

A Philosophical Conjuncture: An Interview with Etienne Balibar and Yves Duroux

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Peter Hallward (PH): The *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were not your concern, Etienne, but it would be very useful to talk a little about what went on at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in those years, and especially in the years before the *Cahiers* were launched, i.e. before 1966. You arrived at the ENS in 1960, right?

Etienne Balibar (EB): Yes, in the autumn of 1960; I was in the same class as Yves [Duroux] and we immediately became friends. The philosophical conjuncture was shaped by the initial stages of Lévi-Strauss and Sartre's discussion on Marxism, history and structuralism; on a political level, the context was marked by the end of the Algerian war. In the student milieu, the left was completely hegemonic, and many students at the ENS quickly joined or moved towards the Communist Party. In our general assemblies that year, the main issues were always the war and the organisation of demonstrations against the war. There were two groups who fought for hegemony in these assemblies: on the one hand the communists, especially the scientists, but also some students in the humanities and liberal arts, and on the other hand, people who had seceded from the Socialist Party (including Alain Badiou and Emmanuel Terray, who were roughly five years older than us) in opposition to the party's participation in the Algerian war. I thought about what to do for a while, and one day I said to Yves [Duroux] 'I'm going to join the UEC [the Union of Communist Students] because, in the end, the communists seem more serious', etc. And Yves smiled at me and answered 'I joined a month ago.'

The UEC was a very lively place, a place of non-stop arguments, an important pressure group that was highly mobilised against the war. The Communist Party (PCF) had always had trouble with its student organisation and was determined to control it, in order eventually to control the UNEF [National Union of French Students]. We participated in a series of successive battles within the UEC, some in which we were in the opposition, others in which we were manipulated by the party leaders. The party leaders excelled in the art of using one dissident group against another; the main person pulling the strings was Roland Leroy, future director of *l'Humanité*.

There were three successive struggles for control of the UEC in those years. The first was the battle against the Trotskyists: Alain Krivine, who later founded the LCR [Revolutionary Communist League], had obtained great influence within the UEC because of the role he and his comrades played in fighting off Le Pen's fascist groups in the Latin Quarter, but during one of the organisation's congresses various other factions united to force them out. Then there was the fight against the 'Italians', the pro-Italians, which is to say the reformist wing of the party, followed by the fight against the Maoists, the pro-Chinese. Leroy used the Maoists against the Italians very effectively.

PH: And in this context, you began studying with Althusser?

EB: In April 1961, that is, at the end of our first year at the Ecole, Althusser published a rather erudite article in *La Pensée* (an official Communist Party journal, which

nevertheless managed to avoid a stifling orthodoxy), which was entitled 'On the Young Marx'; it would eventually be the second chapter of *For Marx* (1965). It became famous for its critique of Sartre's analytic-teleological method.¹ We were very impressed. It corresponded perfectly with our philosophical preferences. Three of us went to see him (Yves, Pierre Macherey and me) and we told him 'we would really like to work with you on this, we want to read Marx, etc.' And Althusser said: 'get to work and read a certain number of texts (Marx's 1844 manuscripts, his text on the Jewish question, etc. - there wasn't any question of *Capital* yet). Come back to see me at the beginning of the next academic year, in October 62, and we'll see what we can do together.' It was obvious that he was very keen.

Althusser then set up a seminar on the young Marx for the year 1961-62 – it was an official seminar of the ENS, but open to all who wanted to come along. We were roughly 10 or 15, attending. And there, something rather unusual took shape, a special kind of collaboration. Althusser told us quite clearly that he had been thinking about certain things for a long time and that he had been waiting for this moment. Something happened, there was as a philosophical conjuncture and also a sort of personal encounter. He wanted to work in a group. The eventual outcome would be the 'Reading *Capital*' seminar of 1964-65, which illustrated the situation perfectly: he did half of it by himself, but if the rest of us hadn't been there, he wouldn't have done anything at all.

So in 1961-62 we did a seminar on the young Marx. The following year we followed up with a seminar on 'the origins of structuralism', and the year after that, 63-64, one on psychoanalysis, mainly on Lacan. He told us: 'you cannot work if you don't study Lacan'. The aim was to keep working on the things we were interested in, but we had to take this detour through Lacan.

YD: Foucault's *History of Madness* (1961) was the point of departure for the seminar of 62-63.

EB: Yes, that's right, the first of Althusser's talks was on *History of Madness*.

YD: Althusser was convinced that it was a very important book, and he did a lot to relate this book to the question of structuralism – a term that, as such, didn't exist yet. Althusser asked each of us to prepare something – I remember that I did something on Dumézil, Jean-Marie Villégier (the future theatre and opera director) did something on structuralism in Freud, and Michel Tort gave a presentation on Lacan. Miller had just arrived at the ENS and he joined this seminar with the others, he was very young, very brilliant.

