

# The Procedure of its Invention, the Construction of its Form, the Means of its Transmission

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**Abstract:** Using Louis Althusser's Letter to Italian comrades concerning the events of May 68 as a foil, the essay interrogates the form and place and determining power of knowledge in recuperating and rendering foreclosed the thought of the event as such, thereby rendering the truth of May 68 indifferently either nothing or impossible. This suggests the necessity of revivifying the 'nothing or impossible' as the undecidable of the event-site of May 68. One of the consequences of what is truly the 'knowledge economy' (in all its forms), which is the maintenance of this impossible *withinknowledge* is to produce divisions within the people (e.g., between students and workers, etc.), and here the essay turns back, as it were, to a reading of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, tracking two key documents: The *May 16 Circular* and the *Decision in Sixteen Points*. These 'founding' documents of the revolution within the revolution reveal a reorientation within the knowledge of the situation to the situation of knowledge itself. The Cultural Revolution demands a change in form and a consequent subjective recommencement based on what is called here the educational invariant – that it be manifestly *for all*. Lastly, with this two-fold analysis as backdrop, the essay polemicises the contemporary scene of the knowledge economy as the decided lack of education and suggests that only by a reorientation to knowledge which affirms what is impossible to it might there appear today as education what is invariant to it. This would be to take the lesson of both the GPCR and May 68.

**Keywords:** Althusser, May 68, Cultural Revolution, Rancière, Plato

I don't bother asking you why didn't you come to ask me what I know so I could tell you what I know you need to know because I already know you don't know even enough to know I know more and better than you.' The nimble and flexible monkeys grab at the pendulous breasts of knowledge everywhere. <sup>1</sup>

Plato the Greek or Rin Tin Tin  
Who's more famous to the billion millions?<sup>2</sup>

And I guess that I just don't know.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Clemens, personal communication.

<sup>2</sup> The Clash, 'The Magnificent Seven,' *Sandinista*, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> The Velvet Underground, 'Heroin', *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, 1967

### The times will have suited it

In a 1969 letter to Italian comrades offering the promised response to the 'events' of May 1968, Louis Althusser begins by noting that in making this promise the previous year he was getting ahead of himself:

For how could anyone presume to speak of events of this kind without having a minimum of *objective* documentation at his disposal? How can anyone presume to speak of an important historic event without that minimum of objective information which would allow one, if not to carry out in full, then at least to outline 'the concrete analysis' of 'the concrete situation' that produced the May events?<sup>4</sup>

Althusser goes on to say that what he has to say – for, as he says, he must say something anyway – will be 'schematic, crude, and perhaps even fundamentally incomplete. I originally hoped to send you my analysis in the form of *theses*. Instead, what I have are, at best, *hypotheses*.'

There are several things that would be of interest here if one were to track Althusser in a similar way to that done by Jacques Rancière in his formidable reckoning of these years, *Althusser's Lesson*.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally, for this essay, that Althusser after the 'event' seeks to put the *knowledge* of the event back on centre stage, to, in a way that will become the predominant form of the relation to this event, subject the event to knowledge and this means – hence 'the concrete analysis of the concrete situation' *which gives rise to* these events – subjecting what 'happened' to prior knowledge *and* subjecting the post-evental situation to that *same* knowledge. Knowledge before, knowledge after, then, and thus the event as such is circumscribed. This circumscription Althusser unconsciously signifies in the slippage from event to events and the subsequent use of them as interchangeable.

Provisionally speaking, and this is perhaps the one thing that all of the most influential theories of the event have presumed as their starting point, an event is an event precisely because it cannot be circumscribed by knowledge. Ironically, but in line with the dual party line in metaphysics, one Aristotelian, the other Kantian, that continues to dog philosophy at the level of the one and the many, the finite and the infinite, subject and object and so on, thus the very form of 'our knowledge' or of what we *know* as knowledge, this discovery of the event as *event* ushers in a rush to return to knowledge. As if it abhorred a void. Although Rancière's critique does not take exactly this slippage, circumscription and return as *the* lesson of Althusser, that Althusser

4 Althusser 2018. Note here how Althusser slips between event and events.

5 Rancière 2011.

prioritises knowledge over event<sup>6</sup> squares with Rancière's trajectory in his work. Another way to put this 'a priori', and this will be reflected later in the essay, is to defer to the *knowledge* of the masses over the *masses'* knowledge. This needs to be understood as a fundamental division, a division in truth, if you like, and not be reduced to a mere distinction, or object of knowledge.

Even though Althusser is not the subject of this essay – the circumscription of events, the division in truth, the production of subjects, the lack in knowledge and so on is – let me add a little more anyway. Let me use and abuse Althusser, against the grain as it were, as exemplary of a wider metaphysic and thus as a way to contextualise what I am trying to say. There are two ironies in Althusser's claim to his objective non-knowledge of the event as the stop on his full engagement with it – his impossible thesis qua hypothesis. The first is that our position today, with regard to *May 68* – a designation, hence the italics, that announces a specific knowledge as that of the knowledge of *May 68* in itself<sup>7</sup> – is one of the saturation of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Althusser *knew* nothing or too little, we know everything or too much. As Kristin Ross puts it in her book on *May 68*<sup>9</sup> one of the features of this saturation is to make the true thought of *May 68* – which must be concentrated in the *event* as such – impossible. The more it is known, the more obscure what is true of it becomes.

Of course, one of the trans-ontological suppositions of enlightenment is that to know is to act and under capitalism to act is to own and to own is to determine in every instance. It's not a surprise at all that knowledge and property so easily accommodate one another – we live now in the 'knowledge economy' after all or, more accurately, knowledge operates and always has as property and or currency when, that is, it is not bound to what is true of it.<sup>10</sup> Not coincidentally, then, this knowledge

6 Rancière's critique, especially in that published as 'Appendix: On the Theory of Ideology: Althusser's Politics' in the English edition, focusses on Althusser's own conception of for Rancière the overplayed and mis-laid distinction between science and ideology. At one point he attributes this to Althusser's Kantianism. Rancière 2011, p. 134.

7 As is well known Althusser was highly critical of the focus on the students and this is what 'May' essentially means. As Althusser points out, the strike of 9 million workers, which for him is the real force of what needs to be thought in '68 as '68 took place in June.

8 On this (see above note) I have sympathy with Althusser's position and that he notes also the obviously bourgeois character of the 'revolt in knowledge', and, as I'll speak about, the need of this revolt to find sanction in the factories. If one were to speculate psychoanalytically one way to consider the movement of knowledge to the factories, especially given how the 'factories' return to work and, so it is said, forestall the revolution, is that in fact knowledge went their seeking its repression in the other – the workers. Thus the workers are then to blame! This is clearly, as history shows us, the psycho-pathology of the New Philosophers, whose performance of this for their bourgeois masters is an exemplary lesson in the more general function of university discourse under neoliberalism.

