

# 11

## Althusser with Deleuze: how to think Spinoza's immanent cause?

*Katja Diefenbach*

*'God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things'*<sup>1</sup>

BARUCH DE SPINOZA, *ETHICS*.

### **Althusser's symptom**

In a reading that announces reading itself as one of its first problems, in the 1960s Althusser pursued the question of how to render Marx's thought philosophically precise, and to separate it from its evolutionistic, anthropocentric and speculative elements while still remaining in the field of Marxism. This occurs in a double sense: he pursues this question and is pursued by it. The stake of the question lies in what Althusser calls his detour – via the path of philosophy to intervene in the politics of the French Communist Party (PCF).<sup>2</sup> As a result, the question of how to render Marx philosophically precise becomes the symptom of Althusser's writing. It indicates the status that Althusser attributed to Marx's name. This name testifies that philosophy is subject to the primacy of revolutionary politics. It obliges a clarification of how a thought that advocates the precedence of non-theoretical over theoretical praxis can become politically effective without relapsing into an 'interpretation of praxis' that is 'its pure and simple digestion or, if one prefers, internalisation'.<sup>3</sup>

A comparison with Blanchot's reading of Marx suggests that Althusser aims to translate the distance separating philosophy and politics within philosophy itself. While Blanchot lets the three voices of Marx (the philosophical, political and scientific) stand beside one another without connection – separate, disparate, 'as if they were juxtaposed'<sup>4</sup> – and in their untranslatable distance unsettle the determinations of theory and praxis, Althusser's concern is to define the distance between these categories, which is to say, to find the language of their translation, and to spell out the politics inherent to philosophy. The first formula of this politics was to identify Marx's epistemological break, the points at which he separates himself from his idealisations; the second was to establish partisanship in philosophy, that is, to effect

interventions, to force contention with other positions, and to think one's own conflictual difference.<sup>5</sup> For Blanchot, however, philosophy's stepping-forth to an outside into which it is enfolded also implies another passage: an intervention in the imaginary self-relation of philosophy. He rejects the claim of being able to determine within philosophy the threshold between politics, science and philosophy, and pushes Marx's different modes of writing to the point at which they experience 'the senseless play of writing'<sup>6</sup> itself. It is only in his late manuscripts that Althusser comes to speak of such a deconstructive politics of philosophy, one that discusses the inappropriability of the political and the encounter with non-sense.<sup>7</sup> Previously, he had not been interested in such a deconstructive approach, but in the immanent determination of the relation between philosophy, science and politics. The self-inscription of theory in the social topology that theory develops is his formula for the determination of this relationship. Althusser asks: at what point in a topology, in which the displacement of the positions of effectivity between social instances is defined, does theory situate itself? Where in the course of the re-inscription of theory into theory is the site of its political effectivity? From where, in its distance to non-theoretical praxis, does it yield political effects?<sup>8</sup> My text starts with the hypothesis that Althusser locates the political effectivity of Marxist philosophy in the dispute over the problem of immanent causality. Althusser relentlessly repeats the question of how Marx's topological analysis of the capitalist mode of production can be translated philosophically into the idea of an immanent or structural causality that invalidates Hegel's immanence model. In the process, he crosses out, one after the other, his previous formulations of this question, to set in motion new formulations in the wake of these crossings-out – a rare and harsh self-deconstruction, in which Althusser, in search of the threshold that would link, through their distance, philosophy and class struggle, does not stop 'thinking differently, speaking differently, developing another conception of history'.<sup>9</sup> The question of immanent causality, with which, according to Althusser, Marxist philosophy is rendered precise, is thus shown to be a site of fracture in his thought, one marked by unstable and changing terminology. In the sense of a symptomatic reading, it is precisely here that the pivotal problem that moves Althusser's thought is found, without it being possible for him to pose it unequivocally.

## Immanence is only immanent to itself

My text undertakes only one intervention. It sets up a series of encounters between Althusser and Deleuze to show the theoretical instabilities distinguishing the idea of immanent causality in the early and late Althusser. In the first encounter between Deleuze and Althusser, it is a matter of discussing the references to Lacan's idea of the absent cause and the quasi-Hegelianisms that persist in the concepts of the complex structured whole, the overdetermined contradiction, and the determination by the economic in the last instance. In the second encounter, the theoretical indecision in Althusser's aleatory materialism is at stake, which refers back to his considerations on Lacan's causality of the impossible in the 1960s, and the influence of the *Cercle d'épistémologie* and its journal *Cahiers pour l'analyse*.<sup>10</sup> In Althusser's late 'materialism of the encounter', without a word of explanation, an existential-ontological concept of the event collides with a Deleuzian concept of the event. In the first case, the event represents an exception from the laws of becoming, a suspension in ontological groundlessness and quasi-transcendental discontinuity. In the second, the event expresses torsions

or 'critical points'<sup>11</sup> in becoming. The principle of causality is not discarded, but supplemented with the principle of expression.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the event does not simply take place on one plane as a kind of original deviation, but on two planes: on the plane of a differential field, which Deleuze calls the virtual, and on which ideal and non-localisable relations vary; and on the plane of individuation, on which these relations, while embodying and positioning themselves, are actualised in singular ways. An event is not followed by its subsequent stabilisation or solidification, like 'mayonnaise when it emulsifies',<sup>13</sup> but a non-representative, dissimilar explication, a 'becom[ing] expressive'.<sup>14</sup> One event is articulated by another: 'a double series of events which develop on two planes, echoing without resembling each other'.<sup>15</sup> By reading Althusser with Deleuze one sees, in the final analysis, that the late Althusser aims to free materialist thought from the 'principle of sufficient reason', while Deleuze writes a materialist metaphysics that wrests from this principle an anomalous turn. Let us put it this way: if to ground means to determine the indeterminate, Deleuze searches for a type of 'determination which is not opposed to the indeterminate and does not limit it'.<sup>16</sup>

The theoretical site in which the encounter between Althusser and Deleuze takes place in the present text is centred around their Spinoza-inspired conceptions of immanent causality. The extreme asymmetry of this site should not be forgotten. Compared with Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, Althusser remains elliptic and superficial. In his few references, he concentrates above all on the first two ontological and epistemological books of the *Ethics*, a reading that, as Tosel points out, removes from Spinoza 'every ethical-political dimension'.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, what links Althusser and Deleuze is the thesis that the thought of immanence cannot be obtained by simply opposing it to transcendence; rather, the problem consists in how quasi-transcendent questions – about the event, the excess of being, the difference between reproductive and productive repetition, in a word, about the new – can be thought immanently. It is a matter of grasping a kind of trans-immanence in immanent terms. In the process, Althusser and Deleuze attempt to exclude four operations: to think immanence as something or the One (substantialisation); to make it immanent to a thing or a subject (deification of human, labour or revolution); to let it become absolutely reflexive (interiorising movement of a self-unfolding whole); or – as in left-Heideggerianism – to retain transcendence in the form of a void or a space left vacant after the retreat of all first principles, to which immanence is exposed in the form of the inappropriable or inaccessible. Unlike left-Heideggerianism, Althusser and Deleuze grasp immanence not as the enclosing or including of a being subsisting in itself, which is to say, as a prison that needs to be forced open through transcendence and ecstasy.<sup>18</sup> What Nancy calls Marxist immanentism – the idea that human beings find their essence in their labour and their works, an idea that, according to Nancy, also destroys the communist idea of community by linking it to the self-appropriation of man-as-producer<sup>19</sup> – represents for Althusser and Deleuze a reduction of immanence to human praxis, its enclosure in the anthropological. For both authors, the significance of Spinoza is based on the radical rigour with which the latter made clear that immanence is only immanent to itself.<sup>20</sup> In the 1960s Althusser summarised these thoughts in the theoretical figure of structural complexity, which makes it necessary to think 'a distance and an internal dislocation (*décalage*) in the real, inscribed in its *structure*'.<sup>21</sup> This distance demands that social formations are grasped topologically, that is, through the arrangement of their different instances (economic, ideological, political, and so on) and the logic in which these instances in their 'relations of relative effectivity'<sup>22</sup> displace one another. The critique of the political economy is thereby freed of the 'myth of a community of labouring men'

that allows one to imagine history ending in the self-transparency of a community consisting of nothing more than the combination of its constitutive activities – a trans-individuality without conflict, excess or expression – in other words, a ‘mode of production *without relations of production*’.<sup>23</sup> Althusser and Deleuze agree on rejecting Marx’s early idea of an absolute human self-activity, in which self- and world-transformation coincide. Trans-individuality never amounts to transparent reciprocity. There is always a distance and an expression of this distance that prevent an immanentist closure of being. This hypothesis separates Althusser and Deleuze’s readings of Spinoza from Negri’s perspective, at the centre of which is the multiplicity of constitutive activities that singularise to the extent that they agree, so that a great crystal of reciprocal acts comes about: ‘the common in its most expansive figure’.<sup>24</sup>

