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The University as power or counter-power? May 1968 and the emergence of a new learning subject

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Abstract

The events of May 68 in France constituted a moment of questioning of the power and of the social role of the University. Two of the philosophers who contributed the most to that questioning were Althusser and Foucault. Their thoughts on the way in which power, discourse and social institutions are articulated played a major role in awakening the students' political consciousness and in opening the doors of the University to social movements that had been, until then, left out of academic discourse. Their positions on the events triggered passionate reactions that ended up changing the institutions of higher education from the inside. The Faure law, issued in the aftermath of the protests, on November 12, 1968, finally acknowledged that higher education should be available to mature students. Taking into account the points of contiguity between conceptual apparatuses of these authors, this paper intends to offer a reflection on the power-effects of the scientific discourse issued by the University and on how its power was contested in a period of deep ideological and political fractures, leading to a paradigmatic shift that democratized the institution and to the emergence of a new learning subject.

Keywords: University; May 1968; Foucault; Althusser; adult education

Introduction

May 1968 is still shrouded in polemics. However, despite the many interpretations about what actually happened and the inability to reach a final balance sheet of eventual gains and losses, one outcome remains undisputed: for the first time in the history of higher education in France the university opened its doors to non-traditional students. It is important to determine the reasons for this major shift, all the more so because the university had until then remained one of the bulwarks of elitism, immersed in its age-old mores and institutional practices, exerting a considerable power not only over the means for the production of knowledge, but also over the mechanisms for its reproduction. Nevertheless, what makes this question far more pressing is that these historic changes, which led to the empowerment of social groups customarily excluded from the structures of knowledge, were not imposed from outside—from social or political forces alien to the university, trying to enforce a specific educational agenda—

but from within, with the students mobilizing themselves for a project of social, cultural, and political transformation. The University of the sixties, in spite of its resistance to change, was able to beget its own wave of contestation that ended up precipitating a ground-breaking renewal of discourses and practices, and ultimately of social identities and political subjectivities (c.f. Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos & Walkerdine, 2008; Lefort, Morin & Castoriadis, 1968).

Without losing sight of the historical circumstances that framed the events of May 1968 in France, this paper aims to shed some light on the causes of this shift in educational policy by taking into account the role that two leading intellectuals in the French academy played in arousing the political consciousness of the students, namely Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. I shall analyse and compare the theoretical apparatuses of both authors as regards the relation between the concepts of power, knowledge, and education. I will also examine the reasons why one of these intellectuals—Althusser—, despite his insistence on the need for a revolutionary rupture, was unable or unwilling to recognize the revolutionary potential of the events and dismissed the students' struggle as little more than a bourgeois fad (Macciocchi, 1973), whereas the other one—Foucault—, more dedicated to identifying the historical configurations of power at the institutional level, took a different course of action and ended up siding with the students and confronting the police (Eribon, 1989/1991). I will also look into some of the benefits that the students' struggle brought about. The Faure law, issued in the aftermath of the protests, constituted the first stepping-stone in the promotion of adult education in the universities as it finally acknowledged that higher education should be made available to mature students and that universities should put into practice measures to promote 'l'éducation permanente'.

Now that the neoliberal discourse seems to have taken hold of higher education, redefining its goals and policies, reducing it to a kind of market transaction (see Biesta, 2005; Crowther, 2011), one should revisit a period in which the French university challenged the tenets of capitalist society and sought to reinvent itself, becoming one of the strongholds of a culture of democratic participation and of valorisation of the human being.

The French University as a locus of contestation

In the spring and summer of 1968, the French university—the repository of knowledge and the regulatory authority for the production of scientific statements, enshrined in its own rituals and mores—was shaken to its foundations. The intellectual and political ferment that ended up reshaping French society did not occur *in spite of* the university and the control that it had of the truth, but rather *because of* the university and the truth-effects that it generated (Swartz, 2004, 2013). Somehow, the critical thinking about society that was being imparted in the French lecture halls was seeping its way into the students' discourse and was pushing for social change. Althusser and Foucault's reflections on the relationship between power, discourse and social institutions, contributed in a special way to this heightened sense of political consciousness.

Of course, this is not the only cause of the protests of 68. A conjugation of historical circumstances concurred to precipitate the conflict (see Horn, 2008; Jackson, Milne & Williams, 2011; Jones & O'Donnell, 2010; Klimke & Scharloth, 2008; Kurlansky, 2005; Quattrocchi & Nairn, 1998; Ross, 2002). The armed stasis of the Cold War formed its most conspicuous backdrop. Although inducing a relative political stability between the two contending blocs, the permanent state of crisis bipolarized

Europe and helped to develop a siege mentality. The impending threat of the nuclear warfare produced a sense of doomsday, which materialized into demonstrations from the 1958 onwards. In the meantime, wars of national liberation in Africa and Southeast Asia, a by-product of the Cold War, were starting to wipe off the last vestiges of colonial pride still subsisting in Europe, and the decolonization process that ensued transformed the social fabric of the metropolises. Labour disputes also formed part of the picture. There were a series of violent factory-strikes that broke out all across France from the mid-sixties onwards, directed against employers and trade union leaders, often resulting in physical confrontation with the police (Ross, 2002). Pressed by a stagnant industrial output, a slower growth rate, increasing foreign competition and more restrictive financial conditions, companies were forced to rely less and less on the labour force. Unemployment was on the rise and the ghost of job insecurity came back to haunt both the young and the middle-aged worker (Singer, 2002). The Left was also being challenged. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the Hungarian Uprising (1956) and the Prague Spring (1968) reduced to rubble the confidence that many Western communists had in the Soviet Union. The political pot of the period was also stirred by the rise of the second-wave feminism—which brought the subject of male oppression and women's rights onto the political agenda and induced new modes of critical representation of women—, and the emergence and consolidation of an independent youth culture, which widened the generation gap and encouraged new forms of political activism (Marwick, 2007; Siegfried, 2007). To this newly conquered sense of independence contributed the expansion of higher education in Europe (Breen, 2010; Kyvik, 2004). In France, the number of students completing their university degrees throughout the sixties rose significantly, with an increase of 275 per cent from 1960-1961 to 1970-1971. This phenomenon caused universities to be overcrowded and has been cited as one of the reasons for the students' protests (Macey, 2004). The Fouchet commission attempted a reform that was highly contested in 1967 and it took the events of May 1968 for Edgar Faure, then minister of education, to propose the creation of a network of comprehensive universities ('universities de proximité') in addition to the already existing seventeen traditional universities (Goulard, 2007; Picard, 2009), which helped to defuse the tension.

