criticism in translation

Althusser: Blowup (Lineaments of a Different Thought)

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INTRODUCTION AND TRANSLATION BY MALCOLM K. READ

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Introduction

NOTHING IS MORE REMARKABLE IN THE TRADITION OF ALTHUSSERIAN MARXISM THAN THE SILENCE THAT HAS DOGGED THE WORK OF Juan Carlos Rodríguez.[1] One thinks of the relative importance attached to the work of Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson. Some might believe the discrepancy is a matter of merit rather than of willful or unconscious neglect. But even the most casual comparison of Rodríguez's *Theory and History of Ideological Production* with Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* (1975) and with Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) suggests that this can hardly be the case. The parallel with Jameson is particularly intriguing. Like Rodríguez, the North American scholar accepts Louis Althusser's view of the social totality as a "decentered structure" in which various levels develop in "relative autonomy" and in which different feudal and capitalist matrices coexist. Also like Rodríguez, he considers literary works to be a form of ideological discourse that represses historical truth. Why, then, the silence that surrounds Rodríguez? The answer lies in the extent to which Jameson's work recontains diverse critical positions in the larger horizon of Marxism. Such a practice, as Eagleton has argued, is congenial to a dominant American pragmatism and eclecticism, as are the presiding Marxist Hegelian categories of reification and commodification (60–62). The consequences, politically, are found in Jameson's amorphous brand of "alliance" politics. The material situation of Rodríguez was very different. Given the militancy of the working class in Spain, his presiding categories were those of exploitation and class conflict, which combine to form the basis of a revolutionary proletarian politics that is anything but acceptable to the North American academy.

Any detailed evaluation of the career trajectories of leading Marxists would need to take into account their material situations, academic and otherwise, in national formations. Among other things, such a comparison would reveal important differences between Althusser and Rodríguez. Rodríguez's ability to move toward and beyond positions occupied by Althusser has much to do with his exposure to Spain's "backwardness," not to mention to the realities of fascism. In such circumstances, he was able to combine

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a knowledge of feudalism not commonly found in European scholars, whether bourgeois or Marxist, with a comparatively comprehensive knowledge of bourgeois culture. Further, if Rodríguez's work avoids the pervasive theoreticism and idealism that characterize Althusser's, the reason is the distinct precariousness of the Spaniard's working conditions when compared with those of his more institutionally privileged master. The Spanish academy, one would hazard a guess, was far from the safe haven for petit bourgeois intellectuals that (by Althusser's own reckoning) was its French counterpart. All of which brings us, by way of substantiation and illustration, to Rodríguez's "Blowup" and his retrospective assessment of some of the most crucial aspects of Althusser's work.

This is not the place to discuss the general crisis of Althusserianism. The present article centers on the role, in Althusser's work, of philosophy with respect to science and ideology. Initially, it had fallen to philosophy to pronounce upon issues of scientificity and to exert the epistemological leverage needed to separate the true from the false. But such a dogmatic, rationalist position was difficult to reconcile with the provisional claims of historical materialism, on which Althusser also insisted, as a result of which he undertook to locate philosophy on the terrain of historical practice. (In Marxist terms, dialectical materialism was relocated in historical materialism.) In the process, philosophy was redefined as the "class struggle in theory," in the form of political and ideological battles over the knowledges produced in the sciences. Such class battles are part of an ongoing war between idealism and materialism.

These developments, from the early (pre-1967) to the later Althusser, have occasioned considerable controversy. Robert Resch, possibly Althusser's most insightful commentator, argues for a fundamental continuity—namely, the belief that science is essentially conceptual. Moreover, he insists that the transition did not weaken philosophy, which continues to play the decisive role in distinguishing between science and ideology. The significant point is that philosophy ceases to operate from its former rationalist standpoint: scientific claims must be defended in terms of their adequacy rather than their truth. Philosophy, in short, is involved in a power struggle, quintessentially at moments of crisis in the development of the sciences. On one point Resch is emphatic: although history is to be found in philosophy, there is, for Althusser, no history of philosophy.

No history? Surely this is a strange position for a Marxist to take and an even stranger one for any commentator to defend. Rodríguez elaborates this insight in "Blowup," in which he argues that Althusser succumbed from the beginning to a "philosophism" with which he found it impossible to break. The key is the question of ideology and Althusser's insistence that ideology is the discourse of the subject. If the subject, conceived as a transhistorical category, has always existed, so has philosophy. The logic of the argument was compelling, particularly for one so attached to his professional status as the French philosopher (at a time, ironically, when philosophy was being radically desubstantialized).

However, at this point Rodríguez's intervention begins to bite. For as the Spanish Marxist had demonstrated in detail in *Theory and History*, the universality of the subject could not be sustained with respect to feudalism, whose key ideological categories, evinced by the dominant ideology of substantialism, were those of "lord" and "serf." The subject, in the form of the "beautiful soul," only began to emerge with animism, the ideology of an emergent capitalism, or so it was argued. The basis of such a position is a Marxist principle that, when it comes to ideology, Jameson, Eagleton, Resch, and a host of other Marxists, symptomatically, let slip from view. To reiterate: "it is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers . . . which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure" (Marx 791). The subject is a bourgeois category, whose "freedom" (to exploit/be exploited) will be trumpeted until the proverbial cows come home, and Marxists have no business accepting it. Down that road lie voluntarism and recuperation by capitalist ideologies, a journey undertaken, depressingly, by the post-Marxists

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who dominate the academic landscape. Such at least is the gravamen of the following essay.

Notes

The excerpts translated here are from *Las líneas maestras de un pensamiento distinto* (Granada: Asociación & Crítica de la Ideología Literaria en España, 2002). Bracketed ellipses mark passages I have omitted from the original text. I am grateful to G. M. Goshgarian for some useful suggestions regarding this translation. The mistakes that remain are my own.

1. Rodríguez has taught for the last three decades in the University of Granada. His key works include *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica*, *La norma literaria*, *La poesía, la música y el silencio (de Mallarmé a Wittgenstein)*, *La literatura del pobre*, and *Brecht, siglo XX*. Only one of his works has been translated into English: *Theory and History of Ideological Production*.

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Althusser: Blowup (Lineaments of a Different Thought)

The risk of saying too little or of saying too much.
—Louis Althusser

WHAT REMAINS AFTER THE EXPLOSION?[1] ALL I can do is enlarge the photograph—hence the term (*blowup*) that I have stolen from one of Antonioni's more problematic films. To blow up a photograph is necessarily to deform it, to blur its sharpest details and outlines. That said, this is the only way to compress almost fifteen years of life (from 1965 to 1979). Anything else would presuppose a Borgesian delirium: an ideal map of a piece of territory that reproduces the territory exactly. For this reason I will speak not of maps (after the fashion of Jameson) but (like Barthes) of photographs. But because I hate photography (that insipid freezing of the instant), I prefer to steal a title from the cinema: here, at least, time unfolds in space, so that it is possibly legitimate to talk of maps and photographs. After all, we are concerned not with the niceties of subdivisions or headings in an essay, only with a *montage* of enlarged narrative scenes.

