposed by Montag – which I sought to reconstruct in its essential steps, I hope not too unfaithfully – ultimately achieves an extremely important overall result, which consists in providing a rigorous answer to a thorny problem within Althusser's theory and its reception. A result, however, which in turn opens, as is always the case with powerful interpretations, new questions, among which I will select a couple that seem to me particularly crucial and that, I believe, are in a sense necessitated by Montag's argument.

In fact, it seems to me that his interpretation, circulating as it does between Spinoza and Foucault (whom he reads in continuity), has as its *global* outcome, as far as the problem of the constitution of subjectivity is concerned, what we might call its "historical anchoring," which functions in his reading as a strategy that provides Althusser's central thesis with a greater consistency than it actually possesses in its original formulation. If it is possible to speak of historical anchoring, it is because the thesis on

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[23] Cfr. Slavoj Žižek, *The Absolute Recoil* (Verso, 2014), 51 and ff.; Id., *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso, 2008), 42.

[24] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 162. Foucault's Spinozism, highlighted by Macherey, undoubtedly played a role in this (P. Macherey, "Towards a Natural History of Norms", in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, trans. T. Armstrong (Routledge, 1992), to which Montag refers to). One could perhaps interpret Foucault's constant criticism of Althusser's theory of ideology, which is always reductively assimilated to the "classical" Marxist theory of ideology, as a stance that betrays a perhaps unconscious need to safeguard his own originality.

[25] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 165.

the materiality of ideology (which leads to the "materialist" version of the notion of interpellation) is in fact linked by Montag, from very early on in his interpretation (already from chapter 6) to very precise *regimes of materiality that are historically specific*; and this in a twofold sense.

On the one hand, his interpretation points to the history of the body and to the regime of modern individualization investigated by Foucault, who, Montag writes, "opens up an entire dimension that Althusser's essay unwittingly presupposes," inasmuch as, in the analyses, carried out in *Discipline and Punish*, of disciplinary regimes, understood as strategies of segmentation and serialisation aimed at containing the effects of capitalist organization, he "described the material conditions of the possibility of interpellation."[26] Taking up, though in a different way, an attempt that Poulantzas had undertaken in *State, Power, Socialism*[27], the reading that Montag offers of Foucault's book allows us, if not to resolve, at least to confront in a coherent manner a real problem that every reader of Althusser's ISA essay must face, namely the thorny status of the concept of "individual" in the formula "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects;" a question, as is well known, never directly addressed by Althusser. By linking the notion of interpellation to the history of the techniques of production of individuality, this path produces, evidently, a very precise consequence: namely *the anchoring of Althusser's thesis on interpellation to a regime of production of individuality*, to "strategies and practices of individualization" (precisely the *disciplines*).[28]

It could be observed, at this point, that Montag's strategy carries some similarities with Poulantzas' theorization of the State and the nature of power at the end of the Seventies. Indeed, Poulantzas was the first to consider together Althusser's theses on ideology and Foucault research on disciplinarity, identifying in "individualization" one of the most basic techniques of the modern capitalist State. But Poulantzas saw in Foucault's perspective not so much a "debate" with (or even an extension of) Althusser's thesis on the materiality of ideology, as Montag does, but a way to "correct" Althusser's views. However, it would be easy (although too long here) to demonstrate that Poulantzas constantly misreads Althusser's thesis precisely at the point in which Montag is most interested: since *Political Power and Social Classes*, where he introduces the "isolation effect" as one of two standard ideological effects of the capitalist State, he understands the "imaginary" in a non Spinozist (i.e., non-material) way; this is why he can then oppose Foucault's investigation on the materiality of disciplines to Althusser's notion of ideology. No doubt, this is why Montag does not follow him here; yet, it must be stressed that Poulantzas, unlike Foucault, makes individualization a strategy *of the State*, rooted in the relations of production; that is, a strategy of what Althusser would have termed the Ideological State Apparatuses of the modern capitalist States. In this perspective, and with

[26] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 166.
[27] N. Poulantzas, *L'État, le pouvoir, le socialisme* (Les Prairies ordinaires, 2013 [1978]), 105.
[28] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 165.

all the caveats deriving from his misunderstanding of some basic features of Althusser's theses, Poulantzas could be fruitfully used to develop Althusser's (or, more precisely, Montag's) theory.

The second sense in which Montag's reading is anchored to a specific historical sequence is linked to the second part of Althusser's thesis, concerning this time not the individual, but the subject. Here, interpretations of Althusser's theory have often hesitated, oscillating between different readings, which can be distributed across two camps: on the one hand, we can understand the "subject" as a concept, or category, endowed with trans-historical validity (thus pertaining to the level of generality that Althusser attributes to its thesis on ideology "in general"); on the other hand (and this is the case with most readings, albeit sometimes they do this somewhat implicitly, in my opinion), we can understand the subject as referring to the central concept of bourgeois modernity and, thus, as an *ideological* notion produced by modern ideological formations (political economy, juridical discourses, human sciences, philosophy…).

As has been noted (for instance by Pascale Gillot[29]), these different interpretations are materially inscribed in Althusser's texts to such an extent that this could be considered an unresolvable issue. Certainly, making the category of subject the central category of the trans-historical functioning of ideology (and linking, in the ISA essay, this category to the notion of interpellation) has the effect (not made explicit by Althusser) of turning it into a concept independent of its appearance in the context of modern philosophy, into a *scientific* concept[30] endowed with, precisely, trans-historical validity and therefore valid for *all* ideologies, whatever their class or "regional" content; but this seems to stand in stark contrast, of course, to the way in which Althusser characterizes it in many other places, and most notably perhaps in the writing so central to Montag's interpretation, the *Two Conferences on Psychoanalysis* [*Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences*], where "subject" is considered an ideological notion internal to, and constitutive of, the dominant modern ideology.

What position does Montag take regarding this alternative? His answer is not explicit; the text does not address the question directly. At several points, both in his discussion of the conferences on psychoanalysis, and in the course of his analysis of the ISA essay, Montag refers to ideology *in the singular*: a circumstance that would appear to situate his discourse on a level of analysis that, strictly speaking, applies to the thesis of the omni-historicity of ideology; thus, to a concept of the subject that operates at this level of generality. However, the entire discourse on the production of interiority developed in the pages about the "materialist" version of interpellation unfolds in reference to modernity, highlighting the way in which, within modern philosophy and early capitalism, the production of the subject functions as a supplement of origin that is

[29] P. Gillot, *Althusser et la psychanalyse* (PUF, 2009), 121.
[30] See E. De Ipola, *Althusser: l'adieu infini* (PUF, 2012), 80 ; for more on this, see Pippa, *Il soggetto surinterpellato*, 52.

a supplement of servitude (for example, Montag writes: "we are so endowed with subjectivity, declared free subjects, originators of our acts, especially the acts of submission and consent.... The imposition of human servitude through force and fraud is not enough, it must retroactively produce its origins (in the modern epoch at least) in the will of each and every subject."[31]) Here, clearly, the very "essence" of interpellation is related to a *certain* ideology – again, it is linked to a specific historical phase – and in particular to the *dominant* modern ideology, in its various versions and components, and to its concept of the subject (for which, of course, contractarianism, with its juridical mechanism of "voluntary" submission considered as the only possible way to achieve true freedom, can serve, as Montag shows, as a privileged point of reference). This reading is clearly in line with the reading of Foucault proposed afterwards, where the soul is nothing but an exterior that imprisons the body and is produced materially by disciplinary practices. In this way, by progressively linking techniques of individualization and subjectivity, Montag rewrites the notion of interpellation in a way that resolves – albeit at the price of a series of decisions – many of the ambiguities surrounding these terms (individual and subject), thus providing a coherent version of interpellation.

At this point, however, one may wonder what the price (or, at least, consequence) of these decisions is; that is to say, one may wonder whether, in this way, by tying interpellation to the regimes of individualization and subject-imputation of capitalist modernity one is not only forced (as seems inevitable) to abandon the thesis of the eternity of ideology understood as the permanence throughout history of its *structure* (insofar as it involves *both* individuals *and* subjects); but also, whether one does not risk reproducing, in a different form, the tendency – surely present in Althusser – to *restrict* the theorization of ideology to a theorization of the *dominant ideology of* modernity, thus making it very difficult to use his theory of interpellation and ideology to think about the constitution of other, dominated or oppositional ideologies, i.e. what we might call *other regimes of interpellation,* as well as *the conflict and contradictions within ideology, or better, between different ideologies*, in the sense of ideological formations. But this is something we could only do if we do *not* anchor Althusser's thesis to the historical phase of capitalist modernity, which – as Montag's argument shows – is by no means easy, and would force us to go against Althusser's formulations in a different sense; ultimately, this is something that would require to change his formulation entirely, and perhaps the meaning of its central concepts.

Now, although the book does not confront this problem directly in these terms, it seems to me that the materialist and resolutely anti-humanist reading of interpellation that Montag proposes, whereby interpellation never depends on a pre-existing interiority, but is the *external production of this interiority*, can open up (and for me it certainly did so) an unprecedented perspective, which is condensed in two pages that, when I first read the book, I wished were many more. I refer to his observations on the *vexata quaestio* of

[31] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 157.

functionalism, and his indication that in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* Althusser "furnished the means to theorize revolt and resistance without recourse to a philosophy of consciousness."[32] The question that Montag raises here is that of revolt and resistance not to ideology "in general" – this would clearly be meaningless, since ideology has no exterior, if we follow Althusser – but that of resistance and revolt *within* ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses *without resorting to a point external to them (that is, to the transcendence of a consciousness*), thinking of its possibility from within the materiality of practices and rituals in a rigorously anti-humanist manner. One can think here especially of the passages in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* in which Althusser speaks of "primary" and "secondary" ideologies, or of the multiple interpellations that constitute the subject itself as a field of conflict.[33] I think this is a very interesting and important field of investigation, both theoretically and politically, which cannot but be confronted by means of Montag's idea of interpellation as an *exterior production of interiority*, so as to attempt to produce, prolonging Althusser's still unsystematic but penetrating remarks, a non-humanist theory of, precisely, resistance and revolt. As far as I am concerned, it was undoubtedly the continuous engagement with Montag's powerful and rigorous reading that allowed me to try and develop this aspect and, in general, the reading of Althusser's theory of ideology that I have been working on for so long now.

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[32] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 159.

[33] L. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2014), 83, 88, 193. I tried to develop this line of inquiry towards an anti-humanist theory of resistance through the concept of "overinterpellation" and "oversubject" in Pippa, *Il soggetto surinterpellato*, 75-118.

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The "Last Instance" as Deconstruction?
Revisiting the Derridean Critique of Althusser's Early Structuralism *via* Spinozist Immanence

Giorgos Fourtounis

Warren Montag 's already seminal *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*, has left its mark on Althusserian studies, to the renewal of which he himself has contributed enormously. There, he undertakes a dual positioning of Althusser's philosophical intervention: in the "theoretical conjuncture" of his own time, without an understanding of which we would be unable to comprehend it, as well as in the present, foregrounding its potential for new theoretical alliances and confrontations, demarcations and appropriations. I felt that I needed much more space if I were to do full justice to the whole scope and wealth of this most erudite study; instead, I'll endeavor a more focused approach to it, following its direction: siding with Montag, I'll question the widespread view regarding the relation between Althusser's first period and early Derrida's problematic and method of deconstruction, which are still largely viewed, as Montag points out critically, "as essentially separate from and often opposed to one another, each endeavoring to think, even if about remarkably similar questions, in a way that was fundamentally incompatible."[1] Partly responsible for this reception, as I will suggest, was Derrida's own critical reading of Althusser's early "structuralism." Accordingly, I will offer a Derridean critique of Derrida's critique of Althusser's texts on structure which, I argue,

[1] Warren Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*, 8.

anticipate his own deconstructive strategy, a fact that eluded Derrida himself as well as many others following him. I strongly believe that Althusser's theoretical relation with this major figure among "his contemporaries", and the retroactive elaboration of a possibility for the philosophical alliance between them that was missed at the time, is of great importance for what is at stake both philosophically and politically today. This discussion will inevitably involve Spinoza whose contemporaneity then and now is intimately linked to its most important questions.[2]

1.

Montag reminds us that Althusser begins his discussion on structure by means of his emphatic opposition to the apparently inescapable dilemma between the two general notions allowed by classical philosophy of causality and the whole: first, what can be termed the *atomistic* conception of the "whole" and its origin (let me tentatively call it "materialist"), where the constitution of the whole is reduced to the transitive, analytic, quasi-mechanical causality of its elements; and second, the *holistic* conception (which might more appropriately be called "idealist"), where both the elements and their totality are governed by an essentialist, expressive and teleological causality.[3] According to Althusser, the entire problematic of classical Political Economy is to be classified in the former,[4] while the latter "dominates all Hegel's thought."[5]

Althusser sought a way out of this dilemma: while he dismissed from the outset the atomistic conception (for its inability to account for, among other things, the "complex and deep space" of "economic phenomena," he also questioned the classical holist notion of the whole.[6] This questioning buttressed his critique of both the economist and the Hegelian (or *hegelianisant*) understandings of Marxism and was itself based on the critique of the category of *expressive totality*, in which a central and privileged element, representing the whole's essence, is expressed in all the elements and determines their totality.[7] These elements then become the essence's phenomena, essentially homologous (despite any epiphenomenal diversity and differentiation), inherently relative and articulable, determined as mutually articulated within the whole. According to Althusser's critique, for this scheme to function, the ontology of this central, determinant element is in principle irrelevant. This in turn entails the critique of the classical Marxist idea, Feuerbachian in origin, of the *inversion* of the Hegelian totality and dialectics: if the expressive totality is essentially idealist, Althusser will say, it cannot be rendered materialist

[2] On a personal note: a conversation with Warren that started more than 20 years ago has largely determined my ways and means of positing and handling the cluster of questions regarding structure in Althusser and beyond. The fact that I return to them, now, picking up again the thread of that conversation from, in a sense, where we left off has a great symbolic and emotional significance for me.
[3] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 85.
[4] Louis Althusser, "The Object of Capital" in *Reading Capital*, 182.
[5] Althusser, "The Object of Capital," 186.
[6] Ibid, 182.
[7] Montag *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 85.

merely by "inverting" it and placing the material element of production in the determinant position, in place of an ideal or spiritual principle.

Althusser then proposed a new concept of the whole, incompatible with both the atomistic and the holistic notions and, more specifically, irreducible to the notion of expressive totality: the concept of the *structured whole*, a whole determined by its structure, on the basis of the latter's distinctive causality, *structural causality*; in short, the concept of *structure*.

At this point, Montag points to a tension traversing Althusser's discourse on structure, which becomes somehow encapsulated within this very term: "what appeared … as a single, unified notion of structure was … the site of division between two antagonistic conceptions."[8] Montag, meticulously reading Pierre Macherey's correspondence with Althusser, concludes that Althusser himself, driven by the critical remarks of his younger student and collaborator,

> drew a line of demarcation within his own work … making visible, if only through the void of a distance taken from certain statements*, the coexistence of two concepts of structure* whose antagonism, whose irreducible difference, had before remained concealed.[9]

According to Montag, then, in the first of these antagonistic conceptions, structure is understood as an organizing principle hidden in the depths of the structured social reality, as its "deeper grammar generating surface phenomena," latent beneath the individualities it comprises, a structure totalizing its elements and thus akin to a genuinely holistic whole: this conception of structure amounts to a recovery of the expressive totality within the very argument that was meant to refute it.[10] A dualist notion thus re-emerges, which opposes the structured to its structure, surface to depth, phenomena to essence and, ultimately, materiality to ideality. The second notion corresponds to Althusser's concept of *overdetermination*: an irreducibly complex relation of unequal and heterogeneous elements, relationally and differentially constituted, within a historically variable architecture, where *each time* one of these structural elements is *dominant*, that is, a *structure in dominance*. Now the structured field should be understood as a "surface without depth," the elements of which do not express a deep and hidden essence.[11] Contrary to the essentialist and teleological notion of expressive totality, the elements here are inherently heterogeneous and divergent; they are not related, complementary and articulable by origin; they do not seek one another and all together their prescribed whole. Within this structure, the intrinsic inequality, individuality and "incommensurability" of the elements are preserved.[12] Structure now is just what, exercising its own peculiar causality or

[8] Ibid, 83.
[9] Ibid, 80; emphasis added.
[10] Panagiotis Sotiris, *A Philosophy for Communism: Rethinking Althusser*, 63.
[11] Warren Montag, "Althusser's Nominalism: Structure and Singularity (1962-6)," *Rethinking Marxism*, 69.
[12] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 85.

"effectivity," holds together or articulates these irreducibly centrifugal elements, making up a genuinely complex individuality.

Now, if the elements are not articulable by nature, then the structure that actually articulates them has to exercise some "violence" on them, namely, its specific kind of causality, in order to *make* them *structural elements*, to integrate them in the network of differential structural relations.

But how should this articulation and its cause, the structure, be conceived? How (and from where) does this structure exert its causality and contain its elements, which are incongruent in principle? To begin with, what holds these elements together cannot be interior to the structured individual: it cannot belong to the series of the elements, for then it too would have to be contained along with the others. But neither can it be exterior to the structured whole: neither simply an external constraint, which would trivialize the concept of structure, nor radically or ontologically exterior, acting from "below" or from "above" of the dimension of the elements – that is, it cannot be *transcendent* to them. What are thus critically questioned, as Montag points out, are the "spatial metaphors [that] are crucial here: inside/outside and surface/depth, which are both in turn related to the theme of appearance /essence."[13]

Althusser responds to this difficulty of situating the structure in relation to the structured field, whose coherence it effectuates, with the theoretical insight to conceive the concept of overdetermination in *Spinozist* terms (and conceptualize the structure accordingly): neither interior, nor exterior (in any conventional sense), the structure is *immanent* in the whole it structures; it is the *immanent cause* of the structural elements, of their relations and their whole, "a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term."[14] Thus, the relation of the structure to the structured social reality becomes analogous to that of the Substance to the universe of the modes in Spinoza. The main argument in *Reading Capital*, indeed, rests largely on (and culminates in) the claim that *immanent causality* is the secret of what Althusser had previously identified as the key concept of the philosophy presupposed and entailed by *Capital*: "*the concept of the effectivity of a structure on its elements,*"[15] or that of the "determination of the elements of a whole by the structure of the whole,"[16] a radically novel concept that had been prefigured, according to Althusser, only by Spinoza. Althusser himself correlated, if not identified, this Spinozist concept of structure with that of overdetermination, as two equivalent attempts to account for the same "phenomenon."[17] The immanence of the structure/cause in its elements/effects undermines the dualism between the structuring and the structured, and with it the structure's transcendence to the social reality whose structure it is. As Montag remarks, in the context of this Spinozist conception, the

[13] Ibid, 77.
[14] Althusser, "The Object of Capital", 189.
[15] Louis Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy," in *Reading Capital*, 29.
[16] Althusser "The Object of Capital," 187.
[17] Ibid, 188.

structure, being what holds together, in its characteristic relations, its divergent elements, stands for the "'conatus' of every singular being, its 'actual' essence, an essence entirely coincident with its actual state."[18]

This being said, the question remains of what to do with what Montag identifies as Althusser's first conception of structure, "irreconcilable" with the above, immanentist one. What is to be done with the tension, or even antinomy, between those two "structures," in Althusser's structuralism? Trying to tackle this question, I will first go through Derrida's discussion of the concept of structure.

2.

Almost immediately after the publication of Althusser's major "structuralist" texts, Jacques Derrida criticized the concept of structure that, according to him, traversed the whole of Western metaphysics.[19] Derrida's critique was directed at the "classical thought concerning structure"[20] as *closed* and *centered* system, where a central, ontologically privileged element organizes the structure and at the same time closes and totalizes it. In this sense, the centered structure can be seen as a version, or perhaps the generic concept, of the holistic whole or expressive totality. Derrida though emphasized the ineluctable *necessity* of this very center that he criticized: "By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself."[21] At the same time, nevertheless, the center transcends the play it determines and makes possible:

> At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden … [T]he center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality.[22]

The center sets a limit, an *end* or an *origin*, to the structure's network of differential references, alternations and permutations, ensures a final reference to a referent that is not constituted by those structural references *between* the elements, but refers exclusively to itself, enfolds its identity in itself, being *present* to itself. In terms of semiotics, the attribution of a center to the signifying structure attaches it to a transcendent and, according to Derrida, a *transcendental signified*, both transcending and constituting the condition of possibility of any process of signification. The signifying chain would reach

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[18] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 92.
[19] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, 351-370.
[20] Ibid, 352.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

then an original or final meaning, a pure ideality, free from any linguistic determination, "a *concept signified in and of itself,* a concept simply present for thought, independent of a relationship to language, that is of a relationship to a system of signifiers."[23]

Hence the inevitable antinomy of classical structuralism, according to Derrida: the center has its place within the structure, precisely at its center, but at the same time it is excluded from the structure; it is not strictly speaking a *structural element*, to the extent that it is not an effect of structural causality: "the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*."[24] Once again, the spatial metaphors inescapably involved in the notion in question are subverted.

Derrida's critique of this antinomic yet necessary relation of the center to the very structure it governs allows us to move from the tension that Montag locates in Althusser's discourse on structure to another, analogous or correlative one, introduced by the insistent clause of the *determination in the final instance*[25] of the social structure by its economic element, always appended by Althusser to his argument. This obstinate addendum engendered widespread critique, according to which we can discern here another opposition between two apparently incompatible conceptions within Althusserian structuralism, this time between the logic of overdetermination, the logic of structure as immanent cause, and the logic of a "final" economic determination: on the one hand, we have the *dominance* of one structural element over the others, a relation entirely internal to the structure and under its auspices; on the other, a relation of *determination*, the determination of the *structure itself* by *one of its elements*. On the one hand, the structure is understood as *cause* and, on the other, as an *effect*. On the one hand, there are the historical displacements of the *dominant* structural element and, on the other, the transhistorical identification of the economy as the always *determinant* element of the structure. Thus, the critique would continue, the category of "determination in the final instance" restores economy as the structural *cause*, reintroducing economism, economic essentialism, and a metaphysical "materialism," invalidating the very argument of overdetermination which was supposed to criticize them. The invalidation of overdetermination by the "final instance," the critique continues, reestablishes expressive totality, the only difference being that the central, determinant position is now occupied by the "economy," the element of material production: ironically, Althusserian

[23] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, 19.
[24] Derrida, "Structure, …", 352.
[25] The French expression used by Althusser is *en dernière instance*, which also has the meaning of resorting to the highest judicial authority for pending disputes, whose verdict is final. It has been translated in English also as "final analysis," "last instance," "last analysis," etc. In what follows, all these formulations found in quotations will be considered equivalent and interchangeable.

structuralism, due to the clause of "final instance," appears as a (merely more complex) version of the inversion of Hegelian totality.

This generic critique of *Althusserian* structuralism, focused on the above discrepancy between overdetermination and economic determination in the final instance, comes close to (and may receive feedback from) Derrida's critique of the classical structuralism's antinomy. In fact, as we shall see, Derrida himself gives in to this temptation. The point of articulation for these two critical attitudes is the apparent possibility of conceiving the economy as the element in *Althusserian* structure that corresponds to the structure's center in classical structuralist thought, according to Derrida's critique: in short, the possibility of considering Althusser's concept of the structured whole as just a version of closed and centered structure. Once again, Althusser's argument would have been short-circuited and returned to what it has set out to criticize: the Derridean critique would suggest that Althusser has fallen into the very trap of "inversion" which he was attempting to dismantle, to the extent that the economy would be directly equivalent, as far as its position and function are concerned, to the transcendent (and "transcendental") center of the closed and metaphysically burdened structure at which Derrida's critique was aimed. The "materiality" of the economic element wouldn't change anything: after all, as structuralism itself has taught us even in its classical version, what matters is not the "substance" of an element but precisely its relations to the other elements of the structure: therefore, what matters here is not the qualification of the center as material, but precisely its position and function *as center*.

3.

As the counterpart of this critique, Derrida announces the "event" (as he qualifies it) that was to be widely codified as *post-structuralism*. As is often the case with the use of the prefix post-, however, it does not imply a simple rejection of what it refers to, in this case, the concept of structure: while Derrida rejects the holism entailed by the postulation of the structure's center, he nevertheless (in a sense identical to Althusser when he defied the relevant dilemma) does not fall into the other pole of the dilemma, the atomism of a trivial notion of "structure" reducible to its elements. On the contrary, as Montag remarks,[26] he relies on what structuralism has contributed, the very notion of the structure's *structurality*, defined as "*the principle of difference*, such as Saussure himself recalls it," which "compels us not only not to privilege one substance … but even to consider every process of signification as a formal play of differences."[27] What Derrida does question is the limitation always-already imposed on this differential principle by the *necessary* assumption of a center of the structure, and he investigates the precarious possibility of conceiving a centerless structure. Thus, Derrida's initial post-structuralist gesture nods towards "a new meaning [or] concept" of structure, unreconcilable with

[26] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 71.
[27] Derrida, *Positions*, 26; emphasis added.

(though, as we shall see, in a specific way inseparable from) the classical one, a *new* concept that would nevertheless still be a concept *of structure*, an essentially unstable "concept" (in the sense that it could never recover from its instability, which would be the unsurpassable condition of its (im)possibility): the concept of an *open* structure, without a center and without a transcendental signified.[28] As Derrida himself writes, the event of post-structuralism came about when

> it became necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site […]. This was the moment […] when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse …, that is to say, a system in which the […] transcendental signified is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.[29]

And if, as we have just seen for Derrida himself, a centerless structure represents the unthinkable itself, his project regarding the concept of structure posits as its horizon the possibility of the impossible, of an inconceivable concept, the task of thinking the unthinkable.

The project in question is a token of Derrida's general *deconstructive* strategy in relation to metaphysics, or what he calls *logocentrism*, and the hierarchical, binary oppositions that constitute its concepts and signify them (particularly those on which Derrida often focused: signifier/signified, writing/speech, nature/civilization, practice/theory, etc., but also, I might add, the opposition I started with: atomism/holism, in defiance of which Althusser developed a new concept of structure). In all these metaphysical dualisms, according to Derrida, "we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-a-vis,* but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) or has the upper hand."[30] Derrida's strategy rests on the thesis that a frontal attack on metaphysical binary oppositions is in a sense self-refuting, as we shall see in more detail. Deconstruction, on the contrary, as the only viable challenge to metaphysics, involves not the abolition of metaphysical and hierarchical dualisms (which of course it subjects to its specific, deconstructive critique), but in a peculiar preservation of the relevant dualities within the very project of their deconstruction: deconstruction does not transcend them (dialectically or otherwise), but neither does it subordinate itself to their dilemmatic logic.

Very schematically, then, deconstruction consists in a strategy of two movements or "phases," structurally interdependent (which means that they are not successive, with

[28] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 6.
[29] Derrida, "Structure, …", 353-354.
[30] Derrida, *Positions*, 41.

the one replacing or evicting the other, but always simultaneous, in a sense that will be discussed shortly):

The *first phase* is the *inversion* (in one way or the other, including the reduction or even the elimination) of a binary opposition, which has always been the field not only of the subordination of one of its poles to the other, but also of the constant resistance to this subordination: "the history of this opposition [is] one of incessant struggles generative of hierarchical configurations."[31] The inversion, then, is an inexorable moment in this history, an essentially political, emancipatory, literally subversive moment, an "overturning," since it "brings low what was high":[32] the hierarchy is overturned and the hitherto hegemonic pole is placed (ineffectively, as we shall see immediately) in a relation of subordination to the hitherto subordinate. Derrida will not stop repeating that this phase of inversion is a necessary instance of deconstruction that cannot be circumvented or transcended; in this sense, it is a rather peculiar "phase":

> When I say that this phase is necessary, the word *phase* is perhaps not the most rigorous one. It is not a question of a chronological phase, a given moment, or a page that one day simply will be turned, in order to go on to other things. The necessity of this phase is structural.[33]

On the other hand, though, as inescapable and unsurpassable as this moment is, it is in itself self-undermining: to remain in this phase is to remain within the deconstructible field and its dualistic logic—which also means that the traditionally hegemonic pole will eventually take its revenge. The emancipatory movement will remain incomplete.

Therefore, a *second phase* is needed: the elaboration of a *new concept* (for instance, of structure), inherently precarious, i.e. such that it can neither remain in the previous field and operate within it, nor can it be transferred to another field (in the sense of an "epistemological break"), and therefore *cannot transcend the first phase* of inversion or overturning.[34] It is often necessary for this concept to retain the same name (even within quotation marks), to retain the same signifier for a displaced signified: Derrida will refer indeed to "the 'strategic' necessity that may require the occasional preservation of an *old name* in order to launch a new concept,"[35] in order for that new concept to be reinscribed in the field under deconstruction, so that it would bring dysfunction within it, but also, through this very dysfunction, would have deconstructive effects within this field and on it. Thus, the new concept coexists with the inverted original, in an unresolved tense relation.

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[31] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 4.
[32] Derrida, *Positions*, 65.
[33] Ibid, 41-42.
[34] Ibid, 26.
[35] Ibid, 71. Translation modified.

4.

I propose here to think of the above oppositional dipoles of metaphysics as instantiations of what I call the dualism of transcendence, or *transcendent dualism*: the originary oppositional distinction, with innumerable variations, between what belongs to the world given to our practices and "an additional dimension, …supplementary to the dimensions of the given,"[36] two poles which conventionally can be termed "material" and "ideal," respectively, where the pole of ideality is structurally hegemonic over that of materiality. Transcendent dualism, then, constitutes an archetypical metaphysical opposition, that distinguishes, and by distinguishing defines, the material and the ideal, and by the same token *subordinates* the former to the latter. In this sense, Derrida will claim that "logocentrism is also, fundamentally, an idealism. It is *the matrix of idealism*."[37] Hence, Derrida's deconstructive endeavor can be seen as a philosophical program countering idealism: "what I have attempted can *also* be inscribed under the rubric of the 'critique of idealism'."[38] In short, deconstruction can be understood also as a *materialist project*, and the question, of course, arises as to what notion of "matter" is involved here.

It follows from the previous account of the deconstructive method, that the implicated materialism *cannot* be reduced to the *mere* inversion of transcendent dualism, in a move that would simply assign the decisive role to "matter" as found in the context and under the aegis of its constitutional opposition to the ideal, that is to say, a matter constructed and delivered by the (inherently idealist) dualism of transcendence: as the *negative oppositional pair of the ideal*. Materiality within transcendent dualism is essentially subordinate to ideality, so that any attempt to deem it hegemonic (or even determinant) is from the outset undermined: its matter is still constitutionally deprived of all the vital, cognitive, productive and organizational powers that are by default endowed to the ideal pole, to which the former is inevitably subjugated, owing to it its coherence, rationality, understandability and normativity. Within this "matrix of idealism," then, matter is constructed as *metaphysical* and, by the same token, an ultimately *idealist* category; it is an inert matter, identical to itself and present to itself, essentially non-structural, unaffected by any differential play, always-already transcendent to any "principle of difference," susceptible to function as a transcendental signified: "the signifier 'matter' appears to me problematical only at the moment when its re-inscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of theoretical regression, would be reconstituted into a 'transcendental signified.'"[39] A "materialism" that would proclaim the primacy of *this* matter, *simply* inverting the relation of subordination, would be an abortive materialism, a metaphysical or even an idealist materialism, if the paradox is permitted.

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[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 128.
[37] Derrida, *Positions*, 51; emphasis added.
[38] Ibid, 62.
[39] Ibid, 65.

This materialism of inversion, then, which includes the traditional self-understanding of Marxism as a Hegelianism "stood on its head," is correlative with a centered, closed, essentialist totality or structure, produced by the self-refuting replacement of an (ideal) center by another ("material") one; it would amount to an "inverted" expressive totality (if something like that has any meaning at all, which of course is part of the problem with this notion of inversion).

Now, if the reversal of transcendent dualism constitutes an aborted materialist project, it is because it represents a "mutilated"[40] deconstruction of transcendent dualism: what would constitute its *first phase* of inversion, necessary but ineffectual on its own, is here cut off from its second one, i.e. the production of a new concept of *matter*, unsuitable for occupying the central position in a closed structure and operate therein as a transcendental signified. In this sense, this second move would be correlative, if not coincidental with, the second phase of the deconstructive endeavor of classical structuralist thought, i.e. the production of a new concept of *structure*, centerless and without a transcendental signified: we wouldn't have to deal then with a structure which would allow "a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center," where "successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center [would] receive different forms or names" (including that of a matter apposite for this substitution, I could add), whose "matrix [would be] the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word."[41] In short, the new "matter" would be consistent with the open and centerless structure, the very one posed by Derrida's critique of classical structuralism as its horizon.

But, once again, the unwavering condition of the whole project is that this second movement will not leave behind the first, ineffective phase of inversion. In particular, the new concept of "matter" must not be able to transcend or to expel the matter of the first materialist movement, the rebellious matter that revolts against the ideal, the matter that struggles to overturn its subordination to the idea, to which it is nevertheless inherently subordinate within the logocentric structures of the deconstructible field. The new concept will still be a *concept of matter*, an irreducibly dislocated concept of what the signifier "matter" historically has stood for, claiming thus "what 'materialism' has represented as a force of resistance in the history of philosophy,"[42] in touch with "its

[40] "Mutilated," in a sense analogous to that with which Spinoza characterized the imagination and the (first) kind of knowledge proper to it (Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P. 29, Cor. [Matthew J. Kisnert (ed.), Michael Silverthorne and Matthew J. Kisnert (transl.), Cambridge University Press 2018, p. 71]. The analogy refers to the fact that, in Spinoza, the 'flaw' of an idea of imagination does not lie in itself, as a "positive" characteristic of the idea. The idea is not untrue in itself; it is not true because, in the context of imagination, it is cut off from other ideas that would make it adequate and true. I have argued elsewhere for the connection between Spinozist imagination and the metaphysics of presence (see Giorgos Fourtounis, *Deconstruction in the "Final Instance": The Spinozist Structuralism of Althusser (1960-1969) and the Early Derrida* [in Greek: Γιώργος Φουρτούνης, *Αποδόμηση σε «τελική ανάλυση»: ο σπινοζικός δομισμός του Αλτουσέρ (1960-1969) και ο πρώιμος Ντερριντά*], Nissos, Athens 2023.

[41] Derrida, "Structure, …," 353.

