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## 1. Dossier: Reading Althusser, Again



## 2. Dossier: Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Language

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# La articulación de las Contradicciones. Chromatic Affections Carolina Guillermet D. (Acrylic on canvas, 195 x 145 cms., 2019)

## By George García Quesada

Carolina Guillermet's most recent exposition featured a series of works under the name and concept of *The Articulation of Contradictions*, one of which we reproduce in our current front cover. At a first glance, the image reminds us of the geometrical compositions of the Bauhaus and Piet Mondrian; however, a closer examination reveals a unique diversity of playful forms and soft colours. Except for a handful of triangles, most forms in the picture are four-sided, nonetheless differing in varying degrees from the regularity of squares or rectangles. Some edges are slightly tilted; others frankly break the horizontal and vertical axes.

This variety of angles in strictly linear shapes matches with a palette that displays a spectre of tonalities. *La Articulación de las Contradicciones. Chromatic Affections* is thus a work of nuisance, of small differences. Kandinsky once famously affirmed that in modern times "our harmony consists of contrasts and contradictions"; Guillermet's work differs from this by constructing her conception of contradiction through smooth transitions rather than through strong contrasts.

It is perhaps in the overlaps between the forms where we can more clearly find this contradiction, as the forms struggle with their neighbours for the space of the canvas. The juxtaposition of irregular forms thus not only suggests depth, but even motion. Instead of a rigid order, we find an array of seemingly contingently ordered shapes. We find complexity in abstraction, and complexity in contradiction.

Even though the artist relates this work –as well as the rest of her exposition– to the emotions aroused by subjective and inter-subjective experiences, we could hardly have found a more fitting concept for an issue with a prominent dossier on Louis Althusser as a contemporary philosopher. Reemerging from long decades of oblivion, the recent readings of his work have emphasised the role of the aleatory and the disjointed, especially through his concept of the *décalage*. This line of interpretation closely relates Althusser's philosophy with Foucault's and Derrida's, and puts a distance between him and classical structuralism.

Althusser's *décalage*, as the articles in this issue indicate, is a concept developed by this author in order to explain historical time. Since Marx's materialism is, according to this philosopher, founded on contingence rather than on teleology or historical necessity, his conception of history does not follow a single direction. Hence, there cannot be a single periodisation for history as a whole, and a plurality of social dynamics must coexist within such a disjointed historical complexity. The first dossier in this issue may thus help the reader to engage in the discussion of this and other Althusserian concepts.

It is also quite fitting for our current issue to have this dossier on Althusser juxtaposed with another one about Wittgeinstein's philosophy of language. Such a *meeting* of two different philosophical discourses configures another *décalage*, another articulation of contradictions such as that present in Guillermet's suggestive work.

# 1. DOSSIER: READING ALTHUSSER, AGAIN

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GUEST EDITORS:
DR. VITTORIO MORFINO AND
DR. STEFANO PIPPA

**Vittorio Morfino**

# Althusser as Reader of Gramsci

**Abstract:** *The article reconstructs the complex relation between Althusser and Gramsci. Considering both published and unpublished writings, the article argues that this relation is profoundly ambivalent: on the one hand, Gramsci is considered the sole precursor in the Marxist tradition who tried to think the superstructure, and particularly politics; on the other hand, he is the paradigm of a conception of temporality and politics from which Althusser wants to take distance.*

**Keywords:** *Gramsci, Historical time, Ideology, Hegemony, Force.*

**Resumen:** *Este artículo reconstruye la compleja relación entre Gramsci y Althusser. Considerando tanto trabajos publicados como inéditos, este artículo argumenta que esta relación es profundamente ambivalente: por un lado, Gramsci es considerado el precursor único en la tradición marxista que trató de pensar la superestructura, y particularmente la política; por otro, es el paradigma de la concepción de temporalidad y política de las cuales Althusser quiere distanciarse.*

**Palabras clave:** *Gramsci, Tiempo histórico, Ideología, Hegemonía, Poder.*

Among the authors whom Althusser confronts while working out his theory, Gramsci is probably the most constantly present. From the beginning of the 1960s through the 1970s, his references to Gramsci, either recognitions of debt or distances taken, allow us to identify the contours and developments of Althusserian theory as on a negative image: from *For Marx to Reading Capital,* from 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' to the texts on the crisis of Marxism, Althusser never ceases to define his own position in relation to Gramsci. However, if we consider the posthumously published texts and documents held in the IMEC Archive, we receive an even stronger impression. From the early 1960s onward, we find a large number of extracts and notes (drawn from the *Notes on Machiavelli,* Gramsci's *Selected Writings, Historical Materialism and the Philosophy of Benedetto Croce,* and the critical edition of the *Quaderni),* a projected article for *Rinascita,* the final chapter on hegemony in *Marx in His Limits,* and finally a text with the title *What is to Be Done?,* which is entirely dedicated to Gramsci.

With respect to this layered confrontation, it is helpful to establish some schematic points:

*First,* Althusser's encounter with Gramsci in the summer of 1961 also carries an encounter with Machiavelli, which makes it such that the two authors are constantly thought in one another, the one through the other.

*Second,* there is a strong ambivalence in Althusser's judgment towards Gramsci. On the one hand, he is considered the sole precursor in the Marxist tradition who tried to think the superstructure, and particularly politics. On the other hand, Gramsci is the paradigm of a conception of temporality and politics from which to take distance.

*Third,* in terms of taking distance, two temporally distinct phases must be highlighted. Starting with a critique of the misrecognition of the specificity of the status of science in general and

the science of history in particular, typified by the second half of the 1960s, Althusser passes, through the end of the 1970s, to a critique of the concept of hegemony in which class domination would be lost.

## 1. The Encounter with Gramsci

Althusser's encounter with Gramsci took place at the beginning of the 1960s. In a letter to Franca Madonia dated 28 November 1961, Althusser refers to a letter from the previous summer that he sent to Bertinoro (Althusser, 1998b, 122). This earlier letter bears witness to several pages of extracts and typewritten notes preserved in a dossier 'Gramsci sur Machiavel (renvoi au texte italien).' Here Althusser carefully notes the essential features of Gramsci's reading of Machiavelli, probably in view of the course he will dedicate to the latter thinker in 1962 (Althusser 2006a, 193-254). However, along the way, his attention is also drawn to other themes. For example, a passage of Gramsci's on ideology that he translates (p. 294) Does not conceive ideology as something artificial and mechanical (like a coat on the skin), conceives of it as 'skin that is produced organically' by the entire animal organism') (ALT2. A31-05.06, 20.); or a page (128) on the educative function of the state in relation to the masses, carried out positively by the school and repressively by the courts, but also, 'a multitude of other initiatives aim to this end, *other so-called private activities, which form the basis of the political and cultural hegemony of the dominant classes,' (14*[1]*)* which Althusser comments on as follows:

> Important idea of Gramsci: that the state is not reducible to the state apparatus, but includes all kinds of other forms of pressure etc. that the state is political society + civil society = armored hegemony of coercion (p. 132)/// G. against the identification of state and government. /// (p. 16)

Finally, he takes note of some of Gramsci's reflections in a section on 'Animality and Industrialism' on pages 326–329 and comments:

> very important theme, in G. and in itself. That any new progress of productive forces and the mode of production supposes new attitudes towards labor, and, through these new *technical* attitudes, a whole upheaval of the *existing mode of life*. [...] The essential idea of G. is that to create these new habits of life, this new way of life ordered according to new content of the division of labor, it is necessary to make violence to nature– i.e., the old disciplines become 'nature and correspond to the old mode of production–, this violence, this training, are inevitable –all of human history is considered from this point of view as a training for animality, if it can never be heard op... Incredible violence most often. Who supposes, this violence, a coercion characterized, and organized [...] (24)

## 2. From 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' to 'The Object of *Capital*'

Althusser's first approach to Gramsci is followed by two public, antithetical positions, the first in the essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination,' published in *La Pensée* in December 1962 (and then in 1965 in *For Marx*) and the second, famously, in 'The Object of *Capital*' in 1965.

In 'Contradiction and Overdetermination,' Althusser argues that Marxist philosophy is neither the object of an inversion *[renversement]* nor the object of an extraction. Instead, Marxist philosophy is a matter of thinking '*the transformation of its* [TN: the Hegelian dialectic] *structures*' (Althusser, 2005, 55). In this framework, revolution cannot be thought through the category of simple contradiction; it is the product of an accumulation of partially heterogenous contradictions, 'which do not all have the same origin, the same sense, nor the same level or point of application, but which nevertheless 'merge' into a ruptural unity' (2005, 62, trans. mod.). The concept of overdetermination allows the Russian revolution to be thought not as the exception to the rule of simple contradiction, but precisely as the rule of the rule.

> The basic notion [is] that *the Capital-Labour contradiction is never simple, but always specified by historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised*. It is specified by the forms of the *superstructure* [...]; specified by *the internal and external historical situation* which determines it on the one hand as a function of the *national past* [...] and on the other as functions of the existing *world context.* (2005, 68-69)

Althusser's reference to Gramsci here is still implicit, expressed in the need to establish the concept of overdetermined contradiction in a Marxist conception of history that is not the simple inversion [*renversement*] of the Hegelian conception, but its radical transformation. The concepts of mode of production and social class in fact change the concepts of civil society and state, as well as their relation. Rather than a 'tacit identity (phenomenon-essence-truth-op...) of the economic and the political,' it is a 'relation between the *determinant instances* in the structure-superstructure complex which constitutes the essence of any social formation' (2005, 74).

Althusser uses Gramsci to intervene with regard to the theory of the specific efficacy of the elements of the superstructure and their essence:

> Like the map of Africa before the great explorations, this theory remains a realm sketched in outline, with its great mountain chains and rivers, but often unknown in detail beyond a few well-known regions. Who has really attempted to follow up the explorations of Marx and Engels? I can only think of Gramsci. (2005, 77)

And he adds in a footnote:

> Gramsci is of another stature [in relation to Lukács]. The jottings and developments in his Prison Notebooks touch on all the basic problems of Italian and European history: economic, social, political and cultural. There are also some completely original and in some cases genial insights into the problem, basic today, of the superstructures. Also, as always with true discoveries, there are new concepts, for example, hegemony: a remarkable example of a theoretical solution in outline to the problems of the interpenetration of the economic and the political. Unfortunately, at least as far as France is concerned, who has taken up and followed through Gramsci's theoretical effort? (2005, 77, fn. 29)

Thus in 1962, Althusser considers Gramsci the only Marxist author who has opened the path on which he is attempting to advance; in particular, the concept of hegemony makes it possible to rigorously think (Althusser uses the strong expression 'theoretical solution in outline [*esquisse de solution théorique*]') the relation of the economic and the political without forcing it into the essence-phenomenon relation. In 1965, at the height of the seminar on *Capital*, things will already have greatly changed, probably as a result of a deeper knowledge of Italian Marxism.

The announcement of this change is located in two series of excerpts which are likely datable to when Althusser was preparing for the seminar. The first series considers of some extracts from Gramsci's *Selected Works,* which Althusser titles 'selected morsels [*morceaux choisis*] (17) sq' (ALT2.A57-01.03)[2]. It is made up of a few extracts from pages 17-45, which take as their object the Gramscian concept of philosophy as a unitary and coherent conception of the world in its relation to religion, common sense, intellectuals, the masses, ideology, and politics.

Althusser rarely intervenes within these extracted passages. In this sense, there are two brief, noteworthy comments which appear to indicate the point of attack of his later criticism.

First, after an initial group of extracts (1-2) Althusser comments: 'interesting: G. identifies religion, ideology, philosophy, and politics' (2). Second, commenting on a passage on the philosophy that becomes a cultural movement, an ideology of an epoch, he writes alongside: 'cf. Hegel!' (2).

The second series of extracts is entitled 'Gramsci's 'historicism'' and was likely written in preparation for the seminar. Here he translates several passages from *Historical Materialism and the Philosophy of Benedetto Croce,* which he describes as a 'Reference Text,' including of

course the famous passage on the philosophy of praxis as absolute historicism, and also copies a series of passages from the *Selected Works*. He summarizes their meaning as follows:

> fundamental theme of the interpretation of Marxist materialism ('philosophy of praxis') by Gramsci. Croce's influence is extremely clear: Croce represents, in Gramsci's eyes, a speculative 'historicism' that must be 'inverted' [*renverser*] in order to obtain the 'historicism' of the philosophy of praxis. (ALT2.A57-01.05, 1)

> Althusser will base his oral presentation in the spring of 1965 on these notes. However, the criticism is not formulated lightly –there are many doubts and hesitations, as expressed in a number of letters to Franca during the period of writing 'The Object of *Capital.'* In a letter dated 17 June 1965, while he is rewriting the passage on Gramsci, he calls it 'very important' and 'necessary' even if this will make 'the Italian friends, who have the religion of Gramsci, shout.' (Althusser, 1998b, 618). Two weeks later (in a letter dated 2 July) Althusser returns to the question. He wonders if his comments on Gramsci are correct, and above all if it is politically opportune to speak in those terms, and in rereading them, realizes that he hadn't seen 'certain important things' and yet not only does he not change his basic judgment, he reinforces it ('reading his Mat. st. e B. C., I discovered things were more serious than I thought...' (1998b, 623-624). His judgment on the political Gramsci is quite contrary to this:It is a politics 100%: the Machiavelli of modern times, he reads Lenin through Machiavelli as much as Machiavelli through Lenin, and that is saying something. (1998b, 624)

A few days later, in a letter from 8 July, he announces that the work is finished (1998b, 625), although the desire to further investigate the question remains.[3]

We can now turn to the passage in 'The Object of *Capital'* on Gramsci. The context here is the fundamental philosophical question about the object of Marx's theory and its specific difference from political economy. It is not a matter of conceiving Marxism as a dialecticization of the categories of political economy by employing a Hegelian concept of time, or of thinking 'economic phenomena [...] in the infinity of a homogenous planar space, but rather in a region determined by a regional structure and itself inscribed in a site defined by a global structure: therefore as a complex and deep space, inscribed in another complex and deep space.' (Althusser *et al.,* 2015, 337). In order to do this, a complex concept of historical time is necessary, because it requires thinking the rhythm of each level of the structure, each relatively autonomous with respect to the others, while also dependent on the social whole, whose efficacy on its elements can only be thought, each time, by forging a new philosophical concept. In this framework, Gramsci is called to center stage as a paradigm of Marxist historicism. This move is certainly not made without methodological concerns, but it is also extremely decisive: Althusser maintains that the famous passage where Gramsci claims 'the philosophy of praxis is absolute "historicism", the absolute secularization and earthliness of thought, an absolute humanism of history' (2015, 277) is not a simple polemic against Croce, nor limited to indicating the practical role of Marxism, the unity of theory and the workers' movement. There is in Gramsci a genuine 'theoretical interpretation affecting the very content of Marx's thought': a historicist conception of the relation of Marx's theory to real history, founded on Croce's theory of religion as a conception of the world which subsumes Marxism under its categories. For this reason, Gramsci 'easily identifies religion, ideology, philosophy and Marxist theory, without calling attention to the fact that what distinguishes Marxism from these ideological 'conceptions of the world' is less the (important) formal difference that Marxism puts an end to any supraterrestrial "beyond", than the distinctive form of this absolute immanence (its "earthliness"): *the form of scientificity.'* (2015, 281).

This is why Gramsci attempts to bring together under one term Marx's scientific theory and his philosophy, thinking this unity in the form of a conception of the world, and also why he tends

to think the relation between Marxist science and real history 'according to the model of the relationship between an "organic" [...] ideology and real history' (2015, 281). Starting here, Althusser constructs a paradigm, or limit-form, of the historicist reading, whose fundamental nucleus is the Hegelian historicization of absolute knowledge, a move that flattens the Marxist totality onto Hegelian totality: by grasping one and the same time in the different levels or instances, 'the effects of distortion and dislocation' are excluded, 'which in the authentic Marxist conception, contradict this ideological reading of a contemporaneity.' Further, this move reduces or omits 'the real difference separating levels' (2015, 282-283).

The symptomatic point where this reduction of levels emerges is, on the one hand, the fusion of science and ideology, and on the other, philosophy and history, a fusion that is produced through a series of conceptual slides [*glissements conceptuels*] which have the effect of reducing the distance between levels. On the one hand, this involves the reduction of science to history, making 'science a superstructure, [...] one of those "organic" ideologies which form such a close "bloc" with the structure that they have the same "history" as it does!' (2015, 283). On the other hand, this involves the reduction of philosophy to politics, since 'philosophy is the direct product (assuming all the 'necessary mediations') of the activity and experience of the masses, of politico-economic praxis' (2015, 284).

However, it is not sufficient for Gramsci to minimize the distance within the social structure that separates the specific place of theoretical, philosophical, and scientific (the place of theoretical practice) formations from the place of political practice. He requires a conception of theoretical practice that demonstrates and consecrates the identity of philosophy and politics, a latent need that explains the 'conceptual slides, whose effect is once again to *reduce* the distinction between the levels':

> In this interpretation, theoretical practice tends to lose all specificity and to be reduced to historical practice in general, a category which is made to include forms of production as different economic practice, political practice, ideological practice and scientific practice. (2015, 285)

Gramsci would find this model in 'experimental practice, borrowed not so much from the reality of modern science as from a certain ideology of modern science' (2015, 285). And here again there is a reduction of one level to another:

> For example, only on condition that it reduces all practice to experimental practice, or to 'praxis' in general, and then assimilates this mother-practice to political practice, can all practices be thought as arising from 'real' historical practice; can philosophy, even science, and hence Marxism, too, be thought as the 'expression' of real history. (2015, 287)

In this way, the distinction between the science of history and Marxist philosophy also disappears. Marxist philosophy becomes nothing more than 'a mere "historical methodology", i.e., [...] the mere self-consciousness of the historicity of history, [...] a reflection on the presence of real history in all its manifestations' (2015, 288).

Certainly, Gramsci takes up these formulas from Croce, intending to invert them, but he actually remains prisoner to them: all of the necessary theoretical reductions allow us to see clearly the basic structure of every historicism: 'the contemporaneity which makes possible a reading in essential section' (2015, 289).

The polemics that this reading of Gramsci stirred up in Italy led Althusser to a new confrontation with Gramsci in some extracts entitled 'Gramsci φ et pol.' (ALT. 057-01.06)[4]. These extracts deal blow by blow with the first section of the *Selected Works,* involving copied passages and long comments. Althusser in part takes up the critiques of *Reading Capital,* insisting on the link between the Gramscian conception of philosophy and historicist concepts of universal history, epoch, and society that would end up expunging class struggle. However, there is an interesting insight with respect to the question of the relation between the conception of the world and philosophy that reflects the discussions in those years around the *Philosophy Course for Scientists.*[5] Note: 'The pathos of Gramsci: thinking/not

thinking a distinction between the "conception of the world" and "philosophy" cf. p. 46-47.' (ALT. 057-01.06, 10). And again: 'no break for him'. But then how to demarcate the difference? For Gramsci it is not a matter of a qualitative difference, but quantitative, 'of homogeneity, coherence, logicity.' (10). Althusser comments:

> striking how G. does not manage to get away with his vocabulary. No difference between quality but rather quantity. Ok. Quantity of what? Of 'logicity' [...] But the nature of this 'logicity' is not at all defined: we have the feeling that it is the same, and that it does not bring anything logically in history (the sciences... silence). [...] The historicism of G. in fact leads to a total denial of the events of theoretical history, i.e., the 'breaks' which occur there. (10)

And a few lines below confirm this: 'we really feel that for G. there is no history of logicity...' (10).

This is precisely the key point of the letter on Gramsci's thought that Althusser published on 15 March 1968 in *Rinascita* with the title 'La filosofia, la politica e la scienza.' (1968, 23–24). If philosophy, as he had said just a few days earlier in the conference on 'Lenin and Philosophy,'[6] is characterized by the relation on one side with politics and on the other with science, Gramsci thought the former with force, but 'has not seen with as much vigor, nor isolated, nor thought the other dimension, the relation between philosophy and science' (Althusser, 1968, 23).

For Althusser, this is Gramsci's weak point, as 'only in hasty and superficial pages [...] [he] supports a clearly insufficient, if not false, conception of the sciences,' not moving beyond the repetition of Croce's equivocal formulas. These formulas assign to the sciences a place in the topic, but they do not capture what is specific to them, namely 'the production of objective knowledge.' From this derives the tendency to 'reduce and completely assimilate [...] "philosophy" to "conception of the world".' (1968, 23) The distinction is simply given by a greater coherence of the former, an only formal difference, if we consider that the same systematic and rational character that Gramsci attributes to it is due to coherency. And yet in order to grasp what Gramsci means by 'coherence' it is necessary to think the relation of philosophy with the sciences, which only 'confers to philosophy the characteristics (coherence, systematicity, and rationality) required by Gramsci: but at this point such characteristics will not have only a formal value, but rather acquire a precise content, defined not by "rationality" in general, but by the specific form of dominant "rationality" that exists in a determinant moment of the sciences with which philosophy established a specific relation.' (1968, 23-24). To safeguard what is authentic in Gramscian historicism, despite its dubious formulations and theoretical equivocations, for Althusser it is necessary to establish two points:

> The history of theoretical concepts (and also scientific and philosophical concepts, in their own sense of the term) is certainly a history. But:
>
> 1) this history must not be conceived as a pure and simple empirical becoming recorded in a chronicle. Rather, it must be conceived within the theoretical concepts of the Marxist science of history;
>
> 2) it is a *sui generis* history which, although part of the history of social formations and articulated within this history [...] is not reducible in a pure and simple way to the History of social formations [...]. (1968, 23-24)

## 3. From 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' to 'What is to be Done?'

May 1968 opens a new season of Althusser's thought, characterized by his reprisal of the question of the base-superstructure relation, most clearly demonstrated by the posthumously published text *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014).[7] In this context, Gramsci again becomes a

resource, as indicated by the famous note 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,' in which, albeit with some caution, he is given the role of the sole precursor of forming the concept of the ideological apparatus:

> To my knowledge, Gramsci is the only one who went any distance in the road I am taking. He had the 'remarkable' idea that the state could not be reduced to the (Repressive) State Apparatus, but included, as he put it, a certain number of institutions from 'civil society': the Church, the schools, the trade unions, etc. Unfortunately, Gramsci did not systematize his intuitions, which remained in the state of acute but fragmentary notes. (Althusser, 2014, 242, fn 7)

This note opens up a period for which Gramsci is present as a positive reference in Althusser's thought. The strongest example of this is the 1972 course on Machiavelli, which is revised and reworked in 1975. Here the Florentine is presented through a deeply Gramscian interpretation. Althusser poses his reading as a reflection on the origins of the state, on what he will later call a 'political primitive accumulation' (1999, 125). Reading Machiavelli through Gramsci, Althusser seizes on the problem of the constitution of a national state and the class struggle at the heart of it, 'pitting the elements of the new, growing mode of production against the dominant forms of the feudal mode of production' (1999, 11). In other words, the nation is the indispensable form for the 'implantation' of the capitalist mode of production, but 'a nation is not constituted spontaneously. The pre-existing elements are not unified into a nation of their own accord' (1999, 12). The instrument of unification is the unique national state: 'But beware: this state performs its military functions of unification, defense and conquest only on condition that it simultaneously undertakes others: political, juridical, economic, and ideological' (1999, 12). This form of unification is ensured by absolute monarchy, where absolute means 'unique and centralized, but not arbitrary', hence, 'the dual aspect of the power of the absolutist state according to Gramsci: it involves violence and coercion, but at the same time consent, and hence "hegemony"' (1999, 12).

This positive reference to Gramsci reaches its apex in the March 1976 Granada conference, 'On the Transformation of Philosophy,' (Althusser, 1990, 241-266) and has its *terminus ad quem* at the Barcelona conference on the dictatorship of the proletariat in July of the same year, where Althusser suspends judgment on Gramsci and attacks 'certain commentators who follow a line of interpretation from Togliatti' (Althusser, 1976). Starting at this moment, there is a radical change, which is influenced from a historical viewpoint by the rise of Eurocommunism and the abandonment of the dictatorship of the proletariat at the 22nd Congress of the PCF, and from a theoretical viewpoint, strictly in relation to political events, from a debate in 1976–77 among socialist and communist intellectuals in Italy on the theme 'abandoning Gramsci?,' and a series of important texts which appeared in those years (from Buci-Glucksmann, 1975 and Poulantzas, 1976 and 1978, and Anderson, 1977, 4-78). These lead Althusser to take up Gramsci in Gerratana's critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, published in 1975 by Einaudi. There are two series of translated extracts with commentaries preserved in the archive, the first of which is mainly on the concept of hegemony and the concept of civil society (ALT2. A57-01-08) and the second on a series of terms, among which the concept of passive revolution is predominant (ALT2.A57-01-10). In the former instance Althusser thinks of intervening in the Italian debate and plans an article for *Rinascita*: in the archive we find several dossiers in which Althusser collects together the debate between Bobbio, Salvadori, Gerratana, and others (ALT2.A26-02-01; ALT2.A26-02-02) as well as other material (ALT2.A26-01-03) and several versions of the article (ALT2.A26-01-01; ALT2.A26-01-02) which he decided not to publish. At the center of Althusser's interest is the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the reason by the PCI did not officially abandon it, thinking of it due to Gramsci as a form of hegemony (Althusser, 1976). I will not dwell on the reading of Gramsci that Althusser offers in these sketches, because it will be reworked and

systematized in *Marx in his Limits and What is to Be Done?*

Both texts are from 1978, with the former published in 1994 and the latter still unpublished. They are closely related, insofar as the treatment of Gramsci in the former volume is also found in the latter, where it is inserted into a wider context. *Marx in his Limits* reprises the themes of the Venice conference 'At Last, the Crisis of Marxism!' (in Althusser 1998a, 267-280). The final section is dedicated to Gramsci. This is not by chance, because Althusser considers him to be the fundamental theoretical inspiration of Eurocommunism, as clearly emerges from a passage in chapter nine where, in advancing the thesis that the state is a separate instrument from class struggle and not traversed by it (here the reference is to Poulantzas), he takes distance from a widespread Gramscianism in France and Italy:

> I maintain, precisely, that the state, the core of the state –which comprises its physical, political, police and administrative forces of intervention– is, so far as possible, constructed in such a way as not to be affected, or even 'traversed', by the class struggle. (Althusser, 2006b, 80)

Althusser introduces his treatment of Gramsci with several remarks in chapter nineteen on 'The Absolute Limits of Marx on Ideology.' Here Althusser emphasizes that Marx spoke of a collective dimension of ideology without truly thinking it, to which Gramsci would add very little, insisting 'that the function of ideology is to serve a social group as a unifying "cement" [...], and replaces the question of ideology with that of "culture"' (2006b, 136). As for the concept of hegemonic apparatus, returning to the considerations in 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,' Althusser now finds the limitation of not specifying precisely what the hegemony-effect is produced through (2006b, 139). And with this Althusser comes to the heart of Gramscian thought, the concept of hegemony, which he deals with in the final section of the text. The concepts Gramsci uses in his theory of the state (with its two moments, force and hegemony) and civil society constitute the set of hegemonic apparatuses. He therefore denies the structure and the 'state-determined conditions of exploitation and the reproduction of social relations,' ensuring that the question of the State can and must 'be decided *for itself,* on the basis of the four concepts at his disposal, and without bringing the infrastructure into play. Gramsci is reluctant to refer to the infrastructure, for the Marxist distinction between infrastructure and superstructure seems to him to be, fundamentally, a mechanistic-economistic error on Marx's part' (2006b, 140-141).

In this way, moving to what is essential, *'the "moment" of Force is ultimately swallowed up by the moment of hegemony'* (2006b, 141), and this is the case for a precise political reason, because what seems to be a theory of the state in Gramsci is actually nothing other than *'a political examination of the "nature", hence of the "composition" or internal arrangement [dispositif] of the states of the day, undertaken with a view to defining a political strategy for the workers' movement* after all the hope that the schema of 1917 would be repeated had faded' (2006b, 141). In other words, the reasons for the definition of civil society and its hegemonic apparatus, the distinction and later the identification of political society with this, and finally the absorption of both into the unique category of hegemony, are to be found in the theory of war of maneuver and war of position.

Schematically, for Althusser hegemony represents a whole constituted by '(1) "*civil society*" (which is its domain); (2) *the state as Force or coercion*; and (3) *the effect, also called hegemony, that results from the functioning of the state as a whole,* comprising, be it recalled, Force and Hegemony' (2006b, 143). Thus, hegemony occurs three times in the Gramscian schema. In a first sense hegemony is that of the hegemonic apparatuses which allow the power of the state and its ruling class to be accepted without violence. It is, with force, one of the two moments of the state. In a second sense hegemony is the hegemony-effect of the state itself, of the good balance of force and hegemony in the state, wherein force does not disappear but is so integrated into hegemony that it does not need to show itself and exercise itself: 'There we have [...] the ethical state [...] whose "organic intellectuals" see to it

that the hegemonic apparatuses of "civil society" operate smoothly' (2006b, 143). In a third sense of the term, hegemony is the hegemony of the party of the working class that causes it to lead without violence, both its members and allies, extending its influence on civil and political society. All of this therefore plays out at the level of hegemony, and insofar as hegemony also designates class domination, a Leninist reading of Gramsci is possible, but at the price of 'a strange silence about the reality of the economic, political and ideological class struggles. They are represented in this scheme in the form of a Hegemony-effect alone, and at the price of the absolute idealism of a Hegemony lacking a material basis, with no explanation of the Coercive Apparatuses which nevertheless play an active part in engendering the Hegemony-effect' (2006b, 144). This misunderstanding has actually produced a rightist reading, which masks the structure of the concept of 'private civil society,' and therefore also hides both reproduction and the class struggle, with its different levels and its stake, the state. The Force of the state is accordingly regarded as virtually nil, since it is fully integrated into the Hegemony-effect' (2006b, 144). Hegemony then becomes not only a supreme effect, but also a supreme cause, because it is at once self-caused and an effect of itself, and has the extraordinary power that its crisis can make the domination of the dominant class vacillate or founder.

If hegemony means a direction that is neither dictatorship, coercion, or domination, suggesting an effect of voluntary consensus, then Althusser sees in this work 'the old Hegelian idea, adopted by Croce and Gentile, that the state is, by its nature, an educator.' Althusser concludes:

> However surprising it may seem, Gramsci has not got beyond the Hegeliano-Crocean conception of culture as the ultimate End of Humanity (2006b, 146).

This explains the sublimation of the state into hegemony, and also why Gramsci, while attributing the element of force to the state, does not explain its place, matter, and exercise (2006b, 146)[8]. Force actually appears so limited [*poco*] because it is hegemony in the first sense that 'obtains the same result of "training" (Gramsci's word) as Force, at lower cost, and, what is more, simultaneously anticipates the results of "culture" itself' (2006b, 146). The state therefore realizes the ideal of a self-forming universal in which 'the supersession [*Aufhebung*] of all Force' is realized. Therefore, it is a natural consequence that 'Force disappears from the ultimate "definition" of the state as the "unity of the state and civil society", of the state as Hegemony, and, finally, of Hegemony all by itself (since the state itself has been "superseded").' (2006b, 147). According to Althusser, Gramsci's profoundest idea is expressed here, which is reflected with perfect symmetry in his conception of the party:

> The End and Task of this 'modern Prince' is the 'regulated society' (!) known as communism. But it will not attain unless it plays, as a party, its pre-state role, by educating its members and the masses over whom it extends its 'leadership', its 'hegemony'. Just like the state, the Party has to educate men, with a view, once the revolution has been made and 'the party has become the state', to ensuring the triumph of the End of humanity in this regulated society in which Hegemony, its Hegemony, will continue to rule, until it vanishes before the end result of universal cultivation become self-cultivation: the infinite development of free individuals in free association. (2006b, 147)

Gramsci's conception, for Althusser, carries three precise consequences. First, it makes the problem of the state as a special machine, with a special body, the instrument of the perpetuation of class domination, disappear: 'The specific reality of the state clearly does disappear in a formula in which Hegemony = Force + consensus, or political society + civil society' (2006b, 147). Thus, if 'Hegemony [is] the last word on the state,' the material nature of the state machine is disguised, creating reformist misunderstandings and meditations on the nature of the state and the becoming-state of the party. This leads to the second consequence, the reduction of ideology to culture, or the substitution of a concept that requires class struggle with a notion that leads to ecumenism and elitism. Finally, the

third consequence, '"the autonomy of politics" or "of the political"' –in other words, in trying to think political strategy for the workers' movement, Gramsci ends up thinking 'politics (and the politician, its agent)' as *causa sui*, as autonomous (2006b, 149-150).

As I mentioned above, this final chapter of *Marx in His Limits* is actually part of a broader confrontation with Gramsci in the same year (ALT2.A26-05.06/07, titled 'Que faire?'). In this text, which reposes the old Leninist question in its title, Gramsci is evoked in order to explain the originality of the PCI's politics: Gramscian historicism, in a communist horizon dominated by Stalinism, had a strong anti-dogmatic charge. And yet, for Althusser its merits seem to be exhausted. Recalling the criticism he made in the 1960s, he claims that Gramsci has the tendency of reducing historical materialism to philosophy, philosophy to politics, and politics to history. From this, two relevant consequences follow. First, historical materialism tends to be erased in Gramsci, reduced to Marxist philosophy or philosophy of practice:

> This does not mean that Gramsci evacuates all of historical materialism, but for example [...] he does not have a very precise idea of what a theory of infrastructure can be, which is practically absent, except for a few allusions, in these writings. (36)

If the structure disappears, what remains is the superstructure. It is not by chance then that Gramsci was the first Marxist theorist to take an interest in the phenomena of the superstructure, the state, and ideologies.

However, the second relevant consequence is that if the structure disappears, then its links with the superstructure, the fact that it plays a decisive role in the reproduction of the relations of production, are not 'really taken into account and thought in all their reality.' (36) This ends up leading to 'a phantom-like existence':

> All that can be done for the superstructure is to describe it, and analyze its functioning at the same level of its manifestation, as if it were not controlled by the hidden links that connect it to the infrastructure. (36)

Althusser recognizes the merit of Gramsci emphasizing the importance 'and having (although timidly) suggesting that the superstructure penetrates the infrastructure, but the unity of "this penetration" though described, was not really thought, and in addition this penetration itself was thought from the viewpoint of the superstructure, without knowing what else this superstructure penetrates' (37). Now, if 'the infrastructure is neglected' (38) and we are forced to think the superstructure starting from itself, all that remains is to describe it and compare its elements. Gramscian historicism would be no more than an empiricism that produced its most interesting results on the question of intellectuals:

> that intellectuals are normally 'organic' [...] that intellectuals have the function of organizing, of being the self-consciousness of a culture that it disseminates in the masses, that the types of intellectuals vary with the forms of society. (39)

However, this conception is founded on 'another idea, deeply rooted in him, on the type of normal historical unity that must be present in his eyes for any veritable historical "epoch".' In other words, Althusser holds that 'for Gramsci, history does not really come into being until it reaches the state of a 'beautiful totality' [...] when a real 'historical bloc' is constituted that is capable of uniting the ensemble of men in the unity of practice and ethics, in short, of a culture' (39).

The concept of organic intellectual depends on this general conception. There is an organic intellectual when culture is not the property only of the learned, but rather when it penetrates the masses. If this does not happen, 'we do not have a real "historical period", a true "historical bloc" capable of securing its hegemony, of dominating and convincing, by persuasion and the general popular spread of its own ideas' (40). In this sense the concept of the organic intellectual is linked to the educative role of the state. In other words, educators are needed who teach the people the ideas that bind the unity of the historic bloc. However, this is not a matter of the simple transmission of ideals, but rather a 'set of practices, from the practices of production to moral and

political practices,' that is, 'a veritable *concrete universal ethic*' (41).

Althusser notes that the example from which Gramsci drew his reflections on organic intellectuals is the church and its focus on avoiding the distance between the learned and the pious, with its creation of the monastic order. 'This is an amazing example,' Althusser points out, 'because ultimately the church is not a "historic bloc", but an ideological apparatus which is always more or less of the state' (41). Gramsci's other example is the comparison between French and Italian history:

> [...] Gramsci prolonged his reflections on the Church with a comparison between the history of France and Italy, opposing France which had, in the revolution, succeeded in constituting a 'historic bloc' by endowing itself with a true educating state and forming a comprehensive body of organic intellectuals for all of the tasks of hegemony, against Italy, which had not known how to accomplish its bourgeois revolution, and thus founding a true historic bloc, and which as a result, did not have a true body of organic intellectuals. (41)

From the unity of these themes, Althusser draws a series of conclusions about Gramsci's thought. First, not only does Gramsci neglect structure for the sake of superstructure, 'but he replaces the Marxist concept of the mode of production with the concept of "*historical bloc*"' (42). Second, by extracting his concept of organic intellectual from the history of the church, he 'followed its model of perfect and universal ethics' (42-43) to an element that belongs to the superstructure. Finally, third, although he 'described the politics of the Church, he did not sketch at one moment a theory of the Church,' which is further proof that he did not possess a 'theory of ideology' (43). This is not so, however, because he was not interested in ideologies, but rather because his historicism prevented him from posing the question of the links between ideologies and structure. In Gramsci, the Church is not an example, 'but the essence itself, *realized,* of the beautiful ethical totality that he projected on the state due to the "historical bloc". [...] The result is that the state was thought starting from ideology. It is a new, "historicist" reduction' (43).

Therefore, absolute historicism turns out to actually be unthinkable, and ends up showing the philosophical thought that founds it on the church and state: 'a normative and hence idealist thought' (44), normative because it assumes models (church, France) and counter-models (Italy), and thus assumes that 'there is in history the normal and the pathological' (45).

According to Althusser, a further demonstration of this point is Gramsci's concept of passive revolution, which is evoked for example in the context of 'a state that functions well, but is not the [result] of a French revolution, for example the Italian state' (45). This is a passive revolution for Gramsci because it did not come from the bottom but was made by the monarchy in allegiance with the bourgeoisie, excluding the people: 'the course of history [...] has not been *what it would have been*' (45). Again there is a norm which measures historical events.

Moreover, Althusser emphasizes the immense extension of the concept in Gramsci: risorgimento, fascism, Nazism, as well as the USSR. Certainly, this concept grasps important aspects, such as the absence of popular initiative, the separation between popular masses and the state, the penetration of the state 'for organizing men into the forced and artificial unity of unions and the state party.' However, the opposition between the normal and pathological requires a normal model: 'And as is always necessary in the passive, abnormal revolution, Gramsci is not far from opposing to all these states which are non-ethical, non-universal in their unity, another sort of revolution, which operates at the same time overseas: namely in Roosevelt's America with the New Deal' (46).

In order to understand the implications of this concept, Althusser proposes two preliminary observations: 1) Gramsci never uses the term counter-revolution, and 2) Gramsci does not seem sensitive to the phenomena of regression, delay, or stagnation. This signals that Gramsci thinks history through the category of revolution, '*either* in the form of active revolution, *or* in the form of passive revolution, which takes place in a bad, unethical state, which does not produce a true

cultural unity among its citizens' (47). This concept certainly reveals a normativism and finalism in Gramsci's thought insofar as it indicates that there are tasks that can be accomplished by either the dominant class or popular movement (49). But even more strongly, it signals that for Gramsci the essence of history is activity: 'either the presence of activity or the absence of activity' (47). Everything is linked: praxis is the interiority of all practices, namely activity, whose essence is politics. Again at the heart of Gramsci's thought, Althusser finds politics as *causa sui.*

## Conclusion

We have referred to Althusser's ambivalence with respect to Gramsci's thought. At the end of the path we have charted, the terms of this ambivalence should be specified. The judgment on theoretical merits that Althusser attributes to Gramsci in *For Marx* and 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' can perhaps be read in light of a passage from 1977:

> Now, when we have read and re-read, both to the letter and with all of the theoretical and historical perspective they are owed, the notes in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* on the state, we cannot but be struck by a strange impression, which Freud has called the uncanny (*Unheimlichkeit*): the feeling of being at home, but coupled with an uneasiness of not feeling quite at home. (ALT2. A57-01.09, 4)

Fundamentally, in an extremely synthetic way, what remains indigestible for Althusser is a model of temporality and historicity that prevents thinking the difference and specificity among levels.

As for the criticisms, we cannot fail to emphasize how strongly these were overdetermined by the theoretic-political conjuncture in both the sixties and seventies. In this sense it is clear that in Gramsci's text –sometimes by doing violence and reducing the complexity– Althusser looks for a limit-form of the positions that are contemporaneous with him. In 1965 he attacks historicism as a paradoxical form which ultimately mirrors economistic justification of Stalinism, and in 1977-78 he attacks the concept of hegemony as the inspiration of Eurocommunism.

However, the proximity and criticisms trace a path, that difficult road that Althusser tries to follow, not without hesitation and rectification, by thinking together determination in the last instance (whose 'lonely hour never comes') and the autonomy of levels (relative, surely, but how much?). If as Althusser says, the essence of philosophical labor consists in demarcation, in the detour through other positions in order to define and hold one's own, then I think that a good key to reading the Althusserian position is constituted by the incessant labor that he carried out on Gramsci, a labor which was all the more necessary insofar as he felt there was something in Gramsci's concepts which played out something essential in his own philosophy.

## Notes

1. All emphasis in quotations from Althusser is Althusser's own.
2. Translator's note: the reference here is to Althusser's copy of Gramsci's *Œvres choisies* in French, which are held in the IMEC archive. Throughout the essay I have translated the title of the work, noting the citation to the material held in IMEC.
3. See the letter of 19 July, in Althusser, 1998b, 628.
4. This text is part of a large set of texts that Althusser and his collaborators exchanged between October 1966 and February 1968. See the presentation by p. Matheron in Althusser, 'Notes sur la philosophie,' in Althusser 1995, 299-300.
5. See in particular Althusser, 'Du coté de la philosophie,' in Althusser 1995, 255-297.
6. The conference was held on 24 February 1968. Now published in Althusser 1998a, 103-144.
7. For a reconstruction of the historical-political context and collective project which gave birth to this text, see Balibar's preface in Althusser, 2014, vii-xviii.
8. In *What is to Be Done?,* Althusser will claim the superiority of Machiavelli over Gramsci on this point: 'We see how much Gramsci, who exalted Machiavelli, is worse than his master. For Gramsci never supported, as Machiavelli did, the

primacy of the moment of force (the army) over the hegemony of the state. While highly present in Machiavelli, force appears in Gramsci only to prepare its pure and simple disappearance from the concept of state as hegemony' (ALT2.A26-05.07, 73).

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# Interpellation and Stigmatization: Althusser and Goffman

**Abstract:** *The essay explores some points of convergence between Louis Althusser and Erving Goffman, most visibly around the concepts of stigmatization and interpellation. Both explore the ways in which norms are imposed on already existing forms of individuality and corporeality, justifying sometimes violent procedures of control.*

**Keywords:** *Stigma, Interpellation, Louis Althusser, Erving Goffman, Roman slavery.*

**Resumen:** *Este ensayo explora algunos puntos de convergencia entre Louis Althusser y Erving Goffman, más explícitamente en torno a los conceptos de estigmatización e interpelación. Ambos exploran los modos en los que las normas se imponen sobre formas ya existentes de individualidad y corporalidad, a veces justificando procedimientos violentos de control.*

**Palabras clave:** *Estigma, Interpelación, Louis Althusser, Erving Goffman, Esclavitud romana.*

I begin with what might seem nothing more than a coincidence: two texts that by all accounts offer little that invites comparison except the fact that both appeared in 1963. One, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* by Louis Althusser, in fact, can be said to have appeared that year only if "appearance" applies to a transcription of two recorded lectures published as a book only decades later. The other, by sociologist Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity,* was as eagerly anticipated as Althusser's text was unexpected: the book was published by Prentice-Hall, a prominent commercial firm, on the assumption that it would appeal to an audience beyond the academic world. The two works' opposing conditions of appearance are in fact linked to a set of differences: not only do they differ by virtue of their languages (French and English, as well as the stylistic characteristics proper to each) and disciplines (philosophy and sociology), but in their idioms. Althusser's lexicon is philosophical: when he discusses psychoanalysis, his aim is to show the theoretical presuppositions that govern its conflicting tendencies in their historicity. Goffman, clearly influenced by Freud, but by means of Erik Erikson and the tradition of ego psychology, with its emphasis on the importance of assimilation and adaptation (the validity of which Althusser, following Lacan, rejects), adopts the popular idiom (which includes certain terms appropriated from the Americanized versions of Freud, e.g., "ego" or "identity") that has emerged around and through the objects of his study, the stigmatized and those who stigmatize them, on the grounds that it in is in this idiom that the complexity of the lived experience of stigma can be fully understood. Althusser, in contrast, argued that, because words were not instruments available to be used according to the will of the writer, strategy was as important in philosophy as in politics, and that the choice of words could be decisive: "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" (Althusser, 1971a, 14). For Althusser, the use of clichés and common idioms on the assumption that the more frequent their usage, the greater the likelihood that they will capture experience in its authenticity, can only leave analysis trapped in the space of the dominant ideas and thus condemned to reproduce it. Goffman, however, ostentatiously avoids technical terms, or rather liberally seasons his theoretical discussions with popular idioms in imitation of the speech both of the stigmatized (and those who scorn them), and of his presumed readership.

While we do not know whether Goffman ever read Althusser's work, we know that Althusser's library contained a copy of the French translation of *Asylums* and that he spoke informally to his students about *Stigma*, without, however, leaving any visible trace of his reading. Thus, if we can speak of an encounter between the two, it must be in the sense of an "objective" encounter, a historically determined convergence between concepts and modes of inquiry that, from very different starting points, arrived at a common theoretical problem or set of problems, conceived in the one case as interpellation and in the other as stigmatization. Further, while Althusser's 1963 text marked the beginning of a nearly decade-long inquiry into the concept to which he finally gave the name interpellation, Goffman's interest in stigma quickly shifted to the practices of social interaction more generally and the strategies individual actors employed in their quotidian encounters with others. In other words, Althusser was working to develop a critical account of the very notion of the rational actor, just as Goffman, had begun to reject the "collective" phenomena that appear in *Asylums* and intermittently in *Stigma*, and to adopt the conceptual underpinnings of game theory.

