ALAIN BADIOU

Translated and with an introduction by Bruno Bosteels

Can Politics Be Thought?

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FOLLOWED BY

Of an Obscure Disaster

On the End of the Truth of the State

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Translator's Introduction

BRUNO BOSTEELS

The two texts translated in this volume constitute Alain Badiou's most elaborate response to the crisis of Marxism before and after the collapse of "really existing socialism" in the Soviet bloc. This response seeks to be faithful to the original impulse behind Marx's thought, whose novelty would still remain to be reassembled all the while acknowledging that the old Marxism is dead. Instead of being merely the inert object of the crisis of Marxism, Badiou proposes that we should be its active subject: the subject of the destruction and recomposition of Marx's legacy in terms of its lessons for thinking emancipatory politics today. Hence the title question, *Peut-on penser la politique?*, the ambivalence of which becomes even more pronounced in English: Can politics be thought? This question can be heard as meaning not only Can we think politics? Is politics thinkable? But also, in line with Badiou's own view of the relation

between politics and philosophy, Can politics be a form of thought in its own right, if by this we understand the hypothesis of an egalitarian practice that produces universal truths about the possibility for collective existence today?

What I propose to do in this translator's introduction, then, is to answer two basic questions that may help the reader understand the place of *Can Politics Be Thought*? and *Of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of the Truth of the State* within the trajectory of Badiou's philosophy: first, what should we take to be Badiou's understanding of Marxism; and, second, to what extent does the crisis of Marxism introduce a necessary break or reorientation, if there is any to begin with, in this philosopher's overall work?[1]

We can begin answering the first of these questions by considering Badiou's recent book, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprising*, which opens with an affirmation that to many of his readers will have come as a surprise: "Here, without concerning myself with opponents and rivals, I would like to say that I too am a Marxist—naively, completely and so naturally that there is no need to reiterate it."[2] To readers of his older works, in particular, this affirmation may indeed seem surprising, insofar as Badiou devotes dozens of pages in these works to a sustained reflection upon the complete crisis of Marxism. Such a reflection not only takes the form of a critique of Stalinism; it also goes much further and declares an end to the referential value of Marxist discourse in general.

For instance, in *Theory of the Subject*, which corresponds to Badiou's seminar between January 1975 and June 1979 and which, upon its publication in 1982, constitutes a belated grand summa of his version of French Maoism, he exclaims, "Yes, let's admit it without beating around the bushes: Marxism is in crisis and atomized. Past the élan and creative scission of the sixties, past the national liberation struggles and the cultural revolution, we inherit, in times of crisis and the threat of war, a fragmentary and narrow disposition of thought and action, caught in a labyrinth of ruins and surviv-

als."[3] Three years later, in *Can Politics Be Thought?*, Badiou similarly and if possible even more forcefully restates the fact that, measured against the force of its beginning in Marx himself, the crisis of Marxism constitutes the dominant event by which the contemporaneity of thought must be measured. If, from this point of view, the crisis of Marxism appears to be both complete and inescapable, then surely more than a few readers familiar with Badiou's older writings will have raised their eyebrows upon hearing him affirm his Marxist credentials in *The Rebirth of History* as though this were the most natural thing in the world.

To readers less familiar with Badiou's overall thought, on the other hand, the affirmation about his being a Marxist will have appeared to be less surprising than unconvincing. This is because to many of these readers, who in the next breath rarely fail to present themselves as trustworthy authorities on the matter, this longtime Maoist cannot really be seen as a proper Marxist. Badiou himself is the first to acknowledge the prevalence of this criticism, which takes aim with particular force at his recent renewal of the communist Idea for being divorced from the economic and material realities of our post-Fordist times. "I am often criticized, including in the 'camp' of potential political friends, for not taking account of the characteristics of contemporary capitalism, for not offering a 'Marxist analysis' of it. Consequently, for me communism is an ethereal idea; at the end of the day, I am allegedly an idealist without any anchorage in reality."[4] Whether they come from the left or the right, the problem with all such summary trials and condemnations of Badiou's insufficiency as a Marxist is that they presume to know in advance the answer to the question What is Marxism? However, not only is the answer completely different, but even the question is posed differently in each case.

For Badiou, the question of what constitutes Marxism is not philosophical but political. Beyond the naïve, spontaneous, and nowadays entirely naturalized principle of a certain dominance of the economy, Marxism always means political Marxism for Badiou. Therefore it is also as a militant political discourse that Marxism

must be periodized, criticized, and, if need be, destroyed and recomposed, based on the obstacles it encountered, the solutions it proposed, and the problems it left unresolved to this day:

> Genuine Marxism, which is identified with rational political struggle for an egalitarian organization of society, doubtless began around 1848 with Marx and Engels. But it made progress thereafter, with Lenin, Mao and a few others. I was brought up on these historical and theoretical teachings. I believe I am well aware of the problems that have been resolved, and which it is pointless to start reinvestigating; and of the problems that remain outstanding, and which require of us radical rectification and strenuous invention.[5]

Considered in this light, it turns out that many of the objections raised against the author of *The Communist Hypothesis* for being insufficiently Marxist depend on a prior definition of Marxism that is foreign to Badiou's own. Whether they view Marxism primarily as the science of history, as the critique of political economy, or as the philosophy of dialectical materialism, such objections fail to take into account the fact that for Badiou and his comrades in the different organizations that he helped found, Marxism has no real existence other than as a militant discourse of political subjectivity. One of these friends, Paul Sandevince (a.k.a. Sylvain Lazarus), in the brochure *What Is a Marxist Politics?* published by the Maoist organization of the Union of French Marxist-Leninist Communists (UCFML), in which both he and Badiou were active until the early 1980s, sums up this significance with his usual concision: "Marxism is not a doctrine, whether philosophical or economical. Marxism is the politics of the proletariat in its actuality," and later: "Marxism is the politics of communism."[6]

With regard to this political definition of Marxism, there has been no significant change in Badiou's point of view. Already in the early Maoist pamphlet *Theory of Contradiction*, which dates back to the mid-1970s, he had written, "We must conceive of Marxism as the accumulated wisdom of popular revolutions, the reason they

engender, and the fixation and precision of their target."[7] Similarly, against the scientific view still dear to his old mentor Louis Althusser, Badiou in *Theory of the Subject* once more underlines the militant political nature of Marxism: "Science of history? *Marxism is the discourse through which the proletariat supports itself as subject.* We must never let go of this idea."[8] And it is also this same idea that will appear in the pages of *Can Politics Be Thought*? In fact to support the militant understanding of Marxism, we could cite almost any text from any period of his work in which Badiou refers to the discourse that Marx and Engels inaugurated with *The Communist Manifesto.*

There is, then, no longer anything surprising if in *The Rebirth of History* we find what is only the latest in a long series of statements about the nature of Marxism as the living knowledge and militant discourse of communist political subjectivity:

> Any living knowledge is made up of problems, which have been or must be constructed or reconstructed, not of repetitive descriptions. Marxism is no exception to this. It is neither a branch of economics (theory of the relations of production), nor a branch of sociology (objective description of "social reality"), nor a philosophy (a dialectical conceptualization of contradictions). It is, let us reiterate, the organized knowledge of the political means required to undo existing society and finally realize an egalitarian, rational figure of collective organization for which the name is "communism."[9]

This privileging of the political over the analytical, of the militant over the critical, or of the prescriptive over the descriptive, can be seen even in the preferred choice of texts from the Marxist canon. Rather than concentrating, as Althusser did, on the discovery of a new, structural type of causality in *Capital*, or even, in the manner of Antonio Negri, on the *Grundrisse* as the dynamic center of Marxian thought, Badiou always favors the historical and interventionist writings, such as Marx's *The Civil War in France*, Engels's *The Peasant Revolt in Germany*, Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*, and Mao's

Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War. Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism are thus tied to different episodes in an internal periodization of revolutionary activity:

> The great stages of Marxism are punctuated by the proletarian revolutions and, precisely, the great Marxists are those who have directed and synthesized the findings of the theory, ideology, and politics of the proletariat in the light of these same revolutions: Marx and Engels for the Paris Commune, Lenin and Stalin for the October Revolution, Mao Zedong for the Cultural Revolution.[10]

Without wanting to submit the canonical texts for each of these sequences to a nostalgic reconstruction going straight to the mausoleum or wax museum of great dead leaders, for Badiou to be a Marxist today means first and foremost to take cognizance not of the solutions so much as of the problems left unsolved during the last revolutionary sequence from the twentieth century, that of the Cultural Revolution in China, which between 1966 and 1976 was marked by the name of Mao Zedong. One necessarily must remain a Marxist even when it comes to pushing the unsolved problems all the way to the destruction and recomposition of Marxism itself.

By contrast, what Badiou seems to have in mind when he affirms his spontaneous adherence to Marxism in *The Rebirth of History* is little more than expedited praise for the analytical strengths of Marx's diagnostic of the exploitation of labor in *Capital*. This is a diagnostic that today, in the context of worldwide turmoil and crisis, may well be truer than it was a century and a half ago: "Basically, today's world is exactly the one which, in a brilliant anticipation, a kind of true science fiction, Marx heralded as the full unfolding of the irrational and, in truth, monstrous potentialities of capitalism."[11] For Badiou, though, it has become ever more painfully evident that the essence of Marxism is not analytical but militant. Not only does he consider communist politics to be a wager essentially disjoined from the critique of political economy, but he goes so far as to suggest that what defines a defeatist stance—even or especially

when it finds shelter in the Marxological orthodoxy of the university discourse—is the inability to separate one from the other.

Marxism in Badiou's understanding, in sum, is neither the science of history nor the dialectical philosophy that puts Hegel back on his materialist feet; it is neither a critique of classical or bourgeois political economy nor an objective description of the misery of the world with an underlying anthropology of the human subject as generic species-being. Instead, it is or was a militant, intervening discourse to sustain the real movement of communism.

Is or was? Great ambivalence surrounds this issue, as is to be expected in a discourse that constantly comes under the sway of the specific conjunctures in which it intervenes. If Marxism is neither an objective science nor a systematic philosophy but an intervening discourse of the political subject, the historical referents and conceptual operators of this discourse can be expected to undergo major changes as well. Marx, Lenin, and Mao—to limit ourselves to the names systematically summoned by Badiou—are far from presenting a homogeneous doctrine that would go by the official name of Marxism, or Marxism-Leninism, to be protected by the guardians of orthodoxy from the threat of ideological deviations. To the contrary, all efforts to safeguard such a doctrine are symptoms of academic conservatism at best and dogmatic sclerosis at worst, due to the fundamental inconsistency of its object. "To put it bluntly, *Marxism doesn't exist*," Badiou will go on to declare in the early to mid-1990s, because "between Marx and Lenin there is rupture and foundation rather than continuity and development. Equally, there is rupture between Stalin and Lenin, and between Mao and Stalin."[12]

As far as the breaks and discontinuities between Marx, Lenin, and Mao are concerned, Badiou sometimes adopts another of Sylvain Lazarus's arguments, which refers to the changing roles of history and politics, or of the relations between the so-called objective and subjective factors. For the author of *Capital*, there thus would exist a close union or fusion between history and politics, enabling a kind of transitivity between the working class as a social category and the proletariat as an organizational operator devoid of all sub-

stance; for the author of *What Is to Be Done?* the need for a vanguard party hints at a symptomatic gap that needs to be bridged between social being and consciousness, or between the class in-itself and the class for-itself; and for the author of "On Contradiction" and "On Practice," who is, not coincidentally, also responsible for a "Critique of Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*," politics is put in the command post as a relatively autonomous practice or instance, whereas history, far from serving as an external referent at the level of social being, becomes entirely absorbed into politics as the name for the latter's contingent unfolding according to a periodization all of its own.[13]

Along similar lines, Badiou has increasingly come to disjoin the analytical from the political role of Marxism ever since he proposed the combined destruction and recomposition in *Can Politics Be Thought?* As a diagnostic, Marx's critique of political economy may well be more valid today than yesterday, but this does not help the militant actors in the political uprisings of our time to devise the appropriate tactics and strategies for intervention. Something has entered into a profound crisis in the articulation between these two aspects or logics of Marxism, which I have called the analytical and the political and which others call the logic of capital and the logic of struggle, supposedly marked by an incommensurability overcome only by the imaginary glue of communism.[14]

In other words, Badiou is less and less convinced that we can understand politics "*through* history, *in* and *with* history," as the early Marx said about the development of religion in *The Holy Family*, in a phrase often repeated by the late Daniel Bensaïd.[15] This is because for the author of *Being and Event* politics is entirely of the order of the event, which cannot be understood unless we put to the side all mere facts and opinions about facts. For this reason, Badiou increasingly will come to see a political intervention—like an invention in art, a proof in mathematics, or an amorous encounter in love, as the other domains in which events can take place—as self-referential and authorized only by itself. This is especially clear in the period from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, which is to say roughly from

Being and Event to *Metapolitics*, when the antihistoricist and antidialectical impetus of Badiou's work effectively reaches a peak. But many commentators still perceive such a stance at work in the proposed return to communism in *The Communist Hypothesis* and *The Rebirth of History*.

Now the drawbacks rightly or wrongly associated with this position should be obvious: a seemingly ethereal aloofness, a privileging of the philosopher-intellectual to the detriment of the masses in revolt, and in general a separation between praxis and Idea under the openly accepted philosophical guardianship of Plato rather than Marx. Conversely, however, the risks involved in the opposite position should be no less evident: an anti-intellectual disdain for theory in favor of the pedagogy of the deed, a tendency to explain away the emergence of autonomous political tactics on the basis of the historical cycles of the capitalist world system, and, in general, a reduction of the political or interventionist Marx of *The Communist Manifesto* and *The Civil War in France* in favor of the analytical or systemic Marx of *Capital*, with or without the subjective supplement of the *Grundrisse*.

In any case, the perceived shift in the trajectory of Badiou's evaluation of Marxism as a militant discourse is less radical than appears at first sight. Even as he will differently come to interpret the sense or meaning of the term "history," Badiou has always defended the thesis that politics—while necessarily anchored or rooted in history—cannot be inferred or deduced from history alone. This is why all political events are necessarily forced events rather than spontaneous uprisings.

Let us consider, for example, how in *Theory of the Subject* Badiou attempts to devise a dialectical articulation between history and politics, mapped onto the dialectic of productive mass and partisan class. "Class, apprehended according to the dialectical division of its dialecticity, means partisan political action anchored in the productive historicity of the masses," he claims. "The whole point is to know how all this works together, because it is this working-together that is class. This entails nothing less than to make the rectifiable

singularity of politics rise up in the real movement of history."[16] It is true that Badiou subsequently will abandon this view of the transitivity or dialectical working-together of history and politics, or of masses and classes organized through the party's action against the State. Thus in *Can Politics Be Thought?* intransitivity will become the new key in determining the essence of politics, which marks the point of the real even at the beginning of Marx's discourse and which only the Marxist critique of political economy later on ended up fixating into a fiction.

Between *Theory of the Subject* and *Being and Event*—with *Can Politics Be Thought?* in the mid-1980s serving as a pivotal transition—the old Marxist paradigm of base and superstructure, of forces and relations of production, and of masses, classes, party, and State is abandoned in favor of the seemingly disparate paradigm of situation, intervention, event, fidelity, subject, and truth that most readers will have come to associate with Badiou's own philosophy. This does not mean that Badiou henceforth will abandon Marx's dialectic and forgo the category of history altogether. In fact in *Can Politics Be Thought?* he proposes that the new vocabulary remains that of the dialectic. And, as recently as in *The Rebirth of History*, he is still revisiting the articulation in question, but now the history in which all politics is said to be anchored or rooted no longer refers to the objective factors but becomes an aspect wholly internal to the subjective process of sustaining a political event as such.

For the post-Maoist in Badiou, the point is not to politicize history but to historicize politics. If we witness a rebirth or reawakening of history, it is no longer premised on the objective history of the class struggle but on the becoming-historical of certain spontaneous revolts and uprisings and on the making-political of those historical moments. In other words, the dialectic, if this is still what we want to call the theory of the event, amounts to an immanent periodization of spontaneous riot, historical movement, and political organization. And so the new version of that old question asked in *Theory of the Subject* in terms of masses, classes, and party becomes in *The Rebirth of History* "How are we to inscribe politically, as active ma-

teriality under the sign of the Idea, a reawakening of History?," particularly if such inscriptions are no longer predetermined but must be treated as both rare and contingent events. "Let us simply note that if every political truth is rooted in a massive popular event, it nevertheless cannot be said that it is reducible to it."[17]

The militant lesson that Badiou most recently has drawn from the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement in North America, and the *indignados* of Puerta del Sol, for example, is that the philosopher should put an ear to the ground to listen to the rumble of massive popular events, while avoiding at all cost the danger of becoming the thought police or judge of history—or, worse, helping the existing cops and judges by becoming a snitch: "For now, though, the philosopher will be allowed to lend an ear to the signal, rather than rushing to the police station."[18] Philosophy for Badiou cannot be the waiting room to the local police station or to the world-historical tribunal from which self-appointed progressives judge everything and nothing under the sky. Instead it is an activity of thought under the condition of events that are partially beyond its control. Badiou has recourse to a number of expressions to make sure that philosophy lets itself be conditioned by and learns from the political events of its time. Thus in French he most often uses the expression *être à l'école de*, literally "to be schooled by" the riots and uprisings of the past decade—exactly in the same way, in the 1970s, it was common usage among French Maoists to rely on this expression to refer to the task of theory in the face of the events of the "red years" that took their inspiration from the Chinese Cultural Revolution. In any case, we should not rush to judgment by imputing to the philosopher a desire for teaching a lesson to the participants in the recent revolts and uprisings. To do so would mean, ironically, to turn oneself into a mirror image of the philosopher rushing to the police station: instead of blaming the rioters for their lack of ideas, we would blame the philosopher for his excessive confidence in the Idea. Any day now I picture somebody along these lines writing a book called *Badiou's Lesson*, echoing Jacques Rancière's harsh attack in *Althusser's Lesson*. But while in *The Rebirth of History* the author does speak

of "lessons," the fact remains that these are lessons to be learned from the people in revolt and not magisterially taught to them, very much in the same way that in *The Century* Badiou presents a series of "lessons" taught by, rather than to, the artistic, political, and psychoanalytic experimenters of the twentieth century. "In the condition of political misery that has been ours for three decades, is it not obvious that it is we who have everything to learn from the current popular uprisings?" Badiou also asks in an article originally written for *Le Monde* with regard to the events of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt. "Yes, we must be the pupils of these movements, not their stupid teachers."[19]