[42] Derrida, *Positions*, 66.

negative, atheistic face (the insufficient but indispensable phase of inversion)."[43] The materialism of inversion, in short, constitutes an unsurpassed and untranscendable phase of the "materialist insistence."[44]

Seen *in both of* these inseparable phases or movements, the deconstruction of transcendent dualism constitutes the project of emancipation of materiality not merely from ideality but *from its dualist opposition to ideality*, without pretending however to transcend the opposition that always has subjugated it. On the contrary, the new concept of matter must continuously reinscribe itself in the opposition that hegemonized it and from which it insists on emancipating itself, remaining dysfunctional within it, a liminal "concept" within the field it opposes. In short: it will be a materialism which, to serve in a viable way its opposition to idealism, will not be its opposite.

5.

However, Derrida gives the impression that he forgets this complex and sophisticated strategy when he discusses Althusser's structuralism and the latter's tense notion of social (overdetermined) structure determined in the final instance by its economic element, stating emphatically that "the concept of last instance would be the general concept of the *deconstructible itself*, if something like that existed. This is why I saw in it the metaphysical anchoring *par excellence*." And he concludes: "Everything interesting and fruitful in the logic of overdetermination becomes compromised, reduced, crushed by this discourse on the 'last instance' which I have always been tempted to interpret as a concession to the economist dogma of Marxism if not that of the Communist Party."[45] Thus, the above-mentioned tension between overdetermination and the "final instance" disappears in favor of a pure antithesis, with the latter just cancelling (or even "crushing") the former: if these two conceptions are indeed in a sense "irreconcilable," as Montag argues, according to Derrida *here* they cannot in any way coexist. They annul each other and, when together, Althusser's whole intervention.

I might discern two aspects of what I consider Derrida's inconsistent application of his own method to Althusser's argument. First, he does not conceive of the determination *in the final instance* by the economy as anything other than a complication of the *simple* determination by the economy, a complication that leaves intact the core of the notion of an "external," determinant economy, and which, if not in practice at least in principle, can be analyzed *all the way down*, reaching what would be the *last analysis*; in short, a complication that can ultimately be untangled and finally bypassed. In this sense, Derrida reads Althusser's argument as reiterating Friedrich Engels's famous letter to Joseph Bloch, of 1890, in which the category in question appeared for the first time in

[43] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 54.
[44] Derrida, *Positions*, 66.
[45] Michael Sprinker, "Politics and Friendship: An Interview with Jacques Derrida" in *The Althusserian Legacy*, 205.

Marxist literature. Engels argues that "the determining factor in history is, *in the final analysis,* the production and reproduction of actual life."[46] History is regarded as a highly complicated and multifactorial process, where

> it is in the interaction of all these factors [of the superstructure] and amidst an unending multitude of fortuities (i.e. of things and events whose intrinsic interconnections are so remote or so incapable of proof that we can regard them as non-existent and ignore them) that the economic trend ultimately asserts itself as something inevitable.[47]

In other words, in Engels (and, according to Derrida's reading, in Althusser), the "final instance" would stand for an *inessential* (and thus ultimately ignorable) intricacy of economic determination, without which "the application of the theory to any particular period of history would, after all, be easier than solving a simple equation of the first degree;"[48] in these terms, the determination in the final instance by the economy would be reducible (through an equation admittedly much more difficult, even beyond our factual capacities, but still *theoretically solvable*) to determination by the economy, *sans phrase*. Hence, according to Derrida, the final instance does not do much more than the economic determinism of the traditional, metaphysically "materialist" Marxism: "[t]o say 'last instance' instead of infrastructure doesn't make much difference and it destroys or radically relativizes the whole accounting for overdeterminations."[49] In short, we find here again the common place of a criticism, reinforced now by Derrida's own questioning, according to which Althusser succumbs to the double deterministic sin of a rigid structuralism and an economist Marxism (or simply Marxism, for many).

Secondly, Derrida's theoretical neutralization of the "final instance" directly corresponds with the fact that he himself is doing exactly what he warned us not to do: the theoretical "mutilation" of what is, I argue, the deconstructive subversion of transcendent dualism *and* classical structuralism. What should have been considered as the first, necessary yet insufficient, instance of the relevant deconstruction, is here severed from the second one, and it is precisely under this condition that it appears as merely an inverted instantiation of the metaphysical concept of the centered structure. Derrida does not treat this "materialist" reversal according to his own method, that is, as the insurmountable condition and the first "structural" phase of a possible deconstructive movement but considers it unilaterally as the primary *target* of it, as "the *deconstructible itself*." What reduces the determination in the last instance of the (overdetermined) structure by the economy to the simple economic determination of a structure (which, *ipso facto*, ceases to be overdetermined), is the fact that it is considered as detached from

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[46] Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 49, 34.
[47] Ibid, 35.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Sprinker, "Politics and Friendship…," 205.

the biphasic scheme of deconstruction. Derrida unexpectedly takes this materialism of inversion as standing on its own and not as structurally intertwined (in an insolubly tense coexistence) with the second instance of it, concerning the production of a new concept.

6.

I propose, in contrast, to read Althusser's structuralism as a double deconstructive critique of metaphysics *and* idealism, the *first phase* of which could be (if not "mutilated") the *classical* Marxian and Marxist *inversion* of Hegelian totality and the determination of the social by its "material production," itself a token of materialist inversion of transcendent dualism in one of its multiple variations. As such, it represents the indispensable (for the whole project, from which it would draw its full meaning) "moment" of overturning, whose necessity is "structural" and whose "time … is never a dead letter,"[50] bestowing the whole project with a subversive meaning, with which Marxism was historically associated, and which deconstruction cannot afford to renounce. Of course, according to Derridean deconstructive protocols, this phase of inversion must be questioned *per se*, so as to explore its limits, i.e. its inability to escape by itself the deconstructible context, and consequently its re-subordination to the "matrix of idealism." And, indeed, much of Althusser's work in the 1960s focused precisely on this critique of the reversal taken in itself: Althusser's whole intervention was based on his strategic demarcation from the logic of the mere inversion of Hegelian essentialist expressive totality; yet Derrida, in order to be able to articulate his critique, had to overlook this constitutive frontline of Althusser's philosophical intervention, omnipresent in his discourse and directly linked to the argument of overdetermination, or to consider it nullified by the clause of "final analysis" (which is the same thing). In both cases, the end result was the suppression of the question of another possible relation between Althusser's critique of a reversed Hegelianism and the obstinate clause of the "final analysis" beyond that of a "theoretical regression," or the cancelling of the former by the latter.

It is worth noting, in particular, that Derrida does not discuss Althusser's analysis of Engels's letter referred to above,[51] which, according to him, contains "Engels's theoretical solution to *the problem of the basis* for the determination 'in the last instance' by the economy [problème de fondement de la détermination « en dernière instance »],"[52] and thus necessarily ignores the conclusion of his argument, formulated already in the very beginning of the Appendix: "we should not conceal the fact that the argument for the *basis* [l'argumentation du *fondement*] will no longer answer to our critical needs."[53] Thus, Derrida overlooks what is clearly implied by Althusser here: the theoretical possibility of a determination "in the final analysis" by the economy without *fondement*, without a

[50] Derrida, *Positions*, 42.
[51] Louis Althusser, "Appendix" to "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in *For Marx*, 117-128.
[52] Ibid, 117; emphasis added. The French original in Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, 117.
[53] Ibid, translation modified.

foundation (or an "infrastructure"), without a "metaphysical anchoring," that is, of a "final analysis" as a complement—and not invalidation—of overdetermination.

This very concept of *overdetermination* is, precisely, the second phase of the whole endeavor: the limitless, inexhaustible, reciprocal determination of all the elements of the structure, through their differential relations. This is, I argue, Althusser's rendering of Derrida's principle of structurality, *avant la lettre*; and it is in this sense that Althusser's overdetermination tends towards the new notion of an open and decentered *structure*, whose theoretical possibility Derrida will explore a few years later. Trying to corroborate this assertion, let me begin from Derrida's discussion of the production of a "new concept of writing,"[54] in line with the problematization of the dominant "logocentrist logic":[55] Derrida will call it "*gram* or *différance,*"[56] clarifying immediately that it refers to "a *structure* and a movement no longer conceivable on the basis of the opposition presence/absence."[57] It is a kind of structure that, through its play of differences, "forbid[s] at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself,"[58] that is, it excludes the possibility of a transcendental signified. In it, "no element can function as a sign without referring to another element *which itself is not simply present*. This interweaving results in *each 'element'… being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system.*"[59] And he concludes: "Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and *traces of traces*."[60] This is, I argue, what Althusser describes as the "mutual conditioning" of the structural elements (or "contradictions" according to the philosophical vocabulary of his earlier essays) within the overdetermined structure, where "*every* [emphasis added] contradiction appears in Marxist historical practice and experience as an *overdetermined contradiction*"[61] or, in another rendering of the same thesis, "*every* contradiction is a contradiction in a complex whole structured in dominance."[62] In this "mutual conditioning" there is not any fundamental "conditioning" that would not be conditioned itself by the other elements within the structure, and thus would put an end to this "mutuality," to this unrestricted relationality or structurality. And Althusser concludes:

> *this reflection of the* structure *articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of the complex whole within each contradiction*, this is the most profound

[54] Derrida, *Positions*, 26.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 27; emphasis added.
[58] Ibid, 26.
[59] Ibid; emphasis added.
[60] Ibid; emphasis added.
[61] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," 107.
[62] Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic" in *For Marx*, 204-205; emphasis added.

> characteristic of the Marxist dialectic, the one I have tried recently to encapsulate in the concept of "overdetermination."[63]

Thus, *each* structural element "reflects" within itself the other elements and their differential relations: "it reflects in itself, *in its very essence*, its relation to the unevenness of the complex whole."[64] Everything reflects everything, and their structural relations, so that there is nothing that exceeds or precedes these mutual reflections. Thus, each element is constituted on the basis of the "reflection" or the imprint on it of the other elements, so that there is no prior "something" within which something else would be reflected, and there are no other prior "somethings" reflected on it. There is no something like an originary substance of the elements; no element is (or ever was) "simply present": they are all, always-already and all the way dawn, reflections of reflections, imprints of imprints, or (in Derrida's account) *traces of traces*.

This inexhaustible complexity of mutual determinations between the structural elements, reflected in each one of them, entails that not one of them can be primary and therefore simply determinant; none, including the mode of "material production," can be deemed the cause of the structure and the other elements. That is, the cause involved here, the *structural cause*, is *the structure itself*, the structure's *causa sui*, as it were, and not some supposed privileged *element of it*, nor a transcendent principle or essence. Now the economy, being a structural element, is constitutively subject to structural causality; it is an *effect* of the structure: the "economy" is not an independent datum but depends on each historical social structure, on the mode of production *in the widest sense*. As Althusser provocatively asserted, in a passage that didn't escape Montag's attention:[65]

> the economic cannot have the qualities of a *given* (of the immediately visible and observable, etc.), because its identification requires the concept of the structure of the economic, which in turn requires the concepts of the structure of the mode of production […] The concept of the economic must be constructed *for each mode of production*, as must the concept of each of the other 'levels' that belong to the mode of production: the political, the ideological, etc..[66]

That is, it is not the "economic" that makes the structure, but the other way around.

Once again, then, overdetermination stands for a limitless "structurality," an unrestrained structural play, without a totalizing center, without metaphysical fastening, without a transcendental signified (even a "material" one). No ontological privilege can exempt the so-called "material production" from this rule of structurality: as Althusser writes,

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[63] Ibid, 206.
[64] Ibid, 209; emphasis added.
[65] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 85.
[66] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic", 183.

> it is impossible to delve down to the birth or origin of the simple universal, "production," since [according to Marx] "when we talk of production we always mean production at a determinate stage in social development of the production of individuals living in society," that is, in a structured social whole.[67]

And, as if to directly refute Engels's explication of the "last instance" as an abbreviation of a perhaps practically insurmountable difficulty of our cognitive or calculative limits to solve an *in principle* solvable problem of determination, he adds: "and this denial [to delve down beneath this complex whole] is a denial on principle: it is not ignorance which prevents us, but the very essence of production itself, its concept."[68]

7.

But now, "material production," always-already an element and an effect of the "structured social whole," poses the question of its *materiality*. We touch here on the second direction of the double deconstructive movement that the whole argument of overdetermination stands for: the tentative production of a new concept of *matter*. And we find again here the Spinozist vein of Althusserian structuralism, the essential correlation of the concept of overdetermined structure with Spinozist immanent causality. The recourse to Spinozist immanence, I argue, constituted for Althusser a peculiar *materialist strategy*, whose complexity is strictly relevant to what is philosophically at stake here.[69] On the one hand, Althusser's entire philosophical endeavor can be seen as an attempt to define a philosophical perspective more effective than any other available to defend the materialist philosophical position. In this sense, he necessarily places his intervention within the idealism- materialism opposition, which, according to him, represents the constitutive (and hence unsurpassable) horizon of the philosophical field. On the other hand, however, we find in Althusser hints (or even overt assertions) that he understands this opposition in terms close to Derrida's deconstructive critique of binary metaphysical oppositions, and of transcendent dualism in particular: as an opposition *essentially* asymmetrical in favor of its idealist term, so that in its context idealism is structurally hegemonic over its opponent and over their very opposition, philosophy's very *Kampfplatz*. In this light, although he will never cease to consider the antagonism between materialism and idealism an insuperable condition of philosophy, he will often question the adequacy of the recorded "materialisms" in countering idealism effectively, in a way directly analogous with that of Derrida's critique: "We must therefore treat the term 'materialism' with suspicion: the word does not give us the thing, and, on closer

[67] Ibid, 195-196.
[68] Ibid, 196.
[69] For a detailed exposition of my argument, see Fourtounis, *Deconstruction in the "Final Instance."*

inspection, most materialisms turn out to be *inverted idealisms*."[70] I could even say that one can follow, through Althusser's entire text, the red thread of a genuine and unresolved aporia: the paradoxical *doubt about the sufficiently materialist character of materialism* itself. Consequently, there is a tendency in Althusser to redefine his unconditional "materialist insistence" out of the box of the constraints of materialism, as it were, so as to disrupt idealism's domination over the philosophical battlefield and its opponent therein, and to restructure the perpetual philosophical conflict accordingly.

The strategy of immanence aims precisely at this: I argue that Althusser's philosophical project resorts to Spinozist immanence in order to reformulate the materialist position in a counter-hegemonic way, reconfiguring the opposition between materialism and idealism *in terms of immanence and transcendence*. Of course, this reformulation cannot be limited to a simple name change, which would substitute immanence and transcendence for materialism and idealism respectively, leaving intact the binary logic of the opposition. Rather, complicating the whole issue, it relegates the whole idealism-materialism dichotomy *to the terrain of transcendence* and its logic. Immanence, as a critique of the thought of transcendence, necessarily includes in its scope the entire transcendent *dualism* (and not just its dominant pole) as the condition of the congenital subordination of the material to the ideal, and consequently of the unequal and asymmetrical opposition of materialism and idealism. Once again, if it is to be emancipated from ideality, materiality has to be emancipated *from its binary oppositional antithesis to ideality*, in a move through which it won't be the same materiality: an emancipation that would essentially affect the emancipated.

To substantiate my claim, if only allusively, I suggest that, in Spinoza's architecture of immanence, a *non-causal* immanence between the (causally insulated) attributes and their "corresponding" modes is necessarily implicated with the immanent *causality* between God and the universe of modes. I can only be very cursory here: [71] to the extent that God or Substance is immanently expressed in all attributes and is the immanent cause of their modes, attributes are *immanent in each other*, though without any causal interaction between them. This is the controversial and rather paradoxical "parallelism" of the attributes, where, on the one hand, there is no causal intersection between their ("parallel") networks of transitive causes, the "order and connection" of each one, while, on the other, there is complete coincidence between them, being "the same" order and connection, expressed in infinite ways.[72] Thus, attributes are equally and fully "substantial," each one of them being *the Substance* itself, in one of its infinitely irreducible ways of expressing itself. Differently put, in that level, too, immanence means that there is no transcendence *between attributes*: no attribute can be conceived as transcendent to any

[70] Louis Althusser, "Philosophy and Marxism. Interviews with Fernanda Navarro, 1984-87" in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, 272; emphasis added.
[71] See Fourtounis, *Deconstruction in the "Final Instance."*
[72] See, for instance, Spinoza, *Ethics* II, P. 7, 47.

other; they are all immanent in Substance, and hence in each other. This, combined with the infinity of attributes, of which "extension" and "thought" constitute two among (the infinite) other attributes, removes the condition for any *hierarchical dualism*, where "thought" could be understood as the transcendent and hegemonic other of "extension," which in turn would be identifiable with matter, negatively defined in respect to the former. On the contrary, in Spinoza, each attribute (and of course "extension" and "thought") is characterized by the *materiality that is proper to it*, its specific "substantiality," its *worldliness*; the sign of their materiality is the universal though always peculiar transitive causality that reigns within each one of them, the constitutive, always-already causal interaction of the "things" (modes) in which it is expressed.

It is in the terms of this Spinozist conception, that Althusser's immanentist conceptualization of overdetermination can function as a deconstructive movement and tend towards a new concept of materiality. Crucial in this perspective is Althusser's *concept of practice*, defined in the first place as a process of *production*, an always differentiated and specified *mode of production*, i.e., a socially organized process of *transformation* of a specific raw material into a specific product. In the context of this definition, the connotation of materiality that is obviously inherent in the notion of practice can be initially correlated to the "inertia" of each practice's raw material, its specific resistance to transformation, which always demands for its effectuation human-social labour (in the most general sense), "using determinate means (of 'production')" under determinate relations.[73] Due to the metaphysical understanding of materiality, the concept of practice was always leaning towards the material pole of transcendent dualism and, according to the established, metaphysical grammar of the term, was constitutively opposed (and subordinated) to a non-material term, *theory* among others.[74] Thus it was prone to a particular version of "materialist" inversion: the proclamation of the *primacy of practice* over its transcendent other, especially theory. Applying now his characteristic nominalist stance (also Spinozist) to this concept, Althusser affirms the essential *plurality* and *diversity* of "practice." This is the point where the concept of practice becomes intertwined with that of overdetermination: there are only irreducibly differentiated practices, in the plural, each time articulated in a complex, structured whole, in an overdetermined "global" structure, as seen above.

Based on all this, Althusser will in fact *deconstruct* the dual opposition of practice and theory, or for that matter every other term denoting transcendence, reformulating drastically the materialist primacy of practice:

> We can assert the *primacy of practice* theoretically by showing that all the levels of social existence are the sites of distinct practices: economic

[73] Althusser, *For Marx*, 166-167.
[74] See Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy", 57-58.

> practice, political practice, ideological practice, technical practice, and scientific (or theoretical) practice.[75]

Once again, the "primacy" of materiality does not lie in the elevation of a material "substance" to a position of dominance over a non-material one (more or less ideal, in the broadest sense), reversing a classical hierarchical dichotomy (though respecting its logic), but in the disturbance of the dichotomy itself, affirming the pervasiveness of the materiality of practice at every instance of "social existence," including those traditionally deemed "ideal." If "practice" retains its material connotation, and if there is always a plurality of practices, then no one among them can be thought of as exclusively or even eminently "material": *they are all material*, fully and equally material, each one in its own way, being characterized by the materiality that is proper and exclusive to it (as all attributes in Spinoza are "substantial," expressing the substance in each one's specific modality).

This conception of practice allowed Althusser to posit, among many other instances, a "theoretical practice" as well as an "ideological practice," both of which are as material as any other practice. In particular, they are *just as material* as *economic* practice, that is, as that which was traditionally referred to as (the) "material production" (where the adjective "material" was supposed to imply the *specific difference* of this particular level of "social existence"). But the implied meaning of matter begins to falter: if the economic practice can still be understood as material production, "the signifier matter" no longer exclusively applies to it. It no longer denotes a "substance" transcending the structural play of differences between the distinct elements of social structure, external to the play of their mutual determinations, fastening the social structure to "a point of presence" through *this* determinant element of "material" production. The materiality of economic production, then, can no longer be understood independently of the inexhaustible overdeterminations by all the others, of which it is always-already the locus. It is not the matter of transcendent dualism, but precisely a *new matter*, which always-already bears, in its very "ontology," in its essential texture, "in its very essence" (as Althusser said above), the indelible "traces" or the irreducible effectivity of all the other practices that are traditionally registered to the so-called superstructure.

8.

However, this new conception of matter does not emerge only at the level of the structured *whole* of the distinct practices, that is, by way of the immanence of what was traditionally understood as the instances of the so-called superstructure in the supposedly *par excellence* material "level of social existence." The *materialist* deconstruction of the materiality-ideality opposition does not occur only at the level of overdetermination *between* the practices; its privileged locus is *each singular practice*. It is at this basic level that the materiality of practice is now understood in terms of the *immanent* relation between

[75] Ibid.

the poles of the metaphysical dipole of transcendent dualism, in a *new* relation that modifies both drastically. That is, the immanentist concept of materiality could only entail a correspondingly *immanentist concept of ideality*, a *materialist* concept of ideality. And it is here that Althusser's concept of *ideology* intervenes. Now "ideology" does not apply only to a particular practice, that which Althusser names "ideological practice:" just as the immanentist conception of materiality does not refer primarily to the "material" economic practice, but concerns every practice, so, too, the correlative immanentist and materialist understanding of ideality, the concept of ideology, is not strictly limited to the ideological practice, but is intertwined with the practice "in general," in its essential plurality, that is, with every distinct, singular practice. I refer to a line of thought traversing the whole of Althusser's work, namely, to the interweaving of every practice, *including ideological practice*, with *ideology*. The meaning of ideology should be taken here in the broadest possible sense of what we may call *social thought*: the most general concept of "social thinking" (where the "social" is at the same time the "object" and the "subject" of thinking: the social thinking itself); on the other hand, the practices of the social whole, including what Althusser calls the "ideological practice," constitute the different levels of "social existence," as we have seen, representing the most general concept of the social, existing by producing (itself).

I venture here a kind of analogy, whose legitimacy should be further examined, with the *two* equal and infinite powers of God in Spinoza (according to Gilles Deleuze, among others), the power of existing and producing and the power of thinking all that exists and is being produced. Just as with the conceptual pair of practice and ideology in Althusser, we are not dealing here with a regression to a kind of dualism, which, in Spinoza, would counterpose the different attributes (and in particular that of "extension") against the attribute of "thought." Rather, the power of existing and producing encompasses all and each one of the attributes, including that of "thought," while all existing productions in every attribute, including those of "thought" (the ideas), fall within the range of the power of thought. This means that everything that exists (each mode in each attribute) is *ipso facto* the *object* of a distinct idea.[76] Inversely, every idea has "its" object and, being itself a mode, *is* the object of "its" own idea, of an idea of the idea. But furthermore, and most significantly, every idea is *immanent in its object*, of which it is the thought; ideas are immanent in their objects and are themselves objects of ideas that are immanent in them. Due to that (non-causal) relation of immanence of any idea to its object, any existing mode (including ideas) and the idea of it are "one and the same thing but expressed in two ways."[77] The idea and "its" object, while being together one thing, are not identical or reducible to each other; being "one and the same thing" amounts to their unity, their complete coincidence *and* their irreducible difference.

[76] See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 86.
[77] Spinoza, *Ethics* II, 7, Sch., 48.

In an analogous manner in Althusser, every *practice*, being an element of social "existence," is *ipso facto* socially thought through "its" *ideology*; inversely, any ideology is always thinking "its" practice, as it is articulated in the structured whole of the practices. There is a peculiar, two-aspect unity of practice and ideology, a strong and fundamental mutuality between them, which Althusser firstly thematized in the context of his essay on the Ideological State Apparatuses: "an ideology *always* exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material"[78] and, conversely, "there is no practice except by and in an ideology."[79] Montag, in his masterful reading of the relevant section of the essay on ideology and the ISAs, explicates the Spinozism implicated in this mutuality: if an ideology is always the ideology *of* an ideological apparatus, it is so in the strongest sense of the *immanence* between them: "ideology is *immanent* in its apparatuses and their practices; it has no existence apart from these apparatuses and is entirely coincident with them."[80] Ideology does not primarily exist as an ideal system, a system of "ideas," so as to be "materialized" in a practice or apparatus in a subsequent time. Ideology is always already material or practical, just as practice is always already ideological, in the sense that they constitute two non-reducible aspects of "one and the same" social reality. Ideology is inseparable from the materiality of a practice's apparatus, in a relation analogous to that of the *non-causal* immanence of idea and its object: "ideology is neither the cause (in any commonly accepted sense of the term) nor the effect of the apparatuses that constitute its material form."[81] Now, given that Althusser keeps the inventory of the ISAs open, and given that the practice of an Ideological Apparatus cannot be in principle distinguished from the general concept of practice, we could say that in Althusser this fundamental mutuality holds for *every practice*: every practice can be thought of as an Ideological Apparatus. This applies equally to *economic* practice and "its" ideology, but also to what Althusser calls "ideological practice:"[82] just as ideas are objects of ideas, so ideological practice is the object of
the particular ideology immanent in it, the "ideology of ideological practice."[83]

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[78] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, 166; emphasis added.
[79] Ibid, 170.
[80] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 151; emphasis added.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Thus, I disagree with Ernesto Laclau's claim of "a clear line of demarcation between two perspectives" on ideology in Althusser, one that recognizes ideology's materiality, the "radicalization" of which by Laclau himself will lead to his own concept of "discourse" as "the horizon of the constitution of any object," and the other restricting ideology to "a superstructure, a regional category of the social whole -an essentially topographical concept" [Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time* (London-New York: Verso 1990), 185] – a demarcation's line which, in the above terms, could be reformulated as between ideology as a ("regional") practice, a specific *topos* in the topography of the social, and ideology as the other aspect of every practice, permeating the whole of social topography. By way of analogy with Spinoza's doctrine of immanence, ideology is both.
[83] Thus, Althusser will speak of the "ideology of ideology" (Althusser, "Ideology …", 165).

Ideology then not only thinks "its" practice, according to modalities that pertain to it (in ways that are often at first sight indecipherably indirect), but it is *immanent in it*, forming with it one and the same social and historical reality, where none of its two aspects is reducible or primary to the other. As in Spinoza there is no mode of extension (or of any other attribute) without its idea, and there is no idea without a mode as its object, so in Althusser there is no practice (including the global "social practice") without its ideology, and there is no ideology without a practice, or a whole of practices, in which it is immanent: there is no ideology not having a "material" existence in a practice or practices, and conversely there is no practice not having an "ideal" or "ideological" existence: there is no practice that is not also an ideology.

In short, ideology is *immanent in the very materiality of social practices*. This cancels transcendent dualism in all of its versions and revokes any possibility of posing an ontological difference, gap and hierarchy between the material and the ideal. Nevertheless, it is still a concept *of matter* what we are dealing with and, accordingly, Althusser's theory of ideology amounts to a *materialist* philosophical position: this is not because of any primacy whatsoever of the material aspect of practice over the ideal, but because *both aspects of it are material*, each in its own way, a network of dynamic relations of bodies (human and non-human) and another one of ideas, the ideas of ideology, two plexuses of worldly things, of "modes" causally interdependent with the others of their kind, two series "parallel" and nevertheless immanent to each other.

It is in this sense that Althusser's overdetermination, in its Spinozist inspiration, can meet Derrida's deconstruction of transcendent dualism, and point to the production of a novel concept of matter and materiality, quasi-unthinkable and non-articulable within the metaphysical conditions of our thought and language, a new meaning that permitted Althusser to put forward his thesis (in a sense contradictory, that is, forbidden by the dominant, metaphysical philosophical grammar) that "'ideas' or 'representations', etc., which seem to make up ideology do not have an ideal or spiritual existence, but *a material existence*. I even suggested that the ideal and spiritual existence of 'ideas' arises exclusively in an ideology of the 'idea' and of ideology."[84]

9.

However, as we have seen, this second phase of the deconstructive materialist project cannot transcend the first, which means that the new concepts of structure and matter cannot merely succeed those that appear in the phase of inversion, in the notion of the determination of social structure by the economy.

My conclusion then is that the persistent, almost obsessive attachment of the clause of determination *in the final instance* by the economy to almost every reference to overdetermination by Althusser suggests, precisely, this necessary and tense, *simultaneous* coexistence of the two incongruent phases of the relevant deconstructive endeavor. The

[84] Althusser, "Ideology…," 165; emphasis added.

incessant reappearance of this phrase in Althusser is not an indication that he could not get over the reassuring determination by the economy: rather he could not *afford* to renounce it or leave it behind. In short, I argue, it is by means of this obstinate recurrence that Althusser's argument of overdetermination anticipates Derrida's peculiar twofoldness of deconstruction regarding matter and materialism, according to which

> the concept of matter must be marked twice (the others too): in the deconstructed field – this is the phase of overturning – and in the deconstructing text, outside the oppositions in which it has been caught (matter/spirit, matter/ideality, matter/form, etc.).[85]

This has nothing to do (at least not primarily) with an internal antinomy of Althusser's argumentation, nor with the external addition of a *sine qua non* Marxist proviso, that would compromise the logic of overdetermination; it has to do with the Derridean "double writing" of both structure and matter, the necessary coexistence of the respective old and new concepts and the maintenance of the tension between them. It is precisely this mutual dependence *and* incompatibility of the two phases that brings Althusser's project of the 1960s very close to the stratagem of deconstruction, as if he were applying Derrida's lesson in advance:

> These two operations must be conducted in a kind of disconcerting *simul*, in a movement of the entire field that must be coherent, of course, but at the same time divided, differentiated, and stratified. The gap between the two operations must remain open, must let itself be ceaselessly marked and remarked. This is already a sufficient indication of the necessary heterogeneity of each text participating in this operation and of the impossibility of summing up the gap at a single point or under a single name.[86]

I think it is worth risking a comment here regarding the materialist dimension and objective of the *Derridean* deconstructive project: Derrida himself will in his turn append a "clause" to the thesis of unlimited structurality and the relevant critique of the "transcendental signified," a clause of demarcation against the endless extension of textuality without a *simple* external limit and the related danger of an "idealism of the text," as he puts it, a clause of "materialist insistence," according to himself; Derrida, in what could be understood as *a "final analysis" of his own*, seems to resort to what deconstruction is meant to criticize, that is, the exteriority of a referent (in a sense "material," as he implies):

[85] Derrida, *Positions*, 65.
[86] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 6.

> …it seems to me that the *materialist insistence* can function as a means of having the necessary generalization of the concept of text, its extension with no *simple* exterior limit (which also supposes the passage through metaphysical opposition), not wind up […]as the definition of a *new self-interiority*, a *new 'idealism,'* if you will, *of the text*. In effect, we must avoid having the indispensable critique of a certain naïve relationship to the signified or the referent, to sense or meaning, remain fixed in a suspension, that is, a pure and simple suppression, of meaning or reference.[87]

Returning now to Althusser, I suggest that perhaps nowhere else does this necessary and irresolvable tension appear so condensed as in his famous phrase, at the heart of his argument on overdetermination: "From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes."[88] In just a few words, the "materialist" determination by the economy is simultaneously affirmed and refuted, never being where and when it "ought" to be, structurally *differentiated* from itself and *deferred*, as if retroactively anticipating Derrida's lesson of *différance*. Thus the supposed antinomy between the "final analysis", understood as the attachment of structurality to an external materiality, and the inexhaustible structural interiority of overdetermination, acquires a positive meaning: as if Althusser were claiming both of its terms, or, more correctly, claiming the claim of both, against the system that prohibits it, that is, against the structure of thought of metaphysics and transcendence, by way of Spinozist immanence. In other words, Althusser subjects his text and his entire problematic to this "antinomy" not only to enable himself to inscribe his otherwise heretical and iconoclastic intervention in something that still makes sense to be called Marxism, not only to be able to inscribe his project within historical communism (Althusser's highest political and philosophical objective until the end), but also to inscribe it in a *non-metaphysical materialism*, a materialism that would not be subordinate to idealism by virtue of its metaphysical construction, a materialism that would not be an "idealist materialism." And to do this, as Montag suggests, "[h]e and his colleagues carefully analyzed the concept of structure as it functioned in the work of their contemporaries in order to differentiate within it a materialist element."[89]

In short, to conclude, Althusser takes the risk of this quasi-antinomy to inscribe himself in the multifaceted, heterogeneous, disparate but nonetheless collective endeavor of his great philosophical generation, of the most privileged of "his contemporaries," his "'objective allies' in the struggle against idealism":[90] the necessary as well as impossible task of interrogating the metaphysics of presence and transcendence from the only available ground: the ground of this very metaphysics. "Within and against," I would say,

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[87] Derrida, *Positions*, 66, emphasis added.
[88] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," 113.
[89] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 11.
[90] Ibid, 9

bringing to philosophy a timely political motto that I am sure neither Althusser nor Derrida would have had any problem subscribing to. Or, in Montag's words, "one must operate necessarily from the interior, and the manner in which one inhabits this interior determines whether one can undermine and destabilize the conceptual order."[91]

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[91] Ibid, 6.

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Is Materialist Philosophy an Anti-Philosophy? Althusser on Philosophy's Perpetual War and the Desire for Understanding

Aurelio Sainz Pezonaga

1. Introduction

This reflection is an attempt to address the question of whether materialist philosophy – and more specifically, the materialism advocated by Althusser after his self-critical turn – constitutes an anti-philosophy.

The question was initially posed by Alain Badiou (who coined the notion of anti-philosophy) in the early 1990s, and his initial answer was negative: "Althusser was, unlike Lacan, Foucault, or Derrida, who were all anti-philosophers, indeed *the philosopher*. And not only did he argue that there was philosophy, but he also proclaimed that there always would be. In essence, he upheld the *philosophia perennial*."[1]

But, about a year later, Badiou seems to contradict himself. In a 1994 article on Wittgenstein's anti-philosophy, he hesitates: "And it is very well possible that Althusser's project, under the name of 'materialist philosophy,' came close to twentieth century anti-philosophy."[2]

This apparent contradiction can be attributed to the fact that Badiou is referring to two different periods in Althusser's intellectual trajectory. Althusser's adherence to the *philosophia perennis* would correspond to his earlier "theoreticist" phase. In contrast, the

[1] Badiou, "Qu'est-ce que Louis Althusser entend par 'philosophie'?," in *Politique et philosophie dans l'œuvre de Louis Althusser*, 46.
[2] Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, 81.

notion of anti-philosophy aligns more closely with Althusser's self-critical turn, during which he redefined philosophy as, in the last instance, class struggle in theory.

