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# Knowledge, Ideology, Reproduction

*The Scholastic Apparatus in Louis Althusser and  
the Althusserian School*

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## Foreword

Of the many puzzling, or at least under-explained, postulates in 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses', one of Althusser's most widely read works, few have been as systematically overlooked as his assertion that the educational system or the 'scholastic apparatus' (*appareil scolaire*) is dominant over all the Ideological State Apparatuses proper to modern capitalist societies. It is finally more fundamental than the political State Apparatus by which the bourgeoisie as a class imposes its rule by means of 'the regime of parliamentary democracy combining universal suffrage and party struggle', as well as the cultural or religious apparatuses that perpetually present the capitalist order as simultaneously the best and the only possible world. If the domination of the scholastic apparatus appears 'paradoxical', as Althusser writes, it is only because in what he calls the concert of the ISAs, 'one Ideological State Apparatus certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent! This is the school.'<sup>1</sup> Thus, the dominant ISA is also the most silent, as if its silence were the necessary condition of its dominance, allowing it the freedom to operate unheard. While Althusser provides a brief explanation of the function of the educational State Apparatus, comparing it to the place of the Church under feudalism, his explanation raises more questions than it answers, particularly concerning the precise meaning of 'ideology' and 'ideological'. His argument abruptly ends and the essay continues, perhaps in anticipation of the reader's questions, with an account of ideology as Althusser understands it. Education never again appears: it has been restored to the silence proper to it.

Only now, a half-century later, has this music been made audible and intelligible: Giacomo Clemente's book, *L'apparato scolastico in Louis Althusser e nella scuola althusseriana*, demonstrates in intricate detail the extent to which both the theory and practice of education, from primary school to the university, were essential to Althusser's theoretical and political development from the early fifties to the period of the 'late Althusser', even when this element of his thought itself proceeded silently and inaudibly. Clemente very carefully reconstructs the often complex and contradictory relations between debates about and within the *apparato scolastico* and Althusser's theories of theory or philosophy. He does so, moreover, with an extraordinary thoroughness, by examin-

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<sup>1</sup> Althusser 1995, p. 175.

ing the published and unpublished texts that Althusser devoted to concrete controversies in the university involving both pedagogy as well as curriculums and situating them in the context of broader discussions carried on by such figures as André Gorz (the unnamed adversary Althusser addresses in ‘Student Problems’) and Pierre Bourdieu, among others. To his credit, Clemente treats Althusser’s work as inseparable from the collective projects in which he was engaged with his current and former students, all of whom had written on educational questions early in their careers, and had agreed to produce together a study of *l'école* shortly after the events of May 68. The participants in this collective project read the work of French educational reformers, from Jules Ferry to Célestin and Elise Freinet, the proposals and critiques that emerged in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution (above all, those of Krupskaya who sought to address the effects of the division between intellectual and manual labour on the concrete forms of proletarian democracy), as well as Freire and various documents from the Chinese Cultural Revolution on the work of transforming the universities. They also engaged with the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (*Les hérités* and *La reproduction*) in ways that stimulated the development of the notion of ideology the Althusserians shared.

Clemente’s detailed account of the collective project whose aim was to produce a theory of the *apparato scholastico* as outlined in the ISAS essay and whose members included Balibar, Macherey, Michel Tort, Christian Baudelot, and Roger Establet shows that the very failure of the group to produce the definitive work to which they had already given the title ‘*L’Ecole*’, itself produced a series of theoretical effects, both immediate and deferred, the power of which we are just beginning to appreciate. Clemente shows the development of Althusser’s ideas through an examination of his early interventions aimed at countering concrete proposals for reform by governmental bodies, as well as those made by students, even entering the discussion of the correct demands of the PCF’s student organisations, to the collective project that marked a break with Althusser’s earlier approach to education and to ideology in general that emerged in the aftermath of 1968. Clemente’s study is full of discoveries, a knowledge of which is necessary to any comprehensive understanding of Althusser’s work: it is nothing less than a map of a previously little-known part of Althusser’s thought, as well as that of his colleagues, especially Balibar and Macherey.

The fact remains, however, that for many readers the idea that education, a field that occupies a very low place in the hierarchy of academic disciplines (one of the forms of its silence), could nevertheless have played an important part in the development of Althusser’s philosophical thought, will prove difficult to accept. Did not Rancière assert a version of this thesis in the service

of his condemnation of Althusser's 'lesson', writing as if Althusser's entire theory existed to justify the current form of the university with its pantheons of experts, specialists, and geniuses set apart from the masses?<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Clemente's book allows us to appreciate the extent to which Rancière's critique captures something of Althusser's notion of education in the period leading up to the seminar on *Lire le Capital*, including its bearing on the science/ideology opposition and the notion of Theory (with a capital T). But Clemente also shows that this was no more than the beginning of Althusser's sustained reflection on the educational system, a process whose development was neither linear nor continuous. Because Althusser literally lived and worked within what he came to call the *appareil scolaire*, the *École Normale Supérieure*, his experience of political and social conflicts was often mediated through this institution (as well as that of the PCF with its proletarian base). Administrative measures, both proposed and enacted, affected him and compelled him in some cases to respond to them; moreover, it was through this institution that he felt the effects of class struggle, especially the reforms imposed by the capitalist class to 'streamline' higher education, that is, both to reduce costs and to weaken or eliminate those disciplines whose contribution to the reproduction of capitalism was in doubt. Even more striking was the impact of successive student mobilisations on the direction of his thought, provoking him to contest their demands, even as he was increasingly marked by their struggles.

