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(working translation)

I - Althusser's extraordinarily rich reading of Marx is centered, in our view, on the radical opposition between the object of knowledge and the real object, and its most important result is to strip the concrete of any form of universality. Based mainly on a single text from the Afterword of the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, it develops into a theoretical construction that can be taken as a stubborn attempt to rethink the entire traditional problematic of Marxism in the light of that opposition. Althusser's articles and those of his colleagues arguably constituted the greatest inventory of Marxism to date. To the extent, however, that abandoning the universal-concrete amounts to rejecting the negation of negation and with it any type of dialectic affiliated to Hegel's thought, Althusser sees himself in the contingency of reducing to a minimum the scope of a series of texts by Marx that assert this filiation and employ the vocabulary of Hegelian logic. In this sense, it ends up questioning these texts, accusing them of inconsistency and imperfection; they would say less than what the author himself achieved in his theoretical practice. With regard to the problematic of empiricism, for example, he "a du s'en servir, pour penser le manque d'un concept dont il avait pourtant produit les effets, pour formuler la question (absente), c'est-à-dire ce concept, auquel il a pourtant donné la réponse dans ses analyses du Capital, que cette problématique a survécu à l'usage par lequel Marx la tournait, la distordait et la transformait en fait, tout en recourant à ces termes (l'apparence et l'essence, l'extérieur et l'intérieur, l'essence interne des choses, le mouvement apparent et le mouvement réel, etc.)..."¹. In other moments Althusser is more condescending : "Pourtant, et en vertu même de ces hésitations contradictoires, Marx prend souvent le parti de ce qu'il dit effectivement : et il se produit alors de concepts adéquats à leurs objets, mais tout se

¹ Quotation in French in the Brazilian original. He "had to use it, to think about the lack of a concept whose effects he had nevertheless produced, to formulate the (absent) question, that is to say this concept, to which he nevertheless gave the answer in his analyzes of Capital, that this problematic survived the use by which Marx turned it, distorted it and transformed it in fact, while resorting to these terms (appearance and essence, exterior and interior, the internal essence of things, the apparent movement and the real movement, etc.)..." (*Lire le Capital*, v. 1, p. 46)

passe comme si, les produisant dans le geste d'un éclair (sic), il n'avait pas rassemblé et affronté théoriquement cette production, ne l'avait pas réfléchi pour l'imposer au champ total de ses analyses"². This "symptomal" reading, where the unspoken devours the spoken, nevertheless pays the high price of making its coherence depend on Marx's incompetence in choice of vocabulary and, in this way, sustaining itself thanks to the absolute impossibility of verifying its cogency. We thus find ourselves faced with a paradoxical situation: to assume literally an opposition that is only clearly stated once, the reader will have to interpret the entire body of Marxism with eyes turned to what's between the lines, downgrading the importance of all the philosophical vocabulary employed by Marx, as if his theoretical practice were inferior to his discoveries. But why favor this and not the other way around? Why not discard the former text in favor of the latter? Would it not be appropriate to try to read the opposition between the object of thought and the real object from a perspective that preserves as much as possible the adequacy and coherence of Marxist concepts? We have the impression that this is possible and Althusser's choice can only be understood when we realize that the replacement of Marxist discourse by his own has the consequence of bringing this philosophy closer to the epistemological tradition of French positivism.

There is no doubt that these comments renew Marxist philosophy, bringing it back to the level of scientific thought: there is no doubt that the problems raised by their speculations are of enormous importance in themselves, unrelated to the question of the correctness of interpretation. However, this last issue must be addressed. It is, after all, about fidelity to Marx's ideas. It is in this sense that we will try to show that the basic text for Althusser's interpretation provides another reading, to then indicate how the universal can be part of reality without falling into idealism or empiricism.

II - The justification of that opposition is found in the following passage : "Hegel est tombé dans l'illusion de concevoir le réel (das Reale) comme le resultat de la pensée, s'embrassant en elle-même, s'approfondissant en elle-même, et se mettant en mouvement par elle-même, alors que la méthode qui permet de s'élever de l' abstrat au

