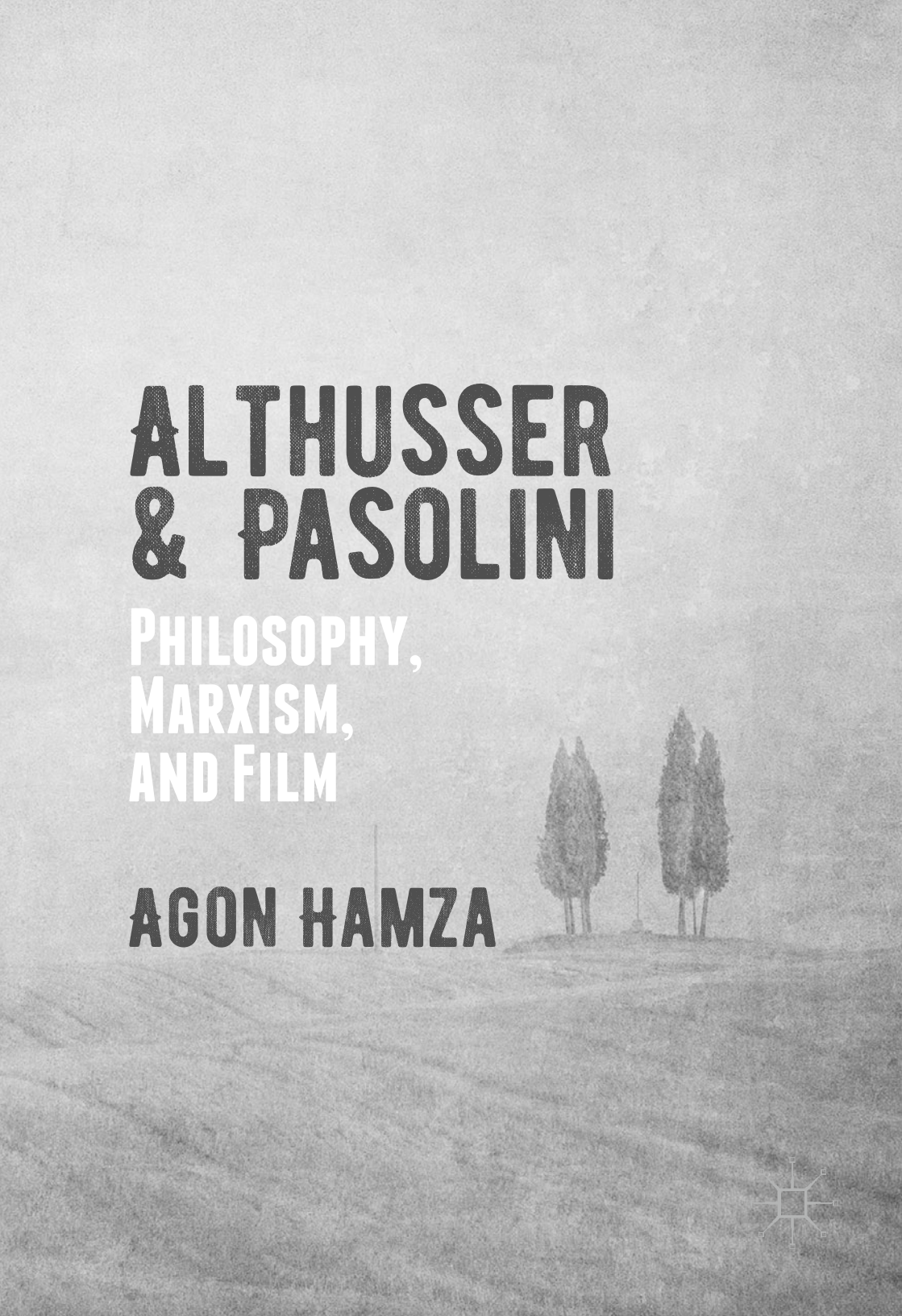
Althusser & Pasolini

Philosophy, Marxism, and Film

Agon Hamza



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To Gabriel Tupinambá, my Party member comrade…for now!

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Althusser and Pasolini

Communists never cry in wilderness. Even when they are practically alone

— Louis Althusser, Essays in Self-Criticism (London: NLB, 1976), p. 39.

One does not really know a person until he has died.

— Pier Paolo Pasolini

This book deals with specific relations: philosophy, film, Christianity, and communism. These relations bear the names of the concepts that are presented by two singular people: Louis Althusser and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The two have hardly been discussed together. There are studies on the relation of other philosophers to Pasolini: such as Žižek, Badiou, Lacan, Agamben, and others. Althusser himself never wrote of Pasolini's work, although in all probability, he must have been acquainted with it.[1] What binds together these two names, and why is it important to maintain their living legacies?

Pier Paolo Pasolini was a very well-known Italian filmmaker, poet, novelist, activist, and a film critic. During the Second World War, together

[1] Althusser's friend Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, with whom he kept a long correspondence, was also a collaborator of Pasolini. She has written prefaces to at least two books of Pasolini, published in Italian and French.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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with his mother, he moved to the northern part of Italy, in the province of Friuli, bordering both the former Yugoslavia and Austria. There "he learned the local dialect in which he was to write some of his first poetry and here too he later became politicized by watching the struggles of the local peasants against their landowners."[2] Arguably, this place, and these struggles, turned him into a Marxist. His political activism and subsequently his membership of the Italian Communist Party were determined by the lives of the sub-proletariat in the suburbs of Rome. It was the life of the sub-proletariat in the suburbs of Rome and their class struggle that influenced his first film *Accattone* (1961). Some commentators insist that the murder of his brother Guido Pasolini, an Italian partisan, killed by the Yugoslav partisans and whom Pasolini mourned throughout his life as a martyr, has had a lifelong lasting impact on his treatment of that figure.

Pasolini's major influences were Christianity and European ancient intellectual traditions. He was educated in both the classics of Greek and Latin, which are materialized in his film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, his script of a film on St Paul, as well as *Medea* and *Oedipus*, both referring to classical Greek tragedies. Even before he joined the Party, he believed that it was only the Communist Party that was able to provide and establish a new culture in the country. However, not long after he joined, he was expelled from the Party under the charges of obscene public behavior and corruption of minors. His first novel, *Ragazzi di vita* (*Hustler*), which was published in 1955, was very well received by the public, but very poorly by the Communist Party and the government. *Ragazzi di vita* initiated a lawsuit against Pasolini and his editor, and even though Pasolini was not sentenced, he was nonetheless subjected to the propaganda of yellow press in Italy. Indeed, he was charged and sent to court many times, with various allegations, including corrupting minors, blasphemy, pornography, insulting the national religion, and so on.

Pasolini's private and public beliefs were in close coexistence. It is perhaps the sexual transgression of his private life (his relationships and affairs with young boys from the suburbs of Rome) that constituted or conditioned his public convictions and belief. Or, to formulate it in more concrete terms, we can argue that insofar as it was sexuality—especially the sexuality as it manifests itself in the working class, which did not fit the communist ideal of the proletariat with which communists worked—Pasolini had a particular interest in the "sub-proletariat" and in the

[2] Hood 1987, p. 7.

function of sex in pauperized life. In fact, sexuality constitutes a crucial aspect of his work. However, although Ninetto Davoli, a 15-year-old boy, described by many commentators of Pasolini's work and his biographers as the love of his life, appeared in a few films, his own sexuality was hardly discussed in his work, and especially in his films. Departing from this, how are we to explain the *Trilogy of Life* and his version of *The Decameron* (1971) and so on? We encounter the relation between law and sex: after all, Pasolini was quite interested in filming sex (sex scenes, close-ups, etc.), but it was not so much sexuality as a stumbling block in the identity of the working class (that element which disturbed the idyllic vision the Italian Communist Party of the proletariat), but rather sexuality as a creative force: both in sublime and in monstrous form, since the *Trilogy of Life*, and especially *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), explored precisely the ascetic sexuality of fascism (in opposition to the lively and larger-than-life polymorphous sexuality of *The Decameron*, or *The Arabian Night* (1974) for that matter). Pasolini's father was a military commander, who became a supporter of Mussolini, unlike his mother, who remained a Leftist and opposed the fascist regime. His last film, *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, which was released shortly after Pasolini's murder, is based on *120 Days of Sodom* by the Marquis de Sade and portrays the life of the rich fascist in the northern republic of Salò after the fall of Mussolini's regime.[3]

Pasolini's work, therefore, can be summarized thus: the immanent tension between Marxism and Christianity; the life of the poor and young workers in the outskirts of big cities in the age of consumerism; the struggle against law, in favor of desire. Later on, for Pasolini, the Italian Communist Party became the party of law and order which was against the so-called extra-parliamentary action; it used the Resistance as a cover-up, a supplement for its lethargy and nonactivity. For instance, his "*Lutheran Letters* are polemical interventions in the politics of the 1970s indictments of the Christian Democrats for corruption, of the communists for their acceptance of consumerism, and of Italian youth for the tyranny of fashion and of possessions."[4] Pasolini condemned the events of May 1968, and paradoxically enough, he sided with the police, as "the sons of the proletariat." Further, according to him, the 1968 revolution contributed only to the ongoing capitalist revolutionizing of the bourgeois order through consumption. In fact, we should note that both Pasolini and Althusser

[3] Perhaps, *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* is the only non-Pasolinian film of Pasolini.
[4] Stuart Hood, *Introduction*, p. 9.

were established figures before the events of May 1968, and indeed their reaction to the events was to be expected. However, these two intellectuals of the Left took different steps and positions toward these events and the revolution. Althusser's position toward the events of May 1968 in France is ambiguous. Far from condemning the events, his critique was directed to the French Communist Party and its inability to become the leader of this revolutionary process. In fact, the French Communist Party denounced and opposed the students' "revolutionary process," qualifying them as false revolutionaries.

Indeed, Althusser was, arguably, the most influential French philosopher in the 1960s. His books *Reading Capital* (a collection of interventions from his seminar on Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*) and *For Marx* marked the beginning of a new relation of philosophy to the work of Marx. Like Pasolini, Althusser's relationship to Christianity was also tense and ambiguous. They were both raised in religious environments. Althusser was a member of the French Catholic Church and a member of a few Catholic organizations in France. In his youth, the main influential figures for Althusser were Jean Guitton, a Catholic philosopher and theologian, who later on became Althusser's mentor, and Jean Lacroix, a French philosopher with whom Althusser later parted ways.[5]

Althusser was born in Algeria, where he spent most of his childhood. Like Pasolini, Althusser's mother played a very important role in his upbringing, whereas his father was a lieutenant in the French army. During the Second World War, Althusser was held in captivity in a camp in Northern Germany, where among very few books he had access to was Blaise Pascal's book *Pensées*. He read it throughout the years of captivity, and Pascal became one of the major influences of his work, especially with regard to his theory on the critique of ideology. He was a lifelong member of the French Communist Party, albeit a fierce critic. He was expelled from the Party only after the murdering of his wife. One has to think not only his letters to the Central Committee of the Party[6] but his entire philosophical and political interventions were in a way a critique of the political lines of the French Communist Party: Stalinism, humanism, and so on.

Following this, we should point out that Pasolini was not at all a believer in an unorganized action, but he just concentrated on making visible the stumbling block to communist organization: the dirty, uncontrollable,

[5] See Althusser 2014, pp. 207–244.

[6] Cf. Althusser 2007, pp. 153–172; Althusser 1978.

useless dimension of the sub-proletariat, epitomized by its devious sexuality. This has to be said, because even though Pasolini evidently did think that the Communist Party, like the Church, was a machine for ossifying and de-sanctifying militancy, it is unclear if this was the destiny of institutionalization in general, or if institutions were simply not attuned to this "useless" dimension of the very people who were to be organized.

Althusser had no teachers, in the level of a father figure, neither in philosophy, nor in politics: "I did not have a father and continued indefinitely to play the role of 'father's father' to give myself the illusion I did have one, or rather to assume the role in relation to myself."[7] Or, better still: "philosophically speaking, I had to become my own father. But that was only possible if I conferred on myself the essential role of the father: that of dominating and being the *master* in all situations."[8] Indeed, Althusser had a very lonely life, even though friends, comrades, and students surrounded him. The solitude can be discerned throughout his writings. It is for this reason that Gregory Elliott entitled one of his essays *Althusser's Solitude*.[9] However, in his *A Response to John Lewis*, Althusser writes: "Communists are never alone."[10] However paradoxical these positions are, we should note that by the latter, Althusser means that as a communist, a philosopher aims to transform the world, "which he cannot do alone without a genuinely free and democratic communist organisation, having close links with its grass roots and beyond them with other popular mass movements."[11] It is in this regard that Althusser and Pasolini differ: for Althusser, the Party (or any other form of organized political action) was a condition *for* politics, whereas Pasolini functioned (to paraphrase Lenin) as a communist without a Party.

Marxism has always had a complicated relation with religion. In fact, politics of radical emancipation can hardly be distinguished or separated from its religious influences. In the same way, we cannot separate religion from most of the great philosophical projects in the Western tradition. It is impossible for us to understand Descartes as devoid of religion, or Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and so on. In contemporary philosophy, we cannot imagine the work of Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, or Giorgio Agamben

[7] Althusser 1992, p. 171.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Elliott 1993, pp. 17–37.
[10] Althusser 2008, p. 122.
[11] Althusser 1993, p. 173.

without their commitments to Christianity. It is important to note, however, that Marxism is by no means the secularized version of Christianity. As we will see in the following chapters, Christianity and religion are *the conditions* as well as *intrinsic* aspects not only for Marxism or communism, but also for philosophy as such. The same holds for Althusser and Pasolini—their intellectual projects cannot be comprehended without understanding their relation to Christianity, whether as believers or not.

Although he denounced religion, Althusser maintained a particular interest in the subject and developed close friendships with priests and theologians. It is through the friendship with Guitton that Althusser met the Pope and De Gaulle:

> [T]hrough my friend Jean Guitton, I had contacts in Rome. I met John XXIII in some gardens as he did not like the Vatican except for his palace. It was springtime, and this pure-hearted man was enchanted by the flowers and the children. He had the appearance of a Burgundian who enjoyed red wine, but beneath that exterior he was a totally artless and profoundly generous man with a slightly Utopian vision, as you will discover. He took an interest in me as a member of the French Communist Party and explained at length that it was his desire to effect a reconciliation between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. He needed intermediaries to obtain the basis for an agreement on unity from Brezhnev. He was quite open about it. I pointed out to him the ideological and political difficulties of such a venture, the position of Mindszenty, for whom he expressed total disdain (he is fine where he is, let him stay there), and quite simply the state of international tension which existed and the prevailing anticommunism within the Church. He said he would take care of the Church if the communists were prepared to make a gesture. I suggested it would be very difficult to get them to make such a gesture, that even the Italian Party would not do so and that the French Party was even less well placed. He was almost sharp with me at this point, saying that since the French Church was Gallican it should be of some help and that there was a longstanding alliance between France and Russia, etc. I left with a feeling of distress at my own impotence, having failed to convince him that I was not in fact the only person concerned. I saw him on two other occasions, and he remained as resolute and as bothered by this issue which meant so much to him.[12]

Even though he was a Marxist, Pasolini maintained "good relations with the Vatican," thus meeting three Popes. He also had a relationship

[12] Ibid, pp. 346–347.

with Pope John XXIII, who back then attempted to establish a dialogue between the Vatican and non-Catholic artists. Indeed, as we see in the very beginning of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, the film is dedicated "to the beloved, happy, familiar memory of John XIII." However, Pope John XIII died before the film was completed. We can assume that it was the Pope who in a way has been the "inspiration" for Pasolini to make this film, although it is surprising given the fact that many religious clerics condemned the film as blasphemous, heretic, and so on.

In 1964, Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* was a winner of the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival. It was also nominated for three Oscars. This film also won the Grand Prize at the International Catholic Film Office. In July 2014, *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican's own daily newspaper, announced that Pasolini's film is "the best work about the Jesus in the history of cinema." According to *The Buenos Aires Herald*, "Giovanni Maria Vian, editor of *L'Osservatore Romano*, declared that 'The Vatican's praise (of Pasolini's movie) goes to further prove Pope Francis' mercy.'"[13]

In fact, this comes as a surprise, given the fact that despite his proximity with Pope John XIII, Pasolini was an anticlerical Catholic, a person who was not convinced of his belief, but nevertheless developed a certain nostalgia for belief. At one occasion, he was quoted as saying: "I am anticlerical (I'm not afraid to say it!)…but it would be insane on my part to deny the powerful influence religion has exerted on me."[14] This influence is clearly discernable in Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* as well as in his screenplay for a film on St Paul. The question we need to ask with regard to Althusser's and Pasolini's religious influence is, therefore: what was the nature of that influence? Obviously neither Althusser nor Pasolini were waiting for salvation, nor was their intellectual work centered on it.

[13] "Vatican 'canonizes' Pasolini's *St. Matthew*," available online at http://buenosairesherald.com/article/165359/vatican-%E2%80%98canonizes%E2%80%99-pasolini%E2%80%99s-s. Indeed, Pope Francis has done some acts and given some statements which are not typical of the Catholic Church: has launched in the Vatican a meeting of the world's Popular Movements, which include migrants, trade unionists, precarious workers, and so on; has attacked anti-immigrant policies of the European Union (EU) as barbaric; has enacted a zero-tolerance policy against pedophilia in the Catholic Church; and so on. He even went so far as to declare that he believes in God, and not in a Catholic God, and that he recognized the theory of evolution and argued that God is not a wizard. However, it is still to be seen if Pasolini's conception of God and Althusser's radical vision of the Church will be met with Pope Francis' policies.

[14] Ibid.

They were certainly not expecting salvation in theological terms: being saved or protected from sin and its consequences. For Pasolini, salvation is the name for the political struggle of the poor and the oppressed against the reign of capital, corruption, and so forth. In Alain Badiou's terms, we can argue that political salvation is the name of the truth that once established its meaning in the world, protects itself from the corruption of externality (capital, democracy, corruption, etc.). It is in this sense that we should understand Pasolini's film: the Kingdom of God has an earthly meaning and the word of God comes to us only through the struggle of the poor, the exploited, the oppressed against the reign of capitalism and its consequences.

In short, this is how we should understand Pasolini's film, and Althusser's philosophical concepts (theses) enable us to read the film in this way.

The first part of the book, *On Althusser*, provides a detailed analysis of the philosopher's most important and influential concepts, as well as those theses that caused and continue to spark great debates among today's philosophers. The first chapter of the book begins with the contextualization of Althusser's thought and philosophical project within what Badiou has called "the moment of French philosophy."[15] The next chapters continue with the periodization of Althusser's work, from its beginning (in 1945) until the end (1980s), and his relation with Hegel and Spinoza and its consequences. Then, the Part analyzes Althusser's Christian writings, which function as the condition for his political commitments, communism, as well as his philosophy. Past this, the remaining chapters of this Part discuss Althusser's concepts of the class struggle, ideology and its critique, ideological state apparatuses, the concept of interpellation, epistemological break, and structural causality.

Arming ourselves with these concepts, the second part of the book attempts to construct *The Gospel According to Althusser*. That is to say, the second part of the book is an analysis of Pier Paolo Pasolini's films and poems through the concepts developed in the first part of the book. The concepts employed in the reading of Pasolini's work are ideology and its critique, interpellation of subjects, class struggle, and the role and the function of philosophy. The conclusion of the book focuses on the role of philosophy today and its relation to film, art, religion, and politics.

[15] Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, available online at http://www.lacan.com/badenglish.htm

This book perhaps can encapsulate Althusser's oeuvre in its totality: it deals with the immanent tensions of his work (Marxism and philosophy), the conditions of his philosophy (politics, Christianity, etc.), as well as renders palpable the limits of his philosophical project. *Althusser and Pasolini* does not aim to be either an introductory book or a book on specialists of the fields. Its aim is rather modest, as it brings together for the first time two crucial Marxists of the previous century, whose work were, in a sense, based and dependent on Catholicism. It is not so much an attempt to rethink or reconstruct Marxism and communism based on these two names (Althusserian communism or Pasolinian communism), but an endeavor to analyze and account for the limits of Marxism as thought and practiced in the previous century.

PART I

On Althusser

Every truly contemporary philosophy must set out from the singular theses according to which Althusser identifies philosophy.

Alain Badiou, Metapolitics *(London: Verso, 2005) p. 65*

CHAPTER 2

Contextualization

The problem of the *beginning*, both as a concept and as an act, is always perplexing and anxious. The difficulty with it is that it confronts one with the most difficult question: where does one begin? Every beginning requires an assumption, and yet the idea of a beginning is that it does not include an assumption, that it is prior to any assumption. One has to ask, where does and how does one begin from? This question gets a further complicated twist when it is directed to Louis Althusser—a philosopher who always struggled with the problem of the *beginning* as such. He constantly confronts this problem, and in a certain instance, the beginning presents a serious obstacle in his work. He always spends a great deal of effort in working on either explaining what he means by the beginning or justifying the new beginnings in his work. This chapter takes as its point of departure the question of new beginnings in the work of Louis Althusser and his specific understanding of them.

Both the key philosophical reference and the subject matter that are present in this study—that is, Althusser's thought and its relation to Pasolini's work—have been declared irrelevant, outdated, and not applicable to our contemporary situation. Or, more precisely, Althusser and the radical emancipatory force represented by Christianity in Pasolini's work have been declared outdated for our liberal–democratic (or postideological) era. Therefore, the true beginning in the return to Althusser is through negating that orientation which treats Althusser either as a dead dog or as a monstrous (or tyrannical) intellectual, this is to say, a Stalinist. On the contrary, this chapter affirms a fidelity to the Althusserian project and its

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philosophical framework.[1] The kind of fidelity that this chapter affirms to Althusser can be succinctly and provisionally defined as fidelity that is not interpellation. Or more concretely, it assumes a fidelity which is not reduced to mere discipleship. In doing so, it intends to open up an Althusserian problematic, which is to say, a set of questions and problems that preoccupied the philosopher throughout his philosophical project and which remain relevant and timely for our predicament.

Undoubtedly, the main contribution of Althusser in Marxist philosophy is his theory of the critique of ideology. This is also evident in the domain of film theory. His philosophical enterprise of "returning to Marx" marks one of the most important, ambitious, and influential philosophical projects in the field of Marxism during the second half of the twentieth century. He tried to "rethink the philosophical and political potential of Marx's thought."[2] To formulate this in Hegelian terms, Althusser's oeuvre in the 1960s captured the spirit of the age. In the aftermath of the Second World War, two philosophical or theoretical orientations that emerged on the French philosophical scene had a return to the theoretical projects launched in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century as their foundational basis, that is, those of Marx and Freud. Althusser's project to "return to Marx" and Lacan's "return to Freud" are perhaps among the most important philosophical and theoretical enterprises of the twentieth century.[3] Using a vocabulary borrowed from Alain Badiou, I can propose the following thesis: if the work of Marx and Freud are an event in theory (the logics of capitalism and the discovery of the unconscious, respectively), then Althusser and Lacan stand for the greatest fidelity to these events. The philosophical event inaugurated by Althusser should be conceived in the following way: every endeavor to rethink Marx's work, as well as reinventing the idea of communism, has to go through the positions established by Althusser. In this sense, Althusser cannot be ignored; one has to engage Althusserian experience. However, the fidelity that Althusser exhibits vis-à-vis Marx does not involve repeating theses, giving exegetical summaries, or dogmatically sticking to the master's positions. Therefore, the return to Althusser should be undertaken precisely in this

[1] Althusser's scholars try to avoid this term because of its negative historical connections with Hirst, Hindess, and so on.

[2] Katja Diefenbach et al. 2013, xiii.

[3] This holds true especially for the 1960s in France. It can be seen especially in the texts published in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*. See Hallward and Peden 2012.

sense: a materialist reading of Althusser that consists of treating Althusser in the way he treated Marx. Such a return to Althusser should not be understood as repeating the same philosophical mantra reduced to a given historical context, but rather as the reinvention of the philosophical and political potential of his thought. This means that one cannot simply take up Althusser within his own conception of his problematic. Here, we are in line with Althusser's lesson in dismissing historicism as a philosophical deviation: the act of historicism reduces a theoretical discourse to its historical context.

Another way of approaching the return to Althusser is through the Hegelian concept of concrete universality; that is to say, by going back to Althusser's oeuvre, we do not commit a historicist reduction of "what is living and what is dead in the philosophy of Althusser."[4] The Hegelian approach would be the opposite of this: instead of asking which thesis is still relevant for our contemporary developments, or the degree to which Althusser's project and thesis correspond to our world, we should approach the theory of the critique of ideology through Althusserian lenses. In sum, the return to Althusser's thought should be done not in a form of mechanical repetition, but as a reinvention, a return to an unfinished project, attempting to reconstruct it by using its own means. We can call it, in Hegelian terms, repetition with sublation (*Aufhebung*). More than his answers, what is of interest for any philosophical endeavor with respect to Althusser's philosophy are the questions he posed and the problematic he has opened up.

Althusser's philosophical project can be encapsulated in the immanent and tense relation between Marxism and philosophy. Indeed, Marx himself had an ambiguous relation with philosophy: in the beginning of his writings, he positions philosophy at "the service of history" or as a "spiritual weapon of the proletariat," while in his middle period in texts such as the *German Ideology* and *Thesis on Feuerbach*, Marx dismisses philosophy. This is the time of what Althusser famously names the "epistemological break" in Marx's oeuvre. Though he locates the break at the point that Marx claims to turn away from philosophy, Althusser endeavors to provide a philosophical reading of Marx's work. This is where we find Althusser's main contribution to the larger field of Marxian studies in the twentieth century. As Étienne Balibar points out, Althusser was the philosopher who forced not only non-Marxists or anti-Marxist philosophers and

[4] Callinicos 1993, pp. 39–50.

intellectuals, but even Marxist intellectuals themselves, to take Marx and Marxism seriously in their own debates. Althusser's revitalization of Marx and not Marxism was the source of this potential. By making Marxism not simply a monument of the past or merely an interesting corpus of ideas, Althusser created a Marxism that was armed with a serious defiance to the larger discourse of philosophical, economic, and political practices.[5] It is only in this sense that one can try to become an Althusserian in philosophy. One of his most important essays—entitled "Is It Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?"—should be transformed (as another essay "The Transformation of Philosophy" indicates) into "Is It Still Possible to Be an Althusserian in Philosophy?" Étienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, two of his students and collaborators in *Reading Capital*, argue that "Althusser was not an Althusserian, he was a Marxist."[6] Along the same lines, Balibar argues, "there was nothing like an Althusserian 'school,' with a more or less unified doctrine, a research program, or an institutional frame." It is in this regard that the (initial) limits of Althusserianism become visible.

This accounts for Althusser's life project: putting forward theses and positions, and later on negating—negation plays a very important role in Althusser's philosophy—and correcting them. Every new thesis that Althusser advances functions as a correction of an older one. Even though his late writings have been published, his research remains radically unfinished. Unlike Lacan, Althusser did not think of establishing his school or unifying his philosophy in a formal system. This is why François Matheron can claim, "the field of Althusserian studies has still not been constituted."[7] Against developing a philosophical system, Althusser chose another path: that of philosophically intervening in particular political, ideological, and philosophical conjunctures. Following this, a paradoxical similarity between Althusser and Slavoj Žižek appears: the only way for these philosophers to endure their time, that is to say, for their philosophies to resist disappearance in their effects, is to formalize them into a philosophical system. But this is a formalization that Althusser (and even Žižek) resists.

As some commentators have noted, Althusser is the philosopher of conjunctures and no matter how one approaches or reads him, there will never be such a thing as a consistent philosophical system called Althusserianism. To use Alain Badiou's vocabulary, one would ask the following question: "What

[5] Balibar 1993, p. 1.
[6] Kavanagh and Lewis 1982, p. 46.
[7] Matheron 2008, p. 503.

problem is Althusser the name of?" It is nevertheless crucial to emphasize that the "return to Marx" that Althusser undertook occurred in a very specific historical and political context. He "launched" his project in a very specific conjuncture, that of the crisis in the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) and the Sino–Soviet split, which ironically would result in what he would later call "the crisis of Marxism." As he put it, "I would never have written anything were it not for the Twentieth Congress and Khrushchev's critique of Stalinism and the subsequent liberalization."[8] Thus, it is clear that Althusser sought to reconstruct Marxism by writing a philosophy for Marx, or more concretely: Althusser tried to articulate a philosophical thesis which would come as close as possible to what Marx wrote in *Capital* (in German, *Das Kapital*).

Althusser's conception of philosophy was that of the theoretical intervention within a certain ideological and political conjuncture. As he put it himself in one of his seminars at École normale supérieure:

> [T]he person who is addressing you is, like all the rest of us, merely a particular structural effect of this conjuncture, and effect that, like each and every one of us as a proper name. The theoretical conjuncture that dominates us has produced an Althusser-effect.[9]

In this sense, it is a certain political and ideological structure that produced one of the most important philosophical projects in Marxism in the previous century, which at the same time enabled its "effect" to intervene in itself.

In the beginning of *Reading Capital*, Althusser announces, "there is no such thing as an innocent reading." Differently put, yet in the same text, Althusser writes that he and his collaborators have tried "to apply to Marx's reading a *symptomatic reading*". The little word "symptomatic" here has a precise psychoanalytical meaning: that of the return of the repressed, which takes a very interesting form if one goes on a bit further in this speculative mode. What Althusser tends to consciously repress throughout his work[10] is the "specter of Hegel."

As is well known, Althusser had a critical engagement with Hegel, whom he saw as the archenemy in his journey of freeing Marx and materialism

[8] Althusser 1975.

[9] Althusser 2003, p. 17.

[10] However, it should be noted that Althusser's approach toward Hegel in the last phase of his writings takes a more positive dimension.

from idealist toxic remainders.[11] His attempt to free Marx's thought consisted of writing a Marxist philosophy freed from what he conceived as Hegelian teleological tendencies—in short, he attempted to write a philosophy for Marx which would be based in a non-Hegelian dialectics, that is to say, without any guarantees. Nevertheless, this very "specter" roams throughout Althusser's work, persisting, returning (sometimes even violently). To propose a rather schematic thesis which I shall defend in the following chapters, I will argue that Althusser *is* Hegelian precisely on those (dark) moments of dismissing Hegel's philosophy (or historicism).[12] To follow his lesson, for a philosopher, "it is not the intentions that counts. What count are the real effects of their philosophies."[13]

It is almost a rule that (with a few exceptions) being an Althusserian in philosophy equals an admiration for Spinoza. As Slavoj Žižek put it, in contemporary academia, it is impossible not to love Spinoza.[14] In short, the followers and defenders of Althusser have established a pact between Althusser and Spinoza, which in part is linked to Althusser's effort to perform a reading of Marx without Hegel. Although Spinoza remains one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy, a certain dose of antagonistic dehiscence has to be introduced in this debate among Spinozist Althusserians through the figure of Hegel. But why such a rather scholastic argument is important in an introductory part like this one? It is not as simple as debating proper names rather than the theses that come with these names. It is through these "names" that perhaps the entire French postwar philosophy can be comprehended. A philosophical field that is determined by these two names.

Putting this reading of Althusser's secret allegiance to Hegel aside for the moment, the crucial question persists: why Althusser? What makes Althusser an important figure in philosophy? Before the discovery and then the publication of his "aleatory materialist" essays, Althusser was indeed

[11] Knox Peden was partly right to write that the "scandal of Althusserianism was precisely to produce a Marxism decoupled from Hegelian metaphysics and its humanist avatars" (Peden 2012, p. 12). Indeed, the main weakness of Althusser's thought is his rebuttal of Marx's Hegelianism, or his Marx devoid of Hegelian inclinations. At the same time, Althusser's fight against humanism, as a part of "theoretical deviations within Marxism," is worth rethinking.

[12] For an interesting critique of Althusser's anti-Hegelianism, see Žižek, 1993.

[13] Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 94.

[14] Slavoj Žižek, "Philosophy: Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and… Badiou!" available online at http://www.lacan.com/zizphilosophy1.htm

treated like the "dead dog" in philosophy and critical theory. Indeed, a certain era was over, that of structuralism, and together with that, the era of Althusser's Marxism, or what we refer to as Althusserianism, came to an end. Recent renewal of interest in Althusser's philosophy is mostly focused in the "aleatory materialist" period, which Antonio Negri refers to as the period positioned between modernism and postmodernism. According to Negri, Althusser is the "vanishing mediator" between the two historical tendencies in philosophy. Althusser's dismissal of dialectical materialism as a "philosophical monstrosity" seems to have paved the path for renewal of Althusserianism in contemporary academia. With regard to this important dismissal, G.M. Goshgarian argues that "aleatory" tendencies are present in Althusser prior to the "last break" in his work.[15] Goshgarian argues that Althusser has presented the materialism of the encounter in a lecture of March 1976, under the title "The Transformation of Philosophy."[16] Based on this, Goshgarian writes that following Engels, Althusser calls "aleatory materialism" the "non-philosophy."[17] Thus, Goshgarian continues, Althusser "introduces aleatory materialism as the non-philosophy of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Drawing on Pierre Macherey,[18] Warren Montag argues that Spinoza is Hegel's *avant la lettre* critic, and he positions Althusser as a successor of Spinoza. He writes that "if Hegel is so profoundly incapable of comprehending Spinoza, it is certainly because Spinoza's philosophy is already realized in Hegel as the true other which he has already become."[19] His assertion that Althusser was a Spinozist can be found in Montag's preface to Étienne Balibar's *Spinoza and Politics*, where he argues that together with Althusser, Balibar and Macherey students were Spinozists; that is to say, they were encouraged by Althusser to read Spinoza and "seeing him as a privileged point in their project of reading Marx."[20]

Étienne Balibar argues that even though the "epistemological break" is one of the most important concepts employed by Althusser in his reading of Marx's thought, it is present in Althusser himself more than anywhere

[15] Goshgarian 2005, p. xvi.
[16] Althusser 1997, pp. 241–267.
[17] Goshgarian, *Introduction*, xvi.
[18] Macherey 2011.
[19] Montag (manuscript). Montag is right to point out that there is no systematic or sustained work on Spinoza by Althusser and his collaborators.
[20] Montag 1998, p. xi.

else.[21] Following this, I would argue that Althusser's late writings are an attempt to "settle accounts with his former philosophical conscience," that is to say, with his early writings (from *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*) and the self-criticism period (epitomized in his *Essays in Self-Criticism*).

In this respect, there is no consequent Althusserian "system" that we can speak of. In an interview with Fernanda Navarro, Althusser writes, "this [aleatory] materialism is not a philosophy which must be elaborated in form of a system in order to deserve the name 'philosophy'."[22] According to Althusser, "what is truly decisive about Marxism is that it represents a *position* in philosophy,"[23] or in a philosophical *Kampfplatz* (German word for the battlefield)—an expression that he very much likes to borrow from Kant. In the Introduction of *For Marx*, developing the concept of the "epistemological break," Althusser presented the periodization of Marx's work: "(this) 'epistemological break' divides Marx's thought into two long essential periods: the 'ideological' period before, and the scientific period after, the break in 1856."[24] In a rather rough periodization, Althusser's thought can be divided into four main periods: (1) his Christian–Marxist period, (2) the early period of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, (3) the period of auto-criticism (*Essays in Self-Criticism*), and (4) the aleatory phase, that is to say, *The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter* and *Marx in His Limits*. Each of these periods is characterized by (at least) one position. The Christian–Marxist period of Althusser is an attempt of *suture* of Christianity with Marxism, in the terms of rendering possible the emancipatory potential of both traditions, at the service of universal emancipation of the proletariat. However, this attempt fails with Althusser's apostasy in late 1940s. The early period of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* is represented by Althusser's engagement with epistemology, or more accurately, with an epistemological reading of Marx's oeuvre. As a result of this, Althusser defines philosophy as a theory of theoretical practice. In the consequent period, which is known as the "period of self-criticism," Althusser abandons the epistemological definition of philosophy and moves toward the foundations of ontological understanding of Marx. In his last period, that of "aleatory materialism," Althusser abandons dialectical materialism and seeks to provide an ontological and materialist framework for really understanding Marx's *Capital*.

[21] Balibar 1993, p. 53.
[22] Althusser 2006, p. 256.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Althusser 2005, p. 34.

