

May 68's effects in Jacques Rancière's path: The Althusserian dichotomy between science and ideology questioned^{1 2 3}

Os efeitos de Maio de 68 na trajetória de Jacques Rancière: a dicotomia althusseriana entre ciência e ideologia colocada em xeque

Los efectos del mayo del 68 en la trayectoria de Jacques Rancière: la dicotomía althusseriana entre la ciencia y la ideología puesta en jaque

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Abstract

After the eruption of May 68, the dichotomy between scientific knowledge and ideology, as Althusserians supported, is jeopardized in favor of Jacques Rancière's valuing of the 1960s boiling political movements. In this essay, we analyze this moment of his path, in which the author rephrases his understanding of the meaning of political revolt and the conception of knowledge. This debate is not circumstantial in Rancière's work. It first appears as a question crossing his thought and is still present in his current writings: the refusal to divide knowledge and its intellectual hierarchies and the suspicion towards a conception that politics would require theory as a prerequisite.

Keywords: Rancière, Althusser, science, ideology, politics

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Resumo

Após Maio de 68, a dicotomia entre um conhecimento científico e a ideologia, tal como sustentavam os althusserianos, é colocada em xeque em favor de uma valorização dos movimentos políticos irruptivos dos anos 1960, por Jacques Rancière. No presente artigo, analisaremos esse momento de sua trajetória, em que o autor reformula sua compreensão a respeito do significado das revoltas políticas e de sua concepção sobre o saber. Esse debate não é algo circunstancial na obra de Rancière, antes aparece como uma questão que atravessa seu pensamento e contempla ainda seus escritos atuais: a recusa à divisão do saber, suas hierarquias intelectuais e a desconfiança em relação à concepção de que a política necessitaria da teoria como pré-requisito.

Palavras-chave: Rancière, Althusser, ciência, ideologia, política

Resumen

Tras Mayo del 68, la dicotomía entre un tipo de conocimiento científico y la ideología, como sostenían los althusserianos, es puesta en jaque a favor del reconocimiento de movimientos políticos irruptores de los años 60, por Jacques Rancière. En el presente artículo, investigaremos ese momento de tu trayectoria en la cual el autor reformula su comprensión a respecto del significado de las revueltas políticas y su concepción del conocimiento. Esta discusión no es algo circunstancial en la obra de Rancière, sino que se manifiesta como un punto que recurre su pensamiento y se observa aún en sus escritos actuales: el rechazo a la división del saber y sus jerarquías intelectuales y la desconfianza ante la concepción de que la política necesitaría de la teoría como requisito previo.

Palabras clave: Rancière, Althusser, ciencia, ideología, política

Rancière: From a disciple to Althusser's critic

In the 1960s, motivated by reading Marx's work away from the guidance of the French Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Français*- PCF) and the dilettante academic debates, Jacques Rancière got closer to the *Cercle d'Ulm*, a group of researchers of Marx's works guided by the philosopher Louis Althusser, professor at *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) in Paris⁴. At the time, Rancière envisioned in the group's work a possibility to interpret Marx's writings to disconnect them from attempts to transform them based on the Soviet State's reasoning. Since 1956, Hungary's invasion and the denouncement of Stalin's crimes in Khrushchev's reports have shaken communist groups, as well as questioned the legitimacy of communist parties.

⁴ The *École Normale Supérieure* is a traditional French research and teaching institution founded in 1794. On *Rue d'Ulm*, the building that sheltered human sciences was built in 1847 (Deaecto, 2017). Because it was located on *Rue d'Ulm*, where Althusser taught and researched, Althusserian Marxist philosophers became known as *Cercle d'Ulm*.

The goal was also not to consider the study of Marx's texts as a mere academic task, following French "university mandarins," whose intellectual activity was closer to apolitical lectures guided by "theologians and armchair philosophers" (Rancière, 2011, p. 18). Althusser organized, in the *Cercle d'Ulm*, a "collective thought" that transformed Marx's reflections into an "act of reading" (Santos, 2021, p. 178). For young ENS researchers, being a part of the *Cercle d'Ulm* meant adhering to an intellectual posture, able to transform the self-absorbed philosophy of the academic environment into a theory that instrumentalized the reflections about the world. The study of Marx's classic works was conceived as a political action to the point that the group considered itself a "party of Marx's theory" (Rancière, 2012, p. 31).

In this period, the Althusserian group coordinated the *Seminar on Marx* in which the ENS researchers, such as Roger Establet, Jacques-Alain Miller, Robert Linhart, Jean-Claude Milner, besides Rancière, sought to define the concepts of the German thinker rigorously. Althusserian's approach was innovative by incentivizing the structural reading of classic texts without the interference of other interpretations.