The First Narrative Sequence: From Heaven to Hell

I

The key schemata that sustain and construct Althusser's thought are unquestionably the notion of the *coupure* ["break"] and the distinction between the *concret-réel* ["real object"] and the *concret-de-pensée* ["thought object"]. On these foundations will be based the structure and development of Marxist thought according to Althusser: thought *from the standpoint of* exploitation.

The key schemata that sustain/construct Althusser's thought are his *philosophy* and his *ahistoricism* (we shall shortly see in what sense).

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This would be the first blowup. After this, the nuances begin. So that we don't get too lost in the script, I will restrict myself to the "Defence at Amiens" (1975) and the "Granada Lecture" (1976). I will refer only when necessary to the texts, unpublished in Spanish, contained in the *Materialism of the Encounter* (subsequently, "aleatory" materialism) and the interviews that were published by Fernanda Navarro and were published under the title *Filosofía y marxismo*.[2] But with one important clarification: [. . .] there is hardly anything in Fernanda Navarro's book that had not appeared previously, in one form or another, which means that it has to be treated with caution.[3] Except that there appears in Fernanda Navarro's introduction one of Althusser's decisive statements: "*One of the reasons I agreed to the publication of this interview of Fernanda Navarro's was that it presupposes the importance that I accord to philosophy as the foundation and center of all political and ideological strategy . . . in which I continue to believe*" (p. 15).

II

Philosophy as the basis and center of a whole political and ideological strategy?

Here is one final instance of the whole "philosophism" that always constructed/deconstructed Althusser's discourse. As Althusser himself recalled (in Amiens and Granada), Marx had already warned (as, needless to say, had Freud) that nobody can be "judged" on the basis of their self-conciousness. Hence the need for a "symptomatic reading" of—or from—the unconscious (see below).

The issue that concerns us here is rather different. Our focus is on the key question that is always implied by the way Althusser frames his argument—namely, is philosophy a substantive issue or isn't it? For Althusser, the answer was clearly affirmative. In *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, the whole matter is clearly stated: philosophy was the Theory of Theories, including scientific theories. While seeming to rectify this position in his *Reply to John Lewis* and *Elements of Self-Criticism*, in actual fact Althusser engineered a relatively minor readjustment, which simply consists of taking the problem to extremes: philosophy was now the *last instance* of power exerted at the "superstructural" level, just as, by the same token, the economy was the *last instance* of power at the "infrastructural" level.

And this is, I insist, a position that Althusser never abandoned. Moreover, it is one that constantly constructed and deconstructed his discourse. Indeed, as FN rightly argues (although from another point of view), this *substantivization* of philosophy was not something that Althusser would rediscover, during the interviews in question, but something that, as we are in the process of elucidating, he had maintained not simply in the 1950s or, euphorically, at the height of his popularity in the 1960s, but throughout his career, including when he was at the height of his powers, between 1975 and 1976.

The only problem was that Althusser's position as a *professional philosopher* was already starting to seem out of sync, dated, quite early on. And certainly, from the 1970s onward, almost nobody believed in philosophy as a substantivized discourse. In its transcendental aspect, philosophy had already been undercut by Reichenbach and the American analysts. Pragmatists had turned it into a "literary genre" or into "cultural studies." [. . .]

Anyway, it is much clearer today what the whole issue was about: as Althusser himself emphasizes in FN, it was not simply a question of (re)building a Marxist philosophy (or, more correctly, a philosophy for Marx or, for that matter, a Marxist theory). Rather, the goal was to oppose, from within the framework of a shared logic, a supposedly Marxist philosophy that certainly did exist: the philosophy of Stalin (the "philosopher"). I insist: not simply the Father of the Homeland, not simply the

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idol of the workers, not simply the military, political, and economic genius, but Stalin the philosopher. To oppose, moreover, the diverse forms that post-Stalinism had taken—in other words, economism, humanism, globalizing dialectical materialism: in short, the most cruelly paralyzing, vacuous orthodoxy. And here was the nub of the problem for Althusser: not simply the fact that such "philosophical" positions were falsely Marxist but that they were always used as watchwords in the service of the party—as philosophy/garbage to be accepted or rejected, as the party saw fit at any time, and also, and this was the really surprising thing, as an absolute philosophy, as the truth in which the party unquestioningly believed and that it took to be its basis or bedrock. This whole problematic is usually forgotten when it comes to analyzing the battle that Althusser waged and the implacable criticism to which he was subjected. [. . .]

We have now defined some of the lineaments of Althusserian thought: the primacy of philosophy and its relation to the sciences; and, along the same lines, the primacy of philosophy and its relation to politics (something to be expected in a militant communist). Except that there is always a third question, which pops up everywhere although it is rarely specified as such: nothing less than the question of ideology (raised obliquely in connection with the unconscious of scientists and the psychoanalytic unconscious, which logically enough—given his depressive personal crises and their theoretical relevance—always obsessed Althusser: his relation to Lacan, etc.).

VII

The psychoanalytic connection did not figure prominently in the early stages of Althusser's work. The sudden release of energy came with "Freud and Lacan" (1964–65), which was a decisive text in many respects. Not only was it the first Marxist reading of psychoanalysis to situate the latter in appropriately conjunctural terms; it also attributed to Lacan a return to Freud in the sense that he (Althusser) was attempting to return to Marx. Most important, it posed in Marxist terms a theme that Marxism had until then ignored, notwithstanding its relevance, and which, unexpectedly, was becoming the real "theme of our times": I have in mind the theme of individuality, the issue of the "subject." But Althusser really engaged the theme of "individuality" in his long article on "the state apparatuses," tentatively subtitled "Notes toward an Investigation."

His caution was understandable. Because although the text is extremely suggestive and, for the most part, exact in its judgments, it has weaknesses that make it vulnerable to criticism. Leaving on one side the curious, "transformative" mixture of Gramscian and Hegelian elements in the definition of *civil society*—Althusser speaks of Gramsci but not of Hegel—the weaknesses are (1) Althusser's ahistoricity is here revealed in its entirety: ideology has no history and the subject has always existed; (2) the ever-lurking presence of an a priori individuality; and (3) problems regarding ideology, which are posed more daringly than before, but which are never resolved. Needless to say, these "weaknesses" require detailed analysis, for the important reason that nuances are always of the essence, as we will attempt to show in what follows.

