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Inter-generational conflict in advance of the May events of 1968: a commentary on Althusser's presentation of Bourdieu and Passeron, December 6th, 1963.

The commentary provides contextual information about the seminar which Bourdieu and Passeron gave in the École Normale Supérieure on December 6th, 1963. It appears that the intended series of seminars was curtailed, perhaps because the initial seminar of December 6th exposed the extent to which Althusser was formally managing the intentions of his guest speakers and resisting the implications of their ongoing research on students and their studies. The commentary argues that the conflict between Althusser and Bourdieu/Passeron was inter-generational in that Althusser's attitudes had been shaped by his experience as a victim of Nazi oppression whereas those of Bourdieu/Passeron were defined, instead, by their unwilling participation in the French colonial oppression of indigenous Algerians. Althusser was intent on examining philosophically the validity of various contemporary versions of social science whereas Bourdieu and Passeron were engaged in educational research which was scrutinising sociologically the validity of precisely this supposedly detached philosophical perspective.

In short, the commentary is aligned with the Bourdieu/Passeron position in that it seeks to offer an historical sociology of the encounter of December, 1963. It provides detail about the socio-political context of the post-war period and of the development of the thought of all three participants during this period. It provides an account of the content of Althusser's introduction and of the reaction to it which presaged the confrontations of 1968, focusing particularly on the disputed question of the pedagogic authority of professors.

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The introductory remarks which follow and the transcribed text of Althusser are both based on work carried out by Derek Robbins during short visits to Paris and to the archives of L'Institut Mémoires de l'éducation contemporaine (IMEC) in Caen in July, 2010, July, 2011, and July, 2013 which was completed and extended by Charlotte Branchu in similar short visits in June, 2017 and June, 2018. We are both grateful for the assistance and hospitality of IMEC and to Olivier Corpet for giving permission for the translation of Althusser's text to be published. We are also grateful for recollections provided by Bruno Queysanne. We acknowledge funding assistance given, respectively, by the School of Social Sciences, University of East London, and Sage. The French text was translated by Rachel Gomme. It will be obvious that the text is what Bourdieu was later to call a 'chose dite', a spoken thing. It is a transcript of spoken words which were never prepared for publication by Althusser. As editors and translator, we have not tried to 'tidy up' Althusser's presentation. It was

colloquial and there are repetitions, reformulations, digressions and asides, which show Althusser thinking on his feet and engaging with his audience. The footnotes are our own.

The Bourdieu/Passeron seminar.

Bourdieu and Passeron together gave a seminar in the École Normale Supérieure at the invitation of Louis Althusser starting on December 6th, 1963. Althusser's preparatory notes (and a comment in his introduction) suggest that he had worked with Bourdieu and Passeron to prepare for the seminar and knew their expectations for it. The intention was that there should be a series of seminars, lasting 20 hours in total, of which there is only evidence that four two-hour sessions¹ took place, which suggests that the seminar came to an early end. The Caen archive has two partial transcripts of Althusser's introduction to the planned series as well as a tape-recording of it. The archive also has a poor recording of the joint presentation made by Bourdieu and Passeron on December 6th and the discussion which ensued, as well as of short tapes of subsequent sessions. The intention of Bourdieu and Passeron was that the series would enable them to present the findings to date of their research on students and their studies; to communicate their methods of enquiry and their epistemological approach in sociological research; and to conduct a 'pedagogical experiment' whereby they would encourage students to apply their methods and approach in their own researches. In an interview with Raymonde Moulin and Paul Veyne of 1996, Jean-Claude Passeron recalled that Althusser used to say that one should choose carefully when and where to speak in a way to maximise the chances of being heard so as to 'spread the truths that one holds'. This process was what he called "to have a concept policy" ["avoir une politique du concept"] (Passeron et al., 1996: 304). This was Althusser's practice as evidenced by the way in which he introduced the Bourdieu/Passeron seminar. The intention of Bourdieu and Passeron was primarily that the series should be devoted to the relationship between culture and the education system but, arguably, Althusser hijacked this intention to make a point of

his own. He was intent on attaching Bourdieu and Passeron to his ideological bandwagon, as he states in his notes. Our contention is that Althusser's introduction was an exercise in a process of epistemological position-taking which was also inextricably linked to one of political position-taking. The encounter was one which exposed generational differences on both counts, or, more specifically, exposed the extent to which the younger generation would not accept that epistemological debate could be conducted within a context which privileged the institutionally endorsed authority of professors over the perspectives of students.

Social political background.

In December, 1963, Althusser was 45 years old while Bourdieu and Passeron were both 33. This was a crucial difference of age with respect to their lived experience of the inter-war years, World War II, the Nazi Occupation, the Resistance, and the Liberation. The differences between Althusser and Bourdieu/Passeron arose considerably from generation difference, from the fact that Althusser was most influenced by the ideological disputes around WWII whereas Bourdieu and Passeron were influenced by their experiences of the Algerian War of Independence. What we see in the seminar is the clash between these generational influences and the emergence of the ideological debate which would reach a climax in the events of May, 1968, and which would shape the thinking of the next generation. To highlight the nature of this inter-generational difference, we need to offer a brief summary of political developments in France during the lives of the three main contributors to the December, 1963 seminar.

