

**Indication as Concept: Althusser, Spinoza, and the Logic of the “Groupes Althussériens” (1965-1968)**

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From John Berger, *Bento’s Sketchbook* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011).

The problems raised by the Althusserian theory of the “break” between science and ideology have been criticized countless times. In his *Elements of Self-Criticism* (1974), Althusser acknowledges that it might have contributed to what he calls his “theoreticist deviation,” starting with a specific rationalist interpretation of the break presented in *For Marx*(1965) and *Reading Capital* (1965). 1 In the self-critical texts of the 1970s, Althusser at least partially blames his Spinozism for being the “cause” of his theoreticism, and having led him to “forget” politics: there must be a critique, then, of the “the science/ideology antithesis, and the epistemological break, which Spinoza, long before Bachelard, inserted between his first and second levels of knowledge.” 2

I would like to bracket, as it were, the retrospective view Althusser provides of his relation to Spinoza, so as to grasp Althusser’s Spinozism from the traces of its implicit influence in *For Marx*. This involves an inquiry into the Spinozism underpinning Althusser’s thinking, but also his relation to his own practice. We can understand this relation according to the Second Corollary of Proposition 16 in Book II

of the*Ethics*, where Spinoza affirms:

the ideas which we have of external bodies *indicate* the constitution of our own body more than the nature of external bodies. This I have explained with many examples in Appendix, Part I. 3

For Spinoza, the concept of *indication* plays a key role in the theory of the passage from the first to the second type of knowledge. I will seek here to understand the way in which it is also at work, if implicitly, in Althusser’s thinking of the relation between science and ideology. In *For Marx*, the adjective *indicative* is repeated – significantly – on a number of occasions, designating both the incomplete character of some of Marx’s ideological formulations and the positive function they can effect in the process of knowledge. 4 From this double function of indication, we will be able to reconsider the division between science and ideology. But the interest the notion of *indication*holds is also connected to the term’s recurrence at the very places in his texts where Althusser comments on his own theoretical work. I wager, in fact, that this concept – whose

theorization is only outlined in *For Marx* – can be used to clarify the way in which philosophy was practiced within Althusserianism: namely, as a practice of collective research. Althusser’s Spinozism would contain, to some degree, the means for theorizing the apparatus of collective thinking the “Althusserians” tried to put in place by striving to continuously organize new research groups.

I will refer to Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza throughout this text. Deleuze’s analysis is *a priori* radically opposed to that of Althusser: while the latter, fascinated by the systematicity and dogmatism of Spinoza’s thought, is almost exclusively interested in the “epistemological Spinoza,” Deleuze is known for having emphasized the emancipatory potentials contained within the “ethical Spinoza.” 5 And while the Deleuzian interpretation, by insisting on the fact that “nobody can undergo for us the slow*experience*of learning what agrees with our nature,” leads to a refusal of a pedagogical solution, Althusserianism was on the contrary accused of placing of the Marxist philosopher in the role of “philosopher-

educator.” 6 The perspective advanced in this article allows us to read the gap between Deleuzian Spinozism and Althusserian Spinozism with fresh eyes. The notion of *indication*, important for both of these readers of Spinoza, in effect allows for a mutual dialogue, if not a *rapprochement*. In providing a sketch of this encounter with Deleuze’s reading, the focus on indication will ultimately be a matter of asking whether Althusser’s recourse to Spinoza effectively reinforces the “*Aufklärer*” dimension of his own thought, leading him to theorize a rigid break between science and ideology, or whether in fact it renders it possible to unseat the representation of Althusserianism as a “pedagogism.” 7

**Indication: From Spinoza to *For Marx***

What does Spinoza’s notion of indication refer to in Book II of the *Ethics*? When, in the imagination, the human mind perceives through the affections of the body, that is, through the affections on the body of the encounter of external bodies, the ideas that it produces confusedly envelop the indications on that body and on the external bodies which affect it.