These opposing trajectories perhaps help explain a key problem that any attempt to compare Goffman and Althusser must face. While Althusser frequently employs the verbal form of interpellation ("interpellate" or *interpeller*), Goffman takes great care to avoid the noun, "stigmatization," or the verb "stigmatize," preferring the participial adjective "stigmatized" (as in "stigmatized individual"). In place of the verb, he most commonly speaks instead of "having," or "possessing" a stigma, which may be "inborn,' as if the stigma is always already attached to the bodily feature or condition with which it is associated, thus obviating the need for an account of the process by which it is stigmatized. The few times he alludes to the process of stigmatization, he tells us that individuals "acquire" a stigma, a verb ambiguous enough to suggest that individuals themselves take possession of stigma, as if they themselves were the agents of their stigmatization. The fact that his stated objective is to examine the effects of stigma, rather than its causes, however, does not and cannot allow him entirely to avoid an account of the process by which stigma is not only acquired by those deemed stigmatized, but also actively imposed by others. And this must also apply to those whose stigma is "inborn," whose stigma is imposed retroactively, that is, the always-already stigmatized. The fact that Goffman's account of stigmatization exhibits a number of essential ambiguities, however, does not distinguish him from Althusser. On the contrary, noting the gaps and silences that appear in *Stigma* allows us to see the ambiguities and contradiction proper to the commentaries on and applications of "interpellation' as the objective effects of Althusser's exposition. Both Goffman and Althusser struggle with what we might call the material existence of stigmatization and interpellation, and the traces of this struggle are made visible by the fleeting but unmistakable presence of the concept of imputation in both works, the fictive foundation of the violence done to and suffered by those deemed owners of "their" bodies and the actions performed by them.

In a way that anticipates, and in certain respects perhaps in its precision surpasses some of his most important theoretical and political contributions, Althusser argues in *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* that the discipline of psychology (from which psychoanalysis must be distinguished) emerged through a synthesis of three distinct concepts: the individual, the

subject and the ego (le *moi*) (1996, 106-107). It operates according to the founding assumption that "the subject is an individual possessing the structure of an ego," an assumption that treats these three concepts as representing three ways of signifying the same reality (1996, 104). As Althusser points out, however, these concepts emerged in and in some sense continue to belong to different domains in which their functions are by no means identical. The single term, "individual," for example, refers to at least two fundamentally separate concepts endowed with distinct meanings and functions: one in biology, the other in the social sciences (particularly as a component of the theory of the division of labor) (Althusser, 1996, 106). Similarly, the notion of subject, according to Althusser, is distributed along two axes: on one side, the legal or moral subject whose division into a subjected being and a subject of actions (an agent or actor) is originary and constitutive; on the other, the subject as the foundation of knowledge, more precisely, the subject of truth as the condition of possibility of the distinction between truth and error (1996, 106-107).

The legal or moral subject can be said to be free insofar as freedom is imputed to it by human and divine law in order that this subject may be held accountable: Althusser calls this subject-form the "subject of imputation," that is, a being whose subjection necessarily precedes the retroactive attribution to it of the freedom or agency it requires to qualify as an author or actor (1996, 108). Finally, Althusser insists on the importance of the concept of the ego, a concept that illustrates the philosophical (and not simply linguistic) problems engendered by the process of translation (especially in the English language rendering of psychoanalytic concepts from Freud's German). Freud's term, rendered in English as "ego," to give it a scientific air, is the ordinary first-person pronoun, *das Ich*, or "the I." The French equivalent of the English "ego" (itself taken from Latin) and the German "*das Ich*" is not "*le je*," as might be expected, but "*le moi*" (Balibar, 2005). What Althusser calls "the subject of truth" is not simply a reduction of truth to its origin in the thought or perception of the individual; the subject of truth requires the subject to think its thinking and perceive its perception in a reflexive relation that positions an ego outside its own thought in order to affirm its truth (Althusser, 1996, 111-113). Althusser insists that here again, in the domain of knowledge, as in the domain of action and conduct, freedom, specifically, the freedom to think, and to think thinking, is imputed to the subject. In fact, he explains that freedom is necessary to the apprehension of the truth as true: the subject of truth is never present at the beginning, where confusion and inattention reign. Instead, because the subject of error is endowed with the capacity to overcome inattention and confusion and "convert itself into the subject of objectivity" or truth (1996, 112-113), it is deemed responsible for any failure to do so, just as it will be rewarded for having freely chosen to undertake and persist in the arduous journey to truth, that prolonged labor of the negative that allows it to become its contrary.

If indeed Althusser's subject of truth is also a subject of imputation, we must be sure we understand the notion of imputation as he uses it. In part, the term "imputation" is drawn from Locke, specifically chapter 27 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Locke defines the idea of the person as a legal, or more precisely, "forensic term" that designates the individual who is subject to judgment and punishable for actions that must be attributed or imputed to him as his own and no one else's in order for there to exist the accountability that law, whether moral or civil, demands (Locke, 1997, II. 27.26). But Althusser's concept of the subject of imputation also, and perhaps more fundamentally, derives from Kant's notion of *Zurechnung* (also translated as "ascription" or "attribution") as developed in *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Here, imputation, not by implication as in Locke's text, but directly, assumes a central role. Kant defines the person as "a subject who is capable of having his actions imputed to him" (Kant, 1991, 50). Imputation, according to him is "the judgement by which anyone is declared to be the author or free cause of an action which is then regarded as *his* moral fact or deed, and is subjected to law" (1991, 53). And Kant adds, "that person —individual or collective [*physiche oder*

*moralische*]— who is invested with the right to impute actions judicially, is called a judge or a court (*judex s. forum*)" (1991, 53). To qualify as a person, the individual subject to whom freedom is imputed is declared a free cause of the actions that now become his or his own and for which he alone is responsible. The fact that one must be declared a free cause of one's actions, means that the declaration of a legal judgment precedes and gives meaning to the perception that one is in fact the undetermined or self-determining cause of one's own conduct. We must impute to the individual what we (and perhaps he) cannot know and treat him as if he were the free cause both law and morality demand he be. Thus, personhood is not discovered in, but projected and imposed upon, individuals (who are not free to refuse this imputation) to render them, as Althusser argued, responsible and accountable for their deeds. The right to impute action, or to assign responsibility, is exercised in the form of a declaration with the force (violence and coercion) of law, uttered in the space of the penal apparatus. Imputation is in fact the initial outline of what, within a few years, Althusser will call interpellation.

When Althusser replaced the concept of imputation, a concept perhaps too well defined and historically situated to serve the critical function required of it, with the more semantically diffuse term of interpellation, however, the replacement came at a certain theoretical cost. To explain interpellation, which remains even by the end of the ISAs essay an anticipation of the concept rather than the concept itself, Althusser, who makes no reference to his discussion of imputation nearly seven years earlier, examines what he calls Christian religious ideology. In fact, this "example" appears to suggest that interpellation arises on a theological or religious foundation, even as it illustrates what Balibar (following Jan Assmann (2000)) has called the theologization (and what we might call the dematerialization and decorporealization) of legal and political terms and concepts by Christianity (Balibar, 2016). By suggesting that the origins of the notion of interpellation lie in the theme of the call and the calling, as in the New Testament, signaled by the use of the Greek term *klesis/* κλῆσις (verb: *kaleo/* καλέω) or the Latin *vocatio* (verb: *voco*), translated into French as "appel," Althusser overlooks the legal and indeed punitive meaning of the verb "call" in Greek and Latin: to be called into or summoned to court, to be indicted and therefore finally punished, a meaning well established in the legal institutions of the Roman empire long before Saul heard the call of the Lord on the road to Damascus. The many interpretations of interpellation as primarily a discursive, verbal or even symbolic act without any immediate relation to the apparatuses of social control, coercion and violence are an effect of Althusser's contradictory and inconsistent account of both ideology and the interpellation essential to it. Recalling its link to the notion of imputation allows us to understand that if we can speak of a call, it is in the sense that we are called free, free agents, so that we can be called to account as responsible parties for the actions imputed to us. Our freedom is thus imposed upon us from without and worn like a mask (the meaning of "persona" in Latin) that covers and conceals the face or, in certain cases, that is carved or burned with a branding iron into the face, to produce what the Greeks and the Romans called a "stigma."

In 1963, the same year that Althusser delivered his lectures on psychoanalysis, Erving Goffman published *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity,* a text that, on the face of it, appears to oppose the orientation of Althusser's lectures or of the later works on discourse and ideology in which the concept of interpellation took shape. Goffman's notion of stigma concerns what we might call informal, extra-legal, micro-level forms of discrimination or prejudice and has little to do with the machinery of the state. The stigmas that such prejudices impose on the objects of their disapproval are often unstable, unequally applied and historically reversible. Moreover, as Goffman's title implies, the stigma attached to certain social groups or populations on the basis of physical abnormalities, phenotypical characteristics or culture, can be "managed," that is, eluded, deflected, or its effects diminished at the level of individual "performance" (a term from his earlier work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life)*, and even occasionally reversed at the collective level.

Further, the various stigmas vary widely in their effectivity and their capacity to limit or constrain individual lives. Stigmatization, the process by which individuals are marked by stigma, however, is more complicated than prejudice in its operation. Like interpellation, stigmatization involves what Goffman himself calls "imputation." According to his account, individuals impute, without knowing that they do so, a set of characteristics to the other individuals they meet. These imputed characteristics are not simply assumptions but are "normative expectations," even "demands" imposed upon these others. If the others are later found to deviate from or fall short of the normal characteristics imputed to them "in potential retrospect," as Goffman calls it, we experience them as bad, dangerous, sick, or failures. Such individuals are regarded as unfit to fulfill the responsibilities of a person, and their abnormality is seen, at least to a certain degree, as having arisen through the agency also imputed to them, a fact that renders them liable to that informal means of punishment called stigmatization.

If anything, the very notion of imputation common to Althusser's interpellation and Goffman's stigmatization appears to underscore what separates them and even what sets them in opposition to each other, rather than what unites them. Interpellation is universal or quasi-universal, addressed to every human individual, apart from the exceptions deemed out of range of the call (*l'appel*): criminals, those suffering from acute mental illness or in certain cases physical illnesses or congenital conditions and, perhaps most importantly, those categorized according to phenotypical or cultural specificities, i.e., racial or ethnic groups—precisely those understood by Goffman to constitute the stigmatized. This does not mean that the analyses of Althusser and Goffman complement each other according to a division of the social, or social and political, world into the mutually exclusive and relatively stable realms of the normal and the stigmatized. Such a position would rest on a relatively stable division between a normal or normalized world and a world of stigmatized groups. In fact, once we shift our focus from the individual (always already) interpellated as a subject, to the process of interpellation in its practical state and from already constituted forms of stigma to the act or sequence of actions that produces stigma, we find that the means by which a universal and eternal subject is constituted is simultaneously the means by which individuals and collectivities are excluded from interpellation or from the dominant forms of interpellation (Macherey, 2014). As Hanan Elsayed (2017) has pointed out, Althusser's allegory of the policeman who interpellates the individual in the street by shouting *«hé, vous, là-bas !»* demonstrates, alongside the "universal" constitution of free (separated) and equal (equivalent) individuals, the exclusion of those who are never addressed by police officers with the formal *vous* but only by the familiar *tu*, a mode of address reimported from the colonies, designed to mark as permanent the inequality between the addressor and the addressee. I have discussed elsewhere the fact that "*interpellation*" in French does not mean "to hail," as Ben Brewster often translates interpellation. Historically, the term denoted the act of interrupting an assembly or calling an individual out of an assembly. In the medieval period, *interpeller* meant to issue a summons to a witness or suspect. At present, one of its most common uses is to denote the action by which police stop, question, arrest and detain individuals and is thus not merely a discursive act, or a form of intersubjective recognition, but an operation directed at the body to which the use, or simply the threat, of violence and coercion is central.

The case of stigma is, if anything, even more complicated. Behind the understanding of stigma is a double imputation: first, there is the act of imputing to individuals normal (or normalizing) attributes that they do not possess, and which accordingly become the criteria by which these individuals are determined to be not only different from, but less than, or inferior to, those regarded as normal. The realities, mental and physical, that precede and serve as the basis for stigmatization become stigmas only through a process of stigmatization that operates as the underside of normalization. As in the case of ideological interpellation, we often think of stigma as a matter of ideas, attitudes or beliefs whose existence is mental or discursive, even if the

effect of collective attitudes possesses a material (physical, corporeal and institutional) existence. In fact, the history of the term "stigma" over the last few centuries is a history of the forgetting of the violence whose persistence can be acknowledged only in the denials that contrast a civilized present to the savagery of the past.

Goffman begins the book with a brief account of the origins of the concept of stigma in ancient Greece:

> The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids, originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor —a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places. (Goffman, 1963, 1)

Stigma is thus "designed" and "cut or burnt into the body," but Goffman does not tell us by whom and in what context; even his account of the purpose of stigma, "to expose something unusual and bad" is formulated with a vagueness that allows him to project the modern form and meaning of stigma back upon its origin (1963, 1). And stigma, for Goffman, is above all a sign, despite the fact that it is a "sign . . . cut or burnt into the body" and therefore a sign whose literal inscription on the body transforms it through a process that necessarily causes the bearer great pain (1963, 1). Goffman, however, regards the body as having no other significance than that of bearing the sign signifying disgrace: it is itself neither the object nor the target of the process of stigmatization.

In a similar way, he uses a series of euphemisms to describe the social effects of stigma on the stigmatized who is marked as a "blemished person . . . to be avoided" (1963, 1). In this category, Goffman includes "slaves, criminals and traitors" (1963, 1), those who by virtue of their social rank, or for having committed crimes, are stigmatized in the modern sense, that is, they are to be avoided. He offers an equally evasive explanation for the imposition of stigma: "Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (1963, 2). Goffman calls these means "anticipations" and argues that "we" who "lean on them" in order to categorize the strangers with whom we come into contact, transform the anticipations "into normative expectations, into righteously presented demands" (1963, 2). It is only here, and in adjectival form, that Goffman first introduces a reference to norms. They are what may euphemistically be called expectations, but are in fact "righteously presented demands," as if, implicit in every social interaction, is the demand (from the Latin *mando:* to command) that we meet the expectations against which we are measured and measure ourselves, and even more that others do the same (1963, 2).

But such expectations or norms, unlike laws, do not have a formal, written existence, primarily because, unlike laws, their number and the number of domains in which they may arise is limitless. We may not even know that a norm exists until it is violated: "Typically, we do not become aware that we have made these demands or aware of what they are until an active question arises as to whether or not they will be fulfilled. It is then that we are likely to *realize* that all along we had been making certain assumptions as to what the individual before us ought to be" (Goffman, 1963, 2). Several years later, in the revised edition of *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966), Georges Canguilhem would argue that "the abnormal, as ab-normal, comes after the definition of the normal, it is its logical negation. However, it is the historical anteriority of the future abnormal which gives rise to a normative intention. The normal is the effect obtained by the execution of the normative project, it is the norm exhibited in the fact. In the relationship of the fact there is then a relationship of exclusion between the normal and the abnormal. But this negation is subordinated to the operation of negation, to the correction summoned up by the ‘ abnormality. Consequently it is not paradoxical to say that the abnormal, while logically second, is existentially first" (1989, 243). For Goffman the phenomenon of "the historical anteriority of the future abnormal which gives

rise to a normative intention," is the imputation "in potential retrospect" of a normality, projected in retrospect, that only potentially or virtually precedes the abnormal and furnishes the criteria by which it can be "disqualified" as a failure or a shortcoming (1963, 2). It is for this reason that Goffman reminds us that the assigning of stigma requires "a language of relationships, not attributes" (1963, 12).

Both Althusser's discussion of subjection in *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences,* as well as "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," and Goffman's "Stigma" are marked by an avoidance of the physical, coercive and violent aspects of imputation/interpellation, on the one hand, and stigmatization, on the other, a fact all the more striking given the specific conjunctures in which texts took shape. To the extent that Goffman examined the stigma attached to race in the US, and the forms of disqualification attached to non-whites, especially African-Americans, his discussions concerned the immanence of norms in modes of communication and quotidian rituals. At the time of the book's composition, the Civil Rights movement had launched a campaign of sit-ins throughout the South to de-segregate public spaces, such as restaurants, movie theaters, parks and libraries. Shortly afterward, the Freedom Rides, aimed to desegregate interstate transport, while the movement also initiated voter registration drives throughout the American South. There was nothing subtle about these violations not only of laws (most of which had been nullified through court decisions), but of norms, that is, the rules not only made visible, but perhaps constituted in retrospect by being violated not only by the organized movement, but by the actions of innumerable individuals no longer willing to show the deference and servility to whites only a few years earlier deemed normal. While the extraordinary violence mobilized to preserve the norms that regulated the hierarchical relations between white and black was in part carried out by the state, much of it, including the most deadly, consisted of actions by white individuals and groups, both formal and informal. The beatings, and often murder, of those who violated the norms of white supremacy, as well as the discursive assaults that preceded and accompanied them, cannot be completely separated from the verbal and physical expressions of discomfort and disapproval on which Goffman tends to focus: indeed, they can be understood as points on a continuum. This allows us to acknowledge, beyond the effort of individuals to "manage" the stigma assigned to them, the existence of both collective resistance to stigmatization and an equally collective reactive attempt to re-stigmatize, or at least to prevent the de-stigmatization of key populations. But we can also see, beyond the limits of Goffman's analysis, the violence, subtle or spectacular, that accompanies stigma like a shadow. Foucault's reminder of the violence of the force of law applies to the less spectacular, often irregular and decentered, violence of norms, of which stigmatization is perhaps the most salient synecdoche: "It is a matter of defining and discovering underneath the forms of justice as it is instituted… the forgotten past of real struggles, of clear victories, of defeats that have been concealed, but that have left their indelible imprint. It is a matter of discovering the dried blood contained in legal code and not underneath the evanescence of history the absolute character of law" (Foucault, 2003, 56, trans. mod.). It is time to confront this violence.

The Greek word "*stigma*" (*στίγμα*) is derived from the verb *stizo* (*στιζω*), meaning to rick or puncture with a sharp pointed instrument. The verb may also mean to tattoo, as well as to cut or burn a mark on human skin or animal hide, that is, to brand. Stigma is the mark or brand produced by this action and a *στίγματίας* was the one who bore the mark or brand. In both Greece and Rome, the imposition of stigmata was primarily reserved for punitive purposes: not slaves in general but runaway slaves, criminals guilty of certain serious offensives, as well as soldiers who deserted. In some cases, the "stripes" left by a severe whipping or scourging (100 lashes was a common penalty, according to Petronius) served as stigmata, visible markers not simply of the bad character of the offender, but of the pain and indignity of the process of stigmatization. Perhaps even more importantly, the stigmata, unlike the wounds on the body of Jesus and later Paul's stripes and scars, were burned into the slave's forehead, or in some cases his entire face, and

typically consisted of letters (F for *fugitivus* or Φ for *φυγάς*) or certain phrases. The runaway slaves in the Roman empire who bore them were called the *inscripti, literati*, or *notati* (those who are written upon, those marked with letters, those upon whom marks are made). Gaius on several occasions in the *Institutes* uses the formula "*servi . . . quibusve stigmata inscripta sunt* or "slaves who have been branded with the stigma or mark of disgrace" (Gaius, I.13). In Latin, which lacks an equivalent of the Greek verb *στιγματίζω*, to stigmatize or to brand, perhaps the most common verb used to denote the act of burning, cutting or imprinting the stigmata is *inscribo,* meaning "to write upon" or "to furnish with an inscription or title." But the verb *inscribo* has another meaning: to ascribe or attribute to, that is, to impute. Precisely in the case of stigma, the act of imputation is neither mental or intellectual, nor merely verbal or discursive. The stigma appears on the slave's forehead literally, that is, in letters, *litterae*, engraved or seared, again literally, into the flesh by the *dominus* (or his agent), the owner or master whose power and proprietorship are displayed in the stigma as much as the criminality of the runaway slave who bears the scar for the rest of his life.

Roman legal compilations are surprisingly vague when it comes to the actual forms of stigmatization. There is little evidence concerning how the mark or stigma was most frequently made (whether through burning, scarification or some sort of tattoo) and what the exact nature of the typical stigma was: a pictorial image, a letter or a sentence. Neither is there any mention in legal sources of the exact location of the stigma on the body (Jones, 1987; Kamen, 2010). Two literary sources, however, Martial's *Epigrams* and Petronius's *Satyricon*, both from the first century CE, refer to the forehead, although the passages in question are ambiguous enough that it is possible to construe them as suggesting that the entire face was covered in letters. For more than a century, scholars have turned to a passage in Petronius's Satyricon for a description of the stigma inscribed on the forehead or face of a runaway slave. The passage is all the more valuable in that the characters involved discuss how one must appear in order to pass, not simply as a slave, but as a runaway slave who has been caught, punished and stigmatized. Three friends, Encolpius, a teacher, Giton, a young slave who is Encolpius's lover, and Eumolpus, an aging poet, board a ship to escape the consequences of their many misdeeds in Rome. They soon discover that the ship's master and owner is one of those they have wronged and they overhear him swearing to exact revenge on them. Encolpius and Giton decide to disguise themselves not simply as Eumolpus's slaves (Giton is already a slave, but is indistinguishable from those who are free, in his dress, manner and activities) but as slaves who were caught and stigmatized after running away. Eumolpius says to the other two:

"My servant is a barber as you have already seen. He will shave both of you here and now and not simply your heads but also your eyebrows; then I will carefully trace [*notans*] an inscription on your foreheads that will make it appear as if you have been branded with letters imprinted through humiliating torture as punishment for running away; these letters will disguise your face and allay the suspicions of anyone who sees you" (Petronius, 1913, 209-211, trans. mod.). Encolpius continues: "we quickly and stealthily went to the side of the ship, and delivered our heads to the barber so that he might shave our hair and eyebrows. Then Eumolpius entirely covered our foreheads with large letters and with a generous hand spread the letters normally used to mark a fugitive slave [*notum fugitivorum epigramma*] over our faces" (1913, 211).

Petronius thus underscores the practices used to make the slave immediately visible and identifiable. Shaved heads were typical of rural slaves engaged in agriculture (who were also those most likely to run away), but less common among urban slaves. Shaved heads and eyebrows were meant to signify a runaway slave, but a more permanent and obvious mark, made by a process that Petronius calls "humiliating torture," was precisely the stigma branded (the Greeks also called the process "cauterization") or carved into the forehead, and perhaps the face as well. It is clear that the stigma consisted of letters (perhaps, as noted earlier, the Greek and Latin initials for fugitive) but possibly words as well. What is this *epigramma* or "epigram" of the

fugitive slave, as Petronius calls it? *Epigramma* is certainly used ironically: the word he uses to describe a phrase "inscribed" in the flesh of a slave's forehead, most commonly refers to the inscription at the base of a statue (as well as the poetic form associated with Martial, a generation after Petronius). The ordinary or universally known stigma of the runaway slave in Greece is today understood to be that cited by the orator Aeschines: κατεχε με, φευγω or "detain me, I am a fugitive" (Aeschines, II.83). Slightly more than two centuries after Petronius, the stigmatization of slaves came to be regarded as unacceptable. In its place, runaway slaves were outfitted with a heavy iron chain around the neck, one of which, recovered in Rome in the early seventeenth century, bore the more elaborate inscription:

TENE ME, QUIA FUGI, ET REVOCA
ME DOMINO MEO BONIFACIO LINARIO.

"Detain me, because I am a fugitive, and return me to my owner (or master) Bonifacio Linario" (Creuzer, 1840).

It is clear from these historical sources that stigmatization was not simply, as Goffman argues, a sign attached or added to the body of the slave to indicate his or her inferior status, as sumptuary laws were intended to do in the late empire, so that the fundamental distinction in Roman law, the distinction between slave and free man, would be immediately visible to the observer. Nor was the stigma simply a warning to potential buyers or even those who observe the slave travelling alone that he had once run away and could do so again. We might have expected the "epigram of the fugitive slave," as Petronius called it, the sequence of words, known to everyone because it was impossible to walk through a crowded Roman thoroughfare without encountering some of the *inscripti* or *literati* whose foreheads bear the mark of the fugitive, so well known, in fact, that Petronius feels no need to repeat them to the reader, to be written in the third person (e.g., "detain him, because he is a fugitive . . ."). Instead, inscription in this case is a form of imputation or interpellation, a violent imposition of a phrase written in the first person and attributed to the former fugitive. Further, the utterance is written in the imperative as if the slave is paradoxically commanding the person who reads the words of the stigma to seize or detain him, or as if, given that the slave is not a legal person, and does not possess the right to speak on his own behalf, the "I" who speaks is the master ventriloquizing the slave, not simply imposing his voice as a kind of prosthesis that the slave is forced to wear, but incorporating it in the most literal sense of the term, altering the body of the slave to transform it into an instrument of the master's voice. But the terms of the epigram are universal, meaning they belong to nobody in particular. In fact, they are terms that belong to the lexicon of the law: both κατεχω and *teneo* can signify arrest or legal detention, while φευγω or *fugio* often designate an escape from custody or an illegal flight or desertion. In this sense, if these are the master's words, the individuals in question are not his property but merely his possessions; in truth, it is the law that safeguards property (including slaves) speaking through the master who in turn speaks through the slave in a kind of double ventriloquism.

This double ventriloquism, however, is not peculiar to Roman law, a sign of its well-known inconsistencies and discrepancies, as well as the silences, the most eloquent of which concern any possible limit on the master's violence against the slave (until the reign of Hadrian in the second century CE). Nor is it limited to the slave. In Petronius's narrative, the legal person, Encolpius, puts on the mask of the slave, a non-person who bears the inscription that imputes a paradoxical personhood to him: the slave commands anyone who finds him to detain him so that he can be returned to slavery. Encolpius thus pretends to be a slave who in turn is pretending to be a person, not, however, to declare himself free, but in order the better to secure his own subjection. We might recall Althusser's account of the paradox of interpellation "the individual *is interpellated as a* (*free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject*, *i.e. in order that he shall* (*freely) accept his subjection*" (Althusser, 1971b, 182).

This same ventriloquism appears in Kant's discussion of imputation cited earlier. Kant defines the person as both a "subject . . . capable

of having his actions imputed to him" and as "the agent" who "is regarded as the author" of specific actions and their effects (Kant, 1991, 50). It is important to note that beyond the actions that are imputed to him, the authorship of these actions (which involves a self-determining will) must be attributed to him as well. Kant necessarily uses the passive voice in speaking of the act of imputation: it allows him to assert that actions and words "are imputed" to someone without having to specify by whom or perhaps by what (the law, the state, etc.). The anonymity that characterizes the act of imputation works to underscore both its universality and its necessity: without it, legal and moral systems would be impossible. For Kant, imputation is a kind of recognition of the element of transcendence that, precisely because it is transcendent, lies beyond perception or cognition and must be imputed, as if it were a necessary rational fiction. But imputation, particularly what Kant calls legal imputation, has a material existence, consisting not only of the apparatus in which it exists and operates, but also of the means of violence that accompany the imputation of responsibility and guilt, the punishment that must be meted out to the "wrong doer."

From this follows another modality of the material existence of imputation. In the last instance, its object is the body considered, not as the dwelling place of the soul, but as a sensory nervous system capable of reacting to specific stimuli with a sensation of discomfort or pain that will in turn determine the individual in question to avoid repeating his misdeeds. It is true that at this point Kant appears to supply the previously missing agent or author of the act of imputation: If legal imputation is "the judgement by which anyone is declared to be the author or free cause of an action which is then regarded as his moral fact or deed, and is subjected to law," Kant adds that the "person –individual or collective– who is invested with the right to impute actions judicially, is called a judge or a court (*judex s. forum*)" (Kant, 1991, 53). But here again a ventriloquism is at work: the judge or court, *judex sive forum*, the individual or collective person "is invested" (passive voice) with the right to impute actions and is thus an individual or collective person to whom the capacity to impute is imputed. Even the subject who by virtue of consciousness, according to Kant, can impute authorship to himself must first have the power to impute imputed to him. We have thus arrived at a ventriloquism without a ventriloquist. This is the meaning of Althusser's notion of the subject of imputation as simultaneously the imputed subject and the subject with the capacity to impute, if only to itself.

For Kant, there exist two distinct and even opposing forms of imputation. Both begin with a judgment that determines whether a given individual can be "regarded as the author (*causa libera*) of an action, which is then called a deed (*factum*), and to which laws are applicable" (1991, 53). The first form of imputation (*imputatio dijudicatoria*) is a critical act in Kant's sense, an act of discrimination that, in separating those to whom authorship of an act may be imputed from those to whom it may not, founds the possibility of morality and moral judgment, that is, of deciding the good and the bad. Its field of operation, however, is restricted to the realm of criticism, that is, Kant tells us, it is moral, not legal, judgment and therefore judgment without the power to impose physical consequences for the actions it deems bad beyond the declaration of its decision.

But there is another form of imputation to which Kant gives the Latin title "*imputatio judiciaria s. valida*." This is a form of imputation that, having determined an individual to be a "subject . . . capable of having his actions imputed to him," and then in imputing authorship of a given deed to an individual, "brings with it the legal consequences of this deed" (Kant, 1991, 53). To clarify, Kant has proposed the synonym or alternative "*imputatio valida*," imputation endowed with force or power, both the force to impose on the individual the authorship attributed to him and the force to bring to the judgment not of good and evil, but of innocence and guilt, punishment. And as Foucault remarked in *Discipline and Punish*, no matter what the nature of the punishment, "it is always the body that is at issue," (Foucault, 1977, 25). The act of imputation that is coextensive with the determination of guilt (*Schuldigkeit*) and blame (*Verschuldung*),

thus includes in its operation as its ultimate phase the pain inflicted on the body of the condemned individual, including the pain of deprivation and confinement. The judgment is fully realized in the corporeal consequences it imposes on the individual found to be free, responsible and guilty for the deed whose authorship has been imputed to him.

It is useful to recall in this connection that the words of the epigram imputed to the slave, "Detain me, I am a fugitive," are not spoken and thus are not a matter of a projected voice, even in a metaphorical sense. Neither are they written in the sense of the verb *scribo*, written like a letter, or as in the phrase *scriptum est*, "it is written," that is, written down or transcribed. The verbs used in conjunction with the making of a stigma signify writing by means of cutting, engraving or burning into flesh. Stigmatization in this sense represents a kind of inverted torture, the point of which is not to extract a statement from the slave, but to carve into or brand him with a statement by means of the most painful techniques possible. A slave as non-person could not serve as a witness (*testis*) or give testimony in a court of law, but information extracted from a slave could be introduced as evidence on the condition that the information was obtained through torture, perhaps to show that the slave was not the "free cause" of his speech, which, on the contrary, was forced from him by the infliction of pain.

Thus, the universal stigma exhibited by the runaway slave cannot be reduced to an act of signification, partly because it is never clear to whom the implied pronoun of the first person refers and partly because the words of the epigram would not have the same meaning if they were written on a piece of paper, even if the piece of paper were pinned to the slave's clothes or hung around his neck. The scars of the cutting instrument or the red-hot iron give eloquent testimony to the pain the captured fugitive endured both as punishment and as the price this particular non-person had to pay to enjoy the privilege of donning the persona that allows one to speak to others in the imperative, or to speak at all.

Bourdieu hailed Goffman as an explorer of *l'infiniment petit* of social life. If we apply Althusser to Goffman's explorations, we see how the multiple practices and the innumerable, minute acts of everyday life described by Goffman become linked in chains to produce large-scale and diverse stigmatizations. To apply Goffman to Althusser is to make visible the inequalities and dissimilarities produced by interpellation, rather than the universal subject of which every individual is an expression. By marking the inscription that modifies the body of those to whom responsibility is imputed, both Goffman and Althusser participate in a modification of the modification, that is, the movement by which stigmatization is contested and resisted.

And yet, the concepts of stigma and stigmatization (as understood by Goffman), on the one hand, and imputation and interpellation (as discussed by Althusser), on the other, are founded on a forgetting of the violence and coercion of their origins. This forgetting, however, is not the delayed effect of the past, but is necessary to the present: it plays an essential role in rendering invisible the violence and destitution that remain consubstantial with stigmatization, imputation and interpellation in their practical existence today. It is an active forgetting that extends into the present by means of the de-materialization that renders invisible and unthinkable the forms of coercion and violence that are inseparable from stigmatization and interpellation and compels us to imagine that they possess a merely discursive or ideal existence. At the same time, these works, so obviously, perhaps too obviously, different in form, content and orientation, bear the marks, letters and phrases, visible to everyone but them, of a time of mass resistance to subjection and stigmatization. The have opened a space for theory and practice that only our vigilance can prevent from disappearing into oblivion.

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# The Interpellation of the Body: Althusser and Kafka

**Abstract:** *This essay stages an encounter between Althusser's essay on the ideological state apparatuses and Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" in order to pose the problem of the body. I argue that this encounter produces the concept of a body that exceeds the limits of the legal subject and its interpellation.*

**Keywords:** *Body, Interpellation, Ideology, Althusser, Louis, Kafka, Franz.*

**Resumen:** *Este ensayo presenta un encuentro respecto al problema del cuerpo entre el ensayo de Althusser sobre aparatos ideológicos del Estado y "En la colonia penal" de Franz Kafka. Argumento que este encuentro produce el concepto de un cuerpo que excede los límites del sujeto legal y su interpelación.*

**Palabras clave:** *Cuerpo, Interpelación, Ideología, Althusser, Louis, Kafka, Franz.*

Althusser once remarked that to read, or more precisely, to read *en philosophe*, as a philosopher or in a philosophical way, meant to discern "the lacunae in the fullness of [a text's] discourse, the blanks on the crowded page" (2009, 28).[1] To be sure, this reading *en philosophe* has nothing to do with "filling in" these lacunae and blank spaces, a reparative act that presupposes these absences are that of a pure negativity or lack and therefore symptoms of the text's defects. Nor would this act of reading be that of penetrating a supposedly mystified or illusory surface in order to reach the secluded depth of the text, where its truth or origin might finally be discovered. On the contrary, the protocol of reading that Althusser sought to develop meant taking a text as it is, even if what it is, as Pierre Macherey would argue in *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire*, is not immediately given (2006, 111). Yet we have to be very careful here, because in one and the same breath Macherey states that, in spite of or rather because of this "complexity," nothing remains hidden. In this sense, the readings produced by Althusser (as well as Macherey) are anything but "suspicious" or "paranoid": they trace the very movement of the text itself, in order to see what it says without saying that it says so. Althusser's own texts (and he would certainly admit it) are not exempt from saying something other than what its author authorized: it is only too easy to find divergences within his own thought and writings (which render any talk about "Althusserianism" or "Althusserian Marxism" meaningless). To take just one example, ideology as it is discussed in his fairly early essay "Marxism and Humanism" or in some of the other essays published in the volume *For Marx* (1965), is strikingly different, I would argue, from the account he gives in the Ideological State Apparatuses essay (hereafter ISAs) several years later, in 1970 (after the events of May 68). To put it very schematically, this difference is above all a difference in the theoretical problematic that Althusser found himself writing and thinking in: for all of the criticisms Althusser

directed against Marxist Humanism in the earlier essay, there is still something "humanist," or at any rate idealist (a synonym for humanism in Althusser's language) about the conception of ideology he advances there, insofar as ideology is still related, if not exactly to consciousness, then at least to imaginary relations. In the ISAs essay, however, Althusser seeks to produce a notion of ideology that possesses a material existence, one immanent in its apparatuses, as an individuating and interpellating force on and around the body. Yet, it is here that we encounter a problem, because, if I am correct in suggesting that interpellation takes place at the level of the body, then I must confront the fact that nowhere in the text of the ISAs essay does Althusser ever mention the body, or at least, the human body. Of course, as Althusser also argued, the absence of a word is not the same thing as the absence of a concept (2009, 101). And it is perhaps for no reason other than this that we may take Althusser's insistence on the material and materiality in the ISAs essay as indices of the present-absent concept of the body that shapes and haunts the text. The question, then, becomes how we might grasp or register those indelible traces which run throughout the text.

As Balibar has recently argued, many of the newer commentaries on Althusser focus on his writings on art (theater and painting in particular), not in order to read these writings "as *applications* of theory within a particular field (say aesthetics or culture), but rather that we view them as 'analyzers,' theoretical *dispostifs* or *machines* constructed by Althusser to resolve theoretical problems and identify the objects of theory" (2015, 2). While Balibar calls our attention to the fact that the deployment of artworks on the theoretical field is not unique to Althusser (he cites the examples of Lyotard on Duchamp, Deleuze on Proust and Kafka, and Derrida on Artaud), he argues that what is striking about Althusser's recourse to artworks is that "that they are in fact essentially descriptions of singular *experiences* resulting from an 'encounter' with a work or group of works, an 'event' in other words, but from which general consequences can be drawn for a much larger field" (2015, 3). In light of this, it may well be instructive to stage an encounter between Althusser's ISAs essay and a text by another author in which the body figures as central and luridly hypervisible: Kafka's "In the Penal Colony." If this pairing seems arbitrary (indeed, the names of these two authors are rarely seen together),[2] it is worth recalling that another important component of "In the Penal Colony" (and that which may serve as a connective tissue between these two texts) is a very particular apparatus, the *Apparat*. And even if this essay will not take the form of a comparison it is worth pointing out that in a manner that resembles Althusser's discussions of ideology, Kafka does not present readers with a single conception of law, one that could be discerned within, if not abstracted from, each of his texts and neatly organized into a coherent totality: rather, a reader finds in Kafka's writings various conceptions of law, conceptions that diverge from or break off of one another so completely that there is no question of collecting these fragments and forming a whole, as if, to borrow a figure from Deleuze and Guattari, these fragments were so many "pieces of a puzzle belonging not to any one puzzle but to many" (1983, 43). Indeed, any coming-together of these errant or perhaps lawless splinters of law could arguably only take the form of a collision. To go further, we could say that the law in Kafka is immanent in each of Kafka's texts and one of the most striking examples of this would certainly be that of "In the Penal Colony," in which the law exists nowhere but in the *Apparat* as it is inscribed on the condemned body that it simultaneously kills. The point here is not to argue that Kafka grasped that which escaped Althusser or to apply Kafka to Althusser (and even less so to apply Althusser to Kafka): rather, I argue that placing these texts side by side, witnessing their apparatuses function and malfunction, may allow us to *faire bouger les choses*, to stir or shake up these texts in order to think them anew. For, if to read Althusser alongside Kafka compels us to grasp the centrality of the body to ideology and the ideological state apparatuses, then to read Kafka alongside Althusser will allow us to grasp a tension internal to Kafka's notion of the body, or rather between the two bodies in Kafka's story, the *Leib* (with all of its Christian resonances), and the *Körper* (the material body

devoid of an interiority). Indeed, in the space opened up by the encounter or collision of these texts, it becomes possible to think the concept of a body capable of resisting or even shattering its apparatuses, a body capable of its own liberation.

With this aim in mind, let us begin tracing the (present-absent) theory of the body in Althusser's ISAs essay. If the human body is absent from the essay, we can at the very least begin with the material, or, indeed, the physical –in fact, a particular physicality, one which will also allow us to elude any mind-body dualism from the outset. For, however much Althusser may suggest that interpellation has everything to do with recognition, that is, *recognition* as an act of consciousness or, in the case of *interpellation policière*, of a guilty conscience[3] (a fact that is made all the more difficult to resist by Ben Brewster's decision to add "hail" into his English translation), this interpretation could only be sustained by gliding over if not suppressing the text's *décalages*. The scene in which Althusser describes interpellation is all the more suggestive and alluring for its brevity. According to the well-known schema, individuals become subjects "by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' (Althusser, 2014, 264). Immediately after staging this "theoretical theater," Althusser cuts to another angle, so to speak, this time focusing not on the call but on the interpellated subject:

> Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual [*l'individu interpellé*] will turn round. By this mere 180-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail [*l'interpellation*] was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed [*interpellé*]' (and not someone else)." (2014, 264)

If it is tempting (and far too easy) to take refuge in the language of recognition in this passage (perhaps because of its very "obviousness"), it is nevertheless important that the reference to the physical and corporeal not be overlooked: "By this mere 180-degree physical conversion [*simple conversion physique*] he becomes a *subject*." The implications of such a remark, one far too easy to neglect, are crucial for grasping the centrality of the body in Althusser's essay: the recognition (if we must retain this word and its repercussions) of oneself as a subject takes place within the body, that is, within the "physical conversion" of the body as it turns toward the one (the police officer? a colleague?) who has interpellated him or her. Indeed, the expression itself of the "physical conversion" captures Althusser's refusal to separate the mind from the body here, as if conversion was not simply a spiritual transformation but was possible only insofar as it occurred alongside or within the movements of the body (a notion which differs from that of Pascal's vulgar, if scandalous, materialism in which the movement of the body, in particular, kneeling, unilaterally produces belief in the mind). The importance of the corporeal here may be easier (and more difficult) to grasp if we take seriously the metaphor of the *interpellation policière*, not because it remains "descriptive" (the limits of which Althusser warns us about in the first part of essay),[4] but because the police officer and police force in general are not properly speaking a component of the Ideological State Apparatuses but of the Repressive State Apparatus. At the very least, the decisions to refer to the police at this moment suggests the very real –and very physical– violence at work in interpellation.[5] To be sure, Althusser refuses a clear distinction between ideology and repression or ideology and violence. Furthermore, for Althusser to assign the Repressive State Apparatus the role of ideological interpellation at this central moment in the text suggests that ideology and repression do not have an inverse relationship but are coextensive with one other. In any case, Althusser's metaphor here compels or obliges us to ask what the relationship between these two components, or, by way of anticipation, *bodies* of state apparatuses, is. Indeed, we are forced to ask what the body itself might be in the ISAs essay.

To begin to offer a response to this question (or at least to specify the question itself) we

might begin by returning to the notion that ideology has a material existence. One of the results of such an argument, and one, I argue, that has not been properly grasped (because it is only symptomatically given in the text), is that any discussion about Althusser's notion of ideology that does not constantly refer back to the ideological state apparatuses in which ideology is always immanent, can never fully account for the break Althusser produces in the notion of ideology. Indeed, this would be the very basis that allows Althusser to criticize what he calls the "ideology of ideology," that is, to criticize the belief that ideology is composed of nonmaterial ideas and must be "interpreted" by a theoretical vanguard to be dispelled. Yet, from the beginning of the section Althusser's writing is tentative and uncertain. He states immediately that the "affirmative form" in which this thesis is given means that the thesis itself remains "unproven" (2014, 258). In a rather flippant or laconic tone, he asks that his readers, "in the name of, say, materialism," let themselves "be favorably disposed toward" the thesis, for "a long series of arguments would be necessary to prove it" (2014, 258). It is important to note this tone not simply for its rhetorical effects but because it marks a genuine uncertainty about the thesis itself. It is not difficult to see why: the thesis has little in common with ideology as it has traditionally functioned in Marxist theory or ideology critique:

> While discussing the Ideological State Apparatuses and their practices, I said that each of them was the realization of an ideology (the unity of these different regional ideologies –religious, ethical, legal, political aesthetic, etc.– being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology). I now return to this thesis: an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice or practices. This existence is material. (2014, 259)

In Warren Montag's reading of this passage, he notes the discrepancy, one Althusser himself appears to overlook, between the latter's use of "realization" and the phrase "always exists in" (Montag, 2013, 151). Montag does not seek to resolve this tension, rather, he allows the it to perform its work in Althusser's text. By placing these two statements into one statement, it becomes possible to see Althusser's Spinozism, that is, his commitment to immanence in opposition to transcendence and teleology. Thus, for Althusser, Montag argues,

> ideology always exists in the apparatus that is its realization…ideology is immanent in its apparatuses and their practices; it has no existence apart from these apparatuses and is entirely coincident with them. Ideas have thus disappeared into their material manifestations, becoming like causes that "exist" only in their effects (or, to add a Freudian reference that is entirely in keeping with both Spinoza and Althusser, ideas in this sense are causes, that are ever only constituted *nachträglich*, retroactively, as the effect of their material effects. (2013, 151-152)

If we take Althusser's thesis, however provisional, seriously, then we must admit that ideology neither has an ideal or spiritual existence nor does it even exist in the minds of individual subjects. Indeed, whatever limitations the ISAs essay may have, it is impossible to deduce from it a notion of ideology as "false consciousness" or something which veils a more substantial reality considered as true. However, if we cannot yet say that the body is at stake in Althusser's discussion, this would be because the body, or at the human body, *le corps humain*, ever appears in the ISAs essay. Indeed, nowhere in the essay does ideology ever refer to the body. Yet, Althusser does use the term for body (*le corps*) in the essay; but the vast majority of these uses refer to nothing other than the repressive and ideological state apparatuses themselves.

After listing the organizations and institutions that compose the various ideological state apparatuses, Althusser writes "As a first moment, it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses. Even presupposing that it exists, the unity that constitutes this plurality of ISAs as a body [*en corps*] is not immediately visible" (2014, 243). While the use of "body" here may strike a reader as nothing more than convenient shorthand for speaking

about a composite organization, the persistence of the term "body" in this way throughout the text suggests that Althusser may be gesturing at something else. The next use of the term "body" occurs after Althusser argues that the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus cannot ultimately be separated, even if one functions "massively and predominantly" by repression and the other by Ideology (2014, 245). It is this last attribute that "leads us toward an understanding of what constitutes the unity of the apparently disparate body [*du corps apparemment disparate*] of the ISAs" (2014, 245). The ISAs themselves are thus composed into a singular body. This unity does not consist in a physical or spatial unity, but a unity of function. Finally, in the next passage where we find the term body, Althusser uses "body" and "bodies" four times in the space of one sentence. This is the last time the word appears in relation to the ideological state apparatuses:

> If the thesis I have proposed is well founded, it leads me back to the classical Marxist theory of the state, while making it more precise in one point. I argue that it is necessary to distinguish between state power (and its possession by…) on the one hand, and the state apparatus on the other. But I add that the state apparatus contains two bodies: the body of institutions which represent the Repressive State Apparatus on the one hand, and the body of institutions which represent the body of Ideological State Apparatuses on the other. (2014, 246)

A couple of points should be clear at this point. There is certainly a notion of the body in Althusser's ISAs essay, but it is not a body reducible to the human body. Secondly, the body of the ideological state apparatuses, which, as we have already seen, is in some sense already a grouping or combination of separate institutions, is united with another body, that of the Repressive State Apparatus. For Althusser, the unity of these two bodies is nothing other than the entirety of state apparatus itself. It is at this point that we may begin to trace the absent-present concept of the body in the ISAs essay: if, as Montag has suggested, the ISAs essay is a very "Spinozist essay," and even more so in the moments that Althusser refuses to name Spinoza, then it is very likely that Althusser may be drawing on Spinoza's notion of the body here, a notion of the body that is always already a composite. Indeed, for Spinoza, the human body would necessarily be included in this world of bodies and composites of bodies. Although we do not have the space to explore in detail Spinoza's notion of the body, it may be helpful to refer to Part II of the *Ethics* (interestingly entitled "Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind"), in which Spinoza writes:

> When a number of bodies of the same or different magnitude form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed so as to preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together form one body or individual thing, which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies. (2002, 253)

If this is the conception of the body that might be at work in Althusser's essay, then we can think of ideological state apparatuses as a composite of bodies that exerts its pressure or force on the human body (itself a composite). There is nothing immaterial about this force: this apparatus interpellates or apprehends the human body, drags it out of and individuates it from the bodies of the masses (thereby decreasing the power of the masses), and imputes[6] it with an identity so that it is recognizable (and can thus be held accountable) as the body proper to particular subject (whether citizen, immigrant, man, woman, white, person of color, etc.) and as the subject or author of certain actions or crimes. Althusser's essay, however, merely opens up these problems and questions: by focusing his essay on ideology, subjection, and reproduction, he does not even begin to address the problem of the body. The consequences of this are enormous: aside from the fact that it has led readers to conclude that interpellation is above all a theory of ideological recognition or, rather, misrecognition, it has also led many to see in the ISAs essay

an entirely functionalist conception of capitalist society bereft of any hope of revolt or revolution. Yet such a functionalist vision of capitalist society finds its double in the text devoid of discrepancies (and therefore openings). Althusser's work, as we have already seen, is anything but an enclosed system. Indeed, our task is to restore to the text the very *décalages* that readers wishing to find in Althusser a functionalist are unable to see. As I have already indicated, however, this is not a matter of filling in the blank spaces or of completing the essay. In fact, in order to carry out our task, we must turn to other texts, in particular, one in which the body is impossible to overlook. Indeed, read alongside the ISAs essay, Kafka's "In the Penal Colony," cannot but force the former's fissures to irrupt.