Althusser published his first significant reflection on education, *L'enseignement de philosophie*, in the June 1954 issue of *Esprit*. His immediate objective is to protest a proposed reform that would eliminate a philosophy requirement for students in 'the experimental sciences', on the grounds that science professors could best teach the philosophy relevant to their field as part of their courses. While Althusser defends the requirement that all university students take a course entirely devoted to philosophy as part of their general education, he feels compelled to defend philosophy itself against the prevailing antipathy. He notes that following the war, various idealisms emerged within philosophy: Hegel read as tragedian and Husserlian phenomenology and existentialism, with their emphasis on human freedom, and a transhistorical human condition. And while he admits that these philosophies threaten the progress of knowledge with their rejection of 'intellectual rigour and scientific honesty', he holds that it would be a mistake to regard them as heralding the end of philosophy or its dissolution into the field of literature. Not only should we

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2 Rancière 2012.

not hesitate to defend philosophy, more importantly, we should recognise that *'la philosophie se défend. Il existe aujourd'hui un front de résistance tacite, des marxistes aux rationalistes, aux idéalistes classiques, et jusqu'à certains phénoménologues, qui refusent de voir la philosophie déchoir dans la « littérature », se couper de la science, ou disparaître comme théorie général.'*<sup>3</sup>

Even in this very early text, Althusser insists that philosophy is the site of perpetual conflict, a 'struggle between tendencies', and that its greatest achievements are products of this struggle, the defence of science against the constant innovations of a multitude of adversaries. What many of philosophy's critics regard as the decline of philosophical thought is merely the temporary balance of forces internal to it: *'La lutte de la philosophie contre ses menaces internes est donc inséparable de la lutte des tendances à l'intérieur de la philosophie: elle est inséparable de la lutte pour la rigueur de la réflexion et de la méthode, de la lutte pour le respect et l'intelligence de la réalité positive. Ce n'est pas cette lutte qui condamne la philosophie: elle en fait la grandeur.'*<sup>4</sup>

The crisis of philosophy, for Althusser, is the attempt, in the name of modernisation, to render philosophy superfluous without saying so in the name of professional training. The reformers argue that the knowledge of philosophy necessary to a given discipline, whether mathematics or history, will be taught by a mathematician or historian, who is thereby presumed to be sufficiently familiar with the philosophy of mathematics or the philosophy of history to incorporate it into their courses: *'on tenait, dans les hautes sphères de la rue de Grenelle, la philosophie pour un luxe anachronique, que la France pouvait s'offrir aux temps de sa splendeur, mais qu'elle devait sacrifier aux rigueurs de la nécessité.'*<sup>5</sup>

*Le front de résistance tacite*, however, must also oppose the tendency to turn the required philosophy course into an exercise in creative writing (that is, fiction or poetry) or in the art of rhetoric. Philosophy's vocation, according to Althusser, is critical reflection on the present and the elaboration of a theory capable of defending the acquisitions of science and of protecting scientific practice from exploitation for non-scientific ends. While Althusser's conception of the struggle between tendencies in philosophy, that is, the opposition of idealism and materialism, is quite crude relative to his later theorisation of philosophical practice (rigorous and systematic thought versus fragments of personal experience taken as universal), even more striking is his defence of

3 Althusser 1954, p. 860.

4 Ibid.

5 Althusser 1954, p. 862.

the traditional *enseignement* with its assumptions of expertise combined with the class-bound dilettantism that Bourdieu and Passeron would soon identify and denounce.

Ten years later, and shortly after the conclusion of the Algerian War and the mass radicalisation in opposition to it, Althusser published 'Student Problems', in many ways an updated version of the earlier text. This time, however, the 'liberal conception of the university' had to be defended not from the ministry of education, but from the students themselves. The national student union, the UNEF, once focused primarily on financial support for students, went through a process of radicalisation with the commencement of the Algerian War. The PCF's failure to support independence for Algeria and its rejection of the strategy of *insoumission* (draft refusal) alienated the Communist student group, the UEC, which led to internal divisions and ended its claim to represent the left among students. With the end of the war in 1962, the national student union, the UNEF, once again turned to *syndicalisme*, but of a far more ambitious type than before. From 1962–64, the organisation produced a set of demands as part of a proposal to transform the French university system, the *Manifeste POUR UNE RÉFORME DEMOCRATIQUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR*.<sup>6</sup> Althusser's 'Student Problems' is a direct response to this Manifesto, the first version of which had appeared a few months before his intervention, particularly its concrete proposals for the reform of both the content and the form of instruction at the university level.

The Manifesto openly rejected both '*le modèle de l'université libérale, qui se voulait indépendante aussi bien du pouvoir politique que des nécessités économiques*' and '*l'université technocratique*',<sup>7</sup> oriented exclusively to the production of graduates suited to the demands of the market. Its emphasis on the outmoded and irrelevant content of many courses, from the sciences to letters, together with its critique of the discrepancy between what students learned and what they would be expected to know after graduation, however, seemed to Althusser to establish the needs of the economy at any given time as the norm according to which a given course could be judged 'old-fashioned'. Such an orientation was antithetical to the training in reflection and criticism that, from its origins in the medieval cities, the university had provided, according to Althusser. In fact, he defends a rather idealised (and idealist) notion of the university as an *Imperium in Imperio* in Spinoza's sense, as if, against everything

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6 *Manifeste POUR UNE RÉFORME DEMOCRATIQUE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR* (1964). [https://www.institut-tribune-socialiste.fr/wp-content/uploads/1964/11/64-09\\_manifestenseig.pdf](https://www.institut-tribune-socialiste.fr/wp-content/uploads/1964/11/64-09_manifestenseig.pdf).