The inability of representative democracy to engage the movements of contestation and to absorb their political subjectivities and demands into the fabric of its discursive practices was bound to lead to a point of near collapse. It seemed that the conditions for 'a ruptural unity'—as defined by Althusser—had been met. Although Althusser himself rejected that possibility, one could always argue that there were 'currents' or 'circumstances' bringing together different groups, each with its own set of demands and interests, and which appeared to be 'fusing' into a ruptural unity aggregating the vast majority of the popular masses 'in an assault on a regime which its ruling classes are unable to defend' (Althusser, 1965/2005, p.99; see also Bell, 1997). But on close examination, the political and ideological demands of the so-called new social movements in the sixties could hardly be said to have been determined *in the last instance* by economic factors or simply by the dynamics of class struggle. They cornered the regime and called into question statuses, institutions and values. The negation of the instituted order also entailed a refusal not only to go along the lines of the traditional political discourses of parliamentary democracy (Sartre, 1972) argued that the students' power lay precisely in their refusal of speech), but also in some cases a refusal to walk down the Communist path. People demonstrated against capitalism, the authoritarian Gaullist state, American imperialism, the Vietnam war, the nuclear threat, and the inability of democracy to represent the people and to overcome

inequalities and social injustices; but they also protested against the 'obsolete Communism' and 'bureaucratic interests' of the French Communist Party (FCP), in search of a new Left alternative (Cohn-Bendit & Cohn-Bendit, 1968/2000; Mendel, 1969). The ideological fractures were not running along the fault lines of the ruptural principle established by Althusser. These apparently lesser contradictions were overrunning the general contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production.

The slogans of the university students that invaded the streets attested not only to this refusal to adhere to the traditional political discourses, but especially to the need for a radical transformation of the political culture. Inevitably, the university was seen as standing in the way of such change: 'Fin de l'Université'; 'Professeurs vous êtes aussi vieux que votre culture, votre modernisme n'est que la modernisation de la police'; (mimicking the *Internationale*) 'Debout les damnés de l'Université'; 'Et si on brulait la Sorbonne?'; 'Le pouvoir avait les universités, les étudiants les ont prises. Le pouvoir avait les usines, les travailleurs les ont prises. Le pouvoir avait l'O.R.T.F., les journalistes lui ont pris. Le pouvoir a le pouvoir, prenez-le lui!'[1] (see Enragés anonymes, 1998; Piquemal, 1998).

André Gorz, one of the co-founders of the *Le Nouvel Observateur*, added fuel to the fire when he denounced this dissolution of the political potential of the students inside the university and called for its annihilation. This sort of institution, he claimed, 'dispenses neither a "useful culture" nor a "rebellious culture" (which, by definition, is not dispensed); it dispenses a university culture, i.e., a knowledge separated from any productive or militant practice' (Gorz, 1970). That is, the university is socially and politically dysfunctional because it serves neither the demands of capitalism nor the project of those aiming to overthrow it. He thus concludes:

> It can thus not be a question of reforming the university, but rather of destroying it in order to destroy all at once the culture separated from the people it incarnates (that of the mandarins) and the social stratification of which it after all remains the instrument. (Gorz, 1970)

For Gorz, the root of the crisis of the bourgeois university and of the capitalist division of labour was, first and foremost, of a political nature. Therefore, in a crisis like this, the violence of the student movement could be dismissed neither as sheer 'vandalism' nor as 'perverse taste for objectless violence', but was in fact the expression of a political necessity which the academy, the political parties and the traditional working class movement organizations, entrenched in their long-standing political discourses, failed to come to terms with.

The university as power: the contrasting views of Foucault and Althusser

Despite Gorz's condemnation of the 'bourgeois' university, it had been inside the latter that the debate about the relation between power and higher education had started. One of the most important voices in that debate was Foucault's. It was he who advanced that power can be regarded neither as 'a phenomenon of mass and homogeneous domination—the domination of one individual over others, of one group over others, or of one class over others', nor as something 'divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively and those who do not have it and are subject to it'. On the contrary, it 'must be analysed as something that *circulates*, or rather as something that functions

only when it is part of a chain' (Foucault, 2003, p. 29; my italics). Therefore, what mattered to Foucault was the study of power not as a form of coercion exercised over individuals or groups, but as a key factor in the structuration of the social body and of its institutional apparatus. Foucault's *circulatory* metaphor serves to emphasize this concept of the relational dimension of power, which not only underlies every governing action, but also constitutes one of the driving forces behind the dynamics of social practices and the construction of subjectivities.

Foucault identified at least two structural elements that provide the framework within which power keeps its momentum, namely the rules of right and what he calls the truth-effects (Foucault, 2003). These elements are interlocked and play a determining role in guaranteeing that the mechanisms of power do not sink under the weight of random social pressures. His enquiries of a more empirical nature into subjects as diverse as the political use of psychiatry and the madhouse (Foucault, 1961, 1962), the birth of the social medicine and the hospital (Foucault, 1963), the historical developments of the judicial system and the prison (Foucault, 1975), or politics, education, and the interdiction of sexuality (Foucault, 1976, 1982, 1984a, 1984b), sought precisely to demonstrate the inner workings of power, be it as the materialization of such rules of right (the institutions), be it as the truth-effects of a given discourse (religious, scientific, political), be it still as a crucial factor in the processes of constitution of identities.

