

What Colour is Theoreticism? Faust Reading Althusser

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“In the Beginning was the Thought”. This first line let me weigh completely. Lest my impatient pen proceed too fleetly. Is it the Thought which works, creates, indeed? “In the Beginning was the Power,” I read. Yet, as I write, a warning is suggested. That I the sense may not have fairly tested. The Spirit aids me: now I see the light! In the Beginning was the Act,” I write. (*Faust*, J.W.von Goethe)

Abstract

Far from disregarding it, Althusserian “theoreticism” is a long detour through the problem of *thinking politics*. This Chapter focuses on some traces laying on the surface of *Lire le Capital*, through the references to a few phrases of Goethe’s *Faust* and its echoes within a Marxist *heritage*. Signs that indicate on the surface of the writing, the mode in which Althusserian thought exceeds the epistemological ground to enhance, through the tension between Theory and Practice, a problematic regarding time, that opens spaces for *political* thought.

Keywords:

Althusser, theoreticism, political practice, theoretical practice, Faust

I. Theoreticism among its limits

In the last page of “Les défauts de l’économie classique. Esquisse du concept de temps historique”¹ in *Lire le Capital*, Althusser ironically recalls the famous vindication of the greenness of life in opposition to the greyness of theory, in Goethe’s *Faust*. This elliptical reference introduced by Althusser, reminds us of a large genealogy of philosophical readings (Hegel, Marx, and Lenin, among many others) that suggest a connection between the development of the “theoreticist deviation” and the very possibility of political thought.

Several readers have considered that the political issue in Althusser’s thought is either a kind of belated emergence, or rather a sort of underground project.² In discussion with these arguments, I propose the thesis that, if it is possible to speak of an *Althusserian problematic*, it

1 “[sous] la condition également idéologique de penser cette distance [entre le concret empirique et la théorie] comme une distance elle-même empirique, donc comme appartenant au concret lui-même qu’on peut alors se donner le privilège (c’est-à-dire la banalité) de définir comme ce qui est ‘toujours-plus-riche-plus-vivan-que-la –theorie’... » Althusser, 1996, p. 308

2 Cf. Rancière, 2011; Negri, 1997, pp.139-157; de Ipola, 2007.

will be through the becoming intelligible of how the question of politics (and the problem of *political thought*) constitutes a paradoxical unit with the so-called “theoreticist deviation”. Thus, I understand that under the heavy burden of that name (which, after May 68, not only alludes to a certain theoretical perspective but also involves a political accusation) the central question of the critique of the theory/practice dichotomy is neglected. That is, the critique not only as a condition for the development of more accurate questions about theory, but as a *political intervention* in the philosophical field as well, through identifying the “proper” Marxist theory of what exceeds the theoretical field itself. Henceforward, Althusser will not get tired of underlining that the singularity of Marxism lies in the complex *conjunction* between theory and politics. And this is deeply related to the way he conceives the crisis of Marxism: neither a theoretical crisis nor a political one, but the crisis of its complex combination.

The Althusserian bet consists in the paradoxical movement of emplacing thought on the *liminal space* in which theory and politics become united and separated, making their *disjointed-unity* the structure of his problematic and its *improper condition*.

The philosophical value of the concept of “detour” has been already pointed out by Althusser himself and by other readers;³ it includes different movements such as long postponements, brief nods, and exogenous issues placed at the center of more or less homogeneous volumes. Among this diversity of possibilities, the resource to the *dramaturgical metaphor* offers a detour to explore the scope of materialist dialectics.⁴ Whatever dialectical materialism is for Althusser, it will result in a detour in which the theoretical question is overwhelmed by the political problematic which involves subject and time.

It could be said that the invocation of theater pursues the *deconstructive* effect of making thinkable what the theoretical field tends to leave unthinkable.⁵ In this sense, the “theatrical practice” of Brecht responds to a certain materialistic homology with Marx’s theory. Brecht becomes the name of a process of transformation occurring *in* the theater; a revolution intended neither to eliminate the theater nor to produce

3 Cfr. Althusser, 2014, p.45; Montag, 2013, pp.5;46

4 That’s the case with “The ‘Piccolo Teatro’ Bertolazzi and Brecht. Notes on a materialist theatre” located at the center of *Pour Marx*, which introduces the dramaturgical metaphor in the axe of the search for a dialectical materialism, opening the path to a conception of non-contemporary time. There, the resource to the materialist theatre introduces, at the same time, the question of political action as a question of the action in history and the status of events. Cfr. Morfino, 2011.