Using Baruch Spinoza's thought as a paradigm, Althusser proposed distinguishing the specific object of science within Marx's thought. When holding on to pure concepts, he sought to separate the historical-conjectural aspects from what would be strictly logic-scientific thought. This separation was drafted in Althusserian's texts intending to impose an "epistemological cut" in Marx's work, dividing what would be "ideological" from the "conceptual" (Costa, 2017).

This cut would affect his youth texts, such as the *Economic and Philosophy Manuscripts* and the *Capital*, a perspective that dissociated Marx's mature thought from humanist traces and the Hegelian idealism supposedly present only in the previous writings of his masterpiece. To Althusser, taking into account the existence of a cut between Marx's writings implied recognizing a qualitative change in the work, considering that the ideological writings gave way to scientific knowledge (Natali, 1995).

When joining the group as a researcher, Rancière presented a study about the concept of "criticism" in Marx in the seminars held between 1964 and 1965, and from this work emerged the publication *Reading Capital* with texts written by Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Pierre Macherey, and Jacques Rancière. The work consolidated the group as formulators of interpretations disconnected from dogmas by refusing to use Marx's thought to justify ideologically the pathways

taken by the Soviet State's bureaucracy. The Althusserian theory of epistemological cut conceived that Stalinism would be an ideological detour in dialectical materialism, that is, a deviation from scientific knowledge.

These consequences of Althusserian interpretation made his writings famous in the 1960s Marxist groups. When conceiving Marxism as a science of society, Althusser delineated an original path, different from the traditions in fashion so far, which sought in Marx's writings sometimes a "critical philosophy," as the intellectuals of Frankfurt School and Lukács, while, in other times, as a "guide for action" as proposed by Antonio Gramsci (Boito, 2013).

In this moment of his work, Althusser focused on the notion of "structure" to develop Marx's theory as a scientific knowledge, i.e., the producer of general and specific concepts in a theory that sought systematicity. Thus defined, the Marxist analysis distinguished itself from a concrete empirical analysis as a *tool* to analyze social reality. Hence, Althusser's interpretation separated the Marxist theory from historical determinisms by evoking a certain distance between knowledge production and reality. In this conception, the knowledge would get closer to reality without, in fact, facing it (Boito, 2013).

When valuing dialectic materialism as a science of social reality, Marxists were tasked to develop Marx's concepts without dogmatism or skepticism. This Althusserian endeavor guaranteed the autonomy of theoretical practice, though this did not mean a rupture with PCF (Santos, 2021, p. 178). On the contrary, the autonomy of dialectic materialism allowed for an identification relationship with the party, to transform it, protect their detours, and prescribe ways for internal rehabilitation (Balibar, 2017, p. 105).

With the outbreak of May 68, this primacy of science over practice and the relation with the PCF created impasses among Althusserians. In May, endless groups engaged with the movement enacted forms of political action that prioritized direct action in public spaces, the creation of irreverent mottos, the valorization of horizontal relations during interventions' organization, and, above all, the joint action between workers and students in different educational levels autonomously from the parties and traditional representative entities. These forms of political action shocked with the concepts of *Cercle d'Ulm* that soon characterized the movement as an "ideological revolution."

In 1968, Rancière was far away from his militant activities and followed the unfolding of initial events at a distance. When remembering his impressions of the revolt, he said he was

confused with what was happening. He understood the movement as nothing more than "ideological" and non- "scientific" manifestations, thus using the Althusserian definitions to observe students' demonstrations. When returning to Paris, Rancière was surprised by the red flags hung in a factory by the Seine River and the meeting between students and workers at the *Sorbonne* University. These scenes imposed on the philosopher a contradiction element between the revolt development in its robustness and the Marxism it apprehended and taught. However, at that moment, his approximation with May 68 was restricted to the movement in the insurrected factory gates (Rancière, 2012, p. 37) because Rancière's relationship with the students was still taken by the mistrust generated by an "ideological revolt."

This evaluation was transformed right after the end of May 68, with the integration of the recently created University of *Vincennes*⁵. At this moment, Rancière felt compelled to reflect on his theoretical concepts, considering the creation of the future Department of Philosophy by Michel Foucault. At first, despite the course's syllabus, he diverged from the Althusserian Étienne Balibar's position, who was the only PCF representative among the faculty (Rancière, 2012). During the semester, the classroom discussions with his students motivated him to "believe more in 68" (Rancière, 2012, p. 39) and revisit concepts he mobilized so far to enact his reading of political reality, such as the science and ideology proposed by Althusser.

We should also point out the role of Rancière's readings of Foucault's texts because, at this point, we can already glimpse some appropriations of books, such as *The Order of Things* and *Archeology of Knowledge*. This meeting between Rancière and Foucault shows us that issues regarding the relationship between practice and discourse became a considerable intellectual concern to both. In 1969, Foucault formulated the notion of "discursive practice" to understand the emerging power relations in the materiality of discourse, while Rancière drafted a historical analysis of discourse intertwined with a political one (Bolmain, 2010, p. 191).