Foucault further maintained that scientific discourse, in its complicity with power—through the various institutional forms that such complicity takes—, acts in order to guarantee its own continuity through mechanisms of submission and exclusion. The most obvious instance of this 'institutionalization' of scientific discourse was precisely the modern university (Foucault, 2003), whose emergence he traced to the late eighteenth century, at a time when the belief in reason had given rise to 'the disciplinarisation of polymorphous and heterogeneous knowledges' (Foucault, 2003, p. 182)—something that not only evicted the philosophical discourse from science, but also levelled to the ground the project for a *mathesis universalis*, a universal science based on mathematics. The Napoleonic university did not simply emerge as yet another institutional materialization of knowledge, of truth, but especially as an attempt to control it, to tame it; in other words, to turn it into something tractable, disciplined, dominated. A project of this nature was bound to ghettoise philosophy, whose critical and self-critical edge could hardly have suited a system of knowledge based on discrete or compartmentalized forms of classification of the world. The appearance of *knowledges*, each with its own terminology, method, scope, apparently well-defined object, etc., derived precisely from this sort of *cladogenesis*, i.e. this branching off of something that was once believed to be unitary and universal. Philosophy, unable as it was to continue to play an organizational and regulatory function within the new scientific system, was gradually forced to pull back.

The compartmentalization of knowledge also brought with it new claims to the monopoly of the truth: no longer that truth that Plato spoke of in his *Republic*—*aletheia*, or the *unhiddenness* of things (Plato, 2000; Heidegger, 2004)—, but that other truth which is much closer to what Heidegger (2004) conceptualized as the correspondence between the proposition and the thing, a truth whose existence hinges on a series of discursive realizations. The monopoly of truth that the university then claimed for itself was the monopoly of a set of discourses over the others. Therefore, the function of the modern university was, from the very outset, to select—which is also to say, from a different perspective, to exclude—discourses, to arrange their distribution and articulation, to apply the rules that guarantee their quality, and to establish a scientific

community to oversee these processes and to make sure that consensus was reached. This, nevertheless, is not to be equated with sheer orthodoxy. As Foucault (2003) points out, the disciplinarisation of knowledges did not end up in crystallized, immutable truths—quite the contrary: since such disciplinarisation rested not on the *content* of statements, but on their *regularity* and on a grammar, i.e. a series of *rules* for the production and validation of enunciations, it gave way to an unlimited multiplication of statements that allowed discourses to regenerate themselves from the inside through various accepted methodological procedures without running the risk of collapse.

Another role that Foucault ascribed to the university is that of using 'directly or indirectly, State apparatuses to centralize knowledge' (Foucault, 2003, p. 183). This does not mean, however, that the university exists as a separate institution in relation to the system of State apparatuses. It may indeed take advantage of other apparatuses to secure the conditions for the monopolistic appropriation of the truth, but it is not autonomous. The university is, to use Althusser's terminology, already part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), and therefore its social function cannot be discussed without considering a whole series of mutual dependencies and determinations that develop over time between such apparatuses.

Ideological state apparatuses

In order to better grasp the nature of the university from an Althusserian perspective, an explication of the workings of the ISAs—and in particular their incidence in the spheres of higher education and adult education—is in order. ISAs form part of processes of reproduction of the productive forces and of the relations of production within a given social formation. Marx had already argued that the stability and continuity of the formation arising from a dominant mode of production hinges on its ability to guarantee that the means of productions, i.e. the material conditions of production, can go on being replicated at different levels of the productive chain (Marx, 1990, 1992). What Althusser now sought to do was to understand how reproduction works at the social level of the productive forces, which is to say of labour power.

Althusser identifies two conditions for such reproduction to take place (Althusser, 1971). The first is the provision of the material means to ensure the subsistence of the worker, namely through wages. The value of such wages corresponds to just a fraction of the value generated by the labour power of the worker himself. Wages allow the worker not only to go on employing his labour force for the enterprise, but also to reproduce himself through the children that he raises and that will also step into the production process later on. The wage alone, however, does not suffice to make the worker truly productive. In a mode of production of such complexity as ours, markedly characterized by a highly developed socio-technical division of labour, the wage-earner must possess the skills, techniques and knowledge required to maximize his contribution to the generation of wealth. He must also be taught the rules that govern the relations between the agents in the productive process—a sort of social grammar that ultimately stipulates his position within a social order structured according to the logic of class domination. This is the second condition. Here the education system fulfils two fundamental functions. On the one hand, it provides the know-how—the *epistêmê* and the *technê*—required for the inclusion of the individual in the productive process. On the other hand, it subjects him to the rules of the social order, be it by imposing the dominant ideology upon him, be it by giving the agents of repression and exploitation the power and the ability to enforce such order, since the reproduction of the productive forces is not simply a matter of imparting knowledge or teaching skills, but also a question of ensuring the ideological subjection of the individual, that is, his

acceptance of the existing relations of production, of the rules of the dominant classes, and of the various mechanisms of reproduction. The way the State is organized contributes to the perpetuation of this situation, in which the worker accepts the ongoing extortion of the surplus value that he produces (see also Heinrich, 2009; Cole, 2008). The main function of the State Apparatuses is precisely to safeguard the interests of the ruling classes against those of the working class either through repression, or through ideology. Althusser maintains that, besides the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), such as the police, the courts, the prisons or the army, which may every now and then resort to violence and are centralized under a commanding unity, there are other specialized institutions—religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade-union, communications and cultural—, operating at a more or less unconscious level and which play an important part in conditioning the thinking and the attitudes of the individual. Althusser refers to the ensemble of these institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses, which are:

> relatively 'autonomous' and capable of providing an objective field to contradictions which express, in forms which may be limited or extreme, the effects of the clashes between the capitalist class struggle and the proletarian class struggle, as well as their subordinate forms. (Althusser, 1971, p. 149)