### Impossible or immanent causality?

Althusser’s encounter with Deleuze confronts us with the question of how the distance immanent to the structure is thought. In both authors, the problem of determination is focused on the question of what occurs in this distance. This question acquires particular incisiveness in view of the fact that for Spinoza there is no gap, no empty space in extension, so the thought of distance implies a certain disassociation from Spinoza, or a clarification of what is understood by this distance inscribed in the structure, of its status or activity.<sup>25</sup> Althusser discusses the theme of immanent causality, which effects the differentiation of a structure, by combining two divergent arguments: first, the cause is present in its absence; second, the cause is immanent in its effects: ‘The absence of the cause’, Althusser writes, ‘is the very form of the interiority of the structure . . . in its effects’.<sup>26</sup> These two arguments come from different models of causality. That Althusser, in the section on structural causality in *Reading Capital*, refers to Lacan’s impossible cause and Jacques-Alain Miller’s metonymic causality<sup>27</sup> shows that, in the attempt to detach the relation between cause and effect from mechanical and teleological models, he cannot decide between the Lacanian idea of a withdrawn cause and the Spinozian idea of an immanent cause. What is the difference?

For Lacan, the distance in being can be traced back to a constitutive lack, a gap or hole, which is torn open by a cause that remains in retreat. It does not represent a simple non-being, but a ‘function of the impossible’.<sup>28</sup> The absent cause thus becomes the counter-concept to the law. Laws describe how mechanisms act on each other and are displaced in their effects. However, the cause refers to the lack or the non-functionality – which is to say, the impossible – through which mechanisms of being, the psyche and reproduction are first installed. This ontological and existential primacy of a retreat within being, which brings about a ‘missing’ or ‘gaping’, is translated by Lacan into the category of truth. There is only truth concerning the impossible. As Jacques-Alain Miller remarks in 1964 in *Action of Structure*, this impossible cause calls forth the function of a misrecognising subject that relentlessly attempts to fill and suture the lack in being. That Althusser, strengthened by the influence of the *Cercle d’épistémologie*, refers to theories that see the structure as organised by the function of an absence that acts reflexively on the elements of the structure as internal negativity (‘the whole is there insofar as it is excluded, sublated; it is there because it is lacking’,<sup>29</sup> as Hyppolite summarised this theme in Hegel), raises the question of the extent to which Althusser’s use of categories of Lacanian-Hegelian origin, such as nothingness, the void, the absent whole, can

be reconciled with a Spinozian model of causality. Here, Deleuze's reading of Spinoza provides a theoretical alternative.

Of decisive importance is that Deleuze reads Spinoza through the short-circuiting of two major axioms: a speculative axiom and an individuation-theoretical axiom. The first deals with the differentiability of the One (translated by Deleuze into the concepts of the plane of immanence or the chaosmos). A univocal substance constituted of infinite attributes ('[b]efore all production there is thus a distinction'<sup>30</sup>) is expressed in modifications producing 'correspondences without resemblance'.<sup>31</sup> For Deleuze Spinoza's ontology of difference therefore begins with an original theory of the distinction in the infinite. The attributes are not parts of the substance, which are distinguished among each other as x from y; they cannot be counted, but represent 'dynamic or genetic elements'<sup>32</sup> that are only formally distinguished in the substance. They are the indeterminate being, which Deleuze attempts to think with Spinoza, and which does not represent something undifferentiated, but what he calls the differential<sup>33</sup> – potentialities [*potentialités*]<sup>34</sup> that are to be expressed, articulated, embodied, and will thereby make themselves. In order to develop this idea of a differential being, Deleuze introduces into Spinoza's ontology Duns Scotus's idea of a non-numerical, formal distinction.<sup>35</sup> Being is not divided into parts, into species and genera, but is difference in itself: a single materiality in differential expressions, which are articulated in and by intensive degrees. This multiple substance, which for Spinoza represents the immanent cause of all things, and suspends the classical opposition between one and many in favour of the differentiability of the One, does not therefore represent anything withdrawn or absent. That refers directly to the second major axiom of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza: that of an individuating expression. With this second axiom, he takes up Spinoza's theory of the mode, in order to think the movement in which the differential individuates non-representatively in dissimilar explications.<sup>36</sup> For Spinoza a mode individuates the absolute potentiality (*potentia*) of nature (God), which is immanent to it, since '[f]rom the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes'.<sup>37</sup> Spinoza passes here from the 'what?' to the 'how?', from the primacy of essence to the primacy of its expression. That is to say, the singular essence of the mode is not a fixed quality, but a quantitative degree in which the productivity of nature expresses itself and is expressed. Even if Deleuze thinks the self-expression of differential being as life, and never stopped presenting himself as a vitalist, he pushes, in certain parts of his writings, the manner in which immanence is lived, made or practiced by modal things to negative and subtractive limits in order to establish the notion of 'a negativism beyond all negation'.<sup>38</sup> This idea of a positive constitution of the negative presents an alternative to the quasi-transcendental status of the void or nothingness in the late Althusser that 'ungrounds' (*entgründet*) everything that is.

To sum up, one can say that Deleuze and Althusser converge at the question of how a structure differentiates through its distances, while they diverge at the question of absence. To increase their convergence Deleuze attempts, especially in *Difference and Repetition* and 'How Do We Recognize Structuralism?', to align the dual terms virtuality/actuality with Althusser's dual terms structure/conjuncture. He identifies the virtual, which he understands as a system of non-localisable relations and singular points, with the structural.<sup>39</sup> With reference to Althusser, Deleuze conceives structure as a pre-extensive, topological space, in which positions are distributed – for example, 'relations of production and property relations which are established not between concrete individuals but between atomic bearers of labour-power or representatives of property'.<sup>40</sup> Even if the object of their study is fundamentally

different (Althusser thinks the problem of the capitalist mode of production, Deleuze that of ontogenesis), they share the question of the structure's time of actualisation. For both Deleuze and Althusser time cannot be understood by simply observing how one actualised form follows another; rather, one comprehends the function of time by investigating how it passes 'from the virtual to the actual, that is, from the structure to its actualizations'.<sup>41</sup> Or, as Althusser explains, the first subject of Marxism is not the historical development of the modes of production, but the question of the 'society effect',<sup>42</sup> hence the problem of how a mode of production (defined as one structure in a complex structure) reproduces itself in differential effects throughout the whole of society. The thought of virtual structures is not atemporal, but distinguishes history from becoming (Deleuze), or result from effect (Althusser).<sup>43</sup>

