



thresholds 30
microcosms

The Man without Work: Jacques Martin
by Nikki Moore for Thresholds Magazine, MIT PRESS

There are many ways to introduce a man. Yet to introduce Jacques Martin as just a man is both incomplete and inaccurate: as, among other things, he is at once a symbol, a schizophrenic, an absence, a mirror and a past friend of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. Viewed as a friend, Martin's relationships with Foucault and Althusser began at the Ecole Normale Superior in Paris in the 1940's. In this context, Jacques Martin is the little known figure who influenced Foucault and Althusser in their identities, in their choices, in their writing and in their *work*. Viewed strictly from Foucault's work, Martin is an *absence of work*, a critique of Kant's formulation of *work* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, a symbol of the breakdown between madness and reason in the collapse of metaphysics. As Martin the schizophrenic, Martin is the embodiment of that breakdown: from his inability to produce coherent thought to his inability to distinguish rationality from the mad voices in his head. Sharing these mad voices, Louis Althusser introduces Martin as this symbol, this absence and this schizophrenic in a retelling of his own autobiography, in which he takes on memories of Martin's childhood, his sexuality

and his purported illness as his own.¹ Therefore without recourse to proper introduction, in what follows I will nonetheless introduce an important figure in Foucault's critique of Kant's theory of work, an important influence on Louis Althusser's 'road to Marxism' and an absence in the collaboration of three men whose presence attempted to recreate something analogous to that which Martin, in the annihilation of his work and the demolition of himself in suicide, both created and destroyed.

Jacques Martin:

Jacques Martin: to single out his name in print is to give deceptive clarity and singularity to a figure seen only through the lens upon lens of others. Cited in the works of Louis Althusser and silently influencing Foucault's writings on reason and madness, the varying views that create what we know of Martin, are a multiplicity of stilted narratives known to posterity only through silent and written dedications in footnotes, in application forms and in story telling of the sort herein. As in the writing of any story, sacrifices are made for what we consider clarity, continuity and readability. While this is a story of Martin it is also of a story of those sacrifices and those processes of subject making which require decisions, additions and primarily, deletions.

The easiest way to tell this story may be to begin in Jacques Martin's beginnings. His birth, verified by one of the only remaining artifacts of his life, took place on the 18th of May, at 5:30 am, 1922.² Christened Jacques Henri Michel Francois Martin, he was born to Felix Henri and Marguerite Martin in the 14th arrondissement in Paris. As a child of five, Jacques and his younger sister Jacqueline, age 3, were sent to live with their maternal grandparents, the Tonnellots, in Nièvre when their mother, Marguerite, was diagnosed with a supposedly terminal case of Tuberculosis. At age 14, Jacques returned to his early childhood home at 6 Rue Froidevaux in Paris where the death of his grandfather and the stunning recovery of his mother brought him to the Lycée de Henri-IV, where he entered as the class salutarian. After taking first place in the French General Exams³ in 1938, Martin applied for admittance to L'École Normale Supérieure.

This above linear story of birth, childhood and Jacques' first step into adulthood is one gloss on Martin. It is the story of a child who grows from boy to manhood, it is the outline for a life that my lines cannot fill. A second beginning of Jacques Martin begins in his time at L'École Normale, where he would befriend Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. To this day, J. Martin's first official file at the École Normale includes, among other things in his application for admittance, a testament to the validity of his birth certificate, a handwritten curriculum vitae, reference letters from past teachers in testament to his intellectual aptitudes, two testaments as to Martin's legal status and a letter from *La Commission Médicale*. This set of artifacts outlines the second Martin, contiguous with the first in his ability to excel in school, yet different in his shadows, different in his relationships, different in his implications.

Jacques Martin's École documentation includes a verification of his birth certificate, issued by the Mayor of the XIV arrondissement on the March 13th, 1941. His file is filled with reference letters that sing the praises of one surely destined for greatness at the École Normale. In Martin's letters for

¹ For further discussion on the ideas introduced in this introduction see Nikki Moore's MIT S.M.Arch.S thesis: *Between Work: Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser and Jacques Martin*, 2005.

² The documentation I found in J. Martin's application to L'École Normale Supérieure indicates his name as written here, "Jacques Henri Michel François Martin," as does a copy of his birth certificate found therein. In his autobiography of Louis Althusser, Yann Moulrier Boutang writes his name as "Henri, Jacques, Michel Martin." See footnote 1, on page 453 of Moulrier Boutang's *Louis Althusser: Une Biographie*. Bernard Grasset: Paris, 1992.