Despite the diversity of ISAs, all of them play from the same score—the ideology of the ruling class—and their effectiveness lies in the apparent invisibility of their effects. Althusser foregrounds the school as the ISA that has the most pervasive effect on the social organization of the capitalist formation by 'drumming into' the individuals the main roles of class society: those of the exploited, the agent of exploitation, the agent of repression and the professional ideologist. Althusser's description of the education system is clearly marked by the historical context, but is nevertheless a very straightforward portrait of an education oriented towards capitalist priorities: the lower levels of education eject the vast majority individuals directly into the production process; others may eventually reach positions of middle technicians or middle executives. There are, however, those few who reach

> the summit either to fall into intellectual semi-employment, or to provide, as well as the 'intellectuals of the collective labourer', the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and the professional ideologists (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced 'laymen'). (Althusser, 1971, p. 155)

This 'summit' is the only reference, albeit metaphorical, that Althusser makes to the university. He prefers instead to speak of the school in more general terms. Here he admits that he took his inspiration from Gramsci. In the Gramscian model of the ethical (or cultural) State, the school in particular is ascribed a 'positive educative function'—in contrast with the 'repressive and negative function' of the court. Although the Italian thinker considered the former to be positive and the latter negative, he still believed that both play an important part in the preservation of the cultural and political hegemonic status of the ruling class (Gramsci, 1971). Althusser, on the other hand, is less optimistic about the benefits or 'positive' effects that the educational apparatus may generate. Education serves the needs of the capitalist economic system through selective processes. In this light, adult education is little more than the development of technical skills and the acquisition of a specialized knowledge meeting the demands of the capitalist division of labour. Althusser subsumes ethics under the category of practical ideologies—which include religion, politics, law, and aesthetics—and which serve no

other purpose but to perpetuate the roles of the exploited, of the agent of exploitation, of the agent of repression, and of the professional ideologist (Althusser, 1971). Therefore, his principal thesis concerning education makes no concessions: 'all Ideological State Apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation' (Althusser, 1971, p. 154). If this holds true for the school, it should also hold true for the university, but in his most relevant writings published around the late sixties, early seventies, Althusser, unlike Foucault, steers clear of the subject, notwithstanding all his preoccupations with scientific discourse and the way in which it could counter the effects of ideology. We can only speculate why an intellectual so actively committed to exposing the logics of State power and the mechanisms of reproduction of the relations of production made such a glaring omission of the ideological function of the university, especially in those years when this institution became the hotbed of ideological and political dissent.

Comparing Althusser and Foucault

Althusser's hesitations to undertake a thorough examination of the ideological role of the university properly speaking makes it difficult for us to establish a dialogue between the theses he advanced and the ideas put forward by Foucault. There are tangible theoretical divergences between both philosophers that cannot be satisfactorily bridged.

Foucault's main concern was the analysis of the historical conditions for the emergence and consolidation of scientific discourses and their effects on social practices and power relations, whereas Althusser was more focused on the role that ideology plays in the construction—through processes of recognition and misrecognition—of the knowledge of the world, including scientific discourse and educational practices. This, in turn, also implies a difference in scope: Althusser preferred to examine the role of the school as an ISA and to discuss how the education system not only conditions the representations of the world and of the individuals, but also serves to secure the preservation of the functions of the capitalist mode of production; Foucault, on the other hand, was more interested in the specificity of the university as the institutional embodiment of scientific discourses, and therefore tried to understand how the rules stipulating what is to be authorized, sanctioned, excluded and prohibited come into being.

Finally, another dissimilarity of some import has to do with the way in which they conceive power itself. For Althusser, power is ultimately materialized in the State and the final objective of the political class struggle is precisely the conservation or seizure of State power. This objective power can be secured as long as the State Apparatuses, both repressive and ideological, remain in the hands of one single class (Althusser, 1971). Foucault's power, on the other hand, is more evanescent and far less easy to grasp. As he argues in one of his defences of *The History of Sexuality*: 'The reason why we have seen the development of so many power relations, so many systems of control, and so many forms of surveillance is precisely that power has always been impotent' (Foucault, 1994a, p. 629). This oxymoron is not entirely innocent. Foucault knew that resistance to power is a central feature of human societies and that the institutionalized forms of power can always be contested and disrupted.

Having said this, despite differences in vocabulary and conceptual architecture, there are some parallels that can be drawn between both philosophers. To begin with, they both sought to denounce the French education system—and, in Foucault's case in particular, higher education—, as a State apparatus that serves power, first and foremost. It either segregates individuals, pushing them to the margins of the system, or assigns them a specific role or function within the social structure, including that of

safeguarding truth or scientific knowledge. By opposing offbeat theories and resisting discourses emerging from the fringes of mainstream science or of the dominant culture, the education system is there to lessen the potential for change by reinforcing already existing meanings and values, at the same time as it perpetuates the relations of power within the social order. In other words, the different forms of knowledge conveyed by the education system not only shape the individuals and determine their function in capitalist society, but also corroborate the existing social organization, including education itself.

On the other hand, Althusser and Foucault tried to demonstrate that the power of education institutions is socially effective precisely because (a) it results from the straightforward imposition of scientific discourses coming from above or irradiating from an easily identifiable centre, and (b) it acts through the invisible dispersion of its effects in the social body—a power that goes on working at an unconscious level, operating under the surface of language and disguising social contradictions as obviousnesses. As a consequence, they dismissed the notion that it is only through repression or dogmatism that power can be preserved. This is not to say that they underestimated the role of repression in the control of individuals. However, they preferred to throw light on those manifestations of power that do not take on an overtly repressive or violent character and that, because of this, are more effective in subduing individuals and groups.

