

From Althusser to Mao: Les *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*

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The *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes* (Marxist-Leninist Journal, hereafter CML) was founded near the end of 1964 by the Cercle des étudiants communistes at the École normale supérieure (Circle of Communist Students, known colloquially as the Cercle d'Ulm), mainly consisting of the young philosophy students of Louis Althusser. By 1966, it became the “theoretical and political organ” of the Union des jeunesses communistes (marxistes-léninistes) (Union of (Marxist-Leninist) Youth, hereafter UJC(ml)). The journal dissolved along with the latter organization after May 1968.¹ Often referred to by the witnesses and experts of the period, the CML seem to have been rarely read or re-read since 1970.² Its esoteric style is partly to blame for this lacuna, but it does not make the situation any less unfortunate. The CML is at once an important source on the history of pro-Chinese communism among French intellectuals, a

¹ The most complete collection of the CML (nos. 1-5 and 9/10-17) is located at the ENS library. A volume of *Documents des « Cahiers marxistes-léninistes »*, 1, *La Russie soviétique de 1917 à 1932 : les premiers stades de la phase de transition, nationalisations, communisme de guerre, NEP* is available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF) as well as the Bibliothèque Documentation Internationale Contemporaine (BDIC) in an archive collection, “Parti Communiste Marxist-Léniniste de France,” which contains a number of other documents on the UJC(ml). These sources were complemented by interviews with Roger Establet, Dominique Lecourt, and Raphael Larrère. Other interviews would obviously be essential for a larger study, bearing in mind that many of the principal members of the CML have already expressed their views on the subject.

² Among numerous other studies on the CML, which are in general quite elliptical, let us note Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Generation*, 2 vols., Paris, le Seuil, 1987, which remains an indispensable narrative (especially vol.1, chap. 8-10); see also Patrick Kessel, *Le mouvement maoïste en France. Textes et Documents*, vo. 1 (1963-1968), Paris, UGE, 1973. In sociological terms, the methodology of this article is framed by the work of Frédérique Matonti on communist intellectuals (*Intellectuels communistes: Essai sur l'obéissance politique. La Nouvelle Critique (1967-1980)*, Paris, La Découverte, 2005), and especially on the “politicization” of structuralism: “La politisation du structuralisme. Une crise dans la théorie,” *Raisons politiques*, no. 18, 2005, p. 49-71; “Structuralism et prophétisme,” p. 172-185, in Dominique Damamme, Boris Gobille, Frédérique Matonti and B. Pudal (ed.), *Mai-juin 68*, Paris, ed. de l'Atelier, 2008; « L'UEC ou l'autonomie confisquée (1965-1968) » with Bernard Pudal, p. 130-143, in the same work; « Marx entre communisme et structuralisme », *Actuel Marx*, no. 45, 2009, p. 120-127 ; “L'anneau de Möbius. La réception en France des formalistes russes”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, no. 176-177, 2009, p. 52-67. Versions of the present article were presented at the ENS in 2004-2005, in Frédérique Matonti's seminar; I thank everyone involved for their advice.

document of the politicization of structuralism, and a response to the sociological problem of the anti-intellectualism of intellectuals--in this case, notably illustrated by the conversion of many members of the French scholarly aristocracy to the advocacy [*la propagation*] of “Mao-Tse-Tung Thought.”³

This article aims to help fill this research gap, even if it will only be possible to give a very summary and contextualized account of texts that require a more thorough reading. We will follow the three phases which mark the evolution of the CML (see Figure 1). In the first period (1964-1965), the journal is primarily engaged in a struggle against the “Italian Leadership”⁴ of the Union of Communist Students (UEC), which also implicitly marked their distance from the French Communist Party (PCF). In 1966, there is a twofold rupture: first, with the departure of “Cercle” members who went on to found the *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, and then with the UEC and PCF themselves following the Central Committee of Argenteuil. Finally, from December 1966 to 1968, breaking with the usual format of a scholarly review and becoming the voice of the UJC(ml), the CML was essentially devoted to analyzing and defending the Cultural Revolution in China.