By 1930, the Constitutional Laws of 1875 which had established the Third Republic had secured social stability for two generations after a century of post-revolutionary opposition between monarchists and republicans and during that period had apparently accommodated the interests of emergent socialist and communist parties. In the congress of Tours in 1920,

the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) was split in two and the majority broke away and formed the French Communist Party (Section française de l'internationale communiste). The Socialists joined with the Radical-Socialist Party in two Cartels des Gauches [Coalitions of the Left]. The first Cartel remained in government from 1924 until 1926. The general election of 1932 returned a second Cartel to power under Édouard Daladier. The Communists adopted an "antifascist union" line, which led to the Popular Front (1936–38), which won the 1936 elections and brought Léon Blum to power as France's first socialist (and Jewish) prime minister. The Popular Front was composed of radicals and socialists, while the communists supported it without participating in it. By 1938, the Radicals had taken control and forced the Socialists out of the cabinet. In late 1938, the Communists broke with the coalition by voting against the Munich agreement, in which the Popular Front had joined with the British in trying to appease Nazi aggression against Czechoslovakia. In September, 1939 Adolf Hitler invaded Poland, and France and Great Britain declared war. Both armies were mobilized to the Western Front, but for the next 8 months neither side made a move. The German Blitzkrieg began its attack in May 1940, and in six weeks of savage fighting the French lost 130,000 men. France was defeated and signed an armistice with Nazi Germany on June 22, 1940. Nazi Germany occupied three fifths of France's territory (the Atlantic seaboard and most of France north of the Loire), leaving the rest to the new Vichy collaboration government established on July 10, 1940 under Marshal Philippe Pétain. For the French people in general, the war period between 1939 and 1945 meant initially the ignominy of military defeat but then came to be experienced as division between direct Nazi rule in an occupied zone of the country, the rule of the Vichy government in an unoccupied zone, and the 'free French' government gathered around de Gaulle in London and, subsequently, North Africa. As the distinctions between zones and between Nazi and Vichy administrations collapsed, the war was experienced as division

between collaboration and resistance whilst it was also experienced as loss – both of men pressed into service in German armies or factories and of Jews deported to concentration camps. Finally, the German defeat was experienced as liberation. The end of the war generated an over-riding sense of release and enthusiasm for freedom. These experiences encouraged responses which were specific to France.

The Vichy regime had severed the link with the traditions of the 3rd Republic. During the period of German occupation, there were two main organisations which could claim to provide the basis for a new, post-war government: the Gouvernement provisoire de la République française (GPRF) which, in June, 1944, replaced the Comité français de Libération nationale (CFLN) and over which the General de Gaulle presided in Algiers, and the representative body of the internal resistance – the Conseil National de la Résistance (founded in May, 1943). There was some feeling that the Chamber of Deputies which had been elected in 1936 might be reconstituted, but it had abdicated in July, 1940, and it was thought preferable, instead, to make de Gaulle provisional national leader. It was his intention to establish a synthesis of previous movements and in September, 1944, he constituted a provisional government which drew upon members of the two competing war-time organisations as well as of members of the original pre-Vichy administration. De Gaulle's desire to unite France could not, however, conceal the fact that the organisational differences represented significant ideological competition - between those who sought to re-establish the traditional authority of the State and those who believed that the Resistance had potentially generated new forms of popular social and political participation. The first post-war decade was primarily one of constitutional conflict.

Support for the non-traditional governmental processes came primarily, but not exclusively, from the Communist Party which, in 1945, numbered more than 500,000 members. At the beginning of 1945, the two principal movements of the Resistance – the Front national and

the Mouvement de Libération nationale (MLN) - held a congress in which they sought to constitute one political force, but the idea of merger was rejected. This represented the end of the attempt to make the participatory emphasis of the Resistance into the basis of a new post-war political system and the reversion to party politics commenced. The Communist and Socialist parties had already reconstituted themselves. The centre-left Radical party of the 1930s was reborn in December, 1944. Parties of the Right had been discredited by association with the Vichy regime, but a new party – significantly still called the Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP) – forged a new identity, representing socially democratic Catholicism.

The constitution of the 4th Republic was finalised during 1946, following two referendums and a new general election. De Gaulle resigned in January. De Gaulle had resigned in the hope that a new constitution would give the president the kind of power that he wanted to overcome the ideological and practical opposition of the majority of the Constituent Assembly. Immediately after his resignation, the three main parties signed a pact of collaboration which enabled a tri-partite government to act, first of all provisionally and, then, as the first government of the 4th Republic, following elections to the National Assembly in November, 1946 and the election of a Socialist, Vincent Auriol, as the new President of the Republic in January, 1947. The tri-partite alliance only lasted until May, 1947, when the Communist members were evicted from the government.

On eviction from government, the Communist Party confirmed that it saw itself still as a 'party of government' but there were to be no communist members of a French government until 1981. At the same time as the left wing was lost to the tri-partite pact, de Gaulle established a new party – the Rassemblement du peuple français (RPF) – with the intention of reforming the constitution with a view to assuring national identity. The sense of disunity was not only confirmed by the eviction of the communists from the tri-partite government but also by the polarised responses to the Marshall Plan announced by the American secretary of state

in June, 1947. What emerged during the next three years was a new political formula which Guy Mollet called the 'Third Force' – governments which sought to oppose communism to the left and gaullism to the right. This was an unstable formula mainly in relation to internal affairs where the socialists favoured centrally directed social reform and the MRP favoured liberal policies. It was the ambivalence of the Socialists, espousing a left ideology whilst supporting a moderate government, which destabilised most of the 8 governments in office through to 1951. Nevertheless, the Third Force maintained control in the legislative elections of 1951, although the government formed in August of that year contained no socialists. To continue in office, successive prime ministers were forced to secure some support from members of the RPF and, gradually, in the period to 1954, the right regained respectability.

Although the Mendès France government (1954-5) seemed open to policies of decolonisation, it was immediately clear from the response to the new uprisings in Algeria in November, 1954, that the Algerian situation was not thought in France to be at all the same as that in Indo-China or Tunisia. Pierre Mendès France appointed Jacques Soustelle as Governor General of Algeria. At first Soustelle tried to pursue a policy of integration but, after continuing Muslim revolt, he became an advocate of *algérie française*. Military reinforcements were sent to Algeria at the end of 1955 at the same time as agreements recognizing the independence of Morocco were being signed. Elections to the National Assembly took place in January, 1956. There was an apparent swing to the left but the rise of the Poujadist vote was significant and there was no clear majority party. President Coty asked a socialist, Guy Mollet, to form a government. It consisted mainly of Radicals and socialists and Mendès France was made a minister without portfolio.