⁵ The *Université de Vincennes* currently *Paris VIII*) was created in September 1968, right after the surge of the revolt movement in France. The university aimed to become a center of Letters and Human Sciences research and teaching, a place of practice and theoretical experimentation, free thought, and horizontal relationships between professors and students. Rancière was in *Vincennes* since the beginning of the Department of Philosophy, organized by Michel Foucault. In 1974, Rancière created the *Centre de Recherche sur les Idéologies de la Révolte* (CRIR), a crucial institution to conduct his studies in historical archives of the French working movement, which resulted in the writing of his books *La parole ouvrière* (Rancière & Faure, 1976), *The Nights of Labor* (Rancière, 1988) and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Rancière, 2013), among other writings.

As a consequence of this immediate post-May 68 context, Rancière wrote the article “*Sur la théorie de l'idéologie: politique d'Althusser*”, in 1969 and later the book *La leçon d'Althusser* [Althusser's Lesson] in 1974⁶. These texts revealed not only the rupture of the philosopher with his mentor and the *Cercle d'Ulm*, but that, above all, structured his re-evaluation regarding the pertinence of the notion of science defined in Althusser's terms, conceived as opposed to what was understood as ideology. As an effect of these reflections, Rancière resignified his concept of knowledge, not from a new definition contraposed to Althusserian ones, but through a critical *posture* toward the power relations implied in possessing a knowledge intended to be scientific. We understand that this posture materialized first in how he wrote his texts, then in an extensive philosophical conceptualization.

Science *versus* ideology: Some points of Althusserian thought in the 1960s

In the first moment of Althusser's work in the 1960s, we see an emphasis on the definition of science from Marx's notion of structure. His writings at the time, such as the books *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, reverberated the most in the intellectual environment (Boito, 2013). We highlight that this was a specific moment in Althusser's intellectual trajectory because of the vastness and complexity of his work. As pointed out by Boito, in the second moment during the 1970s, there are considerable changes in his conceptions due to the criticisms he received in the previous years.

Since 1963, when a student strike started in the main Parisian universities, separately from PCF, Althusser started to characterize students' fights as "ideological". Considering the

⁶ “*Sur la théorie de l'idéologie: politique d'Althusser*” is an article written in 1969 and published in 1970 in the Argentinian collective work *Lectura de Althusser*. In France, the text was published in 1973 in the magazine *L'Homme et la Société*. In 1974, Rancière included it as an appendix of *La leçon d'Althusser*. The version we use is the one from the 1974 book (Rancière, 2011).

alleged spontaneity of these demonstrations, the students would show, according to this perspective, the lack of mastery over the "Marxist science," something that would only be bypassed by students' intellectual submission to "Marxist philosophers"⁷ at the university.

This position can be seen in the article *Problèmes étudiants* from 1964, in which the philosopher affirms that the role of communists at the university would be to hold scientific knowledge, that is, Marxism-Leninism. Only science would allow the knowledge of reality and could engender instruments to solve practical difficulties. Thus, communists would have the right to teach Marxist theories to students and then allow political action (Althusser, 1964, p. 81).

In this article, Althusser (1964) developed the idea that knowledge would have an evident pedagogical role, the transmission of knowledge to subjects that do not have it: "In each way, it is not (...) about the difference of generations as such where the relationship teacher-student lays, but on the fundamental pedagogical relationship of those who possess *knowledge* versus the status of those *who don't* [our emphasis] possess the same knowledge" (p. 91). Thus, "pedagogical" was understood as a relationship grounded on the difference between knowledge and ignorance (Ross, 1991, p. xvi). These unequal positions between knowledge and no knowledge would imply a hierarchy between those who hold the knowledge and those who do not. This hierarchy should not be seen as a problem or a fair reason for students' criticisms of the power positions in the university because, in Althusser's (1964) view, this asymmetric relationship between professors and students would be the "technical" expression (p. 90) of the pedagogical role.

The different positions in the university were not limited to the classroom but, first, would also be present in the administrative spaces of the institution and research centers. According to Althusser, when demanding equality in the knowledge relationship in all university instances, such as in the 1963 strike, the students proposed the formation of "semi-researchers" (*demi-chercheurs*), stuck to the democratic illusion of a "semi-knowledge" (*demi-savoir*). The mistake of considering "semi-knowledge" as knowledge would hinder students from reaching the "weapon of scientific knowledge," thus delaying their formation as full researchers (Althusser, 1964, p. 94).

⁷ We use the expression "Marxist philosophers" to refer to the intellectuals aligned with the Althusserian perspective, as Althusser and Rancière use themselves in the texts used in this article.