5 Cf. Derrida, 1994

any anti-theater. A movement performing on its structure a similar *displacement* to the one Marxist theory effectively produced in philosophical *kampffplatz*. Far from seeking the removal of the philosophical or theatrical representations, the materialist position is nothing but walking through the fields of Theatre or Philosophy, assuming that *present absence* that, behind them, determines their form: *politics*. The critical movement that connects Brecht “theatrical practice” to Marx’s “theoretical practice” lays in the work of identifying knots of overabundance in the contentious fields of Theater or Philosophy to demonstrate how both of them “exist to suppress politics to which they owe their existence”.⁶

Hence, Theater should be read not by the virtue of what it says, but seeking that which it makes visible without seeing it itself. This is the way that the elliptical reference to *Faust in Lire le Capital*, and the broad sequence of philosophical and political evocations that this reference brings with it, should be read. It is inevitable to find there a critical dialogue with the Preface of *Philosophy of Right*, where Hegel invokes Goethe, referring to *absolute knowledge*, to assert the primacy of philosophy over religion and art: “When Philosophy paints its grey in grey, one form of life has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering.”⁷ The question at stake is nothing less than the place of Philosophy itself. But, for Althusser, the problem is not resolved with a simple rejection of Hegelian Idealism. It requires action on two fronts, against the omnipotence of the Concept (or Theory) and the assertion of Life (or Praxis), to demonstrate the deep connection between them. Althusserian thought does not, however, proceed through mere denial, but through taking the inherent *aporia* of a discourse to its extremes. Althusserian theoretical practice works on philosophical discursive matter producing the simultaneous critique of abstract oppositions: “No doubt this proclamation of the exalted status of the superabundance of ‘life’ and ‘concreteness’, of the superiority of the world’s imagination and the green leaves of action over the poverty of grey theory, contains a serious lesson in intellectual modesty, healthy for the right (presumptuous and dogmatic) ears. But we are also aware of the fact that the concrete and life may be the pretext for facile chatter which serves to mask either apologetic ends (a god, whatever his plumage, is always lin-

6 “J’ai dit tout à l’heure que dans la philosophie et dans le théâtre, c’est la politique qui parle, mais que sa voix est en générale recouvert. » Althusser, 1997,[1968 ms.], p.549

7 Hegel, 1896, p.xxx

ing his nest with the feathers of the superabundance, i.e. 'transcendence' of the 'concrete' and 'life') or mere intellectual laziness."⁸

This fragment ironizes against the celebration of *practice*, understood as immediately grafted into the "concrete life", and as an affirmation of the *percipio* over the *cogito*. The phenomenological "inversion" leaves intact the essence of Idealism: the religious complicity between *Logos* and Being. Althusser identifies it as the core procedure of idealistic Epistemology, the myth of religious reading, intended as an immediate and transparent access throughout things⁹.

The vague reference to *Faust* gives, nevertheless, a new light to this Althusserian critique of empiricism, in so far as the problem of *practice* exceeds the theoretical field, and therefore, it warns against the risk of an idealistic conception of political practice figured as the specular inversion of the Concept.

In this sense, the development of the Althusserian problematic through several decades can be conceived in terms of a persistent effort to *disjoint* every form of identification between the "Problem of Knowledge" and the question about politics, recalled in the different reappearances of the *religious myth of the state of nature*. If this effort has been frequently misunderstood, it is not due to a lack of this topic in Althusser's work. Instead, it is because of the practical way in which he actually conceives the critical operation of the symptomatic reading, which requires *taking position* in a field that is already occupied. Hence, it should be said that these "misunderstandings" are not an aberration

8 Althusser, 1970 [1968] Althusser, 1970 "Qu'il y ait, dans cette proclamation des titres exaltants de la surabondance de la 'vie' et du 'concret', de la supériorité de l'imagination du monde, et de la verdeur de l'action, sur la pauvreté et la grisaille de la théorie, une sérieuse leçon de modestie intellectuelle à bon entendeur (présomptueux et dogmatique) salut, - nul doute. Mais que le concret et la vie puissent être un prétexte aux facilités d'un bavardage, qui peut servir à masquer, soit des desseins apologétiques (un dieu, quelle qu'en soit la griffe, est toujours en train de faire son nid dans les plumes de la surabondance, c'est-à-dire de la 'transcendance' du 'concret' et de la 'vie'), soit une pure et simple paresse intellectuelle, - nous en sommes également prévenus. » Althusser, 1996 [1965], p.308.

