

Insistir en Althusser. Entrevista a Warren Montag.

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ENTREVISTA

— Profesor Montag: varias veces Althusser despliega sus razones sobre la fecundidad de un “rodeo” por Spinoza para precisar la filosofía que conviene a la teoría marxista. ¿Cuáles serían las razones de la tradición spinozista para producir un “rodeo” por Althusser? ¿Qué puede aportar Althusser al estado actual del debate en este campo?

— Althusser develops the idea that his use of, and even reference to, Spinoza should be considered both a kind of retreat (recul) as well as a detour in Elements of Self-Criticism, a relatively late text (1974), written in fact around the time he was working

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on Machiavelli, on the first versión of Machiavelli and Us. The formulations of “retreat” and “detour” seem so familiar to us and so typically Althusserian that we don’t question them. In his self-criticism (another concept whose function in Althusser is far from clear), he offers an analogy to explain his recourse to Spinoza: Marx, especially in the 1850s and 1860s had to return to Hegel “to rid himself of Hegel,” to separate himself from Hegel, as if unanalyzed residues of Hegel persisted in his thought and had to be confronted. This is clearly not comparable to Althusser’s relation to Spinoza: he certainly did not seek to rid himself of Spinoza or separate himself from Spinoza, above all because there existed no adequate reading of Spinoza’s work in which he might seek refuge or, in contrast, from which he would have to extricate himself. Althusser produced no substantial text on Spinoza, nothing comparable to his work on Montesquieu or Rousseau, and there is little evidence of a comprehensive interpretation of Spinoza comparable to something like Negri’s Savage Anomaly on his part. In fact, we might well reverse his proposition and say that he was only able to grasp Spinoza by means of detours through Marx and—this is very important—Freud. Althusser offers us not so much interpretations of Spinoza’s texts (although archival materials show that he read them closely and repeatedly) as illuminations of the points of heresy in Spinoza’s thought, illuminations nearly always immanent in a discussion of someone other than Spinoza.

Obviously, the question of causality brought Althusser to Spinoza: he was fascinated with the very notion of an immanent cause, the cause that cannot exist prior to or outside of its effects (in the plural). Ipola has insisted on the importance of the debates and discussions around the ideas of structural causality, metonymic causality, the absent cause, etc. from the mid-sixties. The notion of base and superstructure as it existed in Marxism drew on the same notions of causality as the substance-attributes relation that Spinoza so thoroughly reconceptualized in the idea of God (or substance consisting of infinite attributes) who cannot exist prior to his decrees. Althusser saw this, but quasi per nebulam (to use Spinoza’s phrase from Ethics II, P7 Sch.) and it was only Macherey who would rigorously analyze this theme in Spinoza’s texts in Hegel or Spinoza in 1979.

But there is another, often overlooked, discussion of Spinoza in Psychanalyse et sciences humaines: deux conférences, the transcription of Althusser's presentations to his seminar on psychoanalysis in 1963-64. This is an extraordinary text in which Althusser contrasts the idea of the moral subject in Descartes and Spinoza. He identifies in Spinoza's rejection of Descartes' model of the sovereign individual subject (in the Passions of the Soul) the emergence of the notion of a subject of imputation, the subject to whom free-will is retroactively imputed and who is therefore declared responsible for "his" actions. This is of course the génesis of the notion of the interpellated subject.

These in my view are among the most important aspects of Spinoza's philosophy for Althusser and they remain to be explored more fully.

— En un breve texto incluido en *Elementos de autocrítica* y dedicado a la gravitación de la filosofía de Spinoza en su obra, Louis Althusser señala que para hacer pensable la dialéctica materialista, más allá de Hegel, era necesario efectuar un "rodeo" por Spinoza. Éste servía de orientación en la búsqueda de una causalidad no "eminente", ni "expresiva" y un "Todo sin clausuras". Ahora bien, también admite: "Seguramente un marxista no puede llevar a cabo el rodeo por Spinoza sin arrepentirse. Pues la aventura es peligrosa y hágase lo que se haga siempre le faltará a Spinoza lo que Hegel dio a Marx: la contradicción."

