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History of the Reproduction-Resistance Dichotomy in Critical Education The Line of Critique Against Louis Althusser, 1974-1985

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Abstract

*This paper examines one intellectual and historical premise upon which the foundational distinction between reproduction and resistance rests in critical education: the line of critique against the French communist philosopher Louis Althusser's theory of education. In the paper, I claim that a particular reading of Althusser coming out of British Marxist scholarship in the 1970s helped configure the distinction, making it thinkable for two founders of critical education: Michael W. Apple and Henry A. Giroux. I contend that this set of interpretations of Althusser during the years before and just after Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* was published, gave substance to the distinction between reproduction and resistance at the heart of critical education. I first briefly revisit Althusser's theory of education and its accompanying philosophy as I understand them. I then look at Apple and Giroux's interpretations of Althusser and the interpretations' importance to the reproduction-resistance dichotomy. Third, I trace the provenance of their interpretations via their citations to a series of source critiques of Althusser by Jacques Rancière, Michael Erben and Denis Gleeson, Alex Callinicos, and E. P. Thompson. I conclude the paper by suggesting that, if this earlier line of critique against Althusser were somehow flawed, then the distinction between reproduction and resistance might be flawed as well since Apple and Giroux base their concepts of reproduction and resistance upon it. And if this were the case, scholars and practitioners of critical education would have to rethink the foundations of our general paradigm.*



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When people get interested in thinking about education from a left perspective, they most likely encounter what Isaac Gottesman (2016) calls the critical turn in education. Reading the work of Bowles and Gintis, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, bell hooks, Paulo Freire and others, students are most likely taught this critical turn through the distinction between reproduction and resistance (Leonardo & Grubb, 2018; Wexler 2017; Uljens & Yimaki 2017; Hattam & Smyth 2014). In the traditional rendering of this distinction, reproduction theories see schools as mechanically maintaining unjust social structures, while resistance theories imbue teachers, students, and others in and around schools with the agency to fight that structure and make their own political realities. Reproduction as a concept casts schools as structural, deterministic, and functional; resistance on the other hand sees school people as agentic, creative, and endowed with a capacity for change.

In this traditional rendering these concepts get ordered into a narrative. First, according to this narrative, there were reproduction theories. Important though they were in pointing out how schools are impacted by capitalist, patriarchal, racist and other kinds of structure, these theories did not leave room for the necessary agency and resistance to change those structures. Then, the narrative continues, resistance theorists stepped in and issued the crucial corrective, shifting emphasis to agency.

Following the corrective from resistance, critical education thus emerged as a paradigm for how to think about schooling and society from a left perspective. While there are unjust social structures, school people can and do resist. This framework influenced strands of urban education, social foundations of education, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, poststructuralist and postfeminist theories of education across disciplines in educational research.

The dichotomy is not a settled matter, and has inspired much debate in the last fifteen years at least (Apple 2006; Farahmandpur 2004; Hill 2005; Kelsh & Hill 2006; Malott 2011; Rikowski 2006; McGrew 2011; Apple 2015).¹ Yet such debates largely focus on theoretical arguments. Another way to approach the issue is to look at the way the dichotomy developed and evaluate its emergence. This paper examines one intellectual and historical premise upon which the distinction between reproduction and resistance rests in critical education: the line of critique against the French communist philosopher Louis Althusser's theory of education. In the paper, I claim that a particular reading of Althusser coming out of British Marxist scholarship in the 1970s helped configure the distinction, making it thinkable for two founders of critical education: Michael W. Apple and Henry A. Giroux. I contend that this set of interpretations of Althusser during the years before and just after Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* was published, gave substance to the distinction between reproduction and resistance at the heart of critical education.

I first briefly revisit Althusser's theory of education and its accompanying philosophy as I understand them. I then look at Apple and Giroux's interpretations of Althusser and the interpretations' importance to the reproduction-resistance dichotomy. Third, I trace the provenance of their interpretations via their citations to a series of source critiques of Althusser by Jacques Rancière, Michael Erben and Denis Gleeson, Alex Callinicos, and E. P. Thompson. I conclude the paper by claiming that, given the flaws in this earlier line of critique against Althusser, it stands to reason that the distinction between reproduction and resistance is flawed as well, since the critique of Althusser is a main ingredient in Apple and Giroux's concepts of reproduction and resistance.

¹ I would like to thank Ash Yezuita for their contributions towards research on this premise.

Scholars and practitioners of critical education should therefore rethink the foundations of our general paradigm.

Althusser's Theory of Education and its Philosophy

Before launching into the intellectual history, a brief note about Althusser's theory and its current status in critical education. In the 2014 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*, Raymond A. Morrow has an entry on "Social Reproduction Theories." A student or researcher looking for a reference guide on the subject might very well find it. If that student or researcher were interested in the French communist philosopher Louis Althusser, a prominent figure in social reproduction theory and Marxist thinking about education, they would find their way to Morrow's section on him. It reads, in its entirety, as follows:

The French neo-Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) proposed the first version of economic reproductive theory that claimed to overcome economic determinism by recognizing the relative autonomy of the ideological superstructures, contrasting the "repressive state apparatus" that exerts physical control over individuals with the "ideological state apparatus" composed of institutions such as religion, education, and law. Since the economic sphere was still determinant "in the last instance," however, Althusser's ahistorical structuralist methodology was widely criticized for an explanatory functionalism that could neither account for the agency necessary for his theory of revolution nor provide guidance for empirical research. Though giving culture more autonomy than traditional Marxism, structuralist interpretations denied agency because social actors were viewed as ultimately mere puppets of controlling coercive and ideological structures. As an abstract, speculative theory based on new "Marxist" conceptions of science, structuralism did not encourage empirical and historical comparison of how particular societies actually organize reproduction processes. (p. 708)

Morrow has credentials to back up this reading. He co-authored the seminal tome *Social Theory and Education: A Critique of Social and Cultural Theories of Reproduction*, tracing the history of social reproduction theory and education in more than 500 pages. He is not alone in this interpretation of Althusser. In fact, that interpretation emerged from a specific line of critique inherited by Apple and Giroux. Morrow's summary is a paradigm case of the doxa, or received opinion, about Althusser's theory in critical education. The doxa has these three aspects: while Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) was an important first attempt to understand education in a capitalist society, it ultimately failed because of its generality, structuralism, functionalism, and overall inability to properly recognize the concrete agency of people in and around schools over time.