EB: Following Althusser's suggestion, Lacan came to do two small, private seminars at the Ecole, exclusively for us. I remember that he did something he would come back to later, on the 'aphanisis' or fading of the subject, which is what he called alienation. We were five or six: Badiou and Regnault were no longer at the Ecole, but there was Yves, me, Rancière, Miller, and then Milner. Lacan had done his homework, he'd prepared his text carefully. Then there were questions. I remember well, as a good Althusserian I asked him: 'thank you, this is very interesting – but what relation do you see with the Marxist problem of ideology?' Ideology – that was always the key word for us Althusserians, the shibboleth of Althusserianism. If I remember well, Lacan then answered, roughly: 'yes, there certainly is one, but it's not the central problem.' And this is where I would say, there was already a sort of division, not a conflict but rather a

¹ Cf. Louis Althusser, 'Sur le jeune Marx (Questions de théorie)', *La Pensée* 96 (1961); 'On the Young Marx: Theoretical Questions', trans. Ben Brewster, *For Marx* (London: New Left Books, 1969), 59-63.

choice, a question of taste and a way of working, that separated the Lacanians from the Althusserians.

For me there was never a question, there was no doubt in my mind: I would remain with Althusser, I would work on ideology and on science, on the epistemological break, etc. But this is probably where Miller, who didn't want to break with Althusser, found a new, more interesting and more exciting teacher. And Yves, as always, maintained relations with everyone. All this crystallized later, over the course of 1965, up until the publication of the first *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* in January 66: there were Althusserian-Althusserians, there were Lacano-Althusserians, and then there were people who didn't want to be identified with a particular school. And these distinctions would be overlaid by political divisions, linked to the question of Maoism.

YD: Yes, when Lacan came to the Ecole (the first session of his seminar at the ENS was in January 1964) he had already prepared the ground for his arrival. Althusser too. His invitation was more than a charitable gesture following Lacan's eviction from Saint-Anne; Althusser also wanted his own strategic alliance with Lacan.² And we were in the middle of it all. We did those first, closed seminars with Lacan and we participated in the first seminar (Lacan's seminar XI, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*)³, he gave at the ENS in 1964 – this is where you find Miller's question, which later became famous: 'what is your ontology?' The following year several of us gave presentations during the seminar itself (seminar XII, *Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis*)⁴, which were taken up again in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*.⁵

To recapitulate, then: in the work on structuralism, in 62-63, there are three things that intersect – Althusser's Marx, Lacan's psychoanalysis, and Foucault. Foucault was very important too, and is too often forgotten: it's impossible to understand some declarations in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* without Foucault. The idea was to review potential ancestors of structuralism on the basis of Foucault, in order to show a connection of thought, to demonstrate that the label might really mean something. This connection went back through the history of philosophy, with presentations on Montesquieu and Rousseau, to arrive at Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. Althusser took us to meet Barthes, we spent an evening at his place, after a conference he had given at the Sorbonne, entitled 'The Structuralist Activity.'⁶ We compared them. Barthes was the first to openly declare himself as a structuralist; Foucault was much more cautious ...

PH: ... and he later rejected the label.⁷

² See Louis Althusser, 'Correspondence with Jacques Lacan' [1963-1969], *Writings on Psychoanalysis*, ed. Olivier Corpet and François Matheron, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 145-174.

³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1963-64], trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977).

⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XII: Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis* [1964-65], trans. Cormac Gallagher, unpublished manuscript.

⁵ These presentations were published as CpA 1.2, CpA 1.3, and CpA 3.5.

⁶ Roland Barthes, 'The Structuralist Activity,' trans. Richard Howard, *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972). According to Barthes, 'the goal of all structuralist activity, whether reflexive or poetic, is to reconstruct an "object" in such a way as to manifest thereby the rules of functioning (the "functions") of this object. Structure is therefore actually a *simulacrum* of the object, but a directed, *interested* simulacrum, since the imitated object makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible in the natural object. Structural man takes the real, decomposes it, then recomposes it', and thereby renders it intelligible (214-215).

⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Foreword to the English edition' [1970], *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), xv.

YD: Yes, but in the preface to *The Birth of the Clinic*, which is one of Foucault's most 'structuralist' texts, from the spring of 1963, you can see perfectly well that he defends a 'structuralist study' of medical discourse.⁸

EB: For us Foucault's preface was a crucial text; it worked out a genuine philosophical alternative to phenomenology. And it was published in Canguilhem's collection; it marked the moment in which we began following Canguilhem's lectures. It was simultaneously a great step forward and a masterpiece in the tradition of French epistemology. We found an attention to language in it that was not at all present in the phenomenologists – nor was it the same as Barthes' Saussurean semiology.