Accusations against the philosopher's overreaching ambition with regard to the recent uprisings depend on a profoundly un-Marxist presupposition that these accusers attribute to Badiou's recent work on communism, namely, the presupposition that it would belong to the philosopher alone to formulate, develop, and propagate what he calls the communist Idea, without which there could be no reawakening of History. This would place today's militants in the position of impatient schoolchildren with a likely attention-deficit disorder waiting for the philosopher's master class about the role of the Idea. The latter, then, would be the philosopher's brainchild with which he supposedly hopes to shepherd the rioters and looters in the direction of a resurgence of communism. Similarly certain readers will have concluded from the title of Badiou's *Philosophy for Militants* that political militancy depends on the prior theoretical work performed by the professional philosopher. This too would lead us straight back to a form of speculative idealism along the lines of how Marx, in his 1873 afterword to the German edition of *Capital*, reproaches Hegel for placing the driving motor of history in the realm of the Idea: "For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of 'the Idea,' is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea."[20] However, while there is certainly no shortage of vagueness surrounding the notion of the Idea as brandished by Badiou, neither *The Communist Hypothesis*

nor *The Rebirth of History* bear out the presupposition that elaborating this notion of the Idea would be the exclusive purview of the professional philosopher. To the contrary, if there is one presupposition consistently at work in all of Badiou's writings on the political condition, it is the notion that politics is an active and generic form of thought in its own right, with its ideas, thoughts, watchwords, and scripts. And whereas Marx speaks about the role of *praxis* in overcoming the inertia of the traditional opposition between theory and practice, Badiou prefers to describe politics as a *pensée-faire*, that is, a collective and generic "thought-practice," which is never exclusively in need of the philosopher to know either what is or what is to be done. "If politics is the practice of a thought in an absolutely self-sufficient register," as Badiou concludes in *Metapolitics*, "then we can say that philosophy's task is to seize the conditions for the practice of thought within this singular register known as politics."[21]

Even the call to ensure that an Idea be rooted in the historical events that mark the present age of riots and uprisings so as to give them greater durability and expansiveness should not be treated as the symptom of a philosopher's desire for hegemony over the future of politics. For, aside from the materialist principle which holds that it is philosophy that is conditioned by politics and not the other way around, part of this call stems very much from the opposite desire, namely, the wish for politics to bring about a situation in which everyone can be a philosopher. "Of course, you will recognize in this a Platonic desire, though expanded from the aristocracy of the guardians to the popular collective in its entirety," Badiou remarks in *Philosophy for Militants*. "This wish could be expressed as follows: wherever a human collective is working in the direction of equality, the conditions are met for everyone to be a philosopher."[22] Not only are ideas and thoughts immanent to actual political struggles, but even the communist Idea, for all its seemingly glacial Platonism or speculative Hegelianism, can be translated as the wish for politics to create a generic place in which philosophers and militants in revolt—like the famous hunter, fisherman, herdsman, and critic in the still overly masculine and pastoral version of communist society

prefigured in *The German Ideology*—become gathered into a single figure, perhaps even without having to split their time between morning, afternoon, evening, and after-dinner activities, as was still the case for Marx and Engels. "In this sense," writes Badiou, "all emancipatory politics contains for philosophy, whether visible or invisible, the watchword that brings about the actuality of universality—namely: if all are together, then all are communists! And if all are communists, then all are philosophers!"[23] According to this formulation, the time may not seem ripe for the universal sharing of philosophy, but, instead of setting our expectant eyes on the future of what is yet to come, we could also read the desire for everyone to become a philosopher as something that already is actualized in every instance of collective struggle, no matter how local or short-lived. In this sense, the argument would be in favor of politics as a generic thought-practice in which theoretical ideas are not transcendent but immanent to the actions and initiatives that are their only practical existence. Of course what remains to be seen is the extent to which Badiou himself facilitates such an understanding of politics as an immanent thought-practice.

In this regard we face a decision between two basic positions: either we maintain the necessity of a double occurrence of thought, first within politics and then within philosophy; or else we strive as much as possible to dissipate such reduplication in the name of strict historical immanence, or what Marx in the "Theses on Feuerbach" calls the "this-sidedness" of practical activity, with the likely result of a gradual withering away of philosophy as a separate activity. If Badiou is reluctant to accept the last position as a simple given, it may very well correspond to the ultimate aim of his entire philosophy, which for this reason always harbors certain elements of antiphilosophy as well. Like the Idea, then, truths are immanent to the situation in which they are worked out. "A truth is something that exists in its active process, which manifests itself, as truth, in different circumstances marked by this process," Badiou observes in *The Rebirth of History*. "Truths are not prior to political processes; there is no question of confirming or applying them. Truths are reality itself,

as a process of production of political novelties, political sequences, political revolutions, and so forth."[24] Ideas would be part of the ongoing political process. Rather than operating at a theoretically superior level, they would be active on the ground or at the grassroots level, in the militant rationality of the struggles themselves.

On the other hand, Badiou is always adamant about drawing a clear line of demarcation between philosophy and the various nonphilosophical procedures—politics among them—in which events take place and truths can be produced. And, while such a line of demarcation is meant as a lesson in restraint to keep philosophy from making the disastrous claim that it can be a politics (or a science, or an art, or a form of love) in its own right, it is also true that this insistence runs counter to the wish to dissolve the heterogeneity between politics and philosophy into a single thought-practice whose unity would be guaranteed by the mediating term of history as the sole realm of all human activities.

In the end a simple way of summarizing what Marx and Badiou have in common is to consider both as thinkers of the generic: according to a footnote in *Of an Obscure Disaster*, this would be the most important conceptual innovation made in *Being and Event*. The location of this genericity is certainly different—with the young Marx, especially, situating the generic on the side of the human subject as a species-being, and Badiou, by contrast, assigning the generic to being qua being as uncovered in a singular truth procedure. However, just as for Marx the collective or communal nature of the human being should not be seen as an anthropological given but as an axiomatic presupposition enacted in the here and now of concrete struggles, we also must avoid the false impression that Badiou's ontology would depend on some kind of phenomenological gift as the appearing of pure being in the miracle of an event. Instead, both Marx and Badiou offer versions of a materialist and dialectical understanding of the link within a given situation between being, truth, event, and subject. The author of *Being and Event* merely pushes the deconstruction of being all the way to the point where the impasse of being is at the same time the pass of the subject. This

means that the generic thought-practice of politics, which organizes a material fidelity to the chance occurrence of an event, can still be considered an instance of what Marx, in his "Theses on Feuerbach," calls revolutionary practice—even if for Badiou the age of revolutions definitely ended with the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice."[25]

Does this mean that there is no significant break in Badiou's work with regard to the militant role of Marxism? Has the crisis of Marxism affected only the vulgar misconceptions limited to the doctrinal fixation of Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet manuals of historical and dialectical materialism? Why, then, would Badiou affirm the need for the destruction and recomposition of Marxism? And, finally, to what extent does a text like *Can Politics Be Thought?* mark a shift in Badiou's philosophical itinerary by contributing to this process?

Here some background history may be useful. Indeed, prior to its original publication in 1985 in France, *Peut-on penser la politique?* had been presented in the guise of two lengthy exposés, in January and June 1984, offered at the Center for Philosophical Research on the Political. Housed at the École Normale Supérieure on rue d'Ulm, this was an initiative begun at the end of 1980 by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy upon an invitation from Jacques Derrida and with the added support of Badiou's former teacher and Derrida's older colleague at the École, Louis Althusser. The significance of this theoretical and institutional conjuncture cannot be stressed enough. While many devoted scholars of Derrida's work have commented on the fact that the Center marks the moment when deconstruction becomes inseparable from the philosophical interrogation of the essence of the political, few of them have paid attention to the concomitant factor of seeing an unexpected dialogue emerge with a number of Althusser's ex-students. Thus among the

notable figures trained in the Althusserian school besides Badiou, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy also invited Étienne Balibar and Jacques Rancière to present their work in progress at the Center, work that eventually would lead to major publications such as Rancière's *On the Shores of Politics* and *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Unlike Balibar's and Rancière's texts, though, Badiou's talks never became part of the published proceedings, which would remain limited to the first two years of activities at the Center collected in the volumes *Rejouer le politique* and *Le Retrait du politique*—still to this day, moreover, only partially translated in English in volumes such as *Retreating the Political*. It is therefore understandable that most readers would fail to make the connection between Badiou's text and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's efforts to reassess the philosophical legacy of the revolutionary left in the wake of Heidegger's and Derrida's proposed deconstruction of the tradition of Western metaphysics. Understandable but also unfortunate, for this failure represents yet another missed opportunity to gauge the effects of a possible encounter between two parallel, if not wholly independent, theoretical and philosophical orientations indicated by the names of Marx and Heidegger in Germany and by those of Althusser and Derrida in France.

It is only in the context in which the arguments behind *Peut-on penser la politique?* were first presented that we can explain why Badiou begins his intervention with a "Threshold" or "Liminary," written in August 1984, in which he responds to the idea that served as one of the principal guidelines for the collaborative work of the Center at the École Normale Supérieure, where Althusser and Derrida were both teaching at the time: the idea of a "retreat" of the political. The French expression *retrait* here suggests both a retreating or withdrawing and a new treatment or retracing of the stakes of the political. Derrida already had played on this duplicity of the trait-as-retreat a few years earlier, in texts like "The Retreat of Metaphor," but readers of Heidegger in French translation also would not have been surprised to see Derrida in *The Truth in Painting*, for example, offer lengthy ruminations on the idiom of the trait and its

withdrawal in an attempt to bring together two families of related terms from Heidegger's original German: on the one hand, terms like *Riss*, *Umriss*, and *Aufriss*, and, on the other, terms like *Zug*, *Bezug*, and *Entzug* or *Entziehung*. Every tracing of a line or trait, according to the combined logic of these two idiomatic series, is simultaneously an inscription and an erasure; every stroke or outline at one and the same time opens a rift or lets itself be engulfed by an abyss; and every relation or rapport marks at once a retraction or defection of the ties that bind us. In the French text of *Peut-on penser la politique?* Badiou adds yet another possibility to this complex configuration, insofar as he links Marxism's historical credibility to its capacity to *tirer des traites*, that is, "to draw lines" or "lay claims" on history as a process endowed with meaning. By the same token, if Marxism in the early 1980s finds itself "in retreat," *en retrait*, or "takes its retirement," *prend sa retraite*, this must be understood in terms of a growing incapacity to lay claims on being the referent that gives meaning to the process of history.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, in the documents with which they punctuate and assess the results of the Center's research, explicitly adopt the logic of the retreat based on the Heideggerian and Derridean understanding of the term:

> The *retreat* in the Heideggerian sense (*Entzug*) of the presentation which only takes place as the concealment or the disappearance of what is presented (this is the structure or the movement of *alētheia*) and, with the Derridean value of the "re-treat," of the "re-tracing" (combining *Zug* and *Riss*) implying in the retreat a "new" incision or inscription, which cuts out again that which retreats.[26]

Even more so than Derrida in "The Retreat of Metaphor" or *The Truth in Painting*, however, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy add a decidedly political slant to this argument. They thus propose that, at a time when globally we are becoming enmeshed in a soft form of totalitarianism in which politics encroaches upon every aspect of everyday life, a step back may be needed in order to redefine the essence

of the political. In what they also call a "liminary" or "introductory" statement, the conveners of the research center define their purpose as follows:

> In these times, in particular, in which the most simple political despair (weariness), but also the ease or calculation of things, generated every imaginable regression and reduced political debate to almost nothing, it was necessary to give ourselves some room. Not in order to shut ourselves off from the political or to reject it but, on the contrary, to replay its question anew. If there was a chance, albeit a very slender one, of a philosophical intervention in politics (or with regard to the political), this was its—exorbitant—cost, if one considers it to be such.[27]

A crucial part of this proposal thus relies on the conceptual distinction between politics, or *la politique*, and what, for lack of a better word, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy prefer to call the political, or *le politique* in French. In the "Opening Address" to the Center, they add:

> In speaking of *the political* we fully intend not to designate politics. The questioning about the political or about the essence of the political is, on the contrary, what for us must ultimately take stock of the political presuppositions itself of philosophy (or, if one prefers, of metaphysics), that is to say, of a political determination of essence. But this determination does not itself produce a political position; it is the very position of the political, from the Greek *polis* to what is deployed in the modern age as the qualification of the political by the subject (and of the subject by the political). What remains to be thought by us, in other words, is not a new institution (or instruction) of politics by thought, but the political institution of so-called Western thought.[28]

By accepting the invitation to speak at the Center for Philosophical Research on the Political, Badiou thus also accepts the challenge of submitting the discourse of Marxism to an interrogation inspired by the work of Heidegger and Derrida. In fact the combination of

destruction and recomposition can be considered Badiou's version of deconstruction. But this also means that to some extent he accepts the idea that Marxism—or, rather, Marxism-Leninism—marks the metaphysical age in the political ontology of the West. Or, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy had said, "In our translation: socialism (in the sense of 'real or actually existing socialism') is the complete and completing figure of philosophy's imposition—up to and including what, for one of us at least, could have represented the hope of a critique and a revolutionary radicalization of established Marxism."[29]

Here perhaps I should add that Badiou, who had been working in almost complete isolation from the dominant academic discourses at the time, would be forever grateful for the chance of a dialogue provided by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy. "I hold them in the highest esteem and love them very much," Badiou told me in an interview, before shedding some light on the circumstances that surrounded the original presentation of *Can Politics Be Thought?* as part of the research center on rue d'Ulm:

> We met in the early 1980s, precisely at a time which for me, no doubt, was the period of maximum isolation, because the New Philosophy had been installed, everybody had rallied more or less to the socialist Left and to Mitterrand, and truth be told, if you consider my own politico-philosophical position, precisely at the time of *Theory of the Subject*, you will find that it went completely against the grain and was worked out in absolute isolation. I really should thank Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy for not having participated in this isolation and for having invited me to the political seminar, which they directed at the time on rue d'Ulm.[30]

Badiou's specific response to his friends' invitation, however, is nothing short of perverse. With all due respect, he accepts that what is happening at the time may be described in the Heideggerian terms of a retreat. And he likewise adopts the distinction between politics and the political, but only to invert the evaluation of both terms in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's use. The retreat of the political thus frees up the mobility of politics as a militant thought-practice for

which Marx's invention, after all, continues to serve as an exemplary model. Except to add that, insofar as Marxism has led to a fixation of militant discourse into a metaphysical doctrine, Marx's beginning must be given the chance of a recommencement. Hence the twofold approach of *Can Politics Be Thought?*

As for *Of an Obscure Disaster*, no further context is needed, I think, to grasp the force of Badiou's rebuttal of the common argument about the "death" of communism after the collapse of the Soviet Union, other than to mention that the title comes from a verse in Stéphane Mallarmé's sonnet "The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe," the last tercet of which reads as follows:

> Calme bloc ici-bas chu d'un désastre obscur
> Que ce granit du moins montre à jamais sa borne
> Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur.
>
> Calm block here below fallen of an obscure disaster,
> May this granite at least reveal its limit for ever
> To the glum flights of Blasphemy dispersed into the future.[31]

Other than the Mallarméan syntax, of which Badiou has always been fond and which likewise dominates both texts translated in this volume, only a few technical terms pose serious problems for the translator. In *Peut-on penser la politique?* Badiou systematically uses *ouvrier* as a referent for Marxist politics. In many cases, as when he refers to the *mouvement ouvrier*, this can easily be rendered as "workers' movement." Elsewhere, however, as when he posits in the section "Refutation of Idealism" that the deconstruction of Marxism as a metaphysical discourse cannot go all the way but must stop at the presupposition that all emancipatory politics depend on a subject that is *populaire* and *ouvrier*, this reference is more problematic. To translate the adjective *ouvrier* as "working class" in this case would mean missing out on the fact that Badiou is participating in a broader interrogation of the elements of class essentialism involved in the official doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. For this reason, I have

preferred "workerist," even though for the Maoist organization of the UCFML in which Badiou was active throughout the 1970s, *ouvriérisme* or "workerism" implied an ideological conflation of the working class with its immediate political capacity, resulting in a limitation of militant struggles to purely economic demands. "It is completely false to think that any social practice of any worker, no matter which one, is revolutionary or proletarian," the UCFML insists in an early circular. "We must firmly combat these orientations which, despite the 'left-wing' air that they may try to put on, are in reality from the right. They indeed reject the mass alliance and the materialist analysis."[32] I will leave it to others to decide if and to what extent "workerist," in the way Badiou mobilizes the term in *Can Politics Be Thought?*, may communicate with the tradition of "workerism" or *operaismo* in the Italian tradition.

Finally, there is the strange neologism of the *horlieu* or "outplace," which also appears in *Can Politics Be Thought?* This term refers back to a complex elaboration in *Theory of the Subject*, in which Badiou opposes the *horlieu*, a portmanteau word derived from *hors* + *lieu*, to the *esplace*, or "splace," another neologism of his own invention based on *espace* + *place*, that is, the space of assigned places. The dialectical opposition between splace and outplace, in this sense, continues and revises the way in which Badiou in his earlier Maoist work *Theory of Contradiction* had opposed place and force. As he explains in *Theory of the Subject*:

> A remark on terminology: if one opposes force to place, as I shall continually do, it will always be more homogeneous to say "space of placement" to designate the action of the structure. It would be even better to forge the term *splace*. If, on the contrary, one says "place," which is more Mallarméan, we will need to say, in the Lacanian manner, "place-holding" or "lieutenancy" for "place." But "force" is then heterogeneous to designate the a-structural topological side. It would be more appropriate to say: the outplace.[33]

For Badiou, an event thus always takes place as the outplace of a structure of assigned places. In Mallarmé's terms, it is that which

proves that what will have taken place is not just the place itself, but the dice throw from which results the constellation of an eternal truth.

NOTES

1 For a more systematic account, see Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). In what follows, I also rely on materials first published in "The Fate of the Generic: Marx with Badiou," in *(Mis)readings of Marx in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, ed. Jessica Whyte and Jernej Habjan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 211–26.

2 Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2012), 8.

3 Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. and introduction by Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), 182.

4 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 7.

5 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 8–9.

6 Paul Sandevince, *Qu'est-ce qu'une politique marxiste?* (Marseille: Potemkine, 1978), 6. More recently, see Alain Badiou, *Qu'est-ce que j'entends par marxisme?* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 2016).

7 Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction* (Paris: François Maspero, 1975), 16.

8 Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 44. Even Marx and Engels themselves had put under erasure the following passage in their manuscript for *The German Ideology*: "We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 3:303–4.

9 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 8–9.

10 UCFML, *Sur le maoïsme et la situation en Chine après la mort de Mao Tsé-Toung* (Marseille: Potemkine, 1976), 3.

11 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 12.

12 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. and introduction by Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 58.

13 Aside from the texts collected in Sylvain Lazarus, *L'intelligence de la politique*, ed. Natacha Michel (Marseille: Editions Al Dante, 2013), see also the anonymous text, most likely authored by Lazarus, "Le mode dialectique," *La Distance Politique* 3 (May 1992): 4–6, available in English as "The Dialectical Mode," trans. Bruno Bosteels, in *Badiou and Cultural Revolution*, special issue of *positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13.3 (2005): 663–68. For Badiou's critical rejoinder to the work of Lazarus, see chapter 2 in his *Metapolitics*.

14 See Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *Marx, prenom: Karl* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

15 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family*, in *Collected Works*, 4:109. See also Daniel Bensaïd, "'Dans et par l'histoire': Retours sur la Question juive," in Karl Marx, *Sur la Question juive*, ed. Daniel Bensaïd (Paris: La Fabrique, 2006), 74–135.

16 Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 27.