² "However, and by virtue of these contradictory hesitations, Marx often takes the side of what he actually says: and then concepts are produced that are adequate to their objects, but everything happens as if, producing them in the gesture of 'a flash (sic), he had not gathered and confronted this production theoretically, had not reflected on it in order to impose it on the total field of his analyses" (*Idem*, II, p. 174-75)

concret n'est rien d'autre que le mode (die Art) dans lequel la pensée s'approprie le concret, et le reproduit (reproduzieren) sous la forme d'un concret spirituel (geistig Konkretes) (Contribution. ES p. 16S. Texte allemand Dietz: Zur Kritik . . . p. 257)"³. Althusser here sees the denunciation of the empiricist confusion that makes the universal part of the real; given this, it would be necessary to distinguish the real process, the objective development of reality, from the process of knowing that results in the production of objects other than concrete objects. On the one hand, we would therefore have reality, whose existence is independent of knowledge, on the other, the production of knowledge that as such, moves in an autonomous universe, starting from theoretical facts and arriving at other more general, adequate, and persuasive theories. It is not convenient for the moment to discuss the advantages - in particular the ideological reevaluation of intellectual work - and the difficulties of this notion of theoretical practice, with the consequent institution of two separate orders, that of the concept and that of the real, maintaining obscure relations of knowledge between themselves. First of all, it is necessary to show the compatibility of the text with the notion of the concrete-universal.

First, let's look at the context and how it is articulated. Polemizing against the use of the inductive method in political economy, Marx opposes [to it] the one that goes from the abstract to the concrete, since "the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration (Zusammenfassung) of many determinations and, thus, the unity of the multiple". It's noteworthy this synthetic and unitary character of the real that rules out induction. In no way is it said, however, that the concrete is necessarily individual, as Althusser's interpretation tacitly presupposes. It only insists on the distance that opens between the concrete and the thought that tries to grasp it. However, if the concrete is a concentration, namely, it consists of a concentration of abstract determinations, how is it possible to remove the dimension of the universal from it, especially when one considers that this concrete reality consists of men who act and think? But the moment one accepts the path from the abstract to the concrete, the danger of the Hegelian illusion arises: insofar as this process of synthesis appears as the result and not as the beginning, to the extent that the starting point of [immediate] intuition and

³ "Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real (das Reale) as the result of thought, embracing itself, deepening itself, and setting itself in motion, so that the method which makes it possible to rise from the abstract to the concrete is nothing other than the mode (die Art) in which thought appropriates the concrete, and reproduces it (reproduzieren) in the form of a spiritual concrete (geistig Konkretes)" (*Idem*, I, p. 49)

representation is renounced⁴, we are led to imagine, as Hegel did, the real result of thought as that which turns in on itself and determines and particularizes itself. Against such an abstraction, Marx contrasts the properly unproductive character of theoretical thought that only appropriates and reproduces (a term that Althusser fails to comment on) the concrete in a spiritual form: "by no means is it the birth process (Entstehungsprozess) of the concrete itself". Hence the limitation of the abstract method: in opposition to Hegel, it is nothing but the way for thought to appropriate the concrete. But when the reality-producing character is removed from it, nothing prevents it from also being the mirror of an objective process. There is, therefore, no need to attribute excessive importance to the notion of theoretical production. When Marx states: "The whole as it appears in the head, like a whole-of-thinking, is a product of the thinking head" he is obviously referring to the singular ideas that are in the head of each individual, resulting from a physiological complex. For Marx, at that moment, it is important to emphasize the subjectivity of the idea in the face of objectivity, therefore, the interpretation that turns this product into an objective scientific discourse, independent of the personal course of representations, is not appropriate⁵.

The same sequence of ideas appears, by the way, in a famous passage of the Preface of the second edition of *Capital*, in which its author separates the mode of presentation from the mode of research proper to science. "It is certainly necessary to formally distinguish the mode of presentation (Darstellungsweise) from the mode of research (Forschungsweise). Research must appropriate the material (Stoff) in detail, and analyze its various forms of development, following the trace of its connections. Only after this work has been carried out can the corresponding real movement (wirkliche) be presented. Once this is obtained and it's **mirroring**⁶ now the life of the material in an ideal way, then it can appear as if it is an a priori construction"⁷. The a priori illusion always lurks in the mode of presentation: once the detailed investigation of particular cases is finished, the real movement is reflected in the plane of the idea. We are then ready to give in to the Hegelian illusion and conceive of the concrete as the result of an

⁴ Althusser, instead of interpreting *Anschauung* and *Vorstellung* as the presence of the individual and general objective according to the immediate reading, identifies them with the theoretical facts from which positivist epistemology departs (*Pour Marx*, p.187).

⁵ *Lire le Capital*, I, p.87

⁶ *Spiegelt*, our highlight.

⁷ *Das Kapital*, Dietz, I, p. 17

a priori construction. It is clear, however, that the danger exists only because we are obliged to take up the same route as Hegel without attributing it a productive character.