The crucial aspect of this periodization is that the Bachelardian concept of "epistemological break," further developed and reworked by Althusser himself,[25] is omnipresent and very active not only in these breaks, but also within these periods. It thus would not be an overexaggeration to argue that in the final analysis, Althusser needed the concept of an "epistemological break" much more for his own thought than for his attempt to rework Marx's oeuvre. Althusser's insistence to go back to his previous thesis, correct them, rework them, and further develop them with different twists and content, sometimes abandoning them (as was the case with "dialectical materialism"), renders palpable the cracks, breaks, and inconsistencies in his project. Nevertheless, Althusser's four stages must be read in their "totality"—a word that he himself was not fond of because of its Hegelian inclinations. The word "totality" should be understood in a Hegelian manner: totality as a whole, including its symptoms; that is to say, totality includes its excess as its constitutive part.[26] Therefore, if Althusser writes that there is no such thing as an innocent reading, I plead guilty of attempting to read his oeuvre through Hegelian lenses. In this respect, one should attempt to read Althusser's project as an *inconsistent philosophical project*. Taking all this into account, the only way to "return" to Althusser is (unlike Balibar's position on this matter) to treat him as our contemporary and insist on the idea that his oeuvre is worth reading only insofar as it is read in its totality (albeit, *inconsistent*).[27] And it is on this point where Hegel appears as a "silent partner" of Althusser: Althusser's Marxism, read from Hegelian lenses, presents the most sublime *reconciliation* of German idealism with Marxism (the latter being a "natural," and hence, logical outcome of the former). Althusser's dismissal of dialectical materialism calls not for another supplement, but for a *new* reconstruction of dialectical materialism. In this regard, Althusser's oeuvre should be read only within the framework of Hegelian philosophy.

Some would write that Althusser was a structuralist in denial who sought to construct a monstrous philosophy for Marx which ended up in a postmodern Marxism. In other words, this means that Althusser was

[25] As Balibar argues, "it seems to me that in reality it is instead an original concept which Althusser introduced between 1960 and 1965, a concept which, it is true, owes 'something' to Bachelard and which does indeed rest on certain common philosophical presuppositions but which in fact has a quite other object and opens a quite other field of investigations" (Balibar 1978, p. 208).

[26] I am following Slavoj Žižek's reading of Hegel.

[27] For more on this, see the chap. 2 of Pfeifer 2015.

never really at home; he was always out of joint with the *position* he was supposedly defending. His most engaged student and successor at the École normale supérieure, Alain Badiou, in his co-authored book (with François Balmès) *De L'idéologie*, engages in a ruthless critique of his former master. According to Badiou, Althusser is "arrogant, idealist, irresponsible, hypocrite and metaphysical."[28] He argues further that it was the "Althusserian doctrine of ideology, doctrine which reduced ideology into the mechanism of illusions, without taking into account the content of the class struggle, contradictory expression of which is every ideological formation."[29] Only 2 years before the publication of *De L'idéologie*, another former student of Althusser, Jacques Rancière wrote a seminal text on Althusser, entitled *Althusser's Lesson*,[30] in which he distanced himself not only from Althusser's work, but also from Marxism as such, arguing that after the events of May 1968, Marxism is no longer the coherent discourse for emancipatory politics, which would be able to verify its own propositions in a given situation. According to Rancière, Marxism as an academic discourse cannot provide a critique of power as such. As he put it, "the Marxism we learned in the Althusserian school was a philosophy of order, whose every principle divided us from the movement of revolt that was shaking the bourgeois order."[31] Although much later, Balibar joined his fellow philosophers and wrote his "Tais-Toi Encore, Althusser!"[32] arguing in the late phase of his work that Althusser was going, consciously as it were, to and through a self-destructive state.

Outside of the French intellectual context, there is a less important but nonetheless significant English critique of Althusser.[33] In 1978, the celebrated Marxist historian E.P. Thompson published his *The Poverty of Theory*, whose result was a burial of Althusserianism in England.[34] "Althusserianism," according to Thompson, "is Stalinism reduced to a paradigm of Theory. It is Stalinism, at last, theorized as ideology."[35] That is to say, Althusser was "engaged in an ideological police-action"[36]

[28] Badiou & Balmès 1976, p. 11.
[29] Ibid., p. 17.
[30] Rancière 2011.
[31] Ibid, p. xix.
[32] Balibar 1991.
[33] In this chapter, I will leave aside the infamous *The Case of Althusser* by John Lewis.
[34] Elliott 2006, p. xvi.
[35] Thompson 1978, p. 374.
[36] Ibid., p. 233.

against advancements of a critique of Stalinism. Elliott rightly argues that Thompson's fierce critique of Althusser "was probably primarily provoked by the distinctive brand of English Althusserianism associated with the sociologists Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst."[37] Their early work was an attempt to celebrate Althusser's thought, especially his insistence on science. It is no wonder their journals were called *Theoretical Practice* (1971–1973) and *Economy and Society* (1972–1974), even though they still import the Althusserian problematic into British academia. And as is often the case, Hindess and Hirst moved from what Elliott calls "hyper-Althusserianism" to anti-Althusserianism. A careful reading of Thompson's book indicates that he has read Althusser through Hindess's and Hirst's reading of Althusser's oeuvre.

Back in 1985, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut argued that Althusserianism "seems very dated and, like the Beatles' music or Godard's first films, inevitably evokes a recent but vanished past."[38] The reactionary turn in French academia and the emergence of *nouveaux philosophes* (André Glucksmann, Bernard-Henri Lévy,[39] and the like) equaled anti-Marxism. Althusser was significantly absent from the philosophical debates of the time until the publication of his later writings. The tragic currents of his life, from mental illness to the murder of his wife Hélène, played a crucial role in the termination of Althusser's career. These events caused some commentators to equate his communism with terror and his murdering of his wife as a "natural" outcome of his ideological beliefs. André Glucksmann called him an "intellectual tyrant," whereas other scholars have baptized him as "the criminal philosopher." In order to "return to Althusser," one should not compromise with the status of the "criminal philosopher" in its Chestertonian implications: one should recognize Althusser as the one of the "philosophical policemen" whose job is to "trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime."[40] To continue with Chesterton again, Althusser belonged to that "corps of philosopher-policemen" whose duty was to introduce a new *philosophical practice* in the French academia, that is to

[37] Elliott 2006, p. xvi. However, it is interesting to note that although Althusser found Thompson's book "interesting," he refused the invitation of the *New Left Review* in 1979.

[38] Ferry & Renaut 1985, p. 200.

[39] The bitter paradox is that Bernard-Henri Lévy wrote the introduction to Louis Althusser's, Louis Althusser 2011.

[40] Although this sentence has been actualized and extensively quoted by Slavoj Žižek, I intend to use it in a different mode.

say, to introduce the philosophy for Marx, in a polemicist mode, against the "intellectual crimes" of "sinful" readings of Marx (historicist reductionism, economic determinism, humanist distortion, etc.). Even more so, Althusser's main philosophical crime was that he renewed Marxism. Or, to formulate this differently, by easing our way into it, we can argue that, however, we don't need to simply reject these *ad hominem* accusations; instead, we can simply revert to Chesterton's idea of a 'philosophical police' from 'the man who was Thursday.' As Balibar noted, "many of those who today claim that Marxism is out-dated can do so only because they pretend to ignore the questions raised by Althusser—questions that, in their own way, took Marxism beyond the traditional roads of 'orthodoxy' and 'revisionism'."[41]

[41] Balibar 1996, p. 109.

CHAPTER 3

Periodization

Louis Althusser's lifetime project, or what I would refer to as his self-given theoretical responsibility, was to give Marx "veritable concepts worthy of him."[1] To flirt with Hegelian terminology, I would argue that the philosophy of Marxism reached its notion with Althusser in the philosophical and ideological conjuncture of his time. As elaborated in the Introduction (Chap. 1), the conjunctures that defined his work were different and therefore his work went through different stages. The conjunctural character of his work brings up the necessity of periodization of his philosophical project. This periodization is not important for simple narcissistic academic purposes, but it is through periodization of Althusser's philosophical project and trajectories that we can render visible and meaningful what is at stake in his project.

The usual periodization of Althusser's work reads as following: (1) the early period of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, which also marks the point when he became the central figure in the French Marxism; (2) the period of *self-criticism*, in which he sets to work out the "theoreticist errors" of the past period; and (3) the period of *aleatory materialism*, in which he attempts to rework his entire philosophical project, mainly and predominantly by the means of rejecting the dialectics. However, there is another period, much less explored until recently, which sheds light on and enables a different reading of Althusser's work: the Catholic–Marxist writings.

[1] Althusser uses this phrase to explain Lacan's relation to Freud's psychoanalysis: Althusser 1999, p. 148.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini,*
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The recent republication of Althusser's early work, known as his early theological–Marxist writings (written in a period of from 1946 to 1951), offers us a completely new possibility of understanding his later phases. Concepts like *interpellation*, *ideological state apparatuses*, *materialism*, and so on cannot be fully intelligible if they are not read also from the standpoint of these writings, precisely because Althusser himself could not overcome either the role of Christianity in emancipatory thinking or that of the institution of the Church in his philosophical project. Their spectral presence always-already determines his work to the extent of being its *silent conditions*.

Each of these periods consists of a certain philosophical orientation. The early Christian period is Hegelian. If Hegel is, as Žižek rightly argues, "*the* philosopher of Christianity,"[2] then we can say that Althusser's abandonment of Christianity is strictly conditioned by moving away from Hegelian philosophy. That is to say, after moving away from Hegel, abandoning Christianity was a necessary move (in a Hegelian sense). Being a Hegelian, in philosophy, implies a level of fidelity to the Christian tradition and legacy.[3] It is important to analyze Althusser's dismissal of Hegelian philosophy, wherein arises an important historical question: did he develop an anti-Hegelian position against Hegel's own writings or against "French Hegelianism," that is, Hegel interpreted in postwar France? This question has important philosophical consequences. In this moment, I will limit myself to this thesis: Althusser's hostility toward Hegel is, in the last instance, hostility toward the French reception of Hegel.[4] In his Master's thesis, Althusser writes:

> For, by way of history, Hegel's thought escapes the prison of a dawning age and the confines of a civil servant's mentality, offering itself to our gaze in the freedom of its realisation and its objective development. In a sense that is not un-Marxist, our world has become philosophy, or, more precisely, Hegel come to maturity now stands before us—is, indeed, our world: the world has become Hegelian to the extent that Hegel was a truth capable of becoming a world.[5]

[2] Žižek 2012, p. 6.

[3] For a Hegelian reading of Christianity, see Žižek 2009, pp. 24–109.

[4] Cf. Althusser 2014, pp. 2005. Thus, my thesis is that Althusser's anti-Hegelianism is hostility toward politically interpreted Hegel.

[5] Ibid., p. 17.

It is in this sense that one can think of both Althusser's passage from Christianity to Marxism (and philosophy) and his abandonment of the Church, because of his fidelity to Christianity. It is worth noting that Althusser never became an apostate Roman Catholic. The rejection, or abandonment, of the Church enabled Althusser to rethink Marxism on universal grounds. It is in this sense that Christianity became a condition for his Marxism. The relation between his fidelity to Christianity and his abandonment of Church should be understood as following: even though it might sound rhetorical, the Church *was* for Althusser the Communist Party.

The second period, that of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, is concerned with epistemology. The difficult and problematic part in each of his breaks is: what took him to shift from one to another period? What was missing in Christianity so that he needed a shift to epistemology? The same applies from his other shifts and breaks. My provisional answer to this is thus the following: since Althusser was *the* philosopher of the conjunctures, every change and shift within the ideological and political conjunctures of his time called for a transformation of his theses.

Althusser's first definition of philosophy was formulated under the epistemological horizon: *philosophy is a theory of theoretical practice*. During his "epistemological period," Althusser continuously struggled in providing a different conception of philosophy as an attempt to de-epistemologize it by providing an ontological framework, which culminates in his "late writings." His posthumous works bear witness to the fact that Althusser became aware that materialism could not be only epistemologically upheld, but rather needs an ontological framework as its grounding. In other words, every materialism is dependent on ontological grounds, which will determine the nature of the former. Althusser's de-epistemoligization of philosophy, which in my view begins with his distanciation from the above-mentioned definition and conception of philosophy, can be read also as the beginning of his attempt to create an ontological framework, which much later on will culminate in his "aleatory materialist" period.[6] In his "self-criticism period," however, Althusser proposes a different formula,

[6] Althusser's translator G.M. Goshgarian argues that "Althusser presents the materialism of the encounter under another name in a March 1976 lecture, 'The Transformation of Philosophy'" (Goshgarian, *Translator's Introduction*, p. xvi). One of the main questions with regard to Althusser's late period is: whether the previous phases of his philosophical project can be read from the lenses of "aleatory materialism"?

"*philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory*,"[7] which will remain his final conception of philosophy.

The final period is that of *aleatory materialism* or materialism of the encounter, in which he attempts to rework his entire philosophical project, mainly and predominantly by the means of rejecting the dialectics. In the recent scholarship, Althusser's aleatory materialism occupies the central space. In fact, the renewal of the interest in Althusser is predominantly due to the discovery of his unpublished manuscripts[8] and the recent interest in the reconstruction of materialism.[9] In fact, with the construction of aleatory materialism, which means the abandonment of dialectical materialism (which in this phase Althusser liked to refer to as a "philosophical monstrosity"), Althusser was in line with the rest of the Marxists: he remained faithful to historical materialism, but he abandoned dialectical materialism.[10] The usual approach to Althusser's later phase is divided into two main camps: (1) a clear break between aleatory materialism and his previous phases of his project and (2) the materialization of an orientation which silently existed throughout his work, especially since the period of self-criticism. Taking one of these positions is an easy solution. Formulating this in provisional and schematic terms, the main importance of his aleatory materialism resides in two points (perhaps correlative to one another): (1) articulation of the ontological framework and (2) his different approach to Hegel.

[7] Althusser 2008, p. 67.

[8] According to Warren Montag, shortly after Althusser's death, an archive was established which consists of his unpublished manuscripts and letters. Altogether, this archive contains nearly 3000 pages, most of which have been published in French, but not in English (Montag 2014, p. 9).

[9] Cf. Pfeifer 2015.

[10] It is interesting to note that his student Alain Badiou pursued the exactly opposite path: he abandoned historical materialism, while he is a dialectical materialist, or as he prefers to name it, materialist dialectic.

CHAPTER 4

Taking Sides: Hegel or Spinoza?

Pierre Macherey's arguably most important book is called *Hegel or Spinoza*. Its recent translation into English[1] sparked yet another debate on the tension between Spinoza and Hegel. Due to the structure of this chapter, I will limit myself to presenting the main argument of this book: according to Macherey, Hegel was not fully capable of understanding Spinoza's system, and at the same time, the latter serves as a critic *avant la lettre* of the former. Similar to this, the recent translation of Frédéric Lordon's *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire* argues that it is through Spinoza that we can comprehend the structures of capitalism. In this regard, Lordon argues that "the temporal paradox is that, although Marx comes after Spinoza, it is Spinoza who can now help us fill the gaps in Marx."[2] Lordon points out a very important aspect of Marx's work, which holds true for Althusser's work as well: Marx's work, and especially the critique of political economy, can be understood only if it is positioned to or read from the philosophical perspective. Balibar rightly argued that "whatever might have been thought in the past, *there is no Marxist philosophy and there will never be*; on the other hand, *Marx is more important for philosophy* than ever before."[3] As explained earlier, Althusser's abandonment of Hegel has to be understood in the terms of refutation of French Hegelianism. How should we understand this? The first thesis concerns the

[1] Macherey 2011.
[2] Lordon 2014, p. x.
[3] Balibar 2007, p. 1.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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philosophical and political conjuncture in the postwar France. According to Althusser, "the fact that, for the last two decades, Hegel has had his place in French bourgeois philosophy is not a matter to be treated lightly."[4] The philosophical conjuncture in France, or the "extraordinary philosophical chauvinism" or as Althusser characterized it, was dominated by phenomenologists, *Lebensphilosophie*, and bourgeois appropriation of Hegel. The return to Hegel, in the postwar period, took a specific form:

> Great Return to Hegel is simply a desperate attempt to combat Marx, cast in the specific form that revisionism takes in imperialism's final crisis: *a revisionism of a fascist type*.[5]

Politically, the postwar reaction was at its highest. Philosophical chauvinism was accompanied by political provincialism, or revisionism. The systematic political critique was alienated in the usual moralistic blackmailing terms. In fact, the political revisionism was centered on the category of *fear*, as developed by the central figures of postwar writings: Camus, Malraux, Marcel, and others. By employing the notion of fear to analyze the political situation in France, they became Fukuyama-ists *avant la lettre*.

Against all these currents, in which the philosophical categories were used as a warrant for the most reactionary elements in the postwar situation, Althusser seeks refuge in the philosophy of Spinoza. In the postwar predicament, in which philosophical currents were dominated by bourgeois appropriation of Hegel and phenomenologists (Marxists or not), Spinozism was indeed perceived as a liberator from that reactionary conjuncture, and being a Spinozist in philosophy was perceived as a liberating experience. We should remember that one of Althusser's main enemies, both philosophically and politically, was Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the author of *Phenomenology of Perception*, as well as Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. The French philosophical debate in the 1950s was centred on the dichotomy between consciousness versus structures, which could in different instances be articulated or defended as or/and critiqued from Husserl's writings. In the initial 'settling of accounts' with phenomenology, to use a term by Warren Montag, Althusser was influenced by two great French epistemologists, Georges Canguilhem and Jean Cavaillès. It should be noted that both Canguilhem and Cavaillès, now regrettably forgotten figures in the contemporary philosophical debates, were major

[4] Althusser 2014, p. 177.
[5] Ibid., p. 189.

influences on Althusser's epistemological formation. As a reaction to the phenomenological tradition, two important currents emerged in France: Althusserian Spinozist-Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Both orientations aimed at rethinking the subject as traditionally understood. Both Althusser and Lacan share the 'theoretical anti-humanism' belief, but they diverge on the nature and constitution of the subject. In an interview with Michael Spinker, Jacques Derrida says "the philosophical and political enemy of Marxists (and first of all Althusser—and this until the end), the obsessive enemy was Merleau-Ponty."[6] Nevertheless, before arriving at this point, Althusser *was* a Hegelian and this can be seen in his Master's thesis and other essays from that period. Taking all this into account, what characterizes Althusser's early period is:

(a) His full identification with Christianity and an attempt to create an alliance between Roman Catholicism and Marxism.
(b) An underlying Hegelian framework, albeit a humanist Hegel, is present in his work, culminating in his Master's thesis and *The Return to Hegel*.
(c) A constant attempt to dissolve his theoretical alliances and build a new philosophical framework for his philosophical project, which culminates with the abandonment of Christianity and Hegel.

The shift in Althusser's position is evident: from identifying with Christianity and referring to himself as a Christian ("we Christians…"), he switches to dismissing religion as a "practical ideology."[7] On another level, he switches from an interesting defense of Hegel against the fascist revisionism to dismissing Hegel as the philosophical rationalization of the existing state of things. In the midst of these conceptual shifts, he is continuously faced with the perplexing question: how to begin with a Critique? In the whole of his oeuvre, we can distinguish between its Christian and scientific perspective. Differently put, Althusser's critique is grounded first on Christian universality; or more precisely, based on his mastery of attempting to ground the critique in its Universalist Catholic fashion, Althusser opens up the space for two decisive moves in his philosophical and political life: (a) paradoxically (or not so much), it was Christianity that enabled him to reject/abandon the Roman Catholic Church, and (b) it enables him to rethink Marxism in universal terms.

[6] Derrida, 1989, p. 185.
[7] See also Ibid., pp. 194–197.

This has to be complicated further. In the section "On Spinoza" in his *Essays of Self-Criticism*, Althusser makes a long remark that is worth quoting:

> Hegel *begins* with Logic, "God before the creation of the world." But as Logic is alienated in Nature, which is alienated in the Spirit, which reaches its end in Logic, there is a circle which turns within itself, without end and without beginning. The first words of the beginning of the *Logic* tell us: Being is Nothingness. The posited beginning is negated: there is no beginning, therefore no origin. Spinoza for his part begins with God, but in order to deny Him as a Being (Subject) in the universality of His *only* infinite power (*Deus* = *Natura*). Thus Spinoza, like Hegel, rejects every thesis of Origin, Transcendence or an Unknowable World, even disguised within the absolute interiority of the Essence. But with this difference (for the Spinozist negation is not the Hegelian negation), that within the void of the Hegelian Being there exists, through the negation of the negation, the contemplation of the dialectic of a *Telos* (Telos = Goal), a dialectic which reaches its Goals in history: those of the Spirit, subjective, objective and absolute, Absolute Presence in transparency. But Spinoza, because he "begins with God," never gets involved with any Goal, which, even when it "makes its way forward" in immanence, is still figure and thesis of transcendence. The detour *via* Spinoza thus allowed us to make out, by contrast, a radical quality lacking in Hegel. In the negation of the negation, in the *Aufhebung* (= transcendence which conserves what it transcends), it allowed us to discover the Goal: the special form and site of the "mystification" of the Hegelian dialectic.[8]

In other words, according to Althusser, Spinoza rejected the notion of the Goal, and by doing so, he rejected every theory of teleology. In Althusser's view, Spinoza was *the* critic of ideology of his time, which in that time has had the form of religion. He refused to see ideology as an error or ignorance, but placed it on the level of the *imaginary* (first level of knowledge). In his radical criticism of:

> the central category of imaginary illusion, *the Subject*, it reached into the very heart of bourgeois philosophy, which since the fourteenth century had been built on the foundation of the legal ideology of the Subject. Spinoza's resolute anti-Cartesianism consciously directs itself to this point, and the famous "critical" tradition made no mistake here. On this point too Spinoza anticipated Hegel, but he went further.[9]

[8] Althusser 1976, p. 135.
[9] Althusser 1976, p.136.

In this regard, according to Althusser, the problem of Hegel is 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.[10]

Here, we encounter the basis upon which Althusser could put forward two of his important theses: (1) History is a process without a subject and (2) the "materialism of the encounter" is centered on the notions of void, limit, lack of the center, contingency, and so on. These two theses render visible the Althusserian paradox: the coexistence of one of the most radical antiontological positions (thesis 1) in an ontological framework. Indeed, this is the real kernel of the problem in Althusser's project. In fact, the future of Althusser depends on the work that is yet to be done on this paradoxical position. The first consequence to draw is, thus, that the two above-mentioned theses *inform* his philosophical project but also make it *inconsistent*. In a sense, "process without a subject" opens up a double space: (a) for rethinking the theory of the subject in Marxist philosophy and (b) for rethinking the relation between Marx and Hegel, in a nonteleological 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. Slavoj Žižek is the first one to elaborate on the Hegelian content of this thesis:

> Louis Althusser was wrong when he opposed the Hegelian SubjectSubstance, as a "teleological" process-with-a-subject, to the materialist-dialectical "process without a subject": The Hegelian dialectical process is in fact the most radical version of a "process without a subject"; in the sense of an agent controlling and directing it—be it God or humanity, or a class as a collective subject.[11]

[10] Ibid.
[11] Žižek 2012, p. 405.

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 the 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 (i.e., Kantian antinomies of Reason). In this regard, 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, 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."[12] 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.[13] The hypothesis that I want to push forward is that if for Althusser, there is no revolutionary subject, but only agents of the revolution (and therefore "history is a process without a subject"), then the proletariat can be read from the perspective of the Hegelian thesis. The proletariat here should not be understood in Lukácsian sense, but it is rather something which renders meaningful Althusser's concept that "history has no subject."[14] This leads to the conclusion that the "agent of the revolution" (proletariat) and "history has no subject" are, indeed, the names for the Hegelian subject. Although in the first read, it might resemble Lukács, we need to bear in mind that the very fact that the proletariat *lacks being* (there is no subject) is what makes it capable of *being the agent of its own coming to be*. The passage from nonbeing to being, through a historical

[12] Hegel 1969, p. 537.
[13] Ibid., p. 373.
[14] Hegel writes that "substance lacks the principle of *personality*," ibid.

process, is indeed very much Hegel's subject. To make the link between the Substance as something split and the Subject, let us go back to Žižek:

> it is not enough to emphasize that the subject is not a positively existing self-identical entity, that it stands for the incompleteness of substance, for its inner antagonism and movement, for the Nothingness which thwarts the substance from within…This notion of the subject still presupposes the substantial One as a starting point, even if this One is always already distorted, split, and so on. And it is this very presupposition that should be abandoned: at the beginning (even if it is a mythical one), there is no substantial One, but Nothingness itself; every One comes second, emerges through the self-relating of this Nothingness.[15]

This enables us to propose the crucial thesis regarding Althusser's Spinoza *versus* Hegel. We have to accept that Althusser is a Spinozist in a sense, but the fact that he has a theory of subjectivity, whereas Spinoza has none, allows us to ask, like Hegel before—"but, what are the conditions of possibility for ideological interpellation?" (i.e., yes, "being is infinite substance, but how then does the appearance of finite subjectivity come forth?")—and the ontology that answers this is *not* the Spinozist one. This is the turning point, and the deadlock in Althusser: he supposed Spinozism as a way to criticize the weak theory of negativity of the French Hegelians, a theory which gave rise to an unthought ideological concept of subject, but the ontology he needed, when he fully developed his critique, was not the one which allowed him to start his critique. If we complicate this further, we need to state that "process without a subject" is an epistemological position; that is to say, it is not a matter of saying that there are no agents, but that there is no ontological transcendental structure of agency. It is a process without a tie to the ideological substructure of the situation (without presupposing that the agents are "subjected" to the historically determined idea of subject of the situation they are breaking away from). In this regard, Spinoza becomes his reference, because he is the ontological backbone of this—he has an ontology of substance to go with an epistemology of ideological subject. So, in order to show that Althusser breaks with Spinoza's substance, we need to show that the "process without a subject" (which is indeed very close to Hegel's theory of becoming true through processes) in fact has *no* ontological presuppositions. That is to

[15] Žižek 2012, p. 378.

say, the ontological commitments of Althusser's epistemological positions *are different* from, or *critical* of, the ontology he thought he was agreeing with, because what Hegel calls a subject is clearly more present (in Althusser's formulation) in the word "process" than in the word "subject." In his *Science of Logic*, in the chapter on the Absolute, when writing on the defects of Spinoza's philosophy, Hegel argues that "*the* substance of this system is one substance, one indivisible totality."[16] When Althusser proposes "process without a subject," as an anti-Hegelian/teleological thesis/conception of history, is he not effectively fighting Spinoza's conception of the substance? Therefore, in his attempt to provide an anti-Hegelian thesis, effectively he provided one of the best anti-Spinozist critiques of Substance. Therefore, "process without a subject" gains its complete meaning *only* if it is posited, and read, from the Hegelian Substance-Subject: "the living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same, is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself."[17]

To proceed further, like with all theorists of the subject as ideological, Althusser, too, was also perplexed with the following: yes, the subject is ideologically formed, *but why does it "stick"*? What needs to be presupposed within "substance" in order to explain how ideology can "capture" something? It is the subject as the ontological condition; that is to say, with Robert Pfaller's thesis,[18] this requires us to presuppose a failure in substance, which is why the failure of interpellation can be a success.

Correlative to this is Althusser's reconstruction of materialism. Althusser's aleatory materialism is devoid of First Cause, Sense, and Logos—in short, a materialism with no teleology. According to him, "to talk about "materialism" is to broach one of the most sensitive subjects in philosophy."[19] Following this, he argues that "materialism is not a philosophy which must be elaborated in the form of a system in order to deserve

[16] Hegel 1969, p. 536.

[17] Hegel 1977, p. 10.

[18] Pfaller 1998, pp. 240–241. Here lies the difference with Žižek's understanding of interpellation, according to his reformulation, or rather his reversal, of Althusser's understanding of ideological interpellation. According to Žižek, ideology does not interpellate individuals into subjects, but rather interpellates subjects into their symbolic identities. In Žižek's understanding, the subject is no longer an ideological construction, and this becomes a hole in the symbolic structure that ideology tries to intricate.

[19] Althusser 2006, p. 272.

the name 'philosophy,'" but what is decisive in Marxism is that this materialism should "present a *position* in philosophy."[20] According to him,

> in the philosophical tradition, the evocation of materialism is the index of an exigency, a sign that idealism has to be rejected—yet without breaking free, without being able to break free, of the speculary pair idealism/materialism; hence it is an index, but, at the same time, a trap, because one does not break free of idealism by simply negating it, stating the opposite of idealism, or "standing it on its head." We must therefore treat the term "materialism" with suspicion: the word does not give us the thing, and, on closer inspection, most materialisms turn out to be inverted idealisms.[21]

In this regard, we can elaborate further on philosophy as an activity of drawing lines of demarcations between different positions. Let us divide these positions as following: scientific, political, and philosophical. I want to add, also: religious lines of demarcations.

It is with regard to the conditions that philosophy realizes its function as an activity of drawing lines of demarcations. It intervenes when, and where, the figure of consciousness has grown old, which is structured in a double level: temporal versus structural. In this level, we have the conception of philosophy that intervenes theoretically in the existing conjunctures, as well as the other conception, of a philosopher as a nighttime warden. Another level is that of philosophical intervention within philosophical terrain as such, which is to say, between different philosophical orientations. The conclusion we can draw here is that philosophy's conditions divide philosophy; that is to say, the novelties of a certain time change philosophy, which in turn intervenes in the fields which condition it. The question that has to be asked now, after all these detours and reading of Althusser's theses, is the following: why is it that Althusser ended up betraying his own Spinozism? The most appropriate answer to this is that he could not operate within a Spinozist horizon because he was a Christian. We shall come back to this in the next chapter. But, chapter 6 briefly and schematically explore the concept of causality as elaborated by Althusser.

[20] Ibid., p. 256.
[21] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

Structural Causality

According to many of Althusser's students, structural causality was central during their period of *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. Structural causality is Althusser's most important endeavor to overcome Hegelian dialectics. But, the question is: whether he really succeeded in doing so? Through the concept of structural causality, Althusser opposed the conventional conceptions of causality (linear and expressive). Some of Althusser's commentators (such as Ted Breton) argued that when he theorizes structural causality, he fails to really grasp the specific causal relations in the totality of the society, and therefore, it fails to be an important and useful political concept.

What is structural causality? Althusser employs this concept in order to mark (or designate) Marx's specific understanding of social totality, dialectics, and contradictions. The starting point is the famous sentence from the afterword of the second edition of Marx's *Capital*, where he argues that "the mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."[1] Departing from this, Althusser's claim is that Hegelian dialectics cannot be separated from his philosophical system, which is idealist. The radical difference between Marx's and Hegel's dialectics, according to him, "must be manifest in its essence,

[1] Marx 1975, p.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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that is, in its *characteristic determinations and structures*."[2] To summarize this, one needs to say that "*basic structures of the Hegelian* dialectic such as negation, the negation of the negation, the identity of opposites, 'supersession', the transformation of quantity into quality, contradiction, etc., *have for Marx* (*in so far as he takes them over*, *and he takes over by no means all of them*) *a structure different from the structure they have for Hegel*."[3]

Departing from the distinction between Hegel's and Marx's dialectics, Althusser elaborates further on the relations between the structure and its elements. For Althusser, linear causality is associated with Descartes, whereas the expressive one is adopted and employed by Hegel. Therefore, he introduces structural causality as a concept that analyzes the effect of the whole on the parts. Althusser argues that through this concept, we can understand that this concept is in fact "premised on the absolute condition that the whole is not conceived as a structure." In this regard, the concept of structural causality overcomes the limits of the other two concepts. Analyzed from the perspective of *structural causality*, elements of the social whole are not extrinsic to the structural whole, nor does it exist as a manifestation of the immanent basis of the structure. The relation between the elements and the structure is complementary in the sense that the latter determines the elements of the whole. Let us proceed with a quote by Althusser, which indeed renders more meaningful the relationship between the totality and its elements:

> In every case, the ordinary distinctions between outside and inside disappear, along with the "intimate" links within the phenomena as opposed to their visible disorder: we find a different image, a new quasi-concept, definitely freed from the empiricist antinomies of phenomenal subjectivity and essential interiority; we find an objective system governed in its most concrete determinations by laws of its *erection* (montage) and *machinery*, by the specifications of its concept. Now we can recall that highly symptomatic term "*Darstellung*," compare it with this "machinery" and take it literally, as the very existence of this machinery in its effects: the mode of existence of the stage direction (*mise en scène*) on the theatre which is simultaneously its own stage, its own script, its own actors, the theatre whose spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be, since it is in essence an *authorless theatre*.[4]

[2] Althusser 2005, p. 93. See also ibid., pp. 161–218.
[3] Ibid., pp. 93–94.
[4] Althusser and Balibar 2009, p. 213.

In other words, Althusser maintains that the whole and the parts that constitute the whole are integral; that is to say, they are indivisible. This concept caused many opposing positions from different philosophical camps. In an interview with Peter Hallward, Jacques Rancière argues that structural causality

> allowed for a kind of double attitude. First one could say, here we are presenting theory, as far as can be from any thought of engagement, of lived experience; this theory refutes false ideas, idealist ideas about the relation between theory and practice. But one could also hope that theoretical practice itself might open up other fields for new ways of thinking about political practice…In fact it didn't open any such fields.[5]

Indeed, Rancière does not have to provide "reasons" since he is stating a historical fact: "it didn't open any such fields"—but nonetheless, one can and should criticize the fact that it *could* have opened up the field, but something was missing. However, today we are in a better position to explore it and draw all the consequences from it.

According to Ed Pluth, "the concept of structural causality itself will never have much to say about the specifics of any model, time, space, or structure to which it is applied—such as, most notably, the capitalist mode of production, its origins, its conditions, its future."[6] Yet he insists that philosophically, it continues to be a more important concept than it might appear, or than the way it has been presented. In his elaboration of Marx's "theoretical revolution," Althusser asks about how it is possible to define the concept of structural causality:

> Very schematically, we can say that classical philosophy (the existing Theoretical) had two and only two systems of concepts with which to think effectivity. The mechanistic system, Cartesian in origin, which reduced causality to a *transitive* and analytical effectivity: it could not be made to think the effectivity of a whole on its elements, except at the cost of extra-ordinary distortions (such as those in Descartes' "psychology" and biology). But a second system was available, one conceived precisely in order to deal with the effectivity of a whole on its elements: the Leibnizian concept of *expression*. This is the model that dominates all Hegel's thought.

[5] Hallward and Peden 2012, p. 269.
[6] Pluth 2014, p. 340.

Against these two modes of causality, the structural one is supposed to allow us to think the structure as a whole; or more precisely, it is supposed to permit us to think the whole as a structure, the relation between the cause(s) and its effect(s). In other words, as Pluth notes, Althusser developed this concept in order to be able to explain capitalism as a distinct mode of production in different situations. In this regard, "a structural cause may be seen to dominate and determine its situation, although it never functions as a TOTAL cause for all the effects/events in a situation. In this way it differs from an expressive cause, which, on the (bad) Hegelian model, is one that does permeate the whole; and it differs from a mechanical cause, the conditions for which are universally applicable to the situation in which it occurs."[7] How are we to understand this? Another quote from Althusser can illuminate the path:

> If the whole is posed as *structured*, i.e., as possessing a type of unity quite different from the type of unity of the spiritual[8] whole, this is no longer the case: not only does it become impossible to think the determination of the elements by the structure in the categories of analytical and transitive causality, *it also becomes impossible to think it in the category of the global expressive causality of a universal inner essence immanent in its phenomenon*. The proposal to think the determination of the elements of a whole by the structure of the whole posed an absolutely new problem in the most theoretically embarrassing circumstances, for there were no philosophical concepts available for its resolution.[9]

In a letter to Althusser, after reviewing the manuscript of *Reading Capital*, Macherey protested against the concept of the *structured whole*, calling it a "spiritualist conception of structure." In his response, Althusser writes: "I agree with what you say about the totality as an ideological conception of structure…But I must say, provisionally at least, that it seems difficult to go further."[10] However, the theory of causality, or the question of causality as such, is very important for any theory of history. Although in employing this concept, Althusser criticized and tried to overcome Hegelian model of expressive totality, more importantly, he criticized the thesis of economy (economic base), which determines superstructure (ideology, poli-

[7] Ibid., p. 345.
[8] Cited from Montag 2014, p. 74.
[9] Althusser and Balibar 2009, p. 207.
[10] Ibid.

tics, culture, etc.). In opposition to this, he developed what is now known as the causality of the "decentered center," by which the economic determination of base -> superstructure is now replaced by the "double determination," which involved another (additional) condition of instances in the social structures. In this regard, the overdetermined causality works in various ways, thus forming very complex interrelated instances of the social structures: politics, economy, religion, ideology, law, and so on. It should be understood as following: every capitalist society is, "in the last instance," determined by the economic base (or instance); however, this very structural relation is then "overdetermined" by yet another instance. The concept of determination and overdetermination are inspired by the writings of the Chinese revolutionary Mao TseTung. In his famous essay "On Contradiction," Mao argues that "contradiction is present in the process of development of all things; it permeates the process of development of each thing from beginning to end."[11] This is what Mao calls "the universality and absoluteness of contradiction." However, the type of the contradiction that is of interest to Althusser is another one. Mao distinguishes between the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction. The distinction between the two can be rendered as following: in a capitalist society, the two forces in contradiction, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, form the principal contradiction. The other contradictions, such as those between the remnant feudal class and the bourgeoisie, between the peasant petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, between the proletariat and the peasant petty bourgeoisie.[12] The concept of casual contradiction should be read together with overdetermination. Althusser rejects the thesis that "something is caused by the other thing." Instead, he maintains on the theory of domination and subordination within the social whole. In his *On the Materialist Dialectic*, Althusser writes that

> domination is not just an indifferent *fact*, it is a fact *essential* to the complexity itself. That is why complexity implies domination as one of its essentials: it is inscribed in its structure. So to claim that this unity is not and cannot be the unity of a simple, original and universal essence is not, as those who dream of that ideological concept foreign to Marxism, "monism," think, to sacrifice unity on the altar of "pluralism"—it is to claim something quite different: that the unity discussed by Marxism is *the unity of the complexity itself*, that the mode of organization and articulation of the complexity is precisely

[11] Mao 2009, p. 58.
[12] Ibid., p. 74.

