

Exchange: Marx's theatre of economic categories

The human mask

Asad Haider

All the characters in this misunderstanding are on stage here, each playing the part ascribed to it by the effect expected of this theatre.

Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*

You too, my friend, should have come here in disguise – as a respectable doctor of scholastic philosophy. It's my mask that allows me a little freedom tonight.

Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*

In *Reading Capital* Louis Althusser made note of an 'obvious' presupposition: that 'the "actors" of history are the authors of its text, the subjects of its production.' This strange theatre, in which 'the stage-director has been spirited away' and the actors have written their own roles, illustrated the ideologies of 'humanism' and 'historicism', which Althusser provoked international controversy by criticising.¹ This controversy continues, as Kyle Baasch shows with 'The Theatre of Economic Categories' (*RP* 2.08), which has the great merit of revisiting French and German readings of *Capital* in the 1960s.* However, despite its scope and erudition, Baasch's argument is undermined by a surprisingly chauvinistic insistence on the superiority of German over French thought – clashing sharply with the young Karl Marx, who in a letter to Ludwig Feuerbach before he left for Paris called for a 'Franco-German scientific alliance.'²

'It is essential to read *Capital* not only in its French translation', Althusser proclaimed, 'but also in the German original.'³ Baasch inverts scholarly conscientiousness into 'philological irresponsibility', which he believes is 'illustrated by the almost ideographic presence of the

italicised German word *Träger*' (20). Those who feel inclined to check will find that in the texts of Althusser and Étienne Balibar *Träger* appears no more than five times, but Baasch is right that they use it to present an interpretation of Marx which views individuals as the 'bearers' of social relations rather than their subjects.⁴

In response Baasch gives Balibar a vocabulary lesson on the word *Charaktermaske*. Balibar uses it in his argument that 'things are transformed in the hands of the agents of production without their being aware of it, without it being possible for them to be aware of it if the production process is taken for the acts of individuals.' These individuals 'really are only class representatives', but classes cannot be understood as 'sums of individuals': 'it is impossible to make a class by adding individuals together on whatever scale.' Rather, 'classes are functions of the process of production as a whole', and therefore 'they are not its subjects', but 'are determined by its form.' 'Character mask' illustrates 'the mode of existence of the agents of the production process as the bearers (*Träger*) of the structure': individuals 'are nothing more than masks.'⁵

Initially Baasch aims to correct Balibar's usage of 'mode of existence': 'only social categories have modes of existence', while 'concrete individuals simply exist' (21). However, this is not an error but the point of Balibar's argument: 'concrete individuals' do not 'simply exist'. When Balibar speaks of 'agents of the production process', he is not referring to an expression of already existing 'concrete individuals', but to abstract categories,

* Kyle Baasch, 'The Theatre of Economic Categories: Rediscovering *Capital* in the Late 1960s', *Radical Philosophy* 2.08 (Autumn 2020), 18–32. Subsequent references given as page numbers in the text.

corresponding to social relations that produce forms of individuality as their effects.⁶ For Baasch we cannot claim that individuals are nothing more than bearers of social relations, because there has to be an underlying person who *wears* a mask. Accordingly, as a 'concrete individual', I am made to bear the economic determinations of capitalist society, but I am not reducible to them.

These days we cannot fail to 'recognise' ourselves behind masks. It seems 'obvious', one of the "'simplest" acts of existence'.⁷ As an already existing person, I put a mask endowed with its own autonomous existence on my already existing face, to work, purchase commodities, or perform in a play. No one can be blamed for a desire, in our historical moment, to drop the mask – but an unsettling aspect of our 'lived experience' is shock or disgust at the sight of a human face.

Centuries earlier, and not in German, Hobbes defined 'person' as 'he, whose words or actions are considered, either as his own, or as representing the words or actions of another man.' To explain the curious role of representation Hobbes takes us to the theatre: 'The word Person is latine: ... the *disguise*, or *outward appearance* of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Visard.' Yet in the theatre – and the courtroom – 'a Person, is the same that an Actor is', and 'to Personate, is to Act, or Represent himselfe, or another; and he that acteth another, is said to beare his Person.' A person may be an *author*, 'he that owneth his words and actions' – but in this case 'the Actor acteth by Authority.' *Even the author is an actor*, who must 'personate' or 'represent' himself with the mask of a character or a legal personality.⁸ Hobbes dismantles our common sense that empirical individuals adopt discrete masks: as 'persons', or their 'bearers', our faces are already masks.