¿Realmente falta la contradicción en Spinoza? ¿La contradicción que "falta" en Spinoza puede buscarse en...Spinoza también? ¿No podrían acaso pensarse los esfuerzos de los principales referentes de la lectura althusseriana de Spinoza (Macherey, Balibar) justamente en relación con la búsqueda de alguna forma nueva y no hegeliana de contradicción?

— This is an excellent and in fact decisive question: is it really the case that there is no concept of contradiction in Spinoza? Of course, the very notion of contradiction as Althusser uses it here is derived from Hegel, and Hegel's philosophy (I'm thinking primarily of the Phenomenology of Spirit and the Science of Logic) can be understood as an enormous defense against the danger of Spinozism, understood as the subversión of every notion of finality, and therefore of the rationality and intelligibility of Spirit

itself. Finality requires of every moment in the realization of Absolute Spirit that it produce its own other, that which will dismember and negate it in order to guarantee the movement simultaneously backwards and forwards of Spirit's return to itself. Nothing could be further from Spinoza than such a scheme, for whom there can be no internal principle of negativity in singular things in the service of an external finality. Every element here is not only foreign but resolutely opposed to Spinoza's project

In order to take your question seriously, therefore, we would have to change terrain entirely, set Hegel aside (but only for the moment) and turn to precisely that thinker in whom Althusser and Spinoza once again draw near each other: Lucretius. While Spinoza mentioned Lucretius by name only once and even then only in his correspondence, the appendices to Ethics II, P 13 in fact offer a Lucretian account of the composition and decomposition of singular things, the encounters that produce a "conjunction," and those that disjoin and thus destroy. From this theory of the encounter, a singular thing like a society or a "mode of production" does not automatically, logically, inevitably, produce the means of its own destruction (as in the "classical" notion of historical contradiction) and nothing guarantees its end which in turn would guarantee the progress of history (towards its end). Spinoza argued that the destruction of a thing necessarily arrives from the outside, from an encounter with a more powerful thing whose nature is incompatible with its own. Does this not rule out the very notion of an internal antagonism and even an instability proper to the thing itself, even if this antagonism serves no finality and therefore does not correspond to a "labor of the negative" in Hegel's sense? The answer is complicated: we should think of Spinoza as moving pre-emptively against the possibility of Hegelian contradiction. In Spinoza the boundary between the interior and exterior, like that between one thing and another can only be provisional. The fact that everything forms a part of something greater ad infinitum (and here he differs from Lucretius in that there is no equivalent to the atom means that the presence, if not the threat, of the external is so constant as to obliterate or at least constantly redefine the distinction between inner and outer, opening onto the possibility of contradictions or that are not logical but historical. Macherey wrote a letter to Althusser in 1965 in which he argued that they should drop the term

contradiction altogether in favor of antagonism or conflict in order to prevent readers from continuing to project Hegel even on to the idea of the overdetermined contradiction read Hegel his (which obviously would have to be developed). It may be possible, however, to find in Spinoza a kind of contradiction immunized against finalism: something resembling what Althusser called in “Contradiction and Overdetermination” a “ruptural fusión,” an encounter that “takes,” but also produces divergence and decomposition in what conjoins. We might think of Spinoza as “bending the stick” away from teleology and providence, while at the same time avoiding an immobilism, through his own theory of the encounter.

– En relación con lo anterior y en el marco de su denominada “autocrítica”, Althusser dice en el mismo texto que la ausencia de la contradicción que atribuye justamente a la gravitación de Spinoza en su pensamiento, tuvo como efecto, la desatención de la lucha de clases en la ideología. ¿Podría revisarse esta afirmación? ¿Puede pensarse la relación entre ideología y política en la problemática althusseriana, a la luz de Spinoza?