³ See Moulrier Boutang, Yann. *Louis Althusser: Une Biographie*, p 454.

promotion a past teacher by the name of Monsieur Gusdorf states that he is one of the best qualified candidates for the École's 1941 aggregation by praising Jacques' solid philosophical background and his valor in expressing ideas. Monsieur Piobetta proclaims that, from what he has seen, Martin possesses a distinguished spirit, with an aptitude for discussion and plenty of finesse. Finally, among others, a Monsieur Gaston Bachelard states that Martin is a good student, with good diploma work and solid knowledge.

With this fine application, Jacques Martin was admitted to L'École Normale Superior, yet the documentation following Martin's admittance takes on darker and darker shadows before it steals away altogether into a void. The first shadows appear in what is missing from Martin's medical record. The paper included in Martin's files decrees that Monsieur Martin, graduated from the Lycée Henri-IV, and under the execution of article 4 (of May 1904), "*est propre aux fonctions de l'enseignement*," i.e., Martin was, in 1941, 'ready for the functions of learning.' While Jacques Martin entered the École with the highest marks, by the time Martin and Foucault failed their final thesis exams, Althusser claims that Martin was suffering from advancing schizophrenia⁴. As his speech, writing and thoughts became increasingly incoherent and unproductive in illness, Martin was unable to distinguish rationality from reason; essentially he was unable to produce coherent work of any kind⁵.

In Jacques Martin's second official folder at L'École Normale, two handwritten testaments bring the tensions of World War II into the history of Martin, the adolescent male, the emerging subject. The first of these two statements reads as follows:

*I, the undersigned, Martin Jacques Henri Francois Michel, born in Paris on May 18, 1922, certify that I am not under the law of October 3rd, 1940, regarding the statute of the Jews. Paris, March 21, 1941. J. Martin.*⁶

⁴ Martin's language skills exceeded that of his colleagues as he entered the École normale in 1941. He was exempted, by examination, from the living language courses required of his compatriots, and his grasp of German earned him several contracts for translation. See Martin's École Normale files and Yann Moulier Boutang's chapter titled "Les Jeu des Perles de Verre" in *Louis Althusser*.

⁵ In the chapter titled "Les Jeu des Perles de Verre", Moulier Boutang describes the only picture of Martin's schizophrenia which exists on paper: his obituary, written by Louis Althusser. Along with a dedication written by Althusser in *For Marx* which alludes to Martin as 'the friend... in the most terrible ordeal', this obituary provides a unique sketch of a man suffering from what we would now call mental illness. Just who that man is, be it Jacques Martin or Louis Althusser, is allusive. The obituary reads as follows, from p 451 of Yann Moulier Boutang's *Louis Althusser*:

"He decided it was enough when he knew that he was going to lose his reason of living: his intelligence, the ultimate edge of this intelligence was, in the final count, a feature drawn from hope, this act of clearness: to precede the night.

Perhaps he had known it was coming? Perhaps it was a recourse. We at least, cannot survive to him without the tearing at this thought. But which recourse? He knew for a long time, knowing its evil, that in last authority, he alone could decide to live.

He fought during twenty years, cold, calm, complete, precise, never weakening nor yielding, without even one word of complaint: worthy. He chose death deliberately so as not to live another death in the night of an anguish without term.

Others before him died, having lucidly risked the limits, in science or the action, and died from the effects of their freedom. He was unable to choose these limits: life had enclosed him forever there, in this dreadful captivity, he made an extraordinary experiment of the intelligence: its only freedom.

Twenty years before us he saw what we start to foresee; in twenty years we will be still at his school. The thought which he left, in two sixteen year old writings, and in all his acts and matters until the end, had an edge of his death: a blade."

⁶ From Jacques Martin's file in the École Normale student archives.

Nearly identical to the abovementioned handwritten testament by Martin, this graph paper statement mirrors the official rhetoric required for entrance into the École: 'I, the undersigned, born in location X on the Xth day of the Xth month, 192X, certify that...' Martin finished this formula with various statements, such as: 'my father is a pharmacist,' 'I have the approval of the Secretary for Public Jurisdiction for my application,' and, as in the above quote: 'I am not under the law of October 3rd, 1940 regarding the statute of the Jews.' The rhetoric comes to bear in another of Martin's testimonies:

I, the undersigned, Martin Jacques Henri Francois Michel, born in Paris on May 18, 1922, certify that I am not under the arm of military law. Paris, March 21, 1941. J. Martin.