Eighteenth-century 'French theory' extended the theatrical metaphor beyond Hobbes's account of political representation to social life, and a self formed behind the mask. For Rousseau masks represented the falsity of the society of spectacle and spectatorship, and theatre demonstrated that this alienation was inherent in representation. Actors become adept in deceit, unlike the orator who appears in public to speak rather than to make a spectacle of himself, who 'represents only himself' and plays his own role. The self of the actor is cancelled by the character.⁹ Diderot used masks to satirise the self-

interested performance of social roles, and suggested that breaking with social conventions and acknowledging the theatricality of everyday life 'unmasks scoundrels'.¹⁰ But Rousseau also sought to overcome representation with transparency: 'So far I have seen many masks; when shall I see men's faces?'¹¹

Hegel declared that 'to describe an individual as a "person" is an expression of contempt.'¹² Ancient Greece made no distinction between individuals and their social roles, while Roman law granted individuals the status of personhood. Yet this reduced individuals to the abstract right of property ownership – *persons* who are *literally* 'nothing more than masks'. Hegel too takes us to the theatre. Tragedy represented the subordination of human will to fate, but moved towards self-consciousness as actors behind the masks asserted their wills, speaking before the spectators and impersonating their characters. Comedy developed self-consciousness by dropping the mask, acknowledging its theatricality, showing there was no distinction between the self, the actor and the spectator. The French Enlightenment had demonstrated the theatricality of social life, but for Hegel its project of unmasking had to be superseded: the moral judgment of hypocrisy was predicated on abstaining from the action that could itself be judged, and retreating behind theatricality to natural innocence would mean giving up the 'spiritually developed consciousness' it had made possible.¹³

In Baasch's account this history becomes a synchronic binary opposition. French theory 'transfigures the radical stereotypicality of everyday life into yet another act in a trans-historical theatrical production' (27). German theory alone can transform 'the grim sociological consciousness of what it means to bear a character mask in an economic drama into the implacable longing for the unrealised individuality' (29). Note that Hegel found the longing for unrealised individuality in bearing the mask, while dropping the mask made a mockery of the subject. The binary opposition makes it difficult to interpret even the German theory. Robyn Marasco suggests that 'both Althusser and the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theorists cast "critique" in opposition to idealism and hypostatized subjectivity', following Marx in 'rejecting the myth of authorship as an absolute origin.'¹⁴ Whether one emphasises divergences or affinities, the new readings of *Capital* emerged in an international

context. At the 1967 conference in which Alfred Schmidt debated with Nicos Poulantzas, he wrote in his own paper that 'at the present position of international discussion', an 'accurate understanding of Marx's method' depended on 'the concept of "presentation"' – the relation between the order of categories and historical development. The footnote, before referring the reader to his own article, cited 'the publications of the Althusser school in Paris'.¹⁵

The effort Schmidt subsequently dedicated to criticising *Reading Capital* indicates his awareness of its significance, and in *History and Structure* he explained the historical basis of the international discussion. The Second International orthodoxy understood the 'constitutive role of history' in *Capital*, but did not grasp 'how historical and structural-analytic elements were related to one another.' The 'indisputable service that the Althusser school has performed' was to point to 'the philosophical content of *Capital*' and the difficulty of historical method, going beyond what Schmidt called 'the empty cult of the "young Marx"' that had previously limited the response to the orthodoxy.¹⁶ 'Historicism', Schmidt wrote, was 'decisive for differentiating the Marxist from the Hegelian dialectic.' He defined it succinctly as the notion that 'knowledge simply coincides with the historiography of its subject matter.'¹⁷ In agreement with Althusser, Schmidt wrote that 'Marx advocates anything but an unreflected historicism, in which knowledge runs directly parallel to the chronological course of events.' It was the problem of 'presentation' that he had already noted in *Reading Capital*: one of 'Marx's insights' that 'Althusser also repeatedly stresses' is that the logical order of categories does not reflect their historical appearance.¹⁸