Let's see this opposition between two forms of thought, both necessarily resulting from theoretical practice that does not interfere with the progress of reality itself. The analysis of particular cases and historical forms of development of a certain mode of production is opposed to the abstract analysis of the essence that mirrors reality in its Kerngestalt (nuclear figure). Against Althusser, we maintain that such mirroring only becomes possible because a process of categorical constitution takes place in reality itself, as counterposed to the becoming of the phenomenon, a process that configures the essence of a determined mode of production and, consequently, of a form of sociability. The essence is part of each moment of the concrete without, however, exhausting all its dimensions, so the discourse would only become scientific when it reproduces the order of this ontological constitution. This for us is the only way to explain the fascination with the Hegelian illusion and respect the coherence and adequacy of Marx's mature texts.

III - This does not mean that we are confusing the object of thought with the real object, but simply that by going from the abstract to the concrete we are formulating a discourse that reproduces an essential synthesis that takes place beyond theoretical practice. For Althusser, we would be falling into a double error: on the one hand, making the essence, the foundation of the object of thought, a moment of reality itself, on the other, assigning the notion of the object the ambiguity that vitiates all empiricism. "Lorsque l'empirisme désigne dans l'essence l'objet de la connaissance, il avoue quelque chose d'important, qu'il dénie dans le même instant : il avoue que l'objet de la connaissance n'est pas identique à l'objet réel."⁸ . However, we do not believe that Althusser paid due attention to the traditional distinction between separable and inseparable parts. The English empiricists made the concept a separable part, that is, a piece of the singular representation, but in other philosophies, we find the notion of an inseparable part that subsists in the whole thanks to a transcendental process of foundation. Therefore, the concept and the essence cease to inhabit the real as one of its

⁸ "When empiricism essentially designates the object of knowledge, it admits something important, which it denies at the same time: it admits that the object of knowledge is not identical to the real object." (*Lire le Capital* I, p. 48)

pieces and come to animate it more intimately and subtly, so that between the singular and the grounded universal a web of articulations is woven that is worth investigating. The same thing can happen with the Marxist categories, as long as a real process of abstraction is discovered that operates beyond scientific investigation since this is the only way to preserve the materialism of the doctrine. Therefore, abstraction would not be like the mining that removes gold from denim, and its product, the concept, does not result from a process external to the object, it would be the object itself insofar as it, the primitive object, is placed at the level of social reality.

As an example, let's take a closer look at the concept of the value of a commodity. In fact, "the mode of being of the commodity as a use value coincides with its physical and tangible mode of existence⁹, that is, the use value of the commodity coincides with the object of use, regardless of the exchange relationship, as the thing appears at our disposal. Therefore, "the use value is not related to human activity as the source of the product, with its being-positing (*Gesetztsein*) by human activity - but simply with its being-for-man¹⁰. The problem boils down to knowing how value, as *Gesetztsein*, possesses the intrinsic universality that transforms it into an inseparable part of the use value of the commodity. Now, this can only happen when the object enters a system of relations that no longer place it immediately for man, but as something common (*Gemeinsames*)¹¹ that is expressed in individual objects.

Since his youth, Marx tried to apply the theory of value formulated by classical theory to the Hegelian scheme of construing value as a form of posited being. We do see the same expression of an equal manifesting itself in different individuals appear in Hegel's *Principles of the Philosophy of Right* (cf. § 101: *Der Wert ist das innere Gleiche von Sachen , die in ihrer Existence spezifisch ganz verschieden sind,...*)¹², in a text from his youth (cf. *Mega*, I, 538: *Auf beiden seiten erscheint als das Privateigentum als Representative eines Privateigentums von anderer Natur, als das Gleiche andern Naturprodukts ,...*)¹³ and finally *Capital* itself (cf. *Das Kapital* , I, p. 41: *die gultigen Tauschwerte derselben warehouse drücken huh gleiches aus*)¹⁴ obviously with different

⁹ *Zur Kritik...*, p. 19

¹⁰ *Grundrisse*, p. 507

¹¹ *Das Kapital*, I, p. 41

¹² In German in the Brazilian original: "Value is the inner sameness of things that are specifically quite different in their existence."

¹³ "On both sides, private property appears as a representative of a private property of a different nature, as the likeness of another natural product"

¹⁴ "The prevailing exchange values of the same commodity express the same thing."

meanings, since the related objects are different. But it is important to emphasize how a category becomes autonomous (*verselbständigt*) and is constituted from human relationships that transform things through work, throwing them through exchange into a new dimension of objectivity, the objectivity value of which the exchanged objects become the expression. It is to be noted that this is done by an objective process between men, where the conscience of the individual plays no extraordinary role. The subject-object relationship is thus replaced by a real abstraction that takes place at the very core of objectivity.