VIII

Although he tries to establish a material basis for ideology (through the family, the school, etc.),[4] ideology was certainly, among the topics treated by Althusser, one of the most suspect. In the Granada lecture, he speaks of the "vaporous nothingness of ideology," something that is repeated in FN, while at the same time referring to ideology as a "system of ideas," again something that is repeated in FN. True, the opposition between ideology and science, between ideology and philosophy, and, even, between ideology and criti-

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cism is precise enough (in the emphatically positivistic sense) in the period of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. And not just in these texts but also in other articles that were decisive at the time, such as, for example, "Theory, Theoretical Practice, and Theoretical Formation: Ideology and Ideological Struggle"—undoubtedly the most important of all—and "On Theoretical Work: Difficulties and Resources." But even in the magnificent essay on Brecht (included in *For Marx*),[5] Althusser is not certain where to place ideology, in spite of the astounding lucidity he shows in his analysis of the melodrama, as a literary genre. So far as I recall, with the exception of another intervention on Brecht, which appeared in his "previously unpublished works," and of his article on Rousseau, Althusser refers to literature directly only to marginalize it immediately as the "other" of philosophy.[6] The same goes for the equally lucid essay on art, dealing with the work of Althusser's friend the Italian painter Cremonini. Although curiously, in the latter, Althusser does try to introduce a historical dimension to what others saw only as "expressionism."[7] Incredibly and somewhat foolishly, many investigators have taken in isolation and attached great importance to the brief letter that Althusser wrote as a corollary to the polemic on theoretical antihumanism and that was published [in Spanish], somewhat immoderately, under the title "Knowledge of Art and Literature" ["Conocimiento del arte y de la literatura"]. In this document, at a conjuncturely significant moment in the mid-1960s, Althusser emphasizes, once again, that literature and art have little to do with ideology, something that he will retract immediately (and never repeat), although it is doubtless inscribed in the aforementioned oppositions between ideology and science and ideology and philosophy. To ignore the particular conjuncture and to cling to what is a brief letter is the act of fools or, as Althusser himself would say, more forcefully, of "nitwits" ("mequetrefes").[8] In reality, as can be seen in the two texts on Brecht, Althusser posed the problem of the ideological dialectic in literature the same way he posed the problem of philosophy in *Capital*—in other words, as an "implicit practice" that needed to be extracted from texts. But this is only clearly established from the 1970s onward; it is absent from the previous decade, when the polemic on "theoretical" humanism was at its height.

Second Narrative Sequence: In Hell

I

Nevertheless, it is clear that in the decisive article on Freud and Lacan Althusser gives a radical twist to the notion of ideology, which is all the more unexpected given that it was written in the crucial period of the mid-1960s. The gist of the change is that individuals are defined by Althusser as "ideological animals." Note the precise term used; gone is the old Aristotelian, Cartesian, or empiricist tradition that defines individuals as rational or linguistic animals. To define individuals as *ideological animals* is to locate ideology as the basis of a whole new problematic. That Althusser does not press this new problematic to its conclusion is certainly true and is one of the more troubling features of the text. But what cannot be denied is that he knows how to mix Marx with Lacan in order to speak of ideological relations as "imaginary relations vis-à-vis the real conditions of existence." And that this mix enabled Althusser to come up with his best definition of ideology. Eagleton wrongly attributes the imaginary-real opposition simply to the influence of Lacan, for whom the place of the "imaginary" is the place of the subject. In actual fact, it is spelled out by Marx, letter by letter, not only in *Capital* but in many earlier texts and has nothing to do with the image of "*false consciousness*" that Engels deploys.

One more thing, and here the influence of Lacan *is* in evidence: Althusser now begins to

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speak about relations of "entrapment" involving the libidinal unconscious and language, or the libidinal unconscious and ideology. His position, it is true, also continues to resonate with the old Marxian slogan "they do it, but without knowing why." But it is important to emphasize the contrast with Marx's claims made in *Capital* with respect to Robinson Crusoe, to the effect that a future communism would presuppose a kind of transparent and direct relation between man and nature.[9] Althusser denies categorically that social relations are ever to be found in their *bare* form, without the mediation of ideology, the libidinal unconscious, etc. (a denial that he will repeat in the two versions of the text entitled *Marx and Freud*).

II

Notwithstanding which, in the piece on the Ideological State Apparatuses, ideology becomes a problem of *addressing* and *interpellation*. In short, of self-recognition when being addressed by an other. When someone addresses you by name, you recognize yourself. Except that ideology functions as a capitalized *Other*, as when Yahweh addresses Moses through the burning bush. In being addressed, Moses becomes a subject, etc. The only problem is that illustrative examples (as Marx shows only too well in *Capital*) need to be chosen carefully, and the present one is not. It has to be said, to begin with, that for Althusser the *Other* is consistent—full and self-possessed—whereas in reality ideology is inconsistent and full of contradictions, in which respect it exhibits the inconsistency of any "other" whatsoever, of any kind of "I." Seemingly, Althusser is blind to the historicity of the present, of individuality in its modern form, which explains why the notion of interpellation began to prove inadequate. But his ahistoricity did not stop here: as the scriptures indicate, and only too clearly, Yahweh does not transform Moses into a "subject" but into a *serf/servant*—that is, into his delegate to the people, the incarnation of his voice, etc. Such ahistoricity is expensive: for Althusser the *subject* has always existed, just as *philosophy* has always existed. He confuses the subject with the ego ("I") and philosophy with the linear, developmental tradition that unfolds in the manuals of philosophy. The biblical Moses, it is true, is obviously portrayed as a subject "subjected" to the voice of the Other. But that is not the point. The key to the problem lies elsewhere, in *the question of historical individuality*. Of course, the handful of desires and pulsions that the pronoun "I" would encompass has always existed, but the actual individuality, the act of saying "I am," is a radically historical phenomenon. To repeat, while the example that Althusser takes is only that—an example—its effects are disastrous: Moses would never have been able to say "I am a subject," as opposed to what in fact he did say, that he was a servant of the Lord, otherwise the bearer of his word, of the sacred tables, which, moreover, he broke because he considered himself to be a bad servant, unable to transmit the Word. And although Althusser knows that individuality is always subjected by the unconscious, he speaks (as was his wont) as if it (the individuality) existed prior to its subjection, as if in some way Moses already existed before being interpellated by his Lord. To put it another way: Althusser seems to think of historical individuality only as the subjection of a prior subject and not as "always already" constructed, even before being born, and of course before the imposition of the "proper name." It is clear that nothing exists prior to this being always already constructed. Althusser often intuits the problem, only to end up distorting it, by diffusing it and blurring it. Something that logically presupposes an error of the gravest kind when it comes to conceptualizing the notion of what could be called the *ideological unconscious*, and—a decisive question for historical materialism—to delimiting the field of ideology at the social

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level. To reiterate, there can be no doubting that, not simply in the essay on the Ideological State Apparatuses but, above all, in the different articles on psychoanalysis, Althusser knew how to perceive all this, and at times with a blinding lucidity. The only problem was that he would always then proceed, unexpectedly, to conjure away the crucial facts to which we refer, as if they were unimportant. Why?

As any informed reader immediately realizes, it seems as if Althusser had always been profoundly influenced by *The German Ideology* (another text that, revealingly—and intentionally—Marx never published) and by Engels's conception of ideology as a form of "false consciousness."[10] These constituted the problematic in which Althusser was immersed, as in a fog, from which he was unable to emerge, which in turn explains why things became so confused regarding the question of Historicity. And it is at this point that the problems really began to pile up, although Althusser always amounted to much more than his problems. [. . .]