17 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 67, 89. For Badiou's changing views of history and politics, see also chapters 3 and 7 in my *Badiou and Politics*.

18 In French this sentence reads as follows: "Dans l'instant toutefois, on permettra au philosophe de prêter l'oreille au signal, plutôt que de se précipiter au commissariat." Gregory Elliot's translation is less evocative of the philosopher as a tattletale who hastens to tell on the rioters in the police station: "For now, however, a philosopher will be permitted to lend an ear to the signal rather than rushing to judgement." See Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 21.

19 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 106.

20 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, introduction by Ernest Mandel (London: Penguin, 1976), 102.

21 Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 86–87.

22 Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, trans. and introduction by Bruno Bosteels (New York: Verso, 2012), 37. Badiou does not elaborate on the Gramscian undertones of this formulation. In fact, to my knowledge Antonio Gramsci is conspicuously absent from all of Badiou's writings.

23 Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, 38. Compare with Marx and Engels: "In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic" (*The German Ideology* in *Collected Works*, 5:47).

24 Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, 87.

25 Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, 5:4.

26 See "Annexe," in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, ed. Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 1997), 138–39.

27 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "Foreword to The Center for Philosophical Research on the Political," in *Retreating the Political*, 105–6.

28 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "Opening Address to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political," in *Retreating the Political*, 110.

29 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "Opening Address," 110–11.

30 Alain Badiou, "Can Change Be Thought? An Interview with Alain Badiou Conducted by Bruno Bosteels (Paris, June 10, 1999)," reprinted in Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, 291.

31 Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe" (The Tomb of Edgar Allan Poe), in *Collected Poems and Other Verse*, trans. E. H. Blackmore and A. M. Blackmore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 70–71 (translation modified). Badiou would go on to use the first hemistich of this verse as the title for his novel, *Calme bloc ici-bas* (Paris: P.O.L., 1997). For an interesting analysis of Badiou's text *Of an Obscure Disaster* based on this Mallarméan poem, see also the afterword by Ozren Pupovac and Ivana Momčilović to the bilingual, Serbo-Croatian and English, edition, *Of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of State-Truth*, trans. Barbara P. Fulks, revised by Nina Power, Ozren Pupovac, and Alberto Toscano (Maastricht, Netherlands: Jan van Eyck Academie and Arkzin, 2009), 62–79. This also gives me an occasion to express my appreciation for another, earlier translation of Badiou's text, "Of an Obscure Disaster: On the End of the Truth of State," trans. Barbara P. Fulks, *Lacanian Ink* 22 (2003): 58–89. Clearly the central concept in the subtitle *Sur la fin de la vérité d'État* is difficult to translate in English because it presupposes Badiou's definition of the State. Instead of having recourse to "State-truth" or "truth of State" in order to render *vérité d'État*, I have preferred to keep a more straightforward expression such as "the truth of the State."

32 "Circulaire sur quelques problèmes idéologiques" (Sept. 1970), reprinted in UCFML, *Première année d'existence d'une organisation maoïste, printemps 1970/printemps 1971* (Paris: François Maspero, 1972), 20.

33 Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 10.

Threshold

Since 1789 at least, France has been the privileged site of politics, with its irreconcilable polemics bearing witness to the fact that here every subject has been politically prescribed. But now it so happens that in this country of mine politics has entered the reign of its apparent absence.

Of course politics is often mentioned with reference to whatever is on the agenda—elections, parliamentary discussions, presidents, trade unions, televised speeches, diplomatic visits, and so on. However, with a kind of knowledge in which words are irresponsible, everyone knows that this is a disaffected scene, one that certainly sends out many signals but signals of such a uniform nature that only an automated subject can be linked to them, a subject unencumbered by any desire.

The founding categories by which choices were once defined—left and right, labor movement and factory owners, nationalism and internationalism, capitalism and socialism, socialism and communism, freedom and authoritarianism—have themselves become progressively inoperative, and, little by little, they no longer designate anything but the delay of the professionals and the lack of involvement of the actors.

It is true that the number of erratic micro-events is multiplying. However, they are everywhere besieged and contaminated by the general indolence induced by the conviction that what we are witnessing here amounts to a performance devoid of any subjective stakes.

Thus, at the farthest remove of its national character as far as politics is concerned, France has entered the sovereign age of skepticism.

This figure, which in the wake of Martin Heidegger might be called the historical and national advent of a retreat of the political, is not sterile for me. The lesson it teaches in my eyes is not fear, nor renunciation. I argue, rather, that it invites the philosopher to the determination of an essence.

When the mediations of politics are clear, the philosopher's imperative is to subsume them in the direction of a foundation. The last debate in this matter opposed the advocates for liberty, as founding reflective transparency, to the tenants of the structure, as prescription of a regime of causality. Sartre against Althusser: this meant, at bottom, the Cause against the cause.

By contrast, when there is a need for assurance regarding the process of an absence, one must orient oneself toward that which disappears, and it is not then a foundation that is in order but rather the capacity to essentialize in the very place of the vanishing. Every thought of the foundation refers to the experience of that for which there is a foundation. If philosophy stands in the proximity to an empty place from which the political withdraws, then it is the guardian no longer of the foundation of the political but of the axioms of its becoming absent. Indeed, if the political retreats, this is because it belongs to the regime of that which takes place all by

itself, to the point where there can be no question of any experience of the political. Philosophy would designate the absence of this experience as retreat, retreat into the dislocated safety of political administering, which is the dissemination and maintenance, without concept, of that which has taken place. Philosophy, in this view of the situation, installs itself with regard to the political in the distance—which is the retreat—between, on the one hand, the chance plenitude of the experienced event, the Fortune of the captain or the revolutionary leader, and, on the other, the wandering automatism of Capital, which now with "modernization" has reached the culmination of its power where nothing of the political is given in experience and where it is possible completely to make do without the hypothesis of any political subject whatsoever. The thought of the essence of the political as retreat slips away in the gap, which is almost nothing and marks the misfortune of our time, between chance and repetition, between *tuchè* and *automaton*.

In truth, however, the idea that the political is neither the concept of an experience nor the subjective norm of a government is something that has begun much earlier. Our thinking must orient itself in the direction of this "much earlier" point. It must become the contemporary of that thought of which the declaration of the retreat, as the philosophical name for the increased lack of political experience, is only the final result.

It is totally exact that *the political* finds itself in retreat and becomes absent, whence the interrogation as to its essence. But this frees up *politics*, the mobility of which, inscribed in thought from Machiavelli to Lenin, has been made philosophically subservient to the reconstitution of the essence of the political.

Our philosophical orientation, in its preliminary and critical function, is oriented toward the destruction of the philosopheme of *the political* in which we have lost sight of the fact that the real, of which *politics* comes to pass as the process, never occurs except in the figure without essence of the event.

The political is never anything but the fiction in which *politics* makes the hole of the event. From Rousseau to Mao, a canonical

statement, which holds that the masses make history, designates the masses precisely as this vanishing irruption of which political philosophy only ever tells the always belated and always torn story.

What retires or takes a salutary leave with the political, at the same time as the narrative and linear figure of the novel, is the fiction of a measure: the idea that the social bond can be measured in thought according to the philosophical norm of the good State, or of the good Revolution, which amounts to the exact same thing. It is this object, now State and now Revolution, fictively evoked as the active foundation of the political philosopheme, about which it turns out to be doubtful today whether it can still claim to be a concept of political experience.

In France the revolutionary idea, which is two centuries old, ruled that there had to be a political subject, albeit in the form of its absolute denial. Transversal to an often abject history (massacres of the workers in the nineteenth century, sacred union in 1914, Munich and Pétain, colonial wars, morose decline), this idea constituted the opening that made it possible to think that a recognizable universality circulated in the realm of the political, and thus that together with the workers' movement the intellectual in France disposed of considerable latitude for intervention and a civic role that was irreducible to the indifference that everywhere else in the West seemed to be the intellectual's fate as far as real issues were concerned.

However, in the representation of this revolutionary idea, as in the counterrevolutionary idea in which *la France profonde* expressed itself, there was a good deal of illusion regarding the social bond. Indeed, the supposition was that politics found its guarantee in the consistency of this bond, whether it was called the proletariat, the people, or—on the contrary—the union of all the French. The thought of the political, conceived as the foundation of an experience, proposed a genealogy of (revolutionary or national) representation based on such social sets.

What the crisis of the political unveils is that all sets are inconsistent, that there is neither Frenchman nor proletariat, and that, for this very reason, the figure of representation just as much as its ob-

verse, the figure of spontaneity, are themselves inconsistent, since the simple time of presentation is lacking. What vanishes is the thesis of an essence behind the relations within the polity, an essence that would be representable through the exercise of sovereignty, including through the dictatorship of the slaves, and even if the relation were that of a civil war within the class structure.

The advantage of this retroactive effect, in which the apparent inanity of what once had consistency puts into crisis the determination of the essence of the political, is that it allows for other genealogies and other references. Only today can we see that Stéphane Mallarmé—not coincidentally just after the Paris Commune—is one of our great political thinkers, the equal of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example.

It is Mallarmé who writes that "the social relationship and its momentary measure, whether one condenses or stretches it in view of governing, is a fiction."

The fiction is precisely the alliance of the social relationship and its measure, which gives stability to the philosopheme of the political.

It is indeed by imagining that political economy and social relationships furnished the circumscribable place of this alliance that the old Marxism went astray and that, thus, the Marxist insurrection of politics found itself covered up and inverted. So-called Marxist political economy, as is well known, has not been able to perform the critique of its own critique. It has philosophically fictionalized that which both Marx and Lenin had pointed out, namely, that the real of politics is never anything but encountered and chanced upon. Economy, the critique of which was meant to track down what absolutely exceeded it in a singular point, has been the means by which Marxist politics, which is the interpretative precarity of working-class consciousness, the freeing up of a previously unperceived political capacity by way of a vulnerable scission, was bogged down in the trappings of a particular doctrine of the political.

What was supposed to be a strategy of the event, a hypothesis regarding the hysterias of the social, an organ of interpretation-

interruption, a courage of fortune, finally has been presented by way of the economy as giving us a convenient measure of social relationships. In this way Marxism was destroyed by its own history, which is that of its *fixion*, with an *x*, the history of its fixation into the philosopheme of the political.

That *the political* is a fiction should not make it innocent. It does not even make it innocent with regard to its truth, if it is indeed the case, as Jacques Lacan sustains, that fiction presents itself as the structure of truth. The truth of the political, as it is included within politics, has precisely been pronounced in the fiction of so-called political economy. Its critique was announced, but its general domination was established. This pronouncement, however, comes to the detriment of that which makes up the truth of politics, and of which we therefore should recapture both the lack and the excess.

Mallarmé has diagnosed how little innocence there is in fiction. "A great harm has been caused to the association of people on earth," he writes, "a secular harm, by indicating to them the brutal mirage, the city, its governments, its laws, other than as so many emblems or, as far as our condition is concerned, what a necropolis is in relation to the paradise it evaporates: a platform, almost not vile."

The fiction of the political is a funerary fiction, and this is all the more so insofar as it causes the real evaporation of politics. At its core, this fiction is that of gathering, of bonding, of relationships. It articulates the sovereign on the basis of the community. The political can be designated philosophically as the concept of the communitarian bond and its representation in an authority. The theory obviously has its variations, according to whether the emphasis is placed on the genealogy of the bond, on its contractual self-founding, or on its natural filiation, or, on the contrary, the emphasis is placed on sovereignty and its representative or organic capacity to guarantee the law of the totality. In all these cases the difficulty of the political philosopheme consists in discovering that there is no transitivity between the essence of the social communitarian bond and its sovereign representation. *The political* keeps wandering between civil society and the State. All sorts of concepts come in to serve as

metaphors for this hiatus. But this is of little importance, as long as what remains unshaken is the assignation of the political to the thought of the communitarian bond, whereby the labor of the fictive has already begun. Even transforming the destruction of the social bond by capital's axiomatic opacity into the place of the retreat of the political only further preserves the conceptual jurisdiction of the bond as such. Likewise, adding the vulgar democratic notion of respect for differences to the threatened social bond does nothing to let us escape the fiction. There can be no molecular critique of the molar concept of politics. No matter how particular its points may be, the latter's political determination by the thought of the relation, albeit a relation of differentiation, always leads us back to the scarce reality of the political. Who would want a difference whose communitarian guarantee consists of respect? Is there not something abject in this display of the differentiated, in the thought of difference as dialogue, pacified by the law of the good rapport? Worse than misrecognition is recognition.

Standing in the rubble of the thought of the political, people nowadays make a big deal out of democracy and out of the combat in which we are urged to engage against totalitarianism. However, what is democracy *as a concept*? What is it, aside from the empirical assortment of parliamentary functions? Is it conceivable that the global crisis of political thought boils down to the platitude that the (capitalist) regimes of the West are more flexible and more capable of consensus than the (equally capitalist) regimes of the East? No matter how precious, the democratic idea thus conceived is not at all up to the task of thinking the historicity of the crisis of the political. Its empirical preeminence is rather one of the symptoms of the widespread and profound nature of this crisis. Indeed, by arguing for the practices inherent in pluralistic regimes, that is, in representative democracies, this preeminence dissimulates that what is in the process of withdrawing is precisely the reference point to which this plurality can be assigned, since all sets are inconsistent. It hides that what ceases to be operative is representation, since we no longer even have presentation.

Democracy is certainly a concept of the political, and one furthermore that touches very closely upon the real of politics. But democracy in its common sense is never anything but a form of the State. In this regard, and as a concept, it is internal to the fictive aspect of the political and enters into a conceptual pair together with totalitarianism only on this very terrain, in which the latter is designated as the culmination of the political.

It is indeed indisputable that at the heart of the twentieth century, in its Soviet paradigm, *the political* deployed itself as the universal pretense of the State. And the parliamentary democracies, which were contemporary to this event, would be wrong to imagine that they remain outside the sphere of influence in which the collapse of this pretense spreads catastrophe for thought. In truth, it is the opposition democracy/totalitarianism, and not totalitarianism alone, which constitutes the dialectical essence of that which under our own eyes enters into the night of nonthought and enjoins us to perform a new founding gesture. Democracy and totalitarianism are the two epochal versions of the accomplishment of the political, according to the double category of the social bond and its representation. Our task concerns politics insofar as it articulates instances of unbinding onto that which is unrepresentable.

The first task, in order to fix *the political* as fiction and orient ourselves toward *politics*, consists in disengaging the latter from the prescription of the social bond. We must effectuate, both practically and theoretically, the de-fixing of politics as communitarian bond or relationship. Let us pose axiomatically that the free mobility of politics stems from the fact that it touches upon the real by way of an interruption, and not by way of a gathering. That politics is an actively intervening-interpreting thought, and not the assumption of a power.

It is in this regard that politics has to do with the effect of a subject, associated with the real as obstacle and separated from the fiction of meaning.

We will also say that politics must be freed of the tyranny of history so as to be rendered onto the event. We must dare to posit

that, from the point of politics, history as meaning does not exist, but what exists is only the periodized occurrence of the a prioris of chance.

The theory of the good State, of the legitimate regime, of good and evil in the order of the community, of democracy and dictatorship, touches upon politics only from the bias of the political, that is to say, in the inevitable generation of the fictive philosopheme. Politics, on the other hand, is the mobile occurrence of a hypothesis. Its procedure is not on the order of legitimation, but on the order of consequence. The alternative between despotism and liberty is no more essential to politics than to the scientific or artistic procedures. And consequences, in turn, are proven only in the unverifiable ordeal of the event.

Whatever may be the belief that escorts it on the basis of the political, politics cannot do without courage, which we can define, at the opposite end of anxiety, as the split precipitation into the undecidable. Whatever apparent guarantees may be drawn from the fiction of its truth, the political decision comes down to deciding from the point of the undecidable. This does not exclude, but rather requires a large degree of calculation.

Finally, we will say that politics, against the grain of the political, which is a measured thought of the social and its representation, is not chained to the social but, rather, marks its exception.

The significant facts for Marxist politics are not on the order of the massive bond. They are not structural but, on the contrary, unnamable symptoms, erratic events, and forms of consciousness that are purely chanced upon. With regard to all this, active thinking arms itself with its precarious hypothesis. The social names the place of relationships. Its thought organizes itself on the basis of social relations, exploitation, and oppression. But relationships touch upon politics only by way of its fixation. The mobility that is politics does not find its truth in the social relation. It is that which testifies to a nonrelation, to the slippage of a de-linking. This is what matters in politics, even though the visibility of this nonrelation depends on a tightening of the conceptual screws around the relation itself.

Although today's fashion scarcely moves in this direction, it is inevitable at this point to mention the name of Marx. Because Marx in turn names the beginning where the old concept of the political started to be inserted into its fiction. I will not enter the debate over whether Machiavelli or Spinoza preceded him in this.

Marx sets out, absolutely, not from the architecture of the social, deploying its assurance and its guarantee after the fact, but from the interpretation-interruption of a symptom of hysteria of the social: the uprisings and parties of the workers. Marx defines himself by listening to these symptoms according to a hypothesis of the truth regarding politics, just as Freud listens to the hysteric according to a hypothesis regarding the truth of the subject. In order to capture the symptom that renders the social hysterical, without pinning it on the fiction of the political, it is necessary for the proletarian political capacity, as a radical hypothesis of truth and the becoming-fictional of the entire former arsenal of the political, to be excepted from the path of the communitarian and the social. This hypothesis touches upon the truth only by setting aside all the social facts, following the method that was already required by Rousseau. It must be possible to think politics in excess of both State and civil society—be they good or even excellent. The political capacity of the proletariat, which is called communist, is absolutely mobile, nonstatist, unfixable. It cannot be represented nor derived from the order that it exceeds.

Having designated politics as being unrepresentable, because its subject-effect is in the perceivable order of the symptom, makes Marx into a thinker of politics apart from the political, the fiction of which he fixates. It is not from a norm that he takes assurance, but from the "there is" of an event in which he comes across a point of the real at the impasse of all conceivable and represented order. The truth of politics lies in the point of this "there is," and not in its linkage.

The subsequent elaboration tightens the link of social relations in order to regulate the space of politics as the punctual outplace of this very place.

Such is the statement of the beginning of Marxism.

However, measured against this commencement and from the point of view of politics, the event of which we are the contemporaries is the crisis of Marxism.

Even if they will not confess to this, all those who today think along the lines of the death of Marxism see clearly that this death, which they proclaim or perhaps have forgotten already, is the visible sign of a much more profound and much more radical phenomenon, which is the crisis of the political in its entirety.

The movement of the present text is guided by the will not to convert this sign into the sign of nothing: the will to be up to the task of its radicalism and not to fall short of the place it assigns to us, which would mean to enter into sheer nonthought by consenting to busy ourselves with nothing more than the managing of current tactics.

What is at stake is nothing less than the possibility, for philosophy, to contribute to keeping politics in the realm of the thinkable and saving the figure of being that it contains from the automatisms of the undifferentiated.

Against the simple registering of abandonment, the movement of the text consists in proposing my own path with regard to the destruction of Marxism, and thus, safeguarded against sheer decline, to enter into the axioms for the recomposition of politics.