7 *Manifeste*, p. 4.

he later argues in the ISAs essay, it is a space of freedom that plays no role in the reproduction of the capitalist order, and that the existing means of the production and transmission of knowledge within it are ‘necessary’ and unchangeable. He does not effectively respond to the argument in the Manifesto that *‘Il va de soi que les «franchises» dont jouit actuellement l’Université, quant à la nomination de professeurs et assistants, à l’utilisation des locaux, etc. et les institutions qui les défendent, assemblées et conseils de faculté, d’université, ne doivent pas être abandonnées aux attaques du pouvoir. Toutefois l’autonomie de l’université, est bien autre chose que ces simples franchises, qui ne sont actuellement que des alibis à une perte réelle de pouvoir de l’université sur son propre domaine et à une diminution de son importance, tant sur le budget de l’Etat que dans la société.’*<sup>8</sup>

Further, the students, influenced by the work of André Gorz (particularly, *Stratégie ouvrière et néo-capitalisme*) and the concept of *autogestion*, or self-management, assert that *‘A long terme, les étudiants affirment avec force leur volonté de participer à la gestion de leur faculté. Dès à présent, ils protestent contre l’absence de tout droit syndical étudiant et revendiquent la reconnaissance de la section syndicale de faculté.’*<sup>9</sup> In response, Althusser introduces the distinction, central to his essay, between the technical and the social division of labour: the first is necessary in an objective sense, necessary to the existing technologies, the existing instruments and means of production; the second is necessary only to class domination and the extraction of surplus-value. This distinction allows him to reject the students’ demands:

Through the knowledge taught at university passes *the permanent dividing line between technical and social divisions of labour, the most constant and profound of class divisions ...* Now, what is remarkable is that in the case of the university the *social division of labour*, and therefore *class domination*, comes *massively* into play, but not only – or even mainly – where student and non-student theorists look for it. It comes *massively* into play, and in a ‘blinding’ way (which doubtless is why one does not always ‘see’ it), in the very *object* of intellectual work; *in the knowledge* the university is commissioned to distribute to the students.<sup>10</sup>

The *Manifeste* further questioned the function of the student-professor relationship, both its inequality and the ways that this relationship rested on a

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8 *Manifeste*, p. 14.

9 *Manifeste*.

10 Althusser 2011, p. 13.

set of individualising rituals and practices. The examinations and the different modes of performance expected of the individual student were organised in a series of competitions that not only made every student the adversary of every other, but produced inequalities that further undermined any form of cooperation. The instructor/professor was set apart from the students so as to judge the degree to which they have acceded to the norm or deviated from it in a hierarchically divided space in which the right to speak or to remain silent is unequally distributed. Moreover, faculty, too, were expected to compete against each other in their scholarly work: they learned very quickly that achievement without recognition was as detrimental to professional advancement as recognition without achievement. The mutual individualisation of student and teacher through various relays and mechanisms would be described by Foucault a decade later, in *Surveiller et Punir*. In fact, Althusser himself both before and after 'Student Problems' was engaged in the production of a concept of '*le sujet d'imputation*' that would become the interpellated subject by 1969–70, as if Althusser's ability to integrate the students' critique was deferred to the time when the student-worker revolt provided an irrefutable demonstration of its truth.<sup>11</sup> In 'Student Problems', however, Althusser reduces these complexities to a simple confrontation with a subject who possesses knowledge and a subject who lacks it: 'The pedagogic function has as its object the transmission of a determinate knowledge to subjects who do not possess it. Therefore, the pedagogic situation is based on the absolute condition of an inequality between a knowledge and a lack of knowledge'. It is worth mentioning that Althusser's practice in no way corresponded to his theory: none of his contemporaries could be said to depend so completely on collective theoretical labour, on thinking with others. Althusser became Althusser only when he and a group of students formed a 'community of thought', as Macherey called it, that in a way resembled the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student. We might even suggest that when it came to reading Marx's *Capital*, he had adopted the students' view that '*il ne peut être question de séparer ce que l'on enseigne de la façon dont on l'enseigne. L'UNEF se refuse à considérer les méthodes de travail comme de simples techniques plaquées sur un contenu*'.<sup>12</sup>

Clemente shows in great detail the ways in which the student radicalisation entered the lecture hall, calling into question not only Althusser's notion of pedagogy but ultimately some of the 'axioms', as one student called them, of his theoretical positions. 'Student Problems' was not only a critique of the

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11 Althusser 1996.

12 *Manifeste*, p. 16.

UNEF's demands as laid out in the *Manifeste*; it was also a direct outgrowth of Althusser's decision to invite Bourdieu and Passeron to hold a seminar at the ENS on the topic of '*théorie et méthode en sciences humaine*'. Althusser's introductory lecture, together with the initial presentations by Bourdieu and Passeron, appeared to some of the students present to ignore the emerging critique of the student-professor relation and the traditional roles and rituals that characterised French academic life. Bruno Queysanne, a member of the UEC (the PCF's student group) and later a specialist in the theory and history of architecture, wrote to Althusser after the event to express his shock and anger at the uncritical restaging of what he argued was not simply a mode of communicating knowledge but an organisation of space and a disposition of bodies, the site of ritualised movements and a liturgy of speech acts. In other words, the struggle in which he and others had participated (a strike at the Sorbonne, at which he was a student, a few months earlier) had revealed, but in a way not entirely intelligible to him or to Althusser, that domination was exercised not simply through the content of what was taught or in the style of the communication, but in the ritualisation of movements and voices whose uniformity and regularity are lived as natural and necessary. For Queysanne, '*la disposition de la salle, le nombre de participants, la manière légère avec laquelle tu traitais des principes*' sufficed to signify the failure to grasp '*l'autoritarisme Classique*' that was irreducible either to the knowledge transmitted or to the allusions and turns of phrase that perpetuate class differences within the otherwise free space of the liberal university. Finally, only what Althusser would later call the mass ideological revolt of the students, a revolt whose intelligence he resisted until May 68, could lead him to the discovery of the concept of the Ideological State Apparatus as the condition of intelligibility of the institution of the university. This concept existed in the practical state in the very actions by students that Althusser initially regarded as threatening the production of knowledge. In an unsigned text published in *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes*, Balibar notes that the argument of Bourdieu and Passeron casts doubt on any notion of students as the proletariat of the academic realm, a notion '*qui faisait des étudiants dans leur ensemble des prolétaires esclaves de ces maîtres capitalistes que seraient leurs professeurs. Les vraies scissions passent au sein du «milieu étudiant» lui-même et on n'y retrouve pas par hasard, avec une faible marge d'approximation, les scissions des classes de notre société*'.<sup>13</sup> While proposals for educational reform had long cited the effects of class differences among students, Bourdieu