The same year that Morrow's entry in the encyclopedia was published, a new book by Althusser came out. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014) appeared for the first time in English translation. The significance of the translation should not be understated. The book was the full text from which Althusser's famous essay on the ISAs was initially excerpted. That essay "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation" (1971), informally called the ISAs essay, has for more than a generation provided the definitive account of Althusser's thinking about education in capitalist society. Yet the book from which it was excerpted was rarely mentioned, if ever. There is thus good reason to revisit the basics of that

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theory and the philosophy behind it for its own sake, but it is doubly helpful to revisit it given the importance of Althusser's thinking (and the rejection of it) for the reproduction-resistance dichotomy as it was configured in the 1980s. Before getting into that intellectual history, I will briefly summarize the theory and philosophy.

I am currently at work on a technical, book-length manuscript detailing a rereading of Althusser's theory, specifically his claim that schools are the dominant ideological state apparatus in capitalist societies (Backer forthcoming 2021). The first part of that book is a rereading of the ISAs essay in the context of the book from which it was excerpted *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, followed by a lengthy exposition of how that theory was taken up in critical education and elsewhere. Readers of this essay should note that all the analysis here is more further elaborated in the forthcoming book. The rest of this section is a condensed summary of some of those findings with respect to Althusser's theory of education, composed with minimal citations for readability. Most interpretations of Althusser are dense and difficult to engage with, so I have chosen intentionally to write the summary without attendant footnotes or page numbers for the purposes of this essay. I recommend readers look to *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* if they are interested in support for the summary (as well as my forthcoming book).

In education Althusser is best known for his claim that, in modern societies, networks of educational institutions form an ideological state apparatus (ISA). This scholastic apparatus—along with others like media, culture, religion, and family—reproduces dominant relations of production. These ideological state apparatuses collectively compose one half of the state, known in Marxist theory as the superstructure (Marx 1977). The superstructure rests upon the economic base, providing a downward-facing force that maintains the economy. ISAs compose an ideological part of the state superstructure, exerting a reproductive force that maintains social structure's continuity over time predominantly via ideology (in contrast to the more uniform repressive state apparatus, which works predominantly via repressive force to ensure the stability and proper functioning of the relations of production through physical and non-physical violence).

Care centers, primary and secondary schools, and universities are institutions in the scholastic state apparatus along with consultants, think tanks, and various parent associations, where individuals and groups tend to toe a ruling class line, which reproduces dominant relations of production. These organizations and institutions have a reproductive effect through interpellation; that is, by trying to recruit individuals to get with the program of dominant ideology, conceived as imagined relations to real conditions (Backer, 2018). This ideological reproduction happens in schools through concrete practices: teaching approved knowledge, skills, and general competence for the division of labor, and teaching adequate submission to and respect for the dominance of the ruling class. This is what it means for the scholastic state apparatus to 'work' through ideology more than violence (though it includes both).

Althusser's theory of ideology is distinctive. Ideology is the imagined *relation* to real conditions, not just the image of real conditions. Rather than ideology-as-consciousness, his theory understands ideology as practice: concrete gestures, actions, habits, and movements rather than beliefs, norms, or stuff in the head (Backer, 2020). Following Blaise Pascal's (1887) provocative aphorism in *Pensees*, Althusser thinks that we do not kneel in prayer because we believe in God, but rather the reverse: we believe in God because we kneel and pray. This dictum contains a materialist heart, as it makes the case that consciousness emerges from material conditions (like movements, practices, and gestures) rather than the reverse. For Althusser, as for Marx, beliefs and ideas do not determine what we do. Instead, what we do determines what we believe. Those

movements, practices, and gestures— exerting and influenced by social forces— are the specific material conditions that determine consciousness. An imagined relation to real conditions names the set of those practices, consciousness, and conditions to which the term ideology, in Althusser's thinking, refers.

Furthermore, the imagined relation is anchored in the material practices (importantly, not vice versa). Rather than an ideology-critique that uses a correspondence-type notion of truth wherein there are some positions that are non-ideological, Althusser's is an ideology-theory using a conflict-type notion of truth wherein all positions are ideological, but only some win hegemony (Rehmann 2013; Backer 2016; Backer 2018). Educational institutions are full of practices that anchor imagined relations to real conditions, dominant and subordinate. It follows that schools are sites and stakes of struggle where dominant class fractions try to reproduce their favored relations of production, attempting to maintain them over time, and working class fractions do just as much to accommodate, counter, and break through that dominance. From taking attendance to disciplinary actions to assignments; from curriculum to governance to finance policy— all are variations of practices caught up in this class struggle.

A unique Marxist philosophy justifies this theory of education and ideology. I have come to understand that philosophy as having two basic insights, one epistemological and the other ontological. I elaborate these in a readable account in Backer (2019) *The Gold and the Dross: Althusser for Educators*, but it is worth a few sentences at the outset here (for a summary and review see Turcotte-Summers & Rocha 2020). Epistemologically, Althusser's philosophy advances what I call the law of dislocation: the real object (reality) is not identical to the object of knowledge (concepts about reality). Our concepts are part of reality but they are never located in reality. These realities— stuff and concepts about stuff— are different. There is no coincidence between them. Althusser follows Baruch Spinoza in saying that the concept dog does not bark. While the concept of dog is about dogs, the concept is not a dog. This does not mean there is no such thing as epistemology. Quite the opposite. Concepts are themselves real things, just like the objects they are about. Yet while concepts are about reality, are part of reality, and actually impact other real things, they are never out and about *in* reality. Concepts encounter reality, they pressure and relate to reality, and are essential for having knowledge about reality. But knowledge about reality is never identical to or located in that reality. This is why Stanley Aronowitz (1981) called this feature of Althusser's philosophy the law of non-identity, though I prefer the term dislocation since it is Althusser's own. The law of dislocation is thus an important preventative to essentialism and idealism, taking a clear stance on the separation between material reality and the knowledge, beliefs, and other mental states humans have about that material reality.

The law of uneven development follows roughly from the law of dislocation. Societies change over time. Althusser's theory of society contains theoretical terms describing that change, taking into account the law of dislocation. The law of uneven development is an ontological insight about what there is. The insight requires a number of technical terms. According to the law of uneven development there are elements and relations between these elements, which, combined, are practices. Think of teachers and students living their lives in schools and everything that entails from day to day, or school districts in a state. Every practice these elements enact exerts a force, or effectivity. These practices get articulated in variations. Their effectivities combine into larger effectivities that become forces, like bones and muscles combining into limbs that articulate with one another in joints. The emergent variations further articulated with one another into huge complex combinations, like organizations, which can get articulated together into apparatuses,

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which have their own effectivities based on the force they exert (repressive, reproductive, productive, ecological).