For Althusser, what differentiates the Marxian from the Hegelian dialectic is the conception of historical time, which determines the relation between knowledge and the course of events. Althusser takes us yet again to the theatre: at the centre of *For Marx*, an essay on the play *El Nost Milan* and Bertolt Brecht's dramaturgy presents a theatrical critique of Hegel's 'dialectic of consciousness'. This dialectic remains within the *tragic*, the temporality of classical theatre 'induced by its internal contradiction to produce its development and result', and it is 'completely reflected in the speculative consciousness of a central character.'¹⁹ But alongside this heroic time *El Nost Milan* staged the 'non-dialectical time' of the la-

bouring masses, indifferent to heroic consciousness, the time of 'everyday life' in which history does not take place. The coexistence of these two temporalities was the 'latent structure' of the play, which could not be exhausted in the self-consciousness of any 'character'.²⁰

In the first edition of *Reading Capital*, Althusser recalled this essay and the term 'latent structure'. But he excised it in future editions, to eliminate any resemblance to a *structuralist* conception of a structure that determines its elements. Althusser conceived of a structure that only exists *in* and *as* its elements – 'structural causality' – to produce a concept of history adequate to Marx's discoveries.²¹ For the idealist dialectic history is a linear and continuous progression of the origin towards its end, divided into periods corresponding to a succession of totalities. Every phenomenon expresses the essence of the totality, and historical knowledge becomes self-consciousness of the present: contradictions already inscribed in the origins of history finally become visible in capitalist society.²² The materialist dialectic rejects this 'expressive causality': historical knowledge is not an expression of the historical process. Marx had to *produce* a different conception of historical time – not a structuralist schema, but a theory of dislocations between temporalities: 'the present of the *conjuncture*'.²³

In Baasch's argument the directional character of the capitalist mode of production itself renders Hegel's teleology valid. This is a kind of hyper-historicism, in which historicism is validated by presupposing an underlying historicism which makes historicism historical. Here the dialectical veers near the tautological. The pre-Hegelian, quasi-Rousseauian notion of dropping the mask in Baasch's article derives from this historicist reading of the *Phenomenology* 'as a kind of self-development of hell', and *Capital* as a 'parodic recapitulation of a Hegelian theodicy of world-spirit', a 'phenomenology of anti-spirit' whose 'teleological narrative' is one in which the 'reconciliation between the individual and the universal takes place at the expense of the individual' (32n44, 28). It is not clear why what Baasch acknowledges is an 'idiosyncratic understanding of Hegel' should be accepted as more accurate or convincing than Althusser's far more delimited reading, which even at its most polemical sought neither to reject nor transmogrify apparently Hegelian categories like the 'dialectic' or 'process', but rather to distinguish them from the Hegelian teleology



in order to specify Marx's conception of history. *Capital*, on this reading, is not a literary adaptation of the *Phenomenology*, but an analysis of the capitalist mode of production, and its standpoint is not that of a uniquely German and 'unmistakably Christian eschatological discourse of reconciliation and salvation' (26), but the international political project of abolishing the capitalist mode of production.

Althusser's philosophical strategy was to move through the Hegelian dialectic to the anomaly it claimed to surpass: Spinoza's critique of consciousness and teleology. Though he notes this influence, Baasch's criticisms consist of very general opinions about the history of philosophy. Baasch says Althusser was inspired by the 'trans-historical model' of 'rationalist metaphysics' to apply the 'critique of social domination to spheres beyond the specifically economic' (19).²⁴ But Althusser theorised the specifically economic with Spinoza's conception of substance which exists in its attributes: structural causality is 'the key epistemological concept of the whole Marxist theory of value, the concept whose object is precisely to designate the mode of *presence* of the structure in its *effects*.'²⁵