9 Ross 2002.

10 Plato, in *The Republic*, already remarks on this coincidence of knowledge qua interest and money

of May 68 proliferates horizontally too, rhizome like, necessarily legitimating all sorts of knowledge with access to what it is a knowledge of. In what we call neoliberalism a certain (false?) conception of this nomadism of the concept often since emphasised in a variety of ways, as essential to May 68, the de-territorialisation thesis par excellence, obtains. So many different meanings, senses, causes, effects, for good, ill or nothing. So many reductions, to pleasure, sex, peace, identity and so on. So many radical knowledges as the knowledge of May 68 – so many such that, precisely, nothing can be true of May 68. And indeed, any claim to the truth of May 68 is already to falsify May 68, such is the pedagogy of these disparate knowledges, radically horizontal and obscurely conservative alike, for which nothing *invariant* can be. Difference will out over contradiction in the post 68 proliferation of knowledge, which is to say, after all, that this must be the empirically attested essence of May 68. Or to put it another way, the battle over the matter of May 68 has been fought and won at the level of its knowledge.

*The* knowledge of May 68 – that there is no truth of May 68 – is the whole of which these proliferations in knowledge are each a part and indeed this distinction cum relation between whole and part is itself dependent on a metaphysical complicity inherent to each of these ‘disparate’ knowledges. Each component part assumes that there is no definitive truth of the events of May 68 (the plural is functional) only this proliferation of its knowledge of which it is one (albeit the ‘best’ one each and every time). The whole of knowledge assumes that the truth of May 68, precisely because each component part eschews it as ground of their critique, is beyond the reach of knowledge as such. In other words, we have the metaphysics of the lack of truth – there is no truth only the proliferation of different knowledges; or there is *the* truth, which all these different knowledges lack but precisely because of this production of lack the truth is impossible to know. Knowledge makes truth – which is ‘out there’ – impossible to know. So either truth is nothing or it’s impossible to know. Subjectively, this ultimately amounts to the same thing. The can be no subject which is not that of knowledge.

So, to return to the terms of the Letter, where Althusser objectively lacked we are subjectively full and yet in both cases the events qua event remain obscure or opaque as some say; all the better to interpret ad infinitum. To lack and to have, as noted, are thereby the same thing because what they share is an orientation to the question of the event and that is, finally, that there is nothing other than knowledge itself. An event is an event in knowledge; its predicate can be found, its effects thereby prescribed. Which is to say, all events are of the knowledge of the event no matter which knowledge pertains.

The second irony – and let’s note irony in the Platonic sense of

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by reference to the term *tokos*. Derrida, albeit with an other orientation, speaks of this also.

interruption and recommencement and not in the sense of a dinner party at Mr Rorty’s – is that Althusser’s admission of non-knowledge of the *event* is actually true. It is the *invariant* feature of an event (and its consequence) being not-knowledge at all, that it is necessarily the starting point for an *other* orientation to the situation of knowledge within which this event *takes place*. So Althusser is correct but, ironically, he doesn’t know it or rather he doesn’t know what he professes to know of the events – that is, the eventality of the events. Or again, that he knows nothing is true but he doesn’t know that that is itself the only possible truth of his knowledge. His science recuperates the event which, correctly, is not it. In short, the event as occurring can and must be thought lest it be known.

For Althusser, knowing nothing of the *event* is actually of a piece with his knowledge of the events. It is, as noted, how the event fits within knowledge a priori. In this sense, the event is a *known* nothing and not a *nothing* to knowledge as such (this distinction signifies a metaphysical division). There is, as noted, nothing knowledge cannot know including what is not knowledge. Which is to say, nothing cannot exist outside of knowledge even the unknown. With regard to our situation today, that of the saturation of knowledge, (which is not Althusserian; there is no Althusserian century) the same irony pertains. The great rhizomatic slew of opinion, ideology, policy, identity, nostalgia, derision, exaltation, celebration, etc., etc., betray May 68 as impossible to know. There is the mark of the bad infinite; there is always something else to know, and, as such, it is unknowable. Another complicit concept in this metaphysics of the impossible is the much loved and metaphysically resilient, ‘potential’. Again, invoked, supposed, operating in knowledge as the end of the true.

To reiterate, it is true that the *event* of May 68 is an event *in* knowledge but is in itself as event non-knowledge and thus it is impossible to know. So again, all the knowledge in the world is correct except insofar as what it knows as what is impossible to know. It knows what cannot or must not be known – this is what all this knowledge collectively arborescently, produces, this impossibility and indeed, as noted, it is its metaphysics. Thus, it knows nothing about impossibility as such or that impossibility can be thought. And indeed it is the event, which is not knowledge and is nothing to it, which, by *taking place*, is the non-impossibility of this thinking of what is for knowledge impossible. It is, invariantly, the single point of a recommencement. But it is not recommencement itself which necessarily requires an unknown subject.

In the same letter Althusser treats with the question of knowledge in a manner which in later accounts becomes almost *de riguer* and it concerns the infamous and animating division between students or intellectuals and workers. This division predates May 1968 of course and is in some sense interminable. We see it as a motivating problem

in Plato and, differently formalised, in Aristotle, and it dominates and determines all questions of knowledge to this day – knowledge when thought, that is, as relevant to the collective or politically. Indeed, it can even be – and is – the basis of precisely how the collective, the polity, is even conceived. We only need think again of that ubiquitous, managerial, global determination ‘the knowledge economy’. This division in the field of knowledge which amounts as much to where knowledge is placed as to who has it, is of course fundamentally linked to education, another epiphenomena of May 68.

Education is the means of knowledge – the (institutional) arrangements for its transmission – and necessarily what is education falls within the circumscription of what knowledge can and must be – and what it cannot and must not be, moreover. In these terms, the students/intellectuals are the educated while the workers are seen thereby to lack. This is not to say of course that workers don’t have knowledge but effectively their knowledge is bound by technique and place whereas the educated intellectual is bound, so to speak to understanding, wherein every knowledge of technique would be submitted, and the place of his/her knowledge is qua *university* everywhere at once.<sup>11</sup> But note this pseudo-Platonic division is just that: one subject to the regime of knowledge whose orientation is as described above; thereby grounded in the determined lack of truth and thus what we have, given there can be no thought of what is true other than as knowledge, is the rule of this division. Lacan famously, and at the time, named this ‘University discourse’ and more famously still noted that its subjects, subjects of repetition in reproduction, were merely looking for a new master. The problem is that this will have been the new master of us all given that the new master is ushered in under the guise of established knowledge.