August 1984

ONE

Destruction

About the crisis of Marxism, we must say today that it is complete. This is not just an empirical observation. It belongs to the essence of the crisis as crisis to unfurl all the way to its last consequences. For Marxism, this means reaching the figure of its completion. And this is the case, not just on the promise of the joint completion of a prehistory but, on the contrary, in the properly historical modality of its completion, which would turn Marxism into a given, both ideological and practical, that is purely and simply obsolete.

I. ON HISTORICAL REFERENTIALITY

In order to think the complete nature of the crisis, we must return to what constituted the singular force of Marxism, that is, the

evidence—foreclosed today—of its historical referents. That which in some way certified Marxism as a universal thinking of revolutionary activity was not fundamentally its investigative or analytical capacity, or the mastery, which it meant to guarantee, of a grand narrative of History. It was not even what it prescribed, or authorized, in matters of political commitment. No: among all the revolutionary doctrines issued in the nineteenth century, that which designated the singularity of Marxism was the historically attested right to lay claims on History. Marxism alone presented itself as a revolutionary political doctrine that was, if not historically confirmed (which is a slightly different matter), at least historically active. For half a century at least Marxism has had historical credit. This credit was actually the guarantee that Marxist politics remained adequate to its founding mobility, and this is what excepted it from the political, conceived as a purely speculative and always obsolete apparatus.

Marxism ties this historical credit to three main referents, which are easy to pinpoint, but their difficult internal articulation has been laid out, above all, in the work of Paul Sandevince:[1]

1) The existence of a series of States emblematic of a revolutionary transformation that is effectively realized and not only projected. These States invoked socialism in action; they materialized the stage of the transition to communism; and they incarnated the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is tempting to call this essential referent the statist referent. Marxism has been the only revolutionary doctrine destined to incarnate itself as a doctrine of the State. Thanks to this, there was this active semblance of a fusion between the point and the link. The idea of a domination of nondomination. From a subjective point of view, it is important to see in this what I will call the victorious referent.

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1. See, for example, the articles by Paul Sandevince [a.k.a. Sylvain Lazarus] in *Le Perroquet* 41 (1984): "The End of Referents," "Critique of Representations," and "Politics under Condition."

Marxism has been lived as that through which, for the first time in history, the oppressed, the workers, the peasants, by arming and organizing themselves, were really able to vanquish the adversary and really to decompose and destroy the military and statist machinery in which the maintaining of old oppressions was concentrated.

This idea of victory has played a decisive role in the popular rallying to Marxism of workers and intellectuals. The October Revolution has been the sumptuous image of an overturning of the principle of force in History. Leninism is above all a victorious Marxism.

Based on this point the socialist States have been able to lay long-term claims on History: the USSR was able to do so at least from 1917 until 1956; then China, as if to regain a harvest already collected, between 1960 and 1976. For almost sixty years these States have incarnated a victorious subjectivity. It is this incarnation that was active much more so than the really existing statist production, even taking into account the illusions and semblances with which it was also riddled.

The first referent is none other than this historical punctuation, organized by a political subject, around the theme of victory.

2) The wars of national liberation constitute the second referent. It is a matter of inventing a new form of war under the direction of modern parties: an asymmetrical war, rooted in the countryside, organizing the peasantry, and unfolding in stages in a prolonged manner. China and Vietnam are exemplary here. Of course it is still a question of victory: Lenin's "Insurrection is an art" corresponds to Mao Zedong's "The people's war is invincible." But it is even more a question of the fusion of the national principle with the popular principle. The war of national liberation poses that a single movement forges a nation against imperialism and liberates a people from semifeudal constraints. Under the hegemony of Marxism, with the guarantee of the Party as popular organization and strategic headquarters, the active unity of people and nation is put to work. The theme of victory comes back, but from now on it applies to foreign war as much as to civil war. It constitutes the nation just as it did

the class dictatorship earlier. These examples, associated with the Chinese referent, provoked a second wave of rallying to Marxism, particularly among the youth in and around the 1960s: the provisory relay, which would prove to be precarious, of the upheavals caused by the shining example of October 1917.

3) The third referent, finally, is the workers' movement itself, including this time in the metropolis of the West and especially in Western Europe. This movement manifested its political permanence in the general element of the Marxist reference. The class unions and the Marxist parties gradually had become the stable internal acquisitions of political life, including in the regulated sphere of parliamentarism. From a social point of view, it made sense to speak of "working-class parties," in a singular mix of institutional longevity and relative dissidence, which in a posture of both waiting and everyday administering combined the figures of a faraway revolutionary Idea and the proximity of oppositional activism.

These three referents—workers' movement, national liberation struggles, socialist States—allowed Marxism to situate itself in the order of real History and excepted it from mere opinion trends, be they revolutionary or not. All three conveyed the conviction that History worked in the direction of the credibility of Marxism. Insurrection, the State, war, the nation, the unionization of the masses: all these terms, which sum up—in appearance—the political capacity of the workers, found their articulation in Marxism and in their supreme subjective agent, the Marxist political party.

We can call the "crisis of Marxism" the step-by-step collapse of this framework of references. Marxism today finds itself confronted with the impossibility of continuing to lay claims on History. Its credit has been spent and now it is reduced to the common proportions of other doctrines.

In the space of some thirty years we have the seen the beginning of the process of destitution of the statist referent (critique of "really existing socialism") and of the referent of national liberations (cri-

tique of liberated nations capable, in their turn, of military expansion, such as in the case of Vietnam).

If Poland—since at least Gdansk in 1980—has come to *complete* the crisis, it is because here the almost century-old connection between Marxism and the workers' movement entered into crisis in a radical way: thus disappeared, in its simplest form, the third and last referent.

The statist referent was the first to enter the era of suspicion, principally as a result of the balance sheet drawn up in the case of the Soviet Union.

Here we must be on alert, philosophically speaking. The discredit into which the USSR has fallen is so profound, and the banality of its fiasco so established, that it is very well possible that thought has lost even the trace of what was really at stake in this historical venture. Evidence carries a notorious power of dissimulation.

The usual angle of attack privileges the terror and the oppression, and thus a wealth of massively confirmed data, so as to throw the USSR out of the purview of all reasonable politics. But what is the order of reasons in which this unreasonable aspect can be ascertained? What conceivable political health diagnoses the Soviet pathology?

Subjectively it is well known that it is in the prophetic resource of art that the Russian horror has finally managed to come to light for the Western conscience. The simple stating of the facts by Victor Serge, David Rousset, and many others did not suffice for this. Only the genius of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has completely shaken the regime of blind certitudes. This is the point where art anticipates the figures of political consciousness.

Nevertheless, for those who, like me, accept that literature can name a point of the real that remains closed for politics, there is room here to make the case for a literary polemic. For we must be firm in admitting that the denunciation of the Terror is not, and cannot be, the radical critique of the politics that grounds it.

The Gulag Archipelago, then, would have reminded the West of its duty, of its conscience. It would have put an end to the Marxist deviation of the intellectuals. The repentant revolutionaries, confronted with the horror of the real, would have found their way back to the path of the Law and the order of Right.

Allow me first of all to greet Solzhenitsyn as someone who in a way is beyond (but historically before) this massive return of French intellectuals to parliamentary democracy as the alpha and omega of political convictions. Solzhenitsyn, it is evident, wants to have nothing to do with human rights, and he laughs at parliaments. At the heart of his discourse we find the spirituality of Russia, whose suffering is worth redeeming for all of humanity. What interests him and drives his prose with a grandiose and esoteric tension is the Christic vocation of the Russian people. Stalin has meant the crucifixion that was needed so that Russia alone might proclaim the Evil of materialist ideology to the world. In doing so, Solzhenitsyn completely recuses the weakness of democracy. Against the blasphemous totality of the red despot, he calls on the spiritual totality of the Master—the real one—whose transcendence has chosen Russia for the painful edification of the century.

No matter how violent the paradox may well appear, from the sole point of view that interests us here—the position of a new concept of politics—we must recognize therefore that Solzhenitsyn belongs to the same dimension of Russian political thought as Stalin, of whom in a certain sense he represents the inversion rather than the destruction.

Solzhenitsyn's political path, to be sure, is steeped in his hatred for Stalin. But the site of this hatred, that which grounds the possibility and creative capacity of hatred, remains immobile. Solzhenitsyn and Stalin both think on the basis of Russian nationalism, always recollected in a populist sublimation, in which the figure of a Grand Inquisitor at the center of a tempest of sufferings bears the

stigma of a salvation far superior to anything of which the West is capable, cravenly installed as it is in its success and its peace.

The camps, for Solzhenitsyn, are the argument of a prophecy. It is a question of keeping the dossier of Evil up to date so that the spiritual demand, which alone is commensurate with an absolute crime, may be sublated (in the Hegelian sense of the *Aufhebung*) from the bottom of the abyss.

As a writer, Solzhenitsyn deploys all the resources of the Russian tradition as it was instituted a long time ago for this great people spread out over the plain and the cold by a singular balance of realism, drawn in the dark colors of errancy and death, and millenarian exaltation, of which the peasant mass is the central hero.

Solzhenitsyn thus inventoried in minute detail the world of the camps only in order to circumscribe that which—in its logic—was radical therein. In the West he has allowed the conscience of the Stalinist phenomenon to be displaced and limited, both general (the camps as the truth of communism) and superficial (against all that, nothing except to hold on fearfully to the little one has). Indeed Western intellectuals were hardly concerned with the powerful national and Christian problematic found in Solzhenitsyn. Their interests were elsewhere. What mattered to them was for the revolution to stop being the transversal concept from which philosophically it was possible to think politics. In this regard, they imagined themselves as achieving a liberation, whereas they were only the anonymous bearers of a symptom, that of the universal crisis of politics and its subtraction from every effort in thinking.

The symptomatic nature of this misgiving can be read in the violence of its drive. Since what was at stake was the entire connection between subject and politics, it was not enough for the revolution to be impossible. For a Lacanian, this would have elevated it to the status of the real. But it was furthermore necessary for the revolution to be a crime. And since Nazism was the true political crime certified in the century, Solzhenitsyn's vast endeavor, which was Christic, nationalistic, and antidemocratic, was reduced to the ideological equation that is immediately perceptible in today's propaganda: Stalin is

Hitler. Against this only parliaments and free markets seemed to have any value.

Solzhenitsyn, in sum, was too Russian for the West to borrow from him anything else than what it already had produced, based exclusively on the petty forces of reaction: the insight that Stalin was totalitarian.

But the category of "totalitarianism," which itself is a notion that is operative only in its coupling with democracy, as I said before, falls short of the exigencies of the planetary crisis of the political. It does not open thought to its own imperative. Thus, from the high vantage point of Solzhenitsyn's literary overview, it turns out that the political understanding of the Russian camps, of the millions of dead, of the generalized terror, of all that has happened and what we must make of it, remains closed to us.

We should not pick the wrong writer when it is art that governs the possibility of political thought. No matter how great Solzhenitsyn is, his grandeur mirrors the dark grandeur in which Stalin has consummated the red disaster.

The one who should be our guide is Varlam Shalamov, whose first texts on Kolyma—these questions of dates are important—began to appear in France starting in 1969.[2]

Shalamov was in the camps of the Siberian Northeast for twenty years. He died in Russia, free but ill and unconscious. He does not put the camps at the service of an apologetics of Evil. He belongs to the other Russian tradition, the one that cleaves to human physical-

2. Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, trans. John Glad (London: Penguin, 1994). Shalamov's short stories had begun to appear, under the title *Article 58*, in 1969 with the publishing house Denoël. We should note in passing that the opposition Solzhenitsyn/Shalamov, which is pertinent for clarifying the stakes in the definition of the essence of politics, is not an immediate subjective opposition. Solzhenitsyn fully recognizes Shalamov's grandeur and even his superiority: "In the Kolyma Stories of *Shalamov* the reader will perhaps feel more truly and surely the pitilessness of the spirit of the Archipelago and the limits of *human despair*." See Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

ity and illuminates it with a few transmissible principles. After observing how, when put to the terrible test of the Siberian experience, horses die faster than humans, he declares that he has "understood the essential point: man has become man not because he was God's creature. . . . He has become man because he was physically the most resistant of all the animals, and, in the second place, because he forced his spirit to make use of its body with happiness."

Kolyma Tales is a collection of short stories, and if one had to cite a predecessor, it is Anton Chekhov who would come to mind, but a dry Chekhov, without the melancholy, if I may say so, a postrevolutionary Chekhov. These stories stand at the threshold between fiction and memory, and they are edited in France in a subtle order of succession, which imposes no architecture but rather a trajectory that begins with the question "How is a road beaten down through the virgin snow?" and ends with "It was a letter from Pasternak." One instantly imagines that the snow through which one suffers is also the virgin page and that, in the end, there is—borrowed from Boris Pasternak—a handwriting that is "swift, soaring, but at the same time precise and lucid."

The universe of the camps, as it is composed along this trajectory with a kind of fragmented sweetness, is—evidently—horrifying. Death, beatings, hunger, indifference, extenuation are the permanent markers of existence. And yet Shalamov's purpose is not to turn everything into Evil. It is rather a question of a kind of world-making, which is such that the exception may become the metaphor for normality, and the literary immersion in this nightmare may awaken us to the universality of a single will.

Whereas Solzhenitsyn keeps track of the archives of the Devil, Shalamov finds, at the limits of the possible, the hard core of an ethics. Even the geography of Kolyma (one gets there by boat, and the detainees call the rest of the country "the continent") contributes to the strange impression of dealing with a utopia turned upside down. Because the reader progressively forgets the stakes of politics, the State, and the centrally planned infamies, in order to lock himself up in a complete world in which all differences of consciousness and

behavior, both ramified and profound, are reduced to their essence. This is the point where we rejoin the possible path of another perception of the truth of politics itself.

Stalin, for example, is just a figure like any other for the prisoners: "Stalin's death did not make a big impression on us who were men of experience." Does this mean that it is the "system," and not Stalin the individual, who is responsible? There is no such argument in Shalamov. What the "men of experience" know is that, with regard to the real of the camps (as well as, in a certain sense, of the factory), it is not the invocation of the great oppressions of the structure that serves the circulation of truth, but the tenacity of a few points, of both consciousness and practice, from where one can clarify the compactness of the hours and halt the subjective decomposition in its tracks. Shalamov proposes what we might call a "behavioral chart" of the detainees—in sum, a class point of view:

> I couldn't denounce a fellow convict, no matter what he did. I refused to seek the job of foreman, which provided the chance to remain alive, for the worst thing in a camp is the forcing of one's own or anyone else's will on another person who was a convict just like oneself. I refused to seek "useful" acquaintanceships, to give bribes. And what good did it do to know that Ivanov was a scoundrel, that Petrov was a spy, or that Zaslavsky had given false testimony?

From this perspective, moreover, the official System—its inquisitors, its bullies, its foremen, and others—rather than signaling Evil, is homogeneous with the detainees, to the extent that it organizes an experiment, a kind of monstrous social production. For Shalamov, the horror belongs not to the communists but to the criminal underworld:

> The camp administrator is rude and cruel; the persons responsible for propaganda lie; the doctor has no conscience. But all this is trivial in comparison with the corrupting power of the criminal world. In spite of everything, the authorities are still hu-

man beings, and the human element in them does survive. The criminals are not human.

The theme of the criminal world is essential in the book. It concentrates the hatred and the horror. For Shalamov, Stalin's crime is less about the camps than about having given power and latitude to the criminals. The reason is that, faced with the criminal world, there exists neither a collective consciousness nor any firm principles. This point is crucial: for Shalamov, it is not politics but the absence of politics that has allowed the camps, and not its absence in terms of the state but its subjective absence. Intellectuals are criticized for having adopted the "morality" of the criminals, out of political weakness:

> In sum, the intellectual wants . . . to be a thug with the thugs, a criminal with the criminals. He steals, he drinks, he is even happy when he receives a punishment of common law: the infamous and cursed stamp of politics is finally taken away from him. And, besides, he has never had anything political about him. There were no politicians in the camp.

Here Shalamov touches upon the deadly egalitarianism of the Stalinist camp. It is not the Other who is struck, as in the Nazi camp (the Jew, the communist, the Russian, or the Pole). It is the same. If the camp is the experience of an ethics in which the crook is the adversary, it is because in and of itself it is devoid of dialectical significance. It thus generates no political thought whatsoever with regard to the State, only the path of a singular and immanent determination:

> Stalin's mortal scythe cut down everyone without distinction. . . . All were people caught by chance among the indifferent, the cowards, the bourgeois and even the executioners. And they became victims by chance.

The chance invoked in this passage bars all access to an apologetic doctrine of the camps, without for that matter giving in to

the irrational. The camp is first of all taken as an effect of the real from which to construct a literary discourse of truth based upon an ethical hypothesis. And it is the profound apoliticism of the victims that lies at the basis of this element of the real:

> The professors, union officials, soldiers, engineers, peasants and workers who filled the prisons to overflowing at that period had nothing to defend themselves with. . . . The absence of any unifying idea undermined the moral resistance of the prisoners to an unusual degree. They were neither enemies of the government nor state criminals, and they died, not even understanding why they had to die.

And again:

> They tried to forget that they were political. Besides they had never been political, no more than the other "fifty-eight" at the time.[3]
>
> The massacre of thousands of people in all impunity could be successful only because they were innocent.

Everything in *Kolyma Tales*, in the name of the victims, calls for them not to settle for political innocence. It is this noninnocence that must be invented, somewhere else than in pure reaction. To put an end to the horror demands the advancement of a politics that integrates whatever has been the cost of its absence.

This is also what grounds the periodization of the phenomena in the book. We do not find the perverse and unchanging system of totalitarianism. The camps have a marked history. At the center sits the terrible year: 1937–1938. It is really there, in the singularity of a moment, where cruelty is unleashed. Shalamov declares explicitly that the torture and the interrogations date from the end of 1937, as well as the immense number of executions of convicts. There is

3. Article 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code applied to "Trotskyists" and other political enemies of the people. It exposed one to the worst.

a before and an after of 1937, and then 1937 itself, as if at that point the regime had gone through the paroxystic time of its own process.

And then, as if in a counterpoint to the ethical intelligence which suffuses all these stories, there is a sort of poetics of the Great North, where the cold, the snow, the trees, the torrents, encountered as obstacles to the mere survival of the "goners," are also a magical and faraway substance, a pressing familiarity, to which Shalamov devotes entire stories, as in "The Dwarf Pine," which recounts the friendship between a man and a tree. This is all the more intense in that, as with everything else in the camps, there is nothing native about this closed nature for the one describing it, he who upon his liberation can write the following, in "The Train":

> Touching the cold brown rail with my frozen hand, I inhaled the gasoline fumes and dust of a city in winter, watched the hurrying pedestrians, and realized how much I was an urban dweller. I realized that the most precious time for man was when he was acquiring a homeland, while love and family had not yet been born. This was childhood and early youth. Overwhelmed, I greeted Irkutsk with all my heart. Irkutsk was my Vologda, my Moscow.

The reader will have understood that Shalamov's stories do not draw up the political balance sheet of Stalin and his camps.