> what constitutes its unity. It is to claim that *the complex whole has the unity of a structure articulated in dominance*.[13]

Here we can see the influence of Mao on Althusser as it is here that he articulates—the relations of domination between contradiction and its aspects.

[13] Althusser 2005, pp. 202–3.

CHAPTER 6

Althusser Before Althusser: From Christianity to Communism[1]

Louis Althusser insisted that philosophical work has no destination. It is rather an enterprise without beginning or end, and therefore without a point at which a philosopher has to arrive, or without a goal to achieve. A philosopher is an individual who jumps on a moving train "without knowing where he comes from (origin) or where he is going (goal)."[2] Through providing a "portrait of a materialist philosopher," Althusser gave us the best description of his philosophical project. Althusser's philosophical project is characterized by jumping from one train to another, thus leaving behind many stations and towns, most of which are rather unexplored or sometimes "superficially" wandered around. The abruptness of his jumping out of the train was determined by the political and conjunctures of the time. The first station on which Althusser jumped was the station already shaped by the aftermath of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War.

Althusser's early writings constitute the immanent tension between religion (or Roman Catholic Church) and Marxism, which in his later work will be replaced with the tension between philosophy and Marxism (or communism). But before examining Althusser's "Christian period," I want to identify the main tensions in Althusser's work. The

[1] I borrow this title from Introduction by Matheron 2014, p. xiii. In fact, this is the subtitle of the second half of Althusser's Écrits Philosophiques et Politiques, Vol. 1.

[2] Althusser 2006, p. 290.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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triad that constitutes the problematic points of Althusser's project is Hegel, Christianity, and epistemology. To a certain degree, these are the fields in which Althusser began his life as a philosopher. However, upon a closer analysis, it can be said that Althusser's continuous attempt is to de-epistemologize philosophy by providing an ontological framework, which culminates in his "late writings." Following this, Hegel marks the crucial obstacle that by all means has to be abandoned. In this regard, Christianity is closely linked with Althusser's abandonment of Hegelian philosophy. Moving away from the latter can be understood only insofar as it is placed in relation with the former. Being a Hegelian in philosophy implies a level of fidelity to the Christian tradition and legacy.

CHAPTER 7

Marxists' Prehistory

The story is well known: Althusser was a devoted Catholic. He started his political life as a Christian, a member of Roman Catholic Church. The status of the Church in France is radically different from other Roman Catholic Churches in Europe, especially with regard to countries like Italy, where the Church was always political in the sense that it exercised its influence on the political life of the country, and France, where due to the legacy of the French Revolution and its aftermath, the role of the Church was highly limited and it could exercise its power only within the institution itself. Althusser's intellectual course begins with Catholicism, under the influence of his friend Jean Guitton, a Catholic priest, who was perhaps the most important person in Althusser's intellectual growth. Althusser remained a Catholic for the rest of his life, even after joining the French Communist Party. What did change was his relation to the Church, which he "abandoned in 1947 or thereabouts." However, he maintained a kind of fidelity to Catholicism; also at the moment of apostasy, Althusser does not reject God or Christianity,[1] but only the "really existing" Christian institution. Roland Boer noted that Althusser "could not seem to exist without one institution or another,"[2] whether it was Church, concentration camp, Party, university, or mental hospital. It is interesting to recall that in his intervention back in 1980, at a gathering in which Lacan was to dissolve his

[1] Louis Althusser: l'approdo al comunismo, avalilable online at http://www.filosofia.rai.it/articoli/louis-althusser-lapprodo-al-comunismo/5318/default.aspx

[2] Boer 2007, p. 109.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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École Freudienne de Paris, Althusser writes: "I had evoked my experience of two organizations other than the one whose meeting I was attending, namely, the Catholic church and the French Communist party."[3] Boer is right to argue that for Althusser, "Catholic Action was a recruiting ground for the French Communist Party."[4] Here lies the "embarrassing" moment of Althusser with regard to his followers and disciples: most of them do not mention his affiliation with the Church or his Catholic past, as if that marks a past that has to be repressed or forgotten, an embarrassment that has to be, at best, not talked about. When that phase is discussed, it is very seldom examined, but it is usually mentioned as a "historical fact" along with many other facts of Althusser's life. The main difficulty remains in abandoning the understanding of his relation to the institutions as purely accidental or a simple coincidence that has no deeper meaning. Indeed, it might not have a deeper meaning, but it certainly calls for an analysis of this split between the belief (in all its forms) and the objectification of the belief itself. The simplest and all-too-fashionable way would be to account for Althusser's relation or dependence on the institutions through Foucault's concept of discipline, which indeed is a certain type of power, exercised through different sorts of instruments, techniques, targets, and so forth. As such, it can be taken over by an institution (specialized or not) or by an apparatus, which is the same concept as Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses." However, in contrast to Althusser, Foucault "understands by the term 'apparatus' a sort of shall we say formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*."[5] Although Althusser praised Foucault in his Introduction to *Reading Capital*, a Foucauldian reading of Althusser's predicament clearly shows the limits of Foucault's oeuvre itself. In addressing the primacy of Althusser over Foucault, Žižek writes:

> The Foucauldian counterparts to Ideological State Apparatuses are the disciplinary procedures that operate at the level of "micro-power" and designate the point at which power inscribes itself into the body directly, bypassing ideology—for that precise reason, Foucault never uses the term "ideology" apropos of these mechanisms of micro-power. This abandoning of the problematic of ideology entails a fatal weakness of Foucault's theory. Foucault never tires of repeating how power constitutes itself "from below," how

[3] Althusser 1996, p. 132.
[4] Boer 2001, p. 174.
[5] Foucault 1980, p. 195.

> it does not emanate from some unique summit: this very semblance of a Summit (the Monarch or some other embodiment of Sovereignty) emerges as the secondary effect of the plurality of micro-practices, of the complex network of their interrelations. However, when he is compelled to display the concrete mechanism of this emergence, Foucault resorts to the extremely suspect rhetoric of complexity, evoking the intricate network of lateral links, left and right, up and down…a clear case of patching up, since one can never arrive at Power this way—the abyss that separates micro-procedures from the spectre of Power remains unbridgeable.[6]

Contrary to Foucault's procedure, the advantage of Althusser's, according to Žižek

> seems evident: Althusser proceeds in exactly the opposite direction—from the very outset, he conceives these micro-procedures as parts of the ISA; that is to say, as mechanisms which, in order to be operative, to "seize" the individual, always-already presuppose the massive presence of the state, the transferential relationship of the individual towards state power, or in Althusser's terms—towards the ideological big Other in whom the interpellation originates.[7]

Following this, the thesis that I want to put forward is that Althusser's attachment to institutions should be accounted only on premises of ideological domain. Can we talk about Althusser's *need* or *necessity* to relate to organized institutions or practices and rituals, since the basic definition of an institution is that of organized and synchronized practices and rituals, which gives us the basic definition of his concept of interpellation? Here, we can encounter Althusser's own paradox at work in the sense that he was attached to, or even subjectively depended on, those very "state ideological apparatuses" as well as "state repressive apparatuses" that he was vigorously condemning throughout his work. All the institutions to which he was related throughout his life are precisely those institutions which in his terminology are "Ideological State Apparatuses": the Church ISA, the Party ISA, the University ISA, and the Hospital ISA. However, it is of significant importance to index another ISA which also played a great role in Althusser's life, an ISA that has haunted him throughout his life: the Family ISA, or more precisely his mother. In his autobiography, Althusser

[6] Žižek 1994, p. 13.
[7] Ibid.

argues that his first definition of philosophy as a "theoretical practice" has enabled him to fulfill his desire "for a compromise between speculative, theoretical desire (derived from my mother's desires) and my own desire which was obsessed less with the concept of practices than with my experience of and desire for real practice, for contact with (physical or social) reality, and for its transformation via labor (the worker) and action (politics)."[8] This is a rather unknown Althusser, much less explored or studied, but all too often repressed, even by the most fanatical partisans of Althusser. However, not many can deny that significant theological factors appear in his later work.

What is of crucial interest here is the abruptness of the turn from the theological works to the first orthodox Marxist texts. Or at least the appearance of abruptness that seems like a de/conversion, for that abruptness is almost the dialectical other of the continuities. In this regard, Roland Boer is right to argue that "if the thesis on Hegel and 'The International of Decent Feelings' are unabashedly theological, then 'A Matter of Fact' and 'On Conjugal Obscenity' fall clearly into ecclesiology."[9]

The abandonment of Church poses an important and also an interesting theoretical moment: Althusser became a "Communist because he was a Catholic":

> I did not change faith, I found that…it is possible to say that I remained Christian deep down, I don't go to church, but what does the church stand for/mean today? You don't ask people to go to church these days, don't you?
>
> I remained a catholic, i.e. a universalist, internationalist, no? I thought that in the communist party there were means more adequate to realize the universal fraternity.[10]

What Althusser says here is that in his conviction communism is Christianity realized with different means. This is *the* crucial point, because it poses two important philosophical and political implications: (1) the status and the role of Church in the struggle for emancipation and (2) the materialism in and of Christianity. But, even a more important aspect to Althusser's Christian writings is, as Stanislas Breton points out, that "without his catholic education during his youth movements, it is possible and probable that Althusser, and not only him, would have never reached the

[8] Althusser 1994, p. 215.
[9] Boer 2009, p. 110.
[10] Althusser: l'approdo al comunismo.

'path of thinking', and we add: Marxist thinking."[11] In this sense, Breton's analysis and Boer's thesis that "Althusser's expulsion of the Church from his life and work enabled the Church to permeate all of his work"[12] should be read together. Christianity, or more precisely Catholicism, is the "condition of possibility" for Althusser to engage with and become a Marxist while it constitutes an obstacle that has to be overcome. But, before overcoming it, Roman Catholicism provided the framework for universal emancipation. That is to say, the alliance between Christianity and Marxism offers the conceptual and political framework for universal emancipation. This is the problematic that haunts Althusser in the beginning of his philosophical life.

[11] Breton 1997, p. 155.
[12] Boer, *Criticism of Religion*, p. 108.

CHAPTER 8

Proletariat of Human Condition Versus the Proletariat of Labor

In "The International of Decent Feelings," Althusser sets himself to polemicize against Christian apocalyptical readings of the (back-then) contemporary texts which attempted to read the predicament of the beginning of the Cold War. The fear of atomic bombs as a consequence of the Cold War was indeed real, but "proletarization" of the people ("we are all victims") from all classes of the social whole was an ideological mystification. The Marxist side of Althusser comes to say that such a generalization of the "proletariat" as a class in the general population is in fact a negation of the specificity of the proletarian class position, as well as the specific contradiction of the political, economic, and ideological struggle of the proletarian against the dominating classes. The threat of the atomic bomb cannot be used as an excuse for the everyday exploitation of the proletarians and the other poor.[1] In the same text, Althusser polemicizes against the back-then prevailing discourses of equality of all the people in front of their misery, guilt, poverty, and alienation of the human condition. All the subjects, despite their class position, equally experience all this. According to Althusser, this discourse replaces the recognition of our equality before God with our equality before our fear of death, atomic threats, and so on. In Althusser's perspective, this position is anti-Christian on two levels. It favors idolatry (our death equals us with God), and it fails to recognize the existence of the proletariat, whose emancipation cannot be accomplished by reappropriating the products of human labor, which has been encapsulated by the feeling of fear.

[1] Althusser 2014, p. 31.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini,*
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Does this not hold true today with regard to ecological catastrophes, new forms of exclusion, new forms of (neo)imperial and (neo)colonial administrations, racisms, and other forms of exploitation? We should forget our social status and our class position, suspend the class identification, so they tell us, because the threats we are facing are real and serious. The ruling ideology tells us that confronted with all the threats, humanity should unify against the secondary divisions that might endanger the future of humanity. The usual response to a philosopher who brings up the question of a class struggle is a "reminder" of a terrorist or ecological threats accompanied by the evocation of "humanity" as a whole. Althusser was faced with a similar overload of "humanist cry."

And against all the odds of conceiving humanity as one totality, Althusser writes that "we have only one recourse left, they bluntly tell us, in the face of catastrophe: a holy alliance against destiny."[2] In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was fashionable to read the situation in the apocalyptic manner through signs:

> [T]he war itself becomes both sin and God's wrathful punishment, the concentration camps are the Last Judgment, the Moscow trials are the Passion, the atomic bomb is the will of God, and the equality of death before the bomb is equivalent to equality before God.[3]

Against this, Althusser takes a Marxist as well as a theological position, as Boer rightly argues. The notions of the "proletariat of fear" and the "proletariat of the human condition" are the new names that attempt to reduce and then replace the old proletariat. The widespread idea that all the people are threatened by the fear of the atomic bomb would equate them with Marx's and the Marxist notion of the exploited majority. The attempt to encompass everyone, people of all social classes, into the proletariat of wear or human condition is a masterful endeavor of ideological manipulation by the people of the ruling class to obliterate the political and economic nature of the proletariat, and therefore of the class struggle. The fear, as a psychological condition, does not change the status of the exploitation that takes place every day and the poverty that comes as a consequence. In the same place, Althusser argues against the newly emerging prophets and their preaching on what he calls as "moralizing socialism."[4]

[2] Ibid., p. 23.
[3] Boer 2007. 4. p. 471.
[4] Althusser 2014, p. 31.

When he warns against the prophets, he takes a clearly Christian position—that is the struggle against idolatry:

> *This false end of the world is teeming with false prophets who announce false Christ's and treat an event as the Advent*. But Christ has taught us that we must beware of false prophets, and also that they will reappear as the Last Days draw nigh. The paradox is plain: the end that is close for every Christian is not the end of the false prophets of history.[5]

This paragraph is obviously drawn from the Bible, or more precisely from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the Gospel according to Saint Luke, verse 21:5 says: "and as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said" and verse 21:6 says: "As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down"; whereas Matthew verse 24:5–8 says: "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: …and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." In a complete harmony with warnings of Mark and Luke,[6] Althusser, arguing from a firm Christian position against idolatry, claims: "when we merely invoke the Lord, we serve, not the Lord we invoke, but another whom we do not."[7] In short, this is the tension that arises in Althusser's position between that of a Marxist and that of a Christian Catholic. In this regard, Althusser's position is "divided into two": (1) as a Christian, he struggles against idolatry and false prophets (epitomized in the concept of the "fear"); and (2) as a Marxist, he struggles against the "moralizing socialism" which is represented in the discourse of "socialism without a class struggle." In his double-position of a Marxist and a Catholic, there is a clear tension, which is rendered visible on the relation of the proletariat and the class struggle, on which Boer is right to argue that:

> [I]s not Althusser's Marxist argument (concern with the proletariat) in conflict with his Christian argument (idolatry must be avoided)? The problem

[5] Ibid., p. 28.

[6] But this would hold for St Paul as well, who back in his days warned: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth." (2 Timothy 4:3–4)

[7] Ibid., p. 30.

> is that, although he says his position is a properly Christian one free from idolatry, putting one's trust in the proletariat become precisely the idolatry he identified earlier. The tension between class and idolatry in this essay is a specific example of the deeper one between Christian and Marxist positions.[8]

Drawing from this, we can argue that Althusser's early Christian texts render palpable the constitutive and immanent tension between theology and religion. But, before getting into this, I want to recapitulate Althusser's idea as developed in his writings. The distinction between the proletariat of fear and human condition versus the laboring proletariat can be as well explained through the background of the lines from Matthew: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus Christ here is at his Maoist best: the true idea does not unite, but it divides. That is to say, the true radical idea does not unite the people, but it sets up a violent line of demarcation between the people and its enemies. The unity of the people despite their class position is the dream of every fascist. To formulate this in a Maoist fashion, we should not opt for the unification of the social whole (under the name of the *proletarian of human condition* or *fear*, after the Second World War; whereas, today it applies to terrorist threats, ecological catastrophes, etc.), but instead draw lines of demarcation between antagonistic and nonantagonistic contradictions among the people. This is the true effect of the radical idea. In other words, from the perspective of the politics of emancipation, one should follow Jesus Christ's dictum from Luke 14:26: "if any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"; if this is translated into political terms, we can recall Mao and argue that "communism is not love. Communism is a hammer which we use to crush the enemy," that is to say, to destroy the nonpeople among the people. In Althusser's early work, this distinction is carried out under the banner of theological writings. In this sense, Crockett's thesis of theology *qua* religion is fully justified, since theology is the dark and suffocating force of the emancipatory potential of religion as such. Althusser's struggle against the *fear* or *proletariat of fear* can and should be understood as the struggle of liberating religion from theology. What we face today with regard to the dichotomy of religion versus theology is not a new phenomenon: it predates our predicament

[8] Boer 2007, p. 471.

and it can be traced back to the appearance of the Big Three monotheistic religions,[9] but that is not our concern here. In order to seek the emancipatory potential of religion, we have to "draw lines of demarcation" between theology and religion, arguing that the former constantly degenerates religion into a form of superstition, is socially manifested through *fear*, and is best exemplified by the socially accepted saying "fear God," which, in G.K. Chesterton's words, is illustrated in the following passage:

> People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or the other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition. It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense and can't see things as they are. Anything that anybody talks about, and says there's a good deal in it, extends itself indefinitely like a vista in a nightmare. And a dog is an omen, and a cat is a mystery, and a pig is a mascot, and a beetle is a scarab, calling up all the menagerie of polytheism from Egypt and old India; Dog Anubis and great green-eyed Pasht and all the holy howling Bulls of Bashan; reeling back to the bestial gods of the beginning, escaping into elephants and snakes and crocodiles; and all because you are frightened of four words: He was made Man.[10]

The frightful sentence "He was made Man" renders meaningful the horrifying emptiness of our pursuit for deeper meaning. As Žižek reads it, what really frightens people is

> that they will lose the transcendent God guaranteeing the meaning of the universe, God as the hidden Master pulling the strings— instead of this, we get a God who abandons this transcendent position and throws himself into his own creation, fully engaging himself in it up to dying, so that we, humans, are left with no higher Power watching over us, just with the terrible burden of freedom and responsibility for the fate of divine creation, and thus of God himself.[11]

The price we pay for our freedom is the abandonment of the ontotheological God, who by sitting up there determines our earthly being, actions, and gestures. The profound lesson of Christianity, or its emancipatory

[9] This is the point that Althusser makes later on with regard to Marxism, namely that Marxism is in danger since its birth from the ideological deviations.

[10] Chesterson 2006, pp. 394–395.

[11] Žižek and Milbank 2009, p. 25.

potential, as developed by Žižek is that we cannot rely on any higher instance or force, and that we are responsible for our freedom. The name for this freedom is the "God who fully, wholly becomes man, a comrade among us, crucified together with two social outcasts and who not only does not exist but himself knows this entirely passing over into the love that binds together members of the Holy Ghost, which is the name of the emancipatory collective."[12] Or differently put, "the Holy Spirit is not the big Other of the symbolic community, but a collective which *ne s'autorise que de lui-même*, in the radical absence of any support from the big Other."[13]

Following this, we come to an apparently antagonistic position with that of Althusser, who conceived religion as a practical ideology (along with ethical, political, aesthetic, and legal practices), with which both materialists and idealists operate. Althusser himself, drawing from Hegel's early theological writings, saw a unity and harmony in the ancient Greece, in which the role of religion was an immanent exercise of life, without relying on any form of transcendental revelation. However, this world is destroyed by the arrival of Jesus Christ, "coming from the Father on high with a transcendent truth and then returning to it."[14] This separation is best exemplified in the New Testament: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). By this separation, from the Christian perspective, at stake is "an attempt to recover the meaning of authentic positivity, to recover, that is, the practical uses of the content of revelation and its concrete implications for the conduct of action."[15]

[12] Žižek, "God without the Sacred: The Book of Job, the First Critique of Ideology," available online at http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/av/transcripts/LIVEZizekGod_11.9TranscriptQUERIES.pdf

[13] Žižek and Gunjevič 2012, p. 55.

[14] Boer 2007, p. 111.

[15] Althusser 2014, p. 47.

CHAPTER 9

Christian Materialism

Broadly put, the principal question with regard to religion and its relation with Marxism is not whether they can coexist together, without submitting one to another. The tradition of *liberation theology* has proven us that it is possible to suture Marxism and Christianity. However, the main question is: whether it is possible to be a materialist (or a Marxist) without going through the religious opus? Or even better: is it possible to be a materialist (and in this case, a Marxist) by abandoning religion as an idealist enterprise?

With regard to Althusser's early writings, one should complement Boer's distinction of his work by arguing that the structure of Althusser's theological writings can be compared to Marx's famous statement:

> [T]he criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.[1]

This structure of this thesis is materialized in Althusser's own theological writings: his criticism of fear, the proletariat of fear or of human condition, the status and the structure of Church, and so on. Along with its critique of ideology, in these essays, one can (and should) seek to reconstruct the already existing materialist tendencies in Althusser's work. In this operation, strange and unexpected encounters can be traced. The strange

[1] Marx 2008, p. 10.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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bedfellow here is Feuerbach, the embodiment of theoretical humanism, whom Althusser has translated and studied thoroughly. In his *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach argues that the best way to pursue the query of the essence of Christianity is through embracing the idea that God has created the world *ex nihilio*. According to him, this nonessentialist thesis expresses the value of this world for the Christian consciousness. Feuerbach argues that if "creation is a product of the Will," which is not the "will of the reason, but the will of imagination," that is to say, the subjective Will, then the world as it is carries the value of nothingness. "Thus, writes Feuerbach, the nothingness of the world expresses the power of the will":[2]

> Creation out of nothing is the highest expression of omnipotence: but omnipotence is nothing else than subjectivity exempting itself from all objective conditions and limitations […] nothing else than the ability to posit everything real as unreal—everything conceivable as possible: nothing else than the power of the imagination, or of the will as identical with the imagination.[3]

Indeed, this can be found in many Christian texts, and it can be best exemplified by the Biblical example of the conversion of water into wine, which, if read in Feuerbachian terms, is *not* the conversion but rather the creation out of nothing:

> Creation out of nothing as identical with miracle, is one with Providence; for the idea of Providence—originally, in its true religious significance, in which it is not yet infringed upon and limited by the unbelieving understanding—is one with the idea of miracle. The proof of Providence is miracle.[4]

This can be said to be the ultimate response of religious people against atheists: they have not found yet, or in Althusserian terms, they have not yet encountered the calamities or misfortunes of the network of causal events at work in the world. Here, Feuerbach evokes the example of a drowning person who does not know how to swim and who, by all means, would want that system of causality to be at work, which is to say, the drowning person would turn into nothing:

> The Christian, the religious Providence, is quite another than that which clothes the lilies and feeds the ravens. The natural Providence lets a man sink in the

[2] Feuerbach 2008, p. 85.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., p. 86.

> water, if he has not learned to swim; but the Christian, the religious Providence, leads him with the hand of omnipotence over the water unharmed.[5]

Further, Feuerbach argues:

> Providence cancels the laws of Nature; it interrupts the course of necessity, the iron bond which inevitably binds effects to causes; in short, it is the same unlimited, all-powerful will that called the world into existence out of nothing. Miracle is a *creatio ex nihilo*.[6]

Following this, we can argue that in order for a person to be an atheist, s/he should take a position of non-nothingness of the structural causality that is at work in the symbolic order:

> The much-belied doctrine of the heathen philosophers concerning the eternity of matter, or the world, thus implies nothing more than that Nature was to them a theoretic reality.[7]

This echoes Althusser and his defense of the theoretical position toward the object as opposed to the subjective reductionism of its significance. Feuerbach writes that "the nothing out of which the world was produced is a still inherent nothingness," that is to say, "when thou sayest the world was made out of nothing, thou conceivest the world itself as nothing,"[8] and on the other hand, Althusser, too, writes about the retroactive constitution of history from the perspective of the present. Thus, in *On the Materialist Dialectic*, he writes:

> Instead of the ideological myth of a philosophy of origins and its organic concepts, Marxism establishes in principle the recognition of the givenness of the complex structure of any concrete "object," a structure which governs both the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice which produces the knowledge of it. There is no longer any original essence, only an ever-pre-givenness, however far knowledge delves into its past.[9]

[5] Ibid., p. 87/n1.
[6] Ibid., p. 86.
[7] Ibid., p. 97.
[8] Ibid., p. 92.
[9] Althusser 2005, pp. 198–199.

The safest path to follow, with regard to this, would be to analyze this from the perspective of Althusser's "aleatory materialist" period, by employing concepts of the void, encounter, and so on. In his *On Genesis*, Althusser says that " [in] the schema of the 'theory of the encounter' or theory of 'conjunction,' which is meant to replace the ideological (religious) category of genesis, there is a place for what can be called linear genealogies."[10] In other words, according to him, the structure can be thought only as an effect of "conjunction," and each element that comes to be combined in the conjunction of (a given) the structure (i.e., water, swimming, drowning) is, in itself, a product or rather an effect as such. In other words, Althusser here is talking about the structure without a cause, which will remain a major problem in his entire philosophical and political project. That is to say, how and whether is it possible to think of the historical (or even political, Christian, etc.) event from within the structure, or the transformation of the social, political, ideological structure as such? Here, Althusser is positioning himself against Hegel, especially with his concept of "expressive causality."[11] It is of crucial importance to note that Althusser opted to reconstruct a new concept of materialism, especially to oppose Stalin's vulgarization of Marx's materialism and its economic determinism. To formulate this in Badiou's terms, I would argue that every truly contemporary philosophy must begin with rethinking materialism, based on the philosophical singularity established by Althusser, either as a ground for following or as a deadlock of "old materialism" that has to be overcome (sublated, in Hegelian terms).

Althusser's early materialism, unlike the one developed in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* and especially his "aleatory materialism," philosophically is conditioned by two antiphilosophical traditions: Marxism and Christianity.

[10] Althusser 2012.

[11] For a critique of Althusser's critique of Hegel, see especially Žižek 1994, pp. 136–140.

CHAPTER 10

Antiphilosophy

If we account for Althusser's theological writings, can we overcome the dichotomy between the truth and meaning (or sense), which is to say, can we still remain in the terrain of philosophy? "The truth" and "meaning" have always been antagonistic categories: in Badiou's philosophy, the rupture between truth and sense marks the struggle between philosophy and antiphilosophy. In Badiou's thought, the emergence of the antiphilosophical tradition (which he bestows on Lacan[1]) conditions or stages the antagonism that marks the form that philosophy will take in contemporary predicament. In Badiou's terms, "philosophy is always heir to anti-philosophy."[2]

Unlike philosophers, who "assume the voice of the master" without submitting themselves to any modest participation in collective teamwork and whose voice is authoritarian, the antiphilosophers treat their life as the stage on which the World Ideas will emerge and they will index their existence as the truth in our world. In doing so, antiphilosophers make "their own life the theater of their ideas, and their body the place of the Absolute."[3] For the antiphilosopher, "the pains and ecstasies of personal life bear witness to the fact that the concept haunts the temporal present

[1] "…a term introduced by the third great and fascinated detractor of philosophy from the last century, Jacques Lacan: antiphilosophy," Badiou 2011, p. 73.

[2] Ibid., p. 10.

[3] Ibid., p. 68.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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all the way to include the throes of the body."[4] In this sense, Badiou argues that "when philosophy is interpretation, analysis, or theory, it is nothing but a variant of religion. It is dominated by the nihilist figure of the priest."[5] In Badiou's project, along with Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Lacan, St Paul is one of the greatest (Christian) antiphilosophers. The guideline here is rather obvious: after all, for Badiou, antiphilosophy is only another word for being a Christian. So, where does Althusser come into this?

Marx famously wrote that "the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism,"[6] which is accompanied by another correlative statement: "the struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle *against that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion." According to Marx, religion is the expression of the suffering, of the oppressed, the real obstacle to the realization of the "real happiness" of the people: "abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness." But, in the same text, he adds: "*religious* suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering."[7] How are we to read this very debatable and problematic beginning of his critique to Hegel's philosophy of right, which at the same time renders problematic Marx's own position toward religion? Marx's humanist critical passion is fully expressed here. If the criticism of religion is "*the criticism of that vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*," then according to Marx:

> [i]t is, therefore, the *task of history*, once the *other-world of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of this world*. It is the immediate *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its *unholy forms* once the *holy form* of human self-estrangement has been unmasked.[8]

How should we think of the passage from religion as an estrangement of human essence to religion as the potential for political emancipation, therefore opening the space for Althusserian intervention in theology and religion?

[4] Ibid., p. 69.

[5] Ibid., p. 1.

[6] **Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, available online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm**

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

Religion (and especially Christianity) is that kind of discourse that allows for transitivity between individual and social matters. Religious discourse is defined by being that which allows for seamless transformations between individual matters and public, communal matters. Indeed, it holds that exact place in Badiou's philosophy, because the antiphilosopher's discourse is based on individual experience, but wishes to transit to the status of philosophical apprehension of conditions which are always inherently social. In his Seminar 16, Lacan develops a very subtle (and a rarely discussed) theory of suffering. For Lacan, suffering "wants to be truth," which is to say that the suffering wants to or can be a symptom, but it is not. In Lacan's own words, "I make the suffering speak, as I made the truth speak in a first approach—the effects of discourse must be tempered—I made them say, although in terms not modulated in the same tone for the one and the other, I speak." Because, Lacan argues further, "suffering has its language and it is quite unfortunate that anybody at all can say it without knowing what he is saying." In the same fashion, another quote from Lacan can orientate us in this direction:

> The truth, Ibid, essentially speaks. It speaks "I" and you see defined there two extreme fields, the one in which the subject is only located by being the effect of the signifier, the one in which there is the pathos of the signifier without any mooring point yet being made in our discourse to the subject, the field of fact, and then what finally interests us and what was not even touched on anywhere but on Sinai, namely what speaks "Ibid."

Herein comes the importance of religion for political militancy: it is the discourse of those whose position is so disempowered that they cannot even partake in the symptomatic response to capital. It is the lumpen, by definition. Therefore, one needs a discourse that can render legible the fact that they want to be truth, but they are not—it is something which expresses and protects it against the real. It is a fantasy (the background of a symptom which cannot write itself as such).

In this regard, any philosophical engagement with religion or theological writings is actually an engagement of philosophy with its double: antiphilosophical tradition. If Marx and Marxism themselves also belong to the great antiphilosophical tradition, then the saturation of Marxism and Christianity (as was the case with Althusser's early writings), creates a strange paradox, that of two great antiphilosophical discourses suturing with one another and presenting themselves as the new vision and

perspective of humanity as a whole? Can philosophy operate with religion and Marxism as its conditions (to use Badiou's terminology), or should it decisively abandon the former and construct philosophical concepts for the latter, as Althusser attempted throughout his life? In this regard, the inquiry into these two great traditions of antiphilosophy can be a *sine qua non* for any project of emancipation.

CHAPTER 11

Definition of Ideology

As we argued earlier, one of the most important contributions of Althusser to the general theory of Marxism is the revitalization of the notion of ideology. Karl Marx himself rarely used the word *ideology*, both as a term and as a critical concept. In this sense, there is not only no systematic theory of ideology in Marx's opus, but also ideology as a notion, as well as a term, has a negative meaning in Marx's philosophical writings. However, in his subchapter on commodity fetishism, Marx provides a general outline of what can be understood as his most consistent (albeit generic) development of the theory of the critique of ideology. This is probably best epitomized by what is now a very famous formulation: "they do this without being aware of it."[1] Slavoj Žižek writes that for Marx, the misperception or the fallacy here is on the side of the being and not of knowledge.[2] He writes that "we have made a decisive step forward: we have established a new way to read the Marxian formula 'they do not know it, but they are doing it': the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already in the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing."[3]

Let us remain in the terrain of Marx's thought for a while. Marxist philosophers and theoreticians all too often attribute to Marx the definition of ideology as a "false consciousness." As the story goes, Marx and Engels defined ideology in their *The German Ideology*. However, the problem is

[1] Marx 1975, pp. 166–167.
[2] For a detailed analysis, see Hajdini 2014, pp. 162–177.
[3] Žižek 1989, p. 32.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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that Marx never said it. In fact, Marx himself barely ever used the wording "false consciousness." It was Engels who used or rather coined this phrase/term in a letter to Franz Mehring in 1893, where he defines ideology as "a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness."[4] The problem with the concept of "false consciousness," simply put, is not just that it misperceives the reality, but that whole ideological struggles (class struggle, political and economic injustices and exploitations, etc.) are transposed to a matter of deception. Against this background, we should read the path-breaking theses on the theory of ideology. Althusser's first task was to free the concept of ideology from the psychological designation, as well as from its individual experience. When Althusser argued that ideology has a material existence and it exists only in practices, he inaugurated the break with the rather "traditional" conceptualization of it (false or distorted representations of reality; empirically false assessment of reality, etc.). In Althusser's conceptualization, this is not the case.

Let us proceed with the formal and systematic definitions of ideology. We have already said that ideology is not the distortion of reality. In fact, ideology exists *within* reality, but it "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence."[5] This is Althusser's basic definition of ideology. We should understand this against the positivist conceptualization (as Althusser argues) of Marx and Engels in their *The German Ideology*, where ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, as a dream. This brings us back again to the concept of "false consciousness." By reducing ideology to the level of a dream or illusion, according to Althusser, we assume that reality as such is external to it; that is to say, there is a sharp distinction between reality and illusion. No wonder Althusser compares this understanding of ideology to the "theoretical status of the dream among writers before Freud," for whom the dream was the purely imaginary, that is, null, result of "day's residues," presented in an arbitrary arrangement and order, sometimes even "inverted," in other words, in "disorder." "For them, the dream was the imaginary; "it was empty, null,

[4] Engels to Franz Mehring. We should add that this term was later on employed by Georg Lukács, where against Engels, he argues that "the dialectical method does not permit us simply to proclaim the 'falseness' of this consciousness and to persist in an inflexible confrontation of true and false. On the contrary, it requires us to investigate this 'false consciousness' concretely as an aspect of the historical totality and as a stage in the historical process," Lukács 1971, p. 50.

[5] Althusser 2014, p. 256.

and arbitrarily "stuck together" (*bricolé*), once the eyes had closed, from the residues of the only full and positive reality, the reality of the day."[6] In this respect, this is the status of philosophy and ideology in *The German Ideology*. For Marx, *at that point* (since, as we have already said, Marx's position toward philosophy changed over time), philosophy is ideology *par excellence*.

When Althusser writes that ideology "represents the imaginary relationship," we should not read it from the Lacanian perspective of an imaginary, as a lived experience of reality. In Althusser's own words, "it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the center of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world."[7] This was a negative approach; that is to say, we have shown what ideology is not.