Althusserian's concept about knowledge as an asymmetric division between those who know and those who do not reappear in a 1969 text associated with the characterization of May 68 as an "ideological revolt of the masses ."To Althusser (2017, p. 132), naming this event as such meant distinguishing it from a revolutionary process, considering that in May, students would have made some strategic mistakes because their strikes, demonstrations, and occupations did not open the necessary gap for a Revolution. Althusser highlights that these mistakes were not made by workers' actions but by *students*. After May, it was up to the communists to point out such flaws and correct them so that future events could explode assertively.

According to this perspective, students' main mistake was their ignorance regarding the origins of the May movement, thus lacking a "historical depth ."This bond between the present knowledge and its historical roots, asked by Althusser, would allow the event agents to know *a priori* the paths the movement should take in the future because revolutionary political action should be total (Althusser, 2017, p. 128).

The demand for "historical depth" meant the perception that the mistakes made by the May youth were justified by the lack of guidance of the working class organized by the PCF. The students' single role would be helping workers in the political fight. Workers were the true protagonists of the Revolution. In other words, students needed to know that, in a revolutionary process, the working class leads the political uprisings, with the youth support in punctual "shaking" actions in institutions, such as the schools and the university, both defined by Althusser (2017) at this moment, as "ideological apparatuses of imperialist States" (p. 135).

These texts by Althusser focused on the analyses of movements coordinated by youth and contemplated his mostly theoretical studies regarding the "epistemological cut." In consonance with the theory that there would be a cut between ideology and science between Marx's youth and mature texts, Althusser envisioned a similar cut between the real youth movements and those projected by the Marxist philosopher as models. In Althusserian's thought, the meaning of "cut" indicated the separation between the rights and errors of political action as the distance between knowledge and the lack of knowledge. In both cases, the dichotomies expressed the opposition between science and ideology, guiding theory and practice.

Hence, it is possible to glimpse an intersection between Althusser's theoretical work and his review texts on practical movements. The philosopher of *Cercle d'Ulm* perceived himself as a representative of a "party of theory" regarding the reading of Marx's work, self-attributing the

domain of the knowledge he considered to be scientific, and assigning to him the task of helping students to understand their role at the university and the political movements.

From this point of view, communist intellectuals should

provide all *scientific* explanations that would allow *everyone*, including youngsters, to clearly see the events they lived [to] guide them if they genuinely want, over a fairground, in the class struggle, opening fair perspectives, and giving them the ideological and political means for a fair action (Althusser, 2017, p. 135).

In his way of thinking, "scientific explanations" would be necessary to differentiate between fair and unfair engagement. The criterion for such distinction would be the base of the political action engendered by class struggle, which should be duly *explained* from the theory produced by Althusserian Marxist intellectuals. These explanations needed to be taught by young people prior to the explosion of the movements as if an intellectual preparation or an appropriation of a specific knowledge before practical action were necessary.

The publication in 1969 of *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (Althusser, 1983) makes the Althusserian concept more evident, unfolding its division of knowledge, in which the theory should be the previous condition for a political action grounded on class struggle. After all, for the philosopher, if the students' flaws in May 68 hindered the transfiguration of a revolt into a revolutionary process, then the cause would be students' "semi-knowledge" in the face of a science held by communist intellectuals.

This characteristic of the students' category would be unavoidable if not for communists' predisposition to explain their mistakes, flaws, and failures because students would be invariably stuck to ideology, considering that schools or universities were "ideological apparatuses." According to Althusser (1983), individuals cannot easily eliminate "imaginary concepts of the world" (p. 86) with which they are intertwined, that is, the ideologies in which they are immersed. There would lay the problem of "ideology," as such conceptions referred to reality but were not real (Althusser, 1983, p. 86).

In Althusserian conception, ideology would be how individuals represent their relationships with their life conditions under capitalist production. These representations were not "real" because they were determined by alienated work and, thus, deformed. Hence, the practices and social rituals expressed by individuals would no longer be more than the materialization

of ideology reproduced by the State's ideological apparatuses, i.e., religious institutions, political parties, unions, families, companies that produce information, school and university institutions (Althusser, 1983, p. 79).

Considering that individuals would be immersed in the forms of capitalist ideology disseminated by social institutions meant affirming that the subjects' actions were determined by such instances, especially schooling institutions, where key aspects of the dominant ideology would be instilled through learning, without individuals noticing it, as a "silent music" (Althusser, 1983, p. 79). Summing up, the subjects' constitution in Capitalism would be shaped by the State's ideological apparatuses, considering that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser, 1983, p. 93). That is, all individual or collective practices and beliefs would result from an ideology reproduction without any possibility of intervention or reaction by those individuals because such transformation processes led by social institutions would be veiled.

