



Althusser,
The
Infinite
Farewell

Emilio de Ípola

FOREWORD BY

Étienne Balibar

ALTHUSSER, THE INFINITE FAREWELL

ALTHUSSER,

Translated by Gavin Arnall *With a foreword by Étienne Balibar*

EMILIO DE ÍPOLA

THE INFINITE FAREWELL

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To Claudia To Julia and Miguel

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Gavin Arnall
Ann Arbor, Michigan
May 2017

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE ON REFERENCES

Whenever possible, I cite existing English translations of original sources. If a text is cited that has not yet been translated, I provide my own translation and cite the original. Sometimes both the existing translation and the original source are cited if the latter provides relevant information to the reader or plays a role in the book's argument.

A philosopher's purgatory can last for more or less time. In Althusser's case, it will have been thirty years. There is no shortage of reasons to explain this fact, and they should not be obscured. Certain signs suggest, however, that this purgatory may be coming to an end. How long will the current renewal of interest last, and what reassessment will it yield? How will it transform the intellectual image of the author of *For Marx* or the way we philosophize? It is likely too early to say. It is possible, however, to get an idea of the questions that will form the heart of the discussion.

Emilio de Ípola's book is one of the striking testaments to this reversal of fortune, perhaps the most original one to date.¹ This book combines three of the elements that have, in a general way, contributed to the unanticipated rise of "Althusserian" studies: the return to the intellectual context of the 1960s to 1980s by one of its active participants; the use of posthumous publications (which exceed in volume, and often in interest, that which appeared during Althusser's lifetime), in order to reexamine what motivated his "project," as well as the internal tensions that marked it; and the relation of this project to a political critique whose points of reference have changed but whose urgency is greater than ever. I do not hesitate to recommend it to both new and old enthusiasts of "theoretical practice."²

Emilio de Ípola's book is written in the first person, and I will ask permission to do the same in the hopes that, rather than leading to sentimentalism, it will more candidly reveal "where I'm speaking from," as one used to say. Having been (along with others) the student, collaborator, and friend

of the man designated here as the “classic Althusser,” I cannot claim any detachment from what is discussed in these pages. I will not conceal, then, that I read de Ípola’s book with much emotion and much pleasure, but also with much interest and, before long, much surprise. He brought me the book one evening when I was in Buenos Aires, lending my support to a teaching program that is striving to maintain a long tradition of Franco-Argentinian exchanges. Emilio is not the kind of person who broadcasts the importance of his work to sing his own praises. He is one of the most authentic dandies I’ve ever had the fortune to meet, a man you might see up on the barricades with a cigar between his teeth, someone whom generations of students have revered, while he insists he was just trying to pass along a few concepts. “You’ll see,” he told me, “I went back to those old debates from our youth using the files at IMEC.³ Maybe some of my *porteño* ideas will move you to laughter or tears.” That’s putting it mildly. I spent all night devouring it. Then I reread it pen in hand, determined to make this work accessible to a non-Hispanophone readership.

Before getting into the substance of the book and describing what I believe to be the contribution of de Ípola’s analysis, it would be fitting to say a few words about the very particular relationship that Althusser maintained with Latin American intellectual revolutionaries during the 1960s and 1970s. In France and the rest of Europe, and elsewhere still, everyone had an opinion about his “intervention.” There were Althusserians and anti-Althusserians, attempts at application or extrapolation, virulent critiques, and reversals of attitude dictated by reflection, emotion, or political stances, not to mention Althusser’s own palinodes. But between Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, São Paulo, Bogotá, Mexico City, and even Havana, at least for a few years, in the period between the guerrillas and the dictatorships—as what Régis Debray called “the revolution in the revolution” was finding its way among the “paths” of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Salvador Allende—the situation was altogether different: there was a general conviction not only that Marxism was *alive*, but that it was being *reborn*, in the strict sense of the term.⁴ Effacing decades of dogmatism and revisionism to undertake the “return to Marx,” going inside his laboratory of thought and reassessing all the old assumptions from a different perspective, which allowed for an absolute fidelity to what the author of *Capital* intended and, at the same time, the victorious overcoming of the obstacles that had tripped up “Marxists” in his wake. The Marxism “recommended” by Althusser would have been, as in a Jorge Luis Borges story (but now with

stakes that were in direct contact with history), at once *identical* to itself and yet *entirely other*;⁵ Marxism's own empirical history would, in retrospect, have represented a deviation or "drift [*dérive*]."⁶ In this way, the figure of Althusser managed, incredibly, to become distinct from the interpreter or critic, without transforming into the political leader; instead, he came to resemble a "double."

There would be room, of course, to interrogate the historical, cultural, psychological, and geopolitical reasons for this representation, which was fashioned out of desire and the imaginary, but also out of demand and intractability.⁷ Some other time, if I can muster the courage, I will describe the devastating effects that this representation ultimately had on Althusser himself—who was unable to bear the position of master, even at a distance. But here we are discussing something more cheerful. After coming to terms with the hope of witnessing the return of truth incarnate, after regaining freedom in the face of both nostalgia and resentment, after effectively measuring the distance between two worlds that are in some sense each other's doubles—which for this very reason can neither divide nor intersect—reflection can take its rightful place. This book, *The Infinite Farewell*, which presents itself as an anamnesis provoked by the shock of the encounter with Althusser's posthumous works, is not just a portrait—the likeness of which we will discuss later on—but also a veritable conversation with him, a conversation in which the irreducible multiplicity of his faces mitigates to some extent his actual absence. In the absence of the ability to summon him to respond, it is still possible to set up the discussion he must have had with himself (or should have had) and to intervene as a third party. What results is a powerful and original construction that is anything but mere commentary. It owes as much to the concerns, knowledge, and thought of its author as it does to the formulations of *Reading Capital* and *Machiavelli and Us*. Others may, if they wish, enter into this work themselves and seek to inflect it. I think it would be time well spent.

Let us now look at how this book breaks new ground in its reading and discussion of Althusser. It will be helpful to follow the order of the three main chapters. In chapter 2, de Ípola offers an entirely updated interpretation of Althusser's relation to structuralism, based essentially on the reconstruction of his so-called *différend* with Lévi-Strauss, the difference between his attitude and Lacan's, and the importance of Badiou's and Miller's interventions in this domain. This interpretation is not archaeological or anecdotal. We will see that it is a key to arguments about the much-discussed

“theoreticism.” The approach de Ípola has chosen imparts the full weight of a philosophical problem as profound as it is difficult—that of “structural causality”—that has not yet, perhaps, revealed all its dimensions.