For, if the human body is (paradoxically) absent or missing from the reaches the ideological and repressive state apparatuses in the ISAs essay, it is completely within the grip of the *Apparat* of Kafka's penal colony. To be sure, this *Apparat* is not identical nor is it reducible to what Althusser calls the *appareils idéologique d'Etat*. And yet, with the *Apparat*, a reader is presented with the mechanism by which law is immanent in its inscription by the apparatus on the body of the condemned subject. The very design of the Kafka's apparatus is suggestive in this regard. The machine consists of three main parts, each having "acquired a kind of popular nickname [*volkstümliche Bezeichnungen*]" (1971a, 142). Of the three parts, the most suggestive is that which is called the "Harrow" [*die Egge*]. As the officer explains, the "Harrow" is "a good name for it. The needles are set in like the teeth of a harrow and the whole thing works something like a harrow, although its action is limited to one place and contrived with much more artistic skill" (1971a, 142). Kafka's metaphor of the harrow here suggests that the body, above all, the condemned body, is like a piece of land in need of cultivation: the harrow of the apparatus "prepares" the body, that is, it tears into the flesh of the body, breaking it up, as if the flesh were unfertile or corrupted soil, in order that the sentence or judgment (*Urteil*) might be planted within the flesh.[7] But the metaphor ends here: there is no yield or harvest, at least not for the condemned individual, for this judgment is at once a form of execution: the subject of the law is a subject of death in the penal colony.

In this sense, the law is not so much a formal code that an individual freely chooses to obey (or not) but exists or is actualized in those moments of its inscription on the body: the law is nothing other than this very torture. This explains why, once the researcher raises concerns over the fact that the condemned individuals never learn of their judgments, the officer replies "There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body" ("Es wäre nutzlos, es ihm zu verkünden. Er erfährt es ja auf seinem Leib.") (1971a, 145). According to the logic of the officer, to know one's punishment has little to do with an act of recognition; on the contrary this learning takes place on the body, it is inscribed into the very texture of the body. The term translated as learn (*erfährt*) could also be translated as feel, bear, experience, or suffer: the body of the condemned bears the knowledge of the sentence or judgment on it, it suffers this sentence. Indeed, learning here is coextensive with bodily suffering and pain, if not, ultimately, death.

But a more serious question arises at this point, one which concerns the crime and the punishment. For, if the sentence or judgment is unknown to the condemned individual (or knowable only through their "wounds") the very fact of having transgressed any law is also unknowable: not only does the condemned man not know his sentence, he does not even know that he has been sentenced (1971a, 145). The "evidence" of a crime, apparently, is the word of the condemned man's captain. Whether or not he is really guilty is beside the point, for the "guiding principle" of the officer "is this: Guilt is never to be doubted" (1971a, 145). Indeed, this guilt is inscribed within the body as a simultaneous punishment for those acts that are likewise imputed to the subject, those acts of which there can be no doubt that the condemned individual committed, and for which he or she must be punished.

And even if the subject does not know the charge or that they have been changed, they will nevertheless come to bear some "understanding" of, if not "enlightenment" through, the law, that is, through the apparatus. Or at least, this is

what, as Gailus, has argued, the officer "believes or wants to believe" (2001, 299). Again, what matters here, at least from the perspective of the officer, is the body:

> "…But how quiet he grows at just about the sixth hour! Enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted (*Verstand geht dem Blödesten auf*). It begins around the eyes. From there it radiates. A moment that might tempt one to get under the Harrow oneself (*Ein Anblick, der einen verführen könnte, sich mit unter die Egge zu legen*). Nothing more happens than that the man begins to understand (*entziffern*) the inscription (*Schrift*), he purses his mouth as if he were listening. You have seen how difficult it is to decipher (*entziffern*) the script (*Schrift*) with one's eyes; but our man deciphers (*entziffert*) it with his wounds. To be sure, that is a hard task; he needs six hours to accomplish it. By that time the Harrow has pierced him quite through and casts him into the pit, where he pitches down upon the blood and water and the cotton wool. Then the judgment (*Gericht*) has been fulfilled (*zu Ende*), and we, the soldier and I bury him." (1971a, 150)

A number of things make this passage interesting. Above all, the officer's remarks suggest that the previous statement that the condemned man will learn/suffer the sentence with the body was more than an off the cuff remark provoked by the perceived judgment of the researcher. Since the very beginning of the story, the officer has expressed a strange attachment to the apparatus as well as an admiration for the commandant who initially designed it. Indeed, the very first line of the story is delivered not by the narrator but by the officer: "It's a remarkable (*eigentümlicher*: peculiar, singular, strange) piece of apparatus" (1971a, 140). This attachment to if not desire for the apparatus comes to the fore in this moment, when the officer describes in startling detail the effects of the apparatus registered in the expression of the face of its victim. In particular, the officer, in a strange moment that foreshadows the end of the story, professes that this seductive exhibition could entice one to experience it oneself. The "*Verstand*" that is produced within the body by the torture of the apparatus draws the viewer in, or at any rate, the officer. Yet, the viewer does not experience, or, rather, "decipher" it. Indeed, what was conceived of earlier in the text as learning and suffering (*erfährt*) has, at this point, been translated into deciphering (*entziffert*). Yet, the deciphering at work in the text is not one that would belong to a surface-depth model, as if some illegible or latent secret were brought to light. What is deciphered is the legible illegibility of the violence of the judgment: the body deciphers the judgment, the inscription, its wounds. The judgment-inscription is nothing other than the wounds on the body, decipherable by no one but the wounded body itself: "You have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one's eyes; but our man deciphers it with his wounds." The judgment is illegible but for the body, that is, judgment is immanent in its inscription or wounding of the body. The final line of the translation brings out the ambiguity at the heart of the officer's speech: while in the German text, the beginning of the line reads, "Dann ist das Gericht zu Ende" (literally: Then the judgment/trial has ended/has come to an end), the English translation reads the line in a quasi-redemptive manner: "Then the judgment has been fulfilled." To fulfill is to make complete, to bring to an end. We could also argue that to fulfill a judgment is to set right the law and therefore redeem the law's trespasser. In the case of "In the Penal Colony," this redemption takes the form of an inscription on the body. To have "HONOR THY SUPERIORS!" inscribed into the body is thus to command the body to do so. But this fulfillment is also a killing and is therefore a frustrated or self-destructive fulfillment. The moment (a long tortuous period, to be sure) of *Verstand* is always already missed. Indeed, there is something in the uncanny nature of this "*eigentümlicher Apparat*" that prevents fulfillment and redemption, if not its very functioning. In fact, the only time "redemption" (*Erlösung*) occurs in the text is near the end of the story, after the officer is killed by the apparatus (and the condemned man is let go). "Redemption" is inscribed in the text only to tell us that it is has been missed. Once the officer is killed, the explorer, somewhat hesitatingly,

examines his body, spending the most time looking at his face:

> And here, almost against his will, he had to look at the face of the corpse (*Leiche*). It was as it had been in life; no sign was visible of the promised redemption; what the others had found in the machine the officer had not found; the lips were firmly pressed together, the eyes were open, with the same expression as in life, the look was calm and convinced, through the forehead went the point of the great iron spike. (1971a, 166)

Everything the officer has claimed throughout the story is called into question with his death. What the researcher witnesses is "no exquisite torture such as the officer desired," but "plain murder" (1971a, 165). Nothing works as the officer had promised, the needles do not even write; instead they violently puncture the officer's body. As Butler has argued, the apparatus of Kafka's penal colony highlights not only the "breakdown" or "malfunction," but more importantly, the "constitutive possibility of breakdown, or malfunction." (2015, 24) Indeed, what type of "counterdiscourse," she asks, might "emerge in the midst of breakdown, animating the remnants of a broken ideological machine for critical purposes" (Butler, 2015, 37)? It is here that our analysis of the body, not the body as such, but the particular notion of the body, or rather bodies, that Kafka uses in "In the Penal Colony" becomes central. For the malfunctioning of the apparatus has everything to do with the effects of its interpellation-inscription on the body, effects that set the body against itself and thus the very problematic of the body at work in Kafka's story.

In fact, the appropriate question here (and one not immediately visible in the English translation) would be: what is the tension internal to the notion of the body in "In the Penal Colony"? For in the story, Kafka uses two different terms that could be translated as "body": *Leib* and *Körper*. Indeed, there is a sort of play between these two: *Leib*, which appears four times in the text, becomes *Körpe*r, the more prevalent term, appearing ten time, which, in turn, turns back into *Leib* and so on. It is hardly surprising that, given the trajectory of the story, this play only ends with the appearance of the term *Leiche* ("corpse"). In a certain sense, *Leiche* serves to resolve the tension between the two terms. One of the most interesting moments of this tension occurs in consecutive lines spoken by the officer, in which he elaborates on the inscription process of the apparatus: "So there have to be lots and lots of flourishes around the actual script; the script itself runs around the body only in a narrow girdle; the rest of the body is reserved for the embellishments" [*Es müssen also viele, viele Zieraten die eigentliche Schrift umgeben; die wirkliche Schrift umzieht den Leib nur in einem schmalen Gürtel; der übrige Körper is für Verzierungen bestimmt*] (Kafka, 1971a, 149). What is above all striking here is the way in which the officer uses these two different words for the body as it undergoes two distinct, yet related, mechanisms or processes of punishment. To put this another way, the condemned body is split into two distinct bodies. On the one hand, the "script itself" [*wirkliche Schrift*] is written on the *Leib*. During this process, the apparatus separates or tears this body from "the rest of the body" or the "remaining" or "leftover" body [*übrige Körper*]. The *Körper* is, in turn, "reserved for embellishments." In an important sense, this splitting of the body into two calls into question the very immanence of the law in the apparatus, and thus in the body. The division or dualism of the body mirrors the division of the judgment itself between the actual script [*eigentliche Schrift*] and the embellishments or ornamentations [*Verzierungen*], and thus re-inscribes within the text a relation of essence and appearance, if not depth and surface. It is not that surprising, then, that the term used for the body of the actual script would be the *Leib*. The term radiates with theological implications and is found in phrases such as "*der Leib Christi*" (the body of Christ), a body invested with (spiritual) life, both human and divine. On the other hand, *Körper* is a more common as well as more material term for body: not only does it refer to the human body, but it can also refer to animal bodies, as well as, to turn once more to Spinoza, to bodies moving through space, colliding or concurring with one another. But while this body for Spinoza is not reducible to

a more primary essence or substance,[8] in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" this body, the *Körper*, is the body of "embellishments," a phenomenal body produced as a remainder from the *Leib*. It is necessary to think through the implications of this division, for, as we have just seen, this division also produces a division within the notion of the law and judgment, a division that is also an opening and thus, perhaps, "a way out."[9] For in inscribing itself into the body, the apparatus produces a remainder, a body in which only embellishments and ornamentations can be inscribed, and not the law or judgment itself. While this body may certainly be harmed, mutilated, or even killed by the apparatus, as surface it harbors no interiority that may "internalize" its interpellations. On the other hand, the *Leib*, the body invested with a spiritual existence and therefore an interior life is that which is imputed with a subjectivity and must therefore recognize itself as a subject, and very often a guilty subject. The *Körper's* interpellations are only ever skin deep, are only ever embellishments or ornamentations, and that is why this subversive remainder can only be overcome by its transformation into the *Leiche*: execution would be nothing other than the suppression of the very *décalages* engendered by the apparatus. But let us note that execution is not inevitable, for, while the officer is indeed killed by the apparatus, the condemned man is ultimately let go. Would it be too much to suggest that, in the very figure of the condemned man, we may glimpse the *Körper*, that is, the body that by all means is surrounded, confined, imputed, subjected, interpellated, but only ever on the surface, for this body is nothing but surface, and that this body may, precisely under particular conditions, get up from and leave the apparatus?

Indeed, would it be too much to suggest that we may also glimpse the conflict internal to the notion of the body in Kafka's text in the very absence of the human body in the ISAs essay, an absence that is nevertheless present in the *décalages* proper to the essay? Perhaps the very absence of the human body in the ISAs essay is what allows us to trace a line demarcation through this body, through its very tension, and is therefore a strategic absence on the part of Althusser. Of course, "strategic" should not be understood in relation to the gambit of a *maître-penseur*, but, rather, in relation to a theorist who "is well and truly *internal* to the conjuncture *in* which he must act if he is to be able to act *on* it" as Althusser once remarked of Lenin (Althusser, 2011, 105). In this sense, we can now grasp why Althusser used the body where he did and where he did not, while recognizing the fact that this came with certain costs. Yet, in this encounter with Kafka, we are now in a better position to see the "body" (that is, its literal as well as material inscriptions) as the site not only interpellation, but of contestation. As Butler has argued if "the instrument of torture in Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony' destroys the body on which it writes, then there must be a body prior to that inscription, stable and self-identical, subject to that sacrificial destruction" (Butler, 2007, 177). We may now see that it is not the human body as such that is prior to its inscription, but the *Leib,* even if, the *Leib* is always already interpellated (for stability and self-identity are unthinkable without interpellation). The stability of the *Leib* finds its double in the stability of the *Leiche*; yet, the third term here not only undoes this stability, but even draws a line of demarcation through the notion of interpellation itself: for the *Körper*, that which is reserved for embellishment and which is likewise produced in the moment of interpellation-inscription, is that which brings us back to Althusser's *corps*. In this sense, the *Körper* and *corps* are productions or performances whose elements do not exist prior to their combinations as such. If interpellation takes place at the level of bodies, and if by bodies we follow Althusser and include not only the human body but all bodies, then interpellation is nothing other than the encounter, and very often the violent encounter and confrontation of bodies; in this sense, interpellation is not the automatic recognition of an individual subject to a subjecting body, but the very confrontation between these bodies. In this case, the outcome of this encounter is not given in advance; nothing guarantees the subjection of the interpellated body.[10] The outcome remains the aleatory and always temporary result of the balance of forces immanent in this interpellation-confrontation. Perhaps this is why the curtain falls on Althusser's little theoretical theater the

moment after the interpellated subject turns and faces the police officer, that is, the Repressive State Apparatus. While the interpellated subject may be arrested, harmed, or even killed, there is no reason why this performance of bodies should not or could not lead to liberation.

In this essay, I have attempted to stage an encounter between Althusser's *appareils idéologique d'Etat* and Kafka's *Apparat* in order to think a concept of the body irreducible to body of the legal (human) subject and thus an improper body, that is, a body not belonging to any subject but a one constantly reconfigured with and against other bodies: the body as a "*connexio,*" which as Vittorio Morfino has argued, "must not be thought as given once and for all, like a Parmenidean structure: its taking hold, its historicity, is founded on a weave of encounters that have occurred or have been missed, that were short or durable, and that all take place precisely on the basis of the existence of different temporal rhythms" (2015, 16). This is not to say that this body is a free body: indeed, the body is always already interpellated, but only on the condition that interpellation is not one-off event in which, once interpellated, the subject works all by itself. For, to read Althusser alongside Kafka, it becomes possible to grasp the fact that interpellation itself depends on the very possibility of its reproduction, that interpellation is subject to the very fragility (because of the materiality) of the ideological state apparatuses in which interpellation is immanent (and we know from Kafka how fragile an apparatus may be that is not properly maintained or reinforced by an entire network of state apparatuses). This body remains undertheorized by both Althusser and Kafka (and there is no question of "synthesizing" these two authors in order to discover or produce it); yet, it is possible and necessary to intervene in the absences or interstices produced by the encounter of these two texts, for this encounter assures nothing more nor less than the opening of pathways toward the this concept of the body that might shatter apparatuses of every type: the body or rather bodies of the masses.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Judith Butler and Warren Montag for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. There are at least a couple of references to Althusser and the ISAs essay in discussion of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony." However, in two essays at least, there is too much of a willingness to accept that "interpellation" concerns the psyche, while Kafka's story concerns the body, a view that the present essay seeks to dispute. See Rutherford 2001 and Gailus 2001.
3. See Butler 1997.
4. Althusser writes that Marx's base and superstructure model remains metaphorical and descriptive and thus needs to be elaborated (2014, 239).
5. Fred Moten reminds us that "Althusser makes sure to let you know that interpellation is, in essence, more fearsome" than, to borrow one of Althusser's own examples, a mere knock on your door by a friend whom you immediately recognize (2017, 31). On the meaning of the term "*l'interpellation*," see Montag 2017.
6. Althusser refers to the "subject of imputation" as one of the consequences of "the whole paradox of psychology whose origin is manifestly political: the subject is the one who subjected to an order, who is subjected to a master, and who is at the same time conceived of in psychology as being the origin of its action. This means that it is a subject of imputation, that is, that it is the one that has to justify its own acts, its own behavior, to a third party" (2016, 73-74)
7. According to the OED, A harrow is an agricultural tool consisting "of a heavy frame of timber or iron, set with iron teeth or tines, which is dragged over ploughed lands to break clods, pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed."
8. See chapter 3, "The Problem of Attributes," in Macherey 2011.
9. A way out is not the same thing as freedom, as Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" suggests. See Kafka 1971b.
10. Both Banu Bargu and Stefano Pippa have recently written about the aleatory in the ISAs essay. See Bargu 2015 and chapter 3, "Contingency and Ideology" in Pippa 2019.

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# Althusser against functionalism. Towards the concept of 'overinterpellation'

**Abstract:** *This article re-reads Althusser's theory of ideology based on the original manuscript from which the famous 1970 on Ideology was culled. It aims to counter the standard critique of functionalism levelled against Althusser, and it does so by arguing that Althusser's theory of ideology is better grasped through the concept of 'overinterpellation'.*

**Keywords:** *Althusser, interpellation, ideology, class struggle, overinterpellation.*

It is well-known that Althusser's highly original and innovative theory of ideology has largely been criticized from many sides. One of Althusser's most important scholars, G. Elliott, comments on the notorious 1970 ideology essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in the following manner:

> The unremittingly mystifying effects of ideology meant that it constituted a 'social cement' ensuring cohesion and reproduction. Ideology was both an invariable component of any society and invariant in its structure […] The upshot of his adoption of the 'point of view of reproduction' was a reworked theory of ideology still dependent on Lacan and Spinoza, and whose functionalism undermined its likely Maoisant ambition to found the paramountcy of class struggle […] Althusser's theory peremptorily inverts humanism, equating subjectification/subjectivity with subjection and ascribing to the structural/systemic level the agency denied at that of the subject/individual. (Elliott, 2009, 211)

Although this passage is taken from a book written several decades ago (it was originally published in 1987), it usefully sums up the many criticisms that have dominated the reception of Althusser's attempt to move beyond a classical Marxist conception of ideology by resorting to other materials drawn from sources external to the classical Marxist canon. It is no exaggeration, I think, to say that these criticisms still largely dominate the current image of Althusser's theory of ideology, especially for those who, for one reason or another, have not followed with particular interest the publication of Althusser's posthumous writings over the past three decades, i.e., what I have elsewhere called the 'second reception' of Althusser's thought. Just to make an example, one can take the recent book by J. Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology*, whose chapter on Althusser, while reconstructing in a rich and precise manner the so called 'debate on functionalism' that followed the publication of Althusser's essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'[1] in 1970 (2014 152), makes practically no references to the recent debates initiated by the discovery of a large amount of texts and notes by Althusser – some of which (and not the least important ones) related precisely to his theory of ideology. In the wake of this debate (which involved such names as Poulantzas, Bourdieu, Hall, Eagleton, Hirst, Haug as well as others) (152), Rehmann argues against Althusser and

his ISA essay that 'ideology-theories' such as his 'run the risk of being transformed back into functionalist theories of legitimacy' (2014, 7).

It is no mystery, indeed, that it was the issue of functionalism that was regarded, from the very beginning, as the crux and the main flaw of Althusser's theory – to the extent that the critique of functionalism can be considered the 'mother of all criticisms' and the origin of all problems. Of course, to this criticism others have been associated: the more 'humanist' one pointing out that in Althusser's theory 'subjects' were totally deprived of any agency; or the Marxist (and Maoist) one criticizing the reduction of ideology to 'dominant' ideology, thus leaving no space for any dominated and oppositional ideology[2]. Closely related to this critique is also another one, which concerns the 'order of exposition' of the 1970 essay: Althusser only introduced the concept of class struggle at the end, with the effect of making it appear as a *deus ex machina* which would miraculously explain the transformation of the social whole. It is well-known, indeed, that the ISA essay –as the above-mentioned passage from Elliott remarks– takes as its point of departure the 'point of view of reproduction', and that 'class struggle' is only referred to in the 'Postscript' (which dates April 1970, while the main body of the essay is dated April-January 1969)[3], with the result of creating *après-coup* what for Elliott is an unstable, and ultimately contradictory, synthesis of functionalism and Maoism.

In his recent and detailed analyses of Althusser's theory of ideology, Warren Montag –today arguably the most important scholar on Althusser in the Anglophone world– voices the same concerns. It is undeniable that, as it is presented in the 1970 essay, Althusser's notion of interpellation, which turns the modern concept of subject upside down, moving it from a constitutive to a constituted position, 'move readers to ask how […] there could be something like resistance to domination. Had not Althusser with his apparatuses, practices and rituals turned human beings into machines?' (Montag, 2013, 159). However, Montag also notes that Althusser himself protested such a reading. In a 'Note on the ISAs', published in 1976[4] in response to his critics, Althusser writes:

> The most frequent criticism directed at my essay of 1969-70 on the ISAs was that of 'functionalism'. My theoretical sketch was seen as an attempt to claim form Marxism an interpretation which defined organs by their immediate functions alone, thus fixing society in the ideological institutions charged with exercising the function of subjection: at the limit a non-dialectical interpretation whose fundamental logic excluded any possibility of class struggle. […] [The critics] did not read with sufficient care the postscript to this essay which emphasized the 'abstract' character of my analysis, and explicitly placed my conception of the class struggle at the centre. (quoted in Montag, 2013, 159)

As any reader of the ISA essay knows, it is true that the 'Postscript' introduces the element of class struggle (2008, 57-58). It is also true that Althusser presented his essay as 'notes towards an investigation' (which is, indeed, the subtitle of the essay) and warned of the 'abstract' character of what was supposed to be only a 'theoretical sketch' which needed further research. But it is surely an overstatement to say, as does Althusser in this 'Note', that class struggle was placed 'at the centre', given the irrefutable fact that 'class struggle' is practically absent from the greater part of the essay, which instead insists on the necessity of taking up the 'point of view of reproduction'[5]. Thus, Montag is quite right in joining Elliott's criticism: 'to present class struggle', writes Montag, 'conceived as an antidote to functionalism, in a postscript and therefore outside the development of his argument is to render it superfluous, nothing more than an afterthought' (Montag, 2013, 159).

Whilst I agree with this criticism levelled against Althusser's essay, I think that his 1976 remarks were not totally unjustified. At the time, of course, readers could not know the content of the longer manuscript on reproduction from which, as we know today, the essay had been culled. However, the longer manuscript now available as *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*

(2014a)[6] contains a series of elements that, I contend, enable us to re-read Althusser's whole theory of ideology in a very different way; and it does so precisely because in it the notion of 'class struggle' plays a much more central role. To anticipate: I believe that turning to the now available *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* makes it possible to counter the standard criticism of functionalism, insofar as it allows us to revise Althusser's theory of ideology at least in two respects. First, (1) this text opens up the possibility to reconceptualize the relationship between reproduction and class struggle, which are effectively only juxtaposed in the ISA essay; (2) secondly, and consequently, it enables a re-reading of the concept of interpellation according to the point of view not of 'reproduction' *alone*, but of 'reproduction *and* class struggle'. As Montag has noted, it is quite striking today to read certain passages of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, because it becomes evident that Althusser carefully removed, during the preparation of his ISA essay for publication, all references 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' (Montag, 2013, 159). Why did Althusser decide to do so? One way[7] to explain such a move is to argue that Althusser wanted to insist on the increasing difficulty of breaking the endless circle of reproduction of capitalism. By showing that the ideological state apparatuses posit their subjective presuppositions in the form of complying subjects, his essay was highlighting the practical problems the communist movement was facing at the time. This reading is surely plausible, given that Althusser was not foreign to the practice of 'bending the stick', which he himself conceptualized as part and parcel of a Marxist practice of philosophy (Althusser, 2008, 171). But I think that there are intrinsic theoretical problems that can explain the differences between the ISA essay and the long manuscript *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*. The main reason –as I hope will be clearer later on– is that the concept of interpellation needed to be further developed and refined, if it was to be able to account for the antagonistic complexity of reproduction that emerges from the pages of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, and that Althusser had not done so when he decided to publish the essay.

Thus, my aim in this article is to show that Althusser's theory of ideology is not necessarily functionalist, even though a clear functionalist tendency can be detected in his way of approaching the problem, especially at early stages (section 1). I shall argue that Althusser, in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* offers a more (compared to the ISA essay) complex account of the ideological constitution of subjectivity, one that allows him to avoid the pitfalls of functionalism (section 2), thus opening up the possibility of thinking the process of subjectification in a less monolithic way than it is usually assumed by the most common readings of his theory of ideology. However, I will also argue (section 3) that in order to grasp what Althusser attempted to conceptualize it is necessary to introduce a new concept capable of accounting of such a more complex process, which I will call 'overinterpellation'.

## 1. The concept of 'interpellation' and the functionalist threat

The concept of 'interpellation' is first introduced by Althusser in some notes exchanged with his collaborators, in the context of the elaboration of a 'theory of discourses' that was to serve as a first stepping stone towards an ambitious book to be titled 'Elements of Dialectical Materialism' (Corpet and Matheron, 2003, 34). In these notes, written in 1966, Althusser's reflections are heavily marked by the confrontation with Lacan, whose theory is for Althusser unable to properly establish the scientificity of psychoanalysis. According to Althusser, to attain this status, psychoanalysis needed to be grounded in a 'general theory' that is nothing else that 'Historical Materialism', although aptly reformulated through the concept of 'discourse' (Althusser, 2003, 45-46). The project will never be completed, and the book will remain one of the many works that Althusser never managed to carry forward. However, these notes will

prove paramount in the immediately following years, as it is here that Althusser takes up again the question of ideology, which he had already confronted in *For Marx* (2005, 232-233)[8], now putting forth the innovative idea (which will then occupy the centre-stage in the notes themselves) that the function of ideology is to 'interpellate' individuals through the category of 'subject'.

As the title of the notes indicates, Althusser's research is premised upon the introduction of the notion of 'discourse'. In the first of the three notes (probably written in September 1966), he argues that the introduction of such a concept is necessary in order to explore the way in which 'every discourse produces a subject-effect', to which he adds the specification that 'the subject-position produced or induced by the discourse *vis-à-vis* that discourse varies'. Such a (perhaps unnecessarily sophisticated) formulation means that there are different types of discourses (Althusser mentions four: scientific, aesthetic, ideological, unconscious) that possess different structures and different elements, which in turn entail a different subject-effect each (Althusser, 2003, 48). Throughout the 'Three Notes', however, Althusser's position changes: by the third note (October 1966[9]), he attributes the subject-effect to the ideological discourse only. This discourse, argues Althusser, is not reducible to language only; its elements are 'gestures, modes of behaviours, feeling, words'. These form the material of the signifiers of the ideological discourse (2003, 50). As far as the ideological discourse is concerned[10], the problem that Althusser addresses is immediately two-fold. On the one hand, the question is to clarify the specific structure of the ideological discourse; on the other, the problem is to understand its function within the social structure, i.e., the articulation of the ideological discourse onto other levels of the social formation[11]. In order to clarify how the ideological discourse works and is articulated, Althusser turns to the notion of *Träger*, which was introduced in *Reading Capital* (Althusser *et al*., 2015, 334). In every social formation, he argues, the base requires that the *Träger*-function be filled, as it is 'a function to be occupied in the social and technical division of work'. If considered from the point of view of the base, such a 'request' remains unspecified. It is at this point that ideology intervenes in a decisive way and that the notion of 'interpellation' is introduced for the first time:

> The question of who must assume and carry out this function, and how the assumption of it might come about, is a matter of perfect indifference to the structure (base or superstructure) that defines these functions: it 'doesn't want to know anything about it' (as in the army). It is ideology which performs the function of designating the subject (in general) that is to occupy this function, and to that end it has to interpellate it as a subject, providing it with the reasons-of-subject for assuming the function. Ideology interpellates the individual, turning it into a subject (ideological subject: hence subject of its discourse), and providing it with the reasons-of-subject (interpellated as a subject) for assuming the functions defined by the structure as *Träger*-functions. […] In order for the individual to be constituted as an interpellated subject, it must recognise itself as subject in the ideological discourse, it must figure in it. (Althusser, 2003, 51-52, trans. mod.)

Two things are worthy of attention here. The first (and we shall see later why this is important) is that, according to this formulation, ideology, in its material and singular instances, *does not* operate at an unconscious level. Althusser does not say that it is 'profoundly unconscious', as he maintained in *For Marx* (Althusser, 2005, 233); rather, he argues that it is a discourse that contains both the subject (the signifier of the subject is included in its discourse[12]) and, at the same time, what he calls the 'reasons-of-subject'. What is required by ideology, according to Althusser, is a two-fold operation: that the individual recognizes itself as/in the 'signifier' of the ideological discourse and accepts the reasons-of-subject. Althusser in fact insists on this point: interpellation is not 'pure and simple injunction, but an enterprise of conviction-persuasion' (2003, 52). It follows that the ideological discourse is a structure that must guarantee itself in some way. Indeed, who provides the above-mentioned

reasons-of-subject? For Althusser, it is necessary that the ideological discourse be structured around a 'doubling' of the subject (s), i.e., that it contains a dual structure whereby the reasons-of-subject (rs) are provided by another subject (S), which represents the *guarantee* of the reasons themselves, their 'ground' (2003, 52). Any ideological formation, then, is only such insofar as it possesses the following basic structure: s – rs – S. A crucial consequence of this threefold structure is that the recognition which produces the subject also involves a cognitive operation of acceptance of the middle term (an aspect that is too often downplayed in the readings of Althusser's theory of ideology). This in turn implies that the constituted subject could *also* call these reasons into question, thus renegotiating its own subjection. This aspect is not explored further here, yet it is a consequence of the threefold structure itself, otherwise the middle term 'rs' would not have any specific function, nor would the term S, since there would be no need to 'guarantee' anything if the acceptance of one's place were always already granted.

The second thing to notice is the way in which Althusser thinks the articulation of ideology and the base. The least that can be said about the way in which Althusser conceives of ideology in these notes is that it is a *highly* functionalist account. It is true that these are notes and must be taken as such, but in them it is evident that Althusser's initial conception of interpellation tended to grasp the articulation of the economic level and ideology in functionalist terms, as the recurrence of the term 'function' in these pages abundantly attests. The subject-effect is what ensures the reproduction and the functioning of the 'structure', in which Althusser includes sometimes also the 'political or ideological superstructure': in sum, it is what makes things 'work' by fashioning human beings in such a way that its own requirements are met. In this sense, one can certainly agree that Althusser seems to grant to the 'structure the agency that he denies individuals', as Elliott remarked in the passage quoted above. However, one should also note that Althusser is careful enough to say that the ideological discourse is not a pure injunction, but an operation of persuasion-conviction. If he insists that the ideological discourse must 'guarantee itself' (via a doubling of its own subject into a Subject), it is obviously because the operation of turning individuals into subjects is always at risk of failing, and in this sense it is possible to say that Althusser *does not* regard individual as totally and forever subjected to the ideological interpellation. It remains true, however, that in these notes, 'ideology' is implicitly equated with the 'dominant ideology'; that there is no consideration of the possible frictions within a certain social formation between different ideologies; and that the notion of 'class struggle' is totally absent.

## 2. Class struggle in the ISAs

As paradoxical as it may appear to those who regard Althusser's theory of ideology as functionalist, it is by reflecting further on the problem of reproduction that, in the following years (especially 1969-1970) Althusser provides a correction to his own functionalism. And this correction interests us insofar as it produces a modification –left largely untheorized by Althusser himself– of the concept of interpellation, hence of the subject.

As is well-known, the basic question posed by Althusser's further work on reproduction can be briefly summarized in this way: where and how are the conditions of the reproduction of production secured? To address this problem, which stands at the centre of Althusser's whole theory of reproduction, he introduces the famous concept of Ideological State Apparatus, clearly drawing it from Gramsci. As I have already mentioned, in the ISA article (which is, I recall, Althusser's only work on reproduction published during his life) the concept of class struggle is quite marginal, and Althusser insists on it forcefully only in the 'Postscript'. But when we turn to the long manuscript on reproduction from which the article was culled, the situation changes considerably: *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* is *entirely* written from the point of view of class struggle. In the opening chapters, in fact, Althusser immediately raises the problem of the relationship between reproduction and

class struggle, which indicates, at the very least, that he was aware of the risk of being accused of functionalism, or of having simply neglected one of the most important elements of Marxist theory.

At this point, it is important to remark that Althusser's initial project, as it is presented by Althusser himself at the beginning of the manuscript (that is, of what is today published as *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*) was to write two volumes. The first volume would deal with 'the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production', while the second would investigate 'class struggle in capitalist social formations'. The second volume of this ambitious project will never be born, the volume on reproduction being the only one to be completed, or at least the only one at our disposal today. Surely, this sharp separation between reproduction and class struggle put in place by Althusser could only reinforce the above-mentioned critique about the (alleged) externality of reproduction and class struggle, their sheer juxtaposition, in lieu of an intimate, conceptual relationship. However, Althusser is acutely aware of the theoretical problems posed by this 'division of work'. In the preface, he writes:

> Since the analyses in Volume 1 depend in certain cases, on principles to be worked out in Volume 2, I ask readers to grant me a kind of theoretical and political 'credit'. I shall try to honour the obligation thus incurred in Volume 2, in which I shall broach the problem of the class struggle in capitalist social formations. (Althusser, 2014a, 2)

The minimum we can say is that Althusser, when embarking on the study of the superstructures and ideology, was aware that the notion of class struggle could not be overlooked, and its effects would need to be considered in the very conceptualization of reproduction itself. A few pages later he adds:

> I wish to warn readers from the outset, *solemnly*, as it were, in order to avoid all misunderstanding, all confusion and all unfounded criticism, that the order of exposition I have adopted has a serious disadvantage, one no other order of exposition can overcome. It is that the present volume proposes to discuss, above all, the mode of functioning of the superstructure (the state, the state apparatuses) as reproduction of the relations of production. It is, however, impossible to talk about the state, law and ideology without bringing class struggle into play. Proper logic would therefore seem to indicate that I should have adopted the opposite order of exposition, and began by talking about the class struggle before talking about the state, law and ideology. The latter order of exposition, however, would have run into the same difficulty, the other way around: for it is impossible to talk about classes and class struggle without first talking about the state, law and ideology. Thus, we are caught in a circle, since we would have to *talk about everything at once* […] The *class struggle* will therefore constantly come into play after a certain –very early– point in our analyses. It will do so by way of a whole series of effects that remain unintelligible unless we refer to its reality and presence *outside* the objects we analyze, but inside them as well […] we shall constantly have to bring its effects into play without first having provided a thorough explanation of their causes. (Althusser, 2014a, 9)

Overall, this methodological awareness (however debatable may be Althusser's solution) makes *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* more attentive to the internal dynamics of the Ideological State Apparatuses with respect to the ISA article, as the 'class struggle' appears in it through its effects – as a veritable 'absent cause' whose nature is not investigated as such, but whose effects are visible and present in the conceptualization of the objects under scrutiny. Indeed, not only does Althusser pay great attention to the process of the *constitution* of a State Ideology following the seizure of power by a determinate class; he also stresses the internal differences in terms of temporality between the seizure of power and the construction, or the re-adjustment, of an adequate ensemble of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which requires a long and constant class struggle (Althusser, 2014a, 88-92). A key aspect of Althusser's analyses is that the ISAs are thought of as a heterogeneity and not

as a simple unity. Whilst the Repressive Apparatus (the State in the strict sense) can be thought of according to the metaphor of the One, the Ideological State Apparatuses are of the order of the Many, but not only in a static sense (as one may think by reading the ISA essay), but rather in a dynamic sense. It follows from these premises that Althusser regards the unity of the State Ideology itself as problematic, or, better, as only ever *tendential* and as a result of class struggle in the domain of ideology. Returning, a few years later, precisely on this point, Althusser insists that it is 'class struggle' that renders the unification of the dominant ideology problematic:

> there is multiplicity in the materiality of ideologies, a multiplicity that, because it could not be totally unified in the ancient dominant ideology, neither can it be reabsorbed in the unity of the new dominant ideology. This is why it seems only fair to recognise in principle the dialectics of this process of unification by inscribing this recognition in the open plurality of the ideological state apparatuses. Open, because one can never say in advance what the development of class struggle will be. (Althusser, 2014b, 238)

However, where the effects of the 'absent cause' of class struggle are most evident is in the following analyses of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, where Althusser introduces a distinction that is surprisingly –at least for us today, for the potential theoretical consequences it may have had– absent from the ISA essay. After explaining that the Ideological Apparatuses 'realise' the State Ideology (i.e. the dominant ideology, the ideology of the dominant class), which has the task of securing the reproduction of the relations of production, he points out that the total process of reproduction, traversed by class struggle, has specific effects on the functioning of the ensemble of the ISAs. He conceptualizes these effects as an internal subversion of the ideology that is supposed to 'realise' itself in the ISAs:

> We must distinguish between, on the one hand, the determinate elements of the State Ideology that are realised in, and exist in, a determinate apparatus and its practices, and, on the other, the ideology that is 'produced' in this apparatus by its practices. To mark this distinction terminologically, we will call the former ideology the 'Primary Ideology', and the latter –a by-product of the practice in which the Primary Ideology is realised– the 'secondary or subordinated ideology' [...] these secondary ideologies are produced by a conjunction of complex causes, among which figure, alongside the practice in question, the effects of other external practices, of exterior ideologies; and in the last instance, however dissimulated, the distant effects, which are actually very close, of class struggle. (Althusser, 2014a, 83)

What we have here is precisely the conceptualization of the 'effects' of class struggle which Althusser mentioned in the passage previously quoted. In fact, it is important to notice that the 'secondary ideology' is not understandable as a 'reaction' to the State Ideology produced by practices in a spontaneous way, but as the effect of something external to the ISA in question, i.e. 'class struggle'. Or, to be more precise, they are to be understood as the effect of the specific configuration of the struggle between classes at a given moment in a given social formation.

Therefore, from this point of view, Althusser can hardly be accused of functionalism, as what is introduced here is precisely the problem of a relation of forces (between struggling classes) *within* the reproduction of the conditions of production. If the State Ideology realises itself in the ISAs, and if their task is to 'inculcate' the dominant ideology, this process is not at all a smooth one –on the contrary: Althusser clearly recognises that the functioning of the Ideological State Apparatuses cannot be conceptualised in isolation from the other elements of the social formation. The theoretical effect of this point of view is the coming to the fore of the notion of 'secondary or subordinated ideologies', which are produced in contrast with, or against, the Primary Ideology. Althusser writes: 'that this does not take place without "contradictions", and that, in particular, the ideological sub-formations "produced" in the apparatuses by their own practices should sometimes 'make the gears grate

and grind' is inevitable' (2014a, 88), adding in a note that this is so 'for good reason, if we recall the effects of the class struggle that operate in them [the ISAs] to "produce" these ideological sub-formations' (2014a, 88, fn. 32). So, here Althusser does not reduce ideology to the dominant ideology (which is, as mentioned earlier, a classical criticism of Althusser), but locates in the ideological reproduction –i.e., in the moment of the constitution of the individuals as subject– the very possibility of a subversion of the dominant ideology, or its transformation.

If the introduction of this perspective, which, as we have seen, is present in Althusser's writings from the beginning of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, renders null the allegation of functionalism, it nonetheless forces us to ask whether the very concept of interpellation is adequate to describe the dynamics –understood very much etymologically, as *dynamis*, force-relation– in which individuals are caught. One of the problems seems to be that Althusser elaborated the notion of interpellation *before* introducing, in the 1968 study, the perspective of class struggle and of the multiplicity of the Ideological State Apparatuses (as I pointed out, in fact, the question of the class struggle was absent from the 1966 notes on the theory of discourse; the notion of interpellation originates in a highly functionalist context), and kept this notion intact even after introducing the crucial idea of a plurality of ideologies in the ISAs, or of the existence of a non-totalisable plurality of ideologies in the social formation. After having dealt at length with the plurality of the ISAs in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, in fact, Althusser introduces his theory of ideology based on the notion of interpellation elaborated in the 'Three Notes' (1966). But he stops at the theory of ideology 'in general' (Althusser, 2014a, 174 – recall that the second volume on the class struggle in capitalist formations was foreseen, but was never written), leaving *de facto* the aspect of the *concrete* and *material* constitution of the subject unresolved. Thus, he leaves unexplored the fact that ideology *never* exists in general, but always in concrete and determinate formations, which are always class or regional ideologies. Therefore, the question that one should ask here is the following: what are the consequences of the (non-functionalist) perspective presented in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* on the conceptualisation of the interpellation of the subject?

## 3. Towards the concept of 'overinterpellation'

My thesis is that not only does such a perspective allow us to reject the criticism of functionalism levelled against Althusser, but also that it forces us to supplement the notion of interpellation by introducing another concept, which I will call 'overinterpellation'. By this term I mean to highlight that, in the very analyses put forth by Althusser, the underlying principle is that individuals are never interpellated as subject, but always as subjects – that is, that individuals are always constituted as subjects not by one interpellation, but by manifold and sometimes contradictory interpellations. The schema of interpellation remains the same, but one of the consequences of the idea of the open plurality of the ISAs, or of the production of different ideologies within the ISAs themselves, is that the individual is caught in a network of 'central signifiers', that is, in a network of different ideological discourses in which the imaginary recognition takes place.

To flesh out the idea of overinterpellation, let us consider chapter XII of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* ('On Ideology'). Here Althusser introduces the thesis according to which 'ideology has no history' (2014a, 174), which does not mean –as it did for Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*– that it has no history because it is sheer illusion, but that it is trans-historical. For this reason, for Althusser, it is possible to propose a theory of ideology 'in general' (174). Althusser argues, following the 'Three Notes', that ideology has a definite structure, i.e., that it functions by the category of 'subject': ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, and 'the category of the subject is constitutive of any ideology only insofar as every ideology has

the function, which defines it, of "constituting" concrete subjects' (2014a, 188).

The notion of interpellation is formal: it only states that individuals are constituted through a recognition, which is also a misrecognition, of themselves as free, as the origin of certain deeds and thoughts, by means of which they also accept the performativity expressed by the determinate ideological discourse itself, thus acquiring specific historical determinations. For example, if I am interpellated as a citizen, I will behave according to the prescriptions (rights and duties) attached to such a category, etc., and I will think, very likely, that the political freedom that I enjoy as a citizen is the most important value of all, and so forth. (This is also true for a Communist militant, who recognizes himself or herself in the discourses of Communist apparatuses)[13]. Shortly afterwards, Althusser introduces the thesis of the material existence of ideology, which was presupposed by the theory of the Ideological State Apparatuses expounded in the previous chapters, and formulates the order of 'real determination' of ideology upon individuals:

> The subject acts insofar as he is acted by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices regulated by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material acts of a subject acting in all good conscience in accordance with his belief. (2014a, 187)

What about, at this point, what Althusser called 'secondary ideology'? In another passage (again absent from the ISA essay) Althusser links it to the problem of the concrete constitution of the subject, thus connecting (implicitly) the issue of primary and secondary ideology to what we might call, by analogy, the primary and secondary interpellation:

> It may be objected that the subject in question could act differently; let us recall that we said that the ritual practices in which a primary ideology is realised can 'produce' (in the form of by-products) a 'secondary' ideology – thank God, since otherwise neither revolt nor the acquisition of revolutionary consciousness nor revolution would be possible. (2014a, 187)

Let us notice, first of all, that Althusser is referring to the same subject. This means, evidently, that the same individual is interpellated at the same time by two different ideologies. It is true that here Althusser refers to the situation in which different interpellations are active as a peculiar situation. Yet, considering what we saw earlier, this is actually the 'normal' situation (primary ideology, or State ideology, is only *tendentially* a totality), and what varies is, actually, only the relation of force between different interpellations. Therefore, Althusser's theory highlights the existence of multiple interpellations, or what I propose to call 'overinterpellation', even if this concept is present only in a 'practical' state; and it also brings to the fore the fact that the 'acquisition of a revolutionary consciousness' finds its condition of possibility in a conflict of interpellations. Now, the passage from 'interpellation', as the central concept of the theory of ideology 'in general', to 'overinterpellation', is clearly the passage from the trans-historical domain (concept of ideology in general) to the historical domain –a shift that Althusser does not completely spell out. It is, indeed, 'overinterpellation' that accounts for what occurs in the *material complexity* of the social whole, much like 'overdetermination' accounted for the 'normal' state of the contradiction, which is never simple and originary (Althusser, 2005, 113).

One could perhaps object, at this point, that the sole distinction between primary and secondary ideology is still too simplistic. This is quite true, but the concept of 'overinterpellation' needs not be confined to this distinction only. It is Althusser himself that provides an interesting illustration of the fate of the subject in its historical and concrete existence. One of the passages in which Althusser puts the concept of 'overinterpellation' to work most clearly is an autobiographical one.