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13 Anonymous [Etienne Balibar], *Les Héritiers*, par P. Bourdieu et J.C. Passeron, notes de lecture, *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes* 3, 28–48.

and Passeron furnished '*non la simple constatation d'une inégalité et de sa correspondance générale avec une inégalité scolaire (économiquement fondée), mais la description du mécanisme de l'inégalité*'.<sup>14</sup> Balibar neither questions their use of quantitative methods, nor does he dispute the results these methods have returned. Instead, he examines '*leur propos et la pertinence des questions qu'ils posent*'.<sup>15</sup>

Balibar defends the positions Althusser articulates in 'Student Problems', but reformulates the terms of the argument. The 'freedom' of the liberal university that allows it to function as an *Imperium in Imperio* where critical thought is by definition always possible, is replaced by the far more limited and conditional notion of the relative autonomy of the university. For Balibar, as for Althusser, this complicates any attempt to establish by analogy a causal connection between the worker-capitalist relation and that of student-professor. It discourages the search for resemblances or homologies and compels us to take the 'reality' of the university as irreducible and determinate. Balibar then returns to the distinction between the technical division of labour, whose necessity derives from the acquisitions and contemporary activity of science (or the sciences), and a social division of labour that represents a continuation of extra-academic class divisions within academia. Because the necessity of the technical derives from the objectivity of a science, it is not susceptible to reform based on moral norms, but changes only in response to the imperatives prescribed by the science in question. The adequate study of a science can only take place according to the forms of the technical division of labour proper to it, which in turn, exists only in the university: '*il s'agit de se les approprier pour pouvoir éventuellement transformer le contenu (idéologique). L'autodidactisme est le plus grand ennemi de l'organisation politique léniniste*'.<sup>16</sup>

But neither Balibar nor Althusser appears to acknowledge the aporia that this position produces: how does one demarcate the technical division of labour at a given moment from a purely social division of labour in their constantly changing practical and institutional existence? Both seem to suggest that the actual state of instruction pertaining to a given science is necessarily determined by the rational activity of the science itself and that this instruction will change only when and if the science itself undergoes change. This position deprives instruction of any autonomy in relation to the science, while granting it complete autonomy in relation to the reality of the social and political world. And while Althusser counters student demands for a more collective approach

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14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

to education with the argument that it is the content of what is taught, not the form in which this content is conveyed that matters, he nevertheless insists that the pedagogical forms through which the knowledge of biology is transmitted are determined by the science itself and cannot be changed. Neither Althusser's position nor its reversal by Rancière ten years later allows us to grasp the problem posed, but overlooked, by Balibar of the reality specific to the university and of the reality or materiality of ideology itself in all its forms.

It is not easy to explain the chasm that lies between the Althusser who could defend the 'liberal conception of the university' and its 'technically necessary' hierarchies in the 1964 essay, 'Student Problems', and the Althusser who, by 1970, regarded the school as a factory that produced ideology, as other factories produce cars or machine parts. Clemente's work not only makes visible and intelligible the caesura that separates two distinct ways of thinking about education in Althusser's work, a caesura determined by the events with which it was roughly contemporaneous: the great struggles opened by May 1968, and before that, in 1966, the Chinese Cultural Revolution (with its critique of the Chinese university and the rejection of the subordinate place of students within it) and the sudden emergence of Maoism in France (in which a number of Althusser's students played a significant role). To use Althusser's own terminology, not only did practice precede theory and critique take flight only after insurgency, but the mass ideological revolts of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and May 68 represented the new theory in the practical state. We should note that Althusser wrote his brief and unsigned text on the Chinese Cultural Revolution within weeks of the Declaration of Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on August 8th 1966 in which the famous 16 points of the Cultural Revolution were laid out. Despite the fact that one of the points involved the need 'to transform the old educational system and the old principles and methods of teaching' and with a thoroughness that made the demands of French student movement seem very modest, Althusser accorded the Chinese Cultural Revolution a historical significance that compelled him to rethink the concept of ideology, and with it, the very notion of the school.

*Le P.C.C. déclare que ce sont les organisations de masse de la jeunesse, principalement de la jeunesse urbaine, donc avant tout des lycéens et étudiants, qui sont actuellement à l'avant-garde du mouvement. C'est une situation de fait, mais dont l'importance politique est évidente. D'une part, en effet, le système d'enseignement en place, ou la jeunesse est formée (il ne faut pas oublier que l'Ecole marque toujours profondément les hommes, même pendant les périodes de mutations historiques) était en Chine le bastion de l'idéologie bourgeoise et petite-bourgeoise. D'autre part, la jeunesse, qui n'a*

*pas fait l'expérience des luttes et guerres révolutionnaires, constitue, dans un pays socialiste, un point très sensible, où se joue une partie d'avenir capitale. La jeunesse n'est pas révolutionnaire du seul fait de naître dans un pays socialiste, ni de grandir dans les récits des exploits de ses aînés. Si malgré toutes les énergies de son âge, elle se trouve, du fait d'une carence politique, abandonnée dans un désarroi ou un «vide» idéologiques, elle est alors livrée en fait aux formes idéologiques «spontanées» qui ne cessent de peupler ce «vide»: idéologies petites-bourgeoises et bourgeoises, soit héritées du passé national, soit importées de l'étranger. Ces formes trouvent leurs points d'appuis naturels dans le positivisme, l'empirisme et le technicisme «apolitique» des savants et autres spécialistes.<sup>17</sup>*

