

International Journal of Education Through Art
Volume 19 Number 2

© 2023 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00130_1

Received 12 November 2021; Accepted 24 March 2022

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Art, education and the actuality of revolution: Althusser's aesthetic materialism

ABSTRACT

This article contributes to research on materialism, art and education by introducing the aesthetic, political and pedagogical theories of Louis Althusser. It begins by situating the argument within the contemporary conjuncture of the global class struggle, particularly in the West, which is defined by an ideological break with the Marxist tradition in which the actuality of revolution is denied. Such a conjuncture demands not only scientific critique and persuasion but also, more importantly, an aesthetic experience in the possibility of a revolutionary transformation of society. Analysing Althusser's writings on aesthetics and politics and applying this analysis to Althusser's own writing, it develops a theory of an aesthetic pedagogical encounter through which we can experience the actuality of revolution and the materiality of thought itself.

KEYWORDS

global class struggle
temporality
communism
Marxism
pedagogy
Marxist reading
epistemology
commodity fetishism

Art and education are increasingly turning to new materialism to give the 'stuff' of art and education its due. This new field has motivated educational philosophers and art educators to consider forms of knowledge production, pedagogies of stuff and the research methodologies that are required for articulating such pedagogies and knowledge. Dorota Golańska and Anna Katarzyna

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Kronenberg, for example, turn to new materialism to argue that ‘thought might take various forms and follow different, often enmeshing trajectories’ (2020: 304), as they show how geo-aesthetics overcomes any hierarchies or binaries between humans and non-humans and thought and flesh. Elizabeth Garber likewise engages new materialism to focus on ‘the in-between’ of ‘objects, materials, language and social aspects of our lives’ (2019: 10). In a recent article, Emily Jean Hood and Tyson E. Lewis advance one research method that resonates with the vibrancy of such an in-between – or a ‘more-than-human’ materiality – which ‘is a description of all material things, objects and stuff, while also hinting at how such materiality is interconnected (human and non-human alike)’ (2021: 224). Hood and Lewis advance a conception of art ‘as a *thin(g)king* space or a zone of contact where the foreign language of things breaks through to modify human perceptual grasping’ (2021: 224, original emphasis).

Thin(g)king is a research methodology through which knowledge is produced by the encounters between different material objects and that ‘signals a moment of contamination in cognitive-perceptual circuitry by the intrusion of a vibrant power that is not its own’ (Hood and Lewis 2021: 229). Such a methodology is attentive to the expressive ruptures within and between humans and other material objects. This allows us, for example, to see and hear the more-than-human encounters between a human artist as she searches for items at second-hand stores. The artist was called to certain materials and ‘at times she made “ooohing” sounds’, which resonated subtly yet ‘were varied in pitch and length’ as ‘the more energy an object emitted, the stronger the noise seemed to be, meaning the duration of the ooh would be longer, and the volume louder’ (2021: 230). In this moment, the language is not of the human or the object but between the two: ‘Neither inside nor outside of language, oohing and ahing are transversal modes of communication’ (2021: 230). Both are utterances that do not communicate determinate knowledge but express the indeterminacy of the thought of the ‘in-between’.

This article builds on Hood and Lewis’s work by introducing the aesthetic, political and pedagogical theories of Louis Althusser, analysing Althusser’s work on aesthetics and politics and applying that analysis to Althusser’s own writing. I argue that more-than-human materiality has not just an aesthetic and educational function but – if we situate it within the current conjuncture of the international communist movement – a political one as well. This analysis demonstrates that, while new materialism considers social context, it does not adequately perceive the *production* of that context. Doing so helps locate materialist aesthetics within the social structures that determine our knowledge, thought and experience of humans and other objects. The aesthetic materialist pedagogy articulated in what follows is meant to mobilize art education research for the class struggle by helping us sense the actuality of revolution.

ALTHUSSER AND THE CURRENT CONJUNCTURE OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

One of the central organizing concepts in Althusser’s work is the insistence that philosophy is always ‘part of the conjuncture in which it intervenes: it exists within this conjuncture, it exists within the “Whole” [i.e. the political, ideological and theoretical]’ (2011: 104). Philosophy is necessarily an intervention in the class struggle in a particular context and concrete situation. Thus,

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while scholars have noted the expanding number of publications attending to Althusser's work over the past decade or so (e.g. Balibar 2015), we can only appreciate this resurgent interest by inquiring into the conjuncture animating it. This is a political and ideological conjuncture that is both unique and daunting.