For a period of 16 months, Mollet's government introduced important social reforms – establishing a third week of paid holiday and reforming social security – and also participated in the launching of the European Economic Community and the signing of the Treaty of

Rome establishing the Common Market. It also consolidated the steps which had been taken towards Moroccan and Tunisian independence. The record in relation to Algeria was less happy. Mollet acquired special powers to pursue his policy of introducing free elections after an agreed cease fire, but the cease fire was the prerequisite for this policy and more French troops were sent to Algeria with extended periods of service (30 months instead of 18) to bring about pacification. On the contrary, the suppression of the Battle of Algiers by General Massu in January, 1957, exacerbated the situation further.

During 1956, Mendès France and other ministers resigned from Mollet's government as a result of his Algerian policy. There were two short-lived governments in the following year, but it was clear that there was no solid base to support any government. The Socialists and the Communists were discredited for different reasons (*vis-à-vis* Algeria and Hungary respectively) whilst the Centre and Right parties could not maintain a majority as a result of extreme differences of opinion over strategy in relation to Algeria. The year of governmental weakness reached a climax in April, 1958, when Félix Gaillard was forced to resign as Prime Minister. Whilst unsuccessful attempts were being made to constitute a new government during May, in Algeria there was an attack on the residence of the Governor General and a Comité de Salut public was proclaimed, led by General Massu. Pierre Pflimlin formed a government but the insurrection of European Algerians against the Governor General seemed on the verge of stimulating civil war in mainland France. It was in this situation that General de Gaulle issued a press statement from Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises (to where he had retired to write his Memoirs) on May 15th, indicating that he was 'ready to assume power'.

Although it was not clear what constitutionally this might mean, Pflimlin's government resigned within two weeks and, on June 1st, de Gaulle was elected as President of the Conseil and, commencing the following day, given full authority for six months within which the constitution was to be reformed.

There was a sense of déjà vu. De Gaulle was now Head of a provisional government whilst a new constitution was to be established, just as had been the case in 1944. Again, de Gaulle sought to establish a multi-party cabinet, although there were now no longer any Communist ministers. The new constitution was approved in a referendum held on September 4, 1958, and this enabled the election to the new National Assembly which took place in November, and the election of the President which occurred on December 21st, 1958. Wanting to present himself as above party politics, de Gaulle had forbidden the use of his name in campaigning in the Assembly elections but an association of ‘gaullists’, the Union pour la Nouvelle République (UNR) won about 70% of the seats, whilst in the presidential referendum, he received 78.5% of the votes cast. De Gaulle asked a faithful ‘gaullist’ - Michel Debré – to form a government which included neither Socialist nor Communist ministers but which did include the former Governor General of Algeria – Jacques Soustelle. Only a day after de Gaulle had been given full authority, he had been received ecstatically in Algiers and had given his “Je vous ai compris” speech which seemed to indicate his attachment to the retention of Algérie française and this impression was confirmed by the presence of Soustelle in Debré’s cabinet. Nevertheless, de Gaulle’s commitment was to restore the power and influence of France and his Algerian policy was pragmatic and subservient to that greater aim. At first, de Gaulle sought to regain civil and military authority over Algeria by destroying, in December, the power which had been usurped by the Comité de salut public under General Salan, but this did nothing to satisfy the aspirations of the Algerian nationalists who had already created a Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne (GPRA) in September. The restoration of the status quo ante of French administration was no longer feasible and de Gaulle quickly, in a speech of September 16th, 1959, shifted towards an emphasis of the need to provide the conditions for Algerian self-determination after the conclusion of a cease-fire. In response, the nationalists rejected the call for a cease-fire whilst

the ultra-right began a new movement of insurrection in the 'semaine des barricades' (January 24 to February 1st, 1960) in Algiers. After conflict and negotiation, De Gaulle finally pronounced Algeria an independent country on July 3, 1962.

The backgrounds of Althusser, Bourdieu and Passeron.

Louis Althusser.

Althusser was born in Algiers in October, 1918, and lived there until 1929. After schooling in Marseille, he gained entry, in 1936, to one of the most prestigious lycées in the French provinces – the lycée du Parc in Lyon - where he stayed for three years. The 'moment lyonnais' was significant for the influence on Althusser of Lyonnais monarchism and catholicism.

In July, 1939, he learned that he had been admitted to the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, and he prepared to establish himself there in October. On September 3rd, war began with Germany. On September 16th, Althusser mobilised, having been informed that the entry for the new students at the Ecole Normale had been suspended. He was captured and deported, finally being placed in captivity in Stalag 10A from which he was rarely allowed out between August, 1941 and May, 1945.

At last taking up his place at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the autumn of 1945, Althusser used his reading of Hegel to generate a philosophical position which enabled him to see communist involvement as the logical corollary of religious conviction rather than as its antithesis. He joined the Communist Party in the autumn of 1948. In July, 1949, the Vatican excommunicated all catholic members of the Communist Party. It was the papal indictment of the group and of the worker-priest movement in 1953/4 that caused Althusser's break with orthodox catholicism. The mode of thinking developed in respect of catholicism and

communism applied equally in respect of academicism and intellectual activity. It implied a commitment to the practice of worker-philosophers and, therefore, to a type of professional behaviour within the Ecole Normale Supérieure. In the autumn of 1948 Althusser was accepted for the post of ‘agrégé répétiteur’ at the Ecole. In the autumn of 1949, Althusser’s position as a teacher of philosophy at the Ecole was confirmed. As the ‘caïman’, he was mainly involved in training students for the agrégation. He gave courses and conferences on Plato (1950) and on Rousseau, Hobbes, and Montesquieu (Boutang, 1992: 465), but his main preoccupation was with the relationship between the work of Hegel and Marx. Althusser’s task, as he saw it, was to retrieve the dialectical self-reflection of early Hegel. “Le retour à Hegel” (1950) was an attack against the dominant, academic exegesis of Hegel. He began a systematic analysis of the origins of Marx’s thought, starting first of all (as early as 1949) with a project to translate Feuerbach’s *L’essence du Christianisme* which was partially realised in a selection from Feuerbach’s work which he was to publish in 1960.