It is surprising indeed to read Althusser's list of the '*idéologies petites-bourgeoises et bourgeoises, soit héritées du passé national, soit importées de l'étranger*' that have emerged or re-emerged in post-revolutionary Chinese academia: "apolitical" positivism, empiricism and technicism of scientists and other specialists'.<sup>18</sup> In a single phrase whose significance for the development of Althusser's thought concerning education and the notion of ideology in general is easily overlooked, he has rejected the arguments advanced in 'Student Problems'. The distinction between the technical and social division of labour which, Althusser had argued, established the teacher-student relation and the individual nature of research as objectively necessary and inalterable, now, according to his own analysis, was among the bourgeois ideologies that promoted a restoration of capitalism. The Chinese Communist Party's denunciation of 'scholar-tyrants' who under the cover of 'purely academic discussion' claimed that truth and reason are above political conflict in order to create the ideological grounds on which to argue in favour of a gradual return to capitalism, would soon enough be applied to Althusser himself. Rancière, the most effective of Althusser's critics, used Althusser's own reading of the Cultural Revolution to portray him as a scholar-tyrant who appealed to science in order to impose a philosophy of anti-revolt on his students.

The Cultural Revolution allowed Althusser to see not only what was invisible to him when he wrote 'Student Problems' in early 1964, namely the objectively materialist character of the objectives of the student movement, but also the extent to which his own intervention had failed, nullified both by the force

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17 Anonymous [Louis Althusser], 'Sur la révolution culturelle', *Cahiers marxistes-leninistes*, 5–16, <https://adlc.hypotheses.org/archives-du-seminaire-marx/cahiers-marxistes-leninistes/cml14-sur-la-revolution-culturelle>.

18 Ibid.

of its own contradictions; this self-nullification, in turn, produced a theoretical void quickly filled with the apologetic ideologies that Althusser otherwise opposed. Without the public acknowledgement of his own errors that would later become a trademark of Althusser, the specific combination of the French student struggles and the Cultural Revolution allowed him to think critically about the material existence of the university, rather than defend its current forms as necessary, a gesture designed to exclude any inquiry into their political function. Althusser now faced the reality to which he had often alluded, but never truly examined: that unlike Spinoza or Marx, he wrote and spoke from within a particular apparatus with the rituals and liturgies that determined what must be said, what could not be said, and, perhaps most importantly, what was sayable, but only at a greater or lesser cost to the speaker. The imprecision of concepts such as 'the educational system' or 'academia' would soon be replaced by 'the educational apparatus', a rudimentary notion to be sure, but one whose very rudimentary character made it capable of preventing both theoretical regression to the earlier conceptions and a theoretical voluntarism for which it would figure as the foundation.

May 68 solidified Althusser's turn in relation to student struggles. In a letter to Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, written in March 1969, he develops a lengthy critique of the role of students in the May events, above all, their relations to the workers' struggles, going so far as to deny the existence of a student movement in any true sense of the term and asking why instead of going to the factories to support the workers, students did not ask them to come to the occupied universities to 'teach them' how to organise a successful occupation. Although he hardly mentions the role of the PCF and its affiliates, much of what he writes concerning the concrete struggles is a defence of its line composed in the workerist idiom of *L'Humanité*. At a certain point, however, he ceases to reduce the student movement to petit-bourgeois pseudo-Marxism and discovers other causes than class position:

It is not terribly difficult to find evidence for the impact of the international anti-imperialist class struggles on the birth and development of this Movement. To name only the most significant, let us remember the effect on young students and intellectuals of the war in Algeria, the Cuban Revolution, guerrilla war in Latin America – where 'Che' met a heroic but politically costly death – the prodigious and victorious struggle of the Vietnamese people against the aggression of the world's greatest military power, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the violent revolt of black Afro-Americans in the large cities of the US and the Palestinian resistance. These anti-imperialist struggles have met with an extraordinary

receptivity among the contemporary youth of our countries, including young workers (let us not forget that in France it was the proletarian and peasant youth who were mobilised for the Algerian war, that it was they who paralysed Salan's 'putsch' and made his officers hesitate and that they have not forgotten this lesson).<sup>19</sup>

The 'combined effect' of the great anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles internationally and a massive rejection of bourgeois ideology, Althusser argues, has led to a mass ideological revolt fought on a new terrain of struggle: the educational system. On the basis of these observations, Althusser advances the following hypothesis:

that the Movement of the young students and intellectuals, on both a national and international level, must be considered as an *ideological revolt* (N.B.: an ideological revolt is not, in and of itself, as the students too readily believe, a political revolution) *which first attacks the apparatus of the educational systems of the capitalist countries.*<sup>20</sup>

The key word here, the single word that signals a kind of 'rupture' with all Althusser's previous thinking about the 'educational system' is of course 'apparatus'. It is with this term that Althusser brings all the lofty ideas and ideals concerning education down to earth, that is, confers upon them the materiality that alone allows them to operate and to produce effects. The concept of apparatus allows us to identify the features of the 'vast battlefield' on which the mass ideological revolt takes place, the uneven distribution of positions with in it, and the advantages and disadvantages proper to each of them. And just as in the Church, which Althusser will soon announce has been replaced by *L'école* as the dominant ISA, the effects of subjection are obtained not by means of ideas, but by ideas existing in the actions and disposition of bodies: 'kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe'.

The result of the theoretical discovery made possible by the May revolt, and the student struggles that preceded it, was the project Clemente describes in detail, and with unflinching precision, on the basis of a wealth of material in *l'archive Althusser*: the attempt by Althusser and a particularly distinguished group of former students (Balibar, Macherey, Establet, Baudelot and Michel Tort), to produce a theory of what they called *l'apparato scolastico*,

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19 Althusser 2018.