This assessment is in reality still before us. This is because the prior condition for it is that an emancipatory politics, which is the only one to which philosophy can co-belong, must come to establish itself in the element of its insurrection, beyond the mortal crisis that hits it today. But Shalamov bequeaths to us this infinitely precious heritage: the prose in which the will of such an assessment can take root. Shalamov does not represent a tribunal, even though he is a judge without appeal. He is a form of consciousness, both exemplary and transmissible.

We must look the Soviet terror in the face; it is impossible to say even as little as "This does not concern us," while covering our face. Because this is, in its own way, our history, insofar as it is a matter of

thinking and practicing the break with all this. Shalamov does not give us any leeway in coming as near as possible to what, it is sometimes said, we prefer to ignore. We, more than anyone, are yoked to the task of avoiding the reproduction of the horror whose subjective truth Shalamov puts into such lucid and fraternal prose, so that it may be rooted out from the ground up.

Here the writer is a guide for action, inasmuch as action aims to recompose a politics worthy of its name, that is to say, a politics consistent with the tension of a subject who speaks the truth.

And what guide could replace the one who—as he tells in "The First Tooth"—at the moment when a prisoner is beaten before his eyes, realizes "that the meaning of my whole life was about to be decided," the one who steps out of line in order to declare with a trembling voice, "How dare you beat this man!" at the risk of being subjected, the following night, to a beating of his own, and of losing his first tooth.

But Shalamov is also the one who, in "Marcel Proust," tells of the precious value of books, of their circulation, their loss, and of how—after having started on the fourth volume, sent nobody knows how to an acquainted assistant-doctor—he had been "floored by Guermantes." He, "a man of Kolyma, a zek."

III. THE END OF VICTORIES

In reading the "zek," we strengthen—without giving up on our aim of defining the essence of politics—the certainty that the statist reference of politics is entirely destroyed. But with this orphanhood of the real comes a division and an equivocation in that notion of which this State is the emblem: the notion of victory. What does it mean to win? Throughout the nineteenth century this question had remained obscure for working-class political consciousness. The Marxism-Leninism from "the era of victorious proletarian revolutions," as it used to be called, had shed some light on this point: to win meant, under specific national conditions, to follow the road

opened by October 1917 and by the USSR. Victory had found its homeland, the "fatherland of socialism."

But now we find that victory is expatriated. The fact that the USSR, China, or any other State whatsoever, even in the common consciousness of those who still pretend to invoke them, cease to be the emblems of victory, the fact that they even become its inversion, or its black sign, means that victory itself is struck with a sense of suspicion and disorientation. Of all the concepts of Marxism, that of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the most compromised in the victorious subjectivity that came out of the October Revolution, by the same token is the first one to be hit. Its crisis obscures the line of demarcation between Marxism, conceived as political realism, and the other currents of revolutionary thought. The dictatorship of the proletariat in some way was the conceptual summa of the victorious political process, a determination that combined the general theme of the proletarian political capacity (dictatorship of the proletariat being symmetrical to dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) with the particular form of the postrevolutionary State (dictatorship of the proletariat being the class essence of the socialist State). The putting into question of the USSR as the historicity of victory causes a major upheaval in the conceptual rigor of this combination.

The second referent (the national liberations) has been deposed in the process of Vietnam's becoming a State, and this all the more so insofar as activism in support of the people of Indochina had been a major source of political radicalism for youth in the West. Vietnam today appears an expansionist military power, strongly tied to the Soviet model, whose powerful national dynamism is not organically linked to any popular dynamism. The separation, which is evident today, between Vietnamese nationalism and popular commitments throws into doubt how well-founded was that which, in the previous sequence, made up the propagandistic force of their supposed fusion. The war, which was said to be "of the people," has undoubtedly carried the national question to victory. But has it actually done so in a dialectical unity with popular emancipation? Today we may ask ourselves whether what was taken to be such popular unity was

not simply a specific technique of national warfare, the general form taken by war in the contemporary era, but without there being any emancipatory popular political universality necessarily inherent in this form. And so if it remains justified to have supported the war effort of the people of Indochina—within the framework of the necessary liberation of nations—we must delimit the justice of this support from everything that pretended to exceed it by reading in the war of the people the profound source for a political innovation and the shelter for a regeneration of Marxism. Rather the war in Vietnam—as subsequent developments show—has established what nationalism was still capable of in terms of inventions adapted to the conditions of the time. It has proven that the (bourgeois) era of national wars not only was not over but also still had potential for political and military innovation. This is a useful lesson for analytical Marxism, without for this reason being any consolation for militant Marxism. The tactics and principles of the prolonged war are today part and parcel of the universal repertoire of political methods. Their class character has come undone, and, as far as Marxist inventions are concerned, the continuation of their use no longer has any referential value for the revolutionary specificity of Marxism.

IV. THE UNIVERSAL MEANING OF THE POLISH WORKERS' MOVEMENT

With socialist States and wars of liberation having been put into doubt, can we then fall back upon the sole consideration of social movements, especially in the figure of the workers? Can we keep alive the connection between a form of Marxism liberated from the statist adventures of the century and the spontaneity of what I have called the hysterias of the social? It would be a question of the political life of a unique referent, unattested outside of itself, which is representable neither by the State nor by the Nation—nor, finally, even by the People.

However, what kind of "life" are we talking about? If we elimi-

nate the experience of the Soviet—or Chinese—State as well as that of national liberations, where and how has the working class on its own strengths proven its independent political capacity? If we limit ourselves to Europe, what can we put forward after the Spartacist insurrection of 1919 in Germany? And even then, what can we object to those who, in terms of factual historical experience, register nothing but the masses being led, under the direction of pure Marxists, toward bloody failures? Opposed to this as the alternative, there is only a slow parliamentary rotting away, of which the French Communist Party offers us the degrading spectacle. Rather than as a referent, the workers' movement—considered as a movement that is socially determined—seems to function as a repetition of what always has been the fate of the oppressed, first the slaves and then the peasants: to practice the alternation of silent submission and insurrection drowned in blood. Between the two there is the strike, which changes only the wage. By supposing that the political capacity of the workers, under the law of capital and empire, does not exceed the universal principle of revolt in its violent and regular forms, we seem to ruin the last ground of the Marxist hypothesis.

It is at this point that the Polish workers' movement, at least between 1980 and 1984, has introduced a novelty, and this novelty remains no matter what are the twists and turns and tactical failures that make up its concrete history. It is indeed totally possible that this movement has exhausted the immediate resources of meaning that its first stage had laid out. It is possible that today it is vanquished, or stagnant. However, the autonomy of politics implies the autonomy of its genealogy. And, furthermore, what is the exact meaning of the "failure" of the Polish movement, given that its affirmed goal was not to "vanquish"? All this remains to be thought. If even Poland—as event—has disappeared from our journalistic actuality, the novelty it carried is far from being integrally available to us.

This novelty is all the more considerable insofar as the Polish movement, by many of its features, was the most classically working-class—the most classically "Marxist"—phenomenon that we have

seen in Europe since the beginning of the century. In Poland the working class of the factories has been, and still is, including in its lack of success, universally recognized as the political pillar of what the Polish call "society." The working class was not simply a component of the general social movement, in which it is not counted. On the contrary, it is the working class, in and of itself, which has constituted the center of the unfolding of the new political thought throughout the whole social body. Intellectuals, peasants, and the urban youth, as per their own confession, stood under the political guarantee of the democratic organization of the factories. The political debate, in its practical essence, is referred back to the debate of the working class.

However, we must take note of the fact that this almost chemically pure working-class political thinking has taken a stance against Marxism-Leninism. The workers' movement itself, politically constituted through mass events, organized its thinking in a relation of radical foreignness to Marxism-Leninism.

So here we have a movement which, on the one hand, seems to verify for the first time in a long time the originary hypothesis of Marxism: the existence of a specific proletarian political capacity, heterogeneous to the political capacity of the bourgeoisie; and which, on the other hand, achieves this verification only in the nominal inversion of this very hypothesis, in the element of a hostility to everything of which this hypothesis was the name, that is, Marxism.

The greatest contemporary workers' movement thus found the self-development of its political thinking only in a relation of complete exteriority to Marxism-Leninism. In my view, whatever the role may be that national constraints (the Church, etc.) played in this process, the result is that it is now universally the case that the organic link between Marxism and the social referent of the workers' movement has been undone before our own eyes.

Thus, today, neither the socialist States nor the national liberation struggles nor, finally, the workers' movement constitute historical referents anymore, which might be capable of guaranteeing the concrete universality of Marxism.

V. THE REACTIVE MEANING OF CONTEMPORARY ANTI-MARXISM

It is no exaggeration to say that Marxism has been historically defeated or undone. Its conceptual maintenance takes place merely in the order of discourse, remitted to its common lot, once the living substance of its incarnation begins to fail.

With regard to this destruction, there are obviously two paths, or two orientations of thought.

The first comes down to stating that Marxism has been judged, and found guilty, in the tribunal of history. Since Marxism vindicated the positive guarantees of history, it must be judged according to its own criteria. The historical destruction of Marxism means nothing less than its death, as a universal event of political thinking. "Really existing" socialism is the verdict that history pronounces on the historicity of Marxism itself: it has had its time. Whatever is left of its appearance is only a cadaver of language, a discourse sustained only by the lie of death.

This idea is so widespread today that it almost goes without saying. This is the principal objection that can be raised against it. To say today that Marxism is dead with regard to living thought is merely to state a fact. There is no profound idea, no discovery whatsoever, behind this statement. It is a common idea, of which it is to be feared that it is only the dissimulating effect of evidence.

What is striking, by contrast, is that this idea for the time being has produced nothing that is not purely reactive. What is today the dominant use of the idea that Marxism is dead? What large-scale consequence has been drawn from this idea? Simply put, it is the notion that the general idea of any politics other than the management of constraints—hence the idea of a politics worthy of thought—is itself dead. And that such a politics, in which thinking would be accountable to being—and not only to necessity—is a dangerous adventure. Is it not dangerous indeed to take orders from death? The anti-Marxists of the new generation take for granted that we

should above all keep what we actually have at our disposal: liberties, Western thought, human rights. In other words, the political essence of contemporary anti-Marxism has meant, in actual fact, the rallying—and for the first time the massive rallying—of intellectuals to the parliamentary form of Western nations and the renunciation of all radicalism, of all essentiality in matters of politics.

This way of thinking about the historical destruction of Marxism amounts to a reactive reflection upon the virtues of parliamentary democracy as the perfectible, but essentially good, form of the State. This critique of politics does not manage to exceed the return pure and simple to the liberal theory of politics. The law is restored as that for which philosophy must provide the foundation. This is the first example of a critique whose confessed aim is the restoration of a classical moment of the political philosopheme.

Contemporary anti-Marxism is thus caught in a conservative and Western drive. At its core lies a reactive conceptual formation in which historical dynamism is replaced with conservative democratic spirituality. This is a veritable disaster of thought, of which the disaster of Marxism is the conjunctural catalyst. This disaster has removed all radicalism from the philosophical question with regard to the political. Here the retreat is really a debacle.

What contemporary anti-Marxism designates as the failure and lie of Marxism does not even reach the level of radical thought about the effects of the destruction of Marxism.

Let us propose this paradox: if we pronounce ourselves "Marxists"—no matter what the meaning of this term today may be—we will say that things are certainly much more serious than anti-Marxism imagines. Because with the anti-Marxist critique (the Gulag, the end of liberties, the defense of the West, etc.) being nothing but the endless repetition of very old objections, if this were all there was to it, we would be able to respond to them with the old refutations.

There is much more to the crisis of Marxism than anti-Marxism can even dream of.

Symmetrically, a dogmatic defense of Marxism amounts to repeating the old refutation of the old objections, which contemporary anti-Marxism in turn repeats.

New anti-Marxism and defensive old Marxism are two aspects of one and the same phenomenon, which is the phenomenon of the maintenance of the political in its retreat, to the point where thinking abdicates before its own imperative in the crisis.

By contrast, the fact that the "Marxist" working-class objectivity of the Polish movement unfolds itself in a subjective anti-Marxism signals the contradictory impact of the novelty involved. Indeed what is at issue is a new political configuration of the workers' capacity and, thus, a new, still silent configuration of Marxism itself.

However, in order for us to think this novelty we must uphold the following statement, which is the only one that is not reactive—because all anti-Marxist thought about the historical destruction of Marxism turns out to be reactive: the contemporary being of that which will mark the new figure of politics, and which we might still call "Marxism" insofar as it must continue along the lines of the emancipatory hypothesis, is nothing else than the complete thought of its destruction.

VI. DESTRUCTIVE SUBJECTIVIZATION AND DELOCALIZATION

Marxism today is not dead. It is historically destroyed. But there is a being to this destruction. To be more precise: it is possible, and necessary, to hold oneself immanent to the destruction.

The real existence of Marxism, at every stage of its development, is an immanent political given. Marxism is not a doctrine. It is the name of the One for a network made up of political practices. The view of the crisis of Marxism as the crisis of a reality ("really existing socialism") that would judge and disqualify a discourse (the Marxist doctrine) can only miss its target. Marxism for its part is indeed "really existing" only insofar as it is that with which a political sub-

ject sustains itself. The result is that the thought of the destruction of Marxism comes to be determined as the historical moment of a political subject. The juxtaposition of a reality and an ideology puts the lack in Marxism, but it does not permit us to think either its force or its weakness.

The fundamental question thus concerns the point of view from where we examine the destruction of Marxism. Does one participate, or not, in the very thing that is in the process of being destroyed? I hold that the radical thought of the crisis of Marxism demands that one should be subjectively and politically in a position of immanence to this crisis.

We must be the subject of the destruction of Marxism in order to propose its concept. Every decentered position produces a bland and external, repetitive and reactive form of thinking of this fundamental crisis of politics.

Evidently I am not saying that in order to criticize Marxism we must "believe" in Marxism. I for one do not believe in Marxism at all. I am not proposing a hypothesis in terms of either belief or allegiance. Marxism in no way constitutes a grand narrative. Marxism is the consistency of a political subject, of a heterogeneous political capacity. It is the life of a hypothesis. The extreme peril in which this consistency finds itself is felt in the subjective experience of this peril. The test of this capacity, bordering on its inexistence, demands that one should inexist along with it. Because as experience shows, the position of exteriority leads to an external concept of the crisis, to the putting on trial of an ideology by the presupposition of a disjointed political reality. The crisis of politics is referred back to the retreat of the political. But Marxism is in crisis precisely because it supports all by itself the irruption of the real. It is on the basis of the destroyed Marxism that one experiences the breakthrough of the real which illuminates the historical process of this destruction.

At issue in the examination of the crisis of politics there is a question of topology. What kind of proximity does one accept to bearing the being-in-destruction of Marxism? On the basis of what imma-

nent courage does the thought of the crisis seek to guarantee itself? It is to this proximity and this courage that we remit the following statement: the radical thought of the destruction of Marxism, in essence, is nothing else than the current figure of Marxism as politics. This is where we can locate the active pass or passage of the contemporary political subject.

To be the subject of the crisis of Marxism is the opposite of being its object. What does it mean to be its object? It means to defend Marxism, to defend the doctrinal corpus against destruction. It means to keep artificially alive all the dead referents at the level of discourse. It means to keep laying claims on history, whereas the credit line has long run out. There exists a way, let us call it Marxist-Leninist, to plead in favor of Marxism, which today is only a figure of its death. This type of Marxism, which relies for assurance on the existence of strong States, or on the supposition that there exists a political "working class," no longer has the courage of thought. It is a statist survival, an apparatus of big parties and big unions, which is politically monstrous and philosophically sterile.

No Marxist today can exist in thought otherwise than as a subject standing in close proximity to the destruction of Marxism. The proclamation of Marxism's good health, whether by States, by political parties, or by academic intellectuals, is a deadly medicine.

Let us push this idea even further. In truth, only active forms of politics can really destroy Marxism, and especially the Marxist-Leninist form of Marxism. The cause of destruction, the passage of the death of that which must die and the birth of that which must be born therein: these are the tasks of the Marxist politics of the new type. For death and birth are themselves immanent phenomena.

What does it mean to be a Marxist today? It means to be the one who stands in a subjective position within the destruction of Marxism, who pronounces immanently what must die and, thus, to die oneself, by situating this death as the cause for a recomposition of politics. It is along this practical process that one may produce the truly political thought of the destruction of Marxism.

To hold steady in Marxism means to occupy a place that is destroyed and, thus, uninhabitable. I posit that there exists a Marxist subjectivity that inhabits the uninhabitable. With regard to the Marxism that is destroyed, it stands in a position of inside-outside. The topology of politics, which remains to be thought in the place of the uninhabitable, is on the order of a torsion: neither the interiority to the Marxist-Leninist heritage nor the reactive exteriority of anti-Marxism. This relation of torsion is opposed to all the triumphalism of the previous Marxism, with its infallible rectitude of the "just line." The state of the art in political thinking today gives proof only of a twisted relation to its own history.

This can be put differently: the referents of politics today are not Marxist. There is a fundamental delocalization of Marxism. Previously there was a kind of autoreferentiality, since Marxism drew its general credibility from States that called themselves Marxist, from national liberation struggles under the direction of Marxist parties, and of working-class movements framed by Marxist unions. But this frame of reference has had its time. The great historical mass pulsations no longer refer to Marxism, since—at least—the end of the Cultural Revolution in China. Look at Poland, or at Iran. Because of this we see an expatriation of politics. Its historical territoriality is no longer transitive to it. The age of autoreferentiality is closed. Politics no longer has a historical homeland.

With regard to Marxism, the political references endowed with real working-class and popular life today are all atypical, delocalized, errant. Any orthodox Marxist will object that the Polish movement is nationalist and religious, that the Iranian movement is religious and fanatical, that nothing in them at bottom is of any interest for Marxism. And this orthodox Marxism will only be an empty object in the process of Marxism's destruction.

It belongs to the essence of all real politics that its historical referents are unthinkable along the paths of orthodoxy. The latter is a straight opinion, but Marxism means torsion, it no longer can have recourse to a straight-mindedness of thought.

We must keep steady in the dislocated place where it will become possible to think that which orthodoxy represents as unthinkable.

All that we have left in truth is only the uninhabitable place of a Marxist heterodoxy that is to come.

VII. THE FIGURE OF THE (RE)COMMENCEMENT

If Marxism today is indefensible, it is because we must give it a beginning.

Marxism began once, between 1840 and 1850. After that, in the history inaugurated by this beginning, it has known various stages, for example, the victory of October 1917 and the theoretico-political form of Leninism. Today it is much more than a stage that is at issue. To speak of a stage would mean that the first beginning is still valid. But we introduce precisely the radical hypothesis that this beginning has ceased to be valid and that it is an entire cycle of the existence of Marxism that has come to an end in the phenomenon of expatriation.