What separates both authors, however, is that for Deleuze the effects of the structure do not represent functions of the impossible, they do not proceed from an absent cause. Deleuze never tires of showing that Spinoza's thought destroys the category of the im/possible – or the in/compossible, as Leibniz would say. That means that the virtual being of the substance (in its infinite attributes) does not lack reality. For Deleuze, it is misleading to say that the substance, 'which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects',<sup>44</sup> as does Althusser. 'The virtual', Deleuze writes, 'is fully real in so far as it is virtual . . . [It] must be defined as strictly a part of the real object – as though the object had one part of itself in the virtual into which it plunged as though into an objective dimension'.<sup>45</sup> The self-evidence with which, in the context of Althusserianism, Lacan's *causa ablata* is analogised with Spinoza's immanent cause (when for example Miller takes Spinoza's reading of the Bible as an example of a reading procedure 'that seeks, across its taking-place, the specific lack that supports the structuring function'<sup>46</sup>), is from Deleuze's perspective untenable. The divergence that appears with this question is best shown at the point at which Deleuze himself comes closest to the causality of the impossible. In 'How Do We Recognize Structuralism?', a text that, as Kerslake and Stolze have shown, testifies to the attention with which Deleuze, in the second half of the 1960s, followed the Cercle d'épistémologie and the Lacanian-Althusserian scene at the École normale supérieure, Deleuze comes back to the figure of a missing object = x that he introduced in *Difference and Repetition*.<sup>47</sup> With reference to Lacan and Miller he declares this object to be an 'empty or perforated site'<sup>48</sup> of the structure, which organises its displacements, but which itself remains withdrawn. He considers the idea of a negative distance through which an absent structure refers back to itself. Finally, however, he overwrites this with the idea of a disjunctive synthesis. Onto the concepts of the void, the lack and the gaping hole, he grafts the 'idea of a positive distance',<sup>49</sup> with which the intervals or interstices immanent to a structure are conceived to be affirmed by being expressed. It is a matter of another form of oscillation. Where Lacan says, 'there is a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval. In short, there is cause only in something that doesn't work',<sup>50</sup> Deleuze says, there is a distance and something that oscillates in the interval. In short, there is cause only in something that works: the individuation of an intensity (also when it is anomalous and dysfunctional).

## Hyppolite's lesson

One can thus see that Althusser and Deleuze share the attempt to think immanent causality with Spinoza, albeit in divergent ways. Their common starting point is the dissociation from

Hegel's model of causality aimed at the self-mediation of the absolute. On a number of occasions, Deleuze refers to Althusser's critique of this movement of self-mediation as a 'monocentring of circles', whereby Hegel, in the attempt to think the movement of the infinite through the finite, would remain in the element of representation.<sup>51</sup> For Hegel, the different moments of the process of being and thought describe the path on which the absolute, due to the power of negativity, is developed through the different. In comparison, Althusser and Deleuze insist on thinking the different other than as a negative distance through which being refers to itself. They come together in the intention to investigate with Spinoza the positive, distributive and displacing causality of the differential. At the same time, however, especially Althusser, on the basis of his reference to Lacan's causality of the impossible, and the use of the category of the complex structured whole, is confronted with the question of 'what is still Hegelian in that which allows us to think against Hegel'.<sup>52</sup> For Hegel himself is one of the most radical thinkers of immanence, for whom, particularly in the *Science of Logic*, there is neither beginning nor end, but only the actuality of the infinite, which drives the finite things out beyond themselves and mediates them. One could say that Althusser and Deleuze detach themselves from Hegel at precisely the point at which the latter idealises the immanent movement of the infinite by confining the differences, through the negation of negation, in a self-referential process, thus leading to the unity of the relationship of self and other, that is, to the self-representation of the absolute. Althusser and Deleuze intervene at the point at which Hegel constructs a unity of mediations, which he raises to the subject of mediation itself. What are the characteristics of this intervention?

For both Althusser and Deleuze, Hyppolite's reading of Hegel, especially his book *Logic and Existence*,<sup>53</sup> is of a significance that should not be underestimated. Both find in this reading a refined, non-anthropological interpretation of Hegel, one also aimed against Kojève's reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hyppolite formulates a precise and productive point at which Deleuze and Althusser can distinguish themselves from Hegel. In Deleuze's review of *Logic and Existence*, written in 1956, Deleuze adopts fundamental hypotheses from Hyppolite's interpretation of the *Science of Logic* for his own thought. These include the determination of philosophy as an ontology of difference, the absolute exclusion of any anthropology, the substitution of the question of essence by the question of sense (expression), and the emphasis that there is no second world beyond appearances.<sup>54</sup> The point at which Deleuze raises an objection against Hyppolite's Hegelian ontology is the thesis that being can only be difference to the extent that difference is pushed to the absolute, which is to say, to contradiction: 'Speculative difference is the Being which contradicts itself'. Deviating from this formula, Deleuze develops his theoretical programme of writing an ontology of difference in which difference does not go as far as contradiction, 'because contradiction would be less than difference and not more'.<sup>55</sup> This programme attempts to think difference in itself. Difference is no longer grasped as a determined distinction of something from something else in the interior of the concept, but as the differential that is actualised in differences: 'instead of something distinguished from something else, imagine something which distinguishes itself – and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it . . . We must therefore say that difference is made, or makes itself, as in the expression "make the difference"'.<sup>56</sup> As I have shown, Deleuze grasps this making of difference as an intensive individuation of thought and being. What is at stake is to get rid of all representative determinations of difference: identity in the concept; opposition in the predicate; similarity in perception; and analogy in judgement.<sup>57</sup>

Spinoza's model of causality is one of the most important paths via which Deleuze attempts to think the intensive genesis of difference in this sense.

Althusser also incorporates Hyppolite's interpretation of Hegel's thought into his rigorous anti-Hegelian stance. He takes up the closing remarks of *Logic and Existence*, where Hyppolite notes that the young Marx destroys Hegel's radicalism by projecting Feuerbach's speculative anthropology into the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, making from each objectification an alienation, from each alienation a human alienation, and from the whole history of the alienation of the spirit the history of the alienation of the human subject: 'Now, as M. Hyppolite has very well noted', Althusser writes, 'nothing is more foreign to Hegel's thought than this *anthropological* conception of history'.<sup>58</sup> Spinoza's idea of immanent causality is precisely the distance that Althusser introduces into Marx to separate him from the reference to Feuerbach's critique of Hegel, that is, from the whole theme of emancipatory sensibility and human alienation. This explains Spinoza's prominent position in Althusser's reading of Marx. Spinoza's name designates the epistemological break that Althusser discerns in Marx's works, or what Althusser later calls class struggle in theory, that is, the work of theoretical delineation, thought's activity of separation.<sup>59</sup> When in Althusser's 'philosophy for Marx' the struggle for the concept of immanent causality is at stake, the reading of Spinoza is the detour that Althusser takes to destroy another detour – the one made by Marx via Hegel.<sup>60</sup>

In a lecture held in Hyppolite's seminar in 1968, titled 'Marx's Relation to Hegel', Althusser puts aside for a moment the theme of his critique of Hegel (the reduction of history to the cumulative internalisation of a principle) to discuss Hegel's positive influence.<sup>61</sup> He points out that Marx finds in Hegel the decisive category of his method of presentation – the category of the process without a subject: 'Marx was close to Hegel in his insistence on rejecting every philosophy of the Origin and the Subject'.<sup>62</sup> In the *Science of Logic*, by equating being directly with non-being, Hegel declares that everything has already begun, and the continuity of the process consists in its discontinuity and extension – or, as Nancy writes, 'the infinite or the absolute will be presented in no determined figure. There will be other figures, but they will now be known for what they are: successive forms in passage, forms of passage itself'.<sup>63</sup> For Althusser, Hegel's rejection of the origin 'as a philosophical issuing bank'<sup>64</sup> makes his thought into the theoretical premise of materialism. Through the absence of the beginning and the end, the foundation and the completion, Hegel in the *Science of Logic* is thus an irreducible differential thinker. At the same time, however, Althusser shows that Hegel created new ways of thinking the delegations of origin and subject: Hegel's subject, Althusser writes, 'is *the process itself in its teleology*'.<sup>65</sup> Correspondingly, for Hegel truth is total and totalising; there is only truth concerning the whole. Even if this whole is never globally present, it inserts the differences in the 'anamnesic interiority'<sup>66</sup> and self-referentiality of the spirit. In other words, the whole fulfils itself in the immanent arrival of its own concept. With reference to Derrida's (thus actually Heidegger's) idea of the crossing out (*rature*) with which a metaphysical category 'is effaced while still remaining legible',<sup>67</sup> Althusser shows how Hegel subsequently reintroduces the origin by way of the reflexivity of the process. What we find in the *Science of Logic*, Althusser writes, is 'the theory of the non-primordial nature of the origin'.<sup>68</sup>