The crucial reference of Althusser's theory of ideology should be presented in its relation with economy. It is not surprising that his most important text *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* begins with his analysis of reproduction. Althusser begins by referring to Marx:

> Every child knows a nation which ceased to work, I will not say for a year, but even for a few weeks, would perish. Every child knows, too, that the masses of products corresponding to the different needs required different and quantitatively determined masses of the total labor of society. That this *necessity* of the *distribution* of social labor in definite proportions cannot possibly be done away with by a *particular form* of social production but can only change the *mode* of its *appearance*, is self-evident. No natural laws can be done away with.[8]

What Marx is saying here is that in order for the social formations to continue to exist, they must not only keep on with the production, but must also reproduce the conditions of the production. In his much-ignored volume two of *Capital*, Marx talks about the process of the production of capital as "its labor and self-expansion process."[9] The reproduction of capital is composed of two elements: direct production and circulation.

[6] Ibid., p. 254.
[7] Ibid., p. 257.
[8] Marx to Kugelmann, July 11, 1868.
[9] Marx 1978, p. 427.

As Marx writes, the continuously renewed process of production is the condition of the transformations which the capital undergoes ever anew in the sphere of circulation."[10] In this regard, in order to fully understand this, we need to comprehend this not on a "local" level (say, on the level of a firm), but rather from a "global" perspective. According to Marx, the total product of society (therefore, its total production process) can be exemplified "into two great departments":

1. Means of production: commodities having a form in which they must, or at least may, pass into productive consumption, and
2. Means of consumption: commodities having a form in which they pass into the individual consumption of the capitalist and the working class.[11]

Let us follow Althusser in his schematic form of expose. Drawing from this, we can come to Althusser's thesis that "every social formation, in order to exist, should reproduce its productive forces and the existing relations of production." The productive forces are the labor force, whose reproduction is ensured "by giving labor power the material means with which to reproduce itself: by wages. Wages feature in the accounting of each enterprise, but as "wage capital," not at all as a condition of the material reproduction of labor power."[12] We should note that according to Marx, "wage capital" is a *variable capital*.[13] In this sense, the wages represent only one part of the value that is produced by the amount of labor force necessary for its reproduction. In sum, Althusser argues that "the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers."[14] In other words, the terrain that is necessary for the reproduction of labor force is *ideology*.

To summarize this, we can say that in order for every social formation to exist and keep on with production, it has to reproduce the means of production and labor force. However, how is the *reproduction of the relations*

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 471. Marx describes the "reproduction schemas" in pages 471–474.

[12] Althusser 2001.

[13] In volume two of *Capital*, Marx writes that "variable capital always appears anew as money-capital invested in wages…," Marx 1978, p. 141.

[14] Althusser 2001.

of production ensured and enabled? For the most part, "it is secured by the legal-political and ideological superstructure." Going beyond the descriptive, as Althusser does, we should say that "for the most part, it is secured by the exercise of State power in the State Apparatuses, on the one hand the (Repressive) State Apparatus, on the other the Ideological State Apparatuses."[15] Therefore, in the last instance of analysis, ideology *is the* reproduction of the relations of production. And it is precisely the fact that ideology reproduces the social basis for the permanence of the organization of capitalist production as a transcendental and immutable horizon of possibility that qualifies it as truly political.

Based on this, can we draw a parallel to the film theory and production of films? According to Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Paul Narboni, the editors of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, film production takes place within one economic system (i.e., capitalism) and should be understood within the given system of economic relations. In this formal sense, the film is a product, or a commodity. Apart from this, the film, as an ideological product (since it also belongs to the superstructure), reproduces not only the dominant ideology, but also the world (reality) in which the ruling or dominant ideology can exist. A more detailed account of this will be provided in the next chapter.

[15] Althusser 2001, p. 100.

CHAPTER 12

Epistemological Break

Following the definition of ideology from the previous chapter, the question we need to pose now is: how does ideology function? For Althusser, ideology always functions in opposition to sciences. Borrowing from Gaston Bachelard, a French epistemologist, Althusser employs the concept of the "epistemological break," which he first used to periodize Marx's work. Gaston Bachelard was a philosopher of science whose book *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* had a great influence on the postwar generation of French epistemologists, Althusser included. According to Bachelard, scientific knowledge should be understood and posed in the terms of obstacles. Scientific knowledge is entirely opposed to (popular) opinions because "nothing can be founded on opinion: we must start by destroying them."[1] In terms of scientific knowledge, opinions are the first obstacle that has to be overcome. In other words, the scientific mind does not permit any compromise with the opinion, in the sense of having opinions on the object we do not fully comprehend. It is because "for a scientific mind, all knowledge is an answer to a question. If there has been no question, there can be no scientific knowledge."[2] In this sense, for scientific knowledge, general knowledge or general opinion is an obstacle. In other words, according to Bachelard, in order for scientific thought to be truly scientific, it has to go through various stages of epistemological obstacles. That is to say, an epistemological obstacle is the moment of

[1] Bachelard 2002, p. 25.
[2] Ibid.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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rupture, or the moment of break, that divides science (or scientific knowledge) from its prescientific past.

What did Althusser make of this concept? Althusser employed this concept in order to separate Marx's "ideological" period from its "scientific" one, which is to say the "idealist–ideological" Marx versus the "scientific" Marx (especially) of the *Capital*, marks the foundation of Althusser's "critique of ideology." Althusser begins by asking whether there was an epistemological break in Marx's oeuvre, and if yes, where is the very precise location of this break. He writes:

> [T]he quotation in which Marx himself attests to and locates this break ("we resolved … to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience") in 1845 at the level of *The German Ideology*, can only be treated as a declaration to be examined, and falsified or confirmed, not as a proof of the existence of the break and a definition of its location.[3]

In Althusser's understanding, it was Marx himself who located the break, in the book which remained unpublished in his lifetime, *The German Ideology*. However, the *Theses on Feuerbach*, according to Althusser, "mark out the earlier limit of this break, the point at which the new theoretical consciousness is already beginning to show through in the erstwhile consciousness and the erstwhile language, that is, as *necessarily ambiguous and unbalanced concepts*."[4] In this regard, the epistemological break in Marx's work was inaugurated in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and executed in *The German Ideology*.[5] But, what does "epistemological break" in Marx's oeuvre really mean? Let us go with a longer quite from Althusser, which in this case is justified:

> This "epistemological break" concerns conjointly *two distinct theoretical disciplines*. By founding the theory of history (historical materialism), Marx simultaneously broke with his erstwhile ideological philosophy and established a new philosophy (dialectical materialism). I am deliberately using the traditionally accepted terminology (historical materialism, dialectical

[3] Althusser 2005, p. 32.

[4] Ibid., p. 33.

[5] Although there seems to be a consensus on the existence of "epistemological break" in Marx's work, different authors tend to disagree on the exact location of the break. According to Moishe Postone, the "epistemological break" in Marx's work happened much later, when Marx returned to Hegel's *Science of Logic* for his critique of political economy.

> materialism) to designate this double foundation in a single break. And I should point out two important problems implied by this exceptional circumstance. Of course, if the birth of a new philosophy is simultaneous with the foundation of a new science, and this science is the science of history, a crucial theoretical problem arises: by what necessity of principle should the foundation of the scientific theory of history *ipso facto* imply a theoretical revolution in philosophy? This same circumstance also entails a considerable practical consequence: as the new philosophy was only implicit in the new science it might be tempted *to confuse itself with it. The German Ideology* sanctions this confusion as it reduces philosophy, as we have noted, to a faint shadow of science, if not to the empty generality of positivism. This practical consequence is one of the keys to the remarkable history of Marxist philosophy, from its origins to the present day.[6]

Althusser is correct in pointing out the break in Marx's oeuvre; however, what he is missing is that the very distinction between science and ideology is, in the last instance, an ideological position par excellence. What Althusser is missing is the very Hegelian-inspired tendency that led to that break. That is to say, Marx's critique of political economy, or more precisely, his *Capital* could be written only after Marx reread Hegel's *Science of Logic*. In this sense, the "epistemological break" occurred but for the exact opposite reasons as thought by Althusser himself. This said, the thesis I want to propose can be formulated as following: yes, there was an "epistemological break" in Marx's work, but the break that occurred is, in the last instance, a rupture in his path that permitted him to conceptualize his "critique of political economy." While Althusser assumed that the concept of "science" that Marx was using in *Capital* came from Darwin and physics, it in fact is better understood as the concept of science used by Hegel in *Science of Logic*, which starts with a clear statement that a scientific inquiry is not merely one which does not presuppose anything, no essence and no being, but which examines the presuppositions which come with what is posited, its "ontological commitments." This is precisely what Marx does in *Capital*: he analyzes the presuppositions that are being posited by the logic of *Capital* itself, rather than mimic a physicist or a biologist who observes impartially the object that he is trying to analyze. The science proper of Marx is the science of letting the commodity speak its own story, and not the science which, beginning with Galileo, requires the planets to be "mute."

[6] Ibid., pp. 33–34.

Let us proceed further with examining how Althusser employs this concept. As Balibar argues, "it seems to me that in reality it is instead an original concept which Althusser introduced between 1960 and 1965, a concept which, it is true, owes 'something' to Bachelard and which does indeed rest on certain common philosophical presuppositions but which in fact has a quite other object and opens a quite other field of investigations."[7] In fact, *Capital* is the work "by which Marx has to be judged," and this is the work in which Althusser puts most of his effort: to the "scientific work" of Marx, and especially his *Capital*, with the *philosophical thesis* which would suit best his (Althusser's) scientific project. In this enterprise, Althusser's task was that of "determining the type of philosophy which best corresponds to what Marx wrote in *Capital*,"[8] which would result not in a Marxist philosophy, but in a philosophy *for* Marxism. Hence, his famous statement that it is difficult to be a Marxist in philosophy. As a result, one of the possible ways of constructing the philosophy for Marxism is through the critique of ideology. The logical question to be posed here: what is the function of philosophy for Althusser?

The main task of philosophy is to draw lines of demarcation between scientific practice and ideological propositions. Philosophy is defined in its double relation to the sciences and ideologies. In this regard, philosophy is *a dividing activity of thought*. It thinks of demarcations, distinctions, and divisions, within the realm of thought. Therefore, philosophy has an intervening role by stating *theses* that contribute to "opening the way to a correct" way of formulating the very problems in which it intervenes. According to Althusser, by stating theses (which should be understood as positions), philosophy produces *philosophical categories*. When he defines philosophy as the "class struggle in theory, in the last instance," Althusser is being very precise: philosophy functions by intervening not in the matter, or bodies, nor in the class struggle, but *in theory*. This intervention provokes or produces theoretical effects. In other words, the "enigma of philosophy is contained in the difference between the reality in which it intervenes (the domain of the *sciences* + theoretical *ideologies* + philosophy) and the result that its intervention produces (the distinction between the *scientific* and the *ideological*)." The indispensable result is what he calls *philosophy-effect*. In this sense, philosophy does not think either sciences or politics. Philosophy's function should "serve sci-

[7] Balibar 1978, p. 208.
[8] Althusser 2006, p. 258.

ences, rather than enslave them," and to reiterate this in Badiou's vocabulary, philosophy has the task of articulating and criticizing the effects of the events of the class struggle. Therefore, everything that happens in philosophy has "in the last instance, not only political consequences in theory, but also political consequences *in politics*: in the political class struggle."[9] Taking all this into account, the intervention in the two distinct realities (that of scientific and ideological) is internal and the *philosophy-effects* produce changes within themselves. Based on this, how are we to rethink Althusser's theory of the critique of ideology? Here, I want to argue that in a certain way, his entire theory of the critique of ideology is at the service of this thesis, which in his idea of rethinking Marxism is meant as a means for proving it right, supplementing it, and rendering it compatible with his project of rereading Marxism. The entire Marxist enterprise in philosophy is centered on the possibility of distinguishing between science and ideology, not only in their realities, but also in reference to the work of Marx himself. This thesis led Althusser to conclude that "Marx could not possibly have become Marx except by founding a theory of history and a philosophy of the historical distinction between ideology and science."[10] In this respect, I would argue that Althusser's philosophical project of reading Marx philosophically is centered on the concept of the "critique of ideology."

[9] Althusser 1976, p. 38.
[10] Althusser and Balibar 2009, p. 17.

CHAPTER 13

Interpellation

Interpellation is perhaps one of the most problematic theses developed by Althusser. It triggered a wide range of critique from different orientations, both from those sympathetic (or even followers) of Althusser and from those who were more hostile to him. Althusser's theory of the critique of ideology can be epitomized in the following thesis: *ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*. How does interpellation work in Althusser's theory? According to Althusser, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject." The existence of ideology is conditioned, or dependent, on the constitution of the subject: "the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing."[1] Here, we encounter the double-function of ideology:

1. The existence of ideology is in *stricto sensu* conditioned by the existence of the subject.
2. And at the same time, the subject can only exist in the ideological field.

There is no ideology, writes Althusser, except for concrete subjects "and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject: meaning, *by the category of the subject* and its functioning."[2] Since ideology *in*

[1] Althusser 2001, p. 175.
[2] Althusser 2001, p. 155.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini,*
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general has no history, the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology despite its determination and date. It is only with the rise of the bourgeois ideology that it appears under the name of the subject (soul in Plato, God, etc.).

To concretize Althusser's theory of ideology, we can talk about the triad of material existence, practice, and the subject. In short, these three elements constitute ideology. In Althusser's own words:

> The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that *the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function* (*which defines it*) *of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects.* In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but it's functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning.[3]

Althusser continues by arguing for the "duplicate mirror structure of ideology," which simultaneously ensures: (1) the interpellation of "individuals" as subjects; (2) their subjection to the Subject; (3) the mutual recognition of subjects and the Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other and finally the subject's recognition of himself; (4) the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right.[4]

When Althusser writes that the subject is an ideological category, one can read it according to Badiou's terminology: the Althusserian subject is always-already part of the state of the situation, which means that his subject is always-already part of the positive order of being and it cannot be the site of an event. In this regard, the subject is always negative. When he writes that "the notion subject is ideological,"[5] he thereby means that "*the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function* (*which defines it*) *of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects.*" In this sense, it is the subject that renders ideology possible, which means that ideology is possible only insofar as it constitutes the subject and operates through him/her. Therefore, he maintains that the "object is a mirroring reflection of subject."[6]

[3] Ibid., p.

[4] Ibid., p. 181.

[5] Althusser 2007, p. 185.

[6] Ibid., p. 185. On this note, Althusser argues that "all classical philosophy depends on the categories of subject and object."

All this can be summarized in the following thesis: "*there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects.*" The crucial element to be noted here is that the subject is constituted in ideological rituals, that is, the hailing. If the practical ritual of "recognition" has the function of rendering "obvious" the materiality of ideology, it by no means gives us the knowledge of this mechanism. Therefore, the only way to actually admit the existence of ideology is through admitting it from within: "ideology never says, 'I am ideological'. It is necessary to be outside ideology, that is, in scientific knowledge, to be able to say: I am in ideology."[7]

Ideology is hence postulated as a reality because it "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." Ideology renders possible the functioning of the ideological state apparatuses (ISA), which have a material base, which means that "ideology has a material existence." This hypothesis is essential for analyzing the nature of ideology as not "spiritual but material existence of 'ideas' or other 'representations'." The ruling ideology is realized in ISAs also because "*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses.*"[8] One can say that for Althusser, there is no practice except by and in ideology, and the latter exists by and for the subjects. Henceforth, his main thesis, *ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*, and therefore, *individuals are always-already subjects.*

Many commentators have noted the impossibility of the Althusserian interpellated subject. It presents the impossibility, an impasse for the politics of emancipation. Althusser has been very careful throughout his work to distinguish between politics, ideology, and science and also to emphasize the distinction between political, scientific, and economic practice. With a proper dialectical move, he maintains that every practice (or process) exists in relation with (other) practices. This considers why for Althusser, "the concept process is scientific." Taking into account that "the notion subject is ideological" and the "concept process is scientific," Althusser proposes his thesis of "process without a subject." Explaining the "process without a subject or goal(s)," Althusser writes that "history really is a 'process without a Subject or Goal(s),' where the given *circumstances* in which 'men' act as subjects under the determination of social *relations* are the product of the *class struggle*. History therefore does not have a Subject, in

[7] Althusser 2001, p. 175.

[8] Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: (notes towards an investigation)

the philosophical sense of the term, but a *motor*: that very class struggle."[9] This thesis should be read together with two others: (1) *it is the masses which make history*, and (2) *the class struggle is the motor of history*. Althusser proposes this concept in his attempt to struggle against Hegelian teleological dialectics, which in Althusser's reading is constituted as a *process with a subject*, as it were. Following this, it can be argued that there is no (ontological) theory or status of the subject in the work of Althusser. To my knowledge, this is one of the most radical antiontological theses. With this thesis, Althusser is content with providing epistemological positions (or framework) for his materialism. In this spirit, it is important to note that in his late phase, Althusser endeavors to construct an ontological framework for his materialism. It is crucial to note however that Althusser never gave up on the "process without a subject." It is Althusser's conviction that the "process without a subject" is the correct term to avoid theoretical deviations in politics. As he put it, theoretical deviations in politics are, in the last instance, *philosophical* deviations and account for the great historical failures of the proletariat: "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. Such deviations are referred to as economism, evolutionism, voluntarism, humanism, empiricism, dogmatism and so on. These deviations are *philosophical* deviations and were denounced as philosophical deviations by the great workers' leaders starting with Engels and Lenin."[10]

The most important critique of Althusser in contemporary philosophy comes from the so-called Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis and from other Lacanian theorists. The main reproach toward Althusser and his theory of ideology is located on the concept of interpellation, the subject, and its limits. In short, according to Lacanians, these are the main limits of Althusser and his philosophical project as a whole. Referring to Mladen Dolar's analysis of Althusser's concept of interpellation,[11] Alenka Zupančič has provided the most succinct position (which marks the difference between Althusser and them):

> the difference between the subject of structuralism (in this case Althusser's subject) and the subject of psychoanalysis. The latter is not an interpellated subject or individual who, after being summoned in an act of interpellation,

[9] Althusser 2008, p. 99.
[10] Althusser 2001, p. 45.
[11] Dolar 1993, p. 78.

> becomes wholly subject (subject to and of the Ideological State Apparatus that summons it). On the contrary, the subject of psychoanalysis is that which remains after the operation of interpellation. The (psychoanalytic) subject is nothing but the failure to become an (Althusserian) subject.[12]

In this regard, according to Lacanian philosophers, Althusser "linked ideology, by conceptualizing it as a process of interpellation, to the sphere of mere imaginary subjectivity."[13] In his recently published *Absolute Recoil*, Žižek argues that the Althusserian theory of ideology is fully capable of grasping the gap that "separates our ideological sense-experience from the external material apparatuses and practices" that sustain it:

> The theory distinguishes two levels of the ideological process: external (following the ritual, ideology as material practice) and internal (recognizing oneself in interpellation, believing). Although Althusser refers to Pascal to account for the passage between them—follow the external rituals and inner belief will come—the two dimensions remain external to each other; their relationship is that of the parallax: we observe ideological practice either from the outside, in bodily gestures, or from the inside, as beliefs, and there is no intermediate space or passage between the two.[14]

In other words, Žižek's critique with respect to Althusser's theory of ideology does not rely only on the "gap that separates knowledge from belief." In order to render visible the gap that eludes Althusser's theory of the ISAs, Žižek refers to the inverted formula of fetishist disavowal "I know very well…but…":

> Belief thus supplements a gap, an immanent split, within knowledge itself, hence we are not dealing here just with a gap between knowledge and belief. The same goes for our stance towards the threat of ecological catastrophe: it is not a simple "I know all about the ecological threat, but I don't really believe in it." It is rather "I know all about…and I nonetheless believe in it," because I do not really assume my knowledge.[15]

The thesis to which Žižek refers is indeed very condensed and is open to various interpretations, and on one level, his critique is fully justified. Further, drawing from Dolar, Žižek argues that "the emergence of the

[12] Zupančič 2000, pp. 41–42.
[13] Pfaller 1998, p. 229.
[14] Žižek 2014, p. 51.
[15] Ibid., p. 52.

subject cannot be conceived as a direct effect of the individual's recognizing him or herself in ideological interpellation: the subject emerges as correlative to some traumatic objectal remainder, to some excess which, precisely, cannot be 'subjectivized,' integrated into the symbolic space."[16] To sum up this critique, the difference between the Lacanians and Althusser resides in the fact that Althusser conceived the subject on the imaginary level, the imaginary misrecognition.

On the other hand, Todd McGowan argues that the "key to Althusser's thought—and the link between this thought and historicism—is that he doesn't believe in failure."[17] Interpellation, including its failures, is always a successful act. That is why for McGowan, "refusal, for Althusser and for historicism, is always just refusal in quotation marks. Simply being a subject who rejects the interpellation indicates that ideology has triumphed by creating a subject."[18]

How are we to respond to Lacanian critiques from the Althusserian perspective? The distinction between belief and knowledge is something that Althusser himself was aware of. In his famous essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser writes:

> [W]hat thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, "I am ideological." It is necessary to be outside ideology, i.e. in scientific knowledge, to be able to say: I am in ideology (a quite exceptional case) or (the general case): I was in ideology.[19]

As noted above, ideology always operates vis-à-vis science, or rather, it exists only insofar as it is in a conflictual cohabitation with the sciences. In this regard, "even the scientist, after breaking with an ideological illusion on the level of his science, cannot fully escape ideology on the level of the rest of his social existence (for example, the very scientist becomes susceptible to an ideology of science, a 'spontaneous philosophy')."[20]

[16] Žižek 2000, p. 115.
[17] McGowan 2014.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Althusser 2014, pp. 264–246.
[20] Pfaller 1998, pp. 230–231.

Contrary to Dolar's and Žižek's positions, I will follow Robert Pfaller's defense of Althusser.[21] In Pfaller's view, it is impossible to talk about any failure in ideological interpellation, precisely because the failure is inscribed in the very process of interpellation. In other words, failure is part of the way in which interpellation succeeds. In Pfaller's words, "in ideology we do not only have to do with some phantasmatic or imaginary content (which fills the void of 'true subjectivity'); ideology is as well the appearance of a void that seems to be something totally different from any ideological content."[22] In this regard, there is no outside to ideology, precisely because "the void is still an identity, and a 'zero-interpellation,' an 'interpellation beyond interpellation,' is still an interpellation. Herein might lie the reason why Althusser, as opposed to Lacan, refused to accept the notion of 'true subjectivity' as a theoretical concept."[23] Again another citation from Pfaller: "if there is a 'true subject,' then it cannot always be found with the theoretical instrument of the distinction between the level of the enunciated and the level of enunciation. What is hidden on the level of enunciation is sometimes nothing but, again, the very subject—the imaginary subject which we hoped to transgress by leaving the level of the enunciated."[24] In the last instance, does not Althusser himself say that interpellation is "'concrete' enough to be recognized, but abstract enough to be thinkable and thought, giving rise to a knowledge."

But, let us go back to Althusser's own text. For him,

> ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) 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!"
>
> Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was "really" addressed to him, and that "it was *really him* who was hailed" (and not someone else).

[21] Nonetheless, the most elaborated version of Althusser's interpellation can be found in the work of Pêcheux (1982).

[22] Ibid., pp. 240–241.

[23] Ibid., p. 240.

[24] Ibid.

> Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man: verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed. And yet it is a strange phenomenon, and one which cannot be explained solely by "guilt feelings," despite the large numbers who "have something on their consciences."
>
> Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: "Hey, you there!" One individual (nine times out often it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that "it really is he" who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.[25]

Ultimately, we all know the Lacanian undertone of Althusser's text and thesis. However, what is striking is another text of Althusser, written in 1966, *Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses*. This text is hardly commented by Althusserians. In this text, Althusser proposes four discourses, according to which each of them corresponds or presupposes a given form of subjectivity. These discourses are: scientific, aesthetic, ideological, and unconscious discourse.[26] Althusser elaborates on all these forms of the discourses and the subjectivity, which are not of equal importance. In my understanding, ideological and unconscious discourses have primacy over the other two. However, when writing on the ideological discourse, Althusser says:

> It seems to me unwarranted to talk about the "subject of the unconscious" in connection with the *Ich-Spaltung*. There is no *divided* or *split* subject, but something else entirely; alongside the *Ich*, there is a *Spaltung*, that is, literally, an *abyss*, a precipice, an absence, a lack. This abyss is not a subject, but that which opens up *alongside a subject*, alongside the *Ich*, which is well and truly a subject (and falls within the province of the *ideological*).[27]

He goes on saying:

> This *Spaltung*[28] is the type of specific differential relation or articulation that binds (in the form of an abyss, a lack) unconscious discourse to the

[25] Althusser 2001, p.118.
[26] Althusser 2003a, p. 75.
[27] Ibid., p. 78.
[28] Althusser 2003a, p.78

> element or, rather, structural category of ideological discourse called the *Ich*. In a word, Lacan would appear to *establish the abyss or lack a subject*, by way of the concept of the division of the subject. There is no "subject of the unconscious," although the unconscious can exist only thanks to this abyssal relation with an *Ich* (the subject of the ideological). The lack of the subject cannot be called a subject, although the (ideological) subject is implied or reflected in Freud's second topography, in an original way, *through* this lack, which is not a subject, but something *altogether different*.

In a sense, here we can talk of two Althusser's: one of "four discourses" and another of the "ideological subject." From a Lacanian–Žižekian standpoint, we can discern the gap in the structure, which in a sense is a Žižekian subject. We shall come to its political implications later on.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle proposed a linguistic interpretation of interpellation, which allowed him "not only to assert that ideology is language, but to define this mysterious ideology declined in the singular: it is the power that circulates across the whole length of the chain of interpellation, the illocutionary force conveyed by utterances, which does not only characterise some particular speech act, but has a material effect in producing subjects."[29] The chain of interpellation, according to Lecercle, runs as following: institution → ritual → practice → speech act → subject,[30] which allows Lecercle to come to this conclusion: "the subject is, therefore, not only interpellated by ideology—which is the core of Althusser's theory—but subjectified by the language that speaks it."[31]

To summarize this, we can propose the provisional thesis with regard to the Althusserian project: the limits of Althusserian philosophy as a whole are rendered palpable through the rigidity of the interpellated subject.

Let us proceed with the interpellation as theorized by film studies. Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"[32] talks about gender representation and masculinity in the classics of Hollywood. According to Mulvey, film interpellates male spectators, thus producing a "male effect" on the film. As such, the male effect on the film is always-already caught "within the language of patriarchy."[33] On the other hand, in elaborating cinematic codes, Stephen Prince argues that "viewing these devices [optical, etc.] as symbolic codes permitted theorists to

[29] Lecercle 2006, p. 165.
[30] Lecercle 2006, p. 165.
[31] Lecercle 2006, p. 165.
[32] Mulvey 2009, pp. 771–772.
[33] Ibid., p. 712.

emphasize the construction of cinematic discourse, that is, the deployment in film of an elaborate semiotic system whose address, and effects, could be comprehensible in Althusserian-Lacanian terms as the interpellation of subjects."[34] In this sense, film should be viewed like a language and understood as a discourse that creates meanings "where only true relations of difference prevail." Therefore, according to Prince, if cinema is viewed as a discourse, it assumes a "symbiotic relationship with ideology, becoming an effective vehicle for its transmission." It is in this regard that the "work of film theory became increasingly focused on deciphering the ideology at work inside the cinema's deceptive and transparent appearance of reality. That appearance of reality was, furthermore, suspect for having ideological effects (e.g., naturalizing that which is historical or cultural, etc.) and for creating ideal and false subject unities."[35] In this sense, while for Althusser, ideology gives an identity to the interpellated subjects (through ISAs), film positions an individual in a pretty much similar (if not the same) way as the ISAs position their "individuals" *qua* subjects.

[34] Prince 2009, p. 89.
[35] Ibid.

CHAPTER 14

State Apparatuses

What is an apparatus, and more precisely, what is an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and what is a Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)? According to the classics of Marxism, the State is an Apparatus. In all its probability, Althusser borrows the term "apparatus" from Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. In Marx's terms, "the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie," whereas Lenin says that "the state is a product and a manifestation of the *irreconcilability* of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and to the extend that class antagonism *cannot* be objectively reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms *are* irreconcilable."[1] In this regard, the State is defined as a repressive force which intervenes in the social field "on behalf of and in the interest of the ruling classes." In Althusser's understanding, this definition is not complete. Indeed, the State exists in apparatuses, and as such, it has no other meaning than the function of its power. But as such, "the Marxist classics treated the State as a more complex reality than the definition of it given in the 'Marxist theory of the state.'"[2]

For Althusser, in order for us to advance the theory of the State from its "classical Marxist" understanding, it is "indispensable to take into account not only the distinction between *state power* and *state apparatus*, but also another reality which is clearly on the side of the (repressive) state

[1] Lenin 1987, p. 273.
[2] Althusser 2001, p. 95.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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apparatus, but must not be confused with it. I shall call this reality by its concept: *the Ideological State Apparatuses*."[3] How should we understand the Ideological State Apparatuses? The first distinction to be made is that between the ISAs and the RSAs. The latter are the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, and so on, and in the last instance, they "function by violence." The former are a number of specialized institutions. Althusser's empirical list of ISAs includes the religious ISA (different religious institutions), the educational ISA (the system of private and public schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA (political systems, including different political parties), the communications ISA, the cultural ISA, and so forth.[4] Does not the same go also for the camera? Analyzed from this perspective, we can argue that the camera is an ideological apparatus whose function is not to the represent the reality as it is, but to transform it through producing it. In this sense, the camera as an ideological apparatus misrepresents the reality as it is. Therefore, the camera does not represent the reality as it is (physically), but as a "passive object," it reproduces and constructs a certain reality. We shall talk about this in the second part of this book.

The other distinction is that "while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses," and "whereas the unified—(Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the *public* domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the *private* domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc., etc., are private."[5] This said, we need to advance further to the ultimate difference between the two Apparatuses: it is violence that makes the RSAs function, whereas the ISAs *function* "*by ideology*":

> This is the fact that the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology. (There is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus.) For example, the Army and the Police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction, and in the "values" they propound externally.[6]

[3] Ibid., p. 96.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 97.
[6] Ibid., p. 100.

Following this, we can come to the most important conclusion. In Althusser's view, we need to distinguish between the State power and the State Apparatuses. The two bodies always conceive the later that we have just examined. In fact, "*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses.*"[7]

Let us return for a moment to Lenin's understanding of the State. Paradoxically, he places the State exactly where Lacan places Love. For Lacan, sexual relation is impossible (*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*); it is always-already a failed relation, doomed in advance. The man cannot relate to a woman directly, but only through the mediation of the *objet petit a*, which is the fantasy through which the subject structures his relationship. Between the fantasy and the *objet petit a*, there is an uncrossable bridge. In other words, as vulgar as it gets, a man thinks he is fucking a woman, but what he is effectively doing is fucking his fantasy for that woman. As Lacan himself puts it, "a very refined manner to supplant the absence of the sexual relationship is by feigning that it is us who put the obstacle in its way."[8] On one level, the sexual relation is *never* voluntary, it is always-already asymmetrical, a non-relationship, in which the sexual partner is first a Thing, and then a "human being." Does not the same hold for the class struggle, insofar as, following Žižek, we perceive the sexual relationship as the Real which cannot be or resists symbolization? Žižek writes that "'class struggle' designates the very antagonism that prevents the objective (social) reality from constituting itself as a self-enclosed whole."[9] To go back to Lenin, one should argue that since class relations are impossible, the State emerges.

For Althusser, the Law is the only apparatus that is simultaneously an ISA and an RSA. It is both ideological *and* repressive, so it binds materially the disjuncted classes. Evgeny Pashukanis, a forgotten Soviet theorist of law, provided the most general theory of law and Marxism. According to Pashukanis, when we analyze the law, we should not be concerned with its ideological form, as a subcategory of a certain ideological formation. But when we deal with a law or its analysis, "it is not a matter of affirming or denying the existence of the ideology (or psychology) of law, but rather of demonstrating that the categories of law have absolutely

[7] Ibid., p. 98.
[8] Lacan 1999, p. 69.
[9] Žižek 2005, p. 230.

no significance other than an ideological one."[10] Pashukanis's example here is Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, "the general concepts of political economy are not merely ideological factors; rather they are abstractions of a kind which enables objective economic reality to be scientifically, that is theoretically, constructed."[11] The point thus is not to see whether a certain Law, or Law in general, ideologizes a certain aspect of social life, because law as such is an ideological category, but the difficulty arises in understanding "whether or not the social reality, which is to a certain extent mystified and veiled, can be discovered by means of these concepts." Just like the categories and concepts of political economy, the categories of Law do not have only an ideological weight, but they are abstractions which make it possible for social reality to be theoretically, that is philosophically, conceptualized. Let us analyze commodity fetishism, which Pashukanis evokes to illustrate the functioning of the Law.

We all know Marx's famous passage from the first chapter of *Capital*:

> A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious a very trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties. So far as it is a value-use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it satisfies human needs, or that it first takes on these properties as the product of human labour.[12]

Oddly enough, Marx does not use the word *ideology*, but the term "commodity fetishism," in his understanding, is the name for ideology. When Pashukanis says that the whole point is not to prove that the Law has an ideological form, but that law is ideological in itself, we should apply the same to class struggle. The question is not to prove how political class struggle is a reflection of hidden economic processes in a given society, but rather how every political class struggle (i.e., ideological) is as such part of economic relations. Does not the same hold for law? For Marx, capital is not wealth or accumulation of wealth, as some economists understand it, but a mode of production, a relation of domination. And as a social relationship, its effect on people is far more disastrous: it binds people almost to slavery relations with the owner of the means of production. In this sense, Pashukanis is right to ask whether the law can be conceived

[10] Pashukanis 2007, p. 73.
[11] Ibid., p. 74.
[12] Marx 1990, p. 163.

as a social relation in the same sense that Marx understood capital; that is to say, that in "analysing its fundamental definitions, the law represents the mystified form of a special relation," and "the regulation of social relations can assume legal character to a greater or lesser extend, can allow itself to be more or less coloured by the fundamental relation specific to law."[13]

Marx begins his *Capital* by saying that "the wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities'."[14] In this sense, the social relations present infinite formal–legal regulations. We can draw parallel lines between the two relations. Pashukanis defines law on a two-fold level: "Law appears sometimes as a principle of social organisation, and at other times as a means of enabling individuals to define themselves within society."[15] Law has thus the double function, external and internal. In this sense, do we not have a striking similarity between the functioning of the Law and the circulation of capital? For every legal relation is a relation between the subjects of law. In *Capital*, Marx talks about the process of exchange between a worker and the capitalist:

> [I]n order that our owner of money may be able to find labour-power offered for sale as a commodity, various conditions must first be fulfilled. The exchange of commodities of itself implies no other relations of dependence than those which result from its own nature. On this assumption, labour-power can appear upon the market as a commodity, only if, and so far as, its possessor, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale, or sells it, as a commodity. In order that he may be able to do this, he must have it at his disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his capacity for labour, i.e., of his person. He and the owner of money meet in the market, and deal with each other as on the basis of equal rights, with this difference alone, that one is buyer, the other seller; both, therefore, equal in the eyes of the law. The continuance of this relation demands that the owner of the labour-power should sell it only for a definite period, for if he were to sell it rump and stump, once for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity. He must constantly look upon his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity, and this he can only do by placing it at the disposal of the buyer temporarily, for a definite period of time. By this means alone can he avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it.[16]

[13] Pashukanis 2007, p. 79.
[14] Marx 1990, p. 125.
[15] Pashukanis 1997, p. 97.
[16] Marx 1990, pp. 270–271.

Workers enter the market as free and equal, but in Marx's words, there is always the Bentham—which portrays the relation between a worker and the capitalist as

> a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interests of each. Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all.[17]

This is what Pashukanis meant with legal relations being relations among the subjects. The wage-workers are equally free—there is no power to make them enter into such relations. Workers *are free subjects.* They are also, formally speaking, equal to capitalists. But it is this formal freedom through which formal equality turns into existing inequality. Here, we see that once the positive point (freedom and equality) is enacted, it becomes its own negation. This reminds us again of Pashukanis, who argues that "property becomes the basis of the legal form only when it becomes something which can be freely disposed of in the market."[18] In a capitalist form of social relations, the enslavement is not legally conducted. The exploitation and relations, which are exploitative, do not require legal sanctioning. However, a mediation is needed: as we said, the wage-worker enters freely into a market and his exploitation is carried out (legally) by the form of a contract. As Marx writes:

> [C]ommodities cannot go to market and make exchanges of their own account. We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are also

[17] Ibid., p. 280.
[18] Pashukanis 1997, p. 110.