What does this equation (*Gleichung*) consist of? asks Marx. "In which something common (*ein Gemeinsames*) of the same magnitude exists in two different things, in a yard of wheat and likewise in a ton of iron. Both are therefore equal to a third party, which in and for itself is neither one nor the other. Each of the two, as exchange value, must therefore be reducible to a third"¹⁵. Marx goes on to exemplify: to measure an area of an irregular surface we divide it into triangles, which in turn are reduced to the ratio between half of the product of their base by their height. Remember that value, like *Gemeinsames*, cannot consist of a geometric or natural property; it is a pity, however, that he does not insist on this difference. But what matters is to pay attention to this logical transformation of similarity into equality that underlies the equation. Contrary to empiricist logic, which interprets equality at the level of multiplicity, assuming an object of which similar properties are said, Marx makes the passage from identity to equality the process of constituting the ground itself ¹⁶. Thus posited equality comes from the systematization of exchange relations, appearing as the third term, ground, form, and social substance, which is now expressed in the present contents. We know that in the case of value, this third abstract and general term is abstract human labor. –“This reduction, says Marx, appears as an abstraction that occurs every day in the process of social production. The resolution (*Auflösung*) of all commodities into labor time is no greater abstraction, nor is it less real than that of all organic bodies into the air. Labor, which is thus measured by time, does not appear as the work of different subjects, but the different working individuals appear rather as simple organs of labor. Or again, labor, as it appears in exchange values, can be expressed as general human labor. This

¹⁵ *Das Kapital*, I, p. 41

¹⁶ In this respect, it is much closer to Frege, where equality has the same role of constituting the path of value (*Wertverlauf*) than to the extensionalist theses of *Principia* by Russell and Whitehead; cf. Frege *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik* I, p 16 and following; II, p. 148 and beyond.

abstraction of the average labor each average individual in a given society can perform; a determined productive expenditure of muscles. nerves. human brains, etc."¹⁷ There is no denying it: real abstraction, which is logically defined by the passage from identity to equality, produces certain objective universals that exist in the average labor that each average individual in each society can perform. It is evident that this constitution of the same has nothing to do either with theoretical practice or with the presuppositions of the epistemological tradition of positivism.

It is convenient to insist on the two forms of existence. Use-value exists for man in the given form of a usable object. Value, however, exists as a posited being, concomitant with an objective process of social relations, to which individuals begin to contribute with their muscles and their brains, their bodies, and their thoughts. This participation of thought in the objective process of creating value is fundamental. Exchange and work are oriented activities ¹⁸, that is, they presuppose conscious processes. In one of the essential moments of the formation of money, Marx shows that the general equivalent appears when the objective relationship that until then was only theoretical and thought out (*gedacht*)¹⁹ comes to be socially realized. This means that the existence of value, money, and other categories also depends on a degree of consciousness capable of converting mechanical processes into finished and human forms of activity. It is obvious that such consciousness does not fly over objects as theoretical consciousness intends, but is embedded in the very relationship between men. Therefore, the universality and generality of value posited by the equation are realized on a completely different level from the particularity of use-value, so as to establish nothing in common between use-value and exchange-value, other than the name.²⁰ Both categories are therefore general, implying, on the theoretical level, generality, but the universality of use value is only scientific, it results, as Althusser would say, from theoretical practice, while that of value and abstract labor is real and concrete, resulting from a system of social relations that sets and replaces it.

Finally, the ambiguity of the notion of object is explained. As an inseparable part of use-value, value is at the same time the whole object, as a posited social form, and a

¹⁷ *Zur Kritik...* p. 23

¹⁸ "Zweckmässige Tätigkeit" (oriented activity) is a word that is systematically employed in Marx's texts.

¹⁹ *Zur Kritik...* p. 32

²⁰ "Randglossen zu Wagner" *Das Kapital* I. p. 847

part, as opposed to the use-value of the commodity. The paradox dissolves when we distinguish the levels of posited objectivity and objectivity that is simply for man.

IV - Accepting the existence of a category as universal-concrete at the level of the *Gesetzsein* has as its first consequence the need to separate the analysis of essence from the analysis of the becoming of a given objective situation. How value, for example, managed to impose itself in a society is a different historical problem from the categorical genesis that is at all times reproduced. Value in this sense does not exist like things, which are for man and subsist even if humanity disappeared, it exists on the contrary by man, its durability depending on the reiteration of the behaviors that set it going. Hence its socially determined reality, constituting, so to speak, a peculiar form of sociability since society is born precisely from such acts that establish its being. At each moment, value, to be, demands the reiteration of exchange, insofar as it posits and destroys itself through it. We therefore, have before us a constant and continuous process of constituting the fundamental categories of capitalist sociability, a contemporary history that determines the essential forms of our social being, as opposed to the history of becoming, of the vicissitudes of the implantation and generalization of a determined mode of social production.