As communist organizer and theorist Brian Becker notes, 'the greatest danger to a revolutionary process is not the experience of a political downturn, such as we have experienced during the past decades' (2019: 339). In fact, in the history of the international movements of the exploited and oppressed, setbacks are more common than advances, with victories being the exception to the more common experience of defeats. The current conjuncture of the workers' movement is remarkable and formidable because the problem facing the movement today is 'that the theory of revolutionary Marxism and the entire vision of workers' power has been discredited and isolated from the people's struggles' (2019: 340). While previous defeats in the class struggle brought about a decrease in practical political activity, they did not hinder the continuation and development of revolutionary theory. For example, although the burgeoning workers' movement in Europe retracted after the failures of the 1848–49 bourgeois revolutions across the continent, the class struggle made incredible theoretical advancements, including the publication of the first volume of Marx's *Capital*. After the overthrow and dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc socialist states, however, Marxism was seriously discredited in the international struggles of working and oppressed peoples, particularly in the United States and other parts of the West where revolutionary organizations never held state power. Previous revolutionary movements and governments were defeated or repressed by their class enemies through serious political struggle. The breakup of the Soviet Union and, by consequence, the international communist movement happened without any real struggle 'because the Soviet Union was defeated and destroyed by sectors within the Communist Party', which means this particular 'defeat offers no lasting legacy for inspiration' (Becker 2019: 341). As a result, Becker writes:

The organizational lessons from previous generations of struggle have been suppressed. If some people have criticized the idealism of the 1960s and 1970s generation – for prematurely believing that revolution was imminent – today's problem is the opposite and far more challenging: the assumption that socialist revolution will never happen, and the masses will always be oppressed.

(2019: 341)

While recently, across much of the globe, the working and oppressed have increased our practical political activity, Marxist theory is no longer the guiding thread in many movements, especially those in the United States and the West. In the past two decades, with the movement against the Iraq war, Occupy Wall Street, the Movement for Black Lives and the Bernie Sanders phenomenon (among others), socialism – but not quite Marxist theory – is once again becoming ascendant. The practical, political and ideological conjuncture is shifting in such a way that could overcome the interruption in the ideological durability of the people's struggles. In this article, I am interested in what education through art can contribute to this project.

There are two aspects of Becker's analysis that I find particularly significant. The first is that Becker ends by explicitly uniting the practical, political and

organizational conjuncture. This unity is precisely what Althusser contended Lenin's famous question, 'What is to be done?' affirmed: '[T]he primacy of the political line over the party, and the construction and organization of the party *as a function of the political line*' (2020: 1, original emphasis). The second is that these three aspects of the conjuncture are united through what I perceive as an implicit aesthetic and educational dimension of the actuality of revolution.

To insist on the actuality of revolution is not to claim that revolution is guaranteed or inevitable; it is not an empirical claim but an organizing theory, one that is central to Marxism (Lukács 2009). As Jodi Dean explains, the power of this organizing principle 'comes from *anticipation*, the capacity of the future revolution to coordinate the actions that will bring it about' (2017: 129, original emphasis). The actuality of revolution, that is, guides every political, strategic and tactical decision facing revolutionary organizations and movements. Crucially, rehabilitating the actuality of revolution is not merely a task of critique, elaboration and persuasion, because political struggle requires 'attacking the collective sensorium that produces and naturalizes an entire universe of experience that *makes sense* for all of those participating in it' (Ponce de León and Rockhill 2020: 109, original emphasis). Marxist aesthetic pedagogy should help people sense the actuality of revolution, providing a perceptual experience of the revolutionary alternative that is immanent in the present. Thus, the current conjuncture of the class struggle demands the production of political, theoretical and ideological activities as well as aesthetic and pedagogical practices. Restoring the break in ideological continuity requires explicit attention to not only aesthetic and pedagogical questions but also those questions as they relate to the current conjuncture of the class struggle. Perhaps, then, Étienne Balibar's surprise at the 'apparently disproportionate' attention paid to 'Althusser's writing about *art*' (2015: 2, original emphasis) is due to the disconnection between aesthetics and the current conjuncture in this reinvigorated research.