> their owners. Commodities are things, and therefore without power of resistance against man. If they are wanting in docility he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them. In order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another, as persons whose will resides in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and part with his own, except by means of an act done by mutual consent. They must therefore, mutually recognise in each other the rights of private proprietors. This juridical relation, which thus expresses itself in a contract, whether such contract be part of a developed legal system or not, is a relation between two wills, and is but the reflex of the real economic relation between the two. It is this economic relation that determines the subject-matter comprised in each such juridical act.[19]

A commodity presents a social relation and the possessor as well as the proprietor is merely the personification of the abstract product of that relation. The lesson thus is this: for Law to function, the subject has to structurally internalize the command of the Law. We do not obey the Law because it is Good or it is the Truth, but because it is necessary. The Law displays its power and terror, without addressing the "concrete individuals" as its subjects. So, if the Kafkaesque subject is the Lacanian subject, then the Lacanian subject has the structure of the juridical ISA/RSA. This is not simply an ideological one, but it touches on the material organization of society.

[19] Marx 1990, p. 178.

CHAPTER 15

Church as an Ideological State Apparatus

Althusser writes about the Christian religious ideology in the same paper.[1] Given the content and the aim of this book, we will talk about the Church as an Ideological State Apparatus. Apart from theological writings, Althusser has written two ecclesiologic papers, which can, or rather should, be understood as an attempt to "draw lines of demarcation" in the French long tradition of the debate on materialism of the Church. Althusser was well aware of the reactionary character of the Church, as a medieval and feudal remnant that persists in our capitalist societies. He goes far enough to compare the Church with the sick man[2] and its words fail to attract the ears of the contemporary men:

> [T]he modern Church is no longer at home in our times, and the vast majority of the faithful are in the Church for reasons that are not really of the Church.[3]

In this regard, there is a schism between the status, structure, and the ideology of the Church with our contemporary conjuncture. In other words, religious institutions are anachronistic institutions with our world—its nature can be grasped only through analyzing the crack between the institution(s) itself and the contemporary world. Althusser asks a per-

[1] Althusser 2001.
[2] Althusser 2014, p. 191.
[3] Ibid., p.193.

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tinent question, "when we consider the people faithful to the Church, the question arises as to whether their faithfulness is still religious."[4] This raises not only theological questions, but also political and ideological ones. It should be noted again that for Althusser, "it is absolutely clear that *there was one dominant Ideological State Apparatus*, *the Church*, which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large proportion of the functions of communications and 'culture'."[5] Therefore, the foremost objective as well as the achievement of the French Revolution, according to Althusser, was not only the transfer[6] of the State power, but "also to attack the number-one Ideological State Apparatus: the Church."[7] Together with the Family, the Church was the most important Ideological State Apparatus, which in bourgeois societies was replaced by another School–Family couple.[8]

Although one can trace the St Augustinian echoes of reason versus faith, or the unity of the two, the whole point of Althusser is to move beyond this dichotomy. Althusser's writing on Church can be summarized in two points:

1. Church is an institution that does not correspond with our contemporary situation. Ideologically speaking, Church has an archaic nature, inhabiting within a "conceptual universe that was established in the thirteenth century."[9] Although theologians argue that they are giving new meaning to old concepts; nonetheless, "the *content* of these concepts is still alive in a real sense, to the extent that these concepts are still intertwined with vestigial features of the worlds that spawned them."[10] In other words, the Church in its structure and its foundation stands for the impossibility of being up to date with contemporary matters. Church and all other religious institutions are anachronistic institutions with our world—their nature can be grasped only through analyzing the crack between the institution(s) itself and the contemporary world.

[4] Ibid., p.192.
[5] Ibid.
[6] It is very interesting why Althusser used the word "transfer State power" for a revolutionary transformation of the relations of productions and all of social structures as such.
[7] Althusser 2001, p. 102.
[8] Ibid., p. 104.
[9] Althusser 2014, p. 194.
[10] Ibid., p. 195.

2. The Church should be conceived as an institution of social relations and collective practice, rather than an institution of spiritual experience. However, Althusser writes that the policies of Church are reactionary, arguing that, for instance, the most daring positions of Papacy are "merely reformist accommodations." Church's social doctrine fully recognizes capitalism, despite its "compromise between medieval corporatism and liberal reformism." Differently put, Church's "most advanced proposals represent nothing more than a form of reactionary reformism."[11] It is therefore, "tied to archaic structures doomed to extinction,"[12] which both structure and determine its reactionary ideological, social, and political character in the world. It speaks the language which men are able to comprehend. In this sense, "the 'Good News is no longer announced to the men of our time' because the Church announces it in a language men no longer understand."[13] The language, according to Althusser, cannot be reduced to mere vocabulary, but:

> it is a totality of real meanings which are experienced and felt every day in life and its gestures, and which the spoken language evokes by allusion; these concrete meanings (social realities, structures, economic and political laws, everyday life, modes of behaviour, gestures) are the real content of the spoken language, which, without them, would be merely noise coming out of people's mouths.[14]

Contemporary men do not understand the language with which they are addressed, because it presents a world that no longer exists. In this regard, Althusser poses a question which refers not only to the Church as an institution, but it tackles religion as such:

> When religion is in reality a social form that takes its place within feudal and capitalist structures, and holds the people in submission, forcing it to experience its submission to men as God's will; when, in its discourse, silences, or diversionary tactics, it shores up these structures and provides them with their theoretical justification; when it ensures their defense and "compensation"; when the faithful experience religion, in reality, as the

[11] Ibid., p. 201.
[12] Ibid., p. 199.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., pp. 199–200.

> theory and legitimation of their social universe - one can no longer avoid the question: is this life of religion still a religious life, is it still the Good News that is being announced - even in the world of the Church?[15]

Which are both philosophical and political implications? Can we think about the possibility of liberating the Church and its transformation into an institution both emancipated and capable of emancipating? According to Althusser, the reappropriation of the authentic religious life and the emancipation of the Church are possible. Furthermore, he argues that what matters is the nature and the degree to which the Church has been alienated[16] in feudal and capitalist structures. Contrary to the young Marx, Althusser believes that religion is not *a priori* a form of social alienation,[17] but the latter comes as a result of the "theoretical reduction" of the Church itself. The old structures that bind the Church to its existing condition can be combated and dismantled by the organized forces, "marshaled by the organized proletariat."[18] However, Althusser makes another crucial point by arguing that "the struggle for the social emancipation of the Church is inseparable from the proletariat's present struggle for human emancipation."[19] In sum, the emancipation of the Church can be done only insofar as it is part of the political, economic, and ideological struggle of the working class.

Believers must fight the alienation imposed onto them by the destruction and critique of all forms and structures to which she or he is subjected to. Only by doing so can the believer experience an authentic religious life. The crucial element to note here is that with regard to the Church, Althusser presents two levels of the *Aufhebung*: (1) when the rejection of the Church permeate his later philosophical work, and (2) attempt for the emancipation of the Church itself, through the destruction of its dominating structures. To put it differently, the future of the Church, according to Althusser, depends solely on the result of the class struggle, carried out under the name of popular emancipation:

> [A]lthough the objective conditions for a social emancipation of the Church through the proletarian struggle already exist, the conditions for a collective reconquest of religious life have not been created.[20]

[15] Ibid., p. 201.
[16] Strangeness of employing this word.
[17] Althusser 2014, p. 203.
[18] Ibid., p. 202.
[19] Ibid., p. 203.
[20] Ibid., p. 204.

The emancipation of the Church opens up a new important question: that of the politics of emancipation; which is to say, can the Church serve as a model for a new type of a political party? We shall discuss the politics of the Church in the next part of this book.

CHAPTER 16

Althusser's Politics

Let us put forward a few preliminary theses. One of the most difficult aspects of writing about Althusser is rethinking his politics. This is indeed a paradoxical position, since, in one instance, his entire oeuvre *is* political. This said, there are no Althusserian political parties or political movements of any kind. In this regard, Althusserianism is not a political orientation in the strict sense.

Jacques Rancière's *Althusser's Lesson* is probably the first consistent philosophical critique of Althusser's philosophical and political project. It is particularly important, given that Rancière belonged to the inner circle of Althusserians at the École normale supérieure, and was one of the contributors to *Reading Capital*. Rancière's response comes after the events of May 1968. According to him, Althusser's doctrine does the exact opposite of what it aims: "the Marxism we had learned at Althusser's school was a philosophy of order whose every principle served to distance us from the uprisings which were then shaking the bourgeois order to its core."[1] In his understanding, Althusser's Marxism had a demobilizing effect on young people and students. In this regard, Althusserianism was the philosophy or doctrine of order, and its critique of humanism and its concept of interpellation:

> The conjuncture defined by this double division allows us to gain a better understanding of the strange status Althusser gives to the problematic of ideological state apparatuses. The fundamental theoretical lesson that the

[1] Rancière 2011, p. xix.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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> mass movement of May 68 had brought to everyone's attention, and that the leftist critique of Althusser had started to systematize, was this: the bourgeoisie's ideological domination was not the result of a social imaginary wherein individuals spontaneously reflected their relations to the conditions of their existence. It was, instead, the result of the system of material power relations reproduced by different apparatuses. Ideological domination was not exerted on students primarily through the content of the courses themselves, or through their spontaneous ideas, but through the concatenation of the forms of selection, transmission, control and use of knowledges (*connaissances*). The question of ideology was not the question of the subject's relationship to truth, but of the masses' relationship to power and knowledge (*savoir*).[2]

But, does Rancière succeed in moving beyond what he identifies as the limits of Althusser? Or is this Rancière's own double deadlock: first, emphasizing what he understands as Althusser's limits, and second, his failure to move beyond that? Earlier, we mentioned the almost military vocabulary that is employed in Althusser's oeuvre. For Althusser, as for Lenin, the main question is: how to take the state power, reorganize it, and transform it? the task is, contrary to Ranciére, how to properly develop the foundations for an Althusserian politics?

So, is it still possible to be an Althusserian today, and more precisely, an Althusserian in politics? Or can we think of politics in an Althusserian model? Let us remind ourselves of Balibar's claim that in France, there were no Althusserian groups. We should advance this by a dogmatic proposition: the Althusserian problematic is indispensably linked with the problem and the question of Marxism today. Earlier, we elaborated on Althusser's two definitions of philosophy. However, we can proceed with another distinction: that between philosophy and theory. Philosophy declares positions, whereas theory produces problems.[3] This is a very rigid and mechanical distinction, but it might as well give us the background. In his perhaps the most important essay in *For Marx*, "On the Materialist Dialectic," he coins a new concept: his materialism is now called Theory, with a capital T. His materialism is a Marxist philosophy, as he argues in

[2] Ibid., pp. 73–74.

[3] I am aware that this distinction is highly problematic. For instance, in his interview with Fernanda Navarro, Althusser declares that "philosophy produces a general problematic: that is, a manner of posing, and therefore resolving, any problem that may arise," Althusser 2006, p. 287.

the opening of this essay. Althusser is concerned with resolving problems through a Marxist practice:

> By *practice* in general I shall mean any process of *transformation* of determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of "production"). In any practice thus conceived, the *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means. This general definition of practice covers the possibility of particularity: there are different practices which are really distinct, even though they belong organically to the same complex totality. Thus, "social practice," the complex unity of the practices existing in a determinate society, contains a large number of distinct practices. This complex unity of "social practice" is structured, we shall soon see how, in such a way that in the last resort the determinant practice in it is the practice of transformation of a given nature (raw material) into useful *products* by the activity of living men working through the *methodically organized* employment of determinate *means of production* within the framework of determinate relations of production.[4]

Then he goes on arguing:

> As well as production social practice includes other essential levels: political practice—which in Marxist parties is no longer spontaneous but organized on the basis of the scientific theory of historical materialism, and which transforms its raw materials: social relations, into a determinate product (new social relations); ideological practice (ideology, whether religious, political, moral, legal or artistic, also transforms its object: men's "consciousness"): and finally, *theoretical practice*. Ideology is not always taken seriously as an existing practice: but to recognize this is the indispensable prior condition for any theory of ideology. The existence of a *theoretical practice* is taken seriously even more rarely: but this prior condition is indispensable to an understanding of what theory itself, and its relation to "social practice" are for Marxism.[5]

This brings us to a crucial moment. We could go on critiquing his thesis of transformation as being the notion of concrete labor, but that is not our concern at this moment. As we said, Althusser distinction between

[4] Althusser 2005, p. 167.
[5] Althusser 2005, p. 166.

ideology and science is crucial. This distinction compels Althusser to call Marx a scientist and not a philosopher. For him, historical materialism is a science, the science of history, which was inaugurated by Marx in 1845, placing Marx in the same category as Thales, Galileo, and so on. This said, he sets the primacy of the science of history to the philosophy which accompanies it, that is, dialectical materialism. The latter is always underdeveloped in relation to the former. In this sense, dialectical materialism is always behind. As he puts it elsewhere apropos the relation between science and philosophy, is of a determinate situation for philosophy: "*Outside of its relationship to the sciences, philosophy would not exist*."[6] But let us go back to the distinction between science and ideology. As we have said, this distinction is purely ideological, in the sense that rather than produce a constructive political vision, we merely "borrow" the constructive capacities of science, leaving ourselves without any proper political orientation. That is, if we stick to this formula in a strict sense.[7] And this cannot be all.

There are political events and developments that *politically* condition Althusser's work. Althusser himself said that it was the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Khrushchev's critique of Stalin (followed with a certain liberalization) that made Althusser write his books. We shall add to this list also the Sino–Soviet split, Lin Biao, the failure of May 1968, the Prague events, and the rotten, anachronistic, and revisionist character of the French Communist Party. Althusser's aim was thus to provide a *leftist critique* of these developments and "above all help put some substance back into the revolutionary project here in the West."[8] Here, we can get a broader picture of Althusser's political project: he is not only a philosopher of the critique of situation, but also a philosopher of the critique of Marxism. His reading of Machiavelli bears witness to this.[9] His philosophical commitment to Marxism and radical politics was certainly conditioned by the conjunctures within which he lived and worked. But when those conjunctures disappear, Althusser's singularity gains its crucial importance. His readings and reconceptualization of Marx echoed so far precisely because they did not reduce Marxism into yet another academic discipline, reduced to the interest of philosophers only. In this sense, Althusser's Marxism is not only a rupture between Marxism and

[6] Althusser 1997, p. 109.
[7] Cf. Johnston 2015.
[8] Althusser 1990, p. xviii
[9] Althusser 1999.

non-Marxist forms of doing politics and philosophy, but a very rupture within Marxism itself. So, how should we understand the proposition that the era of Althusserian politics is not over?

We said that there are no Althusserian political organizations. The thesis I want to propose thus is that the Althusserian politics is inconceivable in our theoretical conjuncture (within the Left), precisely because we are still trapped in the Trotskyite–Khrushchevian fantasy concerning Stalinism. Althusser's position was that only through Marxism could we understand our history. Does this not hold true for most of the critiques of Stalinism? Employing the usual catchwords (abuses, horrors, crimes, and so on) in understanding and explaining Stalin is helping ourselves with pseudo-concepts, as Althusser knew very well. We often mistake *facts* for concepts.[10] The term "Stalinism," Althusser writes,

> the Soviet leaders have avoided using, but which was widely used by bourgeois ideologians and the Trotskyists, before penetrating into Communist circles, offers in general the same "disadvantages" as the term "personality cult." It designates a *reality* which innumerable Communists, above all, have experienced, either in direct and tragic form, or less directly and with more or less serious consequences. Now this terminology also has theoretical pretensions: among bourgeois ideologists and many Trotskyists. It *explains* nothing. To set out on the road of a Marxist explanation, to be able to pose the problem of the explanation of these facts, the least that is required is to put forward *Marxist concepts*, and to see whether they are suitable. That is why I am proposing the concept of "*deviation* ", which is a concept that can certainly be "found" in Marxist–Leninist theory. Thus one might, first of all, talk of a *"Stalinian" deviation*: first of all, because to talk of a deviation necessarily requires that it should next be *qualified*, that one should explain *in what* it consisted, and always in Marxist terms. One thing, at the present stage, must be made clear: to speak of a "Stalinian" deviation is not to explain it by an individual, who would be its "cause". The adjective certainly refers to a man in history, but above all to a certain *period* in the history of the International Labour Movement.[11]

In this sense, "Stalinist deviation" is not a Marxist (theoretical) concept. At best, it can be said to be the Trotskyite supplement to the lack of a philosophical rigorous analysis of the era in which Stalin ruled the Soviet Union.

[10] Althusser 1999.
[11] Ibid.

And perhaps avoiding Trotsky's and the Trotskyist influence throughout his work was one of the greatest values of Althusser's political and philosophical rigor. As Marxists, we should never forget the internal determinations, as Althusser calls them:

> For Marxism the explanation[12] of any phenomenon is in the last instance *internal:* it is the *internal* "contradiction" which is the "motor". The external circumstances are active: but "through" the internal contradiction which they overdetermine. Why the need to be precise on this question? Because certain Communists, finding the "explanation" in terms of the "cult" inadequate, thought of the idea of adding a *supplement*, which could only be *external:* for example, the explanation by capitalist encirclement, whose reality no one can deny. Marxism, however, does not like supplements: when you need a supplement too much, you have probably missed the *internal* cause.

Mao TseTung used to say *never* forget the class struggle. In this sense, can we not analyze Stalinism as a form of internal determination of class struggle? In any case, the theoretical (i.e., philosophical) and political trap that we find ourselves in regarding our history is mostly and predominantly due to the Trotskist reductionism.

How are we to understand historical materialism while avoiding the slogans of the Left which sound more like lines from blockbusters such as *The Lord of the Rings* or *Braveheart* than proper elements of a serious radical Marxist and communist project? An Althusserian path would have been to assert the primacy of the class struggle with respect to the critique of ideology and the unconscious over the conscious.[13] Sociological, cultural, and psychological analyses are not only insufficient, but in themselves ideological. Far from providing an objective analysis of the situation, their contribution to the ideological–political struggle is predominantly mystificatory. This leads us inevitably to what is perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of Althusser's oeuvre: taking sides and drawing lines of demarcations. In a letter to Macciocchi, commenting on an electoral campaign, drawing from Mao's *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*, Althusser says:

[12] Ibid.
[13] Pêcheux 2015, pp. 1–2.

> An electoral campaign can be a first (limited but real) step towards understanding what is happening among "the people." A campaign also provides a means of responding to the preliminary but absolutely essential question for every political undertaking: *What does "the People" mean, today, in Italy?* Another way of putting it might be: What classes make up "the people"? What fractions of classes are involved *beyond* the proletariat, the poor peasants?[14]

And right away, he concludes:

> As long as you can't answer the question: what, today, comprises the people in a given country (*today*, because the composition of the people varies historically; *in a given country*, because the composition of the people changed from place to place), you can't do anything in politics. Only by knowing what "the people" means can you then develop: (1) a mass political line; (2) corresponding political actions.[15]

The class struggle is not only about reflecting on the capacities and strength of the adversaries, but according to Althusser, it is mostly and predominantly about choosing our own terrain and our form of the struggle. Departing from this, the question we need to pose thus is: in today's conjuncture, who will systematically and collectively carry the antihumanist struggle? Furthermore, given our political and ideological predicament, the Left is engaged in those struggles which (such as, antiracism, antisexism, multiculturalism, antiausterity, etc.), without downplaying their importance, are insufficient insofar as they do not disturb the "symmetry" of base–superstructure relation, and (more importantly), they do not produce a new theoretical orientation. In short, the struggles in which the contemporary left is engaged is are already overdetermined by the ruling ideology. Or to misappropriate Althusser's own words, contemporary Left is "advancing" in direct opposition to that in which they fire. Given this situation, there is no political party which is ready and able to propose new lines of demarcation in our situation. Further, there are no organizations that live up to a series of critiques provided by Althusser: critique of humanism, sectarianism, economism, and so on. Can we, in accordance with Althusser's thesis, apply the ideological state apparatus (ISA) theory to ourselves? As Pêxheux notes, "the ISAs constitute

[14] Althusser 1973, p. 5.
[15] Ibid.

simultaneously and contradictorily the site and the ideological conditions of the transformation of the relations of production (i.e., of revolution, in the Marxist–Leninist sense)."[16] Althusser was fond of the slogan from the Great Cultural Revolution: "Trust the masses." However,

> [t]he masses can only act in mass organizations. The C.R.'s [Cultural Revolution]. most original and innovative means are found in the emergence of organizations specific to the C.R., organizations distinct from other organizations of the class struggle (union and party). The organizations specific to the C.R. are organizations of ideological class struggle.[17]

We have elaborated on *social classes and their definition*: it is not only by the place they occupy in the relations of production and as a result *by* the relations of production that the class position is defined—it is *also* defined by the political and ideological position in those relations. This is a *crucial* aspect, which brings us back to the critique of idolatry of the proletariat and the *necessity* of defending the primacy of the class struggle. In this sense, we can begin to interpellate individuals into Althusserian militants, which would not be *only* some isolated and old lunatics.

[16] Pêcheux 2015, pp. 4–5.
[17] Althusser 2010, p. 8.

PART II

The Gospel According to Althusser

If any one will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life.

—St. Augustine, Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, According to Matthew (Colorado: Independent Publishers, 2015) p. 6

Montage thus accomplishes for the material of film (constituted of fragments, the longest or the shortest, of as many long takes as there are subjectivities) what death accomplishes for life.

—Pasolini

CHAPTER 17

Setting the Stage

Let us begin this chapter with Pier Paolo Pasolini's perhaps truly most subversive film, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Specifically, how are we to place it within the Althusserian context, and furthermore, which are the philosophical instances in the work of Althusser that will permit one to read the film? An Althusserian-inspired film theory mostly operates by employing Althusser's concept of interpellation of individuals into ideological subjects in order to understand the position, status, and function of the spectator. Jean-Jacques Lecercle, an Althusserian French philosopher, proposed a linguistic interpretation of the concept of interpellation, which allowed him "not only to assert that ideology is language, but to define this mysterious ideology declined in the singular: it is the power that circulates across the whole length of the chain of interpellation, the illocutionary force conveyed by utterances, which does not only characterise some particular speech act, but also has a material effect in producing subjects."[1]

Could we not read Pasolini's movie as a reversed version of Lecercle's chain of interpellation (institution → ritual → practice → speech act → subject)? By reversing it, we get subject (supposed to become) → speech act → practice → ritual → institution. In short, I would like to suggest that the reversed chain of interpellation encapsulates Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Therefore, we have Jesus Christ who, in his position of the subject-supposed-to-become Christian, speaks and practices his speech, which later on turns into or takes the form of a ritual. The

[1] Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *A Marxist Philosophy of Language* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), p. 165.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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final instance is: the institution (*qua* Church). Subjected to the lenses of an Althusserian project, Pasolini's film gains a completely different meaning. The following is thus an Althusserian reading of the film, its main theological, religious, and political implications, as well as its effects. This part of the book will draw from the theses developed in the previous chapter and in reading Pasolini's cinematographic work, some poems, his political positions, it will aim to construct an Althusserian Gospel, with a primary focus on Pasolini's cinematic work. In this strict sense, the cinematic art functions as a nonphilosophical condition for philosophy. What makes Pasolini's Christianity so unique? Why Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* and not other films on (the life of) Jesus Christ, such as Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988)?[2] Despite the controversy it caused (and after all, every film on religion or religious books always causes a great deal of reactions and so on), *The Last Temptation of Christ* tries to adhere to the well-known interpretation of the Bible by being original with the story line and the dialog, while Pasolini's *Gospel* attempts to reveal the political side of it, precisely by sticking to the words of the Bible as they are; a side which is not explicit within usual interpretations of the Bible. That is why *The Gospel* is simultaneously orthodox and revolutionary, and while Scorsese's work is creative, it ultimately does not consider anything new of the Christian event. In this sense, Pasolini's reversal presents the Althusserian field. The Althusserian field is the field of reversals. In the last instance, the concept of interpellation is a concept of reversing. The (Althusserian) Christian reality as constructed by Pasolini corresponds perfectly well to the Althusserian field. And such is our point of departure and analysis for this chapter.

[2] Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* is based on the novel with the same title written by Nikos Kazantzakis (1953).

CHAPTER 18

Camera as an Ideological Apparatus

Let me begin an analysis with the typical film theory perspective of the 1970s: camera as a cinematic apparatus. The French film theory of the 1970s was highly inspired by Althusser and the apparatus theory was arguably the dominant theory in France.

The initial thesis reads as such: camera, as a cinematic apparatus, is an ideological apparatus, and in being so, it has *ideological* effects upon the spectator. As Jean-Louis Baudry asks, "does the technical nature of optical instruments, directly attached to scientific practice, serve to conceal not only their use in ideological products but also the ideological effects which they may themselves provoke?"[1] It is precisely the "optical instrument" which one refers to as a camera that constitutes a (cinematic) reality. According to Baudry, "the optical apparatus *camera obscura* will serve in the same period to elaborate in pictorial work a new mode of representation, *perspectiva artificialis.*"[2] The spectator is therefore a subject, a spectator-subject who is constituted alongside the cinematic reality. Such constitution of the spectator-subject is positioned vis-à-vis the screen (e.g., a movie theater, TV set or screen projector at home). It is because of this structural positioning toward the screen that the individual *qua* spectator is interpellated into a spectator-subject. Following this, I propose an Althusserian thesis that runs as following: the film spectator

[1] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1974–1975), p. 40.
[2] Ibid.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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is an interpellated subject, constituted by the *effects* of the cinematic experience. In this sense, the way Baudry uses the term "subject" should be understood not as a discursive or objective position, but as a subjective position of the spectator vis-à-vis the screen.

Baudry was aware of the distinction between reality and the strength of the filmic picture: to a certain extent, the so-called reality is always-already insufficient to produce meaning as such. Therefore, the spectator-subject is the instance which produces meaning of the produced reality of the screen. The spectator-subject acts as an agent of the filmic scripture which gives meaning to itself. However, is this really the case? Particularly, how is one to position the role of the camera as an apparatus? Baudry argues that "equally distant from 'objective reality' and the finished product, the camera occupies an intermediate position in the work process which leads from raw material to finished product."[3] Camera is not merely a vanishing mediator[4] between the final product (film) and its screening, but rather, it is central to the production of a film. The camera carries out the construction of images which do not only obscure reality, but also produce the meanings of reality. It is in this precise sense that the cinematic apparatus should be understood as an ideological apparatus which produces an ideological position. One may translate French *dispositif* also as "dispositive," but nevertheless prefer to keep Althusserian "apparatus," since its ideological effects are already inscribed in the historic understanding of the concept itself. The spectator position is always ideological because the narrative produced by the film practice always hides the labor process which is required for producing a film. As Baudry claims, "between 'objective reality' and the camera, site of the inscription, and between the inscription and projection are situated certain operations, a work which has as its result a finished product."[5] Does Pasolini make this process visible? Yes he does, and he does so by evoking the *gaze* as a constitutive element of the apparatus. In a short piece called "Observation on a Long Take," Pasolini writes that the "subject is always incarnate, because even if, in a fiction film, we choose an ideal and therefore abstract and nonnaturalistic point of view, it becomes realistic and ultimately naturalistic as soon as we place

[3] Ibid., p. 41.

[4] I should emphasize that Althusser himself was opposed to the (Hegelian) concept of *mediation* and instead writes about overdetermination. See the elaboration of this concept in the previous chapter.

[5] Ibid., p. 40.

a camera and tape recorder there."[6] The distinction between the "objective reality" (as the raw material) and the spectator's impression of reality (provided by the screen) prevents the spectator from seeing the real transformative labor that is carried out. In this sense, camera as an ideological apparatus is a vanishing mediator between the "objective reality" and the "cinematic reality." In order to proceed further, it is important to summarize the concept of the camera as an ideological apparatus. The camera (the instrument) works as an ideological apparatus because its function is to transform objective reality into a mystified cinematic one. In addition, this transformation is correlative with the onset of a subject-of-the-ideological gaze, that is, of interpellation. However, there is the counter-thesis of the camera as a mystifying instrument. Once the gaze is reflected as a constitutive element of the whole apparatus, the process itself is not any more hidden, but rather, in a certain way, is "demonstrated," which makes reflective cinema an art of radical "demonstration" (or as the French would say, *monstration*).

Cinematography is a system of signification. Its specificity and what distinguishes it from other systems is related to the "*work*, that is to say, to the process of transformation."[7] For Baudry, the "question becomes, is the work made evident, does consumption of the product bring about a 'knowledge effect' [Althusser], or is the work concealed?"[8] Baudry's inquiry rests on what lies between the ideological surplus-value and the simple consumption of a product. In order to comprehend this, one needs to employ those cinematographic techniques which Baudry conveys. Hence, he asked whether "the instruments (the technical base) produce specific ideological effects, and are these effects themselves determined by the dominant ideology?" If effects are, indeed, determined by dominant ideologies, then the "concealment of the technical base will also bring about a specific ideological effect. Its inscription, its manifestation as such, on the other hand, would produce a knowledge effect, as actualization of the work process, as denunciation of ideology, and as critique of idealism."[9]

In "defense" of the cinema, one could thus propose the following (Lacanian-inspired) argument: is not our everyday reality always-already mystified? And is not the role of cinema—at least to some extent—precisely,

[6] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Observation on a Long Take," *October*, Vol. 13 (Summer 1980), p. 3.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., pp. 40–41.

[9] Ibid., p. 41.

a demystifying one which reveals the inner ideological split, that is, to expose the Real of reality itself? From this perspective, the camera has a de-interpellatory function.

In order to create a particular reality, the camera has to perform a specific task. Pasolini's camera is a specific one, going through intensive frontal close-ups (consider the faces of Jesus Christ, his disciples and apostles, his parents, and so on) and remarkably fascinating long shots (e.g., the baptism). Pasolini relies on European modernistic camera techniques, which are different from what we see in Hollywood movies. In arming himself with these traditions and orientations, Pasolini presents a very *specific* reality: neorealistic and radically modern at the same time. As he himself put it, "cinema […] reproduces reality,"[10] which always happens in the present tense.

[10] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Observation on a Long Take*, p. 3.

CHAPTER 19

Film as a Commodity

A short detour to commodity analysis allows a perspective on the transformation of reality, as well as the perspective which cinema establishes for us. Film theorists Comolli and Narboni point out that film is a commodity "possessing exchange value," but which "as a result of being a material product of the system, it is also an ideological product of the system."[1] This is the two-fold aspect of the film. First, it is a particular product, that is to say, a commodity produced within a certain economic formation, which, as every other commodity in order to be produced, involves the existence of labor force. First, when it is produced, it becomes an ideological product of the given social–economic formation. The second, and arguably more crucial, aspect is that the product occurs within the capitalist form of organization of production.

In this sense, insofar as film is part of an economic system (i.e., capitalism), it is also therefore part of an ideological system. Even though Althusser does not "rank *real art among the ideologies*," he nonetheless argues that the "peculiarity of art is to 'make us see' (*nous donner à voir*), 'make us perceive,' 'make us feel' something which *alludes* to reality."[2] However, Althusser also says something else: insofar as ideology "slides into all human activity, that it is identical with the 'lived' experience of

[1] Jean-Louis Comolli & Jean Narboi, "Cinema/Criticism/Ideology," *Screen Reader 1*, 1977, p. 4.

[2] Louis Althusser, "A Letter on Art: In Reply to André Daspre," in *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 174.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-56652-2_19

human existence itself: that is why the form in which we are 'made to see' ideology in great novels has as its content the 'lived' experience of individuals."[3] In this sense, film and cinema *are* living experiences of individuals with a given reality. This is where the role of a critic emerges. The film critic not only renders visible an ideology of the given film (of the cinematic genre), but also serves to transform the very ideological coordinates which condition the film as such. It is not a coincidence that Pasolini was a film critic himself, thus aligning himself with the French *Nouvelle Vague* experience of film critics turned into film directors.

At this conjuncture, the film is understood as a commodity in the double Marxian sense. Michael Henrich analyses the commodity and its use and exchange value.

One only describes something as a *commodity* if it is exchanged, something that in addition to its *use-value* also has an *exchange-value*. The use-value of something is nothing other than its usefulness; for example, the use-value of a chair consists of the fact that one can sit on it. The use-value is independent of whether or not the object is exchanged.[4]

For something to be a commodity, that is, to have an exchange-value together with a use-value, is "not a 'natural' property of things, but rather a social one."[5] Or as Karl Marx claims, "use-values are not only realised [*verwirklicht*] in use or in consumption. They constitute the material content of wealth, whatever its social form may be."[6] In this regard, it is important to distinguish the distinction between the natural form and the social form of a commodity. Translating this in cinematographic practice, one can argue that there is nothing natural about the movies—natural in the sense that camera and other technical aspects of production (editing, post-production, and so on) do not have the function of transmitting the "objective reality" at cinematic level. We all know Lacan's formula of fetishist disavowal: *je sais bien, mais quand meme* (I know very well, but…). The entirety of the cinematographic experience is based on this formula: as a spectator, I know very well that they are only images on the screen, but I nonetheless identify with the characters and situations, and even, at times, empathize with them.

[3] Ibid., p. 175.

[4] Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx's Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), p. 40.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 126.

According to Marx, commodities are "residue of the products of labour:

> there is nothing left of them in each case but the same *phantom-like objectivity*; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure. All these things now tell us is that human labour-power has been expended to produce them, human labour is accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values – commodity values."[7]

The *phantom-like objectivity* is the equivalent to *value-objectivity*: abstract labor is therefore the value producing labor.[8] This is how one ought to approach the specificity of the cinematic. Its specificity or what makes cinema a specific art resides in the labor which transforms *and* produces a reality different (or other) than an "objective reality." The consumption of a film is always accompanied by an ideological value; that is to say, the camera as an ideological apparatus (and other technological instruments necessary for production) produces specific ideological situations, or ideological effects. In this sense, the ideological function of cinematographic art is the creation of reality.[9]

Comolli and Narboni maintain that a filmmaker cannot solely change nor transform the economic relations that run (or regulate) the production and distribution of films regardless of how revolutionary or subversive he or she might be. A filmmaker can perhaps deform and deflect the structures, but by no means can he or she negate them. Here, Comolli and Narboni are fully Althusserians: "because every film is part of the economic system, it is also a part of the ideological system, for 'cinema' and 'art' are branches of ideology."[10] However, not every filmmaker plays the same role in cinematic production. As Comolli and Narboni argue, the "job of criticism to see where they differ" is slow and requires patience, as well as hard work, if one is to change those ideologies which condition these filmmakers. For Comolli and Narboni, "*every film is political*, inasmuch

[7] Ibid, p. 183 (emphasis mine).

[8] Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx's Capital*, p. 48.

[9] Several key directors of the twentieth-century cinema have in different stages of their careers dreamed about filming nothing less than *The Genesis* (or at least the elements of it): David Wark Griffith, Orson Welles, Jean-Luc Godard, Robert Bresson, and so on.

[10] Jean-Louis Comolli & Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Criticm/Ideology," *Screen Reader 1*, 1977, p. 3.

as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing)."[11] Pasolini's *Gospel* is an exemplification of this: although it was produced in the postwar Italy during post-fascist and within a capitalist ideological and political context, it *did* at least provoke and deform the political, ideological (religious) structures of this period. In fact, the film continues to be highly political and provoking in the strictest sense of the word. As a genre, political films are an attempt to "attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts": first, by a direct political action, "on the level of the 'signified,' i.e. they deal with a direct political subject."[12] Their understanding "to deal with" has to be comprehended in an active sense; that is to say, "they do not just discuss an issue, reiterate it, paraphrase it, but use to attack the ideology" which "presupposes a theoretical activity which is the direct opposite of the ideological one."[13] Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* does exactly this: it attacks the predominant religious (Christian) ideology from and by the theoretical activity of Marxism. Differently put, films like *The Gospel* or *Medea* function not merely as a demystifying enterprise, but also as a cinematic *critique of ideology* that desecrates what the traditional and established myth of the Western bourgeoisie accepts as sacred. Ravetto argues that Pasolini's films "clearly challenge conventional moral discourses that are fastened to cultural and sexual politics, they excite a certain moral panic."[14] Here, one can supplement Ravetto's thesis and add that Pasolini's films also excited a certain political and ideological panic among the ruling classes.