Following this logic, it would only be possible for subjects to have an attitude of "recognition" of these practices and rituals embedded in the experience. Due to their immersion in the process, they could not enact the "scientific knowledge" about such daily instances without the appropriate instruments. This differentiation between both attitudes of the subject facing the experience, the "recognition" and the "scientific knowledge," would ground the opposition between "ideology" and "science." To Althusser (1983),

"it is this knowledge that we have to reach, if you will, while speaking in ideology, and from within ideology, we have to outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific [our emphasis] (i.e. subject-less) discourse on ideology." (p. 95).

In Althusser's perspective, true reality would only emerge in scientific knowledge because reality would be permanently hidden from subjects due to ideology. Therefore, there is an association between science and a "subjectless" instance, considering that the subjects are so because ideology made them "subjects." Hence, reaching the real would only be possible in a "technical" and "objective" instance, separated from the daily life, the experienced, and the subjects' sensitive reality.

This statement regarding science establishing itself as a subjectless discourse would be resumed on other aspects in future discussions. For instance, when Althusser (1978) stated in *Réponse à John Lewis* that history is a "subjectless process" (p. 28) because, according to Marxism-

Leninism, man does not make history; the masses do. In fact, to Althusser, the idea that man makes history would be an expression of bourgeois ideology and its idealism, thinking the "real history" would not be finding the free man to act but to know class struggle in the "concreteness of production relationships" (Bolmain, 2010, p. 184).

Therefore, without science appropriation, i.e., historical materialism, the individuals would only produce impressions about what they recognize, without glimpsing nor understanding the real, masked by everyday and ideological rituals and practices. Summing up, the opposition between science and ideology would establish a hierarchical division between subjects' sensitive perceptions and scientific knowledge. This polarization is similar to the hierarchy between the opposition of the working class, defined as the class explored in the large production, the only one able to gather the classes explored in Capitalism and the other categories (Althusser, 1978, p. 25).

Thus, science would be the only safe way of raising awareness of the alienation provoked by ideology. From the appropriation of this knowledge, the individual would not be limited only to his daily reality but, above all, could understand it, i.e., know the social organization of classes engendered by the social division of labor and the consequent production of oppression relations over the working class.

In this scenario, students' demands that started to demand a category reposition in University power spaces would be no more than expressions of fights and *ideological* practices in the 1963 strikes and May 68. They are ideological because they do not understand their limitations by insisting on making protagonists the students who were only secondary actors in the Revolution. These movements would continue to be ideological by not understanding the mechanisms of class struggle in the university and mistakenly incentivizing the opposition between students and teachers.

If the students wanted to go beyond the ideological point of view, they had to act as students, that is, keeping their opposition as someone who does not hold knowledge. Hence, they would assimilate the Marxist theory formulated by their representative organizations, converging with PCF, which, in turn, would align with the group of "Marxist philosophers" in the University (Althusser, 1964, p. 103). In fact, the PCF would be the last party apt to overcome the scope of ideology by having a Marxist scientific doctrine, going beyond the "State's ideological apparatuses." So, students' only option would be to let themselves be guided by Marxist

intellectuals in the university and, consequently, by PCF direction if they sought a "fair" political action, as Althusser stated.

The power of intellectuals: Rancière's criticism of Althusserian interpretation of science

Antonia Birnbaum (2005) delineates Rancière's rupture to Althusser and the *Cercle d'Ulm* in two moments: the criticism over the opposition between science and ideology and to Althusserian's interpretation of historical materialism as the science of real, unfolded in the article "Sur la théorie de l'idéologie: politique d'Althusser," from 1969; and the deep analysis of Althusserian's notion of "class struggle in theory" (p. 3) in the 1974 book, *La leçon d'Althusser*. In this first moment of separation, in 1969, Rancière's criticism is focused on the ideology transformed into a general concept in Althusser, whose end would explain the mechanisms through which the cohesion of the social totality would be guaranteed. Therefore, ideology would be conceived as an "instance of the whole" (Birnbaum, 2005, p. 2). According to Rancière (2011, p. 219), the problem with this definition would be its contradiction with Marx's concept of ideology, to whom ideology would be a *specific* overdetermination of society divided into classes and not of societies in general.

Althusser's interpretation would highlight the opacity aspect of social structure to its agents and would accentuate the imposed facet of this structure to the subjects. Thus, ideology would become a participant in the class struggle as a "dominant class" in opposition to science, the "dominated class" (Rancière, 2011, p. 224). Considered a "fetishized" way of conceiving class struggle, in Rancière's criticism of Althusser, ideology appears as its single Other (Birnbaum, 2005, p. 3).

In the same article from 1969, Rancière considers that Althusser paradoxically displaced this debate about ideology from the Marxist field, moving it to a classic discussion of philosophy and metaphysics. What was formerly categorized by philosophers as a "mistake" induced by the sensitive world reemerged in Althusser as "ignorance" provoked by ideology (Rancière, 2011, p. 226).

This conceptual elaboration prevented Althusser and his followers from perceiving that the role of knowledge had been questioned in May, through a fight that targeted knowledge. In Rancière's (2011) words:

In May 1968, however, 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. (p. 215).