As with Deleuze, the crux of Althusser's reception of Hyppolite lies in introducing Spinoza's model of immanent causality as a radical critique *avant la lettre* of Hegel's subjectivisation of the whole and the related teleologisation of dialectic. Hence, after Epicurus, Spinoza is made the actual and most radical thinker of a process without a subject or goal which inscribes a



forgotten trace into a materialist dialectic in which the elements of a structure do not express a movement of cumulative internalisation, but of decentring overdetermination.<sup>69</sup> Unlike Deleuze, for Althusser the detour via Spinoza comes at a price, '[f]or the adventure is perilous, and whatever you do, you cannot find in Spinoza what Hegel gave to Marx: *contradiction*'.<sup>70</sup> As against this verdict, Macherey attempted to show that one could trace in Spinoza a new concept of contradiction that has to be understood as a 'struggle of tendencies that do not carry within themselves the promise of their resolution'.<sup>71</sup> Instead of suggesting that Spinoza simply subtracts the negation of negation from the movement of contradictions, as Macherey does, readers of Spinoza such as Del Lucchese hold that Spinoza has replaced the concept of contradiction with that of conflict, thus making Spinoza a thinker of 'the themes of limitation, crisis, and destruction'.<sup>72</sup>

## Structural causality

But how does Althusser conceive the category of a process without a subject or goal in a Spinozian sense? What happens in this process? In *Reading Capital*, in which he introduces the concept of structural causality,<sup>73</sup> Althusser basically gives the same answer as in *For Marx*, only now it is not oriented to the problem of the political break (condensation, displacement or fusion of contradictions, dislocation of their internal aspects), but to that of the reproduction of social formation. His answer is that the reproduction process has to be pinpointed in the mechanism by which social elements in their degrees of effectivity are displaced on the basis of their relational positioning in the structure. With this topological model, Althusser particularly wants to remove Hegel's model of causality from Marxism – although he does not endeavour to examine more precisely the Hegelian-Marxist or value-theoretical positions in the new readings of Marx in the 1960s and '70s.<sup>74</sup> Relatively schematically, he attempts to replace what he calls the expressive model of causality in the Leibniz–Hegel line, in which the whole is conceived as harbouring an inner principle that is articulated by 'phenomenal forms of expression'.<sup>75</sup> In doing so, Althusser works with three arguments, by which he subverts his strategy to separate Marx's model of causality from Hegel:<sup>76</sup> the assumption of a determination by the economic in the last instance; the idea that the structure forms a complex whole composed of a series of elements that, in their topological relations, are supposed to partially internalise each other, since they are conceived as mutually conditioning each other.

With the hypothesis that the structure expresses itself in the displacement of degrees of effectivity between relatively autonomous elements, Althusser takes up Marx and Engels's idea of a totality of social relations that reaches far beyond the economic, and consists in the interaction of really distinguished elements, which are only determined 'in the last instance'<sup>77</sup> through the realisation of surplus value. So as not to withdraw to a relativist position of infinitely mutating interactions, Althusser claims it would be necessary to take up the idea of a primacy of determination by the economic that unifies the play of differences between social elements by determining the displacements of their degrees of effectivity.<sup>78</sup> That means the relations of production do not affect other social relations directly, but only via the displacement of the degrees of effectivity in and between the relations of production, the juridico-political and ideological instances. In other words, the economic determines nothing but the relation which becomes prevalent in the overall structure; it determines the relational logic in which

the degrees of effectivity vary in the structure. Thus, in the first place, it becomes necessary for Althusser to clarify the position of the economic in the topology into which he translated Marx's base-superstructure schema. The key task is 'to reveal the *site* occupied in the structure of the whole by the region of the economic, therefore to reveal the articulation of this region with other regions (legal-political and ideological superstructure), and the degree of *presence* (or effectivity) of the other regions in the economic region itself'.<sup>79</sup>

As already in *For Marx*, Althusser explains this dislocation of degrees of effectivity through a complex movement of partial reflection. By assuming that the social instances mutually condition one another in their existence, Althusser infers that they internalise the position that they occupy in the structure. Hence relations are not thought, as in Spinoza, through the intervals that they articulate, but through their terms, which form a kind of higher individuality by reflecting and interiorising their relational position in the complex structured whole.<sup>80</sup> According to Balibar, the difference between Marx's and Foucault's idea of the 'structure of social conflict' can be located precisely in this Hegelianising figure of complex reflection. In Foucault there is no, at least no strong or stable, interiorising mechanism from which, retroactively, the logic arises that determines the metonymic mode in which the complex whole reproduces itself (by dislocating degrees of effectivity). In other words, the relationships in which social mechanisms displace themselves in their effects 'do not form a superior unity or individuality'. Their terms do not become, through the partial internalisation of the relationship itself, 'the functions or the bearers of the relationship'.<sup>81</sup> This means that the process does not subjectivise itself. Here it should be added that although Foucault does not think the category of struggle through a sort of complex dialectic in which the terms of a relationship partially internalise the relationship itself, he conceives the transformation of modes of regulation in this way. In *Security, Territory, Population* Foucault explains (clearly adopting an Althusserian figure of argumentation) that the dispositif of discipline has not been replaced by the dispositif of security; what has changed from one to the next is only the 'system of correlation' between social mechanisms ordered in 'complex edifices' in which nothing but the 'dominant characteristic' is displaced.<sup>82</sup> None other than Deleuze attempts to push Foucault to the point of not primarily thinking reflexive and overdetermined relationships between stratified social elements, but the expressive becoming of unformed functions.<sup>83</sup> Already in 1969 Hyppolite pointed out to Althusser that it would not be easy to separate Marx's from Hegel's idea of determination by attributing to one 'the complexity of an *effective overdetermination*', and to the other 'the complexity of a cumulative *internalization*'.<sup>84</sup> The partial reflexivity through which Althusser still defines overdetermination relates, for Hyppolite, to precisely the idea of structures that Hegel develops in the *Science of Logic*, especially in 'The Doctrine of Essence': 'There he describes structures in which the essential and unessential are reflected in one another, in which the existential condition of a dominant contradiction are an element in the contradiction itself'.<sup>85</sup>

However, Althusser's achievement in rendering inoperative a series of simplified ideas of determination in Marxism should not be underestimated, above all: the direct and mechanical determination of the superstructure through the base; the reduction of the relations of production to intersubjective relations, or to one of their basic patterns (the struggle for recognition); the evolutionistic periodisation of modes of production through one single principle that drives the universalisation of the particular (division of labour); and the essentialist understanding of the value-form as a principle of abstraction that determines all concrete historical forms in their passage and movement. In doing so, however, he overlooks that in the *Ethics*

Spinoza develops the idea of a creative determination and an intensive relation that is relatively independent of its terms. On a number of occasions, Warren Montag has drawn attention to correspondence from 1965 in which Macherey sets out for Althusser how Spinoza's model of immanent causality is characterised above all by the idea of the intensive infinite. The logic of an absent whole that totalises the interrelation of its parts is, according to Macherey, even in Althusser's complex variant of totalisation via differential dislocations, rejected in Spinoza's thought. With reference to Deleuze's Lucretius commentary, Macherey declares that the immanent expression of the infinite that traverses the finite, which Spinoza wants to theorise, cannot be grasped in the metonymic effects of a complex whole: 'Nature as the production of the diverse can only be an infinite sum, that is, a sum which does not totalize its own elements. There is no combination capable of encompassing all the elements of Nature at once, there is no unique world or total universe'.<sup>86</sup>