When Marx founded Marxism, his fundamental referent was the workers' movement. There existed neither the reference to socialist States nor that of national liberations. Of course it was not a case of autoreferentiality. The workers' movement, in its historical emergence starting in the years 1820–1830, surely was not "Marxist." If we reread the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, this absolutely inaugural text, we observe that Marx explicitly places his political thinking under the supposition of the entirely independent existence of the workers' movement. The point of departure states the following: "There is the revolutionary workers' movement." That is to say, there is that which a subject designates symptomatically as the obstacle where it becomes unbound. It is a pure "there is," a point of the real. And it is with regard to this "there is" that Marx advances this or that thesis. Such is the meaning of the enigmatic formula according to which "the communists do not form a separate party opposed to

the other working-class parties." The communists, as Marx seeks to ground their political designation, cannot be regrouped under this designation. They are not a fraction whose unity is a doctrine. The communists constitute an existing dimension of the whole set of the working-class movement, of that which Marx calls "working-class parties." The "communist party" is a general attribute of the working-class parties. Marx tries to isolate and think this attribute, which sums up how the real of the workers' movement is given as a political real.

Finally, Marx's thesis is not only "There is the workers' movement." Marx's thesis is also "There are communists," there exists this specific, irreducible dimension of the workers' movement, of which he attempts to provide the criteria and establish the political consistency. Therein resides the interpretive operation, the one that formulates the truth of proletarian politics, and whose conceptual name is that of the communist party.

Such is the figure of the commencement. It is not a matter of separating and structuring a part of the existing phenomenon. It is a matter of a "there is," of the act of thinking from the breaking point of an element of the real. It is a matter of the proximity of political thought to the real of the workers' movement, given in its symptoms, its attributes, and particularly in the communist attribute. When Marx declares that a specter haunts Europe, the specter of communism, he does not pretend, for his part, to be this specter so as to make its threatening figure appear in his doctrine. His aim is to think this haunting in the element of truth.

Subsequently we have had the long history of the Marxification of the workers' movement. The doctrine of the "fusion" of Marxism with the real working-class movement. The German Social Democratic Party, October 1917, the Third International: everything that constituted the system of referents that we mentioned at the beginning. In this long history Marxism will become the reflexive thought of this Marxification. It will ground the autoreferentiality. Marxism then speaks of the way in which Marxism penetrates the real of the class struggle: Marxist parties, Marxist directives, Marx-

ist States. The "there is" becomes "there is Marxism." All along this sequence, Marxism enables itself to speak of itself, of its historical credibility, of its conquering march. This effort is also, necessarily, that of its putting into fiction. Marxism in itself becomes its own representation.

The crisis of referents means that Marxism today is no longer capable of thinking itself from within any real experience. It no longer has the power to structure any real history. All the experiments, which are delocalized with regard to Marxism, propose a discontinuity in the previous history of the Marxification of history. Marxification could not be the object of Marxism. It is also here that resides the chance of freeing politics from the Marxified form of the philosopheme of the political.

We are thus brought back to the figure of the commencement: we no longer proceed starting out from the "there is Marxism" because this "there is" passes through its destruction. We proceed from the "there is" of an interruption or break, and within the framework of this "there is" we propose, just as Marx did in the *Manifesto*, certain inaugural political hypotheses. More particularly, we (re)formulate the hypothesis of a political capacity defined by nondomination.

Because of this, we can justly say that Marxism has completed its first existence. It is a cycle that has run its course, and I use "cycle" here in order to distinguish it from a simple stage. That which is completed is a first cycle of Marxification, brought to the point where this Marxification completely evades becoming the object of Marxism. This Marxification has produced a lot of things, admirable and sinister: it has produced the work of Marx, October 1917, Stalin, the Third International, the Chinese Revolution, the liberation of the nations of Indochina. And then, just behind us, adherent to us, there is the extreme border of this cycle, which already effectuates its completion, and which runs, let us say, from the Chinese Cultural Revolution to the Polish workers' movement.

What offers itself as the principle of existence of Marxism in this cycle is largely obsolete. This is why we are led back to the figure of

a commencement. That of which the true political forms today are contemporary is no longer the Marxification but a historico-political "there is" whose emancipatory dimension—its heterogeneity with regard to the figures (including Marxist ones) of domination—must be thought anew.

We must redo the *Manifesto*.

VIII. THE (RE)TURN OF THE SOURCES

What should we make of the so-called accomplishments of Marxism in the figure of the (re)commencement? Is the latter, as the deconstruction of Marxism-Leninism, the forgetting pure and simple of these "accomplishments"? The question is as meaningful—neither more nor less—as the one that would ask whether the ontological overturning of thinking must entail the integral forgetting of metaphysics. For Marxism-Leninism indeed marks the metaphysical age of political ontology properly speaking.

Marx, in the order of thought, did not start from nothing. Hegel was an obligatory reference for him—one that, to be sure, did not provide all by itself the principle of the formulation of the "there is," nor the rule of political commitment. I would say that the previous Marxism—the one of the completed cycle of Marxification—functions in its entirety as a reference "of the Hegelian type": both and at the same time necessary and prescribing nothing determinate. Marxism has become for itself its own Hegelianism. The referent for the accomplishments of Marxism must be dismembered, disarticulated, overhauled, and reassembled so as to participate in its own way in the contemporary designation of the "there is" that lies at its beginning, because brought back to the founding hypothesis: "There is a political capacity in the order of nondomination."

Politics must by chance pierce a hole in the metaphysical disposition of Marxist knowledge.

Lenin thought that Marx had articulated three referents of

thinking: a philosophical referent (Hegel and German dialectical idealism), a historico-political referent (the French revolutionary working-class movement), and a scientific referent (the English political economy).

We, for our part, have two things at our disposal. We have Marxist thought, as it has unfolded itself in the cycle of Marxification and as it is destroyed today—but neither more nor less than the Hegelian thought of the end of History was destroyed. And we have, from the Chinese Cultural Revolution to the Polish workers' movement, certain political events whose symptomatic function must be evaluated and whose subject must be interpreted in the understanding that this subject remains unthinkable, as far as its truth is concerned, in the simple filiation of the completed cycle of Marxism.

To put things differently, we must pronounce ourselves anew on the question of the sources of Marxism. It is a possible definition of the entire first cycle of existence of Marxism to say that its sources were German philosophy, English political economy, and French politics. The idea of the (re)commencement entails that these three sources today have dried up, and the new disposition of the sources for our thinking is, perhaps, entirely heterogeneous to whatever the Marxist tradition has been able to register.

If Heidegger had to search in the poem for what under the epochal impact of metaphysics served already for him as a source for its deconstruction, we must similarly find the erratic true statement in which, under the impact of the Marxification, whatever the latter hides and forgets in terms of Marxist politics, in the end comes to be stated. This politics, as far as its sources are concerned, is less in need of a doctrine than of a poem, that is to say, of the interpretation of an event.

There is certainly the Polish workers' movement, which is a source more than an object. Whence the fact that, like the French workers' movement of the nineteenth century, it is not its victory but its breakup that is law.

I myself have for a long time developed the thesis that, in France, the theory of Lacan about the splitting of the subject and the eclipse

of the object could be the source for a formulation of the Marxist theory of the political subject.[4]

All this is disparate and problematic. But the set constituted by Hegel, Ricardo, and June 1848 did not stand at the origin as an altogether clear and consistent identity either.

No doubt, to begin at the beginning, we must think all the way to the end the completion of the previous cycle. The initial task is that of the study of the terminal border of this cycle, that is to say, the effective critique of Marxism-Leninism, which is the process of its deconstruction.

Through this critique, which defines a political guideline—both theoretical and practical—we place all of Marxism in the position of a source for the inaugural gesture of another thinking of politics. The deconstruction of Marxism-Leninism establishes the destruction of Marxism in the guise of the (re)commencement. This scission is the gesture by which we become once again capable of hosting in our midst, albeit at the cost of great anxiety and peril, the "there is" of the real on which an entirely new practice of politics can be founded.

We are our own Erinyes: this is always a plausible objection. It is true that nothing can erase the blood. But it is much rather the anti-Marxist who believes that he can wash the blood from his hands. As a "Marxist"—an unpronounceable Marxist—I ask: By what gesture does politics become mobile again and leave behind the funerary fiction of the political, that is to say, the fiction of the economy and of Marxism-Leninism? If this gesture is impossible or untraceable, the decision, as in the Sophoclean tragedy, will proceed under the banner of the unthinkable. If it is possible, in the vulnerability illuminated and organized by a hypothesis regarding the truth of the proletarian political subject, then Marxism will withstand, as in the Aeschylean tragedy, the affirmative scission of the law that, to our misfortune, it had become.

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4. See my *Theory of the Subject*, translated and with an introduction by Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum-Bloomsbury, 2009).

TWO

Recomposition

I. THE EVENT. EMPIRICAL TRAJECTORY

The retreat of the political commits us to the following paradoxical endeavor: insofar as the determination of the essence of politics cannot be guaranteed either by the structure (inconsistency of all sets, de-linking) or by meaning (History does not amount to a totality), there exists no guidepost for the determination of this essence except the event. The evental "there is," taken in its chance-like nature, is precisely the site from where one must circumscribe the essence of politics. The firmness of the essentialization rests on the precariousness of the occurrence.

The event, though, is not on the order of reality. Here the orientation of thought aims in the direction of the distinction of the event from its common imitation, which we might call the fact. The

contemporary reduction of political reflection to the inessentiality of journalism is due in the first place to the confusion between fact and event.

Nothing is more decisive today than to separate the determination of the essence of politics from all "political" factuality, especially from the numerical considerations attached to it. Politics will be thinkable only if it is delivered from the tyranny of number—the number of voters as much as the number of protesters or strikers.

Let us first convince ourselves that today there is very little politics in circulation, almost none at all, and that in particular it is on the verge of complete inexistence whenever numbers are put on display.

The dominant regime of that which presents itself as political reflection today is—typically—the electoral commentary. However, neither the commentary nor the elections give us access to the essence of politics.

Commentary is the murmur of impotence, which is proper to inactive democracy, that is to say, to journalism. An election is certainly a fact, a reality, and it can be highly important in this regard. However, in general an election is neither an event nor a point of the real. And when it is, that is something, if I may say so, that does not depend on the election itself. The relation between the electoral reality and the political real must be diagnosed from the point of the impossible where the electoral calculation fails to enumerate everything from which it nonetheless derives its consistency.

By way of example, it is clear that, in all the recent French elections, a very important subjective stake has been linked to the massive urban presence of immigrant workers.[1] However, the point where representation touches upon this real is not readable from within this representation itself. In particular, the assertion of the

1. What is called (but this designation is already reactionary) the "immigrant problem" has played a capital role in the municipal elections of 1982, the partial election of Dreux, the European elections of 1984 (success of the list of the National Front).

"rise of racism," itself significant in the electoral calculations of the right and the extreme right, delivers no real political meaning. The proof is that this assertion, like all those others that present the rise of anything whatsoever, can induce only fear. But fear is not a political sentiment. It is a sentiment that belongs to the order of commentary.

In order to understand what the electoral number forecloses in these circumstances, we do well to refer to the event rather than to the fact.

The event is that which comes to be lacking in the facts, and from the point of which the truth of these facts can be assigned.

Do we currently have at our disposal an event of this order? Can politics come into being as truth with regard to the "political" order of facts? Let us advance by way of a provisory hypothesis that woven into the "facts" of the Talbot factory there is the event of which the elections organize the oblivion.[2]

Certainly what happened in the factory of Poissy at the start of 1984 is today massively forgotten in the order of fact. It is not a decisive date in the factual chronology plotted by the parliamentary or unionist storyline. But it is one aspect of the distinction between event and fact that they do not refer to the same scale of importance. It is entirely possible—as I said earlier about Poland—that an event makes itself scarce from explicit memories, whereas the loyal infinity of its effects persists invisibly by putting into circulation some truths.

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2. The facts of Talbot are situated between November 1983 and February 1984. The board of directors proposes the plan to lay off close to three thousand workers. Strike, occupation of the B3 workshop. Mobilization of the middle management and the "union" CSL (Confederation of Free Unions). Fights. Attack against B3 by those whom the press prudishly calls "nonstrikers," under the slogan "To the oven with the blacks." The CGT (General Confederation of Labor) (like the government) approves the plan. It judges the occupation "adventurist." It does not want to get involved. The CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labor), who obeys the call of the CRS (Republican Security Companies) supports the evacuation, which ends up happening.

Objectivity, as can be seen, is simple. The subjective fracture is essential.

Politics also has the task of repunctuating the chronicle. Of distributing other accents, isolating other sequences.

I will show in what sense what happened in this factory has periodized the time of politics.

Talbot, apparently, is only a local miniature of national "political" facts. Indeed what do we observe? Three characteristic elements in what is currently given.

The first element is the governmental policy of industrial restructuring. This policy is unquestionably the denial of everything around which the Socialist Party in 1981 had rallied its clients. The propaganda at the time denied the crisis of capitalism and flaunted its certainty to see unemployment come to an end with the rebounding of consumption. As in the posters of the tranquil town depicted with its chimneys throwing smoke, it was possible to treat the crisis with the sweetness of a summer evening, in a serene republican culture, and to the satisfaction of everyone.

Talbot crystallizes in one point, depending on the choice of one's convictions, either the lie of this promise or else the complete error of this doctrine. The government reveals itself in suspense on this point between two impossible forms of consensus, that of its promise and that of the brutality of capital, for which popular good sense estimates that Thatcher, Reagan, or Chirac are more qualified, if only by the greater adequacy of their ideological history.

The second element of the Talbot situation is the incapacity of the CGT to master a working-class situation, as this situation is massively saturated by the brutality of the restructuring and contains a minimum of self-constitution and capacity for independent speech of the migrant workers. The CGT and the PCF reveal themselves in suspense on this point between the approval of the layoffs and expulsion of the immigrants, which suppresses them in their role as syndicalist mediators, and the Islamic demagogy, which suppresses them in their role as bearers of the productive type of chauvinism and organizers of the good qualified Frenchmen in the factories.

The third element is the capacity of the gangs of the CSL to organize against the strikers a significant number of the French wage

laborers, with shouts of "Blacks to the oven" and, thus, within the space of the factory to unleash a small but genuine civil and national war.

Now these three elements are immediately readable in the numerical macro-situation of the elections. The small number of practical actors (two or three thousand) stands in metonymically for millions of voters.

The first element reads: inconsistency of the Socialist Party, which is unable to carry forward any independent political project and navigates without instruments between its emancipatory cultural tradition and its state function of rallying to the needs of capital. Whence its suitable passage from 30 percent to 20 percent in the 1984 elections.

The second element reads: historic decline of the French Communist Party, which, different in this regard from its Italian counterpart, has not been able for the past thirty years to make itself indispensable for the cohesion of nation and State, to manage the flow of opinion, or to control the objective and subjective transformations of the working people in the factories, frantically holding on to the representation of a "workers' movement" that concrete history had everywhere reduced to a fiction. Whence its descent into the hell of the electoral tally of a mere groupuscule.

The third element reads: ascent of the capacity of the extreme right—coming from Pétainism rather from Nazism—to fill the identity void in which the reactive consciousness of a mass of people is plunged due to the crisis, the provincialization of France on a planetary scale, and the massive presence of immigrant workers. Whence the 11 percent of Jean-Marie Le Pen, built on an abstract discourse of social satisfaction of the Same—"France first," "The French are French," and so on—in a kind of tautology for use in the *bistrot*, of which the Arab occupies the *no man's land*.

And yet we should maintain that it is only there, where the isomorphism breaks down between event and reality, between micro and macro levels, that the eventality of the event is politically interpretable.

Let us speak first of all about a silent subjective victory. In Talbot the gangs of the CSL have won. They have won not against the workers but against the government of the left. Indeed as soon as the latter presents the politics of the so called return home of the immigrants as the lesson to be drawn from the event, it confirms the very basis of the reactive view. That is, the view that the immigrants ought no longer to be represented in their interiority to society and to the factory—that is, as workers who have been here for twenty years—but in their national exteriority. Considered as a disposition of thought rather than as a practice of subvention, the politics of sending back the immigrants is situated exactly on the same terrain as the doctrine of the extreme right. The parameter of formal nationality must prevail absolutely over any other, and, in particular, over the real worker, and this all the way into the heart of the factory.

Between "Blacks to the oven" and "Immigrants go home, I buy their return ticket for *x* millions," there is an important difference in tone, but alas there is no difference in political principle. The reactive subjectivity is summoned equally by these two propositions. The extreme right thus won, subjectively speaking, over the government at Talbot. Now this victorious anticipation is illegible in the election results since the commentary presents the opposition between the right's racism and the left's antiracism as a self-evident given, with one scoring points over the other. The truth is that the new rapport to which the Talbot situation gave way between the actions of the extreme right and the redeployment of left politics with regard to immigrant workers was not a relation of frontal opposition but a relation of communicating torsion. Because of this torsion, there is a fundamental identity that circulates between statements formally situated on disjunctive or even opposite ends. This is what the electoral count makes unreadable, all the while fortifying itself with it, since the extreme right is evidently gaining parliamentary credibility from the fact that its discourse ceases to be perceived as extremist or atypical now that this discourse, though misrecognized, circulates so to speak from one end of the spectrum to the other.

The point where we can undo this torsion is not so clear as one

might think. The formal declarations of antiracism are without effect in this matter. We must also scrutinize the facts where the event comes to be constituted.

The pivotal statement of workers' resistance in the occupied Talbot factory has been "We want our rights." It is clear that this statement—that of a right as such for the worker and, I emphasize, for the fired and immigrant worker—does not resonate anywhere in the electoral numbers. Nevertheless it is the fourth term in the Talbot situation, the supplementary term, which alone had the capacity to reshuffle the situation in order to make it into an event.

Today some posit that if the statement of the immigrant workers remains foreclosed from the parliamentary arena, it is simply because they have no right to vote.

Such is the point where political thought gives up on its own imperative, under the injunction of sheer numbers.

As far as I am concerned, I am a firm partisan of the right for immigrants to vote. I have been, in propaganda and in deeds, for more than a dozen years, since the first hunger strikes of workers without papers, in 1972.

But I imagine by no means that the sphere of representation and number would be able to qualify the event about which I speak in the order of politics.

On the contrary, I argue that the statement of the workers at Talbot, as it has taken place forever, this statement that bears on the subject of rights, is intrinsically unrepresentable. And the politics of this statement lies, precisely, in this unrepresentability.

Let me put this differently. The figure of politics induced both by the Western parliamentary delegation of power as well as by the despotic bureaucratism in the East is that of the programmatic expression of forces. Its root would lie in the idea that group interests or ideals are projected onto the composition of governments by putting into place certain programs and plans. The nature of such programs and plans, in the West much as in the East, is primarily economical. Bureaucratic despotism merely posits its capacity to express, so to speak, in one fell swoop the national program, in the guise—which,

I should add, is purely decorative and abstract—of a dictatorial working-class legitimacy. What we have here is a kind of secular religion in which the cult is more important than the belief, as in the Roman Empire. Parliamentarism, on the other hand, organizes the appearance of a conflict of programs on the established ground of a convergence of necessities. In all cases, political consciousness is remitted to whatever from among its tenets can be delegated to a system of propositions susceptible of state implementation.

In the workers' statement of rights, the law of political consciousness is entirely different, since what constitutes this consciousness is not a defined programmatic or accountable figure. As the government and the unions say in unison, the rights in question do not exist. And furthermore the Moroccan workers, in the very act of proclaiming this right, also affirm that in light of the facts they, who have worked in France for twenty years, have no right whatsoever.