9 "Pour le jeune Marx connaître l'essence des choses, l'essence du monde historique humain, de ses productions économiques, politiques, esthétiques et religieuses -c'est bel et bien lire (lesen, herauslesen) en toutes lettres la présence de l'essence 'abstraite' dans la transparence de son existence 'concrète'. Qu'en cette lecture immédiate de l'essence dans l'existence, s'exprime le modèle religieux de Savoir Absolu hégélienne, cette Fin de l'Histoire, où le concept devient enfin visible à ciel ouvert, présent parmi nous en personne, tangible dans son existence sensible - où ce pain, ce corps, ce visage et cet homme son l'Esprit même : voilà qui nous met sur la voie de comprendre que la nostalgie d'une lecture à livre ouvert, et du 'Grand Livre du Monde' galiléen lui-même, est plus vieille que toute science, qu'elle rumine encore sourdement les phantasmes religieux de l'épiphanie et de la parousie, et le mythe fascinant des Ecritures où, vêtue de ses mots, la vérité avait pour corps le Livre : la Bible. » Althusser, 1996 [1965], p.7

tion of the reading. They are the result of a struggle within the different tendencies on an agonistic field; and therefore, the cost of avoiding the constructivist illusion of producing a new discourse, more real and more authentic.¹⁰ Althusserian theory of reading requires recognizing that materialism is not another Philosophy, but the assumption of the most radical effects of the conflictive inherence of the philosophical field, which marks the surface of each philosophical theory with "inner" contradictions and ideological inconsistencies. The point is that this *political approach* to philosophy, which might be considered a typical late Althusserian thesis, can be deduced from the very *structuralist philosophical movement* -as Etienne Balibar describes it: "...from a structuralist point of view, the distinction between "philosophy" and "non-philosophy" has an essentially relative signification, or yet again, that what is important for thought (for the philosophical *activity*, we might say, recalling how Barthes once spoke of the *structuralist activity*) is always the task of finding the non-philosophical, or the limit, the non-philosophical condition of philosophy, and of managing, by means not only of a specific turn of expression but also of an invention of categories, to bring about its recognition as something new in and for philosophy. Structuralism presents itself, in a particularly coherent and radical way, as a practice of *immanent externality*.¹¹

Similarly, Althusser's *intervention* is about insisting on symptomatic exceptions spread in the philosophical field, to reveal what they are aimed to forbid: political practice as its *immanent externality*. Moreover, it is only by means of a serious consideration of *political practice* as a limit of the theoretical field that we can understand the concept of *theoretical practice* itself.

"Hence, if we wish to preserve the spatial metaphor, the paradox of the theoretical field is that it is an *infinite* because *definite* space, i.e., it has no limits, no external frontiers separating it from nothing, precisely because it is *defined* and limited within itself, carrying in itself the finitude of its definition, which, by excluding what it is not, makes it what it is."¹²

10 Althusser knew this very well, and he was led to considering the formula of the "curvature of the stick" or through irony regarding the "vicissitudes of the comprehension". Cf. Althusser, 1993

11 "... (a "thought of the outside," as Foucault put it) in opposition to reflexive, foundational, ontological, or apophantic styles of philosophy." Balibar, 2003, p.5

12 Althusser, 1970 [1968] "...si nous pensions ce champ dans la lettre de la métaphore spatiale, comme un espace limité par un autre espace au dehors de lui. Cet autre espace est aussi dans le premier espace, qui le contient comme sa propre dénégation ; cet autre espace est le premier espace en personne, qui ne se définit que par la dénégation de ce qu'il exclut en ses propres limites. »

Faust's references allow us to acknowledge that the concept of philosophy that would be stated by Althusser years later, is already working, in same *practical sense*, among the pages of *Lire le Capital: that philosophical theories, idealist or materialist, bring in their own adversary*.¹³ This idea gathers the most powerful Hegelian heritage *against* itself, insofar as it conceives materialist dialectics as an activity of thought capable of making visible the contradictory character of the Philosophical terrain. Thus, it is a practice of thinking that, by means of exposing its own tensions, achieves its main thesis: that philosophy has an outside which compromises it as an *immanent externality*.