YD: At the time, in the spring of 63, we finished our seminar on structuralism, and I remember that for us this text – one of Foucault's great methodological texts – confirmed our somewhat floating and slightly obscure interpretation of structuralism. During this year, we thus drew together a certain way of working in the history of the sciences, in the history of thought, together with a general theory of discourse, with epistemology. We thought that we were going to combine Canguilhem, Foucault, what Althusser said about Marx's theory, and what Lacan said about Freud's theory.

EB: What you have to understand is, basically, that we were all, to one degree or another, students of Althusser, students of Canguilhem, and members of Lacan's audience.

YD: Lacan, by the way, had got hold of one of Canguilhem's articles 'What is psychology?', which we then re-edited in the *Cahiers* (CpA 2.1). Lacan was enthusiastic about this text.

EB: Canguilhem's article was partly directed against Daniel Lagache, who had a psychologizing conception of psychoanalysis – and Lacan was in conflict with Lagache, at the time when he was founding his new school, the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris*, in the spring of 1964. Lacan drew on Canguilhem to pursue his own critique of psychology.

PH: Ok, we now have points of reference to help us think psychology, the human sciences, economy and history, and politics. How do you explain the fascination with mathematics and the abstraction of mathematised logic, already prominent in the first issue of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*?

YD: There is someone else who needs to be mentioned: Jean Cavailles. It was the moment when people begin to talk about him, and following his example, to take more of an interest in modern mathematics. It was the period in which students of mathematics at the ENS were Bourbakists, the moment when Jules Vuillemin published his *Philosophy of Algebra* (1962). I myself wrote my masters dissertation on Cavailles, with Canguilhem. There was also Michel Serres, who taught us, who gave excellent lectures and who knew the history of mathematics well. He also wrote, by the way, an

⁸ 'Is it not possible', Foucault asks, 'to make a structural analysis of discourses that would evade the fate of commentary by supposing no remainder, nothing in excess of what has been said, but only the fact of its historical appearance? The facts of discourse would then have to be treated not as autonomous nuclei of multiple significations, but as events and functional segments gradually coming together to form a system. The meaning of a statement would be defined not by the treasure of intentions that it might contain, revealing and concealing it at the same time, but by the difference that articulates it upon the other real or possible statements, which are contemporary to it or to which it is opposed in the linear series of time. A systematic history of discourses would then become possible' (Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* [1963], trans. Alan Sheridan [London: Taylor & Francis, 2003], xvii).

article on Foucault's *History of Madness*, called 'The Geometry of Madness';⁹ Althusser had told us that it represented the first attempt to read the book as a structuralist text, in the precise sense of a *mathematical* structuralism.

PH: Was Lacan himself aware of this tradition of thought? Why did he lean towards mathematical logic, towards Frege and so on, in his 1965 seminar?

YD: The role of logic was something peculiar to Lacan. It came from him. It didn't come from us, contrary to what some people say, people who say that we 'logicized psychoanalysis', etc. This isn't true. It was Lacan who made us work on Frege; it wasn't our proposition. Frege still hadn't been translated. For us it followed, fundamentally, from the primacy of theory. For us, structuralism was basically a new way of asserting the primacy of theory. It was a new form of theory in which the mathematical aspect necessarily came to the fore. We had no problem with the claim that there was a *logic* of the unconscious, in the strong sense of the term.

EB: But how did this join up with Lacan's work?

YD: As I said, it was Lacan who demanded it [*l'a demandé*]. I think that Lacan had always considered that there could be a logic of the unconscious, a calculus of the unconscious, a logic of the unconscious structured as a language – a logic of the unconscious. Lacan had always thought this.

PH: Already in the speculation on 'logical time' (1945), for example.¹⁰

YD: That's it. Lacan had been trained in mathematics by a rather peculiar fellow, Georges Théodore Guilbaud. Guilbaud gave a series of private seminars to three great figures – Benveniste, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. He was a professional, academic mathematician, who wrote very little but who published some extremely ingenious articles on topics that pushed the boundaries of the discipline, for instance on topology. In any case, we weren't the ones who passed the virus on to Lacan, it was more of an encounter. Lacan was already working on the idea of a *formalisation* of the unconscious, and he had had the idea of the *matheme* for a long time.

PH: Though it seems to become more radical over time.