– In his “notes de lecture” on Spinoza (which number in the hundreds of pages), Althusser declared “trés remarquable” the discussion of the body in the first part of Ethics III. Not only does Spinoza argue (Ethics III, P2, Sch.) that the mind does not determine the body to act, an argument that nullifies a century of Marxist arguments about “false consciousness,” “reification” and in general what was understood by the term “ideology,” (i.e., false ideas) but he wrote (Ethics III, P11) that whatever increases or diminishes the power of the body to act increases or diminishes the power of the mind to think . These are in fact the guiding principles of Althusser’s work on ideology in all its unevenness and conflictuality, culminating in “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses.” The fundamental break that Althusser introduces into Marxist thought concerning ideology is that it is the body that is at stake in regimes of subjection and that it is the body rather than the mind that is the target of practices of subjugation. Once we admit that ideas always exist in material forms and that ideology, far from existing as disembodied thought that misrepresents reality, exists only in

apparatuses, practices and rituals, as Althusser, through Spinoza, came to understand, ideology can no longer be understood as error or illusion which could be corrected or dispelled by science, knowledge, truth etc. Once we understand that “the imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence,” is fully material and inscribed in legal and disciplinary practices, the struggle against the imposition of that “imaginary relation,” like the struggle against subjection itself becomes a matter of physical *forcé*, of bodies. We can think critically only to the extent that we disturb and disrupt the physical regime of subjection: mass struggle does not arise from correct theory: it is the condition of possibility of such theory. It is not a matter of coincidence that Althusser could see what is perhaps the central element of Spinoza’s “immense theoretical revolution,” as well of of his heresy, and not just see it, but make use of it for his own theoretical/political purposes, only in the light of the mass movement of 1968 (the ISAs essay was written immediately following the May events), whose power made visible and thinkable something previously condemned to the ‘inner darkness of exclusion.’”

— En su artículo “El Althusser Tardío: ¿Materialismo del Encuentro o Filosofía de la Nada?” publicado en *Decalages* 1, vol 1, 2010, usted afirma que la interpretación “paralelista” de la prop VII , Parte II, de la *Ética* resulta contraria a toda la obra de Althusser, tal como resultaría evidenciado en la noción de “práctica teórica” y en la afirmación de la materialidad de la ideas o la definición de la conciencia como acción, presentes en su teoría de la ideología.

¿Puede inscribirse en esta línea interpretativa y como su consecuencia, la reformulación althusseriana de la tesis marxista de la “primacía de lo real sobre su pensamiento” por la tesis de la “primacía de la práctica”?

Si así fuera, ¿cómo entender la afirmación realizada por Althusser en la entrevista concedida a Fernanda Navarro, en la que sostiene que la Filosofía tiene un exterior inesperado que es la “práctica”? ¿Cómo entender la afirmación de la “práctica” como “exterior” a la filosofía sin recaer en alguna forma de dualismo?

– The confusión engendered by such phrases as “the primacy of the real over thought,” and even “the primacy of practice,” both of which are taken from Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-Criticism and thus have a kind of liturgical function in Althusser, can be attributed to a single word, “primacy.” Althusser was very fond of this word for the very reason that it allowed him to gesture in a certain direction while avoiding a host of difficult and politically/theoretically embarrassing questions for which in all probability he did not (yet) have an answer. The postulation of “the primacy of the real over thought,” could be read in very different ways: 1) thought is dependent upon the real in the sense that its truth or “reality” is outside of it and that it is therefore not real or determinant in itself; this is simply an inversión of the dualism that separates spirit from matter in order to preserve the purity of the former from contamination by the latter. From Althusser’s perspective, this is just another variant of idealism in that it refuses the materiality of thought and converts it into a secondary, less real versión of reality; 2) that thought is (part of the) real and has no separate existence from what is not thought, that is, matter, a formulation that blocks both the Kantian “bracketing” of the real as that which by definition we can never know in itself and at the same time the naive certainty of an empiricism sure of the correspondence of subject and object. You will undoubtedly catch the reference to Hegel who very close to Spinoza on these questions.