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'I, the undersigned... certify that I do not fall under the arm of military law,' signed by Jacques Martin in 1941. In 1941 the German occupation of France had been in effect for over a year. Though Poland was invaded by Hitler's Germany in 1939, the 1940 invasion of Belgium came as a surprise to the French and the British. As both of the latter countries rushed north to protect their neighbors, the German army made its way south, through northern France to arrive in Paris for a coup and occupation. Moving the head of government to Vichy released little pressure from the city of Paris. In 1941, Jacques Martin could sign the release stating he was not part of the military, but within the span of two short years, all of this would change.

With one remaining file, written by Emile Bréhier on April 17th, 1943, the archives of Martin's time at the École come to a close. Again, Bréhier, like others before him, writes that Martin's previous years' work is "good, with a sharp and solid spirit". The future looks promising... yet Martin's files end here. There are no hints of a graduation, no signs of what was to become of Martin post-ENS. It seems then, that we might end here, where we began with this Jacques Martin; full of intellectual promise, genius and compelling communicative abilities. Yet, by way of Moulier Boutang's work, another story and another Jacques Martin comes into being. It is one, perhaps, that takes on more shadows than Martins' ENS files could hold.

In June of 1943, two months after the last noted reference letter as to Martin's work at the ENS, the German occupation of France finally swept Martin into the militant, anti-Semitic and unsteady public domain of World War II Paris. At this time Jacques Henri Michel François Martin and 249,999 other Frenchmen were called up for civilian service in the ranks of the Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO). The STO began as a way to fuel the German war machine and the German agricultural and industrial economies. After the 1942 invasion of Belgium and France, workers from each conquered nation were required, by the Nazi regime and its Vichy counterparts, to fill labor shortages in exchange for their freedom from Bolshevism. Fritz Saukel, head of the STO under the Germans, first forced all prisoners of war to work in German factories and industries. Next, with the help of propaganda offering better wages and decent food, the French could choose to support their families by means of German employment. Then, 'exchanges' were promised: for every three French workers employed in Germany, one prisoner of war would be released. Yet, by 1943, the exchange figures were disappointing on both sides. By June of that same year, all unemployed French men between the ages of 16 and 60, along with childless women between the ages of 18 and 35, would be exported by train for work in Germany. In June of 1943, as pressure for STO recruitment grew, Saukel demanded that all unemployed men between the ages of 20 and 22 would be sent for service in Germany. This age group included and targeted France's best, brightest and most energetic as they entered their respective Universities and

⁷ From Jacques Martin's file in the École Normale student archives.

Écoles. The 20-22 call enraged the French, and as resistance to STO grew, schemes were devised whereby 'unemployed' students could falsify their French employment status and escape STO deportation. According to work done by Yann Moulier Boutang, it was particularly easy for *normaliens*, (students at the École Normale), to evade the STO in this way. Sympathetic industries and businesses run by past graduates or admirers of the École Normale offered *normaliens* false employment to escape the draft: Jacques Martin was offered at least one such escape route. Yet, in June of 1943, Martin left France for Francfort sur le Main, where he stayed in STO service until April 12, 1945.

Beginning in 1941, the year Martin applied to the École, France's escaped and former leader, Charles de Gaulle, began making speeches from London calling up the French to resistance by way of British military service. In France as in the French colonies, French loyalty was strained as de Gaulle formed the Free French Forces and lead them in a failed march against the Vichy government. Still in this era of tension, Martin's decision to work in Francfort sur le Main is troubling. Louis Althusser, in his autobiography, speaks for Martin on the issue of his STO service : Althusser insists that it is Martin's Kantian ethic, his inability to evade duty, that brought him to Germany⁸. Yet once he was there, Althusser and Moulier Boutang claim, the intellectual prowess that echoed through Martin's ENS files took its first steps into a darkness that he would ultimately claim in suicide. The date when schizophrenia first took hold of Martin is unknown, but Althusser claims that his abilities began to diminish in Germany.⁹

When Martin returned to the ENS from Francfort sur le Main, his situation did not improve: *he had trouble getting rid of the feeling that he had missed an opportunity.*¹⁰ In a climate of resistance, STO's were not well received and Martin felt disenfranchised. Apart from social friction, Martin deeply questioned his own relationship to German philosophy and culture.