READING ALTHUSSER READING ALTHUSSER

In his opening contribution to *Reading Capital*, Althusser articulates the book's conjuncture 'by the most dramatic and difficult trial of all, the discovery of and training in the meaning of the "simplest" acts of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading' (2009a: 15–16). In other words, in the 1960s, Althusser felt it necessary for the Marxist movement to theorize and enact new elementary pedagogical practices (Ford 2022). Althusser notes that Marx is above all 'a reader who reads to us; and out loud', as Marx 'felt the need to fill out his text by reading out loud [...] for reasons deeply rooted in the theoretical conditions of his work of discovery' (2009a: 18, original emphasis). This first kind of reading is when 'Marx reads his predecessor's discourse (Smith's for instance) through his own discourse. The result of this reading through a grid [...] is merely a summary of concordances and discordances, the balances of what Smith discovered and what he missed' (Althusser 2009a: 19). To remain here is to stay trapped in 'the mirror myth of knowledge as the vision of a given object or the reading of an established text, neither of which is ever anything but transparency itself' (Althusser 2009a: 19). According to this kind of reading, the truth of an object is within the object and is obtained just like 'gold is *extracted* (or abstracted, i.e., separated) from the dross of earth and sand in which it is held and contained' (Althusser 2009a: 38, original emphasis; Backer 2019). Reading in this form distinguishes between the essential and the inessential,

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the unsaid and the said: the essence is hidden and we discover or grasp it in the 'most literal sense: removing the covering, as the husk is removed from the nut' (Althusser 2009a: 39).

The limitations of this kind of reading lead Althusser to a second kind of reading, which we could call a Marxist form of sensing text. This is a reading that focuses not on sights and oversights but on the connections or flows between the visible and the invisible. Marxist reading therefore concerns the possibility of sight, in which 'non-vision is therefore inside vision, it is a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision' (Althusser 2009a: 22). Hence, we can discover a new conception of knowledge. Against immediate and essential reading where the text mirrors knowledge, we have a 'real transformation of the means of production of knowledge' (Althusser 2009a: 29). Knowledge is something that is actively produced through reading and writing. We move from the production of knowledge as a product to the process of the production of knowledge, which in turn means that knowledge is always unfinished and uncertain, is always in the midst of thought.

Importantly, the reading and writing of *Reading Capital* produces both the product of knowledge and the process of thought. Althusser is clear that reading-writing-knowledge are in constant movement; there is only re-reading and rewriting. It is not insignificant, after all, that Althusser introduces the essay by discussing the form of the book, noting that it is a series of lecture notes from a class in 1965 that bear traces of their conjuncture 'in their construction, their rhythm, their didactic or oral style, but also and above all in their discrepancies, the repetitions, hesitations and uncertain steps in their investigations' (2009a: 13). Rather than edit these notes to create the (illusion) of a final work, they take the risk of 'present[ing] them for what they are: precisely, incomplete texts, the mere beginnings of a *reading*' (Althusser 2009a: 13, original emphasis). The text exists only to be re-read and rewritten.

These two forms of reading and their respective conceptions of knowledge are pedagogical, political and aesthetic at the same time. Recalling his introductory remarks, Althusser clearly felt in the 1960s that it was necessary for his class to theorize and enact new elementary pedagogical practices. Lewis shows that in symptomatic reading 'pedagogy is not simply the relay of information but rather the facilitation of the proper relationship to (revolutionary) knowledge', which means that 'Marxism must take purchase not simply in the synthesis of information but in the very cognitive senses through which our education takes place' (2005: 147). The Marxist movement needs pedagogy, the theorization of new practices of encountering the raw materials of education.