Here Althusser attributes a crucial importance to the 'open plurality' of interpellations:

> What do we mean when we say that ideology in general has always-already interpellated as subjects individuals who are always-already subjects? […] this means, concretely, the following: when religious ideology begins to function directly by interpellating the little child Louis as a subject, little Louis is already-subject – not yet religious, but familial-subject. When legal ideology (later, let us suppose) begins to interpellate little Louis by talking to him about, not Mama and Papa now, or God and the little Lord Jesus, but Justice, he was already a subject, familial, religious, scholastic, and so on […] when later, thanks to auto-heterobiographical circumstances of the type of the Popular Front, Spanish Civil War, Hitler, 1940 Defeat, captivity, encounter with a communist, and so on, political ideology (in its differential forms) begins to interpellate the now adult Louis as a subject, he has already long been, always already been, a familial, religious, moral, scholastic and legal subject [...] and is now, lo and behold, a political subject! This political subject begins, once back from captivity, to make the transition from traditional Catholic activism to advanced –semi-heretical– Catholic activism, then begins reading Marx, then joins the Communist Party, and so on. So life goes. Ideologies never stop interpellating subjects as subjects, never stop 'recruiting' individuals who are always-already subjects. The play of ideologies is superposed, criss-crossed, contradicts itself on the same subject: the same individual always-already (several times) subject. Let him figure things out, if he can. (2014a, 193-194)

The concept of 'overinterpellation' allows us to capture precisely the fact that, in the concrete process of reproduction of the conditions of production, it is always a matter of a multiplicity of interpellations (a variation in terms of regional and class, or fractions of class, etc.). Through such a concept it becomes possible to stress the continuous variation of the ideological interpellations (dependent upon class struggle, whose effects are never foreseeable 'in advance' (2014b, 238), i.e., contingent), of the diverse and virtually contradictory constitutions of individuals as subjects. Therefore, it becomes possible to stress that the subject itself is never of the order of the One, is never a unity, but of the order of the Many – and such a multiplicity must not be considered as a simply given multiplicity, but as a *dynamic* one (in the etymological sense of the word), eventually dependent upon a political relation of forces. It is not entirely correct, then, to state that the subject in Althusser is always of the order of the State, as many have argued (most recently Badiou, 2011, 63), since it is clear that the subject itself is not determined by a single ideology, let alone by the State Ideology in its supposed (but in reality impossible) purity, but rather in and by the very struggle between different interpellations, being but the unstable unity (a unity in dominance, to use Althusser's formulation) of a plurality of ideological discourses. In fact, we may even say that the concept of 'overinterpellation' makes it clear that if it is true that the individual is always abstract with respect to the subject, as Althusser puts it (2014a, 192), the subject is abstract with respect to the *subjects* that a single individual always (already) is. The subject itself is, ultimately, a 'field', or better, 'a process'. In this sense, we can say that for Althusser –reread based on the concept of 'overinterpellation'– not only is the subject not a 'substance', but is itself but an unstable *process*.

We can ask, at this point, if, for Althusser, the 'overinterpellation' of the subjects leaves them a 'space' of freedom. This point is particularly dangerous, if anything because of the intrinsic polysemic and philosophically charged, character of the concept of freedom. However, the idea of freedom is introduced by Althusser himself, even if much later, in an unpublished note on ideology. Here he develops the same idea that was present in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* of a multiplicity of interpellations. I quote it in its entirety to make the continuity apparent:

> Ideology acts by interpellating the individuals as subjects or rather, as the individuals are always-already subjects, by interpellating the subjects as subjects, i.e., by displacing the point [en deplacant le lieu] of their interpellation. So a child, subject of identity (Pierre, Nicolas, etc.), is very early

> interpellated as a moral subject (you must do this and not that...), and later as scholastic, juridical, ideological, political, military, scientific etc. […] I recall that it is an ISA that interpellates it, displacing the point of application of its interpellation as subject. (Althusser, 1985-1986?, unpublished note)

A few lines below, Althusser introduces the idea of an 'objective freedom' due to the multiplicity of the interpellations:

> It is sufficient to indicate the multiplicity of the interpellations to immediately make appear, between the different subjects, a play in which the objective freedom of every individual is inscribed. (Althusser, 1985-1986?, unpublished note)

So, it is clear that Althusser came to think that his theory of ideology is compatible with a certain idea of freedom, which he terms 'objective freedom'. Such a freedom would consist of the different interpellations acting on a certain individual (who is already a certain type of subject, historically determined). In this sense, a theory of 'overinterpellation' is indeed a theory of objective freedom, at least in the sense that it implies that individuals are not univocally determined by one ideology, or univocally 'produced' by the State Apparatuses. However, it remains fundamentally anti-humanist: the subject *is* constituted, in a plural, unstable and potentially contradictory way, by the process of 'overinterpellation'. This is another way of saying that our 'identities' are not entirely ours, that human beings find their places in a world that they did not choose. However, this does not mean that human beings are turned into machines, or that ideology is 'profoundly unconscious', as Althusser said in his essay in *For Marx*. It is a fundamental tenet of Althusser's second theory of ideology[14] that ideology has a *certain relationship* with the unconscious, but that it is not itself unconscious[15]. Rather, ideology has to do with effecting a subject-position (which is also an object-position) and to establish a regime of evidence that subjects recognize as their 'world'. But the very structure of ideology, as elaborated by Althusser, betrays its fragility: ideology operates in such a way as to ground such evidence by doubling itself, that is, by resorting to a double structure of the type S – s. It is important, on this point, to return to what Althusser says in the 'Three Notes'[16]: ideology is not pure injunction, but an operation of conviction and persuasion. In that text, he added the fundamental mediation of the 'reasons-of-subject' between 'S' and 's' to account for the fundamental structure of ideology. This is indeed a key component of ideology. No ideology is purely irrational or a-rational, but provides the subject with some sort of 'reasons-of-subject'. Thus, the very idea proposed by Althusser that ideology is a 'discourse' –an idea that, in spite of providing the context for the formulation of the concept of 'interpellation', is not mentioned in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*– must be retrieved: ideology is a matter of practices *and* discourses, understood as two sides of the same *dispositif*. In fact, it is only by retrieving the discursive dimension of ideology that we can think of 'overinterpellation' as an operation of continuous de- and re-centring of subjects, whose subjectivity is constantly restructured around different central signifiers[17], to which different practices (can) correspond. Now, it is in relation to the mediation of the 'reasons-of-subject' that Althusser's insistence that the friction between primary and secondary interpellations can produce a revolutionary consciousness should be interpreted[18]. Let us consider again the previously mentioned autobiographical passage. The subject, writes Althusser, is caught in a process of overinterpellation, with multiple interpellations overlapping and sometimes contradicting each other. And he adds: 'Let him figure things out, if he can' (*'à lui de se debrouiller'*)[19]. This points towards a capacity of the interpellated individuals to negotiate their own interpellation, i.e., their being a subject. The very expression used by Althussser is interesting here. '*Se debrouiller*', as a verb, stresses the process of 'untying' the knots of the network of interpellations. It is, significantly, a reflexive verb that alludes to an activity upon oneself, and such an activity is rendered by a Latin prefix (de), which indicates a 'moving away'. We should link this idea of 'figuring things out' to the idea that a fundamental part of ideological interpellation is

the provision of some sort of 'reasons-of-subject', which can, in principle, be contested and called into question. If, for Althusser, the human animal is an 'ideological animal', as he famously argued (2014a, 188), this is not *all* s/he is. The process of displacement of central signifiers –that is, 'overinterpellation'– is the very field in which frictions between individuals' multiple subject-positions manifest themselves, producing both the need and the objective possibility to negotiate one's own subject-position.

## Notes

1. Henceforth: ISA essay.
2. For the first line of criticism, the most thorough attack against Althusser was certainly that of E. P. Thompson (1978). See also Benton (1984), Anderson (1980) and Elliott (2009). The second line often overlaps with the first one, albeit it is logically distinct from it, since it is not 'humanist' in itself. It was originally formulated, and most forcefully expressed, in Rancière's early critique of Althusser (1973) as well as in Badiou's 1976 work on ideology (2012).
3. See Althusser, 2008, 57-58.
4. This is now in Althusser, 2014, 218-231.
5. In the first pages of the ISA essay, Althusser resolutely writes: 'I believe that it is possible and necessary to think what characterizes the essential of the existence and nature of the superstructure *on the basis of reproduction*. Once one takes the point of view of reproduction, many of the questions whose existence was indicated by the spatial metaphor of the edifice, but to which it could not give a conceptual answer, are immediately illuminated. My basic thesis is that it is not possible to pose these questions (and therefore to answer them) except from the point of view of reproduction' (2008, 10).
6. The long manuscript, written in 1969, from which the ISA essay was culled for publication in *La Pensée*, was discovered after Althusser's death. It was published in 1995 in French with the title *Sur la reproduction,* with an introduction by J. Bidet. It was only translated into English in 2014. Balibar reconstructs the story of the 'montage' of the ISA essay from the manuscript on reproduction in his 'Foreword' to Althusser, 2014, vii-xviii, where he also draws attention to the fact that in 1970 essay published in *La pensée* Althusser inserted dotted lines to mark the 'stitches' of his 'montage' (xii). These dotted lines were removed in the English translation of the article.
7. See Montag (2013, 161).
8. For a comprehensive and detailed reconstruction of Althusser's development of the concept of ideology, from *For Marx* to the ISA essay, see Montag, 2013, 103-170.
9. For the chronology of the three notes written by Althusser, and for details about the collaborative work they initiated, see Corpet and Matheron, 2003.
10. I will leave the other discourses aside, as they do not directly concern the development of the argument at stake here.
11. There is another big issue addressed by Althusser in these notes, which, again, cannot be discussed here: the problem of how to think the relationship between the unconscious and ideology. For a discussion of this point, which would take too far for the central concern of this article, see the seminal essay by Morfino (2011), and the work by Eyers (2013) and Bruschi (2014). I have addressed this point myself in Pippa (2019).
12. 'The ideological subject participates in person, is present in person in the ideological discourse, as it is itself a signifier of this discourse […] the ideological discourse, in which the subject-effect is present in person and is therefore […] the central signifier of the discourse, possesses a structure of specularly centering.' (Althusser, 2003, 49-50)
13. This means that there are two levels of misrecognition. One is formal: I am the origin of my deeds and thoughts, and in this sense the theory of interpellation is clearly directed towards the tradition issued by the ego cogito et sim. But then there is the misrecognition that pertains to the content of a certain interpellation, which varies according to classes and regions of ideology. The crucial point is that there is no pure formal interpellation because ideology in general simply does not exist (only the *concept* of the structure of ideology in general does).
14. I.e., the one he started elaborating in 1966 with the introduction of the concept of 'interpellation', previously absent.
15. As perfectly shown by Morfino (2011). See also Pippa (2019, 116-126).
16. But is absent from *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (and the ISA essay), although it is implied by some passages and ideas, as I shall argue in a moment.

17. See footnote 12 above.
18. Indeed, Althusser is quite clear on this, as for instance when he argues that in order to understand the forms of class struggle within the ISAs one needs to take seriously Marx's phrase that 'it is in ideology that people become conscious of class struggle and fight it out' (Althusser, 2014a, 155).
19. On this specific point, see also Macherey (2014, 97).

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# *Que faire* (with Discourse)? A materialist approach to discourse, ideology and politics in neoliberal conjuncture

**Abstract:** *Althusser's* Que Faire? *(2018) allows for a critical revision of the "discursive turn" in current social and political theory. As Pêcheux shows, the influences of Spinoza and Freud can be recognized and elaborated on to develop a* clinical *theory of discourse capable of taking into account overdetermination and class struggle in a rigorous way.*

**Keywords:** *Ideology, discourse, reformism, overdetermination, multiple temporality.*

**Resumen:** *El volumen póstumo de Louis Althusser,* Que faire? *(2018), hace posible una revisión crítica de "giro discursivo" en la teoría social y política actuales. Como Pêcheux expone, las influencias de Spinoza y Freud pueden ser reconocidas y desplegadas para desarrollar una teoría clínica del discurso capaz de tomar en cuenta los conceptos de sobredeterminación y lucha de clases.*

**Palabras clave:** *Ideología,discurso, reformismo, sobredeterminación, temporalidad múltiple.*

## I. What is to be done (once again)?

Among his manuscripts, Louis Althusser left a ninety-page long essay under the title *Que faire?* (2018a), in which he critically revised the eurocommunist tendency, conceived as an identity between the end and the means, and as a poor response to the crisis of communist thought and the popular *demands* of democratization in the URSS. Such a response risks being an empty proclamation which lacks a '"concrete analysis of the concrete situation" not only of the class struggle of the countries concerned, but of the whole world, capitalist imperialism and 'socialist countries included' (130-131, my translation).

This is how Althusser, in the prime of the global neoliberalization process (Harvey, 2005), admonishes that the crisis of the international communist movement and, more broadly, leftist thought, are intertwined in a reformist tendency that will ultimately contribute to it. The suppression of the communist option, which is consubstantial with the abandonment of crucial concepts such as that of class dictatorship, far from providing some kind of shelter from the fledgling anti-democratic tendencies (such as the ones denounced in the countries from the old Soviet bloc, but also the dictatorships in Latin America, the place where the neoliberal reforms begun) leads to the risk of debasing the very idea of democracy. In this context, the PCF's official strategy of recovering Gramsci's theoretical contributions, which dispense with a concrete analysis of the situation, strengthens some theoretical risks that were already present in its thought – especially the politicist and historicist tendencies.

Althusser recognizes a series of shifts that operate around the concept of *hegemony* by associating the notion of "historical block" with the idea of a "concrete universal ethics" coined by Hegel, to replace the *historical* unity with an *ethical* unity, taking the conjuncture for the social totality, which should instead be conceived as its *ideological effect:* the "society effect". The interpretation of economic exploitation as a mere component of "civil society", coupled with a (corresponding) neglect of the "force" component in its conception of the State under the theory of "State *as* hegemony" (Althusser, 2018a,135), tends towards a simplification of the heterogeneous, which leads to replace the concept of class struggle with that of "a struggle of hegemonies" and to a dissolution of the materiality of the State within the question about the hegemony of the dominant class (136).

The interest of the analysis offered by Althusser stems less from what he may elucidate of Gramsci's thought –whose consequences should be qualified by the considerations that Althusser himself proposes in other writings– than from what it shows us about the Althusserian intervention itself and its critical commitment to its own conjuncture. If such intervention turns out to be more audible today than in the sixties and seventies, it is because the consequences of the theoretical-political torsion that Althusser denounced in the intellectual field that was his own, and whose avatars were understood by some of his colleagues and disciples (Badiou, 2008; Balibar, 1991), may today be read more bluntly. There, Althusser insisted on signaling the idealist turn in the international communist intelligence, which, shrouded as a supposedly ethical affirmation, abandoned the question of the historical determinations of the conjuncture (that of the long agony of imperialism that foreshadows the coming barbarity).

"Politicist" is, in this context, the simplification of the concept of historical time in the hypertrophy of an "Absolute Present" of the temporality of the State: the flattening of two distinct levels, that of the (structural) stability of the dominant mode of production and that of the (imaginary) eventfulness of politics, under the historicist guise of permanent change, "without a fixed point" (Althusser, 2018a, 66-67). "Change" may be another one of the images in whose name that ideology of time operates, rendering the *immanent exteriority* that constitutes any dominant ideology unthinkable and erasing the theoretical function of the concept of *class struggle*. This amounts to the simplification of the complex temporality of the historical concrete and a displacement towards a contemporary and homogenous conception of time in the shape of a *spiritual concrete* of the universal ethical unity. Politicism consists of a chain of reductions; of the complex of practices to the (philosophical) idea of political *praxis*, of political practice to political ideology and of the State to the dominant Ideology.

## II. The theory of ideology as a rupture of the contemporaneity between history and discourse

Some of the ideas from 1978 had been anticipated in other passages of Althusser's writings, especially in the notes for his course at the École Normale Supérieure, published as *Politique et Histoire, de Machiavel à Marx* (2006). There, we can see that Hegel's theory of the State as the reality of the ethical idea –*die Wirklichkeit der sittlichen Idee*– (Hegel, 1955, § 237) constitutes the prehistory of Althusser's theory of ideology because his theory of *ideological State apparatuses* is part of a break with the Hegelian theory of the State and, more precisely, with his idea of the State as the "universal in action" (see. Romé, 2011, 133-140). The emergence of Ideological State Apparatuses as the unseen in the visual field of Hegelian historicism grounds the problem of the relationship between *temporality* and *discourse* as part of the question regarding the theory of history.

In the Hegelian *Philosophy of History*, the account of history is contemporaneous to the historical fact; it is a "common internal foundation" which makes them both manifest at once, because the history of the State lives in the memory of the individuals, to the extent that they are *possessed* by it (Hegel, 1967, 141). The

rupture with the *contemporaneity* based on a common foundation makes visible the *ideological efficacy* constitutive of the State's power, and reveals itself as a *material dispositive* of (idealist) Philosophy. This means, as the scene for the production of evidence that places in the same narrative temporality *some* subjects for *a* State.

The identity reconciled in the Absolute Knowledge is, from a materialist perspective, the *identification* between Philosophy and History. That is why the critique of ideology as a criticism of the contemporaneity between history and discourse, inaugurated by Marx in 1845 is, in another sense, Freud's too. In the context of a break with the so-called Philosophies of Consciousness, Althusser's first references to Freud are related to history and, more precisely, to an overdetermined conception of the dialectic that questions the concept of *contemporaneous time* (Althusser, 1965a).

Thus considered, the detour through psychoanalysis allows him to critically recover the Hegelian idea of the State, in order to recognize the core of its *ideological function* and conceptualize one dimension of the power of the State in the materialist terms of a complex of apparatuses, of which it consists along with its subjects while *narrating a common history*.

This theorization is already present in *Machiavel et nous* (1994), and developed strongly in *Que faire?*:

> Everything is already in Machiavelli, the theory of the state, and its two moments, "the beast" (the force) and the man (the consensus), although there is in him more than in Gramsci, since in his thinking the beast divides, being both lion (brutal force) and fox (ruse and fake) [*ruse et feinte*], and finally the fox is nothing but the *virtù*, or capacity to use force and consensus (hegemony) at will, according to the exigencies of the conjuncture [...] this capacity of cunning is reduced in the end to the power to feign, to the power to pretend [*de faire semblant*]. (2018a, 106; my translation)

Machiavelli goes beyond Gramsci by forcing the division strength/consensus that remains captive in the inward/outward scheme proper to the *Philosophies of Consciousness* on political theory. This withholds the primacy of force, to the extent that it stresses a dimension that is of the material order of force, but produces its effects in the "subjects' interiority". The figure of the *fox*, which Althusser identifies as "psychic violence" (110), allows us to point out the unconscious efficacy of the ideological instance. The Prince is not conceived as an empirical subject, but as a *political strategy*: man-lion-fox, a "*topique* that has no center, that has no 'I' that may unify the three 'moments', the three 'instances', that is never 'man', in other words, *moral subject*, *any more than being conditioned to seem one*" (112).

The strength/consensus dichotomy does not allow us to acknowledge that which constitutes the key of political power: "that force may be productive" and able to be part of a strategy, producing "effects of hegemony": as a *materiality* that produces *psychic* effects based on a compulsion that is not brute force. This is the way Machiavelli thinks the "political education of citizens through their amalgam in the army" in the sense of a psychic force that is constitutive of the powers of the State (113).

In order to account for their mechanism, Althusser speaks about the Prince's *semblance* as a mask or an image unified as the *State Ideology* (106). Closer to force than morals, the imaginary logic of the figure of the fox consists in its "power to feign" (*pouvoir de feindre*). That imposture, –or *representation*, according to Lefort (110)– is consubstantial with the State, but only to the extent to which the image that sustains it is "recognized" by the people. The power of the State does not exist without the people *recognizing themselves in the image* of the Prince.

We find thus a *theory of identification* with psychoanalytic resonances, which supposes a complex materiality of "bodies", "images", "*semblants*" and "psychic violence" that evokes the Freudian development of military corps in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), which is related to his theory of ideology as constitutive of State power and the weight that the function of *recognition* acquires within it. In it, he discovers the paradoxical *retroactive temporality* in which the effects of hegemony are

both the product and the condition for the birth of a new State (114).

That this force is productive is something Foucault rightly pointed out, and Althusser is aware of that; but Machiavelli says more when saying that force is productive *of ideology*.

## III. Materialism of the imaginary. From Foucault to Pêcheux and Spinoza

The question about the status of discourse as a problem of the theory of history is formulated by Foucault (1969), in terms of the status of the *document* in historiographical labor. When it ceases being an inert piece of matter on which to attempt to rebuild what was said or done, the image of history as memory falls to pieces: history is a certain mode, for a society, to provide a status and elaboration to a mass of documents *from which it does not separate* (14).

Foucault discovers the solidarity between the transformation of the status of discourse and the problematization of the concept of *historical time*. The classical postulates thus challenged are those of a *general history*: *the possibility of establishing a system of homogeneous relationships*; one and only form of historicity between the diverse instances which subjects them to the same type of transformation (17-18).

In keeping with the ideas of *Lire le Capital* (1965a), Foucault places the "first moment" of this epistemological mutation in Marx and acknowledges the obstacles to ground that discovery in the subject's foundational function: "as if we were afraid of thinking the *Other* in the time of our own thought" (21). Time is conceived of in terms of totalization and the revolutions are never anything but a *raising of awareness* (22).

And it is Althusser who takes on the task announced by Foucault of "thinking the Other in the time of our own thought itself", by breaking with the Hegelian idea of the State as an incarnation of the Absolute in history. And opening up a theory of State ideology as the effect of a double identification based on the materiality of bodies and apparatuses, which produces a temporal simplification that could be called "hegemony".

Foucault turns out to be an ally, but his theory leaves the problem of ideology vacant. Foucault thinks the relationship between materiality and discourse as the *productivity of force*; discourse is to him the power which one wishes to own (1971). Nonetheless, he lacks the necessary theoretical tools to go beyond a *descriptive* theory of power: 1. a theory of the *unconscious* that may account for the mechanisms of "psychic violence" in their materiality and 2. a theory of *class struggle* that may account for historical violence in its materiality. Ultimately, it is necessary to pursue a tradition that may enable exploring the *materiality of the imaginary* in its temporal complexity.

It is Michel Pêcheux who lays down the two theses that allow us to comprehend the problem of ideology adequately.

> -To take seriously the reference to historical materialism means to recognize the primacy of class struggle in relation to the existence of classes themselves, and that entails, with respect to the problem of ideology, the impossibility of any differential analysis (of a sociological or psych-sociological nature) that attributes its own ideology to each "social group" before the ideologies enter into conflict, as each seeks to ensure its domination on the others. This also leads us to interrogate the notion of dominated ideology […] in order to determine its characteristics given the primacy of class struggle.
>
> -To take the reference to the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious seriously means to recognize the primacy of the unconscious over consciousness; and that entails, speaking still of ideology, the impossibility of any psychologistic conception that produces a consciousness […]. To conceive ideological processes according to the form of such a pedagogical trajectory—auto- or hetero-determined—is quite simply to reject in practice the consequences of Freudian materialism (2014,1-2)

These theses trace the limits of the Foucauldian perspective. The proposition of the problem of discourse turns out to be insufficient to confront the idealist siege, and may turn into a new universal dialectic that imagines having the property of "producing its own matter" (Pêcheux, 1977).

What is at stake is "the mode of conceiving the concrete material forms under which 'ideas' enter the struggle of history" and this compromises the positions assumed by the different theoretical currents.

The *logical-formalist tendency* eliminates history (and the class struggle), as it conceives the human Spirit as a-historically transparent to itself, under the shape of a universal theory of ideas. And even if the historicist tendency conceives history as a "series of differences, displacements, transformations", it "understands domination as a form of interiorization" and *subordinates division to unity*. Following Althusser (1973), Pêcheux calls this empiricist approach to the class struggle *reformism*. And that is where he places Foucault: the absence of the category of contradiction in Foucault is responsible for the return of notions such as *status, norm, institution, strategy, power,* etc., which indefinitely outline the materiality of the State power, without being able to think the relationship of the concrete (discursive) formations of ideology and politics with the class struggle. Despite offering an approximation to the problem of the *materiality of the imaginary*, Foucault lacks a notion, even a practical one, of *contradiction*. That is why Pêcheux acknowledges a more solid forerunner in Spinoza, for whom the materiality of discourse is contradictory. By criticizing religious ideology in the name of religious ideology, Spinoza shows that it, in itself (and the discourse that realizes it), may not be taken as a homogenous whole identical to itself. And it is from Spinoza that Pêcheux draws the idea that ideology does not exist but *under the (material) mode of division*; it does not realize itself but within the contradiction that organizes its unity in itself and in the struggle of the contraries. This leads him to consider that the concept of *discursive formation* should be submitted to a Spinozan "rectification".

It is not possible to fully account for the material consistency of discourse if its historicity is not thought from a materialist point of view; this means, in terms of its *contradictory (overdetermined) objectivity.* This is a crucial point to comprehend the bifurcation between the theories of discourse that embrace the constitutive problem of ideology and those that think about it as a secondary or subordinate question. And this allows us to point out that what is lost in this field, when the theory of ideology is blurred out, is precisely the relationship between discourse and history, in a material sense.

*Reformism* in the field of discourse is the name of a consideration of historical change that dispenses with structurally contradictory objectivity. A space of interiority is reaffirmed to be at the heart of the discursive formation, if its unity is not conceived of in its overdetermined condition (under the double primacy of the unconscious and contradiction). If it is not conceived in terms of an unequal, hierarchical and contradictory articulation, as much as it may be proclaimed as a pluralist critique of any form of metaphysical unity, the notion of formation loses its historical condition, because it turns into a category blind to the "ensemble system" that is its constitutive exterior: the "material objectivity" of the structure of subordination-inequality of the complex whole with the dominance of the ideological formations of a given social formation (see Pêcheux,1982). If the discursive formation is thought of as an interiority, it acquires a structure isomorphic to the structure of consciousness, which exists in a temporality closed in on itself. A theory that enunciates such exteriority in terms of the relationship of a discursive totality with its symptom is not enough. Additionally, a theory of historical causality is necessary, i.e., a complex conception of time and the social totality capable to interrogate and conceptualize the real consistency of that exteriority and the relations between it and the imaginary interiority of the discursive formation. That means, a theory capable of accounting for the objective *materiality of the imaginary***.**

## IV. Reformism and neoliberalism

Ironically, Althusser denounces this *reformist* position in relation to the political strategy in 1978, in terms of the idea of "class consciousness". The visual operation that the image of the "self-consciousness" constitutes, which is internal to the ideological field, takes on a new consistency when the field itself closes up and denies the complex *ensemble system* that rules over it: "we see only what we see, and this does not go far enough [...] only, the rest is missing [...] the rest, that is to say the whole ensemble system that governs the concrete forms and the concrete means of the bourgeois class in its antagonism to the working class struggle, and which leads to this simple fact, which seems to go without saying." (30, my translation)

The "proletarian point of view" may coincide (in an relation of interiority) with the "point of view of the State", in spite of believing to oppose it or being its "alternative", if the construction of that perspective is produced as an identitarian experience, in a phenomenological relation to *its world*: as *contemporaneity* between facts and its narrations. This is what Althusser calls insistently "to tell oneself stories".

That is why he denounces the politicist temptation of history that enshrines "change" in abstract terms. Not only because of the theoretical problems this carries along –on which he had insisted already in his criticism of historicism (see. 1965a)– but also because of the political consequences he supposes this could have in the conjuncture of the late seventies: "forms of enlarged reproduction are by no means technical forms [...] That our century is the century of speed is due to the needs of the bourgeois class struggle: to make capital circulate as quickly as possible to extract as much of surplus-value as possible" (Althusser, 2018a, 48, my translation).

In this context of accelerated change, commanded by the temporality of extended reproduction of capital at an unprecedented rhythm, materialist theory must acknowledge that the reasons for "change" are not to be found in what we simply "see" changing, and enunciating the historical condition of theory –submitting it to the temporality of its object– only strengthens the "absolute historicism" that lacks an outside and, therefore, is interior to ideology (49).

These passages from *Que faire?* expose, with mastery and anticipation, some of the theoretical risks that compose a unity with the dominant ideological tendencies. On one side, the fascination with what we "see change", as if that were in itself the "reason for change", leads to a technological fetishism that believes itself to be a critical diagnosis of the neoliberal conjuncture, a renewed form of "biopolitical" economism that consecrates the Absolute Power. On the other, the production of intelligibility schemes of the conjuncture that fall into a certain "politicist" optimism: a fetishism of popular *demands*, taken immediately as political, blind to the complex ensemble that reigns over concrete historical formations in the struggle of the bourgeois class in its antagonism to the working-class struggle. A diagnostic that hypostatize the contingent aspects of the conjuncture, subsuming the structural ones, in a kind of ontologization of a determinate (technical or political) practice.

Those same concerns organize his posthumous volume *Sur la reproduction* (2011), whose main part emerged in a frenzy of writing in the months after the events of 1968. There, Althusser warns of the *politicist deviation* that, under the generic term of "domination", simplifies the Marxist problem of the relationship between economic exploitation and the political and ideological class struggle. And he recognizes its mirrored image in the technological fetishism that confuses the *social* division of labor for a *technical* one. He saw then a double simplification looming over theory which flattened the conjuncture between the "neoanarchist" denunciation of "Power" and an "economicist or technocratic" fascination (2011, 68-69). When the climate of revolt would not allow to elicit the price the left would have to pay for unburdening itself from theoretical Marxism, Althusser would insist on the dependence of the vitality of Marxism on the rigorous development of what he called "the point of view of reproduction" based on a conception of *existence as duration*. Starting from the principle of the primacy of the relations of production over the productive forces,

determinant to a *social formation*, the "point of view of reproduction" is indispensable in order to account for any *concrete situation:* where the capitalist relation of production –as a structural relation of dispossession and separation of the labor force from the means of production (see Althusser, 2018b, 144)– is *abstract* with regards to the concrete and contradictory complex of relationships of production and superstructural formations in which its reproduction is given –*as duration and, as such, existence* (Althusser, 2011, 68).

In a social formation, there is not a single intervening mode of production, but one functions in a *dominant* mode in an articulated whole, wherein residual or emerging relations of production strive, but are conditioned by its dominance, in a *complex and contradictory unity*. In this sense, the determined social formation is, in its objective unity, a contradictory combination of temporalities.

In a mode of production, understood as the unity of productive forces and relations of production, it is the *relations of production which play the dominant role* and not the productive forces. And relations of production are not to be confused with either "work" or with "property": the *social* division of labor is neither the technical division of labor nor the legal forms of its organization (2011, 69).

These two theses situate the historical existence of a social formation as a complex ensemble of concrete relations in which it *lasts*. In this development we find the framework that sustains Pêcheux' thesis. His references to the French expression *ensemble* have a philosophical worth that Balibar discovers in Marx and develop in the terms of a *transindividual ontology*, underlining its double, material and imaginary, consistence (1993). Milner suggests this with the aporetic expression of *tesei-objectivity* (2002). These developments, given the new dimensions starting from Pêcheux's work, lead us to think that the development of historical materialism requires a (materialist) theory of the discursive processes and formations, to the extent that a singular need may not be conceived of but as a relation of relations in which the imaginary is a part of the concrete materiality (Balibar, 2018).

The Marxist historical totality itself supposes in its structure a double relation, which exists only as overdetermined in its temporal complexity and contradictory materiality. On this terrain, the possibility opens up to think the problem of ideology as an objective overdetermined complex of contradictory processes, and not only as a failed operation of domination or ideal universalization, or as a sociological opposition between two "worlds". A scheme irreducible to a single interpretation (which would constitute the inversion of a false criticism of the spiritual totality) and the image of the total subsumption of subjects in the technical logic of capital.

## V. Towards a materialist theory of discourse

*Les verités de La Palice* (Pêcheux, 1975) lays out the consequences of these theses on the terrain of the problem of discourse. But, far from being a mere application, it advances the field of discourse in terms of a *Theory of discursive processes* and develops the problem of historical temporality (which other theories abandon by abandoning the concept of ideology). The category of *overdetermination* constitutes the philosophical framework of his program to develop a *non-subjectivist theory of the subject*, based on a theory of identification and the *material efficacy of the imaginary*.

The development of his conception of the decentred and necessarily repressed determinations that produce the subject effect as a cause of itself provides an account for the philosophical thickness (and political sense) of Althusser's intervention that reintroduces the so-called Philosophies of Suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud) in a genealogy that extends beyond the XIX Century, including Spinoza in the perpetual battle against idealism –distinguishing itself from Foucault in this respect. His materialist reading of discourse as an exercise of intellection of a constitutive forgetfulness (Haroche, Henry and Pêcheux, 1971) is the fiber that reunites what is only imaginarily experienced as separate: *discourse and decree* (Montag, 2015).

> […] ideology and the unconscious meet: in a forgetting deeper than any memory, because memory is nothing more than the forgetting of forgetting, the rendering absent of the absence that allows us to be stand-ins for ourselves, the disappearance of every gap into the density of a discourse without empty spaces, the writing without margins that covers the page, the uninterrupted murmur of incessant voices. […] If ideology, in the concrete form of a specific ideological formation, rests on a "primal or originary forgetting", like Freud's *Urverdrängung*, it "frees" the subject from the memory of the command that determines what he can and must say. (§ 33)

Pêcheux sets himself the task of elaborating a materialist theory of discursive processes able to account for the *necessary material connexion* between repression and unconscious and ideological subjection. 'Necessary material' means that 'discourse' does not *exist* but in concrete discursive *processes and formations*. The concept of discourse does not denominate a discursive existence, but the atemporal mechanism of mutual consistency between a signifying articulation and the subject-effect. If the concept of "discourse" is to be upheld, it is in order to name this *material inscription of a double forgetting as a mechanism of subjection*. In this sense "*Trois notes sur la théorie des discours*" (Althusser, 1993) holds a certain familiarity with Lacan's discourse theory developed in 1969-1970 (1991). Pêcheux, more carefully, uses the category of dispositive for this idea, which Althusser would turn to in order to discuss his "theoretical dispositive", in his reading of Machiavelli (see. Romé, 2019).

It is in this sense that the insistence on conceptualizing *langue* as *base* should be understood. This means understanding it as an atemporal structure, indifferent to history and, therefore, to the class struggle. Pêcheux avoids flattening the dimension of discursive practice onto the structure of *langue*, to uphold the materialist causality that affirms the immanence of the structure in its effects, which is the condition of a theory of history as a *necessity of contingency* and as a temporal complex that avoids, simultaneously, historicism and formalism.

This is not about replacing the metaphysical and foundationalist image of a metalanguage with the equally metaphysical and foundationalist affirmation of its pure inexistence, in order to affirm a pluralist and relativist ontology of the contingency; it is about affirming the historical existence (*the presence of the absence* of metalanguage) in the contradictory and conflicting form of the class struggle that is fought on the discursive materiality. *Langue* is not a "metalanguage" (an over-structure or a Cause), but an absent cause; a structure that does not exist but in the contradictory complex of its effects.

As Althusser points out, *langue* has no function because langue does not exist as such. Only discourses exist, to which it provides the constitutive elements (1993, note 9). Even before the topography of base-superstructure, what Althusser sets in motion, according to Montag, is the rejection of any scheme that may imply an expressive causality, in order to substitute for it the concept of immanent causality inspired by Spinoza. *Langue* does not exist as the "discourse of discourses": it disappears in the irreducible plurality of discourses (2015). It is the "irreducible plurality", not of "discourses", but of the *discursive formations* and *discursive processes* that constitute the concrete of a determinate (discursive) *conjuncture*. *Langue* cannot ever be simply a system governed by rules whose expression follows a legal model. And it only exists as an absence, in the material process of a systematic repression of what Gadet and Pêcheux (Pêcheux and Gadet, 1981, 51) will later call, following Jean-Claude Milner, gaps and contradictions that set this order against itself in a perpetual production of equivocity (Montag, 2015, §17).

*Metalanguage* is there the (imaginary) experience of significative unity, of an objective, contradictory complex in dominance, of discursive formations in which the structural unity of langue exists. Pêcheux inaugurates a theoretical program that enables us to think, at once, historical time and the symbolic order, not only thinking "the time of the Other in the time of our own thought" but inscribing it within a theory of history.

## VI. Formation and discursive processes as *conjuncture*

Although Pêcheux does not speak of a "discursive conjuncture", the idea acts in a practical mode in the concepts of *discursive process* and *discursive formation*. In order to keep the structural category of language from colonizing the discursive formations, thereby reinstating the expressive causality that would turn them into "phenomena", he identifies the overdetermined action of three structures (the structure of language, the social totality and the psychic structure) in the discursive processes and formations.

Thus, he reintroduces the Althusserian idea of *conjuncture* at the heart of the problem of ideology and manages to comprehend the difference between the structural dimension of ideology –confusingly called "general ideology"– and the conjunctural dimension of historically determined ideological formations –called "particular ideologies" (2011, 209).

The idea of a *dominant ideology* –better understood as "State Ideology" (Althusser, 2011, 92)– is no longer to be confused with the "Ideology in general", but comprehended as the imaginary effect where an articulated and contradictory material complex with a dominance over the ideological formations exists *as if it was "Ideology in general"*. This is the structural (atemporal) mechanism immanent to those formations, stuck between tendencies and counter tendencies with a dominance.

The "point of view of reproduction" names the analytic approach (of the situation) and is not to be confused with the point of view of the State (which does not distinguish conjuncture and structure). Pêcheux elaborates on this base an analytic of the concrete form of the conjuncture and the articulated and contradictory complexity of the temporalities that make it up.

The concept of *formation* gains theoretical weight with *Sur la reproduction*, from the very definition of *social formation* as a temporal complex, by holding the distinction (and disproportion) between the concepts of social formation and mode of production and affirming that there is always more than one mode of production in any concrete historical formation. A *social formation is a tendentially unified temporal complex*. The diversity of social formations is not due to the existence of an inexhaustible multiplicity of modes of production, but to the singularity of its hierarchical articulation in a complex totality of superstructural formations, overdetermined by this *combination*.

Therefore, it is not possible to account for this complexity if not producing a detour through *conjuncture*. And this should be understood in two ways: 1. That of the *need* for a thought *of* the conjuncture and 2. a *conjunctural practice of thought*. The Althusserian reading of Marx consists of, first of all, an enterprise of shaping a kind of theory capable of assuming that there is no way of naming the historical complexity without embracing the concrete existence of a singular situation; the main principle of that kind of theoretical thinking is what Althusser calls overdetermination. Althusser laid out this question early on in writings like "*Sur la dialectique matérialiste*" (2005) where he holds that the Marxist problematic inhabits simultaneously Marx's theoretical practices and the concrete thought of the Marxist political leaders obliged to mobilize the Marxist theory of history with regards to a singular case of the conjuncture they found themselves intervening in. Overdetermination names the *necessary combination* between two temporalities of thought: the thought of the "*fait accompli*" incarnated by the historian and the thought of the task, i.e., the thought of the *fact to accomplish,* which is typically that of man of politics (2005). Althusser returns in 1985 to this idea based on the Spinozist theory of the three genres of knowledge and proposes a kind of epistemology of Marxism and psychoanalysis as *clinical theories*: dispositives of knowledge whose laws do not constitute legal generalizations, but tendential ones, which aim to the singular. They are different from the *experimental test dispositive* of the physical sciences, but rigorous in a knowledge and treatment of the singularities, individual (medicine, analysis) or social (history of a people), already acting on history (politics) (Althusser, 1994).

This very idea of a "theoretical dispositive" appears in his reading of Machiavelli as a counter

mythical dispositive. But the material and spatial evocation of theory as *dispositio* is inspired by the Brechtian theory of theater (Althusser, 1995, 78). And we find it also in Pêcheux, in his conception of Marxism as an "experimental science of history", articulated with the proletarian political practice: it is *experimental* (in the sense of *experiment*) and not subjective because it breaks with the spontaneous political functioning of the subject-form that is *experience* (*Erfahrung*) (Pêcheux, 1982).

The Pecheutian development of an analytic of discursive formations, and the immanent reading of the ideological mechanism that operates in them, is also produced in the universal-singularity of the case: Althusser arrives at the postulate of the mechanism of interpellation as an atemporal structure, as a result of the analysis of *the concrete complex of formations in which that mechanism exists*, under the dominance of the formation of a *legal ideology*. In the *analytical* sense (from *the "point of view of reproduction"*), the theory of ideology is actually the theory of *legal* ideology. The structural approach to the functioning of this formation will allow us to acknowledge what is atemporal in it: not only in terms of a mechanism that functions experientially as a circle without time, which enables us to understand what the specific ideological formation shares with others –dominant in *other* times– such as the ideological formation of (Christian) religion. But Ideology "in general" is not a *primary form*. The theoretical operation reads the structure immanent to the existing ones without ontologizing it, i.e., without turning it into an autonomous (metaphysical) form of this existence. In analytical terms, this is the "point of view of the State", the mechanism/form of interpellation that imposes itself on the individuals (imaginarily) as if it were, and in that sense it is, necessary as a structure to the individuals that inhabit them. Any analytic that does not distinguish structure and formation grants either the structures or the empirical subjects a metaphysical priority, and is interior to the "point of view of the State" and, therefore, *reformist*.

This caution is indispensable to provide a dimension for both the materialist specificity and the philosophical and critical magnitude of a notion of *materiality of the imaginary*, such as the one we have laid out. When Pêcheux distinguishes between Ideology in general, particular ideologies and dominant ideology, he allows us to return to that crucial writing of the Althusserian problematic that is "*Marxisme et humanisme*" (2005) and see that the reading Althusser extracts from that process of rupture brought along the structural features of the ideological mechanism he denominates "interpellation"; and that, therefore, the so-called "Ideology in general" is nothing but the immanent structure of the dominant ideological formation of capitalism: Humanism.

The theory of interpellation is a *clinical* theory in the sense of a reading of the concrete processes in which it exists as its structure. The question is that ideological efficacy consists in the necessary repression of its secondary order and the imaginary restitution of the immediacy of the "world" (forgetting of having forgotten, as Montag says). Thus, the theory of ideology discovers that the retroactive temporality of the State power –the circle Machiavelli discovers, as we pointed out earlier– meets the subject's retroactivity, who is decreed as such through a double forgetfulness. It is the temporality of a *myth* that makes the narrative experience of existence possible.

## VII. Mythical dispositive and theater of consciousness

The Pecheutian theory of discursive processes is the theory of temporal processes necessarily repressed in the discursive formations, with the subject-effect as *causa sui,* which requires the double repression of the de-centred –social and unconscious– determinations that constitute it. Thus, it reads the mutual consistency of the "evidences of the subject and meaning" that are at work in the discursive processes as operations of simplification of the complex historical temporality. Double simplifications: simplification of the procedural complexity of the times articulated in the conjuncture that is lived as the "Present"; and simplification of the temporality

of the subjectivation processes in the retroactivity that enables the subjects' experience as if they were "always already" subjects, which Pêcheux describes as "metaphysical figures" of the type of *Münchausen* (1982, 101-109).

The combination of these two orders of simplification is at the core of the imaginary scene identified as the "theater of consciousness", which the Althusserian concept of *interpellation* has the merit of exposing. In it, we find once again the relation between image and force as a relation between State power and "psychic violence":

> This figure, associated both with religion and with the police ("You, for whom I have shed this drop of my blood" / "Hey, you, there!"), has the advantage, first of all that, through this double meaning of the word "interpellation", it makes palpable the superstructural link [...] between the 'subject in law' (he who enters into contractual relations with other subjects in law, his equals) and the ideological subject (he who says of himself: 'It's me!') It has the second advantage that it presents this link in such a way that the theatre of consciousness (I see, I think, I speak, I see you, I speak to you, etc.) is observed from behind the scenes, from the place where one can grasp the fact that the subject is spoken *of*, the subject is spoken *to*, before the subject can say: 'I speak'. (1982, 105-106)

Interpellation, as a concept that exposes the *scenic* backdrop of consciousness, exposes the mechanism through which the experience of identity operates in a phenomenological space and a non-dialectical time, whose condition is the forgetting of the superstructural (overdetermined) bond between the (legal, ideological) apparatuses and the structures of certain discursive formations ("Hey, you...", "You, for whom...") and the divergent process of identification, whose result is a subject "identical to itself".

The theatrical metaphor constitutes a strong claim in the effort to read the mutual consistency of eccentric (historical) determinations of ideology and the eccentric (unconscious) determinations of the psyche. Drawing on Brecht, Althusser uncovers the *topique* of the *phenomenological drama,* that:

> [...] gave us tragedy, its conditions and its 'dialectic', completely reflected in the speculative consciousness of a central character [...] What is the ideology of a society or a period if it is not that society's or period's consciousness of itself, that is, an immediate material which spontaneously implies, looks for and naturally finds its forms in the image of a consciousness of self living the totality of its world in the transparency of its own myths? (2005, 144)

Every myth describes a spatial interiority and a non-dialectical temporality or a fake circular dialectic that produces an experience of its own situation under the dramatic-dialectical mode. Against this concentric topography, Marx's materialist principle of historical time warns us that "there is no dialectic of consciousness: no dialectic of consciousness which could reach reality itself by virtue of its own contradictions; in short, there can be no 'phenomenology' in the Hegelian sense" (144).

It is no coincidence that the theatrical evocation and the reference to the structure of myth also meet in the genealogy of the Freudian concept of "original phantasies" (*Urphantasien*) – whose naturalist predecessor are the "original scenes" (*Urszenen*). Like Marx, Freud inherited and challenged at once the epistemic distinction between the imaginary and the real, starting with the problem of *temporality.*

Fantasies are "imaginary scripts" in which the subject finds itself present and in which it represents its origin (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974). "As collective myths", they attempt to provide a solution to the enigma of the origin (and its suspended temporality): they *stage* the moment of emergence of the individual, as the "origin of a history...". It is so that they represent its Cause: "[they] represent, in a shape more or less deformed by defensive processes, the realization of a desire and, ultimately, an unconscious desire" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1974). "Scenes" in which the subject is always present, including the primary scene (of its conception) from which it would seem to be excluded and in which

it participates through the permutation of roles, attributions and syntactic changes, like Freud outlines in the neurotic's family romances [1909].

Fragments of "Family romances" were integrated through quotations and paraphrases in the work of Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909) which affirms that the manifestation of the intimate relationship that exists between dream and myth fully justifies the interpretation of myth as the dream of a people. "The child's self-behaves like the hero of the myth, and the hero should actually be always interpreted simply as a collective self..." (1909, 63-68).