G. M. Goshgarian addresses this necessary distinction of moments in his Introduction to *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, with the peculiarity of introducing a third, pre-theoreticist phase. In this early phase, as Althusser himself acknowledges in the "Introduction: Today" of *For Marx*, the goal was nothing less than the philosophical death of philosophy. This death was conceived as the reduction of philosophy to the role of an evanescent vigilant or critical conscience of science.: "Philosophy meant retracing on our own account the Young Marx's critical Odyssey, breaking through the layer of illusion that was hiding the real world from us, and arriving at last in our native land: the land of history, to find there at last the rest afforded by reality and science in concord under the perpetual vigilance of *criticism*."[3] Goshgarian characterizes this *death of philosophy* as a form of anti-philosophy and raises the question of whether Althusser's proposed new practice of philosophy should, in fact, be interpreted as a return to this pre-theoreticist and anti-philosophical phase.[4] Goshgarian thinks not: "the late Althusser is not exactly an anti-philosopher; he is [...] a non-philosophical philosopher who believes that philosophy will always exist, like ideology."[5]

Althusser's position was already quite explicit in *Lenin and Philosophy*: the materialist position in philosophy is not an anti-philosophy, "philosophy will not be suppressed: philosophy will remain philosophy."[6] Materialist philosophy is not anti-philosophy, but rather a new practice of philosophy, another way of philosophizing different from the idealist way; it is still philosophy. The assertion that "philosophy will not be suppressed" serves as a critique of the anti-philosophical stance associated with Marx and Engels, particularly evident in *The German Ideology*, which advocates for the "radical suppression of philosophy." Althusser's interpretation of Thesis XI in *Lenin and Philosophy* – a thesis that has significant grounds to be read as anti-philosophical – demonstrates that his intervention seeks to establish a philosophical practice that positions itself both against anti-philosophy and against idealist philosophy.

In "On Brecht and Marx" (1968), Althusser describes the new practice of philosophy as a displacement by which one occupies in philosophy the place that represents politics.

2. Philosophy's Perpetual War and Class Struggle in Theory

What place, then, represents politics in philosophy? According to the beautiful introduction to "Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?" (1975) this place is none other than philosophy's perpetual war. Althusser describes the battlefield (*Kampfplatz*) that is philosophy:

[3] Althusser, *For Marx*, 29-30.
[4] Althusser, *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, xix.
[5] Goshgarian, "Philosophy and Revolution: An Interview with G.M. Goshgarian," 16.
[6] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 67.

> A philosophy does not make its appearance in the world as Minerva appeared to the society of Gods and men. It only exists in so far as it occupies a position, and it only occupies this position in so far as it has conquered it in the thick of an already occupied world. It therefore only exists in so far as this conflict has made it something distinct, and this distinctive character can only be won and imposed in an indirect way, by a detour involving ceaseless study of other, existing positions. This detour is the form of the conflict which determines what side a philosophy takes in the battle and on the "Kampfplatz" (Kant), the battlefield which is philosophy. Because if the philosophy of philosophers is this perpetual war […], then no philosophy can exist within this theoretical relation of force except in so far as it marks itself off from its opponents and lays siege to that part of the positions which they have had to occupy in order to guarantee their power over the enemy whose impress they bear [*qu'ils portent alors en eux*].[7]

The place that represents politics in philosophy is the space of theoretical relations of force that constitutes philosophy as a practice and that establishes each of the interventions that make it up as philosophical. First, then, a Hobbesian image of philosophy, a war of all against all. Or perhaps it would be better to say a Sophist or Nietzschean image, or even better a Spinozist one, because Althusser's Hobbes is a Hobbes without contract, without transfer of rights to a sovereign. Philosophy is a struggle of ambitions or desires for power[8] in the space of theory. But then he adds a qualification to this war. The war and the space of conflictual relations that constitute specific philosophical practices and interventions is, in the last instance, a class struggle in theory. What is being fought out on this battlefield is not the war of all against all who are theoretically ambitious to impose their concepts on others. Because, "the politics which constitute philosophy (like the philosophy which supports the thought of political thinkers) cannot be identified with such-and-such an episode of the political struggle, nor even with the political inclinations of the authors," but bear on and turn around "the ideological hegemony of the ruling class."[9]

We might ask: why these two aspects: the field and the stakes? Why is the field of demarcating interventions in the philosophical conjuncture best described using a Hobbesian, Nietzschean, or Spinozist framework, while the stakes require a Marxist explanation? My tentative answer, offered in the spirit of Balibarism, is that any account of the politics of philosophy must accommodate the differential relationship between politics and the science in which philosophy intervenes. Perpetual war constitutes the field of politics in the politics of philosophy, whereas class struggle (the knowledge of class struggle) is the conflicting object of knowledge. Or, as Althusser himself says,

[7] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 165-166.
[8] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 66 and 82-86.
[9] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 167.

philosophical interventions take a dual form: practical and theoretical.[10] The crucial point is that these two forms, perpetual war and class struggle, are not identical. They have distinct origins: perpetual war arises from the ambition of philosophers, while class struggle is explained by historical materialism. Philosophy is internally divided. It consists of two irreducible yet inseparable aspects or forms, as long as philosophy exists. Importantly, neither of these aspects can claim to be the true representative of philosophy.

Secondly, a clarification must be made. For Althusser, class struggle is inseparable from the thesis of the primacy of class struggle over classes. The assertion that philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in theory means that class struggle constitutes the conflicting philosophical positions in the same way it produces the antagonistic positions in economics and politics. Just as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are formed through economic and political struggles, so too are idealism and materialism shaped through philosophical interventions. But why materialism and idealism? Why does materialism align with the struggle of the proletariat and idealism with the struggle of the bourgeoisie? Althusser's answer is that philosophical practice involves a conflict over scientific practice, over the very concept of scientificity. This conflict manifests as a struggle between the idealist exploitation and the materialist defense of scientificity.[11] In particular, it is a conflict over the scientificity of historical materialism and, by extension, of all other sciences. Materialism, I will argue with Spinoza, is the philosophy of the desire for understanding, the philosophy of the communism of understanding.

Finally, we must not overlook two important consequences. First, if class struggle constitutes the materialist and idealist philosophical positions, then neither can exist prior to this struggle. Both are outcomes of the struggle and evolve alongside it.[12] Second, materialism and idealism are constituted in relation to one another – not only in a conflictual dynamic but also through a mutual detour, indispensable for their differentiation. This means that each "bears within itself the specter" of the other. Pure materialism or idealism, therefore, does not exist. "[E]very philosophy reproduces within itself, in one way or another, the conflict in which it finds itself compromised and caught up in the outside world. Every philosophy bears within itself the specter of its opposite: idealism contains the specter of materialism, and vice versa."[13] Similarly, we can speak of the relationship between philosophy and anti-philosophy. In philosophy's perpetual war, there can be no philosophy that does not entail a specter of anti-philosophy. Therefore, there cannot be a materialist philosophy that does not entail the specter of anti-philosophy.

These consequences give a new physiognomy to the two aspects of philosophy, perpetual war and class struggle in theory. As perpetual war, philosophy appears in a

[10] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 61.
[11] Ibid., 62.
[12] Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 143.
[13] Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 268.

Spinozian light as an unbounded Whole, which is only the active relation between the various demarcating interventions.[14] Spinoza had described the philosophical battlefield when he affirmed, in Proposition 1 of Part IV of the *Ethics*, that "nothing positive which a false idea has is removed by the presence of the true insofar as it is true." This proposition contradicts any philosophical conception that insists on the omnipotent character of knowledge, and places ideas in a perpetual war in which victories and defeats, always partial and temporary, are determined not by the truth or falsity of ideas but by the powers of their affects.[15] In philosophy, as in politics, one never leaves the state of nature definitively.[16]

As class struggle in theory, philosophy is immersed in contradiction, in the irreconcilable antagonism between classes. The class struggle is not to be found in Spinoza.[17] But if we think of the Hobbesian, Sophist or Nietzschean perpetual war from Spinoza's point of view, then those demarcating interventions that constitute the battlefield of philosophy as a space of relations of theoretical force are also distinguished from one another by virtue of their greater or lesser *potentia*, by the active or passionate character of their desire, by their joy or sadness. By their correctness or lack of it, says Althusser.

In summary, philosophy's perpetual war represents the anti-philosophical aspect of the materialist philosophies of Althusser and Spinoza. Yet, in itself, it functions as a philosophical thesis with a specific purpose. In Spinoza, propositions that depict the conflict of ideas as a conflict of affects – rather than a clash between truth and falsity – serve to identify ideas, and consequently minds, as parts of nature. This framing eliminates the possibility of conceiving minds or ideas as a "kingdom within a kingdom." Similarly, for Althusser, philosophy's perpetual war rejects the notion of a subject of philosophy – an origin or a finality that could confer unity and essence upon philosophy. Thus, the anti-philosophical propositions in Althusser and Spinoza are, in fact, philosophical propositions.

3. A Spinozist Reading of Foucault

Let us now return to the original question. We know that all philosophy bears within itself a trace of anti-philosophy, including the concept of philosophy proposed by Althusser. But does this mean that materialist philosophy is itself an anti-philosophy?

My response now takes up Montag's reference to Macherey's Spinozist reading of Foucault's will to knowledge, active in the form of power-knowledge,[18] and Juan Domingo Sanchez Estop's idea, in his *Althusser et Spinoza. Détours et retours*, that Althusser's apparatus of thought translates Spinoza's attribute of thought into the lexicon of historical

[14] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 141.
[15] Spinoza E4P7 and E4P7C, G II, 214-215.
[16] Spinoza Ep. 50, G IV, 238-239.
[17] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 141.
[18] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 163.

materialism.[19] Knowledge does not exist solely as a "spiritual" reality; rather, it resides and evolves within a definite historical system of conditions of theoretical production.[20]

Let us recall Foucault's thesis as cited by Montag: "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."[21] My hypothesis is that the line of demarcation between anti-philosophy and materialist philosophy can perhaps be drawn between a Nietzschean and a Spinozist reading of Foucault's and Althusser's correlation of power and knowledge. Nietzsche is one of Badiou's examples of an anti-philosopher due to his rejection of the will to truth. A Nietzschean reading of the power-knowledge correlation would argue that the inseparable mutual implication between power and knowledge renders the existence of truth or the true impossible, making any pursuit of objective truth futile and deceptive.

On the contrary, a Spinozist reading would assert that understanding the mutual implication between knowledge and power is the very condition for the existence of the true. In Macherey's words, reading Foucault:

> To think of one's own history – that is to say, to think of oneself as belonging to a certain type of society in the conditions of an actuality – is to liberate thought from what it thinks without thinking about it, and thus to open for it the way to the only freedom which can have any meaning for it: […] that which allows it 'to think differently,' the expression which one could also use to illustrate the *amor intellectualis Dei* of which Spinoza speaks.[22]

"To think of one's history" is the Foucauldian way of describing the knowledge of the mutual implication between knowledge and power. On a Spinozist reading, the fact that this thinking enables us "to think differently" signifies that it is the condition for the existence of the true. In Althusser's framework, the knowledge of the mutual implication between knowledge and power is articulated through the understanding that Marxist theory is deeply rooted in and influenced by the dynamics of the class struggle:

> When one is aware that this 'theory' is itself subordinated to the practice of class struggle, hence to its errors and failures, and its deviations as well; when one is aware that it is wholly caught up in the class struggle, since it constitutes, simultaneously, one of its means and stakes, one understands better how it can escape the idealist image of bourgeois philosophy, that closed system in which everything is thought out in advance and nothing can be called into question without undermining the whole edifice.[23]

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[19] Sánchez Estop, *Althusser et Spinoza*, 101.
[20] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 41-42.
[21] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.
[22] Macherey, "Towards a Natural History of Norms," 184.
[23] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 191.

As Althusser stated in the opening paragraphs of his *Elements of Self-Criticism*, understanding the mutual implication between science and class struggle is essential for the epistemological break of historical materialism and the practice of a "correct" materialist philosophy.[24]

The term within Spinoza's philosophy that corresponds to the Foucauldian "to think of one's own history," Macherey suggests, is *amor intellectualis Dei*. I take Macherey to mean that the will to think otherwise aligns with the *potentia intellectus* – the power of the intellect, or the power of the mind or reason as defined by the sole activity of understanding (*intelligentia*), as Spinoza outlines in the Preface to the Fifth Part of the *Ethics*. This intellectual power – "thought power" (*force de pensée*), as Althusser calls it[25] – which is a condition for human freedom, presupposes a striving for understanding (*intelligendi conatus*),[26] or what we might equally describe as a desire for understanding (*cupiditas intelligendi*).

Cupiditas intelligendi could be understood as a translation of the Greek term *philo-sophia*, but it is, above all, a subversion of the idealist conception of rationality as merely an individual and mental activity, positioning rationality instead as a collective and embodied practice.[27] Through the *cupiditas intelligendi*, the activity of understanding transforms into a collective and social effort, a struggle that unfolds as a process without a fixed subject or predetermined end, yet capable of accounting for itself. This understanding recognizes itself as a *conatus*, a determinate power of nature, and through this knowledge of itself, its power grows. It can initiate cycles of perfection – recursive increases of power – resulting in both intensive and extensive cycles of liberation, ultimately culminating in the *amor intellectualis Dei*.

The *cupiditas intelligendi* is inherently political because it is a power among powers. Natalia Romé calls it "the political desire for the true".[28] To strive for understanding is to engage in theoretical-political struggles with or against the dominant currents of thought in society. I will then use the perspective offered by the Spinozist desire for understanding to explain why philosophy is not the *index* of the separation between science and politics, but rather of their mutually constitutive relationship, which is perhaps the most problematic theoretical link in Althusser`s self-criticism.[29]

If we understand the relationship between science and politics under the primacy of contradiction over the contraries, philosophy emerges in the nexus, in the in-between of this necessary implication as its effect, as its historical reaction (*contrecoup*).[30] Thus, "philosophy exists somewhere as a third instance between the two major instances which

[24] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 105-106.
[25] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 42.
[26] Spinoza E4P26D and E5P10D, G II, 227 and 287.
[27] Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, xvii.
[28] Romé, *For Theory,* 168.
[29] Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, 178-190.
[30] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 150.

constitute it as itself an instance: the class struggle and the sciences."[31] Philosophy operates within the necessary relation between science and politics and ideology. It is not a practice that can simply exist or not, or exist independently of this necessary connection. Instead, it exists and expresses itself within this very relation. Just as the true or the scientific cannot exist outside the correlation between knowledge and power and cannot be constituted unless we recognize this condition, the new practice of philosophy is "*new* in that it is a practice which has renounced denegation [of its political intervention in theory and its theoretical intervention in politics], and, knowing what it does, *acts according to what it is*."[32]

The correlation knowledge-power (or knowledge-affect) does not imply a fusion or indistinction between social practices. Scientific practice, understood as *cupiditas intelligendi*, engages with supports or confronts obstacles that it inevitably encounters as power among powers. These supports or obstacles – social, practical, and political in nature – function as affects that either "lead [the mind] to understanding"[33] or "prevent the mind from understanding".[34] They must, however, be distinguished as such from *cupiditas intelligendi*. The power of understanding and the ideological power form a unity of opposites, maintaining both a differential and conflictual relationship.

Philosophy then is the practice that intervenes in the differential relation between science and politics:

> The ideological is something that relates to practice and to society. The scientific is something that relates to knowledge [*connaissance*] and to the sciences. So, where have we intervened? Very precisely, in the 'space' where the ideological and the scientific merge but where they can and must be separated, to recognize each in its functioning and to free scientific practice from the ideological domination that blocks it.[35]

The formulation, though possibly too general, becomes concrete when grounded in the Marxist 'space.' Materialist philosophy is the theoretical-political intervention in the differential relationship between the theory and practice of historical materialism and, through this, in the differential relationship between Marxist theory and the workers' movement. This is how Althusser describes his own philosophical practice:

> These texts [*Montesquieu, la politique et l'histoire,* Feuerbach's *Manifestes philosophiques*, *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*] are thus explicit interventions in a definite conjuncture: political interventions in the existing world of Marxist philosophy, directed at one and the same time against dogmatism and the rightist critique of dogmatism; and also philosophical

[31] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 65.
[32] Ibid., 67.
[33] Spinoza E4P26, G II, 227.
[34] Spinoza E5P27, G II, 227-228.
[35] Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 99.

> interventions in politics, against economism and its humanist "appendix." But since they appealed to the history of the Labour Movement and to Marx, they could not be reduced to a simple commentary on the conjuncture. And I want to say this: whatever might be thought about its weaknesses and its limits, this philosophical intervention was the work of a member of the Communist Party, acting – even if I was at first isolated, even if I was not always listened to, even if I was then and still am criticized for what I said – within the Labour Movement and for it, thus the work of a militant trying to take politics seriously in order to think out its conditions, limits and effects within theory itself, trying in consequence to define the line and forms of intervention.[36]

Montag accurately describes Althusser's self-critical turn as beginning with a rejection of the political character of knowledge, ultimately leading to a full understanding of the conflict in which all science is necessarily situated.[37] It is also important to point out that the distinction between philosophy and science, initially theoriticist yet consistently emphasized by Althusser after his self-critical turn, corresponds to the effort to avoid reducing all social levels to an expressive totality, as occurs in the historicist problematic, and thus preserve the specificity of the different social practices.[38] In this passage, as Gabriel Albiac suggested at the time, Althusser regards his theoriticist theses as political rather than epistemological interventions, as they articulate a political vision of the relative autonomy of scientific practice. The question of whether scientific practice develops its own productive processes and validation criteria is simultaneously political and theoretical because its resolution is fraught with political and theoretical consequences.[39]

The specificity of Althusser's intervention in the history of Marxism lies also in his conception of the Marxist philosopher as a rank-and-file militant; he is a militant philosopher, not a leading philosopher. This figure signals the overcoming of the division between intellectual and manual labor, as expressed in the organizational split between leaders and rank-and-file militants.[40] Althusser's philosophical action addresses the core issues of Marxism, but it does so from the margins: from within, yet in the wings (*á la cantonade*), through an internal displacement. In his intervention, theory and practice are distinguished, not conflated, and they maintain an irreparable difference.

Althusser thus opposes any Marxist position that defends the closed unity between theory and practice, or that attributes to the proletariat the status of the (theoretical-practical) subject of history. The "subject of history" means precisely this: the fundamental unity of theory and practice in a single agent and, consequently, the fundamental unity of theory itself – and, through theory, the fundamental unity of

[36] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 168-169.
[37] Montag, "Althusser's Lenin."
[38] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 119ff.
[39] Albiac, *Althusser: cuestiones del leninismo*, 88-91.
[40] Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 25-26.

practice. For Althusser, this triple unity is a mystification that leads either to dogmatism or to humanism. He aims to distance himself from these two dominant tendencies of his time. What Althusser proposes is that there is no a priori unity between science and politics, nor between knowledge and power. There is no subject as the origin of this unity – neither a subject of liberation nor a subject of domination. This unity is conjunctural. It is conjunctural because science and politics are two distinct and irreducible practices. This remains a consequence of the primacy of class struggle over classes. The subjects of history should be identified before the struggle begins, but when the struggle takes precedence, the unity between theory and practice, or between knowledge and power, is contingent on that struggle.

The correlation between knowledge and power is the Foucauldian counterpart to the Marxist relation between theory and practice. The mutual implication of knowledge and power risks being misunderstood as an integrated unity within a subject. Power – or the capitalist class – may present itself as a subject of history, as a unified historical entity, or even as an epochal subject. But in both Althusser and Spinoza, the relations between knowledge and power, between theory and practice, are always dislocated. They are marked by inequality of origin, non-contemporaneity, plural temporality. The encounter between Marxist theory and the workers' movement is a political event. It has not always existed, and once it occurs, it is not definitive. Instead, it is subject to the class struggle[41] and can therefore assume different modalities. There is no subject of history, neither dominant nor a revolutionary. Rather, there are forms of subjectivity, partial and diverse events, contingent encounters between knowledge and power, and between theories and political practices of liberation.[42]

In Spinozist and Althusserian terms, the dislocation between theory and practice presupposes a singular desire for understanding within historical materialism. Overdetermined by various factors, primarily ideological and political, historical materialism remains a force for knowledge – a sustained and endless break which opened a theoretical continent,[43] initiating a cycle of increasing adequate knowledge of history. This very force makes historical materialism the bearer of a communism of understanding, a relational materialism grounded in Proposition 37 of the Fourth Part of Spinoza's *Ethics*, with its two demonstrations and its first scholium. The communism of understanding, an ethical-political thesis, holds that "the good that everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men." It conceives the good as that which "leads to understanding"[44] while evil are those affects that "prevent the mind from understanding."[45] This common desire for understanding arises from the fact that the

41 Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 151-152.
42 Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, 147 and 174.
43 Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 39-40.
44 Spinoza E4P26, G II, 227.
45 Spinoza E5P27, G II, 227-228.

good of understanding is "common to all, and all can enjoy it"[46] and it is intrinsically tied to the desire to do good and to unite with others in friendship (*pietas* and *honestas*). Furthermore, knowledge of the second kind is composed of common notions – ideas that are common to all bodies, to all human beings, or at least to all bodies with which humans habitually interact.[47]

It should not be forgotten, however, that the passionate side of the communism of understanding is the ambition to know. Both are driven by the effort to make others love what one loves. Spinoza, in the *Ethics*, provides the example of intellectual ambition and arrogance through his critique of interpreters of nature and the gods, as outlined in the Appendix to the First Part. These interpreters base their authority on the astonishment they produce in others, explaining what is not understood by appealing to divine or supernatural art and resorting to God as a sanctuary of ignorance.[48] Idealism – understood as the "claim to possess the truth, not just of things, but of all existing truths"[49] – is the institutionalized expression of the ambition to know. It posits an absolute beginning that claims to know the absolute origin of all that exists. Well, the struggle between the communism of understanding and the ambition to know occurs at the very heart of Marxism. This struggle arises for various reasons but necessarily for one in particular: the desire for understanding the class struggle – like any desire for understanding – is singular, finite and always overdetermined by the conjuncture in which it operates. Furthermore, as Balibar suggests, it is also underdetermined, because it results from the encounter of multiple determinations, each with its own *conatus* and history.[50]

In short, the key to the materialist philosophies of Althusser and Spinoza is the recognition that objective knowledge is not destroyed or rendered impossible by its immersion in social conflicts. On the contrary, acknowledging this necessary immersion in social struggles is the condition for the existence of objective knowledge and the foundation of a new practice of philosophy. However, to advance this thesis, the philosophy that proclaims it must deny itself as objective knowledge or as knowledge of enduring bodies. Instead, it must situate itself within the differential relation that both unites and distinguishes science and politics. In Spinoza, this differential relation between science and politics can be located in the transition from the second to the third kind of knowledge. In Althusser, the same relation is constituted by the dual aspect of philosophy: as perpetual war and as, in last instance, class struggle in theory.

For both Althusser and Spinoza, however, perpetual war is only one aspect of the problem. The other aspect is objective knowledge or the desire for understanding – provided we also recognize these as powers. In other words, the partial victories or defeats within philosophy's perpetual war do not depend on the truth or falsity of ideas. Rather,

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[46] Spinoza E4P37D2, G II, 236.
[47] Spinoza E2P38 and P39, G II, 118-121.
[48] Spinoza E1Ap, G II, 81.
[49] Althusser, *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, 20.
[50] Balibar, "Avant-propos pour la réédition de 1996," xii-xiii.

interventions on the philosophical battlefield differ significantly depending on whether one takes sides in favor of the production and reproduction of objective knowledge (the sustained break, the desire for understanding) or militates against knowledge.

To counter the theoreticist depoliticization of science, Althusser, in *Elements of Self-Criticism*, introduces three significant shifts within his self-critical turn. First, he asserts the primacy of the political form over the theoretical within philosophy.[51] Second, he expands the role of philosophy beyond its double representation – before the sciences and politics – to include other practices. Third, he defends the revolutionary character of historical materialism. He differentiates the science of history, historical materialism, from other sciences, considering it a revolutionary science immersed in the class struggle – "that could not have developed in Marx or in the labor movement except given a radical and unremitting break with bourgeois ideology, an unceasing struggle against the assaults of this ideology."[52] The "proletarian (philosophical) theoretical positions" that Marx developed from proletarian political positions provided a vantage point from which the mechanisms of exploitation and class domination became visible.[53] Soon, however, Althusser would extend this revolutionary character to all sciences.

In *Elements of Self-Criticism*, Althusser notably attributes his theoriticism – his separation of science and politics and his rationalist interpretation of the epistemological break – to his detour through Spinoza.[54] According to Althusser, it was the absence of the class struggle in Spinoza's thought that diverted him from a political conception of the science of history. While I can readily agree with Althusser regarding the absence of class struggle in Spinoza's philosophy, it is equally important to highlight that Spinoza's notion of the desire for understanding inherently carries a deeply political or ethical-political dimension of knowledge.

4. The Element 1 of SPS and the Desire for Understanding

Althusser understands the epistemological break, "which Spinoza, long before Bachelard, inserted between his first and second levels of knowledge,"[55] as a beginning without end. The conclusion of this beginning is undetermined; the beginning continues, persists, and endures indefinitely. It is a continuing or sustained break [*coupure continuée*] within which complex reorganizations can be observed.[56] However, the persistence of the break is an effect whose immanent cause can be identified with the Spinozian desire for understanding. This desire for understanding constitutes the conscious effort of the break to persist. Where can we locate the equivalent of the desire for understanding as the immanent cause of the continuing break within Althusser's categories?

[51] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 143.
[52] Ibid., 105.
[53] Ibid., 160-161; Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 18-33.
[54] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 141.
[55] Ibid., 190.
[56] Althusser, *For Marx*, 64; Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 39; Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 66.

My suggestion is that this equivalent might be found in one of the two elements of the spontaneous philosophy of the scientist (SPS), that which arises from the experience of scientific practice itself and which Althusser calls "element 1." Althusser lists the theses of this element, which is characterized by a materialist and objectivist orientation and is closely identified with the scientific method. He also emphasizes the absence of any doubt regarding the cognitive power of science and the rejection of any "question of right."[57]

In *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser defines materialism as "simply the strict attitude of the scientist towards the reality of his object which allows him to grasp what Engels called, 'nature just as it exists without any foreign admixture.'"[58] This list of theses corresponds closely to much of Althusser's reading of Spinoza during that period.[59]

Through the relationship between the two elements of the spontaneous philosophy of the scientist, Althusser highlights the political dimension of scientific practice. Scientific practice is always and necessarily embedded in social struggle – a struggle for or against the exploitation of science by idealist philosophy in favor of other ideological practices. Althusser describes this as a struggle for or against the domination of element 2 (of extra-scientific, idealist origin) over the materialist element 1. The exploitation of science by idealist philosophy entails the exploitation of element 1. This struggle "reproduces in the heart of the SPS the philosophical balance of power that exists between materialism and idealism."[60] Furthermore, "the forms of this struggle are themselves governed by other more distant forms, those of the ideological struggle […] and the class struggle."[61]

Thus, the correlation between knowledge and power is rooted in scientific practice itself, manifesting as a struggle between two forms of philosophy: the philosophy that emerges from the practice itself – the convictions that exist *in* that practice[62] – and the philosophy that originates from other practices, ultimately tied to the social formation in which the practice is embedded. In comparison to Spinoza's definition of desire, the spontaneous philosophy of scientists plays the role of the idea or consciousness of scientific practice, which corresponds to *appetitus*. However, as Spinoza explains, "between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite," meaning desire can be defined as appetite accompanied by self-consciousness. Besides, appetite itself is *conatus* when "it is related to the mind and body together."[63]

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57 Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 133.
58 Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 40.
59 Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 137-138 and 187-193.
60 Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 134.
61 Ibid., 116.
62 Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 168.
63 Spinoza E3P9S, G II, 1475.

In the social struggle in which scientific practice is immersed, "[s]cience is […] not neutral, because this struggle for or against values for which it serves as support or pretext is pursued at the very heart of it."[64] The desire for understanding reflects the commitment of scientific practice to its immanent, materialistic, and philosophical dimension. This commitment manifests as scientific practice distinguishes itself from external causes while acknowledging its necessary relationship with them. The external element, itself an idea arising from the scientific practice, is nonetheless inadequate, or at least incorrect. While scientific practice strives to persevere through both internal and external ideas, the external element 2 primarily falters by conflating the internal and external causes of scientific practice.

Conversely, by translating the desire for understanding into the Marxist problematic of spontaneous philosophy and ideology, we can fully grasp it as a historical power among historical powers. It is always tied to a specific theoretical and political conjuncture, "the conjunction of the material, technical, social, political and ideological conditions which determine it."[65] This perspective helps us avoid the risk of an idealism of eternal knowledge that lingers in Spinoza's philosophy – or, more precisely, in a reading of it that adopts the Enlightenment's or Lenin's vision of the omnipotence of science.[66]

To test this reading, we can revisit the second half of the 1970s, focusing on the 1976 Granada conference on "The Transformation of Philosophy" and the posthumously published works *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy* and *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*. The former was written in the same year as the conference, while the latter two years later.

What is most compelling in these works is Althusser's recovery of the idea of a philosophical force inherent in scientific practice. Science itself generates materialist effects that disrupt, challenge, or threaten the dominant ideology, thereby provoking a counter-offensive: an idealist philosophical force opposing the materialism embedded in the desire for understanding that propels the sciences.

The materialist force that I term, following Spinoza, the "desire for understanding" prevents Althusser's materialism from being classified as anti-philosophy. Althusser acknowledges that his conception of philosophy's perpetual war can be viewed through a Nietzschean lens. Moreover, this Nietzschean perspective is not only a potential interpretation but, as we have seen, is embedded within Althusser's depiction of perpetual war. However, it is simultaneously reabsorbed into a Marxist framework. For this reason, Althusser confronts what he terms, in "The Transformation of Philosophy," the negative omnipotence of philosophers; what he describes in *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy* as "the idealism of the class struggle"; and what he identifies in *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers* as subjectivism, particularly class subjectivism. Each of these positions bears a

[64] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 108.
[65] Althusser, *Essays in Self-criticism*, 148-149.
[66] Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 137-139; Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 47.

resemblance to anti-philosophy, and in all three texts, Althusser addresses them as problems requiring resolution.

"The Transformation of Philosophy" contains Althusser's most distinctly anti-philosophical formulations. For instance, he asserts that "Marx manifestly considered that to produce philosophy as 'philosophy' was a way of entering into the adversary's game."[67] He further exhorts the realization of a philosophy that is a non-philosophy, drawing a parallel with the revolutionary State as a State that is a 'non-State.' This position is presented in a particularly problematic manner:

> To support our argument by comparison with the revolutionary State, which ought to be a State that is a 'non-State' – that is, a State tending to its own dissolution, to be replaced by forms of free association – one might equally say that the philosophy which obsessed Marx, Lenin and Gramsci ought to be a 'non-philosophy' – that is, one which ceases to be produced in the form of a philosophy, whose function of theoretical hegemony will disappear in order to make way for new forms of philosophical existence.[68]

However, in "The Transformation of Philosophy", Althusser also expresses concern that "the most important thing" of his exposition – the depiction of philosophy's violence as exploitation, domination, and the appropriation of its exterior, including social practices – might be interpreted through Nietzsche's concept of the will to power.

> But the most important thing remains to be said. Because what has been said so far could be interpreted in terms of the will to power, accounting for the history of philosophy somewhat in Nietzsche's manner: at a given moment there existed men motivated by *ressentiment* who, wounded by the world, set about dominating it through thought – in short, making themselves the masters of the world, conceiving it exclusively through their own thought. The philosophers were precisely these specialists in the violence of the concept, of *Begriff*, of appropriation, who asserted their power by subjecting to the law of Truth all the social practices of men, who became sadder and sadder and lived on in the night. We know that such a perspective is not foreign to some of our contemporaries who, naturally enough, discover in philosophy the archetype of power, the model of all power. They themselves write the equation knowledge = power and, in the style of modern and cultivated anarchists, affirm: violence, tyranny, state despotism are Plato's fault – just as they used to say a while back that the Revolution was Rousseau's fault.[69]

[67] Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 263.
[68] Ibid., 264.
[69] Ibid., 250-251.

Against this purely anti-philosophical interpretation, Althusser explicitly posits a theory of philosophy as a theoretical laboratory for the constitution of the dominant ideology, rooted in Marx's investigations. It is Marx, as developed by Althusser himself, who stands in opposition to Nietzsche and the Nietzschean tendencies of certain contemporaries – whom Althusser does not explicitly identify but who might include the so-called "new philosophers" such as André Glucksmann, as the English translator suggests.[70] However, this solution seems not to have fully satisfied Althusser, as he revisits the issue in the chapters of *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy* and *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers* that engage with the subject of Marxist philosophy.

In *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, Althusser frames the question through the dual nature of philosophy: "political by virtue of its function, theoretical-scientific by virtue of its form, with its political function representing the essential determination of this double aspect."[71] From this duality emerges a critical problem: "Of what use is it to philosophy to borrow the dominant forms of rationality and scientificity?"[72] In other words, why is philosophy not simply political? Althusser explicitly rejects the notion of a purely political philosophy, which he terms "idealism of the class struggle […], the belief that all these struggles, from the economy through politics to ideology, are struggles for pleasure, or prestige, or simply for victory."[73] This idealism of the class struggle appears to be a veiled critique of Nietzsche's will to power.

Althusser's initial response aligns with his argument in "The Transformation of Philosophy." He extends his earlier critique of the exploitation of science by idealist philosophy, as outlined in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, to encompass all practices. The central struggle, he argues, lies in the control and orientation of these various practices, including science and technology.

> [T]hese class struggles do not have as their sole stakes the relations or apparatuses which constitute the forms in which they are waged. Also at stake in them – indeed, fundamentally at stake in them – are the *practices* in which exploitation is imposed and undergone; among these practices figures the practice of the sciences and techniques. In all these struggles, it is a question, at the summit, of maintaining or capturing state power and the state apparatuses and, at the base, of controlling and orienting the different practices as a function of the class antagonism that divides society into classes.[74]

However, while this represents progress over the idealism of class struggle, it does not resolve the problem. In fact, it may complicate it further, as this control and orientation

[70] Ibid., 251n5.
[71] Althusser, *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, 131.
[72] Ibid., 131.
[73] Ibid., 132.
[74] Ibid., 132.

could just as easily be achieved through forms other than rationality – a possibility Althusser himself acknowledges on the following page.