The complex articulations push and pull. They shift over time. To use a geological metaphor these practices go layers deep, some variations becoming dominant over others. The whole thing forms an uneven structure, one that is peculiar to the play of forces over time in a specific context, from the smallest granular level to the largest tectonic level. Thus society, in Althusser's theory, is a social formation of conflicting, differential, and idiosyncratic forces constantly in flux. Furthermore, the structure of society is immanent within that uneven balance of forces, rather than transcendent on them. There are no guarantees about any practice or variation in the formation. All formations are idiosyncratic and all moments of those formations are peculiar. History, or changes in social formations over time, develops unevenly through these forces, the movements of all the combined practices and articulations of practices. Rather than a transcendent or mechanical structure imposed upon individuals and groups, the social structure in this case is immanent within the practices individuals and groups enact. The structure emerges. There is thus no teleology or supervening subject in history. There is no machine or god of the process, yet there are structures and dominance and tendencies that, like living rock, are set in stone but change over time. The law of uneven development is Althusser's destalinized concept of the Marxist dialectic.

Think of the game Jenga. Pieces are arrayed uniquely with idiosyncratic forces holding between them. There are distinct regions of the structure such that an intervention in one part of the structure can have small or large impacts on others, depending on the unique array of effectivities created by the pieces and their relations between one another. Pieces are relatively autonomous, they can be moved to varying degrees. There are no guarantees for any small or large shift, and practices, variations, and variations of variations have differential effectivities given the specific conditions of their development. There is always contingency between the forces, variations, practices, and entities entering into those practices. Faults, torsions, tensions, and contradictions always exist and sometimes overtake the structure, which can transform little by little or drastically— all driven by a competition between two sides in a struggle. The concepts of apparatus, function, force, and interpellation in Althusser's thinking are all undergirded by the laws of dislocation and uneven development, which make for an anti-essentializing and destalinized Marxist philosophy of education.

For a variety of reasons, this aspect of Althusser's theory is not widely acknowledged in critical education. As we will see, Althusser's thinking was digested in a particular way, according to a particular line of critique, and thus set aside as scholars like Apple and Giroux configured the nascent field of critical education. Some might argue this setting aside of Althusser is for the better. He stayed a member of the French Communist Party after 1956, a party that maintained its support for the Soviet Union after the existence of the gulags was revealed, took a stand against the popular student rebellions of 1968, and suffered heavy losses in mainstream French politics in the late 1970s. Althusser was a central point of contention between leading British Marxists in the 1960s and 1970s, getting caught up in deep rifts between historians Perry Anderson and E.P. Thompson and manifesting in the pages of intellectual-activist journals like the *New Left Review* and *Socialist Register*. Finally, and most disturbing, Althusser killed his longtime partner and wife Hélène Rytman in 1980. He was found unfit to stand trial by the French government due to severe mental illness, with which he had struggled his entire life. He spent the remainder of his life under house arrest where he wrote and published a memoir detailing the killing and, in a way, renouncing his work (Althusser, Corpet, & Boutang 1983).

These significant personal and political scandals led to Althusser's fall from grace and perhaps contributed to a lack of engagement with his thinking. William S. Lewis (2019), in his careful examination of whether scholars should study Althusser's theory separate from these disturbing events, focusing specifically on the killing of Rytman, concludes that there is a case to be made that, indeed, we should not engage with Althusser's thinking in a way that separates it from its circumstances. Lewis calls this approach an external one to Althusser's life and work. Lewis distinguishes the external approach to an internal one, where scholars and activists engage with the theory and ignore the events surrounding Althusser's personal and political history. The worry, which has persisted since 1980 at least, is that in taking an internal approach we perpetuate vile social forces such as patriarchy and other oppressions, particularly when we should be lifting up under-cited scholars across the intersectional spectrum (and ones not associated with Stalinism at that!).

Lewis argues that there is a middle ground between the internal and the external approaches, a dialogical and reflective internalism that names and holds the obvious tensions when working with Althusser's ideas. These ideas were hugely influential across the social sciences, education in particular. Studying Althusser anew illuminates the roots of critical education and can also be of use for its insights into Marxism as that framework comes into a new vogue in contemporary politics. I propose that, given Althusser's importance to critical education, such an approach is justified. As I detail in what follows, re-examining how Althusser was taken up in critical education sheds new light on the field's presumptions.

The Foundations of Critical Education

Gottesman (2016) points to critical education researchers Michael W. Apple and Henry A. Giroux as a central sources of left thinking in education in the United States postwar. When we think of critical education, we tend to think of them. Furthermore, Raymond Morrow and Alberto Torres (1995), in their massive history and critique of social reproduction theory in education, point to Apple and Giroux's claims in the 1980's to support their own arguments about Althusser and reproduction in critical education. Thus I start this history with Apple and Giroux.

Raised by communists and having been a classroom teacher, school principal, and union leader, Apple was inspired by – but critical of – the neo-marxist approach of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis. He fell in with the Durkheimian sociologist of education Basil Bernstein's circle in England, as well as the burgeoning cultural studies milieu in Birmingham. Apple would go on to connect with Giroux, who studied education and history at Carnegie-Mellon University. Giroux worked early on with labor organizer-turned-intellectual Stanley Aronowitz in 1973 and, through these connections, would also bring left perspectives to education (starting perhaps with Giroux (1976)).

Apple and Giroux would introduce, to a wide audience of American intellectuals and activists, a distinct line of British-leftist thinking about education. These more culturalist voices associated with figures such as E. P. Thompson would be added to and pitted against the structural neo-marxisms like those of Althusser, Bowles and Gintis, Bernstein, Gramscian historian Michael B. Katz, and left political economist Martin Carnoy (and his collaborator Henry Levin) that had emerged after 1968 in the United States. Since Apple and Giroux were visible as founders of the new tradition separate from neo-marxism, it was their readings of Althusser that others would encounter for the first time in education and helped configure the new paradigm.

Apple's first mention of Althusser is in a footnote in 1978, calling him a French philosopher of science. There would not be a more substantial engagement from either of the scholars until Giroux published an explicit critique in 1980. In "Beyond the Correspondence Theory: Notes on the Dynamics of Educational Reproduction and Transformation," in a section called "Myth of 'Total' Domination," Giroux claims that Althusser's notion of domination is an "oversimplified view" that infects his theory of schooling. He explains that

in Althusser's (1971) Hobbesian vision of schooling there is little recognition of the dialectical interplay of power, ideology, and resistance. In Althusser's view, the school functions to transmit the necessary skills and discipline required to socialize students passively into their future work roles. Domination appears so total in this type of perspective that teachers and students "appear as unwitting servants of such an ideology and have little choice in avoiding the service of its interests" (Erben and Gleeson, 1975) (p. 232).