YD: Yes indeed; there was the encounter with us, and we were very enthusiastic about it, insofar as we took it to be a very pure form of the theoretical.

EB: Perhaps this is something very French, by the way, this preference for mathematics over logic. Set theory was, obviously, the jewel in the mathematical crown; for Bourbaki it was the pillar of the system.

YD: Once again, this goes back to Cavailles: his secondary doctoral thesis was on set theory,¹¹ and his main thesis was entitled *Formalism and the Axiomatic Method*.¹²

⁹ Michel Serres, 'Géométrie de la folie', *Mercure de France* 1188 (August 1962), 683-696 and 1189 (September 1962), 63-81; 'The Geometry of the Incommunicable: Madness', trans. Felicia McCarren, in Arnold I. Davidson, ed., *Foucault and his Interlocutors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 36-56.

¹⁰ Jacques Lacan, 'Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty' [1945], *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).

¹¹ Jean Cavailles, *Remarques sur la formation de la théorie abstraite des ensembles* (Paris: Hermann, 1938).

Bourbaki considered modern, structural mathematics to begin with sets: different structures are built on them, but the foundation is set theory. Bourbakism was, in a way, Russell's revenge on Poincaré.

EB: Yes, though David Hilbert and the Hilbertians were more important to the Bourbakists than Russell, both in the presentation Cavaillès gave of them and in the ideology of the 'working mathematician' (or as we would say, in the Bourbakist version of the 'spontaneous ideology of the scientists [*savants*]', to use Althusser's expression). Lautman and Cavaillès were, moreover, very strong in philosophy.

YD: Their death was a tragedy for France: the intellectual history of France wouldn't have been the same if they hadn't been killed.

EB: Yes, it changed a lot of things. The death of Cavaillès and Lautman was a catastrophe for French philosophy. Their project was kept alive by Canguilhem (and Althusser had built on it, even if he was not directly concerned by mathematics), and the obsession of our generation was to pick up where they left off, to restart what had been interrupted. Do you remember that preface Foucault wrote for Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*, where he talks about the two branches of French philosophy, one oriented towards the concept and the other towards consciousness or existence?¹³ The first branch had been interrupted, and several of us wanted to continue and renew it.

YD: This is very important. It's why we insisted so much on Canguilhem's text on the concept.¹⁴

EB: We went back to the concept, but we also turned towards something new...

YD: ... and what was new, fundamentally, was the role of the human sciences: linguistics, anthropology, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and Marx, our own 'Marx'. You know, Cavaillès's last word in *On the Logic and Theory of Science* (1946) roughly says: our generation must replace the philosophy of consciousness with a philosophy of the concept.¹⁵ So I think, in the end, we remained faithful to this legacy, in *our* conception of structuralism. We had more means, more ways of developing this 'strong' structuralism, this conceptual structuralism: we weren't limited to mathematics, as Cavaillès was, since for us the concept at work in maths was also the one at work in Marx, in Freud. It was above all this: Marx, Freud and mathematics.

PH: You put Marx before Freud, Althusser before Lacan? In the *Cahiers* themselves it would seem that Lacan's influence is more in evidence.

YD: The *Cahiers* were something that happened *between* Althusser and Lacan, and certainly with an explicit predominance of Lacan. That's clear. Why? Because the *Cahiers* took shape around the theory of discourse and epistemology. To see the relation with politics that this represented, one has to understand the relation between the

¹² Cavaillès, *Méthode axiomatique et formalisme* (Paris: Hermann, 1938).

¹³ Foucault sees a general 'dividing line' running through the various other oppositions that shape the field of modern French philosophy, 'one that separates a philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject, and a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality, and of the concept' (Foucault, 'Life: Experience and Science', trans. Robert Hurley, in *The Essential Works*, vol. 1: *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion [London: Penguin, 1998], 466).

¹⁴ Cf. Hallward, 'Theoretical Training', CF1, 000.

¹⁵ Cavaillès, *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science* [1946] [Paris: Vrin, 1997], 90.

Cahiers pour l'Analyse and the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, in which we also participated, Miller, Regnault and me, etc.

The *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* were launched towards the end of 1964 (and the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* one year later, towards the end of 1965). The first issue begins with a text written by Miller, 'The Function of Theoretical Training', a text conceived along the same lines as the later *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*.¹⁶ How does this text conceive of politics? Politics involves an education in theory, against ideology. Rancière explains all this very well, in his *Althusser's Lesson* (1974).¹⁷ Unlike Etienne, Rancière was intrigued by Lacanianism, and he was furthermore very close to Milner, they came from the same *khâgne*. All this was bound up, of course, with personal relations: I was friends with Etienne, and with Miller, and through Miller also with Milner; Rancière was friends with Miner, but not with Miller; Etienne wasn't close with either Rancière or Miller, etc. You need to understand that this whole business, the story of *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* and of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, only concerned a small group of around twenty people, all inside the Ecole Normale – with the sole exception of Badiou, who left the ENS too early and who left, precisely, as a Sartrean, to spend a few years as a teacher in Reims, a rather quiet town ...