I can attest to the fact that the dispute between Sartre and Lévi-Strauss in the early 1960s over the articulation of symbolic structures and the different regimes of historicity (following the nearly simultaneous publication of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and *The Savage Mind*) indeed sparked numerous theoretical projects (in Marxism, epistemology, and applied psychoanalysis, as well as anthropology and politics, in the history of philosophy), which the group provisionally assembled around Althusser was attempting to combine.⁸ I also think de Ípola is right to propose a symptomatic reading of the denials contained in the double movement of imitation and rejection that marked our attitude toward the idea of “structure” as Lévi-Strauss understood it, both before and after *Reading Capital* was put together. Some minor individual differences aside, Althusser and the rest of us were all much closer than we ever wanted to admit to the question posed by the idea of symbolic efficacy (one need only look closely, as de Ípola does here, at the analogies between the problematic of the lacking signification [*signification manquante*] in Lévi-Strauss and that of the absent cause in Althusser to be convinced of this fact) and, on the other hand, not attentive enough to its implications with respect to the question of the “supposition of the subject,” to the extent that structure reveals itself to be essentially incomplete, marked by a constitutive lack. By the same token, I think he is right to suggest that in this ambivalent relation to structuralism (which combined a systematic attempt to take structuralism beyond its own formulations and a retreat before its “idealist” philosophical consequences) there resides one of the keys—if not *the* key—to the uncertainties and inconsistencies that mark Althusser’s theoretical project: either one attributes these to the internal, subterranean pressure of another philosophy that is contradictory with the first and betrays itself in the form of a “Freudian slip,” or else one attributes them to the external pressure of politics and its organizational demands. The implications of this complex would also be the point of departure for revisiting what, precisely, is *theoretical* in Althusser’s *theoreticist* ambition (which we shared with him) to rectify the course of revolutionary politics by starting from an “epistemological break,” which was understood as tantamount to a revolution in the field of “science.”

As a matter of fact, this work, which brings up to date fine conceptual figures and surprising relationships between texts, is not lacking in contem-

porary relevance; it goes beyond a rewriting of Althusser's self-critique that would restore to him what he *did not say* or said insufficiently.⁹ Indeed, now is the time to reread the structuralist debate and to reassess the roles that different representatives of the "philosophical moment" of the 1960s played in that debate.¹⁰ And this rereading must not limit itself to discussions about the legitimacy of applying the "linguistic model" to anthropology, literature, the history of religion, and psychoanalysis, or (to use Milner's terminology)¹¹ the relation between a "research program" and a "structuralist *doxa*," or the possibility or impossibility, in general, of relegating questions of knowledge and practice (even those of affectivity and "life") to one or more *orders of discourse*, to an *instance of the letter*, as Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida debated. This rereading must address above all the relation between the *idea of structure* as such and the category of the *subject*, which governs the entirety of classical philosophy (potentially under other names, in particular, that of *praxis*). As I have argued elsewhere, this relation cannot be reduced to a reciprocal exclusion (such that a coherent structuralism would constitute the archetype of a philosophy "without a subject," and the condition for thinking subjectivity would be to "do away with structure"), yet it necessarily entails a certain contradiction. In recreating—"inventing," in the literal sense—the debates of Lévi-Strauss and Althusser on this topic, de Ípola does not just reconstruct the backdrop of contemporaneous developments (the most ambitious expression of which was probably the Lacanian notion of the *barred subject*, which Jacques-Alain Miller related to the *function of misrecognition* that Althusser said was shared by Marx's and Freud's critiques of humanism); he also brings to light a singular chiasm [*chassé-croisé*]. It is unquestionably true that adopting the structural point of view should block the path to any conception of any *constituting subject* (be it in thought or in history), at the risk of seriously troubling any political philosophy that takes on the task of recognizing in history the collective subject capable of "transforming the world." But, as it so happens, the incessantly renewed questioning into the properties and modalities of the *constituted subject* (for Althusser, the subject constituted by "ideology," which is itself considered to be the representative "instance" in which the material "last instance" is recognized and misrecognized) confers on Lévi-Strauss's work a remarkable relevance after the fact. What de Ípola diagnoses in Althusser is a wavering between a return to the themes of philosophies of praxis (Sartre, Gramsci, even Lukács) to reestablish the possibility of a *transformation* of social relations and the existing state of things, and (the more interesting op-

tion, in his view) the ambiguous opening (in the form of things that spring to mind in a premonitory way, or Freudian slips) onto another problematic (by way of “conjuncture,” “singularity,” and “overdetermination”). One can see that he also took cues from Lévi-Strauss himself as to the relations between culture and individual psychological processes, which form the very site of variation and, more profoundly, of anthropological *deviation*.

I will say no more about that. But one can see, I think, that de Ípola’s analysis harbors the seeds of a *general* questioning (concentrated here on two authors) of what, in the work of structuralists—those who claim that label or repudiate it, those whose work is of greater or lesser significance—makes it possible to revolutionize the question of the subject, starting with a critique of its ideological and metaphysical inheritance, but also to clear the way for a new position, one that is still uncertain, in which indetermination and efficacy could be in question simultaneously. This allows us to glimpse the fact that, from a philosophical perspective, the great frontier that must be recognized is the problematic of *modalities* (classically: reality, contingency, necessity). Such would indeed be the heart of the inquiries undertaken by the “last Althusser,” which de Ípola, in a Straussian vein, dubs *esoteric*.¹² But prior to this, we must go through and take seriously, whether we want to or not, the privileged lens through which Althusser, nearly from start to finish, undertook to treat (and rectify) the philosophy of the subject: his problematic of *ideology*, which he attempted to think “for Marx and against Marx.”

Let us move on, then, to the second trouble spot identified by de Ípola (in chapter 3). One might ask oneself, ultimately, given both the problems it encompasses (precisely those having to do with the *constitution of the subject*) and the method it unceasingly applies (which is always characterized, at bottom, by the search for a *double inscription of the ideological*, at once “within” and “without” the existing social formation, or knowledge, thus at the point where these are made and undone), whether ideology for Althusser is not another name for structure. I am tempted to think so, retrospectively, and to draw from this an argument in favor of the idea that, in his search for a “philosophy for Marxism” that would not be the existing “Marxist philosophy” (the centerpiece of which has always been the development of the *materialist concept of ideology*, which Marx named but immediately gave up in favor of considerations grounded in the search for the “language of real life” and in the power of the “ideas of the dominant class”), Althusser was destined sooner or later to run into a contradiction

with his own “theoreticism,” insofar as it actually represented less an epistemology than a politics.

Assisted by some of his students, Althusser of course made great efforts to find a common language for dialectical materialism, the history of sciences focused on the “formation of concepts,” and the analysis of discourse and unconscious formations (whether individual or collective), the horizon of which was represented (initially) by an “idea of science” applicable to the theories of Frege, Husserl, Lenin, and Freud. First developed around 1900, but only recognized as a conceptual unit after the fact and in a different geophilosophical location (Paris), this idea certainly owed nothing to Hegel, whom it suspected of mysticism and sophistry; it sought rather to extend an “applied” rationalism (Bachelard) of formalization and experimentation, adapted to what would later be called “complexity” (rather than “life”), beyond the field of natural sciences. But in Althusser’s version (which de Ípola here calls a “Kautskyian” *theory*, which will require younger readers to do some archaeological digging),¹³ on account of his political objectives, rationalism focuses on results that one could call “pedagogical” in the broadest sense. The watchword was not just *theory* but *theoretical training [formation]*. The dominant ideology is “inculcated” by State ideological apparatuses (such as school and family, but also political parties), all the more effectively because it happens unconsciously, by way of material practices or behaviors, if you will, imposed on individuals by institutions, rituals, and disciplines that always already “think” for them. How to *undo* this conditioning, which is as necessary to individuals as the air they breathe? By “fighting,” of course, but first (and to be able to fight) by “understanding” and “analyzing” the mechanism that forms you and makes you think the way you do. . . . *Sed intelligere*, wrote Spinoza.¹⁴