VII

But let us get back to where we were—that is, to the concept of the Ideological State Apparatuses, which Negri deploys in such an ambiguous fashion, not only in his reading of the late Althusser but also in the way he poses the *real subsumption* of the modern capitalist world. It is important to recall that slave ideology dominated everything in the Greco-Roman world; that sacralization dominated everything in feudalism and in the baroque of Catholic nations; to recall, in sum, that what Negri means by real subsumption is that today capitalism has triumphed over the aristocracy and over the proletariat, which nobody would deny. What Negri does seem to forget is that, in what would be called the United States of America, capitalism had already triumphed from the eighteenth century onward in every domain, including the public and private spheres (which, in any case, are a capitalist invention); and that even in Western Europe the contradictions are inscribed in the confines of the capitalist system. Negri seems at times to make the same mistake as Marx and Engels: it is big industry, he insists, that creates the proletariat, when it is obvious that big industry and the proletariat are created by capitalist relations. But this error is simply symptomatic of a misapplication of history, on Negri's part, which again raises the issue of Althusser's own ahistoricism. It is true that Althusser knows how to use Marx's theory of the "modes of production" to periodize history, but the late Althusser again selects an unfortunate example to illustrate his materialism of the *encounter*. The aleatory encounter that can arise in politics, between *Fortune* and *Virtus*, as described by Machiavelli, is not to be compared to that between the capitalist ("the owner of money") and the ("free") worker, who possesses only his labor power (the value of which is determined by the capitalist market). It is a bad example of "encounters" and further proof of Althusser's questionable ability to historicize, when he speaks of himself and Marxism and even when he refers to Machiavelli himself.

And the same can be said of the essay on the Ideological State Apparatuses, which already in 1978 Althusser considers "ancient and possibly crude," although Negri, as we were saying, will use it constantly to attack and, at the same time, to legitimate Gramsci's always contradictory notion of "cultural hegemony." Why did Gramsci substitute "culture" for "ideology"? This may have spelled a relative victory for the Communist Party, after Togliatti, but in the final instance it amounted to one more defeat.

VIII

Nevertheless, as is obvious, neither Marx nor Marxism could ever be totally relinquished by Althusser. And so in the final part of his

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interviews with FN, Althusser again poses the two basic themes of *ahistoricism* and *ahumanism*. And curiously he poses them with a clarity that had not always characterized his previous treatments of them. On the one hand, he admits what we could call an unquestionable epistemological "relativism." Following Lenin, he indicates how there can be no dogma, only concrete truths that must be recognized and constructed with respect to each social formation. If this is so, it is because the history of historical societies can only be explained through reference to the existence of exploitation. And exploitation takes on a different form in each mode of production. Antihistoricism, then, would imply the need to construct a specific image of time and space and of social and individual relations for each productive mode and for each of its conjunctures.

It follows that, contrary to the claims of Althusser himself, Marxism does not simply serve to explain capitalism. Greco-Roman slavery had been carefully studied by Perry Anderson and Bradley, among others, as had feudalism by many Marxist writers. For the fact remained that, among other things, it was necessary to know about feudal relations and sacralized ideology to appreciate the process of formation of the bourgeoisie and of capitalist power from the fourteenth century until now. The reason is that this process of formation and consolidation is a process of struggle (of struggle to the death), and without knowing about the feudal enemy it is not possible to be informed about a triumphant capitalism. And triumphant it (capitalism) has been, even from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, when it has had to struggle against its own enemy within—the proletariat or the workers' movement in general. This is something that has been subject to serious analysis, beginning with Poulantzas (although he also ended up committing suicide), especially in *Political Power and Social Classes in the Capitalist State* (1969) and in his analysis of the formation of the English bourgeoisie; Toni Negri in his book *Constituent Power* (1994); and Giovanni Arrighi in his analysis *The Long Twentieth Century* (1998), which curiously begins in the fourteenth century.[11]

So everything would have been as clear as daylight, if it had not been for the philosophical contradictions that seem to be inscribed in the notion of the *coupure*, as Althusser defined it. The problem, as we were saying, was that the *coupure*, if such a thing exists, needs to be established, uniquely and exclusively, from the standpoint of a distinct conception of history, what we might call historical materialism as developed from Marx onward. Which means that some clarification is called for as regards the implication of *historicism* and why Althusser always resisted it, but why it was an obstacle that he struggled to overcome, as if he was not altogether certain what he was dealing with. Let us take things a step at a time, beginning with the following proposition: historicism is in fact nothing more than an idealist variant of evolutionism—Althusser himself calls evolutionism a poor man's Hegelianism—or a late-nineteenth-century inversion of scientistic positivism, after the fashion of Ranke, Dilthey, Croce, Cassirer, and others. We are dealing, in other words, with what is, at root, a philosophy of the human spirit—its evolution from itself toward itself, from the origin or seeds to the mature fruit, the domain not of determinist causes but of free forms or, as Croce says, *history as the deed of freedom*. It is true that the Marxist tradition has often been understood (both from without and from within) as if it was one more historicism, albeit of the most vigorous, most material kind. With consequences that are only too familiar: instead of the development of the spirit toward its full liberation, what we have is the evolutionary development of the productive forces (economism) or of the political or social forces (voluntarism, sociologism, etc.), toward the point at which they achieve their full liberation "in the final struggle." All of

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which clearly explains why, in his reply to John Lewis, in Amiens, in Granada, and in his final interviews with FN, Althusser insisted so vehemently on historical realities as processes without origin or determinate end, without efficient cause or final meaning, lacking any kind of subject or teleological basis (irrespective of whether it is liberty, the productive forces, or the proletariat qua subject, as imagined by Lukács, that is at issue).[12]

IX

But if all this seemed clear enough, from what Althusser had to say, why, then, was he haunted by the specter of historicism? And if historical materialism was the root of the true break in Marx, why the problems and constant confusions? In my view, there is only one plausible answer, already discernible in its outlines: Althusser was blinded by his own "philosophism." One question poses itself above all others: if historicist evolutionism was what needed to be rejected, what, then, was to be done with the history of philosophy, which Althusser always understood as the fullest expression of linearity and evolutionism? Because for Althusser the issue was beyond dispute, from the beginning of his work to the final interviews with FN. In the latter he makes the point explicitly: philosophy is made up of the history of philosophy; philosophy is the passage of the same to the same from Plato down to the present day (with, of course, localized, epochal variations). Which is tantamount to saying that in essence philosophy has no history. And here the contradictions become palpable, for which reason Althusser is obliged to insist, similarly and repeatedly, on the transhistorical nature of ideology. Something that he would never do with respect to politics (with the exception of political philosophy) or with respect to the class struggle at the economic level. As a result, Althusser is faced with a real "epistemological obstacle." He would never have dared to say that the Athenian state was the same as its Machiavellian counterpart, or that the feudal economy depended on a stock market, such as that of Wall Street. But that doesn't prevent him from universalizing the world of philosophy, to the extent that it seems at times as if the world of ideas were suspended from the clouds and history were only played out in the terrestrial realm, its only realities being confined to the sphere of politics and economics.