Althusser's Hobbesianism, lack of dialectical interplay, and total domination have their roots in Erben and Gleeson's critique of Althusser from 1975, as well as others to whom I turn later. This critique of reproduction as totally dominating— as opposed to resistance, which is agentic— was the basis for Giroux's general move against the neomarxist.

Two years later Apple (1982) edited a collection of essays under the title *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: Essays on Class, Ideology, and the State*. In his contribution to the collection he showed a slightly different engagement with Althusser's claims. Recognizing the materiality of ideology in Althusser's theory, he agreed that "[a]s both Gramsci and Althusser remind us, 'ideology is a practice producing subjects'." Yet Apple asked the following questions:

Are schools— as important aspects of the State— simply 'ideological state apparatuses' (to quote Althusser), ones whose primary role is to reproduce the ideological and 'manpower' requirements of the social relations of production? Or, do they also embody contradictory tendencies and provide sites where ideological struggles within and among classes, race, and sexes can and do occur? (p. 14)

The state apparatuses are simple for Apple. They do not embody contradictory tendencies as sites of struggle. Reproduction is the name for that simple, uncomplicated, struggle-less theory.

But reading the passage more carefully, note the ambiguous construction of the questions. Apple casts ISAs as simple reproducers, but then asks "or, do they also" embody contradictory tendencies. Apple is indecisive with respect to the state apparatuses' simplicity and struggle-lessness. There are two options here. On the one hand, ideological state apparatuses could be either simple reproducers of labor power or sites of struggle (a clear disjunction). On the other hand, ISAs could be both simple reproducers of labor power and sites of struggles (a conjunction). Apple's "or, do they also" formulation is indecisive in this regard. That indecision regarding reproduction's simplicity is a theme in both Giroux and Apple's later, more developed accounts.

Take Giroux's milestone *Theory and Resistance in Education: Towards a Pedagogy of the Opposition* (1983). Notable for its forewords by both Paulo Freire and Stanley Aronowitz, *Theory and Resistance* became a key text for critical education. In its first section laying out existing theories, called "Theory and Critical Discourse," there is a central chapter called "Reproduction, Resistance, and Accommodation in the Process of Schooling" reviewing reproduction theories up to that time. In that chapter there is a subsection "Theories of Social Reproduction and the

Problematic of Ideology and Power.” Offered as a kind of catalog of theories of reproduction from which critical education must move on towards better theories of resistance, within this subsection there is a sub-subsection, the first in fact, called “LOUIS ALTHUSSER.”

Before examining this text, it is clear that neither Giroux’s project nor Apple’s are meant to be in-depth engagements with one philosopher or scholar. They are rather wide-ranging articulations of a new framework. In Apple this manifests in his passing reference to Althusser in pursuit of broader aims. In Giroux, it manifests as the claim that others have already produced sufficient interpretations of Althusser. He does not proceed on a detailed reading “[s]ince this position [about Althusser] has been treated extensively elsewhere by others (Hirst 1979; Erben & Gleeson 1977; Callinicos 1977; Aronowitz 1981).” Giroux states that he will focus his analysis “primarily on the conception of power and ideology that emerges from Althusser’s position” (p. 79). We see the citation to Erben and Gleeson again as in the 1980 essay, but this time with Callinicos, Hirst and Aronowitz (who I take up later). Giroux does not see the need to interpret Althusser further, lists the citations, and moves on. Along with Apple’s “or do they also” question, Giroux’s reference to a previously existing line of critique may be one of the most important moves when it comes to the interpretation of Althusser in the foundations of critical education, and perhaps its shakiest ground. Because others have done the interpretive work, Giroux says, there is no need for us to go into detail regarding the theory.

Giroux’s interpretation is a mix of reverence and repulsion. He first appears more decisive than Apple on the question of the ISA’s and simple reproduction. He says that

Althusser’s theory of the state and reproduction is clearly an important advance over traditional and liberal accounts...for it dispels Marxist theories of schooling that argue that schools are simply the ethereal reflection of the economic order. Schools, in Althusser’s view, are relatively autonomous institutions that exist in a particular relation with the economic base, but that at the same time have their own constraints and practices...that are modified, altered, and in some cases contradicted by a variety of political and social forces. (p. 80)

Clearly Giroux reveres the theory, a shift from his 1980 reading. Yet soon after this reverent description, Giroux returns to the older 1980 point about total domination. He goes on the offensive, this time citing Paul Willis’s 1981 essay on cultural production and even drawing on Stuart Hall:

As a number of critics have pointed out (Erben & Gleeson 1977; Aronowitz 1981; Willis 1981), Althusser has fashioned a theory of domination in which the needs of capital become indistinct from the effects of capitalist social relations. In fact, Althusser’s (1971) notion of domination has become so one-sided that it is impossible to deduce from perspective the possibility of ideologies which are oppositional in nature (Hall 1981). This is no small point, because it suggests that schools are *not* to be viewed as social sites marked by the interplay of domination, accommodation, and struggle, but rather as sites that function smoothly to reproduce a docile labor force. (p. 82)

While the question of the relation between capital’s needs and the effect of capitalist social relations is an interesting one, Giroux, rather than pursuing it further, ups his rhetoric. He says in Althusser’s theory the working class is “dumb and inert” (p. 83). They “hop and jump” into the division of labor. Giroux explains this “failure” (p. 83) by saying Althusser’s theory is “at a level

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of abstraction that appears uninformed by the concrete interplay of power relations” (p. 83). Althusser’s theory is thus tragic to Giroux because it “appears to suffer from the very reification it analyzes” and “has enshrined [domination] in a formalistic system that is as insular as it is theoretically demeaning to the notions of struggle and human agency” (p. 83). That Althusser’s theory totally dominates people, that it renders them docile, passive, etc., is a major theme in the earlier critiques from which Apple and Giroux draw upon.

Giroux’s reverent and repulsed read on Althusser would appear, but in a different form, in Apple’s (1985) landmark book *Education and Power* that came out two years after Giroux’s *Theory and Resistance*. The book articulates similar ideas, condensing them into a ready-to-hand critique in more careful, yet still ambiguous phrasings. In a chapter titled “Culture as Lived,” Apple says his goal is to critically examine

claims about both the school’s function as what Althusser has called an ideological state apparatus—one that produces agents (with the ‘appropriate’ dispositions, values, and ideologies taught through a hidden curriculum) to fill the needs of the social division of labor in society—and the place of our educational institutions in producing the particular knowledge and the cultural forms ‘required’ by an unequal society—that is, as a site for the production of cultural commodities (technical/administrative knowledge) that are important to an economy and to increasingly powerful class segments. (p. 91)

I should note first that while Giroux talks about Althusser’s theory explicitly, such mentions and citations to text are less present in Apple. This passage above (and the ones from 1982) is an exception, where Apple names the theory of the ISAs. Like Giroux however, Apple’s is not a hermeneutic project but rather finding the right balance between cultural production and economic reproduction for critical education. The reproduction-resistance dichotomy is thus center stage. We see in the passage above that, to Apple, the ISAs concept is one kind of claim about producing agents for the division of labor, aligning it with economic reproduction, while on the other side there are claims about producing knowledge and cultural forms. Each of these approaches are flawed.