The true answer, I believe, is provided by Althusser in the following chapter, where he returns to element 1 of the spontaneous philosophy of scientists in its struggle with element 2. The key insight is that scientific labor "naturally produces a materialist reduction, a materialist critique *in actu* of the idealist contents of the categories and ideas under whose domination scientists work."[75] Consequently, the rationalist, scientific form becomes the necessary guise that the dominant ideology must adopt to combat, dominate, and orient the materialist philosophical force immanent in scientific practice. This materialist philosophical force, or desire for understanding, inherently challenges any non-rationalist form of ideological unification.

In *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, Althusser approaches the question from the opposite perspective. He frames it not from the idealist side (the issue is not why idealist philosophy assumes a scientific form), but from the perspective of materialist philosophy, or philosophy for Marxism. The central problem becomes why a philosophy for Marxism cannot simply be a pure anti-philosophy or a mere defense of power for its own sake.

The opening paragraph of Chapter XX articulates an anti-philosophical thesis in its starkest terms: "philosophy produces not knowledge, but only a weapon in a fight. A weapon is a weapon: it produces nothing but the power of victory."[76] The second paragraph immediately counters this claim by raising an objection:

> But if this is so, does it not mean that philosophy, which depends on the ideology determinant for the dominant class, is merely an ideology? Is it not to expose oneself to the classic jibes of all those who, beginning with the Sophists, have mocked philosophy's pretensions to utter the Truth about all things? In other words, how can we ensure that philosophy is not the theoretical delirium of an individual or a social class in search of guarantees or rhetorical ornament?[77]

This poses a serious problem because it calls into question the very nature of Althusser's discourse. The theory of philosophy that Althusser articulates in these texts relies on a specific theory of society and history, a "scientific theory of philosophy."[78] What is at stake, then, is the scientific character of the Marxism on which Althusser bases his argument: "a scientific theory of class struggle [...]. *This scientific knowledge of the ideology*."[79] Marxism, understood in this way, provides philosophy with a "conscious determination ensured by scientific knowledge of its conditions, forms and laws."[80] This determination

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[75] Ibid., 136.
[76] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 180.
[77] Ibid., 180.
[78] Althusser, *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, 119.
[79] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 181.
[80] Althusserm *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 181. See also Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 142.

serves as a criterion of "correctness [*justesse*], a practical category that refers to the adaptation of means to ends as a function of the class character of the one pursuing those ends [...] *the 'correctness' of the philosophy of the proletariat escapes subjectivity because it is under the control of an objective science, the science of the laws of class struggle*" rather than being founded in the universal character of the proletarian class, as Lukács posited in *History and Class Consciousness*.[81]

The question of the conflict between element 1 and element 2 of the spontaneous philosophy of scientists resurfaces within historical materialism – the science of the laws of class struggle. Perpetual war, Althusser argues, also occurs within the proletarian camp. He presents this issue in connection with Stalin's "proletarian philosophy" and "economistic evolutionism."[82] At the same time, Althusser highlights the constitutive paradox of the proletarian class position in the philosophies of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci, and Mao: necessary yet modest, intermittent, and unsystematic.[83]

This paradox arises from the fact that, while a philosophical system emerges from the struggle to constitute the unity of the state, the non-systematicity of proletarian philosophy does not align with the anti-systematic stance of Kierkegaard or Nietzsche – a stance that represents "the underside of the systems they reject"[84] – but instead corresponds to the unity of a class that does not seek to exploit others. What, then, is meant by "system" and "non-systematicity" in this context?

Returning to Montag's analysis, the unity of the working class is not achieved through hierarchical organization but through the encounter and concurrence of complex elements. It is not governed by a principle of vertical order or "the concept of structure understood as the principle of the unity of its elements, the whole whose causal significance lies in its assigning to its parts their place and function." Instead, it is "the conjunction of singular entities in a larger singular entity that persists in its conjoined state for a specific duration of time."[85]

Thus, a philosophy that seeks the unity of the working class must itself be unsystematic and objective, a contradiction at its core. The encounter of materialist philosophy must form an objective non-system: a contingent encounter of practice and theory, of the workers' movement and historical materialism, of revolutionary struggles and the desire for understanding.

5. Conclusion. Many Historical Materialisms

Materialist philosophy cannot simply be any kind of intervention in philosophy's perpetual war. While it integrates an anti-philosophical aspect – namely, the recognition of the battlefield itself – it cannot be reduced to an anti-philosophy. Instead, it must

[81] Althusser, *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, 182.
[82] Ibid., 182.
[83] Ibid., 183.
[84] Ibid., 176 and Althusser, *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, 135.
[85] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 90. See also Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter*, 277.

simultaneously serve as the philosophical expression of the desire for understanding immanent in scientific and other practices. For materialist desire – the desire for understanding – is not only a process of production but also the motor of a continuing break: an ongoing transformation of ideology into objective knowledge. The raison d'être of both idealist and materialist philosophy, then, is to fight the social war provoked by this break.

On the side of materialist philosophy, this means intervening in favor of the break itself and supporting the desire for understanding that immanently sustains it, while resisting any idealist exploitation of the break and the desire for understanding. Ultimately, by seeking the liberation of materialist desire and its communism of understanding – which requires opposing the dominant ideology – materialist philosophy also strives to liberate all other practices.[86]

As previously mentioned, in *Elements of Self-Criticism*, Althusser introduced three significant shifts as part of his self-critical turn. Later, in *How to Be a Marxist in Philosophy*, Althusser extended the revolutionary character of historical materialism to all sciences. In this way, he acknowledges the capitalist exploitation of science and technology. The desire for understanding has become a fundamental aspect of labor power within late capitalism. Today, we should propose an additional shift that pluralizes both historical materialism and revolutionary practices.

In the existing conditions, resistance to the capitalist exploitation of the desire for understanding takes the form of a proliferation of explanations about the various forms of domination and strategies for overcoming them. There are not only multiple revolutionary movements but also many historical materialisms. This does not mean merely multiple Marxisms, but distinct historical materialisms which – while likely to bear traces of Marxism – need not be directly identified with the tradition of *Capital*. These historical materialisms offer the theoretical basis for proposals that, as Étienne Balibar suggests, understand politics as the transformation of specific material conditions: social, structural, and conjunctural relations; for there can be no politics of transformation without knowledge of the conditions to be transformed.

As Balibar explains, the concept of "conditions" can be interpreted in various ways: similar analyses can yield opposing practices, certain structures can be prioritized over others, and the very notion of "conditions" itself can be conceived in fundamentally different ways. This divergence is evident, for example, in the contrast between Marx's and Foucault's approaches to conditions.[87] Extending Balibar's insight, we can observe similar divergences in the understandings of "conditions" across communist, feminist, ecological, anti-racist and other critical perspectives.

It is in this sense that Spinoza once again demonstrates his relevance. While his philosophy may lack an explicit focus on the apperception of class struggle, it

[86] Althusser, *Philosophy of the Non-Philosophers*, 185.
[87] Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, 9.

compensates by recognizing the extension and multiplication of singular desires to understand and overcome forms of social domination.

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Co-operation and Overdetermination: On the Humor in the Critique of Political Economy

Dylan Fagan

I. **Prise and Reprise; On the Practice of Reading (and Writing)**

I thank everyone for the opportunity to commemorate *Althusser and His Contemporaries* in this symposium.[1] A symposium being a chance for reprise and therefore a prise. I don't think I need to mention to many here that *prise* in French, and here I quote the *New Cassell's French Dictionary*, is "taking, capture, prize, hold, handle, purchase, grasp, grip, quarrel, dose, pinch (of snuff, etc.), fighting, close quarters" and *reprise* is "resumption, taking back, retaking, recapture, recovery, reconquest, revival, renewal, return (of an illness etc.), repair, darn, repetition, mark of repetition, burden, refrain (of a song), pick-up, acceleration (of an engine)."[2] This symposium therefore is an opportunity to *practice* these activities in reading *Althusser and His Contemporaries*. Already having said here

[1] The minimal division of memory and reminiscence [*re* + *men*] or commemoration [*cum* + *memor*] is an old philosophical question. Aristotle writes: "to remember, however, differs from reminiscence, not only in time, but because many other animals participate of the former, but no one of the known animals, as I may say, participates of the latter, except man. The reason of this is, that reminiscence is, as it were, a certain syllogism. For he who exercises reminiscence syllogizes, because he has before seen or heard, or suffered something of this kind; and reminiscence is, as it were, a certain investigation." See "On Memory and Reminiscence," [Περὶ μνήμης καὶ ἀναμνήσεως / *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*] in *The Works of Aristotle: Volume VI*, 177/453a7.

[2] *New Cassell's French Dictionary,* ed. Girard (New York: Funk & Wagnalls), 593, 643. The adjective *pris* is "caught, seized, taken in, congealed, curdled, frozen."

Althusser and His Contemporaries, let us hasten to add, hearing for ourselves a kind of humorous hailing, do not forget the subtitle! 'Philosophy's Perpetual War,' like that other important subtitle, 'Critique of Political Economy,' ought to be kept in mind here throughout.[3]

Reading and rereading *Althusser and His Contemporaries* for this symposium brought forth three particular points, nodes, or realms of Marxist theory that I want to address, which I think exist in related and important ways in the book. They are domination, commanding, and co-operation. Their engagement, we will suggest here, borrowing a phrase from Althusser, "generates philosophical counter-currents" within their positions, instances, and effects in and for the critique of political economy.[4] This engagement, we want to first say, primarily concerns Althusser's notion of a practice and specifically practices of reading (and writing).[5] For Althusser elucidates, particularly in his contributions to *Lire Le Capital,* how reading (and writing) *is* a particular instance of activity, i.e., a practice, that intervenes on ideological effectivity.[6] As such, reading (and writing, therefore, in the most clear and yet diabolical way) is *how* one prizes *and* reprises. Practices of reading and writing thus are *how* one can attempt to introduce a kind of divagation into, for instance, philosophy's perpetual war. *Althusser and His Contemporaries* is both a demonstration of this particular problematic as well as an effort (in the true sense) to introduce emending effects into that very field of reading and writing that is the practice of the ideological, i.e., prise *and* reprise, the political, or what Althusser called the class struggle.[7]

II. **Of Domination, Commanding, and Co-operation**

To begin, we can first try to outline a general and particular critique of a theory of 'domination' developed in *Althusser and His Contemporaries*. In many places and ways, the book demonstrates how a certain notion of 'domination' is susceptible – particularly in the history or chronicle of reading Althusser, and particularly in the reading of particular texts of Althusser, such as the 'ISA essay' 'early' in this chronicle – to a kind of ideological effectivity which itself bears significant and specifically political effects.[8] This is a notion of 'domination' such that ideology *simply* dominates human beings who are its passive patients. That ideology is *simply* error made by 'individuals,' *simply* misrecognition passively

[3] While Montag's subtitle here invokes, or reorients, Kant's '*Der Kampfplatz...Metaphysik,*' the latter is regularly translated in English as 'the battlefield of metaphysics.' Here, 'war' strengthens the chains of signification so that the 'philosophy' in question bears on the concepts and questions of war and *Gewalt*.
[4] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, 177.
[5] Regarding practice, in "On the Materialist Dialectic: On the Unevenness of Origins," Althusser writes, "by *practice* in general I shall mean any process of *transformation* of a determinate *product*." See *For Marx*, 166.
[6] See Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, 57ff.
[7] For a brief and schematic articulation of this entangled problematic, see Althusser, "How Should We Define "Culture"?," 488.
[8] See, for instance, Lewis, "The Althusser Case."

made by 'individuals.' Amongst its alleged entailments, this schematization purports to usurp the power of 'individuals' to act in or on the class struggle.[9]

Montag identifies how Althusser specifically differs with this theoretical position in at least two primary ways. Firstly, this notion of ideology and domination presupposes that the former is an ideal rather than material attribute. It supposes that ideology is predominately characterized by ideas and is 'specular' rather than 'lived practically,' i.e., materially practices. As Montag writes, Althusser articulates in the 'ISA essay' that "ideology is immanent in its apparatuses and their practices; it has no existence apart from these apparatuses and is entirely coincidental with them,"[10] and "the materiality of ideology consists of its immanence in bodies and forces, in the indelible traces of language itself, the utterance, the word, the signifier in all the forms irreducible to anything more primary than themselves."[11] Secondly, the prevailing 'idealist' schematization of ideology supposes an adequacy of 'domination' to its grasp on 'individuals.'[12] Such a conceptualization of ideology and domination denies the existence of a *décalage,* i.e., denies that there are lags, opacities, and discrepancies characterizing the ideological relation as such. Readers here can be referred to the particularly important eludications in Chapter 8, "Althusser and Foucault: Apparatuses of Subjection," regarding the fundamental conceptive discrepancy *within* Althusser's rethinking of ideology that is the verb interpellate. Montag there draws out how Althusser's theorization of ideology, particularly in its own crossed-out and excised materials from publication, bears an effort to break up the notion that the "force and solidity" of ideological formations – and their movements of bodies and minds (in bodies) – cannot be disrupted or modified.[13]

In order to address the effects of this conceptual deviation, we first want to suggest that the theoretical node of "overdetermination" in Althusser's writing can be understood to work to displace the aforementioned 'idealist' and homeostatic notion of ideology as 'domination.' For 'overdetermination,' as perhaps proleptically articulated in "Contradiction and Overdetermination," points not to a homeostasis but instead an uneven and variegated plurality of effects and relations crossing over (and between) 'the body and the mind.'[14] Rather than a flush comportment of the body and the mind qua domination, Althusser writes that there is instead an "*accumulation of effective determinations*" in contradictions.[15] Instances of domination and exploitation are not the effect of a single

[9] This understanding can be said to derive in part from certain readings of the so-called young Marx. See Althusser, "'On the Young Marx'," in *For Marx*.
[10] Montag, *Althusser and his Contemporaries,* 151.
[11] Ibid, 155.
[12] Althusser jocularly writes, "this restructuration of the problematic of an ideology can proceed by many other routes than that of the simple immediate relation of object and reflection!" "'On the Young Marx'," 68.
[13] Montag, *Althusser and his Contemporaries,* 160.
[14] On the threshold of the body and the mind, see Spinoza, "Ethics," in *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Volume I*, esp. IIIP2. See also Part III of this essay below.
[15] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination: Notes for an Investigation," in *For Marx*, 113.

contradiction of a binary polar force but rather a tangle (*Knäuel*) of forces and contradictions. Ideological formations thus form in a discrepant compact. The concept of overdetermination for Althusser therefore can be said to have "left the land" of contradiction and ideology according to a schema of homeostatic domination and is instead "basing the future of its city *on another element*."[16] The appropriation by Althusser of Freud's *Überdeterminierung* can thus be understood as a tactic in the effort to newly displace this homeostatic schematization of domination in contradictions. But, as Althusser also writes, "*overdetermination*…I shall use it…as an *index* and as a *problem*."[17] The 'index' therefore does not immediately or necessarily dissipate the domination to which its 'problem' points.

Althusser's usage, or deployment, of overdetermination here moreover points to a superlative primacy with regards to the problematic of practice in and for the question of domination and ideology in the specific conditions of contradictions characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Towards the end of "Contradiction and Overdetermination," Althusser identifies the outstanding, i.e., ongoing, question of the 'survival' of "*customs, habits,* even '*traditions*'" for Marxist political theory and practice.[18] He underlines the importance of the uneveness of these 'practices' by positing that "*the overdetermination of any contradiction*" is such that certain 'surviving' practices can "modify the existing superstructure" even "*beyond their immediate life context.*"[19] But how does such a practical modification 'take hold'? For a disruption in a spurious concept of domination by this conceptive overdetermination does not 'auto-poetically' introduce a new practical emended resolution.

In order to address this conceptual lacuna, we want to suggest here that *Althusser and His Contemporaries* identifies a particular and fundamental significance of humor (and the humors) for interrupting and rethinking so-called domination, particularly by 'practicing' the conceptual node developed by Althusser in his reprisal of Freud's notion of overdetermination. For humor is both a tactic (i.e., use as a theoretical weapon), as well as an effect and attribute of 'the body and the mind,' or 'the base and the superstructure.' Humor is overdetermined, disruptive, and thereby bears a crucial position for a theory and practice of fracturing domination, commanding, and co-operation in the conditions of the contradictions characteristic of the capitalist social formation so that another form of social relation can take hold.

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16 Althusser, "Feuerbach's 'Philosophical Manifestoes'," in *For Marx*, 47, trans. modified.
17 Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," 101.
18 Ibid, 114.
19 Ibid, 115-6. The text of "Contradiction and Overdetermination" cuts off here and resumes with an Appendix which takes up Engels' letter to J. Bloch in 1890 and the question of what he would call structural causality in *Lire Le Capital*.

A question of humor emerges in *Althusser and His Contemporaries* in Chapter 3, "Settling Accounts with Phenomenology: Husserl and His Critics" in a perhaps surprising situation. This is in the exposition of the critique made by Althusser, Jean Cavaillès, and Georges Canguilhem among others, regarding "the entire complex reality of history" and "the intelligence of scientific history itself" according to 'phenomenology.'[20] For in contrast to the latter's notion of a history of science based on the progress and epochal epistemological guarantees of 'problem solving,' Montag writes, "on the contrary, as Althusser jocularly puts it, 'reality has a bit more imagination.'"[21]

This remark, we suggest here, bears a crucial effort to emend the aforementioned 'idealist' schematization of ideology as a mode of homeostatic domination. Firstly, we can say, it critically articulates how the 'immediate results' of 'ideology' do not dissipate the problematic of the ideological itself.[22] The action of 'scientific problem solving' is neither identical nor adequate to the emendation of ideological effectivity itself. There is instead here an intransitive epistemological break underscored by Montag (and Althusser) that disrupts the notion of an epistemological homeostasis, i.e., science solves the problems it sets out for itself.

Secondly, we note that this intervention is 'raised up' in a mode of jocularity by Montag. In order to understand the critical basis of this 'humorous' conceptualization, whereby a homeostatic notion of domination is interrupted in an effort to introduce another mode of conceptual co-operation, we can turn to a passage from Part VIII in *Capital* that articulates how the concept and action of 'commanding and co-operation' comes to displace a spurious, 'idealist' notion of 'domination.' In the now historic English language translation of *Capital* by Ben Fowkes, this passage is in the 'upstream' chapter 30, entitled "Impact of the Agricultural Revolution on Industry. The creation of a home market for Industrial Capital." In the *Marx-Engels Werke* edition, it is section 5 of chapter 24, entitled "*Die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation*."[23]

To remember here again, in Part VIII of *Capital*, Marx articulates "so-called *ursprüngliche* accumulation" in a sequence, or displacement, of concepts, beginning with the secret of *ursprüngliche* accumulation and continuing to the expropriation of the agricultural people from the land, the bloody legislation against the expropriated since the end of the 15th century, the forcing down of wages by Act of Parliament, the genesis of the industrial capitalist, the impact of agricultural revolution on industry, the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation, and then finally to the modern theory of colonization. One of the significant attributes of this sequence is the way that these social

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[20] See Althusser, "George Canguilhem's Philosophy of Science: Epistemology and History of Science," in Macherey, *In a Materialist Way*, 164.

[21] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*, 44.

[22] In the terms of Althusser's theorization of ideology in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation" [1969-1970], the imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence is not the symbolic relation to the real conditions of existence.

[23] See Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Ben Fowkes, 909; Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in *Marx-Engels Werke Band 23,* 773. Cited hereafter as '*Capital*' and '*Das Kapital*.'

forms appear as bearers of a process of exchange and sublimation which does *not necessarily* appear in the capitalist social forms themselves.[24] There is therefore here within this process, i.e., so-called primitive accumulation, a particular *loss* of an appearance of necessity within the 'forms and categories' of classical political economy that works, or serves, to displace the ideological problematics of the capitalist process itself.[25] This sequence or conceptual movement does not therefore exposit the capitalist social formation as the simple result of a *Bildung* or *Entwicklung* through the 'problem solving' of classical political economy, but instead as the effects of losses stemming from interventions and interruptions that 'work through' the limit of the capitalist process of production.

We can also note that there is here, as elsewhere in *Capital,* a magnanimous discursive jocularity. Jokes abound.[26] One example: in Chapter 29, entitled "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist," when Marx reports the immense death from famine in the Banyuwangi region of Java under Dutch colonial administration from 1750-1811, he quips, "*Das ist der doux commerce!*"[27] Fowkes gives, "That is peaceful commerce!" *Doux* is also soft, sweet, mild, genial, or tender. *Doux commerce* is untranslated by Marx. It is the last sentence of the paragraph. Marx thereby ends, changes, and loses at once the standing 'house' of language by this inserted mordant jocularity.

Now we can return to the question of how this limit of *Capital,* in its exposition of "so-called *ursprüngliche* accumulation," introduces an overturning of the idealist problematic of 'ideology' by displacing the 'ideological' primacy of domination and inserting the practical concepts of commanding and co-operation therein. In chapter 30 of *Capital* ("Impact of Agricultural Revolution on Industry"), Marx elucidates why the domination mete by the forms of capital and commodity are *not* adequate to the domination of the capitalist conjuncture itself. For the population in the capitalist process

[24] It is the loss of the 'mute compulsion' in Australia that so horrifies Herr Peel. Marx writes, "Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to Swan River!" *Capital,* 933.

[25] Georg Lukács also centralized the transformation of 'forms and categories of thought' in his reading of Marx. The epigraph from his *Marx's Basic Ontological Principles* reads, "*Categories are forms of being, characteristics of existence* – Marx." Fredric Jameson added his own emphasis to this position with the epigraph to his second *Ideologies of Theory* volume: "…by the same dialectical process every problem of categories becomes transformed into a historical problem. But (it should be noted) into a problem of universal history which now appears…simultaneously as a problem of method and a problem of our knowledge of the present – Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness.*"

[26] Wilhelm Fliess complained to Freud that *The Interpretation of Dreams* is *too* filed with jokes. See Freud, "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, *Volume VIII*, 3.

[27] Marx, *Capital,* 916; *Das Kapital,* 780. After calling the Dutch colonial Administration "the model capitalist nation of the 17th century," Marx reprises Thomas Raffles calling the 19th Century Dutch colonial administration in Java "one of the most extraordinary relations of treachery, bribery, massacre, and meanness."

is now, Marx writes here, "transformed into material elements of variable capital."[28] In this situation, Marx writes:

> The flax looks exactly as it did before. Not a fibre of it is changed, but a new social soul has entered into its body. It now forms a part of the constant capital of the master manufacturer. Formerly, it was divided among a mass of small producers, who cultivated it themselves and span it with their families in small portions. Now it is concentrated in the hands of one capitalist, who sets others to spin and weave it for him. The extra labour expended in flax-spinning was realized formerly in extra income to numerous peasant families, or perhaps, in the time of Frederick II, in taxes *pour le roi de Prusse*. Now it is realized in profit for a few capitalists. The spindles and looms, formerly scattered over the face of the countryside, are now crowded together in a few great labour-barracks, together with the workers and the raw material. And spindles, looms and raw material are now transformed from means for the independent existence of the spinners and weavers into the means for commanding them and extracting unpaid labour from them. You cannot tell from looking at the large factories and the large farms that they have originated from the combination of many small centres of production, and have been built up by the expropriation of many small independent producers. Nevertheless, unprejudiced observers did not allow themselves to be deceived.[29]

The means of production are, Marx writes, 'transformed from means for the independent existence of the spinners and weavers into *the means for commanding them* and extracting unpaid labour from them.'[30] The idealist and ideological problematic of homeostatic domination is decidely displaced here. For it is not 'ideas' but the 'material' means of production which commands the workers here. The idealist schema of individual domination, i.e., ideology= '*individuals*' dominated by misrecognition, moreover forecloses this processual posteriority that is a new *massive* commanding and extracting of unpaid labour by transformed spindles, looms, and raw material.

The consequences of this transformed problematic are made explicit by the next statement. Marx writes: "*You cannot tell*...."[31] There is thus here an imputed loss of the continence of the synthesis of an 'individual' consciousness. To return to where we began in Chapter 3 of *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* we can say that the problematic of passive and dominated although still constituted 'individuals' obfuscates the critical activity of

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[28] Marx, *Capital,* 908-9. In this action, they are, Marx sets in jocular and mordant quotation marks, "set free."
[29] Marx, *Capital,* 909. From here Marx then brings forth a long quotation from Mirabeau, calling him, humorously, "*des Revolutionlöwen,*" in a critical effort to resignify 'revolution' and 'lion' at once.
[30] Ibid, emphasis added. Marx writes, "Und Spindeln und Webstühle und Rohmaterial sind aus Mitteln unabhängiger Existenz für Spinner und Weber von nun an verwandelt in Mittel, sie zu kommandieren und ihnen unbezahlte Arbeit auszusaugen." *Das Kapital,* 774.
[31] Marx, *Capital*, 909; emphasis added. Marx's German is "…sieht man es nicht an…" *Das Kapital,* 774.

dissipation in 'you cannot tell from looking at the large….that they have been built up by the expropriation of many small.' Montag's invocation of Althusser's jocular 'reality has a bit more imagination,' we suggest, identifies that the problematic of 'individuals' who are absolutely 'dominated' loses, or forgets, the processually developed problematic of a transformed means of and for commanding and co-operation. This does not however mean that there is no domination of 'individuals.' On the contrary, there is a priority, i.e., a reproduction, of a massive domination of 'individuals,' and an adequate concept of co-operation has to lose a spurious notion of 'individuals' in order to begin or take hold.

Humor is critical to this endeavor. Marx and Althusser both write jocularly in their efforts to displace particular ideological (theoretical) practices, such as those which presuppose that the dissipation of the capitalist forms of domination can be practiced without a certain loss of the ideological effectivity of so-called domination.[32] Joking is just such a discursive mode that can disturb the particular relations of the body and the mind, and these disturbances can modify the 'spontaneous' commanding domination of 'individuals' as well as the 'the entire complex reality of history' and 'the intelligence of scientific history itself' according to 'phenomenology.'

III. **Humor and the Emendation of Ideological State Apparatuses**

The notion of passively dominated individuals by 'ideology' is thus not *conceptually* adequate to and for the conjunctures of the capitalist mode of production and its concomitant modes of contradiction and co-operation. For even the partisan mouthpieces of capital and classical political economy note that the capitalist does not absolutely 'dominate' the wage worker or the capital form.[33] How then to conceptualize co-operation *sub specie emendationes*?

One of the indeed critical functions of the appropriation of the notion of overdetermination by Althusser is the identification that co-operation is not simply the summation of positive, extant capital-form parts, however dominating, dominated, or otherwise they may be. This is particularly clear in the Appendix to "Contradiction and Overdetermination," where Althusser crucially identifies how Engels' 1890 letter to Joseph Bloch thinks of co-operation as the imbrication of priorly extant sovereign and separate individual wills. Althusser argues that in doing so Engels thereby 'forgets' that there are individuals and forms that do not bear "the presuppositions of the classical bourgeois ideology and bourgeois political economy."[34] There are 'individuals,' and therefore modes and events of co-operation, which are caused by a mode of causality – in *Lire Le Capital,* called 'structural' – whose forms and effects are not adequately grasped through schemas of so-called expressive causality.

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[32] See, for example, Marx, *Capital,* 936.
[33] See Fagan, "Inversion and Interpellation: On the Modern Theory of Colonization and Indonesian Interventions in the Critique of Political Economy," esp. chapter 4 "On *Die moderne Kolonisationstheorie*."
[34] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx,* 124.

What, then, is co-operation for the critique of political economy? Is it simply Chapter 13 in *Capital*?[35] Is it reading and writing in Althusser's sense of a practice? The aforementioned prise *and* reprise? How can this co-operation 'lose' the notion and practice of the concepts of individuals, domination, and commanding that characterize 'classical bourgeois ideology'?[36]

Co-operation is etymologically the compound of the Latinate *co-* and *-opera*. The entry for *opera* in the *Chambers Murray Latin English Dictionary* gives "pains, exertion, labour, service." For *co-*, it gives "*cum,*" that which is mutual or common. Co-operation thus can be said to be the pains, exertion, or conatus in common.[37] While "Contradiction and Overdetermination" critically identifies the conceptual dead-end in the notion of 'individuals' and co-operation in 'classical bourgeois ideology and bourgeois political economy,' the concept of overdetermination there marks a tangled navel or nodal point, an 'index and a problem,' rather than a ready-made solution to this conundrum. For how does a 'conatus in common' get introduced and 'take hold,' i.e., the *prise* of a *reprise,* where the capitalist process and parts prevail?

In reading the aforementioned imputed jocularity by Montag, we want to suggest in conclusion that this humor in *Althusser and His Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War* provides such a 'practice-theory' for the critique of political economy. For humor is both a notion of a bodily disposition and a mental quality as well as the bringing about and change of those dispositions. Humor is a co-operation of minds and bodies. Humor is thus a minded body and a bodied mind.[38] This humorous co-operation does not, we note, foreclose a certain impermeability of minds and bodies ("The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion, rest, or anything else").[39] Rather, co-operation for the critique of political economy is the occurrence of *the humorous materiality of ideology*. It is a mode of and effect on minds and bodies. Thus, it can and does change.

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In Chapter 3, "Settling Accounts with Phenomenology: Husserl and His Critics," Montag elucidates how Althusser and his contemporaries marshaled critical energy to point out the practical effects of Husserl and the big-name of phenomenology. At its

[35] Or chapter 11 in *Das Kapital* or the recent translation of *Capital* by Paul Reitter?
[36] This is specifically the notion of 'individuals' thought and practiced by the epochal guarantees of Husserlian phenomenology. On the ideological effectivity of such a guarantee, see Louis Althusser, "On Feuerbach," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, 130 ff. On another possibility of causality without this guarantee, see Althusser, *Lessons on Rousseau,* 139-40.
[37] It is worth remarking that English language spellings differ here internally; the British 'co-operation' that Fowkes uses holds up a discursive mark from 'cooperation,' making visible the action of 'overdetermination' in synthesis and spelling.
[38] See *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary Volume I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1347-8.
[39] Spinoza, *Ethics,* IIIP2.

core, Montag writes, "such a logic of scientific discovery is nothing more than an ideal of how a science ought to advance but may not (every such norm has its exceptions)…On the contrary, as Althusser jocularly puts it 'reality has a bit more imagination.'"[40] Althusser's phrase in French is '*La réalité a un peu plus d'imagination*.' The reported speech here is from his preface to Pierre Macherey's "Georges Canguilhem's Philosophy of Science: Epistemology and History of Science" published in 1964. The longer passage from which this passage emerges, which comes towards the end of Althusser's preface, is as follows:

> Reality has a little more imagination[41]: there are imaginary responses which leave the real problem they evade without a true response; there are sciences which are called sciences and are only the scientific imposture of a social ideology; there are non-scientific ideologies which, in paradoxical encounters, give birth to true discoveries – just as one sees fire leap from the impact of foreign bodies. The entire complex reality of history, in all its determinations – economic, social, ideological – thereby enters into play in the intelligence of scientific history itself. Bachelard's, Canguilhem's and Foucault's *oeuvre* offers proof of it.[42]

There are important implications to draw here with regards to our question of the conceptual displacement from 'individual' domination to massive commanding and co-operation in and for the critique of political economy. First, we can note that Althusser outlines here how so-called epistemology and epistemologies bear not simply scientific but also political attributes and effects. As such, this 'phenomenology' does not lose the 'social ideology' (i.e., theoretical humanism and historicism) that 'individuals' are adequate to their domination and commanding. Secondly, there is a particular instance of co-operation brought forth here in the reading and naming of Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault.[43] With or under this particular instance of co-operation, Althusser brings about a communion or alliance in the act of drawing a line of demarcation. Thirdly, Althusser writes that 'true discoveries' emerge through a conjuncture with 'non-scientific ideologies.' History, the economic, social, and ideological emerge in 'paradoxical encounter(s).' 'Paradoxical encounter' here could be contrasted with a certain schema of auto-poiesis in expressive causality. Lastly, the statement itself begins 'humorously': 'reality has a bit more imagination.' The utterance could be called a joke or a moment of wit whose effort and purposiveness is to emend a spontaneous philosophy of reality, imagination, and their relations.

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[40] Montag, *Althusser and his Contemporaries,* 44.
[41] NB: Ted Stolze's translation of *'La réalité a un peu plus d'imagination'* differs here slightly with Montag's aforementioned translation.
[42] Althusser, "George Canguilhem's Philosophy of Science: Epistemology and History of Science," 164.
[43] For an important exposition of this problematic, see Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski.*

A humorous form of co-operation is produced, Freud said in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* [1905], by a mode of work that is a taking away, a work of losing certain words. Quoting Theodor Lipps, Freud writes "the joke says what it has to say, not always in few words, but in *too* few words – that is, in words that are insufficient by strict logic or by common modes of thought and speech. *It may even actually say what it has to say by not saying it.*"[44] This humorous co-operation thus is not the activity of a summation or convergence extant 'individuals.' There is here instead a mode of co-operation that is an activity of determination that loses (*verlieren)* certain words and dissipates what Marx calls a relation (*Verhältnis*) and *Gefühl* at once.[45] The *New Cassell's German Dictionary* gives for the latter "feeling, sentiment, emotion, touch, sense of feeling, consciousness."[46] The effect of this co-operation in a humorous loss is thus not a deficiency. Instead, this humor facilitates the emergence of a practice that 'loses' particular ideological attributes under an advent of 'a bit more' imagination for reality.[47]

Such jocular humors *can* bring about the dissipation of the dominations and commandings spoken by the capitalist character-masks, including its so-called scientists. But this humor does not exist in the form of a guarantee, but rather as a test or attempt. Reading and writing the critique of political economy is such a mode and instance of this testing humorous intervention. This practice determines an order and connection of bodies and minds. It can facilitate an event of co-operation, i.e., a conatus in common. To do this is to exert an effort to bring about the emendation of the intellect *in* ideological state apparatuses.