The two philosophers also attempted to explain the mechanisms that guarantee the longevity of such institutions, be it through a mere process of reproduction (Althusser), be it through the stipulation of the sets of rules for the validation of discourses (Foucault). In order to do that, they traced the evolution of such mechanisms through the historical transformation of the institutions dedicated to education or to the control and validation of truth (the Church or the State).

Finally, they both admitted that it is still possible to counter the effects of the equation between power and scientific discourse (embodied either in the university or in the school) by means of a *critical epistemology* that allowed us to unmask hidden relations of power and deconstruct mechanisms of domination: in Foucault's case through the concept of 'genealogy', which is presented as 'an insurrection against the centralizing power-effects that are bound up with the institutionalization and workings of any scientific discourse organized in a society such as ours' (Foucault, 2003, p. 9); in Althusser's case through 'the (scientific) knowledge of the mechanism of [ideological] recognition', which must be reached so as to start outlining 'a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology' (Althusser, 1971, p. 173; see also Ryder, 2013).

Thus spoke the philosophers: Althusser and Foucault's views on May 68

Althusser, who was at a psychiatric hospital during the protests, remained shrouded in silence for a long time. When he finally tore the veil and spoke about what had happened, his appraisal disappointed many left-wing radicals (Hewlett, 2010). Though a Marxist, he seemed to incarnate the scholars' inability to understand the university as a privileged locus for challenging existing power relations. Instead of exploring the students' subversive potential to the benefit of the FCP, he saw their actions as a manifestation of their ideological subjection to the bourgeois state—hence his criticisms that the events of May 68 were merely 'bourgeois' and 'counter-revolutionary', and that the students had fallen victims of 'infantile leftism' (Collins, Glaberman & Hamerquist,

1978; Jones & O'Donnel, 2010). In his correspondence with Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, a member of the Italian Communist Party, Althusser emphasized that whatever had happened was not a moment of *fusion* leading to a 'ruptural unity', but of historical *encounter*. He went on to explain that 'an encounter may occur or not occur', but when it does, it 'can be a "brief encounter", relatively accidental, in which case it will not lead to any fusion of forces'. Althusser argued that this had been precisely

> the case in May, where the meeting between workers/employees on the one hand and students and young intellectual workers on the other was a brief encounter which did not lead, for a whole series of reasons . . . , to any kind of fusion. (Macciocchi, 1973, p. 307)

One may always discuss what exactly the consequences of this 'brief encounter' were, in particular on the ideological, discursive and political planes, and speculate about the legacy of May 1968. However, to downplay everything that had happened, as Althusser did, as 'a brief encounter' of social actors lured by some form or another of 'infantile leftism', especially after having advanced the thesis of the 'ruptural unity' which was required to start a revolutionary process, is a move that could only have led to the discredit of his entire theoretical edifice. He even supported Edgar Faure's politics not so much because he subscribed to the principles of the reform proposed by the latter, but because 'the (bourgeois) intelligence of E. Faure' contributed to the 'disintegration' of the student movement (Macciocchi, 1973).

Althusser's arguments earned him the bitter opposition of one of his disciples, Jacques Rancière, who set out to denounce Althusserianism as 'a philosophy of order' (Rancière, 1974/2011). In his discussion of the lack of articulation between the theory and political praxis of the Party, Rancière struck home by arguing:

> In May 1968 . . . everything was suddenly and brutally clarified. As the class struggle broke out openly inside the university, the status of the 'theoretical' was thrown into doubt, though not by the perennial blabber about praxis and the concrete, but by the reality of a mass ideological revolt. Thenceforward, Marxist discourse would no longer be able to rest its entire case on the affirmation of its own rigour. The class struggle made the bourgeois system of knowledge an open question because it raised, for everyone, the problem of knowledge's ultimate political meaning, of its revolutionary or counter-revolutionary character. (Rancière, 1974/2011, p. 129)

This passage is crucial to the debate about the relation between power and the university for two reasons. Firstly, it confirms that the university—here referred to as 'the bourgeois system of knowledge'—does indeed offer yet another stage where the class struggle can be fought out through contending discourses and practices. So much so that even Marxism, which is supposed to provide the conceptual framework for the critical evaluation of that struggle, is drawn into the contention. Secondly, it became clear to Rancière that, in the period that followed the student uprising, the Althusserians' defence of academic knowledge also corresponded to the revisionist offensive against the fundamentals of the political struggle on which the students had embarked. Hence his accusation: 'the link between the Althusserian reading of Marx and political revisionism was not just a case of equivocal coexistence – it was an effective theoretical and political solidarity' (Rancière, 1974/2011, p. 129). Thus, since it was not the result of a carefully planned course of action drawn up by the unassailable logic of Marxist orthodoxy, the revolutionary thrust was looked down on as the unwanted child of circumstances, which had no place in the Marxist science as conceived by Althusser. 'In the end,' claims Rancière, 'Marxist discourse resolves to be the justification of academic knowledge and of the authority of the Central Committee'. Worse still:

''Science' becomes the slogan of the ideological counter-revolution' (Rancière, 1974/2011, p. 154). Despite also acknowledging the contradictions surrounding the events of May 1968, Foucault took a different view of the movements of contestation that took to the streets of Paris, arguing that they could not be read, regardless of Althusser's best attempts, in the light of the Marxist problematic. Not that Foucault as a philosopher rejected Marxism downrightly. As he once stated, 'I am neither and adversary nor a partisan of Marxism', although there are authors who do not hesitate to label him a 'historical materialist' (Olssen, 2006, p. 37; Stickney, 2007, p. 73)—recognizing nevertheless that he does not fit the mould of either classical or structural Marxism (see also Smart, 1983/2010). Althusser, his former tutor at the *École Normale Supérieure*, had once encouraged him to join the FCP, which he did together with Gérard Genette and Jean-Claude Passeron. However, the Party's doctrinaire positions soon proved to be incompatible with Foucault's own understanding of Marxism and he decided to resign his membership in 1953 (Macey, 2004; Mills, 2003). This short association with a radical political organization did not turn him into a revolutionary and even Sartre believed that he was a conventional, conservative professorial 'mandarin' (Miller, 1993/2000). It neither prevented him from becoming involved in government-related initiatives later on: in the mid-sixties he took part in a commission established by Christian Fouchet, de Gaulle's minister of education, to map out the reform of higher education (precisely the reform that fuelled the students' protests in 1967 and 1968) (Miller, 1993/2000), and in 1976 he joined another government commission to work on the reform of the penal code (Mills, 2003).