1964-1965: The Young Althusserians Re-educate the UEC

It is simply impossible to describe in full detail the intellectual and political context around the creation of the CML. It will suffice to remember two elements: on the one hand, from the beginning of the 1960s, the coming-together of a group of young communist “normaliens,” predominantly philosophy students, around Louis Althusser and his seminar on Marx; on the other hand, the crisis that traversed the UEC, during which one heterodox tendency in particular, the “Italian Leadership,” imposed its view over the rest. In this crisis, the young Althusserians of the “Cercle d’Ulm” backed the pro-PCF faction against the Italians, while simultaneously hoping to be able to influence the Party line, at the urging of their teacher: first,

³ Translator’s note: This phrase recalls a famous quote from Mao’s “On Contradiction,” cited by Badiou in *Théorie de la Contradiction*: “The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” [«Lorsqu’on est dans le cas dont parle Lénine: “Sans théorie révolutionnaire, pas de mouvement révolutionnaire”, la création et la propagation de la théorie révolutionnaire joue le rôle principal, décisif.» Cf. Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la Contradiction*, Paris: Maspero. 1975, 19.]

⁴ “Direction italienne”; this terminology implies that the leaders are influenced by “Italian” communism as practiced and theorized by the PCI (Gramsci readers, etc).

by discretely promoting the Chinese example; second, by advancing a definition of Marxism as a “theoretical anti-humanism”; third, and crucially, by giving intellectuals a guiding role within the Party.

All the authors of the CML were not members of this circle *stricto sensu*. Among the known authors of the CML (see figure 2), one notices that the oldest, namely those that first entered the ENS up until 1962, were also those who participated at the farthest remove, at least from the journal’s pro-Chinese evolution: Badiou, Macherey, Establet, Régnauld, Balibar, Debray, Milner, Rancière, Miller, Rougemont. The youngest members (entering after 1962) accompanied this evolution, notably Linhart (driving force behind the CML and the UJCml), Broyelle, Lévy (these last two completing the “triumvirate”), and Riss. The first authors had lived through the protests against the Algerian War, attended Althusser’s initial seminars on Marx, and some of them collaborated on *Reading Capital*. Their successors, arriving on the rue d’Ulm after these past theoretical and practical battles, found a comparable intellectual and political enterprise in the CML and then the UJC(ml). It is only for especially timely interventions that they will solicit work from their elder students (issues 5, 6/7/8, above all 12/13) and their teacher (issue 11, and, anonymously, 14).

From its inception in the autumn of 1964⁵ all the way through issue 11 in April 1966, the CML was mimeographed and prepared at the ENS in the “union room.”⁶ The result of a joint effort between Miller (“cahiers marxistes”) and Linhart (“cahiers léninistes”), its “Marxist-Leninist” title allowed a concession to orthodoxy, but in the terms of the March 1963 letter by which the Central Committee of the CCP broke with the CPSU (the Sino-Soviet split). Many militants of the same time period elsewhere adopted these terms as well. The title of the journal was accompanied by a quote from Lenin displaying a confidence in the virtues of theory, and which the CML adapted to their own goals: “Marx’s theory is omnipotent because it is true.” The articles, save for one exception, were anonymous, with only an alphabetical list of the authors being given on the first page. The

⁵ « Comment est née l’Union des jeunesses communistes (marxistes-léninistes) ? », Fonds PCMLF, carton 1. The first issue probably appeared in December. Until no. 11, the publication dates are uncertain (P. Kessel dates no.1 to February 1965), but the first five issues all appeared in the school year of 1964-1965. Furthermore, there are no reliable final sales figures, but it is certain that the CML sold well, according to *Génération* (t. 1, p. 265-266), as the first printing of no. 1 (1,000 copies) quickly sold out.

⁶ Translator’s note: The original reads “turne syndicale.” “Turne” is ENS slang for room - one of the rooms, generally devoted to work or sleep, was apparently devoted to union and political activities.

political anonymity of the militant (the circle presented itself as an virtually intellectual collective, competing with the of the party model) reinforced a belief in the anonymity of scientific research.⁷ With one exception (Linhart on Algeria in no. 2), it was only when the older students (who were beginning to compose their own personal works) were solicited that the articles were attributed to individual authors, giving the CML the appearance of a scholarly journal. Conversely, when the CML distanced itself either temporarily (nos. 9/10) or definitively (starting from no. 14) from other intellectual currents, all signatures disappeared.

The first five issues responded foremost to an explicit ambition from issue 1: reform the UEC from within of all revisionist deviations by giving a lesson in Marxism--an authentically scientific Marxism, according to the Althusserian framework. By focusing on the question of “theoretical training”, the Cercle both made a point of being respectful of the party and at the same time worked hard to inspire, due to its intellectual refinement from the ENS, the UEC’s line and ultimately that of the Party itself. The members of the Cercle--young students co-opted by the university institution--adopted an authoritative stance approximating that of Althusser in the famous article “Student Problems”⁸ : that the communist students hoping not to fall into ideological error (issue 1 was entitled “Science and Ideologies”: “only bring good faith and, more importantly than any psychological attitude, the desire to work”).⁹

These lessons in Marxism were presented in a “normalien” and scholarly form, mostly through textual exegesis.¹⁰ Many articles contained references to “quasi-Marxist” or “Marxological” works dear to the Italian section: the young Marx of the 1844 Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts, Magri, Lefebvre¹¹, the young Lukàcs, and Lucien Goldmann.¹² Besides Althusser and Charles Bettelheim, few

⁷ A comparison that Althusser acknowledges, in *The Future Lasts Forever*, Paris, Stock & IMEC, 1993, p. 209. .