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[44] Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,* 13; emphasis added.
[45] Marx, *Capital,* 936.
[46] *The New Cassell's German Dictionary,* ed. Betteridge (New York: Funk & Wagnalls), 179.
[47] How does this humorous co-operation coagulate? Suspended over an abyss:
a un peu plus
verlieren

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"The Disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin": Montag's Althusser

Joseph Serrano

> If I may be permitted here a word on a well-known formula: it is Kautsky's and it is taken up by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done*. It concerns the fusion of the workers' movement and Marxist theory. According to this formula, Marxist theory is elaborated by intellectuals and is introduced into the workers' movement from the outside. I have always been convinced that this formula is unfortunate (…). This theory was not "imported from the outside" into the workers' movement; it was conceived through an immense theoretical effort *within* the workers' movement. The pseudo-*importation* of which Kautsky spoke was simply the *expansion*, within the worker's movement, of a theory produced *within* it it by the organic intellectuals of the proletariat.[1]
>
> --Louis Althusser,
> "On Marx and Freud"

Of all the epithets, qualifiers, or even adjectives that we could apply to Althusser, none, I would argue, captures so succinctly and accurately the force of his writings as an expression that appears early in Warren Montag's *Althusser and His Contemporaries*: "the disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin." This epithet registers the degree to which Althusser was a philosopher who thought in terms of practice and its theoretical and political effects, of struggle and warfare, of strategy and tactics, above all, of the precise balance of forces in a singular conjuncture:

> The disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin could settle for nothing less than an exact inventory of forces in play, and an identification of friends as well

[1] Althusser, "On Marx and Freud," 22, Translation modified.

> as enemies. In theoretical terms, this translates into a very careful and informed survey of philosophical works, reading them "to the letter" and noting their effects on the theoretical conjuncture of which they are a part and their effects on the relations of dominance and subordination between the ideas that constitute it.[2]

Montag's Althusser is one for whom the field of philosophy is indeed a battlefield: to imagine that philosophy could be anything other than class struggle in theory is to be captive to the spontaneous philosophy of the bourgeoisie, a philosophy that dreams of its absolute autonomy from and exteriority to class struggle. Thus, in order to tip the balance of forces in theory in favor of the proletariat, it is necessary to understand this terrain as precisely as possible, to understand every position within it (for every position is always already occupied), to grasp all the objectives and strategies on the field (for there are always more than two), and, when the concrete analysis of the concrete situation requires it, to form tactical alliances with philosophies or, better, concepts that may well be foreign to Marxism. To be sure, such an orientation within philosophy cannot but carry risks; and if Althusser appears here as something like a master strategist, one who is able to grasp the totality or whole of a particular battlefield, and, at the extreme, one in control of the effects of his own texts precisely because of his sensitivity to the effects of others, Montag cautions us against accepting this view:

> Such an approach to Althusser's reading of structuralist works may be effective, however, only if it is carried out with the following proviso: that we not regard Althusser as a rational actor in a game of strategy, as the absolute master of his words and deeds (if not of their consequences, which can be unintended). To see Althusser as master of his work would, of course, contradict in the most flagrant way everything he himself wrote.[3]

Montag's argument here is that to be a disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin—whether in philosophy or in politics—is to accept that one ultimately does not and cannot master the effects his or her texts have on the theoretical conjuncture (if they have any at all). This important qualification raises a number of questions: while the names "Machiavelli" and "Lenin" appear in the text as if they were stable referents, I would argue that he in fact understates the ways that his reading or rereading of Althusser simultaneously asks us to reconsider these names.[4] Likewise, we might also consider what it means exactly to be a "disciple" of Machiavelli and Lenin. For if the term "disciple" signifies (among other things) fidelity to a certain teacher, philosopher, or perhaps philosophical (or religious)

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[2] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 17.
[3] Ibid., 17-18.
[4] See, for example, the recent article by Peter Thomas, "Lenin's Alternative: Dual Power and a Politics of Another Type," in which he summarizes the many "Lenins" Marxists and Anti-Marxists alike have highlighted.

tradition, what becomes of discipleship when we are dealing not with self-enclosed and coherent systems or doctrines, but writings, sentences, phrases, and words that are determinately disordered (or combined and uneven) precisely in the way Althusser always argued? Framing, for example, his own discussion of Machiavelli in *Machiavelli and Us*, Althusser warns us that "a philosophical reader who wishes to enroll Machiavelli *in his own ranks*" will "rapidly have come to realize that Machiavelli 'marches in the opposite direction from that in which one wishes to make him march; or even worse, that if he certainly does not fire in the line of the march, we do not even know where he is firing: he always fires elsewhere."[5] What would it mean to be a disciple of such a figure? What is the nature of the discipleship at stake here? To begin to develop this question, I want to look at passages from two of Althusser's texts in which the names Machiavelli and Lenin appear in similar, but not identical terms. The problem hinges on Althusser's notion of the conjuncture, but more importantly, on the prepositions Althusser uses to theorize Lenin's and Machiavelli's relationships to their conjunctures. If, however, Althusser is indeed a disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin—and this, I argue, is one of the Montag's most important contributions—it is not only because of his attempt to intervene in his own conjuncture, but because of his attentiveness to the fact that the force of any intervention derives not from the individual philosopher, that is, not from a subject, but from that non-subject that makes history, the masses. If there is an Althusser we might call Montag's Althusser, it is an Althusser who submits to and registers the actions of the masses in philosophy, an Althusser who thinks *in* and learns from the masses. And it is thus this Althusser and no other that deserves to be called the disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin.

Let us begin with Althusser's discussion of Lenin in the 1967 lectures *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, in which he draws a line of demarcation between philosophical practice and other types of practice, above all, what he calls "pragmatism." Althusser's line of reasoning, in fact, includes phrases that, to borrow one of Montag's observations, "push well beyond the requirements of the argument."[6] Considering these phrases compels us to ask whether they possess a symptomatic significance in the passage, whether they refer to questions Althusser does not pose yet enjoins us with his silence to pose for him. According to Althusser, the practice of philosophy (and it is here that Lenin provides Althusser with the model of one who practices philosophy) differs from that of a mechanic or surgeon: whereas the latter "act" according to "an idea in their head," and thus outside of the object on which they act, Lenin's practice is that of an entirely different nature. For the "object" of Lenin's practice is not any object but the very conjuncture itself, that is, the very relationship of forces that constitute a conjuncture, relations in which Lenin is completely immersed. Lenin's practice, his "action," occurs inside of the conjuncture to which it belongs. Let us follow Althusser's own—Leninist—practice of drawing lines of demarcation and trace the line

[5] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 5.
[6] Montag, *Althusser*, 210.

he draws through the notions of "acting" and "action." In the first case, that of the mechanic or surgeon, Althusser identifies what he calls a "pragmatist conception" of practice and action

> according to which all these 'adjusters' adjust their part, their political line, their intervention to obtain a result, attain an end that governs their action from the exterior. According to this representation, action is the action of a *subject* who 'adjusts' or 'tinkers with' [*bricole*] his intervention with an *end in view*—that is, for the achievement of an *aim* that 'exists in his head' to be realized in the external world. If we accept that argument, we deserve to be called pragmatists, subjectivists, voluntarists, etc.[7]

It is worth considering Althusser's use of the term subject here, which, although it might initially seem to differ from the notion of the interpellated subject he will develop in the following years, is nevertheless connected to it (and this will become clearer when we turn to Machiavelli). Here, the subject is the one who acts with an end in view, who acts to achieve an end, and we might add, an end for which they and they alone are responsible. For Althusser, this type of action can in no way be used to describe that of the "political leader" Lenin precisely because of the difference in his relationships to his "object":

> The mechanic who 'adjusts' his part knows very well that the motor pre-exists him and waits for his work to be completed to begin to run the engine again: it is completely external to him. So with the surgeon: it is certainly more complicated, but he is not part of the patient. In contrast, the political leader Lenin interests us for different reasons, and it is not by chance that we have borrowed his terms: 'drawing a line of demarcation', 'Thesis' (think of the 'April Theses') and 'correct'. These are political terms. But they suit our purposes, and it is certainly suits our purposes that the practice which helps us to think the proper practice of philosophy as adequately as possible should be *political*. For in contrast to the mechanic and the surgeon, who are subjects who act on the basis of an 'idea in their mind' – (1) because they are *subjects* and (2) because this idea simply reflects the fact that the engine to be repaired or the patient to be operated on are *external*, 'exists outside their minds'—Lenin, the politician, the working-class leader, is well and truly *internal* to the conjuncture *in* which he must act if he is to be able to act *on* it […] He is not a 'subject' who has in 'mind' an 'idea that he will carry out' and wants to realize externally: he is the leader of a class struggle organization, the vanguard of the popular masses, and in so far as he defines a 'correct line' 'one step ahead of the masses and one step only', he is simply reflecting in order to inflect *a balance of forces in which he participates and takes sides*.[8]

[7] Althusser, *Philosophy*, 104.
[8] Ibid., 105.

For those familiar with Althusser's work, much of his argument here will not seem unusual. What might nevertheless still surprise or disorient readers is Althusser's insistence that Lenin, unlike the mechanic or surgeon, is not a "subject." Although we all know that Althusser is one of the most tenacious critics of the notion of the subject, I think there is still something worth exploring here. It is one thing to say, as Althusser does repeatedly in his work, that the masses are not a subject, much less the subject of history (though as Balibar once argued the masses may act or "present themselves *as* a subject *in* history"—but "as" and "in" are not the same thing as "are" and "of"),[9] but it is a different thing to refer to a historical individual, and one who certainly seems to have played a decisive role *in* history as a non-subject. In fact, what follows in Althusser's sentence, I think, raises more questions. Indeed, what does it mean to say that Lenin is not subject who acts in order to realize the idea in his head? Would not the October revolution, to which he dedicated his life, be the ultimate proof to contrary? The second half of this statement, however, displaces received notions of political action: Lenin is not a subject who acts according to an idea in his head but is "the leader of a class struggle organization, the vanguard of the popular masses, and in so far as he defines a 'correct line' 'one step ahead of the masses and one step only', he is simply reflecting in order to inflect *a balance of forces in which he participates and takes sides*." What does it mean to say that Lenin, by acting inside the conjuncture, "is simply reflecting in order to inflect"? What type of reflection is at stake here? Because the object in question is not any object but the precise balance of forces in which Lenin necessarily participates and takes sides, the reflection here is perhaps like that of a broken mirror: to reflect the balance of forces is to reflect that cracks in the mirror that paradoxically hold it together while revealing its fragility.[10] This reflecting can only occur because Lenin, according to Althusser, "is well and truly *internal* to the conjuncture." In order to act "on" it, Lenin must act "in" it. The play between the prepositions "in" and "on" suggests that it is only by thinking and acting within the conjuncture that one may simultaneously produce and find themselves within the cracks in the mirror, the inflection points, that allows one to act *on* it, to effect a shift within it, that is, within its balance of forces, in order to transform it. More importantly, the effects are not always what one intends, and what seems like a productive theoretical or political development may in turn become an obstacle at a later date. If Lenin, or any political leader who happens to be one step ahead of the masses and one step only, is not a subject, it is because they do not occupy the central place in the conjuncture's balance of forces but merely one of its nodes, an argument which complicates the idea that Lenin or the Party is one step ahead of the masses, at all.

I will return to this question in the final part of my paper. For now, I would like to turn to one of Althusser's discussions of Machiavelli. Althusser's language, as indicated

[9] See, above all, Althusser's "Reply to John Lewis," 80, and Balibar's "Searching for the Proletariat," 147.
[10] I borrow the concept of the "broken mirror" from Macherey. See Macherey, "Lenin, Critic of Tolstoy," especially 134-151.

above, is similar, but not identical. According to Althusser, Machiavelli, whose problem is to think the deed to be accomplished, the unification of the Italian nation, does not pose the problem of national unity in general, but "in terms of the case, and hence, the *singular conjuncture*."[11] By demarcating the "singular conjuncture," which is in fact one of several late hand-written additions to the text, from the general, Althusser displaces the problematic of the general-particular. The "case" (that which befalls or happens), [12] belongs neither to the general nor particular but the "singular conjuncture" or, in Lenin's terms, the "concrete situation." And it is for this reason that Althusser ventures to declare that:

> Machiavelli is the first theorist of the conjuncture or the first thinker consciously, if not to think the concept of conjuncture, if not to make it the object of an abstract and systematic reflection, then at least consistently—in an insistent, extremely profound way—to think *in* the conjuncture: that is to say, in its concept of an aleatory, singular case.[13]

In an important sense, Althusser refers here to the primacy of practice, that is, the necessity of practicing something before being able to theorize it. Yet, it is almost as if he suggests that, to think *in* the conjuncture is merely a first step toward thinking the concept of the conjuncture, to think and produce the concept of the conjuncture via an abstract and systematic reflection. Does this line of argumentation suggest that Althusser maintains the need for a general theory of the conjuncture, one that could provide a framework or methodology with which to make sense of or account for all the aleatory, singular cases that may take place? This is in fact a tension that prevents Althusser's text from total closure.

For it is at this point in *Machiavelli and Us* that Althusser defines what it means to think "in" the conjuncture. On the one hand, it "means taking account of all the determinations, all the existing concrete *circumstances*, making an inventory, a detailed comparison of them" (18).[14] It is significant that Althusser does not use the term "totality," at least not in this passage, even though his definition seems to lead in this direction. Indeed, what are we to make of this need to take into account all the determinations and concrete circumstances? (And as Althusser writes of Lenin in the passage cited above: "Lenin too had to take into account all the elements of a conjuncture before fixing the correct political line.")[15] On the other hand, and keeping in mind

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[11] Althusser, *Machiavelli*, 17.

[12] As Mathéron, the editor of the Machiavelli lectures notes, the phrase "its case," like the uses of the term aleatory, is a late, handwritten addendum to the text. See ibid., 105n13. As is well known, the term "case" is derived from the Latin word for fall, *casus*, and verb to fall, *cadere*, it has some of the sense of the aleatory, as in that which falls, or befalls one.

[13] Althusser, *Machiavelli*, 18.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Althusser, *Spontaneous Philosophy*, 104.

Althusser's criticisms of the concept of totality,[16] we might take this to mean that the task of thinking in the conjuncture involves grasping a non-totalizable and perhaps infinite sum, certainly an impossible, unthinkable task. Another question: who is this figure who is able to take all this into account? Would this figure not be located at the center of the conjuncture? Would this figure not be a Subject, that is, the Subject-Prince armed with *virtù*? Yet, as Althusser writes, to think in the conjuncture it is not sufficient to take account of all the "elements and circumstances." More importantly, and here Althusser introduces a preposition we have not yet seen, to think under [*sous*] "the category of the conjuncture is not to think *on* the conjuncture, as one would reflect on a set of concrete data."[17] This inventory of concrete circumstances, determinations, and all other forces at play, are not simply data that a subject reflects on—and let us recall that the activity of reflecting is a term Althusser uses affirmatively in the discussion of Lenin. Rather, "to think under [*sous*] the conjuncture is quite literally to submit [*se soumettre*] to the problem that produces and imposes its case."[18] I want to point out that the subject of Althusser's sentences here is not a person or philosopher but an activity, the infinitive "to think." When the name Machiavelli reappears in the following sentences, it signifies not the one who acts but the one who is acted on. Thinking in has become thinking under; the result is that the one who thinks, the one tasked with thinking, must "submit" oneself or be submitted (or subjected) to the problem that is produced and imposed in and by the conjuncture.

Yet, what precisely does it mean to submit oneself to the conjuncture? Althusser does not necessarily answer this, but it is worth pointing out that the term "submit," as is well known, plays an important role in the ISAs essay, above all, in the ambiguity Althusser highlights in the definition of the term subject: the subject is at once "a center of initiatives, the author and therefore the one responsible for their actions," and "a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and therefore one who is stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting their submission."[19] In fact, in what follows in the lectures on Machiavelli, there is an interesting resonance with some of the themes of the ISAs essay: "Here the terms must be inverted: Machiavelli does not think the problem of national unity in terms of the conjuncture; it is the conjuncture itself that negatively, yet objectively, poses the problem of Italian national unity."[20] Of course, the conjuncture is not a subject, but it is nevertheless that to which Machiavelli must submit, that by which Machiavelli is subjected. In an important sense what Althusser proposes here is a reversal of Machiavelli's own discussion of the necessity of conquering *Fortuna*. It is the prophet that is subjected here, and this transforms the activity of thinking into something else. As

[16] See, for example, his comments in "This Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy" (p. 88-89 in this issue) as well as "Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?" in *Spontaneous Philosophy*, 220.
[17] Althusser, *Machiavelli*, 18.
[18] Ibid., [60].
[19] Althusser, "Ideology," 269.
[20] Althusser, *Machiavelli*, 18.

Althusser puts it: "Machiavelli merely registers in his theoretical position a problem that is objectively, historically posed by the case of the conjuncture: not by simple intellectual comparisons, but by the confrontation of existing class forces and their relationship of uneven development—in fact, by their aleatory future."[21] Thus, thinking becomes registering, but to register does not mean simply to record or reproduce or, as in the case with Lenin, to reflect. On the contrary, what is registered by the one who submits to the conjuncture is the uneven development of class forces locked in struggle. To think in and under, to submit to or be subjected by the conjuncture and the problem posed by it, if it is in some sense to become a vessel of the conjuncture, is by no means to become a mere expression of it, if for no other reason than that to register the problem posed by the conjuncture is to register the empty place that emerges in the course of class struggle, that is, as Althusser puts it, "its aleatory future," the place in which it is not only possible but necessary to act and intervene.

Let us return to Althusser's line, placed within quotation marks, that Lenin (and we might as well include Machiavelli) is "one step ahead of the masses and one step only." If we read this in light of Althusser's lectures on Machiavelli, we can propose that, if Lenin is one step ahead and one step only, it is not because he leads the masses, but, on the contrary, because Lenin submits to the masses, to the mass movement, and thus registers the moods of masses, their internal conflicts, and, indeed, the aleatory future of the masses. Can we say that it is finally the masses who produce and impose the problems that are registered by Lenin in theory?

To begin to formulate an answer to this question I would like to return to *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, in particular, to what I would consider one of the most striking passages in the text: the final paragraph of chapter 8 on Althusser and Foucault, in which Montag illustrates the effects not of Althusser and Foucault on the events of May '68 but the reverse, that is, the way in which the mass movements within this conjuncture, within this balance of forces, produced effects in both politics and philosophy:

> A shift in the relationship of forces had disrupted the regime of painstakingly disconnected individualities, each encased in the cage of its own subjectivity, and allows them to break free and coagulate into mass movements that in turn disrupted and, in disrupting, made visible the rituals of subjection in factories, schools, and prisons. As the balance of power shifted so did the relations of knowledge. Each incursion of mass struggle, like a flare over the battlefield, revealed the obstacles, traps, and emplacements that blocked the way forward.[22]

It is significant that this is the passage that concludes Montag's discussion of Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," which, as everyone knows, is a

[21] Ibid.
[22] Montag, *Althusser*, 170.

perfect example of a functionalist work written by "a nearly perfect specimen of that now-extinct species, the structuralist."[23] Given its place at the end of the chapter, however, it would be easy, if not to write it off as a rhetorical flourish, then at least to overlook its importance for understanding Montag's intervention within the study of Althusser. Yet I would argue that this passage crystallizes a number of themes important to this intervention. On the one hand, the question here is ultimately about the relationship of forces, and more precisely, of a *shift* within these relations, one that allows these "painstakingly disconnected individualities" to break out of their "cages" of interpellation and "subjectivity." This shift is also a shift in the case, in the conjuncture, one induced not by a subject but by the very relationship of forces itself, a relationship that is in perpetual motion. Yet this shift affects not only the political terrain but the "relations of knowledge" (and we could say, paraphrasing Spinoza, that the relations of forces and the relations of knowledge are one and the same relation) by "reveal[ing] the obstacles, traps, and emplacements that blocked the way forward." We would not be wrong here to place the adjective "epistemological" before "obstacles" in this sentence, for what should be clear is the way in which epistemological obstacles can be—at least temporarily—dislodged from "blocking the way forward" during periods of revolt: the lines of demarcation drawn through epistemological obstacles such as ideology, the subject and subjectivity, as well as consciousness in the ISAs essay are nothing other than the extension of this revolt into the apparatuses of thought. Hence the very unevenness of these effects, such as Althusser's attempt to transform the concept of not only "ideology," but above all, of "consciousness."[24] As Montag observes:

> This is a very revealing moment in that it shows Althusser's desire to preserve, or rather, appear to preserve an entire conceptual vocabulary, with the sole exception of the term "ideas." It is as if it would be too much altogether to eliminate the terms "belief" and, even more, "consciousness" (*the importance of which for Marxist thought in all its diversity can hardly be stated*).[25]

Given the importance of the notion of "consciousness" for almost all variants of Marxism, it would be nearly impossible to remove this epistemological obstacle from this body of thought without serious consequences On the other hand, the attempt to retain it while transforming its meaning (*faire bouger les choses*) cannot but produce any number of symptoms, whether those symptoms appear in the text itself or in readings (its effects) of the text. As Montag asks: "But do these terms, and even more importantly, the notions of interiority that they suggest actually survive in Althusser's text? Should we, as so many

[23] Ibid., 15.
[24] Describing Althusser's attempt to argue that both ideology and ideas always already exist in apparatuses, practices, and rituals., Montag observes "that while the term 'ideas' has disappeared from further considerations of ideology, the notions of 'belief' and 'consciousness' survive" (Ibid., 153).
[25] Montag, *Althusser*, 153, my italics.

readers have done, take Althusser at his word?"[26] I would argue that Montag's response to this question helps us understand what is finally at stake in Althusser's argument cited above that Lenin is not a subject:

> In fact, the word "consciousness" appears only once in the remainder of the essay. Not only is it placed in quotation marks, but it is immediately qualified in the following way: the reproduction of the relations of production is assured "in the 'consciousness,' i.e., in the behavior" (*dans la conscience, c'est-à-dire, dans le comportement*) of individual subjects. Consciousness, that is, behavior: Althusser has preserved the language of interiority, the words "belief" and "consciousness," in the very same sense that Spinoza preserved the concept of God, in order more effectively to subvert it.[27]

Montag's reading allows us to see the symptoms that disfigure Althusser's text: they are perhaps most visible in Althusser's emphasis on reproduction, which, in turn, has led to the well-known charges of Althusser's functionalism. Indeed, to say that consciousness-sive-behavior is the site in which the reproduction of the relations of production is "assured," as many critics of Althusser are more than happy to point out, would seem to call into question the very possibility of revolt and revolution. Yet, what is striking about Montag's argument is that he reads this reading as an effect of text itself. In fact, what Montag questions is not the validity of the functionalist reading (although this reading is certainly undermined), but Althusser's own attempt to respond to this critique in his 1976 "Notes on the ISAs," in which he writes that those who read the ISAs in this way "did not read with sufficient care the postscript to my essay which emphasized the 'abstract' character of my analysis, and explicitly placed my conception of class struggle at the center." Montag's reading highlights the symptomatic nature of this defense:

> It goes without saying that we can give no credence whatsoever to Althusser's explanation of the effects produced by his text, which, to judge it according to Althusser's own positions, is absurd. Not only is no text innocent of its effects, but to present class struggles, conceived as the antidote to functionalism, in a postscript and therefore outside the development of his argument is to render it superfluous, nothing more than an afterthought. It is surely significant that the question of ideology in general and the "Ideology" essay in particularly figured only marginally in the *Elements of Self-Criticism* published in 1974, as is Althusser, in so many other ways a perceptive reader of and critic of his own texts, remained blind to the antagonisms internal to what was perhaps his most widely read work.[28]

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Montag, *Althusser*, 159.

The problems multiply when we compare the ISAs essay with the much longer manuscript, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, a text Althusser initially envisioned as a "Marxist-Leninist" manual for communist militants,[29] from which the ISAs essay was not only extracted but also heavily revised. The longer manuscript in no way resolves the problems of the former. On the contrary, it raises new problems; yet it also opens new lines of inquiry. Montag describes the tensions between the ISAs essay and *On the Reproduction* in this way:

> The history of the text makes his blindness even more puzzling. For, if the reading of the "Ideology" essay as a functionalist work is in part a response to Althusser's rejection of the phenomena of consciousness and interiority, as I have argued, the text also produced this response because Althusser took great care to excise from the published version of the text every reference not only to class struggle, resistance to domination, but even more importantly, every passage that *furnished the means to theorize revolt and resistance without recourse to a philosophy of consciousness*. It is puzzling indeed today to read the suppressed chapter, "Reproduction des rapports de production et revolution" (Reproduction of the Relations of Production and Revolution," or the section on "The Ideological state Apparatuses and the Ideological By-Products [sous-produits] of Their Practices." In the same way it is difficult to reconcile Althusser's reference to the "fragility" of the ISAs in the original, a phrase that captures the materiality of the ideology as he conceives it, with their machinelike character in the published essay.[30]

According to Montag, these "excised passages," however incomplete or fragmentary, nevertheless "furnished the means to theorize revolt and resistance without recourse to a philosophy of consciousness." Yet, what would it mean exactly to theorize revolt and resistance as a Marxist without relying on consciousness? To put this another way: how might we transform these fragmentary "means" into something like a theoretical dispositive that could precipitate a break with or more precisely *within* the theoretical problematic in which the concept of consciousness is given? It is interesting to pose this question alongside a passage from the introduction to *Althusser and His Contemporaries*:

> [I]f the possibility of revolt or resistance finally resides in the realm of subjectivity, is it not the case that Althusser must have recourse to some version of the political subject, if he is not to be simply the theoretician of and apologist for an immutable order? Further, does he himself not speak of intervention and taking sides in philosophy, both of which, as Badiou reminds us, imply a subjective dimension?[31]

[29] Ibid., 142.
[30] Ibid., 159-160. My italics.
[31] Montag, *Althusser*, 11.

The Badiou essay to which Montag refers is "Subjectivity Without a Subject," in which he argues that "choice" is an important aspect of political intervention. It would, however, be difficult to find the idea of choice in either Althusser's corpus or Montag's reading.[32] Indeed, as Montag puts it in the chapter on the ISAs, both reproduction and resistance have nothing to do with interiority, and thus choice, but only "bodies and forces,"[33] a phrase which appears three times in the chapter. It is precisely within this battlefield of bodies and forces in which every space is always already occupied that the ISAs necessarily emerge:

> Because the ISAs arise in response to the resistance that precedes them and makes them necessary, like so many weapons of mass subjection in the never ending war between classes, they necessarily bear the imprint of this war, the stresses and strains of conflict from which there is no respite, and the capacity under specific circumstances to produce effects other than and opposed to those they were designed for. It is no wonder then that Althusser can describe these apparatuses as fragile, capable of producing not only subjection (which for Althusser is also always a process of individualization) but "by-products" of collectivity, the composition of forces and revolt. How such by-products come into existence, Althusser does not tell us.[34]

Montag's reading suggests that theorizing revolt without recourse to philosophies of consciousness was for Althusser a necessary yet impossible task.[35] Yet, if *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* does not finally explain how revolt is formed "without recourse to a philosophy of consciousness," it is also the case that it is not the only text of Althusser's in which such a description of revolt and revolution appears. In fact, a similar, if fleeting, conception is found in another of Althusser's most well-known texts, a text which, in Montag's words, "provoked and continues to provoke incomprehension and anxiety in its many critics."[36] Perhaps one of the reasons why "Contradiction and Overdetermination" is so difficult to comprehend is precisely because of the way it argues that revolution is not the result of a vanguard party that has successfully injected class

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[32] "Evental overdeterminations, catastrophes, revolutions, novelties, becoming-principal of the non principal contradiction. Here lies the real stuff of partisanship, the militant's opportunity, the moment of choice. Overdeterminations puts the possible on the agenda […]. Overdetermination is in truth the political place. And it must indeed be said that overdetermination belongs to the subjective realm (choice, partisanship, militancy), even though it knows no knows no subject-effect (such effects are statist), nor does it verify, or construct, any object (such objects only exist in the field of science)." Badiou, "Althusser," 65.
[33] Ibid., 150.
[34] Montag, *Althusser*, 160.
[35] I cannot but recall here the opening sentence to chapter 2 of Montag's *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries*: "But is it possible to reject, all at once, the edifice of philosophical dualism that frees mind from body, spirit from matter and language from being? Nothing is less certain." (26). This question applies as much to Spinoza's *Ethics* as it does to Althusser's ISAs essay.
[36] Montag, *Althusser*, 191.

consciousness into the masses but the effect of a ruptural unity (*unité de rupture*), an argument which rejects every philosophy of consciousness:

> If this contradiction [between "the forces of production and the relations of production essentially embodied in the two antagonistic class] is to become "*active*" in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of "circumstances" and "currents" so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will *necessarily* be paradoxically foreign to the revolution in origin and sense, or even its 'direct opponents'). They "*fuse*" into a *ruptural unity*: when they produce the result of the immense majority of the popular masses *grouped* in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are *unable to defend*. Such a situation presupposes not only the "fusion" of the two basic conditions in a "single national crisis," but each condition considered (abstractly) by itself presupposes the "fusion" of an "accumulation" of contradictions. How else could the class-divided popular masses (proletarians, peasants, petty bourgeois) throw themselves *together* [*se jeter* ensemble], consciously or unconsciously [*consciement ou confusément*], into a general assault on the existing regime?[37]

As Montag has noted, this passage "represents Althusser's reading" of a text by Lenin written between February and October of 1917, his "Letters from Afar," in which he "emphasizes that what makes the historical situation 'extremely unique' is the 'merger' or combination of *absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous* class interests, *absolutely contrary* political and social strivings to produce an effect."[38] The name Althusser borrows for this conjunction or accumulation of circumstances and forces, this *enchevêtrement*, which is anything but "the notion of *the* historical contradiction and its phenomena and just as far from a re-allotment of contradictions with an invariant syntax that persists through every historical moment," is, of course, overdetermination, a "practical concept" that "does nothing more, but also nothing less, than make visible the terms and even concepts of Lenin's theory of contradiction as an *enchevêtrement* or entanglement of lines, a knot or node (*noeud*) through which alone the central contradiction between labor and capital must be 'activated.'"[39] It is as if this "central contradiction," and one central to Marxism indeed, were nothing more than the temporary alignment or, perhaps, disalignment, within the purportedly indestructible armor of capitalism, the *kairos* that disappears as rapidly as it appears in the course of battle. It is, to quote another Althusser text, "'the precise moment,' 'the opportunity' (Lenin)" that has 'to be seized with both hands' (Machiavelli, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao), since [it] may only last a few hours."[40] Yet does this not return us to the traditional reading of the relationship between *virtù* and *fortuna*

[37] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," 99 [98].
[38] Montag, "Althusser's Lenin," 60.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Althusser, *Future*, 231.

that Althusser seems to revise in a passage discussed above from *Machiavelli and Us*? It is significant that that this sentence is written in the passive voice; the Althusserian grammar of revolution refuses to refer to a subject that seizes. More importantly, it is Althusser's discussion of the role played by the "popular masses" that leads to another conception of political intervention, a conception that reverberates with echoes of the aleatory.

As Montag has noted, Althusser will return to the themes of "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in his late work on the materialism of the encounter; nevertheless, he rejects the idea that the earlier work is simply an anticipation of the later. "In fact," Montag argues,

> we might say that the implication of Althusser's argument in "Contradiction and Overdetermination," combined with the specificity of the material he introduces through citation, is that his effort in the mid-1960s to think "structural causality," the existence of structure in its effects, on the one hand, and the philosophy of the encounter, the accidental conjunction of a multiplicity of singular things, on the other, represents two ways of thinking the same problem, even if these terms and ideas appeared so dissociated that they could be seen as alternatives.[41]

If it is the case that Althusser's "two ways of thinking the same problem" can be "seen as alternatives," it is nevertheless true that he employs similar language in both. For what has perhaps not been adequately noticed—and this is certainly an effect of the letter of Althusser's text—is the verb used by Althusser in "Contradiction and Overdetermination" to describe the way in which the "popular masses" combine to launch an assault on the state: *se jeter*, to throw themselves. As is well known, the language of "throwing" is central to Althusser's philosophy of the encounter: "The dice are thus thrown [*sont ainsi jetés*] on the gaming table, which is itself empty (but filled with men of valour)."[42] In the case of "Contradiction and Overdetermination," however, this throwing is a reflexive act, *se* jeter, and this introduces a certain ambiguity: while it may be translated as "How else could the popular masses *throw themselves together*" it could also be translated as "How else could the popular masses *be thrown together*?" The ambiguity of the French suggests that this throwing or being thrown together is in no way that of a class in-itself becoming a class for-itself, that is, the formation of the subject of history. For this throwing together *may* take place "consciously" but it may also take place "confusedly": this adverbial qualifier prevents readers from believing that this act is necessarily a "conscious" one, an act which realizes an idea in the head of the masses. It is likewise significant that, at this point in the essay, there is no reference to the Party leading the masses, no question of a party leadership that introduces revolutionary class consciousness into the workers from the outside, a perspective Althusser criticizes in this

[41] Ibid., 61.
[42] Althusser, *Encounter*, 172 [544]. Translation modified.

paper's epigraph; rather it is the masses who throw themselves/are thrown together and thus make history, but this throwing together can only occur once the conjuncture transforms into a genuinely "revolutionary situation." We might say that this throwing together is the very form that the "seizing" referred to above takes. In other words, this seizing is nothing other than the temporary configuration, or better the aleatory dissolution of interpellated subjectivities into by-products and sub-formations in which the masses are reassembled in an assault on the state apparatus. Hence the simultaneously central and marginal role of the masses in "Contradiction and Overdetermination," one not unlike the solitary hour of the last instance: it is the activity of the masses that is decisive, but the masses are nothing other than a temporary alliance of effects, by-product, and sub-formations, the very existence of which does not precede its effects nor can it be guaranteed in advance. Yet, as another revolutionary Marxist once put it, "those who demand guarantees in advance should in general renounce revolutionary politics."[43] The table is cleared and the dice are thrown. The disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin knows no other guarantees than that.