In an interview Foucault gave in 1984, he admitted that he had not witnessed the protests of May 1968 first hand since he was in Tunisia at the time. He thus saw himself as 'an outsider' (Foucault, 1994; Raber, 2004) and declined to engage in the type of polemics that had set his former tutor and the students at loggerheads. As he later stated: 'If I open a book and see that the author is accusing an adversary of "infantile leftism" I shut it again right away' (Foucault, 1997, p. 111). He justified his censure with something that should remain unaffected by such quarrels: the quest for the truth. According to Foucault, Marxists were unable to pursue this quest because of their permanent attempt to determine the admissibility or validity of the statement in the light of their doctrine—an attitude that had prevented them from clearly perceiving the motivations of the various movements that stood behind the May rebellion of 1968. Besides, these events were far more complex and posed far more challenges to the politics of the period than what the categories of structural Marxism were able to account for. The 'powerlessness' that Marxists were experiencing in their endeavour to provide adequate answers to the questions that were being brought up with reference to women's rights, the environment, minorities, the nuclear threat, etc., was, in Foucault's opinion, a consequence of the 'liberation of the act of questioning' which gave rise to 'a plurality of questions posed to politics rather than the reinscription of the act of questioning in the framework of a political doctrine' (Foucault, 1997, p. 115). From this moment onwards, the dogmatic framework of Marxism gradually ebbed down and finally new political and cultural issues related to the personal sphere were taking on a growing importance on the social agenda. It was this that allowed Foucault to consolidate the position of his theoretical work amongst the French intelligentsia (Foucault, 1997). In any case, when he was appointed the first head of the philosophy department at the new university of Paris VIII, in Vincennes, he did not let his reluctance towards Marxism cloud his judgment when it came to appointing left-wing radicals to teaching positions there (Mills, 2003). Despite having served in the Fouchet commission, which had given rise to the students' discontentment, Foucault, unlike

Althusser, took a sympathetic view of their demands and wants. The students' uprising in Tunis in March 1968, which he witnessed first-hand, had already left a vivid impression on him and made him more sensitive to their expectations and pressing needs (Eribon, 1989/1991). So much so that when things came to head shortly afterwards his appointment to chair the philosophy department, Foucault did not hesitate to take part in the student occupation of the department building. By then, he was becoming 'a typical central figure in the counter-culture' (Watson, 2002, p. 627), with his involvement in the gay liberation movement and in the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations and his consumption of drugs. He was determined to show that his previous involvement with the government was not going to compromise his intellectual integrity. Commenting on the intention of the minister of education, Olivier Guichard, to withdraw the title of *licencié d'enseignement* from the students of the department of philosophy, he presented a defence of the role of the philosophers inside the education system that might be read as the defence of a university without dogmas and open to plural thinking. As he stated, 'with the role that they [the *licenciés*] have been assigned, what they teach should be a philosophy of conscience, of judgment, of freedom.' By this he meant 'a philosophy that safeguards the rights of the subject in the face of all knowledge, the supremacy of all individual conscience over politics' (Foucault, 1970, p. 34; my translation).

Après Faure: Towards the construction of a new learning subject

Foucault's proposal for a 'philosophy of conscience' necessarily entailed a new perspective of the university as a place of dialogue, inquiry and an open-minded exchange of ideas in the process of construction of a democratic space. By the time Foucault made this comment, this renewal of higher education was already underway thanks to the efforts Edgar Faure, the man who set out to bring to an end the Napoleonic university Foucault was so critical of. As he declared, 'the Napoleonic conception of centralised and authoritarian university is outdated . . . it is necessary to make its last traces disappear as quickly as possible' (Faure, 1968, p. 18; my translation). The university that was to rise out of the rubble of the Napoleonic institution should rest on three pillars: autonomy, participation and openness to the world. Despite the terse criticisms that André Gorz made of the Faure reform—that it only served 'the fiction of the chance of social promotion offered to all via the free access to studies' that 'lead nowhere' (Gorz, 1970)—, it signalled the turning point in the history of higher education and adult education in France as it valorised autonomy and multidisciplinarity, and opened the doors for the participation of other social actors in the university community.

The debate on the reform of higher education, however, was not new. The 'reform coalition' of the Colloque de Caen of November 1966 had already defended a higher level of administrative, budgetary, scientific and methodological autonomy. The Colloque d'Amiens (March 1968) had also denounced the maladjustments of education, the issues of institutional isolationism and lack of communication inside the institutions, and the rigidity of the school system, proposing instead the setting-up of a system of continuing education, the implementation of a national policy of educational renewal, an emphasis on the preparation for working life, the investment in interdisciplinary research. It also stressed the necessity of a more detailed examination of the real needs of children, adolescents and adults (see Faucherre, 1992). And yet, the awareness of such problems on the part of the university reformers did not prompt any closer

cooperation with the education ministry. Besides, modifications that were underway when the uprising started (Prost, 1992) did not correspond to any substantial reorganization nor provided a satisfactory response to the proposals of the reformers. Neither were they meant to address the demands of the *Union Nationale des Étudiants de France*, which, besides calling for the end of the *numerus clausus*, pushed for the modernization of teaching contents, the offer of all-round training and a higher education system prepared to meet the long-term real needs of the economy (Wilson, 1987).