In *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze thematizes the Spinozist notion of indication as follows:

[O]ur ideas of affections indicate a state of our body, but do not explain the nature or essence of the external body. This is to say, the ideas we have are signs, indicative images impressed in us, rather than expressive ideas formed by us: perception or imagination, rather than comprehension…[T]he primary “thing indicated” is never our essence, but always a momentary state of our changing constitution; the secondary (or indirect) thing indicated is never the nature or essence of some external thing, but is rather an appearance that only allows us to recognize a thing by its effect, to rightly or wrongly assert its mere presence. The fruits of chance and of encounters, serving for recognition, purely indicative, the ideas we have are inexpressive, that is to say, inadequate. 8

Nevertheless, although indicative ideas are inadequate, indication does not solely involve a “privation” of knowledge:

[The inadequate idea] contains something positive, and so something true…a sort of indication that we can grasp clearly.This is, in fact, how we are able to have some idea of its cause: having clearly grasped the conditions in which we see the sun, we can clearly infer that it is an object far enough away to appear small, rather than a small object seen at close range. 9

In the rational knowledge that common notions allow us access to, the world is no longer apprehended from its effects but from its causes. By only being interested in common things and not in singular things, common notions allow us to avoid the confusion present in the ideas of affections, and to positively utilize the indications that are enveloped there. 10 From then on, the idea of affection not only has a specific positivity which makes it not simply a privation, but moreover this consistency can be taken as the point of departure for the process of rational knowledge, and takes on a positive function for knowledge. 11 While in the imagination, where the ideas of affections are considered as attributes of the external object, the “positive function” of ideas of affections cannot be

activated, common notions use ideas of affections as indications of the state of the human body and the external body – indications allowing one to rationally know a property common to both the affected body and the affecting body, or an aspect of the relation between them. The ideas of affections, therefore, only effectively become *indications*the moment when they are apprehended through common notions, the second type of knowledge. This rational apprehension is inscribed in another process of knowledge, which takes for an object not the exterior world as it presents itself to us, but the external world insofar as we are a part of it and it constitutes the cause of our affections and affects. As Deleuze has cogently shown, in this process of knowledge – whose object is the totality of joyful and sad affects, good and bad encounters of a body, that is, the singular essence that is the idea of a body and which alone provides access to the third type of knowledge – the indications of our body find a different sense and usage.

These Spinozist characteristics of indication, foregrounded by Deleuze, will make it possible to

conceptualize how Althusser makes use of the notion of indication in *For Marx*. In texts like “On the Materialist Dialectic” and “A Complementary Note on ‘Real Humanism,’” but also “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” the notion of indication appears over and over. 12 While in the “Note on ‘Real Humanism’” indications are ideological concepts that intervene in the Marxian process of knowledge – just before or during the break they are said to be indications of – in the two other articles they are knowledges in the practical state present in Marx’s scientific works. 13 Recall that the aim of “Contradiction and Overdetermination” and “On The Materialist Dialectic” is to state in an explicit and theoretical form the problem of the the difference between the materialist dialectic and the Hegelian dialectic. Althusser’s argues that the solution to this problem exists in a *practical state*in Marxian texts:

So to pose and resolve our theoretical problem ultimately means to express theoretically the “*solution*” *existing in the practical state*, that Marxist practice has found for a real difficulty it has encountered in its development, whose existence it has noted, and, according to its own submission,

settled. 14

From this perspective [*cadre*], an indication is not a form of true knowledge: “For the (practical) recognition of an existence cannot pass for a knowledge (that is, for theory) except in the imprecision of a confused thought.” 15 Knowledges in the practical state are thus for the most part defined negatively. They refer to notions that are not yet systematically reflected in a general theory, and arise implicitly in Marx’s theoretical practice or Marxist political practice.

However, these knowledges are not defined solely through their limitation; they also contain a certain positive function insofar as they constitute *an indication for knowledge*specific to the Theory that Althusser is attempting to elaborate. This Theory is Marxist philosophy defined as the materialist dialectic, or the

Theory (with a capital T)… of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences), which transforms into ‘knowledges’ (scientific

truths) the ideological product of existing ‘empirical’ practices (the concrete activity of men). 16