At the first part of *Lire le Capital* the substantial reflection on reading, indicates this way towards the outside under the concept of *décalage*. This concept leads the theoretical field to its limits. And in this sense, the elliptical references to Goethe's *Faust* have a beautiful meaning; they reveal a *disadjustment*, but not *any disadjustment*. They exhibit the disadjustment of what it could be conceived as the greatest ideological operation of unification at Modern Age. An operation that is encrypted as humanist epistemology, and consolidates a strategic alliance between the two idealistic forms of Theory and Politics: one characterized by the illusion of cognitive immediacy, and the other by the divine image of free and creative action. Both of them concern the myth of the *state of nature* as the religious myth of reading. The state of nature is analyzed by Althusser in *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes*, a text that has remained unpublished until recently.¹⁴ The myth of Eden is supported by the idea of a fundamental identity between perception, intelligence, and language; a space in which the truth of things, *present* in the things themselves, could be pulled out by a straight gaze. According to Althusser, Christian Paradise is thus, the typical image of *empirism*, where the abstract and the concrete match perfectly and without excess. It is the myth of completely satisfied human being, a placed where no working is needed: neither for a living, nor *to know*. Therefore, Edenic relationships between men are as transparent as those that they build with nature. Conceived as an immediate union of body and soul, human being is guided, following the *movement of nature*. There is neither conflict nor crime, in Paradise; therefore, there is no need for Right or for Politics.

Althusser, 1996 [1965], p.21

13 Althusser, 2014, p.95.

14 Published in French in 2014 by the *Presses Universitaires de France*, thanks to G.M. Goshgarian, with a preface of G. Silbertin Blanc.

It is here, at this point, that the symptomatic reading discovers the *outside* of idealistic modern philosophies, as echoes of the religious myth of the state of nature in which the idealistic discourse invests in a "deep materialist truth". Althusser points out in the Edenic scene, the recourse to *prohibition* as the symptom of divine omnipotence, where it finds – paradoxically—its own limits.¹⁵

Warren Montag has demonstrated how deeply Althusser seeks the hidden excess of the theological siege to philosophy, to discover the symptom of its forbidden surplus: "...interventions were nothing less than acts of theologico-philosophical sabotage, their strange and troubling formulas, the *sabots* thrown into the machine that produces the cover over the part of the present that we call the future, halting its operation and in doing so breaking the ties that bound us to destiny".¹⁶

A long battle for the future is fought at the ground of philosophy. It is always a double conflict against theology and positivism. Assuming the emplacement of philosophy *in* real history, Althusserian problematic stands for its right to exist. Therefore, it can't consist in suppressing completely the religious memory placed deeply at the history of philosophy. Materialism is a *position*, not an abstract notion posed against other abstract philosophical concepts. It is the result of an actual activity of identifying the forms of ideological unification in the historically configured philosophical field. This is the sense in which Althusser reads the religious genealogy of idealistic philosophies – from Locke and Rousseau to Kant – supported in the several forms of the *state of nature*. These idealistic discourses refer, in a displaced form, to the *opacity* of real existence; this is implied in their persistent effort to restore the imaginary immediacy of social relations. This reading allows us to understand why, when the ascendant bourgeoisie needs to reach masses to constitute its own ideological unification, it produces a mythical discourse that as-

15 Prohibition to take the "fruits of the tree of the Good and Evil" whose danger God knows well, but is unable to avoid.

16 In a paper entitled "Althusser and the problem of Eschatology" Montag identifies the religious genealogy of the famous phrase about the last instance, "*Ni au premier, ni au dernier instant, l'heure solitaire de la "dernière instance" ne sonne jamais*" and shows how the symptomatic reading works in it deconstruction: "In opposition to what Althusser himself called the theological model of expressive causality that dominated Marxist notions of base and superstructure, Althusser's Economy is an absent cause, a cause nowhere present but in its effects. Before and after, first and last, beginning and end do not apply to the God who exists only in his decrees, who acts by not acting and who arrives by not arriving. It is the occasion of his non-arrival that must be marked and celebrated, the end that does not come, the last that is not last, as if the true end, the end which God is, is not the end, just as the first is not the first. Althusser has played theology against theology, God against God, end against end, heightening the internal contradictions of a field in which both theology and philosophy are detained to produce new effects." Montag, 2015. My translation.

sumes a polemical form, a controversial texture (to the extent that it is compelled to take account of masses existence, their practical experience and material conditions).