The tasks which Althusser had to perform as caïman in preparing students for the agrégation examinations generated his first book which was published in 1959 as *Montesquieu, la politique et l’histoire* (Althusser, 1959). Althusser celebrates Montesquieu’s recognition that he needed ‘to speak a new language’ to utter ‘new truths’ (Althusser, 1959: 8) and he comments that Montesquieu felt that ‘his thought opened up a new world’. In these respects, therefore, Althusser regarded Montesquieu as an admirable model. The catch, however, was the same as the catch of the revisionism of Hegel: we have de-historicised and de-temporalised Montesquieu, establishing his insights as elements of our received culture without recognising the conditions of his acts of construction. Althusser’s consideration of the work of Montesquieu bore on the project with which he was to be primarily concerned in the 1960s, that of rescuing the pioneering work of Marx from the threat of comparably revisionist appropriation.

Douglas Johnson has recalled that ‘on a celebrated occasion in 1961’ Althusser ‘orchestrated a debate with Sartre, and to the delight of his students, he devastated him.’ (Althusser, ed. Corpet and Boutang, 1993: xi). Althusser’s rise to intellectual ascendancy was integrally related to his rejection of Sartre’s attempt to reconcile his earlier existentialism or phenomenological ontology with Marxism. Sartre’s attempted reconciliation was essentially humanistic whereas Althusser was ‘absolutely committed ... to establishing Marxism as the science of society’ (Althusser, ed. Corpet and Boutang, 1993: xii). Two of the most influential texts of the decade, both published in 1965 – *Pour Marx*, exclusively written by Althusser, and *Lire le Capital*, written by Althusser and a team of normalien co-authors – were consolidations of articles and series of lectures in which Althusser led the way in re-interpreting the work of Marx and, simultaneously, in proposing a transformed relationship between philosophy and social science.

This proposed transformation was conceived at a time when student unions were formulating, after the Algerian war, new demands for the education system. At the time of a supposed democratisation of the university, one argument, made, for instance, by Raymond Aron², was that there should be material improvements and economic investment in universities, while other factions of the left, and notably the UEC (The Union des Étudiants Communistes, part of the wider umbrella of the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France - UNEF), pushed for changes in the content and format of (higher) education. In their critique of the bourgeois university, non-directive teaching was one of the most significant and practical of their reform proposals. Less than three weeks before the Bourdieu/Passeron seminar, the central committee of the French Communist Party (PCF) had issued a statement which defined the political tasks to be undertaken by students. It asserted that the Party and the UEC together were working ‘to mobilise all students in the combat for peace and democracy, for an University which will allow the blossoming of scientific humanism and the promotion of

progressive values'. The struggle to realise these high objectives is constantly linked with 'the daily battle for material benefits for students, primarily for the most disadvantaged students, and the unflinching struggle against social segregation at all levels of education'. This statement was subsequently published at the head of a number of *La nouvelle critique: revue du marxisme militant* (152, January, 1964: 7-12) which included an article by Althusser entitled 'Problèmes étudiants' (Althusser, 1964) in which he argued that the liberalism of the university is a real political value to be deployed in opposition to monopolistic bourgeois control. The traditional liberal values of universities should not be written off as manifestations of 'bourgeois individualism' but should be appreciated as 'authentic scientific values' (Althusser, 1964: 86). To neglect these values would be 'a political error' because scientific knowledge 'is indispensable for all political (and trade union) work in the University' (Althusser, 1964: 87). A precondition for communist action in the university sphere and in that of scientific research is that professors, students, and researchers 'should all collaborate, on the basis of the knowledge and experience which they each have of their own domains, in elaborating a scientific analysis of the reality of the university situation.' (Althusser, 1964: 80-1).

Althusser had, earlier, contributed, in June/July, 1963, an article entitled 'Philosophie et Sciences Humaines' to the *Revue de l'Enseignement Philosophique* (13, 5) (reproduced in Althusser, ed. Sintomer, 1998: 43-58). This was a response to the report of an enquiry on the Human Sciences which had been carried out by the Association of Professors of Philosophy in Public Education. Althusser tried to argue on two fronts: firstly, against some Marxists, that philosophy has autonomous existence and should not be absorbed into human sciences, and, secondly, against idealist philosophers, that no attempt should be made to defend philosophy without recognizing the validity of the sciences of human facts. He urged the readers of the *Revue* to embark on a defence of 'philosophy' against those attitudes of

‘industrial civilisation’ and ‘technocratic thought’ which were assuming that it had been eclipsed by ‘science’, including the ‘human sciences’. This defence should assert the autonomy of philosophical discourse but should emphasize its capacity to analyse ‘this world’ (Althusser, ed. Sintomer, 1998: 49) rather than to be preoccupied with timeless or metaphysical issues. An analysis of ‘this world’ would involve an analysis of the claims of the human sciences rather than an acquiescence in their supposed superiority and a subservient adoption of their positivist procedures.