⁸ Louis Althusser, “Student Problems,” *La Nouvelle critique*, no. 152, January 1964, p. 80-111. A shortened version of this attack appeared in *Radical Philosophy* 181 (2012), trans. Warren Montag.

⁹ “Fonction de la formation théorique” CML no. 1, p. 2. Reprinted in Jacques-Alain Miller (author), *Un début dans la vie*, Paris, le Promeneur & Gallimard, 2002. For a critical analysis of Althusser and his students’ positions (both theoretical and political), see Jacques Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista. New York: Continuum, 2011, a work that appeared in the immediate aftermath of May ‘68.

¹⁰ “Le concept marxiste de rapport de production,” CML, no. 1, p. 1-12 ; « Processus réel et processus de pensée », CML, n°1, p. 4-11.

¹¹ “La conception pseudo-marxiste de l’aliénation,” CML, no. 1, p. 12-21.

¹² “Monsieur Goldmann bouleverse la science,” CML, no. 3, p. 13-27.

contemporary authors found sympathy among the CML group. However, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's *The Inheritors* received a favorable reading, one directed implicitly against the PCF and overtly against UNEF¹³ and the leadership of the UEC.¹⁴ *The Inheritors* showed that economic disparity is not a sufficient condition to explain the inequality present in the university, thus going against the official Party discourse. The reading was especially opposed to the UEC and UNEF, as the CML denounced their representations of the "student militant." The conclusions recalled the language of "Student Problems": "far from thinking political activity as the avoidance of scholarly tasks, it is fitting to bring scholarly methods into political activity", remaining true to their image of Marx, Engels, and Lenin as hard-working and diligent intellectuals [*boîte à fiches*]. The members of the Cercle d'Ulm were veritable hard-working and diligent intellectuals themselves, masters of scholarly methods, and could thus legitimately give lessons to their adversaries.

But these direct attacks against the UEC and the UNEF only represent a portion of the first issues of the CML. There were also articles that went against the Party itself in a more and more regular but still implicit fashion ("in contraband"¹⁵) by raising questions about the peasantry and revolution in the Third World: subjects that, by looking past the citadel of the European worker and the discursive constraints of the PCF, pointed towards the Chinese experience. An article in issue 1 criticizes "underdevelopment", a notion attributed to André Gorz, a writer associated with UNEF.¹⁶ No. 2 dealt with Algeria and India. The article on underdevelopment, signed by Linhart, relies on the experience of a personal trip to Algeria in the summer of 1964, and was a determinant factor in his conversion to a pro-Chinese outlook.¹⁷ The article on India is an overview of a book by (*est la synthèse d'un ouvrage*) Charles Bettelheim, who had very important connections to Althusser's students.¹⁸

¹³ Translator's note: Union Nationale des Étudiants de France, or the National Union of Students of France, is the principal student union in France; today, it represents around 30,000 students.

¹⁴ "Les Héritiers par Pierre Bourdieu et Jean-Claude Passeron. Notes de lecture," CML, no. 3, p. 28-48.

¹⁵ Cf. Frédérique Matonti, *Intellectuels communistes*, op. cit., p. 11-13.

¹⁶ "Idéologues de 'l'opulence' et idéologues du "sous-développement," CML, no. 1, p. 28-39.

¹⁷ See the account of Hamon and Rotman in *Génération*, 1, op. cit., p. 229-231.