The two forms of reading are political because they turn on different modes of knowledge production. The first reading remains within the capitalist mode of knowledge, in which knowledge is defined by accuracy and transparency and presented as a finalized product. The second form of reading exposes us to the communist mode of knowledge, in which knowledge is a social process that remains opaque (Ford 2020). What is known as 'symptomatic reading' is merely 'a *first* reading [...] merely the first strokes in a drawing which can as yet be no more than a sketch' (Althusser 2009a: 26, original emphasis). Althusser's 'symptomatic meaning ensures that meaning is produced, in process, but never stable or unitary' and, moreover, that 'misunderstanding and misrecognition belong to the process as much as or more than their opposites' (Davis 2001: 304). Marxist reading produces knowledge and at the same time produces a dislocation between the knowledge of the object and the object itself. There is no final transparency and no final audible

articulation of any 'truth' because Marxist reading produces another internal abyss within the discourse and knowledge itself.

In what ways is this form of reading aesthetic? In another one of Lewis's takes on Althusser's pedagogy, he presents educational production as a process composed of raw materials that are transformed through 'a redistribution of these things (a work on and through perceptual transformation)' that results in the product of 'a subjectivity without a subject (dis-identification with all assigned roles)' (2012: 37). In sum, then, 'education is an "encounter" between subjects in raw materials in such a way as to introduce a radical destabilization of the self and its perceptual field' (Lewis 2012: 37). In the rest of this article, I flesh out the connection between Althusser's articulation of the aesthetic, political and pedagogical elements of the class struggle by turning to his writing on art.

THOUGHT AND THE PEDAGOGICAL AESTHETICS OF CLASS STRUGGLE

In a short letter to André Daspre, Althusser makes some incomplete yet provocative comments about the role of aesthetics in the class struggle. Referring to an article that helps Althusser distinguish between science and aesthetics, he tells Daspre that art 'does not replace knowledge (in the modern sense: scientific knowledge), but what it gives us does nevertheless maintain a certain *specific relationship* with knowledge' (Althusser 2001: 152, original emphasis). This is an aesthetic education in that it allows us to '*see, perceive* (but not *know*) something which alludes to reality' (2001: 152, original emphasis). Whereas science produces knowledge, even if that knowledge is opaque and always in process, then art produces the affective experience of knowledge in the making, or the immersion in the disjuncture of thought in which there is a radical disjointedness between existing, possible and impossible knowledge.

Althusser's essay on Carlo Bertolazzi's play *El Nost Milan* provides an illustration of the aesthetic and pedagogical capacities for literally sensing the actuality of revolution. Structured around two contradictory temporalities, each of the play's three acts begins with the empty and ahistorical time of capital. In the first act, for example, there are 'a good thirty characters who come and go in this empty space, waiting for who knows what, for something to happen [...] in their lives, in which nothing happens' (Althusser 2005: 131–32). This is the ideological (chronological) time of capitalism, 'a stationary time in which nothing resembling History can yet happen, an empty time, accepted as empty' (Althusser 2005: 136). Yet in the act's final moments, 'in a flash a "story" is sketched out, the image of destiny' as a young girl, Nina watches a clown's performance through a circus tent (Althusser 2005: 132). 'For one moment', Althusser recalls, 'time is in suspense' (2005: 132). The promise of a child's wonder conflicts with the danger of the child's life, as we see Togasso, the town pimp with a watchful eye on Nina. This suspension of temporality is thus an interruption that jars the scene and ruptures the ahistorical time of capital and makes us feel the possibility of history.

In each act, the two temporalities coincide. While there is 'the coexistence of a long, slowly-passing, empty time and a lightening-short, full time', there is 'no *explicit* relationship' between them (Althusser 2005: 134, original emphasis). The political force of the play 'is constituted precisely by the absence of relations' (Althusser 2005: 135). The reason we can feel the disordering of

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our temporal perception is precisely because the first ahistorical time is felt through the absent relation it maintains to the dialectical time of the history. This is an aesthetic pedagogy through which we feel the possibility of another world – and time – present in our own; an educational encounter generated by the internal organization of the play, a rupturing event in the temporal organization of the play itself that ‘gives us precisely a direct perception of this time’ (Althusser 2005: 136) during which struggle – or History – happens. We sense the possibility of a revolutionary rupture because we experience the incommensurable and coexisting temporalities and possibilities of our time through an internal distance within the play’s architecture.