These background publications, the one already published and the other about to be within a month, indicate that Althusser had wanted to embark on an engagement with the work of Bourdieu and Passeron because he was seeking to resolve the tensions which were apparent in the arguments he had advanced in different contexts. Relating to the interests of militant students, Althusser wanted to assert that political action should be dependent on analytical research undertaken equitably by all participants within the university context. Relating to other teachers of philosophy, Althusser wanted to insist that there remained a function for philosophy in assessing the validity of the procedures of the human sciences. The tension was whether the former activity was compatible with the latter, whether Althusser was primarily concerned to analyse reality or, rather, to arbitrate ‘philosophically’ between different analytic procedures.

At the Ecole Normale Supérieure, Althusser organised research seminars on ‘The young Marx’ in 1961-2, ‘the origins of structuralism’ in 1962-3, and ‘Lacan and psycho-analysis’ in 1963-4, before devoting 1964-5 to a re-reading of Marx’s *Das Kapital*. There was no published product emanating explicitly from the 1962-3 series on structuralism. It seems likely that the Lacan seminars were arranged to fill the gap left by the collapse of the Bourdieu/Passeron sequence.

Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu was born in the Béarn in August, 1930. He entered the *École Normale Supérieure* in 1951. There he was a member of a *Comité d'action des intellectuels pour la défense des libertés* [an intellectual action group for the defence of liberty] which was founded in 1952 in opposition to a communist cell which had been established by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. He gained his *Diplôme d'études supérieures* in 1954 with a commentary on, and a translation (from Latin) of, a Leibniz critique of Descartes. This was supervised by Henri Gouhier who was a professor of philosophy and the history of philosophy most known for his books on Auguste Comte. He taught in a lycée for just over a year before he was conscripted to serve in the army in Algeria early in 1956. He spent the latter part of his 27 month military service in the press office of the Governor-General and then, when he was demobilised at the end of 1957, he taught at the University of Algiers for two years (1958-60) before Aron invited him to Paris in 1961 to become the secretary to the research group which he had just established. Based on literature research undertaken while in the Governor-General's office, Bourdieu published *Sociologie de l'algérie* in 1958. He also collaborated with statisticians to generate analyses of workers and employment in different sectors of Algerian society, providing complementary ethnographic information. Back in France, he published the findings of this research, first of all in *Travail et travailleurs en algérie* (Bourdieu, Darbel, Rivet, and Seibel, 1963) and in several spin-off articles. Some of these specifically considered the political and cultural situation of Algeria as it acquired independence, and some were absorbed internationally into a developing field of 'Mediterranean anthropology'. While Bourdieu was consolidating in this way the research he had undertaken in Algeria, within Aron's research group (the Centre de Sociologie Européenne, CSE) he directed a programme of research on 'students and their studies' which explored aspects of pedagogic practice in terms of a culture clash between privileged and disadvantaged students which was thought to be analogous with

the culture clash which he had witnessed between colonisers and colonised in Algeria.

Althusser was right to recognize that Bourdieu, trained philosophically, already possessed substantial experience in working both as an ethnographer and as a participant in large-scale data analyses. He did not realise, perhaps, the extent to which Bourdieu was in the process of transposing his observations of colonial domination so as to develop a critique of magisterial domination within pedagogic practice.

Jean-Claude Passeron.

Passeron was born in a village in the Alpes Maritimes in November, 1930 and attended a lycée in Nice. He entered the École Normale Supérieure at the same time as Bourdieu. Unlike Bourdieu, Passeron was associated with the communist cell founded by Le Roy Ladurie. Passeron gained his licence in philosophy, specialising in psycho-physiology. His Diplôme d'études supérieures of 1955, entitled "L'image spéculaire" [the mirror image], was directed by Daniel Lagache who shortly before (in 1953) had broken away from the central body of French psychoanalysis to form the new Société Française de Psychanalyse [French Society for Psychoanalysis]. Passeron was conscripted to military service in Algeria from 1955 to 1958, returning to France to teach at a lycée in Marseilles until 1961. Aron then invited him to Paris to become his assistant at the Sorbonne. Aron asked him to lecture on Weber. Nothing had been translated into French apart from his two 'vocation' lectures which were published, with an introduction by Aron, as *Le Savant et le Politique*, in 1959 (Weber, ed. Aron, 1959). To carry out Aron's request, Passeron read translations of Weber in Italian. In the early 1960s, Bourdieu and Passeron made a pact that they would collaborate within CSE for ten years. They worked together on the project which was nearing completion in December 1963, which led to the joint publication of "Les étudiants et leurs études"

(Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964a), and also on the project on photography which led to the publication of *Un art moyen* (Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel, and Chamboredon, 1965). In relation to the former, Passeron produced a separate report on female students (Passeron, 1963) and also a separate report on photographic practice amongst workers in Renault factories (Passeron, 1962). With Marcel Maquet, Passeron produced, in 1961, a working paper of CSE entitled “Le malentendu de la langue d’enseignement” which anticipated some of the discussion of linguistic domination in pedagogic communication which were later assembled in *Rapport pédagogique et communication* [pedagogic relations and communication] (Bourdieu, Passeron, and de Saint Martin, eds., 1965).

Bourdieu/Passeron.

By December, 1963, Bourdieu and Passeron had been collaborating for two years on the project on students and their studies. The surveys took place in the academic years of 1961-2 and 1962-3 and involved the cooperation of professors of sociology in diverse French universities, notably those in Lille, Paris, and Lyon. The findings were published as a working paper of the CSE in 1964 (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964a), but the extent of the participation of students and staff in many universities must have meant that the nature of the project was well known and that its findings were eagerly anticipated well before their publication. They were to be re-published in revised form as *Les héritiers* [The Inheritors] (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964b). The sample for the research was limited to students of Philosophy and Sociology. The central thrust of the research was an exploration of the relationship between the prior culture of students and the cultural orientation inherent in university curricula, but the restriction to students in two disciplines was important. In analysing the results of their enquiry, Bourdieu and Passeron were examining objective correlatives of their own transition from philosophical formation to sociological practice. They offered sociological explanations for student choices between subjects and, therefore,