### Pars intensiva

When in the first half of the 1960s Althusser attempted to render Marx philosophically precise via Spinoza, he integrated into this operation a series of Bachelardian theorems. As against the myth of a continual progress of thought, the French epistemological school – Bachelard, Cavailles, Koyré, Canguilhem – holds that science proceeds in a discontinuous way in the course of breaks and unforeseeable leaps. Bachelard, in particular, points out that a new science does not simply assert itself in an area in which there had previously been an absence of knowledge, but has to establish itself against prescientific positions, against 'a tissue of positive, tenacious, interdependent errors'.<sup>87</sup> Althusser takes up Bachelard's thesis that a new set of problems spans a theoretical field at whose edges earlier positions are localised, which represent variants of wrongly posed questions and often form an epistemological pair, a 'bipolarity of error'.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, Althusser sees Marx and Spinoza's thought of causality as being framed by two major 'epistemological obstacles',<sup>89</sup> by Descartes's model of mechanical, and Leibniz's model of expressive causality, which was taken up by Hegel, and in which each part represents a *pars totalis* articulating the principle of the whole.<sup>90</sup> With the schematic framing between two erroneous variants, Althusser misses the manifold references that entered into Spinoza's concept of the immanent cause, especially the idea of creative determination that characterises the emanative cause in Neoplatonism. While Althusser simplifies the problem of causality through polar schematisation, Deleuze, in a reverse operation, makes it more complex by showing how Spinoza integrated into his ontology Neoplatonist, scholastic and Renaissance philosophical elements. In a sort of secret history of a philosophy of immanence, Deleuze reconstructs how Spinoza 'grafted an expressive immanence of Being onto the emanative transcendence of the One'.<sup>91</sup> He starts by arguing that Plotinus' emanative and Spinoza's immanent cause both remain in themselves. The emanative cause, however, stands over being, and its effects leave the cause that remains in itself. They are nothing but the things that follow, the descending things, emanations representing the degradations of a being that flows out of and down from an eminent One. For Deleuze, Spinoza's radicalism lies in the hypothesis that the effects remain in the cause just as the cause remains in itself: 'From this point of view the distinction of essence between cause and effect can in no way be understood as a degradation. From the viewpoint of immanence the distinction of essence

does not exclude, but rather implies, an equality of being; it is the same being that remains in itself in the cause, and in which the effect remains as in another thing'.<sup>92</sup> For Deleuze, due to the equality and univocity of being, immanence is not to be separated from the idea of expression; the substance expresses itself in its effects, while on a second level the effects express themselves in the substance as dissimilar modifications. This second level is that of 'the very production of particular things',<sup>93</sup> the ontogenetic level, which Althusser does not discuss in Spinoza. This omission leads him to miss the two fundamental characteristics of Spinoza's model of causality: first, that determination is affirmative and positive; second, and directly related to this, that the cause is not absent but explicated through its effects in a non-representative, non-resembling expression. Althusser described the activity of the immanent cause only through the displacements of '*indices of effectivity*', which are determined by the positions that social relations occupy 'in the mechanism of the whole'.<sup>94</sup> However, in Spinoza, expression primarily has nothing to do with the interaction between the parts of a whole, but with the activity of what medieval scholasticism calls a *pars intensiva*, an intensive part or intrinsic degree. While for Deleuze it is the individuation of such a degree that occurs in the structure's internal distances, Althusser restricts himself to saying that its dislocation takes place in this distance, without analysing the type of activity characteristic of the degree itself. Deleuze turns to Spinoza because the latter's philosophy of expression makes it possible to think this degree in terms of the individuation of the intensive or the indeterminate (both assumed to be differential in themselves), and thus to reject Hegel's basic alternative, which Hegel himself so often attributed to Spinoza: either 'the indeterminate, the indifferent, the undifferentiated or a difference already determined as negation, implying and enveloping the negative'.<sup>95</sup> As against Hegel's idea that each determination is a negation, Deleuze refers to Spinoza in order to think determination as affirmation – or in Spinoza's own words: 'That through which things are said to be determined to produce an effect must be something positive'.<sup>96</sup> The following theses are therefore linked: the cause affirms itself in its modifications; the modifications express intensive degrees of the cause; the indeterminate is not an indifferent abyss, but the internal differentiation of the cause itself. Here, everything depends on thinking difference not as distinction, but as that by which distinction makes itself (as the differential).

Analogous to the planes of the virtual and the actual, Deleuze shows that there are two planes of intensive quantity in Spinoza: that of the essences and that of the existences. As singular essences the modes constitute an (eternal) degree of nature's intensity or potentiality; as embodied existences they articulate this degree affectively in fluctuating transitions between minimal and maximal thresholds. This distinction refers to a major difficulty in Spinoza's thought, which is discussed by both Macherey and Deleuze – namely, how the physics of bodies and the theory of essences relate.<sup>97</sup> Here, we are confronted with two different concepts of parts. As extensive part, the mode builds a whole made up of an infinite quantity of parts, which in turn are formed from an infinite quantity of most simple bodies. An extensive thing – an individual, as Spinoza says – is always a composite thing that exists as soon as it subsumes a certain quantity of infinite parts within itself and organises them within a specific correlation of movement and rest. This bodily existence of things is transitory. The bodies compose themselves in encounters and then decompose themselves, enter into larger connections or are destroyed. Here, causality and determination are transitive and mechanical: 'A mode comes into existence, not by virtue of its essence, but by virtue of purely mechanical

laws which determine an infinity of some extensive parts or other to enter into a precise given relation, in which its essence expresses itself'.<sup>98</sup> While the extensive parts act on one another mechanically, and are displaced within their compositions, the intensive parts express the potentiality of the substance in a singular degree. When a metastable composition emerges from the interactions of extensive parts, and corresponds to a singular essence, extensive and intensive parts come together to constitute a thing that strives 'to persevere in its being'.<sup>99</sup> This function of perseverance that Spinoza calls striving (*conatus*) has nothing conservative about it; it is the process by which an essence affirms its singularity, and thus difference itself. In the final analysis Spinoza does not focus on the essence of things, but on the expressive act through which it is articulated and tested, not by imitating the essence but articulating its potential between minimal and maximal thresholds. That the thing strives in its differentiation makes out of the *conatus* a kind of springboard of existence. Here, extension and intension accompany one another in Spinoza. The interactions between bodies refer to variations of affect. In a good encounter between bodies, which brings about a supplementing or linking of parts, the body experiences joy, which is expressed in an increase in the potentiality to act; in a bad encounter it experiences sadness and a reduction of its potentiality to act. Thus extensive bodily states (affections) correspond to intensive variations of potentiality (affects). This path is discontinuous, but it makes possible radical torsions in becoming. For Spinoza it arises from the middle of imaginary and affective fluctuations, and might pass from the maximisation of the joyful passions to active affects (thought) and to happiness. In other words, the linking of extensive affections and intensive affects can trigger rational ideas; thinking commences from below, locally, within the imaginary. Starting from a little joy one reaches the first cause-ideas (common notions), and can potentiate and activate oneself further. As also Althusser takes up in his theory of ideology, the imaginary ideas and passions, however, will never disappear; one cannot eliminate the imaginary relations one establishes to the problematic conditions of one's existence, one can only radically change them. The constitution of freedom is for Spinoza a path that proceeds from social and psychic conflict and must traverse it again and again: 'Such is the difficult path of salvation. Most men remain, most of the time, fixated by sad passions which cut them off from their essence ... The path of salvation is the path of expression itself: to become expressive – that is, to become active; to express God's essence, to be oneself an idea through which the essence of God explicates itself, to have affections that are explained by our own essence and express God's essence'.<sup>100</sup>