In our view, *Capital* above all narrates the categorical history of capitalist production, namely, all the necessary steps in the positing of Capital, from its elementary form, the commodity, to its most immediate manifestations, such as price, rent, etc. It is, in short, about making a horizontal cut in the various existing capitalist systems and studying the essential connections of their existence. How they came to be, how they evolved from this or that other mode of production, whether they are autochthonous or implanted, constitute problems that categorical genesis does not deal with.

It is necessary to insist on the fact that the categorical genesis does not create anything, its products are just categories that stipulate objective conditions of existence, which are not to be confused with the historical causes of a given phenomenon. This is better understood when the mode of presentation (*Darstellungsweise*) is studied in detail, understood as an objective genesis of forms. From the first pages of *Capital*, we find a close parallelism between the concept of expression and that of constitution. Let's take an example and, without prejudice, look for its meaning: "To express the value of linen

as a clot of human labor, it must be expressed as an "objectivity" (*Gegenständlichkeit*) that is objectively (*dinglich*) different from the linen itself and at the same time common to other commodities"²¹. Linen is an object of the sensible world; to the extent, however, that it comes to express human labor, it has to express an objectivity that is *dinglich* different from linen. This, however, can only find its origin in the position that the exchange process has advanced. According to the tradition of German Idealism, discourse is for Marx positional, it proposes objectualities at every step of its development. Contrary to this idealism, however, [here] discourse is not that of conscience or the development of the Spirit. It is there tacitly pronounced in each exchange operation, in the gestures and words of concrete men who transform certain objects into expressions of others, inserting them in an eminently social context²². Therefore, with natural objects transformed by labor, a metamorphosis occurs that places them as forms of expression of objects that persist exclusively through oriented behavior, the establishment of a practical and objective logos in which social meanings find their genesis. Men in everyday life and history, expending physical effort in transforming nature and themselves, establish and maintain a historically dated and socially determined realm of logical and objective objectivities, far more effective than consciousness in isolating their individuality and than nature in the blindness of its mechanism.

In this way, the intimate connection between expression and positing is understood since one is the obverse of the other. Each positing of an object corresponds to the transformation of the members of the equation into expressive forms of the new posited entity. But to the extent that such entities are hidden, the method that goes from the abstract to the concrete must go through the forms of expression, from the most elementary to the most complex, to reveal the objectualities that the discourse inscribed in capitalist praxis places at each step. For this reason, the method is fundamentally a mode of expression, it does not create anything independent of the continuous reiteration of social processes, since to bring the essence into existence it is necessary to extirpate all old modes of behavior and the ideals that correspond to them, demanding the struggle for the implantation of a new social organization. It is obvious that this struggle is the condition for the historical becoming of the system, but it is in view of

²¹ *Idem*, I, p. 56

²² Without, however, having developed the mechanism of positing and expression Merleau-Ponty already saw this path; cf. the last work note, published in *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.328.

these essences, these ideals incorporated into natural things by an immediate process of social relations, that human behavior is oriented and determined.

V - By removing from the process of exposition and genesis of forms any ontological dimension, any positional dimension, Althusser's interpretation is forced to elucidate *Darstellung* (exposition) from his point of view. This task fell to Rancière.

Let us take as a starting point the constitutive equation of value. We immediately face a difficulty: the terms of the equation are heterogeneous, as one appears as use value and the other as exchange value. Following Marx's overt indications, we resolve the difficulty when we make both terms equal to a third that exists as a posited being, a concrete universal whose survival depends on the reiteration of exchange and the objective transformation of individual labor into abstract labor. Faithful, however, to Althusser's teaching, which rejects this constitution of an objective universal, Rancière must seek a solution at the level of the correlated terms themselves. But at that moment, the specter of Bailey's objection to Ricardo arises: value would be just a relation between terms. Marx himself, however, took charge of Ricardo's defense, recalling the substantive character of value: by examining the existence of relations between things, so as not to obtain absurd propositions such as those that, for example, refer to the distance of the letter A and the table, it must be assumed "quelque chose de spécial, une propriété des choses que les met à même d'être éloignées l'une de l'autre"²³. To avoid Bailey's nominalist interpretation and an ontological interpretation, such as ours, Rancière must find a middle ground. Marx's text would thus allow for two readings: 1) Ricardo's defense, emphasizing the existence of a substance of value; 2) but as this omits the critical issue, that of the identity of the sign "=" and the problem of heterogeneity of the [related] terms, the text should also be read at a second level where one can "lire **implicite**"²⁴. . . que les marchandises ne s'égalisent que dans le mécanisme très particulier de la représentation (*Darstellung*). Elles ne s'égalisent ni comme simples choses, ni même comme exemplaires de la même substance: elles s'égalisent dans les conditions formelles déterminées, imposées par la structure dans