PH: Meanwhile there was an argument between Miller and Rancière, after the 'Reading *Capital*' seminar.

YD: Yes there was an argument, it's a minor story but it was uncomfortable for Althusser, and the role of peace-keeper fell to me. Miller had mentioned the concept of a metonymic causality in our 'Action de la structure' (CpA 9.6)¹⁸, but this text hadn't been published yet, and it circulated at the ENS in manuscript: we had written it in September-October 1964, at the same time we were preparing for the seminar on *Capital* (which took place the following spring). Like the text itself, we had developed the concept together, as a group. Rancière then used the idea of metonymic causality to make sense of something in Marx, which was perfectly in keeping with what we were all saying at the time. Well, he added a footnote in the text for *Reading Capital* to reference this unpublished text; and in any case, no one has written about this period, about the project of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, etc., better than Rancière himself in his *Althusser's Lesson* (1974).

What you have to understand is that, in the year 1965, the student group at the heart of the UEC thought that, in a way, there was nothing more that could be done [within the Party]. They had been used, as Etienne explained, against the 'Italians'; they had been manipulated by the party leaders, and so began moving towards a split. From then on it was about creating their own group, the group that eventually became the UJC(ml) (Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes). The UJC began to exist in the autumn of 66. This group affirmed both an Althusserian theoretical rigour and the Chinese Cultural Revolution. When Althusser drew on Mao Zedong's texts on contradiction,¹⁹ he said that he used them precisely on account of their theoretical rigor, and not in order to take political sides with the Chinese against the Soviets. This argument was very important at the time, all the more so since, although the war in Algeria was over, it continued in Vietnam. You can't understand the student

¹⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Fonction de la formation théorique', présentation des *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*, reprinted in Miller, *Un Début dans la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 86.

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *La Leçon d'Althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); *Althusser's Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Continuum, 2011).

¹⁸ Miller, 'L'Action de la structure', CpA 9.6:102.

¹⁹ Althusser, 'On the Materialist Dialectic', in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1969), 194, cf. 211-212, 94n.6.

mobilisation in 68, if you forget that it started in the *Comités de Vietnam de Base*,²⁰ in an open battle against the French Communist Party: the party said 'peace in Vietnam' and we said the 'FLN will win!'. We thought that the PCF position was opportunist, as usual, and would refuse the struggle and the victory in order to have peace. They started up in 1965, these *Comités de Vietnam de base*. There was thus a political conjunction between this mobilisation regarding Vietnam on the one hand, and the theoretical orientation of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* on the other.

PH: But these first *Cahiers* were solidly established over the course of 1965, and so preceded the creation of the UJC by more than a year?

YD: That's it. The *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* are the fruit of the Cercle d'Ulm, which is to say the circle of *normaliens* in the UEC. Miller and I wrote that introductory text for the first issue in October 64. The political head of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* was Robert Linhart, a very close friend of mine and of Miller's. Then there was Benny Lévy, who entered the ENS in 66. These *Cahiers* were conceived as a sort of intermediary institution, halfway between a political group and a theoretical journal, to support what we called the 'schools of theoretical training'. These schools were set up in various universities in Paris, so as to disseminate more or less the positions you find in *Reading Capital*: they taught Althusser's Marx, the theory of revolution. Rancière was one of the teachers in these schools, which began to operate in the autumn of 1965, and which thus coincided with the Cultural Revolution.

The same people were behind the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* and then the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. But over time the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* became more and more intensely political, while the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were more purely theoretical. When you say that, in the end, one can't find much politics in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, in a way that's true; it moves more and more towards an emphasis on epistemology. Its last issue, on formalisation, is the one that goes furthest in the direction of a 'theoreticist' version of structuralism.

PH: And this last issue is also the one in which Badiou's influence seems most marked.

YD: Yes, Badiou joined the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* after joining Althusser. He wrote a text on Althusser in early 1967, 'Le (Re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique',²¹ which was a very important article for him. He sided with Althusser on account of his rigour. He had already been defending Lacan for a long time, for the same reason, and this is why, when Badiou joined the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, it obviously didn't pose any problems. And when he joined, he brought a knowledge of mathematics and of logic that the others didn't have.