Using the term "ideological revolt," Rancière inverts the relationship between the "real" and the "ideological" as established by the Marxist philosophers of *d'Ulm*. In Rancière, reality is accessed through an "ideological revolt ." The goal is not to instrumentalize science to understand the real but the opposite movement, because the reality starts to be understood when the "Theoretician statute" is questioned through a social revolt.

With such criticism, Rancière highlighted the conservative role of teaching institutions and their legitimizing hierarchical structures based on knowledge. Hence, he contraposed the thesis supported by Althusser that the university was inserted in the "technical division of labor," safe from social contradictions. That would mean that, due to its technical nature, the hierarchical positions within university instances should be kept, even in non-capitalist societies.

At this first moment of rupturing with Althusserianism, Rancière sought to explain the subjacent relationships between knowledge and power in the university to combat the idea that the divisions enacted by knowledge were technical. Therefore, the appropriation forms of academic knowledge would be defined by Rancière, at the time, as an "expression of class struggle," a conflict that would even encompass teachers and students. Rancière (2011) ends the 1969 article with a phrase that indicates his concern about the prominent role that science in Althusserianism intended to keep when faced with social reality. He states, "cut off from revolutionary practice, there is no revolutionary theory that is not transformed into its opposite." (p. 254).

The bluntness of the phase, almost a motto, could be explained by the fact that such questions related to the organization of social movements escaped the University walls. The post-May period provoked the members of social and political movements, such as the *Gauche Proletarienne* to which Rancière belonged, with Maoist tendency.

This delimitation proposed by Birnbaum allows us to understand a change in the terms of the debate between Althusser and Rancière, following the Althusserian self-criticism movement during the mid-1970s regarding the dichotomy between science and ideology woven in previous years. The development of the concept of "class struggle in theory" is evidence of this reformulation in which the concept of class struggle gained a more central position to Althusser, who, in his turn, appropriated Maoist theoretical formulations to review critical points of his work.

This notion of "class struggle in theory," however, would first be a *new way* to conceive the sharing between a true and a false discourse and not, in fact, a rupture. Hence, the place of objective knowledge continued in Althusser's writings as a specific domain that guided and arbitrated the fights' instances from an exterior point of view (Birnbaum, 2005, p. 3).

In *La leçon d'Althusser*, this continuity is visible in the reiteration of Rancière's criticism of Althusser's notion of science, mainly on the role of its carriers. When critically debating with Althusser's positions in *Réponse à John Lewis*, defending the notion that "masses make history" (p. 41), Rancière (2011) highlights that⁸ it was implicit the idea that such masses would have been previously educated and organized by Marxist intellectuals. In this moment of reviewing his writings, Althusser appropriates the Maoist thesis to revert it into a way to save Marxist philosophy as a stronghold of University specialists (Rancière, 2011, p. 41).

In chapter 2, entitled "A Lesson in Politics: Philosophers Did Not Become Kings", Rancière (2011) details the implications of the dichotomy established by Althusser between science and ideology when affirming that the defense of science, in the terms proposed by the latter author, would end up reflecting the class position of Marxist intellectuals of the *Cercle d'Ulm*, by justifying the place of authority of those who intended to speak in the name of knowledge holders: "It is true, though, that one of the noteworthy effects of Althusserianism is that it secured a royal place for communist intellectuals in that cohort, the university elite" (Rancière, 2011, p. 65).

Considering this place of power granted to intellectuals, the theory sought to explain that real movements can become an instrument of oppression, a "philosophy of order," in

⁸ In *Réponse à John Lewis*, Althusser (1978) debates the concept of history used by the British Marxist in which history is made by men, by historical subjects. In Althusser's perspective, Marxism-Leninism states that the masses make history because class struggle is its engine. The contradictions of capitalist production engender mass action.

Rancière's understanding. That is why Rancière ironizes Althusserian discourse, calling it a "lesson on Marxism." When continuing to identify mistakes and gaps to be corrected by the movements and organizations, this discourse intended to explain the practice through a supposedly scientific analysis.

To Rancière, the problem of this position is the submission of politics to a "theoreticism," which devalues it as such. Althusser and the intellectuals who echoed his ideas opted to ignore the typical dynamic of mass movement in favor of elaborating their analysis that adhered to the expectations of solving political issues from the previous study of the "scientific practice" of the Capital (Rancière, 2011, p. 62). Thus, these Marxist philosophers bypassed the troublesome reality of political movements with their own peculiarities and dilemmas, which did not fit their previously created theoretical scope to keep their place as intellectual authorities intact.