I believe that in chapter 3 of his book de Ípola uncovers, in an altogether illuminating way, why it is that the idea of “the interpellation of individuals [as] subjects”—an idea that even today drives interest in Althusser for disciples of “critical theory” in much of the world¹⁵—*displaces this pedagogism* by revealing its incompatibility with an effective materialism (all the more flagrant given that, from the start, Althusser was ardently opposed to the Platonic or Kantian notion of a relation of knowledge to ideology that would be modeled on the antithetical pairing of truth and error, or illusion, even a transcendental one). But he also shows why it *gives rise to internal contradiction* in the concept of ideology, in a form that is no longer epistemological (or is no longer dominated by epistemology), but that is thoroughly political

(and historico-political). To move quickly (since the readers must go to the text and form their own opinion), I think de Ípola is absolutely right to insist on the idea that two theories Althusser articulated successively¹⁶—one that accounts for the “reproduction of relations of production” by the fact that ideological apparatuses recruit individuals to serve as carriers of these same relations, and one that accounts for the effect of subjectivity by the way in which subjects “recognize” themselves in the figure and injunctions of an (imaginary) Subject to which they are “subjected”—are logically contradictory. He is likewise absolutely right to interpret, once again as a symptom, the way in which, in his attempt to overcome his readers’ confusion, Althusser ends up having recourse to the very idea he had argued against as “historicist,” “Hegelian” (and Lukacsian), etc.—namely, the idea that the *abstraction* of mechanisms of “ideology in general,” which allows them to function “in the mode of eternity,” is *the product of forms of individuality*, themselves *abstract* and reified, imposed by capitalism on its carriers in order to incorporate their labor force.¹⁷

What is worth asking oneself, however, is why Althusser was not able to give up on the idea that there is a *class function* of ideology (in “class societies”—but what other kinds of societies are there?), or the idea that subjectivization entails *in general* an effect of misrecognition (or alienation, not in the Feuerbachian sense, but rather in the Lacanian sense, thus in the final analysis still a Hegelian sense). And what is interesting about these ideas is that *they are both political*, albeit in radically incompatible senses. One is political because it attacks a social, collective domination that distributes power among groups and submits individuals en masse to an expropriation of the very conditions of their own lives, and the other is political because it sets the internal limits of what each individual can effectively grasp of the conditions and motivations of her actions or her participation in a process of emancipation. These are the two sides, which it is tempting to call “objective” and “subjective,” of what constitutes a relation in a structuralist sense. But a relation is, precisely, not an “individual,” and there is no pineal gland or psychophysiological parallelism that connects these two sides in an immediate way. In order to make this hold water theoretically, one would have to admit that the revolutionary struggle itself represents a form of ideological subjection (as, precisely, interpellation by a Subject—a Subject that could very well be Revolution or Communism) (and all of Althusser’s work was likely haunted, without his admitting it, by the question of the alienation of revolutionary political action itself, and what distin-

guishes this form of alienation—or does not distinguish it—from imprisonment within the framework of the dominant ideology).¹⁸ But how can we concede this last thesis (in view of “ideology in general,” which “will have no end,” as Althusser announced from the start, and in view of his analogy, even his identification of ideology “in the last instance” with the mechanism of the unconscious) without *negating* the difference in efficacy, in historical significance, and even in ethical value (where does one get the idea that Althusser overlooked this dimension?) between multiple ways of *being subjected*, which may very well be formally identical, but which do not in any way entail, in *given conditions*, the same conservative or transformative effects on the “world”?

It seems that, no matter what, the analysis of ideological mechanisms always winds up in an all-or-nothing aporia: *either* a liberation that is “absolute” or “total,” extracting individuals and their collective movements from the very limits of ideology (which, for Althusser, is a myth), *or* no liberation at all, because all subjection is the flip side of a reproduction of “domination.” Unless we consider that not only is there contingency, variability, or ambivalence to the effects of subjection, but, perhaps, that there is no ideological formation—monotheism, rights of man, social revolution, what have you—that is conservative or transformative *in itself*, but there are only *effects of conservation, resistance, or transgression* of ideology, of which the figure of interpellation is never the only explanation. Here we approach the famous “labyrinth of freedom” that Leibniz speaks of, and it is understandable that Althusser would have gotten caught in it, given the double pressure of a philosophical context dominated by Spinozism (to which he himself had made a significant contribution) and a political situation dominated by the swaying movements of the idea of revolution (which he had made his life’s work), as de Ípola demonstrates relentlessly.¹⁹ But I would suggest that we not rush to declare these aporias unproductive or unimportant or to believe that we have at our disposal the guarantee of escaping them once and for all.

This brings us to the third part of de Ípola’s argument, the “solitary hour” of a thought taken to “extremes” that it had always foreseen but had never arrived at naming as such, as the title of chapter 4 suggests in a wonderful turn of Althusser’s famous formulation of the inaccessible “last instance” of historical analysis. In other words, in a series of texts that are unfinished, uneven, intentionally provocative, and resolutely indifferent to the conventions of pedagogical and dialectical exposition, texts that are sometimes a

bit mad, but that suddenly allow us to reread in another way everything that came before, the uncovering of a long-repressed “esoteric” philosophy, or better, one that was prevented from growing by the joint effect of (structuralist, rationalist) theoreticism and (Marxist, revolutionary) practicicism: this is what one calls the philosophy of the “last Althusser,” which is contained essentially in two posthumous texts and marked by the repeated (some are tempted to say *incantatory*) use of formulations like “aleatory materialism” or “materialism of the encounter,” which evoke explicitly or implicitly the Epicurean and Lucretian model of the *clinamen* as a beyond (or a below) of the metaphysical opposition between determinism and freedom, and which suggest, within the field of history, a resolute *primacy* of the “conjuncture” (of cases, of singular situations) over “structure” (or better still, the erasure of the opposition between structure and conjuncture, the latter being only the spare change of the former, according to the preference clearly affirmed by all of the structuralists).²⁰ What I find particularly interesting here is not only de Ípola’s effort to demonstrate the *reversal* that took place in Althusser’s priorities, causing what previously seemed to need lengthy theoretical construction or deduction to enter a state of primitive “materialist fact” (like the fall or rain of atoms in the void). It is not even simply the way he elucidates the virtual coherence of this philosophy to come (which a whole subset of Althusser’s current readers, both young and older, are choosing to work on today). It is two characteristics particular to de Ípola’s reading, starting from the end.