Althusser, of course, realized all of this, for which reason he clung tenaciously to the metaphor of the Marxist edifice, of a base and a superstructure. The eidetic superstructure is always bound in some way to the material or economic infrastructure. But since this metaphor of the building never convinced him, Althusser will gradually, and symptomatically, distance himself from the image of the *coupure* and will even come to suppress the adjective *historical* so as to speak of materialism in its brazen, unalloyed form (or of the history of philosophy as a struggle between idealist and materialist tendencies, something that Macherey had already proposed). It is thus not by chance that, as we have indicated, between 1978 and 1986, he begins to propose what he will eventually call *aleatory* materialism or materialism of the *encounter*. But the contradictions remain, suspended from the clouds. A careful examination reveals that both the *encounter* and the contingent, *aleatory* event are images that refer us to a world in which ideas seem to have a life of their own. Except that this life is bound to the earth, is material in form, which would explain why Althusser claimed that Machiavelli always interested him more than Marx, seeing that in Machiavelli the ideas that are more directly material are directly political. Nor can there be any doubt, as we were saying, that Althusser was always desperate to be a "political philosopher," but above all to be, by the same token—and this we should never forget—a professional philosopher at a time when, let us recall, the image of philosophy qua philosophy was under threat from all sides. Against

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all odds, Althusser defiantly defended his fortress: philosophy was, emphatically, philosophy. Except that he had attacked philosophy precisely on its weak flank—namely, that of historical practices, where, according to Althusser, philosophy could muster little resistance. But if Althusser was capable of this, again the inevitable question: why the Althusserian attachment to *philosophism*? There were only two ways of resolving the dilemma: these consisted of, first, abandoning the belief in linear evolutionism, of the kind implicit in the history of philosophy (which spelled the end of professional philosophy, in the form in which Althusser had defended it); and, second, admitting linear historicism but only as applied to philosophy, on the basis of which it was concluded that the world of ideas (philosophy, ideology, etc.) could indeed constitute a tendential battleground, albeit of a singularly ahistorical kind. [. . .][13]

The Fourth Narrative Sequence: Granada 1976

I

I am again schematizing in the extreme. In Granada Althusser used two key terms: *transformation* and *practice* or *practices*. The existence not only of theory but also of Marxist philosophy is taken for granted. And the central question is: how does Marxist philosophy view philosophy? There can be only one reply: through its very presence, and of its own accord, Marxist philosophy unveils the internal mechanisms of philosophy. It forces it to undergo a transformation. Hence the obviousness of the title: *The Transformation of Philosophy*.[14]

Althusser's basic theses are clear enough:

1. Marxist theory and Marxist philosophy "have a disruptive effect" in our culture because they place the question of class struggle on the table. What Althusser doesn't explain, as always, is why he believes in the existence of a "perennial" philosophy, that of the manuals, from Plato to Husserl. If he says that this philosophy should be *transformed*, it's because he believes in it.
2. Nevertheless, what is also apparent is the paradox of Marxist philosophy. It exists but has never been produced as philosophy. Hence, Althusser perforce has recourse to a materialist tradition, by introducing new names, such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger.
3. Philosophy is produced in the field of the history of philosophy. This thesis verges on an absurd traditionalism, and it is where the text begins to falter. The history of philosophy (the historicism of the manuals) only allows for "generic" differences in philosophy, which is what distinguishes it, in principle, from the sciences. I insist that this is the stuff of manuals pure and simple. Thus, the origins of philosophy lie in the Greece of Plato, when philosophy was distinguished from geometry; philosophy reaches its peak in Kant, who both depended on and distanced himself from Newton.
4. It follows that the distinctive feature of philosophy, as a genre, is its relation to the sciences and its difference with respect to myths, religion, politics, or aesthetic sensuality (how was it possible for Althusser to speak of aesthetic sensuality?). The reason is that philosophy is distinguished by its pure rationality (this is where things become grotesque), whose model can only be found in the rigorous discourse of the existing sciences. And then the escape clause: philosophy becomes a science of the sciences, just as in *Reading Capital* philosophy was the theory of theories. The claim is that sciences know not what they do. [. . .]

Marx had undertaken an initial critique of this "perennial" philosophy. The only

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problem was, as indicated above, that it was limited to submerging philosophy in "*the vaporous nothingness of ideology*." But then things changed: it is true that Marxism has no established philosophical discourse as such, but it has produced prodigious philosophical effects. It caused classical philosophy to tremble to its foundations through, for example, the scientific knowledge of the class struggle, as posed in *Capital*. But already from the *Thesis on Feuerbach*, the class struggle implies the appearance of practices. Unfortunately, the first thesis on Feuerbach, to take but one example, has been understood only as a humanistic praxis, which is a false image of the dialectic. The irruption of practice into philosophy implies something completely different, insofar as practices are always the included and the excluded in all philosophies. Practices are what men do, but since they know not what they do, philosophy undertakes to tell them the truth of their practices. This is a decisive symptom: when practices make an appearance, the event presupposes the condemnation of philosophy qua philosophy. Practices are the necessary "exterior" of philosophy (for which reason philosophy undertakes to tell the truth about practices while pretending not to include them in itself). But here's where things start to happen: practice is not the truth, is not realized in the act of saying or seeing. Practice is a process without a subject because there is no truth in practice. Which is not to say that practice is the same thing as Gramsci's praxis. Practices are what threaten the status of philosophy, which is why they open old scars. If philosophy is the Whole, it cannot admit the existence of this exterior that consists of practices. And it is here that philosophical traps arise.

Althusser marks the spot: the traps set by philosophy consist in its ability to reorder practices and to embrace them in *its* truth. Again the image comes to mind of Chaplin and Brecht's "suitcase," which we mentioned at the beginning. If the trouser leg or shirt arm "is left hanging out" when the suitcase is closed, it suffices to trim it off with scissors. The important thing is that the suitcase closes properly and that everything is contained in it. The traps set by philosophy, then, consist of turning its "outside" into its "inside," without anyone being the wiser for it. The traps set by philosophy are the knowledge of philosophy. But it is not an abstract "knowledge = power" that is at issue, as Foucault (referred to obliquely by Althusser as the *enlightened anarchist*) would have us believe, nor power for power's sake, but its effects, its results. The effects that are produced by the discourse. If we think about it, Althusser is interrogating himself about the actual modus operandi of philosophy, about what led him in his earlier texts to consider it a theory of theories. But when he speaks of this, when he speaks of knowledge of and power over practices, Althusser is coming round to the view, slowly but surely, that philosophy is the "superstructure" of the ideological unconscious, or even of ideology in general. When he tells us that discourse above all produces *effects*, that it constitutes a kind of power, Althusser is referring us to the Amiens text. The formula is now redeployed, but in order to speak strictly of philosophy. The effect of philosophical discourse, on being produced, works to distribute practices and thereby to legitimate the hierarchy of practices in the social whole.