This involves producing the theory of the break that Marx initiated by transforming a specific ideological problematic into a scientific problematic. Thus, even if knowledges in their practical state miss the object that they are intended for, in that they do not provide an adequate knowledge of it, they can constitute an indication for another object than what was initially intended. This definition of the indicative function finds an echo in the ninth thesis of *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*: “An ideological proposition is a proposition that, while it is the symptom of a reality other than that of which it speaks, is a false proposition to the extent that it concerns the object of which it speaks.” 17 The term symptom evokes the symptomatic reading of Marx’s texts that Althusser practiced since *For Marx*, whose role is precisely to view particular concepts as signs of problems and spaces of discourse, as indications for a programmatic Theory that would always be in the process of beginning. On the other hand, beyond containing lessons for a process of knowledge yet to come or in the course

of being constructed, indication has another function: “Marx’s indications can and must *provoke* us into theory: into as rigorous as possible an expression of the practical solution whose existence they indicate.” 18 An indication can thus be understood as the virtual trigger of the process of knowledge, in which it finds a new usage. In terms of its indication, a concept has two meanings: one for the process through which it emerges, and another for what allows for a certain form of engagement. These two “senses” or “meanings” correspond to two different usages. When it was in the process of its emergence, which was thus the means by which the true effectuated itself, the concept is considered as an adequate knowledge of the object to which it refers or designates. After the passage to another problematic, the concept is no longer the adequate knowledge of an object; but if it functions as an indication, it nonetheless contains a partial truth.

The ideological concepts of “Complementary Note on ‘Real Humanism’” have a certain positive function despite their inadequate nature:

[In the phrase “real humanism”] the adjective real is *indicative*; it points out that to find the content of this new humanism you must look in *reality* – in society, the State, etc. So the concept of real-humanism is linked to the concept of humanism as its theoretical reference, but it is opposed to it through its rejection of the latter’s abstract object – and by providing a concrete, real, object. The word *real* plays a dual role. It shows up the idealism and abstraction in the old humanism (negative function of the concept of reality); and at the same time it designates the *external reality* (external to the old humanism) in which the new humanism will find its content (positive function of the concept of reality). However, this positive function of the word ‘real’ is not a positive function of *knowledge*, it is a positive function of *practical indication.* 19

Indications designate unbalanced ideological concepts that can set the mechanism of the break in motion. Whereas knowledges in the practical state provoke in order to formulate a Marxist philosophy, unstable ideological concepts drive the passage from ideology to science. An unstable ideological concept is a concept that most often

played the role of a “trigger” for Marx’s own process of knowledge; it designates the remaining distance before exiting from the ideological problematic, as the direction towards which it leads:

This inadequacy manifestly designates an *action to be achieved*, a *displacement* to be put into effect. It means that to find the reality alluded to by seeking abstract man no longer but real man instead, it is necessary *to turn to society*, and to undertake an analysis of the ensemble of the social relations. In the phrase real-humanism, in my opinion, the concept “real” is a practical concept, the equivalent of a *signal*, of a notice-board [*panneau indicateur*] that ‘indicates’ what movement is to be put into effect and in what direction, to what place, must there be *displacement* to reach the real earth rather than the heaven of abstraction. “The real this way!” We follow this *guide* and we come out into society, the social relations, and the conditions of their real possibility. 20

For Althusser, the ideological concepts of the young Marx should not be considered as principles which clarify his scientific works, but as traces of a

process of thought or knowledge, showing that he started with ideology and indicative that this was an ideologically determined milieu. In this framework, ideological concepts – mainly those dating from the period of the break, where the movement of extraction is set in motion – are evidence of the fact that thought does not take place in the immediacy of a bringing to light or a taking-hold of conscience; before producing the scientific concepts of dialectical materialism, Marx had to make a detour through the “false.” Indication has a double function for ideological concepts. As constituent traces of Marx’s process of knowledge, they are indications of the task Althusser sets for himself; as inadequate and unstable concepts, they were practical indications for Marx himself. Nevertheless, although the inadequacy of ideological concepts causes Marx to change terrain, all the reasons for the triggering of the break are not found in the instability of ideological notions. Here, they constitute an *occasion* to know, an *occasion* to set a process of knowledge in motion; but at this moment, the process of science cannot take place yet, the occasion cannot be seized: “You can stay indefinitely at the frontier line, ceaselessly repeating

concrete! concrete! real! real! This is what Feuerbach did, and Feuerbach too, spoke of society and State[.]” 21 The beginning of the scientific process always remains necessarily contingent – which, according to Althusser, is similar to the passage from the first to second kind of knowledge. 22

If there are unstable ideological concepts, it is because the exit from ideology is forced to be expressed in an ideological language. Science is constructed in a language that is not convenient, which continuously risks making it indicate something other than its objects.