## Destructured and unbound

In his book *Hegel or Spinoza*, published in 1979, Macherey undertakes what Althusser announced with his reading of Marx, but blocked through terminological instabilities and Hegelianising references. Macherey supplements Althusser's operation; he does what Althusser demanded, developing out of Spinoza's model of causality the theoretical figure of a process without a subject or goal. In doing so, he too takes a detour. He follows Hegel's reception of Spinoza to uncover the strategy with which Hegel introduces himself as the true thinker of the absolute, who grasps the substance in the form of a 'negative unity of the self'.<sup>101</sup> What Macherey shows is Hegel's misreading, in which the acuity of Spinoza's ontology of difference remains misunderstood up to the moments in which Hegel's and Spinoza's thought

converge. Macherey pinpoints the way in which Hegel systematically misrecognised Spinoza's anticipation, through his critique of Cartesianism, of the theoretical reasons why Hegel himself broke with Kantian anthropology and rejected the external difference between being and cognition, turning it into the internal difference of being itself. Compared to Hegel's conception of being as identical to difference (i.e. as mediation), Macherey claims Spinoza's ontology of difference to be more radical, as it cancels the internal teleologisation of the process of the absolute.<sup>102</sup> In Spinoza there is no unity of mediations that becomes the subject of mediation itself. The book ends with the hypothesis that in Spinoza, due to the doctrine of attributes, the idea of an intensive infinite, a positive determination, and a non-finalistic causality, there is a sketch of a materialist dialectic 'that function[s] in the absence of all guarantees, in an absolutely causal manner'.<sup>103</sup> Although, with these ideas, Macherey draws on central elements of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, he avoids every individuation-theoretical interpretation of Spinoza's model of causality. As in Althusser the dimension that makes the *Ethics* into a book of practical liberation is not discussed by Macherey in 1979. He discards the hypothesis of a selective life, in which, in a process of internal differentiation, a thing maximises the joyful passions to leap into active affects,<sup>104</sup> and remains committed to Althusser's reading strategy to deploy Spinoza's thought as a distance separating materialist and idealist dialectics. Despite his enthusiasm for Macherey's precise reading, Stanislas Breton emphasises that this strategy not only introduces an 'unacknowledged teleology' – the materialist dialectic as last horizon of thought – but also ignores the sutures between materialism and idealism. According to Breton one of these sutures runs along the idea shared by Spinoza and Hegel of absolute causality (*causa sui*), which for Breton – here following Heidegger – refers to the fact that materialism and idealism are linked in the principle of (sufficient) reason.<sup>105</sup>

In his late texts, Althusser takes up this argument and declares, with reference to Heidegger, that materialism and idealism meet where they obey the principle 'according to which everything that exists, whether ideal or material, is subject to the question of the *reason for its existence*'.<sup>106</sup> Althusser counters this principle with an alternative principle that – as André Tosel explains in this volume – represents a non-principle: the aleatory or the deviation, the atoms' swerve. Althusser's late 'materialism of the encounter' culminates in the thesis that an event expresses a deviation that is groundless and lawless. Nothing precedes it. It renders all transitory laws inoperative. Once again, the question of the ground shows the divergence between Althusser and Deleuze, which is due not only to different readings of Heidegger, but also to a different idea of immanence and causality.

In 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter' Althusser vacillates between, on the one hand, the idea that an event expresses an individuation, the process of an interlocking of atoms, of a grasping or a varying of relations between heterogeneous series, and, on the other, the idea that an event absolutely precedes its grasping or 'take' [*prise*], that it constitutes an exception, a cut, over which 'no law presides'.<sup>107</sup> The interpretation of the encounter inspired by Deleuze is reduced to a few sentences: after the brief reference to a 'primacy of positivity over negativity (Deleuze)',<sup>108</sup> Althusser describes the encounter as something that occurs between 'series (*séries*) of beings that are the results of several series of causes'.<sup>109</sup> Here, Althusser draws on Deleuze's concept of the virtual as varieties of relations and singular points that are distributed along at least two rows of elements. A synthesising event, which takes place in this field of pre-extensive, ideal connections, is not a pure contingency, a lawless act, arising without reason, and destructuring and unbinding the embodied

and instituted relations, but the affirmation of differences, or what Deleuze calls a disjunctive synthesis. The ancient atomism, from which Althusser takes the model of the encounter, has, according to Deleuze, conceded 'too much independence'<sup>110</sup> to the atom, and reduced the thought of the swerve [*clinamen*] to spatiotemporal relations. What is lost thereby is the intensive character of the expression that Deleuze ascribes to a virtual encounter: the change of a differential relation or a potentiality. Put very schematically, at stake are different ways of thinking Heidegger's idea of being as difference. '[I]t was only with Heidegger', Althusser writes, 'that the void was given all its decisive philosophical significance again'.<sup>111</sup> For Althusser, the void is thus that which ungrounds and unbinds the factual; it testifies to 'transcendental contingency',<sup>112</sup> that is, it revokes all provisional laws, everything that has stabilised in the form of sense, purpose or principle. Hence, for Althusser, an encounter is not the individuation of the differential, but something transcendent in the Heideggerian sense, a stepping out in itself of the existing, with which it deactivates its juridical-factual bonds: '*Transcendere* means to step over; the *transcendens*, the transcendent, is that which oversteps as such ... *Dasein* itself oversteps in its being and thus is exactly not immanent'.<sup>113</sup> Although in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze draws on Heidegger's idea that the distance between Being and beings is nothing negative, but difference, fold, question,<sup>114</sup> he criticises Heidegger to the extent that the activity of difference is thought as a retreat, as a withdrawal in the very act of presentation. That is opposed to Deleuze's idea of immanent causality, to determine the indeterminate without limiting or negating it. Difference does not retreat; it expresses itself. Unlike Althusser, Deleuze does not therefore open the principle of the ground to Heidegger's abyss, in which the indeterminate 'conceals itself in the act of presentation or manifestation as the non-given in givenness',<sup>115</sup> but to the virtual, which is neither withdrawn nor undifferentiated, but in which the indeterminate exists as the intensive.

In the 'materialism of the encounter' Althusser understands structure not in this sense of the virtual in Deleuze – a non-totalisable multiplicity of causes – but as a process that starts after the event: the stabilisation of a set of laws as soon as the elements of an encounter take hold, interlock and co-stabilise one another. Structure is here replaced and cancelled-out by the concept of conjuncture, to which Althusser ascribes an internal character of process and differentiation. It is a becoming-necessary and becoming-form, 'just as water "takes hold" when ice is there waiting for it, or milk does when it curdles'.<sup>116</sup> By losing the concept of structure (understood in the sense of the virtual), one loses the possibility to think an immanent and affirmative differentiation of difference in the Spinozian tradition.

In some respects, Althusser's late concept of the encounter seems to be comparable to Badiou's thought. When at the beginning of the 1980s Badiou passes from a dialectic of destruction to a meta-ontology of the event, he discusses the event as 'what escapes the facts, and from where the truth of these facts can be assigned'.<sup>117</sup> This corresponds to the quasi-transcendental status of the void in the late Althusser, which makes it difficult to think this void as a subtractive effect of the encounter or *conatus*, as Warren Montag and Giorgos Fourtounis attempt in a radical limit-reading.<sup>118</sup> They have to push the late Althusser to his most extreme margins to be able to graft onto the idea of the *clinamen* as a principle of pure contingency the Deleuzian idea of the *clinamen* as *conatus*, which does not manifest contingency but, to the contrary, the plurality of causal series which cannot be brought together into a whole.<sup>119</sup> However, Althusser's idea that a purely contingent encounter subsequently becomes necessary by becoming stable, by making itself consistent – thus 'curdles' or 'solidifies'

– recalls the procedure of fidelity that Badiou defines at the beginning of the 1980s as what subsequently gives an impossible event political consistence.<sup>120</sup>