All this comes down, in the field of politics, to a fundamental division: knowledge knows what must be done with the all as divided and thus what must never come to knowledge is what this all is capable of without it. The point being, this distinction in knowledge of intellectual/worker is a product of a metaphysics of knowledge itself (and its institutionalisation) which requires within itself as itself that this distinction be. Hence, the relations between workers and intellectuals (including students in this) in May 68 is necessarily bound by this distinction as the limit of the field itself. It is what some intellectuals – though seemingly, never the workers – announce must be crossed and

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11 Note Althusser’s distinction between science and ideology incorporates into science the knowledge of technique – thus a representation of science is science for Althusser and this science is that of the intellectuals. Ostensibly he opposes this science to the ideological discourse of the students and thus his distinction operates to cut off the students from the workers at the level of what can be truly known of them. The students approach the worker as bourgeois-petit bourgeois ideologues while the intellectual ‘scientist’ knows the workers in their objective state. Note it is not necessary to take one side or another here. We can say, after Stalin, both are worse and which, as we’ll see, is what Mao essentially puts into action.

the nature of that crossing, as Ross shows, is itself contested. But what matters is not, in the first instance anyway, the differences in the way the Maoist and the Trotskyists intellectuals,<sup>12</sup> for example, approached the worker and the factory but the very conditions of possibility of the approach. Which is to say, the knowledge that conditioned the approach, that such an approach in this way, intellectual to worker, university to factory, was necessary, which is to say, then, the knowledge of the distinction in knowledge constituted by the ‘worker in technique’ and the ‘intellectual in understanding’. It’s this *situation* of knowledge that this distinction exemplifies as its material condition thus making of it a real division, that must be thought because this very kind of attempt to overcome it – to go to the factory – is the sign of its repetition as knowledge itself. As Althusser asks, rhetorically, why did the factory never go to the university? We can see in this question (for which Althusser has a reasonable answer) the symptom of what is an exemplary doubling down on the lack of the worker in the field of established knowledge. Not only does the worker lack it does not know it lacks. If it did it would seek out, so it must be assumed, given this is what knowledge demands, the knowledge of the university.<sup>13</sup>

What divides or what unbinds from knowledge is, in the first instance, the event. The event is that which is not subject to this knowledge and thus this distinction in qua division by knowledge: it inaugurates the division *from* this operating distinction. Thus, to think is to put oneself (and one’s knowledge) under the sign of the event, which is to say, to, on the basis of that which happens and is not knowledge, be reoriented to the situation of knowledge without it. To think unbound from knowledge – this is what an event offers to its unknown subjects. And this is where education or the question of education matters for it is always about the constitution of subjects such that in knowledge its subjects will necessarily be those of its reproduction: the state of knowledge, which the university guarantees (now more than ever) assures itself in the subjects it educates of itself as knowledge and as all there is to know of knowledge.

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12 In *May 68 and Its Afterlives*, Ross 2002, p. 111, speaking of the *enquête* made by students and intellectuals in the factories and countryside throughout the period of the mid-sixties and beyond, contrasts the investigations of a Maoist derivation with the approach of other radical organisations. Ross quotes Georges, a Citroën worker, saying that, for example, the Trotskyist would come to the factory armed with a tract; with quotes, page numbers etc. The Maoists, on the other hand, took their point of departure from what we told them. They *didn’t know anything* before we talked to them. They listened to what we said and made a tract out of that. We were really struck by that’ (emphasis added).

13 One can see this reflected in much of the so called academic discourse on education, specifically that pertaining to the difficulties of ‘educating’ the working class or so called disadvantaged. Their ‘resistances’ are attributed to their lack of understanding of the ‘advantages’ of knowledge. These advantages are rarely spelled out, merely assumed and amount only to what the state determines them to be. Of course it is not expected that these newly knowledgeable subjects will be advantaged within this regime of advantage only that they will, suitably enlightened, accept being placed within it.

Whereas those subject to an event, so to speak, cannot be so subject, cannot be subject to knowledge and thus cannot reproduce what is known as knowledge. In fact, such a subject knows *nothing* of that knowledge and will work precisely to produce 'in knowledge' what is not this knowledge and what is not this situation of knowledge in and ultimately as the world as such. And as what is not knowledge is what is not for all, equally and the same, what the subject of the event produces in the world is what is true of and for all – that knowledge as it is known is not all there is to know. This is the universalism which is the lack of the university. The division between intellectual and manual, university and factory, in the regimes of known knowledge is itself undone and as such we see it as precisely a matter of such knowledge.

It is worth noting here that in the approach of the intellectual to the worker as indicative of the 'memory' of May 68 is an assumption on the part of the intellectual that – one way or another – in the worker lay some form of legitimacy or authenticity even – though not necessarily truth.<sup>14</sup> But for or of what? This is the issue and of course in one sense the intellectual is not wrong: non-knowledge is the chance of a real recommencement, of something truly new, which of course is impossible in knowledge itself. The intellectual, so to speak, seeks his alienation in lack. But this is the problem. The intellectual by virtue of his intellectuality – his education in knowledge – is convinced that in the worker – which, as we have seen, is known a priori – he will find the truth of *his* knowledge and this is why he goes there. It's a species of exoticism.

He leaves the place of knowledge and traverses across town to the place of its lack. The place where it can be made true, so his knowledge assures him. It's a strange and paradoxical move but it is assured by knowledge(science) itself. Of course these encounters are ultimately impossible – not because this division is interminable one way or another but because, as noted, of the knowledge that this traverse is subject too. Let me just add that this same symmetry pertains when the worker is ignored – when his position of lack (of knowledge) is the basis of his exclusion from political or social effect or power etc. The conservative vision of the hoi polloi is coincident with that of our 'left-wing' intellectual insofar as it is a case of 'knowledge coming to lack'. The conservative simply acts to conserve on the basis of the lack of knowledge that must be placed in the worker, whereas the 'radical' left-wing intellectual seeks in this lack a legitimacy for the work of knowledge.

If we think about the neoliberal approach to this – which might be thought as a weird *laissez faire* amalgam of the two; the endless adaptability of 'our' knowledge i.e. –we are, in some respects, despite

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 14 Indeed, for Althusser as Rancière portrays it, the science is constituted in the intellectual contra ideology which is the 'natural' knowledge of the worker. It is weird how this form of the relation works in Althusser given his opting for the PCF and the 'worker' against the bourgeois ideology of the students. Rancière posits an explanation.

neo-liberalism's beginnings in the late 1930's early 1940's, in post-May 68 territory. Neoliberalism is truly part of the same discursive or perhaps epistemic arrangement of rhizomatic proliferation for which there are only knowledges ('bodies and languages' as Badiou puts it in *Logics of Worlds*) and no truth (in both senses).

Truth for this *episteme* is after all synonymous with authority, with order, with the rule of the one, with metaphysics tout court and so the fall of truth among the intellectuals is at once the fall of the state and its power. In many ways, and as has been often remarked, it is really post May 68 – and this might be extended to include all that May 68 signifies, globally – that neoliberalism, that multitudinous end of the state program, gets going and this is undeniably because the *knowledge* of the times will have suited it. The knowledge of May 68 won out we might say as *events* and so not event, and this knowledge being itself liberal in its metaphysics, the lack of truth, the proliferation of bodies and languages as knowledge as such, became the intellectual currency of the neoliberal sublime – which is, as a capitalism, an exploitation of all that exists and not simply another orientation to the market. This knowledge of lack, so to speak, puts the 'new' into the system of liberal economy that is capitalism – it is the new technique of its discourse. The unity of the operating division of the radical and the neoliberal is found in their metaphysics. Every year since May 68 has slowly unveiled to us the primacy of this unity.