In the general context of the human development which may be said to make urgent, if not inevitable, all great historical discoveries, the individual who makes himself the author of one of them is of necessity in the paradoxical situation of having to learn the way of saying what he is going to discover in the very way he must forget. Perhaps, too, it is this situation which gives Marx’s Early Works that tragic imminence and permanence, that extreme tension between a beginning and an end, between a

language and a meaning. 23

Whence the problems, discrepancies, and imbalances of the Marxian process of knowledge. If these are understood through a certain problematic, these problems and imbalances, which can eventually function as “notice-boards” in Marx, can also be indications for the formulation of Marxist philosophy.

This question of the inadequacy of ideological language for expressing the invention of new concepts can find an echo in the *Ethics*. In the preface to Part IV, Spinoza returns to his approach and the way in which he is forced to adopt the language of the imagination, even if this vocabulary is tied to several prejudices and illusions:

As for the terms “good” and “bad,” they likewise indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, and are nothing but modes of thinking, or notions which we form from comparing things with one another…However, although this is so, *these terms ought to be retained*. For since we desire to form the idea of a man which we may look

to as a model of human nature, we shall find it useful to keep these terms*in the sense I have indicated.* 24

By incorporating them into an extremely rigorous system of theses, propositions, and demonstrations, Spinoza provided an incomplete meaning to theological or Cartesian notions such as “God,” “substance,” “attributes,” “freedom,” “good,” or “bad.” Utilizing the “general notions” of the imagination in a sense determined by his project, Spinoza redirects the usage of the existing terms within the ideological milieu in which he constructed his thought, in order to alter their meaning. 25 Defining good and bad starting from an existing model, he sets in place mechanisms of *détournement* established starting from his own problematic. Consequently, *more geometrico*– the way in which the Spinozist system is constructed – can be considered as the means by which Spinoza tries to produce a systematic enterprise or project of *détournement* of ideological terms. Each of the propositions discovers its meaning in relation to others, the understanding of each term as well as their usage is gradually redefined as the reader

progresses through the text. The geometrical order thus would have the task of making the reader realize the detour by which the author must proceed in order to produce these concepts. Not that we, the reader, exactly reproduce Spinoza’s path; rather it entails setting in motion a detour through the false, through the unintelligible, in order to gradually arrive at understanding. And progressively, ideological terms no longer indicate what they indicated, but something else entirely.

Althusser, in his fascination with the great dogmatic systems like those of Spinoza and Hegel, paid close attention to the theoretical and political effects that such a theoretical apparatus [*dispositif*] could produce:

In Spinoza’s anticipation of Hegel we tried to see, and thought that we had succeeded in finding out, under what conditions a philosophy might, in what it said or did not say, and in spite of its form – or on the contrary, just because of its form, that is, because of the theoretical apparatus of its theses, in short because of its positions – produce effects useful to materialism. 26

Under these conditions, systematic exposition in no way contradicts the philosophical effects produced; on the contrary, it can, through the rigor of the chain of its reasons, not only constrict more tightly the space it intends to open, but make the consistency of its own production infinitely more rigorous and more sensible and fruitful (in the strong sense) to the freedom of the mind. 27

Can we not say, then, that Althusser tried in his own way to set up a dogmatic and systematic theoretical apparatus? For example, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, or “Notes on Philosophy” (1967-1968), Althusser pronounces his theoretical interventions in the form of a dogmatic “system” of theses: one can observe here a means by which to make certain terms indicate something other than their initial or usual meaning – in short, a means of activating their “indicative function.”

**Neither *Aufklärer*, Nor Philosopher-King**

When describing his own work, Althusser repeatedly deploys the notion of indication:

We must rest content with these schematic gestures and not enter into the dialectic of this theoretical labor. 28

[O]ur exposition so far has been merely indicative. 29

But if this is the case, the following question is bound to be asked, even in the very summary state of my suggestions [*indications*]. 30

As I have given some very hasty *indications* of this, through the concept of encroachment, in my note “Sur la psychanalyse.” 31

As an index [*indice*] which gives a negative foretaste of this absence, a simple remark will do[.] 32

The choice of this term does not seem to arise from mere chance, or the feigning of prudent modesty on Althusser’s part, but makes clear reference to the concept of indication as it functioned in *For Marx*. Viewing these texts or particular passages as

indications leads us to consider them as marked by a certain incompleteness, and to judge their interest not solely on what these fragments currently hold, but on the meaning they could have taken on through other processes of knowledge and other theoretical interventions, and thus starting from the effects they can produce.