To return to the opening question, the political effects that the late Althusser attempts, in the contention over the concept of causality, to generate through philosophy (if such a thing is possible at all) point in a different direction from Deleuze's effects. While Althusser tends to think politics in the function of the impossible – to seize a situation when all conditions for such a seizure are missing – the late Deleuze pushes his idea of individuation to ever more subtractive versions, to think a political existence of the negative beyond negation – an expressing that subtracts or voids: it undoes individuality, it eliminates the perceptible, it gives preference to the not.<sup>121</sup> If, for Deleuze, the event is a torsion in becoming that yields neutralising and subtractive effects, for the late Althusser it is a radical interruption in becoming. That is the site at which Spinoza leaves him. Henceforth, reading Althusser with Deleuze will help to register the problems characterising their respective thinking of politics. During times of radical political renewal – new forms of social struggles, anti-colonial liberation movements, and the spreading uprisings of an anti-capitalist student and working-class youth – the fidelity to the PCF and the assumed necessity of party organisation drove Althusser, step by step, to ever sharper criticism of the party, particularly following its Eurocommunist turn, as well as to a continual reformulation of a Leninist or Machiavellian idea of the political act; at the same time, he proved himself to be almost incapable of thinking the multiplicity of radical struggles and inventing new modes of non-authoritarian organisation. Starting from the opposite position, and recognising something that Althusser had difficulty acknowledging, and thus drawing the consequences (the fact that the party normalised the proletarian struggles), Deleuze claimed that the distance between the idea of political organisation and ethical individuation could be short-circuited by way of one single philosopheme: the intensive different/ciation of being. In his thinking of minoritarian politics he thus omitted that the act of political organisation and ethical singularisation are not one and the same praxis.

*Translated from the German by Benjamin Carter.*

## Notes

- 1 Spinoza 1985, EIP18, p. 428.
- 2 See 'Philosophy and Marxism' in Althusser 2006a, p. 253.
- 3 Althusser 1994b, p. 41.
- 4 'Marx's Three Voices' in Blanchot 1997, p. 98.
- 5 See 'Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?' in Althusser 1976a, pp. 165–6.
- 6 'Marx's Three Voices' in Blanchot 1997, p. 100.
- 7 [... der aleatorischen und provisorischen Beschaffenheit des Seins entsprechen ...] in Althusser 2010a, p. 72: 'Which word to use to think the consistency of this subversion, ... which in the interior of philosophy ... will hold a discourse on philosophy that scatters and destroys its being, that is, its effects, without leaving it?'. The chapter is included neither in the *Écrits philosophiques et politiques* nor in *Philosophy of the Encounter*. It corresponds to the tenth chapter of the manuscript from which 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter' was decoupled.



- 8 See Althusser 1994b, p. 42.
- 9 [... der Anspruch, *anders zu denken* ...] in Althusser 2010a, p. 19. This paragraph directly precedes the chapters that have been edited under the title 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter'.
- 10 The *Cahiers pour l'analyse* were issued between 1966 and 1969 by the Cercle d'épistémologie at the École normale supérieure (ENS). Among the editors were Jacques-Alain Miller, Jean-Claude Milner, François Regnault and Alain Badiou. See the translation and contextualisation of the *Cahiers* by Peter Hallward, Christian Kerslake, Ray Brassier and Knox Peden, <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/>.
- 11 Deleuze 2001, p. 189.
- 12 Here, Deleuze writes a genealogy of expressive causality that is radically different from that of Althusser. The latter links Hegel and Leibniz, arguing that both think a totality whose parts contain, in the immediate form of their expression, the essence of the totality itself. Deleuze, however, links Spinoza and Leibniz. At the end of *Expressionism in Philosophy* he explains how, by defining expression as dissimilar explication of an univocal substance, Spinoza is more radical in his thinking of expression than Leibniz (see Deleuze 1992, pp. 321–35).
- 13 'The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter' in Althusser 2006a, p. 192.
- 14 Deleuze 1990a, p. 320.
- 15 Deleuze 2001, p. 189.
- 16 Deleuze 2001, p. 275. On the deconstruction of the formula *omnis determinatio est negatio*, which Hegel ascribes to Spinoza, see Macherey 2011, pp. 113–22.
- 17 Tosel 1994, p. 209. In Althusser 1995b and 2006a we find a couple of remarks on the status of affections and affects in Spinoza, although they are not really integrated into the idea of the encounter. On this marginal position of Spinoza in the late writings, see Tosel in this volume.
- 18 See Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p. 47: 'The reversal of values had to go so far – making us think that immanence is a prison (solipsism) from which the Transcendent will save us'.
- 19 See Nancy 1991, pp. 1–19, 58–60.
- 20 See Deleuze and Guattari 2003, p. 48: 'Spinoza was the philosopher who knew full well that immanence was only immanent to itself and therefore that it was a plane traversed by movements of the infinite, filled with intensive ordinates'. Compare Nancy 2004, pp. 11–2.
- 21 Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 17.
- 22 Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 100.
- 23 'Marx in his Limits' in Althusser 2006a, pp. 36–7.
- 24 Hardt and Negri 2009, p. 181.
- 25 See Spinoza 1985, EIP15Sch, pp. 421–4; 'Letter 13 to Oldenburg' in Spinoza 1985, pp. 207–12.
- 26 Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 188.
- 27 See Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 188; Miller 2009. For *causa ablata* see Lacan 1977, pp. 20–3, 125–9.
- 28 Lacan 1977, p. 129.
- 29 Hyppolite 1997, p. 162.
- 30 Deleuze 1990a, p. 182.
- 31 Deleuze 2001, p. 184.
- 32 Deleuze 1990a, p. 80.
- 33 See Deleuze 2001, pp. 214–21.

- 34** Both Spinoza's Latin concept of *potentia* and Deleuze's French concepts of *potentialité* and *puissance* are translated as potentiality in the present text. This should not to be understood in the sense of the Aristotelian *dynamis*, a potentiality that has to be realised, but in the strict anti-Aristotelian sense of a pure differential or an intensive degree, as is argued below.
- 35** See Deleuze 1990a, pp. 64–7.
- 36** Deleuze distinguishes the plane of virtual differentiation from that of actualising differentiation. He calls their relation *différent/ciation*; see Deleuze 2001, pp. 244–8, 279–81.
- 37** Spinoza 1985, EIP16, p. 424.
- 38** Deleuze 1997, p. 71.
- 39** See Deleuze 2001, p. 183.
- 40** Deleuze 2001, p. 186.
- 41** 'How Do We Recognize Structuralism?' in Deleuze 2004, p. 180.
- 42** Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 65.
- 43** See Althusser and Balibar 1970, pp. 65–6; and Deleuze 1995, pp. 169–76.
- 44** Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 189.
- 45** Deleuze 2001, pp. 208–9.
- 46** Miller 2009 and, in the French original, Miller 1968, p. 101.
- 47** See 'How Do We Recognize Structuralism?' in Deleuze 2004, pp. 184–91; Deleuze 2001, pp. 103–5, 109, 120–24; Stolze 1998, pp. 51–63; Kerslake 2009.
- 48** 'How Do We Recognize Structuralism?' in Deleuze 2004, p. 188.
- 49** Deleuze 1990b, pp. 172, 173, 175.
- 50** Lacan 1977, p. 22.
- 51** See Deleuze 2001, pp. 310–11; Deleuze 1990b, p. 361.
- 52** Foucault 1981, p. 74.
- 53** See Hyppolite 1997.
- 54** See 'Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*' in Deleuze 2004, p. 15–16.
- 55** 'Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*' in Deleuze 2004, p. 18.
- 56** Deleuze 2001, pp. 28–9.
- 57** See Deleuze 2001, p. 262.
- 58** 'Marx's Relation to Hegel' in Althusser 1972, p. 182.
- 59** See Althusser 1976a, pp. 58–9, 165–75.
- 60** See 1976, pp. 134, 141, 178.
- 61** See Althusser 1972, pp. 181–6.
- 62** 'Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?' in Althusser 1976a, p. 178.
- 63** Nancy 2002, p. 8.
- 64** 'Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?' in Althusser 1976a, p. 179.
- 65** 'Marx's Relation to Hegel' in Althusser 1972, p. 183.
- 66** Derrida 1982, p. 43.
- 67** Derrida 1997, p. 23.
- 68** 'Marx's Relation to Hegel' in Althusser 1972, p. 184.
- 69** See Althusser 1969a, p. 101.
- 70** 'Elements of Self-Criticism' in Althusser 1976a, p. 140.