In the same essay, Althusser writes that Brecht’s revolution in theatre consists in his rejection of themes, meanings and didactic lessons in favour of the staging of a relation through ‘abstract structural elements’ (2005: 145), a staging that occurs not through character development or plot lines but through ‘the dynamic of the latent structure’ (2005: 147). The dynamic is latent because it cannot be explicitly articulated or brought to consciousness and is ‘therefore visible to the spectator in the mode of a perception which is not given, but has to be discerned’ (Althusser 2005: 146) through the alienation effect performed through the structure of the play. Instead of identifying with or recognizing ourselves in the actors or with the hero or any other character, the play’s configuration produces a distance between our ideological consciousness and the possibility of another kind of consciousness, helping us read the invisible within the visible.

This is like the disjuncture Althusser experiences in the works of abstract painter Leonardo Cremonini, which perform a Marxist reading of society as ‘his whole strength as a figurative painter lies in the fact that he does not “paint” objects [...] nor “places” [...] nor “times” [...] nor “moments”, but that he “paints” the *relations* which bind the objects, places and times’ (Althusser 2001: 157–58, original emphasis). These relations are abstract because they cannot properly be known or empirically verified. ‘I do not mean – it would be *meaningless*’, Althusser tells us, to say ‘that it is possible to “paint” “living conditions”, to paint social relations, to paint the relations of production or the forms of the class struggle in a given society’ (Althusser 2001: 162, original emphasis). It is possible, however, ‘to “paint” visible connections that depict by their disposition the *determinate absence* which governs them’ (Althusser 2001: 162, original emphasis). This is what enables Althusser to say that Cremonini ‘never “painted” anything but the absences in these presences’ (2001: 159). We cannot know the class struggle or the mode of production because we cannot see the abstract relations that govern them. We can only perceive the invisible within the visible, sensing these abstractions through their heterogeneity and through the disjointed juxtaposition of presences and absences.

As Balibar has it, this

dissociation of times, experiences, and imaginaries, which is not pedagogically *explained* [...] but is *inherent* in the antithetic visions [...] is communicated to the audience almost physically by virtue of the discrepancy of their respective rhythms and the heterogeneity of their actions.

(2015: 6, original emphasis)

The first (and minor) thing we need to do here to get a sense of the pedagogical aesthetics of the class struggle is to correct Balibar’s equation of pedagogy

with explication. The second thing we need to do is to draw out the educational shift from epistemology to ontology or, more to the point of this article, from knowledge to thought.

This is a shift from exchange value to use value, from product to process. Knowing involves a determinate judgement that occurs when the given data come under the mind's order and comprehension, even if that ordering is only temporary, the raw materials for another ordering. Thinking, by contrast, is an exposure to the process of knowledge production itself, which takes place beyond the subject's mental capacities. Thought is what ruptures the ability to know and enables us to thin(g)k. The chronical ahistorical time of capitalism in *El Nost Milan* is a time that we cannot know but can perceive. Because nothing happens, we can rest in the illusion that we can understand the characters, their lives, context and relations. Yet the historical time of suspension ruptures that illusion and exposes us to the outside of knowledge, to our inability to know, to thin(g)king. In the play, this happens temporally; in the paintings, it happens spatially.

The move from knowledge to thought is important because the flexibility of capitalism allows it to accommodate and profit from oppositional knowledge (Ford 2021). If difference is articulated and presented as knowledge, capital can profitably incorporate it, which not only blunts its oppositional force but also provides more energy for capital's commodification. Even communist science, then, is both antagonistic and subjectable to capital, which is why it is so significant that, for Althusser, art is not a form of scientific knowledge. As he formulated it in his letter to Daspre, historical materialists produce 'scientific concepts' of art 'in order to *know* it, and to give it its due', yet by knowing it, we neither 'pass art silently by nor sacrifice it to science' (Althusser 2001: 155, original emphasis). In other words, we let the aesthetic remain a pedagogical and political force, which comes precisely from 'making visible, but not making known' (Toscano 2014: 1232). When we encounter the text of *Reading Capital* aesthetically, as Althusser urges us to do through the form and content of his writing, we do not *know* it but *thin(g)*k it.