But we can, I believe, take a step further. By viewing his theoretical interventions as indications, Althusser signals that he understands them as moments of a larger process, composed of other researchers, forms of research, and other processes:

I have not indicated these reference points because I think I can answer this question; but because they may perhaps make possible, subject to certain scientific studies in progress, a definition of what might have been the role of the German Ideology and even of German ‘speculative philosophy’ in Marx’s formation. 33

[Philosophical] Theses open the way to a *correct* position on the problems of scientific and political practice, etc. These formulae remain

schematic and much work will be necessary to complete them and render them more precise. But at least they indicate an order of research the trace of which may be found in subsequent works. 34

All of this already could lead to clarifications, but I do not currently have the time to develop them, and they can be indicated and further developed by others besides myself, in more favorable conditions. 35

In these passages, Althusser seems to make reference to an existing research group. 36 One thus gets a sense of what Althusser means by indications: he addresses this group with the goal of outlining orientations, suggesting directions for research, or even setting other processes of knowledge in motion. Additionally, the other “provoked” researchers have the task of producing indications themselves, that can in their turn trigger other processes. Thus, a structure of research would be established, which would function through a network of researchers that orient each other through a sort of unfolding sequence of indications.

The function of indication, then, seems able to work best only when it is supported by the existence of an effectively active research group. Therefore, in order for theoretical interventions to be able act as indications, they must enter into a structure that is not only theoretical, but also material and organizational; a more expansive system constructed around common problems, a structure of research in which a research group develops and organizes a collective form of thinking. 37 Starting from this practice of research in common, which has indication as one of its tools, it is possible to outline the demand for a form of the transmission of knowledge where the separation between the one who knows and the one who passively receives knowledge tends to disappear. This would therefore enable us to overcome the educative model wherein the teacher, separated from the students, is the only one to be in the position of a critical relation to ideology and thus truly active. This model of “education” which proceeds by indications and not explications can anticipate or resonate with with Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in which the teacher who proceeds by explanations as a necessary intermediary between the text and its

readers is contrasted with the “ignorant schoolmaster” who is content to compel a student to think – or if one likes, provoke to think – through a relation of one will to another will. 38 In my view, the concept of indication contains resources for thinking another model of the transmission of knowledge, one very different than the one often attributed to Althusser – in short, a form of transmission following from a Kautskyist-Leninist conception of ideology. This other model nevertheless remains problematic insofar as it primarily concerns intellectuals – since it can only function within a theoretical and material structure of research – and does not seem to offer a solution to the question about the inclusion of the masses in the process of knowledge.

It is only starting in the 1970s that Althusser inquires as to how theory can produce effects for the masses without, however, entering into an educative relation which would reproduce the division between leaders and led. In “Is it Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy?,” Althusser aims to elaborate a Marxist and materialist theory of the efficacy of the true, relying on the Leninist

formulation of bending the stick: in order to correct false idea, a counter-force must be applied. This conception of the efficacy of the true is opposed to that of the Enlightenment:

It follows that if you want to change historically existing ideas, even in the apparently abstract domain called philosophy, you cannot content yourself with simply preaching the naked truth, and waiting for its anatomical obviousness to “enlighten” minds, as our eighteenth-century ancestors used to say: you are forced, since you want to force a change in ideas, to recognize the force which is keeping them bent, by applying a counterforce capable of destroying this power and bending the stick in the opposite direction so as to put the ideas right. 39

For Althusser, theory “left to itself” has little efficacy since false ideas are anchored in the materiality of social relations – that is to say, in the materiality of ideology (with Spinoza). At the end of the 1970s, this reflection will end up giving rise to the theory of double inscription in the topography, whereby in order for ideas to have an efficacy, they must be

situated not only in the space of theory, but also among the “ideological forms in which men become conscious of [class] conflict and fight it out,” among the “mass ideological forms.” 40 And these ideological forms can only exist if they are supported by mass organizations. The efficacy of ideas on the masses therefore depends on the existence of mass organizations which, contrary to the Leninist party, do not reproduce the division between leaders and led.