This authority was understood as a "new power" grounded in possession of knowledge: "We found this power in 'science,' and it was from within science that we tried to undercut every attempt to contest the *authority of knowledge* (savoir) [our emphasis] it was the desire to act that spurred us on to the defence of the hierarchies of knowledge (savoir)." (Rancière, 2011, p. 90). This position came into crisis with the outbreak of May 68, which disputed these asymmetries founded in the possession of theory but became relevant once again among Marxist intellectuals during the 1970s.

According to Rancière (2011), identifying knowledge possession to action was a way to safeguard the authority of intellectuals identified with this position in the university, mainly regarding the criticisms of students. When conceiving the theoretician as a prominent instance concerning the political practice, the Marxist philosophers assumed the division between those who held this theory and the others. This division would also establish a hierarchy around knowledge possession, enclosing those who did not have it to an inferior position among the people who would never understand their own reality in depth.

This would have happened in May 68, as, from Marxist philosophers' perspective, the revolt participants were immersed in ideology, not able to understand reality. The characterization of the movement by Althusserians continued to be shaped by the concept of ideology, which divided the explanations about the movement from terms such as "absent science" or the eruption of an "uncultured delirium." For these reasons, the "Marxism lessons" provided by intellectuals about May's mistakes were consolidated as a discourse that lasted in time and

wished to be untouched by political movements' criticisms. They became Rancière's (2011) object of reflection in the mid-1970s. The author shows that even post-May 68, it was necessary to deconstruct "the despotic figure of scientific (savant) power" (Rancière, 2011, p. 103).

This authority of knowledge, supported by Althusserian philosophers, demonstrated that they would judge any political movement as 'ideological.' The intellectuals Rancière criticized would use adjectives to negatively characterize social revolts as empirical, unpredictable, absurd, revisionists, or deviant. To Althusserians, actions that were not an unfolding of a pre-established historical movement – namely, the taking of the State and the cessation of reproducing oppressive production relationships — would not be rational. To Althusser, May 68 would have been a "time of madness," which could only be explained by the notion that there was a lack of "theory" to the movement, taken by the "void" of ideology (Rancière, 2011, p. 66).

In Rancière's (2011) perspective, this condemnation of movements experienced daily in support of siding philosophy would always place Marxist philosophers in an advantageous position, immune to error, as their political convictions would never be tested, because we saw the same type of detracting analysis before and after May 1968. The defense of "class struggle in theory" legitimizes academics' class positions stipulated by the "correction" of words used: the revolutionary would be the one that recites "the masses make history," and the reactionary, who uses the word "men" in the place of "masses" (Rancière, 2011, p. 126).

Emphasizing that a particular world interpretation, or word arrangement, would be a previous condition for the outbreak of politics would result in the reserve of specific places for each one in their relationship with knowledge. In other words, expecting politics to rationally be the consequence of a study or a theory means conceiving it from a "pedagogical" viewpoint, in which one would substitute a real class struggle for the difference between knowing and not knowing (Rancière, 2011, p. 86).

This conception of theory and politics, which postulates the difference between knowing and not knowing, implies the need for a guide or a specialist, one that would master the knowledge demanded to trigger a political movement considered proper. Only from his intervention others would be able to act beyond ideological ties. In fact, instead of politics, one would seek a "theory of education" whose objective would be to remove subjects from their place of illusions, from the position of not knowing (Rancière, 2011, p. 105).

To Rancière, this gaze over empirical history grounded on the notion of "lack" made disappear in Marxist philosophers the issues erupted about the perspective of workers and intellectuals about their production, i.e., about the constructive relationships in their daily lives. This also occurred with students' political conceptions in the 1960s when questioning "educators' knowledge" and its relationship with the existing order. Despite these intellectuals, this type of political motto, a new type of revindication, was able to impose itself as a political force when denouncing the division between the producer and the consumers of knowledge (Rancière, 2011, p. 82).

Hence, students posited specific problems to their category, which they felt in their daily lives, drawing:

attention to the following topics: the ends of academic knowledge, which seemed to be to educate future auxiliaries of the bourgeoisie; the forms for the transmission of knowledge – the 'pedagogic relation' – tied to this objective (lecture courses which inured students to being docile); individualism (which the UNEF had opposed with its proposal for research groups, the GTUs⁹); and the arbitrary nature of exams. (Rancière, 2011, p. 83).

Students' fights and organizations, autonomous from PCF, showed intellectuals a new form of politics, as students put their knowledge into play, connecting it to power, and showed their relationships with the political sphere, questioning their professors and Marxist intellectuals' positions. Knowledge as an object of criticism slipped into the criticism of "the despotic figure of scientific (savant) power," those who exercised such power stated that the revolt was a mistake (Rancière, 2011, p. 104).

⁹ UNEF was a national organization that represented French students: *Union Nationale des Étudiants de France*. The term GTUs stands for University work groups.

Writing as the creation of equalitarian knowledge

Between the 1969 article and the book *La leçon d'Althusser* from 1974, it is possible to glimpse a more profound development of the themes related to the possession of scientific knowledge and the approach to a new theme. We perceived a resignification of Rancière's writing, resulting from the concept of knowledge developed by the philosopher, which seeks to demonstrate the underlining power relations.