PH: To go back for a moment: did this double fidelity to Althusser and Lacan become more problematic after the internal split within the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* (in late 1965) that gave rise to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*?²²

EB: Faithful to the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the UJC began sounding the trumpet of anti-theoreticism well before 68. I saw this from Althusser's side. I remained Althusser's faithful supporter during all these years.

²⁰ Cf. Kristin Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 90-92; Julian Bourg, 'The Red Guards of Paris: French Student Maoism of the 1960s', *History of European Ideas* 31:4 (2005): 472-490.

²¹ Badiou, 'Le (Re)commencement du matérialisme dialectique', *Critique* 240 (May 1967): 438-467.

²² See Hallward, 'Theoretical Training', CF1, 000.

YD: And I was the mediator, as always.

EB: As you well remember, Yves, Althusser had been accused of theoreticism well before 68, by the PCF on one side and by the Maoists on the other. Exactly the same rhetoric came from both sides: they said, 'you are forgetting the class struggle, you are forgetting that praxis governs theory', etc. By that stage we were no longer at the ENS: from 1965 to 67 I was in Algeria, doing my military service as a teacher, and Yves was doing the same in Madagascar. But I would receive news from a friend of Linhart's, Jacques Broyelle (who later switched to the right, well before Glucksmann), who told me that our friends had agreed to join the editorial board of the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, and that I should join too. I wanted to verify things for myself and I asked, I can't remember whom, Macherey, I think, for more information. I then discovered that they had already signed me up – the usual method. In the end I decided not to join.

But I was very close to Linhart, and upon returning to Paris I met up with him. I remember the formulation that summed up the basic issue for him. I told him, 'theory is necessary, there must be a relative autonomy of theory, which doesn't negate the importance of the class struggle, but all the same, we can't do without theory.' I stuck to our *credo*, albeit now in a somewhat defensive way. And Robert told me: 'But Etienne, who gives the *orders*, as far as theory's concerned? The theoretician cannot give himself orders! The orders have to come from the people, the masses.' They were thus already vigorously anti-theoreticist, and the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* must have seemed even more theoreticist to them than Althusser himself.

YD: Yes, but the real turning point, Etienne, as you must know, came when the people of the UJC were invited, in the summer of 1967, by the Chinese Communist Party. It's when they came back that they began to prepare for what they called *l'établissement*, the idea that intellectuals should go to the factories and learn from the workers. This is when anti-theoreticism reached its most violent pitch. Immediately afterwards the first members of the UJC established themselves in the factories.

PH: Let's go back to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*. Did you initially conceive of them as consistent with the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, as part of a coherent project. Or were they the result of a split, a break?

YD: I would say that to begin with the project was coherent, in the sense that in both cases it was a matter of theoretical training [*formation*]. We were going to engage in politics through theoretical rectification. But this ended very rapidly.

EB: That's right. Miller and Linhart had been very close, but in late 1965 quarrelled over the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes* issue on literature, which Linhart suppressed.²³ Linhart was intoxicated with politics and with Leninism. A little younger than us, he had marked his entrance into our group (the Cercle d'Ulm) in a spectacular way, showing that he knew almost the whole of Lenin's work by heart. Linhart more or less identified with Lenin. He had read the thirty volumes of his complete works, and memorized them. I don't mean that Miller and Milner were against Lenin on the contrary, there was indeed also a very algebraic Lenin – but for them it wasn't the fundamental reference.

²³ Cf. 'Theoretical Training', CF1, 000.

YD: While they began with the same orientation, the two *Cahiers* diverged very quickly. The project of a 'theory of discourse' went more and more towards formalisation, towards what the last issue of the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* turned out to be – which is to say, towards a position rather distant from psychoanalysis. There was a real evolution. It's obvious when you look at the importance of the ninth issue, on the genealogy of the sciences. I took part in the interview with Foucault, by the way, in the Salle Cavallès [at the Ecole]: it began at about 4pm, we continued until roughly 8pm. We were seven or eight, I can't remember exactly who was there. It was October/November 67 and the result was that beautiful text by Foucault (CpA 9.2).

EB: Yes, it's the core of what he subsequently turned into a book, which became *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

We also need to mention someone else, who wrote in the *Cahiers* under the pseudonym Thomas Herbert: this was Michel Pêcheux, who committed suicide in 1983. He was a student in philosophy at the ENS one or two years before us. Pierre Macherey did some seminars on his work, which are available on his website.²⁴ Pêcheux was very brilliant, with an immense range of cultural reference, scarred by a dreadful personal and familial history. Placing himself at the centre of a theoretical configuration in which he wanted to renounce neither epistemology, nor psychoanalysis, nor linguistics, nor formalisation, nor Marxism, he pursued the dream of synthesis right to the end... This resulted in work that was sometimes a little scholastic, and sometimes very strong.