20 Ibid.

a fundamentally different object than 'education', that opened both a new field for research according to which the terrain of struggle could be understood as something more than a battle of ideas. The spatial arrangements, separating or compacting, excluding or confining individuals, assigning places according to hierarchies of authority, organising greater or lesser visibility and audibility, the modes of surveillance and discipline, all could now be examined, not as natural, inescapable forms of any conceivable educational system, and thus politically neutral, but as means of a simultaneous subjection and subjectivation of individuals. The emergence of these practices as objects of study did not replace or distract from the imperative to understand how the educational apparatus reproduced class inequalities; on the contrary, they were shown to be means (among others) by which they were reproduced.

Balibar has provided an account of the circumstances that led Althusser in 1969 to write the manuscript he initially intitled 'De la superstructure', published posthumously as *Sur la reproduction*, that confirms that by this time, he saw the school and education as forming the central mechanism in the reproduction of the division between intellectual and manual labour (drawing in part from Durkheim) and thus of class relations. The group of former students described above were already engaged in a collective project on the French educational system, both examining empirical data and rereading such figures as Durkheim and Bourdieu, as well as the more practically oriented works of Célestin Freinet and Krupskaya (both of whom addressed the problem of the overcoming of the division of intellectual and manual labour in relation to the Russian Revolution of 1917). Althusser proposed a contribution to this project that, whatever his initial intentions, attempted to provide its theoretical foundation. While the collective project ultimately foundered, Clemente shows that the work that preceded and followed it around the question of education and its apparatus, and that has been strangely neglected or dismissed even by scholars of Althusser, represents, despite, or because of, its ultimate failure to cohere into a unified school of thought, an essential moment in 'Althusserian' thought that has something to contribute to theory today.

Near the beginning of *Sur la reproduction* Althusser affirms his break with the positions expressed in 'Student Problems', asserting that 'the purely "technical" division of labour is just a facade for a very different kind of division, the social division of labour, which is an effect of the division between classes'.<sup>21</sup> Now, Althusser understands the idea of a necessary technical division of labour,

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21 Althusser 1995, p. 65.

one of the justifications of the existing arrangement in schools, as an extension of the division between ‘manual labour and intellectual labour’, to which Marx refers from *The German Ideology* on.<sup>22</sup> While Althusser describes Marx’s formulation as ‘crude’, he insists that it refers to what is ‘produced by all class societies’. It is still produced, and increasingly produced, by modern capitalist class society, despite the ‘spectacular progress of science and technology’ and the growing numbers of ‘intellectual workers’ in new categories, such as ‘researchers’, whom we shall discuss when the time comes. That is why Marx was on the mark when he said that socialism should ‘abolish the distinction between manual and intellectual labour’.<sup>23</sup>

This process of separating and dividing students is not an expression or representation of the prevailing division of labour into manual and intellectual, workers whose tool is the body and those who work with their intellect, but is part of this division; such a process cannot be understood as operating through ideas or the propagation of the pseudo-knowledge that exists to justify it. Instead, the means of separation and division proper to the *appareil scolaire* are material in every sense of the term, involving techniques of individualisation, as well as enclosure, and the disposition of bodies in both space and time, precisely the phenomena described a few years later by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. In fact, Althusser, in *Sur la reproduction* articulated a concept that was central to the published extract and that in fact illuminates the ideological work of the *appareil scolaire*, although Althusser nowhere acknowledges this: the concept of the interpellation of the individual as subject. School is the place where individuals are subjected through practices of coercion often subtle, but sometimes actively violent, that is, they must be rendered docile (meaning ‘teachable’, derived from the Latin verb *docere* – to teach), in order to made into a subject, a being responsible both causally and legally for his or her actions. The double process of subjection and subjectivation, however, to take his analysis further than he does, does not produce a universal subject but a universal hierarchy of subjects produced by the division of labour, itself always the site of class struggle. This latter point is key: the very fact that the educational system, despite Althusser’s lapses into functional explanation, is understood as an apparatus rather than as the institution of the transmission of knowledge whose material existence is no more than a setting or backdrop, represents the break (*coupure* or *rupture*) that makes possible both a knowledge of the role of the school in the reproduction of capitalist social relations and a knowledge of the mechanisms (the practices and rituals) by which it operates.

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22 Althusser 1995, p. 64.

23 Althusser 1995, p. 63.

The body of the student is as much a target as the mind; not simply ensuring sufficient exercise to reinvigorate the mind, but the daily, hourly, surveillance of the body: the extent and frequency of its movements, a division of such movements into the productive and unproductive, the ration of mobility to immobility, in short, a surveillance that induces self-surveillance and a discipline that is finally realised in self-discipline. The fact that it has proven very difficult to challenge the organisation of time in education, to reduce the periods of relative immobility imposed on the child, the reason 6–8 hours somehow appears normal and natural, and any effort to reduce this time seems an encouraging of idleness, derives from the usually unstated assumption that such disciplining of the body prepares most students for the drudgery that awaits them. For the majority of children, such discipline, in addition to the acquisition of basic skills in math and reading, together with an idealised narrative of their nation's history, constitutes their education. Others, a few, continue on, destined for intellectual labour, not only better trained in the use of language, but to varying degrees, equipped with a knowledge of basic logic and rhetoric, as well as history, political science, etc. Fewer still will become specialists: scientists, social scientists, scholars of philosophy, art, literature, etc.