were scrutinising sociologically the nature and function of the two discourses. They were engaged in research which was seeking to resolve sociologically the question which Althusser was posing philosophically. It follows that the philosophical discussion of the claims of the human sciences to be scientific which Althusser outlines in his introduction to the Bourdieu/Passeron seminar was a direct challenge to the way in which they were both seeking in empirical research to subject a philosophical argument to social explanation. Having known Bourdieu and Passeron as his students at the *École Normale Supérieure*, Althusser would have been well aware that both had been offered academic positions by his ideological arch-enemy at the Sorbonne, Raymond Aron, who, since his appointment to the Chair of Sociology there in 1956, had been delivering courses of lectures opposing both Marxism and Durkheimianism and espousing Weberian sociology. The sub-text of the seminar, for Althusser, must have been a desire to “save” Bourdieu and Passeron from the influence of Aron, but, at the same time, it was an opportunity for Bourdieu and Passeron to articulate their (different) attitudes towards Aron, which were not those of subservient assistants.

At the same time as the educational research project, Bourdieu was directing another project within the CSE on photography. The findings were not to be published until 1965 as *Un Art Moyen* (Bourdieu, Boltanski, Castel, and Chamboredon, 1965), without any contribution by Passeron. The French edition provides a chronology of the research projects on which it was based. It begins with a reference to a seminar organized in the CSE in 1961-2 on ‘the image in industrial society’ under the direction of Aron. It is clear from this title that the original conception of the project was framed by Aron’s concerns, particularly his insistence on the recognition, in ‘industrial society’, of the cultural changes which were being effected by the seemingly inevitable progress of the kind of ‘industrial civilisation’ whose values Althusser opposed. The first joint publication of Bourdieu and Passeron, which appeared in the month

of the seminar, arises out of this dispute about the value of elements of mass technological culture.

It is apparent from “Sociologues de mythologies et mythologies de sociologues” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1963) that Bourdieu and Passeron were at the time irritated by the new problematic of “mass culture” linked with theories of modernity³. The supposed shift from oral to visual culture, as well as its homogenisation, – of the content of culture, as well as its reception - are highlighted as constituting no more than an intellectual myth, which strongly relies on commonsensical imaginaries. Bourdieu and Passeron note the lack of consideration for the actual inequalities of access to “mass media”, thus presenting factual flaws in the analysis, paired with the aesthetic judgement of what constitutes “mass culture” by the targeted theorists. Mass media theories fail to address individuals’ modes of consumption, which is the only way to acknowledge and analyse nuances within the population. It is in having this empirical blindspot that the study of culture from massmediologists is “neither sociology, since it maintains the nostalgia of a priori deduction when one should only consult experience, nor pure theory since it allows for hard fact where it would like to deduce it, massmediology is a metaphysics – in the kantian sense -, but that has gone wrong” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1963:1007).

It is plain from the presentation which Bourdieu and Passeron made at the seminar that they conceived their analyses of students and their studies within this wider, societal context as case-studies of the inequalities of access to culture, juxtaposing the claims of traditional, scholastic, and mass media cultures, rather than as a contribution to a ‘sociology of education’. To re-use their example from the seminar, when a boss and a manual worker watch the same film, they will not see the same things. The object of consumption takes its quality from the mode of consumption – which varies according to one’s education levels. Thus, access to and modes of consumption of culture, they found, were substantially socially

determined, and decidedly influenced by the education system, itself experienced through one's social origins.

In as much as Althusser knew of the emergent findings of Bourdieu and Passeron's project on students and of their article on massmediology, he might have been hopeful that they were inclined to offer a subtle empirical contribution to Marxist understandings of domination, and he might have sensed an epistemological affinity with his own idea of science. He had not realised, perhaps, that their analyses of domination extended to a scrutiny of the dominance of professors of philosophy in proposing solutions to social problems. Whether Althusser knew of the extent of Bourdieu and Passeron's work, especially in the critique of the "master" and of the pedagogical relationship – not simply of the institution as state apparatus – is unclear.

The seminar.

The content.

In his introduction, Althusser presented the room with his at the time ongoing neo-Kantian concern over what constitutes a (social) science. The three fundamental elements he identifies as constituting a science anticipate his analysis within *Reading Capital*. The "general theory that has a determined shape" – the first condition of a science he mentions in his introduction – can be found in *Reading Capital* as being Marxist philosophy. The "specific method" which needs to correspond with this theory, he identifies as historical materialism, as well as conceptual terminology that provides tools of thinking systematically the objects of Marxist philosophy in their objective form. Althusser's particular attention in the seminar is paid to what the object of a science might be. For any inquiry to be scientific, it needs its own, well-defined object that no other discipline can claim. Some sciences are "without an object", precisely as, as he argues in *Reading Capital*, Marx makes the case against classical political

economy to exist in right – their object does not exist. Althusser's contribution in *Reading Capital* is particularly linked with identifying the object of Capital, and in seeing Marx's distinct epistemological and scientific break. In it, Althusser defines the boundaries of a theory of the structural and structuring form of society, that is, of modes of production that are unique and distinct from the objects of classical economy, classical political economy or history (Althusser et al, 1965; Bidet, 1997). The similarity with his own standard for setting up a scientific reading of Marx – in a similar effort to Lacan's scientific re-assessment of Freud (see Brillant, 2003) – is striking. It is doubtful whether he wishes to question sociology in quite the same way, or if this exercise is addressed at his students (and future co-writers of *Reading Capital*) present in the room.

Althusser might have seen in his invitation to Bourdieu and Passeron the opportunity to explore post-positivist views of scientificity and to use the debate to position himself against idealism and humanism. The debate around ethnology is relevant because of the type of knowledge that is being produced: Newtonian versus Galilean. Althusser makes a point about how Bourdieu showed him the benefits of ethnology as an important method of creating knowledge. This acknowledgment allows him to make another point altogether: ethnology is useful to directly observe the Gestalt of a certain group of people, but only as far as their society is not too complex. This point reasserts the necessity for realist, non-humanist methods of generating knowledge.

