

1. DOSSIER:
READING ALTHUSSER, AGAIN

GUEST EDITORS:
PROF. VITTORIO MORFINO
UNIVERSITY OF MILAN-BICOCCA
AND
DR. STEFANO PIPPA
UNIVERSITY OF MILAN-BICOCCA

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This dossier presents a collection of essays on the thought of Louis Althusser written by scholars of different generations who work in different parts of the world. For some time now, Althusser's work has been at the centre of a new, worldwide debate, which was triggered by the publication, over the last few decades, of numerous posthumous texts that emerged from the rich, and in many ways surprising, "Fond Althusser", today hosted in Caen (France) at the Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine. If it is true – and it certainly is – that Althusser's intervention in the conjuncture of the 1960s, with the publication of the "classical" works of Althusserianism, profoundly modified "how we read Marx and how we make sense of the development of Marx's ideas", as recently recalled by Robyn Marasco and Banu Bargu in their introduction to a special issue on the French thinker (Bargu and Marasco, 2019, 239), it is no less true that the ongoing "second reception" that we are witnessing of Althusser's writings opened, on the basis of the new materials, a new phase of interpretation of Althusser's philosophy itself. This "second reception" has included, as is well-known, new and unprecedented themes and authors (to limit ourselves to the most striking cases, the "materialism of the encounter" of the later writings, or the stratified and complex interpretation of Machiavelli). At the same time, it made possible both a novel and different investigation of the more classical themes (such as his Spinozism, the concept of structural causality, the theory of ideology...), and a new confrontation with themes developed in contemporary philosophy in the wake of Althusser's intervention.

Far from aiming to render Althusser a mere object of historiographical interest, this dossier has the ambition – or, at least, more modestly, the hope – to contribute to the second reception of Althusser's œuvre in a spirit of critical rethinking of his theoretical contributions, with the goal to forge new theoretical tools, open up new perspectives, and (why not?) reconsider some key aporias of his theoretical endeavour, *for* and *in* the current conjuncture – and for the challenges that it poses to those for whom the goal of emancipation remains an unsurpassable and necessary horizon of thought.

The papers collected in this dossier revolve around some of the most central themes of Althusser's work – the theory of ideology, the question of the structure, the Spinoza-Hegel-Marx relationship – and refer to thinkers who were central to the development of his thought (Gramsci, Spinoza, Foucault), at the same time engaging in a dialogue with other figures (Pêcheux, Goffman, Kafka, Žižek, Laclau...) so as to clarify core issues of his philosophy by testing their strengths and limits, or prolong their effects in an original way. In particular, although it is dealt with in many different ways by the various authors, or linked to different themes, the question of ideology – or perhaps it would be best to say: the *problem* represented for Marxism and for all theories of emancipation by the slippery, controversial and contested, not to say aporetic, notion of ideology – runs through all the contributions collected in the dossier, bearing witness not only to its centrality to Althusser's project as a whole, and Marxism more in general, but also to the comprehension of contemporary forms of power and domination. As is well-known, the problem of ideology constituted the object *par excellence* of Althusser's project in its different stages, from the "epistemological break" by means of which alone a science of history could establish itself, through to the infamous thesis of the "interpellation of individuals as subjects", put forth by Althusser in the 1970 article published in the journal of French Communist Party *La Pensée* under the title "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" – a title immediately followed by

the subtitle “Notes towards an investigation”, which unmistakably indicated its status of incompleteness and non-conclusiveness. On this last point, it is perhaps worth recalling that the article comprised two parts, separated by dotted lines, that in a certain sense had (and have had) an autonomous and independent life. The first part focused on the classical Marxist question of “reproduction”, while the second part was devoted to the reformulation of the concept of ideology, or better: to the elaboration of a novel concept of ideology which resorted to theoretical resources derived from Spinoza and Freud. To each of these parts corresponded the invention of a new concept: that of “ideological state apparatuses” for the first and that of “interpellation” for the second one. The posthumous publication of the unpublished writings revealed that this text was culled from an actual book, now available to the readers as *Sur la reproduction* (Althusser, 1995) and in English as *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014), which was in turn based on a series of discussions within a group to which it was to serve as a contribution (Balibar, 2014, ix-x). But the book was itself never really completed: in Althusser’s intentions, *Sur la reproduction* was meant to be the first of a two-volumes study, centered on the question of ideology and devoted to the themes of reproduction (first volume) and class struggle in capitalist formations (second volume). The second volume, unfortunately, was never written. Obviously enough, this means that today we have at our disposal new important materials for the interpretation of Althusser’s theory of ideology and reproduction. But more importantly, this circumstance indicates that the theory of ideology and reproduction remained for Althusser an “unfinished project”, one which remains today necessarily open for further developments and investigations.