Here consciousness is induced by the event through which the right without right can be affirmed, that is to say, to use the expression from Marx and Lyotard, the absolute wrong, the wrong in general, done toward these people.[3]

This wrong cannot be represented, and no program can inscribe its compensation. Politics begins when one proposes not to represent the victims, which is a project in which the old Marxist doctrine remained the prisoner of an expressive scheme, but to be faithful to the events in which the victims pronounce themselves. Nothing supports this fidelity except a decision. And this decision, which promises nothing to nobody, in its turn is held up only by a hypothesis. It is the hypothesis of a politics of nondomination, of which Marx has been the founder and which it is our task today to found anew.

From this point of view, political commitment has the same

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3. The idea of a "wrong generally" done to the workers is present in Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*. The "wrong" is a central concept of the latest book by Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

reflective universality as the judgment of taste for Kant. Political commitment cannot be inferred from any proof, and it is not the effect of an imperative either. It is neither deduced nor prescribed. Commitment is *axiomatic*.

II. DEFINITIONS AND AXIOMS

What is at stake is to circumscribe the nonprogrammatic essence of politics and to think what I would call an intervening fidelity.

I adopt for a moment Spinoza's expository style.

I call *prepolitical situation* a complex set of facts and statements which are such that in them there are popular and workerist singularities collectively engaged in which we can discern a failure of the regime of the One. Thus an irreducible "There is a Two." Or again: a point of the unrepresentable. Or yet again: an empty set.

I call the *structure* of the situation the existing mechanism of the count-as-one, which qualifies the situation as being *this* situation in the sphere of the representable.

I call an *event* that which the qualification of the regime of the One leaves as a remainder, and, thus, the dysfunction of the whole regime. The event is not given, because the law of all donation is the regime of the One. The event is thus the product of an interpretation.

I call *intervention* the supernumerary statements and facts through which the interpretation realizes itself, which releases the event of scission, that is, the "There is a Two."

I call *politics* that which establishes the consistency of the event in the regime of the intervention and propagates it beyond the prepolitical situation. This propagation is never a repetition. It is an effect of the subject, a consistency.

I call *fidelity* the political organization, that is, the collective product of postevental consistency beyond its immediate sphere.

Talbot is a prepolitical situation, in that the qualification of the situation as a unionist strike against the layoffs is shown in its fail-

ure. The statement of immigrant workers as to their rights cannot be counted within this qualification, nor has it been. The parameters that are the action of the CSL and the scuffles, the inertia of the CGT, the departure of the CFDT, the arrival of the CRS, the government's assessment in terms of the politics of deportation, all this forms a coherent set, legitimated by the global situation, which we can represent as One. These parameters effectuate the count-as-one, that is, the structure. The immigrant workers as effective consciousness are the empty set of this One. They are thus rigorously uncountable therein.

The void is always this point sutured onto the real from which the plenitude of representation avers itself simply as one of the terms of a Two.

Here the event is the statement of the right without right. It is produced by the interpretation of inadequate programmatic forms in which it is operative. The index of the inadequacy of these forms is their floating multiplicity. Some say: we need twenty million; others: the reimbursement of social benefits; still others: one month's salary per year of seniority, and so on. The interpretation produces this event which, in a prepolitical situation, has been the statement that it was impossible to treat workers as used goods. Under the circumstances this impossibility is precisely the reality and, thus, the possibility. The possibility of the impossible is the basis of all politics. It is massively opposed to what we are taught today, which is that politics is the administration of the necessary. Politics begins with the same gesture by which Rousseau finds the origin of inequality: by setting aside all the facts.

It is important to set aside all the facts so that the event may take place.

The intervention gives consistency to the event, which it interprets, by propagating the evental statement as a statement of reflective judgment. In doing so it organizes a form of fidelity. Organization is the materiality of a reflective judgment.

In my definition of the prepolitical situation, I stipulate that there have to be "workerist and popular singularities" involved. This prescription is axiomatic, that is, general. By this I mean to say that it concerns the essence of the situation, and not this or that concrete circumstance, which can include the youth, the intellectuals, and others. As far as its essential, which is to say strategic, determination is concerned, I indeed forbid that politics can unfold without the subjective implication of workers, of people from the popular neighborhoods, of immigrants, of peasants, and so on.

In this way, though, I expose myself to a decisive objection. What is the use, someone will tell me, of destroying Marxism in its substantive historicization (I mean a history that substantializes the proletariat) and bringing it back to the hypothesis of a politics of nondomination, if you reintroduce the empirical worker in the final instance? I can understand—the objector continues—that for the idea of a generic and emancipatory worker's being, in short, for the idea of a proletariat, you substitute an ungrounded and purely subjective hypothesis, of which the whole point is to examine the consequences and not to verify the effects. You thus have broken the expressive link between the social and the political. You have liquidated the epic poem of the proletariat in favor of an axiomatics of the political process. So then go all the way! In the axiomatization, suppress also the condition of the working-class or popular parameter of the situation. Because what you have there is only the situational phantom of the lost proletariat.

This objection is not without reminding us of the one Hegel aims at Kant: Why maintain the "absurd thing-in-itself"? If the Subject constitutes experience, then let us go all the way, that is to say, let us conceive of the Absolute itself as Subject. There should subsist no unrepresentable world-behind-the-world.

Similarly, if the process of emancipatory politics has as its only condition that it should be open from the point of view of the event, then it is not subject to any predicative situation with regard to the

workers. "Worker" and "popular" are traces of the old social substantialism, which pretended to infer politics from the organization of society into classes.

Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, anticipated this objection in the section titled "Refutation of Idealism." He established that knowledge cannot operate in the space of representation without there ever being anything represented. Put otherwise: it is necessary for being qua being to keep representation in an impasse for representation to represent anything at all. To evacuate the thing-in-itself, in reality, amounts to the dissolution of the subjective constitution of experience, and not, as Hegel believes, to its extreme limit. For experience is only Subject when linked (topologically) to a real that is lacking in it. Hegel believes he has put in relief an inconsistency on the part of Kant, but in reality it is he who is inconsistent with the Kantian doctrine of the Subject.

I take it upon myself here to refute the absolute political idealism that a "maximal" interpretation of my axiomatics could authorize and that would consist in limiting oneself to the intervention alone, without ever naming the qualification (workerist and popular) of the evental site where the supernumerary intervention takes place.

Like Kant, I necessarily reason from the absurd. If indeed we were able to show directly that it is necessary for prepolitical situations to be working class, we effectively would have restored a workerist political privilege, and thus we would have restored the substantialist presupposition that our gesture of re-foundation puts to the side. If there is no proletariat, in the sense of a political subject identifiable in terms of its social being, we cannot hope to establish, by way of a constructive argument, that the eminent political situations are those of the workers. Our only chance is if we manage to justify that it is impossible *not to* consider (strategically) the workerist and popular qualification of the situations.

THEOREM. The political intervention in the current situation, that is, in modern politics, cannot avoid strategically being faithful to events whose site is workerist or popular.

Let us suppose that we could avoid this. Insofar as the axiomatic hypothesis is that of a politics of emancipation, therefore of a subjective politics that is nonstatist and ruled by the principle of nondomination, the result would be that this politics would be able to unfold without ever including in its immediate field those places where the mass of the dominated (whatever their number may be) materially exist—in modern conditions, that means in the factories, the poor suburban neighborhoods, the immigrant shelters, or the offices of repetitive informational labor. With regard to the factories in particular, the exception would be radical, since we can easily establish that the factories are separated from civil society and from the moderating laws that in the latter rule over social relationships.

Under this supposition, the politics of nondomination would not exist for the dominated themselves except in the form of representation, since no event giving way to an intervention would include them as its site. In particular, the workist and popular statements would not constitute the subject matter of political intervention.

To be more precise: strategically decentered from politics in terms of its basic atomic unit (the intervention starting from the event), the dominated would not be able to formulate their interest in this politics except in programmatic terms; that is, they would have to rally themselves to this politics on the sole ground that it is representable as an egalitarian politics, or as a politics of nondomination.

Now it belongs to the essence of politics to exclude all representation and never to take the figure of programmatic consciousness. Its essence resides entirely in the fidelity to the event such as it materializes in the network of interventions.

Consequently it is impossible that politics could strategically avoid taking into account the workerist and popular character of the situations. If it were to proceed to avoid the latter, it would be inconsistent with its own inaugural axiom.

COROLLARY. The militant figure of politics demands, in its very concept, the presence without mediation (in particular without parliamentary and unionist mediation) of the workerist and popular

event in the great sites, factories, suburbs, and elsewhere. It is remarkable that this requirement is drawn, not from the supposition of a "working class" or of a "people," but on the contrary from the disappearance of all suppositions of this order. And, as a matter of fact, if you have "the party of the working class," you have your mediation at your disposal from the origin and you are in no way obliged to initiate a politics without mediation in the factories, the inner cities, and so on. Besides, nobody asked the intellectuals of the PCF to set a foot there. Today, on the contrary, either politics does not exist (which is something capitalism certainly authorizes us to say) or else it summons its actors, that is to say, in the current situation a majority of intellectuals to the constitutive places of its evental essence. The direct militant figure is thus wrested from its status of execution and rallying to the cause. It is an immanent concept of political existence as such. This much can be drawn implacably from the nonprogrammatic essence of politics. Whoever does not *act* it *is* not part of it.

IV. GENEALOGY OF THE DIALECTIC

It is a common theme today that the political could be rendered into thought only at the cost of putting an end to speculative philosophy, that is to say, by putting an end to the dialectic.

The point is to be clear about the subject of the dialectic.[4]

I claim that the concepts of event, structure, intervention, and fidelity are the very concepts of the dialectic, insofar as the latter is not reduced to the flat image, which was already inadequate for Hegel himself, of totalization and the labor of the negative. The dialecticity of the dialectic consists precisely in having a conceptual history and in dividing the Hegelian matrix to the point where it turns out

4. A good part of my *Theory of the Subject* is dedicated to the concept of the dialectic. I take support from Hegel, from the materialists of Antiquity, and from Mallarmé.

to be essentially a doctrine of the event and not the guided adventure of the spirit. A politics, rather than a history.

Depending on the point from where we handle and purify dialectical thinking, it is possible to recompose its genealogy. Other ancestors for another concept. If we want to clarify the axiomatics from where politics begins, we will consider—for example—those whom I call the four French dialecticians.

What is the importance of this question? Considerable, insofar as it is a matter of inscribing the refounding of all politics against a horizon that has been philosophically cleared. Cleared from what? From the mechanist and scientist approach in which Marxism has been held hostage ever since its introduction in France by Lafargue and Guesde. All active thinking must realize its national inscription. French Marxism has wanted to be the heir of the Enlightenment, of the anticlerical combat, of scientific progress. In the Christian dialectic it has found its polar opposite, whether blind or recognized. It has secularized and provincialized the revolutionary ideal.

Each time someone has tried to put a stop to this limited image, the only answer has been to inject French Marxism with a little dose of Hegelian tragedy. Or else they touched up the materialist reference (Spinoza or Lucretius rather than Diderot or Helvétius). But the representative kernel of Marxism, its center of gravity, did not budge: Marxism as the scientific theory of history, supported by a positive theory of the relations of production and the organization of society into classes. It is true that in the background of this representation the national characteristics of the workers' movement were lying in wait: trade unionism, logic of the struggle, priority of the program.

Taking advantage of the fact that the old workers' movement is dead, we must put an end to the old Marxism.

With the gesture by which a whole cycle of existence of politics must be closed, and another one opened, I propose a different filiation. Every birth makes for a genealogy.

It is a matter, as we know today, of putting an end to the representative view of politics. Lenin's canonical statement, according to

which society is divided into classes and classes are represented by political parties, has become obsolete. In its essence this statement is homogeneous with the parliamentary conception. Because in one case, as in the other, the key point is that of the representation of the social in politics. Politics, in this sense, as Lenin also says, "concentrates the economy." Representation and concentration are the terms with which to measure the site of politics and think the existence of parties. Such are the figures in which Marxism has gone astray.

First of all, we will recognize dialectical thinking by its conflict with representation. Such thinking tracks down the unrepresentable point in its field, which avers that we are touching upon the real.

Rousseau, for instance, radically forbids political representation. The people, who are the absolute foundation of sovereignty, cannot be delegated to any person, nor to itself either. In this last sense Rousseau is not an anarchist. Considered as a pure political capacity, the people are unrepresentable. Rousseau is totally hostile to parliamentarism.

For Mallarmé, poetry should express neither the poet nor the world. The poet must be absent from the work, as if the latter took place without him. And as for the world, Mallarmé says powerfully that there is nothing to be added to it. The poem thus should effectuate a singular process, which delivers its very essence without figuring it. Everything comes to lack it.

For Pascal, God is not representable in philosophy. Nothing in the world leads to God. The world is no more transitive to God for Pascal than the social is to politics for me. Just as all the social sets are inconsistent in politics, so too—for Pascal—does the "double infinite" of the World draw no totality from which to infer God. The subjective rapport with God has the aleatory nature of a wager. (We must also wager communist politics: you will never infer it by way of deduction from Capital.)

Finally, for Lacan, nothing represents the Subject. He insists on the fact that if desire is articulated (in the signifier), this does not mean that it is representable. Sure, there is the formula "A signifier represents the subject for another signifier." But this indicates

precisely that no particular signifier represents the subject, which instead is forced to fall in the in-between of a chain of language.

In all these cases—and for each one what is at stake is the place where a subject-effect is instituted: God, the People, the Poem, Desire—the law of the concept is that of a procedure of unrepresentation. For me, similarly, politics in no way represents the proletariat, class, or nation. What constitutes the subject in politics, though manifested in its existence by the political effect itself, remains inarticulable in it.

It is not a question of something, which exists, becoming representable. It is a question of that by reason of which something comes into existence, which nothing represents, and which is presented purely and simply by its existence. Pascal abominates the Cartesian, or Thomist, idea of "the proofs for the existence of God." For Rousseau, the people do not preexist in any way the Contract by which they constitute themselves as a political capacity. And this Contract itself has no conceivable "proof." Mallarmé wants a poem that reflects itself in itself, without any explanation whatsoever from a point of view that would be external to it. Of the Lacanian subject we will not even say that it does not exist. It is rather the real that itself ex-ists. I also have no particularly great taste for the proofs of the existence of the proletariat. It is already quite enough to risk a heterogeneous politics, without the guarantee of any deduction.

If there is a point of the unrepresentable, thinking cannot give itself over to the reflection of realities. It must necessarily make a break for a procedure of explanation to be set in motion, which has no external referent. Thinking, which does not represent anything, produces effects by the interruption of a chain of representations. All dialectical thinking is thus first of all an interpretation break. It designates a symptom from where it may formulate a (hypothetical) interpretation as to the effects of thinking itself. Such is the case of Marx, who, in the *Manifesto*, on the basis of those event-symptoms that are the workers' insurrections of the beginning of the nine-

teenth century, formulates the hypothesis of a proletarian political capacity—of a politics that is not a politics of representation.

We recognize dialectical thinking by its interpretive method. It always begins by putting aside representations. The Lacanian method, which hails from Freud, consists in rejecting the conscious representations as guides for the investigation of the subject and in operating from the side, by way of interpretive interruptions, on erratic indices: slips of the tongue, dreams, uncanny words, and so on. Pascal initiates his pedagogy by putting into crisis the self-valorization of the human being. He indicates the latter's absolute scission: the human being is total misery (insignificant particle of the universe, cornered between the infinitely great and the infinitely small, deprived of all meaning) and incomparable grandeur (reflective thinking upon its own misery). From this starting point, the interpretive interruption proposes the hypothesis of salvation by grace, which alone is up to par with the abyss of the scission. And Mallarmé instructs the division of language: on the one hand, its function of communication and exchange, which Mallarmé calls monetary; on the other, what announces itself in the system of the poem and with regard to which Mallarmé formulates a radical hypothesis: the capacity of language, against the backdrop of the pure void, to exhibit the essence of the thing.

In all these cases, the break with representations connects with a generic hypothesis as to the existence of a procedure in which truth circulates without ever being represented. It is a hypothesis with regard to the capacity for truth: proletarian political capacity (Marx), popular capacity for sovereignty (Rousseau), capacity for finding salvation (Pascal), capacity of the absolute Book (Mallarmé), capacity of the subject in truth (Lacan). And in the very place of the initial symptom, where thinking introduces the break (insurrection, poem, liberty, scission in abyss, act of the signifier), this hypothesis retroactively institutes the subject for whom such a capacity coincides with the process of existence itself: the proletariat, the crowd, the people, the Christian, the unconscious.

Dialectical thinking thus bores a hole in the disposition of knowledge (of representations), on the occasion of a symptomatic breakthrough, which it interprets according to the regime of a *hypothesis of a capacity* in which the aftermath of a subject is averred.

Aside from Marx and Freud, who assure its modern regime, in France it is this complete method that we find only in Pascal, Rousseau, Mallarmé, and Lacan.

You will notice that all four are exceptional masters of language, among the greatest of our artists of writing. This is because in France, where the philosophical accumulation has never possessed the self-assurance of the Germans, art alone organizes the posture of undecidability in which a subject articulates itself onto an event.

Let us reflect indeed that if dialectical thinking breaks with an order of representations, it never has any guarantee of the real except its own experience. The breakthrough, which authorizes the making of a hole, is a singular event.

Dialectical thinking does not start from the rule but from the exception. And the new theoretical law that articulates this exception, as far as the existence of the subject is concerned, can only take the form of a wager. It is a long wager, a hypothetical explicitness. Rousseau admits quite openly that no real society probably has ever been supported by the contract by which the people institute themselves qua subjective political capacity. Mallarmé's Book was never written. For Pascal, we can draw no decisions about any particular salvation; the number of the chosen is indeterminate, perhaps null. And for Lacan, the truth of the subject is in suspense, which is why the psychoanalytical cure is, in principle, infinite. As for us, we know what "really existing" socialism is worth.

But this undecidability of the subject of the hypothesis is the ransom to be paid for the fact that it is not representable. Therein lies the principle of truth. In order to render it explicit and to make the initial event resonate, the resources of art are not superfluous. Neither for religion nor for poetry, of course, nor for the analyst nor for Rousseau's legislator. Nor for politics, which is an art more than a science, without a doubt.

With the courage bestowed on us by such ancestors, I return to the formal mediations.

It is to the one who begins from scratch that the simplest abstraction is granted. The model on which I will work is particularly thin. It serves to establish the impasses in the conceptualization of the representable. Its import is analogous to that which Lyotard attributes to the corpus of anecdotes in the tradition of sophistry and skepticism, or Lacan to his exemplary dilemmas, like the one of the three prisoners: to exhibit the difficulties of being, in an order in which the striking logical funniness precisely has the function of keeping reality at a distance.

My corpus is drawn from Raymond Smullyan's book, titled *What Is the Name of This Book?*, so that anyone asking about the name of the book receives in return, as if in a mirror, the answer: What is the name of this book?[5] Just as, at the end of the day, to anyone who asks us what is our politics, we can answer that the point is for them to participate in the question: What is our politics?