ABSTRACTION, POLITICAL ECONOMY AND MATTER

Rejecting both materialism and idealism, Marx tried to rupture the dichotomy between matter and thought to let the force of production materialize itself in what Alberto Toscano designates with the 'silently borrowed' term 'materialism without matter' (2014: 1222). Materialism without matter is a theory opposed to new materialist approaches in which 'the question of the relationship between social being and forms of thought, or between capitalism and cognition, remains obscure' and that does not account for its 'place in the understanding and critique of capitalism as a system of abstract domination' (Toscano 2014: 1226). For Marx, capitalism is a system in which 'individuals come into connection with one another only in determined ways', which means that under this mode of production 'individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on one another' (1993: 164, original emphasis). Such abstractions are 'nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master' (Marx 1993: 164).

It is notable that this definition of capital appears early in the chapter on money in the *Grundrisse*, because money is precisely a real abstraction that governs subjectivity and social relations and, we might add, relations between

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humans and other matter. Abstraction is cognitive and sensorial. Money is the abstract representation of a real abstraction, value. Money dissolves or disrupts the relations in which it intervenes because 'it is indifferent to its particularity, and takes on every form which serves the purpose' so that 'where money is not itself the community [...] it must dissolve the community' (Marx 1993: 224). Money (in the capitalist mode of production) makes qualitatively distinct things (e.g. concrete labour power) commensurable and exchangeable. Money, on this reading, is not merely an economic representation of value but a relation that 'structures a socially transcendental aesthetic, which is not solely a matter of commensurability [...] but also that of a practical arrest of time and evacuation of space' (Toscano 2014: 1229). Capitalist abstraction, as matter without matter that is accorded matter, is political and aesthetic.

We are now in a better position to return to the 'more than human materiality' at the basis of Hood and Lewis's methodology and to find it immanent in the conjunctural elements of politics, aesthetics and pedagogy. In the earlier discussion of Cremonini, I overlooked one key aspect of Althusser's essay. The abstractions Cremonini paints are the abstract relations 'between "men" and their "things", or rather, to give the term its stronger sense, between "things" and *their* "men"' (Althusser 2001: 158, original emphasis). What is Althusser saying except that this aesthetic experience makes it possible to research, in the words of Hood and Lewis, 'the more-than-human assemblages that make up a specific context' (2021: 227)?

There are two qualifications to make with Hood and Lewis's argument. First, it is neither the human nor the relations between and amongst human and other material objects that constitute the setting of such research. It is instead '*an authorless theatre*' that 'is simultaneously its own stage, its own script, its own actors' and whose 'spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by the constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be' (Althusser 2009b: 213, original emphasis). This is the experience of the actuality of revolution, the possibility of history.

Second, we can consider Hood and Lewis's important discussion of how the turn to new materialism is also a return to not only approaches to the world that centre and account for its materiality but also to the historical materialism of the international communist movement. Their analysis of the matter of historical materialism and the political implications that follow, however, needs a slight correction. Hood and Lewis argue that in Marx's *Capital* 'the appearance of vibrant matter is an illusion generated by capitalism masking the real origins of value' (2021: 225). They give the example of a commodity in a grocery store, in which we cannot see the socially necessary labour time required for its production as it 'spontaneously appears as if on its own accord', which means that 'arguing for the power of things would thus play into the hands of capitalist ideology, and therefore be a bad abstraction' (Hood and Lewis 2021: 225). Here, they are referring to the famous section on the fetishism of commodities, in which 'material relations between persons' appear as 'social relations between things' (Marx 1967: 78). As Althusser insists, however, Marx's critique in this section targets 'the fact that it is *apparent*: the relations between men appear to them to be relations between things' (2006: 128, original emphasis). The problem is not that under capitalism the relationship is distorted or mystified but that it is visible and apparent while the real abstractions that are social relations are necessarily invisible.

Indeed, nowhere in the section on commodity fetishism does Marx call for or say that under communism things will not appear as such. The visibility of economic relations 'is as much a part of the reality of social relations as is the other appearance, that of the immediacy and transparency of the relations between men and "their things" or "their products"' (Althusser 2006: 128). Is not the last formulation a reiteration of what Althusser finds so revolutionary – and, I would add, aesthetically materialistic – about Cremonini's paintings? Marx does not want to reveal the human labour behind things but rather wants to help us, by way of religious, literary and economic dramaturgy, come to thin(g)k and feel the real abstractions that govern us, which is another way of sensing how the human is always more-than-human. This facilitates precisely what Hood and Lewis critique in Marxism: Marx does see 'the effects of the fetishization of commodities as exploitative of the agentic powers that adhere to material realities beyond the human' (2021: 225).