In *The Future Lasts Forever*, Althusser approaches the theme of the efficacy of the true from the perspective of the materiality of ideology, itself understood through the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

The extraordinary thing is that the people themselves, with their self-consciousness and knowledge, then explained to these deaf, blind prophets the meaning of God’s message! They explained it to all of them, except that idiot Daniel who not only failed to understand what God said to him (the lot of all prophets) but even the explanation provided for him! This simply proves that ideology

can, in certain cases, and maybe naturally does, remain totally impenetrable to those subjected to it. 41

Even if he relates the question of the efficacy of the true more through the “political Spinoza” or to a greater extent, Machiavelli and Lenin, than to the “ethical Spinoza,” when Althusser talks about the resistance of ideology to its clarification, one cannot help but think of Books III, IV, and V of the *Ethics*, and specifically the first proposition of Book IV, where “No positive quality possessed by a false idea is removed by the presence of what is true, in virtue of its being true,” and then in its scholium:

This proposition is more clearly understood from II. xvi. Coroll. ii. For imagination is an idea, which indicates rather the present disposition of the human body than the nature of the external body; not indeed distinctly, but confusedly; whence it comes to pass, that the mind is said to err…and similarly other imaginations, wherein the mind is deceived, whether they indicate the natural disposition of the body, or that its power of activity is increased or diminished, are not contrary to the

truth, and do not vanish at its presence…thus imaginations do not vanish at the presence of the truth, in virtue of its being true, but because other imaginations, stronger than the first, supervene and exclude the present existence of that which we imagined[.] 42

For Spinoza, imaginations can only vanish or diminish when they are opposed to other stronger imaginations. Consequently, if a theoretical intervention is to produce effects, it is not enough to say the truth or the true: it must mobilize imaginations. Now, in this passage, imaginations are precisely “indications,” that is to say, the positivity of inadequate ideas that is able to be utilized in a process of knowledge. From this point, we can better understand why for Althusser, as for Spinoza, indicative concepts play a key role in the transmission of knowledge. 43 But could we not consider that by qualifying his own theoretical interventions as *indications*, in his own practice Althusser seems to anticipate, in a certain way, the theory of the topological double inscription that is made explicit only in “Marxism Today” (1978) – even though in the Althusserian practice of

philosophy initiated in *For Marx*, this “double inscription” would not happen in different “places,” but operates within the same theoretical intervention? 44

It is not, however, a matter of using indicative or metaphorical formulae in order to vulgarize or render science and philosophy more comprehensible. Indications are, rather, incomprehensible formulae, whose lack of explication and fragmentary character can provoke thought or thinking. In “Transference and Counter-Transference,” Althusser returns to Spinoza’s theoretical dispositive [*dispositif*]:

To enlighten the reader, that is, to render the task more difficult for him, we adopted an order of exposition that conforms, at least in its disposition, to the geometric order (*more geometrico*), borrowed from the only philosopher who did so: Spinoza. This order makes its own proofs. It renders the thought of its author practically unintelligible, and at the same time produces significant theoretical (Marx, Montesquieu) and political (anti-religious, revolutionary) effects in history. 45

The reader thus does not look to be enlightened through explications, but rather to be provoked to think and even, indirectly, to act through concepts and formulae whose ungraspable character sets out a problem. This way of conceiving the effects of a theoretical intervention can be traced back to indication, to the extent that the latter is precisely a form of knowledge or concept that poses a problem. This could potentially resonate with the Deleuzian Spinozism, and its maxim that “nobody can undergo for us the slow*experience*of learning what agrees with our nature, the slow effort of discovering our joys.” 46 This makes it impossible to conceive the exit from the imagination as a seizing of consciousness brought in from the outside by a third party. The use of indicative formulae could then be understood as an attempt at giving the reader the possibility of thinking for themselves, to form their own experience – in the manner of the Spinozist who effectuates the experience of his own joys – of the detours that thought causes to take place and problems posed by the production of the true. In light of this passage, it is not a question of direct provocation to

action, but rather a triggering of a process of knowledge that can then produce, in an indirect manner and in a direction the “transmitter of the indication” cannot control, political, even revolutionary, effects. Because the triggering of political action requires a detour through a kind of process of knowledge, the usage of indicative formulae or the consideration of interventions as indications does not seek to have the same effect as a “political manifesto.” This indirect dimension, which causes the political efficacy of the theoretical intervention to be quite fragile – improbable, even – henceforth eliminates the possibility of a “philosopher-king” using such an inscription of science in ideology in order to lead the masses.