Philosophical discourse is engraved with the mark of a siege: every philosophical theory is beset by its opposite because it reproduces, on its surface, the conflict in which it is *externally* committed. This “inner externality” -which might be considered close to the lacanian concept of *extimacy*¹⁷- concerns *political thought* itself, and reveals the enrollment of the philosophy in history. Philosophical abstraction becomes active insofar as it is *divided within itself*; and therefore, philosophical thesis can only be asserted under the paradoxical condition of taking into account its own denial.¹⁸

Symptomatical reading implies recognizing this condition as the very rationality of the philosophical abstraction itself, and if this thesis first appears in a “practical state” in *Lire le Capital*, Althusser will later make it the guiding principle of the materialistic position. It is neither the content of a positive discourse nor a prescriptive regulation over philosophical thinking. It merely aims, instead, to take statement of a fact: the (im)proper condition of philosophical discourse, that deals with a *former* conflict that is, nevertheless, always present. Althusser does not furnish a positive theory of the power of this sort of *ambivalence* of concepts, but this inhabits, in a practical sense, his theory of reading which hasn't stopped of *bearing its fruits*.

II. Faust reading Althusser

It is well worth remembering that while reading *Capital*, Althusser identifies the “historicist misunderstanding”, where many philosophical genealogies seem to be tied up, as the primordial *strategic location*.¹⁹ And that this quarrel with Historicism swirls around the so-called Althusserian theoreticism, which has been fiercely criticized. But it is this statement which requires the fairest consideration. The problem that emerges over this knot of readings, is the problem of *time*. The elucidation of this problem not only leads forward to the category of *overdetermination* as

17 Lacan, 1992. pp.71;139

18 Althusser, 2014, pp.97-98

19 Althusser, 1996 [1965], p.303

a way of putting into a new field the question of theoretical apodicticity, but also to the concept of a *differential temporality* that enables political thought. At this point we can see a detour into Spinoza (a theory of history and theory about reading, both of them taking into account the opacity of immediacy) and also into Freud's theory (the critique over a continuous and homogenous time).²⁰ Althusser understands that the materialistic concept of History demands a confrontation with the Hegelian notion of Time – in which the essence of History is reflected as such. For Hegel, Historical Time is the reflection in existence of the continuity of the dialectical development of the Idea. The relation between the social totality and its historical existence is a relation with an immediate existence. Therefore, the concept of time implies *expressive causality*, making existence an *emanation* of the Essence.

Althusser identifies the central features of Hegelian temporality as the *homogeneous continuity of time, and contemporaneity of time* (involved in the category of historical Present).²¹ By this means, the Hegelian whole has a type of unity in which each element of the whole, whether an economic determination, a political institution or a religious or philosophical form, is never anything more than the *presence of the concept to itself* at a historically determined moment. This entails that the relational complexity of social practices is restricted to existence in a *contemporary present*. The status of the spiritual whole despises the effectiveness of the differences between the elements, and that's why the continuity of time expresses the *Presence of the Concept* in its positive determinations.²²

The ideology of continuity and contemporaneity of time is the hard core of the concurrence between empiricism and idealism, and the consolidation of solidarity between immediate-spontaneous conceptions of practice and theoretical idealism. In the last term, ideologies of the *pure Theory* or *pure Practice* (or, of the pure frontier between them) have in common this conception of contemporary and continuous time, which, therefore, supports the specular relation concerning *the Theory* and *the Praxis*.²³

20 Idem, p.288

21 Idem, p.276

22 Idem, p.277

23 « ...de ce qu'en un autre contexte et á d'autres fins Lacan a appelé la 'relation spéculaire duelle) pour ouvrir, en un autre lieu, un nouvel espace... » Althusser, 1996 [1965], p.57

Within this framework, the scarce but powerful phrases of *Faust* spread among the pages of Marxist tradition, draw a spectrum of nuances faced by Althusser as the main *enigma of heritage*. And thus, invite to a detour whose itinerary provides a glimpse at the variety of problems that configure its own theoretical conjuncture: Marxism, besieged by humanism and historicism; philosophy besieged by theology and positivism, and science besieged by technocratic thinking and relativism.