¹⁸ On this point, see François Denord et Xavier Zunigo, "Révolutionnairement vôtre' : économie marxiste, militantisme intellectuel et expertise politique chez Charles Bettelheim," *Actes de la recherche en science sociale* (158), March 2005, p. 8-29. Note that the SER published alongside the CML, les Etudes de

In March 1965, it is the takeover [*reprise en main*] of the national bureau of the UEC by the pro-PCF members, with the support of the Cercle d'Ulm, which precipitates this crypto-Chinese path: the lessons in Marxism in store for the Italian faction, from then on, hardly have any place. Nos. 4 and 5 thus revive the pro-Chinese “contraband”, and concern, respectively, the question agriculture and revolutionary perspectives in Latin America. These two issues were produced in very different ways. The issue on agriculture was edited by agricultural students and engineers of the School of Mines--an institute close to the rue d'Ulm. In this collaboration, the division of labor between engineers and the normalien philosophers is obvious: the latter give the theoretical framework, the former fill in the empirical details. By contrast, no. 5 (“Latin America: Problems of Revolutionary Strategy”) contains articles from Régis Debray and Étienne Balibar, the oldest members of the group and who were to be most distant from the future UJC(ml).¹⁹

1966: Internal and External Ruptures

Debray's participation issue 5 underscores, *a posteriori*, the heterogeneous nature of the Cercle d'Ulm. As is apparent from the historical documents concerning the foundation of the UJC(ml), this heterogeneity can be shown by distinguishing between three positions in the group: one position made up of dedicated revolutionaries, but with “erroneous” and “petit bourgeois” outlooks (Castroist), such as Debray; another, authentically Marxist-Leninist; and finally, a group of “bourgeois intellectuals” driven by “scholarly preoccupations”, neglecting the “unity of theory and practice” and organizational questions: in short, pure intellectuals, with whom a split seemed inevitable.²⁰

This split would take place in 1966, which would be a year of rupture for the cercle d'Ulm. The first of these occurred through no. 8

planification socialiste. *Revue du matérialisme historique* (nos. 1-2 in January 1966, no. 3 in March), with texts from Bettelheim and Linhart (Fonds PCMLF, carton 3).

¹⁹ Régis Debray, “Amérique Latine : quelques problèmes de stratégie révolutionnaire” ; Étienne Balibar, “L'exception et la règle,” CML, no. 5.

²⁰ “Comment est née l'UJC(ml) ? ,” cited document. This teleological and retrospective understanding must be considered with caution. The opponents of the UJC(ml) did not hesitate to critique such a narrative of its origins. According to the former members who joined the PCMLF (Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France), the UJCml had written an “idealist history” of its birth, pretending that their point of departure in this regrouping was Marxist-Leninist.” (“Contre la ligne noire. Le mouvement de critique, été-automne 68,” fonds PCMLF, carton 5).

of the CML, overseen by Jacques-Alain Miller.²¹ This issue seems out of place, due to its title (“The Powers of Literature”) and its contents: “The Grammar of Aragon”, by Milner, “Grombowicz’s Optic”, by Régnauld, “A Fiction of Borges”, by Macherey.²² In his introduction, Miller cites in turn Sartre, Valéry, Jakobson, Sollers, and, indirectly, Lacan (but never Marx and Lenin), and stresses that the intention of the contributors “is that literature must be subjected to research which bears not on its effects but on its powers. Power: this concerns what literature can do on its own and upon itself.”²³ This claim to autonomy in regard to the Marxist-Leninist project led to a crisis within the Cercle, ending with the suppression of the issue and the resignation of Miller, Milner, and Grosrichard. Together with Régnauld, the departed would go on to form the editorial committee of the first two issues of the *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, the publication of the Cercle d’épistemologie (Epistemology Circle) at the ENS.²⁴

Once the “bourgeois intellectuals” had left, the next issue (9/10) of the CML, “Vive Leninism!”, could focus on revolutionary topics *stricto sensu*. This radicalization, however, can also be explained through the accelerating crisis within the ranks of the UEC. In December 1965, the PCF’s support of Mitterand caused intense protests from the left-wing of the student organization. The protests from the Trotskyists led to the dissolution of the *secteur Lettres*, where they held a large presence. The Cercle, while critiquing this dissolution, preferred to wait and prepare for a probable split by strategically placing different Marxist-Leninist factions in different

²¹ Nos. 6, 7, and 8 were the only issues missing in the CML collection kept at the ENS. This absence is explainable in the case of no. 8, but what about the two preceding issues? Until they are explained or their content is revealed, one can reasonably guess that they never existed. In fact, “Comment est née l’UJC(ml) ?,” refers to nos. 1 to 5 as the “first series” of the CML, then seems to pass over any mention of the missing issues.. Similarly, nos. 1-2 of the *Etudes de planification socialiste*, from January 1966, refers, in its conception of science to the first five issues of the CML. Unless nos. 6 and 7 were also the subject of a disagreement which condemned them to oblivion, we can assume that no. 8 was in fact a triple issue (6/7/8) – in which case the continuation of Balibar’s article to appear in no. 6 was not published.

²² Reprinted, respectively, in the *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, no. 7, March/April 1967, p. 45-56 et p. 57-70 ; and *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall. London: Routledge, 1978.