In *La leçon d'Althusser*, Bolmain (2010) identified an "equalitarian trace" (p. 185) when Rancière displaces the issue of whether the subject makes history or the masses to affirm that the Marxist question would value the competence of the masses. In Marxism, it would be assumed that the tools for freedom emerge from the intelligence of the oppressed because the idea that the laboring class needs assistance to think is an axiom of bourgeois ideology.

This "equalitarian trace," besides being dealt with by Rancière, structures his writing in *La leçon d'Althusser*. In the book, he does not intend to define a comprehensive concept or refute Althusser's interpretation. To a certain extent, Rancière uses the style of academic polemics, but ironically, he undoes this type of writing. On the one hand, Rancière uses this textual genre, similarly to the one seen in Althusser's own writings, answering a tendency he intends to criticize, presenting an alternative interpretation of the same subject, and seeking a particular adherence to the field to his version. On the other hand, the text inflects this type of writing because, as Ross (1991) affirms, to Rancière in 1974, it was the "first clearing of the terrain" (p. xvi) to highlight the type of reflection that took shape in his trajectory: the criticism to the discourse that intends to "speak for," which wants to be representative.

Rancière's concern crosses the writing of *La leçon d'Althusser*, which breaks away with some rules of the academic text when organizing themselves in moments as if they were scenes, in which some discussions presents seem to be more like dialogues between texts of different natures than as an argument aiming to defend a definition or idea. Thus, we find a set of themes and authors mobilized according to the needs of each debate held together with historical sources, for example, the use of Bentham's text about the panopticon to say, together with Marx's texts, that the bourgeois ideology is not from human freedom but of vigilance and assistance (Rancière, 2011, p. 29).

This mixture of authors with historical texts is even more visible in the penultimate chapter of the book, *Leçon d'histoire: les méfaits de l'humanisme*, in which Rancière (2011) makes extensive use of archival documents to contrapose himself to Althusser affirming that in the 19th century the workers educated themselves in the fights against their employers. Rancière turns to Bentham in a citation at *Réponse à John Lewis* in which Althusser (quoted by Rancière, 2011) puts himself in the position of discovering something that the ideology intended to conceal: "Behind the man, Bentham triumphs" (p. 169). While workers' texts demonstrated what they knew themselves that equality of Rights was merely formal and, because of this, they pressured, in their discourses, the factories' authorities and the governments to recognize their rights to equality and freedom: "Workers are not slaves; they still have in France the title of citizens, and without pride or pretension, they believe to be as free as those who employ them" (Barraud quoted by Rancière, 2011, p. 158).

By alternating moments discussing concepts with those in which different types of texts dialogue, Rancière practices a type of writing that will later become his thought style. The "equality treaty" appears, since *La leçon d'Althusser*, not only as a theme of concern but also as a type of reflection, in which we do not read the specialist that seeks to argue about each theme exhaustively. The word of others is not merely an example of argument, an instrument that identifies a reality only the author can access. First, we face an open effort to understand diverse voices beyond one's own in a plan of equality in writing.

For such reasons, Rancière's texts criticizing Althusser's and his followers analyzed in this article are not a circumscribed moment in his work. They express an opposition that crosses his future writings: the "equality treaty." From the refusal of opposing science and ideology and the scathing criticism to "class struggle in theory," Rancière values political and discursive practices that break away from what is experienced, understood as the potential place of politics and not simply one of ideological determination: students and their daily demands, the 19th-century workers and their appeal to equality, the LIP¹⁰ workers fighting for autonomy.

These different experiences dialogue with each other, talk with authors mobilized for each discussion, and with the author himself in his writing. We will also find, in distinct ways, in future books, such as *The Nights of Labor*, *Disagreement*, and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

¹⁰ Rancière refers to the strike in the LIP factory in Beçanson, France, in 1973, when workers occupied the factory space and implemented a self-management system.

The latter radically discusses the issue of equality through a narrative that shows the refusal of a schoolmaster/intellectual to be considered a "wise master," that is, the divergence of a position that places oneself as the holder of a word, to which a superior status is attributed.

In *La leçon d'Althusser*, Rancière (2011) ponders about the place of non-knowledge in Althusserian discourse, which is always assigned to others, a place of empty words opposed to the plenitude of science belonging to the intellectual. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, the word is conceived from its possibility of "filling itself" or "empty itself," according to the will that places into action any intelligence and not due to the intervention of a higher intelligence. Summing up, the use of this will depends on the subject itself, which mobilizes it in favor of its own intelligence. After all, everything is separated not between words – masses or subjects, for example —, but in the words themselves, in their twists, in an exercise of “wild dialectics” (Rancière, 2011, p. 167).

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