Burden and opportunity, the richness of these literary evocations lay in their capacity to reveal the *excessive* element that besieges Marx readings, *that* what they bring with them *beyond* them. This *heritage* is a dense legacy that inscribes Marx (with the several Marxist readings) into the history of philosophy; neither as an anti-philosophy nor as the recognition of its pure “philosophical condition”, yet as a *décalage* between readings that desestabilises philosophical ground. An event capable of stating what it is forbidden for Philosophy itself: the question about politics. By means of this movement of the reading, dealing with the contradictions of its own heritage, we may find on the surface of Althusserian writing, the blanks that allude to that which overflows its own theoreticist frame. At this point, *Faust becomes a reader of Althusser*, insofar as it involves a deeply interrogation about time inserted on the core of the “Problem of Knowledge”, that displaces the problem and leads it into an interrogation about *the limits of the theory*.

Althusser’s references to *Faust* recall, in some elliptical way, those from Hegel, Marx, Bloch and Lukács.

The phenomenological reading of Lukács finds and underlines in *Faust* a question about Time that concerns politics. Against the tragic and timeless conception of the instant that characterizes the universe of tragedy, *Faust* furnishes a conception of the “present instant” as the instant of the acknowledging. Neither a tragic nor a messianic perspective, this reading claims the *political* sense of the temporality of the “present instant” as a moment which opens itself to the world and that inscribes it in the continuity of time.²⁴

Phenomenological and hermeneutical readings have the virtue of leading our gaze toward the end of the second part of *Faust*, characterized as “the fruition of action.”:

*I open room for millions there, a dwelling
Not idly sure, but to free toil compelling;
Green fields and fruitful, men and herds at home*

24 Cf. Jameson, 1974, p.140; Lukács, 1993.

*Upon the word new-wrested from the foam
Straight-settled on the hill-streight, piled on hight
By swarming tribes intrepid industry.
Within a Paradise how'er so grim
The flood without May bluster to the brim
(...)
My will from this design not swerveth
The last resolve of human wit
For liberty as life alone deserveth
He daily must conquer it.
(...)
Fain would I see such glad turmoil
With a free people stand on a free soil.
To such a moment past me fleeing
Tarry, I'd cry thou are so fair
(...)
Now in the presage of such lofty bliss
The highest moment I enjoy e'en this.²⁵*

It is indispensable to think the Althusserian reading not as a simple rejection of phenomenological approaches, but their *critique* instead. A questioning that aims to capture what appears as an allusion, to get out what insists there, but cannot rightly be thought. Phenomenological reading exhibits the idealistic relationship between time and emanative causality in the Hegelian heritage, as a relationship that works at depoliticizing theory. And that, therefore, forclodes the possibility of thinking its own limits.

The temporality of an absolute and homogeneous presence is, according to Althusser, the principle behind the Hegelian formula according to which no individual can jump over his time. The ontological category of *present* prohibits all knowledge that brings us to the future...

The inquiry about that *excess* is actually placed at the final pages of *Faust*: the moment of the future and the masses, the departure time of solitude. This is the time in which the dichotomy Theory/Praxis has nothing else to offer. At this point, it seems that there is more in *Lire le Capital* than Althusser himself would have preferred to settle there: that inquiry is “present by absence” in *Lire le Capital*, under the form of a question about a knowing capable of thinking the future. This kind of thought can-

25 Goethe, 1912, p.332

not be a purely theoretical one, but it could be conceived in the *conjunction* between theoretical practice and non - theoretical practices. The opportunity of putting into shape this question depends on the opportunity of the combination of the theory with that which is not identical or immediate to it.

In the Preface of *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel states the task of Philosophy (the apprehension of what is *is*, because what *is* is reason). Philosophy becomes, from then on, an inquisition into the rational, and therefore the apprehension of the real and *present*. In this sense he submits that every individual is a son of *its time*, while Philosophy is its time apprehended in concepts. Hence, it would be as foolish to believe that a Philosophy can transcend its present world as to believe that an individual could leap out of his time or “jump over Rhodes”. To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present is to conceive clearly the *unity of form and content*.²⁶

As Althusser has pointed out, this conception of the present constitutes the *absolute horizon* of all knowing, since it can only be anything but the existence in knowing of the internal principle of the whole. *Tomorrow is in essence forbidden for thought*.²⁷

Althusser's reading take us to Marx own reading of Hegel, in the well-known passage of *Der 18te Brumaire des Louis Napoleon*.....where a sort of complex temporality arises: “The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, it can only draw it from the future. It cannot start upon its work before it has stricken off all superstition concerning the past. Former revolutions required historic reminiscence in order to intoxicate themselves with their own issues. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own issue. With the former, the phrase surpasses the substance; with this one the substance surpasses the phrase.”²⁸

The core question rises *among* the Hegelian notion of time, as an Absolut Present, and that one which Althusser *reads* in Marx. It is within the *spectrum* opened by this difference of temporalities where the question of politics starts to take shape.