The myth functions as a discursive dispositive that allows to identify the tautological effect of the *retroactive* temporality of interpellation, in whose paradox the subject is produced as if having *always already been a subject* and the social order as if derived from an anthropology: "the 'evidentness' of identity conceals the fact that it is the result of an identification-interpellation of the subject, whose alien origin is nevertheless 'strangely familiar' to him'" (Pêcheux, 1982,107)

That said, what Pêcheux enables us to think and contributes substantially to the materialist approach to ideology is that the Freudian temporality of estrangement in the experience of the sameness, which consecrates the effect of the interpellation as the reunification of a mis-adjustment, finds its existence in the discursive materiality of the syntactic incrustation –called "preconstructed" (107). A repressed temporal separation, distance or gap in the phrase, between what is pretended to have been thought before, elsewhere or independently, and what is contained in the global affirmation of the phrase. This is the *material* reason of the paradox of the indetermination of first names: they reject any determination (in spite of requiring it *by necessity*) because other terms, without being such, offer a placement from which they support their imaginary effect of singular designation: "designation by a proper name correlatively implies the possibility of designating 'the same thing' by a periphrasis like 'he who…'" (65). Pêcheux reaches thus the syntactic level of discursive formations to re-inscribe the conflictive consistency of the imaginary materiality in their *dispositio*.

Montag locates in the Spinozan background the ambivalence between demand and decree –which Freud was also aware of– in order to bring out the politicity that is inherent to discourse. In syntax, one finds "the paradoxical *retroactive temporality* in which the effects of hegemony are at the same time product and condition for the birth of a new State" (Pêcheux, 1982, 65). Then, the dimension of the *command* that any *demand* conceals is deactivated when its discursive form is made visible.

> To read the discursive form, reality, is for Pêcheux to reformulate it as command, thereby inscribing it in a scene of discipline and punishment: one cannot ignore a command without impunity. […] the command present itself as an act of both illocutionary and physical force : it is expressed in such phrases as "everyone knows that…" or "as anyone can see" (…) To formulate the command as command, to translate it into itself, is to disobey one of its most important orders : it is thus both the cause and effect of a shift in power relations. (Montag, 2015, §29)

But, to the extent that any ritual is forced to come to pass, to repeat itself materially, it is –says Montag– exposed to "infelicities", "misstatements" that may be the *occasion* for something new: "*il n'ya cause que de ce qui cloche*" (2015, §12).

Pêcheux allows us to understand politics in the strong meaning of a radical transformation, without replacing the concept of class struggle for autonomy of politics turned ontology. In this sense, the opportunity (the *chance*?) is inscribed as an *internal distance* in the *complex assemblage of the existent*, –only to be experienced as a *familiar strangeness*. A liminal space, the immanent border that indicates an *irrepresentable* limit in the discursive materiality that systematically escapes and marks thought with real historical tensions, while it symptomatizes its incapacity to capture them immediately and to offer its Concept.

And the –necessarily displaced– presentation of the irrepresentable is the point where, reading Machiavelli, Althusser (1995 [1972-1986], 54; see Romé, 2019) discovers the suspended

temporality of that *unsettling familiarity* that evokes the Freudian notion of *Unheimlichkeit* and allows us to outline the opening of the conjuncture to the opportunity for political action.

## VIII. Concluding remarks

With Pêcheux, disperse and fragmentary developments could be brought together through the weak but suggestive thread that connects the critique of idealist and empiricist epistemology under the "religious myth of reading" of a manifest discourse (Althusser, 2005); materialist critiques of classic theater, inspired by Brecht and Bertolazzi (Althusser, 2005); critiques of the political anthropologies of the "State of Nature" that replicate the scheme of the *Edenic Myth* (Pêcheux, 2014 [1978]); and the references to the *theoretical dispositive* in Machiavelli (1995 [1972-1986]). It is a weak connection, where the discursive questions are invoked apropos other questions, regarding science, theology, politics, etc.

The Pecheutian operation *produces* the discursive question that pushes the Althusserian theory of ideology forward. The emphasis on the *scenic* condition of interpellation brings forth the weight of fantasy and desire as constitutive components of the materiality of power –the "psychic violence" of the decree– both in the ideological operation as well as in its discursive existences. It takes the interweaving of ideology and discourse to an extreme point that allows us to recover the epistemic sense of *conjunctural thinking*.

The materialist stake of a theory of discursive processes is rooted at the same time in the Freudian theoretical novelty, which, among other things, exposes the bond between fantasy and unconscious repression, and in the Marxist theoretical novelty, which, among other things, breaks away from the myth of the small producer by developing its theory of primitive accumulation. In both cases, a complex, plural and non-contemporaneous conceptualization of temporality is set in motion. It is that complexity which remains ignored in the theories of discourse that only ask the question about its mechanism, ignoring the problem of the origin (or pretending to resolve it with an ontological jump toward an affirmation of pure contingency). The reading of the mythical fantasy as a dispositive of discursive production clarifies that it requires the repression of the material objectivity of the imaginary; in other words, the complex transindividual, overdetermined –hierarchical and unevenly articulated– *ensemble* of apparatuses and real discursive formations of a given conjuncture (educational, moral, legal, etc.) whose concrete existence as a *contradictory unity in dominance* is a product of the determined state of the class struggle, in the context of a given social formation. The class struggle does not respond to any kind of sociological position, nor to a *combat between ideologies* (neither "proletarian and bourgeois", nor "dominant and subordinate"), as Althusser denounces as a reformist reading of the Gramscian theory of hegemony (2018a). The primacy of the class struggle may only be read in the concreteness of an order of *formations* that exists as a (metastable) equilibrium between contradicting relations of production and the transformation of the articulated complex in dominance. That means, in a determinate conjuncture, and never "in general": never in a structural comprehension of its formal mechanisms, which, flattened onto the conjuncture (without a concrete analysis of the situation) reproduce the "point of view of the State".

Pêcheux understands better than Althusser his thesis about the clinical theory of temporality in the analytic of the "case": "it is only possible to give a content to the concept of historical time by defining historical time as the specific form of existence of the social totality under consideration, an existence in which different structural levels of temporality interfere" (Althusser and Balibar 1970, [1968] 109).

And he produces *avant la lettre* the critique of the process that operates today as the supposed "overcoming" of the concepts of class struggle and unconscious, not only in the images proper to common sense, but also in the abstractions and ontologizations that slip into the field of allegedly critical thought.

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# A Dislocation without a Subject. Althusser, Laclau and Spinoza

**Abstract:** *This article studies the relation between Laclau's concept of dislocation and Althusser's concept of structural causality, to demonstrate that the hegemonic articulation of identities cannot be ascribed to the operation of a subject, since it can only be sustained by a social force that can either block or mobilise processes of subjectivation.*

**Keywords:** *Laclau, Althusser, Spinoza, dislocation, structural causality, overdetermination.*

**Resumen:** *Este artículo estudia la relación entre el concepto de dislocación de Laclau y el concepto de causalidad estructural de Althusser, para demostrar que la articulación hegemónica de identidades no puede serle adscrita a la operación de un sujeto, pues solo puede ser sostenida por una fuerza social que bloquee o movilice procesos de subjetivación.*

**Palabras clave:** *Laclau, Althusser, Spinoza, Dislocación, Causalidad estructural, Sobredeterminación.*

Dislocation is, in Ernesto Laclau's work, the name for the fundamental condition of the political. The constitutive contingency of the social structure means that the construction and destruction of the equally impossible and necessary fullness of society becomes a matter of political action. In this article, I argue that a similar conception of the dislocation of the structure is already at work in one of Laclau's main sources, Louis Althusser, and particularly in his interpretation of the Spinozist concept of immanent causality. The interest of this analysis lies in the link that Laclau establishes between the notion of dislocation and the idea that any social contradiction is always already overdetermined by all the other contradictions. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the latter idea is borrowed by Laclau and Mouffe from Althusser in order to put forth their central claim that any social identity is the result of its articulation to other identities. By bringing together the notions of dislocation and overdetermination, and by showing that the former is already present in the Althusserian account of immanent causality, I counter their main critique of Althusser: the affirmation of the essential incompatibility of the concept of overdetermination with the Spinozist basis of Althusser's thought. It is in fact precisely through the concept of immanent causality that Althusser is able to think the structure's constitutive dislocation and the necessity of overdetermination. The proximity of Althusser to Laclau will therefore become fully manifest by opposing Laclau's understanding of his own relation to the former. However, this investigation enables us to grasp a more fundamental point of separation between the two authors. In particular, I will claim that, from an Althusserian point of view, the structure's dislocation cannot immediately coincide with the subject, as Laclau asserts.[1]

How does Laclau settle the problem of his relation to Althusser? In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* Laclau and Mouffe argue that the concept of overdetermination implies

a comprehension of the social as a symbolic order. As such, the social lacks the ultimate literality of an essence and can never objectively and positively constitute itself as a totality. Its regularity consists in the precarious articulations of its elements –articulations that can always be undone and renewed by political action. Laclau, however, refuses Althusser's attempt to anchor these articulations of the social in the determination in the last instance by the economy. In fact, this unilateral determination contradicts the symbolic dimension entailed by overdetermination and prevents recognition of the fundamental lack that constitutes every social structure (2001, 97-105). According to Laclau, this aspect of Althusser's philosophy entails a conception of the subject as an effect of ideology, which ensures the reproduction of a fully objective and positive social structure. In *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, Laclau explicitly links this contradiction to the Spinozist horizon of Althusser's philosophy:

> In the Althusserian formulation –with all its implicit Spinozanism– the central point is the production of the 'subject effect' as an internal moment of the process of reproduction of the social whole. Instead of seeing in 'identification' an ambiguous process that shows the limits of objectivity, the former becomes precisely the opposite: an internal requirement of objectivity in the process of its self-constitution (in Spinozan terms, the subject is substance). (1990, 186)

Laclau thus contends that Althusser's thought should be purified of all instances that undermine his account of overdetermination.[2] However, in what follows I will try to show that if Laclau is right to affirm that the Althusserian theory of the subject-effect does not allow thinking the subject as the constitutive lack of the positivity and objectivity of the structure, this does not mean that Althusser could not think this lack at all. On the contrary, Althusser formulates a concept of dislocation that is ultimately incompatible with the Lacanian notion of the subject advocated by Laclau.

Every significant structuralist since Levi-Strauss (1987) shares the following basic assumptions that, as we shall see, are also present in the thought of Laclau. Any element of a structure is differentially defined by its articulation to the other elements; there is no transcendent element escaping this rule and granting closure to the system because such an element would have no relation to the structure. Therefore, the structurality of the structure, the fact that the structure is something more than a formless series of shifts from one element to another and has a certain unity, can only be granted by an element that is at the same time present within the structure as an articulated element and absent from it. This element stands for the existence of a demarcation of inclusion from exclusion –a demarcation that is as such emptied of any content. The structuration of the structure is precisely the temporary result of the both necessary and impossible attempt to produce a meaningful totality by filling in this absence, that is, by assigning some content to this empty element.

Alain Badiou (1967) shows that Althusser formulates a similar conception of the structurality of the structure.[3] In the social whole, as Althusser conceives it, there are distinct and determined practices. Their distinction and determination are produced by their differential articulation to other practices. When a practice is connected to the others Althusser terms it an instance. He then adds that in the social whole, there is always a dominant instance that secures the unity of the whole by assigning a specific efficacy to its elements. The role of the dominant instance can shift from one instance to the other, insomuch as it is not essentially assigned to any specific content. This articulation structured according to a dominant instance is what Althusser calls a conjuncture, and the reflection of this articulation upon every instance of the whole is what he calls overdetermination. In order to explain the production of this articulation, that is, the production of what Badiou calls 'the conjuncture-effect', Althusser has to introduce a new kind of determination: determination in the last instance. Yet this kind of determination cannot be produced by any of the articulated instances[4] insofar as they are all defined by their

specific place in the articulated whole and cannot precede the conjuncture-effect. In fact, even the instance that is generally called economy cannot produce this kind of determination. From this standpoint, it is incorrect to claim that in Althusser determination in the last instance reintroduces a unilateral determination that erases overdetermination. In fact, the determination in the last instance can only be produced by an absence that is merely represented within the whole by a lieutenant: the dominant instance. This is why,

> If no instance can determine the whole, it is possible on the contrary that a practice, considered in its specific structure, a structure, so to say, dislocated (*décalée*) with regard to the structure that articulates this practice as an instance of the whole, is determinant with regard to the whole in which it is present in a decentred form. (…) [T]he shifting of the dominant and the correlative distortion of the conjuncture is the effect of the fact that one of the instances is underlain by a structure-of-practice that does not coincide with the instance that represents it in the whole. (Badiou, 1967, 456)

Now, in order to understand how this determination works, it is necessary to approach it in the light of the Althusserian conception of structural causality. Here the philosophy of Spinoza becomes crucial. To explain this kind of causality, in *Reading Capital*, Althusser affirms that

> The effects [of a structure] are not outside the structure, are not a pre-existing object, element or space in which the structure arrives *to imprint its mark*: […] the structure is immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, […] *the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*, […] the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects. (Althusser and Balibar, 2009, 208-209)

Althusser contends that structures as well as their elements are the result of the process of structuration or of effectuation itself. Hence, the latter is a process producing interiority without any preceding interiority that exteriorises itself. As recent research has shown, this idea is consistent with Spinoza's account of immanent causality. In fact, in contrast to Leibniz's inscription of the relation in the interiority of an essence, for Spinoza 'any interiority is constituted by relations that are external to their elements' (Lærke, 2009, 172). Spinoza thus replaces an interiority that 'imprints its mark' on a space of elements external to it, with the pure exteriority of relations that produce interiority by relating (and therefore producing) their own terms. The structure is immanent to its effects because it coincides with the process that produces these effects through the production of their relations. It thereby constitutes them as the internal elements of a whole that assigns to them their own interiority. Now, if this movement of articulation is not the expression of some underlying interiority, then the structure is always ridden by an instability preventing its closure and its infinite reproduction. As we shall see, it is in fact dependent on an exteriority that is constitutive of its interiority.

This is why the structure is always dislocated. If the structure only consists in an actual articulation of relations that is not the expression of a preceding interiority, then the element lacking is its own ultimate consistency as a structure. Thus this void is the structure itself as an entity posed independently of its effects.[5] If this is the case, the fixation of the dominant instance and the consequent overdetermination of all the instances is the precarious embodiment of the impossible consistency of the structure. This does not mean that overdetermination simply ensures the reproduction of the structure, as this would patently contradict Althusser's thought. It rather indicates the mechanism whereby a specific articulation of instances –the conjuncture– results in a structure in dominance that is reflected upon the instances in such a way as to determine their efficacy.[6] While the structure depends upon a specific articulation of its instances for its existence, thus being necessarily dislocated, it is nonetheless reflected upon these instances, thereby gaining an unstable consistency.[7] Determination in the last instance –the production of the conjuncture-effect– coincides with the dislocation of the structure with regard

to its effects, that is, with the process that produces the articulation of its elements. This dislocation creates a void whose efficacy is reflected in the overdetermined character of the whole. The consequence of this reading is that certain ambiguities concerning the last instance (and the very notion of instance) can be redressed. In fact, the economy has to lose any notional primacy because the representative of the void within the whole is only the shifting dominant instance that precariously fixes the dislocated structure. What on the contrary should be retained is the idea of a determination in the last instance by a 'structure-of-practice' which exists only in a dislocated form through the production of its effects and is therefore unidentifiable (or merely represented by a lieutenant) within the structured whole. In this sense, it is possible to reaffirm that 'from the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the "last instance" never comes' (Althusser, 2005, 113).[8]

Laclau's conception of the structurality of the structure seems consistent with this Althusserian theorisation of structural causality and overdetermination. In fact, Laclau claims that every particular identity is determined by its differential relations to other particular identities. However, 'without limits through which a (non-dialectical) negativity is constructed, we would have an indefinite dispersion of differences whose absence of systematic limits would make any differential identity impossible' (2007, 52). Since this systematic limit cannot be assured by a new difference,

> The system […] is present, if you want, through its absence. […] [I]f that impossible object –the system– cannot be represented but needs, however, to show itself within the field of representation, the means of that representation will be constitutively inadequate. Only the particulars are such means. As a result the systematicity of the system, the moment of its impossible totalisation, will be symbolized by particulars which contingently assume such a representative function. (2007, 53)

The overdetermination that defines each element of the structure according to its relations to the other elements of the structure is therefore produced by the very absence of the structure, as an entity independent from the process of structuration itself –an absence that can merely be represented by one element of the structured system.

However, even though they share a similar conception of the structurality of the structure, the structured elements that the two authors take into account are different. While Althusser focuses on practices, instances and contradictions, Laclau analyses discourses, identities and antagonisms. This difference leads to the problem of the materialist or idealist character of Laclau's thought. However, rather than insisting on this question, that has already been debated at length[9] and whose treatment would at least require a precise identification of the 'dividing line' between materialism and idealism (is discourse less 'material' than economy or should we not admit with Althusser that 'matter can be discussed in many senses'? – the difference between materialism and idealism then lying in the way in which we understand the constitution of any object, as 'immaterial' as it may seem), I will concentrate on a problem that still persists in my account of Althusser's Spinozism and that could be instrumental in shedding some light not only upon it, but also upon what distinguishes it from Laclau's position.

My account of structural causality led me to acknowledge a fundamental relation between dislocation and the void of the structure. How is this conception of the void of the structure compatible with the Spinozist principle of the full positivity of being? In other words, how can the coincidence of absence with immanence be understood? The void of the structure marks the impossibility of the totalisation of the process of structuration of the social whole, that is, the impossible consistency of the structure itself. However, from a Spinozist point of view, this impossibility is not the result of an ultimate lack of being. Rather it results from the inscription of any process of structuration in the infinite and untotalisable productivity of the substance that continuously ties and unties the temporary fixations of its modes. This means that the structurality of the structure depends on its capacity

to counter the dislocating forces of the 'field of productivity' in which it is inscribed. I must thus stress the importance of distinguishing Spinoza's God from Althusser's social whole.[10] The latter is an unstable structuration of elements produced by a multiplicity of relations always contingent upon others relations. It is what Spinoza calls a complex individual. The former is on the contrary the name of the infinite productivity of the articulations of individuals itself, i.e. of relation as producing the related individuals.[11] This productivity is of course absolutely necessary because it cannot be determined by any free subject. However, this necessity is not that of an essence in which all its possible relations are always already inscribed, but of an essence that coincides with its relational potency, with its existence: an *actuosa essentia*. The arising of relations is thus necessary, but this necessity coincides with contingency insomuch as it is not always already recorded in an order that reality ought to respect.[12] Only by taking this distinction between Althusser's social whole and Spinoza's God into account, can we understand the complex kind of determination implied by immanent causality and the role of dislocation in Althusser's theorization of the structure. Any structure is in principle dislocated (and thus void) because of its dependence on the excessive productivity of relations that unceasingly construct and destruct the temporary structurations that embody it. The attempt to embody the impossible consistency of the structure or to fill in its void, aims precisely to render a temporary structuration immune to these dislocating effects. From this point of view, the late Althusser is right to state that Spinoza's God is the ultimate void. Vittorio Morfino explains this idea by asserting that its infinite productivity 'lets reality in its entire facticity rise from the ashes of the great hypostasis of metaphysics' (Morfino, 2002, 151). In other words, Spinoza's God 'voids' any attempt to hypostatise a particular structure as an entity fully consistent and independent from the contingent process of its structuration. As the very principle of dislocation, it unceasingly produces the void of any structure[13]

Even this conception of the substance does not seem too different from Laclau and Mouffe's idea of a 'field of discursivity' in which every discourse is situated and that determines 'the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture' (2001, 111). In fact, this idea implies that

> Against the essentialist vision we tend […] to accept the *infinitude of the social*, that is, the fact that any structural system is limited, that it is always surrounded by an 'excess of meaning' which it is unable to master and that, consequently, 'society' as a unitary and intelligible object that grounds its own partial processes is an impossibility. (Laclau, 1990, 90)

This excess is understood by Laclau as a 'constitutive outside': 'there is always a constitutive outside which deforms and threatens the "system" and this very fact means that the latter can only have the status of a *hegemonic* attempt at articulation, not of a ground' (1990, 214).[14] We can thus understand dislocation as 'the *disruption* of a structure by forces operating *outside* it' (1990, 50)[15].

Some doubts could however still be formulated as to the possibility of thinking the emergence of a structure, as unstable and precarious as it may be, out of the infinite and untotalisable productivity of the substance. By claiming that the void of the structure coincides with the infinite and untotalisable productivity of the substance, do we not risk erasing the specific efficacy of this void, namely the mobilisation of the impossible and necessary process of filling it in, which is the base of any form of unity? In Laclau's thought, at least after the adoption of Žižek's Lacanian critique,[16] this problem is solved with the introduction of an idea that seems to entail a first essential difference with regard to a Spinozist perspective. According to Laclau, if the 'constitutive outside' is immediately constituted by the inside as a 'negativity' that both prevents and forces it to attain a full identity, it is because of a more fundamental lack that prevents every identity from being fully itself. Thus, this lack dialectically produces a tendency to its fulfilment. Insomuch as he rejects the idea of an ultimate and constitutive lack of being, a

Spinozist attempt to answer these questions has to go through another path that implies the idea that every thing strives to persist in its being.[17] If any process of structuration is inscribed in, produced and dislocated by an untotalisable field, then for any individuality to persist in its being it is necessary to counter the process that unceasingly voids its own structure even though it is on this same process that its structuration depend. In order to explain how this is possible, a last central notion constructed by Althusser in the light of Spinoza's philosophy (namely of his theory of imagination) has to be introduced: the notion of ideology. In fact, any closed totality can only be the result of an ideological totalisation that fills in the void of the structure – a totalisation that, in other words, fixes the infinite productivity of the processes of structuration. The precarious result of a process of structuration, with its specific relations of dominance and overdetermination, is therefore turned by ideology into an eternal form bound to reproduce itself indefinitely.[18] In my opinion, this is why Balibar has enigmatically wondered 'if in Althusser […] ideology is not simply the other name of the structure' (2012, xiv): ideology, to play with an Althusserian expression, produces 'the sentiment' of the structure.[19] In this sense, ideology, by entertaining a sort of mirror relation with the last instance, becomes hardly identifiable as one of the instances of the social whole; it rather permeates every instance and every practice, by expressing '*the way* men live the relation between them and their conditions of existence' (Althusser, 2005, 233). The role of ideology is thus absolutely crucial: as Giorgos Fourtounis has claimed in a thought-provoking article on Althusser's immanentist structuralism, a serious immanentist perspective, veritably aiming to refute any form of transcendence, far from relying on a formless transitive causality, recognises and explains the existence of a 'transcendent remainder' that it strives to annihilate (2005, 116). This is why Althusser claims that science is always a science of ideology. The science of the conjuncture is in fact a movement that brings a structure –that is the ideological totalisation of a specific structuration of the social whole– back to its inscription in a wider field of productivity, thereby unveiling its contingency, i.e. its structurality.

The question of ideology allows me finally to determine the most fundamental difference between Althusser and Laclau. It is here that the question of the subject plays a fundamental role. From an Althusserian point of view, ideology is that which grants consistency to a structure for a subject. The subject is thus conceived as the referent of ideology in its production of the totalisation of a process of structuration and is essentially linked to the reproduction of a structure. Laclau is right to state that a theory of the subject is absent from Althusser, if by 'subject' we mean the point where the structure's full determination is hindered, and to link this absence to Althusser's Spinozism. However, this lack of a theory of the subject does not mean that the structure is necessarily bound to reproduce itself indefinitely. The difference between the two authors resides in the fact that, in spite of accounting for the dislocation of the structure, Althusser would refuse Laclau's conceptualisation in which 'subject equals the pure form of the structure's dislocation, of its ineradicable distance from itself' (Laclau, 1990, 60).[20] Marking his distance from Lacan, Althusser insists precisely on this point in a text of 1967 called 'Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses': 'there is no *split*, *divided* subject; […] next to the *Ich* there is a "*Spaltung*", that is to say properly an *abyss*, a precipice, a lack, a gap. This abyss is not a subject, but is something open *next to a subject*' (1993, 165).[21] We can now suggest that this abyss is produced by the conflict between a particular structuration of the social that tends to close itself in a wholly structured totality and its inscription in the process of the infinite productivity of the substance. What we are dealing with here is thus not the opposition between the necessity of a structure and the opening of a variety of possibilities that a subject could freely seize, but with a wholly necessary process where a structural necessity is subverted by a force (reminiscent of Badiou's structure-of-practice). This is why I would suggest understanding this conflict in the light of the opposition between structure and force introduced by Derrida in *Writing and Difference*[22].

This notion of force is particularly useful because of its proximity to Laclau's concept of decision, a proximity which confirms what distinguishes him from Althusser and reaffirms points of their possible encounter. In fact, if Laclau refuses to conceive the subject as a self-determining instance by recognising the limitations imposed by the possibilities opened up by the structure's dislocation, he preserves the space for a free choice between those possibilities.[23] Equalling the structure's dislocation, the subject thus becomes 'the distance between the undecidable structure and the decision' (Laclau, 1990, 30). Here a problematic alternative opens up for Laclau: either these possibilities are all equally compelling and the decision is blocked by a kind of liberty of indifference, or one possibility is more compelling (Laclau would say 'credible') than the others. In the latter case, however, it is not a possibility anymore, but rather a force that captures the choice of the subject or is necessarily invested by the subject.[24] Only by assuming this second option, which entails the identification of decision with force and the separation of decision from choice, it is possible to claim, as Laclau does elsewhere, that the decision is 'a complex situation whose mechanisms –largely unconscious– escape the "subject" of the decision; and that this subject does not precede the decision, but is rather the product of the latter' (Laclau, 2004, 307). Decision thus becomes the inscription of one's agency in a force and subjectivation becomes the retroactive result of the stabilisation of the force as a structure. Hence, the proximity between Laclau and Althusser is operating even at the very core of their point of separation. Of course, this Spinozist conception, insofar as it deprives possibility of an ontological status, seems ultimately incompatible with Laclau's tendency to identify decision and choice. However, we should remember that the kind of necessity that this conception implies is neither unilateral nor blind. It is not unilateral because it coincides with the contingency of an essence that is only defined by its relations, thereby implying that other articulations can arise that untie the necessity of the given ones. It is not (at least not necessarily) blind because knowledge can intervene in it by linking the structure to the infinite field of relations, thereby opening the space for a force to impose itself on the subject –a force that, unknotting the stabilised forms of power, produces new articulations that could increase the individuals' acting potency.

In this article I have insisted on the affinities between Laclau's theory of dislocation and the Althusserian conception of structural causality. The latter, far from contradicting the overdetermined character of the social whole, explains the necessary dependence of the structure upon the contingent process of structuration of its elements, and therefore the fact that the structure is always dislocated. It consequently allows us to conceptualise overdetermination as the way in which the precarious result of this process, namely the structure itself, is in turn reflected upon its elements –a kind of reflection that always risks producing an ideological totalisation of the structure, ultimately erasing overdetermination. I have however shown that these affinities entail some essential differences and that, even more interestingly, these differences are reflected in Laclau's own thought in the form of a series of tensions.

The first difference lies in Laclau's conception of the constitutive lack or negativity of every identity as opposed to Spinoza's idea that the void of the structure is nothing but the effect upon its *conatus* of the positive forces of the infinite productivity of the substance. In Laclau's thought this difference is reflected in the tension between the idea of a 'constitutive outside', with all its resonances with a certain understanding of the Spinozist conception of the substance, and the idea of an ultimate lack in the subject. The second and most important difference lies in the Laclauian identification of dislocation with the subject as opposed to the Spinozist identification of dislocation with a force. This difference is reflected in Laclau's thought in the tension between force and choice that inhabits his concept of decision. In the light of this analysis, a last question should be posed: can the Spinozism of Althusser add something to (or eventually displace) Laclau's conception of the political? I would suggest that, instead of reducing political action to the interplay between processes of subjectivation and desubjectivation, Althusser's

philosophy summons it to turn its attention, both practically and theoretically, to its irreducible outside, that is, to the processes of dislocation that exceed, instead of simply overlapping with, those processes of subjectivation and desubjectivation, either blocking them or allowing them to be mobilised anew.[25]

## Notes

1. While it would be worthwhile to expound on the optimal approach to Spinoza, Althusser and their relation in order to avoid some easy misunderstandings, I will have to limit myself to briefly indicate that to understand Spinoza's importance for Althusser, it is crucial to remove the Hegelian glasses through which the former is usually read (and which Laclau himself wears in the rare passages of his work where Spinoza is mentioned). This means that Spinoza should not be interpreted as the first, insufficient step towards Hegel and subsequently as entirely belonging to the same rationalist tradition. The fact that, as Hegel said, Spinoza's substance is not subject, does not mean that Spinoza's substance is contradictory unless it is turned into its own subject, as Hegel did, but that his conception of the substance is simply incompatible with the one of Hegel. The most important attempt to read Spinoza from this point of view is still Macherey (2011). See also Montag and Stolze (1997).
2. To sum this up in another way I could say that, in the eyes of Laclau, if his own work can be considered as a radicalisation of some themes developed by Althusser (Laclau, 1990, 178), this is true only insofar as the Althusser of 1962, that is, the author of 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' (2005), is concerned, while the Althusser of 'On the Materialist Dialectic' (2005), *Reading Capital* (2009) and 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' has to be radically criticised (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 98).
3. Emilio de Ípola proposes an in-depth analysis of Badiou's interpretation by confronting it to its Lévi-Straussian and Lacanian sources and to the conception of the structure that Jacques-Alain Miller was developing at the same time (de Ípola, 2012, chapter 2).
4. If this was the case, we would have a kind causality such that we would be either unable to fix the infinite series of determinations and thus to introduce any kind of unity, or forced to fix this series by hypostatizing one of its elements – for example, the economical instance.
5. If the structure were separated from its effects, a kind of 'expressive causality' would be reached, where a transcendent principle is imprinted in every element of the whole. It would be easy to show how transitive causality (see note 4) and expressive causality ultimately communicate: they both result in a kind of hypostatisation.
6. From this analysis I could infer that rather than simply coinciding, as Althusser himself sometimes suggested, structural causality and overdetermination are better described as the two sides of the same coin. They account for the same process by approaching it respectively from the point of view of the structure and from the point of view of its effects. This idea could eventually lead to also distinguish structural or immanent causality from metonymical causality as expressing the same process from two different points of view.
7. In this sense, overdetermination is at work both when the specific articulation of the instances produces a situation of 'underdetermination' and when it produces a 'condensation' of contradictions, that is, when the reproduction of the structure is in danger.
8. We could therefore reintroduce the distinction between economy as a specific instance of the structure and production as the absent and immanent cause of the social whole. Laclau himself proposes such a distinction in one of his early works (Laclau, 2011, 75-76). This article could of course be opposed to my interpretation of the Althusserian conception of the last instance. In fact, it criticises Balibar's (and indirectly Althusser's) conception of the last instance as it is developed in *Reading Capital,* asserting that 'Balibar accepts the notions of "economic base" or "economic level" as simple synonyms of "level of production"' (74) thereby introducing a kind of self-sufficient 'economy' as the transhistorical embodiment of the last instance. This is why 'economy' plays the role of determining which instance has to ensure the extraction of surplus labour; that is, which instance is dominant. The level of generality that I assume in this article by studying the relation between Althusser and Spinoza obliges me (or rather allows me) to avoid this crucial problem that would require a global reassessment of the Althusserian reformulation of historical materialism and an in-depth analysis

of Althusser's (and Balibar's) self-criticism. For such a reassessment, see Bruschi, 2020. I would only say that it is in my view possible to establish a continuity between *Reading Capital* and the last works of Althusser on the 'materialism of the encounter' (2006), which radically erase every possibility of subordinating the contingent structuration of a mode of production to the rule of some transhistorical instance preceding this structuration. The principle of such a 'retroactive' reading of *Reading Capital* could be founded for instance upon the idea that 'there is no *immediate* grasp of the economic, there is no economic "given", any more that there is any immediately "given" effectivity in any of the levels. (…) The identification of the economic is achieved by *the construction of its object*, which presupposes a definition of the specific existence and articulation of the different levels of the structure of the whole, as they are necessarily implied by the structure of the mode of production considered. (…) It is probable that the majority of the difficulties of contemporary ethnology and anthropology arise from their approaching the "facts", the "givens" of (descriptive) ethnography, without taking the theoretical precaution of constructing the concept of their object: this omission commits them to projecting on to reality the categories which define the economic for them in practice, i.e., the categories of the economics of contemporary society' (Althusser and Balibar, 2009, 197-198). If we link this idea with the affirmation that the Marxian 'discovery' of the concept of surplus value destroys political economy's vision of economy as a self-sufficient homogenous space (Part II, Ch. 7-8), we understand how Althusser aimed to bring to light the dependence of economy upon a specific structuration of production which is always 'political', thereby disrupting any 'fixed' distinction between instances and the identification of a self-sufficient transhistorical 'economic' instance as the last instance. Of course, it could still be possible to claim with Laclau that, in *Reading Capital*, Balibar has nevertheless not gone far enough in this work of theoretical construction.

9. For a critique of Laclau from an Althusserian point of view that insists on this problem, see Lewis, 2005. Laclau and Mouffe have also directly approached the question of materialism and idealism in 'Post-Marxism without Apologies' (Laclau, 1990).
10. The importance of this distinction has been underlined in Thomas (2002).
11. Here, the unavoidable spatial figurations that I will employ (in particular the distinction between inside and outside) encounter their limits. The outside in which a structure is inscribed is in fact the very relation between an inside and an outside, preceding and producing these two terms.
12. This idea seems to contradict the Spinozist text, where contingency (along with possibility) is opposed to necessity, deprived of any ontological status and conceived as a mere lack of knowledge. However, inasmuch as this lack of knowledge concerns the essences of things (and not their causes as in the case of possibility) and since, as I have stated, these essences are produced by the intertwinement of relations that do not respect any teleological or even logical order, I can risk the hypothesis that contingency is something more than a mere lack of knowledge: it indicates the absence of reason or aim in the arising of necessary relations. In fact, since the very beginning of the *Ethics*, with the introduction of the quasi-contradictory concept of *causa sui*, Spinoza tries to rethink the classical antithesis between necessary and contingent: 'the substance as *effectus sui* has a cause, thus its existence is necessary; as a *causa sui* it does not have a cause, thus its existence is radically contingent, is the pure fact without reason of its existence; moreover, the mode, isolated from totality, is contingent, only exists referred to something else, to the absolutely necessary, that is, to the substance, but this substance only exists as the necessity of the modal contingency, that is, as the infinity of necessary relations that the contingent existences engage in' (Morfino, 2002, 68).
13. See Bruschi 2015.
14. See also: 'if all objectivity is systematically overflown by a constitutive outside, any form of unity, articulation and hierarchisation that may exist between the various regions and levels will be the result of a contingent and pragmatic *construction*' (Laclau, 1990, 186).
15. What I stated in note 11 about Spinoza is of course also valid here: the spatial figuration (inside/outside) can only partially account for the kind of relation that Laclau tries to construct. The 'constitutive outside' is the very relation between inside and outside that implies the impossible 'internal' achievement of the structure.
16. See his article 'Beyond Discourse-Analysis', published in Laclau, 1990.

17. Let me underline that the answer proposed by Žižek and Laclau could still be considered as unsatisfactory. For example, Judith Butler writes that 'it seems that Žižek and Laclau also converge at the Hegelian assumption that lack produces the desire and/or tendency toward the effect of being or substance. Consider the unproblematized status of "tending" in the following claim by Laclau: "…we find the paradox dominating the whole of social action: freedom exists because society does not achieve constitution as a structural objective order; but any social action *tends towards* the constitution of that impossible object, and thus towards the elimination of the condition of liberty itself" (Laclau, 1990, 44)' (Butler, 1993, 278). The idea that the fundamental lack that constitutes every identity mobilises a process of totalisation, seems therefore to be an assumption that Laclau cannot ultimately justify.
18. In this sense, overdetermination could be understood as the product of the tension between dislocation and ideology.
19. Laclau proposes a similar conception of ideology: 'the ideological (…) would consist of the non-recognition of the precarious character of any positivity, of the impossibility of any ultimate suture. (…) The ideological would be the will to "totality" of any totalizing discourse' (Laclau, 1990, 92).
20. This idea is essentially linked to the affirmation of the constitutive lack of being of every identity.
21. This is a not so implicit critique of Lacan. On this question see Bruschi (2014).
22. Derrida introduced the notion of force in order to counter the structuralist tendency towards a kind of 'preformism' or 'teleologism'. See Derrida, 2001, Ch. 1, in particular 22 and 30-31.
23. This conception of freedom and possibility is summed up in (Laclau, 2007, 18-19).
24. This idea can be generalised is such a way as to counter the impression that the individual's *conatus* is a purely defensive stance that is haunted by an external force. As I have indicated above (see note 11), it is on the contrary the very relation between the interior and the exterior that determines in the last instance the eventual rise of a force and the disruption of a structure.
25. I would claim that it is only from this point of view that the question of the relation between idealism and materialism in Laclau's thought could be posed anew.

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# Class Struggle in Theory: the position of enunciation of philosophy and the Hegel/Spinoza debate

**Abstract:** *The present work is an attempt to discuss the limits of Louis Althusser's philosophical project. These limits are highlighted through a discussion of Hegel and Spinoza, which is in a sense the very thrust of Althusser's work.*

**Keywords:** *Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Althusser, Class struggle.*

**Resumen:** *Este trabajo intenta discutir los límites del proyecto filosófico de Louis Althusser. Estos límites son resaltados mediante una discusión de Hegel y Spinoza, la cual es en cierto sentido el mismo impulso fundamental de la obra althusseriana.*

**Palabras clave:** *Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Althusser, Lucha de clases.*

I want to begin with an obvious statement: Althusser is both a communist and a philosopher, within the same register of thought. This relation between communism and philosophy, is a relation of tension. In a certain sense, his whole work can be understood within the span of this tension. One of his main aims was to push the readings and debates of/on Marx onto a philosophical terrain. In doing so, Althusser faced a major obstacle, or rather a problem: that is, Hegel. But, I shall discuss this later.

Over two decades ago, in a discussion of Althusser's work and project, Étienne Balibar, argued that it will take another generation to give a more objective account of this. Last year[1] was the centenary of Louis Althusser's birth, which, in continuation with the anniversary of the publication of *Reading Capital* and *For Marx*, was used as an occasion to account for Althusser's work in the present situation. Indeed, it was a good moment or occasion to return to his work once again and rethink its potentials, limits and contradictions.

What do we think of when we think of Louis Althusser? What is in Althusser's philosophical project, which historical determination of his work, remains with us today?

Althusser's philosophy, as Balibar has elaborated, is grounded on the formula 'premises without conclusions' and 'conclusions without premises', which has temporary effects. But this is precisely where Althusser's greatest lesson lies: that as materialists, it is idealistic to create philosophical systems that would somehow endure the corrosion of time. It is this kind of intervention that is the point of materialist philosophy, not its lasting effects in idealist systems of philosophy. Intervention is what changes the coordinates of a certain situation. Its effects can be traced directly in the material world, and not in ideal systems. In other words, what is at stake for Althusser's understanding of philosophy is not 'its demonstrative discourse or its discourse of legitimation'; rather it is defined by the position it occupies within the already occupied positions in a philosophical battlefield, 'for or against such-and-such an existing philosophical position, or support for a new philosophical position.'

The question is therefore as follows: how can we conceptualise Althusser's project? This is

what this paper seeks to do. If there is no Althusserian systematic philosophy, nor an Althusserian School, doesn't his philosophy stand for the philosopher who immediately disappears in his effects? In this sense, Althusser is a vanishing mediator par excellence. Althusser's theory cannot be fully grasped, or understood.

In Althusser's understanding, philosophy thinks only the Marxist-Leninist politics. In other words, this relation can be articulated as follows: philosophy is preoccupied, in the last instance, not with thinking about the present as such (description), but with intervening negatively, through demarcations, in it (prescriptively). It is this specificity that Althusser has in mind when he designates philosophy as a class struggle in the realm of theory. And class struggle in the realm of theory is what this paper is concerned with.

But, before that, I want to say something about relation of philosophy to ideology, according to Althusser. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that his project of 'return to Marx' is, in the last instance, an ideological project. In fact, we should read his statement that 'philosophy is the highest form of theorisation of ideology' in this light. Marxism, or rather the work of Marx on the critique of political economy can be approached philosophically only following an ideological premise. One of the greatest contributions of Althusser is the thesis according to which 'all human beings are ideological animals.' One cannot live outside of ideology, because men 'can only live and act under the domination of ideas, those of their own practice or the practices dominating their own practice.'

Therefore, every claim to be outside of ideology is the ultimate ideological position.

Althusser's main concern: how to understand and rethink the potentials of Marxist theory with regard to communist politics? As many have argued, Althusser had no doubt until the end of his life that communism was the correct name for the liberation of mankind from all forms of exploitations and oppressions. His concern was not to question the notion of communism itself, but the way communism was conceptualised or understood within different orientations of Marxism and their respective ideologies. It is from this perspective that we should read his thesis from *Lenin and Philosophy*:

> to turn to the past of the Marxist Worker's Movement, we can call by their real names the theoretical deviations which have led to the great historical defeats for the proletariat, that of the Second International, to mention only one. These deviations are called economism, evolutionism, voluntarism, humanism, empiricism, dogmatism, etc. Basically, these deviations are *philosophical* deviations, and were denounced as philosophical deviations by the great workers' leaders, starting with Engels and Lenin. (Althusser 1971, 45)

This is the task he set himself: to correct Marxism by providing the correct philosophical theory and by struggling against the political deviations, which in the last instance, are philosophical. The struggle against these deviations was carried out from the communist position in philosophy.

However, here we should be careful not to reduce his specific and singular contribution to a conjuncture which no longer exists. His interventions should not be reduced to a purely academic philosophical work either. What distinguishes Althusser's intervention is his faithfulness to Marxism itself. But, does Althusser fully theorise the political consequences of his philosophical interventions? Further, it seems to me that Althusser left many theses developed only as a tendency. Also, it appears that there is a discrepancy between his ambitions in outlining the philosophy *for* Marx, and the amount of published work during his lifetime. Although, perhaps the posthumous publications exceed the amount of those published during his life.

However, Althusser was very clear in his position that there is no such a thing as a pure communist politics, or pure Marxist theory. Consequently, there was no pure philosophy for Marx, in the sense of purifying Marx's work from ideological mystifications or distortions. The function of philosophy is not to theorise the results of the break of Marxism from ideology, but to theorise the theoretical conceptual apparatus which makes Marx's theory intelligible.

Balibar once wrote that 'the most fundamental of all these aporias, the one which in fact governs the whole fate of Marxism (as Althusser had perfectly understood and shown), being the aporia of the concept of ideology' (Balibar 1995, 159). From this standpoint, I want to continue with elaborating how, in my opinion, the class struggle operates in theory.

According to Althusser, philosophy exists only through occupying territories, conquering positions in the field that is always-already occupied by an adversary. Occupying a philosophical position means at the same time drawing lines of demarcation from the other philosophical positions, which operate within a thick field of philosophical battles. This thesis holds true not only for Althusser, but also for a large part of the French philosophy whose aim, beginning from the 1960s onwards, was an attempt to demarcate itself from Hegel. Althusser, who in his youth devoted a long study to Hegel, in his doctoral defence, declared: 'I have turned the weapon of Spinoza against Hegel' (Althusser, quoted in Anomymous, 1975, 44).

Athusser's position can be summed up as following: in his analysis of the social formation, history and politics, Marx's true predecessor is not Hegel's dialectical method, which was saturated with metaphysics and idealism, as well as with a teleological conception and understanding of history. It was Spinoza's monism which according to Althusser was the genuine ancestor of Marx's work. According to this line of thought, against Hegel's monstrosity, Spinoza is the anti-teleological and materialist thinker, who resonates very closely with Marx's work, and especially with his 'mature' writings. In other words, for this approach, the philosophical foundations that permit us to fully understand Marx are those of Spinoza's materialism.

For many decades now, if not ever since Hegel, the opposition between Hegel and Spinoza constitutes the philosophical battlefield. In many crucial aspects, the battle between the two philosophers and the position one takes within this battle, determines the philosophical and political paradigm one takes.

This battle determines also the way we approach and read Marx, insofar as that reading is a *philosophical reading*. Thus, the Althusserian question on *how to read Marx* is once again emerging as a crucial determinant of the way we approach his work and especially the critique of political economy. The thrust of the present paper can be formulated as follows: the current crisis of Marxism, which in a sense goes back to the beginning of Marxism itself, is not only a result of the weakness of its sociological analyses, or constant defeats in the political dimension –the crisis of Marxism is more a result of the weakness of the philosophical substrate of Marxism, that is, *dialectical materialism*. Reorienting ourselves in thinking, that is, by means of rethinking the dialectical materialism *for* Marx, we can open up the space for orienting and recuperating the Communist hypothesis, which can help break away with the impasses of the contemporary capitalism. The question thus is: what is at stake in the 'crisis of Marxism' and why the debate between Hegel and Spinoza could possibly change the terms of the crisis itself? Differently put, why does this debate affect Marxism as such?

## Marx's Hegel

The traditional understanding of Marx's Hegelian roots bears on two fronts: on the one hand, the political theory of the proletariat and, the logic of Capital, on the other. The first case is usually associated with Marx's early works, and his operation of 'inverting' Hegelian dialectics, whereas the second concerns his 'mature' work and the operator is the famous 'extraction' of the rational kernel out of its "mystic shell" (Marx 1982, 103).

Politically, Marx's Hegelianism would be recognisable in the way the universal and the particular are bound together in his understanding of the proletariat. Is there a necessary link between the general direction and organization of society and the existence of a particular subset of this same society? The Hegelian theory of the concrete universal –of something which stands for the whole *within* the whole, even more so than the abstract apprehension of its totality– was fully deployed in Hegel's work both

in his understanding of Christianity as well as in his ontology, where the relation between a concept's extension and its exception turns out to be the relation between the concept's *formal* and *concrete* existences. In his social theory, however, Hegel took a more "formalist" perspective by considering the concrete establishment of social rules by the State, the means to regulate the interaction between private volitions in civil society, to be the expression and realisation of the very concept of volition, and hence to stand for the concrete universal of society as such. This view, in which historical existence was as real as the rational existence of the State, was then subverted by Marx, who –in line with the materialist turn of his time– recognised an impasse in Hegel's deployment of the articulation between civil society and State. Rather than taking the State to serve as the concrete measure for the concept of what humanity is at a given historical moment, Marx took up Feuerbach's theory of generic being to say that it is in the very concrete activity of labour that men make their essence objective. This is a process which is extrinsically and formally deviated and deformed by the State laws of property, alienating workers from the participation and realization in their historical existence.