While Baasch suggests Althusser did not understand the theory of value, he anticipated many points later central to the German discussion, to the point that John Milios speaks of a 'harmonious merger' between 'the Althusserian theoretical intervention' and 'an approach drawing on Marx's value-form analysis'.²⁶ Althusser clearly established that *Capital* was not 'a continuation or even culmination of classical political economy', the starting point of Hans-Georg Backhaus's article inaugurating the German 'new reading' of Marx four years later.²⁷ 'Marxist political economy' presents 'substantialist' theories of value, granting abstract labour a natural and physiological reality inherent in individual commodities and measurable in units of labour-time. But for Marx's *critique* of political economy, labour is abstract insofar as it is socially validated through exchange of its products, and value is not measurable prior to money. Structural causality demolishes the idea that the substance of value

has an independent and prior existence.

Much of this has been obscured by pitting a thesis of 'continuity' between Marx's early and late works, often associated with the initial German new reading, against Althusser's concept of the 'epistemological break'.²⁸ Properly understood, the epistemological break bears out Michael Heinrich's argument in his recent Marx biography that neither continuity nor discontinuity explains Marx's theoretical development.²⁹ As Balibar points out, the break is not an event or empirical date, but a tendential and internally contradictory process, which actually has nothing to do with continuity or discontinuity.³⁰ The target of Althusser's critique was a reading of Marx in the 'future anterior' – or in Heinrich's terms, 'a novel of personal development' with a 'teleological tendency', 'narrating history as a constantly progressing maturation and convergence upon a goal'.³¹ Althusser's proposition that 'history is a process without a subject or goal(s)' – subject to as many scandalised distortions as the epistemological break – takes on a very practical relevance.³²

Althusser's theory of ideology is also a critique of teleology, as his use of Spinoza's concept of the imaginary indicates. Baasch precludes engagement with this theory in advance with the historicist and nationalist claim that 'in Frankfurt, it was recognised that the antinomy of agency and structure' – to which French philosophy is apparently reducible – was 'merely the re-emergence' of an earlier 'sociological problematic that pits structure against agency' (19). We are far from Frankfurt principles of 'immanent critique', and there is a 'performative contradiction' between the emphasis on human agency and a structural-functionalist reduction of French consciousness to this supposed antinomy. Consequently Baasch criticises Althusser's theory of ideology as presuming that freedom is a 'narcotic doled out to the masses, rather than a lived experience conditioned by legally non-coercive individual economic transactions' (23). However, Althusser differs from most Marxist theories of ideology by arguing that it is *not* a 'narcotic', implying false consciousness or a capitalist ploy. As with Balibar on 'concrete individuals', this is not an error but

the point of his argument: ‘lived experience’ is an effect of social relations, not an independent and prior substance they modify. When Althusser says that the ‘lived’ is ‘imaginary’, he is elaborating Spinoza’s point that due to the limits of our perception, we attribute phenomena to our will or desire without understanding their real causes. His claim that ideology will continue to exist in communist society simply means that we will never apprehend in our consciousness all the real relations that constitute us. This is only disturbing if we equate any opacity of social relations with false consciousness and social domination.

Yet Spinoza’s entire exposition is directed towards human freedom. The imaginary leads to inadequate ideas as an effect of our corporeal limits, but through reason we can arrive at more adequate knowledge of the causes that affect us, to overcome the tyranny of superstition and organise our relations to increase our powers of acting.³³ If we are unwilling to let go of the fantasy of the transparency of social relations, identifying freedom with the hope that the world is ordered and meaningful, we remain servile to fear. What is at stake is a conception of freedom that does not rely on the sovereign will of the author. We are back in the theatre. Near the end of his paper for *Reading Capital* Althusser gives the following illustration of structural causality:

the mode of existence of the stage direction (*mise en scène*) of the theatre which is simultaneously its own stage, its own script, its own actors, the theatre whose spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by the constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be, since it is in essence *an authorless theatre*.³⁴

The resistance to theoretical anti-humanism is a yearning for authorship, ownership of words and actions as property and authority over representation. But in the authorless theatre, there are no authentic faces obscured by masks – concrete individuals, human subjects, disfigured by a malignant author whose place we seek to occupy – and we cannot rewrite the script by imagining ourselves to be the original authors of social relations.