But the content of the distinction Apple makes, again, is unclear. Just as in 1982, we do not get a final decision about whether Althusser’s theory is *both* of these kinds of claim or only one of them. When critiquing what he calls reflection theories, Apple says such theories have

a tendency to portray workers as something like automatons who are *wholly* controlled by the modes of production, technical administrative procedures, and ideological forms of our society. In more theoretical terms, agents exist (as abstract social roles), but they have no agency. In a real sense, then, structures exist, actors don’t. (p. 70)

Theories like Althusser’s, then, understand workers as “*wholly*” controlled automatons. Only structures can be actors in such theories. Apple uses italics to emphasize the immensity of this lack of agency. Putting the case in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, to Apple, theories like Althusser’s are neither sufficient nor necessary for critical education due to this severe oversight. But, as before, Apple goes on to write that these theories constitute one part of a picture whose other part he is filling in. This filling-in-the-missing-piece strategy implies that reflection theories (of which Althusser’s, we assume, is one) are necessary but insufficient for critical education. A very different claim.

The ambiguity is present throughout the text. Sometimes Apple writes that “supposed correspondence theories can only partially describe what *is* lived out” (p. 74), noting that his goal is to show how structures’ “control...is less than total” (p. 77). In this vein, he provides anecdotes of work stoppages, like white crane workers showing solidarity with a mistreated black peer by operating their cranes more slowly (p. 77) and women cashiers slowing their transactions to resist oppressive managers (p. 81). In this sense, reproduction is necessary but insufficient as a concept (rather than unnecessary and insufficient). But ultimately Apple’s formulation follows the “or, do they also” tendency I pointed to above, neither taking a fully culturalist position nor fully structuralist position, nor combining them, but rather skating around the tensions inherent in the formulation of reproduction, resistance, and their concepts. Reproduction, in Althusser’s theory, is a wholly determining concept that leaves no room for agency ‘or, it is also’ a theory with room for agency and struggle that just needs further elaboration.

Apple’s conclusion serves as a near perfect articulation of critical education’s paradigm for thinking about school in its social context. Oppressive structures reproduce oppression, while people in schools resist. But looking at the indecision with which Apple fashions the thesis, we can note that Apple provides little evidence that reproduction theorists like Althusser were saying something different. When we read Althusser’s theory, there is a clear account of resistance, struggle, and countervailing forces. Althusser (nor Bowles and Gintis, for that matter, specifically in the final chapter of *Schooling in Capitalist American* on revolution) say otherwise. They talk explicitly about revolution, class struggle, and contradiction.

The distinctive feature of Apple’s (1985) account is that he only mentions the authors of correspondence theories briefly, if at all. Rather the term “correspondence theory” or “reflection theory” is taken to mean those strictly reflectionist, mirroring theories which totalize the constraints on human beings to the extent that we are *wholly* determined by society and thus cannot act, existing as mere automatons. The account is clearly aimed at Althusser, as Althusser is named briefly, but others as well. The theories as well as authors disappear into Apple’s interpretation of them, which the reader can accept without issue given the broad scope of the project. Giroux set a precedent for this move by saying the interpretation of authors like Althusser had already been worked out by others. Apple was largely following suit here. Again, specific interpretive claims were not what Apple and Giroux were setting out to do. They largely accomplished their goal when it came to critical education. But theories such as Althusser’s were blurred in the process.

We have thus seen the reproduction-resistance dichotomy get configured in the texts above. Giroux dichotomized reproduction and resistance, associated Althusser’s theory with the former and his own with the latter, and in the process dismissed the need to read more about Althusser since that hermeneutic work had already been done by others like Erben and Gleeson, Callinicos, Connell, Hirst, and Willis. Apple takes up the same dichotomization, citing similar sources in footnotes, listing the bibliographic information of texts containing these interpretations and critiques, but engaging with the text themselves less. Further, looking at Apple and Giroux’s claims more carefully, there is an inconsistency and indecision in their readings to which students and scholars of critical education should attend. As these founders of critical education formulate basic presumptions of the field, they exhibit an inconsistency with respect to Althusser. While Althusser’s theory is an important intervention, it entails understanding human beings as automatons. Reproductionist and reflectionist theories like that of the ISAs are incomplete pictures needing augmentation ‘or, do they also’ need to be rejected for their wholly-determinative character. Given the importance of these arguments against Althusser for the reproduction-

resistance dichotomy, as well as their inconsistency, scholars of the critical education tradition should indeed go back to their sources and assess the strength of these earlier interpretations.

Sources

We can start with Jacques Rancière (2011), one of Althusser's students. His first book was *Althusser's Lesson* published first in French in 1974 and translated into English in 2011. The book is a polemic-provocation aimed at his teacher; a kind of revenge for Althusser's position on the events of May 1968. He writes that "Althusser misled us" (p. xix) and that "[w]e had declared Althusserianism dead and buried in May 1968" (p. xx). Some, like Althusser's other student Étienne Balibar, understand Althusser's theory of the ISAs as a way to comprehend the events of 1968 and square them with the old left. But Rancière sees Althusser, in the ISAs essay, "struggling, somewhat pitifully, to reconcile his old ideas with the lessons offered up by the events themselves" (p. xx). In one searing line, reversing Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, Rancière writes that Althusser's armchair Marxism is an approach to political work that "[i]n the end [says] 'It's all in vain. We've tried in various ways to change the world; the point now is to interpret it'" (p. xiii).

Further, he would say of Althusser that his theory is "the *superimposition* of two functions of ideology (the preservation of social cohesion in general the exercise of class domination)," (p. 132) which implies a dubious union of two antagonistic frameworks (from his perspective): Marxism and functionalism. Althusser's account of ideology up until that point welcomed "the *coexistence* of two heterogeneous conceptual systems: historical materialism and Durkheimian bourgeois sociology" (p. 132). Rancière also proposes in passing that Althusser's account "could very well be a renewal of the myth of an ideological state of nature" (p. 134).