²³ The introductory text is reprinted in Jacques-Alain Miller, *Un début dans la vie*, op. cit., p. 90.

²⁴ The present article, by covering the CML exclusively, runs the risk of validating the retrospective vision of “Comment est née l’UJC(ml),” that is, to describe the “Powers of Literature” issue as an academic deviation when compared to the initial line of the journal, and not as one of the possible orientations that was simply delayed by the struggle within the UEC. However, the first five issues of the CML can also be seen as the beginnings of the *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, and issues 9-10 through 17 as a strictly militant deviation. Note that the *Cahiers pour l’analyse* remains to be studied. But now see *Concept and Form*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden. London: Verso, 2012. See also their website, <http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/research/crmep/projects/cahiers/>

sectors of the UEC. There was also a “Parisian collective” with the aim of reassembling the left-wing of the organization like the Trotskyists. This relation of competitive alliance with the Trotskyists, most strained over the question of Vietnam, explains the publication in 1965 of a volume of the *Documents des cahiers marxistes-léninistes* on the “first stages of the transitional phase” in the Soviet Union: this was a collection of texts by Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Bukharin, and Zinoviev, introduced by Linhart. The aim was to read and comprehend heretical texts, rather than simply censure them in a counter-productive manner: “we think that Marxist theory is all-powerful not because there are guardians of the inner circle vigilant enough to ban suspected books, but because it is true.” The *Documents*, while still attacking certain Trotskyist analyses, showed the CML to be defenders of free discussion among militants; at the same time as the “bourgeois intellectuals” left the Cercle d’Ulm, those who stayed on did not sacrifice a degree of intellectual freedom, a tactic used implicitly against the PCF. In no. 9/10, an issue containing particularly brilliant exegeses²⁵, they proposed an adequate reading of Lenin, one of a “living Marxism” opposed to an “ossified” Marxism of economism. One of the articles led explicitly into the Maoist doctrine of revolutionary war.²⁶ It is important to note that no. 9/10, which mentioned the Cercle d’Ulm once again, is hereafter published by a “Society of Research and Study,” a technical structure that Lecourt headed until the folding of the CML. This move, one that was strictly about the journal’s work-structure, should be seen as part of the greater logic of its break from the PCF. The editorial apparatus, then, is already ready when the Cercle d’Ulm breaks with the PCF and the UEC and only has to wait for the political organization to follow.

The PCF Central Committee’s resolution from the meeting at Argenteuil in December 1966 precipitated this split²⁷: the Cercle d’Ulm circulated a very critical communique, “Is it necessary to revise Marxist-Leninism?”, which resulted in its dissolution as a group within the UEC. Around this same time, CML no. 11 was published,

²⁵ This issue obviously demands a more systematic reading ; it would also be a choice material in order to analyze the literary style of CML, especially on debts to that scholarly art of philosophical reading— cf. Louis. Pinto, *Les philosophes français entre le lycée et l'avant-garde*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1986, and *La vocation et le métier de philosophe. Pour une sociologie de la philosophie dans la France contemporaine*, Paris, Le Seuil, 2007.

²⁶ “Note sur l'insurrection,” CML, no. 9/10, p. 3-52.

²⁷ On the the Argenteuil Central Committee affair, see Matonti, *Intellectuels communistes*, op. cit., p. 92-108. For Althusser’s specific experience, see Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*. London: Brill, 1988, 170-173.

consisting of a single (signed) article from Althusser, “Historical Materialism and Dialectical Materialism.” This choice was a twofold challenge to the Party, at once a show of solidarity with their teacher and with Althusser’s theoretical proposals. In the article, Althusser reaffirmed the necessity of Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism) and thus the need for specialists of this discipline, outside the science of Marxist history (historical materialism).

But it is with issue 12/13, “Art. Language, Class Struggle,” that the CML opposes the direction taken at Argenteuil, by arguing that a Marxist-Leninist party must never cede to the “revisionist” temptation (the term is used against Garaudy) of treating art and culture as “common treasures of humanity” (Aragon’s expression) protected from ideological critique. On these cultural issues, the CML logically chose to mobilize all the symbolic resources available to an intellectual journal: professional layout and printing, distribution by Maspero (editor of most of the far-left heterodox works in France at the time), interchanging articles signed by the older members (Badiou, Balibar, Establet, Macherey) and documents reconstituting the Marxist-Leninist canon (Lenin, Stalin, and--finally--Mao). Two articles by Establet and Macherey take Bourdieu’s sociology of culture in new directions, which they hold to be more or less reconcilable with Marxist analysis.²⁸ Macherey also gives a Marxist reading of Tolstoy, relying heavily upon a text of Lenin, in conformity with the Marxist-Leninist canon and counter to any sort of revisionist orthodoxy.²⁹ The same appeal to the canon is found in Alain Badiou’s text, a series of numbered statements interspersed with diagrams and quotes from Mao as well as Lacan, which was paired with a text from Mao on art and literature.³⁰ The most remarkable article-document coupling is Stalin with commentary from Balibar.³¹ Stalin’s text is a critique of the “leftist” linguistics of Nicholas Marr and an affirmation