For the young Marx, then, it was not a matter of doing away with Hegel so much as pointing out that the logic of concrete universality, if properly followed through, should not lead us to recognise the State as 'march of God in the world' (Hegel 1991, 279, §258), but rather to recognise that there is a social class whose concrete existence stands in for the existence of society as a whole. In their debasement, the poor working class did not only speak of the true consequences of a society based on private property, but they also incarnated the very same properties which the upcoming bourgeoisie sought to champion: if one wanted to defend the rights of a man with no particular identity, no particular nation, regardless of his possessions and social standing, one would find this very 'abstract man' walking down the streets, 'abstracted' due to his social conditions from his identity, nation, social standing and means of living.

Even though Marx's theory of class would get increasingly complex throughout his investigations, the idea that one can orient social change by a compass that is guided by a particular social class –that is, that history endows situated sub-sets of society with a different power of action– has direct links with the Hegelian theory of negativity and concrete universality. These are links that Marx would never let go. To criticise his Hegelianism, or at least to probe how necessary it is to spouse it in order to uphold other parts of his theory, is to touch upon the question of class composition, political agency and the relation between the tactical support of the working class and the strategic vision of a new society.

But Marx's Hegelianism is also very much at stake in his mature critique of political economy, especially as it is presented in *Capital*. If his early work was based on a critique of Hegel's idealism –prompting the need to 'invert' the logical grounding, from the immaterial realm of laws to the material problem of survival and work– when it came to the logic of capitalism itself, the stakes could no longer be conceived in this way, for the logic of value, albeit not reducible to that of property, was equally removed from the material. If Marx's early work on economy was primarily concerned with explaining alienation, the production of disparities by intervention of unjust property rules, in *Capital* the problem is quite distinct: here the enigma, the form of value, is rather that of equivalence. How can different objects be equated in the market? *And how can profit be produced while keeping to this rule of equivalence?* This is where Hegel's *Science of Logic* became an important aid, because it was not a matter of showing that 'below' the equal treatment of juridical subjects by laws there was the unequal treatment of economic subjects. Instead, it was the matter of showing that the generalisation of a real form of equality, with no exceptions, produced, out of its own functioning, a short-circuit that allowed for asymmetrical power relations and the accumulation of value.

In Marx's mature conception, the logic of value does not lead to pauperisation solely because it is constructed on top of a class of dispossessed workers - instead, in its very functioning, in its 'levelling' of the field of

value, capitalism creates the conditions for surplus extraction. This argument, running sometimes against our usual understanding, implies that local trades of labour force-commodity for money are not unfair –people are paid the market price for their labour, like the price of any commodity– which is something that goes against the regular theory of power which usually underlines the theories of action and the denunciation of exploitation by socialist movements. Nonetheless, by using Hegel's dialectical theory, Marx could simultaneously maintain that capitalism introduced a new sort of freedom and equality in the world and that this very process had produced its opposite effect –while not needing to espouse a two-faced social theory, with the logic of equivalence being applied at one level of economic life and a logic of power relations underlying it, as a separate domain.

This is, then, a second point of intervention: disentangling Marx from Hegel at this point could also mean disentangling the presentation of the logic of capitalist exploitation from such an 'autonomous' view of pauperisation, which many think downplay the role of direct power relations in the presentation of capitalist immiseration.

Finally, at the point of contact of these two uses of Hegel in Marx's work, there is a third thesis, that of the historical teleology of communism, which many –Althusser included– considered the most dangerous collateral effect of Marx's reliance of Hegelian dialectics. Binding together the thesis on the proletariat (derived from the logic of concrete universality) and the thesis on the logic of capitalist exploitation (derived from the logic of speculative identity), Marx would also import into his political and historical theory the idea that capitalism produces its own gravediggers. That the conditions of capitalist exploitation not only single out a class that stands for the whole, but that this singling out is connected with its increasing centrality as the productive forces of society – so that, at some point, capitalism would have itself set the conditions for its overcoming.

This thesis touches both on the critique of political economy and on the political vision of the Left –a Left that trusts capitalist development to deliver the conditions for its abolishment will definitely behave differently than one that does not; just as a Left that has a transcendental trust on the proletariat might behave differently towards other fronts of struggle today. So, the question of 'Hegel versus Spinoza' tends to be a question about these essential points of Marx's thinking. We can see this in the way that Hegelianism is usually treated by the defenders of the Spinozan Marx as a sign of traditional Marxism, the philosophical ideology of orthodoxy and the justification of its historical failures. Spinozism, on the other hand, is seen by Hegelian Marxists as an attempt to find a new justification for letting go of the essential categories of class and class exploitation in favour of the already established fronts of struggle today.

## Political Hegel

However, underlying this debate, there is another set of questions, pointing to a more subtle problem: why does Marx require a philosophical substratum? What is it in revolutionary political thinking that seems to require, to convoke even, the help of abstract philosophers? After all, one could criticize Marx's Hegelianism in the name of a 'pure' political thinking, not necessarily in the name of a different philosophical orientation. Plus, the idea that certain political proposals would mean something totally different were they not backed up by some philosophical perspective seems to contradict the very materialist principle that orients itself by the concrete historical conjunctures rather than by some abstract general principle.

When considered under this light, the question 'Hegel or Spinoza?'[2] could be approached in a new way. If it is true that Marxism bears some strange relation to philosophy, if it requires the maintenance of some relation to it –inversions, subversions, extractions, etc.– then an interesting question to ask would be: which philosophical perspective, Hegelian or Spinozist, best accounts for this immanent relation between politics and philosophy that parasitises Marx's thinking?

Most of the Spinozist arguments for a 'new Marx' work with the following strategy: we recognise that Marx interacts with Hegel more than with any other philosopher, then we criticise

this as being a contextual problem (a fruit of the prominence of Hegel in those times) and not really bearing on Marx's central ideas, which we then show to match in a much more adequate way the central ideas of Spinoza. Marx's scientificity, his theory of voluntary servitude and power relations, his concept of necessity, etc. –all of this would betray his exterior Hegelian presentation, pointing towards a deeper commitment to the Spinozist tradition. Note that this is not the only way to approach Marx, though: one could have, instead, criticised the Hegelian influences, while accepting them to be authentic and crucial, and then shown that a *better* Marxism, more adequate to our times, could be provided by this alternative philosophical underpinning. We would leave Marx as a Hegelian thinker, for all its worth, and become, ourselves, Spinozist Marxists. But for some reason this is not the main strategy taken by these commentators.

One of the possible reasons for this is that if one takes Marx's interlocution with Hegel seriously, then the question that we must answer is what in Hegel's work was so politically useful that led Marx to refer to him? This is not a question of philosophical importance, but of political one. We can accept that Marx turned all of Hegel's theses upside down, that he dismantled Hegel's system and his theory of the State – but all of this only makes the question even more pressing: what is it that survived after all this dismemberment, why not abandon the reference altogether? The reason why this would be problematic for Spinozists is that, by accepting it, we would already be doing *a Hegelian analysis of Marx's inheritance of Hegel*. The idea that a formal thinking can find its true basis outside of itself –that the extension of a concept is realised in the case that is its exception, its negation– is the Hegelian move *par excellence*. Of course, this proposal is something that Marx himself spells out, when he talks about the realisation of philosophy by means of the proletariat. But let us say that this thesis is extrinsic to his actual political theory, and that it is part of this exterior shell that doesn't really contribute to the important kernel of his work, which only shines through when we consider it from a Spinozist lens. Still, the very idea that Marx did not know which philosophical project was presupposed in his work, and that while he thought he was 'realising philosophy' by following Hegel into the political realm, *he was in fact doing what he desired, but not what he wanted* –that is, realising a 'practical philosophy', but not the one of Hegel, but of Spinoza– is nothing but a perfect example of what Hegel's dialectical logic does. Now, what is the position of new Hegelian Marxists today? That is, not the Marxists who merely accept the references to Hegel in Marx's work, but who worry about the role of dialectics in the interiority of Marx's work? They do not defend that Marx was 'truly' and 'authentically' Hegelian: in fact, the curious thing about the arguments proposed by philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek is that *they agree with the critiques put forward by the Spinozist Marxists*, as is best exemplified by Althusser's work –the rejection of teleology, the complexification of class analysis, the acceptance that political agency is not ahistorically determined– but they *disagree that Marx held these views due to Hegel*. In fact, it is where *Marx quotes Hegel that he is at his least Hegelian*. To 'be Hegelian', in this line of argumentation, does not mean to agree with Hegel, but to let go of philosophy and accept the absolute separation of political and economical thinking from the abstract and extrinsic references to philosophy. Similarly to how Žižek reads Lacan –arguing that the psychoanalyst only became Hegelian when he dropped the references to Hegel, and began to think in a Hegelian way about non-Hegelian themes– we find here a defence of Hegel which in no way means a defence of the political import of Hegel's philosophy. The very appearance of a proof of his Hegelianism –let us say, a text by Marx claiming the centrality of Hegel to his whole project– would in fact show that Marx was *not* Hegelian, as this reliance on abstract mediations is as far from the immanent self-deployment of the concept as one can get. This brief consideration of the structure of arguments can seem a bit of a joke[3], but it nonetheless helps us to set the problem in the correct terms. As Althusser constantly reminded us, the role of philosophy for politics is not to guide action or to intervene on the theory of politics, but precisely to prevent ideology from closing up the space

for indetermination in political activity. Both Spinozist and Hegelian Marxists agree on this point, with one distinction: for Spinozists, this division between philosophy and politics can be set out from within philosophy itself – and since Spinoza did produce a theory of knowledge more akin to this process, it would be a better fit for Marxism – while Hegelians call this process thinking itself, and require *every* field to work out their own self-splitting by themselves: it is political thinking itself which must rethink its own presuppositions, rework its limitations and let the useless theoretical representation of its practice behind. Another way of putting this distinction is to say that, while agreeing on the task at hand, Spinozists see this as philosophy's role, while Hegelians claim this to be a process that philosophy has no bearing on –the owl of Minerva comes much later. So, insofar as the debate between the two philosophical positions is *staged philosophically*, Spinozists will always have the upper hand –the formulation of the problem in philosophical terms is already what grants them "victory"– while Hegelians will always find a better argument by letting philosophy go, assuming its uselessness, and pushing political thinking to account for its own abstract commitments, since this gesture itself has the structure of a Hegelian moment.

## Class Struggle in Spinoza and Hegel

The question Hegel versus Spinoza is interesting only for politics, in so far as both are trying to argue, in different ways, that there is indetermination, and therefore place for political creativity within Marx's work. Spinozists critique Hegelians for saying in Hegel's ideas there is a teleological argument, an inner logic. Whereas Hegelians claim that Spinozists are trying to philosophically interpret something which is supposed to be autonomous –which is politics. Therefore, the whole problem can be formulated as: from where does one states the autonomy of politics, political economy and political movements? Should one state this autonomy philosophically– to have a philosophical theory of the autonomy and therefore to critique teleology, the concrete universality as some kind of an infrastructure of social agency philosophically, or to hold with the Hegelians, whose position is that we are philosophically correct in not solving this problem and letting it be solved by politics itself. This means that political work is to critique politics. Dialectics in politics is to have the next movement (be by capital itself or be by the political movements) which is within politics its own immanence. Therefore, it is a break with its own transcendental limit. It is in these terms that this problem should be reformulated. The question is not so much that of interpreting Marx, as much as it is a matter of locating the question on: from where does one stage the autonomy of Marxist politics. This is in fact a class issue, not in the sense of what one says about class, but *where from* one speaks about politics. This is so because Spinozists and Hegelians are both philosophers. Are we in our own particular class positions, say, within philosophy departments, in a position to participate in political struggle by saying that it is supposed to be autonomous, or is this something which should be said *from within* a political movement? The catch is that even though Hegelians seem almighty, speaking from the perspective/position of Absolute Knowledge, they hold in fact the position which states that we are not in a position to claim or defend the autonomy of politics – only politics can do that. Whereas, Spinozists, who explicitly try to be more on the side of autonomy, self-creativity, etc, stage this from within a non-political perspective. So, theirs is a philosophical theory of the non-philosophical, whereas the Hegelians state that this can be done only non-philosophically within politics. Only politics can defend itself.

Even though at the letter of what is being said, the Spinozists' argument sounds like they are trying to free/liberate politics from teleological necessary historical version of Marxism, in fact because they are doing this from within philosophy, they are reaffirming it. So explicitly they are for autonomy, and implicitly they maintain that politics needs a philosophical interpretation. On the other hand, Hegelians are explicitly giving philosophical interpretations, they are philosophically talking about dialectics, certain laws of dynamics, things that necessarily

divide themselves, but implicitly they are saying that the task of this division falls on politics itself. They are explicitly talking about, let us call it, dependence of philosophy and politics, but implicitly in their very positioning they are truly recognising the autonomy.

For Althusser, the problem with Hegel was that he could not find place for the subjectivity without a subject:

> For Hegel, who criticized all theses of subjectivity, nevertheless found a place for the Subject, not only in the form of the "becoming-Subject of Substance" (by which he "reproaches" Spinoza for "wrongly" taking things no further than Substance), but in the interiority of the Telos of the process without a subject, which by virtue of the negation of the negation, realizes the designs and destiny of the Idea. (Althusser 1976, 136)

The first conclusion to draw is, thus: that the two above-mentioned theses not only inform his philosophical project but also make it inconsistent. In a sense, 'process without a subject' opens up a double space firstly for rethinking the theory of the subject in Marxist philosophy, and secondly for rethinking the relation between Marx and Hegel in a non-teleological fashion. However, at the same time, Althusser abruptly closes up this possibility by qualifying the subject as an idealist concept. It is worth noting that his thesis on the process without a subject, which is intended to elaborate an anti-Hegelian position comes as close as possible to the very Hegelian conception of the subject qua substance. For Hegel, Substance does not exist; it is only a retroactive presupposition of the Subject. Substance comes into existence only as a result of the Subject, and it is for this conceptual reason that it is enunciated as predecessor of the Subject. In this regard, the idea that Substance is an organic whole is an illusion, precisely because when the Subject presupposes the Substance, it presupposes it as split, a cut. If the Substance would ontologically precede the Subject, then we would have a Substance which has Spinozist attributes, but not a Subject. However, can we keep this line of argumentation à propos the Althusserian concept of the process without a subject? If we hold this position, then we are in the pre-Kantian universe. The Hegelian approach assumes that this understanding of Substance is dogmatic religious metaphysics, because being/Substance is posited as a totality, as indivisible One. This totality can be accounted for, as such, only in the fantasy (that is, Kantian antinomies of Reason). Here for Hegel, it is impossible to think of the Substance that will become a Subject, because it is always-already a Subject ('not only as a Substance, but also as a Subject'): it exists only with/in the Subject and without the former Substance, hence is simply a nothing. In this instance, we have to be precise: when Hegel talks about Substance and Subject, he is practically talking about the Absolute: it is the Absolute which is not *only* a Substance, but *also* a Subject. And the "absolute is essentially its result." As Hegel himself put it in his critique to Spinoza, with him the "substance is not determined as self-differentiating", which is to say: not as a subject.

So, to conclude, it is interesting to draw a line of comparison between Žižek and Althusser, as two Marxists who engaged in the art of critique of ideology. Žižek argues that today's global capitalism functions differently from the time when Althusser theorised the concept of ideology. In psychoanalytic terms, again elaborated very often and to details by Žižek, the change in the structure of ideology consists of the shift from the prohibitive, authority Law, to the permissive and hedonist superego injunction. What are the consequences of this, which at the same time, point out the contemporary limits of Althusser's theory of the critique of ideology? According to Žižek, we cannot adequately think critically our conjuncture using Spinoza's immanentism. But how should we read this?

According to Žižek's thesis, capitalism appears as if there is no transcendence - as if the causal interaction of parts/affections at ground level are all there is to it, with power always emerging as a restrictive force, extraneous to the flow of productive life. Just like Hardt and Negri argued throughout their work, but especially in *Multitude* (Hardt & Negri, 2004) social life is a creative, immanent thing, property is an alien force to it, because social life, in its being, has

no transcendental limit, that is always external. However, there is a crucial difference to which we should be attentive: this is how capitalism appears, and not how it works, because its logic has presuppositions and internal limits. It is because of this that the appearance of global capitalism is Spinozist. But, even though the *appearance* is Spinozist, on a critical stance we can reveal the Hegelian (and Kantian) sub-structure of the functioning of the late global capitalism.

In his critique, Žižek argued that Althusser's thesis of 'process without a subject', aimed to be the opposite of Hegelian 'Subject-Substance', as a teleological conceptualisation of a "process-with-a-subject." The former was conceptualised as a materialist dialectical thesis. Žižek's stance is that Hegel's dialectical process is the most radical version of a 'process without a subject', more radical than Althusser's own conceptualisation of it. But, if Althusser's opposition between Marx and Hegel is nothing but a misunderstanding, why mention it? Why not simply pass on it silently? And to really conclude, on a spontaneous point: to avoid Althusser's criticism of Hegel, one would have to show why capitalism is or equals Hegelianism. Or perhaps worse: Hegelianism as capitalism is actually not entirely true. If this was so, then one could easily assume Althusser criticises a totalising system, one instantiation of which is capitalism, and thus Marx seeks to detotalise it. The key resides on the following: the Hegelian dialectical process conceived as 'without a subject' means exactly the same thesis as Hegel's 'the Absolute must be grasped not only as Substance, but also as Subject.' The thesis of Substance-Subject is not about a mega-Subject, controlling the dialectical process. For Žižek, Hegelian system is the "plane without a pilot", in which no agent is needed to push or direct it.

In this sense, Althusser's failure consists on his inability 'to think […] a capitalist universe "structured like the Spinozian absolute," i.e., the re-emergence of Spinoza as the paradigmatic thinker of late capitalism.' Put differently, the 'global consumerist capitalism is in its basic structure Spinozian, not Kantian: it actually appears as a flow of absolute immanence in which multiple effects proliferate, with no cuts of negativity/castration interrupting this flow' (Žižek, 2017, 201).

This is why, Žižek argues that it is difficult to find a more 'arrogant' philosopher than Spinoza, 'whose *Ethics* claims to reveal the inner working of God-Nature – if nothing else, it can be shown that here Spinoza is much more "arrogant" than Hegel' (Žižek 2017, 10). It is due to this, among other dimensions, that the limits of Althusser's project become visible.[4]

## Notes

1. Editor's note: this paper was submitted in 2019.
2. The classic study of Pierre Macherey *Spinoza or Hegel* (2011) should be mentioned here. Macherey takes a partisan position in defense of Spinoza, against what he (and the entire Althusser's group) consider to be Hegel's misreading of Spinoza, or even more, his inability to grasp Spinoza's system. In this sense, Macherey posits Spinoza's system as a critique *avant la lettre* to that of Hegel.
3. The turning around of Marx not being a Hegelian as precondition for reading him as Hegelian, and why does this not work with any anti-Hegelian, but specifically with Marx is a topic which cannot be fully and systematically elaborated in the format of this article, thus remains to be done elsewhere.
4. In his "Mr. Cogito tells of the temptation of Spinoza", the poet Zbigniew Herbert aims at the same path as Žižek. This beautiful poem is an ironical 'examination' of Spinoza's work, (Herbert, 2007, 314-316).

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# WITTGENSTEIN´S LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

## GUEST EDITOR:

## DR. NICOLA CLAUDIO SALVATORE

# Wittgenstein´s Legacy and Contemporary Philosophy

In this Special issue of the *Revista de Filosofía de la Universidad de Costa Rica*, we present a number of works on the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Arguably, Wittgenstein was one of the most important, if not the most important, philosopher of the XX Century, and his work on language, logic, epistemology and philosophy of language, and philosophy of religion is as relevant and thought provoking today as it was when Wittgenstein´s masterpieces, namely The *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus, Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty*, were firstly published.

These papers are the result of various discussions that took place during our post graduate seminar at the Universidade do Vale do rio dos Sinos- UNISINOS, in which we read and discussed Wittgenstein´s *Philosophical Investigations* along with several of his lesser known works.

In *Wittgensteinian Fideism vs Classical Theism*, Salvatore and Oliveira present and discuss Wittgenstein´s remarks on religious language and religious beliefs, and try to see if and to what extent, Wittgenstein´s views on the epistemology of religious beliefs are tenable.

In *Concepts, Perception, and Wittgenstein's theory: a conversation with the sciences,* Vollino compares and contrasts Wittgenstein´s philosophy of mind and language with some recent results of the cognitive sciences. The relationship between language, thought and cognitive sciences is also the focus of the contribution of Marconatto and Sestari in their *Algorithm and Language*.

In *The Problem of the Relationship Between Language and World in Heidegger and Wittgenstein*, Azeredo discusses the analogies and differences between Heidegger´s and Wittgenstein´s treatment of language and thought in our understanding of the specificity of human nature and of our relationship between mind, language, and world.

*Meditations About the Implications of the Seventh Wittgensteinian Aphorism in Associative Speech*, by Brandes, situates and puts in context Wittgenstein´s somewhat unsystematic remarks about psychology and psychoanalysis, and offer some thought provoking reflections on the Tractarian remarks on the *ineffable* and therapeutic practice.

Finally, Borba dos Reis defends and develops Wittgenstein´s theory of meaning and use, drawing also on Strawson´s pragmatic approach to language, and defends this proposal against a number of influential criticisms.

Our intent here is not merely exegetical; we wanted to see if and to what extent Wittgenstein´s work can help to positively address, and if so how, a number of contemporary philosophical issues, and we hope to give an interesting contribution to the debate surrounding these themes. Whether we succeed or not, is for the reader to decide.

*Nicola Claudio Salvatore, guest editor.*
*UNICAMP*
*UNISINOS*
*Porto Alegre, 06/09/2019*

**Nicola Claudio Salvatore**
**Rodrigo Oliveira da Silva**

# Wittgensteinian Fideism vs. Classical Theism

**Abstract:** *In this paper, we will present and discuss Wittgenstein´s views on religious beliefs, in order to see if and to what extent they give a plausible account of religious belief and their epistemic status. In the first part of this work, we will present and discuss Wittgenstein´s views on the subject, while in the rest of the paper we aim to show that Wittgenstein´s treatment of religious belief might lead to a number of unpalatable conclusions.*

**Keywords:** *Wittgenstein, Religion, Fideism, Theism, Belief.*

**Resumen:** *En este artículo presentamos y discutimos las perspectivas de Wittgenstein sobre las creencias religiosas, para ver si, y en qué medida, aportan una explicación plausible de la creencia religiosa y su condición epistémica. En la primera parte, presentamos y discutimos las perspectivas de Wittgenstein sobre el tema, mientras que en el resto buscamos mostrar que el tratamiento de Wittgenstein sobre la creencia religiosa podría llevar a varias conclusiones desagradables.*

**Palabras clave:** *Wittgenstein, Religión, Fideísmo, Teísmo, Creencia.*

## 1. Wittgenstein on religion; a minimal reading

In this section, we will present and briefly discuss Wittgenstein´s main thesis on religious beliefs. The first thesis that can be extracted from Wittgenstein´s somewhat unsystematic remarks about God and religion goes as follows: "God does not reveal himself in the world [...] Not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is" (1961, 6.432, 6.44).

There are at least two themes worth mentioning in this passage; the first is that Wittgenstein does not seem to exclude the existence of God; the second is that what he seems to exclude is that God, whatever being he might be, could reveal himself in the world. A second interesting claim about God in Wittgenstein´s writings on the subject goes as follows:

> What do I know about God and the purpose of life?
> I know that this world exists. That something about it is problematic, which we call its meaning.
> That this meaning does not lie in it but outside it . . .
> The meaning of life, i.e. the meaning of the world, we can call God.[. . .]
> To pray is to think about the meaning of life.
> (1979, 72–3, 4 July 1916)

In this passage, Wittgenstein seems to elucidate his conception of God; *The meaning of life, i.e. themeaning of the world, we can call God.* That is to say, reading backwards, we can call God the meaning of life. God is an "umbrella term" to define both the meaning of life and the problematic, unclear aspects of reality.

Finally, let´s consider the following claim:

> To believe in a God means to understand the question about the
> meaning of life.
> To believe in a God means to see that the facts of the world are not
> the end of the matter.
> To believe in God means to see that life has a meaning.
> (1979, 74, 8 July 1916)

According to Wittgenstein, then, the belief in God is not merely reducible to the belief in the existence of a Supreme Being; rather, he claims, to believe in God is to believe that the "facts of the world" have a meaning. In other words, to believe in God means to believe that both human life and human history have an objective meaning.

Accordingly, religions are first and foremost consequences of the particular meaning that different cultures attribute to human life and to human events. Religions are the cultural expression and manifestation of different answers to the same problematic; namely, the meaning of life.

Hence, religious statements cannot be, strictly speaking, true or false, as if they were empirical statements about facts. Therefore, any attempt at justifying or critizing religious beliefs on the basis of evidence or reasons is, claims Wittgenstein, misguided in the first place. To understand this point further, consider this passage:

> A proof of God's existence ought really to be something by means of which one could convince oneself that God exists. But I think that believers who have furnished such proofs have wanted to do is to give their 'belief' an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they themselves could never have come to believe as a result of such proofs. (1980, 85)

If religious beliefs do not describe facts but at most express a worldview, then they cannot be strictly speaking true or false. Hence, the very idea if trying to "prove" the existence of a Supreme Being or some of the basic tenets of Classical Theism is a somewhat misguided attempt if not plain nonsense.

A worldview, claims Wittgenstein, cannot be proved or disproved; to the extent that, he claims, even if it was proved the historical falsity of religious beliefs, this will have little or no consequence on the life and the worldview of a believer:

> Christianity is not based on a historical truth; rather, it offers us a (historical) narrative and says: now believe! But not, believe this narrative with the belief appropriate to a historical narrative, rather: believe, through thick and thin, which you can do only as the result of a life. Here you have a narrative, don't take the same attitude to it as you take to other historical narratives! Make a quite different place in your life for it ....Queer as it sounds: The historical accounts in the Gospels might, historically speaking, be demonstrably false and yet belief would lose nothing by this . . . because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by men believingly (i.e. lovingly). That is the certainty characterizing this particular acceptance-as-true, not something else. (1980, 32)

## 2. Classical Theism and facts

To sum up, Wittgenstein´s views about religion and religious beliefs can be summarized as follows:

1. God is first and foremost a linguistic abstraction to express what a particular religion-culture considers to be the Meaning of the world. Hence, he exists more as an umbrella term to *express a worldview* than as a personal being.
2. Religious beliefs are not beliefs about facts; hence, any attempt at proving or disproving religious beliefs, or even at arguing for their rationality or irrationality, is somewhat misguided.
3. Questions of truth and falsity are so irrelevant when it comes to religious beliefs that even if it would possible to show that the

historical facts about a particular religion, i.e. Christianity, are strictly speaking false, this would have no impact on the believer, as religious beliefs express both a way of thinking about the meaning of life and a way of living.

We will now consider these points in turn, in order to see if and to what extent Wittgenstein´s views on religious beliefs are tenable and also if they represent a plausible account of the epistemic status of religious beliefs.

Firstly, while it is true that religious beliefs do indeed provide a sort of framework by which a believer observes reality and lives, or tries to live, this does not necessarily excludes the fact that a religious believer is also committed to the belief in the existence of a Supernatural Being which, at least according to Classical Theism, is Benevolent, Omniscient, All-owerful, etc.

That is to say, religious beliefs cannot be merely reduced to a way of looking at human life and history; they also involve a *strong metaphysical commitment,* that can be thus evaluated, whether positively or negatively. Take for instance Plantinga´s Ontological Argument (1965):

1. It's possible that a Maximally Great Being (MGB) exists.
2. If it is possible that a MGB being exists, then a MGB exists in some possible world.
3. If a MGB exists in some possible world, then it exists in all possible worlds.
4. If a MGB exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
5. If a MGB exists in the actual world, then a MGB exists.
6. Therefore, a MGB exists.

Now, consider another contemporary argument in support of the existence of God, offered by William Lane Craig (1979)

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

To see if and to what extent these and similar arguments do succeed in order to, if not prove, at least argue for the rationality of religious beliefs is not a task we should set ourselves here. However, the main point we want to make is that these arguments, and the criticisms of these arguments, are not misguided but a legitimate philosophical task that can, if successful, show whether the metaphysical commitments held by religious believers are at least *prima facie* sound or not.

Also, has been pointed out among the others, by Kai Nielsen (1967), to exclude religious beliefs from any kind of epistemic evaluation would lead to an unbearable form of Fideism. That is to say, to state that religious beliefs are not in the market for epistemic evaluation of any sort, we would allow for any incoherent and or irrational belief, as long as they express a "religious worldview" of a community of believers.

Take the case of someone that believes, on the basis of the geological empirical evidence available, that the Earth is approximately 4.543 billion years old, and a proponent of Young Earth Creationism (YEC), namely the view based on a literalist reading of the Bible which holds that the universe, Earth, and all life on Earth were created by direct acts of God less than 10,000 years ago.

If the account of the structure of religious belief proposed by Wittgenstein is correct, then it is hard to see how these agents could resolve their dispute; not only from a practical, but also and more importantly from an *epistemological* point of view. This is so because following this account, it would be impossible to *rationally* address, let alone solve, the dispute at issue, at least by using rational means such as evidence or reasons.

This is not to say that a proponent of the "Old Earth Theory" can not settle the dispute with his YEC opponent (or vice versa): this disagreement can practically be settled, but in a somewhat "epistemically unsatisfactory" way. Consider the following remarks of Wittgenstein´s last work, *On Certainty* (1969; henceforth OC):

"Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled with one another, then each man declares the other a fool and heretic" (OC, 611).

"I said I would 'combat' the other man - but wouldn't I give him *reasons*? Certainly; but how

far do they go? At the end of reasons comes *persuasion*. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives)" (OC, 612).

Now, is the view according to which the Earth is approximately 4.543 billion years old and YEC both equally plausible, as YEC "expresses a worldview" and as such is not open to epistemic evaluation? Is a proponent of YEC being epistemically rational, when he disregards the huge amount of empirical evidence against his deeply held, a-rational religious convictions? Can "persuasion", which according to Wittgenstein is based on nothing more than "all sorts of slogans (OC 610) rather than evidence and reason, be the only way to settle the dispute between a proponent of YEC and OET? Hardly. However, following Wittgenstein´s account of religious beliefs, we might be led to these and similar implausible conclusions.

A second line of criticism that can be moved against Wittgenstein´s remarks of the epistemic status of religious belief can be stated as follows. Recall that according to Wittgenstein, historical facts are so irrelevant for a religious believer that even if the basic tenets of, say, Christianity, were proven false this will have little to no impact to the religious worldview.

It should be noted that this notion is completely at odds with how religious beliefs are formulated, at least in Classical Theism. Just consider the New Testament (henceforth NT); the life, ministry and death of Christare narrated three times in the synoptic gospels with historical emphasis, in special in the gospel of Luke, to the extent that the author(s) strive to locate these events in human history. Moreover, the main events of the life of Christ are mentioned not only in the gospels, but also all over the NT, with a particular emphasis on both their historicity and the importance of these facts in order to stress the truth of the Christian faith:

> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. (Acts 2:32)

> If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. (1 Corinthians 15:13-18)

> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. (Acts 3:14,15)

> Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people. (Acts 13:28-31)

In these passages, we can see how important is from a religious point of view that the events narrated in the Gospels are real events, occurred to real people in the course of real human history. Of course, these events might be false or have, also, an allegoric meaning[1]; however, what matters is that whether religious beliefs can be rationally held or not depends also, *pace* Wittgenstein, on whether the plausibility of their historical claims can be defended or not. This is especially true when it comes to the belief in the Resurrection of Christ, which according to Christianity is not an event but *The event* on which the Christian faith is based.

On this score, William Lane Craig has famously proposed the following facts order to argue for the plausibility of the Resurrection (1985):

1. After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea.

2. On the Sunday following the crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers.
3. On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.
4. The original disciples believed that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary.

Setting aside whether Craig's argument is successful, what matters is that religious beliefs are also factual ones; beliefs about the existence of a Supreme Being and beliefs about the occurrence of certain facts. As such, the rationality of these beliefs is not, or at least, should not, be exempted from epistemic evaluation.

## 3. On God and the Meaning of life

Before concluding, it is worth considering the relationship between religious beliefs and the meaning of life.

So far, we have argued that Wittgenstein´s conception of religion, according to which religious beliefs are outside any form epistemic evaluation, is not tenable. This is so because religious beliefs do not express merely a worldview, but are also *factual* in nature; that is to say, are beliefs about the existence of a Supreme Being and the occurrence of certain events. As such, their plausibility or implausibility can and should be assessed.

Before concluding, we will discuss the relationship between religious belief and the meaning of life. As we have seen, according to Wittgenstein religious beliefs are a sort of outlook on life, by which religious believers see attribute to life a particular meaning.

If from a side is undeniable that, according to Classical Theism, to affirm that God exists is also an affirmation of a peculiar meaning of human life and human history, there are nonetheless some objections that could be raised at this point.

Consider a Deistic scenario, in which a Supreme Being exists but He is fundamentally uninterested and uninvolved in his creation, there is no Revelation, no History of Salvation etc. It is hard to see which meaning, if any, the belief in a similar Being would give to human life and history.

To the contrary, according to Classical Theism, human life acquires a new and profound meaning not only because a Supreme Being exists, but because this Supreme Being reveals Himself to humanity and acts within human history. That is to say, according to the Theistic worldview, human life acquires its meaning due to the special relationship that God chooses to have with its own creation. Revelation, Scriptures, the History of Salvation, and the historicity of the main events of the life of Christ all concur to give a specific meaning to human life in the Classical Theist framework; hence they are part of what Wittgenstein calls "The Meaning of Life," according to a Theistic worldview, and are thus not so irrelevant to the religious system as in Wittgenstein´s account.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have presented and discussed Wittgenstein´s account of religious beliefs. We have argued that his observations do not represent a viable account of the epistemology of religious beliefs and that they can also lead to a number of implausible conclusions. This is because religious beliefs, far from merely expressing a worldview, are also factual beliefs, whose rationality or irrationality is open to epistemic evaluation.

## Notes

1. This is not to say, of course, that all that happened in the Bible is an historical narration of should be taken literally; here, we are just stressing the fact that the various author of the Bible, both in the Ancient and in the New Testament, do not simply express a worldview, but taken themselves to relate historical facts and do not merely express a "worldview".

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# Concepts, Perception, and Wittgenstein's Theory: a conversation with the sciences

**Resumen:** *En el presente artículo son presentados resultados de experimentos de la psicología experimental y de la neurociencia sobre los efectos de los conceptos en nuestra percepción. Al traer estos resultados a la filosofía, se busca aproximar la utilización de los conceptos y sus efectos en nuestra percepción según el punto de vista de Wittgenstein. De acuerdo con psicólogos y neurocientistas, la utilización de conceptos puede auxiliar en el reconocimiento de sonidos, como reconocer más fácilmente el sonido de una juguera tras escuchar el susurro de las hojas. De esta manera, los conceptos, como Wittgenstein argumenta, son habilidades de agentes cognitivos, cuya utilización aprenden de forma colectiva.*

**Palabras clave:** *Conceptos, Percepción, Wittgenstein, Psicología experimental, Neurociencia.*

**Abstract:** *This article presents results from experiments of the experimental psychology and Neurosciences about the effects of concepts in perceptions. By bringing these results to philosophy, its aim is to relate the effects of the concepts in perceptions with Wittgenstein's theory about the subject. According to psychologists and neuroscientists, the use of concepts may guide the acknowledgment of sounds, such as recognizing more easily the sound of a blender after hearing the rustle of leaves. Therefore concepts, following Wittgenstein, are skills of cognitive agents, who learn them from a collective use of language.*

**Keywords:** *Concepts, Perception, Wittgenstein, Experimental Psychology, Neuroscience.*

## 1. Introduction

This article presents an analysis of experimental psychology research about the influence of concepts on perceptions and, by bringing Wittgenstein to the debate, tries to understand how the philosopher would understand such results and if his theory would have something to say on the subject. The aim, therefore, is to bring Wittgenstein closer to the psychological sciences to understand how his theory behaves with contemporary discoveries about the influence of concepts on our perception.

According to Barsalou et al. (2003), conceptual systems are constructed from modality-specific systems. Conceptual systems are the basis of knowledge, responsible for supporting all cognitive activities and experiments demonstrate that perceptual variations alter conceptual processing such as, for example, recognizing the sound of a blender faster after hearing the rustle of leaves. (Barsalou et al., 2003, 86). As claimed by Barsalou et al (2003, 87), fMRI tests confirm the representations of specific modalities in the conceptual system as conceptualizing forms of objects activates the cerebral zone responsible for perceiving forms.

Concerning Wittgenstein's theory of perception and concepts, there is a divergence among commentators. Some claim that Wittgenstein does have a theory about perceptions

as O'sullivan (2015) points out by claiming that "throughout his career, Wittgenstein was concerned with matters of the philosophy of perception". There are also those who claim that the philosopher never dealt with the subject, as Good (2006, 5) states that although in his book he deals with Wittgenstein's theories and theories of perception, the philosopher never worked on a theory of perception, only with the conceptual sense of sight: "he never had a theory of perception and was never interested in having one".

Thus, by making explicit the contemporary findings of psychologies and neurosciences on the influence of concepts in our perception, some commentators' points of view will be made explicit about Wittgenstein's theory of perception and, finally, an attempt will be made to approximate the explanations in order to look for some point of common agreement between the philosopher's theory and the discoveries of the sciences on perception and the use of concepts.

## 2. Experimental psychology and the influence of concepts on perception

From empirical experiments, such as brain imaging, Psychologists demonstrate that the representation and use of conceptual knowledge depend on modality-specific systems. (Barsalou et al., 2003). The human conceptual system develops the knowledge that sustains cognitive activities, viz., memory, language, thought. Researchers, using examples such as behavioral experiments and neuroimaging experiments, argue that state re-enactments in modality-specific systems ground the processing of concepts:

> Theoretical research shows how modality-specific re-enactments could produce basic conceptual functions, such as the type-token distinction, categorical inference, productivity, propositions, and abstract concepts. Together these empirical results and theoretical analyses implicate modality-specific systems in the representation and use of conceptual knowledge. (Barsalou et al.., 2003, 84)

According to psychology, concepts are knowledge about particular categories, such as 'bird'. Thus, concepts such as 'body', 'wings', 'feathers', 'behavior' represent the knowledge we acquire in analyzing the category of birds. About cognitive activities, knowledge plays an important role, such as assisting perception, inference, categorization and, in abstract processes, assists in the reconstruction of memories and provides mental representations.

Barsalou et al. (2003) present an alternative view. That is, there are proponents of the proposal about conceptual representations being structured in a modal form. However, there are also currents which base the conceptual representations in amodal form. In this way, there is a distinction between the approaches of amodality and modality, namely, between transduction and re-enactment. Regarding the distinction between the modal approach and the amodal approach on the acquisition of knowledge, in the case of the former, each specific characteristic of a stimulus that excites a given modality is stored in the memory system. That is, when listening to a song, sound characteristics are stored in memory systems close to the cerebral modality responsible for the sound representations, for instance. Neurons near the area help in the storage of information and, in the absence of the stimulus, help in the partial reconstruction of mental representation. On the other hand, the amodal approach in knowledge acquisition refers to sensory-motor representations converted into amodal representations, such as the visualization of a tree or the sound of the fall of an apple on the ground being converted into a non-perceptual representational format, such as a semantic system or a list of characteristics, for example. (Barsalou et al., 2003, 85).

According to Damasio (1989), there is evidence that corroborates the re-enactment process by proposing another way of perceiving the process of obtaining knowledge, such as the convergence zone theory developed by the neuroscientist. According to this theory, hierarchical sets of associative areas integrate information of specific modalities between the perceptual modalities. In his article "Time-locked multiregional retroactivation: A systems-level proposal

for the neural substrates of recall and recognition," the neuroscientist presents his theory for understanding the neural basis of memory and consciousness. The construction of mental representations occurs within space-time and through sequences and consequences between amodal and modal forms of functioning. That is, stimuli excite neurons located in diverse and separated regions of sensory-motor association cortices, which have a motor function, therefore, in amodal form, and the neurons responsible for specific modal areas (called by the neuroscientist of zones of convergence) connect to the neurons previously described and record amodal information from the combined organization of feature fragments which occurred in synchrony during the experience of entities or events in multiple and separate regions. Thus, as Damasio concludes:

> This proposal rejects a single anatomical site for the integration of memory and motor processes and a single store for the meaning of entities of events. Meaning is reached by time-locked multiregional retroactivation of widespread fragment records. Only the latter records can become contents of consciousness. (Damasio, 1989, 26)

Thus, multiple activations of the brain are required simultaneously for the perceptual experience to occur and during the use of mental representation, as in the case of memory recall, the process of the multiple regions occurs near the stimulated sensory channels. Therefore, the term retroactivation indicates that the experiences evoked depend on a reactivation close to the perceptual channels where the input of stimuli and the output of perceptual responses occur. Thus, there is no unique and specific location for the stimuli in a cortical region. As Damasio continues, meaning occurs by the activation of many regions through fragmented information from stimuli, depending only on the location of their storage in correspondence with the corresponding perceptual area:

> A display of the meaning of an entity does not exist in permanent fashion. It is recreated for each new instantiation. The same stimulus does not produce the same evocations at every instantiation, though many of the same or similar sets of records will be evoked in relation to the same or comparable stimuli. The records that pertain to a given entity are distributed in the telencephalon both in the sense that they are inscribed over sizable synaptic populations and in the sense that they are to be found in multiple loci of the cerebral cortex and subcortical nuclei. (Damasio, 1989, 28)

Such an idea, that is, that realizing encompasses multiple parts of the brain is corroborated by other researchers who have discovered multiplicities of subsidiary functional regions that demonstrate global sensory modal functioning. Maunsell & Van Essen (1983), for instance, have discovered some distinct visual areas in the cerebral cortex of monkeys. Such areas are well-defined hierarchically concerning their interconnection patterns, such as motion analysis and shape and color analysis.

While the amodal approach has been studied only theoretically by addressing important conceptual functions, such as the type-token distinction, categorial inference, productivity and propositions, the modal approach has been corroborated by empirical experiments. Thus, empirical experiments demonstrate the relationship between representations of modality-specific systems and working memory, long-term memory, language and thought, as demonstrated by tests in which perceptual variations alter conceptual processing such as, for instance, recognizing the sound of a blender after listening to the rustling of leaves, and perceptual similarities affect the verification of properties such as more quickly recognizing a pony's mane after checking a horse's mane rather than a lion's mane, and by reading perceptual simulations are created, for example, when reading on a nail nailed to the wall, the reader imagines a nail in the horizontal position whereas, when reading on a nail nailed to the ground, he imagines a nail vertically. (Barsalou et al., 2003, 86). Simulations also occur in object formats, such as imagining a bird with open wings while reading text on the subject (Zwaan, Stanfield, Yaxley, 2002).

When processing concepts also occurs the change of body states, such as visualizing an object immediately activates the correct shape of the hand to handle it. (Klatzky et al., 1989). Tests of fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging), for example, confirm the representations of modality-specific in the conceptual system. (Barsalou et al., 2003, 87). When conceptualizing colors of objects activates the area responsible for the process of the feeling of colors while conceptualizing forms of objects activates the cerebral zone responsible in perceiving forms. Similarly, action-related categories activate the motor cortex, categories with visual properties activate the visual cortex, and social categories with emotive properties activate areas responsible for emotions. (Martin et al., 2001). Barsalou (2003) claims that concepts act in this way in our perceptions of being non-modular. That is, they are multimodal simulations, since they participate in more than one modality, and are distributed in different modality systems:

> Because the conceptual system shares mechanisms with perception and action, it is non-modular. As a result, conceptual representations are multi-modal simulations distributed across modality-specific systems. A given simulation for a concept is situated, preparing an agent for situated action with a particular instance, in a particular setting. Because a concept delivers diverse simulations that prepare agents for action in many different situations, it is dynamical. Because the conceptual system's primary purpose is to support situated action, it becomes organized around the action–environment interface. (Barsalou, 2003, 513)

## 2. Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Perception

About concept studies in philosophy, there is no definitive theory about the subject. In the history of philosophy, there are distinct lines, each with its definitions. The classic theories on the subject analyze the concepts in terms of necessary conditions and sufficient conditions. Neoclassical theories, on the other hand, argue that concepts have necessary conditions and deny that all concepts have individually necessary and sufficient conditions. Prototype theories categorize concepts employing a list of characteristics or in terms of paradigmatic cases. Theories - theory understand concepts as entities individualized by the functions they possess in mental theories which are immanent in the mind. Finally, atomistic theories comprise most of the concepts as primitive entities impossible to be analyzed (Earl, n.d.).

Hence, the term 'concept' is used in various forms to describe mental representations, images, words, senses, properties, mathematical functions, etc., and is analyzed in different ways between philosophers and psychologists. Fodor (1975), for example, is interested in intentional explanation and defends the existence of concepts while Quine (1960) has a skeptical position on the subject. On one hand, from the psychological point of view about mental representations, concepts are considered as types of internal representations which have individual ideas depending on their specific token, such as the word 'dog' being able to have numerous inscriptions like tokens - to be big, to have bitten me, to have four legs, etc. On the other hand, philosophers consider that such types of mental representations are not identical to concepts more than types present in natural languages, such as using the Portuguese word 'cão' or the French word 'chien' to describe the dog concept, as well as imagine a scenario representing the actual animal dog. (Guttenplan, 1994, 186).

Some philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, understand concepts as skills. That is, concepts are not mental particulars but skills of cognitive agents. Therefore, it is through skepticism about the existence and use of mental representations that concepts are understood in this way. Wittgenstein does not presuppose, in this way, the existence of a private language. For the philosopher, it is from the collective use of language that we learn its use. (Margolis & Laurence, 2019).

About perception, according to Campbell & O'Sullivan (2015), since 1930 Wittgenstein worries in his writings with the nature of the visual field and the interaction between

perception, thought and imagination, as well as with problems about the role of the body in the formation of our observational and psychological concepts. In his "Wittgenstein on Perception: An Overview", Campbell & O'Sullivan (2015) present, in a general way, the philosopher's theories about perception, beginning with the analysis of the visual field. In his early writings, more specifically in the Tractatus, Wittgenstein had in mind to criticize Russell's theories of perception in dealing with such matters as the visual field and judgment. According to Campbell & O'Sullivan (2015), Russell "developed a theory of judgment which presupposes a contrast between judgment and perception" and Wittgenstein, in criticizing this view, produces his theory in which he embraces both concepts (Campbell & O'Sullivan, 2015, 10).