*Yet in Frankfurt, at the heart of German philosophy is where he found the resources for his mutation. He began to read a lot of Hegel, and in 1945, he entered into Marx with both feet. ...he left [for Germany and the STO] ...as a Kantian very concerned with aesthetics and at the liberation he found him[self] Marxist and Hegelian.*¹¹

What we know of Jacques' direct relationship with Marxism, and by extension, the Parti Communiste Francais (PCF) is that he was never an official member. He attended meetings, and along with Althusser, is remembered for a dedication that often superseded that of his card-carrying comrades. What remains of Martin's views on Marxism in the 1950's are ideas passed through to the mind and works of Louis Althusser¹². Personally and philosophically Althusser absorbed Martin, reading Marx, Hegel and Kant with Martin's help and translations. When Martin was still in the early struggles with schizophrenia, Althusser found an apartment for Martin at 6 Rue d'Ulm, next to his own at 7. But by 1948, Martin's abilities to communicate and to write were fading fast. Instead of leading Althusser into

⁸ Moulier Boutang, Yann. *Louis Althusser: Une Biography*. P. 455

⁹ Moulier Boutang, Yann. *Louis Althusser: Une Biography*. p.455

¹⁰ Translation of Moulier Boutang, Yann, p 456.

¹¹ Translation of Moulier Boutang, Yann. *Louis Althusser : Une Biography*. p.456, italics, (...) and [], mine.

¹² Althusser's Marxism can also be traced back to Martin's translations of Kant, Hegel and then Marx. Intrigued and persuaded by Althusser's future wife Helene and Martin's communist commitments, Althusser abandoned his fervent catholic convictions and joined the French Communist Party, known as the PCF. In the years directly after Martin's death, Althusser published his first breakthrough works on Marx: *Reading Capital* and *For Marx*. In these works, Althusser developed a theory of anti-humanism in Marx's later writings, a move that announced a break between the early and later Marx, and catapulted Althusser to a controversial limelight within the PCF.

the depths of Marx, Kant and Hegel, Althusser now became the coach for his teacher. When, in that same year, Martin failed his final dissertation, his own situation became truly unstable. He lived in the pockets of his friends, borrowing money and failing to show up for carefully and specially arranged job interviews.¹³

After turning down all offers for employment, in Martin's defense Althusser said of Jacques that to subject himself to the will and choosing of an other, a larger group, or organization would bring a shadow Martin could not shake¹⁴. Yet not all of Martin's actions were stilted: sometime after March 12th, 1950, Jacques joined millions of others in signing 'The Call of Stockholm'¹⁵. 'The Call' was a petition, drafted by communist Frédéric Joliot-Curie, stating opposition to the use and production of atomic bombs. It reads as follows:

*We require the absolute prohibition of the atomic weapons, arms of terror and the massive extermination of populations. We require the establishment of a rigorous international control to ensure the application of this measurement of prohibition. We consider that the first government who would use, counter any country, the atomic weapon, would be committing a crime against humanity and should be treated like a war criminal. We call all the men of goodwill in the world to sign this call.*¹⁶

Millions of people world-wide signed the Stockholm petition, and by doing so, they participated in the mounting Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. According to the terms of the petition, the United States Military should be tried as War Criminals for the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and all of its efforts toward stockpiling an atomic arsenal would be called to a halt,

¹³ Moulrier Boutang, Yann. *Louis Althusser: Une Biography*. p. 456

¹⁴ In an interesting yet short reference letter in Martin's ENS files, a professor notes that after some debate, Martin chose to study philosophy over law. The debate is attributed to Jacques personal enjoyment of philosophy outside of the University climate, and his fear that this enjoyment might change or be stifled once his work in the field was formalized or requisite. Echoing Martin's later decisions not to formally join the French Communist Party, it is possible to guess that Martin, unlike Althusser, resisted group adhesion and corporate decision making.