If it is possible to say, a decade after *Althusser and His Contemporaries* was published, that this book has served as something like an initiation into Althusser's philosophy, both for those new to Althusser and those already familiar with his writings, it is also necessary to add that what its readers have been initiated into can hardly be described as a unified and systematic doctrine; on the contrary, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, if it is an initiation at all, is an initiation into the outside of philosophy, into those "lines of force that constitute" philosophy, which is precisely where Althusser's thought always lived (even as the philosopher named Althusser lived within the walls, the very ideological state apparatus itself, of French Philosophy, the *École normale supérieure*).[44] This space, philosophy's outside, is alluded to in the epigraph with which this essay begins; and it is in this space that a particular theme—one that has not always been visible within Althusser's oeuvre, but which has been central to Montag's as a whole—becomes apparent: the action and intelligence of the masses. One of Montag's most important contributions to the study of Althusser, I would argue, consists in making visible this theme within Althusser's thought, not, to be sure, as the latent truth waiting to be discovered, but as that which echoes "within the interstices and silences" of this thought: for, as Montag puts it elsewhere, it is within these interstices and silences that we can hear a voice "from another time and place: to lead the masses, you must first learn from them and from all the forms of struggle in which they are perpetually engaged."[45] This voice, I would argue, is not only that of Trotsky,[46] but also that of Montag, who has made intelligible and audible Althusser's thought as a thought of the outside through his

[43] Trotsky, "It is Necessary to Build," 602.
[44] Montag, *Althusser*, 211.
[45] Montag, "Introduction" to *Michel Verret's Article on the "Student May*," Verso blog, 2018
[46] Montag, "Learning from the Masses: Trotsky at the Modern Circus," *Leftvoice*, September 6, 2020, https://www.leftvoice.org/learning-from-the-masses-trotsky-at-the-modern-circus/

intervention *within* it. And it is because of this ability to intervene, not as an impartial spectator but as a passionate participant, and thus to produce effects, above all those that cannot be foreseen in advance, within the very letter of the text, and therefore within the outside of the text, the philosophical and political conjuncture, that the phrase "the disciple of Machiavelli and Lenin" applies not only to Montag's Althusser but to Montag himself.

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Response to Commentators

Warren Montag

I am immensely grateful to the friends and comrades who, with such care and attention, took the time to respond to *Althusser and His Contemporaries* and, above all, to Dylan Fagan, Lale Arab Jouneghani and Joseph Serrano, who first proposed and then organized the symposium represented here in written form. Reading the responses was a profoundly encouraging experience; I could see for the first time that something like an epistemological break has occurred in the reading of Althusser and the "Althusserians." Things have "moved," to use Althusser's expression. The initial commentaries (above all, in the English language) that for many readers both preceded and obscured their reading of the texts published during Althusser's lifetime were rendered obsolete by the quantity and variety of the posthumous publication that continues and will continue for some time. Now, thirty-six years after Althusser's death, it has become clear that the concept of the materialism of the encounter that occupied a privileged place in Althusser's work after 1975 did not simply displace or replace the "structural Marxism" attributed to *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. It allowed us to read these texts in a new way by making visible the parts of these works other than those "the conjuncture "selected" for us [*que la conjoncture avait 'choisi' pour nous*][1]" the passages so regularly overlooked that they might as well have been illegible. The specification of the materialism of the encounter in the later work retroactively invalidated the notion of Althusser's "structural Marxism" and in so doing

[1] Louis Althusser et al, *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition,* Trans. (Verso, 2015), 11.

also opened the way to a re-examination not only of his oeuvre, but of structuralism in its complexity and heterogeneity, as well.

The responses gathered here are, without exception, engaged in precisely this rereading and, just as importantly, the rethinking of some basic problems that necessarily accompanies it. But these developments cannot be explained solely by the appearance of a mass of previously unknown material by Althusser. Both Balibar and Macherey have spoken of Althusser's overriding need to think and write as closely as possible with others, that is, collectively, producing shared ideas and engaging in a shared evaluation of these ideas on the basis of their effects. Macherey, writing nearly 20 years after the experiment in collective thought had come to an end, offered the following description of his participation in this collectivity: "within the limits of its irregular singularity, with its difficulties and wanderings, not to speak of its dramas, it was an exhilarating experience in every sense, intellectually, politically and humanly."[2] Referring to Althusser, he declared that working "with him," and not under his direction, he learned "what it was to share ideas, to have what Spinoza called common notions, a non-negligeable aspect of the communism" whose arrival they regarded as certain.[3]

I have never regarded my "own" work as in any real sense mine, but rather as the product of a collective project in the absence of which I would have thought and written very differently. Over the past few decades, a community of thought (represented by the present symposium), united in an attempt to think with, rather than about, Althusser, has emerged out of an extraordinary geographical, linguistic and cultural diversity. It has certainly been my participation in a collective endeavor made more powerful and fruitful by the readings of Althusser that have come, not simply from North America and Europe, but also from Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, Georgia, Iran, Brazil, Chile and Argentina, among other places, that allowed me, always in conjunction with others whose singular perspectives I have always found extremely valuable, to identify the conceptual limits that I, that we, had to break through to move forward and explore the "immense forest" of the Althusser's writing, published and unpublished, finished and unfinished, course notes (*notes de cours*) and correspondence.

As a way into the discussion of *Althusser and His Contemporaries,* I want to recall an essay, one of Althusser's least read texts (cited a total of 9 times in French language scholarship and approximately twenty times in English translation). I am referring to *La découverte du Dr Freud*"/The Discovery of Dr. Freud," written, hastily and without the necessary texts at hand, in 1976 for a conference organized by the International

[2] Pierre Macherey*, Histoire de dinosaur: faire de la philosophie, 1965-1997* (Presses Universitaire de France, 1999), 6. [my translation].
[3] Ibid.

Symposium on the Unconscious to be held in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1979.[4] Althusser submitted what he himself called a draft to psychiatrist Léon Chertok, one of the Symposium's organizers in June 1976. As was customary for Althusser, he also sent copies to friends whose expertise he valued: Elisabeth Roudinesco, Michel Pêcheux, Jacques Nassif (a former student and at the time a psychoanalyst and member of the École freudienne de Paris) and Fernand Deligny, asking for scrupulously honest feedback, no matter how brutal. With the exception of Deligny, Althusser's correspondents did indeed respond with brutal honesty, objecting that Althusser's summary of Freud was often inaccurate or simply confused. Even more alarming to them, however, was Althusser's critique of Lacan, particularly of the latter's recourse first to linguistics and later to formal logic and algebraic topology. Roudinesco, Pêcheux, and Nassif, however, were less concerned with the theoretical questions raised by Althusser than with the danger that Althusser's critique would be utilized by an expanding "anti-Lacan" camp that extended far beyond the world of psychoanalysis to become part of the attempt to forget the sixties (and above all 1968) and the philosophies that had emerged out of the struggles of that moment. Although Althusser did not entirely accept their defense of Lacan's trajectory, he withdrew the essay and replaced it with "On Marx and Freud," later published in the Proceedings of the Symposium.

And yet there remains something profoundly ironic, and therefore symptomatic, in the "conclusion" of this episode. In "*La découverte du Dr Freud,*" Althusser took issue with Lacan's declaration in his analysis of Poe's "Purloined Letter" that "a letter always arrives at its destination," arguing that it was based on a philosophy of "destiny and the most classical finalism."[5] To Lacan's declaration, Althusser opposed his own: "it happens (*arrive*) that a letter does not reach (*n'arrive pas*) its destination.[6] To Althusser's consternation, *La découverte du Dr Freud* was later published, without his permission, by Chertok in 1983. It seems that sometimes a letter does reach its destination, and by virtue of its materiality, exactly as Plato feared, is carried far beyond the control of its author whose intentions have disappeared into the words of which the letter is composed. This also means that if Chertok hoped to mobilize Althusser (whose prestige was at its lowest point in 1983) against Lacan by publishing a critique so powerful that those of his friends still sympathetic to Lacan felt compelled to pressure Althusser to suppress it, he too would be disappointed. Despite the fact that Althusser declared in a letter to the editor of *Le Monde des livres* that he considered *La découverte du Dr Freud* "an unsuccessful, hastily

[4] Louis Althusser, "The Discovery of Dr. Freud," *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, Trans. Jeffry Mehlman (Columbia UP, 1996).
[5] Ibid., 92.
[6] Ibid.

written and unpublishable draft,"[7] he insisted in a private response to Roudinesco that "the question of Lacan" remained open.[8]

Why then return to *La découverte du Dr Freud,* a text he himself judged an unpublishable failure? Perhaps the reference to Poe's "Purloined Letter" in Althusser's essay offers a first clue: what is most significant in it is not what is hidden, a meaning concealed in its depths, but precisely what is repeated throughout the text, even to the point of redundancy, as if Althusser, unable to theorize what is most important according to the order of his arguments, must repeat it as often as possible, so that, despite the inaccuracies and ambiguities the essay displays, readers cannot miss it. This symptom also reminds us that the essay constitutes an intervention, which for Althusser takes the form of drawing a line of demarcation. The line he draws here, against his declared intention, does not traverse the works of Freud and Lacan, but between them, separating them. Althusser sets Freud against Lacan as the standard against which the latter may be judged and found wanting and does so moreover in a complete reversal of the positions outlined in his 1964 essay "Freud and Lacan" that Althusser nowhere acknowledges. For Roudinesco, Nassif and Pêcheux, the later text was not only a rewriting of the earlier with the objective of writing Lacan out of the story of psychoanalysis. It was, perhaps more importantly, a self-criticism unrecognized as such by Althusser himself, that is, a critique of his own earlier, far more laudatory, account of Lacan's project, viewed by Althusser in 1976 as a failure (although a failure of a certain type: not all failures are the same). Further, his critique of Lacan did not even extend to the aspects of the project Althusser had earlier understood as necessary to the founding of "a science of the unconscious," while his positive evaluation of Freud consisted of vague (and often erroneous) summaries of Freudian theory.

In 1964, Althusser declared that the importance of Lacan lay in his recognition that "in principle, Freud founded a *science.* A new science that is the science of a new object: the unconscious."[9] The recognition of this new object, however, was necessarily obscured by what Althusser called Freud's "theoretical solitude," that is, the absence of theoretical precedents, the concepts or conceptual systems that would enable him to adequately think his discovery. Freud was compelled to think the specificity of this new object in "imported" or "borrowed" concepts. While Althusser argues that Freud chose from a variety of sciences (above all, physics and biology) the elements "beneath the cover of which" he could develop a science without precedents, he also recognized that the importation of foreign, already existing, concepts necessarily produced as a by-product the obscurity, contradiction and incoherence that unfailingly accompanied the advances of Freud's theory.

[7] Ibid., 82.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

The conceptual noise surrounding Freud that was sufficient to disorient critics and followers alike, led not simply to outright rejection but also to "attempts at annexation and revision," compelling Lacan to undertake a "return to Freud," that is, a return to Freud's own words, beyond the summaries that so often serve to conceal precisely what is most unprecedented in his work. It is here that Lacan made his own discoveries, the most important of which was the discovery of the absence of a problematic of the unconscious definitively separated from a philosophy of consciousness in Freud's work. To mark this break and even more to construct a barrier to prevent theoretical regression, Lacan turned to linguistics and the diverse models of language emerging from it.

Althusser had clearly ascribed to Lacan an itinerary and procedure similar to his own return to Marx, which was not a return to the purity of an original source, but to the "mature Marx," whose investigations had led him to the point of a necessary forgetting of origins, an invalidation of his putative forbears that left him without predecessors and without precedent. The break or rupture that occurred, however, was not a diachronic shift from one synchronic system to another, as in Kuhn's paradigm shift. It was a fault-line that ran through and not between Marx's texts and thus compelled Althusser (with the help of Spinoza) to pose the question of what it is that we do when we read a text like Marx's *Capital* or for that matter Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. The "immense theoretical revolution" carried out in both works must be located and identified by reading word by word, not to uncover the hidden totality in which the apparently disparate and conflicting elements of the text are revealed to be effects of an underlying system or order, but to register the fractures that occur in it and to explain the movements that produced them.

Both Lacan and Althusser, each in his own idiom, sought, with great caution, to build on the new theoretical formations they had identified. I am well aware that my use of the term "caution" to describe the work of either Althusser or, perhaps even more, Lacan, may strike readers as absurd. Are they both not known for producing a series of neologisms, while at the same time "extorting" new meanings from familiar terms? In response, I would argue that they both resorted to a variety of rhetorical figures, above all, those typically regarded as forms of repetition or paraphrase, not for the sake of emphasis, but in order to complicate an argument through a process of clarification that simultaneously specifies and expands its meaning, both limiting and pointing the way beyond the established limits of this meaning. In "Freud and Lacan," Althusser cites Lacan's own explanation of his style of speaking and writing (during which the latter refers to himself in the third-person):

> There is no stylistic form, however elaborate (and the unconscious abounds in such forms)—not excepting erudite, concettist, and precious forms—that is disdained by the unconscious, any more than by the author

> of these lines: the Gongora of psychoanalysis, as people call him, at your service.[10]

Lacan's phrase "Gongora of psychoanalysis" refers to the seventeenth-century poet known as one of the key figures of the Spanish baroque, whose epic poem, *Soledades,* pushed against the boundaries of conventional syntax to the consternation of many of his contemporaries. The name "Gongora" had an additional meaning for Althusser: Gongora appears in Spinoza's *Ethics* (EIV P39 scholium) as "the Spanish poet" who, following an illness, has forgotten the works he has written and which he can no longer understand. But the question remains: why did Lacan express his most important ideas in a style that might justly be called Gongoresque in that it constantly flirted with unintelligibility? Althusser's answer:

> The appearance of a science that, to the extent that one believes in it, risks breaking up existing boundaries and thus of recasting the current state of a number of several disciplines. Whence the contained passion, the impassioned contention of Lacan's language, which can live and survive only in a state of alert and prepossession: the language of a man already besieged and condemned by the crushing strength of threatened structures and guilds to anticipate their blows, at least to feign returning them before they have been received, thus discouraging the adversary from crushing him under its own. Whence also the often paradoxical recourse to the support of philosophies entirely alien to his scientific undertaking (Hegel, Heidegger), as if to so many intimidating witnesses, thrown in the face of some in order to exact their respect, as if to so many witnesses of a possible objectivity, the natural ally of his thought, to reassure or teach the others.[11]

In addition to the necessity of defending the "irreducibility of the object of psychoanalysis," the unconscious, with the most effective theoretical weapons at hand, those most able to neutralize the attacks and attempts at annexation by existing disciplines and forms of knowledge, Lacan sought, Althusser argues, to mimic an unconscious that exists only in its effects, entirely immanent in the sonic or graphic materiality of the letter, by means of constant punning and other forms of wordplay. This is the meaning of Lacan's declaration that "the unconscious is structured like a language," rather than the formalism or structuralism often attributed to him. This seemingly simple statement, simple only if we believe we know how a language is structured and perhaps even more what "structured" means in relation to language, in its very ambiguity held open a place for a recasting of its terms. In 1970, Lacan would re-state this proposition in the form of

[10] Jacques Lacan, *The Complete Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (Norton, 2007), 391.
[11] Althusser, *Writings, 21.*

a problem and thus of a line of inquiry that sought precisely to explain "the irreducibility of the object" of psychoanalysis: the unconscious.

At this point, I may be accused of reading Lacan in a way that is, if anything, more "Althusserian" than Althusser's own reading in 1964, while ignoring Althusser's misreading of certain aspects of Lacan's early work, notably the notions of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. If I have done so, however, it is because I want to show that through his explanation of Lacan's theoretical practice, its defensive strategies, its calculated avoidance of clear and distinct definitions, as necessary to the holding of a new theoretical space, Althusser came to understand his activity as an intervention in a specific theoretical conjuncture. If Althusser discovered something of himself, something fundamental, in Lacan's project up to 1964, it is difficult not to see his severe critique of this project a little more than a decade later as in part a displaced critique of his own project that is displaced precisely because it is absent from his self-criticism of the mid-1970s.

A number of those close to Althusser in the latter half of the 1970s have described "The Discovery of Dr. Freud," as a self-destructive work, as bad if not worse than his absurd claim in *The Future Lasts Forever* never to have read Freud. Here, Althusser was not content to say that he never read or understood Freud; the essay represented an attempt to demonstrate it. He begins by arguing, "with all the required prudence" that while Freud recognized the "objective existence of the effects of the unconscious and their conditions," he "did not succeed, despite his efforts, in elaborating a theory of the unconscious," (Althusser explains that by "theory of the unconscious," he means a scientific theory of the unconscious).[12] What he calls here and elsewhere "prudence" or "caution" compels him to distinguish "what Freud did from what he did not do."[13] And while what Freud did was "in itself a prodigious accomplishment," to fail to recognize what is absent, that is, a scientific theory of the unconscious, is to allow false theories (whether they claim to be Freudian or not) to occupy the place of the scientific theory that psychoanalysis requires and in doing so, become obstacles to its development.

Althusser adduces two examples of such obstacles. The first is the American school of ego-psychology that, more than twenty years earlier, Lacan had denounced as a normalizing technique whose aim is assimilation and adaptation, which in turn required a strengthening of the ego understood as autonomous. The second is that of Lacan himself, who had "waged a fierce struggle" to defend "the specificity of Freud's thought."[14] Instead of being satisfied with this struggle, however, "he attempted to do what Freud was not able to do, he attempted to constitute a scientific theory of the unconscious."[15]

[12] Ibid., 86.
[13] Ibid., 89.
[14] Ibid., 90.
[15] Ibid.

What is striking here is that the words with which Althusser condemns Lacan could just as easily be applied to his own work, to his own attempt to found a science of history through a return to Marx. This in turn confers a particular interest on the argument that stands at the conceptual center of Althusser's essay:

> I cannot enter here into the details of a gigantic edifice that has not stopped proliferating, and for good reason, which is that it could only pursue an object that was out of its reach because it did not exist. What did not exist was the possibility today to constitute a scientific theory of the unconscious. That possibility will perhaps exist tomorrow, and if it exists, it will take on forms that will certainly surprise Lacan himself, but that possibility does not exist today:[16]

> I think that a rereading of the whole of Freud's work starting from the hypothesis I have just enunciated would finally allow one to understand the necessity of the paradox of a body of thought that is deeply scientific but at the same time prodigiously prudent, a thought that is imperturbable but at the same time multifarious, a thought that never stops saying the same thing, deepening it, but that at the same time says it in forms that are new at every turn and at every turn disconcerting.[17]

Althusser's repeated use of the term "prudent" is noteworthy here; this is not a word often associated with Althusser, who often experienced his own writing process as a "*fuite en avant*," a flight forward, but also a" headlong rush," or as "advancing through a fog," that is, blindly. Moreover, while the Lacan of the 1976 essay is marked by a failure to exercise prudence, the Lacan portrayed in the earlier text is precisely prudent, even, like Freud, "prodigiously prudent," prudent in the sense of Aristotle's φρόνησις, differentiating action that is possible from what is impossible and determining the most effective means to achieve the possible. Lacan at this stage, according to Althusser, understood the necessity of defending the notion of the unconscious, the object of psychoanalytic theory, and by any means necessary. He did not, however, Althusser argues, grasp "the necessity of the paradox of a body of thought that is deeply scientific but at the same time prodigiously prudent." Just as we must understand the conditions of possibility that have permitted advances towards the emergence of a science, so we must understand the "conditions of impossibility," that at present prevent us from responding adequately even to the problems we are able to pose.[18] Althusser insists on rejecting Marx's dictum that "Mankind always sets itself only such problems as it can solve" because it assumes the contemporaneity of historical time and prevents us from grasping the combined and uneven development of knowledge. The prudence that Althusser demands requires constant attention to the ever-changing relation between what is

[16] Ibid., 91.
[17] Ibid., 94.
[18] Ibid., 98.

possible and impossible in a given line of inquiry at a specific moment. Any lapse in attention may result in a (typically masked) regression or a *fuite en avant*, a flight forward and, as in the case of Lacan, the production of a "gigantic edifice that has not stopped proliferating, and for good reason, which is that it could only pursue an object that was out of its reach."[19] If, that is, the object of knowledge it pursues is a fictional object defined by the inquiry itself.

Prudence, as Althusser understands it, derived in part from Machiavelli's maxim, means that we must learn to act (and think) according to necessity (*secondo la necessità*). And in the face of the impossibility of continuing a line of thought, an impossibility that is neither a priori nor transcendental, but historical and conjunctural, Althusser resorts to what he calls "necessary paradox," a strategy of marking an unanswered question that must not be dismissed or forgotten by making it the site of a fundamental paradox. To take two of the most notorious examples, he compels us through his writing to speak of the effectivity of absent causes, and of last instances that never arrive. In doing so, he reminds us that it is not enough "to shatter all the classical conceptions of causality for a new conception to emerge.[20] Althusser's paradoxes mark the space constituted by two impossibilities: the impossibility of accepting the old conceptions of determination and causality and the impossibility, at present, of producing a genuinely new conception.

The problems Althusser marked with the terms "prudence" and "caution," and even more the phrase "conditions of impossibility" (linked in turn to the notion of underdetermination) appear in various forms in nearly all the papers collected here, as does Althusser's use of both the word and the idea of paradox. Giorgos Fourtounis' extremely perceptive reading of both the overlapping critiques of the use of "structure" in philosophy and the social sciences by Derrida and Althusser, and Derrida's commentary on Althusser's use of "the last instance" points to something additional that merits notice. I have discussed elsewhere Derrida's symptomatic inability to see the recurrence of the idea of necessary paradox throughout Althusser's work. This episodic blindness is all the more striking given that Althusser's assertion that "from the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes" captures what Derrida, a few years later, would call *différance originaire* or "originary deferral"

> That is neither absence nor presence, neither negative nor positive. Originary deferral is supplementarity as structure. Structure here means a complexity irreducible to an interior from which the play of presence and absence can only be modulated or displaced: that within which metaphysics can be produced but cannot be thought" [*qui n'est ni absence ni présence, ni négative ni positive. La différance originaire est la supplémentarité comme structure. Structure veut dire ici la complexité irréductible à l'intérieur de laquelle on*

[19] Ibid., 91.
[20] Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 344.

> *peut seulement infléchir ou déplacer le jeu de la présence ou de l'absence: ce dans quoi la métaphysique peut se produire mais qu'elle ne peut penser*].[21]

The investigation of the necessary paradox that is originary deferral, the trace and finally writing itself, according to Derrida, requires patience. Here, his language differs only slightly from Althusser's:

> Perhaps patient meditation on and a rigorous inquiry around what is still provisionally called writing, far from falling short of a science of writing or hastily dismissing it in an obscurantist reaction, allows it on the contrary to develop its positivity as far as is possible, they are the wandering of a thought faithful and attentive to a world irreducibly to come, proclaimed in the present, from beyond the closure of knowledge [Peut-être la méditation patiente et l'enquête rigoureuse autour de ce qui s'appelle encore provisoirement l'écriture, loin de rester en deçà d'une science de l'écriture ou de la congédier hâtivement par quelque réaction obscurantiste, la laissant au contraire développer sa positivité aussi loin qu'il est possible, sont-elles l'errance d'une pensée fidèle et attentive au monde *irréductiblement à venir* qui s'annonce au présent, par-delà la clôture du savoir].[22]

We might say that the last instance in which the economy becomes determinant remains for Althusser *irréductiblement à venir* or irreducibly to come. At this point, however, I want to pose the obvious, perhaps too obvious, question of what it means to postulate as an end, the end, an instance that is perpetually, from the first moment, deferred. It is possible, of course, to read this declaration as a form of negative ontology or perhaps a negative messianism (according to which the only true messiah is the one that never arrives), a determination defined by what it is not and does not do, but such a reading leads only to ineffable mysteries and therefore to the transcendental limits of knowledge. Althusser's formulation, like Derrida's in the passage cited above, takes the form of what Balibar has called (following Pascal and Foucault) a "point of heresy," a theoretical paradox that makes visible the conceptual limits imposed by the relationship of forces that defines a given theoretical conjuncture. The concept of causality necessary to a rigorous knowledge of history has not yet been developed, even if we have advanced to the point where the various obstacles to this knowledge have been recognized as such and determined to be inadequate. In the interim, the length of which cannot be determined in advance because it depends on theoretical and practical struggles that have yet to take place, a paradox of this type furnishes the means necessary to defend the break with prior notions of causality,

[21] Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Editions de Minuit, 1967), 238 [my translation].
[22] Ibid., 14 [my translation].

in the light of which obstacles became identifiable as such and to hold open the conceptual space that would otherwise be quickly filled: "ideology abhors a vacuum."[23]

The importance of Joseph Serrano's remarks on Althusser's philosophy of the conjuncture becomes clear at this point. The conjuncture cannot be understood as a finite totality whose elements, a term Althusser, following Lenin, tended to avoid, in favor of "circumstances" or "tendencies," constitute a kind of system, however temporary. In fact, in the nineteenth century, "conjuncture" was most often used to describe weather that is, a temporary conjunction of circumstances (e.g., barometric pressure, temperature, wind, humidity and precipitation) whose duration cannot be determined in advance. While Lenin's use of "conjuncture" in the "Letters from Afar" corresponds closely to its meteorological sense, the instability and transience, that is, the irreducible openness of a conjuncture to new circumstances and currents that may lead not to its total transformation, but to a partial reconfiguration subtle enough to pose the question of whether the conjuncture under consideration has changed or is changing. In "Contradiction and Overdetermination," perhaps even more than in the texts from the 1980s, Althusser's terminology works against the inevitable tendency to attribute stability to both the "elements" of a conjuncture and their relations to render it intelligible. Serrano is right to remind us that knowledge of "our" conjuncture, a knowledge necessary to both political and theoretical practice, cannot be a knowledge about or on the conjuncture, given that what we know about the conjuncture is necessarily derived from our place within it. Further, as Althusser, points out, citing Machiavelli, it is possible to see and understand more from certain vantage points than from others, above all, to see and understand the all too brief moment or opening in the concatenation of circumstances in which we ourselves are caught that endows us with the ability to act and produce unusually powerful effects.

I want now to turn to Althusser's essay "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," and his treatment of ideology more generally, which is unsurprisingly the object of a significant amount of commentary on the part of my interlocutors. I will organize my response around three topics: 1) the question raised by Althusser in the first thesis concerning ideology in the ISAs essay, "ideology has no history," to which I, with little awareness, paid scant attention; 2) the meaning or meanings of "imaginary" as both adjective and noun in the essay; and 3) the question of the individual who is interpellated as a subject.

1.

Stefano Pippa is absolutely right in his assertion that I treated interpellation as if it were proper to or even simply coincident with the emergence of capitalist property and social

[23] Louis Althusser, "Letter to the Central Committee of the PCF, 18 March 1966," Trans. William S. Lewis. *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007), 165.

relations, as well the legal forms in which they were codified. I turned to Foucault's account of disciplinary society in its historical specificity in order to understand more completely and concretely not simply Althusser's argument that ideological interpellation was at the center of his recasting of the notion of ideology, but also his insistence that ideology has a material existence. This allowed me (although I was hardly alone in this), to "bracket" Althusser's first thesis that "ideology has no history." Althusser offers two distinct accounts of the "omni-historical" character of ideology:

> A – Ideology is "an *omni-historical* reality, in the sense that its structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history."[24] This is a surprising characterization, to say the least. Althusser has in fact offered a description of ideology here as a combinatory whose structure and function are immutable. In this way, ideology in general is a system composed of immutable elements whose combination defines historically specific ideologies. This represents a regression on Althusser's part to the structuralist formalism he had repeatedly denounced over the previous decade. Moreover, it plays a more important role in the account of the reproduction of the relations of production and the introduction of the Ideological State Apparatuses than in the section of the essay devoted to his discussion of ideology proper. The most serious consequence of reversion to structuralist formalism is the functionalism that Althusser introduced in the published version of his text. The theoretical cost of this version of ideology's omni-historicity is quite high: Althusser's earlier assertion that the formal structure of all ideology is always the same, authorizes him to restrict his analysis of what he declares is the central operation of ideology, that is, the interpellation of the individual as a subject, "to a single example, one accessible to everyone, that of religious ideology, with the proviso that the same demonstration can be produced for ethical, legal, political, aesthetic ideology. etc."[25] The example he cites ("'not to the letter but 'in spirit and truth'")[26] is the Biblical account of God calling on Moses by name on Mount Horeb (Exodus 3:4). I cannot enter into the details of Althusser's interpretation of the Biblical narrative and will instead simply ask what questions and problems are excluded by Althusser's rendering God's calling out to Moses the functional equivalent of a police officer calling out "Hey, you there!" (*Hé, vous là-bas!*) in the street. In the posthumously published text, "Marx in his Limits" (written nearly ten years after the ISAs essay), he reflected on the unanticipated by-products and side effects of examples such as these, seemingly used for heuristic purposes and often by means of a theoretical "bending of the stick:" In particular, a formula produced by an author may survive the meaning assigned to it by and in a given conjuncture and take on new meanings or simply connotations

[24] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Trans. G.M. Goshgarian. (Verso, 2014), 255.
[25] Ibid., 266.
[26] Ibid., 267.

opposed to those it earlier possessed: "Circumstances come and go, but words remain, and can serve to support or even entrench an ambiguous or hostile interpretation or even tendency."[27] The ISAs essay is filled with such formulas: necessary, perhaps, in a given conjuncture, but later capable of generating unforeseen and sometimes regressive misreadings.

B – The second explanation of the "omni-historical existence of ideology" is in certain ways opposed to the first: there is no set of immutable elements whose combination determines the precise character of a given ideological conjuncture. Instead, Althusser turns to Freud: "our proposition, ideology has no history, can and must (and in a way which has absolutely nothing arbitrary about it, but, quite the reverse, is theoretically necessary, for there is an organic link between the two propositions) be related directly to Freud's proposition that the *unconscious is eternal*, i.e. that it has no history."[28] While he himself said little more about the link between ideology and the unconscious, his former student Michel Pêcheux was engaged in developing Althusser's theses on ideology by means of what he called a "triple alliance" between (Althusserian) Marxism, (Lacanian) psychoanalysis and linguistics. On the relation between ideology and the unconscious, Pêcheux argued that "the reader will realise that these two categories do not meet here by accident. But he will also realise that on this question, and despite important recent studies, the essential theoretical work remains to be done, and I want above all else to avoid giving the impression, rather widespread today, that we already have the answers. In fact, slogans will not fill the yawning absence of a worked out conceptual articulation between ideology and the unconscious', we are still at the stage of theoretical 'glimmers' in a prevailing obscurity, and in the present study I shall restrict myself to calling attention to certain connections whose importance may have been underestimated, without really claiming to pose the true question that governs the relationship between these two categories."[29] Dylan Fagan's emphasis on humor coincides with Pecheux's emphasis on *der Witz* as understood by Freud, that is, as a compendium of the forms in which resistance and conflict appear in the liturgies, rituals and practices by which order is produced: "humor is overdetermined, disruptive, and thereby bears a crucial position for a theory and practice of fracturing domination, commanding, and co-operation."[30] Pêcheux was particularly interested in the production of "the obvious' by the ISAs, not simply the obviousness of, say, the rationality of the unhindered market, but even more the obviousness that I am

[27] Louis Althusser, "Marx in his Limits," *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings 1978-1987,* Trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2006), 23-24.
[28] Althusser, *Reproduction,* 255.
[29] Michel Pêcheux, Language, Semantics and Ideology. Trans. Harbans Nagpal (St. Martins Press, 1982), 104.
[30] Dylan Fagan, "Co-operation and Overdetermination: On Humor in the Critique of Political Economy," *Décalages,* Vol. 3, Iss. 1.

fundamentally separate from others and am master of my speech and actions. The phenomena that Freud identified, the dream, the slip, the parapraxis and the joke, all work to undermine the notion of the sovereign self-determining subject as sites of what Lacan called the discourse of the Other. The liturgies we are required to recite and the rituals we perform so regularly that we forget they are rituals, are constantly subject to disruption, the omission or addition of a word or the substitution of one word for another, in the one case, and the interruption of or deviation from a prescribed sequence of actions in school or workplace, in the other. There is nothing in itself subversive about any of these actions, but they in their unavoidable existence serve to diminish the obviousness of the obvious and thereby increase the possibility of critical thought and action.

2.

As Natalia Rome has noted, Althusser's use of the notion of the imaginary in the ISAs essay has led readers to assign it very different sources and meanings, from Spinoza to Sartre (whose text *l'Imaginaire* was one of the very few of his works to earn Althusser's praise) to Lacan. As she has also noted, the notion as it appears in the second thesis on ideology, has an importance that has often eluded readers: "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." We must note at the outset that what Althusser qualifies as "imaginary" is not the ideological representation or misrepresentation of reality but the relations of individuals to "their real conditions of existence." What are the relations to which Althusser refers, and what does it mean to call a relation "imaginary"? Here, I would to point to a passage that Althusser returned to repeatedly in the collection of his notes on Spinoza held in the Althusser archive: the scholium to EIII P2. To regard as obvious, so obvious that to question it seems absurd, the idea that we, all of us, in our individual existences, freely determine the actions performed by our bodies, including speaking and writing, is, according to Spinoza's conclusion to this long scholium, to "dream with our eyes open." This waking dream is precisely the "imaginary relation" to which Althusser refers. The obviousness that holds the imaginary relation in place, however, is not merely a false belief or a prejudice in the conventional sense that might be dispelled by the presence of truth. If the imaginary relation of the individual to his or her "own" body and the actions it performs is in some sense false, it is in its very falsity nevertheless real. As Althusser argued in the *Two Lectures on Psychoanalysis,* the subject thus described is an individual to whom the characteristics of a legal subject, an author of the words and deeds attributed to the individual and thus responsible and punishable for them. In this way, it is essential to understand that the imputation of the characteristics of a subject to the individual, however false or "imaginary" as a description of the actual causal processes that determine an individual's actions, is very real and material. The imaginary relation is imputed not

simply by the repressive apparatus of the state (police, courts and prisons), but also by the normalizing disciplines that traverse both the realm of the state and that of "civil society" and in doing so call their opposition into question.

3.

"Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects." Neither the verb "interpellate" nor the noun "interpellation" appear in the ISAs essay until the concluding section, where they together occur 23 times. I have discussed elsewhere the problems engendered by the translation of the French term (which is both commonly used and has a number of distinct meanings, including being stopped or detained by the police) into English as "interpellation" (a word considered obsolete in modern English until revived by the translation of Althusser's essay). The problem was only aggravated by the occasional substitution of "hail" which further obscured the possible meanings of Althusser's term. A number of the responses to *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, however, focus on a different problem: that of the individual (or "concrete individual") who is interpellated as a subject. In my view, it is incontestable that Althusser writes as if the individual already exists as an individual, that is, separated from others and independent of them, prior to being interpellated by ideology, prior to being constituted as a subject. Althusser, for example, speaks of individuals being "recruited" to their positions as subjects, a figure of speech that again suggests the existence of autonomous individuals before their induction into ideology. Pêcheux, ever-attentive to the aporias and ambiguities of Althusser's texts, especially in the case of the ISAs essay, argues that the production of the individual and the interpellation of the individual as subject are the simultaneous results of one and the same process and the two aspects have always already been realized. This is certainly a necessary addendum to the script of Althusser's "little theater" and therefore a step forward in developing it. Natalia Rome, moving in certain ways beyond Pêcheux's rectification, argues that "neither *individuated bodies* nor *the masses* are natural materialities. The body-form (whether that of the individual or the mass) is historically produced."