[11] Ibid., p. 4.
[12] Ibid., p. 6.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, p. 31.

CHAPTER 20

Representation

What makes Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* a unique film in the series of films on Jesus Christ? Although it is apparent in the film credits that the script was written by Pasolini himself, it is, in fact, written by an anonymous writer of the Gospel. This is not the case with other films which focus on the Bible or Jesus Christ, such as Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, or even Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. It also differs from other film scripts about St. Paul that Pasolini intended to shoot, as he focused on transformation *through* the process of rewriting. However, in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Pasolini uses biblical verses in order to transform the Gospel into an audiovisual work. The Gospel becomes a series of *moving images*, and should be understood *through gaps between what is heard and what is seen, between sounds and images,* than through the spoken word only. The cinematography in its double, audiovisual dimension dominates over the spoken word. Paradoxically, although Pasolini's *Gospel* moves through time with a straight narration line, it is much more dynamic and radical from the temporarily point of view. This is in contrast with the ultraviolent Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, which covers only the last 12 hours of the life of Jesus Christ and uses flashbacks to go back in time seeing Jesus teaching his Apostles during his childhood. The spoken language of Gibson's film is Aramaic and Latin, and it draws from many sources (New Testament, many other Catholic writings, canon of the Hebrew Bible, and so on). Unlike Gibson, Pasolini makes Jesus Christ speak Italian and his first and only source is the Gospel of Matthew. Pier Paolo Pasolini does not rewrite

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-56652-2_20

the screenplay, but, instead, *edits the Bible*. Although he omits some scenes, Pasolini creates scenes on the basis of Matthew's dialogs. He takes the text of Matthew out of the Bible and treats it as a book on its own. That is to say, he decontextualizes the Gospel of Matthew, and in doing so, he "desanctifies the biblical Matthew by quoting it whole, and as though it were isolated from the rest of the Bible."[1] Given this, the question beckons: How exactly does Pasolini edit the Bible? A good example is the scene of the Sermon on the Mount (which Pasolini on one occasion characterized as "stupendous, interminable"), in which his "film rendition of the sermon highlights this uncertainty about the sayings' context, presenting most of the sermon through a series of head shots of Jesus speaking, but varying the background sky."[2] This poses another question: that of fidelity and transformation. Is it possible to remain faithful to an original work and successfully transform it? Earlier, I argued that Pasolini presents a specific reality of the cinematographic art. Now, one can argue that the specificity of this transformation resides in the dialectical combination between the original work (i.e., the Bible) and the esthetic currents of Pasolini's period: Pasolini transformed Matthew's *Gospel* also through music,[3] location, architecture, and so on. In this sense, the original book is subjected to the influences and currents of "our" period. From Pasolini's perspective, the only way through which we can understand the "essence" of an original work is through its transformation. In "Observations on the Long Take," talking precisely about the transformation of reality that takes place in the editing process (montage), Pasolini writes that as a result of it, we get "*a multiplication of 'presents,'* as if an action, instead of unwinding once before our eyes, were to unwind many times."[4]

It has another dimension in the English translation of the movie title, which contains the word *Saint*, whereas the word *Saint* does not appear in the original Italian title (*Il Vangelo Secondo Matteo* and not *Il Vangelo Secondo San Matteo*). This is where Pasolini de-canonizes the Gospel: "Matthew can only be a saint according to the canon."[5] He employs a different method of "translating" the gospel: he moves it in various locations,

[1] George Aichele, "Translation as De-canonisation: Matthew's Gospel According to Pasolini," *Crosscurrents* 51 (2002).

[2] Ibid.

[3] From Bach's *St Matthew's Passion* to Odetta's *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*, and so forth. For Pasolini, the music he used for his films always has a religious nature.

[4] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Observation on a Long Take," p. 4.

[5] Ibid.

none of them being Palestine. The film also "translates the written Italian words of the already-translated gospel into the spoken Italian words of the movie's actors, in a nearly word by word representation of dialogue from Matthew's story."[6]

Pasolini employed the same method in the screenplay he wrote for a film on St. Paul—which he never shot. According to him, the idea behind this screenplay was to transpose the "entire affair of Saint Paul to our time":

> This does not mean that I want in any way to tamper with or alter the very letter of his preaching: on the contrary, as I have already done with the *Gospel* [*of Matthew*], none of the words pronounced by Paul in the film's dialogue will be invented or reconstructed by analogy. And since it will naturally be necessary to make a selection from among the apostolic discourses of the saint, I will make this selection in a fashion that summarizes the entire arc of his apostolate (I will be aided in this by specialists, who guarantee the absolute fidelity to the entirety of the thought of Paul).[7]

Does not this same sentiment hold for his Matthew? How can one be *absolutely faithful to his entire thought*? This faithfulness can be established and maintained only through action—the cinematographic "*Action*!" When Pasolini says that his aim was to tell the spectator that "Saint Paul is *here, today, among us*, and that he is here almost physically and materially. That it is our society that he addresses; it is our society for which he weeps and that he loves, threatens and forgives, assaults and tenderly embraces,"[8] then the proper way to read *Matthew* is to transpose his gospels to our contemporary predicament. In fact, in *The Gospel According to St. Matthew,* Pasolini succeeds in doing this. For Pasolini, the Gospel of the Bible was "a great intellectual work, a great edifice of thought" which "fills, integrates, regenerates, sets one's own thoughts in motion."[9] This is the perspective from which one ought to read the film. He wants to transpose the Gospel to the situation of the 1960s (characterized by the creative explosion of political, cultural, theoretical practices) and provide it with a more contemporary meaning or interpretation. In this sense, might one rethink the Gospel of St. Matthew and apply it as the critique of contemporary reality? And furthermore, why,

[6] Ibid.

[7] Pier Paolo Pasolini, *St. Paul* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 3.

[8] Ibid.

[9] "Pier Paoli Pasolini Speaks," available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IA1bS1MRzw

specifically, Matthew? The reason why Pasolini chose Matthew's Gospel over others is because according to him, it was a process of elimination: John was mystical, Mark was vulgar, whereas Luke was sentimental. Pasolini does not allow much space for metaphors or metonymies. The aim of the film is certainly not to restore a belief in God. His version of Jesus is not a supernatural one who is the son of God capable of miracles; nor is he an anti-Jewish Jew (that we get from Matthew 23).[10] Although "hypocrites" are included in the film, they are not specifically Pharisees and scribes. Rather, they are bureaucrats and owners (capitalists). Pasolini's Jesus is too little (if at all) a theological one, but much more a political leader. More so, he is "not a Cynic philosopher, as many contemporary New Testament scholars would argue, but rather an apocalyptic preacher."[11] He is not a contemporary tolerant postmodern and antiviolence person (Matthew 11:12).[12]

Enrique Irazoqui, a student of economy and an anarchist who was visiting Rome to discuss his work with Pasolini, became Pasolini's Jesus. In his *Pasolini Requiem*, Barth David Schwartz quotes Pasolini: "…Even before we had started talking, I said 'Excuse me, but would you act in one of my films?'"[13] In Schwartz's description, Irazoqui was a "son of a Basque father and a Jewish mother…thin, stoop-shouldered, heavy-browed, anything but the muscular Christ of Michelangelo."[14] Irazoqui had no script; the only thing he knew was that he was playing the Christ:

> [T]he fellow who played Christ was a student from Barcelona. Except for telling him that he was playing the part of Christ, that's all I said. I never gave him any kind of preliminary speech. I never told him to transform himself into something else, to interpret, to feel that he was Christ. I always told him to be just what he was. I chose him because he was what he was, and I never for one moment wanted him to be anyone else other than what he was—that's why I chose him.

[10] Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

[11] George Aichele, *Translation as De-canonisation*.

[12] Pasolini's films are often violent. Because of the excessive violence, sadism, and sexuality displayed throughout the film, *Salò, 120 Years of Sodom* continues to be banned in many countries.

[13] Quoted from Roger Ebert, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, available online at http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-gospel-according-to-st-matthew-1964

[14] Ibid.

Nonprofessional actors play all other roles: peasants, workers, subproletarians, and so on. The actress who plays the Virgin Mary in the scenes of the Crucifixion is Susanna Pasolini, Pasolini's own mother. The renowned Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben appears in the role of Apostle Philip.[15] Although in most of Pasolini's films, nonprofessional actors play the roles; however, in *Teorema* and *Medea*, he sets to work primarily with professional ones. In *Medea* (1969), the American-Greek opera singer Maria Callas plays the role of Medea. In *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, professionals also play some of the roles (The Duke by Paolo Bonacelli; or the President, played by Aldo Valletti; or Caterina Boratto, who played Signora Castelli). When he chooses actors, Pasolini never tests them before, apart from

> for Christ, though—not for myself—but for the producer who wanted a certain guarantee. When I choose actors, instinctively I choose someone who knows how to act. It's a kind of instinct that so far hasn't betrayed me except in very minor and very special cases. So far I've chosen Franco Citti for *Accattone* and Ettore Garofolo for the boy in *Mamma Roma*. In *La Ricotta*, a young boy from the slums of Rome. I've always guessed right, that from the very moment in which I chose the face that seemed to me exact for the character, instinctively he reveals himself a potential actor. When I choose non-actors, I choose potential actors.[16]

When asked about how he manages to work with bourgeois persons who are not intellectuals, Pasolini responds:

> I was faced with this problem filming *The Gospel*. Whereas in my other films my characters were all "of the people," for *The Gospel* I had some characters who were not. The Apostles, for example, belonged to the ruling classes of their time, and so obeying my usual rule of analogy, I was obliged to take members of the present-day ruling class. Because the Apostles were people who were definitely out of the ordinary, I chose intellectuals—from the bourgeoisie, yes—but intellectuals.
>
> Although these non-actors as Apostles were intellectuals, the fact that they had to play intellectuals removed, no instinctively but consciously, the inhibition of which you spoke. However, in the case of one's having to use bourgeois actors who are not intellectuals, I think that you can get what you want from them, too. All you have to do is love them.[17]

[15] On this note, it would be very interesting to analyze Agamben's reading of Christianity from the perspective of Pasolini's reading of the Gospel of Matthew.

[16] Pasolini 2007.

[17] Pasolini 2007.

Nonprofessional actors were coming mostly and predominantly from rural areas, and from working-class background. The environment and the set were of the same nature and visual nature. In fact, his films are all shot in working-class areas. As it is the case with *The Gospel*, and it holds the same with his other films, Pasolini's footage and shot of his characters express the truth, their truth, in a very dramatic fashion. Earlier, we had discussed how Pasolini employs and does the editing. In the case of *The Gospel*, the editing was done in such a manner that all the scenes, which could not be "mystified," were cut off. To proceed further on the function of the camera as an ideological apparatus, and following Pasolini's own words:

> I don't know what it is, but the eye of the camera always manages to express the interior of a character. This interior essence can be masked through the ability of a professional actor, or it can be "mystified" through the ability of the director by means of cutting and divers tricks. In *The Gospel* I was never able to do this. What I mean to say is that the photogram or the image on the film filters through what that man is— in his true reality, as he is in life.[18]

Taking the variety of the cast into account, the question which arises is, what makes Pasolini's Jesus Christ a nondivine being, that is to say, a social human, devoid of his theological properties?

At the elementary level of politics, Pasolini is influenced by the communist political radicalism, and within cinema, the Italian neorealist movement. In most of his films, he hires nonprofessional actors. In this sense, he posits a radical political Jesus Christ who is stripped off of his symbolic properties (the son of God) and is reduced to the "one amongst us." In the film scene, when someone comes to him and asks him "Teacher, what good thing I must do?" (Matthew 19:16), we see Jesus looking from below to him and answering the following: "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." The camera then moves up, shows Jesus from above enumerating the commandments. The message of Jesus Christ is that instead of following a leader, one should remain faithful to the invariants of a given political orientation. Commandments here stand for the rules that can be reinvented eternally in different historical situations. Another aspect to this is the location where Pasolini shot his film. He visited the Holy Land but did not find it suitable for the film. According to Pasolini, shooting the film in the locations where the

[18] Ibid.

story happened would not fit the vision he had for his film, largely due to its commodification, which therefore alienated the Holy Land from its Biblical attributions. Instead, he chooses the rural regions in the south of Italy,[19] which in his view resemble much more the Biblical settings than the Holy Land. This is Pasolini's apparatus: he is not merely altering the locations, casting nonprofessional actors and providing a terrestrial nature of Jesus Christ for visual purposes. He is doing these things precisely because in altering locations, actors, and so on, he transforms Jesus Christ into an earthly figure. He also did not want to make historical reconstruction, as it is fashionable with many historical films, but rather to leave "things in their religious state, that is, their mythical state. Epic-mythic."[20] As we said, Pasolini did not shoot his films in the places where the "story actually happened." Instead, he followed the rule of what he called the "rule of analogy":

> That is, I found settings that were not reconstructions but that were analogous to ancient Palestine. The characters, too—I didn't reconstruct characters but tried to find individuals who were analogous. I was obliged to scour southern Italy, because I realized that the pre-industrial agricultural world, the still feudal area of southern Italy, was the historical setting analogous to ancient Palestine. One by one I found the settings that I needed for *The Gospel*. I took these Italian settings and used them to represent the originals. I took the city of Matera, and without changing it in any way, I used it to represent the ancient city of Jerusalem. Or the little caverns of the village between Lucania and Puglia are used exactly as they were, without any modifications, to represent Bethlehem. And I did the same thing for the characters. The chorus of background characters I chose from the faces of the peasants of Lucania and Puglia and Calabria.

But did he do the same with *Salò*? Salò is the name of a town in the northern Italy which was the capital city during the fascist republic. But in the film, there is the Bishop, the Duke, and the Magistrate is engaged in debauchery and a libertine form of life in fascism, as we will see later. However, the film is not a historical representation of the fascist republic: there are no Mussolini's posters, nor fascist salutations and other typical fascist insignias. In this sense, representation functions as a reconstruction through displacement. A given historical

[19] It is interesting to note that Mel Gibson used some of the same locations to shoot his *The Passion of the Christ*.

[20] Pasolini 2007.

period is represented through cinematographic art through displacing its setting, signs, insignias, and so on. In the last instance, there is no fidelity to "telling the story as it was or happened"—the past always gains its meaning only through *a posteriori* reconstruction. This, however, does not make Pasolini a postmodern relativist: on the contrary, his position is strictly that of the retrospective understanding and conceptualization of events, even when they are catastrophic (such as fascism). In Pasolini's words, he "wanted to represent the end of a world, past glory days. It was a poetic choice—I could have set it in '38, in '39 or '37, but it would've been less poetic."[21] Elaborating on the poetical aspect of that period, he argues that "decadence and twilight are inherently poetic. Had I set it in the heyday of Nazism, it would've been an intolerable movie. To know that all this took place in the last days and that it would soon be over gives the spectator a sense of relief. Substantially this is a film about 'true anarchy,' that is, the anarchy of power." By saying this, Pasolini is reaffirming what he mentions many times: he is a bilingual writer who employs both poetry and cinema. In Pasolini's belief, there is an inherent and profound unity between the two forms of artistic expression. On another occasion, he goes on saying that there is a distinction between the literary structures, that include both poetry and prose, they both are unique. Although they have the same fundamental structure, there is the *language* of poetry and the *language* of prose. On this level, Pasolini draws another distinction, that of cinema. Like literature, cinema has one structure and its structural laws. His example is a "banal Western film" and a film by Godard, which in his understanding, have the same fundamental structure: same frame, same photography, a similar (if not the same) relation with the spectator, and so on. The difference, however, is the following:

> [T]he film of Godard is written according to the typical characteristics of poetic language; whereas the common cinema is written according to the typical characteristics of prose language. For example, the lack of story is simply the prevalence of poetic language over prose language. It isn't true that there isn't a story; there is a story, but instead of being narrated in its *integrality*, it is narrated *elliptically*, with spurts of imagination, fantasy, allusion. It is narrated in a distorted way—however, there is a story.[22]

[21] Pasolini 2012.
[22] Pasolini 2007.

Pasolini is fond of distinctions, as he proposes yet another one. According to him, fundamentally, we have to make the distinction between a cinema of prose and a cinema of poetry. The latter is not necessary poetic, as often, one "may adopt the tenets and canons of the cinema of poetry and yet make a bad and pretentious film. Another director may adopt the tenets and canons of the prose film—that is, he could narrate a story—and yet he creates poetry."[23]

In his *The Cinema of Poetry*,[24] Pasolini argues that it is impossible to create any cinematic discourse without taking into account the terminology of semiotics, for the filmmaker uses a determinate object in order to turn it into a cinematic image: "the word (linguistic sign) used by the writer is rich with a whole cultural, popular and grammatical history, whereas the filmmaker who is using an im-sign has just isolated it, at that very moment, from the mute chaos of things by referring to the hypothetical dictionary of a community which communicates by means of images."[25] It is in this sense that the language of cinema is always poetic.

Writing about propos Italian neorealism, Gilles Deleuze argues that "the real was no longer represented or reproduced but 'aimed at.' Instead of representing an already deciphered real, neorealism aimed at an always ambiguous, to be deciphered, real. This is why the sequence shot tended to replace the montage of representations."[26] What defines neorealism according to Deleuze is "this build-up of purely optical situations […] which are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism."[27] The point, however, is that "the characters themselves reacted to the situations; even when one of them found himself reduced to helplessness, bound and gagged, as a result of the ups and downs of the action. What the viewer perceived therefore was a sensory-motor image in which he took a greater or lesser part by identification with the characters."[28] In this respect, in Deleuze's understanding of Pasolini as wanting to go further than the semiologists (Deleuze refers to Umberto Eco's critique of Pasolini):

> [H]e wants cinema to be a language system, to be provided with a double articulation (the shot, equivalent to the moneme, but also the objects

[23] Ibid.
[24] Pasolini 1976, pp. 542–558.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), p. 1.
[27] Ibid., p. 2.
[28] Ibid., pp. 2–3.

> appearing in the frame, "cinemes" equivalent to phonemes). It is as if he wants to return to the theme of a universal language system. Except that he adds: it is the language system…of reality. "Descriptive science of reality," this is the misunderstood nature of semiotics, beyond "existing languages," verbal or otherwise. Does he not mean that the movement-image (the shot) consists of a first articulation in relation to a change or becoming which the movement expresses, but also a second articulation in relation to the objects between which it is established, which have become at the same time integral parts of the image (cinemes)?[29]

With respect to this, it can be argued that the reality that Pasolini articulates is not a represented reality of the Bible, but rather, a transformed reality, through camera and montage. Or as Pasolini would himself say, he refuses to transmit the impression of reality, but represents the reality itself: "I always stay within the framework of reality, without interrupting it because of a symbolic or linguistic system."[30] This provides an answer to the earthly and unsacred dimension of Pasolini's Jesus. It also allows us to proceed further with a reality of *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, as presented by Pasolini.

[29] Ibid., p. 28.

[30] Quoted from Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 287. See Pier Paolo Pasolini, *L'expérience Hérétique: Langue et Cinéma* (Paris: Traces Payot, 1976).

CHAPTER 21

The Christian Reality

Following the previous chapter, it can be argued that Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* is an attempt to constitute a Christian subjectivity. However, what kind of a Christian subject? Pasolini's version of Christianity is Christianity without the sacred, or in Žižekian terms, it is Christianity whose commitments are not ontotheological. Jesus Christ is not so much the transmitter of the Divine word; he does not preach escapism, but, rather, earthly revolution. The lack of effects in the film (apart from the usual trick of walking on water) is a clear antitheological position of Pasolini. He is not concerned with the miraculous aspect of the Gospel, which in the film is depicted at a minimalistic level. Pasolini successfully avoids Hollywood-like spectacles, and in doing so, Jesus Christ gains a full earthly dimension. According to Althusser, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." With respect to this, Pasolini's initial anti-ideological move is to present a sense of realism by demystifying the "sacred." Jesus is much more concerned with social oppression and exploitation than he is with the individual sin.

In this sense, Pasolini's Jesus is the actualization of Karl Marx's *Thesis Eleven*: he is not keen on contemplating and analyzing the world as it is, but he is certainly interested in changing or revolutionizing it. This is what makes Jesus a political leader and not a philosopher. The transformation of Matthew's Jesus by Pasolini is in complete accordance with his personal beliefs. One could easily imagine Matthew's Gospel, as presented by Pasolini's film, becoming a biblical canon if the Bible were to be rewritten.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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Matthew's Jesus would be much more political than theological, a fighter against the oppression and exploitation of the classes, rather than an anti-Semite Jesus, a Jesus concerned about social organization, instead of abstract notions of humanity. This Jesus is made possible by Pasolini's film, and it is in this sense that one should conceive the cinematographic constitution of the Christian subject. Fabio Vighi writes, "One can deduce from his entire cinematic oeuvre, and particularly from *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (*The Gospel according to St. Matthew*), Christianity for him represents a unique narrative capable of projecting essence (the sacred) onto the field of actuality, insofar as it turns the externality/transcendence of essence (God) into the minimal difference that cuts across the surface of things."[1] It is important to consider that the transfiguration, as presented in all its glory in Matthew 17:2[2] (as well as in Mark 9:2–3[3]), does not take place in the film. As some commentators have noted, "the crowds that rush to see the risen Jesus at the end belong more to Marxist neo-realism than they do to Christian iconography."[4]

An important aspect of Pasolini's cinematographic art is how the gaze is constructed. When the viewer watches *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, he or she is confronted with (at least) two *objects*: the gaze and the voice. For a fuller understanding of the implications of Pasolini's films on both film theory and practice, one should be able to move onward from the 1970s debate on the ideological consequences of the apparatus to the 1980s debate on those two cinematographic *object a* par excellence, *le regard et la voix*.[5] In Lacanian formulation, the object-voice cannot be distinguished from the object-gaze insofar that the latter stands for or provides the framework for the former. Consider the first minutes of the *Gospel*. The angel appears and talks to Joseph, the husband of Holy Mary. The angel looks not at the viewer but rather a bit away. Similarly, when Jesus talks to either his Apostles or people, he rarely looks directly into the camera. It is always as if there is the third person to whom he is addressing. Let us move to another level of Pasolinian objectivity and consider a scene

[1] Fabio Vighi, *Traumatic Encounters in Italian Film: Locating the Cinematic Unconscious* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006), p. 42.

[2] "And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

[3] "After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."

[4] George Aichele, *Translation as De-canonisation*.

[5] As one of the most important books of this period is titled: Pascal Bonitzer, *Le Regard et la Voix*, 1976.

from the middle of the film. Jesus Christ is at the beginning of a queue of people, looking through the side of the camera angle. The next scene is a wide angle and depicts a landscape and the people. This scene is followed by one of those powerful close-ups where Jesus Christ walks away, with camera following him while he preaches verses from Matthew 12:18: "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles." This is followed by the verses from Matthew 12:19 and the shot shows a landscape as Jesus Christ comes into view. Jesus Christ then walks away, with his disciples following him. How might one approach an analysis of these scenes? The landscape looks objectively neutral, typical of Pasolini's camera (an Italian village). He then turns the camera 180°, revealing those watching this landscape. However, once the landscape/village is revealed again, it is not objective anymore, as it is seen through the eyes that have already seen. This point of view is inscribed in the image itself, because the editing revealed the view before. This allows a distinction to be drawn between the view and the gaze: the view is what one can see; the gaze is the object inscribed in what one is seeing. This is the coexistence of the objective and the subjective. Pasolini is anchoring the viewer's gaze in the picture itself. This is another name for interpellation.

Pasolini was always very careful about *directing* the gaze. His reflections on this can be traced through his critical writings during the early fifties to mid-seventies. Here, he writes on Liliana Cavani's film *Milarepa* in 1974:

> Liliana Cavani's *Milarepa* is one of these absolutely rare movies. We do not remember it as a movie, but as a perfect geometry in which visual experience lived in reality is synthetized and crystallized. Curious experience! In reality, we are in fact condemned to live one "eternal subjective": the camera always sticks to our eye, the angle is always determined by the point where we find ourselves, and the visual field is always a space that has our body as a centre.
>
> But, in a movie, on the contrary, the eyewitness, the one that sees, is the master to choose all possible angles and he is in the centre of all possible spaces.
>
> He can see at the same time Milarepa's mother in her village and Milarepa in the monastery hundred kilometres away.
>
> The experience of the real by eyewitness of the cinema is the experience of the omnipresent, ubiquitous spirit that sometimes sees the person like an object, and sometimes identifies himself with the person, so makes himself a subject, consequently seeing the spot which was his point of view as an object.[6]

[6] First published in *Cinema Nuovo*, no. 229, May–June 1974. Translated from French: Pier Paolo Pasolini, "La délirante rationalité de la géometrie religieuse (Milarepa et Le

Does not the same model for interpellation hold for Pasolini himself? Is he not primarily interested in such *sujets supposés (ça) voir* (only as a consequence of that gaze, *supposés savoir*)? In his *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, the actors throughout the film rarely (if at all) look at the camera when speaking. The ambiguity of Pasolini's film lies between the addresser and the addressee, in other words, the problem of interpellation. One sees the person (Jesus, angel, etc.) who addresses, but not the people, masses, the believers and so on. This is an interpellating instance, where the addressee remains anonymous, literally without-name and without-identity. It can be argued that indeed this is the true dimension of an interpellating act: the interpellating instance is devoid of concrete individuals. The function of ideology is therefore not the constitution of concrete individuals into ideological Subjects, but rather the interpellation of anonymous masses into (political, religious) subjects of collective belief.

Dernier Tango à Paris)," in *Écrits sur le Cinema: Petits Dialogues avec Les Films (1957–1974)* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinema, 2000), pp. 181–182.

CHAPTER 22

Religious Suspension of the Theological

It is crucial to understand Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*: as a "transformation of a biblical text into a filmic medium."[1] In this first instance of analysis, there is an encounter of an analogy between Althusser and Pasolini. In the previous chapter, I argued that Althusser's entire philosophical project can be described as an attempt to return to Marx. In this sense, the first line of comparison to be drawn with Pasolini is that his *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* should be read as the "return to Jesus Christ." Althusser's return to Marx took the form of a philosophical reading of (particularly) Marx's *Capital*, thus providing pivotal philosophical concepts that would render it meaningful. In this sense, Marx was not a Marxist—a position he himself kept. The same could be applied to Jesus: Jesus could become Christian only retroactively. It always takes another figure to formalize a system of thought or belief by giving it a name (and, thus, meaning). In this regard, both Marx and Jesus Christ become Marxist and Christian, respectively, and only retroactively: *from a name, they become a concept.*

An analogy can be drawn with Islam and the Qur'an. One of the most important questions with regard to Islam and especially of today's so-called Islamic fundamentalism concerns the Prophet: was Muhammad a Muslim? Upon a close reading of Qur'an and especially the function of Muhammad in Islam as a religion, one encounters a surprising figure

[1] Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Introduction: Translating Pasolini Translating Paul," in Pier Paolo Pasolini, *St. Paul* (London: Verso, 2014), p. xix.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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of him as a political leader, rather than the messenger of God.[2] In this sense, a true event in contemporary cinematography would have been a Pasolinian-like film on Muhammad and Qur'an in general, aptly entitled *The Qur'an According to Muhammad*.[3] Perhaps a Pasolinian film on Islam could be the wager of Islam's liberation from its theological constraints and its contemporary obscurantism. As Walter Benjamin suggests, political thinking "is not private thinking. However, Brecht once expressed that the art of thinking is in other people's heads and that is decisive."[4]

All this leads us back to Pasolini's film. On one important level, Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* is a film that sets out the distinction between religion and theology. I approach this problem through the concept of *belief*, which is one of the main questions in today's philosophy, religion, as well as politics.

The current epoch has been designated as *cynical*, in which belief (in political systems, ideological projects, God, or any other "value") is no longer operative. Gilles Deleuze writes that "we need an ethic or a faith, which makes fools laugh; is it not a need to believe in something else, but a need to believe in this world, of which fools are a part."[5]

The response of the religious clerics regarding the financial crisis of 2008 was interpreted on moral conservative terms. According to their analysis, the financial meltdown occurred due to the abandonment of traditional religious values and the pursuit of a more hedonist liberal life. But has a situation arisen where belief as such has disappeared? How should one understand *belief* in contemporary situations in which the prospect of radical emancipation is not the real possibility? One should bear in mind that contrary to the era of Althusser and Pasolini, Marxism (and communism) stood neither as the main dividing force in social domains, nor as a prospect of a near future. The predominant tendency in today's Left is socialism, or

[2] A clarification should be done in order to avoid the usual outburst of criticism: far from defending Islam (or any religion for that matter), one has to point out two important thesis: (1) Muhammad is more of a political leader than the terrestrial representative of God, and in being a political leader, he articulates the conjuncture of his time: exploitation, freedom, equality; and (2) the theological dimension which comes *a posteriori* obscures the religious dimension of the Islamic emancipatory potential.

[3] In the exact same logic, one could imagine applying the Badiousian methodology to Qur'an: rewriting Qur'an in the same way as Badiou rewrote Plato's *Republic*. This would be the ultimate proof of Muslim emancipation.

[4] Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 227.

[5] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 173.

capitalism with a "human face." Interestingly, the movements that mainstream media and politics refer to as "religious fundamentalist" are also anticapitalist. However, they are anticapitalist for all the wrong reasons: antimodernism, the push for identity, and, above all, resentment are the reasons for their anticapitalist stance. This is the strangeness of our situation, in which being an anticapitalist is not anymore a subversive position. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that in his late work, Althusser gave up on socialism. While he no longer believed in socialism, he recognized communist tendencies in different parts of the world, especially in Latin America, due to the great influence of liberation theology. Althusser's generic definition of communism is "the absence of relations based on the market," which in his understanding means the absence of "exploitative class relations and the domination of the State."[6] According to him, the main issue lies in how to spread communist interstices around the world:

> No one can foresee that—and it will certainly not come about on the basis of the Soviet model. Will it be through the seizure of State power? Of course, but this would lead to socialism (and State socialism at that, necessarily) which is "a load of crap."[7]

Althusser "does not believe in voluntarism in history," because, quoting Marx, he argues that history is much more imaginative than we are. In this line, while he still was hopeful for new forms of organization that will "inflect the course of the history," he writes that "it will not come about as a result of the eschatological visions of a religious ideology with which we are all utterly bored."[8]

Following this, it can be argued that the same holds also for political events, such as the Arab Spring, and especially with the case of Egypt: when a big political event marks a rupture in the already established political, ideological, and social edifice, and thereby creates a *gap*, it is usually religion which takes over, and fills the gap, in the situations where the Left is weak or inexistent. Furthermore, this is certainly the case when the Left lacks a true political idea that breaks away with the existing order of being to the end. Currently, there exists the phenomenon of perpetual crisis: a crisis of an idea, a crisis of politics, and a crisis of an organization. The only thing that the contemporary Left is capable of is the

[6] Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. 225.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., p. 226.

creation of new (largely) false enemies. Given this, what is the role of religion? Althusser's struggle against the *fear* or *proletariat of fear* can and should be understood as the struggle of liberating religion from theology. The distinction between religion and theology should be articulated in terms of the proletariat-without-identity as religion has always had a place for the voiceless (e.g., in the pedagogical work with peasants undertaken by members of the catholic clergy in Latin America). This dimension of religion is sublimated into a concern, not necessarily for the human being as such, but for wider humanity, as an abstract totality. On the other hand, theology is concerned exclusively with the metaphysical notion of humanity, or more precisely, it is concerned with an abstract conception of divinity. The consequences of this divinity are seen in various forms which conceptualization of humanity. Here, I want to argue that in today's conjunctures, it is not atheism that is the real threat to any authentic religious experience, but rather religious fundamentalism, whose reliance on the onto-theological God is the ultimate threat to religion itself. Fundamentalism is the true name for those who do not believe[9]—we should distinguish here, following Pfaller, between the pure personal *faith without belief*, proper of fundamentalism, and the *belief disjunct from faith* that characterizes the atheistic struggle. Drawing upon Hegel and Althusser, the conclusion to be made is that the problem of fundamentalism is *not* a religious problem, but rather a theological one. By making clear the distinction between religion and theology, one can also open up the space to think of the distinction between class without identity as a conception of the formal totality ("humanity," "society") in an abstract sense. This is possibly a distinction on which a new relation between religious experience and politics of emancipation can be thought. Here, the main obstacle to religion is its liberation from theology, which will take the form of freeing *belief* from the constraints of *faith*. If one is to formulate this in old Marxist terms known to Althusser, then it can be argued that theology is the theoretical deviation in the form of idealist speculation obfuscating the potency of religion. That said, the legitimate question is: should we be enthusiastic (philosophically and politically) about the return of religion? The return of religion is indeed the proof of our political poverty. Religions are in themselves opportunistic; one should not celebrate them, but at the

[9] Slavoj Žižek, "ISIS Is a Disgrace to True Fundamentalism," *New York Times*, September 3, 2014. Available online at http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/03/isis-is-a-disgrace-to-true-fundamentalism/?_r=0

same time, should not negate their truly emancipatory potential. Upon a closer reading of the holy books, one can depict the problem of poverty, exploitation, and political, social and economic oppression. However, neither Jesus nor Muhammad could think in terms of Kantian, Hegelian, or Marxist concepts. Pasolini was fully aware of this fact and therein comes his Althusserian side. Shortly before joining the French Communist Party, Althusser was closely collaborating with two Christian groups: the "Union of Progressive Christians" [*L'Union des Chretiens Progressistes*] and "Youth of the Church" [*Jeunesse de l'Eglise*]. The former was very close to the Communist Party, whereas the latter was a center for religious studies. The Dominican father Maurice Montuclard, who founded the "Youth of the Church," wrote an article which can explain Althusser's commitments to Christianity, and in this way, to Pasolini's as well:

> It is of crucial importance to the Gospel and the Church that Christians cast off…the bonds of humanism and a civilization that was once Christian, and is now "bourgeois"; that they bring to today's historical developments their active, lucid presence, and, with it, the influence and reality of grace. This entails…1) A Christian vision of secular History which is distinct from the historical action of the Church visible, though never opposed to it, and is a progressive force to the extent that God chooses to make this vision too an instrument of Salvation in Jesus Christ. 2) A subordination of politics to religion, and, more broadly, of the temporal to the spiritual, different… from the kind of subordination authorized by Christianity's post-medieval regime.[10]

And the paragraph that follows:

> If we want the Christian message to be heard, we have to preach the Gospel—*the Gospel, not Christian humanism*. If we want people to believe in the Church, we have to present it, and consequently experience it, in such a way that it will show it is capable of relying on its own supernatural means, not superfluous human help, to bring a reborn humanity to life, liberty, fraternity, and the worship of the true God…A world is disappearing; as it falls, it is taking with it, along with our privileges and certitudes, all the sources of support the Church once fell back on to facilitate and promote its mission by human means. This world is disappearing in favour of a better humanity in a new civilization. How can we not wish that its fall will create

[10] Quoted from François Matheron, *Introduction*, in Louis Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. xvii.

> new opportunities, as yet unknown but already certain, for the progress of evangelization? How can we not choose to free the Gospel of its trammels so as to pave the way, in this nascent world, for a Church wholly attuned to the freedom of the Gospel, and wholly based, in its teaching, methods, and institutions, on the sovereign power of grace? No, we no longer have a choice: we have chosen the Gospel.[11]

In this sense, the Gospel gains its full meaning if it is read in its total naivety: it is not a text which clarifies situations, or necessarily offers an easy way out. On the contrary, the parables are very ambiguous and *Jesus Christ does not provide (easy) solutions.* Therefore, although religion is, in the last instance, a political organization, bluntly applying the biblical texts (gospel, parables, and so on) to given social, political, and economic situations is nearly impossible. It would be an all-too-easy historicist solution. In this sense, both Althusser and Pasolini were aware that the only way to maintain a certain level of fidelity to religion (and in their case, to Christianity) is *to radically transform it.* In this regard, every religion is grounded on political foundations and every political formation or orientation function, to a certain extent, is grounded on a religious view of reality.

[11] Ibid., pp. xvii–xviii.