YD: The theory of discourse suited him very well. He devoted himself to it, and it allowed him to combine together a general theory of ideologies, translation, psychoanalysis, Marxism, linguistics, etc.

PH: And concretely: how were the issues of the *Cahiers* conceived and produced?

EB: The *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* were essentially Miller and Milner.

YD: The real core was, in my opinion, Miller, Milner and Regnault. Then there were those who joined in: Pêcheux [Herbert], Mosconi, even Bouveresse. It was very much a project run by *normaliens*.

EB: Yes, it was very, very *normalien*!

YD: What allowed people like Mosconi, Bouveresse and others to relate to the project was the theory of discourse.

EB: It drew together students of logic on the one hand and students of the humanities on the other, including, Derrida's big issue, which infuriated Lévi-Strauss. Derrida, by the way, had a great animosity towards Lévi-Strauss, which never left him; I'd say that as far as theory goes, Lévi-Strauss was perhaps his main enemy.

YD: Miller liked Derrida a lot, he had been his student at the ENS. In 66-67 Miller was in his final year at the Ecole, and they discussed things together. Derrida was interested in the *Cahiers*, and he gave them this text (CpA 4.1), this chunk of what would become *On Grammatology* (1967). They were very happy with it. Don't forget the practical side,

²⁴ Pierre Macherey, 'Idéologie: le mot, l'idée, la chose: de Thomas Herbert à Michel Pêcheux' (2006-07), <http://stl.recherche.univ-lille3.fr/seminaires/philosophie/macherey/macherey20062007/macherey17012007.html>.

too: once the journal was launched, the problem was to get hold of enough copy to fill its pages.

EB: They also wanted to make a name for themselves. There was that side to it too.

YD: Some texts were essential to the project, for instance Miller's texts, Regnault's very beautiful text on Descartes and Machiavelli (CpA 6.2), and Milner's fundamental text on the *Sophist* (CpA 3.5) (to which he always remained faithful). Other texts were more makeshift: there's Althusser's text on Rousseau (CpA 8.1), because Rousseau was on the program for the agrégation that year, and there was, for instance, Bouveresse's dissertation on Fichte (CpA 6.7), Grosrichard's dissertation on Molyneux's problem, (CpA 2.3), or Mosconi's on Condillac (CpA 4.2) – those were the MA dissertations we all had to do. Except the last two issues, these were different; here they managed, somehow, in that year 1967, to recruit a few high profile figures, for instance Antoine Culioli, François Dagognet, Jacques Brunschwig (whose very technical article on Aristotle's logic played a decisive role for Lacan, in the theory of the negative existential proposition, the famous not-all [*pas-tout*]), etc.

EB: During that period structuralism became powerful, that's why.

YD: And those last issues of the *Cahiers* were published by Seuil, thanks to François Wahl, who published Lacan's *Écrits* (1966), and who wrote the only philosophical book on structuralism that existed at the time; it appeared just before May 68.²⁵ These last issues are clearly more professional, more coherent; sometimes, with the other issues, we had to improvise.

PH: But always in line with the theory of discourse?

EB: Yes; this idea of a theory of discourse didn't designate a fixed method, but a field, a set of priorities, which allowed for a kind of competition between several ways of conceiving things, some more formalist, others more historical, others metaphysical.

YD: Yes, there was a certain very strong theoretical core, drawn up in that programmatic text on the action of the structure (CpA 9.6). During those years, the key years of 1966 and 67 and those first months of 68, it was through the *Cahiers* that structuralism became known in France. And you have to recognise that there is, after all, a unity in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, from Cavaillès to Canguilhem, to Foucault, etc., whose *Archaeology of Knowledge* had been deeply marked by the *Cahiers* – and in the end there is relatively little Lacan. The Lacan who figures there is the Lacan who deals with discourse and science.

PH: And yet psychoanalysis is very present in the journal: there are Leclaire's seminars, the texts by Green, Tort and Nassif texts, the Schreber extracts, etc.

EB: I think that Miller had a good relation with Leclaire, who of all Lacan's disciples was the most interested in all this.

YD: Of course the relation with Lacan remained important. His seminar still took place at the ENS. But necessarily, the *normaliens* had to keep a certain distance; they realised, of course, that they couldn't contribute to the theory of analysis unless they became

²⁵ François Wahl, *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?* (Paris: Seuil, 1968).

analysts themselves (which is why Miller later underwent psychoanalysis, in the 1970s). It wasn't tenable, the idea that there could be a commensality between analysts and non-analysts, around the appropriation of analytical theory by a theory of discourse.