Thus the vision of May 68 which is given to us as the knowledge of it makes us all subject to it and thus subjects of the material order of the day such that in fact we know nothing else, that we know anything other than this is impossible. Thus in the face of such knowledge we adapt, we flex, we innovate, we are resilient and as such ruthlessly individual. We are the good, egoic subjects of knowledge. But as knowledge itself tells us consistently at the limit – there is that which is not knowledge which we cannot know. This is then the state of knowledge but a state which itself refuses itself as state relevant to its knowledge. Indeed, the state of knowledge is obsessed by what is not it, which is to say, by what it determines as not it such that it has determination over it. But how does knowledge, the state, know what is not and cannot be known? How does it know what it is not? This is the *aporia* in knowledge (reminiscent, of course, of Plato's question in the *Meno*) that, again, an event makes real and shows as invariant to it. What is invariant to knowledge – signified in the division between worker and intellectual in this regime of knowledge – is that knowledge comes to lack. Which is to say, as Plato demonstrated, the indiscernible is real.

### The style of plain living and hard struggle

Given that we are speaking in terms of knowledge, in some sense in terms of ideology but also of the place of knowledge, the means of its

transmission, its production of subjects and so on and thus as education, and given, via May 68 we are speaking of how the intellectual/worker division is operative both materially and ideologically, it is clear we are talking also in terms of culture. May 68 was to be thought of and spoke of itself in part as being a cultural revolution. Not merely in the sense of an imitation of the Chinese experiment but in its own terms, albeit that these terms took China as influence. But a Cultural Revolution, as was the case in China is not a revolution solely in the sphere of what is designated all too exclusively as culture. As we will see the term cultural revolution as it was spoken of in China is a revolution in civilisation. It's a revolution in knowledge as such and this means in terms of its interminable structuring division. What makes it cultural is the means of its revolt but the aim of its effect is material.

As just noted, *The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution* influenced the events of 68 as it influenced and became exemplary for many of the radically emancipatory movements of the time and still.<sup>15</sup> Its influence on May 68 wasn't ubiquitous obviously, it's enough to note our example above of the way Mao's and Trots differently approached the factory, to show many flowers were only half-blooming in May.<sup>16</sup> But it's also not incidental to note that the way of the Mao's as related by Ross, when thought in the context of the GPCR, is to think of precisely how on the basis of a revolution in culture, the thought of the 'masses' is and will have been the thought of all. That's to say that what the GPCR did in the world of knowledge was decide the necessity for an other orientation to what was known as knowledge, to, more importantly, undermine what this knowledge prescribed as impossible to know. But if the event is anything at all – if May 68 can be *evental* – it functions as the limit of the limit of knowledge. Not just of one knowledge in opposition to another; not the approach of one to another; but what is known as knowledge itself.

The GPCR is an instance in this effect whose aim at its heart was not the synthesis of the distinction in knowledge as knowledge but the undoing of the conditions of its very possibility. This is reflected in the efforts of the Mao's in May '68, to work to have done with the division as such, by regard to what is true of its *evental* collapse, an effort that of course fails or falls back into knowledge. But this is the point. The failure was one in knowledge which is not the failure of the event as such. The event cannot fail – it happens or it doesn't. This is why the struggle over the knowledge of May 68 is crucial still. There must be nothing left to speak of.

To contextualise or even to serialise May 68 or at least the (hypo) thesis I am running here – that the knowledge of May 68 is the means of

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15 In India for example, the Naxalite insurgency.

16 See Ross's citation from Emmanuel Terray and Jean Chesnaux in Ross 2002, pp. 92-98 e.g.

its undoing as event, as site of a possible truth that is not recoverable, assessable, determined by knowledge itself and as such is the invariant and non-impossibility of a new subject and a new subject formation – I want to, fairly cursorily, show how something significant and similar pertained to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China. To do so I focus on two critical documents of the GPCR and their subjective, collective effect on 'knowledge'.

In 1966 two documents are published and disseminated across China, thereby addressing themselves immediately to 700 million people. It's true not every one of these 700 million people read the documents but it's true to say that everyone is inscribed within them. The shorthand titles of these two documents are the *May 16 Circular* and *The Sixteen Point Decision* (from August 8).<sup>17</sup> These were released by the Central Committee but are clearly authored by Mao Tse-tung. Although the Cultural Revolution was already an active policy by this time, superseding, importantly, the existing Socialist Education Movement, most commentators consider these the founding texts of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The GPCR is, as we have been speaking about, one of those things that everyone knows about but in truth knows almost nothing about. And thus it is probably one of the most under-conceptualised and over-determined events of modern times, as much de-historicised as it is de-politicised. In China an active policy of 'thorough negation' of the GPCR has been in place since the late 1970's. In May 2016, *The People's Daily*, mindful of the anniversary nature of these documents, published an article calling the GPCR 'a mistake... that cannot and will not be allowed to repeat itself'. The article went on to laud the modernising achievements of the past 30 years.<sup>18</sup> As Wang Hui argues, this 'policy of negation represents not merely a rejection of the radical thought and practice of the Cultural Revolution but a 'thorough negation' of China's whole 'revolutionary century' which, he says, 'includes also the French and Russian Revolutions and the Paris Commune which served always in China as models, and indeed orientations toward them have defined the political divisions of the time.'<sup>19</sup>

This same process of negationism – which is really a pedagogy of un-thinkability – is evident throughout much western commentary on the GPCR which seems to be split between the smug denunciations and

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17 available at [https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/cc\\_gpcr.htm](https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/cc_gpcr.htm) and <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1966/PR1966-33g.htm>

18 In the column to the right of the online version of the article, giving headlines for articles of interest, were several that caught the modernising eye: 'Students take stylish bikini graduation photos'; 'Monkey grabs a handful of breast; air stewardess packed into overhead bin; Top 20 hottest women in the world.'