CHAPTER 23

Religious-Political

One of the main arguments of secular politics in the postpolitical era is that secularism provides us with a neutral position on matters of religion and belief and that the politics should be carried out separately from religious influence. In this sense, politics is a site for administration, human rights, and the proper medium for creating a just balance between the rights of the individual and those of the community, and so forth. Politics thus becomes a cold-blooded enterprise whose ultimate aim is to administer activities that are at the service of global capitalism, and which in this mode of functioning presents the limits of the possibilities for a political, ideological, and economic transformation. Contemporary forms of politics function under the maxim: "live without Ideas"; that is to say, under the guise of realism, it obeys the numbers (instead of Ideas), consumerism, managerial efficiency, and so on.

The "empty politics" (i.e., devoid of the Idea) is complementary to the secular conception of belief: it is an *empty belief*. Apart from theology/faith, administrative and managerial aspects of politics threaten religion and the real authentic belief, that is to say, the spiritual dimension of belief. In this regard, one should follow Pasolini despite (personal) religious inclinations, and should remain *faithful to the religious dimension of politics* and not the political dimension of religion. In this sense and in accordance with the positions of both Pasolini and Althusser, one should regard religion as an ideology, but an ideology whose view of reality consists of creating *new collective spaces*.

In this sense, the return of the religious aspect in politics has a double function: First, against communities, it creates collectivities; and second,

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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it returns the passion to politics. Nonetheless, today's return of religion in the social–political life is the exact opposite of the Althusserian–Pasolinian premise. Let us take a short detour and consider today's forms of the so-called religious fundamentalism. The exemplary case is Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[1] They claim to refer to an old Islamic tradition, to which they try to remain faithful. The question apropos Islam and ISIS is thus the following: What it is in Islam that renders possible or creates the conditions for the emergence of ISIS and its reference to Islam? Let me analyze the Ummah, the "Islamic nation," which in its conceptualization comes very close to the Paulinian conception of Christianity as the collective of believers. Ummah is a political collective of believers who uphold the word of God. But what is the word of God? If one avoids theological definitions and speculations, it becomes apparent that there is a certain progressive aspect in the Qur'an of the word "Ummah." At different stages, the Qur'an refers to different collectives, and in some cases, Ummah refers to one man, namely Abraham. What unites all of these is a sense of salvation and universality that binds together the collective. This collectivity, insists the Qur'an, is the best kind of collectivity. But, at the same time, it is not the best because of the color of their skin or the wealth they possess. To borrow an expression from Badiou: these categories are not categories of truth. What makes the Muslim collectivity, the Ummah, the best kind of collectivity is that they do righteous things; they uphold what is right and just even if that is against themselves, their family, or their nation. Ummah is a collectivity of principles, of universal ideals, of shared commitments to justice and equality. In this general sense, the Ummah cannot stand for a merely religious community because universal principles, the word of God, is not a property of any religion in particular, but rather belongs to all people. Anyone who is willing to uphold justice and equality is a member of the Ummah, regardless of one's culture, personal beliefs, color of the skin, or gender orientation. All these differences are accidental features and they have no morally relevant bearing on the dispensation of justice. Ummah is a collectivity that can be characterized as such because it does what is right. Furthermore, it is a universal collectivity of brotherhood, not in an abstract sense, but in the sense of shared universal ideals and com-

[1] Despite its fast expansion in the territories of Iraq and Syria, ISIS seems to be more of a "seasonal lasting phenomenon" than an organization that poses a long-lasting threat. However, what matters is how Islam will take up to the consequences of ISIS phenomenon that had overshadowed the religion as such.

mitments. This can clearly be gleaned from the many verses in the Qur'an, but also from the very word "Islam," which in its pure Koranic meaning is understood as the complete and loving submission to Allah, where Allah, charitably interpreted, can stand for universality itself—Islam as a primordial or original religion, a primordial and foundational experience of what is divine and of what is right and just. In this sense, everyone who is willing to abide by what is right can be considered a Muslim, which precisely means a member of the political community known as Ummah. This is obviously not the case today as many Muslim thinkers and scholars all too dogmatically define what Ummah is and exclude not only other religions, but also a great number of religious Muslims themselves.[2] In this sense, ISIS signifies the main symptom of what is wrong with Islam: its urgent need for an epistemological and ontological break with its "present." In other words, this means that Islam should break away with its theological dimension which obscures its political potential. The same can be applied to Christianity: the Holy Spirit is a collectivity of believers, bound together by the feeling of love (*agape*, a political love).

From this trajectory, I return to Pasolini's film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. Pasolini is concerned with the poor, and in the last instance, his film translates Matthew's Gospels as a political treatise: in this sense, the Pasolinian reading of Matthew should thus take the form of a *religious foundation of politics*. However, he does not exaggerate the poor as illustrated in Matthew: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3), whereas in Luke: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (6:20). How should the poor be read? In his reading of Pasolini's *Accatonne* and the modern subproletariat, Fabio Vighi argues that Pasolini's position toward the unprivileged social subjects or subproletariat and the others of the neglected social space (suburbs, slums, and so on) is not the patronizing position of an intellectual who fights for their political, economic, and cultural empowerment. Pasolini does not say to the subproletariat, "I will fight for your rights to be recognized by the existing hierarchy (liberal leftist)." Instead, according to Vighi, Pasolini says: "'You, the displaced and exploited, are the universal measure of progress insofar as you are excluded.' My point

[2] I thank Sead Zimeri for discussing these points. In order to avoid the critiques of subjecting Islam to a Christian reading, we need to point out that there are clear and conceptual differences between Islam and Christianity, that is, with regard to Law, institutionalization, sacrifice, and so on.

is that only this second perspective truly disturbs the foundations of late-capitalist hegemony."[3] Vighi's conclusion is therefore, "it seems plausible to suggest that the whole of Pasolini's artistic and intellectual production should be regarded as an unrelenting defense of the universal dignity of human kind by granting it as a prerogative of the dispossessed, the exploited, the segregated."[4] In fact, Pasolini developed an almost fanatical relation of overidentification with those "toxic" elements in the social field which were continuously mocked by the Italian bourgeois of the 1960s. For instance, when he was asked which is the general type of people he likes the most, he answered:

> [T]he type of people I love the most by far are people who perhaps never even reached fourth grade. Very plain and very simple people, and those aren't just empty words on my part. I say it because the culture of the petite bourgeoisie, at least in my country, but perhaps in France and Spain too, always brings corruption and impurity along with it, while the illiterate, or those who barely finished first grade, always have a certain grace, which is lost as they're exposed to culture. Then it's found once again at a very high level of culture. But conventional culture always corrupts.[5]

He makes a similar point apropos bourgeois:

> The most detestable and intolerable thing, even in the most innocent of bourgeois, is the inability to acknowledge experiences of life that are different from their own, which means conceiving all other experiences as substantially analogous to their own. […] Those bourgeois writers, no matter how virtuous and dignified, who cannot recognize the extreme psychological difference of another human being from their own, take the first step towards forms of discriminations that are essentially racist; in this sense they are not free, but they belong deterministically to their own class: fundamentally, there is no difference between them and a head of the police or an executioner in a concentration camp.[6]

[3] Fabio Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion: Žižek, Agamben and the Modern Sub-proletariat," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20/5 (2003), p. 102.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Pier Paoli Pasolini Speaks, available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IA1bS1MRzw

[6] Quoted from Fabio Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion," p. 102.

Pasolini's position toward the poor or, more precisely, toward the subproletariat of Roman suburbs should not be read in a patronizing dimension of today's disposition toward charity. To quote Oscar Wilde, charity tries "to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor."[7] Perhaps Vighi provided the most convincing argument apropos Pasolini's determination not only to defend the excluded, but also to refer to them in universal terms: "Pasolini intervened from the standpoint of the repressed structuring principle in order to attack the hegemonic field at its very basis. His 'shocking' solidarity, in other words, was an intrinsically political one."[8] Let us now consider the reconceptualization of classes and rethinking the class struggle from the Christian perspective of Pasolini and Althusser.

[7] Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*.
[8] Fabio Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion," p. 104.

CHAPTER 24

Class Struggle

The perspective of the Bible as presented by *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* provides an apt starting point for analyzing the problem of class struggle and universalism.

Jesus Christ says:

> Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth.
> I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
> For I have come to turn
> a man against his father,
> a daughter against her mother,
> a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
> a man's enemies will be the members of this
> household (Matthew 10:17).

This ought to be read alongside the following: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). In the previous chapter, I argued that the true political Idea divides, and it is from this conjuncture that I would like to advance my claim further. The two Bible verses of Matthew and Luke point out the ultimate antihumanist and antihistoricist aspects of Christianity. The ordinary interpretations of these verses can be divided into two distinctions. First, it is the historical and social context of Jesus Christ which has to be taken into account in order to understand these interpretations;

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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and second, the passages call for a break with the tradition—namely that the mother and the father stand for the continuation of the old. These two readings constitute two sides of the same coin and therefore should be abandoned. A more convincing move in reading these verses from the Bible is to think of the mother and the father not as parents, but rather, as social and political hierarchical instances which stand for the mechanisms of social domination, oppression, and exploitation. This is the function of the *sword* in social and political life: it radically breaks away with all the conditions of domination and exploitation. Let us compare this with a scene which visualizes Jesus's mother and brothers. We have a shot of Jesus, turning to listen to a young man who tells him: "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." Jesus looks at him from above, with his head turned right and his eyes looking at the young man. Jesus then turns his back to him and the verses he speaks are not the same as in the Bible ("Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother," Matthew 12:49). Instead, he goes back to Matthew 12:44.[1] Here, he turns his back to reveal the next shot, which shows people looking up into the sky. Only after this, Jesus responds to the young man in a very authoritarian voice and attitude with verses from 12:49. In other words, Christ is saying that anything else one worships is in fact idolatry and serves to bind one to an authority which is not the Holy Spirit.[2] This, for Jesus, is not a Christian gesture. Poignantly, the next shot presents the viewer with Jesus's mother, who is smiling.

Where does philosophy comes into this—particularly, considering the political struggle in the field of religion, as developed by Pasolini? Or to recast the question differently, what are the political instances with regard to class struggle from the perspective of Pasolini's Christianity? Philosophy

[1] Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to my house from which I came"; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. "Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation."

[2] I rely on Žižek's reading of the Holy Spirit as a collective of believers, bound together by the feeling of love. Or as "the spiritual substance of the religious community," Slavoj Žižek & John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), p. 33.

worthy of a name is not interested in the so-called real life, or any political development as such. As a field, philosophy is interested, and it only registers; therefore, it is a discipline which considers the results and the effects of emancipatory politics, its successes, as well as its failures. By Althusser's understanding, philosophy thinks of only the Marxist–Leninist politics. In other words, this relation can be articulated as following: 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. However, this provides yet another complication. According to him, in the capitalist social formation, class struggle is the name of politics. This is very important for Althusser's conception of philosophy, although it is important to remember that politics is one of the two conditions of philosophy. Althusser notes that philosophy does exist simultaneously in those situations in which social classes and sciences exist.[3] In other words, philosophy is strictly conditioned by the existence of class struggle, carried out in political domain and scientific discoveries. The nonphilosophical conditions of philosophy in the Althusserian project are thus science and politics, which in different periods of his project take different positions. During the primacy of science, Althusser in his "Maoist period" insists that politics takes primacy ("put politics in the commanding post"). However, elsewhere, Althusser insists that one condition cannot overtake the other one:

> The rightist deviation suppresses philosophy: only science is left (positivism). The leftist deviation suppresses science: only philosophy is left (subjectivism). There are "exceptions" to this (cases of "inversion"), but they "confirm" the rule.[4]

According to Althusser, theoretical deviations in politics are always of a philosophical character: "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."[5]

[3] Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 13.
[4] Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 3.
[5] Ibid., p. 26.

How one should understand this, from the perspective of Althusser's definition of philosophy? The way we should read this formula can be elaborated as following:

1. Class struggle exists apart from, and independently of, philosophy, but its effects can be named, marked, and classified only by philosophy.
2. Although philosophy is, in the last instance, a class struggle in the field of theory, it does not take an active part in the class struggle, but rather produces theoretical effects in politics.
3. Philosophy states propositions are *theses*,[6] which should be understood as positions; that is to say, philosophy operates by stating dogmatic propositions that, once stated, take the form of the *theses*.

By operating through *theses*, which are positions, philosophy's function *in the* class struggle becomes clear: it takes the proletarian class position in the realm of theory. Philosophy has an intervening aspect for Althusser, meaning intervening through demarcating between "the ideological of the ideologies on the one hand, and the scientific of the sciences on the other."[7] In this sense, philosophy exists and operates, or rather, its place in between the practices in which it intervenes (scientific, ideological, and political) and the results or effects of it relies on its intervention.

Drawing from all this, it can be argued that, for Althusser himself, *philosophy is constituted in its intervention*. That is to say, philosophy is constituted through theoretical intervention, *by the means of ideology*, in certain realities, by producing effects in those domains, which retroactively condition the transformation of philosophy itself. Every philosophical premise is that *a true idea does not unite, but divides*.

In a nutshell, the following can be said to be the two primary functions of philosophy, as conceived by Althusser: philosophy intervenes precisely not in everyday life, but rather with regard to the determination in last instance; and since philosophy has an intervening character, it maintains an authoritarian relation with regard to its (nonphilosophical) conditions. Hence, dialog, debate, and other democratic categories are foreign to philosophy, if not, enemies. The same holds for Pasolini's Christ. He states propositions, gives orders, and preaches. He is neither a democratic

[6] Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy for Scientists*, p. 74.
[7] Ibid., p. 83.

figure, nor a liberal-tolerant leader, and this is why this characterization is of interest in philosophy, especially in the field of class struggle.

One of the main preoccupations of the contemporary Left is the unification of the masses, classes, or people. Recall the beginning of the ongoing financial crisis in which, apart from articulating and theorizing the fatal consequences of this crisis, the Left was almost equally concerned about the fact that the society is split into two or more parts. If one relies on Althusser's conception of philosophy as a division, one should read it from a Žižekian perspective; that is to say, a philosopher should, by definition, *take a side*. In other words, when the philosopher registers the effects of the class struggle, she or he does not occupy the position of the *beautiful soul*, deciding from a distance what is worthy of thinking and what is not, but rather, he or she is fully engaged in the given struggle. What philosophy, specifically, a Marxist philosopher does when he or she is engaged in a class struggle is that he or she register what is *universal* about that very struggle. A good example here is Badiou's "Idea of communism," where he means that it is important to elevate the singular dimension of politics to the universal level, allowing others not clearly affected by that political project to see the demarcation that such politics produces in the world, between the truth and the state. Therefore, the universal validity of a struggle and a practical engagement is not, in the final instance, mutually exclusive. As Žižek repeats, the access to objective truth cannot be reached if one adopts a position outside of the struggle. According to him, the great dialectical paradox is that it is only through an engaged position that one can access universal truth. Given this, how should class and class struggle be read in general terms? In other words, is it possible to account for them separately?

According to Althusser, it is not possible, because "class struggle and the existence of classes are one and the same thing."[8] For him, class division does not come later, but it is the class struggle which constitutes the division of and between classes. The exploitation of one class by another is already a class struggle, the minimum for the constitution of class as such. This is a central thesis in Althusser's understanding of contradictions: class struggle precedes classes, and this also implies that class struggle is not a product of classes which previously existed in the social field. The positivist understanding of classes as positive and social groups which exist independently of the class struggle ought to be abandoned. An important aspect

[8] Althusser, *On Ideology*, p. 82.

to be noted is that class struggle has always existed in every class society. During the violent turn of the class struggle, these become more apparent in the world. Class struggle ought to be understood as a historical form of contradiction which is inscribed into the mode of production and "divides classes into classes." In other words, classes are constituted *a posteriori*, as a result of class struggle. Philosophically, "it affirms the *primacy of contradiction* over the *terms* of the contradiction." The political implications of this thesis are also radical: one is pushed to accept a radical political and theoretical thesis, *society does not exist*, "as a positive order of being."[9] Althusser condemns the theoretical notion of "society" as nonscientific.

This term is in fact fraught with moral, religious, and legal overtones; in short, it is an ideological notion that must be replaced by a scientific concept: the concept of "social formation."[10]

Here, political consequences have to be drawn. Far from being a Thatcherite position, the thesis that "society does not exist" affirms class struggle as a central category of any politics of emancipation. For Althusser, who followed Marx very closely in this respect, class struggle is the name for politics which prevents the (all too often liberal) conception of classes as parts of a positive social body, and at the same time, in a Hegelian fashion, by being "categories of the real of a political struggle which cuts across the entire social body, preventing its 'totalization'."[11] The two (apparently) antagonistic positions that one needs to accept are that capitalism designates the horizon, and yet it is antagonistic in its nature. It is important to emphasize that Althusser is not naïve and unaware of the (importance) of the "critique of value," as some of critics have argued. His position is that only from a perspective that is engaged with class struggle can one even discern the true objects of a critique of political economy. He inverted the order: it is not that an economic analysis will really *convince* anyone of class struggle, but rather, it is the class struggle that demarcates a position from which the critique of political economy should be made. This connects back to the point on the influence of Christianity on his thought, namely not only the Bible passage about the sword (division), but also another verse from the Bible: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me" (Isaiah 65:1).

[9] Žižek, *Living in the End of Time*, p. 198.
[10] Althusser, *On the Reproduction*, p. 19.
[11] Žižek, *Living in the End of Time*, p. 198.

In the earlier chapter, I elaborated on the distinction between the proletariat of human condition and the proletarian of labor. For Pasolini, "identifying the Roman sub-proletariat first, and later the modern, transnational lumpen-proletariat, with universality qua the unacknowledged remainder of the socio-symbolic order remains of crucial importance."[12] Or as he himself put it, "the greatest ill in the world is poverty and therefore the culture of the poorer classes must be replaced by the culture of the ruling class."[13] Pasolini was an organic intellectual. To formulate this in Gramscian terms, whose theory he embraced and was influenced by for some time, Pasolini developed a genuine and profound hatred for bourgeois culture:

> My hatred for the bourgeoisie is not documentable or arguable. It's just there and that's it. But it's not a moralistic condemnation; it is total and unmitigated, but it is based on passion, not on moralism. Moralism is a typical disease of part of the Italian left, which has imported typical bourgeois moralistic attitudes into Marxist, or at any rate communist, ideology.[14]

Pasolini equates the new consumerist culture (the bourgeois culture) with a new form of fascism. This cultural hegemony (consumerism) constantly reproduces conformism, which in Italy emerged immediately after the war. Can we read his film *Teorema* (1968) from this perspective, that of emerging consumerism in Italy? Although the film has no "real center," not much dialog, thus leaving the spectator to construct the "dialog" him/herself. Perhaps what Pasolini called *the poetics of cinema* is best expressed in *Teorema*. Some scholars have interpreted this film in a Machiavellian–Marxist sense. Pasolini's critique of the corrupt and decadent Italian middle-class family is best exemplified by the doings of young man, played by Terence Stamp. He engages in sexual acts with all the members of the family, including the maid. According to such interpretations, the Visitor, exposes the naked truth of middle-class corruption and decadence, but at the same time, he grants by constructs the characters by giving them the possibility of realizing their potential (i.e., the son leaving the house to become an artist, the maid going back to her village, etc.).

[12] Vighi, "Pasolini and Exclusion," p. 104.

[13] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Unhappy Youth," in The *Lutheran Letters* (New York: Carcanet, 1987), p. 16.

[14] Quoted from Oswald Stuck, *Pasolini on Pasolini* (London: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 26.

Writing on Machiavelli's *Prince* and Gramsci's reading of it, Althusser argues that

> Machiavelli's New Prince is thus a specific political form charged with executing the historical demands "on the agenda": the constitution of a nation. Gramsci's Modern Prince is likewise a specific political form, a specific means enabling modern history to execute its major "task": revolution and the transition to a classless society. Gramsci's Modern Prince is the Marxist–Leninist proletarian party. It is no longer a single individual, and history is no longer at the mercy of this individual's virtù. In Machiavelli's time, the individuality of the ruler was the requisite historical form for the constitution of a state capable of achieving national unity. The form and the objectives have since changed. To take up Lenin's expression, what is "on the agenda" is no longer national unity, but proletarian revolution and the institution of socialism.[15]

But, how should we read sex in this film, as well as in Pasolini's trilogy? Or rather, how are we to understand the allegory of sex in Pasolini's films in relation to consumerism?

> I consider consumerism a worse fascism than the classical one, because clerical-fascism did not transform Italians. It did not get into them. It was totalitarian but not totalizing. I'll give you an example: fascism has tried for twenty years to eliminate dialects and it didn't succeed. Consumerism, which, on the contrary, pretends to be safeguarding dialects, is destroying them.[16]

For Pasolini, sex is always an allegory of commodification, of bodies, of languages, of resistance, and so on. This is best illustrated in *Salò*. A brutal film which contains scenes of violence, rape, humiliation and tortures, and murder. The fascists capture the most beautiful young boys and girls in town and use them as their slaves. The Republic of Salò is a fascist enclave, from which there is no escape, which the fascists tell the young people while welcoming them:

> You herded, feeble creatures, destined for our pleasure. Don't expect to find here the freedom granted in the outside world. You are beyond reach of any "legality." No one knows you are here. As far as the world goes, you are already dead.

[15] Althusser 2001, p. 13.
[16] Pasolini 2012.

The function of sex thus is to present the commodification of bodies. According to Pasolini, consumerism manipulates and uses bodies just in the same way as fascism did. Throughout his films, we can see the strict parallel between Nazi-fascism and consumerism. Even when he writes about hippies and his initial support for them, Pasolini takes the same anticonsumerist path. He supported them initially as an antipolice and antifascist position, as both attacked hippies. In hippies, he saw a violent nonviolence, entropy, a subculture of resistance, albeit them being non-Marxists. In them, he could see his own anarchic elements and parts of his own ideology. However, later on, he came to understand that "the language of the long hair was no longer expressing 'leftist things' but instead something quite equivocal, a Right-Left, that was making the presence of the provocateurs possible."[17] And speaking about the young Italians (as Merlin's), he writes:

> Their freedom of having their hair as they like is no longer defensible, because it is not freedom anymore. They moment has come to say to the young people that the way they wear their hair is horrible, because it is servile and vulgar. The moment has come that they themselves should realize it and should free themselves from their anxious guilt in obeying and degrading order of the horde.[18]

The same holds for us today: Shall we also tell our own fellow hipsters that there is absolutely nothing subversive in their hair, beards, or tight jeans? There is neither nothing transgressive about carrying pets as accessories either. This form of "transgression," already inscribed in the popular culture and consumerism, is what fits best capital and its circulation. In the Althusserian fashion of demarcation, we need to distinguish between pop-culture (or capitalist-inspired) transgression and truly subversive acts of political, ideological, and even cultural transgression.

[17] Pasolini 2010, p. 40.
[18] Ibid., p. 42.

CHAPTER 25

Class Struggle Versus Humanity

After the Second World War, Italy was a poor country, which transformed from fascism into an industrialized nation. Pasolini lived his whole life outside of this culture and he was never part of it, but attached himself to the subproletarian culture. In fact, throughout his work, he seeks to reestablish this lost culture. In *Genariello*, he writes:

> It often happens in our society that a man (middle class, Catholic, even potentially fascist) noticing consciously or unconsciously this anxiety to conform, makes a decisive choice and becomes a progressive, a revolutionary, a Communist; but (very often) to what end? In order to be able to live at peace with his anxiety to conform.[1]

According to him, the situation of post-fascism, but not of antifascism,[2] worsened especially from 1968 onward:

> [N]ational conformism, the conformism of the "system" has become infinitely more conformist from the moment when power became consumerist power, therefore infinitely more efficacious in imposing its will than any other preceding power in the world. The process of persuasion to follow

[1] Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Geniriello," in *The Lutheran Letters*, p. 20.

[2] Pasolini writes: "In other words, our guilt as fathers could be said to consist in this: *that we believe that history is not and cannot be other than bourgeois history*," Ibid, p. 16.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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> a "hedonistic" concept of life (and therefore to be good consumers) renders ridiculous any authoritarian effort at persuasion—for example, to follow a religious or moralistic concept of life.[3]

Here, the attempt is to unify the proletarian culture with the bourgeois culture, under a new form of dictatorship: that of material goods. According to Kriss Ravetto, Pasolini's understanding of neofascism or contemporary society is that of a "networking of repressive forces, capitalism, moralism, Catholicism, bourgeois culture, and patriarchal hegemony."[4] But, if we are to take Pasolini's own words, fascism, or rather "the fascist regime, in the end was nothing more than a bunch of criminal who took the power"[5]—that is why, in his understanding, fascism did permeate "every social desire with a fatalistic desire for repression, consumption, and destruction."[6] With this in mind, let us go back to the class analysis of Althusser Chapter 8. Althusser engages in a *theoretical struggle* against the prevailing discourses of fear and of the human condition which pervade the proletariat. Althusser writes that "whereas the laboring proletariat is defined by sociological, economic and historical conditions, this latter-day 'proletariat' would seem to be defined by a psychological state: intimidation and fear."[7] What unites the proletariat of poverty and alienation with the proletariat of fear is equality: however, it is equality in death. In this regard, *fear* becomes the condition of the contemporary society. It unites people against all kinds of threats, from military threats, to ecological changes, to new viruses (Ebola today, and so on). When Althusser wrote about the post–Second World War period, he said:

> Man, know thyself: your condition is death (Malraux), is to be a victim or an executioner (Camus), is to draw steadily closer to the world of prisons and torture (Koestler), or to nuclear war, your total destruction, or to the end of what makes you man and is more than your life: the gaze of your brothers, your freedom, the very struggle for freedom. Humanity, says Camus, is racing towards the abyss like a train hurtling ahead at full speed, while the passengers pursue their petty quarrels.[8]

[3] Ibid.

[4] Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 15.

[5] "Pasolini on Consumeristic Civilization," available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bipWHxTi-3c

[6] Kriss Ravetto, *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics*, p. 16.

[7] Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. 3.

[8] Ibid., p. 4.

Different social classes and other social strata are united in a human totality, or rather, humanity itself is a new form of a proletariat—the proletarized humanity, "not by the means and relations of production but precisely by the means and relations of destruction that, as the experience of the war shows, make use of their bodies to realize the goal of global annihilation."[9] But, what is important to bear in mind is that the proletariat of the class struggle cannot be part of this Holy Union, for class struggle always divides: *class struggle stands for the sword*. Althusser maintains that fear is a psychological condition and is a "captivity without possibility of flight," which renders its emancipation impossible. This is because the object of such fear is the future of men, their destiny. The "real" proletariat finds in itself the means of emancipations from its proletarian position. The proletariat of fear is devoid of the struggle between itself and the exploiter, between the worker and the capitalist, and so on. It is impossible to emancipate or liberate oneself from one's human condition (i.e., of fear, terror, and so forth). However, emancipation from the worker's position *is* possible. The proletariat of fear emerges to supplement an authentic belief. The proletariat of labor, whose foundations and adamant belief rest on equality of all, is against the human condition. In Althusser's view, class struggle permits the "holy alliance against destiny":

> Fear is not a fatherland, nor is courage. […]; more, *the human condition is not a human fatherland*. It is, perhaps, the fatherland of men as they appear to God; because we are Christians, we call this condition original sin. For the man who is not a Christian, and for the Christian who does not usurp God's place, the human fatherland is not the proletariat of the human condition, it is the proletariat *tout court*, leading the whole of humanity towards its emancipation. This proletariat has a real content.[10]

It is through this that Althusser's Marxist arguments are allied with his Christian reading:

> For, as Christians, we believe that there is a human condition; in other words, we believe in the equality of all men before God, and his Judgment, *but we do not want the Judgment of God to be spirited away before our very eyes; nor do we want to see non-Christians and, occasionally, Christians as well,*

[9] Montag, *Althusser and His Contemporaries*, p. 195.
[10] Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. 8.

> *commit the sacrilege of taking the atomic bomb for the will of God, equality before death for equality before God* […], *and the tortures of the concentration camps for the Last Judgment*.[11]

One can elaborate on the double relation of the proletariat of fear versus the proletariat of labor from the perspective of temporality. For Althusser, the former exists only in tomorrow, because today is already tomorrow. Tomorrow is constituted by the nonexisting world: it ceases to exist because of wars, natural or ecological catastrophes, diseases, and so on. Unlike this, the proletarian of labor exists only in today. Its misery, exploitation, and poverty constitute its life. Tomorrow is inexistent, because today reproduces itself in tomorrow. Althusser writes that "*he knows that tomorrow will be a today, and that the proletariat of the morrow is, today, a smoke-screen for the proletariat of every day.*"[12] Althusser is here drawing on Matthew 6:31: "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

In Pasolini's visualization, this is recited after the shot of *Prayer*, where the face of Jesus Christ is seen close up and in short frames, with flashlights against the black background. The scene, which presents Jesus Christ speaking "against the proletariat of the morrow," is brighter than the previous one: Jesus Christ has a scarf on his head, speaks calmly, and the background is a white shining sky. The images become brighter as Jesus finishes reciting these lines. In a typical Pasolinian manner, the coming scene is from *The Narrow and Wide Gates*: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." (Matthew 7:13). Here, it is important to proceed with a formal definition of the proletariat, as considered by Althusser and Pasolini: the proletariat is not a generic condition and description of the whole humanity, but rather has a specific class dimension within the general social relation.

In today's situation (especially in Europe), the rise of rightist populism and national fundamentalism, as well as the rise of religious identification,

[11] Ibid., p. 9.
[12] Ibid., p. 6.

functions on the category of fear: fear of Arabs, Muslims, Africans, and others. So in this sense, today's preachers and defenders of Christianity depart from an imaginary situation with respect to the cause of this predicament. The absence of a class analysis and of a class struggle is inevitably substituted by identity-based analysis as a solution of real problems. In this sense, the public restlessness over cosmic or natural catastrophes, war threats, and so on are triggered by an apocalyptic prospect. The ruling ideology calls to abandon partial ("partisan") positions for the sake of moral and apolitical ones. The proletariat's conditions of exploitation, oppression, and poverty do not change according to or because of the human conditions (whatever they might be). A good example is the threat of an ecological catastrophe. The threat of an ecological catastrophe is real, but at the same time, it functions as a very powerful ideology. One is confronted with the ideological propaganda of such threats, from global warming to destruction of forests, air pollution, and so on. These surely are all real threats ("scientifically" proven), but humanity throughout history has experienced, at least, equally serious ecological or environmental changes, and it has succeeded in surviving. However, this is not our main concern. The ideological propaganda calls to unite in saving mother earth: the rich and the poor should leave behind their class differences and unite in the battle against this external and more urgent adversary. While the people united, the rich are getting richer, whereas others are fighting yet another "false" struggle. In other words, while global warming and other disasters are real and ought to be taken seriously, their ideologization should be opposed and questioned. In other words, one should not accept the ideological mystification of natural disasters as the real threat to the end of the human life on earth. The petite-bourgeois is particularly worried about the change of temperature on earth and the preservation of the beautiful environment with its plants and animal life. Instead of engaging in campaigns where the ultimate aim is, for example, recycling, maybe it would be best to reconsider the current ideological approach to the planet and think about the existing state of the situation: an increase of poverty and unemployment, different forms of exclusions and de-subjectivization, new forms of exploitation and oppression, and so on. In other words, it is more pertinent to focus on locating the real antagonisms within the logic of capitalism, and carrying out the class struggle in these real sites. In this sense, the millenarianism is not only far away from any political account or analysis of our situation, but also obscures and mystifies the political action against the real antagonisms of our situation. To clarify this further,

it is important to focus on the ideologization of real actual problems by giving them a *religious* apocalyptic dimension, always-already displacing the site of the real struggle. To make an explicit reference to Pasolini and Althusser, we have to say that the environmental subject is an ideological (interpellated) subject. The language of Pasolini's *Gospel* is, in this regard, to paraphrase his own words apropos Lenin, indecipherable, but it does not lack the unity and as such, it its *potentia* it only in the future to come.

CHAPTER 26

The Politics of Religion

The greatness of Pasolini's *Gospel* is that, unlike today's religious turn, he *proposes a new* vision, or rather, a new idea of God. Today's religious leaders and religious–political movements talk about diet, clothing, traditions, and "traditional" ways of living. For Muslims in Europe, it seems like a dominant problem is located in the prohibition or not of wearing a hijab, or the main concern of Saudi clerics is whether women are allowed to eat bananas or not. Equal to this, Catholic priests are worried about abortion or gay rights. The question to be posed is this: where is religion in all this? Is there room for God and religion in the contemporary forms of the "return to religion"?

The antagonism between the new and the old ways of living is an old struggle. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx writes:

> The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.[1]

[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, available online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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In other words, the antagonism between the traditional and the new is located in the relations of power and profit. But by referring to and employing traditions, the bourgeoisie instrumentalizes it for monetary interests. The argument of religious fundamentalists is that capitalism is a threat to culture, and traditions do not stand as legitimate. In this regard, the dichotomy between traditions versus the new democratic and tolerant ways of living does not only constitute real division, but also has little, if anything at all, to do with religion. Far from denying its importance, however, I would argue that in today's presentation and practicing of it, religion is reduced and degenerated into manuals for behavior, diet, and clothing. Given this, the true threat to religion comes from the *religious defenders of religions*.

The question that persists, however, is how is it possible for a doctrine of universalism to regress into a doctrine of closed communities? This is particularly in light of religion being posited as an ideological weapon for political groups who stand for the affirmation of identitarian and particular politics? If religion is appropriated by reactionary politics, why is it then worth returning to? Or more precisely, what specifically in religion is worth reappropriating?

Althusser writes that the calls for the

> *false end of the world is teeming with false prophets* [the prime examples of which are Camus and Malraux] *who announce false Christs and treat an event as the Advent*. But Christ has taught us that we must beware of false prophets, and also that they will reappear as the Last Days draw nigh. The paradox is plain: the end that is close for every Christian is not the end of the false prophets of history.[2]

In Pasolini's film, a scene begins with a shot of a shore in which there are local people going about their daily routine. The scene commences with a wide shot, proceeding with a rather fast zooming in. The next sequence of frames is close-up shots of the daily activities of the locals. This is followed by a scene where Jesus Christ is sitting, looking sideways, as six Apostles approach him. The Apostles stand at a distance of 2–3 meters away from Jesus and the camera is positioned in such a way that the Apostles and Jesus Christ are looking at each other, but none of them is looking at us, the viewers. One Apostle says: "John asks you, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

[2] Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. 10.

In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven," and "watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15). While this is cast as the struggle against idolatry, Althusser posits a different struggle against those who do not see the real problem of the proletariat, that is, the exploitation of the working class under capitalism. However, is not Althusser committing the very same error he is criticizing? The false prophet stands for the mystification of the real problem, because (in Althusser's understanding) he or she fails to see the 'real' of the problem. However, by identifying socialism as the solution to real problems (of exploitation, oppression, and domination), is not Althusser falling in the same trap, because from the Christian perspective, "the type of idolatry that would enlist him with the false prophets, no matter how much he might not want to see himself as a true prophet. For his later Marxism, it would be God himself who would become the mystifying, idolatrous figure that obfuscates the class struggle itself."[3]

Taking all this into account, is it possible to account for *a new social and political emancipation* which can be also based on religious forms of organization? Writing about the Church, Althusser compared this proposition to a sick man:

> [T]he world no longer listens to the Church, whose words fail to reach the men of our day; the Church has become a virtual stranger for broad masses of people who are already the present and future of this world. On the other hand, when we consider the people faithful to the Church, the question arises as to whether their faithfulness is still religious. This historical situation is simultaneously the historical context Christians are living in, and a reality all men, Christians or not, meet at every turn. Just as, in an earlier age, all roads led to Rome, so, today, all roads lead to two obvious and interrelated facts: *the modern Church* is *no longer at home in our times, and the vast majority of the faithful are* in *the Church for reasons that are not really* of *the Church*.[4]

From an ideological perspective, the degradation of the Church consists in the fact that according to Althusser, *it falls behind in rethinking itself*: it is based on the concepts that no longer appeal to the contemporary men.