First of all, there is the fact that de Ípola (drawing in part on the remarkable work of his former student Francisco Naishtat and playing liberally on analogies with both Sartre and more recent essays in political sociology) inscribes the question of aleatory materialism within the perspective of *collective action*, which entails both discursive (performative) and nondiscursive elements. Twisting a phrase of Badiou’s (a great Sartrean if ever there was one), de Ípola speaks of “subjectivity without a subject,” an oxymoron that marks the necessity of twisting traditional philosophical perspectives in order to analyze the forms and stages of political action (or agency, or organization).²¹ The “encounter” Althusser spoke of and the “swerve” [*dévi-ation*] he situated at its origin (not a punctual origin, but an origin that is virtual, always available) here takes on a more concrete and historical meaning, far removed from the naturalism of habitual Lucretian references and yet alien to any dialectic of the subject of history as an “I that is we and we that is I” (Hegel).²² The encounter is the *crystallization of collective units*

(themselves contextual, aleatory, contradictory, but not at all indeterminate as a pure “multitude” would be) that *cause situations to deviate* from their internal instability, or from “counter-tendencies” inherent in their tendencies (de Ípola very rightly points out how far back this preoccupation with counter-tendencies goes in Althusser, and that they go from being a precaution against a naturalist positivism of the laws of history to an ontological characteristic of processes, or historical eventalism). This way of reading Althusser’s indications from a resolutely political perspective (and not *meta-political*, as a whole set of contemporary readings have a tendency to do, particularly those who locate in Althusser’s turn against his own organizational “Leninism” arguments for assigning him a metaphysics of spontaneity) is already, it seems to me, very elucidating with respect to the referent of the “last Althusser,” which was constituted more than ever by the field of class struggles and questioning into the *alternative to capitalism* as a “material possibility” (or a possibility *in fact*) of its very movement.

But there is more still. By referring extensively to Althusser’s “Machiavelli and Us” (an unpublished work that largely dates, let us not forget, from 1972, and that thus illustrates in a striking way the idea that there exists a “subterranean” Althusser that permanently shadows his public writing, a work of which I have elsewhere said that, precisely in its imperfect state, is perhaps the most perfect thing Althusser ever wrote),²³ de Ípola also introduces another idea: that of the profound identity between the thought of *encounter* (or *conjuncture*) and that of *conflict* (or *struggle*). As you will see, tying together the disjointed threads of different texts leads de Ípola to assign a strategic value to Althusser’s “thesis” (first articulated as a reaction against Marxist sociology and economism) according to which “classes” would not precede their own struggle, but on the contrary, would *result from* the modes, vicissitudes, and degrees of intensity of that struggle.²⁴ Pushed a bit further, this hypothesis leads to the idea that “classes” (an essentially *relational* notion, or whose existence “for itself” is only ever the objective and subjective effect of a “for the other,” as Sartre would have said) only form *within a historical conjuncture* (temporarily and locally—though this does not mean they are short-lived or have no future) through the convergent action of those who are mobilized in the resistance of these classes and recognize themselves in their struggle. It seems to me that we come very close here to the possibility of moving beyond the obstacle Althusser believed could not be overcome when he was contemplating—in a fairly scholastic way, it must be said—classes and masses (not to mention heads),

which explains, among other reasons, his reticence to “finish” the *Machiavelli* text and make it public. I wonder if we haven’t come right back to the aporia I mentioned previously, with an “ideology” the effects of which are transformative but whose mechanism is, as such, conservative. This would likely not be de Ípola’s own thesis, given that he tends (along with Naishtat, Cefai, or even Badiou) to posit the logic of *action* against that of *subjection* (or ideology), and probably understands the expression “subjectivity without a subject” in this way, as a final nod to the “first Althusser.” But the discussion is just beginning (again).

I hope that with the foregoing remarks, by setting out certain necessary steps and reversals, I have not overly encroached upon an author’s right to himself present his own thought, in his own language. If this is the case, I beg his forgiveness; we shall place our faith in the reader’s ability to distinguish between what he actually demonstrates and what I’ve just attributed to him—shaking up some of his formulations a bit, just as he himself does with those of Althusser. I’ve done this because I found it necessary to explain why an old Althusserian might find himself at once destabilized and moved to revisit his earliest lines of inquiry by a reading as thought-provoking as that of *Althusser, The Infinite Farewell*. I’ve done it, in fact, because I glimpse in this text the possibility of rejoining the ranks, if not handing over the reins once and for all to other interpreters, others who are taking up the pieces of analysis scattered across Althusser’s troubled “career,” others who may or may not be “Marxists,” but for whom the double demand—the double intransigence—of the concept (which is theoretical, whether we like it or not) and of transformation (of “ourselves,” as Foucault would say, and thus of the relations that constitute us) will always be meaningful. I think that this is what Emilio de Ípola had in mind when, with an audacity none of us could have mustered, he conceived of this book and brought it to fruition. Which is an altogether effective way of remaking the exoteric—in other words, the common—out of the esoteric: the involuntary secret of a man who thought he was “alone.”

Irvine, California, February 2012
Translated by Katie Chenoweth

Althusserianism (what a word!).
— LOUIS ALTHUSSER, *Lettres à Franca*

PROLOGUE. ALTHUSSER?

I initially conceived of this work as a brief presentation of the philosophy of the “last” Althusser. For obvious reasons, it was supposed to focus on the works that the French philosopher produced during the last years of his life, or more precisely on the texts written and published late in Althusser’s life or released after his death.¹

I nevertheless stumbled upon a difficulty not long after beginning that revealed itself to be resistant to any solution, despite my best efforts to the contrary (and some objectionable tricks of the trade). The object that I had decided to investigate and that I thought would be possible to grasp without too much trouble was becoming more and more complicated and intangible, as if it insisted treacherously on deterring my efforts to contain it, on demonstrating that it was—at least for me—completely elusive.

Some formulations that the last Althusser employs, for example, seemed entirely novel at first glance, such that it was possible to view them as signs of a profound philosophical rupture with the “classic” Althusser.² After a

second reading, however, either because of some passing reference or a sudden experience of *déjà vu* compelling me to return to earlier texts, it became clear that what had seemed like the discovery of something novel was not actually that novel, that the extent of its novelty was more limited than initially presumed. Or perhaps its alleged originality, to reveal itself as such, required an arduous labor of reinterpretation and revision of Althusser's earlier texts, which seemed, at least partially, to anticipate later formulations. The frequent irruption of difficulties such as these eroded the idea that something like a clearly perceptible and analyzable philosophy of the "last Althusser" existed. I accordingly had to either abandon writing the book or reconsider and amplify the bounds of its object of study.

This sort of "retrospective" demand, by virtue of which the originally pared-down object of study called for an unanticipated return to earlier texts, generated a second, complementary demand, anticipatory in nature. Indeed, to make matters even more complicated, I noted after a while that my object of study stretched not only back toward the past but also forward into the future.³ This future was one that Althusser, who died in 1990, would not witness, a future that would have as its protagonists other authors, some of them Althusser's former disciples, and others affiliated with his thought. The former group consists of philosophers such as Étienne Balibar, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière,⁴ and Jacques Bidet, while the latter group includes, among others, Slavoj Žižek and Ernesto Laclau. It is likely that some of these authors did not have access until very recently to Althusser's unpublished works. In those texts, they might have discovered that Althusser, during his solitary journey lasting almost a decade, explored the same philosophical terrain that each of them, in their own way, has traversed since then.⁵ There was, accordingly, continuity that stretched into the future and that challenged the thesis of a *sui generis* philosophy with no ties to the past and no anticipatory projection, a closed philosophy, if you will, of the "last Althusser."⁶ My initial object of study, as the saying goes, thus "melted into air." This is not the entire story, however, and to clarify this point, please permit me a detour. It does not give me pleasure to warn the reader that this detour will not be the last.