19 Hui 2009, pp.5-6.

cheap irony of specialist mandarins, professing a singular insight and those whose general tenor might be described as empiricist-hysterics or *histrionicist* if you'd prefer. Supposedly horrifying statistics abetting moral posturing itself grounded in the mythological liberalism that is the west's progressive self-understanding – hence assumption after assumption – seems to be the general form much of this enquiry takes, making any real thought of the process impossible *a priori*. It's worth noting, too, that western publishers are also partial to the individual eyewitness account, which, being individual is definitive each time. As Hui notes about China but which marks a global truth, '[t]oday, the most powerful counter to any attempts at critical analysis of China's problems—the crisis in agricultural society, the widening gap between rural and urban sectors, institutionalized corruption—is: “So, do you want to return to the days of the Cultural Revolution?”<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, this negationist approach to the knowledge of the GPCR mirrors and repeats the very 'knowledge' that was at issue in the struggles carried forth in the GPCR. One that can be reductively characterized as presenting as both neutral qua 'objective' and hierarchical in conception and effect – indeed the latter *because* of the former. This because subjectively speaking neutrality is always a choice for what already exists. Thus the question of an *education* in and by this knowledge is a critical one for the GPCR, precisely because this framework serves as the dominant orientation to the revolution itself and for Mao, it is this orientation that has come to give the direction of the revolution its revisionist form – which is to say, taking some lines from the Circular, 'to appraise the situation from a bourgeois stand and the bourgeois world outlook'.

Since about 1961, the right faction – those westerners like to call 'moderates' – was in the majority in the party; certainly in the upper echelons but spread across the country – though Mao would axiomatically maintain that 95% of cadres were good. Rightist essentially meant two direct things: first, following an ostensibly Stalinist path economically – thus a sort of top down determination, primarily industrial; 'it considers things, not people' Mao says in his critique of 1958 – 'its basic error' he says 'is distrust of the peasants.' Secondly, a Khrushchevist path politically, which in short meant an abandonment of the commitment to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It 'obscures the sharp class struggle that is taking place on the cultural and ideological front' the *Circular* says; it abandons politics as such, given all class struggle is political. The key word here is 'obscures', for this is the key criticism of the *Circular* in the field of knowledge – that what appears left in form was right in essence. Moreover, these external models, ostensibly communist, in fact hark back

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20 Ibid., p.5.

to the social formations of pre-revolutionary China, making the rightist both traditionalist and individualist. Thus knowledge before, knowledge after.

To cut what is a very long and complicated story short and to twist it toward the concerns of this essay, this meant for Mao, echoing Robespierre (echoing Saint-Just), an abandonment *within* the revolution of revolution as such, insofar as what both positions combined conspired to do was to take the masses off stage, so to speak, as subject and position them as object; as that with which something needed to be done, or in other words, the knowledge of what was to be done in the name of the masses was not that of the masses themselves. Indeed, we can say that for the revisionists, the intellectual bourgeoisie of the communist party or the capitalist roaders, the knowledge of the masses does not exist and this lack of the masses is amplified in commentary. In fact, the impossibility of the knowledge of the masses is necessary to such commentary given that the (much beloved in the West) 'thesis' of the 'cult of Mao' requires a minimum of 700 million passive dupes. It is this paradox in knowledge – a knowledge *of* the masses *not* its knowledge – which Mao identified as the impasse of the revolution and it is why, also, the revolution ostensibly begun in 1966, within the communist party itself, was a 'Cultural' one: that is to say, a revolution in and of knowledge as such – its concepts, categories, assumptions, habits, traditions, the privileges it accords to its technicians and so on – which means, most fundamentally, a revolution with regard to its orientation, and indeed, *that it has one*, which is to say that knowledge can only truly be 'knowledge in truth'.

Let me note again that 'cultural' as used here signifies civilisation. Thus the Cultural Revolution is a revolution in civilisation and civilisation in this Chinese context refers to an educated class – those who make up and determine 'the civil', if you will, and have done so *traditionally*. In the context of the GPCR the orthodox or revisionist position is the educated position and determines the status of the civil. So what is at stake in the documents is the thorough-going *re-orientation* of everything that circulates as knowledge in the situation of contemporary China and this includes the knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, given that Mao seemingly upsets the orthodox relation of base to superstructure in emphasising the primacy of the struggle in knowledge. Indeed, this choice for revolution over orthodoxy *inside* the revolution – of, the *Circular* says, 'opening wide to the masses such that they can 'hit back'' as against an opening wide to bourgeois liberalism which would be the protection of the bourgeoisie from the masses – underpins much of the trouble to come.

The *May 16 Circular* and the *Sixteen Point Decision* are comrade documents we might say. The *Circular* is a document of critique and intervention and the *Decision* is a document of affirmation or action. Alessandro Russo argues that the former remains within the formal

procedures of the party even as it opens them to critical exposure, while the latter is the basis of what he calls a 'pluralisation' relative to this critical exposure.<sup>21</sup>

The *Circular* is directed in the first instance at the 'Outline Report on the Current Academic Discussion made by the Group of Five in Charge of the Cultural Revolution.' This Report, which the *Circular* critiques in the strongest terms, was presented under the guise of a critique of a play called *Hai Jui Dismissed From Office*. The play was based on real events and was considered within the remit of the terms of the GPCR to be revisionist. The author of the play was well connected in the Party, and moreover the revisionary tendency of the play drew many sympathisers. The problem with the report, as the *Circular* makes clear, is definitely that the play was revisionist and that the report was sympathetic, but the real affront was that the report was sympathetic by stealth. It did not come out and support the line of the play, instead it obfuscated political critique – the content of the play – for academic assessment – a formal exercise.

What is relevant is that the Report of the five – written by one man, really, Peng Cheng, Mayor of Peking – exposed the revisionist position to public critique. In writing the report in the way they did, thus channelling the political struggle in the cultural sphere into so-called pure academic discussion, so frequently advocated by bourgeois politics, and thereby opposing giving prominence to proletarian politics, the revisionist current has asserted itself as what it is: 'duplicitous and without line.' As such – and this should ring familiar today – this document of the revisionist bourgeoisie 'nurses a bitter hatred against those on the left already published and colludes in suppressing those not yet published. Yet they give free rein to all the various ghosts and monsters who for many years have abounded in our press, radio, magazines, books, text-book, platforms, works of literature, cinema, drama, ballads and stories, the fine arts, music, the dance, etc., and in doing so they never advocate proletarian leadership or stress any need for approval.'

The upshot is that the document the *Circular* criticises has, despite itself, exposed the field of culture more generally to critique and made culture a way in to the exposing of the bourgeoisie. Thus, now, officially if you like – which is to note Mao never had the free reign theorists of totalitarianism fetishize – there is the impetus for a real revolution in culture because culture itself – the province of the educated bourgeoisie – has exposed its own artifice and shown itself to be operating at the highest levels and so with the greatest influence on the direction of the state ... through the arts, etc., but most critically in and as education.

The point of this artifice, as noted, is the de-politicisation of the content of the play by recourse to academic form, which is to say again

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<sup>21</sup> Russo 2005, p. 549.

that it is this form that is the target here, not academics or specific types of knowledge or art or literature per se nor any persons as such – except that 5% who are the 'enemies of the people'. In other words, this form of knowledge, which supposes that it is neutral, supposes neutrality to be off limits to politics, and supposes that before knowledge the bourgeoisie and proletariat are equal, must be critiqued for what it is and transformed. The means of this transformation, which is a re-orientation, is the thought of the masses; the assertion, if you like, of the truth of the proletariat into the field of knowledge itself.