ART, EDUCATION AND OUR CURRENT CONJUNCTURE

The question of Marxism is the question of what is to be done, which means 'that orientation, or the political line, *comes before* organization' and that the 'orientation (the line) and organization (the party) *depend* on the workers' and the people's class struggle' (Althusser 2020: 1–2, original emphasis). As such, 'everything depends on the "concrete analysis of the concrete situation" of the current tendency of the workers' and people's class struggle in its antagonism to the bourgeois class struggle' (Althusser 2020: 2). No Althusserian theory of aesthetics and pedagogy exists without a consideration of the current conjuncture.

As I showed with Becker's help at the beginning of this article, the conjuncture of the Marxist movement – in the United States and the West in particular – is one in which the balance of forces between the exploiters and exploited, the oppressors and oppressed, is shifting towards the latter, although the former is still dominant. The temporality of our current conjuncture, in which the class struggle is debilitated by the incredulity of the actuality of revolution (or the impossibility of History), is exactly the temporality of the ahistorical time in *El Nost Milan*. While we cannot import an artistic event from another time into our own and expect it to have the same effect, it is clear that we need a rupture within temporalities that guide social movements insofar as they do not believe in – or do not base themselves on – the actuality of revolution. Marxist pedagogy is oriented towards the disjunctural encounter between subjects and objects, or between humans and their things (like this text), or between things and their humans.

These encounters are contingent, unplanned, uncontrollable and opaque. Any knowledge generated will only be retroactively assigned because the encounter is not guided by any teleology or reason. Yet the Marxist teacher does not merely arrange for encounters: they arrange for encounters that might advance the class struggle as we build for revolution. By introducing 'more-than-human' matter into art education, Hood and Lewis unconsciously mark another fundamental aspect of our current conjuncture: our conception of subjectivity and materiality. The aesthetics of Marxist pedagogy must entail 'thin(g)king [...] that is not bound up in a singular material body, but rather happens through the comingling of material bodies' (Hood and Lewis 2021: 229). In other words, the abstraction of the individually bounded thing itself holds the class struggle back, keeping all manner of objects – and

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commodities – trapped within the confines of the capitalist mode of production. This is precisely why the pedagogy of the authorless theatre is so crucial. The pedagogical and political materiality of aesthetics here ‘allows the audience not simply to “suspend its disbelief” but to do so willingly and accept as credible the “role” of the author played, authoritatively, by an actor’ (Montag 2015: 45). This is because the spectator and the actor, like the theatre and the stage itself, are nothing but the effects of the totality of the conjuncture, nothing but the vibrant relations within and between them.

The aesthetics, politics and pedagogies of such vibrations are not ahistorical, universal or transcendent, for what counts as art, politics and education results from skirmishes by various social forces. Rather than embrace them as static, we should approach them as ‘concepts in struggle that vary according to the social setting and historical conjuncture’, so that rather than ‘being general or universal ideas’, we see them as ‘immanent notions in struggle that are operative (or not) in various cultural matrices’ (Rockhill 2014: 179). These vibrations, then, are structured by – and effective within – our current conjuncture. The problem is not that historical materialism is not concerned with the liberation of things from systems of exploitation, but that new materialism is not concerned with the capitalist mode of production (and its current form of imperialism). With this perspective, we can see that the translations of vibrations into new knowledge can serve to reinforce the very system new materialism is seeking to fight against.

The aesthetic pedagogical encounter is political precisely insofar as it decomposes individuality and suspends the rule of abstractions as we experience the materiality of thought itself. Of course, this is just a preliminary sketch, so the reader ‘in turn will be dragged in the wake of this first reading into a second one’ (Althusser 2009a: 14). If the second reading is a Marxist one, it will entail not only the political knowledge to advance the struggle of working and oppressed people but also the aesthetic experience of thin(g)king the actuality of revolution.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Ford, Derek R. (2023), 'Art, education and the actuality of revolution: Althusser's aesthetic materialism', *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 19:2, pp. 261–73, https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00130_1

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