II

The story of the suitcase, the distribution/deformation of practices, generates at the same time philosophical objects that resemble real objects while being different from them. Philosophical objects have no real referent—on this, Althusser had insisted from 1966 onward. Rather, their reference is always internal to discourse: *truth*, *the one*, *the cogito*, *the transcendental subject*. . . . In other words, if philosophy has no object in the sense that the sciences do, its objects are, nevertheless,

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not gratuitous. Rather, they are the crucial means whereby discursive activity imposes its control over practices. In this way, Althusser prevents philosophy from floating on air or living in some ethereal realm, in the company of the stamp collectors and chess players. So far, so good. But by making philosophy intervene in practices, Althusser attaches it to the reality of ideology. And the reverse also happens: practices impact philosophy, and this is what Marxist discourse reveals.

At this point Althusser poses the basic question, why does philosophy exist? why do its texts continue to be read? He replies, because its results—the effect on practices and, to be more exact, on the ideas generated by practices—are demanded by the structure of society. Furthermore, why does philosophy need to be conflictive? why the need for internal disputes, in accordance with Kant's perceptive image of philosophy as a battlefield? Althusser again refers here to the image of the infrastructure and the superstructure, now basing himself on the preface to the *Contribution* of 1859. In the superstructure, according to Marx, is to be found a philosophical ideology, together with a moral ideology, a juridical ideology, a political, aesthetic, and religious ideology, in sum a variety of ideological practices that need to be constantly brought together under the central yoke of the dominant ideology. As practices can be conflictive, philosophy itself, which needs to unite these ideological practices, also needs to be conflictive. It is unable to avoid the impact of these practices. Logically enough, Althusser has reservations about Marx's reference to a *philosophical ideology*. But, to expand his argument, he is bound to conclude that what happens in philosophy is closely connected with what happens in ideologies and that what happens in ideologies is closely connected to the class struggle. Once again, the argument seems obvious: rather than with real objects and scientific knowledge, philosophy is concerned with ideas, with the images loosely attached to practices, scientific and otherwise, and, as we were saying, with the ideas that men form about what they do in their lives.

III

Since there are no practices without ideology (including scientific practices that are realized through ideology), it could be said that people live and act under the influence of ideologies that inhabit their practices (and often independently of their wills and consciousness). It is, then, ideologies that philosophy unites and distributes; and it is on the basis of ideologies that philosophy operates on social practices. And again the crucial question: why should philosophy have this omnipotent power? Because the class struggle depends not only on strength but above all on consensus. And so it is that the Ideological State Apparatuses make a second appearance, to achieve what Gramsci—and Althusser again cites him—would call *cultural hegemony* over society. Philosophy acts as the nuclear element of the dominant ideology; it holds this ideology together and binds it to the other ideological practices.

But the dominant ideology is not constructed by decree. And because ideologies are always contradictory, the need arises to unite them, to suture them. This is the role of philosophy. Which means that philosophy is neither a gratuitous nor a merely speculative attitude. And here Althusser again deploys his key notion of the *last instance*: philosophy is always determinant in the last instance at the ideological level, which explains why it constitutes the class struggle in theory carried to the extreme. Philosophy is the laboratory and theoretical cement for the dominant ideology. And so to the last question, one of paramount importance: what, after all this, is the role of Marxist philosophy? This question, it has to be said, is posed by Althusser in the future anterior tense, in sight of a future that needs to be considered now, since in a manner of speaking it exists already. The problem

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is obvious: if philosophy is the product of class contradictions, if philosophy functions above all as a laboratory, as what cements the ideological effects of the bourgeoisie, then what about Marxist philosophy, what about the kind of thinking that projects its effects precisely toward a society without classes? How is it possible to philosophize in a classless society, in which, possibly, the function and presence of philosophy is superfluous?

Althusser is here underlining an important nuance. One needs to take into account the existence of not only a dominant ideology but also its *dominated* counterpart, or at least its more or less fragmented elements or the class instinct of which Lenin spoke. Not to mention the existence of a long, but always dominated, tradition of materialist philosophy. Of course, Althusser's discussion of such issues suffers from the usual pervasive ambiguity in that, once again, we find ourselves floating on air. Could it be that there has always existed a sort of human spirit, or something similar, which evolved through the notorious tendential struggle between materialists and idealists? Are we talking, with respect to this struggle, of a continuum between the good (materialists) and the bad (idealists)? Althusser is aware of this danger and tries to argue, more subtly, as we saw above, that philosophy is both what establishes the foundations of the building and what cements the superstructure. In other words, philosophy provides both the basic categories and the context for experimentation. From which it would follow that there is a materialism that is bourgeois and another that is . . . what? Althusser is here feeling his way toward a subterranean materialism. The subterranean materialists would be the philosophers who, with the greatest difficulty, were able to establish their opposition (to whom?) in the form of an embryonic discourse or, one might say, of a philosophy that never quite became a philosophy. To repeat: Epicurus, Machiavelli, and the silence of Marx. Of course, Marx caused the whole of philosophy to tremble—as we indicated earlier—through his use of *practice*, in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach. It is curious that Marx, at the end of his life, when writing to Engels, ridiculed their cultic obsession with Feuerbach. It is no less curious that Althusser was aware of this obsession and that he tried to destroy it, from the 1960s onward. And if now Althusser again uses *practice*, it is in a completely different sense. Let us recall: in *Capital* Marx practises the philosophy that he never wrote. In this practical philosophy are to be found the keys to a theory of philosophy and to a theory of Marxist philosophy (or of a philosophy *for* Marxism). Except that Althusser began to realize that his own "philosophism" was also starting to tremble. He emphasizes the fact, obvious enough, that Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci all had the gravest doubts about philosophy, while also insisting on something that deeply concerned all Western Marxists—namely, that neither Stalin nor the Stalinists ever entertained the slightest doubt about philosophy qua philosophy. On the contrary, Stalinism was what created Marxist philosophy qua philosophy, and not only on the basis of "elements" drawn from the philosophically untrained Engels, who had never even attended a German university with a philosophical tradition, but also from such key but questionable figures in the materialist tradition as Plechanov, Bodganov, and Lukàcs. After all, it was the philosophical positions of Stalin that not only set in process the campaign of political terror but also provided the framework in which to create a Marxist philosophy. Here lies the key to everything, including why Althusser adds that neither Marx nor Lenin nor Gramsci ever posited Marxism as a philosophy, to be promoted as such, but as a new practice of philosophy.

IV

The word *practice*, although, to be sure, used by Althusser throughout his career, finally

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acquires a new meaning: not practice as crudely understood by the neo-Kantians but, as we have progressively seen, as it relates to ideological practice and the theoretical practice of philosophy. His point of departure is the *postface* to the second German edition of *Capital*, in which Marx made some fundamental distinctions, notably between two kinds of dialectic: one to glorify the existing order of things; another, critical and revolutionary. In the history of Marxist thought, the first kind is exemplified by Stalin's dialectic, which served to glorify his own order. The second, the critical and revolutionary variety, is the true Marxist inheritance. To speak of order, Althusser correctly insists, is to speak of economic and political power, the power of the state. Hence, on the one hand, the relation between philosophy and the state and, on the other, philosophy's "status" as discourse. And so another truth is out of the bag: there can be no doubt that to construct philosophy qua philosophy, even under the guises of "opposition," is also to accept the basic procedures of the dominant bourgeoisie.