The *Decision in 16 Points* is a different document. If the *Circular* opens the space of culture to the *new* form of its critique, the *Decision* is the affirmation and direction of this revolution as such. It's sort of the 'what is to be done' of the GPCR. And what is to be done, abstractly put, is to shift knowledge from its objective form – by which subjective revisionism hides and insists – to its subjective form which, as the document specifies, is that constituted in the masses. To put it another way, if the knowledge of the state under revision, which is what the *Circular* criticises, is predicated on the impossibility of the thought of the masses, the *Decision* makes this thought of the masses axiomatic and prescriptive, or not impossible: this is the basis of the pluralisation thesis Russo maintains by which he means that 'the document of the central committee allows groups authorising their own existence to form across the country, to take up this process of what becomes known as struggle-critique-transformation.'<sup>22</sup>

These groups are certainly concentrated in the first instance in schools and universities, thus the Red Guards, but ultimately exceed this concentration, and involve workers, soldiers and peasants alike both in discrete organisations and together. (The successful example of this being the Shanghai Machine Tool Plant Worker University.)<sup>23</sup> This despite the efforts of the so called 'work groups' sent into the schools and universities in the early stages of 1966 by the revisionist leaders Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. These work groups, supporting and comprising the Black Gang or Black Line, were actually a pretence aimed directly at preventing this organised coming together of students and workers. The French Communist Party, perhaps or perhaps not, with a similar motive, had a similar idea in 1968.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 549.

<sup>23</sup> See: *Take the Road of the Shanghai Machine Tools Plant In Training Technicians from Among the Workers: Two Investigative Reports on the Revolution in Education in Colleges of Science and Engineering*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1968.

<sup>24</sup> Again, re: Althusser's Letter – 'the primacy of the general strike over the student actions.' This 'is correct not only because it reflects the real relationship of forces in May, but also because it conforms to the Marxist-Leninist thesis of the revolutionary character of the working class, and *of it alone*.' Looked at from the orientation of the *Decision*, and so from that of the truth of the masses, it is possible to consider the CFP's move as more Maoist, and less reactionary than it is given credit



The *Decision* begins by declaring that ‘the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution now unfolding is a great revolution that touches people to their very souls’ and indeed to change the very soul of man is what is declared to be at stake. This has been described as a metaphysical proposition but if so it’s clearly a materialist metaphysics assuming as it does – and contrary to liberalism which reserves man in his essence – that the soul can indeed be changed and through ‘education’ no less, albeit one that is as much taken as it is given, which is to say is *subjectively* transformative. Moreover, what is meant by ‘soul’ is clearly ‘orientation’ and this is precisely what the GPCR is about and what May 68 assumed of itself as event: a complete re-orientation of all to the situation as such.

As mentioned this is not, supposedly, an orthodox position but it is clearly in line with Marx’s determination in *Theses on Feuerbach* that materialists must stop leaving subjectivity to the bourgeois idealists and conceive of a materialist subject as the very possibility of a real change in the world. In short, without this thought of the subject, no such change is possible because, as today, all we have is the subject of infinite potential or innovation – adaptable, flexible, resilient etc. in the face of a change *which is not its*. Indeed, as we see under the logic or knowledge of capital, the vitality of adaptation is the impossibility of the subject and this is the supposed subject of education today – schooled into existence as that capable of adapting to what is already determined to exist, which is itself not for changing, as the Lady said.

In direct contradiction with this orthodox prescription, then, the *Decision* prescribes that the educated subject must, ‘meet head-on every challenge of the bourgeoisie in the ideological field and use the new ideas, culture, customs and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society. At present, our objective is to struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic ‘authorities’ and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature and art ...’ So clearly, a bourgeois education cannot support a subject capable of such transformation; such a subject needs an *other* orientation.

As noted, the *Decision* sets out both what is at stake and what is to be done; it notes the forms of resistance and how they shall appear; it advocates boldness, no fear, and necessarily in this invention,

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for. It maintained the basis and means for the refusal of the division of knowledge predicated in the approach of the intellectuals. Nevertheless, it is the case that the PCF were in no way inclined to revolutionise the PCF in a way that would ‘let the masses educate themselves in the revolutionary process’.

experimentation; the latter, Russo argues, ‘in the Galilean sense, in that it reveals an unknown truth, allowing something crucial, though unthinkable in the existing system of political knowledge, to appear: namely, the structural heterogeneity between emancipatory politics and governmentality, posing the question of how to deal politically with emancipation...outside the form of the party.’<sup>25</sup>

In this sense are friends and enemies distinguished and the *Decision* invokes Mao’s famous thesis regarding the two types of contradictions: those between the people and its enemies and those amongst the people themselves – namely, not to mistake the former for the latter. Indeed, this mistake by the Red Guards leads almost to civil war – a mistake Mao, in a conversation with the various leaders of the factions in 1968 held to give them a chance to stop the violence themselves, attributes only half-jokingly to their ‘orthodox education’. Some readers may be pleased to know that in this same vein the *Decision* makes clear that ‘care should be taken to distinguish strictly between the reactionary bourgeois scholar despots and ‘authorities’ on the one hand and people who have the ordinary bourgeois academic ideas on the other.’

To end this section, I want to highlight what I’d say is the central thesis, the one that brings the thought of the masses onto the stage; that interrupts history as revolutions qua events do. What Mao does is situate this reversal of knowledge, thus this new orientation of the knowledge of all, in the masses as a fixed point. This, Wang Hui argues, is ‘to move from the traditional ‘worldview based on heavenly principles’ to the axiomatic principles of the scientific worldview’; this, he says, ‘embodies a sea change in social sovereignty.’<sup>26</sup> Hence the great and axiomatic statement of Point 4 of the *16 Point Decision*: ‘Trust the masses, rely on them and respect their initiative. Cast out fear. Don’t be afraid of disturbances. ... Let the masses educate themselves in the great revolutionary process. Let them decide for themselves what is just and what is not.’

Let me conclude in 4 points:

1. The masses become the point of orientation – and so the opposition to the orthodox position is to take up this singular position of the universal class and not to retreat into some form of relativism or difference.
2. As self-educating, self-authorising in the field of knowledge, the masses become subject. Thus the subject is not abandoned lest one

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25 Russo & Pozzana 2012, p. 310.

26 Hui 2009, p. 140.

becomes, again, subject to anything and everything, but renewed relative to this new orientation which is essentially its very axiomatic existence in the field of knowledge: the emancipation of the masses by the masses.

3. Critically, these two assertions assume that the masses think or are actively capable of thought. What could 'trust the masses' refer to but that they can think the situation as such, other-wise than via the knowledge prescribed for them by 'bourgeois' others; and what is it for them to educate themselves except to suppose that they have the capacity to do so.