That claim should sound familiar. We hear an echo of it in Giroux's mention of the Hobbesian tradition in 1980. But Giroux did not get that reference from Rancière. It came secondhand from two British sociologists of education Michael Erben and Denis Gleeson who read Rancière's provocations against Althusser and formalized them for an English research audience interested in education in 1975. In their reconstruction of Althusser's arguments (refracted through Rancière), they understand his concept of reproduction as "being concerned with...a competent, reliable and well behaved (passively socialized) labour force" (p. 76). The docility and passivity that Giroux and Apple find in Althusser can be traced to Erben and Gleeson to some degree. Rather than "engage with [teachers and students] in struggle," for Erben and Gleeson, Althusser's theory is "scuppering the ship while it is still in port" (p. 81). Therefore, "[h]is statement that the school may be the site of class struggle becomes meaningless" (p. 82). Its claims to being a class struggle is meaningless because the theory over-emphasizes "those passive features of socialization to the exclusion of active features" where "men give meanings to [their] predicament" (p. 83). The proof, Erben and Gleeson imply, is in the pudding. They give historical examples of when "the arena of activity can change the character of that arena, and may even precipitate a mass advance" (p. 87). While they admit that Althusser claims schools are a site and stake of class struggle, they also say that the statement is an unfulfilled promise in the theory.

They then reiterate Rancière's suggestion about Hobbes, claiming that Althusser's concept of reproduction comes from a functionalist-consensus tendency, also apparently implicated in a state of nature tradition of political theory.

Althusser's reading of the nature of reproduction proceeds along a different path from that of Marx in that he assumes the consent implicit in social contract theories.

In one form or another, theorists such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Weber and Parsons have placed great emphasis examining constraints concerned with the problem of order which have limited men's actions and choices when coming to terms with doubt and violence. (p. 88)

Yet while these are reiterations of the affiliation between Althusser and functionalism/Hobbes, like Rancière, the authors only gesture towards the claim— or rather drape Rancière's provocation in academic formality— rather than fully arguing for it. The writing has more of an accusatory structure than a logical one, but the style and tone is one of disciplined sociological argumentation. Something similar is true of Hirst's critique, though in a different way.

The British communist social theorist Paul Hirst (1976), in his critique of Althusser, takes issue with Althusser's question itself: the question of the reproduction of the relations of production. He says this question is too general and, for that reason, functionalist: "given the level of generality of the analysis, this [concept of] reproduction can only be converted into a functional imperative...No general answer can be given to this question is *not* functionalist" (p. 388). Hirst writes that in this view the "agency which performs" the "reproduction function...can be therefore conceived strictly as a support of the function" (p. 388). Again, this is because "[n]o general answer, derivable from the general form of the relations of production, can be given to these questions...there can be no general theory of the maintenance of capitalism" (p. 389). This problem of generality and functionalism in Althusser's thinking, which Giroux and Apple both cite, was a main contribution to the interpretation critical education would digest. Hirst's was also a formalization of certain critiques like Erben and Gleeson, but instead of gesturing towards those claims Hirst does offer argumentation. The same is true of Callinicos.

Alex Callinicos's (1976) *Althusser's Marxism* builds on Hirst's insights, taking them a step further. After a deft summary of Marxism from its inception through 1968 and a deep engagement with Althusser's published work up to that time, Callinicos — a precocious 25 year old British-Zimbabwean socialist — advances this point about generality and functionalism, but adds a new critique: Althusser's closet Stalinism. Callinicos makes this move by summarizing Althusser's own distinction between a "right critique of Stalinism and a left critique of Stalinism." The right critique, Althusser says, is made by "the studies of 'totalitarianism' beloved of American political scientists" and is also similar to "the analyses of Russia produced by Trotskyists" (p. 93). Althusser, says Callinicos, does not care about the right critiques. To Althusser they are "insubstantial." Only the left critique is viable, that being "'implicit' in the practice of the Chinese Cultural Revolution" (p. 93), showing Maoism's influence on Althusser at the time.

As a Trotskyist himself, Callinicos is not happy about Althusser's assessment of the situation. No Marxist likes to be deemed conservative, much less associated with American political scientists. Althusser's remark about Trotskyism being an insubstantial, rightist critique of Stalinism (in favor of Maoism) is a little slap in the face to Callinicos's tendency of Marxism. So Callinicos comes to Trotskyism's defense, calling it "one of the most serious attempts...to produce a Marxist analysis of the Russian social formation" (p. 94). He notes that Althusser's critique of Trotskyism "is not a serious argument" and slides in a barbed parenthetical that Althusser "could of course expel the Trotskyists from the Marxist tradition, as Stalin did when he classified— and shot— them as fascists" (93). The comments are offhand, but telling. Historically they are certainly true. Yet Althusser's dismissal of an intellectual critique is a far cry from violent purging. Callinicos's critique here is coming from someone in the Trotskyist tendency of Marxism, which

vehemently rejected any formation maintaining connections with Stalin, including the French Communist Party.

While Althusser defends the Maoist critique of Stalinism in several places, Callinicos thinks this “serves merely as a certificate of revolutionary militancy that enables him to evade the real questions that are Stalin’s heritage” (p. 94). To this Trotskyist, Althusser does not go far enough. Althusser’s meek outcry-that-was-never-an-outcry against Stalin is an inherent feature of Althusser’s position as a whole for Callinicos. “The ambiguity we encountered in *For Marx* on the question of Stalinism is, in fact, a structural feature of Althusser’s political position” (p. 94). We can perhaps see the beginnings of Apple’s notion that Althusser’s is a “*wholly* determining” theory and Giroux’s insistence that Althusser’s theory is one of total domination. Althusser was a Stalinist to Callinicos (and thus Apple and Giroux who cited his interpretation).

All these threads— disrespect for agency, functionalism, Stalinism— culminated in the pyrotechnic *The Poverty of Theory, Or an Orrery of Errors*, published in 1979 by the Marxist historian E. P. Thompson. Mixing academic, polemical, and historical modes of discourse, Thompson seeks to decimate Althusser and Althusserianism in the book. Hailed by intellectual historian Scott Dworkin (2008) as one of the most impactful books on Marxism postwar, it is essentially an open letter— more like hate mail— to Althusser against his theory, and all theory. We are told at the outset of *Poverty* that “Althusserian ‘Marxism’ is an intellectual freak” that has “lodged itself firmly in a particular social *couche*, the bourgeois *lumpen-intelligentsia*” (p. 3). Althusser “makes a virtue of his own theoretical imperialism” (p. 13) and Thompson thunders on about how “[t]he absurdity of Althusser consists in the ideological mode of his theoretical constructions. His thought is the child of economic determinism ravished by theoretical idealism” (p. 16). The rhetoric is volatile. Willis’s in 1981 would follow suit, as would Giroux in 1983.