Althusser alludes to this reality, not simply to demonstrate the function of the *appareil scolaire*, or to stress the inequality that it necessarily produces, but even more to evoke the urgency of transforming education in the course of the cultural revolutions that followed both the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949:

That is why Lenin's desperate insistence on the need to establish a new, polytechnic school education (it unfortunately had small success), which would, moreover, combine manual labour in real production with intellectual labour, was – and is – so important. That is why it seems to us that the news reaching us through what we can gather about certain experiments of the Cultural Revolution (mandatory training periods in basic production units for 'intellectuals' of all orders, 'controlled' shakeups in the distribution of different manual and intellectual jobs among the producers, a real upgrading of jobs involving only implementation to posts of great authority and responsibility) has something to do with the class struggle against the radical determination, in our country, of the 'technical division of labour' by the 'social division of labour'.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Althusser 1995, p. 65.

Overcoming the division of labour, or at least reducing it to the greatest extent possible, was, for Lenin, the unavoidable condition of any genuine proletarian democracy. Workers had to have as much time as possible away from work to continue their education and participate in the management of the Soviet republic, even as an increase in production was a pressing necessity. The obvious answer was the polytechnic: a merging of production and education by increasing labour force participation, so that all would work part-time in order for everyone to have time for 'education', now understood as a lifelong endeavour. In accordance with the notion of proletarian democracy, the emphasis was placed on the self-education of groups and individuals, rather than on instruction by experts. Everyone would be teacher and student simultaneously. Krupskaya argued that mathematics and the physical sciences could be learned best in the context of workplace in which the theoretical and practical were united. As Althusser noted, however, the difficulties faced by the early Soviet republic prevented the realisation of these projects. The failure to overcome the division of labour weighed heavily on the development of the USSR. The question of the school also emerged as the central unresolved problem of the 1949 Chinese revolution, a source of inequality and thus dissatisfaction that increasingly threatened the gains of the revolution. Together, these developments, together with the struggles in the French university that culminated in May 1968, seemed to Althusser to establish the centrality of the *appareil scolaire* as the means of production of the division of intellectual and manual labour.

Baudelot and Establet's *L'école capitaliste en France* (1971) was the only publication to issue directly from the *L'école* project or, more precisely, from the failure of the participants to agree on the conclusions to be drawn from their research. It was here that the rudiments of the notion of *appareil scolaire* advanced by Althusser were finally sketched out. Moreover, Baudelot and Establet attempted to justify his argument that this ISA was dominant in relation to the others, and not just because it was the apparatus through which the mass of the population passed, and where they were inoculated against anti-capitalist (socialist or communist) ideas. They were among the very few in the years following the publication of *Ideologie et les appareils idéologiques d'état* to articulate the degree to which the conception of ideology that emerged from this essay differed from what had been understood by the term previously. Althusser, they argued, had shown that ideology, if the term is to be useful, cannot be understood as ideas: ideology '*n'existe pas en dehors des pratiques dans lesquelles elle se réalise*'.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the notion of submission to bour-

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25 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 273.

geois ideology can no longer be understood as something like acceptance of the ruling ideas; instead, this submission ‘s’effectur par la soumission de chaque instant à un ensemble de pratiques qui constituent le ‘rituel matériel’ de l’idéologie bourgeoise’.<sup>26</sup> In the case of the *appareil scolaire*, ritual extends beyond the classroom, where it takes the forms of the division of roles between student and teacher, examinations and writing exercises, but also exists in the material links between school and family (another ISA, according to Althusser), such as the report card (*carnet de notes*) in which grades (*notes*), as Baudelot and Establet argue, presented to the parents, serve as a form of compensation or reward for a student’s labour. Competition for grades mimics the operation of the market: the achievements of a student, like those of a worker, are attributable solely to the effort and ambition of each individual. Success or failure are the outcome of free and fair competition, the results of which are attributable only to the individual student.

Baudelot and Establet further underscore the coercive function of the rituals proper to the *appareil scolaire*, from homework to the forms of discipline applied to recalcitrant students and the incentives offered to those who obey. These measures constitute the form in which bourgeois ideology is communicated, but they cannot be separated from its content, that is, its ideas, theories and themes. In *L’école capitaliste*, it is noteworthy that the preferred term for the process of the transmission/imposition of the dominant ideology is one Althusser tended to avoid: inculcation. In French as in English the term suggests what is popularly known as ‘brainwashing’, that is, the process through which an individual is compelled through coercive and manipulative means to adopt beliefs opposed to those he or she held previously. Baudelot and Establet, however, add something to the meaning typically assigned to the term, by recalling its literal meaning in Latin, that of ‘treading down’ or ‘treading in’, as in a foot pressing something into, or imprinting itself on, the ground through the direct application of force. In this way, they not only capture the materiality of the pedagogical means of instruction, the force that must accompany the act of teaching, given the resistance that instruction always encounters. The fact of resistance in turn signals that the *appareil scolaire* is the site of struggle (the ideological class struggle) in which practices of resistance and refusal counter the disciplinary strategies on which the supremacy of bourgeois ideology rests. The struggle against bourgeois ideology is not simply reactive, as if it were still captive of that ideology by remaining its mere negation. Again in contrast to Althusser, Baudelot and Establet speak of a separate and distinct

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26 Ibid.

proletarian ideology immanent in the acts of resistance carried out by students (and occasionally teachers), whose dispersed and divergent manifestations are the effects of a strategy rooted in the collective memory of the working class.