As spectators we are united with the actors in the authorless theatre; our consciousness is the play itself. We recognise ourselves in the theatre of ideology, and perform our roles every time the curtains are raised. But every play is incomplete, restaged again and again, and

its contingency opens to the dislocation of ideology. In his essay on theatre in *For Marx*, Althusser is a spectator. But as he leaves the theatre, he is able to think of ‘the production of a new spectator, an actor who starts where the performance ends’ – the emergence, within an apparent passivity, of the power of acting which is politics.³⁵

Asad Haider is a founding Editor of Viewpoint Magazine and author of Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump (2018).

Notes

1. Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2015), 291. I would like to thank Robyn Marasco, Warren Montag, Teddy Paikin, Panagiotis Sotiris and Gavin Walker for their helpful comments.
2. Karl Marx, ‘To Ludwig Feuerbach in Bruckberg’, in *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 349.
3. *Reading Capital*, 11.
4. In *Reading Capital*, see Althusser, 40, 260, 335, and Balibar, 418, 435.
5. *Reading Capital*, 435.
6. As Balibar writes: ‘Men do not appear in the theory except in the form of bearers of the connections implied by the structure, and the forms of their individuality as determinate effects of the structure.’ *Reading Capital*, 418.
7. *Reading Capital*, 13.
8. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 111–2. Baasch cites a passage at the beginning of the second chapter of *Capital* in which Marx uses the words *Charaktermaske* and *Träger*, though it adduces no evidence to support his interpretation; the purpose of citing it seems mainly to imply that Balibar did not read this chapter and was not good at German. But this passage shows that Marx is specifying the content of the ‘juridical relation, whose form is the contract’: ‘The persons [*Die Personen*] exist for one another merely as representatives and hence owners, of commodities.’ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 178–9. See also the course on Hobbes in Louis Althusser, *Politique et histoire, de Machiavel à Marx*, ed. François Matheron (Paris: Seuil, 2006). I am indebted here to Ross Poole, who provides a more comprehensive historical account in his ‘On Being a Person’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74:1 (March 1996), 38–56.
9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Politics and the Arts: Letter to M. D’Alembert on the Theatre*, trans. Alan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 81. Consider Althusser’s account of Rousseau’s ‘discrepancies’ in *Politics and History*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1972), and his *Lessons on Rousseau*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (New York: Verso, 2019).
10. Denis Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew and First Satire*, trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.
11. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or the New Heloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press,