The Faure Law sought to address all these issues. It acknowledged that the universities should provide opportunities for continuing education to all sections of the population, and that it should remain open to former students, as well as to all those who had been prevented, for several reasons, from pursuing their studies. It also took the power from the hands of the teaching staff. Nineteenth-century republican reformers believed that the university should be, above all, a professional organization of professors, who alone were invested with the authority to decide on the fate of the institution. Edgar Faure, however, was a stern advocate of the Gaullian principle of 'participation' and maintained that ultimately the universities should be run jointly by students, teachers, administrative staff and external stakeholders 'external personalities chosen for their competence and in particular for their role in the regional industries', (Loi d'orientation de l'enseignement supérieur, 1968; my translation), as materialized in the deliberative body of the 'Conseil d'Université', thus guaranteeing the sharing of the decision-making power among a wider diversity of actors. Another important development was the insistence in the idea of transversal cooperation and multidisciplinarity, which was translated into the collaboration between disciplines and the teachers' involvement in joint teaching and research activities, thus tackling the problem of the excessive specialization by discipline. The idea of transversal cooperation thus took over the myth of integration of all knowledge around a single organizing principle (see Musselin, 2004).

Edgar Faure's reform reflected, though partially, a series of concerns about adult education which he would later explore in the UNESCO 1972 report entitled *Learning to be: The world of education, today and tomorrow*. Despite the several criticisms that have been addressed to this document and the distortions that have been made of its major ideas (Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Boshier, 1998; Collins, 1998), the stress that it laid on the master-concepts of *lifelong learning* and the *learning society* has left an indelible mark on educational policies worldwide in the past few decades. As Faure et al. argued back then, 'all that has to be learned must be continually reinvented and renewed' and therefore, if

> learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society. (Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnema & Champion Ward, 1972, p. xxxiii)

This conceptual leap towards lifelong learning is as much indebted to Faure's progressive and humanistic agenda, as it is to the ideological crisis of May 68, which showed that the university, too, 'must be continually reinvented and renewed'(Faure et al., 1972) One must note, however, that the very concept of lifelong learning was no novelty. John Dewey had already proposed it back in 1916 in his *Democracy and Education*, when he argued that education was 'the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth, or adequacy of life, irrespective of age' (Dewey, 2012,

p. 35). Shortly afterwards, the 1919 Report on adult education drafted by the Adult Education Committee of the British Ministry of Reconstruction, chaired by Arthur L. Smith, maintained that adult education 'should be both universal and lifelong' (British Ministry of Reconstruction, Adult Education Committee, 1919, p. 5). And yet, despite the soundness of their argument about adult education being 'a permanent national necessity', much remained to be done (see Jarvis, 2004, p. 63). The Faure report of 1972, which takes the idea much further, seems to have finally embodied many of the concerns and ideals that had paraded down the streets of Paris in 1968:

> . . . most education systems do not help their clients—whether they be youngsters or adults—to discover themselves, to understand the components of their conscious and unconscious personalities, the mechanisms of the brain, the operation of the intelligence, the laws governing their physical development, the meaning of their dreams and aspirations, the nature of their relations with one another and with the community at large. Education thus neglects its basic duty of teaching men the art of living, loving and working in a society which they must create as an embodiment of their ideal. (Faure et al., 1972, p. 66)

But the report also appears to be a direct reply to the criticisms made by André Gorz to the Faure Law, when it stated that

> whatever power education has, or has not, to alleviate in its own domain inequalities among individuals and groups, a resolute social policy to correct unfair distribution of educational resources and effort is the obvious pre-condition for any progress in this respect. (Faure et al., 1972, p. 73; see also p. xxvi).

Biesta highlights the importance of the report, claiming that it configured 'lifelong education in terms of solidarity, democracy and "the complete fulfillment of man"' (Biesta, 2005, p. 2). However, he also admits that it resulted from a context of optimism, when, in the aftermath of the students' protests, people believed that it was possible to intervene and change things for the better (in Macherey's words, 'everything or almost everything seemed possible . . . we still thought we were going somewhere') (as cited in Ross, 2002, p. 114). Biesta recognizes that Faure's humanistic vision remains to be fulfilled and that the very concept of lifelong learning has been taken hostage by the advocates of the economic imperative, who have relegated the democratic and personal functions to a subordinate position (see also Fejes and Nicoll, 2008).

This problem of subordination of lifelong learning to the demands of the global economy throws into sharp relief the problematic of the *subject* with respect to degree of freedom that he enjoys within the social order. As we have seen, Faure sought to defend an education aiming at the emancipation of the individual and his fulfilment as a human being, and yet, in the decades that have followed, such vision has succumbed to the dictates of the neoliberal agenda (see also Cunningham, 1998). Is it possible for the human subject to claim some freedom of action through education, within the current framework of economic relations?

Here Foucault and Althusser would take different views. For Althusser, the *subject* is little more than the ideological effect of the reproduction of the relations of production and of the socio-technical division of labour: through ideology the individual is led to believe that he is a free subject, so as to guarantee that he will not oppose his own subjection, i.e. the acceptance of his own subordination to the productive apparatus. There is no place for resistance against that condition, for 'an individual is *always-already* a subject, even before he is born' (Althusser, 1971, p. 176). Not even

science can be expected to rescue the human being from that predicament (see also Rancière, 1974/2011). And in terms of adult education, Althusser's claims about the inescapability of ideology drive us to a cul-de-sac. Those conscious efforts we make in the educational process to escape subjection to the ruling ideology—the belief that emancipation can be achieved, the conviction that the relation between exploited and exploiters can be supressed, etc.—are themselves an ideological effect. As Stephen Brookfield states: 'teachers believe that they are imparting values of self-determination to students who are making a free choice to accept or reject these', but the fact is that 'neither group can see the ideological web in which it is caught' (Brookfield, 2005, p. 75).