¹⁵ In a recent interview, Gilles Deleuze describes his own response to The Call of Stockholm in a way which may shed light on Martin's own dilemma. Deleuze states: *To be in the French Communist Party at this time there, there were cell meetings all the time. It was the time - I have a bench mark - L'appel de Stockholm. ... I do not know even any more what it was, the call of Stockholm, but that occupied a whole generation of Communists. Then me, I had problems because I knew many communist historians, full of talent, and I said to myself: good god, if they worked on their theses, that would be much more important for the Communist Party, which at least would have work at handsome price instead of using them get signatures for the call of Stockholm, stupid call on Peace or I do not know what... and I did not want any part - I was not talkative, I did not speak - and to sign the call of Stockholm, that would have put to me in a state of timidity, of panic... I never did anything to sign with anybody. Moreover, it was necessary to sell Humanity, and all that... I did not want to have any part in the Party. ... All the respect of the human rights, it is... really, one wants almost to take hold of the odious proposals. That formed so much part of this soft thought of the poor period we're speaking of. It is pure abstract. Human rights, but what is that? It is pure abstract. It is empty. It is exactly what one a few moments ago said for the desire, or what I tried to say for the desire. The desire that does not consist in setting up an object, with saying: I wish this. One does not wish, for example, freedom and liberty, etc. It is zero. One is in situations.. Interview segments from : « **G comme Gauche** : L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, 1988 ». Yet, Martin, unlike Deleuze, did sign the Call. Did he hope to 'shake the feeling that he had missed an opportunity'? By signing, did he hope to redeem his status from its STO taint? Did he believe in the Call's rhetoric and promise? Was he simply part of the era where, as Deleuze said, The Call was the primary question? Translation, mine.*

¹⁶ Translation mine.

putting the Soviet Union in a clear atomic advantage. When the author of 'The Call of Stockholm' was held at Ellis Island and barred from entering the US, the tension surrounding the Stockholm document hit its peak. All that remains of Martin's reflections on this situation is knowledge of a signature of agreement with Joliot's petition.

In the height of these tensions, in 1951, Martin's mother Marguerite died from lung and cardiac failures. Martin inherited a large sum of money from her, but also re-inherited lasting problems with his father, Henri. Authoritarian and dominating, among other things, Henri never forgave Martin for choosing philosophy rather than his own unfulfilled medical aspirations. When Henri died in 1969, five years after Jacques, neither father nor son had resolved their conflicts with one another, and the disconnect forced Martin to fend for himself without parental support, even through his struggle with schizophrenia.

So, without work, without income, and without stable support, Martin dreamed of days in Italy and a trip to the United States that would never result. In the meantime, Martin's only documented actions after signing 'The Call' are his French translations of two German texts: Ernest Wiechart's *Misse Sine Nomine* from 1950-1951, and Herman Hesse's *Les Jeu des Perles de Verre* in 1955. Along with his translation of Hegel's *L'Esprit du Christianisme et son Destin*, these works are all that remains of Martin's academic textuality. And, apart from choosing their object, Martin's translations reveal little about his own ideas and inclinations.

Of those ideas and inclinations, once again we are left to pick up the fragments from Althusser and the writings of Foucault. In his autobiography, Althusser remembers a day when Jacques Martin announced that he had destroyed all of his work. What and how much Martin destroyed is unclear. What is clear is that upon destroying all of his own productions, Martin became a true *l'homme sans oeuvre* - a term both Jacques and Michel Foucault had attributed to Martin and his condition¹⁷.

His condition: nothing in Martin's academic files hint toward Martin's condition outside of his past scholastic record. So it is up to this point, as I have attempted to put together a timeline of sorts for Jacques Martin's life that my work fails. Gaping holes, ignored tangents, all that would complicate the linear nature of my narrative has been carefully streamlined into the above story of one man and one part of this man's life. I have, in effect, falsified all that this article contains, as no life is as unilinear as the story I have told. Particularly not the life of Jacques Martin, as he most likely considered himself no one in particular.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault and Martin came up with a nickname for Martin that outlived Martin's 1964 suicide and helped consolidate many of Foucault's theories on madness and reason. Foucault and Martin called Martin by the name he already embodied: he was called *L'homme sans Oeuvre*: the Man without Work. More than a joke about Martin's inability to produce coherent thought, the 'man without work' became the unspoken prototype for what Foucault would later call 'the absence of work.' For discussions on the Absence of Work, see: Foucault, "Madness, the Absence of Work" *Foucault and His Interlocutors*. Ed.: Davidson, Arnold I. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1997, pp. 97-106, along with Moore, Nikki *Between Work: Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser and Jacques Martin*, MIT thesis, 2005. Also Kaufman, Eleanor. "Madness and Repetition. The Absence of Work in Deleuze, Foucault, and Jacques Martin," *The Delirium of Praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski*. John Hopkins University Press: Maryland, 2001., and Felman, Shoshana. "Madness and Philosophy or Literature's Reason" *Yale French Studies*, no. 52 Graphesis: Perspectives in Literature and Philosophy, 1975, pp. 206-228.