Yet the book also has fascinating insights about the history of Marxist thinking that we cannot dismiss. In fact, I would go so far as to say that, despite *The Poverty of Theory* being mostly chaffe when it comes to critique of Althusser, the wheat contained in its pages is definitive when telling the history of the reproduction-resistance dichotomy in critical education. Specifically, Thompson’s history of the difference between structural and voluntarist marxisms in the 20th century, and his outright preference for the latter over the former, goes most of the way towards explaining why Apple and Giroux dichotomized reproduction from resistance through their understanding of Althusser.

The insight comes when Thompson explains the historical origins of Althusser’s ravished idealism, claiming that the main issue is actually in Althusser’s “static structuralism.” Thompson argues that Althusser gets this static structuralism from a strain present in Marx’s own thinking. What Thompson finds lacking in Marx is a tendency towards theory. This makes sense, as much of Thompson’s book is about theory’s poverty generally speaking and the comparative strength of historical analysis when it comes to thinking about ending capitalism. Thus, to Thompson, the extent to which Marx is anti-historical is the extent to which he prefers a static theory over actual, real, lived, experiential and agentic history. Thompson tells us we should appreciate that part of Marx while passing over the structural part of Marx:

When capital and its relations are seen as a structure, in a given moment of capital’s forms, then this structure has a categorical stasis: that is, it can allow for no impingement of any influence from any other region (any region not allowed for in

the terms and discourse of this discipline) which could modify its relations, for this would threaten the integrity and fixity of the categories themselves. (p. 83)

He says Marx falls for this “trap of Political Economy” in the *Grundrisse*, for instance, but does not fall for it elsewhere in his writing. Let us follow Thompson’s history using this distinction between the theoretical and historical Marx. Marxism, he says, had an evolutionist concept before and after World War I. Historical Marxism was “infiltrated by the vocabulary (and even premises) of economic and technical ‘progress’” (p. 97), a kind of static structuralism. The October Revolution in Russia gave this evolutionist concept “a more utopian incarnation...in the form of a prettified and wholly fictional projection of ‘the Soviet Union’” which “was offered as an emblem of [communists’] own future history” (p. 97). Yet the subsequent period, specifically “the decade, 1936-1946” slowed and even reversed this evolutionism. “Marxism, in the decisive emergencies of Fascist insurgence and of the Second World War, began to acquire the accents of voluntarism.” Marxist vocabulary took on “more of the active verbs of agency, choice, individual initiative, resistance, heroism, and sacrifice” (p. 97). The emergency of fascism called Marxism to adopt such thinking and language. Indeed, “[v]ictory in those emergencies no longer seemed to be in the course of ‘evolution’: far from it” (p. 97). Thompson himself came of age in this voluntarist moment and, he says, he ultimately prefers its discourse.

I cannot disclaim the fact that my own vocabulary and sensibility was marked by this disgraceful formative moment. Even now I must hold myself steady as I feel myself revert to the poetry of voluntarism. It is a sad confession, but I prefer it even today to the ‘scientific’ vocabulary of structuralism. (p. 98)

The passage is illuminating. To Thompson (like Althusser actually!), Marxisms and Marxists emerge in response to historical conditions. These are what Althusser would call problematics. Thompson goes further to say that there is a trap-problematic in Marx’s own thinking that is too abstract and focuses too much on the social organism and its structure. Thompson calls this problematic the “*Grundrisse* face of Marx.” After World War Two, structuralism emerged when Marxists preferred it as a concept and discourse, compared to the other voluntaristic notions of agency, choice, and sacrifice called forth by fascism’s rise. Structuralism is thus a kind of reaction.

Given his own preference for the voluntaristic style, we can understand Thompson’s critique of structure – maybe his critique of Althusser as a whole – as the friction between two problematics of Marxism encountering one another, each emerging out of a different period of history. Thompson’s sad attachment to the poetic warmth of voluntarism clashes with Althusser’s colder structure. (He seizes on Althusser’s sentences, for example, when critiquing the theory of interpellation, taking sentence construction for conceptual content: “[n]otice, once again, the passive, transitive form, the reification of agency by the Other” (p. 235). You can spot where Giroux gets that formulation here as well.) This critique of style goes some distance in explaining the largely rhetorical disagreements with Althusser in the line of critique. Many of the critics do not like the functionalist *sound* of the language, the deterministic *feeling* of the account, the *sense* of abstraction rather than the concepts themselves.

There is a kind of melancholic disappointment in Thompson as he writes that his beloved “[v]oluntarism crashed against the wall of the Cold War” (p. 99). Comfortable in his home discipline, Thompson even sounds sympathetic to structuralists given their historical context, since “[i]n the West our heads were thrown against the windscreen of capitalist society; and that screen

felt like— *a structure*” (p. 99). Painting in appealingly broad strokes, he claims that “[f]or more than two decades each impulse towards independent forward movement... (Hungary 1956, Prague 1968, Chile 1973) has been suppressed with a brutality which has confirmed the paradigm of structural stasis” (p. 99). Structuralist stasis is therefore “Cold War stasis” writ theoretical (p. 100) to Thompson. This is why structuralism, borrowed as it is from “sociology, linguistics, and anthropology” appeals to Marxists during that moment. The agentic voluntarism of the antifascist days could not withstand the intrepidly cold screen of capitalist society in the Cold War, making the static-structural “*Grundrisse* face of Marx” appealing to a new generation of Marxists. Thompson is sad and angry about that dynamic.

Despite the affective expression here, which, along with the history, is very compelling, Thompson wants us to reach a rational conclusion about Althusser’s theory, which is much less compelling. Thompson tells us that Althusser’s theory is a paradigm case of this structuralist-theoretical mistake, whose style and moment Thompson abhors, and, therefore, is incorrect and wrong and bad, etc. Thompson’s abhorrence is something of a world-historically melancholic preference for a Marxism on its way out. Thompson is mad and sad, and tells a good history of that anger and sadness, which he thinks is sufficient for a case against Althusser. In any case, by way of some reflection, Thompson’s melancholic preference cobbles together, amplifies, and gives a kind of substance to the critiques from agency, functionalism, determinism, and even Stalinism we have seen up till point (Thompson reiterates Callinicos’s claims regarding Althusser’s Stalinism). Thompson deftly combines, affirms, and amplifies these ideas— despite their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Thompson’s book was a shot heard around the Marxist world and influenced later critics in education, like Raewyn Connell (1979) in Australia and Paul Willis (1981) in the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, both crucial voices in left sociology of education. While Connell would preserve the more careful interpretive project of Hirst and Callinicos— giving Althusser his due credit for the importance of his work and engaging with his writing, while also taking him down— Willis would tend more towards Thompson’s style of pyrotechnic rejection (which to some degree is Rancière’s as well), denouncing the theory as dangerous nonsense with provocative but less-than-rigorous rhetoric.