Althusser's ahistoricism is again breathtaking: in speaking of philosophy as a hegemonic element of bourgeois ideology, he returns us to the supposed origins of philosophy, as found in Plato, only to immediately relate Plato to Dietzgen. Dietzgen had based himself on Plato in order to speak of philosophers as lackeys of the state, which is to cede too much importance to philosophers. Moreover, we are back again with the manuals and their version of the origins of philosophy, however much Althusser continues to complicate the scenario. Marx had in mind not only the bourgeois state but also the future state, of the *community*—that is to say, the "state that was a nonstate," of which Engels had spoken.

Once more, Althusser proposes the relation between philosophy and politics (or between philosophy and state) but now has no choice but to cling to the supposed materialist tradition, in the manner indicated above. And I say "supposed" because here the contradictions are indeed of a fundamental kind. For example, when it came to the language of Greco-Roman slavery, in a world of slavery, the basis of the materialist word (to reiterate) should have been a materialism of the soul. For my own part, I have yet to discover (in Aristotle, Plato, etc.) any evidence of a materialism of the souls of slaves, as opposed to a materialism of the souls of their masters. The atoms of Democritus or of Epicurus, while possibly the other face of Platonism, simply amount to a naturalistic conception of the world, which has subsequently been reinterpreted (including by the young Marx, in his doctoral thesis) to establish, misleadingly, a connection with the lay sensualism of bourgeois criticism. The prime axis of the materialism of the slave mode (I have a soul, slaves don't) is nowhere contradicted in the documents of the subterranean materialism of which Althusser speaks.

And much the same applies to Althusser's view of feudalism, where again his ahistoricism is flagrant. A genuinely materialist discourse would have insisted at some point on the fact that the souls of serfs are equal to the souls of their lords. I have found no such statements either in atheists or in heretics. To claim feudal "nominalism" for materialism is always a questionable tactic. The materialism of class struggle is nowhere in evidence in the feudal world, except in the interstices of the peasant revolts, which vaguely connect Münzer and Husse to the classic rebellion of Spartacus. One is much more likely to find evidence of a class-conscious materialist word in Machiavelli, but only with respect to his analysis of the new politics and new forms of power. . . . So that, in sum, Althusser's claims regarding a subterranean materialism need to be treated with caution. Except that Althusser is never one to beat about the bush and returns constantly to Marx. So the transformation of philosophy is not simply of interest with respect to the Granada conference but is

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also the key problem that is going to occupy him from 1977 to 1979. That is, the transformation of politics or, to be more exact, the transformation—or disappearance—of the party. Hence the subsequent texts on the twenty-second congress of the Communist Party and the definitive position assumed in 1978: *what must change in the Communist Party*. These are further thoughts that grow out of and conclude the Granada conference, with the same message: insofar as philosophy had always been bound to the dominant class and to the state, of course Marx was as distrustful of philosophy as he was of the state. And so on to Althusser's radical break with the whole tradition of the party.

V

The logic of this development presupposed, for Althusser, neither an anarchistic rejection of the state nor a rejection of philosophy but simply the need, on the part of the exploited, to find other means of organization—examples of which had already been set by the Paris Commune and the Soviets of 1905–17—and new forms of philosophical intervention that might accelerate the end of bourgeois ideological hegemony. In short, a transformation of politics and a transformation of philosophy.[15] Such is the true legacy of Althusser. The need to invent a new practice of politics and a new practice of philosophy. New forms of existence that might contribute to the free exercise of social practices and human ideas. In other words, a communism that would involve the freedom to do anything except to exploit.

Because this much is clear: if capitalism is deprived of the freedom to exploit, then it is reduced to nothing. Although philosophy has been replaced by the *media* and by the psychosocial, economic, and linguistic "sciences," although capitalism has taken over our private lives and our daily routine, it is a mistake to claim that bourgeois ideology has ceased to be "substantive." The opposite is true: it has become our skin. And it is precisely for this reason that the tremendous task undertaken by Althusser is today more valid than ever. The point is not to create a substantive philosophy, which might either be Marxist or serve Marxism. The point is, rather, to posit Marxism as a different kind of thinking and theorizing. In short, as a different kind of skin: the sense (unconscious or conscious) of what it is not to exploit.

Finale and the Descent into Darkness: The Street Where the Sun Never Shone

It was in 1979 that I saw him for the last time, and the last letter that he wrote to me dates from then.[16] The plan—a gesture of desperation—was to create an international journal on Marxism. But we had already drifted far apart. Later, I did not dare visit him in his clinics of insanity and didn't even attend his funeral. I prefer not to remember that black period and to return to our friendship as it was at its fullness. Take, for example, one particular morning in 1977, or was it 1978? Anyway, when Althusser was deeply involved in the texts connected with the twenty-second congress of the French Communist Party. And what a freezing morning it was in the Rue d'Ulm! Everything seemed sad and gray in Althusser's little office in the École Normale. The barren garden, the tufts of grubby grass, the simple hand-written note that was pinned to the doorbell ("*Althusser, sonnez ici*"). For someone who had been involved with him and his world for so long, it all took on the appearance of desolation, of exile, of defeat, although immediately the effect was somewhat mitigated by his presence when he opened the door: the corduroy jacket, the mischievous smile, and his fingers interminably rolling a cigarette (an activity that, he insisted, with his peculiar sense of humour, served "to eradicate the division between manual and intellectual labor"). It was like entering another world. Much importance has been attached to the period he

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spent in the POW camp. Likewise, with respect to Hélène, although her war experience was much worse. It was their relationship, it is claimed, that turned Althusser into a communist. But what has not been sufficiently emphasized is the atmosphere of intelligence and cordial happiness that surrounded them and with which they knew how to surround all of us. At the end of a small hallway there was a kind of lounge where Hélène would invite us to have tea, perhaps with a shot of the vodka sent to them by a Georgian friend. Althusser showed me a series of party documents and some articles from *L'humanité*, with which I was familiar, more or less. He collapsed into an armchair, while I leafed through the texts, which consisted of distilled venom directed against him. "What do you think?" he asked. Even I was taken aback. "They really hate you," I replied, dryly. And then something surprising happened. He spat out that, possibly, he also had begun to hate, to hate "them." I suggested that I believed him to be incapable of hating anyone. He began to smile: "Perhaps it's because. . . ." We finished off the phrase in unison: "because elephants are contagious." And we both burst into guffaws of laughter. Because, as I forgot to explain, Althusser's laughter was as contagious as his intelligence. Although he lived in the Rue d'Ulm, the street where the sun never shone.