After returning to philosophy in 1929, Wittgenstein, by questioning his earlier understanding of visual perception, namely, visual assimilation into logical structures, began to revise his understanding of the notion of visual field as well as the notions of sense-data, visual and perceptual impressions such as the exploration between physical world and visual space in which he claims that neither the observer nor the eyes are represented in the visual field: the essential thing is that the representation of space visual representation of an object (Campbell & O'Sullivan, 2015, 13). However, in his Big Typescript, such ideas encompass appearance, sense data, and visual space, and at this point, the philosopher treats the idiosyncrasies of visual space as facts about grammar, that is, how we describe the visual field is to report how it looks to us. In this way, the visual field is only part of the grammar of our language, according to the philosopher.

Regarding the meaning of words connected to the senses, according to Wittgenstein in his Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, the rhythm of a sentence influences his understanding. (Wittgenstein, 1998, 1090). That is, regardless of behavioral marks can understand what is said and this is due to the familiarity between words. In the same way, when associating images with words helps in their understanding. Although such questions relate more to the philosophy of language, they can very much cooperate with questions concerning the philosophy of perception. When we read the word 'reading' we attribute to it the word 'mold', as the philosopher describes in his Brown Book:

> Look at a written word, say "read", "It isn't just a scribble, it's 'read'", I should like to say, "it has one definite physiognomy". But what is it that I am really saying about it? What is this statement, straightened out? "The word falls", one is tempted to explain, "into a mould of my mind long prepared for it." (Wittgenstein, 1998, BB, 170)

To say that meaning is a Physiognomy, therefore, is to claim a critical Physiognomy with which Wittgenstein develops an understanding of meanings based on human physiology. It is thus through the needs of the individual that one makes the meaning: "the form of critical physiognomic judgment is one of reasoning that is circular and dynamic, grasping, intention, thoughts, and emotion in seeing the expressive movements of bodies in action" (Wack, 2014). About family resemblance, using the example of a leaf as a sample in a general way of what a leaf would be –color, shape, weight– Wittgenstein deals with the impossibility of recognizing objects exactly as they are. That is, even if the leaf has a shape or a color, what color would this be, or what format would this leaf have? For whom? Thus, the philosopher defines the Family resemblance by use of the concept. It is like using the concept in question that will be understood as familiar among other concepts used in the same way, as the concept of leaf for the object thus named, namely the green object and with a certain format since it is with such object that we interact in our language game:

> Here also belongs the idea that if you see this leaf as a sample of 'leaf shape in general' you see it differently from someone who regards it as, say, a sample of this particular shape. Now this might well be so –though it is not so– for it would only be to say that, as a matter of experience, if you see the leaf in a particular way, you use it in such-and-such a way or according to such-and-such rules. (Wittgenstein, 1998, 74)

Hence, Wittgenstein is concerned not with the recognition employing comparison between mental image and perceived object, but with recognition through the behavioral use of concepts. It is using the concepts in such a way that we will conclude that we are talking about the same thing. Language is, therefore, a game with rules that we share, and, in this way, we perceive objects in the same way, that is, through the use of language. (Mizak, 2005).

## 3. Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience: a conceptual analysis

Once the point of view of psychology about the analysis of the effects of concepts in our perception, as well as a presentation of Wittgenstein's theory of perception, has been presented, it is finally possible to develop an analysis of the results of neuroscientific experiments and under Wittgenstein's philosophy to try to find some point of convergence. The proposal is to try to understand how Wittgenstein would respond to such experiments.

Science is said to tend to confuse concepts about terms such as 'sight', 'recall', and so many psychological attributes by relating these to the brain rather than relating them to the creature to which that brain belongs (Bennett & Hacker, 2001). Bennett & Hacker (2001), in analyzing the results of neuroscientific experiments, conclude that, regardless of the empirical results of science, it is necessary to clarify the usage of concepts by psychology: "One cannot logically ascribe psychological attributes such as perceiving and remembering to the brain but only to an animal as a whole" (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 500). With this assertion, they claim that psychological attributes are not properties of body parts, such as the brain, but rather of a complete body, and thus seek to demystify the conceptual use in neurosciences of psychological attributes.

On the use of concepts by neuroscientists, some scientists claim that the brain can experience, believe and make interpretations about the world. Others describe neurons as being capable of gaining knowledge and being able to calculate the probability of external events related to the welfare of the animal of which it is a part. Nevertheless, neuroscientists also claim that the act of seeing functions as a continuous search for answers to the questions posed by the brain and the responses acquired by external stimuli captured by the retinas are used to construct the best hypothesis about the external world, and psychologists agree that there is something like a description in the brain about the external world (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 510-11).

The use of concepts such as 'experiencing', 'believing', 'interpreting' sounds wrong. Such concepts are normally used as activities practiced by living beings:

> We pose questions and search for answers, using a symbolism, namely our language, in terms of which we represent things. But do we know what it is for a brain to see or hear, for a brain to have experiences to know or believe something? Do we have any conception of what it would be for a brain to make a decision? Do we grasp what it is for a brain (let alone a neuron) to reason (no matter whether inductively or deductively), to estimate probabilities, to present arguments, to interpret data and to form hypotheses on the basis of its interpretations? We can observe whether a person sees something or other –we look at his behavior and ask him questions. But what would it be to observe whether a brain sees something– as opposed to observing the brain of a person who sees something? We recognize when a person asks a question and when another answers it. But do we have any conception of what it would be for a brain to ask a question or answer one? These are all attributes of human beings. (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 511)

Therefore, to say that the brain participates directly in events, would it be a discovery about how the brain approaches human activities, a linguistic innovation, or conceptual confusion? According to Bennett & Hacker (2001), the last option is the most viable, since the brain is not capable of practicing acts such as thinking, knowing, seeing and hearing.

Such a question is philosophical because it acts in the realm of concept understanding, and thus Wittgenstein's theory is invoked to analyze the situation, which anticipates the following claim: "only a human being and what resembles like to living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees, is blind; hears, is deaf; is conscious or unconscious". (Wittgenstein, 1998, §281). These statements, however, are not limited to human beings being also perceived in Bonobo chimpanzees when they are taught to communicate by sign language. By using language and, therefore, by their behaviors, it can confirm such attributes, and not only by cerebral analysis. This misleading way of dealing with concepts is attributed, according to Bennett & Hacker (2001) and Bennett et al. (2007), to the Cartesian dualism by dealing with matters related to the soul and exclusively to humans. Even discarded by many neuroscientists, it determines how to explain cognitive and perceptual abilities in the brain. Thus, "only a human being and what behaves like one can intelligibly and literally be said to be blind, hear or be deaf, ask questions or refrain from asking, hypothesize or abstain from making conjectures" (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 511).

Therefore, concepts of psychology are not able to define something clearly, for their meanings are reserved to whole beings and not to their parts, that is, the ear does not hear, but the being that has the capacity of hearing. Therefore, psychological predicates do not correctly describe parts, only beings as a whole, such as a human being, a chimpanzee, and so on. To describe a part of a body as a whole is to experience, in this way, the fallacy of mereology, that is, of the relation between the part and the whole. As Bennett & Hacker (2001) point out, even though there are cases in which we may allege that "the man is sunburnt" and "my hand is sunburnt," the cases currently analyzed are those of psychology, neuroscience, and science which have no application to parts of the body and, therefore, have no intelligible application to the brain.

We perceive sensations in other humans when describing their states, as exclaiming that they feel pain by deferring an "ouch!". That is, one understands as a state of pain because of his linguistic ability and behaviors infer descriptions related to pain. Describing something through behavior, therefore, is to describe what is visible to you, or in your field of vision, how the dog has specific behaviors by perceiving a cat in front of you. It is this behavioral evidence that is the description of psychology: it is from the behavior of the living being that its mental states, such as pain, happiness etc., are therefore presupposed. Such behaviors as psychological evidence are described by Wittgenstein, as Bennett & Hacker (2001) argue, as 'criteria' and, thus, "the application of psychological predicates to another person stands in need of behavioral criteria" (Wittgenstein, 1998, §580):

> Pain-behavior is logically good evidence for being in pain; perceptual behavior (appropriate to the object perceived and to the perceptual modality involved) is logically good evidence for the animal's perceiving. Wittgenstein called such logical, non-inductive evidence 'criteria'. (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 514)

For instance, an actor who acts to be in pain may not necessarily be feeling such a state, merely imitating the behavior. However, it is through criteria about the person's pain, behaviors, and beliefs that they will ensure that the person is in the state described by such behaviors:

> The criterial ground for ascribing psychological predicates to another person are conceptually connected with the psychological attribute in question. They are partly constitutive of the meaning of the predicate. So the normal ascription of psychological predicates to others does not involve an inductive identification. However, given the possibility of inductive (non-logical) identification becomes available through inductive correlations of subjects of psychological predicates with other phenomena, e.g. neurophysiological events in the brain. But any inductive correlation presupposes the criterial nexus that is partly constitutive of the psychological concept in question. (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 514).

Hence, we should not attribute pain to the brain, since it does not behave correspondingly, i.e., screaming in pain, crying. Also, we attribute the experience of eating an apple or studying a book to an individual, not to their stomach or their eyes. Neuroscientific experiments, therefore, like fMRI, only demonstrate the experiences of the thinking individual at the moment of the experiment, not the experience of the brain in question: "it presupposes the concept of thinking, as determined by the behavioral criteria that warrant ascription of thought to a living being (Bennett & Hacker, 2001, 515).

## 4. Psychological Experiments and Wittgenstein's Theory: finding a convergence

It was presented the findings of experimental psychology and neuroscience about concepts and their effects on our cognition. Nevertheless, after presenting a few points of Wittgenstein's theory, was presented a critique about the use of concepts by the sciences in treating the human body in a dualistic way by attributing to the brain and other sense organs capacities and characteristics that are best attributed to beings, namely, the animals and human beings possessing such organs. In spite of presenting here philosophers who criticize the way neurosciences use concepts to describe brain activities, arguments will be presented below in an attempt to bring Wittgenstein closer to the neurosciences and experimental psychology with the use of Wittgenstein's theories in philosophy of language.

We now turn to the attempt to formulate arguments that corroborate a meeting of Wittgenstein's theories of perception with the experiments made explicit throughout this work. It was presented experiments that demonstrate evidence of brain activation after stimulus attributed to a particular concept. For example, experiments in which perceptual similarity affects property verification, such as recognizing a pony's mane more quickly if the participants see a horse's mane rather than a lion's mane. In another experiment, in which there is an exchange of modalities, it is quicker to recognize the sound of the blender after having previously heard the rustling of leaves rather than experiencing the taste of cranberries. In another experiment, when reading a text in which there were orientations on positions of objects, namely, when reading the position of a nail nailed to a wall, participants imagined the nail in the horizontal position and, when they read about an object nailed to the floor, people imagined it in the upright position. Likewise, when reading about birds in flight participants process images of birds flying faster than images with birds with folded wings. (Barsalou et al., 2003).

Other examples such as experiments with the use of fMRI that present physical evidence in the brain when using concepts such as activating motor areas of the brain when using movement-related concepts and, when using color-related concepts, activating area of the brain responsible for color detection, demonstrate that concepts, under the light of experimental psychology, influence the brain directly and in a different way. According to Wittgenstein's theory, it can be seen from a more detailed analysis of the empirical examples that, to detect each example, there must be a similarity between concepts. That is, to facilitate the recognition of a pony's mane it is necessary to check previously the mane of a horse rather a lion's mane. That is, it can be said that the use of a concept is more easily detected when recognizing its linguistic use, as in the case of Wittgenstein's theory about Family resemblance: a concept is recognized by its use and similarity with others.

Thus, it concludes that such psychological experiments have a common result: they corroborate Wittgenstein's philosophical theory, which claims that when we use concepts we participate in a language game in which it includes an event, the act of speculating about the event, creating a hypothesis, a history, a reading, or acting, solving riddles, translations, what needs the use of language, that is, of concepts. (Gillette & Matar, 2018).

Philosophers use Wittgenstein's theories to criticize the sciences about their dualistic use of concepts in describing the brain. However, I believe that neuroscience presents evidence for

the correct description of Wittgenstein's use of language, such as the need to develop language games to use and learn the applicability of concepts. Those concepts most used and presented in certain language games become more easily identifiable and aid in the detection of other concepts with similar use, thus corroborating Wittgenstein's understanding of the Family Resemblance: the experiments of neuroscience and experimental psychology reveal the form as we detect concepts, that is, from their use. It is through the similarity of the use of concepts that we detect them, and it is through their use that our perceptions are influenced by them.

## Conclusion

This work intends to present the interaction between philosophy and empirical experiments in experimental psychology. For that, it involved neuroscientists, psychologists, contemporary philosophers and philosophers of the history of philosophy, such as Wittgenstein. By approaching the philosopher to the contemporary debates, one tried to verify an affirmation of the theories of Wittgenstein, like the games of language and the Family resemblance on the use of the concepts. By detecting the influence of concepts on specific parts of the brain, one reflects how one can interpret such activities: the detection of one concept facilitates the perception of another, and these activate certain areas of recognition in the brain as color concepts activate the area of color recognition and, of forms, activate respective areas. With this comparison between the experiments and Wittgenstein's theory, he sought to reflect on a possible interdisciplinary approach between the history of philosophy and the studies of science. Developing this mental exercise tries to approach theories of the history of the philosophy to the contemporary debates to find similarities or divergences between theories and empirical practices. The present work is part of a Ph.D. dissertation under construction and practicing these mental exercise hypotheses contributes to a better understanding of how the concepts influence our perceptions. The next step is to bring other philosophers closer to such experiments, and by using experimental philosophy, to develop philosophy experiments about how concepts influence our perceptions.

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# Algorithm and Language

**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to highlight characteristic elements of the relationship between algorithmic data processing and human language. We also seek to analyze the interactions of human language with the evolution of algorithms and their uses. We conclude that human language is progressively influenced as the goals to be achieved by the algorithms progress and evolve.*

**Keywords:** *Algorithm, Philosophy of language.*

**Resumo:** *O objetivo deste artigo é destacar elementos característicos da relação entre o processamento de dados feitos por algoritmos e a linguagem humana. Buscamos ainda analisar as interações da linguagem humana com a evolução dos algoritmos e dos seus usos. Concluímos que a linguagem humana sofre influência progressiva conforme progridem e evoluem os objetivos a serem atingidos pelos algoritmos.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Algoritmo, Filosofia da linguagem.*

## 1. Introduction

More and more humans interact with their creations and in recent decades the most prominent human creation are algorithms, and among them the algorithms that use human language as a substrate to be worked on. The functioning of human language structures seems to be influenced and modified by the increasing use of algorithms, especially algorithms that use virtual databases to achieve their goals.

Initially we will define and conceptualize what is an algorithm, its main functions and some of its uses. Then we will list and develop the understanding of some of the relationship between algorithm and language, from this understanding we try to better understand the influences between language and algorithms.

Furthermore, we will try, beyond the multiple influences, to understand how much each one has from the other and if it is possible to separate the parts, whether there are parts at all. We assume that it is important to know what are the goals of the algorithms and whether they are compatible or contrary to the goals of humans.

For conceptual purposes we understand *language* as *an instrument and a convention for communication.*

## 2. Algorithm

### 2.1. What is an Algorithm?

Every computer program is an algorithm, but not every algorithm is a computer program. As what interests us here in this article are the virtual algorithms *–logical sequence of immaterial data processing that seek to achieve a goal–* we focus on them.

It is noteworthy that algorithms can also be found in physical nature, as well defined by Daniel Dennett "What Darwin discovered was not really an algorithm, but a large class of related algorithms" (Dennett, 1998, 53). The existing algorithms in the material world will not be objects of study of this article.

"The word algorithm (and the idea of studying it) comes from Al-Khowarazmi, a 9th century Persian mathematician" (Russell & Norvi, 2013, 31), but the first algorithm is attributed to Euclid who used it to calculate the greatest common divisor of a number. Algorithms are born from the studies of formal logic, which is one of the great fields of philosophy's research, and developed as such from the 19th century with the works of mathematician George Boole (1815-1864) and which we now know as Boolean propositional logic.

But it has been in recent decades that studies of algorithms have developed increasingly, especially driven by computer data processing. And here appears one of the characteristics of algorithms, which is to compute something, and computing, or computation, is a concept that is difficult to define, because it can be understood either as counting something, as calculating something, or even as adjust, compare, parallel, include or exclude something from a count. We can compute numbers, symbols, images, sounds and a multitude of other elements. But the computation that interests us here is the computation of language, especially the written language in words.

### 2.2. Algorithms and words

Algorithms have goals to be fulfilled and their existence is due to this: to achieve a goal. The substrate –in our case the words– and the process exist only to reach an end. In other words, the end is the purpose of an algorithm. For an algorithm, the computation or the way it handles words is directly related to the end it wants to achieve, which can be many. For example, a database search algorithm –such as Google– will treat words differently if its goal is to teach, communicate, or disclose something.

The ability of an algorithm to achieve its goals is increasing depending on the refinement of word processing and the size of the databases it has access to. The probability that an algorithm will achieve its purpose increases if the processes it uses to handle words are well designed and if it has access to a large number of words. The quality and complexity of an algorithm influence the result as long as it has a big amount of information and processing power.

Algorithms are problem solvers and tend to imitate with improvement other algorithms that have the same or similar goals. "And it is through the 'imitation' of these aspects that computational algorithms learn and specialize in solving specific problems" (Florão,2017, 52). Algorithms are classified primarily by the purpose they seek to achieve, and algorithms that use words as a substrate may have various functions to fulfill, such as relation, search, translation, selection, deletion, misrepresentation, exchange, word disclosure, and so on, and they use other words to achieve what they are meant to achieve.

An algorithm can also be a word patterner. "An algorithm is designed to extract and use statistical patterns in data" (Meira, 2017, 57). Thus, an algorithm can also standardize text by whether exchanging words for words of similar meaning or not, and it can do so depending on the purpose for which it was created. This, of course, can change the meaning of the texts and the original purpose for which they were created.

According to Squirra, algorithms can also use words to create new words or texts as well as to develop facts triggered by those words. "Algorithms are used in journalism to mine large volumes of data for the purpose of predicting certain facts" (Squirra, 2018, 139). Because of their large data processing capabilities, algorithms can scour large databases to perceive words in contexts that humans could not. Algorithms relating words that relate to other words in certain virtual environments can draw conclusions about facts that we could not draw. Algorithms developed for journalistic purposes are a good example for this algorithms' capability. "Algorithms are currently being used by journalists both to filter content from the internet and produce news as well as to distribute it in a personalized way, allowing consumers to get more than they like and less than they don't like" (Magalhães, 2017, 244).

A final feature of the relationship of algorithms to words is that they can also create new texts. According to Carreira "The algorithms that generate automated texts are the result of several technological advances, such as artificial intelligence and the generation of natural language."

According to this author, the creation of texts is already relatively common among journalistic institutions.

One of the problems with this way of using algorithms is "algorithmic cannibalization", that is, one algorithm uses the text of another algorithm to produce text that will be used by another algorithm and so on. The outcome of this process is still poorly known or studied, but may lead to poor language or standardization of language or texts with little originality, poetry, innovation, literature or dullness. At least until whenever an algorithm is created to improve texts with these characteristics.

## 3. Algorithm and language

### 3.1. Relationship

In the history of language development there was a time when language was the main relationship with itself, language created new languages, and in the relationship between different languages new ones developed, this era passed away. Today languages have between them (between it and itself) several relation elements that interpose in linguistic links, one of these elements is the algorithm.

For a long time the goal of language was to communicate something, to conceptualize, indicate, relate, mean and express it. Today, especially in the digital world, language is increasingly being used as a means to achieve the goals of algorithms. Word manipulation is done in order to achieve what the algorithm proposes to achieve. And what the algorithm proposes to achieve is something that is increasingly difficult to know because in addition to algorithm creators keeping their purpose secret, many algorithms create other algorithms or modify themselves to improve their performance and increase their chances of achieving their goals.

An algorithm modifies itself by improving its performance by eliminating paths that did not reach its objectives, searching for new paths, seeking relations of equality, discrepancy or similarity between the words and contexts in which they are used. As Rodrigues highlighted (2017, 99) "computers can analyze large volumes of data and extract knowledge from them. They use resources like natural language and computer vision to identify patterns through machine learning algorithms." Language has thus become more than a means for the algorithm to achieve its ends, language is a means for the algorithm to improve itself and to develop as such. Algorithms grow using and relating languages. Words have become the food for digital algorithms.

Algorithms already have a rudimentary form of learning. Many of them are created for more than a particular purpose: they are created with the ability to use human language to nourish and develop, it is almost a biological relationship, only virtual. In the words of Rodrigues (2017, 100) "artificial intelligence is used to perform tasks previously performed by humans; linguistics adds understanding of language and information extraction in texts".

### 3.2. Utilization

Words have become for algorithms what they are for humans: an instrument and a convention for communication. Rodrigues (2017, 101) highlights another capability of algorithms, "variability: refers to data whose meaning is constantly changing, depending on the time and context a word may have other meanings". Algorithms are making a rudimentary form of interpretation, and they use human language as an instrument to interpret contexts and better achieve their ends.

In addition to this form of interpretation, the algorithms are communicating with each other to better achieve their goals: "The Internet of Things (IoT) allows multiple devices to 'talk' to each other over the Internet or a private network" (Rodrigues, 2017, 101). But in this process of communication between algorithms the human language is not the main language used, in this communication the algorithms use "machine language", which is a human creation.

The algorithms use "machine language" to work with human language. Algorithms designed to work with human language use non-human language.

### 3.3 Modification

In the introduction we defined language as an instrument and a convention for communication. We chose this definition because we believe that algorithms have changed the three concepts by which we define language: *Instrument; Convention; Communication*.

#### *3.3.1 Instrument*

An instrument is a resource we use to achieve some result; thus, language is one of the tools humans use to communicate, and algorithms have changed the resources we use to communicate. This change has influences not only in language, but in various spheres of the human being in society, as it is well asked by Pastor (2019, 285): "In the digital networks, Big Data, Internet of Things, computational mediations, digital data, algorithms, smart cities, devices, etc., how to think –in sociological, philosophical, anthropological, communicational terms– the social environment, social dynamics and the practice of the social sciences themselves? "

Algorithms have changed language's diffusion logic, but they have also changed the speed of transmission, and in many cases, reshaping the logic and speed of language transform the language itself. For example: More and more digital communication is done by images and less by texts.

#### *3.3.2. Convention*

The term convention here refers to a set of rules that are created by the relationship and communication between individuals, language is therefore a set of rules that have been developed throughout the evolutionary process. We understand language as the result of the evolutionary process, but also as a driver of this same evolutionary process. We believe that any theory about language that does not take this into account tends to be poor in its explanation.

Language seen as a social convention took thousands of years to evolve, and the more it evolved, the more it drove human evolution, as it was one of the primary tools for transmitting knowledge. For thousands of years oral language has been the primary means of conveying knowledge, and only four thousand years ago writing has slowly begun to take place in part of this transmission, and less than four decades ago algorithms have changed much of the communication rules.

In the digital world the rules of communication are different, the language is different and the language goals are different. This differentiation was only possible through the use of algorithms. For example: The linguistic rules of communication in social networks are distinct from the rules of oral or written language in a book.

#### *3.3.3. Communication*

Because we are especially concerned with written language in this article, we will define communication simply as the process of transmitting knowledge. But the process is not neutral, it interrelates, that is, influences and is influenced by the knowledge to be transmitted. The "sender-message-receiver" theory no longer has space in the digital world of algorithms.

The algorithms allowed a hybridism between language, process and transmitted knowledge. For example: A word placed on a digital social network tends to have a different and often dubious meaning, and when what is communicated by that word is perceived by tracking algorithms, algorithms tend to change the relationships and environment of existing words with future words. For example: an algorithm of an instant messaging application such as WhatsApp tends to suggest new words based on the written word database and to change new word suggestions depending on the written word. Another example: Google autocomplete is an algorithm based on all searches made by Google, and the choices we make in our searches will influence new searches.

Pastor defines this process as "complex of interrelated entities" and in it there is no longer "a radical separation between nature and culture, human and non-human" (Pastor, 2019, 271).

Another concept used by this thinker, which helps us to understand this process, is the author-network, where the individual is already a crowd and every action of this individual produces difference, either by imitation or modification of communicative language. "What matters is the microrelationships, the multiple diffuse and infinitesimal relationships that occur between or within individuals." And yet "the small repetitions, oppositions and adaptations, or their sociological correlatives, the imitations, hesitations, and inventions that constitute subrepresentative matter and, as such, they refer not to individuals, but [...] to flows and waves of beliefs and desires" (Pastor, 2019, 273).

In large part, algorithms, using written language, will influence and modify the communication of this flow of beliefs and desires. For example, the algorithms of social networks tend to increasingly propagate the terms that are most used by users of this social network, influencing the beliefs and desires of these users.

In the digital world driven by algorithms "things are not simply "are" (static things), they "are" at this moment" (Pastor, 2019, 277). And "being at this moment" influences being and communicating not only in the digital world, but in the "real world," whatever it is. Trying to exemplify: When someone is on a social network, he or she is there for his/her beliefs and desires that may have already been influenced by algorithms whose purpose was to get people there. But when that person is on the social network or messaging application the algorithms know he or she is there, and whatever they do in these virtual environments will influence the algorithms that can influence other algorithms in a network that includes other people as well that are in this virtual world. The algorithms' relationship to words occurs in a similar way.

And where does the "real world" stand? For the virtual world probably in the Global Positioning System (GPS). Using GPS the algorithms know from where most of the machines are connected to them, and also know the language used in these places and will know which words can be used to achieve their intended purposes. Algorithms influence the words of the virtual world and the "real world" of which the virtual world is increasingly part.

## 4. Concluding Notes

Realizing that human language is progressively influenced by algorithms that work with words is not difficult, the hard thing to know is how much one influences and is influenced by the other. Probably, this process feeds back constantly and finds a balance by eliminating the most glaring discrepancies.

Eliminating discrepancies can also be the major negative effect of using algorithms in language, as with "algorithmic cannibalization" language tends to be standardized so that it becomes increasingly accessible to more people. It tends to become average, mediocre. Poetry and literature tend to have less and less effect on the meaningful world of people, and widely divergent opinions tend to be planned.

Probably the algorithms are also controlled by finding a common point where the action of each one is the most advantageous for all. We think that another limiting and controlling factor is language itself, because words and their meanings and relationships are finite and finite are also the goals pursued by each algorithm.

We started this study by seeking to know how much of the goals of the algorithms are also the same goals of humans. We ended up by believing that technology and algorithms have become an ecosystem of which the human is also part. We can no longer separate actions from algorithms from human actions, we are one movement, to where the humans go the algorithms tend to follow their course, and the opposite also tends to be true. We have the algorithms in a dance without rhythm, but with many movements.

From our studies we have also concluded that such a text will probably be able to be written by algorithms in a short time, if they already cannot do it right now.

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# The Problem of the Relationship Between Language and World in Heidegger and Wittgenstein

**Abstract:** *This essay aims to demonstrate that there is an approximation between Heidegger and Wittgenstein in relation to language as a description of the world, founding it as reality. The first position is that one should not oppose these two philosophers considering methodology as the only form of definition. The second central position is that Heidegger and Wittgenstein bring philosophical thought to a construction of the world and man because language exists, and language is possible because there is an image of the world.*

**Keywords:** *Language, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, World.*

**Resumen:** *Este artículo tiene como objetivo demostrar que existe una aproximación entre Heidegger y Wittgenstein en relación con el lenguaje como una descripción del mundo, y lo funda como realidad. La primera posición es que uno no debe oponerse a estos dos filósofos considerando la metodología como la única forma de definición. La segunda posición central es que Heidegger y Wittgenstein traen el pensamiento filosófico a una construcción del mundo y del hombre porque el lenguaje existe, y el lenguaje es posible porque hay una imagen del mundo.*

**Palabras clave:** *Lenguaje, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Mundo.*

*"Ultimately, the later Heidegger and Wittgenstein are alike trying to let us live and think as humans, at last". (Braver, 2012, 239).*

## 1. Introduction

The reality where we all are inserted is dictated by language. Is there an inexpressible or language-independent world? Only by language can one know the world? The starting position, that needs to be considered for this work, is that world and language are amalgamated. There is only one world because there is language, and it is what allows the world to be world, not as an instrument neither as a result, but as a condition of being.

If you want to show that two philosophers, normally in opposition, construct this same meaning, language and world are constituted as a condition of existence, as life, as a reality that is perceived and inserted.

From that assertion, one has as its first general result that if philosophy, as we always hear of the great philosophers, is the thought about the world and about each one "[...] about our own conception, about how we see things. (And what we require of them)" (Wittgenstein, 1995, 6), it is essential to philosophize about language. If this second position (the indispensability of philosophizing on language), is constituted as a paradigm, no philosopher can be excluded from the wake of the philosophers in history, that is, they must all work minimally with language and such material.

There is no philosophy without a preoccupation on language, without a clarification and a position. The main focus here is that many of the "said" contradictions between philosophers,

especially those who are more attentive to language, thus classified as analytical –philosophers of language (in a broader sense: Wittgenstein, Russell, Carnap, Strawson, Quine etc.) and non-analytic philosophers, like Heidegger, are not entirely true, thus such philosophers can't be put in opposition since the phenomenon they study, in this case language, have not been researched by the same prism, as will be seen here above all in relationship between Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

Other researchers have also published this relationship as a "non-opposition", as is the case of Lee Braver in his book *Groundless Grounds: a study of Wittgenstein and Heidegger* in 2012, relating Heidegger and Wittgenstein, in which "[...] these two central thinkers make similar arguments for similar views on a wide range of fundamental issues. And where they disagree, we can bring them into dialogue and compare their reasons" (Braver, 2012, 2).

Our first statement sums up that we can't think of an opposition between them, so the former thinks the language conceived by his theory and the second "[…] a study on the representative scope of language, on the limit for the expression of thoughts" (Coelho, 2009, 22).

There is an approximation of these "separate" groups of philosophy, based on the specificities of analytical research, whether it is interest in language, scientific modes of thinking, how the various problems are linguistically treated, or how the "analytical philosophy of language refers to a way of doing philosophy which includes the belief that the problems of philosophy can be solved, or must be solved, through an analysis of language" (Tugendhat, 1992, 16) , it is concluded that one can converge with other so-called "non-analytical" thinkers with special attention, to what Gadamer describes, that language is not "[…] only one medium among others […] but has a special relationship with potential community of reason [...]. Language is not mere "fact," but "principle." In it rests the universality of the hermeneutical dimension" (Gadamer, 2002, 113).

Therefore, in this work, at first there is a will of approximation between Heidegger and Wittgenstein, only then to approach a specific problem, worked by both, that allows this relation to be of approximation and not of opposition. It will be seen that the notion of the world goes through the comprehension of language, inevitably, and that each contributes to this understanding that can be related without major contradictions and problems.

Before presenting these two thinkers, it is emphasized that the "rejection" of both in relation of proximity is strong in the academic circles. If we analyze the references to Heidegger in works of Philosophy of Language, we still see little or total rejection of the thinker as to the work of language. It is seen in such works as William G. Lycan's *Philosophy of Language a Contemporary Introduction*, that not only does Heidegger's work be pointed out once, Nicholas Bunnin's *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* and EP Tsui-James, quoting Heidegger only in the final part and without pretensions of deepening or highlighting. Already in Part I of *Areas of Philosophy*, specifically in chapter III *Philosophy of Language of Martin Davies*, not even the contact. Or more fiercely, in a direct attack on metaphysics, as Carnap did in 1931 in *Erkenntnis* (text that analyzes Heidegger's metaphysical work) in which he affirms that there are "[…] two types of pseudopropositions: or a word that is mistakenly believed to have a meaning or the words that occur in them have meaning, but are combined in a way contrary to the syntax, in such a way that they do not produce any sense. [...] both types occur in metaphysics. [...] all metaphysics consists of such pseudopropositions" (Carnap, 2016, 95).

In addition, Hilbert lectured *Die Grundlegung der elementaren Zahlenlehre* in December 1930, in the *Philosophische Gesellschaft Hamburg* the following remark against Heidegger's thoughts: "In Overcoming Metaphysics by the Logical Analysis of Language a recent philosophical conference, I find the phrase "Nothingness is the pure and simple negation of the whole being". This phrase is instructive because, despite its brevity, it illustrates the main obstacles against the principles set out in my theory of demonstration" (Carnap, 2016, 114-115).

From this dense context, it is realized, at least as something strongly emphasized, that rejection is greater than an attempt to assimilate, although an approximation exists in other authors such as Merleau-Ponty, for example "[...] the word is not a mere instrument of thought, but it is the body of thought in the world. The thought exists through speech, and it is only in this attitude of expression that signification is realized" (Silva, 1994, 57), this thought engendered by Heidegger from the point of view of language as an instrument of conception of the world, not exhausting it in what may be the result of the meaning of the words, but "assume that language contains its evidence in itself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1986, 131).

By "softening" the confrontation, one can also see with Rorty in the work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* a positive Heidegger presentation:

> In this conception, "philosophy" is not a name for a discipline which confronts permanent issues, and unfortunately keeps misstating them, or attacking them with clumsy dialectical instruments. Rather, it is a cultural genre, a "voice in the conversation of mankind" (to use Michael Oakeshott's phrase), which centers on one topic rather than another at some given time not by dialectical necessity but as a result of various things happening elsewhere in the conversation (the New Science, the French Revolution, the modern novel) or of individual men of genius who think of something new (Hegel, Marx, Frege, Freud, Wittgenstein, Heidegger), or perhaps of the resultant of several such forces. (Rorty, 1979, 264)

Or, more recently, with Daniel Debarry, who at the *V Conference of the Brazilian Society of Analytical Philosophy* in 2018 presented a proposal that seeks to "put into conversation the analytical and continental traditions in philosophy" (Debarry, 2018, 71).

So, as well summarizes Harries,

> Both have been invited to disregard the past. This is certainly true of Wittgenstein: repeatedly suggests that traditional philosophy rests on a misuse of language. One can point to these passages to present Wittgenstein as an anti-philosopher who has surpassed the philosophy of the past by showing that the puzzles which occupied it can be made to disappear by "bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." (Inv. 116) Heidegger, too, speaks of the end of traditional metaphysics; his own thinking is an attempt to step back to the most fundamental plane. (1968, 281)

In this way, one can say that Heidegger and Wittgenstein think about language and it corresponds to a description of the world, founding it as reality. Both, as Braver puts it, "[...] locate the fundamental problem in the way philosophizing suspends our ongoing engaged behavior in the world, with its tacit knowledge of how to use words and interact appropriately with different types of entities, to take up disengaged theorist stance" (Braver, 2012, 10).

The first position assumed here, therefore, is that one can't simply oppose these two philosophers, or separate groups in philosophy because they consider that methodology would be the only defining form.

The second central position is that both Heidegger and Wittgenstein bring philosophical thought to a construction and enlightenment of the world and man, in which reality can only exist, in which world and man exist, if language exists, it is only possible a world, because there is language, and only language is possible because someone has an image of the world. In *Philosophical Investigations*, especially from paragraphs 89 to 109, Wittgenstein does not constitute a systematic work, he leaves aside the structural theory between language and reality and argues that language must be usable and functional, and for that, the relation between words and world is not enough. There are many meanings in language and many ways of applying it in everyday life. There are a myriad of "language games," each one being justified within the situation in which man uses, having, as many languages as he does with forms of life.

## 2. Wittgenstein and the concept of language

Wittgenstein's concept of language is understood and evaluated in the rouse of the twentieth-century British universities, focusing more precise and particular problems in the attempt to solve them by analyzing prepositions and meanings, as Moore and Russerl did, for example.

Here it is observed that from a more general view, an idea that extends as a great system, a concern is born that turns to the real expressions of the human activity. Although, Russell later added

> [...] a new ingredient to the nascent philosophical current. ... The role of philosophy, no longer as an analysis of the meanings of the terms of natural language, but as its replacement by an ideal language, expressed strictly in terms of symbolic logic, which has become the formal instrument characteristic of analytic philosophers. (Macdowell, 2016, 153)

Wittgenstein, in the 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, atomizes analysis, in which the combination of words in sentences mirrors the combination of the constituents of the proposition and this to the structure of the possible or actual facts of the world. It can be summed up in two conclusions, which allow us to think that the impossibility of metaphysics was not rooted in what can be known, but in the nature of what can be said:

> a) Logical and mathematical statements are tautologies. These are determined by their particular syntactic structure. b) The formulation of the "verifiability principle", that is, the meaning of a statement is reduced to the empirical data whose occurrence determines the veracity of the statement. In linguistic terms a factual proposition will be significant if it can be reduced to a combination of propositions expressing facts of immediate experience. (Oliveira, 2006, 3)

The atomism quoted above allows us to think that propositions are irreducible when they are equivalent to a property (the sand is white = a white sand).

The world we live in is no more than a link from empirical things to meanings. Thus Wittgenstein's aim was to establish the limits of meaningful saying and thus to solve / dissolve all traditional philosophical problems resulting from the misuse of language.

Secondly, Wittgenstein "revises" his *Tractatus* thinking, around the 1940s, first of all highlighting a new way of thinking about the now systematized structures of language, now focusing on "language games", used specifically by groups, with their own rules from practices of language and not a priori, resulting in social use event, "[...] argued that words and sentences are more like game pieces or tokens, used to make moves in rule governed conventional social practices" (Lycan, 2008, 76). It is, therefore, a conception,

> We want to establish an order in our knowledge of the use of language: an order with a particular end in view; one out of many possible orders; not the order. To this end we shall constantly be giving prominence to distinctions which our ordinary forms of language easily make us overlook. This may make it look as if we saw it as our task to reform language. Such a reform for particular practical purposes, an improvement in our terminology designed to prevent misunderstandings in practice, is perfectly possible. But these are not the cases we have to do with. The confusions which occupy us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work. (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 132)

This conception sees in language an order that "fix" the traditional problems previously raised by philosophy, considered as inconsistent ones.

> It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones. It was not of any possible interest to us to find out empirically 'that, contrary to our preconceived ideas, it is possible to think such-and-such' - whatever that may mean. (The conception of thought as a gaseous medium). And we

> may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: in despite of an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information […]. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language. (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 109)

Language evolves into language-games which include not just other propositions, but "the actions into which [language] is woven" (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 7). Linguistic study can no longer just look at words since the context that defines them encompasses behavior as well. "Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form" (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 23). This holism continues to expand and deepen until what determines our concepts, our moral and reactions, is not what one man is doing now, an individual action, but the whole actions of human, the background (Braver, 2012).

This marks a drastic change from his early theory of meaning-objects. As David Pears writes, Wittgenstein realized later that this theory of language greatly underestimated our continuing contribution to the fixity of meaning and so represented the whole enterprise in a way that made it impossible. One of the recurrent themes of Philosophical Investigations is that we cannot give a word a meaning merely by giving it a one-off attachment to a thing. What is needed is a sustained contribution from us as we continue to use the word… This distinction (between obeying a rule and disobeying it) must be based on our practice, which cannot be completely anticipated by any selfcontained thing. We do not, and cannot, rely on any instant talisman (Pears, 1988, 208 – 209, cited by Braver, 2012, 84).

Wittgenstein's holism expands from closed systems of propositions to a meaning-giving background consisting of cultural practices and the basic patterns of behavior that make up ordinary human life.

It is maintained, even in the face of such a sense, that an analysis by language is complex, seeing problems such as the determination of nature or even a specific method.

Some other researchers continue with formulations on this intention, such as S. Kripke with his causal theory of reference, PF Strawson with his "descriptive metaphysics," J. Searle with a wingspan for philosophy of mind, G. Ryle with the connectivist model of natural language.

What emerges from this panorama is an "internal" diversity of specific methods, themes and approaches, but never confined to pure language analysis, but rather linked to aesthetic, moral, political, and religious problems. They are related to the ontology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion. This general interpretation is not consensual, as many tend to do nowadays seeing the philosophy of language linked to other themes, or to relate it to hermeneutics, as Gadamer did, in which calculating is according to a rule, "The more alive is the less conscious the linguistic act is of itself. The true being of language is what, in being heard, we plunge into: what is said" (Gadamer, 2002, 149-150). However, it still is a force that creates: "[...] language is not a reworked conventionalism, it is not the weight of previous schemes that cover us, but the ever-new generating and creative force to impart fluidity to this whole" (Gadamer, 2002, 242). This approach by Gadamer is rejected, for example in the book *Margins of the philosophies of language: conflicts and approximations between analytical, hermeneutic, phenomenological and metacritical of language* in which Cabreira emphatically states:

> But, on the other hand, I remain skeptical (against Gadamerian optimism) regarding the reception of the late Wittgenstein by the frames of hermeneutics. My idea is that after the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein continued to think of articulated language, specifically in propositions, as a privileged place for

> the production of significations, although they are now diversified and articulated in situations of use, and not studied in a logical way general. Nevertheless, the idea of an organizing "logic" continues. I do not think that the interest in a public and socialized theory of language should be confused with an interest in the links between language and the historical-cultural context, in a hermeneutical sense. (2003, 77)

Wittgenstein emphasizes the use of contexts in which daily activities are developed, such as advice, measured orders, requests, worries ... In *Tractatus*, language was a fixed and formal relationship with the world. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein world made up of predetermined facts by logical structures of linguistic activities that in their own dynamics separate themselves from ideas as limits and deprivations, diverging from the consensus of unique analytic standards, "Wittgenstein wants to help us with the knotted squalor of the real, to force our heavenward gaze down to the detritus of practice" (Braver, 2012, 226).

This game structure of language allows one to open himself to innumerable constructions arising from the human situation in its totality.

> If in the beginning, such a thought has as one of its characteristics verificationism as legitimating the meaning of a proposition, in the second, the philosopher is willing to admit even a transgression of language. Thus, it breaks out against all epistemic and anthropological dualism, and criticizes radically the philosophical tradition of language, which he himself accuses himself of having been a part of. (Machado, 2013,18)

Thus, it is through language that someone can tell the world, and not only name it, attributing to the context a degree of construction and signification, therefore, a meaning "[...] is not an abstract object; meaning is a matter of the role an expression plays in human social behavior. To know the expression's meaning is just to know how to deploy the expression appropriately in conversational settings" (Lycan, 2008, 76). Language does not end or limit the world, but opens it by the rule given in the game, not limiting language as well as the world. "Words, says Wittgenstein, only acquire meaning in the flow of life; the sign, considered separately from its applications, seems dead; it is in use that he gains his vital breath. Our expressions gain different functions, according to the context in which they are employed, thus modifying what is meant by them" (Costa, 1992, 63).

For Wittgenstein, there is no truer language game than another language game, they all have an equal value because they keep with them certain rules which he called rules of grammar, which are the semantically relevant rules for the use of language each reality, in each context. With this idea about language, he more strongly emphasizes the linguistic phenomenon from the human condition and the diversity of identity. For this reason, analyzing these games in the constitution of the world is odd, since one can see a direct relationship with Heidegger, from another perspective, but convergent. This frees up the scenario of signs for an understanding of language in its pragmatic relationship with the world.

If language games are directly related to life and to the world in which we live, there is necessarily an interweaving between culture, world and language (Glock, 1998). Games appear, maintained by contexts of life and as a result of human activities "[...] to imagine a language means to imagine the form of life" and "[...] the term" language-game "is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 19, § 23).

Word meaning is defined from the function that the word exerts in the game of language. Such a game must be situated in a practical linguistic context. It is in the proper relation of each language game, which must adapt to each practical context, that language acquires its meaning.

The way of life would care for the place where language sets in, it would be a shelter where language would establish itself, "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 25).

These language games further clarify our understanding of reality and how we acquire meaning from things. They are varied in each medium, in each community, varying even in time and intensity, such as saying "sit down", would it be to use a chair? Sit on the floor? Sit on the bent leg? There is no way to generalize a term because it can't be applied generically.

Thus, language games can't occur in particular contexts, but should require a context with a community that shares the same rules, such as a card game or board. For Wittgenstein, this is called "family resemblance" (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 67). For him, language is an instrument, its concepts are instruments, "the difference is merely one of convenience" (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 569), the words would have felt only when they had something as utility, an end; language is only a means to this end, meaning occurs due to the end.

## 3. Heidegger and the concept of language

If for Wittgenstein the world is the real and practical place in which we are located, for Heidegger there is a prior structure for meaning. The Heideggerian exercise on language is "[...] bringing language as language into language" (Heidegger, 2012, 192). His goal, in a way, is to systematize and question the conceptual presuppositions of theories in metaphysics, philosophy of language and theory of knowledge, contemporaneously encompassed under the denomination "Analytical Philosophy of Language".

This activity is transcendent and it is understood as overcoming (*Überstieg*), as "[...] something possible as existence" (Heidegger, 1971, 31), that is, a relation "... that leads from 'something' to 'something'" (Heidegger 1971, 33). It is a world constitution, which converges to Wittgenstein's work as we will see below.

Such overcoming of *Dasein* is established by the structure of the world. To clarify the world, the "world phenomenon" is what "[...] must serve to clarify transcendence as such" (Heidegger, 1971, 38). What exactly is the world? Heidegger describes the world in relation to transcendence, as:

> 1. World means a "how" of the being of the beings, but also of the beings themselves. 2. This "how" determines the entities in their totality. It is, at bottom, the possibility of each "as" in general as limit and measure. 3. This "how" in its entirety is, to some extent, prior. 4. This prior "as", in its entirety, is the same relative to human Dasein. The world is, however, precisely inherent in human Dasein, in which the world, in embracing all beings, also includes Dasein in its totality. (Heidegger, 1971, 39)

Heidegger alludes in paragraph 34 of *Being and Time* to the theme of his ontological conception of language. One of the main difficulties for his understanding concerns the unprecedented distinction proposed between "discourse" (Network) and "language" (*Sprache*), which allows the development of his critique of traditional conceptions of man as the talking animal or as the "Rational animal," as well as the critique of the ontological conceptions of language proposed by linguistics and the philosophies of language, which conceive of it as a systematic set of logically determined signs through which the communication of messages occurs.

The problem with these definitions of human and language is not that they are false, but that they conceal the more original character of discourse as constituting the "openness" of *Dasein*, and obscure the ontological bond between being of the being that we are and the being of language itself.

Already since *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that the fundamental basis of language is not logic neither grammar, much less lies in the potentialities of the biological (phonic apparatus) rational animal, but lies in the existential constitution of *Dasein*, that is, in the "openness" of being-in-the-world. Subsequently, Heidegger will assert that the being of language lies in the openness of the truth of being, while retaining the same criticisms addressed to the improper conception of language. In the period of *Being and Time*, the opening that each one of them is consubstantially constituted by "understanding",

"disposition" and "discourse", and Heidegger will attribute to this existential last the ontological character of language.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that language is the utterance of discourse (Heidegger, 2014, 223), *Dasein* is expressed only linguistically because the openness guarantees such possibility. Obviously, this is not an ontological presupposition that must be accepted in the manner of an axiom, from which certain theoretical consequences would be derived. Discourse can't be understood as a human faculty or property that would allow linguistic enunciation, for Heidegger does not locate the origin of language in the 'interior' of the being, nor does it restrict it only to its apophantic functions. On the other hand, discourse is the ontological instance that enables ontic expression in several historical languages, insofar as it makes possible the communication of shared meanings in a world of occupations. To communicate something linguistically is not to transmit private experiences or information from the interior of a subject to the interior of other subjects, but to share meaning with others, before the possibility of all being occupied with a world (in common). Thus, the analysis of language has to be, simultaneously, an analysis of co-existence. After all, discourse is the articulation of significance and coexistence can be mediated by communication. Moreover, affirming that the existential basis of language is discourse, "[...] as articulation in meanings of comprehensibility inserted in the disposition of the being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 2014, 224).

