

Panel 1 | *Ruptures in philosophy*

G. Michael Goshgarian | *The early "late Althusser"*

Althusser's 'aleatory materialism', I argue, is best approached as a retrospective rereading or even translation of his previous work. In this perspective, I try to show, referring to published and unpublished material, much of it dating from 1966, that it was in the mid-1960s that Althusser defined the essentials of "'the materialism of the encounter".

Caroline Williams | *Althusser and Spinoza*

There is an abiding presence of Spinoza throughout the corpus of Louis Althusser. My paper is devoted to an exploration of this most nuanced and diverse presence of Spinoza from the theory of epistemology established in *Reading Capital* and later refined in *Three Notes on the Theory of Discourses*, to discussions of the subject and history in *On Feuerbach, Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses*, and *The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter*. By tracing these diverse readings of Spinoza, the discussion hopes to shed light upon some of the ruptures and continuities in Althusser's *oeuvre*.

More specifically, my aim is to consider the precise theoretical shape of Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism, and the mutual imbrication of philosophy and politics implied by this formulation. In his *Metapolitics*, Alain Badiou credits Althusser with the opening up of "the enigma of subjectivity without a subject as the intra-philosophical mark of politics". How might Althusser's own reflections assist in the intellectual task to think subjectivity without the subject, and hence outside all political idealisms?

Giorgos Fourtounis | *Aspiring being: the "aleatory encounter" as "absolute beginning"*

This paper will examine the notion of "absolute beginning", which dominates Althusser's *Machiavelli and Us*, in connection to both his early "structuralist" elaborations and his later aleatory materialism of the encounter. I maintain that the comparative study of this "absolute beginning" ("from nothing"), and the obviously correspondent "aleatory encounter" ("in the void"), from which each individual thing emerges, can provide us with new insights on both Althusser's late materialism and his text on Machiavelli (which is, in fact, both prior and posterior to the former –a kind of palimpsest, bearing traces of the early, middle and late phases of Althusser's thought), helping us clarify their internal tensions and perhaps fill some of their gaps.

Doing so, I will try to problematize the widespread interpretation according to which aleatory materialism represents a break with the earlier Althusserian structuralism (that is, an overcoming of the "Althusser of the conjuncture" over the "Althusser of the structure"), and to identify a thread of "aleatory structuralism" traversing his whole theoretical endeavor. In particular, I will try to show how, by bringing to the fore this generally overlooked tendency, we can contribute to a better handling of some old, notorious aporias, at the heart of his structuralist problematic, concerning the knot between "structural causality" and "ideological interpellation", the relation between subjection to structure and subjection to ideology –in short, concerning the many faces of the crucial to structuralism "aporia of the subject".

Panel 2 | The primacy of politics

Ozren Pupovac | *At this side of interpellation: Althusser's critique of the subject*

My paper is an attempt to trace out a different path for reading Althusser's concept of interpellation. I argue that the significance of the notion of interpellation should not be sought at the level of the development of a general theory of the subject or a general socio-political ontology, as it was generally presumed. The concept of interpellation should, first and foremost, be taken as a critical and therefore limited concept: developed in line of the legacy of young Marx's criticism of Hegel's concept of the State, and primarily, of Marx's criticism of liberalism, it is a concept geared at exposing, as Althusser would put it, "the functioning of the category of the subject" – which means, the ideological effects of the abstract figures of juridico-political liberty and equality with regards to capitalist exploitation and domination. In other words, Althusser does not develop a "theory of the subject", let alone a theory of the "political subject" born in the element of ideology, but seeks to formulate a theory of ideology around the critique of the liberal theory of subjectivity rooted in the universality of subjective rights. His immediate interlocutor thus seems to be not Lacan, but Evgeny Pashukanis with his notion of the "fetishism of the subject".

The concept of freedom as self-reflective consciousness, rooted in everyday experience of self-identification and self-awareness of the individuals, and inscribed as the basis of the juridical order, is precisely the illusory trait which enables capitalist relations to persist over and over, without the need for coercion. But if Althusser thus sketches a critical limit to the philosophical appropriation of the notion of free individual will, he also opens up an original path to the problem of politics, as he posits it at the remote from the notion of (self)consciousness. In conclusion, I will argue that the originality of Althusser's critique of the subject resides in his rejection of the transitivity between knowledge and political action.

Slobodan Karamanić | *Three uses of topography: theory, politics, state*

By elaborating the philosophical concept of aleatory materialism, Althusser definitely dismissed the common criticism of his earlier philosophical work as being "functionalist", "descriptive", "sociological" and thus incapable of thinking the singularity of political events. With the principles of the "primacy of encounter" and the "necessity of contingency", Althusser, as it seems, resists to deduce the emergence of the political act from existing laws of history. One fundamental question, however, still remains open: does this affirmation of aleatory and contingent signals the complete refutation of his prior dialectical materialist concept of the "structure in dominance" and especially his writings concerned with the questions of the state and ideological subjectivation? Is there any conceptual relation that binds the philosophy of encounter with his previously developed concept of overdetermination and the critique of ideology?