Does this invalidate the idea (and we have to watch our terms very carefully here) that theory or philosophy is outside of if not opposed to practice. In one of his greatest texts, “Lenin and Philosophy,” a text that hasn’t received the attention it deserves (but maybe its time hasn’t come yet), Althusser makes the following argument: philosophy does not think about what is external to it, and even less does it act upon the world, a world understood as outside of and beyond it. Instead, philosophy thinks about itself; it intervenes in itself, in philosophy, by “drawing lines of demarcation,” that is, not simply making distinctions, but by making philosophical difference, conflict, the conflict by which philosophy lives and moves and has its being, visible. Doesn’t this condemn philosophy to a purely academic existence in every sense of the word, that is, to irrelevance? For Althusser, philosophy produces effects “outside of itself,” political and perhaps epistemological effects, by intervening within itself, as if philosophy had no existence apart the world of apparatuses, practices and rituals by was immanent within it, dispersed in its very existence into the infinity of singlar things as if it were the action of God or nature thinking itself.

– Más allá de la operación crítica propia de la posición antihumanista (o quizás como efecto de ella) ¿es posible encontrar los rudimentos de una definición positiva (y no subjetivista) de “individuo” en la problemática althusseriana, por ejemplo, vinculada con las nociones de *encuentro* y de *caso*? ¿puede ubicarse en ese problema la gravitación de Spinoza?

– I touched on this earlier in my reference to Ethics II, P 13 in which I argued that Spinoza is a thinker of the encounter. In addition to the idea of encounter, though, and necessary to it in fact, is the idea of conjunction, the notion that while in many cases, bodies (or atoms in the case of Lucretius) collide and then repel each other, in some cases, some bodies conjoin to form a new body, an individual to be precise, and said after and by that fact alone to agree (the verb “conveno”) with each other. Spinoza uses the Latin verbs “coniunctio” and “concurro” to capture the idea of individual as conjuncture. In Ethics II, Definition 7 an individual is no more than several individuals “concurring,” that is, meeting in an encounter in such a way as together to be the cause of a single effect. Althusser’s passionate interest in singularity, encounter and conjunction/conjuncture can be traced back to this sentence in the Ethics.

– En su libro *Louis Althusser*, usted afirma que la publicación de su biografía, *El porvenir es largo*, abre una manera radicalmente distinta de introducirse en la obra de Althusser. ¿Por qué justamente una biografía, un modo de escritura tan atado a la construcción del Sujeto (aún una tan atípica, como la de Althusser) lo haría? ¿Por qué elige usted esta vía para reabrir el debate sobre Althusser?

– I discussed L’avenir dure longtemps only because I felt I had to, not because I think it is comparable in importance to Althusser’s philosophical work. When it appeared in French, a number of right-wing intellectuals in the US and the UK immediately seized on it as representing the authentic Althusser, the truth beneath appearances, the madman, murderer, etc. I tried to show its contradictions, the way in which claiming to speak about himself, Althusser revealed himself fundamentally to be unable to do so. It’s the story of an interpellated subject denying the fact of interpellation. Is this the same Althusser who wrote For Marx? Only in the sense that he served as an unwitting demonstration of his own theses on the subject-form. He is like the Spanish poet in the Ethics (Ethics IV, P 39 Sch., a passage that Althusser described in his notes on Spinoza as an “excellent text”), unable to make sense of the works he himself once wrote.

— También en su libro *Louis Althusser*, usted aborda el rechazo que él mostró frente al arte realista. Usted cita a Althusser en “Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract”, donde afirma que es imposible “to paint living conditions, to paint social relations, to paint the relations of production or the forms of the class struggle in a given society. But it is possible, through their objects, to “paint” visible connections that depict, by their disposition, the *determinate absence* which governs them. The structure which controls the concrete existence of men...can never be depicted by its presence, in person, positively, in relief, but only by traces and effects, negatively, by indices of absence” (Althusser, 1971, 237/ Montag, 2003, 19). Quizá sea extrapolar ideas, pero resulta muy sugerente que esa idea de la ausencia que produce efectos es el prisma con el que él leerá la importancia de la construcción del acuerdo, del “tacit consent”, en la obra de John Locke y su centralidad para la filosofía y la práctica burguesa. ¿Cómo evalúa usted la relevancia de esta idea de la presencia de la ausencia en Althusser? ¿Qué raíces teóricas y prácticas tiene su construcción?