I AM CONSCIOUS OF the fact that, given the author under consideration and the current intellectual climate, it is inevitable to run into an obvious and pertinent objection: why return to Althusser today? Who could be in-

terested in his work?⁷ Despite the commotion and renewed interest provoked by the publication of his autobiography and some other unpublished writings, it would be dishonest not to recognize that this interest is still limited and is even considered by some, typically sociologists and political scientists, to be incomprehensibly anachronistic. There is furthermore no shortage of people who still to this day brand Althusser's work as the most thorough verification of the terminal crisis of Marxism.

But the passing of time improves vision and opens up new perspectives with which to approach and evaluate the work of a formerly celebrated author. It even makes possible the correction of certain oversights (some of which, as I will show, are a bit suspicious) and calls attention to some blind spots in the criticism that targeted Althusser's work when it was already past its prime.⁸

The first complete edition of Althusser's autobiography was published in 1992 with the title *The Future Lasts Forever*.⁹ Its author had died two years earlier after sinking into such profound oblivion that it had appeared definitive. In Argentina, the youngest generations ignored his existence and even forgot his name, while many among those who remembered him did so only to insistently advocate for the need to forget him. With the appearance of his autobiography, however, things began to change. The book stirred up old memories among those who had known him, and those who had discovered him through this work read it with interest. This commotion and interest grew as new posthumously published texts progressively came to light.

The publication of *The Future Lasts Forever* troubled many, making them feel almost remorseful. There was no shortage of individuals who declared, after decades of bitter attacks, that they had discovered an "other" Althusser. Of course, psychologists and psychoanalysts of all theoretical tendencies and geographical locations also jubilantly welcomed this *morceau de roi* with which they were unexpectedly provided. They did not hesitate in celebrating it with lavish banquets.¹⁰

Additionally, the Institut Mémoires de L'édition Contemporaines (IMEC), in coordination with the *Fondation Althusser*, took on the task of methodically publishing the vast collection of unpublished manuscripts that Althusser had produced between 1947 and 1986 and that the *Fondation* had entrusted to IMEC. This effort is still currently underway.

Knowledge of these unpublished texts, many of them recently released or soon to be released, provoked, among other things, the emergence of a renewed interest in Althusser's classic works. Since the 1990s, a consider-

able number of monographs and essays have appeared that analyze from different angles the relationship between the classic works and those of the last Althusser. Not all of them have been celebratory, of course, but none of them have been devastating critiques. Time has tempered certain passions and dissolved the partisan fervor of certain polemics. Althusser has accordingly been slowly and unevenly reintroduced into contemporary philosophical and political debates, a process that, at least for the moment, is still taking place.

This account may help clarify the insurmountable difficulties experienced while attempting to delimit the object of study and confine it to the last Althusser. Yet, as I previously mentioned, this was not the entire story. I quickly discovered in fact that there was something personal underlying my reasons for writing about Althusser, something that incited me to expand my object of study and opt for an interpretation of the whole. It happens to be the case that I was myself an Althusserian enthusiast starting in the early 1960s and, as was required, occasionally also a critic of some of Althusser's theoretical positions. In all honesty, I did not yet realize that those two characteristics were the trademark of all good Althusserians (it was not accidental that our principal referent was, after Althusser himself, the young philosopher Alain Badiou, who more than satisfied both criteria).

Since the mid-1970s, Althusser "had fallen out of favor [*cayó en desuso*]," to apply Salvador Giner's formulation.¹¹ I accepted this situation, which coincided with what had generally been referred to as the "crisis of Marxism," neither happily nor with surprise. In October of 1980, I thought, along with the grand majority, that beyond the famous psychopathological or criminal story appearing in the media, no one would continue to care about the work of Althusser, not even to subject it to the most ferocious of critiques. I was prey, although less so than others, to what Oscar Terán called "the moment of aversion to Marxism," which affected so many intellectuals of the Left during the early 1980s.¹² It was an intense, although transient, collective passion. Not long thereafter, someone took up the gauntlet, and that someone was in fact Althusser himself with the release of his unpublished texts. Reading those "unforeseen" texts revived interest in his work. The storm had already passed by then, and the time that had elapsed permitted me to see things more objectively and with better judgment than I did in the 1980s.

Without a doubt, this revival of interest in Althusser's philosophy was and is partial. This is in part because Althusser was the last Marxist thinker

who, as he himself would have said, “usurped” the heaven of philosophical and theoretico-political ideas during the 1960s. Even worse, he was a philosopher who presented his opinions with a seductive and, at the same time, deliberately lofty turn of phrase. He was an intellectual tailor-made for the iconoclasts of Marxist symbols that we all aspired to be—and were—during those years. Apprehension toward his work partly endured, along with a resistance to revisiting it.

For that reason, even though Althusser has become interesting again—and not only because of the tragedy of his personal life—this new interest is not the same as before. It is more philosophical than political, more theoretical, let’s say, than militant. The anachronism that still affects Althusser’s thought could no doubt be partially transmitted to this book. If so, I will have simply added more untimeliness to the untimeliness that, for many people, definitively stigmatizes the work of Althusser.

In this way, I quickly discovered the appeal of reviewing the global itinerary of Althusser’s thought. Above all, it would permit me, or rather oblige me, to review and perhaps take stock of my own theoretical itinerary. While satisfying, this conclusion also comes with a proviso that I have tried with great effort to respect—namely, that of inhibiting my personal background from surreptitiously occupying center stage, even if only intermittently or unobtrusively. In chapter 1, I felt obligated to refer to the intellectual climate of the moment and to how students and young leftists, myself included, were affected by Althusser while at the same time contributing to his own formation.¹³ But there is nothing further from my intent than to force upon the unknowing reader a covert autobiography.

The preceding observation clarifies the specific and singular objective of this text. My aim, simply put, is to give an account of Althusser’s philosophical itinerary and especially of the conceptual and political tensions and conflicts that unsettled, like a kind of silent but constant turbulence, the unfolding of his entire oeuvre. These tensions and conflicts—at least this is my hypothesis—tended to partially dissipate and lead to a way out in the texts produced during the last years of Althusser’s life, but not without the price of injurious revisions. To provide an emblematic date, I am referring to the texts published by Althusser or posthumously disseminated by others after *Positions* (1976).¹⁴ It should be noted, of course, that *The Future Lasts Forever* (1992) and the volume titled *Lettres à Franca* (1998) shall not be excluded from the inventory of works considered.