4. So the thought of the masses – *that* they think – is the condition for the revolution in knowledge, the disturbances, such that the question is 'what is knowledge relative to this orientation' – which is to say, what is civilisation such that it manifests the thought of the masses?

This idea of trust in the masses, that they *think* is Mao's most radical idea. To put it bluntly, to possess knowledge is traditionally what marks you out as distinct from the run of men and there is a coincident assumption that this distinction accords to it certain privileges – whatever they are: status, power, research holidays, money – your run of the mill competitive advantages and so on. Knowledge is distinction from and against the masses, by definition. Thus as long as knowledge is *conditioned* by this framework of 'each according to his abilities' the revolution will always be in danger of backsliding into this bourgeois framework of relative merit masquerading as natural advantage and failing to be revolutionary as such – and thus always 'televised'!

Turning this upside down, then, Marxism-Leninism is supposed to be the thought/truth of the masses and to make this thought/truth manifest is the revolution: the revolution is the self-education of the masses in what is thought/true of them. That the masses were generally steeped in tradition is what makes their exploitation by the superior knowledge of the revisionist in Marxism-Leninism possible and thus what makes the revolution top-down so to speak, supposing as it does that the masses are forever ignorant in just this way. Mao's 'axiom', that the masses think, is the *decision* of the sixteen points: that the masses can come to know all they do not; precisely, the truth of Marxism-Leninism which, as *manifest* – hence as the work of the masses themselves – will have been the truth of the masses. Thus Marxism-Leninism is itself no doctrine, no knowledge.

For Mao, then, this recasting of knowledge, of culture, is the way to the full realisation of the promise of revolution. Again, this is unorthodox to suppose that changing the superstructure effects the base except that for Mao here the change is not in what is taught – thus not in known knowledge per se – or at least the target is not the banishment of certain symptoms but in the *orientation* of teaching and knowledge itself and thus

the recasting of the subject of knowledge itself – hence the masses.<sup>27</sup> This is not some vulgar imitation of a vulgar Lysenkoism: new knowledge doesn't depend on the masses for its existence as knowledge and nor is the masses a check on what can come to be known – that 'we will come to know all that we do not know' is one of Mao's favourite things to say, after all – rather, whatever knowledge comes to exist in the situation of the revolution it will be and can only be that of all or the *thought* or truth of the masses – which is Marxism-Leninism – which is not the *knowledge* of Marx or Lenin!

The masses, the political category par excellence, are the subject of and for all knowledge. It's precisely a prescription on the way forward and not something already attested to in experience or empirically – it is not precisely known knowledge but as has been said, knowledge in truth whose experiment is to be carried out – for example, in the factory universities which sought to train their own technicians within this framework of the thought of the masses or this truth. Moreover, this change in the subject of knowledge is the only way to fulfil the victory of the base as it were, to concretise their alignment – to move from the socialist state maintaining the false division of labour to the non-state form of communism – something Plato, with full knowledge of the *failure* of the GPCR and the seizure of power by the right, wisely said was nowhere visible but not impossible.

This 'not impossibility' of another knowledge than that which orients all education today is something that once again needed to be decided in the event of May 68. Whether it is 'Maoist' is not the issue. Whether it *is* the thought of all, the decision that the all are capable of thought is what's at stake and not, precisely, what we once again have: that the all are subject to what is known of them and thus that they do not, cannot and – hence the orientation of contemporary education – *must not think* what is true for them. Lest it upset the smooth archi-metaphysical institutional order of what passes today as the *knowledge* of the new, so called neoliberal, bourgeois state form.

### The destruction of incapacity

Today, in the constructed aftermath of May 68 – and thus in line with the *denkverboten* that state knowledge accords to it – more completely than at any other time, knowledge and the state are synonymous, implicative, and education is reduced to being the training ground for good state subjects: as so many policy and curriculum documents, no less than course descriptions, excitedly attest. The rhetoric of employability, job readiness, adaptation, flexibility, resilience and so on – all of which see the subject in no other terms than that of 'human resources' permeates

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<sup>27</sup> Rancière makes this essentially Mao-ist criticism of Althusser in his breakdown of Althusser's science ideology distinction and how it effects his critique of May 68. See Rancière 2011.

and determines the educational discourse of the so-called West and those determined to follow its 'lead'. Educational systems everywhere have been humanitarily-intervened-on in the name of the good of education. Such a good requires, the World Bank tells us:

flexible and nimble institutions and policy frameworks that can adapt to rapid change, and a creative and entrepreneurial private sector that can exploit new opportunities that emerge from that rapid change. Thus creating a society of skilled, flexible and creative people, with opportunities for quality education and life-long learning available to all, and a flexible and appropriate mix of public and private funding.<sup>28</sup>

This is the fluxable good(s) the West trades on in its interest, repeated in policy documents and faculties of education everywhere without remorse. As Marx noted: 'Whenever it comes across evil it attributes it to its own absence, for, if it is the only good, then it alone can create the good.'<sup>29</sup>

The problem today is *not* that neo-liberalism is trying to take over education, the problem today is that *education is neoliberal: global, nomadic, horizontally distributed*. Neo-liberalism is the contemporary form of the state, knowledge of capital. It provides the norm by which reality is constructed, exactly what the cronies of the Mount Pelerin Society set out for it to be some 70 years ago: '...a thoroughgoing re-education effort for *all parties* to alter the tenor and meaning of political life: nothing more, nothing less.'

Hence in neo-liberalism, neo-liberalist pedagogies, which we have embraced and deliriously reconciled as the 'knowledge economy': not simply knowledge for sale or reduced like all else to the commodity form, but knowledge as economy; economy, the law of the state qua household as all knowing and thus itself unknowable. What is occluded in education is the opening to thought of this unknowable guarded, again, by some God or other. Thus what is occluded by knowledge is the thought of education itself.

Today the 'market', already a metaphor, a mark of the displacement of the real, is for us that master signifier which knows precisely what we do not and cannot know and thus what *must* not be known. Hence as the totalising condition of all known knowledge the market cannot be thought; it marks the space of the ineffable limit for creatures like us and, as with the mind of God, we must only know it as our 'manifest destiny' and not presume to think it. Which is to say, to think what is true of it –

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<sup>28</sup> 'Building Knowledge Economies: Opportunities and Challenges for EU Accession Countries. Final Report of the Knowledge Economy Forum "Using Knowledge for Development in EU Accession Countries", World Bank in cooperation with the European Commission the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank Paris, 19–22 February 2002', May 2002, [www.worldbank.org/eca/knowledgeconomy](http://www.worldbank.org/eca/knowledgeconomy).

<sup>29</sup> Marx 1974, p. 404.

exploitation, division in two e.g. – which is also to say, to think what-it-is-not *for all*. That way lay the camps, so goes the current pedagogicisation.