In response to this question, I would like to concentrate on one theoretical metaphor frequently used by Althusser: the metaphor of topography. Althusser employs this particular metaphor in examining (at least) three distinct but complementary problems: first, he discusses the questions of theory and materiality of ideas as doubly inscribed in the social topography; second, the topographical framework serves him as a place of thinking the possibility of the politics of singularity – this trait of thinking we can follow starting from his invocation of Lenin's thesis of the "the weakest link" to Machiavelli's *virtù* and *fortuna* doublet; third, the spatial metaphor appears also central in Althusser's characterisation of the state as a place of repetition and reproduction. While in all these cases Althusser postulates

the social existence as a set of distinct and multiple practices, the crucial question is not only the question of the nature and persistence of domination but at the same time the question of subjective and political decision that one should make in order to break with the immanence of the given situation. In this sense, far from being merely descriptive and deterministic, Althusser's topographical invariants must be interpreted as specific theoretical and practical articulations of the principle of the primacy of politics over theory.

Mikko Lahtinen | *Althusser, Machiavelli and us: from Marxist philosophy to materialist politics*

The importance of Machiavelli to Althusser has become evident mainly after his death through the posthumously published writings. Especially after the publication of his "Machiavelli and Us" it should be evident that Machiavelli should not be reduced to a single thread in Althusser's fragmentary and in many places contradictory "aleatory materialism".

Althusser's interpretation of Machiavelli is an important achievement which deserves much greater recognition than it has received so far. And recognition should not be strived for simply because of "academic" reasons but also because Althusser's "philosophy of the conjuncture" and "aleatory" interpretation of Machiavelli can be an intellectual pointer, a revolutionary weapon, on the battlefields of global capitalism.

Panel 3 | The critique of political economy and the legacy of Althusser

Marko Kržan | *Should there be a Marxian perspective on contemporary capitalism?*

The paper tries to establish a positive theoretical paradigm for the analysis of contemporary capitalism on the basis of Althusserian rereading of Marx's *Capital* in the 60's and the debates on value theory in the 70's. It does so by pointing out a fundamental, but unexplored, contradiction in Marx's definition of his object. It is generally accepted that (simple) commodity production cannot exist as an independent mode of production, and yet capitalism itself is defined as general commodity production. We argue that this contradiction has its counterpart in the notion – widely accepted in sociology – of modern society being comprised of relatively autonomous social fields, and that it should be conceptualised as an analysis of the conditions and limitations to the autonomy of the economic level of the capitalist mode of production.

The second part of the paper examines some of the recent Marxist accounts of contemporary capitalism, focusing on the "cognitive capitalism" thesis (C. Vercellone). We argue that formulations, such as "crisis of the law of value", point to fundamental changes in the articulation of the relative autonomy of the economic level. Nevertheless, we believe that their merits could only be explored to the fullest if one could back them up with a coherent theory of value.

Timm Ebner, Jörg Nowak | *Althusser's concept of material practices*

Althusser tried to get rid of both humanist and stalinist marxism by dissolving the notion of the predetermined subject of political revolution as well as holding onto the notion of the capitalist economy as a dominant structure in modern societies. These two movements, the dissolving and the unifying one, is contained in the concepts of "overdetermination" and of

"structure with dominance". Following this, there is no simple dichotomy of determination (economic) / contingency (politics) or of material/ discursive.

This line of thought is also present in Althusser's text "Marx in his limits", where he works out a conception of politics as class domination. For Althusser, politics is the decisive moment of intervention for oppressed groups. Following the consequences of overdetermination, a working class politics has to address all other antagonisms like gender relations, racism, religious conflicts etc. in order to be successful. The economic as a "dominant structure" means that there *is* determination, but also that revolutionary practices that enforce a rupture on this determination will have to be a political act proper, depending on subjective capacities of organization. And the concept of class domination confronts us with the question how to avoid regressions into old forms of domination: how do we organize proletarian class domination and what kind of relationship between domination and self-determination do we want to install?

Frieder Otto Wolf | *Dialectic and contingency in thinking reproduction: looking back at a line of Althusser's theoretical initiatives*

From "Contradiction to overdetermination" via "On reproduction" to the "June Theses" the problem of thinking the reproduction of capitalist domination in its tension between necessity and contingency has been a central concern of Althusser's philosophical initiatives. Looking back at a number of advances made by Louis Althusser in approaching this problematic will be helpful for our own debates. This is not only true for his successes but also for his failures. In this sense the three texts referred above will be subjected to a re-reading.

Panel 4 | Politics and philosophy in the late Althusser

Vittorio Morfino | *History as the "permanent revocation of the accomplished fact": on Machiavelli in the late Althusser*

The lecture seeks to highlight the strategic role played by the interpretation of Machiavelli in the construction of aleatory materialism, in polemic with Schmittian interpretations of the late Althusser.