Bourdieu and Passeron were widely influenced by Bachelard in his conception of science, and adopted his 'rupture' with common sense. It is key to their philosophical understanding of the practice of sociology that researchers must operate epistemological breaks in order to minimise or eliminate both the illusion of transparency (spontaneous sociology) and the illusion du constat (positivism). They did agree on the neo-Kantian model of objective determination of social conditions that render social behaviour possible but also had a keen

interest in Weber and interpretative sociology. Introduced to them by Aron, they shared an interest in Weber for their methodological frame to do empirical sociology as opposed to social philosophy. In their critique of massmediology, as well as in their studies on culture and education, Bourdieu and Passeron operate that rupture with common sense and follow Weberian ideals of sociological production of knowledge in a way that certainly coincided – to an extent – with Althusser’s wish to oppose ideology (common sense values/moral judgement) and science (scientific findings based on rigorous, reflexive inquiry). As Althusser writes himself in his preparatory notes, his introduction can be read in this framework: “1) Attach the B/P wagon to the ideological fast train (Althusser). 2) Public visit of the wagon.”

Althusser’s prescriptive introduction about which questions will be looked at, and how, causes Bourdieu to jokingly refer to Althusser as Nietzsche’s dragon. Passeron’s equally surprised reaction confirms the unpreparedness of the whole room to Althusser’s scholastic exercise. There is a strong irony in such an introduction being done in the context of Bourdieu and Passeron having come to discuss the result of their research on education which will lead to the publication of *Les héritiers* and, later, *La reproduction*. Indeed, the various topics planned for the seminar include their further work on language and domination, the critique of professoral charisma, and the “double role [of university] of creating and keeping culture” (Bourdieu et al, 1964: 835). Bourdieu and Passeron explicitly want to draw on first hand experience as well as scientific knowledge in this seminar (in a way that Weber also recommends doing pedagogy, through disenchantment⁴). They emphasize on several occasions their intentions to make the seminar “an experiment.”⁵ This is perhaps a consequence of the conclusions drawn from studying pedagogic relationships and education, and is most certainly influenced by three factors at that time: a) their particular use and involvement with GTUs⁶; b) the uniqueness of the organisation of labour within the CSE;

and c) more specifically that of Bourdieu and Passeron themselves. Indeed, in their presentation for the seminar, they voice their will to work in their own particular way, which is two-voiced and inclusive. Perhaps they saw Althusser's seminar as a platform for tentatively experimenting with what they will later call "rational pedagogy", before finding themselves constrained within Althusser's own exercise in position-taking. We can perhaps see here the premise of deep philosophical differences in Althusser and Bourdieu and Passeron's relation to knowledge. Indeed, when the former argues for a permeable, scientific discussion among "legitimate" figures, Bourdieu and Passeron take a much more Spinozist⁷ approach to scientifically generated knowledge. Bourdieu wanted his own work to be used as *opus operandum* rather than *opus operatum* (Robbins, 1998): "But, contrary to appearances, it's by raising the degree of perceived necessity and giving better knowledge of the laws of the social world that social science gives more freedom. All progress in knowledge of necessity is a progress in possible freedom... By bringing to light the laws that presuppose non-intervention (that's to say, unconscious acceptance of the conditions of realization of the expected effects), one extends the scope of freedom." (Bourdieu, 1993: 25).

The reaction.

The Bourdieu/Passeron seminar was not only made up of students from Normale but also of activists and non-"classics" students. The format and content of Althusser's introduction however constituted a master-class in classical pedagogy. His exercise in boundary making produced effects in the audience. The most significant one was Bruno Queysanne's intervention at the end of the seminar. Queysanne – a member of UNEF and, particularly, UEC⁸ – fervently opposed the idea of the seminar as it was presented: a traditional take on a traditional class. As he explained further in a letter he addressed to Althusser subsequently, the seminar was presented to him – and others – as the idea of the "year one of sociology",

and he expected non-traditional methods but was shocked by the size of the room, the number of people in it, and Althusser's tone.

For Queysanne, Althusser presented "the most refined form of classical authoritarianism". Althusser's exercise of asking "the right questions" meant that the work to be achieved was already pre-set and that it was "a simulacrum of research" that was being proposed with the result that he would not 'accept to play that game'. Queysanne denounced the non-critical approach that was being adopted: a seminar that dealt with the university without questioning its own structure.

Althusser's reply during the seminar and in writing afterwards asserted his position strongly and decidedly. He explained that Bourdieu and Passeron do sociology classes for students and do research because they can (because they have the necessary scientific, theoretical, and technical capacities). "They have, if you wish, the level of knowledge required to make real discoveries", and not simply to discover what is already known. Althusser proceeds to give a politically key definition of what it is to be a student: a student is in a position of non-knowledge or a not-yet-knowledge. By giving such definition, Althusser suggests an objective distance between the student and knowledge that the teacher has to fill. Althusser criticizes the idea of science held by Queysanne (and, by extension, unionists at that time), which 'doesn't correspond with reality'. Althusser insists that 'even in Marxist theory, scientific truth is essential for any political action'.

This statement was to be the foundation of Althusserian thinking and philosophical practice thereon. It justified his intellectual endeavour as essential and political, even if happening in the sphere of philosophy (see Althusser, 1965), legitimising himself as a philosopher and teacher. It positioned him against student unions who were causing trouble within the Party at the time, especially around the issue of the student salary, and it combined both these factors

in order to justify and secure his own place within the Party: as a champion of the use of scientificity, against Garaudy, and attacking dogmatism in the Party, legitimising himself as a revolutionary (Brillant, 2003).