We are today attuned, conformed, post May 68, post the consolidations of the new capital that is reformed on the basis of the negationism described above to the dogmatic claim that any notion of 'common purpose' is untenable – being *false* at the limit. Ineffable difference, the *constancy* of deterritorialisation has the day. Nomadology and the neo-liberal sublime coincide at this juncture, of *knowing* what must not be known, of, ultimately, and in tune with the times or at least the theoretical times of western theory, committing a *destitution* of the subject. Thus they coincide not just in their hori-zonal conception of global space (much beloved of the Israeli state) but also in their metaphysics of the subject.

This destitution is not 'de-individualisation' however, or even the individualisation of communities of difference but de-subjectivisation: the impossibility of some collective, participative formation predicated on an indifference to differences, on some idea irreducible to any specified or determined body and to any determinative and classificatory schema of language. In short, the destitution of a subject predicated on what we are capable of here and now beyond such a reduction to the finitist categories of 'bodies and languages', identities and differences. This subject has been shamed into impossibility by charges of immodesty and impiety: impiety before the market, immodesty before our a priori determined limits, which, when we add the vitalist-empiricism converts this knowledge into what is effectively a bio-logic of subjective incapacity. Thought, the very kernel of the subject, the wager that is its sole predicate is annulled in the knowledge that goes before it of this 'partial impenetrability', this living impossibility.

Purposefully vague but ideologically crucial conceptions of change, innovation or disruption predicated in an affective other-worldly vitality provide the very conditions of the constancy of this nomadic regime of knowledge: constant movement or innovation, and so, paradoxically, an anti-statist 'disruptive' conceit is its loudest most interminable refrain, its contemporary pedagogical force. The unsayable, ineffable etc., being what remains over as a thoroughly un-actualised infinite potential, stands guarantee for the in-terminable multiplicity of appearances or knowledges, movements and 'disruptions', which the repetition of deterritorialisation requires. Another way to put this is as the 'free market in ideas', where everyone can choose their own 'truth' qua identity given precisely that nothing is truly true – nothing 'solid'. This is the triumph of the simulacra, wherein the economy of immutable difference is life itself – the beings of (non)being.

What we need to ask is what holds out against this, what point of indifference, what point of a new orientation? What in the education

situation refuses the demand to not demand the impossible as real? Without holding to something un-deterritorialisable, nomadology can only be conceived as a clearing for what already exists and not an inventing of what *can* be: ‘...if the people do not have their *own* politics [education], they will enact the politics [education] of *their* enemies: political history abhors a void.’<sup>30</sup>

This nomadism of our contemporary capitalism is too much and not enough. It is movement sanctioned by the constancy of what is impossible for us, what is impossible to know. What is off limits is that this very bond between the logic of indetermination and the multiplicities of desire be itself cut<sup>31</sup> and thus what is impossible in the moving image of knowledge that organises us pedagogically – we are all *educated* after all – is the truly new: not some laissez faire fantasy, which is to return to the market-divine but the truly new as that-which-is *for all*. A subject is what holds to *this* – that truths – which are new and what insists – are what a collective is capable of – which is (not) impossible. In other words, the state is incapable of truth, but this does not mean, as has long been assumed, that truths are thereby fictions of the state.

An education predicated on a limit or a horizon of the knowable – ‘the pedagogy of the world as it goes’<sup>32</sup> – is, as Plato says, a queer sort of education; meaning that it reduces to a mere utility function and, having a use, can be bought and sold depending on the difference currently demanded by the market. Education is currency. It presumes also, ‘conceitedly’ to use Plato’s term of art, that there exists a knowledge, contradictory – as noted, the knowledge of the limit – off limits to thought and so – and clearly problematically for the concept – off limits to education. It knows that to un-know the state is impossible as *there is* no such knowledge and it is this *unknowability* or this subjective incapacity that is taught.

Today education, given over to the nomadic predations of state logic – there is nowhere it cannot go – is the taught knowledge of the lack of education. This is not a paradox but the logic of the systemic necessity to *not* hold fast. ‘The solemn and sanctimonious declaration that we can have no knowledge of this or that always foreshadows some obscure devotion to the Master of the unknowable, the God of the religions or his placeholders.’<sup>33</sup> We might call it the hidden curriculum. It comes down to a single presumption: ‘that which is not susceptible to being classified

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30 Badiou 2012, p. 193

31 The unsayable/impossible seems to be the one stake our contemporary anti-Platonists won’t wager!

32 Badiou 2009, p. 302

33 Ibid., p. 302.

within a knowledge *is not*.’ As Durkheim points out, with specific reference to education, to what is true for it, ‘the recurrent and never fully solvable tension between thinking and knowledge is the rule rather than the exception’.<sup>34</sup> The thinking of education needs again to be unbound from its knowledge.

It is ridiculous to give summary to polemic but let me just note again what May 68 thought as event and thought thereby in relation to what conditions it as such, forces into the scene of education. In the first place that education is site of a fundamental antagonism: this because it can never rest assured as the knowledge of the state. It asks necessarily of this state of knowledge, this moveable feast of the knowledge economy, which supposes itself to be the limit of all. When the knowledge of the state is the state of knowledge education nowhere exists. Education always exceeds its limit and so begins again as an exception to it. This is the promise of education for all. And it is this immanent force that the knowledge of the state operates on in its interests. It idealises the promise and instrumentalises the procedure, betraying what is invariant to it. But this invariance insists and shows itself as unbound from the state and its limits, its metaphysics, its bio-logic. To insist on this invariance, which insists as what is not the knowledge of the state, and thus as what is truly education, is the force of the subject. The subject of education is the capacity to take, to produce, to invent a non-state form. The exceptional force of education is invariably to not know the state. This educated subject is the end of the subjective incapacity that the state cannot not teach; the teaching that the interests of the state are the interests of all and that there are no others is the intrinsic corruption of the state. The subject of education is necessarily the destruction of this subjective incapacity, the corruption of this corruption. Hence it is found nowhere in the state but is not impossible.

Education truly can only be the destruction of this incapacity – which can only be un-educative given it stakes all its worth in a limit which is unthinkable for it. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is possible to see – within and despite the knowledge of May 68 – in the construction of itself as an exception qua event that just such a subject insists and this despite the insistence of its encircling metaphysics that no such subject is possible. Indeed, the individuals that make up this becoming subject are precisely de-individuated in the invention of this event as the recommencement of what is invariably truly new, truly exceptional and *for all*. Something within the situation of the state that the state as such renders impossible for it is by the *thought* of the event made manifest as truly of that situation. The subject names this procedure of its invention, the construction of its form, which is at the same time the means of its transmission. Those truly the subject of education insist in this exception

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34 Durkheim 1977.

at the limit and on this ongoing procedure of which May 68 can be seen to be its singular orientation. What is decisive, as the GPCR demonstrated, is that today we refuse to not read this subject there. Or in other words: find what rusticates you and let it kill them.

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