— This passage from the text on Cremonini is truly extraordinary in a number of respects: here Althusser again calls into question Marxism’s reliance on what he called “expressive causality” or “emanative causality” in explaining the relation between economic production and the forms of social life. Not only does Althusser reject such notions, but he also rejects its inversión, a mere pluralism of equivalent factors. Instead, he proposes in very clear terms here the idea of a structural causality: a structure that, like Spinoza’s God, does not exist outside of or prior to its effects. It exists only in “traces and effects,” as the principle of their conjuncture which allows them to persist in their conjoined state. Immanence in this sense is absence, the absence, for example as Althusser notoriously remarked, of the last instance which will never arrive. But this absence itself must be absented, the void voided for there not to remain the suggestion of a distant present, a present in the form of a past that was once present. Althusser evokes here the notion of the trace, which he discovered in Derrida’s *Grammatology* at the very moment he wrote his text on Cremonini, understood as the mark of what has never been present, a cause entirely coincident with its effects. This did not prevent him in the 1980s from lapsing in the notion of an originary void or nothingness that would precede what exists as the foundation and truth of its finitude. But he himself had already provided all the means necessary to formulate a critique of such notions.

Can we say that Locke's notion of tacit consent (or Hobbes's notion of a founding covenant between all the individuals in the state of nature) expresses the idea of a structural causality, that is, of a structuring absence? I don't think so: in crude terms structural causality is the causal principle of what is, while the "tacit" agreements of Hobbes and Locke establish what should (but may not) be. They have furnished norms that divide a given population into those who keep their promises and those who do not, those who are therefore rational and those who are not, those, finally, who cannot legitimately be harmed and those who, ceasing to be human, must be destroyed. They have invented ideals against which not only individuals but whole cultures may be judged inadequate and illegitimate and have produced at least in these concepts what Spinoza called satire rather than philosophy.

– En su texto sobre la lectura althusseriana de Locke, usted afirma que Althusser quería devolverle entidad filosófica a Locke, algo que la tradición francesa le negaba, y aprovecha la ocasión de la publicación del libro de Raymond Polin, *La politique morale de John Locke*, en 1960, para escribir una reseña y subvertir la lectura habitual del filósofo empirista. Indaga usted allí en la "función del origen", como aquello que resume en una palabra "what has not to be thought in order to be able to think what one wants to think". Para citar a Althusser in extenso, en *Leer El Capital*: "The function of the concept of origin, as in original sin, is to summarize in one word what has not to be thought in order to be able to think what one wants to think". ¿Podría ahondar un poco más en esta idea? ¿Qué cumple esa "función del origen", en la propia obra de Althusser?

– What fulfilled the function of origin in Althusser's own work? Perhaps no other philosopher of the twentieth century was as concerned to analyze the philosophical function of the notion of origin than Althusser, a concern that brought him to Spinoza. He traced the ruses and disguised and disavowed presence of origins even in such contemporaries as Foucault, above all in the *History of Madness* where an originary *déraison* doubles back upon itself in the act of signification to become its opposite, reason. In his notes on Derrida's *Grammatology* he worried that the very concept of

trace that he himself appropriated might serve in Derrida's work—and after all it was borrowed from Levinas's "Trace of the Other"—as a way of preserving a certain notion of origin, even an origin "beyond being and non-being." It was the question of origin that drew him, after nearly twenty years, back to Hegel, to Hegel's critique of beginnings in the Science of Logic which hinted at a critique of ends as well.

Yet he didn't entirely escape such a notion, nor could he, if we take his positions seriously, and not simply in the work of the 1980s. He struggled with the very concept of structure as evidenced by his use of the equivocal phrase, "latent structure," in the first half of the sixties, above in the essay on "Il Piccolo Teatro." But the most egregious example is no doubt the ISAs essay itself with its functionalist account of ideology and the rise of the apparatuses.