²⁸ Roger Establet, “‘Culture’ et idéologie,” CML, no. 12-13, p. 15-18 ; Pierre Macherey, “À propos de ‘l’Amour de l’art,’” p. 8-14.

²⁹ “‘Les Paysans’ de Balzac : un texte disparate,” CML, no. 12/13, p. 43-70, et “Tolstoï, miroir de la Révolution russe,” p. 71-76.

³⁰ Alain Badiou, “L’autonomie du processus esthétique,” CML, no. 12/13, p. 77-89, and “Interventions aux causeries sur la littérature et l’art, à Yenan,” p. 90-111. The former was translated into English as “The Autonomy of the Aesthetic Process,” trans. Bruno Bosteels. *Radical Philosophy* 178 (April-May 2013), 32-39.

³¹ Étienne Balibar, “Marxisme et linguistique,” CML, no. 12/13, p. 19-25, and Josef V. Stalin, “A propos du marxisme en linguistique,” p. 26-42. For the Stalin, see the English translation, “Marxism and the Problems of Linguistics,” available at

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1950/jun/20.htm>.

of the autonomy of language, in that it is irreducible to the status of a “superstructure”; but this affirmation is not of the same type as the Argenteuil resolution, which gave autonomy to artists and writers in the name of general humanist principles, concessions to the “petty-bourgeois naggers for the freedom to think and write.”³² If Stalin allows for the autonomy of language, as Balibar explains, this is in terms of the theory of dialectical materialism and the theorist-specialist who is trained to scientifically judge the relations between two particular sciences (linguistics and historical materialism) and to point out the political dangers of wrongly reading these relations. Beyond this consistent provocation (to re-read Stalin in 1967), it is certainly this figure of the theorist-specialist, intervening in cultural matters in the name of a general epistemological competence, which seems to hold the attention of Balibar and the CML; a figure from which the Argenteuil Central Committee specifically distanced itself, in order to maintain the subordination of theorists on social-scientific and philosophical matters.

December 1966-1968: Theoretical and Political Organ of the UJC(ml)

Following the display of intellectual capital in no. 12/13 (through the solicitation of the older theorists) the last issues of the CML were overtly pro-Chinese publications which, while maintaining a professional level of layout and circulation, abandoned the features of an academic journal. Now the theoretical and political organ of the UJC(ml) (founded in December 1966), the CML hereafter only published anonymous articles. This militant anonymity was put in the service of the “struggle against revisionism” via the appropriation of “Mao Tse-Tung Thought”, the decisive weapon of the ongoing struggle in the “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (GPCR). Nos. 14/15 are dedicated to this current. Alongside documents presenting the UJC(ml)’s positions³³ and the lineage that runs from Lenin to Mao³⁴, these issues contain accounts dedicated to Mao Tse-Tung thought, distilled through the concepts of “political force,”³⁵ “productive force,”³⁶ and “military force.”³⁷ One of these articles was

³² “Introduction,” CML, no. 12/13, p. 7.

³³ “Résolution politique de la première session du premier congrès de l’UJC(ml),” CML, no. 15, p. 72-78.

³⁴ “Lénine : formes de la lutte des classes sous la dictature du Proletariat,” CML, no. 15, p. 64-71.

³⁵ CML, no. 14, p. 79-92.

³⁶ CML, no. 15, p. 4-52.

³⁷ CML, no. 15, p. 53-63.

written by Althusser, although his text sees the open break with the party as being an instance of “infantile leftism.”³⁸

Let us be clear: while the first two periods of the CML’s history can be roughly understood as a progressive break with the PCF (see footnote 2 above), this overtly pro-Chinese period is much more difficult to interpret. The direct attacks against the Italians, the reading of heterodox “contraband”, the analysis of the political consequences of cultural and artistic questions; all these lose their relevance from the moment that CML makes its “coming-out,” rendering these attacks explicit and leaving behind the usual form and content of intellectual debate. After 1966, the CML seemed to situate itself among the recurrent notions and ritualistic slogans that are ever-present in Maoist discourse, which cause it to be so difficult to understand today if one does not want to force the religious analogy.