The ontological category of the Hegelian present prevents any anticipation of thought, any knowing that deals with the future. At this point

26 Hegel, 1896, pp.28-30

27 “...demain lui est par essence interdit.” Althusser, 2008, p.278

28 Marx, 1907, p.7

we understand why Althusser affirms that no Hegelian politics is possible, and that, in fact, *there has never been a Hegelian politician*.²⁹

This quotation of *Lire le Capital*, about the lack of a hegelian politician alludes to the problem of political thought placed in the liminal space of theory. This liminal space cannot be considered by a Philosophy of the *adjustment* between substance and phrase. Moreover, we are led to think that this kind of philosophy finds its own task on the effort of resisting any *décalage* between substance and phrase.

This will be the great challenge for the materialist philosophical position: to give rise to a concept of time from the very *deconstruction* of continuous/contemporary time. This task would only be possible by assuming seriously the imaginary “problem of individual in history”³⁰ and developing instead the accurate concept of *political practice*; this is to say, to identify its *difference* with theoretical practice. The future of Marxist dialectical materialism depends on it, Althusser repeats this frequently. But, this means that it should be conceivable a sort of philosophical “necessity” capable of opening its own “inner space” to such a “knowing of the future”.

Can we guess, following Althusser, where could we find that “knowing of the future”? Could we consider it a “knowing”, in the strict sense of the term?

We can risk a thesis, searching –as Althusser would say- twenty pages forward: that kind of knowing claims for a *political thinking*. Not a theory *about* politics, but the *political reading* of an actual conjuncture: “... the analysis of the structure of a *conjuncture*, the displacements and condensations of its contradictions and their paradoxical unity, all of which are the very existence of that 'current situation' which political action was to transform, in the strongest sense of the word, between February and October, 1917.”³¹

Against the speculative thesis that conceives the concrete and the singular of a situation, as the phenomena in which an aprioristic necessity expressed itself, the political thought manages to consider the contradictory unity of an actual conjuncture. Far from idealist theo-

29 « ...il n'y a pas de politique hégélienne possible, et, de fait, on n'a jamais connu d'homme politique hégélien. » Althusser, 1996, p.278

30 “ de 'probleme' du 'role de l'individu dans l'histoire' qui posé sous sa forme celebre est un probleme faux parce banal, theoriquement 'adulterin' puisqu'on y confronte la theorie d'un objetc à l'existence empirique d'un autre” Idem, pp.300-301

31 1969,p.179

ries this singular kind of knowing is a *knowing of the singular*. A knowing of revolutionary practice, placed within the liminal space of theoretical field, and performed while thinking *the limits*: "...about the practice of the class struggle, in other words, about what makes it possible to act on History from within the sole history present, about what is specific in the contradiction and in the dialectic, about the specific difference of the contradiction which quite simply allows us, not to demonstrate or explain the 'inevitable' revolutions *post festum*, but to 'make' them in our unique present, or, as Marx profoundly formulated it, to make the dialectic into a revolutionary method, rather than the theory of the *fait accompli*." ³²

III. A few words to jump out of the train

The simultaneous battle against both the empiricist and idealist forms of continuous and contemporary time is, at last, a conflict within the religious images of *genesis*: the idealistic unity between logical order and historical order which reminds us the Edenic nostalgia of immediacy of life. Althusser led us to understand that it will be only by questioning these ideologies of Time interwoven into Epistemology, that it will be possible a *political thought*; and thus, to consider political practice as a *real practice*.

Between the green and the gray, "fate" of the materialistic dialectics is played. It is only after having settled this confusion, that the distance to think politics as a practice of *this world* can be opened, and rooted out of the domains of "the small god of the world" image of the great God.

"Althusserian theoreticism" can be considered, hence, as an immense theoretical effort to pursue the implications of the *aporia* called *theoretical practice*, to its limits; that is, towards that impossible place of the current instant. There lays the great challenge of the materialist position: the radical adventure of *thinking politics*.

Reading Althusser is not about elucidating his psychological intentions, and has nothing to do with exegetical pleasure. It responds to the *political urgency* of (re)commencing a thought that has obligated itself to elude the dichotomies with which, finally, the 20th century has been entangled.

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32 Althusser, 1969, p.180

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