But finally Althusser refused the consolation of origin, declaring that in philosophy there could be no empty corner of the forest, no empty space from which to enunciate one's these possessed of nothing more than their rational *forcé*. Philosophy was perpetual war without origin or end, in which every statement must confront the opposing positions pre-emptively before they lay siege. More than one critic denounced him as an irrationalist, unable to see his postulation of a reason immanent in the struggle that constitutes philosophy's very existence.

— Usted está traduciendo el artículo de Balibar: "L'invention de la conscience: Descartes, Locke, Coste et les autres". ¿Con qué elementos de la obra de Althusser (y con qué otros elementos de otras obras) se podría retomar esta crítica a la conciencia? ¿Considera usted que siendo necesaria esta crítica para una teoría materialista o más bien se debe disputar el término para otorgarle otras connotaciones, como pareciera hacer Balibar al incluso adscribir a la filosofía de Spinoza un eje en la conciencia, como hace en su artículo sobre la "transindividualidad"?

— I'm going to translate Balibar's long introduction to his own translation of Locke on consciousness, Identité et différence: L'invention de la conscience. It's an extraordinary text that simply by reading Locke to the letter reveals some of the paradoxes internal to Locke's account of the origin and function of consciousness. I see

this as part of the general Project of Balibar's recent book, Citoyen Sujet, and his interogation of the notions of subject, subjectivity and consciousness in their historicity. Balibar's general argument, and this is relevant to Locke, concerns the historical priority of subjection over subjectivation, that is, of the priority of subjection to something that occupies the place of the sovereign over being the subject of an action. It is not difficult to see even in Locke's supposed empiricism, let alone his political theory, the necessity of an original subjection to God who acts as the guarantor of knowledge and reason. Consciousness, which plays so little role in Spinoza's thought, can be seen as the correlate of subjection.

Through Balibar, we can see the indissociable link between subjection and subjectivation as the form of individualization proper to modernity, precisely what the philosopher Roberto Esposito has called immunization. Immunization separates the individual from others not only in a purely affective sense, but even more in the form of practical existence, through apparatuses, practices and rituals, if you will, that sever and prevent (immunize against) concrete relations with others that we might call horizontal. A sovereign instance to which the individual relates only vertically must exist and act to guarantee the separateness of the individual: there can no autonomous subject without subjection. We cannot fail to recognize that which these procedures and processes of interpellation/immunization arise to counter, and oppose: the uncontrolled contagion and transmission of affects, but also knowledges. This is not "intersubjectivity," a model that tends to project the priority of individuals whose interrelations are secondary. Balibar, borrowing a phrase from Simondon, declares the anteriority of the transindividual over the individual, posing as a problem to be explained historically the very existence of something like the individual subject (which is absolutely distinct from the singular).

— En su ponencia "The Law's Outside: Schmitt, Kelsen and Lawful Resistance to Law", dictada en Gran Bretaña y de próxima publicación en español en Youkali, usted afirma que la disputa central entre Kelsen y Schmitt, se dio en los términos en que Schmitt definió a Kelsen, para identificarlo con el "formalismo jurídico" (y así

anularlo). Es notorio que, como usted bien afirma, también las lecturas de izquierda quedaron prendidas de esa descripción interesada de Kelsen, tanto que se despolitizó absolutamente su figura, ligada a la socialdemocracia austríaca, que sostenía una posición radical en cuanto a la necesidad de crear una sociedad y un Estados multiétnicos en la época. Usted dice allí que “what was truly at stake in the Schmitt/Kelsen antagonism, not only a politics of the same against multiplicity, but also and perhaps more fundamentally, the question of the origin or even, as Schmitt insists, the creation, of law and hence the question of law’s creator in whose will and command law began. Kelsen’s work, by depriving these questions of any interest or validity, forces us to question these questions and to inquire into their political effects rather than to answer them”. ¿Cómo explica usted la no sólo fuerte, sino la persistente influencia de Carl Schmitt sobre la izquierda europea y americana en el siglo XX? ¿Cómo se relacionan o no sus conceptos de contingencia y ruptura con los postulados, por ejemplo, por Walter Benjamin? ¿Qué implica para usted hoy una “lawful resistance to law”, una resistencia legal a la ley?