Conclusion

Zooming out, I have looked at Apple and Giroux’s foundational arguments dichotomizing reproduction from resistance and the relative importance of their view of Althusser in crafting that distinction. I have traced the lineage of their interpretation of Althusser through their citations, looking at basic arguments made by Rancière, Hirst, Erben and Gleeson, Callinicos and Thompson. What looked like an indecisive mixture of reverence and repulsion for Althusser in Apple and Giroux’s writing is actually a residue of the interpretations they had consulted when crafting critical education as a tradition. I find the repulsion running through Rancière and Erben and Gleeson, while the exegetical reverence runs through Callinicos and Hirst (though the latter are repulsed in their own ways). Obviously thinking Althusser was important enough to devote an entire book to denouncing, Thompson expresses the repulsion in an epic form that rippled through the English-speaking Marxist world. Yet the plain fact that so great a figure as Thompson felt compelled to devote an entire book to Althusser betrays a kind of reverence amidst the repulsion. These critics must respond to Althusser’s theory, as it dissolves human agency in static structure, his functionalist-Stalinist claims are unworthy of existence. We can see where Apple and Giroux get some of the substance of their dichotomy between reproduction and resistance in this case.

My conclusions are that (1) Apple and Giroux's interpretations of Althusser are an important ingredient in the foundational dichotomy between reproduction and resistance in critical education; and (2) these interpretations were influenced by a specific set of texts coming mostly out of England in the 1970s. The implication of these conclusions, taken together, is that if there were something amiss in the latter group of texts, then something would have to be amiss with Apple and Giroux's reading of Althusser. Further, if something were amiss with this reading, then a crack would emerge in the foundations of critical education, built as it is upon the dichotomy between reproduction and resistance.

I can report that each of the source interpretations mentioned in the preceding analysis leaves much to be desired. Rancière's points were never intended as explicit argumentation, but rather, as he says in his own words, they are provocations. Erben and Gleeson merely formalize and repeat Rancière's provocations. Hirst's arguments, while valid, do not hold up well under scrutiny. Generality is a feature of any theory of political economy, even his own. Callinicos's suggestion about Althusser's Stalinism—that it is a feature of Althusser's position—is lacking. While Althusser may have stayed in a political party that refused to reject Stalin, he himself constantly rejected Stalin and Stalinism. His theory is known as—and in my estimation actually is—the foremost destalinization of Marxist theory. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Trotskyism, Callinicos had a partisan interest in making these claims. None of these texts are a definitive nail in the coffin for Althusser's theory, though of course they raise important questions.

Finally, Thompson's *Poverty of Theory* should not be taken too seriously, at least as an argument against Althusser. The context around this denunciation is important to note here. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ambitious Marxist historian Perry Anderson took over the editorship of one of England's flagship socialist journals *New Left Review*. The shift in editorial control signified a shift in the British left, a rising new generation of scholar-activists. Thompson was part of an older generation with a different vision and experience. Along with others disagreeing with the new turn in *NLR*'s editorial control, he founded the *Socialist Register*. Anderson at that time revered Althusser's thinking and scholars in other fields recognize that Thompson's critique in *Poverty* is aimed at undermining Anderson as much, if not more than, Althusser (Anderson 2016; "Casualties of History," 2020).

At its best, *Poverty* is a history of Marxism and an emphatic expression of various intellectual, political, and disciplinary preferences by a celebrity in his waning days. At its worst, the book is an insulting and capricious essay expressing that celebrity's apostatic anger as the winds change. Dorothy Thompson writes in the Preface that the book stands out in Thompson's work as not his best. She says it was never meant as an argument, that it was a product of the particular political moment in which it was written. (Thompson himself, in a strange postscript to the essay, disclaims the book as lacking argument and evidence.) Dorothy Thompson expresses a clear lack of confidence in the idea of publishing it at all, much less its seriousness as a contribution to debates. Again, at most, we can use Thompson's preference for the voluntaristic problematic of the 1930s—and his overall influence—to explain why reproduction gets dichotomized from reproduction. But the explanation is not a justification. Far from it.

In general, it is unclear whether Althusser's theory is functionalist, leads to the dissolution of individual action or agency, or is hand in glove with Stalinism. These might be warranted associations or questions to ask of the theory. None of the sources from which Apple and Giroux drew their interpretations of Althusser settle the question. Many if not all of them leave much to be desired.

Further none of the source interpretations, or those they influenced, engage with the robust tradition of researchers who took up Althusser's theory and applied it to great effect in education and many other humanities and social science fields. Althusser's theory was taken up, applied, and advanced by a long line of diverse and influential scholars, whose work either explicitly focuses on education or has important implications for it. Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet's book-length application of Althusser's theory to France's school system *L'Ecole Capitaliste en France* (1971) was never translated into English, for example. The text was published three years before Bowles and Gintis's similarly titled book about US schools and deserves a closer reading. Stuart Hall's (1985, 1996, 2001) influence on Zeus Leonardo's (2009) research on race, whiteness, and education is another tradition to follow in this regard, as well as marxist-feminist analyses of education throughout the 1980s and 1990s such as those advanced by Michele Barrett (2014), Rosemary Deem (2012), Madeleine Arnot (1982), Linda Valli (1986), and Anne-Marie Wolpe (1978, 1996). Nor do they consider the historiographies and interpretations completed by scholars like William S. Lewis (2005), Gregory Elliott (2006) and Warren Montag (2002, 2013), whose readings of Althusser come to quite different conclusions than the line of critique laid out here.

In sum, I find that the source critiques of Althusser are flawed and far from definitive interpretations. The mixture of unsubstantiated provocation, missing steps in reasoning, and blustery partisanship combines with a hard-to-miss reverence for Althusser's thinking, repulsed though it may have been. Apple and Giroux cited these sources in their broader project to separate critical education from neo-marxism through a rejection of social reproduction, fashioning a dichotomy between reproduction and resistance that relied upon these flawed premises when it comes to Althusser. Apple and Giroux's interpretations of Althusser are subject to the flaws of those whom they cited, which is evident in the ambiguities of their engagements with Althusser. Given their reliance on these earlier critiques for rendering the foundational dichotomy between reproduction and resistance in critical education, these flaws redound to the heart of the field itself.

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