The following essays confront the issues directly or indirectly raised by the theory of ideology from a variety of different perspectives. In the opening paper, “Althusser as Reader of Gramsci”, Vittorio Morfino pauses on the complex and theoretically dense relationship of Althusser with Gramsci, who was a constant presence in his thought. Drawing on published and unpublished writings, Morfino analyses the profound ambivalence of Althusser’s relationship with the work of the great Italian thinker and politician: first praised as the greatest theoretician of the superstructure, then criticized as the paradigmatic figure of an absolute historicism that conflates the many levels of the social totality, then again eulogized as the one who paved the way for him towards the key concept of “ideological state apparatuses”, and eventually condemned as the “father” of Eurocommunism. The essays by Warren Montag and Joseph Serrano focus precisely on a crucial question that emerges from Althusser’s reflections on the question of the apparatuses and ideology, that is, the question of the body. In his text “Interpellation and Stigmatization. Althusser and Goffman”, Warren Montag brings the Althusserian theory of interpellation into dialogue with the notion of “stigma” elaborated by Ervin Goffman in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, published in the same year as Althusser was thinking through the notions of “imaginary” and “imputation” in his still little known 1963 lectures on psychoanalysis and human sciences. Through a historically rich and theoretically subtle reconstruction of the concept of imputation, “a fleeting but unmistakable presence in both texts”, Montag brings to the fore the physical, coercive and violent dimension inherent to the practices of interpellation/imputation and stigmatization, arguing that applying Goffman to Althusser can help us identify the “dissimilarities and inequalities” produced by historically determined practices of interpellation. The centrality of the body to Althusser’s theory of ideology is taken up also by Serrano who, in his essay “The interpellation of the body: Althusser and Kafka”, takes a different route and turns to Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” in order to pose the problem of the body anew. After reconstructing the presence in Althusser’s essay on ideology of a notion of the body reminiscent of Spinoza’s definition of individuality in the second part of the *Ethics*, Serrano stages an encounter between Althusser and Kafka which aims to open up a conceptual space for thinking a “concept of a body capable of resisting or even shattering its apparatuses, a body capable of its own liberation”. By reading Althusser with Kafka and

vice versa, Serrano outlines a concept of a body that exceeds – through the existence of a “subversive remainder” – the limits of the legal subject and its interpellation.

Stefano Pippa’s essay “Althusser against Functionalism. Towards the Concept of Overinterpellation” returns to a well-known theme of the “first reception” of Althusser’s theory of ideology, that is, the criticism of functionalism levelled against the 1970 essay immediately after its publication, and proposes a “critique of the critique” starting from the perspective opened up by *Sur la reproduction* and the way in which, in this text, Althusser takes into consideration the effects of the class struggle. At the centre of Pippa’s paper is the concept of “overinterpellation”, with which he attempts to bring to the fore the plurality of interpellations in which the subject is always-already caught. This concept, argues Pippa, is implicitly present in the pages of *Sur la reproduction* that Althusser will not include in the famous 1970 essay: in this sense, the concept of “overinterpellation” attempts to reopen one of the numerous *Holzwege* of Althusser’s œuvre and reactivate their efficacy for the present theoretical conjuncture. The issue of ideology is further investigated by Natalia Romé’s essay “*Que faire* (with discourse)? A Materialist Approach to Discourse, Ideology and Politics in the Neoliberal Conjuncture”. Romé addresses the key question of her essay via a detour through one of Althusser’s most brilliant students, Michel Pêcheux, whose work combines in an original way two Althusserian intuitions: the theory of historical time put forth in *Reading Capital* and the Spinozist interpretation of ideology in terms of “materialism of the imaginary”. Following Pêcheux, Romé puts forth a critique of the theories of discourses which rejects their surreptitious installation in a space of interiority dominated by a closed temporality, and shows the necessary relationship between this imaginary interiority and a complex theory of temporality and social totality. From this perspective, the dominant ideology of the 1970 essay on the ideological state apparatuses ought to be interpreted, argues Romé, not as “ideology in general”, but as the imaginary effect of the complex and contradictory articulation-in-dominance of a plurality of discursive formations. In this sense, the concept of “conjuncture” becomes crucial in order to think the contradictory unity of these formations.

The vexed question of Althusser’s Spinozism is at the centre of Fabio Bruschi and Agon Hamza’s contributions, who both pause on the significance of the references to Spinoza in Althusser’s work, offering divergent conclusions. Fabio Bruschi’s article, titled “A Dislocation without a Subject. Althusser, Laclau and Spinoza”, rejects Laclau and Mouffe’s thesis that the concept of immanent causality would stand in contradiction to his notion of overdetermination. By reading Althusser’s concept of “structure” on the basis of a “relationist” Spinoza, Bruschi argues that it must be understood as the infinite productivity of a process that can be closed off and totalised only ideologically. In the light of this perspective, his essay shows the proximity, but above all the irreducible distance that separates Althusser’s reflections on the subject from Laclau’s. From a different angle, Agon Hamza’s “Class Struggle in Theory: the position of enunciation of philosophy and the Hegel/Spinoza debate” returns to the problem of the relationship between Marx, Hegel and Spinoza, which, as is well-known, was the core issue of Althusser’s reinterpretation of Marx in the 1960s, one that fixed for long time – and, as Hamza’s essay shows, still does – the coordinates of the debates on the interpretation of Marxism after Althusser. For Hamza, it is only by confronting this issue again that it becomes possible to answer the question of the possible contribution of Althusser’s thought today, in a conjuncture radically different from the one in which he intervened. Returning to key questions such as the role of philosophy, the issue of class struggle, the autonomy of politics, and the problem of ideology, Hamza argues that it is today necessary to confront again the question of the philosophical substratum of Marxism – and this poses anew the question of the alternative “Hegel or Spinoza” in their relation to the structure of contemporary capitalism. One key concept, Hamza offers for consideration, is that of “process without a subject”, which, however, must be reinterpreted through Hegel, not Spinoza, following Žižek’s

suggestions that Hegel's dialectical process is the most radical version of such a category, "more radical of Althusser's own conceptualisation of it".

By putting together this dossier, as we hope will be clear to the readers of the essays collected here, we did not intend to present an artfully coherent image of Althusser's thought. Rather, we wanted to collect texts that would seek to give new voice to Althusser's theses, that would attempt to make them speak to our present and bring them into dialogue with other authors. Texts, in sum, that would engage critically with Althusser's ideas in order to test them, so as to open up new perspectives capable to make us think not so much "on" Althusser, but "with" Althusser – in the same way that it was for him a matter of thinking "with Marx", even beyond the fetishism of the letter of his texts, the problems that lie ahead of us.

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V. Morfino and S. Pippa, guest editors.