In a perhaps equally disappointing way, it should be emphasized that in spite of its breaks with partisan orthodoxy and intellectual (bourgeois) conventions, the last issues of the CML are direct manifestations of the social dispositions of its leaders. Since we cannot study here the stylistic breaks and continuities between the initial “lessons in Marxism” and the last studies on Mao’s thought, we can read what the overview of China at the height of the cultural revolution owes to the academic and scholarly position of the authors. At a general level, the commitment of intellectuals to Marxist-Leninism is undoubtedly tied to the belief in the intrinsic power of true ideas, in a way that recalls the motto of the CML, as well as the desire for social redemption through a union with the people. The cultural revolution was supposed to abolish not only the social but also the technical division of labor, especially through the transformation of the mass of manual workers into experimenters, progressively freed from the “cult of the book” and their imprisonment within bourgeois specialization. The commitment of intellectuals to an anti-intellectualist prophecy is not surprising, considering that in the overall picture of the Chinese Revolution it was the school which saw its boundaries extended to the forefront of an entire society [*leurs frontières étendues au frontière d'un société*

³⁸ “I gave them a real talking-to, and said they were behaving like children, not engaging in political action”: Althusser, *Future Lasts Forever*, op. cit., 353, translation modified. In his memoirs, Althusser recalls the paternalism of his article (« Sur la révolution culturelle », CML, no. 15, p. 5-16), which he rather criticized

tout entière]. More specifically, it is tempting to see the embracing of the Maoist oppositions between “contradictions within the people” (settled through discussion, deliberation, and education), “investigation”, and “antagonistic contradictions”³⁹ (a ruthless struggle against the external enemies of the people) as a translation of the Chinese experience within the walls of *la rue d’Ulm*, at once the “red base” in the offensive against Party revisionism and the space where dissensions or even complete breaks did not damage the collective morale (students who chose to stay in the Party, pro-Chinese students, bourgeois intellectuals, and others continued to co-exist). Like the title of the 1966 pamphlet, *The Whole Country Must Become a Great School of Mao Tse-Tung’s Thought*⁴⁰, it is possible that in the last issues of the CML the experience of an entire country was viewed through the prism of a “grande école:” the ENS.

The CML did not completely confine itself to commentaries on the GPCR. The topic of No. 16, for example, was “State Capitalism in France.” Alternating between citations from Engels and Lenin on economic matters, the issue is directed against the political and economic stance of the PCF, which consisted in realizing an advance towards socialism through the peaceful path of “true democracy,” i.e. State intervention. This involved a threefold ideological drift towards economism (disregard of the political question), chauvinism (defense of “national” interests over the preferences of the proletariat, forgetting to some degree the proletariat in the Third-World) and a petit-bourgeois outlook (support of consumption, defense of petty-bourgeois interests while only denouncing the monopolistic or “feudal” bourgeois). The issue’s critiques are concretely applied to the “democratic nationalist” proposals put forth during the crisis in the steel industry⁴¹, and then to the New agrarian policy put forth by the PCF in 1964. The latter critique recalls the arguments previously expressed in no. 4: the formation of agricultural cooperatives could have pedagogical merits, but would not be able to economically work outside of the state apparatus, and thus could not constitute a

³⁹ Cf. the famous text “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957), available at https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_58.htm

⁴⁰ Renmin Ribao and Jiefangjun Bao, *Tout le pays doit être une grande école de la pensée de Mao Tse Tse* *Toung*, Pékin, éd. en Langues étrangères, 1966. Or again, in Mao’s terms: “The army must truly become a great school” (CML, no. 15, p. 62).

⁴¹ “La sidérurgie,” CML, no. 16, p. 20-43.

peaceful path towards socialism.⁴²

But it is important to note that despite the promise of further studies on the same topic in the introduction of no. 16, more than a year went by before the next issue (17), dated April-June 1968. Additionally, this last issue seemed to borrow at least half of its material from CCP propaganda⁴³, the other half relying exclusively on *Peking Informations*.⁴⁴ It is not difficult to see here a withdrawal of the CML's status as the theoretical and political organ of the UJC(ml), which had devoted itself more and more to other forms of writing and discourse (tracts, bulletins, pamphlets) in addition to other forms of practice. These practices included a campaign of "investigations [*enquêtes*] in the countryside and visits to China and Albania in the summer of 1967, the *établissement* campaign in the autumn of 1967, and the attack on the exhibition on the accused war crimes of the Vietcong. All of these activities realize the promise given in the introduction of no. 14: "these two issues (14 and 15) are the first (written) forms of our response to the reactionary and revisionist travesty."⁴⁵ Through this year-long silence, as well as the actual contents of this last issue, the experience of the CML illustrated the fact that, well before its own dissolution in May '68, the pro-Chinese group from the Cercle d'Ulm had for the most part distanced itself from purely intellectual activities.