Especially after *Kehre*, in which Heidegger conceives language from new structures, one understands *Dasein* with more accessibility to the world. It is emphasized that by language there is an "opening of the world", utilizing intentionality. This intentionality does not equate to an instrument, since it is not something constituted and not constitutive. "El lenguaje no es solamente un instrumento que el hombre posee entre muchos otros; es lenguaje es lo que, en general y ante todo, garantiza la posibilidad de encontrarse el hombre en medio de lo abierto del ser que está siendo" (Heidegger, 1992, 1).

Heidegger bets on a language that is placed as a means (clearing), of being in it so that there is openness of beings, "Sólo hay mundo donde hay habla" (Heidegger, 1992, 4).

Once established that language is the foundation of ontological difference, since "the being of man is based on speech" (Heidegger, 1992, 4), language is given as and by dialogue, as the unity of existence, because it is through the dialogue that is related to being with the other, the one with the other, which is glimpsed in the German expression *Mit-teilung.* We are dialogue, it is the one that connects and gives meaning.

This sense precedes man, undoing the idea of language as an instrument. According to Nunes, this is where Heidegger

> […] turns to the essence of language... Taking away the instrumental conception in which Linguistics would incur, which - words speak for themselves - their power of appeal and silence, the latent meaning they hold and the meaning that they dispense with - an intention that comes down to the very expression of making language, as language, come to the word (*zum Work kommt*), at the same time hermeneutic experience and way of thinking. (2012, 188)

Language produces this movement of openness, of clearing, and manifests itself as the possibility of an existence. The life in which Heidegger concentrates „[...] ist das poetische oder praktische Leben, daswir arbeitend und handelnd mit den Anderen führen, in dem wir uns in einem ständigen Gespräch befinden. Für die vermeintlich sprachlosen Instinkte und Triebe des Lebens bringt Heidegger nur wenig Interest auf" (Trawny, 2003, 24).

Every language in itself has the mode of being of *Dasein*, "[...] every language is –like Dasein itself– historical in its being" (Heidegger, 2014, 321). For Heidegger, language is the "essence" while everything else is accidental.

> But language is used not only for pointing out and for showing (even when we take these terms in their full Heideggerian import). It is also used to sigh, to command, to request, to pray, to enquire, to lie, to express wishes, conditions, and counterfactual conditions, simply to avoid silence,

> and for many other purposes. Heidegger seems not only to emphasize the illocutionary usages of words to the exclusion of everything else but even to ignore altogether the existence of such other perlocutionary functions and forms of sentences and words. It may be objected that Heidegger is not just a philosopher of language and is not concerned with providing a full account of the many diverse and complex uses of language, that he is concerned primarily with an attempt to "think Being," and that his remarks on language are only incidental to his project of rescuing Being from the oblivion in which it has fallen in Western thought. (Kogkelmans, 1972, 264-265)

Moreover, referring to the way of being "in the open" one can affirm that the existential basis of language is discourse, as "articulation in meanings of comprehensibility inserted in the disposition of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 221). Since language can't be understood correctly only through purely formal or logical analyzes of its system of signs, conceived exclusively as subsistent or simply given objects, language is founded on the primary ontological phenomenon of the occupied being-in-the-world (and worried) with the other and with contingent reality, always being open to the ready understanding of coexisting being and the world that presents itself. For this reason, Heidegger can affirm that "the meaningful totality of comprehensibility comes to the word. From meanings come words. These, however, are not things-words endowed with meanings" (Heidegger, 161). In other words, the existential origin of language is significance, always understood in a certain disposition and interpretation.

The assertion that language is the "house of being" concerns the essence of language and does not attempt to produce a concept of the essence of language. With respect to the essence of language, one can only find clues or nods (*Winke*) that manifest it enigmatically, not signs or concepts that refer to a meaning already established and fixed; it is a question that can create another research.

## Conclusion

In an epistemic and idealistic worldview, Descartes and Kant emerge, asserting that the subject is responsible for the possibility of the world as a phenomenon, and thus, there would be a specific cognitive apparatus capable of doing so. The subject creates the world from innate and transcendental models, in this case, the cogito and a priori, respectively. There are still other works, as with Husserl, that would postulate the condition of the existence of the object so that it acts subject, because the consciousness of the subject is permanently aware of something, establishing relation with the world that exists.

After the twentieth century, in the well-known "linguistic turn", other structures will sustain the subject and the object in its existence. For example, with Wittgenstein, who in a second moment of his works, after *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, points the world as a purely human construction supported by language. Wittgenstein here assumes a less reductionist position, since in the first moment he stated that the world is an interlacing of logical facts, in which language would assume the role of displaying things representing reality. What a word says is what it wants to express, nothing more, to think and speak of the world "[...] there must be something in common between language and the world. The common element must be in its structures. We can know the structure of one of them if we know the structure of the other. Since logic reveals the structure of language, it must also reveal the structure of the world" (Fann, 1999, 24).

Language is contained in the limits of the world, beyond, only silence, silence before pseudoproblems. This harshest stance is gradually being rethought from the perspective that emerges, later on, by an analogy between language and play (chess (Wittgenstein, 1986, § 205)), turning now to a new possibility in which language assumes specificities within certain environments, in certain contexts. All these different activities will be what Wittgenstein will conceive of as language games. Here he breaks with the idea that language is only mediation, considering

it part of the totality of the human situation, opening it up for innumerable possibilities of construction.

This passage from the pictorial or referential theory of language to the pragmatic theory as clarifying the gap between the two distinct moments of wittgenstenian thought. If in the first, such a thought has as one of its characteristics verificationism as legitimating the meaning of a proposition, in the second, the philosopher is willing to admit even a transgression of language. Thus, it breaks out against all epistemic and anthropological dualism, and criticizes radically the philosophical tradition of language, which he himself accuses himself of having been a part of.

Without a careful analysis, one has the hermeneutics lost in infinite articulations of which there would be no profit, very dispersed. But analytic without hermeneutics seems to be too introductive, superficial, since it only accounts for establishing models to which they can be replaced. As a radicalism of dualities in which there is a relation between perception and predication, for example between things and words, Heidegger arises more emphatically, with the affirmation that there is only being-in-the-world, as unity and understanding. Without existential analytics with the ontology in the light of the analytic of language, there is no philosophy.

The most obvious fact, both Heidegger and Wittgenstein, points out to an exit from tradition and are confronted with any idea that is ended in a formula or model.

If in the second Wittgenstein, language is broken up as pure mediation and is considered as part of the human totality, opening numerous constructions of reality. Language is given by use, by the play of language that inaugurates constructions of world before the use, thought that goes to meet Heidegger.

Heidegger must be regarded as one who takes a wholly negative attitude towards the classical philosophy of language. It is not a simple critique, but a concern to find a pillar for its underlying assertions that must always be interpreted by the question of being. In evaluating Heidegger's view, one must always be clear that everything he says about language must be understood within the context of the general concern of *Being and Time*: to clarify the question about the meaning of Being. In the later works of Heidegger, in the post *Kehre* phase, his attention shifts from a concern with language, from the point of view of man's speech, to a concern with the essential contribution of language to the very possibility of man's speech.

Heidegger from hermeneutics maintains special attention to language, for it is in the word, it is in language, that things come to be and are, above all, privileged access to its main philosophical question, being, as it says in the work *Paths of the Forest* of 1977, "Language is the enclosure (*templum*), namely, the house of being" (Heidegger, 1998, 356).

Turning to the words of Ernst Tugendhat, a scholar well known in analytic philosophy, who had Heidegger as a teacher, he points out the being of the Heideggerian ontology meaningful by the analytic, assuming it as concrete and coexisting.

> One way of philosophizing is not related to other ways of philosophizing how a mode of dancing relates to other modes of dancing. Ways of dancing are not mutually exclusive or mutually exclusive. You can dance tango, boogie and rock'n roll the same night and with equal enthusiasm, without worrying about the waltz. But one can't seriously philosophize in a way without rejecting or incorporating the other modes. [...] Philosophy, like all science, deals with truth. [...] The presentation of a way of philosophizing includes the task of relating it to other possible ways of philosophizing and, in the confrontation between them, to demonstrate its correctness. (Tugendhat, 1992, 14)

Heidegger presents himself as one who does not bother to give a complete account of the various and complex uses of language but rather is concerned with the thought of being, and what derives from language converges to this question.

Faced with this, both Wittgenstein and Heidegger connect these cultural concerns with scientism, the idea that science gives us the one true description of reality. This description, especially in its classic Cartesian–Newtonian form, is of a cold atomistic universe, whereas Heidegger and later Wittgenstein emphasize the rich, holistic world we live in, a world that is far better captured in artworks than in scientific formulas. "They want to examine our limitedness without thereby transgressing our limitations, without peeking over to see that nothing lies beyond this world's horizon–not even nothing" (Braver, 2012, 231).

Heidegger's later work emphasizes the role that language plays in our experience, to the same conclusion as Wittgenstein: "[…] it is language that tells us about the essence of a thing" (Braver, 2012, 248). It isn't that we are presented with a pre-sorted world where categories kneel for us to affix words to them, but that we are always in a linguistic world. We cannot select pristine reality from our reality, making the distinction empty.

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# Meditations About the Implications of the Seventh Wittgensteinian Aphorism in the Associative Speech of the Psychoanalytical Subject: whereof one cannot speak thereof one must (really) be silent?

**Abstract:** *This essay aims to reflect, specifically, about the statement "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent", seventh aphorism of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, and its implications on the symbolic capacity of the speaking subject who is concerned in psychoanalytic theory. The fact of having psychism, fruit of a structured language, is the item that makes the human being unique in nature and differentiates us from other animals. What is the price we pay for not speaking about some things?*

**Keywords:** *Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Subject, Speech, Language, Freud, Wittgenstein, Lacan, Unconscious.*

**Resumen:** *Este ensayo pretende reflexionar, específicamente, sobre la afirmación «De lo que no se puede hablar, hay que callar», séptimo aforismo de Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus de Ludwig Wittgenstein y sus implicaciones en la capacidad simbólica del sujeto hablante a quien se refiere la teoría psicoanalítica. El hecho de tener un psiquismo, fruto de un lenguaje estructurado, es el elemento que hace al ser humano único en la naturaleza y diferencia nosotros de otros animales. ¿Pero cuál es el precio que pagamos por no hablar de algunas cosas?*

**Palabras clave:** *Psicoanálisis, Filosofía, Sujeto, Habla, Lenguaje, Freud, Wittgenstein, Lacan, Inconsciente.*

*"L'inconscient se déploie dans les effets de langage[1]".*
*"L'analyse a pour but l'avènement d'une parole vraie[2]".*

*Jacques Lacan*

Sigmund Freud[3] revolutionized the way of understanding the human psyche and left his legacy: the psychoanalysis as we know. Subsequently, the post-Freudians would leave their own collaboration. In the course of his lifetime, Freud worked with many people, as such: Josef Breuer, in the early days of experimentation, Wilhelm Fliess, in extensive correspondence by letter mail, Carl Gustav Jung, considered by Freud as his "heir", Anna Freud, his daughter, Sandor Ferenczi, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Ernest Jones, Stefan Zweig, Marie Bonaparte and others (Roudinesco e Plon, 1998, 272). As a clinical physician and neurologist by formation, he dealt especially with wealthy women of Vienna high society, "[...] qualified as 'nervous patients' and suffering hysterical disorders" (Roudinesco e Plon, 1998, 274).

Freud himself (1996f) will define psychoanalysis as:

> (1) a procedure for the investigation of mental processes that are almost inaccessible by any other means, (2) a method (based on this research) for the treatment of neurotic

> disorders and (3) a collection of psychological information obtained along these lines, and which gradually accumulates into a new scientific discipline. (287)

From this tripartition of psychoanalysis as a procedure, a method of treatment and a theory, Dunker (2011) defines this method as being a science about the *subject*. In response to the argument raised by methodologists, he points out that the object that psychoanalysis has at its summit is the subject and it is understood that this subject who psychoanalysis deals with, is not born ready, but gradually constituted through the first relations with its first caregivers. When this subject is observed, he is seen as an individual inserted in a culture, which has manifestations and in which the belonging members occupy certain positions.

> Psychoanalysis is a philosophical rupture in determining that the process of psychoanalytic investigation is a process that starts from the effects, it determines a philosophical rupture as philosophy speaks of the production of knowledge. Therefore, psychoanalysis may be one of the pilot sciences for the redefinition of philosophy. If I start from the effect and go through rebuilding operations, then I interpret the cause. I have the manifest dream, the free association determined technically and then, I make the construction of operators and say, displacement and condensation, put on the scene, symbolization. With this I construct, I interpret the existence of a force capable of acting without showing itself. A force that comes from a place different from where the fact happens, but that has the capacity to produce it. *I construct, interpret a force* I call unconscious desire. (Menassa, 2007, 41)

It is said that Freud, along with Nicolaus Copernicus and Charles Darwin; the first with the heliocentric theory, stating that the earth was not the center of the universe and the second affirming that the human being was not conceived as said by creationism, gave the third the narcissistic wound of mankind, saying that our process of free will is conditioned by an instance that we do not know and do not master: *the unconscious*.

Such postulation is fundamental for a proper understanding of the dynamics of Freudian presuppositions. The notion of the unconscious already existed, in a disconnected and diffused way, prior to the invention of psychoanalysis; especially in poetry, literature and philosophy. It should be noted, however, that the psychoanalytic definition of this concept is not to be confused with the "non-conscious" of modern cognitive psychology, nor with the vague notions of the "subconscious" from popular imagination; nor should it be confused with Jung's archetypal collective unconscious in analytic psychology.

As preliminary considerations, some points indicated by Freud (see 1923b, 239, cited by Frangiotti, 2003) are pertinent to the relations between psychoanalysis and philosophy and show their relations of difficulty or cooperation:

> By pointing to the conceptual difficulties of the central principles and assumptions of psychoanalysis as well as the internal coherence of Freudian metapsychology, philosophers would be neglecting an essential aspect of psychoanalysis, namely, clinical experience that they do not possess. In this sense, *they cannot prove the effectiveness of Freudian theses in practice*; therefore, they must either stay away from psychoanalysis, or approach it as apprentices and not as judges (...) the coherence of Freudian theory takes place in the session of analysis and not in the reflection of the philosopher. Freud himself points out that, because they [the philosophers] do not have the experience of clinical phenomena, philosophy is incapable of solving problems such as dreams and hypnosis, and thus erroneously concludes that the hypothesis of the unconscious is absurd and easily refuted through logical rules. (60)

With the twentieth-century work, The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), Freud revolutionized the basis of the conception of the unconscious by presenting it as a psychic structure that completely escapes conscious access and whose processes govern the life of the subject. This structure,

guided by the pleasure principle, is characterized by not being subject to time and objective rationality, by being neither linear nor moral, by not giving to the contradiction and, perhaps, mainly, by not being object of physical and anatomical location. It is in this work, concluded in 1899 and published in 1900 to mark the new millennium, that Freud conceptualizes the unconscious and establishes a new field of knowledge different from those produced up to that time and that continues to produce transformations in the subjects that allow themselves to be crossed by this speech (the psychoanalytical speech, that is).

Following the line of Karl Marx's reasoning that work produces the worker, it can be said that Freud was not "the father of Psychoanalysis," but its first child. In German, the title of this work is *Die Traumdeutung*, word composed by *Traum*, translated to English as dream, and *Deutung*, noun derived from the verb *deuten* which refers to deciphering, seeking an enigmatic meaning, unveiling a hidden meaning.

According to Frangiotti (2003, 65) "[...] the superiority of psychoanalysis to traditional psychologies comes from the hypothesis of the unconscious, which is established, in turn, from observations of clinical data".

The well-known first Freudian topic, also known as topographic theory, states that the psychic apparatus is structured in three instances, each with a specific function, being: the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. Considering these three propositions, psychoanalysis deals, in a significant way, with the latter. According to Freud, the unconscious is the gateway of the psychic apparatus, and also its most primitive and archaic part. Their laws are their own and they completely escape the understanding of the objective world rationality. Eventually, this mysterious instance is revealed through dreams, faulty acts and wits[4].

Freud states that the dream processes are subject to condensations and displacements, and are capable of revealing contents related to the intrapsychic experience of individuals. For analyzing its contents, after some experiments with methods in force at the time, Freud proposes the technique of free association; where the patient speaks lying on a divan, uncensored, whatever comes to mind. He also realizes that the dream has meaning and that its sense is relative and destined to the fulfillment of some desires. With the perception of the dream meanings and the proposition of his listening through speech, he concludes that the psychic apparatus is symbolic, operates through language, is a constituent of the human being and, although not physical, is capable of producing effects on the body, as we can see in the symptoms.

It is pertinent to recapitulate at this point that Freud mentions the word instinct (*Instinkt* in German) to designate more explicit, fixed and hereditary patterns of animal behavior, typical of each species. He also uses the word pulsion[5] (*Trieb* in German) in order to refer to something more comprehensive and inherent, coming from an innate and profound instance and differentiating them: pulsion is the force that comes from the body and acts on the core.

Badinter (1980) points out that instinct is the set of innate characteristics, belonging to a set of animals of the same species and variable among the others. Therefore, an instinct would be common to a whole species, and there is no possibility of one member manifesting some effect of this instinct and not others. Any attempts to justify or equate the behavior of human beings (as subjects, like the psychoanalysis conceives) with the behavior of irrational animals, makes the understanding of this concept erroneous.

Within the psychoanalytic understanding, the human subject is not endowed with instinct, because the exit from the condition of animalism and barbarism is marked by the acquisition of language and this, in turn, institutes the entrance of the human being in the civilizing process. Thus, the Freudian pulsion can be understood as a libidinal impulse that guides the behavior of the human being. Being driven by unconscious forces, they are alienated of decision processes; it is a concept in the borders of the psychic and the somatic.

The post-freudian French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan[6] would later revise this (and many others) concept of the unconscious by affirming that it is constituted of language and constituted by this language. In addition, he said that psychoanalysis is also an ethic. Lacan would seek in

Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson and Saussure the bases for his understanding of psychoanalysis, with the main focus on the importance of linguistics as constitutional. The speech is a properly human attribute, it is what sets us apart from other animals. According to Menassa (2007), "[…] just as in 1900 there is a definitive separation between the unconscious and the conscience; in 1906/7, linguistics produces a definitive separation between the *word* and the *thing* (39).

Entering the field of language, we see the Austrian Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century and one of those responsible for the linguistic turn of philosophy, putting the theme of language at the heart of philosophical reflections. In the field of analytical philosophy and philosophy of language, he is known for having criticisms and contributions to psychoanalysis, as well as being contemporary with Freud and a reader of him. Like Socrates, and a few others, Wittgenstein was a philosopher who sought to live in consistency with the principles he believed in philosophically. Unlike Freud, he came from a wealthy family and refused to use that fortune in order to perform simpler tasks in his life.

His work is commonly divided into two parts: the first Wittgenstein, composed by the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and the second Wittgenstein, with the work called *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), which was published posthumously. In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein structures his work in order to articulate two spheres: "[…] the essential structure of the world and the essential structure of language. All arguments revolve around the establishment of these structures" (Carmo, 2009, 12), and he also aims to identify the boundaries between language and reality, along with defining the limits of science. For Wittgenstein, in the 4.116 aphorism, whatever "can be thought at all can be thought clearly. All that can be said can be said clearly" (Wittgenstein, 1921, 77).

There is a distinction in the philosophy of mind between the point of view of the third person (the scientist who makes images of the brain, describes it and explains them) and the subject's view of the first person (he who experiences and describes his experiences). This difference depends on a distinctiveness between languages and technical terms. Furthermore, Wittgenstein showed that it is difficult in any context to claim that we linguistically refer to mental events (states or mental processes) or to brain states or processes. Both linguistic attempts would be a kind of semantic illusion.

At this point, psychoanalysis can undraw the curtain to the symbolic events' argument. Stein (2015) emphasizes:

> […] it is obvious that access to one's own perceptions or sensations is still exclusively in the first person. [...] it is also obvious that the search for the causal network that leads from objects to their perception does not dispense with the investigation of what we call "representation," a concept still extremely controversial both in philosophy and in neuroscience. And so, methods and tests have to take into account the first-person account of representational "subjective" experiences. [...] one of the main questions of the philosophy of mind are the other minds. The problem is to question whether it is possible to achieve a reliable state of knowledge about what other people feel, think, and want. (159-167)

According to Carmo (2009):

> […] In the course of his argument about the linkage of these structures *(the essential structure of the world and the essential structure of language)* Wittgenstein intends to solve all philosophical problems, showing that they are really pseudoproblems and that, as such, they do not deserve attention which is customary for them. The task does not seem easy since there are several philosophical problems and for a long time even the most audacious minds have failed to solve even a third of them. (12)

As described by Frangiotti (2003):

> The central idea of Wittgenstein's critique of psychoanalysis is the attempt to challenge Freud's idea of the supposed scientific character of his deep psychology.

> In different ways, Wittgenstein seeks to examine psychoanalytic explanations by comparing them with those of science. Thus, it raises *three crucial problems* that call into question the coherence and validity of Freud's general strategy. First, the mythological-and therefore non-scientific-character of psychoanalytic explanations. Second, the claim that the validity of the analyst's explanations ultimately depends on the consent of the patient, which makes it incompatible with the supposed objectivity of scientific approaches. And third, the Freudian confusion between reasons and causes or between explanations based on causal motives and explanations. (60)

It is important to recapitulate at this point, that this essay aims only at an analysis of the statement of the seventh aphorism of the *Tractatus*, in the light of aspects of psychoanalytic theory. Of the three Wittgenstein's criticisms, raised by Frangiotti (2003), we will focus our attention only on the last statement. The first two, although intrinsically linked to the third, can be worked independently and will receive my proper attention in separate works. So, at this point, I do lay the foundations for the probable continuation of this theme.

Among other arguments, Wittgenstein criticizes psychoanalysis, based on his reading of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and based on the weak argument that psychoanalytic interpretations are not true interpretations, but creations approximate to aesthetic interpretations. Would this make psychoanalysis less credible or less scientific, (as initially proposed by Freud with his ambition of a *Naturwissenschaft*[7]), by operating through explanations that are not meant to be explanatory?

No, it wouldn't. This was an inaccurate reading of the psychoanalytic method, which goes back to the quarrel of methods that occurred in Germany in the twentieth century. Wittgenstein mistakenly understands that in psychoanalysis, an interpretation is an explanation, which is not true. The analyst does not provide logical and clear explanations aiming that the analyzed relearns aspects about himself. The analyst also does not tell the patient what is 'inside' his mind without his knowing; this is not how the subject transforms and repositions himself in his life and in his history.

As said before in this text, the process of language is a fundamental factor for our development and our organization as human beings endowed with speech and symbolic language, which differentiates us from other animals. Our speech structures our unconscious. This unconscious is not anatomically located and is not observable through measuring instruments; is a *concept*.

> [...] Because they do not have a theoretical framework from which to conceive an *unconscious behind consciousness or because they consider this absurd idea,* the psychologies of consciousness are limited to describing the psychic phenomena as they are presented to us, without ever being able to explain the interruptions of conscious processes. They, in fact, do not succeed "in the sense of revealing what is unconscious to the patient. Rather, [they make this patient] ... incapable of overcoming their deepest resistances, and, in more serious cases, they invariably fail. (Freud 1912, page 384, cited by Frangiotti, 2003, 65)

Returning to the focus of this work*: if the unconscious is structured as a language, as Lacan points out, and this unconscious is not subject to the same rules which govern the objective reality of time and space, as Freud points out, is it then subject to the same methods of uniform inquiry and research as the positivist sciences propose? Furthermore, is the unconscious consequently implied in the same linearity of objective discourse, and therefore, if the speech is one of the ways to access this unconscious, should we shut out something we suppose we do not know, or should we talk about this unknown even without knowing?*

The psychoanalysis does not work by inferring pre-made explanations about causes, motives, or reasons for people's behavior. In the psychoanalytic investigation, no behavior, fact or dreams can be observed from the direct observation of these phenomena, but from the free associations of the patient; it is about what a person

talks about what he does, how he stands, how he justifies himself in an extensive and complex chain of connections that each subject is propitiating to themselves. Such a *modus operandi* described above refers to what we conceive as contemporary psychology, not as psychoanalysis. The latter is not aimed at psychoeducation and does not have professorial characteristics.

Therefore, being the subject of which psychoanalysis occupies a speaking subject and being through this speech it is possible to reveal aspects of the unconscious of each subject, *it is necessary to speak even about what is not known, according to the principle of free association, where the patient speaks, lying on a couch and uncensored, whatever comes to mind.*

Freud first tried to appease pain and mitigate the psychological suffering of his patients by working with the methods available at the time, some considered to be *avant-garde* and others which were already in obscurity, always observing and recording the effectiveness (or not) of these treatment methods. Moura (2003) notes that:

> In 1896, in the case of Anna O., the germ of the psychoanalytic method arose when the suggestive treatment for the cathartic method occurred. In the first type of treatment, the patient was hypnotized and the hypnotist influenced her through speech, intending to modify the affective state of the patient, without investigating what would be producing the pathogenic effect. Distinctively, the cathartic method was the procedure in which the hypnotist intended for the patient to eliminate his pathogenic affective states through the ab-reaction, that is, the hypnotist searched, through questions, the traumatic element in the memory of the patient, so that, through speech, could be able to effect the discharge of the affection retained by the traumatic representation. (Moura, 2003, 14)

Working together with Breuer, Freud and the first progressively abandon hypnosis by the cathartic method and institute the free association: at last comes the psychoanalysis. In 1893-1895, they published together the book *Studies on hysteria* containing clinical reports of the two colleagues (Roudinesco e Plon, 1997, 275).

*The unique experience of the psychoanalytic clinic shows that words leave the body lighter.* This last sentence becomes even more pressing when we examine cases of hysterical and psychosomatic conversion.

In the case of psychosomatic illness, an organic commitment occurs, whereas the biological body is the scene of the original occurrences in the psychism, or in the absence of them. In these psychosomatic cases, there is a body that is not invested with words; an incomplete operation is given.

When describing the characteristics of the psychosomatic diseases, we perceive fragile subjects, who present the most diverse symptoms that affect and threaten their physical integrity: vascular disorders, ulcerative retrocolitis, alopecia, psoriasis and high blood pressure, just to name a few. These symptoms are forms of a psiquism which does not triumph in elaborating crises and causes the organism to turn some mechanisms against itself, including mechanisms dedicated to mediating the relations of the organism with the outside world. For purposes of illustration, a psychoanalyst may claim that a psychosomatic patient does not cry, but is afflicted with an asthma attack; in the same line of reasoning, another patient does not express his anger, but becomes a hypertensive and that a gastric ulcer patient prefers the burning wound to the narcissistic wound of the castration, the cut.

They do not trace the path of anguish to neurosis, from anguish to annihilation, to death.

Psychoanalysis works so that the subject is able to enclose this moment from others, modifying their 'impression' that this state is fulminant to the subject. The phrases spoken by these patients demonstrate this, because they are loose phrases that do not bind to anything; they express in themselves the moment on which the subject transits and the opening generated by these phrases, intertwined with others, directing the treatment to the cure. In this sense, the same operant forces that generate the disease, are those that can operate the cure.

A patient's speech reveals a double meaning: a manifest, concrete and sometimes prone

to objective sense and a latent sense, which is subtle and subjective. The fluctuating attention to the patient's free association, constitutes the meanderings of the psychoanalytic method. *The unconscious and the drives have their expression in the body as scenery.* In the neurotic, the disease is a kind of toll paid for feeling that we escape law enforcement.

In cases of hysterical conversion (or hysteria), there is an attempt to symbolize the imaginary body. There is a symbolic memory that 'forgot' its function and memory; it is a mnemonic symbol. It is said that this body in question is imaginary because it represents a fragmented body, corresponding to the first image of the body that we had before the formation of the I, the body of the polymorphous perverse baby, as referred by Freud.

Freud (1919, 327; 1914a, 91; and 1914b, 165 cited by Frangiotti, 2003, 61) points out critically that:

> The abyss that seems to separate philosophy from psychoanalysis increases when we take into account that Freud comes to compare philosophers with paranoids - by focusing their reflections on self-observation and for producing illusions –and with the schizophrenics– for resorting to verbal representations and for their own realities by proposing hermetic and self-sufficient speculative systems.

In all cases, the psychoanalytic experience shows empirically that associating freely, that is, to speak even about things that are not known, has effects that operate the relief and even the cure of psychological issues, culminating in well-being.

Psychoanalysis takes the mythical perspective to explain what is common to all subjects: the prohibition of incest, universal law that separates the "order of culture" from that which is the "order of nature". This law, when instituted in each subject, produces access to the register of the symbolic, that is, it constitutes the talking subject, the subject of the unconscious: the barred subject, through the operation of the paternal metaphor and its correlative mechanism, the original repression.

In the logical time of the unconscious, a transformed idea can change the course of an illness, and even of life. Since speech is such an efficient mechanism and so accessible and free to all, should we really not use it? Should we really shut up in the face of our suffering, having the ability to speak about what afflicts us*? It is precisely about what we do not know, that we should speak!*

The fact of having psychism, fruit of a structured language, is the element that makes the human being unique in nature and differentiates it from other animals. Psychoanalysis proposes a rupture to the traditional model of thought, linear and rational, by postulating that the unconscious is an instance in all of us and that it is structured as language, being the fruit of a construction work. All our civilizing process, as social organization and culture, were impacted by the effects of speech and suffered its repercussions. In everyday clinical practice, we observe in many of our patients that various illnesses come from non-symbolization and from the "lack" of words to define our malaise. In addition, the artistic expressions, in their varied forms, have their function in acting where, eventually, the word does not find expression; this because words are limited, as same as we are. The psychoanalytic investigation works with the patient's speech; how he expresses himself, how he describes himself and how he stands. In view of the above expressed, should we really shut up before what we do not know or what we suppose we do not know?

Given the already marked sickness, due to the constrictions of culture, should we be silent about what we are not sure? What is the price that we pay for non-speak about some things?

## Notes

1. "The unconscious unfolds in language effects", quoted by Lacan, in French.
2. "The goal of the analysis is the advent of a true word", quoted by Lacan, in French.
3. Originally registered Scholomo Sigismund Freud, born in Freiberg, Moravia (present-day

Czech Republic), in May 6 1856. Son of Amalia and Jacob Freud.

4. More properly referred as "chistes", as said in Portuguese and Spanish.
5. Or "drive" as some translations.
6. Registered as Jacques Marie Émile Lacan, was born in 13 April 1901, in Paris.
7. In German: Natural science based on empirical evidence from observation and experimentation.

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# Use Theory: considerations about the threat posed by mathematics

**Abstract:** *In this article I deal with the philosophy of language, that is, with the proper basis for telling whether or not something has meaning. More precisely, I will defend the thesis that the meaning of words and things is given in the context of social relations. I will try to answer the objection that mathematics preserves its meaning even if there are no social relations, for it would be as an implicit substance in nature. I will argue, by analogy, that mathematics does not have a different ontological status than other languages and that, therefore, its existence does not constitute a threat to the theory of use.*

**Keywords:** *Theory of use, Math, Social relationships.*

**Resumen:** *En este artículo trato sobre la filosofía del lenguaje, es decir, de la base adecuada para saber si algo tiene sentido o no. Más precisamente, defenderé la tesis de que el significado de las palabras y de las cosas se da en el contexto de las relaciones sociales. Intentaré responder a la objeción de que las matemáticas conservan su significado incluso si no hay relaciones sociales, ya que sería una sustancia implícita en la naturaleza. Argumentaré, por analogía, que las matemáticas no tienen un estado ontológico distinto en otros idiomas y, por lo tanto, su existencia no constituye una amenaza para la teoría del uso.*

**Palabras clave:** *Teoría de uso, Matemáticas, Relaciones sociales.*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, it has become common in Brazil, in the context of political discussions, fostered mainly by partisan groups, to speak of fascism. It happens as follows: One group disagrees with the ideas of another group on general or specific topics, for example abortion; when this occurs both groups –most notably those on the left– accuse the rival group of fascism.

Discussions of this kind can be considered in a number of ways; I would like to draw attention to one specific claim. Sometimes it happens that those who are called fascists ask the offender: "Do you know what fascism is?" What is behind this question is the belief that the word 'fascism' is not being used properly, because it is dated geographically (Italy) and temporally (1919), so it is inappropriate to speak of fascism other than in this specific period of the history.

These considerations lead us to think of some questions, for example: when does a word mean something? What are the contexts in which words are used properly or not? There is a long tradition in philosophy that has, in one way or another, tried to answer these problems.

In this text I will briefly present some of the main theories of meaning and the arguments for and against such theories. I will argue for use-based theory of meaning, the theory of which seems to be developed by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. I will pay particular attention to an argument that could be used against the theory of use, namely the

argument that defends mathematics as a universal language.

## 2. Theories of Meaning: a very brief presentation

The central argument of a referentialist theory can be expressed as follows: A word Z has meaning insofar as it refers to objects in the world. Thus, we could say that external objects fill the sounds we articulate with the mouth with meanings. For illustration purposes only, for example: the word 'guitar' has meaning because it refers to an object in the world, namely a speaker consisting mostly of six strings, an arm, tuners, and so long.

Arguments that seek to counter referentialist theory realize that not all the words we use refer to external things, that is, there is a group of expressions that refer to things we cannot touch. Such things are abstract entities like: love, friendship, joy. Although the word 'fascism', for example, does not correspond to an object in the world, it does not seem to be meaningless at all. In addition, there are typical language-specific expressions that have no specific reference: very (US); Bah (BR).

An alternative to traditional referentialist theory is the theory of definite descriptions developed by Bertrand Russel. Russell argues with this theory that words do not refer to objects but to a series of definite descriptions of them. Thus, an expression such as "the present king of France is bald" could be divided into a series of descriptions defined as "there is a king of France", "the king of France and bald" and so on. The strongest criticism of this theory is that it fails to realize that the descriptions are contextual, that is, the meaning of expressions is subject to the norms established through social relations. P.F. Strawson seems to be the main critic of Russell's position. Strawson states that the phrase "the present king of France is bald" is not false, it is only misused.

One position held by logical positivists, such as Carnap, is that the meaning of words and expressions is necessarily connected to their truth value. True-value expressions are those that can be true or false. A weakness of this theory is that only statements would have meaning, interrogative or exclamatory expressions would be out.

In addition, there seems to be an error of formation in the verificationist theory itself, so to show it clearly, I will present, as an example, the self-contradiction implicit in the argument of absolute relativism and then compare it with the verificationist argument.

The absolute relativist states "everything is relative." What exactly does he mean by that? He means that the truth of all things is variable, that is, it can be true or false depending on who utters it and the context in which it is uttered. In this case, the expression 'everything is relative' may be true in some cases and false in others. In this sense, it seems that there is no good reason to believe that everything is relative. But what does this have to do with the verificationist argument?

Similarly, the statement of linguistic verificationism is "only verifiable expressions have meaning." The embarrassing point for the linguistic verificationist here is that the normative expression of linguistic verificationism itself cannot be verified. I do not intend to list here the whole series of arguments that involve the meaning of words and expressions, perhaps it is important to mention that some have even argued that it is not possible to learn a language:

> Learning a language (including, of course, a fi rst language) involves learning what the predicates of the language mean. Learning what the predicates of a language mean involves learning a determination of the extension of these predicates. Learning a determination of the extension of the predicates involving learning that they fall under certain rules (i.e. truth rules). But one cannot learn that P falls under R unless one has a language in which P and R can be represented. So one cannot learn a language unless one has a language. (Fodor, 1976, 63-64)

This kind of argument, however, seems to find little acceptance in empirical experience, since we are not born having the ability to use any kind of language, and yet through social

conviction we learn to speak a language and, in some cases, even more than one.

To summarize, it is possible to state that there are propositional theories of meaning on the one hand and theories of use on the other. Propositional theories focus their attention on the study of sentences and their structure. Theories of use, on the other hand, focus on the social and practical aspects of language.

The foregoing explanations of theories of meaning, therefore, only serve to support the main discussion I intend to promote here, namely, mathematics is a universal language in the sense that it lies in the very nature of things as Galileo suggested with phrases that some attributed to him as "The book of the world is written in mathematical language."; "Mathematics is the alphabet with which God wrote the universe." I will try to show that such statements do not follow.

## 3. Use Theory and Some Analogies

Wittgenstein had already considered some of the possible objections to the theory of use, and I do not intend to develop Wittgenstein's argument in detail; therefore, in this article, I do not intend to engage in controversy of interpretations. However, it is worth saying something about Wittgenstein's private language argument. Wittgenstein presents the following example:

> Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? How do I use words to signify my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case my language is not a "private" one. Someone else might understand it as well as I. – But suppose I didn't have any natural expression of sensation, but only had sensations? And now I simply associate names with sensations, and use these names in descriptions. (Wittgenstein, 2009, 256)

Put in other words, the word 'pain' has no meaning because it refers to a given sensation, but because it is learned by those who use it in a social context. I will suggest that the meaning of words and expressions is strictly connected to the rules of use in interpersonal relations. Next, I will consider the critique that mathematics has no meaning linked to social relations.

For the sake of argument, I would like to present an example; It will serve as an analogy to a second example, and in a third moment I will connect it to the case I am dealing with.

It is very common in biology, specifically evolutionary biology, to speak of a distinction between natural selection and artificial selection. Things are differentiated somewhat like this: organisms mutate randomly and such mutations are favored or not by the context or external pressures, if such an organism is favored, it can be said that it has adapted well; if he was disadvantaged it can be said that he did not have a good adaptation (which will probably culminate in his extinction). On the other hand, if we have a kind of artificial selection we have the same process; however, such a process has a direct intervention of a human being; so because of human intervention we give this sort of selection a new name.

I consider that there is arbitrariness in such a distinction, above all, because what underlies it is the humanist idea that the human being is something different, in the sense that it cannot be understood as one of the things of the natural world. What is the reason for separating human beings from the rest of nature? Some might claim that the rational capacity of man distinguishes him from the rest of nature.

The preceding answer I raise some objections: (i) it is not clear that only humans possess rational ability; (ii) what reason can be given to say with conviction which is the most relevant feature?; (iii) being human species just one of the animals belonging to nature and rationality only a characteristic of human being, there is no reason to say that rationality is not natural.

Understanding that I have shown, even briefly, that the distinction between natural selection and artificial selection is based on a misinterpretation of human ontology, I now present a similar case that occurs in the field of language.

Many logic manuals start with an explanation of language types. Thus, most textbooks

distinguish between natural and artificial language. The natural language is born of our common relations; derives from it what we know as languages: Portuguese; English; Italian. Artificial languages, on the other hand, would be born, not as a product of human relations, but as instruments to accomplish certain ends, such as logic and mathematics.

However, such a distinction seems very strange, since there is also no purpose in natural language, namely that of communication. On the other hand, if mathematics, for example, is an established language with specific purposes, why has it changed over time?

Suppose, for example, that a particular human community has adopted a different convention in which the number 4 quantifies what in our culture we call 3. It would be appropriate to say under these conditions that in this community the expression '4 + 4 = 6' is a well-formed expression. Obviously, as we have already established the rules of formation, it is absurd to state from our context such an expression.

What I want to draw attention to with the examples presented is that mathematics, like any other kind of language, is absolutely subject to the dynamics of use relations. Another example can be given to illustrate what I am trying to defend, suppose all human civilizations for a terrible catastrophe have disappeared from the face of the planet. Consider, in addition, and just to prevent possible criticism, that the same catastrophe that was able to decimate all human beings also affected all animals with some degree of rationality. Would it be appropriate to state under such conditions that mathematics would still exist?

This would only be possible if it were not derived from human relations, but if it varies, as has already been explained, it does not seem to be the case that it is a natural element, at least not in the material sense of the term.

## 4. Final Considerations

One might defend, to object to my proposal, some Platonic argument, claiming that material nature is an imperfect copy of the ideal and immaterial world and that it obeys mathematical laws. Frege perhaps learns a more sophisticated version of such an argument he points out that:

> In arithmetic we are not concerned with objects which we come to know as something alien from without through the medium of the senses, but with objects given directly to our reason and, as its nearest kin, utterly transparent to it. (Frege, 1994, § 105)

Whatever the case may be, and I do not intend to dwell here, the arguments of Platonic origin already have a ready antidote, because in 2500 years of philosophy no one has intelligibly been able to say what such a world of ideas consists of, be it internal or external. On the other hand, we can also say that even if the world of ideas existed, it would make no difference to our relations, since our commitment to language does not need or require justification.

It should be noted that language norms are nothing more than an identification of the regularity of the use of such languages. Thus, grammar does not determine what is correct or not, it merely spells out what a particular social context means by correct.

Mathematics is also subjected, therefore, to the same conditions as all other forms of language. What perhaps contributes to keeping alive the illusion that it would be something else is precisely its effectiveness in predicting events when used in physical or chemical formulas. However, mathematics itself has limitations in such predictions.

In summary, considering all that has been presented, I find it safe to say that mathematics is a language and therefore natural. It is natural not in the sense that it intrinsically participates in things as Galileo, Carl Sagan, and so many others thought; but in the sense that they are a production that comes from human relations.

In return, the central argument advanced in this paper can be summarized as follows: ($p_1$) If the theory of use is not affected by the critique that mathematics is a universal language, then the theory of use seems to offer a good description of how words and expressions mean something; ($p_2$) the theory of use is not affected by

the mathematical argument; (c) the theory of use adequately describes the way in which we attribute meaning to words and expressions.

I would like to point out, by the end, that the propositional character from which I wrote this article does not imply that it is not open to criticism, on the contrary. The best thing I could dream of achieving from this essay is that it will find others who consider it worthy of any objection. Because in the end, thought and its products are socially developed.

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Anote únicamente la inicial del nombre del autor. El año escríbalo entre paréntesis, después del nombre. Por ejemplo:

Murillo, R. (1987) *La forma y la diferencia*. San José: Ed. de la Universidad de Costa Rica.

Dentro del cuerpo del artículo aparecería, cada vez que se cite este texto, únicamente: (Murillo, 1987, 34). Si menciona al autor en el cuerpo del texto no lo repita en la referencia; por ejemplo:

El profesor Murillo piensa que eso es un error (1987, 34).

Si, además, menciona el año de la publicación, tampoco debe repetirlo; por ejemplo:

En 1987 el profesor Murillo escribía, con énfasis, que eso era un error (34).

Cuando el paréntesis de la referencia coincida con el final de un párrafo, debe ponerlo antes del punto si está citando una oración incompleta, o si es una cita indirecta (como en el ejemplo anterior), y después del punto si está citando una oración completa; por ejemplo, véase esta cita en párrafo aparte:

La luz es el hilo que eleva al hombre desde el terreno de la apariencia hasta el del ente. (Murillo, 1987, 27)

Pero si la misma oración fuera a citarse, incompleta, dentro del texto, la referencia quedaría así:

En su texto de 1987, Roberto Murillo recordaba cómo se ha considerado, siempre, que la luz nos eleva "desde el terreno de la apariencia hasta el del ente" (27).

Si, en este modelo, debe anotar referencias del mismo autor con la misma fecha, distíngalas de este modo:

Gadamer, H. G. (1998a) *Arte y verdad en la palabra* (Trad. Arturo Parada). Barcelona: Paidós.
_____. (1998b) *El giro hermenéutico* (Trad. José Francisco Zúñiga García y Faustino Oncina). Madrid: Cátedra.

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Toffler, A. (1985) *La tercera ola* (Trad. Adolfo Martin, 2 Vols., 2ª ed.). Barcelona: Orbis.

Tenga presente que en este modelo el orden de apellido, primero, y nombre, después, debe mantenerse aunque sean dos o más autores. Por ejemplo:

Marx, K. y Engels, F. (1982) *Obras fundamentales* (Trad. Wenceslao Roces, t. 2). México: Fondo de Cultura económica.

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Ramírez, É. R. (Comp.). (1985) *Ciencia, responsabilidad y valores*. Cartago: Ed. Tecnológica de Costa Rica.

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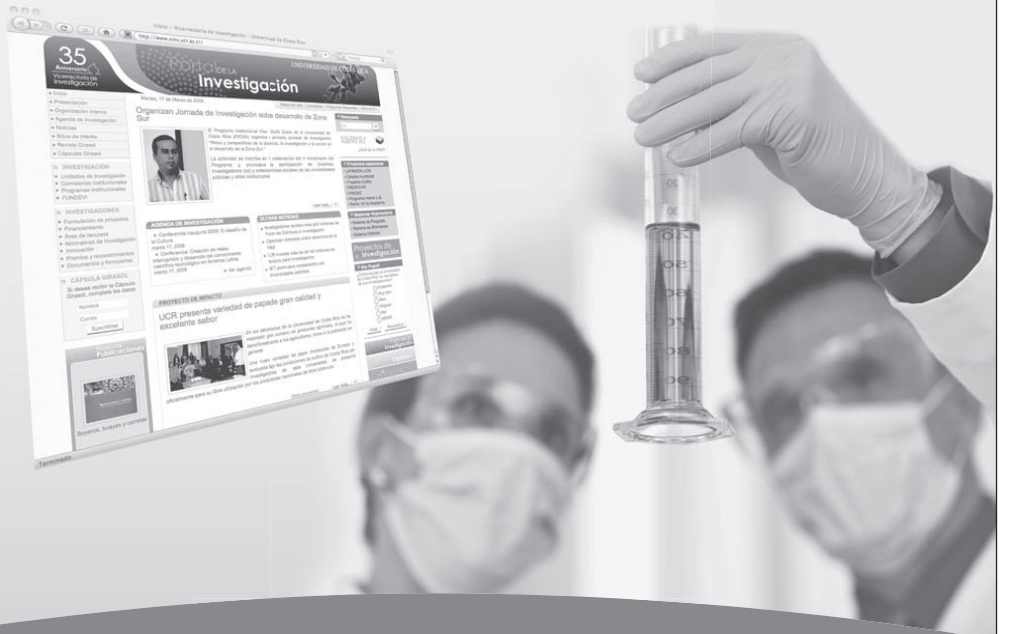


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