PH: And after 68 it appears that the *Cahiers* themselves were no longer tenable. Did you abandon the *Cahiers* in the immediate aftermath of 68?

YD: 68 made everything explode. Afterwards it's another story that begins. The main actors of the *Cahiers* all joined the Gauche Prolétarienne. They were gripped by politics, and were completely engaged. You have to remember that the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, the UJC(ml), were *against* May 68, almost to the end. During the whole of the summer 68 the UJC tore itself apart, it was terrible. That's how the Gauche Prolétarienne took shape, around Benny Lévy, precisely with the exclusion of Linhart, who was condemned to *l'établissement*, to establish himself in the factory;²⁶ Linhart's establishment at Citroën was a condemnation, it was like in China, when people were sent for re-education at a pig farm...

PH: And was this predictable, was it unsurprising that the *Cahiers* editors would throw themselves into Maoist politics, and become engaged in organisations like the Gauche Prolétarienne?

YD: Yes, all this was predictable. In the spring of 68 Miller was teaching philosophy at Besançon. Besançon was a hotspot of revolutionary syndicalism, with *les gars de la Rhodia*, etc.

EB: I remember a phone call from Miller, telling us that the revolution had begun in Besançon, with the creation of the first Soviet, with the workers of the Rhodiaceta and the revolutionary students, etc. We found a small car and a little petrol in a jerry can (by now France had run out of petrol) and the four of us immediately drove to Besançon, to arrive the following day – at which point the Soviet had already ceased to exist, because the workers had decided they no longer wanted anything to do with the leftist students...

YD: It's true that this was quite striking, to see people as far removed from politics as François Regnault and Jean-Claude Milner, people with such refined tastes, etc., taken with the Gauche Prolétarienne...

If we go back a little, a decisive moment was marked by the philosophy courses for scientists. Althusser organised these courses in the autumn of 1967 through to April 68 – but I don't know how they began.

EB: If you read the correspondence we exchanged at the time (which is now in Althusser's archives at the IMEC), the correspondence of the Groupe Interne de Discussion Philosophique, which took shape after *Reading Capital* (1965), when Badiou had joined us, you'll see that we were trying to develop a complete philosophy, on the basis of the ideas presented in *Reading Capital*, together with Spinoza, the notes we prepared on the theory of discourse,²⁷ etc. And you'll see that there were scientists among the correspondents: there was for instance a young chemistry professor, a communist comrade, Jean-Marie Savéant.

²⁶ Robert Linhart, *L'Établi* (Paris: Minuit, 1978); cf. Virginie Linhart, *Volontaires pour l'usine: Vies d'établis 1967-1977* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1994).

²⁷ Althusser, 'Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse' [1966] trans. G.M. Goshgarian, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings* (London: Verso 2003).

Althusser had decided – and this is what he explains in the first course²⁸ – that scientists were spontaneous materialists, and philosophers spontaneous idealists. Consequently the class struggle in theory was to a certain degree incarnated, within the university, by the relation between philosophers and literary scholars on the one hand and scientists on the other. Pierre Macherey had always had a great pedagogical talent; he was passionate about teaching and was looking for students. And Pierre had the idea that, after *Reading Capital*, there ought to be courses for non-philosophers – this was his idea. In 1965-66 he established an introductory course, once a week, in which he talked about Descartes, Hegel, etc. Althusser thought it was a brilliant idea, and arranged for several of us to take turns intervening: Michel Fichant, Regnault, Badiou, etc. The first published text to come out of this was Badiou's *Concept of Model* (1969).

YD: Which was hugely influential amongst young leftist students of mathematics, after 68 – but it's a terribly sectarian book. This was the period in which Badiou was more Althusserian than Lacanian, in which he used Althusser to criticise Lacan. In his text on zero (CpA 10.8) he basically says: Lacan is ideology. Don't forget, by the way, that the last issues of the *Cahiers* were finished well before May 68, and well before their actual publication; the ninth issue (published in the second trimester of 68) had been completed by the end of 67. And the last issue, which only appeared in the first trimester of 69, had already been finished by March-April 68. These last issues take up more or less the same ideas as the courses for scientists, and it's the same people talking: Badiou, Regnault, and Thomas Herbert.

EB: With these courses, perhaps Althusser wanted to do something parallel to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, but which would be less elitist.

YD: Oh, I'm not sure. In any case, 68 blew everything up.

Translated by Cécile Malaspina, revised by Peter Hallward.

²⁸ Althusser, 'Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists [*savants*]' [1967], trans. Warren Montag, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1990).