Figure 1. Numbered Issues of the Cahiers marxistes-léninistes

Mimeographed by the Circle of Communist Students at the ENS :

No. 1, "Science and Ideologies" (December 1964) No. 3, untitled (the concept of production, Lucien Goldmann, Bourdieu and Passeron's *The Inheritors*)

No. 2, Untitled (Algeria, India)

⁴² "Eléments sur la question agraire," CML, no. 16, p. 44-77 et "Comment le Parti communiste adapte son programme agraire aux conditions nouvelles de notre époque," p. 78-87.

⁴³ "La lutte entre les deux lignes dans le Parti communiste chinois," CML no. 17, p. 32-64 (from an article by Yen Tchang-Kouei, translated from *Jiefangfun Bao*, the daily newspaper of the Popular Liberation Army, and the only non-anonymous article in these final issues of the CML).

⁴⁴ "Les étapes de la grande révolution culturelle prolétarienne (Nov. 1965-Summer 1967)," CML, no. 17, p. 3-31.

⁴⁵ "Introduction," CML, no. 14, p. 2. Emphasis in original.

No. 4, "Agriculture"

No. 5, "Latin America: Problems of Revolutionary Strategy"
(June 1965)

No. (6/7/8), "Powers of Literature" (end of 1965-beginning
of 1966)

Publication of the Société d'Édition et de Recherche (SER),
mimeographed:

No. 9/10, "Vive le léninisme!" (1st trimester, 1966)

No. 11, "Louis Althusser, "Historical Materialism and
Dialectical Materialism"(April
1966)

Published by the SER, printed and distributed by Maspero,
dated :

No. 12/13, July-October 1966: « Art, Language, Class
Struggle »

Idem, "Theoretical and Political Organ of the UJC(ml)" :

No. 14, November-December 1966: "The Great Proletarian
Cultural Revolution(I)"

No. 15, January-February 1967: " The Great Proletarian
Cultural Revolution (II)"

No. 16, March-April 1967, "State Capitalism in France"

No. 17, April-June 1968, "The Great Proletarian Cultural
Revolution(III). Stages of the GPCR (Nov. 65-Summer '67).
The Struggle Between Two Mass Lines in the Chinese
Communist Party."

Figure 2. Named Authors or Collaborators in the CML

In order of appearance. Academic discipline, entrance year,
relevant issue of CML

Jacques Broyelle (Philosophy, ENS 1964) : 1, 2, 4

Robert Linhart (Philosophy, ENS 1963) 1, 2, 4

Jacques-Alain Miller (Philosophy, ENS 1962) : 1, 6/7/8

Jean-Claude Milner (Linguistics, ENS 1961) : 1, 6/7/8

Jacques Rancière (Philosophy, ENS 1961) 1, 3

Christian Riss (Mathematics, ENS 1963) : 1, 2, 3
Georges Rougemont (Greek Studies, ENS 1962) : 1
Etienne Balibar (Philosophy, ENS 1960) : 3, 5, 12/13
Alain Grosrichard (Philosophy, ENS 1962) : 3
Bénard (Engineering, cercle de l'École Supérieure d'Agronomie
Tropicale, Nogent-sur-Marne) : 4
Raphaël Larrère (Engineering, Institut National de la Recherche
Agronomique, cercle de
l'Institut national agronomique) : 4
Momiche (cercle de l'école des Mines) : 4
Régis Debray (Philosophy, ENS 1961) : 5
Dominique Lecourt (Philosophy, ENS 1965) : Director of Publication
(n°9/10 and all
following issues)
Louis Althusser (lecturer of Philosophy, ENS 1939/1945) : 11
Pierre Macherey (Philosophy, ENS 1958) : 6/7/8, 12/13
François Régault (Philosophy, ENS 1959) : 6/7/8
Roger Establet (Philosophy, ENS 1959) : 12/13
One should add Lenin (nos. 12/13 et 15), Stalin, and Mao (nos. 12/13)
and Yen Tchang-Kouei (no.17). Also note the absence of important
UJCml figures who most likely anonymously participated in the last
period of the CML, notably Benny Lévy (Philosophy, ENS, 1965).