²³ "something special, a property of things that enables them to be distant from each other" Marx quoted by Rancière. *Lire le Capital*, I, p.130

²⁴ Our highlight (J.A.G.)

laquelle s'effectue ce rapport"²⁵.. In this way, "propriétés qu'elles revêtent dans l'équation doivent être déterminées par les propriétés de l'espace où s'effectue la représentation, la Darstellung"²⁶.

Let us see one of the formal operations that, according to Rancière, place this space as an absent cause of the related terms. In the case of value, this takes on the form of a thing, an expression which means that value appears in the form of the equivalent commodity. "Le paradoxe est que la valeur ne saurait ni apparaître dans la forme naturelle d'une marchandise, elle y disparaît comme valeur, elle y revêt la forme d'une chose"²⁷. Rancière fell into the trap of the young Marx, which he knew so well how to refute. When the commodity appears in use-value, it does not lose its character as a commodity; by taking on the form of a thing that is for man it does not become by that independent of the market. It is necessary not to confuse the use-value of the object and the use-value of the commodity, the use-value of a natural product and the use-value of a posited social substance, which exists thanks to the present system of social relations. Here both use values just coincide, but the object does not cease to be a commodity when we stick to a single term of the equation. Therefore, there is no paradox, because the Gestztsein does not abandon its level, it's only the social commodity substance that unfolds its contradiction by showing itself in opposite forms.

To resolve the non-existent paradox, Rancière calls for a concept foreign to Marxism, metonymic causality: "ce qui détermine la connexion des effets (les rapports entre les marchandises) c'est la cause (les rapports sociaux de production) pour autant qu'elle est absente. Cette cause absente ce n'est pas le travail comme sujet, c'est l'identité du travail abstrait et du travail concret en tant que sa généralisation exprime la structure d'un certain mode de production: le mode de production capitaliste"²⁸. In these terms,

²⁵ "read implicitly. . . that commodities are equalized only in the very particular mechanism of representation (Darstellung). They are equalized neither as simple things, nor even as examples of the same substance: they are equalized under the determined formal conditions, imposed by the structure in which this relationship is carried out." *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 131

²⁶ "the properties that they assume in the equation must be determined by the properties of the space where the representation, the Darstellung, takes place." *Ibidem*

²⁷ "The paradox is that value cannot appear in the natural form of a commodity, it disappears there as value, it takes on the form of a thing." *Idem*, p. 130-131

²⁸ "what determines the connection of effects (the relations between commodities) is the cause (the social relations of production) insofar as it is absent. This absent cause is not labor as subject, it is the identity of abstract labor and concrete labor insofar as its generalization expresses the structure of a certain mode of production: the capitalist mode of production." *Idem*, p.133

however, the problem only retreated. In order to avoid that between the social relations of production and their effects an objective and determinant essence of individual behavior is constituted, which is the third term placed by the equation as an abstract moment of social reality, Ranciere retreats the problem of determination to the mode of production as a whole. This is undoubtedly enough to refute the dialectic of the young Marx, but it does not explain how the mode of production in its present organization, which should not be a mere concept elaborated by scientific investigation, comes to have a determining function. Althusser's complementation²⁹ is useless, insisting that, in structural causality, this causality that operates on the effects does not remain external to them, "the whole existence of the structure consisting in its effects". As long as it is not elucidated how the totality determines, how the structure is in the effects but subsists after them, the problem remains insoluble and metonymic causality is a name that covers it up.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the problem of economic objects, instead of opening the way for an ontology of the social, leads to its negation. It is Rancière himself who underlines the three meanings employed by Marx in characterizing the nature of the commodity: 1) the commodity-form; 2) sensible-supersensible-things or social things (sinnliche-übersinnliche oder gesellschaftliche Dinge); 3) value objectivity as an expression of human labor. But he soon reduces them to the metonymic manifestation of a determined mode of production, that is, a social structure that is only revealed through scientific knowledge: "Le caractère de cette Gegenständlichkeit fait qu'elle n'est connue que pour ce qu'elle est - c'est -à- dire pour une manifestation metonymique de la structure – que dans la science . Dans la perception ordinaire elle est prise pour une propriété de la chose en tant que telle"³⁰. It is not clear however whether this causality is real or an artifice of thought to organize the data of perception. Moreover, if that explanation were correct, it would be necessary that all social objects were taken as properties of things and of conduct, which does not happen. Despite their fantastic character, checks, capital, and income have a present force, they are poles that guide our behaviors that can in turn only be explained by them. There is no doubt that only science when proceeding with the genesis of forms, denounces the fetishism of this