But it should also be clear that my focus is *not* on the life or the narration

of the life of Althusser the individual. It is even less my goal to “explicate” his writings and his philosophical itinerary through the interpretation of the avatars of his personal life. The Lacanian psychoanalyst Gérard Pommier, among others, has already attempted this, and it has resulted in an obvious failure, not counting the interest awakened by the intrigues of private life and the tragedy of others.¹⁵ While a modest inventory of reconstructed memories and of the alleged trickery that the “play of the Signifier” inflicted on the “victim” may perhaps maintain appearances,¹⁶ it contributes nothing to psychoanalysis or to our knowledge of an author’s work.¹⁷ My objective is of an exclusively theoretical and philosophico-political nature. Occasionally, and for reasons that the reader will have to understand, this study will adopt the form of a story, but I have sought to abstain entirely from meddling with Althusser’s personal history.¹⁸

It is well known that Althusser addressed the issue of reading and discussed it with striking insistence, even to the point of engaging in polemics with himself on the matter. He expressed one of his recurring concerns with the similarly recurring formulation: *to see clearly in Marx*.¹⁹ Yet to see clearly in Marx required having available the basic elements for a theory of reading. Althusser forged these basic elements out of an acute critique of standpoints that conceive of knowledge as a form of vision. Clearly tracing a line of continuity with the theory of analytic listening, Althusser proposed his own theory of “symptomatic” reading. Although inspired by Freud and Lacan, this theory had as its immediate referent an essay written by Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire titled “The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study.”²⁰ Althusser understood this kind of reading to be comparable to what psychoanalysts call, in reference to analytic listening, the principle of “free-floating attention,” which is to say the guideline that recommends remaining alert and attentive to lacunas, questions without answers, answers without questions, turns of phrase and the twisting of words, repetitions, metaphors, and in general the rhetoric of a determinate discourse *at every level*.²¹ This guideline also advises paying special attention to what is forgotten, to contradictions, to slips, and to open-ended conclusions in the text being read. The analogy with analytic listening does of course have its limits. From this point of view, a text is always (im)patient, it slowly but surely reveals its certainties and doubts, and, as Plato once said, it does not respond to the questions that are posed to it but rather continually insists on its positions, ignoring its own silences and disregarding the queries of the reader.

Today I think that the outline of this symptomatic theory constituted a

necessary but insufficient step toward a form of reading that does not want to lose itself in the quagmire of commentary or justification. Althusser's own practice tried to be faithful to the symptomatic theory, but, despite achieving some noticeable results,²² his fidelity was merely sporadic, and had he truly adhered to it, he would have encountered certain limits that would have impeded the free unfolding of his own thought. For this reason, the imagination, intuitions, and above all *ex ante* conclusions prevailed in the Althusserian reading of Marx (as in the reading of other authors). With his pen, Althusser converted the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin into an infinitely moldable material, malleable to his previously held theoretical convictions, to his shifts in philosophical direction, and, on occasion, to his righteous indignation (something that—far from opposing—I am inclined to celebrate).²³

Accordingly, what I am interested in analyzing here—and I insist on this point—is the path of Althusserian thought and not the path of his readings or of the “lessons” that Althusser believed he could extract from these readings. This is nevertheless where I run into problems, specifically the problems of *my* reading.

If, as noted earlier, my intention is to explore and discuss the trajectory of Althusser's thought as a whole (and not only that of the “posthumous” Althusser), this is because in the very course of my investigation I glimpsed, despite appearances, how Althusser's thought does not lend itself to being divided into clearly demarcated stages. On this issue, I am contradicting the widely held opinion that such stages do in fact exist. It has thus been said that there was initially a “classic” Althusser, the Althusser of the 1960s, who was habitually and not arbitrarily associated with the structuralist tendency. Later on, there would be the intermediate period during which Althusser would deploy in multiple ways what he called his “self-critique.” This self-critique focused on two points: (a) forgetting about the class struggle in his classic writings and (b) his theoreticism (linked in diverse ways to the prior issue). Toward the late 1970s, an unknown and somewhat unpredictable Althusser began to emerge, an Althusser who at first only gained expression through allusions, ironies, and criticisms—such as, for example, by adopting an attitude increasingly less complaisant toward Marx (as well as toward Engels and Lenin). A bit later, this Althusser became plainly visible in his last philosophical works, those published after his death, on “aleatory materialism” or “materialism of the encounter.”

I will nonetheless try to demonstrate during the course of this book that

these chronological demarcations, despite offering valid and useful points of reference, are ultimately inadequate. The way in which Althusser's thought and writing evolves, oftentimes despite the author himself, is more complicated, more "twisted" [*retorcido*], to use an unscholarly word. In Althusser's work, there are changes in position, core thematic ideas that appear and disappear without explanation, and a burdensome doubleness [*duplicidad*] in the economy of his thought, a doubleness located at the center of his work's aporias but also at the center of the interest that his work arouses. I believe that the key to understanding the Althusserian itinerary as well as the eventual *actuality* of his thought can be found in this doubleness, which needs to be broken down in what follows. It can be found at least there where Althusser manages to transcend the conditioning of the historical moment in which he lived, and especially there where he manages to break out of the "long-term prisons" in which some of his own theoretical positions had enclosed him.

If this is the case, then the periodization of Althusser's thought into "stages" ignores something of fundamental importance: that *already in his first well-known writings—the book on Montesquieu, for example—there are unexpected statements, incongruent with the logic of the argument, and observations that slip by as though the author decided to let them pass unnoticed.*²⁴ It is already possible at that moment, I repeat, to detect traces, which would become more and more frequent later on, of other thought, not so much different from the thought that Althusser develops in explicit terms as incommensurable with it. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Before concluding this prologue, I would like to note that during the month of February 2005, with the intention of writing this book along with other publications already in circulation, I had the opportunity to consult Althusser's unpublished manuscripts in the library of the Ardenne Abbey (Normandy) at IMEC, where I was received and lodged with generous hospitality. I was accordingly able to access some extremely valuable sources of information. For that reason, I want to express my sincerest gratitude to Mme. Eliane Vernouillet and the Comité de Accueil of the abbey for their hospitality, and to IMEC's director, M. José Ruiz-Funes, for his helpful cooperation. Without this disinterested collaboration, without the mild calm of the mountains and of the afternoons in Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe, where the Ardenne Abbey is located (and where the cruel devastation of the Nazi bombers of 1944 can still be felt), without the amicable silence of the library, it would have been very difficult for me to write this manuscript.

I would also like to express my profound gratitude to María Elena Qués and Carlos Altamirano, who read this text and who made suggestions that were softened by well-chosen compliments to facilitate my acceptance of said suggestions, constantly encouraging me, insisting that the work was worth publishing.

I would of course also like to recognize the decisive intellectual and affective support of my wife, Claudia Hilb, the best possible reader, a critic so intelligent that even her objections felt like praise, a generous collaborator in resolving the technical problems that my inexperience multiplied. I also want to recognize the support of my son, Miguel, who has given me the breath of his music, and of my daughter, Julia, happy that she could finally be the one to tell me with loving seriousness that it was time to finish my “homework.” But I feel thankful above all for something much simpler and easier to say: because they are here, by my side.

Emilio de Ípola
Buenos Aires, fall 2007

FOREWORD

1. The book first appeared in Argentina with the publishing house Siglo XXI, which has made a major contribution to the intellectual life of the Hispanophone world over the past half century.