- 71 Macherey 2011, p. 212.
- 72 Del Lucchese 2009, p. 1; see also Tosel 1994, pp. 28–31.
- 73 See above all the chapters 'Marx's Critique' and 'Marx's Immense Theoretical Revolution' in Althusser and Balibar 1970, pp. 165–93.
- 74 For Germany, see for example the works of Hans-Georg Backhaus and Helmut Reichelt.
- 75 Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 186.
- 76 On this discussion see Montag 1998a, pp. 64–73; Fourtounis 2005, pp. 101–18.
- 77 Engels 1934, pp. 81–5.
- 78 See 'Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?' in Althusser 1976a, p. 183.
- 79 Althusser and Balibar, 1970, p. 179.
- 80 See Althusser 1969a, p. 206.
- 81 Balibar 1991b, p. 52.
- 82 Foucault 2007, p. 8.
- 83 See Deleuze 1988, pp. 59–78.
- 84 Althusser 1969a, p. 101.
- 85 Hyppolite 1973, p. ix.
- 86 Deleuze 1990, p. 267; see Montag 1998a, pp. 71–3.
- 87 Bachelard 1968, p. 8.
- 88 Bachelard 2002, p. 30.
- 89 On the idea of the 'epistemological obstacle' see Bachelard 2002, pp. 24–32; Althusser and Balibar 1970, pp. 186–7.
- 90 See Althusser and Balibar 1970, pp. 17, 96, 187.
- 91 Deleuze 1990a, p. 176
- 92 Deleuze 1990a, p. 172.
- 93 Deleuze 1990a, p. 14.
- 94 Althusser and Balibar 1970, pp. 106–7.
- 95 Deleuze 2001, p. 52.
- 96 Spinoza 1985, EIP26Def, p. 431.
- 97 See Deleuze 1990a, pp. 201–15; Macherey 2011, pp. 146–62.
- 98 Deleuze 1990a, pp. 209–10.
- 99 Spinoza 1985, EIIP6, p. 499.
- 100 Deleuze 1990a, p. 320.
- 101 Hegel 2010, p. 212.
- 102 See Macherey 2011, pp. 85–6.
- 103 Macherey 2011, p. 213.
- 104 In 'The Encounter with Spinoza' Macherey argues that Deleuze elides all traces of ambivalence from Spinoza in not recognising, for example, that the passions in Spinoza, even the joyful ones, due to their oscillating nature, could never accumulate in such a stable and consistent way that they would build a path to the common notions and active affects. See Macherey 1996, pp. 152–7.
- 105 Breton 1983, pp. 63, 85–6. On the principle of sufficient reason compare the Leibniz–Clark correspondence in Leibniz 1989, p. 321; Spinoza 1985, EIP11Def, p. 417: 'For each thing there must be assigned a cause, *or* reason, as much for its existence as for its nonexistence'.

- 106** 'Philosophy and Marxism' in Althusser 2006a, p. 272.
- 107** Althusser 2006a, p. 194.
- 108** Althusser 2006a, p. 189.
- 109** Althusser 2006a, p. 193.
- 110** Deleuze 2001, p. 184.
- 111** Althusser 2006a, p. 175.
- 112** Althusser 2006a, p. 170.
- 113** Heidegger 1982, p. 299.
- 114** See Deleuze 2001, p. 65.
- 115** Kukuljevic 2011, to whom I owe the motivation to consider Deleuze's notion of indetermination in comparison to Althusser's notion of overdetermination.
- 116** Althusser 2006a, p. 192.
- 117** Badiou 1985, p. 69.
- 118** See Fourtounis 2007; Montag 2010, pp. 168–9.
- 119** See Deleuze 1990, pp. 269–70; Deleuze 2001, p. 184; Montag 2010, p. 168.
- 120** See Badiou 1985, p. 77.
- 121** See Deleuze 2007, p. 391; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 279; Deleuze 1997, p. 71.

# Encountering Althusser

Politics and Materialism in  
Contemporary Radical Thought

**Edited by**

**KATJA DIEFENBACH**

**SARA R. FARRIS**

**GAL KIRN**

**and**

**PETER D. THOMAS**

**B L O O M S B U R Y**  
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

**Bloomsbury Academic**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

175 Fifth Avenue  
New York  
NY 10010  
USA

50 Bedford Square  
London  
WC1B 3DP  
UK

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)

[www.janvaneyck.nl](http://www.janvaneyck.nl)

First published 2013

© Katja Diefenbach, Sara R. Farris, Gal Kirn, and Peter D. Thomas

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury Academic or the author.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Encountering Althusser: politics and materialism in contemporary radical thought /  
edited by Katja Diefenbach ... [et al.]. p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4411-5213-8 (pbk : alk. paper)— ISBN 978-1-4411-4636-6 (hardcover :  
alk. paper) 1. Althusser, Louis, 1918-1990—Political and social views. 2. Political  
science—Philosophy. I. Diefenbach, Katja.

JC261.A45E63 2013

320.53—dc23

2012021316

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4411-4636-6

PB: 978-1-4411-5213-8

**JVE**

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NN  
Printed and bound in the United States of America

# Contents

Notes on Contributors viii

Introduction: Encountering Althusser xiii

## **PART I** Aleatory materialism and the philosophy of the encounter 1

### **1** The hazards of aleatory materialism in the late philosophy of Louis Althusser

*André Tosel* 3

### **2** Rethinking aleatory materialism

*Panagiotis Sotiris* 27

### **3** ‘An immense aspiration to being’: the causality and temporality of the aleatory

*Giorgos Fourtounis* 43

### **4** History as ‘permanent revocation of the accomplished fact’:

Machiavelli in the last Althusser

*Vittorio Morfino* 61

### **5** The parallax object of Althusser’s materialist philosophy

*Katja Kolšek* 75

### **6** The very essence of the object, the soul of Marxism, and other singular things:

Spinoza in Althusser 1959–67

*G. M. Goshgarian* 89

## **PART II** Althusser’s non-contemporaries 113

### **7** Althusser, Machiavelli and us: between philosophy and politics

*Mikko Lahtinen* 115

- 8** Conjuncture, conflict, war: Machiavelli between Althusser and Foucault (1975–6)  
*Warren Montag* 127
- 9** Althusser's last encounter: Gramsci  
*Peter D. Thomas* 137
- 10** Althusser and Spinoza: thinking the enigma of subjectivity without a subject  
*Caroline Williams* 153
- 11** Althusser with Deleuze: how to think Spinoza's immanent cause  
*Katja Diefenbach* 165
- 12** Althusser and Tronti: the autonomy of the political versus the primacy of politics  
*Sara R. Farris* 185
- PART III** Thinking production and reproduction 205
- 13** Louis Althusser and the concept of economy  
*Ceren Özselçuk* 207
- 14** Althusser and the critique of political economy  
*Michele Cangiani* 225
- 15** The problem of reproduction: probing the lacunae of Althusser's theoretical investigations of ideology and ideological state apparatuses  
*Frieder Otto Wolf* 247
- 16** To think the new in the absence of its conditions:  
Althusser and Negri and the philosophy of primitive accumulation  
*Jason Read* 261
- PART IV** The materiality of ideology, the primacy of politics 273
- 17** The impossible break: ideology in movement between philosophy and politics  
*Isabelle Garo* 275



- 18** The theory of ideology and the theory of the unconscious  
*Pascale Gillot* 289
- 19** Ideological interpellation: identification and subjectivation  
*Rastko Močnik* 307
- 20** 'Es kömmt drauf an': notes on Althusser's critique of the subject  
*Ozren Pupovac* 323
- 21** Between the tenth and eleventh theses on Feuerbach:  
Althusser's return to new materialism  
*Gal Kirn* 335
- Bibliography 352  
Index 368