If interpellation is a simultaneous process of an always specific individualization and of the imprinting on the individual the identity of a subject, however, it is all the more necessary to give an account of the physical and corporeal processes of individualization involved in putting the stamp of "subject" on the individual in the course of its production. This is precisely the point at which Foucault's notion of the disciplines that developed through an uneven and combined process beginning in the eighteenth century becomes relevant. It is here that he furnishes an outline of the rituals and practices whose aim is ever greater conceptual and practical separation and specification of individuals, summarized in the ideal diagram offered by the panopticon, the image of the body imprisoned in a material soul. I would argue that between 1970 and 1975, a period during which Althusser and Foucault hardly spoke, there nevertheless existed a kind of dialogue

between them, an exchange that neither exactly intended nor sought to bring about and which was carried on behind their backs, as it were.

There is no question that Althusser's account of the interpellation of individuals as subjects, despite its ambiguities, hesitations and ellipses, succeeded in calling into question the prevailing notions of the individual subject as self-determining author of his or her actions by demonstrating that subjectivation and subjection "are one and the same thing" in Spinoza's sense. At the same time, to assign a subject form, even limited to the capitalism that existed in Europe and North America, risks reproducing a kind of uniformity and even formal equality, according to which the individuals produced in and by the social relations specific to it are all constituted as subjects not only to the same degree but in the same way. As Macherey noted in his reading of Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, the experience of being identified as a Black man by a child while riding on a train is certainly a kind of interpellation, although it is clearly identified by Fanon as a continuing effect of the apparatuses of France's colonial empire and as such both resented and resisted. We are therefore compelled to speak of the multiple processes of interpellation involved in the production of different and unequal subject forms in the same society.

Finally, Natalia reminds us of the question of the masses. In the *Holy Family*, Marx spoke of his contemporaries, the practitioners of "criticism" whose target was neither the state nor the landlords, but the stubborn, superstitious mass in the singular: "for them, the mass is an indeterminate object, and therefore can neither carry out a determinate action nor enter into a determinate relationship. The mass, as the object of Critical Criticism, has nothing in common with the real masses who, for their part, constitute among themselves massive contradictions." The masses, who assuredly do carry out determinate actions, are constantly changing in scale and composition in relation to the social and political contradictions that animate them. For this reason, Pêcheux argues that "the masses are precisely unrepresentable: contrary to the mystical body of Christ, contrary to the body of the King, contrary to the body of the popular bourgeois state, the masses escape the order of representation, because they do not constitute one body. Thereby, the proletarian revolution necessarily disrupts the representation of society as a social body."[31] The masses are not produced by nor can they be contained by the ISAs; the masses, the constantly changing masses (in Latin, the *mobile vulgus*) are formed by a process of "dis-identification." Is it significant that the phrase, "the masses," appears only once, in the demographic designation of "the masses of people," in the ISAs essay, as if it was excluded along with all the references to resistance and revolt found in the manuscript published posthumously as *Sur la reproduction* (*On the Reproduction of Capitalism*).

[31] Michel Pecheux, "Dare to Think and Dare to Rebel! Ideology, Marxism, Resistance, Class Struggle." Trans. Ted Stolze, *Décalages*, Vol. 1 [2014], Iss. 4, 23.

It was in relation to the questions and problems posed by the attempt to identify the radically new concept of causality presupposed by Marx's "immense theoretical revolution" that Althusser encountered the limits imposed on his theory and practice by the conjuncture (and I am speaking here of a conjuncture particularly favorable to thought and action). We might recall Foucault's remarkable characterization of a historical moment whose closure had become visible only in 1976, the year he had spent preparing his seminar, "Society Must Be Defended." In the opening of the seminar, he bore witness to the end of a time of an "immense and proliferating criticability of things, institutions, practices, discourses; a sort of general friability of surfaces, even and especially the most familiar, the most solid, the closest [*l'immense et proliférante criticabilité des choses, des institutions, des pratiques, des discours; une sorte de friabilité générale des sols, même et surtout les plus familiers, les plus solides, les plus proches*]."[32] Althusser's repeatedly renewed attempts to produce a theory of causality adequate to Marxist theory and, above all, the class struggle understood as the motor of history, were inseparable from the long wave of mobilization (from the final years of the Algerian revolution to the defeat of the revolutionary movement that brought about the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship, that is, 1960-1976) and the rapid decline of the left internationally that followed. The period of the proliferating "criticability of things," was a period of experimentation in both theory and practice that allowed Althusser to re-examine the notion of causality specific to the concepts of class struggle and contradiction in the works of Marx, Lenin and Mao. Moreover, it is important to note that Althusser and his young colleagues regarded the Cuban Revolution as a historical experiment whose struggles and debates they followed with passionate interest.

To address the responses of Davit Galashvilli, Panagiotis Sotiris and Banu Bargu, I will treat the three figures through which Althusser attempted to develop the concept of causality that remained "in the practical state" in the canonical analyses of 1848, the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949 (as well as the emergence of capitalism itself): overdetermination, structural causality and the materialism of the encounter. Despite the chronology of the particular texts in which these figures appeared, they should neither be understood as a linear, progressive sequence nor as a regressive movement in which what was genuinely new in the earlier texts is lost or forgotten in the later. The difference between these figures lies in the specific theoretical obstacle each of them addresses and the means furnished by the conjuncture, that is, the configuration of forces in both theory and practice that governed even the use of words and determined their power to affect readers:

> The realities of the class struggle are 'represented' by 'ideas' which are 'represented' by words. In scientific and philosophical reasoning, the words (concepts, categories) are 'instruments' of knowledge. But in

[32] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*: *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*. Trans. David Macey (Picador, 2003), 6.

> political, ideological and philosophical struggle, the words are also weapons, explosives or tranquillizers and poisons. Occasionally, the whole class struggle may be summed up in the struggle for one word against another word. Certain words struggle amongst themselves as enemies. Other words are the site of an ambiguity: the stake in a decisive but undecided battle.[33]

Briefly, we can characterize "Contradiction and Overdetermination" as less a critique of Hegel as of the version (or versions) of the Hegelian dialectic and the concept of contradiction that propelled it, adopted by Marxism. This was a dialectic that, despite the famous difficulty of Hegel's texts, reduced the complexity and conflictuality of a given historical conjuncture to the phenomena of a single, essential contradiction whose resolution or overcoming produced a new contradiction in a process often concealed from those who live it (the cunning of reason) that leads to the End and goal of all history. What Althusser called the structures of the Hegelian dialectic, totality, contradiction, teleology, all tied to a notion of expressive causality, needed only to be inverted to serve as a conceptual foundation for Marxism. Althusser alludes only obliquely to the political costs of the of this appropriation through inversion: not only the refusal to recognize the combined and uneven development that made "backward" Russia, rather than advanced Germany, the site of the first socialist revolution, but even an embrace of colonialism as the necessary means to the maturation of the backward societies of the non-European world. We might recall that the French Communist Party rejected Algerian independence on precisely these grounds until just prior to the publication of Althusser's essay. In opposition to this "poor man's Hegelianism," and its simplified notion of contradiction, Althusser declared:

> If this contradiction is to become '*active*' in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of 'circumstances' and 'currents' so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will *necessarily* be paradoxically foreign to the revolution in origin and sense, or even its 'direct opponents'), they '*fuse*' into a *ruptural unity*: when they produce the result of the immense majority of the popular masses *grouped* in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are *unable to defend*. Such a situation presupposes not only the 'fusion' of the two basic conditions into a 'single national crisis ', but each condition considered (abstractly) by itself presupposes the 'fusion' of an 'accumulation' of contradictions.[34]
>
> If, as in this situation, a vast accumulation of 'contradictions' comes into play *in the same court*, some of which are radically heterogeneous – of different origins, different sense, different *levels* and *points* of application –

[33] Louis Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Writings* (Monthly Review Press, 1971), 21.
[34] Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," *For Marx* (Verso, 1969), 99.

> but which nevertheless 'merge' into a ruptural unity, we can no longer talk of the sole, unique power of the general 'contradiction'. Of course, the basic contradiction dominating the period (when the revolution is 'the task of the day') is active in all these 'contradictions' and even in their 'fusion'.[35]

In these passages in which Althusser, employing Lenin's language, explains that the "essential contradiction" between the forces of production and the relations of production becomes active in a causal sense only by means of a specific accumulation of circumstances and currents in a vast conjunction of often "radically heterogeneous" conflicts situated at "different levels and points of application." Although Althusser's adherence to Lenin's characterization of what the former, with some hesitation, will call a contradiction sufficiently overdetermined to permit the fusion of its elements into a "ruptural unity," has prevented readers from seeing what he would soon describe as a philosophy of the encounter at work. This does not mean, however, that "Contradiction and Overdetermination" constitutes an anticipation, that is, an underdeveloped version of the aleatory materialism Althusser proposed in his last works, interspersed among citations from Lenin. On the contrary, Althusser has described an encounter that "takes" (a fusion) between irreducibly antagonistic forces, something like a unity of opposites, or two opposing armies "joined" in a battle whose outcome and duration cannot be determined in advance.

The fact that, say, the emergence of capitalism was not determined by an overcoming of the essential contradiction of feudalism as the next stage in a teleology that would, at the moment of capitalism's maturity, begin to give way to communism, but was the result of an encounter between specific elements and forces that, as Althusser will say openly, might never have happened, does not thereby condemn capitalism to a constantly precarious existence, as if it were likely at any moment to decompose as many revolutionaries once assumed. In "Contradiction and Overdetermination," he speaks of a "fusion" of circumstances and events; four years later, in a text written in 1966, but published only posthumously, "On Genesis," he will use a term that reappears in his late work: of the many encounters that happen and from which nothing results, there are a few that "'conjoin' by 'taking hold' [*prenant*] in a new structure."[36] Here, I would argue, Althusser illuminates both the need for a new concept of causality and the difficulties and risks that any attempt to address this need will face. To use the term "structure" to describe the thing that results from an encounter that takes hold is a way of declaring the intelligibility of the result, that is, a composite thing whose structure allows it to persist indefinitely. At the same time, however, "structure," as it was used for example in linguistics (deep structures), suggests an order, a formal system of elements formed

[35] Ibid.
[36] Louis Althusser, "On Genesis," Trans. Jason E. Smith. *Décalages*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, 1.

according to a set of rules, in the manner of the formal combinatory Althusser often criticizes. In fact, Macherey in an essay on structuralism and literary analysis originally published in *Les temps modernes* in 1966 argued for a new understanding of the notion of structure: the fact that the [literary] work can be related to a structure does not imply that it is itself, in its literal existence, unified; the structure supports the work all the more in that the work is diverse, scattered, irregular: to see the work is to see this irregularity."[37] The fact that the term "structure" no longer refers to an order or system that would be the effect of a greater order or system, but precisely to a singular disorder, means that the structure of a work does not exist prior to or outside of the work, nor can it be extracted from the work as the essential separated from what is inessential. Instead, structure becomes the work's cause in the sense that it is a cause that exists only in its effects. Borrowing from Spinoza and Freud or, more accurately, reading Freud in the light of Spinoza, Althusser proposed a notion of structure as an immanent cause, a cause that exists only in its effects and thus inseparable from the work in its material existence, that is, the disarray and "disorder" proper to it. In this way, as Panagiotis Sotiris argues, Althusser rejects notions of indeterminacy or randomness, just as he rejects the causality of origins and ends that operates through some version of expression, representation or emanation, in order to outline a new, unprecedented concept of causality.

The concluding chapter of Althusser's contribution to *Reading Capital*, "Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution," shows both the ambiguities of his notion of structure and the prudence that allowed him to resist the temptation to deny the existing conditions of impossibility that prevented him from further developing the notions of structure and structural causality. "Contradiction and Overdetermination," published three years earlier, had been criticized as an empiricist account of the determination of historical crises, above all revolutions, content to enumerate the accumulated factors whose collective weight could be understood as their cause. Althusser attempted in "On the Materialist Dialectic" by introducing the notion of "structure in dominance" and the "complex structured whole, to counter the accusations of both pluralism and empiricism occasioned by the earlier:

> The unity discussed by Marxism is *the unity of the complexity itself*, that the mode of organization and articulation of the complexity is precisely what constitutes its unity. It is to claim that *the complex whole has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance*. In the last resort this specific structure is the basis for the relations of domination between contradictions and between their aspects that Mao described as essential.[38]

[37] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, Trans. Geoffrey Wall (Routledge, 1978), 155 (translation modified).
[38] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," *For Marx,* 202.

Just as the terms "accumulation (of circumstances)" and "fusion" served as place-holder concepts that identified and defended an empty space of an absent concept, so "the unity of a complex whole" whose dominant structure or primary contradiction determine the subordinate status of the other structures or contradictions, serves to prevent regression to notions of expressive totality, while marking with its clearly improvised character the absence of an adequate concept of the causality proper to history. Macherey, however, would later criticize such formulations as "the unity discussed by Marxism is *the unity of the complexity itself*, that the mode of organization and articulation of the complexity is precisely what constitutes its unity" as insufficiently distinguished from notions of structure as organized complexity and therefore as a kind of order or system that made the complexity intelligible.[39]

It was around this precise problem that Althusser himself, however tentatively and incompletely, produced a genuinely new and still undeveloped notion of causality that appears, fittingly, only at the conclusion of his final chapter: he called it structural causality. This new conception did not appear in pure form, but in the form of a contradiction which Althusser presents as a progression without noting the antagonism between them: one the one hand, structural causality as a theory of "the effectivity of a structure on its elements" according to which "the elements of the whole" were determined by "the structure of the whole; " on the other, a problematization of the notion of a structure of the whole, as well as perhaps the notion of structure itself, at least in its dominant forms, by introducing the idea of the absent or immanent cause. Just as the absent cause is not absent from its place outside of the effects it produces, so the immanent cause is not simply contained inside of its effects as a force distinct from them. At this point, Althusser has abandoned the first definition in favor of the second:

> This is an extremely important point if we are to avoid even the slightest, in a sense inadvertent relapse into the diversions of *the classical conception of the economic object*, if we are to avoid saying that the Marxist conception of the economic object is, for Marx, determined *from the outside by a non-economic structure*. The structure is not an essence *outside* the economic phenomena which comes and alters their aspect, forms and relations and which is effective on them as an absent cause, *absent because it is outside them. The absence of the cause in the structure's* '*metonymic causality*' *on its effects is not the fault of the exteriority of the structure with respect to the economic phenomena*; *on the contrary*, *it is the very form of the interiority of the structure*, *as a structure*, *in its effects*. This implies therefore that the effects are not outside the structure, are not a pre-existing object, element or space in which the structure arrives to *imprint its mark:* on the contrary, it implies that the structure is immanent in its effects, a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that *the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*, in

[39] Macherey, *Literary Production,* 151.

> short that the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects.[40]

To say that *the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects* is to abandon every notion of structure as order or system whether transcendent or immanent. Structure, if we want to retain the word, is nothing more than a singular configuration of elements or forces in their conjunction. This marks a caesura in Althusser's thought, or perhaps one of his many detours.

The "late Althusser," represented in "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter" and "Marxism and Philosophy" may be understood as a return to these same problems. I will not repeat the arguments found in *Althusser and His Contemporaries*. Instead, I will return to my remarks on Althusser's critique of Lacan in "Dr. Freud's Discovery," and the self-critical reflections in "Marxism in its Limits." Without denying all that is interesting in "The Underground Current," I would argue that it is an example of a "flight forward in theory," that is, an attempt to move past the tentative and unfinished formulations that were devised to address the questions raised by the struggles and historical/political experiments of the previous two decades. When I say "move past" the questions and the attempts to address, if not answer, them, I am referring to the operation of denial and forgetting in Althusser's articulation of "a philosophy of the void." As he remarked in a letter to Macherey in 1966,

> I do not now feel able to leap over the barrier of the "organic whole" and "contradiction." To leap over this barrier means of course to replace the provisional concepts with better designed concepts. I still lack the latter. If you can help me and enlighten me, I ask you to do so immediately. It's of the greatest importance . . . to know if it is possible today to go further.[41]

In *the Elements of Self-Criticism,* Althusser argued that "whatever you do, you cannot find in Spinoza what Hegel gave to Marx: contradiction." Can we not say the same about the materialism of Epicurus and Lucretius? This should not surprise anyone given the fact that Spinoza's definition of a singular thing in EII and his account of the nature of the body in the appendices to *Ethics* II P13 appear to be derived from the very arguments from *De rerum natura* to which Althusser refers in the *Underground Current.* Unlike Spinoza, however, Althusser is compelled to postulate the void or nothingness that not only precedes but makes possible the falling of atoms though the void, the swerve that makes the encounter possible, allowing some from among the countless collisions that take place between atoms, to become attached and in lasting become a world. It is in the encounter that lasts that the very existence of atoms, until then condemned to "irreality" becomes "an accomplished fact." What is perhaps most remarkable about Althusser's exposition

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[40] Althusser, *Reading Capital, 344*.
[41] Cited in Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, 74.

is his argument that from the absolutely contingent origin there arises not simply a world but a world governed by laws, that is, by necessity, that allow it to persist in time. Here, he emphasizes the nullification of the category of origin: the accomplished fact is preceded only by non-accomplishment, unreality and absence. If his argument stopped here, we might understand it as strategic, a more elaborate version of what Derrida called the trace of what has never been present, less a concept than an occupation of a place in theory to defend an opening that requires new concepts.

But Althusser, who describes his aim as the elaboration of a "philosophy of the void,"[42] has endowed the void with a function that is not simply strategic: the void is the name of the original and in fact "transcendental" absence of order or teleology, those myths designed to "abolish chance," and reduce contingency to a "modality of necessity." He argues in opposition that we must "think necessity as the becoming-necessary of the encounter between contingents."[43] This becoming-necessary, that is, the necessity born of the *prise*, may give rise to the temptation to regard the world thus formed, and endowed with the laws governing its existence, as possessing the capacity to reproduce itself indefinitely. Althusser significantly, advises us to abandon the notion that the elements or atoms that form a particular whole are united by relations of *convenance*, accord or compatibility, of which its laws are an expression. These laws, which he will later qualify as "tendential," constitute a tendential order that no matter how stable at a given moment, is "haunted by a *radical instability*."[44] Althusser does not identify the causes of this instability, which appears as an afterthought that marks the place of a deferred account of the radical instability that haunts every lasting encounter.

Is the fact that the word "contradiction" only appears once and the word "antagonism" not at all in "The Underground Current" significant? If so, what are the effects of these specific absences on the text? To answer this question, we might begin by noting that "The Underground Current" is a kind of rewriting of "Contradiction and Overdetermination" twenty years later in an idiom better suited to a conjuncture in which a close reading of Lenin's explanation of the "miracle" of the Russian revolution would likely remain a dead letter. "Contradiction," assumed in always specific forms in the earlier text, is reduced to an unspecified, and unexplained "radical instability" that appears only once, in the latter. The assurance that no order formed by an encounter that "takes," no matter how law-governed and coherent, can last for eternity, becomes a kind of eschatological guarantee that the world thus formed will one day suffer an unmaking, an end that will arrive like a thief in the night. In this way, Althusser can argue that just as capitalism might not have come into being, so it may, or in fact must, at an unknowable

[42] Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Philosophy," *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings 1978-1987*, Trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2006), 262.
[43] Ibid., 163.
[44] Ibid., 165.

point cease to be. Althusser's abandonment of the notions of immanent and thus inescapable contradiction and the problem of how the accumulation of contradictions overdetermines a "ruptural fusion" sufficient to destroy a capitalist regime, marks a retreat, but a tactical retreat that brings with it a detailed knowledge of the terrain to be retaken when and if circumstances permit. The recourse to Epicurus and Lucretius represents what Machiavelli called "acting according to necessity;" it serves to identify the sites that must be reoccupied during the next incursion. Althusser, whether he knew it or not, was still at war.

But what is this war and why did Althusser describe it as perpetual? As Aurelio Saenz Pezonaga argues in his reflections on Althusser's philosophical practice, this war, which continues within, as well as outside of, Althusser's works and as such exhibits a vast array of tactics, including fraud as well as force, impersonation and camouflage, as well as the massing of forces in a frontal assault, is never simply a struggle for power without regard for truth. In fact, we might say that it is a struggle to make truth effective by dismantling the obstacles that prevent its apprehension. In relation to the sciences, philosophy operates for the most part "within the true," to use Canguilhem's expression.[45] It is here that the operation of drawing lines of demarcation to separate philosophy or more precisely the philosophical exploitation of scientific advances from the results of scientific practice takes place. At stake in this struggle is not simply power, hegemony or subjection. On the contrary, the struggle for power is simultaneously a struggle to make truth effective, just as power is increased by the effectivity of the true:

> Philosophy represents the people's class struggle in theory. In return it helps the people to distinguish in *theory* and in all *ideas* (political, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) between true ideas and false ideas. In principle, true ideas always serve the people; false ideas always serve the enemies of the people.[46]

When Althusser in 1976 spoke of Freud's "perpetual motion," that is, his unending effort to dismantle or circumvent the concepts that only too readily offered themselves as substitutes for the concepts adequate to the object of psychoanalysis, he was, wittingly or unwittingly, speaking of himself. His theory of philosophy as a struggle to find and keep open the way to true ideas demanded constant intervention and tactical innovation in an interminable process within which the last instance was only one ruse among others in a perpetual war.

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[45] Etienne Balibar, "'Being in the True?' Science and Truth in the Philosophy of Georges Canguilhem," Trans. Andrew Fan, *Décalages*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, 3.
[46] Louis Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other*, 21.

Following Althusser
Preface to the Korean Translation of Althusser and His Contemporaries

Warren Montag

To see one's book translated into a foreign language, any foreign language, is an honor. For me, however, to see *Althusser and His Contemporaries* translated into Korean is something more than an honor. In the early 1980s, I met a small group of Korean students who had fled the severe repression that followed the crushing of the Kwang-Ju revolt in May 1980 and had managed to find their way to Los Angeles's large Korean community. Life was not easy for them, financially or culturally, but Los Angeles with its relatively large and diverse community of political exiles from all over the world (Mexico, Argentina, Chile and El Salvador; Palestine, Iran and Lebanon; The Philippines and South Africa) offered not only refuge, but also solidarity and an intellectual/political community. As they gradually returned, one by one, to Korea only later to end up back in Los Angeles, I followed the progress of the popular movements of students and workers and the flowering of Marxist theory that accompanied them, including an enthusiastic interest in the work of Althusser. To be able to speak to, and with, a Korean audience about Althusser is a way of returning to that time of struggle in theory and practice, not out of nostalgia, but to gather the resources to resist and overcome the powerful forces of reaction at work in the present.

The proper name "Althusser" today designates, in addition to the individual named Louis Althusser who was born in 1918 and died in 1990, a body of work (in

English a "corpus"—a body—and in French an *oeuvre*—a work) and the principles of inclusion and exclusion that guide the selection of texts we call "Althusserian." As Foucault pointed out in "What is an Author," the name of the author is not simply one proper name among others: it also serves as a guarantee, albeit a fictitious guarantee, of the unity and integrity of the body of work we attribute to the author.[1] In this sense, the personal identity of the author, an identity that persists over time, is itself underwritten by the legal concept of the person responsible both causally and morally for the actions assigned to him, a concept that according to Foucault is anterior to the notion of author as proprietor. In either case, the notion of author acts as a kind of substrate that allows us to assert a uniquely intimate relation between works written by an individual from childhood (when the author's work is relegated to the category of juvenilia) to old age, even if such works are judged to be the products of the author's senescence, or his or her "deliria." These categories introduce divisions into an oeuvre like Althusser's whose function is to isolate the characteristics of the work of the author's maturity, situated between the "not-yet" and the "no longer," or, as François Matheron put it, between Althusser before Althusser and Althusser after Althusser.[2] In fact, Althusser poses an unusually complicated challenge for any attempt to establish a chronology of his theoretical development. Where exactly can we find the Althusser in relation to whom we speak of a before and an after? What if we discover that the divisions internal to his work are not chronological, corresponding to the legal categories of the age of minority, the age of majority and a declaration of *non compos mentis* for reasons of senility, but contemporaneous at every moment of his work, and, further, that these divisions are not stable, but, on the contrary, exhibit frequent variation in number and intensity? These are not easy questions to answer, even, or perhaps especially, for those familiar with Althusser's texts.

Moreover, as Foucault also reminds us, even what we call the "complete writings" or "collected works" of an author does not include everything he or she has written. I refer not simply to the extreme case of Nietzsche's laundry bill that he cites, but even to such texts as letters. Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* as published in 1677, following his death, included unfinished works from both his early (the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*) and final (the *Tractatus Politicus*) periods, as well as 74 letters by both Spinoza and a number of correspondents. We know that an undetermined number of letters were destroyed on the grounds that they had no relation to his philosophical project and therefore did not merit a place in his corpus, but there exists no record of the missing letters: we do not know the dates of their composition, nor to whom or in what language they were written. Without however any sense of what they contained, we cannot be sure whether today we would agree with the judgment of Spinoza's seventeenth century editors.

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'une auteur," *Dits et Ecrits*, Tome I, texte °69
http://1libertaire.free.fr/MFoucault349.htm

[2] Louis Althusser, *Écrits philosophiques et politiques,* vol. I, ed. F. Matheron, STOCK/IMEC, Paris, 1994, 13.

The case of Althusser presents no such problem. The difficulty for us is not the scarcity of materials, but their overabundance and this very excess confers an unusual importance and difficulty in determining what we mean by "Althusser's oeuvre." It certainly includes everything he "signed," or perhaps "signed for," whether in a literal or legal sense, the texts he voluntarily submitted for publication and which, with very few exceptions, appeared under his name. Further, while posthumous publication does not often alter our sense of a philosopher's project and orientation, which typically remain tied to the texts published in his or her lifetime, in the case of Althusser, the polemics it provoked and its influence on contemporary thought render him, as in so many things, an exception. Before the still ongoing project of posthumous publication had begun, Althusser's oeuvre was widely read as organized around the central opposition or tension between structure and conjuncture, to cite Balibar's formulation;[3] after his death, a mass of material, above all a series of texts devoted to an exposition of the notion of aleatory materialism written after 1980, fundamentally complicated the reception of Althusser's oeuvre, calling into question the idea that it could be understood as organized, however tendentially, around a single opposition. More recently, the publication of a number of longer texts described by Althusser himself as belonging to a genre foreign to his work prior to 1968: the manual aimed at workers and the PCF rank and file (notably *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, *How to be a Marxist in Philosophy,* and *Que Faire*), together with work of extraordinary philosophical and political interest (*Machiavelli and U*s, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences,* and *Deux Cours sur Rousseau)*, has only further complicated any attempt to define what we mean by the term "Althusserian." And while it is necessary to acknowledge, and more importantly to understand, the heterogeneity of his project, a heterogeneity that resembles in certain ways the overdetermined contradiction he described at the beginning of his adventure, there remain serious obstacles to the task of establishing the specificity of the forces of which his work is composed and the precise points at which they enter into opposition and conflict.

We might take as a test case an apparently insignificant episode involving two of Althusser's texts, neither of which has received much attention: the two texts associated with the "Tbilisi affair."[4] Both were written in 1976, but one was first published in German translation in 1977, with his permission, while the original French version of the other was published in 1983 against his wishes. The question of whether either essay, including the text he had decided not to publish, legitimately belong to his oeuvre is not easy to answer and not simply because of the legal issues involved. Althusser wrote "Dr. Freud's Discovery," in 1976 for an international symposium on the unconscious to be held in Tbilisi, Georgia. While he submitted it to Leon Chertok, who was responsible for the French component of the symposium, he also sent copies to a number of friends, including Michel Pêcheux and Elisabeth Roudinesco. With the exception of Chertok

[3] Etienne Balibar, "Althusser's Object," *Social Text*, No. 39 (Summer, 1994), 157-188.
[4] Louis Althusser*, Ecrits sur la psychanalyse: Freud et Lacan*. Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1993, 187-245.

himself, who approved of Althusser's critique of Lacan, his interlocutors responded with detailed and profoundly negative critiques, directed above all at Althusser's crude and often inaccurate presentation of Freud. In addition, Pêcheux and Roudinesco worried that the effects of his brief critique of Lacan, as it was formulated in the essay, combined with his simplistic presentation of Freud, would be read as an endorsement of the regressive, biologistic tendencies in psychoanalysis. Althusser responded to these reactions by withdrawing the essay and replacing it with "On Marx and Freud," a text very different in every way from the first. Chertok, probably hoping to use Althusser's critique of Lacan for his own purposes, ignored Althusser's decision and included "Dr. Freud," rather than the later essay, in the version of the conference proceedings published in a special issue of the *Revue de medicine psychosomatique* in 1983, which appeared the next year in book form.[5]

This provoked Althusser to his first public statement since 1980. In a letter of protest published in *Le Monde* in 1984 he described "Dr. Freud" as an "inadequate rough draft, hastily written and unpublishable," a text he had expressly withdrawn from consideration because regarded it as a failed effort to describe what in psychoanalysis represents an attempt to develop Freud's discovery, as opposed to a regression to pre-Freudian positions.[6] But the essay was not merely "inadequate:" what proved so shocking to the friends whose evaluation he had solicited was the fact that it is difficult to reconcile "Dr. Freud" with anything else that Althusser had written on psychoanalysis and, more importantly, with anything he had written for publication. Nor were they wrong: it would be difficult to attribute this text to Althusser at all, were it not for the brief discussion of Lacan, where something of Althusser, something properly "Althusserian," certain ideas, as well as his style, which appear for a moment only to vanish into the fog of the remainder of the essay. The stark discrepancy between two segments of the same text, and the predominance of an Althusser unfamiliar to his readers is striking. It is tempting (and to some extent valid) to attribute the emergence of this "unalthusserian" Althusser to his ever worsening mental disorder. But the entire "Tbilisi affair," that is, the composition of "Dr. Freud," the reaction of colleagues and friends, his reaction to their reaction and the writing of a new essay, offers a view of Althusser "behind the scenes." We see Althusser at work, that is, his manner of thinking and writing, or more precisely of thinking through his writing. He wrote not to express already existing ideas, but to discover new ideas, ideas necessary but still lacking, to be discovered in and through the writing that produces them, something akin to what Spinoza called the idea of the idea. To make discoveries through the process of writing, however, is to confront the ever-present risk of failing to produce the necessary idea, or of mistaking, in the act of discovery, the false for the true or the inadequate for the adequate idea, or the contrary:

[5] Louis Althusser, La découverte du docteur Freud [The discovery of Dr. Freud]. *Revue de Médecine Psychosomatique et de Psychologie Médicale,* 25(2), 81-97.

[6] Althusser*, Ecrits sur la psychanalyse,* 190.

missing what the writing itself has produced. These are risks that no method or logic of discovery can avoid, they are the risks that must be taken to produce and discover what Machiavelli called *"la verità effetuale,"* not simply a truth, but an effectual and effective truth, a truth that exists in the effects it produces. Althusser sometimes marked the submission of a text for publication with the phrase "*alea jacta est,"* (attributed to Caesar, meaning "the die is cast," signifying that one has "past the point of no return" by crossing the Rubicon) in his letters to friends. His writings were experiments and tests: tests of the solidity and durability of his theory, but also tests of the dominant ideas and concepts to determine the strength of their defenses and locate their points of vulnerability. The Tbilisi affair, shaped by the effects of fortune in Machiavelli's sense, allows us to see why Althusser wrote constantly, stopping only to enter into conversations whose effect was to stimulate more writing: he was even capable of writing about his silences, experiencing and overcoming them at the same time.

He left behind an enormous repository of experiments and accounts of the risks he took with concepts and with the words in which he formulated them, of which very few were published during his lifetime. The substantial and surprisingly diverse collection of notes, manuscripts based on his courses (covering such figures as Descartes, Hobbes, Bossuet, Locke, Spinoza, Freud, Lacan, among many others), finished and unfinished essays and book projects, together with thousands of letters, collected in the Althusser archive at the IMEC has altered our understanding of Althusser's corpus, but not simply because this (still growing) collection adds to its diversity or breadth. More importantly, offers a privileged view both of the philosophical reference points and conjunctural imperatives that formed the silent and invisible backdrop to his most familiar works, and of the laboratory of concepts and the theoretical instruments with which he constructed or isolated them. It is above all in this collection of unfinished and unpublished (and often unpublishable) materials that we can read the record of his "errors," keeping in mind Althusser's high regard for the work of Canguilhem for whom error had a reality and history finally inseparable from the truths produced by a given science. We find both the failed or abortive experiments that Althusser abandoned, and the unfinished but not necessarily unfinishable experiments set aside because, as in physics today, the required instruments have yet to be designed or manufactured. And there is no doubt that, just as political practice consists of experiments that yield a knowledge of history, so philosophical experiments or interventions yield a knowledge of the concepts that constitute this knowledge. A knowledge of Althusser's errors and failures (which compels us to distinguish between projects that reached an objective impasse and those whose abandonment was determined by the rhythms of his affective life) is necessary to an adequate understanding of what in his work is true.

His writing on aleatory materialism is particularly instructive in this regard. The text given the name "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter" was written after the tragic events of 1980 and published posthumously in the form of

selections from a longer manuscript made by François Matheron. It was almost certainly abandoned by Althusser because of his worsening mental and physical condition, a fact that compels us, his readers, or those of us among his readers who continue on the path that he opened up, to determine whether this admittedly composite text contains something new, and if so whether its theses have been (or can be) tested. Its symptomatic lapses, its perversely inaccurate reading of Spinoza, but perhaps most of all the simultaneous hyperbolization and simplification of the concepts first proposed in the work of the early sixties (and perhaps the 1959 book on Montesquieu), all call attention to the concepts he appears to have set out at the end of his life to revise: the overdetermined accumulation of overdetermined contradictions, the notions of encounter, *enchevêtrement*, ruptural unity, etc. Borrowing from Epicurus and Lucretius. Althusser substituted images for what he had earlier proposed as concepts: atoms raining through the void, the swerve that in turn allows certain atoms to become hooked together for an indefinite time. I argued in *Althusser and his Contemporaries* that the aleatory materialism of the late Althusser served in part (and at a time when the revolutionary upsurge of 1968-1975 had given way to a period of counter-revolution whose end was nowhere in sight) to guarantee that capitalism whose origins lay in an encounter "that might not have happened" was destined to end, not in its completion and transformation, not even in revolution, but in an unforeseeable collision or perhaps a slow degradation of the forces that bound its disparate elements until a moment of collapse. But it also represented a return to make visible the theoretical aspects of the early work that had been overlooked by all but a few of his readers and critics, above all the unpredictable surges of the accumulation and dispersion of contradictions, that is, the movements of over- and underdetermination. Althusser was drawn to Machiavelli's notion of fortune "that brings the good with the bad and the bad with the good" in which he recognized the first form of a philosophy of the conjuncture, that always temporary combination of forces and circumstances. None of these theories was exactly synonymous with the others and all of them were what Lenin called "relatively true:" notions "sufficiently 'indefinite' to prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the term, from becoming something dead, frozen, ossified," but at the same time sufficiently "definite to enable us to dissociate ourselves in the most emphatic and irrevocable manner from . . . philosophical idealism."[7] Each of Althusser's concepts marked out a space and defended it by occupying it in a specific conjuncture for as long as it persisted, that is, until a new conjuncture demanded a new concept.