However, in order for Althusser’s texts to have any efficacy as indications for any reader whatsoever, and thus potentially for the masses, the process triggered by the indicative concept needs to have time to be put into effect – seizing the occasion is not sufficient. Readers must have the time to themselves undergo this process analogous to “the slow*experience*of learning what agrees with our nature , the slow effort of discovering our joys.” By

repeating the adjective slow, Deleuze insists on the extended temporality of the process by which an individual begins to know. For Spinoza, the mind does not pass from passivity to activity all at once, but becomes more and more active to the extent that it produces adequate ideas. With this conception, where the raising of awareness or consciousness is not enough, the transmission unfolds in a temporal process that must continue through the reflection of the reader – in the aftereffect of the transmission. Simple indicative or metaphorical formulae, even if they constitute “stronger imaginations than inadequate ideas,” cannot be immediately clarifying, but only indirectly, to the extent that they enable a triggering of a process of knowledge. Therefore, the receivers of indications can “seize the occasion,” but never really enter this process as long as it is the passive reception from an “enlightened master”; to speak in terms of indications or metaphors is thus not enough to make the masses enter into a process of knowledge. The question of free time, which non-knowers lack, is a classic problem in Marxism. To show that the exit from ideology or the process of knowledge needs time comes back to express the

necessity of creating a communist organization of labor, in order for each person to be able to undergo their own learning experience. For Rancière, an insistence on the time required for intellectual activity almost inevitably leads to the reasoning that sees the masses as not having time to experience for themselves this long detour through thought, and that they must be educated by the Party and its intellectuals. 47 Thus, if the deployment of “incomprehensible” indications makes it possible to establish a relation of transmission wherein the educated are active from the first, it does not allow for the immediate formation of such a relation with the masses of workers.

**Toward An Alternative Althusserian Spinozism**

In Spinoza, the process of knowledge forms or creates the *index sui et falsi*: the false is revealed at the same time as the true. 48 We can understand what it means to be *in*ideology – the mechanisms that prevent us from thinking – only once we have emancipated ourselves from it. In *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Althusser emphasizes the influence this

aspect of Spinozism had on his conception of the process of knowledge. 49 How can we interpret this in light of our problem? In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the method which allows for distinguishing the true from the false is the reflexive idea. Because it always comes after the process of knowledge has taken place, the method is never defined *a priori*. The idea of the true idea is above all an experience: the experience of the certainty whereby once I know, I know that I know. Because an individual has experienced and practiced the process of producing the true, they can produce other true ideas as well as distinguish between an idea that was actively produced by the intellect and an idea passively received via the mechanisms of the imagination. In one of his lecture courses, Deleuze alludes to this “experience” by which the true produces both its own norm and that of the false:

Everyone, everyone, even the most wretched of the wretched has had this experience, even the most idiotic of morons has missed something that led him to say: but wouldn’t I, wouldn’t I have spent my whole life being mistaken? So we always exit

somewhat from the first kind of knowledge, that is, in Spinozist terms, he will have understood even this tiny [*miniscule*] point; he will have had this intuition of something essential, or indeed the intuition of an essence, or indeed the understanding of a relation. We can be very generous, there are very few people who are total idiots. There is always one thing they understand. We all have our one small thing. 50

In Deleuze’s interpretation, the kinds or “genres” of knowledge are not separated by a clean break, which only science could effectuate. Against this, in the Althusserian version of Spinozism – if we follow André Tosel – the *verum* does not correspond to any kind of idea produced outside of ideology, but to *Science*, and more exactly, Marxist Science. 51 The method, or the idea of the idea, would then consist in stating, beginning from Marx’s theoretical practice, the procedures and dispositives that transform *Capital*into a science. The production of the true idea, and the idea of the true idea, are not the fact of a single or same individual. The reflexive idea is no longer the experience that can effectuate an individual when, returning to the course of the process through which a true idea is

produced, all the ideas that have been produced to that point are declared false. Since only science produces new concepts, the philosopher himself does not produce the true, but is content to declare the break and its consequence; that is, what must be rejected in the false and what must be deemed true. 52 Because Marx did not state the method by which he produced historical materialism and rejected the concepts previously produced within ideology, it is up the “Marxist researchers” following him to render this practical experience explicit in the form of a method. But by above all identifying the Spinozist method with the Theory through which the scientificity of *Capital* is defined and measured, Althusser seems to neglect the notion of experience. The latter category no doubt obscures the border between science and ideology too much for Althusser to agree to deploy it. There is indeed, then, a certain intellectualist or theoreticist tendency in Althusserian Spinozism.