²⁹ *Idem*, II, p. 167 and following

³⁰ "The character of this Gegenständlichkeit means that it is only known for what it is – that is, for a metonymic manifestation of the structure – only in science. In ordinary perception it is taken for a property of the thing as such." *Idem*, I, p. 131

objectivity, but that does not stop the latter from enduring with the same resistance as mathematical objects. Rancière himself senses the need to move to the objective side of scientific discourse, to its content posited by contemporary praxis, but he does so by resurrecting, as incredible as it may seem, the transcendental object = X, which appears identified with social relations.

VI - The most disastrous consequence of this horror to ontology appears in the Althusserian conception of totality; "Il est impossible de penser l'existence de cette totalité dans la catégorie hegelienne de contemporanéité du présent"³¹. Now, Marx says exactly the opposite. In a beautiful page in which he examines the difference between the logical order and the historical order, he states: "the condition that the capitalist must bring into circulation values created by his labor, or even values that are not created by current or past wage labor in order to place them as capital, such a condition is part of the antediluvian conditions of Capital, of its historical presuppositions, which as historical presuppositions are past and belong to the history of its formation, but in no way to its contemporaneous history, namely, do not belong to the real system of the mode of production dominated by it. If, for example, the flight of serfs to the city is one of the historical conditions and one of the presuppositions of urban life, this flight is neither a condition nor a moment of the reality of constituted urban life, but belongs to its past presuppositions, to the presuppositions of its becoming (Werden) which are overcome in its existence (Dasein). The conditions and presuppositions of becoming, of the birth of capital, suppose that it not yet is but is coming into being, so that they disappear with real capital, which, starting from its reality, sets the conditions for its realization"³². The text is clear, from the logical point of view Marx shows that there is no presupposition to the system that survives that is not replaced by it, that sets the conditions for its realization. For Althusser, however, a system that puts its own conditions of realization is incomprehensible, since it consists of a concrete universal, a totality that is not a totality of thought. Faced with this text, however, Althusser's reaction would be predictable. Incidentally, one can already find in his books the necessary elements to transform this real abstract totality, this real capital into a product of theoretical practice: Rancière interprets "effective movement (wirkliche)" as "le réel

³¹ "It is impossible to think of the existence of this totality in the Hegelian category of contemporaneity of the present." *Idem*, II, p. 48

³² *Grundrisse...*, I, p. 363

au regard de la science"³³, and Althusser, without shame, "modes of existence" as "theoretical determination of the concept"³⁴. Furthermore, in the same sense of displacement of terms, the Gliederung, "combination articulated within society bourgeois reality, that is, part of bourgeois reality, is metamorphosed into an "articulated-totality-of-thought" that thinks the historical articulation"³⁵. Faced with such freedom in the face of texts, which makes interpretation irrefutable because unverifiable, it is only pressing to ask the reasons that took them so far.

VII - We will point out only one of them, the most apparent one. Denying any ontological dimension to the logical order implies giving theory a thickness that it does not have except in positivism. Based on the historical fact that science always begins its work with instruments elaborated by previous doctrines, Althusser outlines an epistemology in which science "ne ' travaille ' pas sur un pur ' donné ' objectif , qui serait celui de ' faits ' purs et absolus. Son travail propre consiste au contraire, à élaborer ses propres faits scientifiques à travers une critique des 'faits' idéologiques élaborés par la pratique théorique idéologique antérieure"³⁶. Well, this results in giving the theory the opacity of the fact, resuming with the Comtian tradition that intended to build its logic from the consideration of "toutes les theories scientifiques comme autant des grands faits logiques" (Cours... I, p. 62). The parallelism of the texts is immediate and both imply the substantiation of the scientific discourse and the transformation of doctrines into the original material of the investigation. Positivism, however, labors in an error. If in the process of cognizing reality we use, in effect, concepts that belong to previous doctrines, this does not mean that we start from that doctrine as a whole. We cannot make such a statement even in the domain of mathematical investigation, which operates above all at the level of language. Without this implying conceiving of a pure datum, the object is the starting point and the point of reference, as it is glimpsed in everyday experience and as it is posed by the ideas that intend to thematize it. Currently, it is impossible to deny that, between mathematical objects themselves and the various discourses that are produced about them, there is a gap; language being below or