The complexity of the struggle over concepts and words is not the only difficulty facing Althusser's readers. His materialism did not permit him any recourse to a meta-philosophy that would allow him to speak about philosophy from outside of it or to any metalanguage that would permit him to escape the often unpredictable effects of the

[7] V.I. Lenin, "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism," *Collected Works*. Vol. 14. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1962, 136.

constitutive heterogeneity of language. Althusser saw himself as engaging in "the struggle for one word against another word."[8] To take and hold a theoretical position against the adversary who occupies that position is "a matter of words." But how does one find the correct word, the word capable of displacing the incorrect term? "To replace one word with another means that one must find this other word, to find it, one must first look for it, to look for it and find it, nothing is better suited to the task than writing (a kind of prospecting, or foraging)."[9] The idea of writing as prospecting rather than representing, or even simply discovering what is there before us waiting to be discovered is significant: prospecting is an activity that alters the terrain over which it ranges and alters it in search of signs of previous alterations of exposed rock, the assemblages of different minerals produced by the processes of alteration. For Althusser, writing gathers words and sequences of words only to double back upon itself in search of those silences that exist by means of words, a writing that is a commentary on itself as it is written, identifying its feints and diversions through new feints and diversions, compelled to write about the compulsions that drive it. Such a writing does not conclude, too aware that a conclusion would be yet another ruse: instead, it stops, sometimes stumbling upon the silence of its own absences and sometimes halting only at the point of utter exhaustion, when the weight of the accumulated reflections that it carries causes it to stagger and collapse.

Does this mean then that Althusser, precisely by means of his insistence on rigor, has paradoxically replaced theoretical writing with a kind of poetry? Such an idea would hardly seem applicable to the author of "Lenin and philosophy" for whom "the practice of philosophy" consisting of drawing lines of demarcation to shift the balance of forces between conflicting words and concepts. Indeed, the most extraordinary moments in *For Marx* or *Reading Capital* are not formal effects of rhetoric or "eloquence," nor can they be understood as a form of sublimity, the fortunate consequences of a madness that has given him access to a truth that must remain unutterable and unrepresentable, captured, if at all, in the tracks of the absence it has left behind, which lead *nulle part*. Instead, the extraordinary moments in Althusser's writing, like the image in a dream according to Freud, are *überladen,* overladen, overloaded, words weighted down with a profusion of meanings that hold together for the instant it takes them to produce their combined effect before they come apart. His writing lights its own way as it is written, opening a space of intensities, temporary concentrations of power at a particular point, perhaps that form of intensity called, when referring to light, irradiance, a luminous concentration of energy that enlarges an area of visibility and intelligibility in proportion as it increases. There are moments of poetry, perhaps, in that the precise combination and sequence of words necessary to open the way to thought forms a configuration endowed with a power sufficient, and sufficiently luminous, to break through and clear away obstacles (the task

[8] Louis Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon," *Lenin and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, 8.
[9] Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca: 1961-1973*. Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1998, 200.

of philosophy, according to Althusser). Sometimes the words necessary to "*faire bouger les choses*" may move his readers as well, in ways enjoyable to some and disturbing to others, particularly those who believe that a Marxist philosopher is obligated to write in a way that instructs without imparting any pleasure to the reader.

We might take the example of the text to which Althusser referred to in the letter cited above, written to Franca Madonia in 1962: "The '*Piccolo Teatro*': Bertolazzi and Brecht." He complained to Franca that he was compelled to engage in foraging and prospecting because he could not find the words adequate to the task of thinking theater; the immense lexicon of terms available to any discussion of theater had become little more than a wall between Althusser and what he wanted to say, or thought he wanted to say. In the end, there was no choice but to deviate from it entirely and to skirt the very notion of theater in its conventional sense, to take us backstage or just outside the theater doors. It is no accident that when Derrida delivered a eulogy at Althusser's funeral, he concluded by reading a passage from "le 'Piccolo' teatro," leaving it without commentary, allowing it to resonate, as Althusser writes of Bertolazzi's play, with a force sufficient to shatter a glass from a distance:

> Yes, we are first united by an institution – the performance, but more deeply, by the same myths, the same themes, that govern us without our consent, by the same spontaneously lived ideology. Yes, even if it is the ideology of the poor *par excellence*, as in *El Nost Milan*, we still eat of the same bread, we have the same rages, the same rebellions, the same madness (at least in the memory where stalks this ever-imminent possibility), if not the same prostration before a time unmoved by any History. Yes, like Mother Courage, we have the same war at our gates, and a handsbreadth from us, if not in us, the same horrible blindness, the same dust in our eyes, the same earth in our mouths. We have the same dawn and night, we skirt the same abysses.[10]

This passage, near the end of Althusser's essay and therefore acting as a kind of peroration, "stands out" as we say in English, not so much because it rises above the rest of the essay by virtue of its rhetorical flourishes, or by what might once have been called its eloquence, but by the opacity it brings to an otherwise lucid text. The phrase "the same madness (at least in the memory where stalks this ever-imminent possibility)," reads today like an intrusion or eruption of Althusser's personal drama in an analysis of a play that he has just argued sheds subjectivity and interiority as it moves to its conclusion : a kind of still-life arranged on stage where nobody moves, their only action a waiting for what will perhaps never come, for what may well be destined to remain always imminent and never present. Few, if any, of his readers could have detected the private meaning of the phrase or could have known that 1962 was a time of terrible suffering for him, although this

[10] Louis Althusser, "The '*Piccolo Teatro*': Bertolazzi and Brecht," *For Marx*. London, Penguin Books, 1969, 150.

meaning clouds the passage and confers upon it an opacity that readers know, without knowing exactly how they know, is an effect of the singular concatenation of words that makes the passage what it is.

There is nothing particularly surprising about any of this; on the contrary, the idea that even philosophical texts carry « private » or personal meanings that, at the extreme, may remain unknown even to the author who places them there or through whom they are transmitted without his knowledge or consent, is hardly new. That in many cases, such meanings are destined never to be known, buried in an unmarked grave of words of which the text bears no trace, is in one form or another a cliche. It is precisely the inversion of this idea that catches us by surprise and renders the drawing of a clear line separating the personal on the one side and the philosophical and political on the other, if not exactly impossible, very difficult. The nearly constant interruption of the most personal and intimate of Althusser's writings, that is, a significant number of his letters, by philosophical and theoretical reflection suggests that Althusser will have proven to be one of the philosophers whose properly philosophical writing is perhaps most difficult to separate in any definitive way from what is typically set aside by scholars as "personal," except within texts, sentence by sentence, and sometimes within the sentences themselves. The 832 pages of the *Lettres à Franca* (1961-1973) demonstrate the ways in which anything Althusser wrote could serve as a laboratory where the philosophical, the political and the personal served as experimental instruments whose application blurred the distinction between them. His correspondence with Madonia allows us to see that 1962, the year Althusser wrote and published both the essay on Bertolazzi and Brecht, and "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (as well as the year his seminar on Structuralism began), was one of the most extraordinary years in his extraordinary life. Dispersed throughout his letters to Franca during 1962 are commentaries on Lenin, on Foucault's *L'histoire de la folie*, Derrida's text on Husserl's *Origins of Geometry* (both of which appeared at roughly the same time), and, above all, on Machiavelli, whose work Althusser taught that year for the first time. Even the most extended of these commentaries, however, are tightly interwoven with deeply personal reflections, concerning not only his passionate attachment to Franca, but the mania that drove it and the depression that blocked it at every turn, as he put it, the desert that he carries with him wherever he goes.

This does not mean, however, that instead of seeking the sources of his philosophical work in the very visible, perhaps too visible, tragedies that befell him, we should look for what would be called in the language of psychoanalysis the intellectualization of his "inner world," and its conflicts, that is, a translation of its language into a philosophical idiom that, lacking the words, conceals what is most disturbing in it. Nor do these personal writings represent an attempt to draw philosophical lessons from the affective intensities that roiled within him. More, and more effectively, than in *The Future Lasts Forever*, Althusser, not only in the *Lettres à Franca* , but in his recently published correspondence with Lucien Sève, abandons himself to the

concatenation of "things," that is, of images, affects, concepts, bodily dispositions, apparatuses and configurations of subjection and struggle as they presented themselves to him. He announced to Franca in 1962, shortly after the conclusion of his 1962 course that "I was extraordinarily and ironically struck by the fact that in the guise of Machiavelli's supposed consciousness (*conscience),* I had spoken of myself."[11] What he describes here is neither projection nor introjection: what he says about Machiavelli's consciousness is no more true of him than of Machiavelli and must be described as a simultaneous attribution (*prétention*) of a consciousness to both, a consciousness or mode of thought in which Althusser and Machiavelli (that is, certain of their concepts) conjoin to form something new.

Finally, Althusser's materialism compels him in "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses" to translate consciousness into "'internal' discourse" (his quotation marks), just as Spinoza translated God into nature or, even more pertinently, the "mind of the Holy Spirit" into scripture (that is, Scriptura or writing) as it is, with its lacunae, discrepancies, and contradictions (TTP, VII). Here, Althusser has indeed found the correct word with which to replace "consciousness;" the concept of discourse nullifies the distinction between interiority and exteriority, between a person's private and public, individual and social existence, just as "interior" in quotation marks suggests that the interior is nothing more than a continuation of the exterior in manner of a Mobius strip. Althusser's gesture is of course also an affirmation of the power and productivity of Spinoza's declaration that thought and extension, mental and physical, inner and outer (and we might add personal and philosophico-political, as well as theory and practice) "are one and the same thing." If we follow the chains of association that led Althusser, who had the courage to pursue his discourse wherever it took him, to some of his most important discoveries, we find ourselves disregarding the borders and boundaries that separate the existing territories into which knowledge is divided, sometimes wandering into the wilderness of an outside defined by these borders and boundaries as their outside. The paths to Althusser's most effective thoughts, i.e., words, wind through this wilderness, over fences and walls without a thought to territorial claims, migrant thoughts that find what they need without asking permission or authorization. Those who want to think with Althusser have no choice but to follow his tracks wherever they lead in a body of writing whose limits have yet to be found.

[11] Althusser, *Lettres à Franca: 1961-1973,* 211.

Marxism and the Spinozist Turn

Warren Montag

In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust recalls the Celtic belief "that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison. Then they start and tremble, they call us by our name, and as soon as we have recognized them the spell is broken. Delivered by us, they have overcome death and return to share our life."[1]

Perhaps this is one way to understand why, of the several tentative turns to Spinoza from within Marxism (some more extended than others), the turn to Spinoza that finally took hold (to use the language of Lucretius' theory of the clinamen or swerve) was that which began in the 1960s. The great class struggles (Argentina, Chile, France, Italy) and the brutal wars for national liberation (Algeria, Palestine, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique), the Cuban revolution and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, whose strategic and tactical lessons we continue to study today, did not serve, as so many thought (and some hoped), to dispense with the need for theory or philosophy, as if it were a luxury that could or should be given up as the struggle demanded. On the contrary, this moment of urgent mobilization in the face of the revolutionary Kairos, or opening, which in many cases turned into an equally urgent efforts to survive the global counter-revolution, was accompanied by the ideas and thought immanent in these mobilizations:

[1] Proust, 59-60.

the power to think increased with the power to act (just as it had in the period following the Russian Revolution) and theory flourished.

If, as Althusser said of Marx's *Capital*, we read only the selections from theoretical works that the conjuncture chooses for us, while the remainder is as overlooked as if it were illegible, the conjuncture that we often simply designate as 1968 illuminated large parts of Spinoza's texts that had previously received little attention. The Spinoza that emerged from the first wave of studies in France, Gueroult's *Spinoza, Tome1: Dieu (Ethique, I)* (1968), Deleuze's *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression (1969)*, and Matheron's *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (1969) was no longer imprisoned by interpretations that often appeared to have arisen as much to constrain and confine his thought as to explain it: Spinoza the pantheist, the monist, the liberal, the secularist, the Christian or the Jew. The new Spinoza was not simply another in the successive versions of Spinoza that appeared from the time of his death in 1677, a Marxist Spinoza, as partial and biased as the others: of the three authors named above, only Matheron was a self-declared Marxist, and he was more influenced by Gueroult than by the existing Marxist (mainly Soviet) work on Spinoza. More importantly, the Marxist turn to Spinoza was part of a broader movement that may be judged by its effects: the insistence on reading the texts to the letter, sentence by sentence, was as characteristic of Gueroult who sought to demonstrate the architectonic unity of a work, as of Althusser and his students who called their own protocol of reading "symptomatic," and led to new discoveries that made it more difficult to reduce Spinoza to just another variation on a few timeless themes in philosophy, or on the secularizing ambitions of the European Enlightenment. The concrete problems posed by the experiments in transforming different social formations, were inextricably bound up with "abstract" theoretical problems. Spinoza, for reasons having to do with his "savage anomaly," had something to say about these problems, and not merely as an anticipation of Marx and later Marxists. He sometimes seems to speak from a position they had merely anticipated, a position ahead of theirs and ours, as if having been liberated by our recognition, he patiently awaits our arrival.

Before we specify the content of this encounter, there remain some preliminary questions to be addressed. What do we mean when we speak of a "turn" to, or even a swerve towards, Spinoza? For those familiar with the lexicon of Marxist, that is, socialist and Communist, organizations over the past century, the idea of a "turn to Spinoza" may initially sound strange. The very notion of "a turn," as in "the turn to the masses" or "the turn to industry," suggests something like a change in orientation or tactics that, moreover, is a response to a change in the conjuncture. Whether the turn constitutes a retreat or the launching of an offensive, it represents an adjustment to changing circumstances with the aim of preserving or increasing the one's own forces. But what does this have to do with theory and, even more, with an orientation to a thinker who lived nearly two hundred years before Marx and whose terminology and method seem to consign him irrevocably to the past? Althusser remarked on a number of occasions that

Spinoza's rejection of every notion of the omnipotence of reason or the invincible power of rational demonstration compelled him to think in terms of strategy: how could he communicate the truths he had discovered without activating the defenses of an audience trained to regard such ideas as his as heresy or simply nonsense? Althusser's observation that the *Ethics* is perhaps the only treatise of atheism that begins with a proof a God's existence is admittedly hyperbolic, but it captures something significant: the model of war may not simply apply to the class struggle in its practical forms, but to the history of philosophy as well, a history intelligible only when it is understood as the scene of perpetual war:

> "A philosophy does not make its appearance in the world as Minerva appeared to the society of Gods and men. It only exists in so far as it occupies a position, and it only occupies this position in so far as it has conquered it in the thick of an already occupied world. It therefore only exists in so far as this conflict has made it something distinct and this distinctive character can only be won and imposed in an indirect way, by a detour involving ceaseless study of other, existing positions. This detour is the form of the conflict which determines what side a philosophy takes in the battle and on the "Kampfplatz" (Kant), the battlefield which is philosophy. Because if the philosophy of philosophers is this perpetual war (to which Kant wanted to put an end by introducing the everlasting peace of his own philosophy), then no philosophy can exist within this theoretical relation of force except in so far as it marks itself off from its opponents and lays siege to that part of the positions which they have had to occupy in order to guarantee their power over the enemy whose impress they bear. If -- as Hobbes says, speaking perhaps to empty benches, and with reference as much to philosophy as to the society of men -- war is a generalized state, and leaves nowhere in the world for a shelter, and if it produces its own condition as its own result, which means that every war is essentially preventive, it is possible to understand that the war of philosophies, in which systems come into conflict, presupposes the *preventive* strike of positions against one another, and thus the necessary use by a philosophy of a detour *via* other philosophies in order to define and defend its own positions."[2]

Spinoza defined words and texts as pious or sacred on the basis of whether or not they, in practice, moved people to acts of devotion and piety, arguing that just as a building once consecrated as a temple would, if used as a place of prostitution, cease to be a sacred site, so texts deemed holy would only be so as long as they led their readers to acts of piety. The history of the socialist and Communist movements shows clearly that the affirmation of the most carefully articulated dogma does not prevent the total abandonment of principles under certain conditions. None are so exact and homogeneous that they cannot give rise to conflicting interpretations; all contain

[2] Althusser, "Is It Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy," 165-166.

loopholes and ambiguities that can be exploited to nullify or reverse their meaning. To be a Marxist in philosophy thus requires constant maneuver, both offensive and defensive, to pre-empt the attacks of the official philosophies or to weaken their defenses. To follow Althusser's argument, not only is a turn or detour necessary to the constitution of a philosophical position, but the specific place and time, as well as the character of the positions a philosophy turns from or toward, that define it at a given historical moment.

The idea of a turn or detour in philosophy, of course, was not invented by Althusser, nor is his version of the turn the only, or even the dominant, one. Perhaps the most well-known philosophical turn is in fact that of Heidegger, speaking of what he called *die Kehre* (which may plausibly be translated as the noun "turn") in his own work, a detour or deviation he took in order in some sense to rejoin the original movement of his own thought from which he had drifted.[3] Significantly, his use of this term has occasioned considerable controversy among Heidegger specialists over its meaning for Heidegger's work. Does it signal a discontinuity in his thought, the adoption of new positions that might call into question some of the arguments outlined in *Sein und Zeit*? Or is the turn the very means of achieving the continuity and coherence of his thought? The difficulty of answering this question is expressed in the anxiety that surrounds the task of translating "*Kehre*" into English: many commentators render it as "turn," while others prefer the less familiar "turning." Most, however, use the German word, with or without an English equivalent. In fact, none of these alternatives captures the specificity of the turn implied by "*Kehre*:" a sharp or hairpin turn, but also a u-turn or turning around. Heidegger's notion of a, or the, turn (*Kehre*) is thus not a turn to something or someone, a philosophy or philosopher, but signals a change in direction or course correction, even a movement of turning back, returning to the point at which the journey went off course and therefore a detour from a detour.

There is, however, another, earlier, conception of the turn, one that is closer to Althusser's notion of the necessary deviation: Hegel's notion of *Wendungspunkt*, literally, the turning point. This term appears in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the moment consciousness becomes self-consciousness, the point at which an advance must take the form of a retreat or return, the point at which consciousness turns around (as a driver turns a car around) and returns to itself to take itself as its own object.[4] This turn, this *Wendung,* may well appear to be a movement backward rather than forward, but Hegel's emphasis is on the point at which the turn takes place. The existence of a determinate point reminds us of the necessity that both governs the turn and confers upon it its contradictory character: if consciousness can be said to have retreated to itself, its movement is nevertheless necessary to its advance. Consciousness has so far taken itself as an other and has reached the turning point from which it will advance by knowing the other as itself.

[3] Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre.*
[4] Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 122.

As strange as it may seem, Hegel's focus on the determinate point at which the turn, return, deviation or detour takes on a necessary character that, separated from the teleology he attempts to impose on the process of Spirit's return to itself, brings us close to the turn in the political sense, and therefore the turn or detour that philosophy, according to Althusser, makes, even as it denies doing so. If indeed there was a turn to Spinoza within Marxism, how do we identify the *Wendungspunkt* that marked not simply the event of the turn, but more importantly the necessity of this event? And further why speak of a single turn, even when it is of a long duration? It would be possible, for an example, to speak of a turn that began with Plekhanov, flourished in the first decade of the Soviet Republic under the aegis of Deborin and his colleagues around the journal *Under the Banner of Marxism,* and survived Stalin's repression in the person of Ilyenkov. Is it accurate, however, to understand the turn that took place in the 1960s as its continuation?

The turn to Spinoza in the Russian socialist and later Communist movement was above all a response to the crisis in physics that began at the end of the nineteenth century and whose philosophical effects were profound. The emergence of quantum theory and the theory of relativity produced a crisis of classical mechanics and physics that was in turn immediately exploited for political purposes. Notions of indeterminacy and uncertainty were abstracted from the specific contexts of their scientific application and cited against Marx's theory of history. Relativity, a concept developed to address the problem of measuring the "absolute motion of the earth," became generalized as relativism and at the extreme laid a foundation for a dogmatic skepticism that denied the possibility of an objective knowledge of a reality outside of sensation. Like Lenin, Plekhanov reacted with increasing alarm to the philosophical effects of what were otherwise valid scientific discoveries, and regarded eighteenth-century materialism as a bulwark against the militant idealism and relativism that emerged as by-products of the developments in physics. This led him to a contradictory view of Spinoza: on the one hand, Plekhanov could declare that Marxism was the modern form of Spinozism, while simultaneously arguing that Spinoza's works were the inconsistent anticipation of a materialism that would be realized only in the doctrines of Diderot and La Méttrie.

Reading the *Ethics*, in particular, through the lens of Feuerbach, Plekhanov argued that Spinoza failed to complete the transition from theology to anthropology and regarded the formula *Deus sive Natura*, not as a translation of God into nature, but as the postulation of a pantheistic equivalence on which a mystical (or perhaps, as Leibniz suggested, Kabbalistic) doctrine might be founded. More importantly, the formula revealed Spinoza's inability to overcome the alienation of human essence whose most powerful manifestation was the very notion of God. For Plekhanov, "Feuerbach's 'humanism' proved to be nothing else but Spinozism disencumbered of its theological pendant. And it was the standpoint of this kind of Spinozism, which Feuerbach had freed of its theological pendant, that Marx and Engels adopted when they broke with idealism."

On the condition that Spinozism be divested of "the theological appendage that distorted its true content," Spinoza could become a powerful ally in the struggle against idealism. Plekhanov, however, discovered that separating the theological from the anthropological in Spinoza's texts was no easy task, given Spinoza's insistence, in practice, that a critique of the one necessarily presupposed a critique of the other.[5] Plekhanov's comments on Spinoza suggest that he initially understood the *Ethics* as a defense of the position that only matter exists, thus inscribing it in early twentieth century debates in physics whose effects were felt within the Russian Social Democratic movement. What mattered was that Spinoza could be counted as belonging to the camp of materialism in its age-old war against idealism. While Plekhanov's approach to Spinoza did not allow an adequate reading of the texts, the importance he accorded Spinoza, precisely because it did not follow from his limited commentary, had the effect of encouraging others to seek out what he somehow sensed was there even as it eluded him.

Among these others, none was as perceptive a reader as Abram Deborin (initially a follower of Plekhanov): Deborin's essay, "Spinoza's World View," stands out from the rest of the commentary on Spinoza produced in the decade following the Russian Revolution. Deborin neither read Spinoza as the precursor to Diderot, nor as the means of resolving the crisis of physics; he clearly understood both the historical specificity of Spinoza's work and its importance for Deborin's own time. Although he sought to show that the materialist dialectic both originated and reached in a certain level of development in Spinoza that surpassed theories of the dialectic after Marx, Deborin understood the complexity of the philosophical conjuncture that produced Spinoza, above all, its irreducibility to simple oppositions such as faith and Enlightenment or superstition and reason. While Deborin and the most important of the Soviet thinkers associated with Spinozism after him, in particular Vygotsky and, later, Ilyenkov, might appear to have made use of Spinoza, rather than to have produced readings of his works, their projects, once they are understood as examples of writing in the face of persecution, help us read the *Ethics* in new ways. The socialist and Communist movements, and the revolution of 1917, made previously overlooked aspects of Spinoza's work visible: in particular, his exposition of the theory of the affects and his refusal to separate mind and body or to ignore the importance of the disposition of bodies for political life. Further, the period of intensified and accelerated struggle that followed the Russian Revolution, led to an appreciation of the power of the masses. and their role in determining the right and power of the state, in ways close to Spinoza's discussion of the multitude as explored in the *Tractatus Politicus (TP)*. 1917 revealed not just the multitude's power to act, but also the power to think immanent in every mass mobilization: these mobilizations, in fact, illuminated Spinoza's works, making intelligible, perhaps for the first time, those passages where the truths they embodied were given philosophical form. The consolidation of the Stalin regime, with its own fear of the masses, did not silence Deborin or Ilyenkov, but it

[5] Plekhanov, "The Fundamental Problems of Marxism," 10-12.

forced them and others to adopt philosophical strategies, as had been the case with Spinoza, that depended on disguise and impersonation, and the use of the official lexicon to continue to reflect on the lessons of October.

The turn to Spinoza, the swerve that led to the encounter that took hold and from which something enduring emerged, occurred in the period just prior to and immediately following 1968. In addition to the three major studies, noted above, that appeared in 1968-69, it is impossible to overstate the role played by Althusser, despite his having published little on Spinoza. It was he who, in returning to Marx's texts, identified the specific problems to which Spinoza provided, if not solutions, the reconceptualization necessary to these solutions, centuries before, the problems had been posed. In particular, Spinoza's reflections on immanent causality in Part I of the Ethics seemed to Althusser to open the way to a rethinking of the causal relation between base and superstructure, and the determination in the last instance by the economy. Indeed, the Chinese Cultural Revolution seemed to Althusser to have underscored in a dramatic way the fact that the superstructure does not automatically change with the base as if it were simply its expression. Ideology, he argued, has a material existence and does not consist of ideas and illusions, but of apparatuses, practices and rituals that work simultaneously on bodies and minds. Spinoza's philosophy, according to Althusser, allows us to understand the juridical individual as both imaginary in that it denies the profoundly inter-individual (Matheron) or transindividual (Balibar) character of social existence and as an obstacle that prevents us from explaining the material processes by which subjectivity is imputed to individuals and renders them fit for the form of servitude proper to capitalism. At the same time, as Antonio Negri showed in *The Savage Anomaly* (1981), Spinoza was perhaps the sole seventeenth-century philosopher to recognize the existence of what he called in his last, unfinished work, the *Tractatus Politicus*, the multitude, a collective actor permanently excluded from the political and legal apparatuses of early modern society, except insofar as it was the collective of those to whom punishment and commands were addressed, but whose power determined the extent of the sovereign's right. By the mid-1980s, a number of Althusser's former students, among them, Pierre Macherey, Etienne Balibar, André Tosel and Pierre-François Moreau, had published major studies on Spinoza (and would continue to do so) that with the contributions of Negri, showed the importance of Spinoza for addressing the issues confronting Marxism in its diverse forms. This insight informs the unprecedented flowering of Spinoza studies around the world.

Despite the diversity internal to this new Spinoza, the diversity of its Marxisms, the distinct rhythms of the struggles that nourished them, the singular orientations of even philosophers most closely associated (politically as well as academically), the differences of language and intellectual culture, it is possible to speak of the points of unity that, often without the knowledge or consent of its partisans, allows them together, as in Spinoza's definition of a singular thing, to produce an effect. I will enumerate them here, by indicating the passages from Spinoza in which the diverse tendencies converge.

1. **Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (TTP) preface:** *"the greatest secret (arcanum) and fundamental concern of the monarchical regime is to deceive the people and to mask the fear necessary to contain them under the specious cover of religion, so that they fight as bravely for their servitude as if they were fighting for their salvation."* This passage, abbreviated and transformed into a question, was repeatedly addressed to the failure of the revolutionary mobilizations in the period between 1968-1975, and the apparent attachment of the laboring masses to the conditions of their servitude: what makes people fight as bravely for their servitude as for their liberation? Spinoza's corollary to this question, repeated three times in the Ethics, offers the beginning of a response: how is it that we so often see the better, judge it to be better, and pursue the worse (Ethics III P2, sch.)?" Three great texts published between 1970 and 1975 represented attempts to explain the defeat of the movement of May-June 1968 in France without recourse to notions of betrayal or the immaturity of the conditions: Althusser's "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.
2. **TTP chapter 7**: *"the chief concern of theologians on the whole has been to extort from Holy Scripture their own arbitrarily invented ideas, for which they claim divine authority. In no other field do they display less scruple and greater temerity than in the interpretation of Scripture, that is, the mind of the Holy Spirit."* By declaring that Scripture is the mind of the Holy Spirit, rather than its necessarily diminished and imperfect expression or representation, Spinoza renders the text as it is, with its gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies, irreducible and no longer susceptible to the allegorical interpretations that sought to restore the text to a state of completeness and harmony. The text is deprived of any depth, of any hidden dimension beneath or beyond the surface: the attribution to the text of such a dimension is the means by which commentators claim to have discovered meanings they have added to the text. The notion of symptomatic reading advanced in *Reading Capital,* together with the critique of literary analysis and interpretation in Pierre Macherey's *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* both drew on, and made possible new readings of, Spinoza's discussion of the interpretation of Scripture in chapter 7 of the TTP.
3. **Ethics I, Proposition 33, scholium.** *"God could not have existed prior to his decrees, nor can he exist without them."* There is no better illustration of Althusser's contention that Spinoza used the proof of the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient God to eliminate any possibility of transcendence or teleology. This sentence represents a reworking of the very notions of creation and of origin: the world is not the realization of God's will because there is nothing unrealized in God: he is entirely immanent in what exists. History is not a

movement from an essential origin in which all that will be is contained *in nuce* and which directs the movement of time to its appointed end. The consequences for Marxism are profound: it is no longer possible to conceive of history as the teleological movement of successive modes of production from slavery to communism, even when this movement is described, as became necessary a mere five years after the Russian Revolution, as delayed, stalled, forced into reverse, etc. By the 1930s, the actually existing capitalism was described as late, overripe, in decay, understood above all in relation to an end that remained imminent, as if the last day refused to come. At the same time, Spinoza's conception of God as a cause absolutely immanent in its effects and thus neither outside of nor prior to its effects, compels us to reject the notion of capitalism as a system or structure of structures that contains all possible capitalisms and of which the existing forms of capitalism are an expression. There is no underlying order or homogeneity of historical time: its structure is immanent in the diversity and uneven development of its effects.

4. **Ethics II, Proposition 7**: "*The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.*" This proposition is one of the most important in Spinoza's entire oeuvre and the proof of its importance lies in the amount of commentary devoted to it and the degree to which this commentary is devoted to explaining away its originality and audacity. Hegel, for example, regarded the proposition as a kind of compromise formation uniting the principals of Cartesian dualism (Hegel argued that for Spinoza there were only two attributes of substance, thought and extension, despite Spinoza's affirmation of an infinity of attributes) by means of a parallelism: the order of ideas in the mind is homologous to the order of the affections of the body, while the realm of ideas remains separate from the realm of things, linked to it by resemblance or analogy. Spinoza, however, does not refer here to mind and body, but to ideas and things, suggesting as Macherey has noted that ideas too are things and subjected to the same necessity. Moreover, he defines the mind as the body's idea of itself and "nothing can happen in that body which is not perceived in the mind" (*Ethics* II, P12). As he will explain in greater detail in *Ethics* III, P11; whatever increases or diminishes the power of the body to act simultaneously increases or diminishes the power of the mind to think. The lesson here for Marxism is painful: no matter how true and how well-argued our critique, its effectiveness depends on the degree to which the existing relationship of forces favors the proletariat and its allies.
5. **Ethics III, Proposition 2, scholium**: *"Experience tells us no less clearly than reason that it is on this account only that men believe themselves to be free, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined; and it*

tells us too that mind's decrees are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according to the varying disposition of the body." This scholium, one of the longest (and most difficult) in the Ethics, concerns the "prejudice" that the mind has command *(imperium*) over the body, which in turn must obey the mind's "decrees." This prejudice arises in part from the fact that people are aware of their actions but lack any knowledge of "the causes by which they are determined." This lack is filled by the imaginary causes such as an individual's desire and free will. In this case, however, what is imaginary about these ideas, is they cannot explanation the determination of bodily movements. They are not mere illusions that can be dispelled by rational arguments; they are fully real and material, and serve as the basis of the notion of moral and legal responsibility. These "imaginary relations" as Althusser called them according to which the causal and legal responsibility is imputed to individuals form an essential part of the means of subjection in capitalist social formations, where ever growing punitive apparatuses and procedures are the means of addressing the effects of increasing inequality and precarious lives.

6. **Tractatus Politicus, 3.2**: *"The right of the sovereign or the highest authority (summarum potestatum) is nothing more than the right of Nature itself and is determined by the power not of each individual, but of the multitude which is guided as if by one mind. That is, just as the right of each individual in the natural state extends as far as his power, the same is true of the body and mind of the entire state."* Negri's argument that the term "multitude" (*multitudo*) in Spinoza's last and unfinished work cannot be understood as a synonym for "the people," the mob (an abbreviation of *mobile vulgus* (the fickle crowd), or even the masses (a term that did not become widespread until the time of the French Revolution), is certainly correct. It is in the TP, where Spinoza turns his attention to mass movements (known in the English of the time as the rabble or the mob, and in French "*la racaille*" or "*la canaille*") without any formal designation or recognition and their central role in determining both right and the duty of the sovereign power, that he adopts the term "multitude." How does Spinoza arrive at the notion that the multitude determines the right of the sovereign? Because he argues that "the natural right of every individual, is coextensive with its power," and that natural right cannot be surrendered even in the civil state, Spinoza argues that legal authority is meaningless without the acquiescence, if not the active support, of the multitude. Irrespective of the legal rights possessed by the monarch or the aristocratic council, their right extends only as far as their power: the effectiveness of the law depends on the relationship of forces between state and multitude. If the lawful sovereigns incur the indignation of the multitude, their power decreases and with it their right to rule. Long

> before Marx and Lenin, Spinoza articulated a critique of constitutional illusions and the danger of mistaking formal rights for actual power.

Commentators have speculated on the reasons for the unfinished state of the *Tractatus Politicus*, beyond the fact of Spinoza's early death. Of particular interest is the topic to which the fragment of chapter 11 was to serve as an introduction: democracy, the "absolute state" (TP, XI.1). The accumulation of contradictions that blocked the way forward remained in place for a very long time. Only the multitude constituting itself as the sovereign of a direct democracy exercised the power sufficient to disperse the relics and debris of servitude. In doing so they helped us discover Spinoza.

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