Notes

1. Perhaps it would be preferable to speak of *explosions*. That of Althusser in the 1960s and 1970s; the murder of Hélène and Althusser's insanity in the 1980s; his death and that of the Soviet Union—and the supposed death of Marxism—in the 1990s.

2. I will be citing the following texts unpublished in Spanish (except for individual essays): *Écrits philosophiques et politiques*, vol. 1 (Stock/IMEC, 1994) and vol. 2 (1995); *Écrits sur la psychanalyse. Freud et Lacan* (Stock/IMEC, 1993). I will cite as "FN" the interviews and correspondence with Althusser published by Fernanda Navarro under the title *Filosofía y marxismo* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1988 [French ed., *Sur la philosophie. Entretiens et correspondance avec Fernanda Navarro, suivis de* La transformation de la philosophie, Gallimard, 1994]).

3. It is symptomatic that Fernanda Navarro must have recourse to a text by Foucault to defend Althusser's "theoretical antihumanism." By the mid 1980s, it seemed that Foucault was more to be trusted than Althusser. Apart from the fact that the Mexican professor was completely ignorant of the real context in which the Althusserian texts were written. For her, Althusser was a "mad" genius who had said some interesting things in days gone by. Which probably explains the air of sadness that surrounds this text.

4. This was misinterpreted as sociological institutionalism or functionalism, rather incredibly, because the act of defining the family as an "ideological state apparatus" was a brilliant stroke of genius on Althusser's part, which broke absolutely with the traditional division between the public and private sector. But since there is no limit to critical crassness, Althusser was obliged to add an addendum to explain his nonfunctionalism. In my book *Theory and History of Ideological Production* (1975, 1990 [Eng. trans., 2002]), I attempted to clarify this further, through a series of notes, although in the prologue I indicated, with respect to the relation between literature and ideology, to what extent the work of Balibar and Macherey *was* implicated in functionalism. Terry Eagleton showed little grasp of the Althusserian problematic in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, published in 1983. More nuanced and much more commendable (above all as an archive of bibliographic summaries) is his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, published in 1991. However, even this work carries two quotations from Richard Rorty, by way of an epigraph, even though, admittedly, they are intended as a target for criticism. The struggle, we suggest, is strictly between empiricists, some of whom were more materialistically inclined than others but all of whom continued in the tradition of cultural studies, as inaugurated by Raymond Williams. I do not deny Eagleton's intelligence, but his empiricism continues at times to be as inane as it was impossible in his *Literature and Marxist Criticism*.

5. Also included in *Brecht, siglo XX*, a work of which I was the editor (Granada: Comares, 1998).

6. Curiously, Althusser diverges at this point from the positions assumed by Korsch or Mattich, both of whom viewed religion and art as the two basic ideologies of the bourgeoisie. Korsch's misconceptions in this respect were particularly far-reaching, as is apparent from his *Marxism and Philosophy*. And Brecht was constantly to remind him of the fact. By the 1920s and 1930s, religion was of no direct concern to capitalism, just as art and religion were issues of secondary importance, emphatically so, in the dominant bourgeois ideology. It could plausibly be argued that Korsch inherited not only the neo-Kantian emphasis on "action" but equally the "religion of art" of the Romantics.

7. For a full discussion, see *Para una crítica del fetichismo literario* (Madrid: Akal, 1975).

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8. In the texts of the 1970s, Althusser effectively uses the term "nitwits" to speak of the new philosophers and theoreticians of literature and discourse. To qualify as a good-for-nothing, one needed only to attach a *gulag* badge to one's lapel, as an anti-Marxist gesture.

9. We spoke earlier of the relation between *thesis* and *positions*, the latter understood in its etymological sense, to which Althusser had recourse in his book precisely entitled *Positions*. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that Althusser, given his constant obsession with Gramsci and the physical presence of the International Communist Party, also used *positions* in the military sense that it had for Gramsci (based on the practice of trench warfare in World War I). In this sense the term means exactly what it says: the front-line position occupied by any Western communist party not only in the 1920s but above all in the 1960s and 1970s. The same variations are found in Marxist thought generally.

10. The commonplace regarding false consciousness survives down to the present day as the Marxist definition of ideology.

11. *The Long Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1994). The task Arrighi sets himself is similar to the one that, in a manner of speaking, I also undertook in my book *Theory and History of Ideological Production*.

12. The non-sense of history and the non-subject of history already imply for Althusser a primary demythologization of the proletariat and the party, as the "only vanguards." Nor can his claim to the effect that "it is the masses that make history" be understood as a mythologization of the "spontaneity" of the masses, after the fashion of Rosa Luxemburg. The dialectic on which it rests is far more subtle: if the class struggle is the only explanation, any meaning that history possesses will consist of nothing more than derivations that this struggle acquires among the multitude of the exploited in each social formation.

13. At this point, the obsession with the history of the sciences inevitably complicates the issue, in that, as far as Althusser was concerned, philosophy has an obvious origin—although he always denied the fact—namely, Plato taken in combination with the supposed origin of mathematics (the myth of Thales) or of geometry (as described by Husserl). Of course, the history of the sciences is a very complex question that is today posed in the context of such obvious "breaks" as the *Copernican revolution*, as argued by Kuhn (who, curiously enough, was a disciple of Popper, the author of *The Misery of Philosophy*). The result is a history of "leaps" that has influenced all historians of science. For further discussion, see my *Theory and History of Ideological Production*.

14. See Louis Althusser, "The Transformation of Philosophy," *"Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists" and Other Essays*, by Althusser (London: Verso, 1990) 243–65. As can be seen, Althusser now makes explicit the identity between *coupure* and conceptual *transformation*.

15. In spite of everything that I have indicated so far, only now perhaps are we in a position to understand Althusser's final *prise de position* with respect to the materialism of chance or aleatory materialism, which is anything but gratuitous: on the one hand, the issue is to avoid any kind of determinism and, on the other, to lend a certain status to the key notion of the *conjuncture*, both historical and personal or discursive. Consider, for example, the materialism of the "*encounter*," which would explain the distinctive conjunctural logic of the encounter between Marx, Althusser, and Spinoza. Materialist discourse is the discourse that would admit the contradictions inscribed in its own internal logic and in the other practices. The kind that "would never close the suitcase." Although the same old problem remains: what to do with philosophy? how to establish this new discursive practice in the here and now? how to transform the current situation? how to produce not a "Benjaminian" alternative but "*the other*" of languages in the construction of our own present-day subjectivities, when faced by the reality of exploitation in today's *empire*, of which Negri and Hardt speak (in a book that is, nevertheless, very debatable)?

16. In the years that followed, former Althusserians, such as Étienne Balibar and Alain Badiou, have worked with the Granada Association of Marxist Studies, directed by Carlos Enríquez del Arbol, who was one of the people who sent my first book to Althusser. Of the world of the "young" Althusserians of Paris, at that time, only my long friendship with Gabriel Albiac has survived. Although, even when one tries to avoid them, memories sometimes come flooding back.

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