³³ "the real with regard to science" *Lire le Capital*, I, p. 137

³⁴ *Idem*, II, p. 176

³⁵ *Idem*, I, p. 59

³⁶ Science "does not 'work' on a pure 'given' objective, which would be that of pure and absolute 'facts'. Its work consists, on the contrary, in elaborating its scientific facts through a critique of the ideological 'facts' elaborated by previous ideological theoretical practice." (*Pour Marx*, p. 187)

beyond its requirements. Furthermore, the need to resort to reflexive propositions is imposed. Furthermore, there is a need to resort to reflective propositions, in which predicates appear nominalized, transformed into terms and, therefore, denoting an objectivity different from the sum of the objects to which the predicate is attributed. Under these conditions, how to maintain the rigid neopositivist structuring of language? How can we not notice that in the very movement of discourse the question of being reappears with all its vigour? In the Hegelian tradition, Marx realized that criticism comes after the analysis of the object, that only after obtaining a discourse that sticks to reality and reveals its most intimate pathways and obstacles, that the critique of ideology becomes possible. And with regard to Althusser, in what terms would he be able to examine the "coupure", between the problems of the youth and of the maturity [of Marx], if he remains exclusively at the level of discourse analysis? We believe that the writings of his youth have at their root a confusion that later science unraveled: the use value of the commodity is not to be confused with the use value of the object. Only this confusion, still made by Sartre, allows us to think about the commodity as an object essentially for man and therefore explainable in anthropological terms. In our interpretation, therefore, the explanation of the object leads to the understanding of the errors in which this partial vision falls. How, however, would Althusser explain the shift from anthropological to scientific discourse in *Capital* (for him only partly scientific) if not for an inexplicable mutation of the structures of language?

In approximating the object, concepts are used, often from the most diverse origins, but in this case, the concepts are metamorphosing because of objectivity, which is also in transformation, to finally acquire new adequacy and new coherence. Positivism suppresses this correlation between theory and object, forgetting to use here the instrumental and transitive character of the theory that it never ceases to affirm, as it prefers to make discourse substantive than to face the problems of an ontology. To avoid it, Althusser, in his grandiose coherence, radically separates the object of knowledge and the real object, even if it costs him to set aside all the rest of the Marxist categories. This was not, however, the solution he found from the beginning. In July 1964, when writing *Contradiction and Overdetermination*, the problem of this distinction was not yet raised. This reveals the notion of overdetermined contradiction, that is, an inseparable contradiction of the social body, of the formal conditions of existence, and of the very instances that it governs since it implies a homogeneity between the

contradiction and its determinations. Now, in our view, this homogeneity is problematic, since we must distinguish contradiction as a category, a real-abstract condition of existence, from historical determination itself. Therefore, the overdetermination comes from the implication of the systematic [abstract] plane in the historical plane, the tendencies that come from the system as a whole joining forces with the tendencies originating from the conjuncture. But, despite this lack of distinction between orders, Althusser's article had the great merit of directing Marxist studies toward concrete history, against the purely formal game of orthodox explanations. Soon after came the impact of structuralism. It seems to us that Althusser and his group did not put up enough resistance. We believe that there was no other solution than a strategically dual position. The first. To applaud the attempt at establishing structures that go beyond concrete totalities, so as to reinforce the struggle against functionalism, which is incapable of admitting concepts such as the capitalist mode of production, since, advocating an organicist conception of totality, it does not understand a capitalism that is not American, English, etc. The second would be to criticize structuralism's repulsion to face even the possibility of a genesis of forms. Neglecting this last notion, the Althusserians were unprepared in the face of the avalanche that this movement meant, and each one began in their way to flirt with linguistics and with the new anthropology; they were not in a position to undertake a radical critique of the notion of structure. Refusing to fall into ahistoricism, they had no choice but to make the new structures historical, insofar as they came to be taken as perishable results of scientific practice. Instead of the historicity of the structure as a moment of reality, they simply preferred the historicity of ideas and scientific knowledge, so the ghost and fear of the fixity of forms ended up leading them to resurrect Comte and finally appease the minds of the old masters of the Sorbonne. We cannot say with certainty that all this happened this way, as we should have carried out a deeper study of the current ideological movements that manifest themselves in France. But it is striking that the ideas and positivism of Althusser and his group came precisely to swell the waters of the anti-historicism that prevails in that country: structuralists, Althusserians or existentialists, each in their way, bring History to the aegis of psychologism and thus justify the distrust that we all currently have against this enigmatic notion.