The Althusserian subject, being devoid of power and of independence of judgement, a reproducer of the very system that keeps him in bondage, is incapable of a radical transformation of his educational practices and of unveiling the obviousnesses that condition the teaching and learning process, and of fighting the exclusions begotten by the education system of the capitalist society. However, Brookfield believes that it is precisely through adult education that it is possible to escape the Althusserian cage, since it is 'in adulthood that the pile of empirical inconsistencies that call ideology into question mounts higher and higher until . . . the whole stack of commonsense realities topples over' (Brookfield, 2005, p. 81). The cynicism and scepticism that life experience teaches us are, according to Brookfield, the best starting point of every ideology critique. Adulthood gives individuals a more mature perception of the problems that afflict society and allows them to become not only more aware of the contradictions inherent in discourses and social practices, but also more sensitive to the different forms of power commanding their lives.

Like Althusser, Foucault would argue that the subject is but the result of forms of power that 'categorize' the individual, and tie him down 'to his own identity' and force upon him a law of truth on which 'he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him' (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). However, unlike Althusser, Foucault believed that the time had come for the individual to face the challenge of freeing himself from type of 'individualization' imposed by the power structures, including those attached to education via disciplining processes. Echoing the tone and content of the May 68 slogans, he would claim that 'the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are', that is, to discover 'new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries' (Foucault, 1982, p. 785). But if even the pedagogic institutions serve to perpetuate power relations, how is that refusal ever going to assert itself? Richard Edwards (2008) argues that since power relations are a constitutive element of the social whole, one must learn to make use of them to turn individuals into subjects capable of action, by means of disciplinary practices and discursive regimes of truth that mobilize them to 'become active subjects inscribed with certain capacities to act' (Edwards, 2008, p. 24). This construction and mobilization of subjectivities through education that Edwards proposes matches Foucault's description of the way in which power shaped the subject through educational practices. At the same time, however, this construction, based as it is on the subjection to given disciplinary regimes, calls into question the belief in lifelong learning as something that necessarily leads to 'individual and social progress, enlightenment and emancipation' (Edwars, 2008, p. 25).

So, what is at stake here is the ability to rethink the social role of the institution and make a critically informed use of its power over the regimes of truth to invest in the construction of subjectivities—that of the lifelong learner, for example—actively and permanently seeking access to knowledge and to a critical understanding of the social

and political reality in which they inscribe their actions, which implies a university continuously deconstructing those discourses that determine the emergence of subjectivities simply serving either the interests of the state or of the productive apparatus. On the other hand, it also entails a negotiation of meanings between the university and the learners, in a dialogue where their demands and interests are not subordinated to, but articulated with the institution's educational (which is also to say transformational) potential. If anything, the future of lifelong learning and of the institutions that sustain it depends more and more on this move towards a customised and participatory learning (see Davidson & Goldberg, 2010).

Concluding remarks

The philosophical proposals of both Althusser and Foucault survived the turbulent months of 1968. However, the way in which they positioned themselves in relation to the events left indelible marks on how their theoretical apparatuses were to be appropriated from then on. In any case, their influence on the students' perception of power relations in French society is still visible nowadays. What these two intellectuals did was—if I am allowed to borrow Jim Crowther's phrase—to 'make power visible' (Crowther, 2012, p. 133) by bringing to light its inner workings. In fact, the critical moment came when the students realized that the university, as it stood, was above all a construction of power which contributed to perpetuate the existing social inequalities and political vices, thus constituting one more stumbling block in the path of the political changes that were being called for in the streets. The fight waged by the students in the late sixties came as the materialization of a politics of contestation born and bred inside the university which not only sought to revolutionize the institution from the inside, but also to induce major changes in the social body as a whole.

It was against the ideological pull towards a culture centred on capitalist commodity production and consumption, as well as against the role played by the university in underpinning the power relations that resulted from the capitalist division of labour, that the French students were moved to act collectively in May 68. In order to be able to imaginatively project social and political alternatives in the context of a democratic regime that was beginning to show alarming signs of erosion, it was imperative to deconstruct the discourse of the academe, exposing its fallacies and its tendency to perpetuate forms of elitism and to impose mechanisms of exclusions, and finally to make the university more receptive to the demands of the new social movements that had already begun to challenge values, attitudes and practices. Despite its 'bourgeois' character, the French university became a privileged locus of negotiation of meanings and of construction of new political subjectivities and was now starting to adapt to the new circumstances. The conditions had been met for the emergence of a new learning subject.

May 1968 marks a defining moment when the university started to adjust itself to the specific demands of social groups that had until then been left out of the system, in a positive response to the increase in civic activism and a more participatory culture. The emergence of the students' critical awareness of the role of the French university in the constitution of power relations ended up leading to a paradigmatic reconfiguration of the goals of higher education and of adult education in Europe from the late sixties onwards. The aftershock of the events of May 1968 brought the university system under close scrutiny and compelled it to respond to a changing context, marked by a dramatic rise in the number of students, the diversification of interests and the demands of under-

represented groups. In this respect, the 'universités de proximité' constituted a major step in widening the participation of individuals from lower socioeconomic strata in higher education (Goulard, 2007). Moreover, several institutions (e.g., Université Paris 8) sought to adapt their teaching methods to different types of audiences so as to provide educational opportunities to people at every stage of life. The changes made in the system sought to encourage adult learners to pursue their own education, regardless of their backgrounds and academic preparation.

But May 1968 also crossed borders and prompted reflections on higher education at the most important international forums, resulting in pathbreaking reports (Lengrand, 1970; Faure et al. 1972; OECD, 1973), which projected into the future the concept of lifelong learning as a key issue in educational policy worldwide.

Notes

[1]'End to the university'; 'Professors you are as old as your culture, your modernism is only the modernisation of the police'; 'Arise, you wretched of the University'; 'And what if we set the Sorbonne on fire?'; 'The power had the universities, and the students have seized them; the power had the factories, and the workers have seized them; the power had the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, and the journalists have seized it; the power has power; seize it!' My translation.

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