The letter to Queysanne led to passionate responses from Lapassade and, notably, from Milbergue whose letter resulted in a publication in *Les Temps Modernes* (1965), carrying a strong attack on Althusser's fundamental points, notably on the objective distance between knowledge and not-yet-knowledge, which he thought problematic in a number of ways.

Should, for instance, the role of the university be solely to transmit consecrated knowledge, and, if so, does this affirm a relationship of dependence between teacher and learner?

Milbergue's arguments amounted to two main points: 1) that scientific theories are historically situated and do not possess absolute truth; and 2) that teachers teach students how to relate to objects, to develop their own investigative procedures rather than to acquire pre-established truths. Milbergue concluded that Althusser remained in the 'insurmountable contradiction between his function as a Marxist theoretical practitioner and his status as professor in the bourgeois university'.

Althusser appeared for some as a new voice that would clear up the path in the mist of ideological confusion and the failure of surrounding humanism or Sartrean existentialism (Lindenberg, 1975). He offered students the dual justification he gave for himself: in their position as intellectuals and as revolutionaries (Dollé, in Brillant, 2003: 42). He legitimised philosophy as a weapon of revolution. However, this distancing from the practice of "the masses" has been questioned in many accounts. As Rancière wrote about May 68: "the Marxism we learnt in the Althusserian school was a philosophy of order, of which all principles led us away from the movement of revolt that was rattling the bourgeois order" (1974: 9). The position of Althusser and his protégés within the Party created in itself a separation from critical debate and gave them the monopoly of theoretical "practice",

yielding critiques of a clear separation between theory and practice (Pertus, 1966), as well as exuding an air of old conservatism. Pertus commented that ‘there was a time when the words “Democracy” and “Republic” were charged with real revolutionary content. For a student reaching political life today, these words are an alibi for all conservative regimes’ (Pertus, 1966: 9).

In spite of some personal and intellectual affinities, Bourdieu and Passeron and Althusser did not share similar visions of the purpose of knowledge. Bourdieu and Passeron strongly believed in the liberating power of knowledge (as Bourdieu famously said: ‘if the sociologist has a role, it would be to provide weapons, not give lessons’⁹). Althusser’s vision of domination relied on the fact that the dominated remain dominated because they are unaware of their domination. Rancière subsequently outlined the simplicity of such vision, and the problematic implications of ‘declaring the inability of the ignorant to heal from their illusions and therefore the inability of masses ever to take their own fate into their hands’ (2001: 12). Rancière attended the Bourdieu/Passeron seminar in the École in December, 1963, and the reactions articulated by Queysanne and Milbergue anticipated those which he expressed in his *La Leçon d’Althusser* (Rancière, 1974). Later, Rancière was to accuse Bourdieu and Passeron of the identically patronising denial of the capacity of ordinary people to understand their own situations, arguing that their work of the 1960s was a replication in sociology of the Platonic ideal of the ‘philosopher king’ (Rancière, 1983). If the series of seminars planned by Althusser, Bourdieu and Passeron had continued, Rancière might have realised earlier that the young sociologists had been lured into a conceptual trap¹⁰. In 1963, Bourdieu and Passeron were insistent that ‘intellectuals have difficulties believing in defences, meaning in the freedom of others, because they gladly attach to themselves the professional monopoly of freedom of thought’ (1963: 1010). The “caiman” of rue d’Ulm exemplified the charismatic master figure exercising his legitimate authority and sublime scholarly culture in front of

Bourdieu and Passeron and the students gathered together on that December 6th, 1963. The fact that the series came to an early end suggests that Bourdieu and Passeron felt the need to extricate themselves from the false position in which they had been placed. In relation to education and culture, they spent the rest of the decade attempting to clarify the implications of their sociological perspective and, arguably, Bourdieu spent the rest of his life trying 'maieutically', uncontaminated by the 'symbolic violence' of academic representation, to give a voice to the socially and politically dispossessed¹¹.

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¹ December 6th, 1963, January 19th, 1964, January 30th, 1964, and February 28th, 1964.

² Aron published “Quelques problèmes des universités françaises”[some problems of French universities] in 1962. (Aron: 1962). He made it clear that his interest was in the way in which European universities, as historic

institutions, might adapt to the challenges of modern, industrial society. The problems of adaptation were to be resolved politically. He examined the ideological legacy in France, not of the medieval university but of the revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes, revised at the beginning of the 3rd Republic. He was highly critical of French universities, but he sought solutions in terms of management, governance, or legislative change.

³ Mostly championed at the time in the studies of the CECMAS (Centre d'études des communications de masse) created by Georges Friedman with Edgar Morin and Roland Barthes (see Masson, 2001)

⁴ Weber was also a fierce critic of the pedagogical process and especially of the figure of the teacher, denouncing charismatic leadership and establishing a clear distinction between Führer and Lehrer – leaders and teachers (Weber, 1965).

⁵ This is also reflected in Althusser's preparatory note.

⁶ Groupes de travail universitaire. These working groups were powerful advocates of non-directive pedagogy. This practice emerged and was championed by student unions at the time (notably U.E.C.), to contest the bourgeois university and the conservative status quo of power relationships.

⁷ Although, it should be noted, that Passeron regarded himself as the Spinozist of the two, believing that this separated him from Bourdieu whom he considered to be a Leibnizian

⁸ The Union des Etudiants Communistes is part of the wider umbrella of the Union Nationale des Etudiants de France.

⁹ Intervention at the AFEF Congress in Limoges, 30th October 1977, published in *Le français aujourd'hui*, 41, March 1978, pp. 4-20 and re-published in Bourdieu, 1980: 95- 112.

¹⁰ For further discussion of Rancière's critique of Bourdieu, see Robbins, 2015

¹¹ See Robbins, 2019 (forthcoming)

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