Katja Kolšek | *Reading Althusser's aleatory materialism: the void as the parallax between materialist epistemology and ontology*

Althusser's later work known as "materialism of encounter" alias "aleatory materialism", is a kind of continuation of Althusser's earlier philosophical project from the point of view of the attempt to provide Marx the absent concept of his philosophy, and from the point of view of Althusser's statement in *Philosophy and Marxism*, an interview with Fernanda Navarro in 1984-87, that the materialism of the encounter is actually the final and true philosophy of Marx as one among other philosophers in the history of the underground current of materialism of encounter. In *Reading Capital* Althusser asserted that Marx's philosophy has to be read as a special kind of theoretical praxis of reading, which he had unconsciously created, and which Althusser tried to elaborate as a philosophical concept of "structural causality", therefore we will firstly present some reflections upon the issue of causality in his materialism of encounter.

Secondly, some theories of the beginning of the post-structuralist current in French thought, in which Althusser is sometimes included, state, that this event was marked by a kind of return to empiricism in philosophy (Deleuze, Derrida) after the decline of structuralism, and given that Althusser's conception of reading in *Reading Capital* undermined empiricism as an ideology of the transparent relation between perceiving subject and real object, and established the "epistemological rupture" between the theoretical and real object, between science and ideology, we will examine Althusser's attitude towards empiricism in his later work and see, what are the premises of possible practice of reading in Althusser's aleatory materialism.

Since the general reproach to Althusser in his period of affirming knowledge (epistemology) as theoretical praxis was his supposed elusion of the problem of politics (as class struggle), our intention is to establish on the basis of Althusser's later works *Machiavelli and us* and *The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter*, our understanding of the relationship between reading, empiricism and "theory as political praxis".

Panagiotis Sotiris | *Rethinking aleatory materialism*

Althusser's later writings on aleatory materialism have been presented to offer the theoretical possibility of not only another Althusser but also another Marxism or materialism. The aim of this paper is to attempt a more critical approach at these texts in order to highlight both their points of originality and strength and their contradictions and limitations.

Special emphasis is placed upon their relation to the rest of Althusser's theoretical production. Continuities with his earlier texts are stressed such as his preoccupation with a non historicist and non teleological materialist conception of history and the conjuncture and his insistence on communist politics and the possibility of a transformation of philosophical practice.

However, the position of the paper is that Althusser's turn towards a more poetic thinking, his conception of the importance of contingent encounters, his emphasis on the singular and the concrete in the sense of a poetics of the singular political gesture in opposition to a transformative politics based upon knowledge of the terrain of struggle and his abandonment of the notion of materialist dialectic represent the main contradictions of his later texts and are points of rupture with Althusser's major theoretical interventions. That is why a return to the totality of Althusser's theoretical endeavor, in both its theoretical breakthroughs and shortcomings, and not just the later texts, is more than necessary.

Jason Read | *Primitive accumulation: between contingency and constitution*

In the final section of his posthumously published essay, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter", Althusser asserts that everything he has discussed so far, the entire idea of the primacy of the encounter from Epicurus through Machiavelli (and even Heidegger) has been simply a prelude to what he wants to call attention to in Marx. What follows is a reading of Marx's famous passages on primitive accumulation. Althusser's remarks predate a current revival of interest and debates over primitive accumulation; debates that attempt to grasp the political and economic dimension of primitive accumulation in the formation of the new enclosures. However, unlike these debates, Althusser's discussion of primitive accumulation is primarily philosophical rather than political or economic, it is a matter of rethinking the categories of contingency and necessity, origin and effect. This division, between historical or economic readings of texts, and a philosophical reading, is one of the central tasks of Althusser's project, despite its many revisions, from *Reading Capital*

onwards. This division which is always tenuous (making it difficult to be a Marxist in philosophy) is perhaps more so with the concept of primitive accumulation, a concept which seems to be primarily historical and not philosophical.

From these provocations (and their corresponding difficulties), I propose to ask the following questions: What would it mean to construct a philosophy for Marxism starting from primitive accumulation? To put it in the central place that previous interpretations of Marx have done with commodity fetishism? What would such a philosophy, or such a practice of philosophy, be? What effects would it have in terms of not only our understanding of capital, violence, and the state, but also the fundamental way in which we understand change, transformation, and reality? A cursory examination of Althusser's engagement with primitive accumulation finds his interpretation poised between two of the major threads of contemporary philosophy: first, his general discussion of contingency and the encounter, places him at the origins of a lineage of thought on the event running through Deleuze, Badiou, and Meillassoux, and, second, his emphasis on the constitution of necessity from contingency, and the aleatory formation of class, places his thought in relation to theorists of class composition and the work of Antonio Negri. Althusser's rethinking of primitive accumulation is thus not only situated between philosophy and its outside, but between some of the more productive strands of contemporary philosophy.

In asking these questions, and examining these connections, I plan to follow the central provocation of Althusser's text; namely, that a rereading of primitive accumulation demands not just an engagement with Marx's text, but with the dominant and underground currents within the history of philosophy.