2. *Translator's note:* This foreword originally appeared as the preface to the French translation of de Ípola's *Althusser, el infinito adiós*; see Emilio de Ípola, *Althusser, l'adieu infini*, trans. Marie Bardet (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), vii–xxi. In his preface to that edition, Balibar adds, “I am pleased, therefore, that the Presses Universitaires de France has decided to take on the publication of this text in France, in a collection that I had the honor of directing for many years with Dominique Lecourt.”

3. *Translator's note:* The IMEC (Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine) archive in France houses Althusser's papers.

4. *Translator's note:* See Régis Debray, *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*, trans. Bobbye Ortiz (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

5. De Ípola will, very rightly, accord a fundamental significance to the title and content of an essay published by Alain Badiou in 1967 when he “rallied” to Althusser's project, exhibited in *For Marx*: “The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism,” granting this idea not simple punctual sense, but that of an infinite process; see Badiou, “Le (Re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique,” *Critique* 240 (1967): 438–67; trans. Bruno Bosteels as “The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism,” in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (London: Verso, 2012), 133–70.

6. Jean-François Lyotard published an essay in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1969 with the title, “Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud [Drifting away from Marx and Freud],” later published as a book in 1973; see Lyotard, *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (Paris:

Editions Galilée, 1994); translated as *Driftworks*, ed. Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotext(e), 1984).

7. In his book, de Ípola attributes the development of the most dogmatic forms of Althusserianism in Latin America to Marta Harnecker's book *Los conceptos elementales del materialismo histórico* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971), in particular, which sold over a million copies (the French translation was published in Brussels in 1974). It also bears mentioning that Althusser himself wrote a preface for the second edition of this book, which can also be found in the collection of essays by Althusser titled *Positions* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1976). Marta Harnecker was Althusser's student in Paris. After returning to Chile she directed the newspaper *Chile Hoy* during the Popular Unity period; she managed to escape arrest during the Pinochet coup d'état and ultimately found refuge in Cuba. She recently served as an advisor to the late President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

8. It would be more accurate to say that the group chose Althusser as its guide and asked him to organize its collective research. See the interviews with Yves Duroux and myself with the English editors of the site dedicated to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*: <http://cahiers.kingston.ac.uk/interviews/balibar-duroux.html>. [Translator's note: These interviews have been published in English in *Concept and Form*, ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, vol. 2, *Interviews and Essays on the "Cahiers pour l'Analyse"* (London: Verso, 2012).]

9. See the letter from Althusser to Emmanuel Terray on Lévi-Strauss, which de Ípola quotes and comments on in chapter 2.

10. See the collective volume edited by Patrice Maniglier, *Le Moment philosophique des années 1960 en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), in which the references to Althusser come from all directions and play a very important role.

11. See Jean-Claude Milner, *Le périple structural* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 2008).

12. To describe the insistent presence of an esoteric thought below the exoteric, de Ípola draws on the metaphor of the underground current that Althusser used to characterize materialism itself. Given that this Straussian hermeneutic is linked to the hypothesis of a writing that takes place under conditions of persecution (Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988]), it is impossible not to wonder what persecution he has in mind when it comes to Althusser. It cannot really be the university, which provided Althusser with a relatively protected space. It could be the party, though one should not conflate different periods and places, nor should one forget that Althusser also aimed to persecute the persecutors (see Althusser's memoir, *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, trans. Richard Veasey [New York: New Press, 1993]). More fundamentally, it is Althusser himself—or his internal double—that points our investigation toward the figure of a philosopher *in permanent conflict with himself*, even more so than other philosophers who might come to mind (Pascal or Nietzsche).

13. Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), orthodox theorist of the German Social Democratic Party, hailed by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done* in 1902, and by Althusser in the preface to *For Marx*, for his theory regarding the “importation of Marxist theory into the labor movement” as the condition for passing from “spontaneous” political struggle to

“organized” struggle, considered perhaps to be the inventor of what I am here calling “pedagogism within Marxism.”

14. Spinoza: “Curavi, humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere” (*Tractatus politicus* I, §4). [Translator’s note: “I have taken great care not to deride, bewail, or execrate human actions, but to understand them”; Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 35.]

15. A baton powerfully taken up by Judith Butler in *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

16. He also juxtaposed these theories, without really articulating them, in the montage of excerpts that resulted in the essay from 1970. In an essay since published in French, as the preface to the new edition of the posthumous work *Sur la reproduction* (Althusser, *Sur la reproduction* [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011]), I called attention to the opening effect produced by the caesura of the ellipses that originally figured in Althusser’s essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” which recent editors have unfortunately persisted in removing.

17. This calls to mind Marx’s theory from the 1857 “Introduction,” in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: capitalism brings about abstract labor, which is virtually present in every mode of production, and which is in fact a *form of organization* of concrete labor itself. [Translator’s note: See “Introduction: Production, Consumption, Distribution, Exchange (Circulation),” in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*, vol. 28, *Marx: 1857–1861* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 17–48.]

18. In his 1978 conversation with the Italian Communists of *Il Manifesto*, Althusser argued that the Communist Party (as he understood it) is a “party outside the State [*parti hors État*]”—a theory I then considered indefensible with respect to “ideological state apparatuses” in general. In the same vein, it should of course be asked whether communism can be “outside of ideology” from his own viewpoint. Together, these two questions lead us to ask whether the State, in an inevitable and uniform way, is what comes in the *place* of the imaginary, the place from which individuals receive their (auto)interpellation—in other words, whether there exist “ideological apparatuses” other than those of the State.

19. Translator’s note: On the “labyrinth of freedom,” see G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom on Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985), 53.

20. Following my former student Kazuya Onaka (in “Pratique et temps: Louis Althusser et les ‘courants souterrains du matérialisme,’” his 2003 PhD dissertation at the University of Paris X, Nanterre), I have called attention to the disconcerting proximity between Althusser’s adoption of the phrase “aleatory materialism of the encounter” and Derrida’s invention in 1979 of the phrase “contingent [*aléatoire*] experience of the encounter”; see Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Ronell, in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 244). [Translator’s note: On this proximity, see also Balibar, “Eschatology versus Teleology: The Suspended Dialogue between Derrida and Althusser,” in *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Suzanne Guerlac (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 57–73.] Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc also rightly brought to my attention the fact that, as

early as 1972, Deleuze and Guattari used the phrase “history is the history of contingencies and encounters”; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 195. The reception of Deleuze is a black hole for the Althusserians and a terra incognita for the interpretation of Althusser.

21. The material referent for Francisco Naishtat’s analyses to which de Ípola refers is the *piqueteros* movement in Argentina in the 1990s, which resisted the International Monetary Fund’s orders to reduce public debt. [Translator’s note: For Badiou’s “subjectivity without a subject,” see Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2006), 58–67.]

22. *Translator’s note*: See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110. On the phrase cited from this work, see Étienne Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

23. See my introduction [titled “Une rencontre en Romagne”] to the pocket edition of Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli et nous* (Paris: Tallendier, 2009).

24. A surprising encounter took place between Althusser and his rival E. P. Thompson around the oxymoronic phrase “class struggle without class”; see Thompson, “Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?,” *Social History* 3, no. 2 (1978): 133–65.