– The importance of Schmitt as a reference point in contemporary discussions of law and even of the political is an enormous topic about which I can just make a few points. Perhaps with the collapse of the “Communist” regimes at the end of the eighties and the resulting shift in the balance of forces globally which meant above all a reconfiguration of the lines of división between something like “imperialism” and its adversaries to the enormous disadvantage of the latter, both exposed what was latent in the so-called democracies and operationalized this latent dimensión. I refer to the rapid collapse of the Yugoslav state, a process that various Western European powers exacerbated through economic and political intervention, and the re-emergence of ethnic cleansing and genocidal strategies for the “containment” of the other not even fifty years after the Red Army reached Auschwitz. How could “civilized” Europeans (as opposed to Rwandans) so easily and quickly lapse into apparent lawlessness in which something like an exterminationist politics could impose itself on all the parties in the conflict? To explain the utter fragility and permanently provisional nature of democratic regimes governed by laws not by men, who better than Carl Schmitt for whom every

constitutional order no matter how rooted in tradition rested on nothing more than the sovereign decision not to declare the state of exception in which any thing is permitted because nothing is illegal. The great theoretician of this moment is undoubtedly Giorgio Agamben who could see the emergence of a new historical period in Europe and North America of a politics organized around the two great outsiders in relation to law and legality: the sovereign who can kill with impunity and homo sacer who can be killed with impunity. The effect of the attacks of 9/11/2001 on the US legal system several years after the publication of Homo Sacer seemed to confirm Agamben's theses, giving Schmitt's theories a new relevance, including the charge that international law is nothing but victor's justice.

I absolutely believe that Schmitt is an extraordinary political and legal philosopher and not in spite of his fascism, but because of it. He openly expresses the unstated but increasingly prevalent assumptions of Western political elites determined not so much to overthrow even the semblance of democratic rule as to progressively hollow it out to that point that the "rule of law" becomes a cover for the state of exception. We have to understand, however, as perhaps Benjamin did in his reference to Schmitt—although this isn't entirely clear—that Schmitt remains prisoner despite everything of a kind of legalism. For him, the state of exception is defined, albeit negatively, in terms of (the absence) of law, not a relation of forces in relation to which sovereignty might be a fiction and the declaration of the state of exception mere words. Benjamin seemed to recognize this when he called upon the Left to bring about its own versión of the state of exception.

In the same way, Schmitt's main enemy, Kelsen, whom he charged with legal formalism and positivism, even in the thirties deriving these characteristics from Kelsen's Jewish origins, by calling into question the very notion of the law's outside and insisting on the interiority of every social struggle to law understood as immanent in social existence itself, rejects the political miracles associated with the forces of order. Force (which is always a relation between opposing forces) and law are mutually immanent. Kelsen might well be the antidote to Schmitt and the Schmittian politics of the world's rulers, but we need to read him after and not according to Schmitt.

— ¿Qué queda de Althusser en el ambiente universitario norteamericano? ¿Cómo describiría hoy la relación entre Teoría Literaria y Teoría Política en ese ambiente?

Si usted tuviera que hacer un mapa histórico de momentos (y de figuras) en los que la literatura y la política se hayan mutuamente enriquecido en el siglo XX, ¿qué momentos citaría y por qué?

— I think that there continues to be significant interest in Althusser in literary and cultural studies. This is in part a consequence of the importance of his former students, each of whom is marked by Althusser's teaching in different ways, particularly Balibar, Badiou and even Rancière. In addition that constant appearance of new material, particularly the late work on aleatory materialism, has attracted a new audience far less interested in the work of the sixties than my generation. Further, the ISAs essay is required Reading in "theory" courses and is complicated enough, as Judith Butler's work shows, to continue to intrigue readers. Most of the readership of Décalages is relatively young and is able to see in Althusser something other than a structuralist or a functionalist. The epoch of the great denunciations of Althusser by E.P. Thompson and a host of angry critics from the Right and the Left is long gone. A new generation has discovered a new Althusser.

— ¡Muchas gracias por aceptar esta entrevista, Profesor Montag!

— El placer es mio, Cecilia y Natalia!