The *appareil scolaire* does not produce class inequality as a result, the outcome of a long series of tests and trials whose conclusion is with few exceptions decided in advance. If this were the case, the authors argue, a comprehensive reform of the educational system could be changed to produce a different result. The division into the two networks or tracks occurs within the *appareil scolaire* and operates from 'the first day of their schooling'.<sup>27</sup> This division is 'the means and principle of its functioning', a fact that for Baudelot and Establet has a fundamental political significance.<sup>28</sup> The demand for '*l'allongement de la scolarité obligatoire*' which they recognise will at least postpone for a time the ordeal of 'direct exploitation in its most savage forms' will not two distinct networks (*reseaux*) corresponding to the division of manual and intellectual labour (and thus to the two primary antagonistic classes in society).<sup>29</sup> Students are separated by means of evaluations (both academic and psychological), examinations, and grades, as well the individual records of behaviour and disciplinary actions, that is, through material practices that produce material results. Certainly, the themes characteristic of bourgeois ideology and its tendency to adopt the guise of 'truth', 'knowledge', 'culture', and 'good taste', are what are most immediately visible and, as such, the most common objects of critique.<sup>30</sup> It is, however, the ideology silently practiced in the *appareil scolaire*, incarnate in its rituals and liturgies, that concerns Baudelot and Establet. We find it in the various forms of individualisation that define the *appareil scolaire* that together mask the collective, class, effects of their practices and allow the claim that treating every student as an autonomous, free and equal, individual is the realisation of the ideals of French republicanism. They cite the example of the imposition of the 'rigid norms' of the French language through 'coercive practices:' students are assessed and judged (and therefore individualised) according to the degree to which they deviate from its stylistic norms.

But the very functioning of the *appareil scolaire* also produces friction, that is, resistance, above all, when the attempt to inculcate bourgeois ideology collides the material forms of proletarian ideology. The children of workers diverted to the *Collèges d'enseignement technique* have devised means of subversion in many ways analogous to the forms of resistance typical of industrial workers.

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27 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 270.

28 Ibid.

29 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 273.

30 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 272.

Baudelot and Establet cite a well-known study by the US sociologist, Donald Roy, on the practice of 'goldbricking' (*freinage ou coulage*) on the shop floor, whereby workers give the appearance of working diligently, while in fact conserving their energy for pursuits outside of work.<sup>31</sup> Students, they argue, use similar tactics to avoid concerning themselves with subjects they regard as meaningless (because these subjects are explicitly committed to the inculcation of bourgeois ideology) but which they are obliged to study. Does this mean that everything that is taught at school is 'ideological', even mathematics, physics, biology, etc.? The authors reject as 'metaphysical' the idea that what is taught must be either simply bourgeois ideology or genuine knowledge. The first is absurd: the reproduction of capitalism depends on genuine knowledge, above all, in the sciences. The second, however, is equally untenable: the primary function of school is the separation and classification of individuals in accordance with the prevailing division of labour. Pedagogical methods, whatever their differences, are designed to achieve this end, with the result that the transmission of knowledge is always subordinated to the process by which what Althusser called the interpellation of individuals takes place.

While the analysis outlined in *L'école capitaliste* clearly represents an attempt to develop the basic notions Althusser proposes in the ISA's essay, there are certain points of disagreement or perhaps rectification. The idea of proletarian ideology is one of these. While Althusser never uses the phrase, which in certain ways leads the concept of ideology in a new direction, his assertion that ideology has a material existence opens the possibility of speaking of a proletarian ideology that exists in the acts, practices and even rituals or counter-rituals of the proletariat. Understanding the educational system as an apparatus which in turn is less a mechanism than a condensation of unceasing class war, leads Baudelot and Establet to explain the tactics and strategies at work. Because bourgeois ideology is always only dominant and cannot entirely exclude proletarian ideology, it is compelled to engage in repression, subjection and deformation (*refoulement, asservissement, et travestissement*), for example, speaking of manual labour in archaic and idealised forms: the worker as solitary craftsman, as much artist as artisan.<sup>32</sup> According to such a representation, the worker is dedicated to his craft, with neither the time nor the inclination to engage in politics which, in turn, never intrudes into his workshop. Working-class youth, confronted with such myths and perfectly aware of the discrepancy between them and the reality of capitalist production, rebel either by disrupt-

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31 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 175.

32 Baudelot and Establet 1971, pp. 274–6.

tion of the everyday order or by simply quitting school: it is not theirs and no reform can change its fundamental character.

Baudelot and Establet conclude with the example of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the campaign to create a genuinely new university or perhaps a model of education not that will no longer serve as a refuge for bourgeois ideology, above all, its insistence on the separation between manual and intellectual labour that preserves privileges and allows the rejection and disparagement of ideas that arise from the proletariat on the grounds that 'truth is above politics'. Because the direction of the Cultural Revolution is determined by the initiative of the masses themselves 'who have been invited to undertake the work of criticising, discussing and remaking the educational system',<sup>33</sup> the Chinese are in the process of discerning 'the first organic forms that will put an end (after a very long process) to the division between manual and intellectual labour, that is, to the material and ideological basis of the existence of classes'.<sup>34</sup> They will do this by implementing the notion of the 'polytechnic' as it was originally understood: the unification of the process of production and the process of learning. The fact that the conditions for its realisation did not exist in either the Soviet Republic or the People's Republic of China should not prevent us from continuing to reflect on the problems that led to its formulation.

The process that led Althusser from his initial considerations on the educational system to the concept of the *appareil scolaire* was anything but continuous; on the contrary, it was marked by the interruptions and reversals that are the surest signs of the power of his thought, the power both to affect and to be affected. Althusser's thought was profoundly affected by the struggles around him, including those waged by students, that made the reality of what could only be understood as an Ideological State Apparatus visible and available for knowledge. Giacomo Clemente not only demonstrates the importance of education in the development of his theory but explores the complex network of discussions and debates within which Althusserianism took shape. His book is a model for all those who seek to grasp the singular force of Althusser's theses, known and as yet unknown, that continue to surprise us with their capacity to illuminate realities once covered in darkness.

*Warren Montag*

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33 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 318.

34 Baudelot and Establet 1971, p. 319.

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In the text, I will quote my own translation of the unpublished archival documents that I have consulted, as well as my own translation of all the texts published in French that have not yet been translated in English; finally, Althusser's works that are available in English will be quoted from the published translations.