PROLOGUE

Epigraph: Louis Althusser, *Lettres à Franca (1961–1973)*, ed. François Matheron and Yann Moulier Boutang (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1998), 685.

1. After Althusser’s death, the foundation that bears his name took charge, with the permission of Althusser’s inheritor, of the classification, organization, and posthumous publication of a large quantity of unpublished manuscripts. This rich material (which spans a period of forty years, approximately 1946–86) includes various essays and studies of great significance.

2. By “classic,” I mean the works of Althusser and his disciples that were published during the mid-1960s (essentially *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*). These works made their authors famous and gave rise to “Althusserianism” as a theoretical figure and ideologico-political wager.

3. To all this, we would have to add the deft rhetorical tricks that Althusserian prose frequently adopted—unbeatable at this art—to mitigate the excessively heterodox (or orthodox) nature of this or that statement. Of course, those cunning schemes contributed even further to thwarting my attempts to restrict the scope of my object of analysis.

4. Recall that Rancière later definitively distanced himself both theoretically and politically from Althusserianism. I believe nonetheless that in all of his anti-Althusserian essays the indelible mark of his mentor remains. Rancière had to try to forget about Althusser so as to erase the latter’s imprint on him. But his effort failed.

5. Alain Badiou recognizes this kind of parallel and convergent thinking in an interview with Bruno Bosteels: Badiou and Bosteels, “Posmaoísmo: Un diálogo con Alain Badiou,” *Acontecimiento: Revista para pensar la política* 24–25 (2003): 63. [Translator’s note: The English version of this text, with the title “Can Change Be Thought,” is included as an appendix in Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 289–317.]

6. In any case, this study will remain focused on Althusser’s work. I will of course refer, particularly in the conclusion, to the production of “post-Althusserianism,” but I will not offer a detailed or systematic analysis of that ongoing project.

7. A respected Catalan sociologist, Salvador Giner, thus asks himself in the mid-1980s with undisguised contempt, “Who reads Althusser these days?” In reality, Giner did nothing more than say out loud what many, myself included, were thinking at that time; see Giner, “Intenciones humanas, estructuras sociales: Para una lógica situacional,” in *Acción humana*, ed. Manuel Cruz (Barcelona: Ariel, 1997), 93n86.

8. The most spectacular example of the anti-Marxist vision that flourished in the mid-1970s can be found among the so-called New Philosophers.

9. Translator’s note: Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, trans. Richard Veasey (New York: New Press, 1993). Published originally as Althusser, *L’avenir dure longtemps, suivi de Les Faits. Autobiographies*, ed. Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1992).

10. Lavish but also forgettable. See my discussion of Gérard Pommier’s book below.

11. See Giner, “Intenciones humanas, estructuras sociales.”

12. Oscar Terán, *De utopías, catástrofes y esperanzas: Un camino intelectual* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2006), 22. Althusser was both the victim and the victimizer of this moment of hatred toward Marx as well as toward himself *qua* Marxist. See, for example, Althusser, “On Marxist Thought,” trans. Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, *Viewpoint Magazine*, September 12, 2012, <https://viewpointmag.com/2012/09/12/on-marxist-thought/>. See also the repeated mea culpas deployed in Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, trans. Richard Veasey (New York: New Press, 1993).

13. Likewise, in the conclusion, I allow myself to refer a few times to my personal experience after completing the theoretical analysis.

14. Translator’s note: See Althusser, *Positions* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1976).

15. See Pommier, *Louis du néant: La mélancolie d’Althusser* (Paris: Aubier, 1998).

This argument does not apply to León Rozitchner’s moving essay entitled “La tragedia del althusserianismo teórico.” Rozitchner offers an honest and valiant reading of *The Future Lasts Forever* and masterfully reconstructs with compassion the tragedy of Althusser, whose explicit philosophy Rozitchner rejects point by point for reasons that he explains at the outset. Rozitchner undoubtedly discovers a link between philosophy and tragedy in what I would hastily refer to as “the question of the subject.” But that question does not function as an explanatory factor for either philosophy or for tragedy; it is, rather, the conflictual nucleus that both disavow, a conflictual nucleus that, according to Rozitchner, is terribly effective; see Rozitchner, “La tragedia del althusserianismo teórico,” *El Ojo Mocho* 17 (2003): 43–50.

16. I am of course referring to the victim of these analyses.

17. If I must take Althusser's autobiography into account, it is because it contains philosophical reflections. This text in particular presents aspects of Althusser's early philosophy and thought with more clarity than other previously unpublished works and deserves our attention.

18. This is true except for in very few cases when it was necessary to refer to Althusser's personal history to clarify some chronological information in relation to this or that aspect of his work.

19. This preoccupation dates back to the first writings of his youth and can even be detected in an almost Stalinist letter he wrote to Jean Lacroix, a letter whose contents would be unimaginable for anyone only familiar with the mature Althusser; see Althusser, "Letter to Jean Lacroix (1949–1950)," in *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), 207–44.

20. Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, "The Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Study," trans. Patrick Coleman, *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 118–75. Althusser cited the work of Laplanche and Leclaire rather often (above all in his courses and his unpublished texts); see Althusser, *Écrits sur la psychanalyse*, ed. Olivier Corpet and François Mathéron (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1993). [Translator's note: Most of the texts collected in this volume are available in English translation in Althusser, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).]

21. In other words, one must consider not only the semantic level but also the grammatical, phonological, and morphological levels, as well as the logic of the argument and the extra-discursive situations in which that argument is transmitted. It is, accordingly, important to consider not only what is stated but also the conditions of the statement.

22. The clearest example of this is the analysis of the "oversights" of classical political economy that Marx revealed at the beginning of *Capital*. Classical political economy is incapable of seeing that it has produced an adequate answer to a question that has never been formulated; see, for example, Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy," in *Reading Capital*, by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2009), 19.

23. See in particular the already mentioned essay "On Marxist Thought" (1982), which remained unpublished until it appeared in 1993. [Translator's note: See Althusser, "Sur la pensée marxiste," *Futur antérieur, Sur Althusser: Passages* (1993): 11–29.]

24. Translator's note: See Althusser, *Montesquieu, la politique et l'histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959).

ONE. THE PAST, THAT STRANGE LAND

Epigraph: L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002), 17.

Louis Pierre Althusser (UK: /ˈɒltʃɪːs/, US: /ˈɒltʃɪːs/; French: [altysɛˈɛ̃]; 16 October 1918 – 22 October 1990) was a French Marxist philosopher. He was born in Algeria and studied at the École normale supérieure in Paris, where he eventually became Professor of Philosophy. Althusser was a longtime member—although sometimes a strong critic—of the French Communist Party (Parti communiste français, PCF). His arguments and theses were set against the threats that he saw attacking the theoretical Louis Althusser >Aligned with the French Communist Party [1], philosopher Louis Althusser >(1918-1990) strove to explain contemporary developments by reinterpreting >the doctrines of Karl Marx [2] and Friedrich Engels [3].[^] Althusser, Louis 1918-1990. BIBLIOGRAPHY. Born in Algeria, the troubled and reclusive French philosopher Louis Althusser revolutionized Marxist philosophy with his radical