[3] Boer, *Criticism of Heaven*, p. 117.
[4] Althusser 2014a, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. 192–193

In the second half of Pasolini's *Gospel*, we see Jesus Christ walking down the field, with his Apostles following. After the walk, they stop, and one of the rare dialogs, based on Matthew 16:16[5]–17,[6] in the film occurs. The next shot shows Jesus Christ putting his arm on Peter's and saying: "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it; I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Like the scene depicts, Althusser also calls for a "social liberation of the Church":

> [T]he social forces dominating the Church can only be reduced by social forces that are objectively capable of defeating them, and, indeed, that need to defeat them. These cannot be random forces; they must rather be the very forces whose advent threatens the destruction of the old structures, making them appear, precisely, as threatened, archaic, and outdated. These forces of reduction and combat are, today, those being marshalled by the organized proletariat. This problem and this struggle are not religious in nature; but, by virtue of the fact that the reduction of collective religious alienation presupposes this political and social struggle as the condition without which no emancipation, not even religious emancipation, is conceivable.[7]

Therefore, the social and political liberation of the Church depends on "reconquering the religious life" and religion itself. This is "not, *a priori*, a form of alienation, this reduction should permit the Christian to reconquer an authentic religious life, whose conditions and limits he must already begin to define, in struggle."[8]

Drawing from this, it can be argued that by providing the means for liberating the Church, Althusser is doing something else: he is offering the philosophical and religious arguments, or the conditions of the possibility for *rethinking the party-form politics, on universal level*. What unites the Church and the Party is that they both are names of the monstrous and outdated models of collective organizations. They both failed in rep-

[5] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

[6] And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

[7] Althusser, *The Spectre of Hegel*, p. 202.

[8] Ibid., p. 203.

resenting the needs and demands of the people. So what kind of a Party-form of organization might one rethink from the premises of Althusser and Pasolini?

The Party we are compelled to rethink is a Party that can be based on the religious foundations of politics (equality, freedom, universality) and whose leader is terrestrial and earthly as well as devoid of any theological commitments. Such a leader is committed to the aleatory stream of events, and on contingency rather than its predestination. A leader like Pasolini's Jesus is certainly called for. This version of Jesus from the second half of the film, in a very irritated and enraged manner, gets into the temple and "drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves". He said, "It is written", he said to them, "My house will be called a house or prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13). The Bible subsequently offers, "and the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them" (Matthew 21:14). Pasolini edits this out of his film, thus presenting a different Jesus not only from other films, but also from most of the Christian doctrinal representations. Pasolini's Jesus is the *political leader* who is concerned and who loves those whose only prospect was the kingdom of earth: "for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). Just like politics (of emancipation), the Church will have to reinvent itself. This can be done only if the exploited, the oppressed, and the excluded join forces and work toward radical emancipation. The struggle for social emancipation of the Church (or any other religious institution) is at the same time the struggle for universal emancipation. As Pasolini has revealed, these contemporary times need a leader who is political, and not a moral authority such as a church, which is not the reproducer of those social conditions perpetuating an ideological domination. Rather what is most needed is a center for a new political action. Instead of mere representation, one ought to consider such a center as a new form of organizing collectives. And on this note, let us conclude poetically:

> Not an Arab people, not a Balkan people,
> not an ancient people but a living nation, a European nation,
> and what are you? A land of babies, starving, corrupt,
> politicians working for landowners, reactionary governors,
> petty lawyers with slicked-back hair and smelly feet.[9]

[9] Pasolini 2014, p. 295.

CHAPTER 27

Pasolini's Political Thought

Politics, in order to be, has to be organized. The question of the form of organization of politics is probably the most important aspect of political thinking today. What is our task "after Lenin"? That is to say, what is the task of the militants of Communism today? How are we to rethink the collective and organized action and thought? In other words, this is the definition as well as the condition of politics. Along with Althusser and Pasolini, as well as with Badiou and Žižek, we are not talking about any form of politics; the only politics worthy of the name is (for the former) Marxist–Leninist politics, which in our situation should be named as Communism. Departing from this, how are we to rethink the idea of Communism?

And first of all, why Communism? Why should we stick to this wretched word, which causes nothing but anger, demobilization, fear, bad memories, anxiety, and so on? Let us begin with the following thesis: Communism is the right name for the politics of emancipation precisely because socialism does not mean anything today. Socialism does not have the power of division; that is, it does not represent an Idea. We cannot orient ourselves, politically, on the premise of the idea of socialism. Furthermore, socialism is the name for the failure of the previous-century Communist experiments. But, here we encounter the first paradox (at least in European and Latin American context): the Left—be it radical or not—is *predominantly* identified with socialism. It seems to me that, to a certain extent, the whole European Left is, in a certain aspect, social-

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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ist. However, there are only a few, handful, people who do stand for Communism and call themselves Communists. This marks yet another oxymoron in our situation: especially in Europe, we distinguish between the radical and nonradical (or anticapitalist) left. This distinction renders palpable the limits of our situation, at least on two levels: (1) the uncreativity of the left, on political level. The more radical the Left proclaims to be, the more and the better it serves the logic of Capital (as is the case with Syriza); (2) socialism marks our universe and the possibility of our political fantasy. Even though we should be ruthlessly critical of the twentieth-century socialist states and experiments, we should at any price avoid the superego injunction of feeling bad or embarrassed of our history. However, this should not make us nostalgic about what from today's misery we perceive as "golden socialist times," as it is very fashionable nowadays in the states of former Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, and so on. Nostalgia is not a political category; it is a clinical state of being in which individuals take refuge in the past as they are "unable" to accept the present and too impotent to try and change it. In this precise sense, the socialist Left today is utterly conservative. The socialist left should accept the following political premise: the twentieth century is over, and together with it, each and every socialist experiment. Singular names—Mao, Stalin, Trotsky, and so on—have no political meaning today, on both levels of mobilization and vision. In the camp of the socialist left, the main struggle consists of bashing "Stalinist deviation" from the perspective of Trotsky. Far from defending Stalin and his legacy, what if we argue that one of the main reasons for our impossibility to think what went wrong with Stalin is precisely the Trotskyite revisionism? In his essential *On Marx and Freud* Louis Althusser talks about how the communist and Marxist movement is constantly involved in a fourfold process of "attack-annexation-revision-split" which turns its conflicting character into an ever-present reason to dissolve and fragment its institutions and fronts of struggle:

> The entire history of Marxism has verified and continues to verify every day the necessarily conflictual character of the science founded by Marx. Marxist theory, "true" and therefore dangerous, rapidly became one of the vital objectives of the bourgeois class' struggle. We see the dialectic referred to earlier at work: attack-annexation-revision-split; we see the attack directed from the outside pass into the interior of theory which thus finds itself invested with revisionism. In response there is the counterattack and, in certain limited situations, splits (Lenin against the Second International). It is through this implacable and inescapable dialectic of an irreconcilable

> struggle that Marxist theory advances and is strengthened before encountering grave, always conflictual crises.[1]

But how should we understand the "Stalinian deviation" from an Althusserian position? When we called Stalinist rule a '"Stalinist deviation," we were still at the level of seeking the causes of Stalin's catastrophic rule at the level of the superstructure, and are still incapable of explaining the inner source of contradiction in the apparatus that truly shaped the space of possible strategies within that historical situation. Althusser attempted to test a *genuine Marxist analysis*.[2] In his understanding, the International Communist Movement, from the 1930s, was affected by a *single deviation*, which he calls "the Stalinian deviation." The tendency of this deviation was an economic one:

> Keeping things *well in proportion*, that is to say, respecting essential distinctions, but nevertheless going beyond the most obvious phenomena—which are, in spite of their extremely serious character, historically secondary: I mean those which are generally grouped together in Communist Parties under the heading "personality cult" and "dogmatism"—the Stalinian deviation can be considered as *a form* (a *special form*, converted by the state of the world class struggle, the existence of a single socialist State, and the State power held by the Bolshevik Party) of the *posthumous revenge of the Second International*: as a revival of its main tendency.[3]

This poses a series of questions and opens up a new problematic. Let us also remember an important fact: unlike Trotsky, Althusser was supportive of the formula of "socialism in one country." The problematic opened up by Althusser takes the form of a series of questions:

> The most obvious of these problems can be stated in the following way: *how* could a basically economistic tendency have combined with the superstructural effects we know so well, effects which it produced as the transformation of its own forms? *What* were the material forms of existence of this tendency, which enabled it to produce these effects in the existing conjuncture? *How* did this tendency, centred from a certain time onwards on the

[1] Althusser (1991), p.20.
[2] Althusser (2006), p.128.
[3] Ibid.

> USSR, spread through the whole International Communist Movement, and what special—and sometimes differing—forms did it take?[4]

Althusser suggests that the first answer should be looked for in Lenin, precisely at the beginning of the seventh chapter of his *The Collapse of the Second International*. Far from endorsing "historicism," but because of the continuity in the Labour Movement, of all the obstacles, of the contradictions, as well as its deviations, which according to Althusser, "because of the continuity of a single class struggle against the bourgeoisie, and of a single class struggle (economic, political *and ideological-theoretical*) of the bourgeoisie against the Labour Movement."[5] In other words, the deviation is rooted not in the Thermidor, but precisely in the Second International—and Lenin continuously struggled against the idealist-economist tendency—and not in the Third, which Stalin dominated in the 1930s. Lenin did not reduce the Second International to its deviations.

If all this is true, Althusser argues, that is, if the "Stalinian" deviation cannot be

> reduced to "violations of Soviet legality" alone; if it is related to more profound causes in history and in the *conception* of the class struggle and of class *position*; and even supposing that the Soviet people are now protected from all violations of *legality*—it does not follow that either they or we have completely overcome the "Stalinian" deviation (neither the causes, nor the mechanisms, nor the effects of which have been the object of a "concrete analysis" in the Leninist sense, that is to say, of a scientific Marxist analysis) *simply on account of the denunciation of the* "*personality cult*", or by a patient work of rectification unenlightened by any analysis. In these conditions, with all the information, past and present, available to us (including the official silence, which refuses to pronounce against these facts), we can bet that the Stalinian "line", purged of "violations of legality" and therefore "liberalized"—with economism and humanism working together—has, for better or worse, survived Stalin and—it should not be astonishing!—the Twentieth Congress. One is even justified in supposing that, behind the talk about the different varieties of "humanism", whether restrained or not, this "line" continues to pursue an honourable career, in a peculiar kind of silence, a sometimes talkative and sometimes mute silence, which is now and again broken by the noise of an explosion or a split.[6]

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., pp.130–131.

To this, Althusser proposes the critique that what is fundamentally at stake, with the "Stalinian deviation," is to be found in the struggle, line, practices, and principles of the Chinese Revolution (from the Long March to the Cultural Revolution and its results).[7]

This brings us to the crucial point: Why then Communism if socialism of the twentieth century was a miserable failure? First, Communism means the history of collective action. It is the name for the historical endeavors and struggles for *universal* emancipation. For a Communist, the emancipation is either universal, or not. For a socialist left, emancipation always has borders, and they are usually national (as is the case with Greece's Syriza or its by-product Popular Unity). As we shall see later on, political forms of capitalism do not offer us the way out of capitalism. Many leftists, especially those from Soviet and Yugoslavian nostalgic positions, downgrade the importance of equality between nations—a position which paradoxically brings them in the positions of Stalin (or even Rosa Luxemburg), who accused Lenin of a liberal understanding of the national question.[8] But equality between nations and independence of nations are not by itself and in itself a guarantee for emancipation. And in Hegelian–Lacanian, terms, Communism is the name of uncertainty—there is no guarantee either in the big Other or in History that things will go as we want them to be, or that we are safe from making fatal mistakes.

Keeping all this in mind, we can proceed further with proposing axioms and variables of the Communist politics. Every politics worthy of its name should consist of what we can schematically call *two pillars*: axioms and variables. The first distinction should thus be the following: we should divide between two types of politics: that is, between Politics and politics.[9] Far from being a question of pure linguistic distinction, thinking about Politics and politics axioms and variables can be the path to thinking about thought and action. Politics (with the capital P) is the name and field of thinking, pure thinking (i.e., philosophy); whereas politics is the field of "practical" work, the "realistic" site in which things get done. In this sense, Politics *qua* axiom is the name of universality, equality, freedom, and so on. The other form, politics *qua* variable is the name of political work on the level of: class struggle, electoral processes and

[7] For more, *Cf.* Crisis and Critique, Volume 3/Issue 1
[8] Cf. Žižek & Hamza 2013; Hamza 2014.
[9] Cf. Hamza 2015, pp. 226–242.

battles, riots, demonstrations, corruption, violence, and so on. The former is universal, whereas the latter is strictly overdetermined by the specificity of particular conjunctures and situations, internal contradictions, and so on. The "dirty" part of politics is crucial: we should be ready to accept it, use it, from violence and corruption, through electoral processes, to the revolution, as long as it does not affect and corrupt Politics. And as we know, there are many examples to prove that it can be done (I am thinking of Aristide, in particular). Or let us go back to Lenin:

> The art of politics (and the Communist's correct understanding of his tasks) consists in correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully assume power, when it is able—during and after the seizure of power—to win adequate support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian working masses, and when it is able thereafter to maintain, consolidate and extend its rule by educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the working people.[10]

But where does Pasolini comes into all this? His political militantism is an excellent example of politics. Further, his political militantism is always based on (Althusserian) drawing lines of demarcation. His position toward the events of May 1968, as we have already said, was very unusual for the left, as developed in his poem "The Communist Party of the Young." On the other hand, he aligned himself with *Lotta Continua*, a left movement in the 1970s, where for some time, he served as the editor of their newspaper. He continued developing a critique of the Italian Communist Party, but nonetheless, it would be quite impossible to locate his position within the Italian spectrum of the Left, or European Left, for that matter. Correlative to this, the Left in Italy did not hold a high opinion of him; some even considered him a bourgeois:

> On 26 October, the Italian Communist Party Unit of Pordenone has decided to expel Dr Pier Paolo Pasolini, born in Casarsa, from the Party due to immoral behaviour. We move from the facts that have determined such a grave disciplinary action against the poet Pasolini to denounce once more the deleterious influence of certain ideological and philosophical undercurrents of Gide, Sartre and other similarly celebrated poets and literary figures

[10] Lenin 1920.

> who pose as progressives but in fact incorporate the most deleterious dimensions of bourgeois degeneracy.[11]

Pasolini was not a party militant, but a Communist one. He intervened in various aspects of the political life (i.e., culture, the problem of languages and dialects, subcultures, abortion, and so on). The proletariat (and subproletariat) becomes *the* object of his films and poems. Films are his form of class struggle, through which he could go against both the Right and the Left, as well as propose new forms of political struggles and relations. Pasolini was expelled from the Party, but he never gave up on the workers' struggles. He was concerned with a "new morality," without regressing into archaism, antimodernism, or populism, as was fashionable to accuse him of (i.e., *Operaismo*, etc.). In the last instance of analysis, is not Pasolini the thinker of new relations between politics and esthetics, morality, culture, and Marxism? As he himself would put it: "The light of the future never ceases even for an instant to wound us."

[11] Quoted from Ravetto-Biagioli 2014, p. 94.

CHAPTER 28

Conclusion: Marxism and Films

Marxism and films are two orientations that address the masses in two different ways. Mike Wayne, a film theorist, on the one hand, argues that films speak to the masses "more routinely, underpinned as it is by the institutional infrastructure of capital and state support…by a technology that multiplies and extends the reach of communication and through vernacular cinematic forms that knit together a variety of widely circulated storytelling and aesthetic strategies."[1] According to Wayne, it is the social reach of films that makes them important and interesting for Marxism. On the other hand, he writes that Marxism "speaks to and arouses the masses rather more…in those great ruptures in the continuity of things that we call revolutions, attempted revolutions or those less matured intensifications of social antagonisms that we call social crisis or cultural revolutions."[2] Departing from this, one can continue talking about Marxist esthetics (the latter, for Althusser, belongs to the field of ideologies), class representation, contradictions within the capitalist culture, and so forth. Also, the production of films is equally an economic process, as we have seen in the previous chapters. In another aspect of analysis, the difference between Marxism and a film is that while the latter is, in the last instance, a tool for the critique of the ideology of the situation, the former is *also* a tool for the political and economic transformation of society. On this formal level,

[1] Wayne 2005, p. 1.
[2] Ibid.

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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one can argue that films (as a critique of ideology) is and should be understood as a complementary aspect of the Marxist critique of society as a whole. This is, at least, how we should understand Pier Paolo Pasolini's films. Pasolini is almost obsessed with fascism. As we know, the notions and concepts of purity and cleanliness mark fascist esthetics.[3] The "toxic subject" of fascism is always represented under the veil of the Evil. Pasolini's neorealist and Marxist move in the cinema (but also in poetry) is the exact opposite of this: his films mark a radical political, ethical, and esthetical shift. In his essay "Cinema as a Democratic Emblem," Alain Badiou writes:

> In cinema we travel to the pure from the impure. This is not the case in the other arts. Could you deliberately go and see bad painting? Bad painting is bad painting; there is little hope it will change into something good. You will not rise. From the simple fact that you are there, lost in bad painting, you are already falling, you are an aristocrat in distress. Whereas in cinema you are always more or less a democrat on the rise. Therein lies the paradoxical relation. The paradoxical relationship between aristocracy and democracy, which is finally an internal relationship between art and non-art. And this is also what politicises cinema: it operates on a junction between ordinary opinions and the work of thought. A subtle junction that you don't find in the same form elsewhere.[4]

Pasolini not only questions the moral foundations of fascist and postwar Italy, but literally negates them. His films signal a political and ethical destruction of the moral foundations of such societies. In other words, Pasolini manages to negate the esthetic and political organization of morality under fascism as well as under our contemporary societies. Pasolini's ideological position is not that of a nihilist—for him, the victim is *the* protagonist (for instance, in *Salò*) only insofar as, through the victim, he goes beyond the historical forms of social organizations (fascism, capitalism, and so on) and diminishes the foundation of their existence. In this sense, Pasolini is neither a cynic nor a nihilist; his method and his aim are to undermine what persists in postwar Italy, and that is fascist morality. Badiou defines cinema as an art of figures and active places of active humanity, which "proposes a kind of universal stage of action and

[3] But not only aesthetics: it goes also for politics, gender relations, and so on.

[4] Alain Badiou, "Cinema as a Democratic Emblem," available online at http://www.lacan.com/badcinema.html

its confrontation with common values. After all, cinema is the last place populated by heroes. Our world is so commercial, so familial, so unheroic."[5]

From this, we can proceed with Althusser and the concept as well as the duty of philosophy. Can Pasolini's opus serve as a condition for philosophy, in Althusser's sense of the term?

There is a common agreement with regard to Balibar's position that there is no such thing as an Althusserian school. Following this, I want to argue that, in the last instance, there is no such thing as *Althusserianism*, neither as a school nor as a philosophical orientation. Furthermore, it is of great interest to see what is going on today in the "Althusser studies"—there are many people who are seriously engaged in Althusser, but in the last instance, only a few are real Althusserians. Althusser serves as a vanishing mediator in order to get to Spinoza. In this sense, most of Althusser scholars are indeed Spinozists and the philosophy of the former seems to serve as the *passé* for the Marxist Spinoza. But is there a possibility for another Althusser? My first thesis is: yes, Althusser is indeed a vanishing mediator *par excellence*; that is to say, his philosophical edifice cannot stand on its own. In being so, in the current scholarship, he stands for the mediator between Marxism and Spinozism, thus creating the anti-Hegelian front. One cannot fully grasp his theory since he could not grasp or develop in full his own thought. In the last instance, is he not the ultimate proof that there can be no such a thing as a Marxist philosophy? One can be a Marxist only on nonphilosophical procedures, especially in science and politics.

However, by no means does this imply that we are done with philosophy; that the real sites of emancipation lie outside of philosophy. The tension in the work of Althusser is the tension between Marxism and philosophy. Because, in the last instance of analysis, Marxism is not, nor can it be, a philosophical discipline. Perhaps the title of the first chapter of *Reading Capital* is the best indicator: "From Capital to Marx's Philosophy." It is also this title that provides the best encapsulation of Althusser's philosophical project: a philosophical project whose theses failed to do what it promised—constructing a philosophy that will be called the *Marxist philosophy*.

Taking all this into account, what does it mean to affirm a fidelity to the Althusserian understanding of philosophy? Furthermore, what does it mean to affirm philosophy in our situation, which is very hostile to philosophy? It has been said that philosophy is, and has always been,

[5] Ibid.

under a threat, and today the hostility toward philosophy is being bureaucratized: from closing down the philosophy departments to the reign of "humanities" and "interdisciplinarity" (to which Althusser was particularly hostile), and so on. This is why our situation is a peculiar one: in the previous century, most of the philosophical discourses were concentrated in defending a certain philosophical orientation. Today, the main difficulty on the horizon is to defend *philosophy* as such, its necessity and absolute relevance to our era. In this sense, we need to regard philosophy as the highest form of intellectual activity. It is a daring position, but when we think about philosophy as the highest form of intellectual activity, we need to think of it as such precisely because (apart from mathematics) it is the only pure science. In this sense, today, we are not only confronted with the task of defending philosophy as such; this task entails a much stronger implication: to defend philosophy is to defend scientific thinking in its purest form, unconstrained by the prevalent economic blackmail, reducing scientific thinking to applicable, and hence, marketable and profitable aims. Hence, the task of defending pure scientific thought today is paradoxically inherently political.

What is the function of philosophy today? Can we talk about a philosophical thinking whose primary function relies not only on theorization as interpretation of the existing social order but also on the sense of marking or creating a point of rupture with the positive order of being? In other words, what is the duty of a critical philosopher: to simply interpret and provide an analysis of what is going on today in politics, economy, culture, sciences; or is it his duty to break with the existing social fantasy, and its constitutive "chain," and reorient himself in thought with regard to the fundamental fantasy? To formulate this in a more simplified way: the duty of philosophy is to reorient ourselves beyond the current coordinates of our world as it stands.

Althusser's definitions of philosophy marked the shift of his philosophical trajectory. His first definition was formulated under the epistemological horizon: *philosophy is a theory of theoretical practice*. It is important to argue that the triad that constitutes the problematic points of Althusser's project—with which he is in a perpetual struggle with—is Hegel, Christianity, and epistemology. To a certain degree, these are the fields in which Althusser began his life as a philosopher. The immanent tensions within his work with regard to philosophy and its conditions are worth consideration. His project was an ongoing struggle between philosophy and the conditions that made his philosophical thinking possible.

To a certain extent, one can argue that what characterizes his work is the continuous struggle to identify, and then alter, the practices which serve his project of "returning to Marx." Although his position was that philosophy is an autonomous discipline, it is nonetheless dependent on other practices, which we will refer to, following Badiou's vocabulary, as conditions.

For now, we will be content in arguing that after his "epistemological period," Althusser continuously struggled in providing a different conception of philosophy, as an attempt to de-epistemologize it by providing an ontological framework, which culminates in his "late writings." His posthumous works bear witness to the fact that Althusser became aware that materialism could not only be epistemologically upheld, but rather needs an ontological framework as its grounding. In other words, every materialism is dependent on ontological grounds, which will determine the nature of the former. Althusser's de-epistemoligization of philosophy, which in my view begins with his distanciation from the above-mentioned definition and conception of philosophy, can be read also as the beginning of his attempt to create an ontological framework, which, much later on, will culminate in his "aleatory materialist" period.[6] In his "self-criticism period," however, Althusser proposes a different formula, "*philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory*,"[7] which will remain his final conception of philosophy.

Let us try to get the matters straight, at least on a provisional level, especially with regard to the inconspicuous words "in the last instance." According to Althusser, because of "its abstraction, its rationality, and its system," philosophy is indexed in the "field of theory"; that is to say, philosophy is a theoretical discipline, but exists within a specific set of conditions. These conditions are: politics and science. In other words, these are the material conditions of life, and of the production of knowledge.

Therefore, philosophy maintains an intimate relation with the *ideologies* that express a given class tendency. From this, we can move toward a provisional Althusserian-informed definition of ideology. Ideology is an oddish mixture of notions derived from science, with specific class interests;

[6] Althusser's translator G.M. Goshgarian argues that "Althusser presents the materialism of the encounter under another name in a March 1976 lecture, 'The Transformation of Philosophy'," Goshgarian 2006, p. xvi. One of the main questions with regard to Althusser's late period is, whether the previous phases of his philosophical project can be read from the lenses of "aleatory materialism"?

[7] Althusser 2008, p. 67.

therefore, it is an oddish mix of the two conditions of philosophy. The class tendencies of *ideologies* are always *practical ideologies*.[8] Taking all this into account, the "last instance" becomes clearer: it designates "determination in the last instance." That is, "in the last instance" refers to the material and determinant support out of which the effective resources of philosophy derive. Philosophy, albeit autonomous in the last instance, as Althusser would put it, is defined by marking a division, or a position, in relation to its very nonphilosophical substratum.

Let us go on and try to examine this position through the opus of Althusser himself. If "philosophy is a class struggle in the field of theory," then this means that the philosopher, insofar as s/he is a Marxist, must "occupy a proletarian class position in philosophy" in which the "political difficulty is '*determinant* in the last instance'."[9] Let us leave this aside for the time being. Althusser is very careful to overemphasize that philosophy is *not* simply a class struggle in theory, but is such *only* in the last instance. He evokes Lenin, who distinguished between three forms of struggle: the political, economic, and theoretical form. These struggles have to be carried out by the proletariat, and "when it is fought out in the political field, the concentrated class struggle is called philosophy."[10] The complication begins here: his insistence is that philosophy as a class struggle, in the domain of theory, produces effects in social practices (political, economic, ideological, scientific, etc.). This is a pure military, or combative, character of Althusser's conception of philosophy—not only in its character, but it has a militaristic nature in its function as such. Philosophy intervenes theoretically in different social practices, but mostly and predominantly in the scientific and political practices. Two complementary theses should be put forward here:

1. Philosophy intervenes politically, in theoretical form, which is to say that it "never intervenes directly, but only by way of ideology."[11]
2. In doing so, the decisive moment for Marxism is that "it represents a position in philosophy."

[8] It is worth mentioning that Althusser distinguishes between *practical* and *theoretical* ideologies. The latter are always "in the last instance 'detachments' of the practical ideologies in the theoretical field," Althusser 2008. pp. 67–68/3n, Althusser 1997, p. 83.

[9] Althusser 2001, p. 3.

[10] Ibid., p. 68.

[11] Althusser 2006, p. 254.

Even though the implications of these two theses are far-reaching, and indeed too complicated to be elaborated in a book of this length, I will limit myself, however, to their basic effects both on politics and on philosophy. With this in mind, we can argue that philosophy, as a discipline, does not engage directly in a class struggle as such, in the sense that it is neither the object of class struggle, nor its agent in any sense of the word. The paradoxical position of Althusser is that, although philosophy *is* class struggle, it is so *only in the last instance*, which means that it has a specific function within the class struggle: that of drawing lines of demarcation, registering the effects of political struggle through giving them the proper name, and so on. To make the first encapsulation of this, in a schematic way, we could say that: (1) both philosophy and ideology are conditioned by science and politics, and (2) philosophy only intervenes through ideology. This puts us in a position to ask a few crucial questions:

1. What is the difference between what philosophy takes and what ideology takes from these conditions, especially since the relation between the two is not always clearly demarcated?
2. What does it mean to intervene on ideology in a nonideological way?

Here, we encounter a problem, which is presented in the form of the distinction between intervention, division, and delimitation. Is philosophy a matter of delimiting a boundary, after which all we get is ideology, or is the field it divides not necessarily divided between the scientific and the ideological? In this sense, is it possible to conceive of the relation between science and ideology in another way than that of a boundary? Here, we can argue that since science is full of holes and true problems, it is ideology that covers them up. But, it is only through philosophical intervention that these problems appear as problematic points. Yes, this is another view. It is also very important to analyze the extent to which this very concept is ideological in itself. That is to say, to what extent—if at all—is the conviction that philosophy demarcates between what is ideological and scientific, is ideological itself. Finally, if and when we divide the scientific from the ideological, we have to face yet another problem: what have we done politically? In other words, how is it that by affecting one of its two conditions, philosophy also affects the other? The answer lies in the fact that ideology "binds" the two conditions (what we have called an "oddish" mix) and thus holds the key to explaining this whole phenomenon.

The Leftist answer or position toward the ongoing financial crisis can be read from the perspective of what Althusser once called "the crisis of Marxism."

But, can we talk about Marxist or communist politics today? Is it possible to rethink the organized communist and Marxist politics, especially today when the Left itself is nothing more but the cause for laughter?

In 1957, Pasolini wrote a very powerful poem, entitled "The Ashes of Gramsci." Here is a fragment from this long poem:

> How much more empty
> —in this void of history, in this
> humming pause in which existence holds its tongue—
> is each ideal, clearly better is
> the immense, bronzed voluptuousness,
> almost Alexandrian, which illuminates
> and impurely ignites all, when here
> in the world, something tumbles down, and
> the world drags itself along, in the twilight, coming
> home to empty market-places, to disheartened factories…
> […]
> Suppertime is almost here;
> the quarter's scarce buses glitter,
> with bunches of workers at their ticket windows.
> And groups of soldiers vanish, languidly,
> toward the mount—which at the centre of
> rotten excavations, dry heaps of filth—
> streetwalkers are concealed in shadow
> waiting, enraged, on the aphrodisiac
> filth: and, not far away, among illegal
> shacks clinging to the mountain, in
> palaces, their own worlds, boys light
> as paper play in the breezes,
> no longer chill, but springlike; burning
> with the recklessness of youth, on a
> Roman evening in May, dark adolescents
> whistle along the pavements, in the evening's
> festivity; and the rolling shutters
> of garages roar, and crash, joyously;
> the darkness has surrendered the night serene,
> and in the midst of the plane trees in Piazza Testaccio
> the wind falling, quivering with unexpected disaster

is sweet enough, although grazing one's hair
and the porous stones of Macello, there one becomes
drenched with decomposed blood, everywhere
the waste and stench of poverty is stirred up.
It's a cacophony, this life, and those lost
in it, lose it cloudlessly, if their hearts
are filled with it: enjoying themselves,
behold the wretched, the evening: powerful
in them, defenseless before them, the myth
is reborn…But I, with my aware heart,
which is alive only in history,
can I ever again act with a pure love,
if I know that our history is ended?[12]

But, did our history indeed come to an end? Can we act with a pure feeling of love, as a voice of wilderness (Matthew 3:3), faithful to the communist invariants, regardless of our present weakness and disorientation? That is to say, can we move beyond the coordinates of capitalism and its political form, at least on the level of imagination? Most of the Left (and indeed this itself is a problematic term) are committed to analyzing the value and capital without an *a priori* engagement with class struggle as a "metaeconomic" hypothesis. In his *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx argues:

> In the crises of the world market, the contradictions and antagonisms of bourgeois production are strikingly revealed. Instead of investigating the nature of the conflicting elements which erupt in the catastrophe, the apologists content themselves with denying the catastrophe itself and insisting, in the face of their regular and periodic recurrence, that if production were carried on according to the textbooks, crises would never occur. Thus the apologetics consist in the falsification of the simplest economic relations, and particularly in clinging to the concept of unity in the face of contradiction.[13]

Are we not facing the same situation as in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, in which the apologetics of capitalism put the blame not on the structural necessity of existing relations of production to create crisis, but rather on the irresponsible managers. Crises are the most important feature needed for capitalist reproduction to take place. It is in the course

[12] Pasolini 1957; Cf. Pasolini 2014, pp. 166–188.
[13] Marx 1969, p. 500.

of crises that the inherent instabilities, antagonisms, and different forms of oppression and domination are reshaped and take a new form, and by which capitalism attempts to provide a new vision of itself for its future. In this regard, crises are not only inevitable, but as Marx has repeated many times, necessary for the inner contradictions of capitalism (accumulation) to be temporarily pacified. The crisis of capitalism is not, by itself, the potential for the beginning of something new, nor does it offer the perspective of a new vision of a different society. To formulate this in Badiou's terms, the crisis is not, by itself, a new figure in the situation. Or even better, crisis cannot be said to be a priori to an eventual site.

What we witness today, as the crisis goes on, is its attempt to revivify itself, albeit it is all too early to be able to account or predict what form and shape it will take. Since the crisis exploded, we are witnessing a proliferation of diagnoses and proposals for solving the crisis, and its effects.

If we take all this into account, which is the ultimate horizon of today's Left, is it radical or not? The publication of Thomas Piketty's *Capital for the Twenty-First Century* caused a storm in all ideological and political camps. Obviously, Piketty touched a weak point of the entire field in which the antagonistic ideological tendencies and orientations coexists. The first problem with the reception of Piketty's book is that we are giving him too much credit and attention by elevating his book to an undeserved level. In this sense, the reaction of the Left to his book is too symptomatic, on at least two levels. First, it is, as if by titling his book as he did, he attempted to rewrite Marx's *Capital* for our century, which among the Marxists caused an outburst of anger. In fact, it is all too clear that this was not Piketty's intention at all.[14] Second, Piketty's book renders visible the limits of the contemporary Left, in the sense that we externalize our failure (in this case, to rewrite Marx's *Capital*) onto somebody who did not even have that intention. We are all too often caught up in "trendy" events which leave no mark, or have no effect, on our project of emancipation. The best service that we, from the Left, could have done to the book is to have treated it as it deserves: an interesting Keynesian-informed book which will turn to oblivion in a rather short period of time. The horizon in which Piketty operates is that of the existing order. Further, Piketty is the best embodiment of what Žižek calls *utopia*. His project is utopian,

[14] Piketty himself admitted that he has never really read Marx: "I never managed really to read it [Das Kapital]…*the Communist Manifesto* of 1848 is a short and strong piece. *Das Kapital*, I think, is very difficult to read and for me it was not very influential," Piketty 2014.

not because of its solution (high progressive tax, etc.), but because its proposed measures cannot be applied in our world:

> I think, imagine a government doing this, Piketty is aware it needs to be done globally. Because if you do it in one country, then capital moves elsewhere. This is another aspect of his utopianism, my claim is that if you imagine a world organization where the measure proposed by Piketty can effectively be enacted, then the problems are already solved. Then already you have a total political reorganization, you have a global power which effectively can control capital, we already won.[15]

If we want to push Piketty-ism a step further, we should also analyze the political situation of the Left in Europe. The victory of the Right, and the rise of neofascist parties in the European Parliamentary elections, is the best sign of the path toward which we are heading. But what we should be concerned about is the weakness of the Left, which enabled the empowerment of the Right, and our terrible defeat. The ultimate problem of the Left today is that it cannot dream beyond capitalism as its terminal perspective.

So this is where we stand today: politics has disappeared and it has been replaced by administrative–bureaucratic procedures; religion became a content-less system of belief, degraded into a system of fashion and dietary specifications rather than what it ought to be: organizing collectives; art rarely becomes what it should be: a production which is addressed to all. It is in this sense that we need philosophy. We need philosophy not only to break away from the established consensus, or from orienting ourselves in thought. Karl Marx wrote that "as the revolution then [reformation] began in the brain of the *monk*, so now it begins in the brain of the *philosopher*."[16] We should proceed further and argue that it is only through philosophical rigor that we can also provide meaning and locate events (be they political, scientific, artistic, cultural, etc.) in the world. That is to say, a nonphilosophical practice gains its proper meaning only if it is subjected to philosophical inspection.

[15] Slavoj Žižek, "Towards a Materialist Theory of Subjectivity," available online at http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2014/05/slavoj-zizek-towards-a-materialist-theory-of-subjectivity/

[16] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, available online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm

Let us return, for the last time, to cinema. For Badiou, in cinema exists a relation between art and nonart; that is to say, "it is a mass art because it is always at the edge of non-art. Cinema is an art particularly charged with non-art."[17] However, he goes on claiming that "just as Plato dominated semblance with allegory, saving the image in the very place of Truth with his immortal 'myths,' we can in the same way hope that cinema will be overcome by cinema itself. After the philosophy of cinema must come – is already coming – philosophy as cinema, which consequently has the opportunity of being a mass philosophy."

In this regard, Pier Paolo Pasolini's artistic and political project should be read only from the perspective of a political and artistic creation. Every creation (and in this case, every artistic creation) is incapable of providing the meaning of its creation. The intentions of the artist (and in this case, the intentions of a filmmaker) are not always compatible with the effects of his/her creation. Following this, we can conclude by saying that the true political and religious implications of Pasolini's work can be located and given their proper consequences only by subjecting his work to a philosophical inspection and reading. Pasolini's Christianity and Jesus, his political struggles and critique of ideology, that is to say, his relationship between religion and politics and esthetics, whose power relies on the profound solidarity of the people. Pasolini's Christianity and Jesus, his political struggles and critique of ideology, that is to say, his relationship between religion and politics and esthetics, should be read and understand only from the perspective of the power it relies on the profound solidarity of the people.

[17] Alain Badiou, "Cinema as a Democratic Emblem."

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Index

A. Hamza, *Althusser and Pasolini*,
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