- 1997), 194.
12. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 292.
13. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 444, 450, 401–2, 319. See Allen Speight, *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
14. Robyn Marasco, 'Althusser's Gramscian Debt: On Reading Out Loud', *Rethinking Marxism* 31:3 (2019), 343.
15. Alfred Schmidt, 'On the Concept of Knowledge in the Criticism of Political Economy', in *Karl Marx 1918/1968* (Bad Godesberg: Inter Nationes, 1968), 96, 238n173. Baasch dramatises the debate between Schmidt and Poulantzas as a confrontation between the German and French readings. Schmidt's student Hermann Kocyba situates it instead in Schmidt's evolving engagement with French theorists – to the point that his initial critiques of Althusser and 'structuralism' drew mostly on the critiques already made in France by Goldmann, Lefebvre and Sartre. 'Alfred Schmidt: On the Critique of Social Nature', trans. Jacob Blumenfeld, in *The Sage Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, eds. Best, Bonefeld and O'Kane (London: Sage, 2018), 310.
16. Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure*, trans. Jeffrey Herf (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 84, 109. I emphasise Schmidt's agreements with Althusser to demonstrate that he engaged with it seriously, rather than reducing it to a national stereotype. Nevertheless, the goal of *History and Structure* is a critique of Althusser, so agreement is noted in the context of substantial criticisms, some of which concern theoretical disagreement, while others are marred by confluences and omissions; compare Schmidt's points on the reading of Hegel to Louis Althusser, 'Marx's Relation to Hegel', in *Politics and History*.
17. Schmidt, *History and Structure*, 31. See *Reading Capital*, 40–9. Baasch describes anti-historicism in passing as a 'conception of history as an entirely impersonal process', but this is more precisely a description of anti-humanism. 'Theatre', 24.
18. Schmidt, *History and Structure*, 61. In 'On the Concept of Knowledge', Schmidt repeats this point about presentation, but he argues that the 'logical order' is exactly the reverse of the 'historical order' (98). Althusser rejects this view, instead arguing that there is no one-to-one correspondence, even in reverse. See *Reading Capital*, 264.
19. Louis Althusser, 'The "Piccolo Teatro": Bertolazzi and Brecht. Notes on a Materialist Theatre', in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 2005), 138, 143–4. On this essay's role in Althusser's theory of history, see Vittorio Morfino 'Eschatology à la Cantonade: Althusser beyond Derrida', in *Althusser and Theology*, ed. Agon Hamza (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 115–28. A dossier responding to Étienne Balibar's 'Althusser's Dramaturgy and the Critique of Ideology' in *differences* 26:3 (2015) elaborates many themes I touch on here.
20. Althusser, 'The "Piccolo Teatro"', 145.
21. *Reading Capital*, 271–6. This revision is reviewed in Warren Montag, *Althusser and his Contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), chapter 5. Baasch cites this book in his article, yet consistently labels Althusser as a structuralist, a characterisation whose inaccuracy Montag's book demonstrates in detail.
22. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 241–2.
23. Althusser argues that the structuralist turn to the synchronic still relies on the homogeneous and linear diachronic time at the core of both the Hegelian and the Second International philosophies of history. See *Reading Capital*, 242–3. When Schmidt writes that Althusser accords 'methodological priority' to 'the synchronic over the diachronic', his criticism is rather wide of the mark. See *History and Structure*, 5.
24. Baasch conflates 'structuralism' with a rationalism influenced by Spinoza, though it is once again a book in his own footnotes which shows us the greater complexity of this intellectual history: Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
25. *Reading Capital*, 342–4.
26. John Milios, 'Rethinking Marx's Value-Form Analysis from an Althusserian Perspective', *Rethinking Marxism* 21:2 (April 2009), 269–70, 261.
27. *Reading Capital*, 13, 310. Hans-Georg Backhaus, 'On the Dialectics of the Value-Form', *Thesis Eleven* 1 (1980), 99. For an overview of the German new reading, see Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, 'The *Neue Marx-Lektüre*: Putting the Critique of Political Economy Back into the Critique of Society', *Radical Philosophy* 189 (Jan/Feb 2015), 24–36.
28. See Althusser's criticisms of the categories of continuity and discontinuity and the practice of periodisation in *Reading Capital*, 251.
29. Michael Heinrich, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*, vol. 1, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019), 27–8.
30. Étienne Balibar, 'From Bachelard to Althusser: The Concept of "Epistemological Break"', *Economy and Society* 7:3 (1978), 207–37, and 'Structural Causality, Overdetermination and Antagonism', in *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory*, eds. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 109–19.
31. Heinrich, *Karl Marx*, 336. It is important to consult Althusser's first 'classic' essay, 'On the Young Marx' in *For Marx*, which presents no periodising schema.
32. See Louis Althusser, 'Marx's Relation to Hegel' and 'Remark on the Category: "Process without a Subject or Goal(s)"', in *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1976).
33. Here we encounter the question of the subject, which, contrary to popular belief, Althusser dealt with directly by tracing a line from Machiavelli to Lenin. See Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, ed. François Matheron, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2000) and 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' in *For Marx*. See also Panagiotis Sotiris, *A Philosophy for Communism* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
34. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, 349. See Montag, 'Althusser's Authorless Theatre', *differences* 26:3 (2015), 46.
35. Althusser, 'The "Piccolo Teatro"', 151. This essay is another primary site in Althusser's work for the encounter with the subject; see the contributions to the dossier in *differences* 26:3 (2015) by Judith Butler, 'Theatrical Machines', and Banu Bargu, 'Althusser's Materialist Theater: Ideology and Its Aporias'. In July 1962 Althusser is completing 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' just as he goes to see the 'Piccolo Teatro'.