I presuppose a universe in which there are only propositions whose intuitive qualification is either true or false. In this universe the producers of statements are held to strict laws, which distribute them into two classes: those who can produce only true statements and those who can produce only false ones. Later we will add the class of those who can indifferently produce false or true statements, thus adding ourselves to the initial universe.

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5. Raymond M. Smullyan, *What Is the Name of This Book? The Riddle of Dracula and Other Logical Puzzles* (New York: Dover, 2011). Smullyan was a particularly inventive logician, whose "didacticism" is illuminating for the philosopher. In some aspects he repeats and perfects the artifices for the presentation of logic that we find in Lewis Carroll. Aside from the book just mentioned, we can cite his *Theory of Formal Systems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), where one finds the most stimulating presentation of Gödel's famous theorems about the incompleteness of first-order formal arithmetic.

In a last gesture of reverence toward the hegemonic constitution of the State's consciousness in France, and as a way of recalling where, a long time ago, my allegiance resided, I will call the left the class of those who always speak the truth and the right the class of systematic liars. This will gives us a break from the example of the Cretan liar, whom we obviously will also see take to the stage, passing from right to left.

Let us note that, as far as true or false is concerned, a proposition can be qualified from the sole fact of the place, right or left, where its producer is positioned. We thus find an intricate unity at the origin between the said and the saying, since the determination of the place of enunciation authorizes us immediately to qualify the enunciated. What we have here is a topology of truth, insofar as it can be discerned from the order of places. Its fate is linked to the orientation of a space. We will see where things stand with regard to time.

The key to this arrangement lies in the fact that at least one proposition in it is unpronounceable, one statement without an admissible enunciation. This is the self-referential statement, which is a variant of that of the Cretan: "I am from the right." It is in fact the rule that applies in reality, or according to the conventions of parliamentary politeness, that nobody pronounces the statement "I am from the right." The right always speaks in the second person. While "You are from the right" is common currency, "I am from the right" is never the statement of the right, which will always deny that there is any meaning to such a statement. It is the statement only of the extreme right, which in this sense is not at all part of the same family. But part of the same era, alas, yes!

In our model "I am from the right" is not pronounceable by someone from the right, someone who, because he always speaks falsely, cannot speak his own truth. Nor is it pronounceable by someone from the left, someone who, by always telling the truth, is constrained to confess that he is from the left. This statement is thus unrealizable according to the law of the place. This amounts to saying that it is in a position of the real in general: the consistency of

the place stems simply from the fact that right and left have in common the inability to say the being-from-the-right, which, of course, is indeed their effective political being, for the first as much as for the second.

This real, however, is only structural. It is the lack proper to all possible statements. It has nothing to do with any situation, since every situation, that is to say, every complex order of propositions, whether true or false, realizes a possibility, which stands under the condition of this lack. I will posit that such a structural lack is the *forbidden* of the place. Because it is unrealizable in any situation whatsoever, the forbidden, in my eyes, is not a political category. It is a category of the very being of the Law. In claiming this I also posit that the classical notion of the transgression of a prohibition, if it has, as is often pretended, some erotic virtue, has zero political virtue.

Purely by saying that he is from the right, the politician from the extreme right is bound to the provocation of his enjoyment rather than to his effect on the political scene. Unfortunately he says other things as well.

To the forbidden, I will oppose the historicity of the *impossible*.

Let us consider the following propositions in which, this time, still within our topology of right/left, two persons are implicated—let us say A and B. Proposition 1: "B is from the right." Proposition 2: "A is from the left." Taken by themselves, these propositions are pronounceable by anyone, except naturally the first one by B himself, since no one can declare himself from the right. But in general these propositions are by no means forbidden. In particular, A can perfectly well say that B is from the right, and B can perfectly well say that A is from the left. It suffices for this that the truth and falseness of these assertions are in conformity with the class of speakers who pronounce them. Thus as long as B is from the left—he speaks truthfully—and A is also from the left, the statement by B that A is from the left, which is true, is in conformity with its place of enunciation.

The problem is that the event here enters the scene in its proper function of impossibilization. If A pronounces that B is from the right, he makes it forever impossible for B to pronounce that A is from the left, and this remains the case no matter what A and B are, whether from the left or from the right. Neither proposition 1 nor proposition 2 is structurally forbidden. But the enunciation of proposition 1 by A renders impossible the enunciation of proposition 2 by B.

If in fact A says that B is from the right, there are two possibilities:

- A is from the left, in which case his statements are always true, and therefore B is from the right. Consequently B's statements are always false, and therefore it is impossible for B to say that A is from the left (since that is true).
- A is from the right, in which case his statements are always false, and therefore B is from the left (and not from the right as A pretends). Consequently B's statements are always true, and therefore it is impossible for B to pronounce that A is from the left (since A is from the right).

As a consequence, as soon as the statement is pronounced by anyone whatsoever that someone is from the right, it becomes impossible for this same individual to announce that the one who has just qualified him in this way is from the left. He could have done so, though, if the other had not spoken first. This time around the impossibility of proposition 2 is not, as in the case of the proposition "I am from the right," a forbidden of the structure, but it is induced by an observable fact, the effective pronunciation of proposition 1.

It is in this sense that I say that it is a question of a historical impossibility and not of a forbidden of the place. You will also note that the forbidden is addressed to all, whereas what I call the impossible is that of only one, namely, he who has been qualified as being from the right. The impossible is a category of the subject, not of the place; of the event, not of the structure. It defines the very being for politics.

To enunciate what is forbidden it is necessary to blow up the law of the place pure and simple. By contrast, to enunciate what historically is the impossible for you, it is necessary only to set apart one fact. Proposition 2 becomes once again pronounceable if the individual B acts *as if* proposition 1 had not been pronounced by individual A.

The forbidden, in order to move beyond the current structure, imposes total destruction. For the impossible, a kind of deafness suffices. My event is constituted in the misunderstanding of what preceded it, which is supposed to be its impossibilization.

In this way, the workers' statement of right at Talbot is not the instantaneous and structural subversion of the existing order. For it to happen it suffices that one does not listen to what makes it impossible, that is, whatever has been said by society as a whole: that the immigrant worker is only an imported commodity and, thus, without any written right of identity or sustenance. Since the enunciation of the right without right is intrinsically possible and becomes impossible only from all that precedes it, it can come into being against the backdrop of the revocation of the preceding facts and without requiring the annihilation of the law.

Thus the essence of the impossible, which is historically assigned, consists in being deaf to the voice of the time. A prepolitical situation is thereby created whose principle, as you can see, is the interruption. Interruption of the ordinary social hearing, the putting aside of the facts. This is also why the police arrive, which is always the fact police, the police against the deaf. "Are you deaf?" accuses the cop. He is right. The police are never anything other than the amplifier of already established facts, their maximum noise, destined to all those whose deeds and words, because they are historically impossible, attest to the fact that they are hard of hearing.

Let us posit that the political mapping of a prepolitical situation requires that one be guided by the seizure of that which is interrupted therein. Because it is only at this price that the impossible is possible.

Today there is much ado about communication. And yet it is clear that it is incommunication, by making the impossible a possibility, that puts some truth in circulation in politics.

VI. FORMALISMS 2: DISCRIMINATING INTERVENTION AND INTERVENTION BY WAGER

What are the structures and trajectories of this circulation?

A single little story will instruct us.

Consider this time a place regulated, in addition to the left of truth and the right of falsity, by a center composed of people capable of true propositions as well as of false propositions.

A political crime has taken place. The police investigate. Three suspects are arrested on material grounds. The police, at this stage of the investigation, know four things:

- There is only one guilty person.
- This guilty person does not belong to the party of the right, which has no political interest in commissioning the crime.
- The three suspects are one from the left, the other from the right, and the third from the center, the misfortune being that we do not know who is what.
- Indeed, and this is the fourth point, the three suspects have refused to make any declaration except the following:
  - — Suspect A declares, "I am innocent."
  - — Suspect B declares, "A is indeed innocent."
  - — Suspect C declares, "That is not true. A is guilty."

The situation, from a strictly analytical point of view, is here determined by four parameters, which together describe its structure.

You have the fact itself: the crime. You have the conjunctural constraints, which are always restrictions placed on the hypotheses. In this case, the constraint that the right has not committed the crime, or that the three suspects represent the three parties. You have the propositions whose referent is the fact of the crime, such as

the declarations made by the suspects. These propositions intricately link the subject to the fact both in terms of the fact itself (who is guilty?) and in terms of the enunciation of propositions relative to the fact. Finally, you have the structural or logical constraint, the law of the place, relative to the topology of truth and of its classes.

To interrogate a fact on the basis of propositions about the fact and within the framework of conjunctural and formal constraints, such is the path of the analysis of the situation, without as yet any politics. It is a matter of mastering what is decidable in the question about the situation posed by the fact itself, that is, in the question posed by strict analysis. We operate here without intervention, that is to say, without a supernumerary statement. Because it is not yet prepolitical, the situation remains at the level of fact keeping. Let us see the bloodhound's intellect at work.

A says, "I am innocent." If A is from the right, he would be saying something false. Thus he would be guilty. Which is inexact, since a conjunctural constraint warns us that the right is not behind the crime.

So A is either from the left or from the center.

If he is from the left, since he says he is innocent, he actually is innocent, given that according to the formal constraint he is bound to the truth. In this case suspect B, who says that A is innocent, speaks the truth. B is thus either from the left or from the center. But he is not from the left, since A already is and there is only one representative of each party. Therefore B is from the center. In addition, in this hypothesis B is guilty, since the only other possible guilty person, the man from the left, A, is not.

Hence a coherent analytical hypothesis is as follows: A is from the left, B is from the center and guilty, and C, by default, is necessarily from the right, which works just fine.

Unfortunately there are other coherent hypotheses. Indeed A, as we already said, can be from the center rather than from the left. In which case, if B is from the right, by saying that A is innocent, he lies, thus A is guilty. And C is from the left, which works out well. The hypothesis "A is from the center and guilty, B is from the right, and

C is from the left" is a well-functioning hypothesis—that is to say, it exhaustively accounts for the givens and constraints of the situation. Finally, still under the supposition that A is from the center, it is possible that B is from the left. He tells the truth by making A out to be innocent, but at once he declares his own guilt, because the guilty one, if it is not the man from the center, must be the one from the left. Hence C is from the right. The hypothesis "A is from the center, B is from the left and guilty, and C is from the right" works equally well.

We thus arrive at a table that sums up the analytical knowledge of the situation (g designates guilt, L stands for left, C for center, and R for right).

	1	2	3
A	L	C+g	C
B	C+g	R	L+g
C	R	L	R

We have before our eyes the maximum knowledge of what analytical intelligence is capable of, the supreme subtlety of commentary, without intervention of any sort. These are famous scenarios, of which our journalists are so fond. Except that, in situations that are infinitely more complex, journalists are far from being equally as demanding in terms of deductive labor as in this skeleton of a situation! In the exhaustion of factual and regular data we contemplate the correlation between a fact and three hypotheses, from which the event, the gesture of the crime, and the place of enunciation (left or center) are dissimulated by the undecidable.

Now in this table we have exhausted the resources of analysis, and we thus have fully assumed the count-for-one of the situation, its unification according to the rule of the place.

To go any further in the interpretation requires that we add something, that we introduce some supplementary statements. The subjective effect here is that we must supplement the situation for the event that it contains, perhaps, to become manifest to begin with.

A subject, hence a politics, is the in-between of an event to be elucidated and an event that elucidates. It is that which an event represents for another event.

Here—where the logic of intervention begins—is the point of supplementation by which the truth, previously blocked in the situation, circulates in the figure of the event.

Nonetheless it would be unreasonable to imagine that the intervention is subtracted from every conjunctural constraint and singularly from any constraint of duration. Whoever has done a bit of politics knows to what extent it is, with regard to the situation, under the pressure of some urgency. It depends on our keeping up with this urgency whether the true will come to be.

Let me say here that the one who intervenes, and who has brief access to the three imprisoned suspects, disposes of very little time, the time of one or two propositions at the most, on its part in any case.

Politics often boils down to having to ask the right question, the one that makes a break so as to deliver that of which the table, the unity of the hypothesis, continues to guarantee the impossible possibility. Therein lies the whole hurried aesthetic of the intervention.

The intervention here is going to tackle the situation from the only certainty that you can read from the table: that suspect C cannot be guilty. The intervention operates from the point of the stupidity of the police, which purely on the analytical level should have freed C. The intervention immediately takes hold of this symptom of stupidity in the situation by asking C the following, which is the first question: "Are you guilty?" You ask this question precisely because you know, by pure analysis, the true response, which is "no," since C is not guilty. You will thus be able to measure on the basis of this response the place of enunciation of your interlocutor, that is,

you will be able to know if C is from the right or from the left, since, as the table also shows, he cannot be from the center.

The political trick, which consists in asking an interlocutor the mastered question of his own place of enunciation, is what I call a discriminating question.

If C answers that he is not guilty, the affair is entirely settled. He speaks truthfully, he is therefore from the left, and it is hypothesis 2 that is validated.

If, however, C answers "yes," that he is guilty, then he is from the right, and we are left with two hypotheses, 1 and 3.

In all cases there is some knowledge gained.

First of all, we have reduced the number of hypotheses from three to two. But, above all, the question of who is guilty—which always titillates the analytical intelligence—by the same token is settled: in hypotheses 1 and 3, the only possible guilty suspect is B.

The intervention *discriminates* insofar as we can calculate this gain in advance and with certainty. Either the answer of C decides the issue and then the answer is no, or else, if the answer is yes, it reduces the number of consistent hypotheses from three to two and determines who is guilty.

But precisely the intervention, inasmuch as it is the atomistic unit of politics, could not remain satisfied with the naming of the guilty party. The latter's location (left or center) is far more important, since it is tied to the enunciation—to the subject—and not only to the objective fact alone. Now the suspense between hypotheses 1 and 3 is not settled from this point of view. If this suspense happens to be the case (C has answered "yes"), then the urgency only increases, since the one who intervenes must decide at once between the two remaining hypotheses.

The art of politics leads us to do the following: to ask suspect A if C is guilty. Here again it is from certainty that one takes assurance (C is not guilty) so as to discriminate between hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3. Indeed if A answers "yes," which is false, it means that he has the capacity for falsehood, and thus it is hypothesis 3 that is well-founded. (Hypothesis 2, we recall, is out of the question, since if

it had been the good hypothesis, then the first intervening question would have taught us as much.)

If, however, A answers "no," which is true, and I cannot resolve the puzzle, because left and center both have the capacity for truthfulness.

My question is such that it receives its qualification retroactively from its effect. The "yes" makes it victorious, the "no" renders it entirely vain, leading back to the previous situation.

The first question produced an effect of necessary modification in knowledge. In this sense, it had the status of a guaranteed prolongation of analytical intelligence. It is not the same when I run the risk of a null effect. The suspense in what happens in the guise of the answer is complete and makes the time of anticipation oscillate, before the retroactive seal is stamped on it, between nullity and mastery.

It is this type of intervention, which is qualified only by its effect and which stands in danger of nullity, that I call an *intervention by wager*. Politics is Pascalian in pretending that it is in any case worth more to wager when one has come to the extreme limit of whatever the security of analysis authorizes, and which is prolonged, as I have said, by the discriminating intervention.

Failure in this instance does not lie in being defeated but in not having done anything other than verifying the equivocity that already was the outcome of the analysis of the situation. An intrapolitical defeat, for me, is the inability of an intervention to disjoin politics from analytics. To fail means not to interrupt a given state of certainty.

VII. INTERVENTION AND ORGANIZATION. POLITICS. THE FUTURE PERFECT

In the conception of politics for which I stand, it is not the relations of force that count but the practical processes of thought. Let us note the extent to which past forms of politics, no matter which side

they were on, have militarized the concepts used to describe these processes: strategy, tactic, mobilization, daily orders, offensive and defensive, movement and position, conquest, troops, general headquarters, alliances, and so on. The model of war is omnipresent. In language at least, what we perceive is the inversion of Clausewitz's axiom. We might say that politics is the continuation of war by the same words.

Does Marx have any responsibility in this bellicose figure, with the struggle to death in which he engages the historical classes? I would rather posit that Marx has validated the prevalence of an older conception, which by subordinating politics to conflicts of power sees violence as its concentrated expression.

The Marxist innovation, as Marx himself says in the letter to Weydemeyer, lies neither in the classes nor in their struggle. It resides in the strategic hypothesis of communism, that is, the hypothesis of the abolition of politics understood precisely as a figure of violence around domination. Marx's ambiguity consists in having kept politics in its antagonistic concept, while delegating the forms of innovative consciousness to what he imagined to be the eschatological end of politics itself. In this sense, we could obviously say that Marx has designated the possible content of another politics rather than having broken with the received form of all possible politics. To the common idea of politics Marx in some way has added the indication of its possible withering away, which he imagined would be possible by using the means of the old politics, no sooner than the worker-subjects would have taken them in their own hands.

Today we should consider the actuality, and not the prophecy, of the independence of politics with regard to the violence of the State, all the while preserving the assignation of the hypothesis of nondomination to the popular and workerist events. This preservation touches in particular upon Poland, where politics is in any case caught in a transformed view of time and where the lasting political consistency of the workers definitely wins out over the capacity for a direct attack.

There is no doubt that politics must master in its field the State

and war, coercion and rebellion. What is in doubt is whether politics can be coextensive with this mastery and whether antagonism may be its central concept.

Or, rather, we must ask: What is a radical politics, which goes to the root, which refuses the administration of necessity, which reflects the ends, which preserves and practices justice and equality, and which nonetheless assumes the time of peace without becoming something like the empty wait for a cataclysm? What is a radicalism that at the same time amounts to an infinite task? Because, just as analysis was for Freud, it matters to posit that politics, revolutionary politics, if we want to keep this adjective, is essentially interminable. By contrast, the old antagonistic law had no time other than to be done as soon as possible, while the parliamentary law, which is indifferent to the ends, looks no further than its inactive present, that is to say, something that can be counted, distributed between the next election and the next devaluation.

At this point I postulate that the atom of politics consists in the intervention by wager, which refers to the event in the hypothesis that some Other is hiding beneath the Same, that some Two has been counted by the structure as One. Such an intervention is possible only under the hypothesis of hypotheses, the inaugural axiom, which holds that we can give political consistency to the events in which it is stated that there exists some heterogeneity, that politics has not been annihilated by economics, or that justice is an intrinsic dimension of the subject, and that we can capture its effect there where the statist communication is interrupted, there where the social bond is dispersed into affirmative singularities.

The intervention by wager politicizes a prepolitical situation by the interpretation it proposes of this situation in which the event is constructed. It holds the Two against the structure of the One. It accepts the risk of its own nullity. It is thus the complete opposite of a knowledgeable and programmatic intervention. It does not pronounce itself about what is to be done, but about what will have been thought. This future perfect is constitutive of the intervention by wager, since it is only in the retroaction that this thinking is

averred, or not, both with regard to the intervening hypothesis and with regard to the direct actors of the situation.

It has been, this thinking, like what escapes the count, because having spoken is what will give it being in the answer that verifies it.

The time of what is called totalitarianism is the past; legitimacy is legendary or racialized. The parliamentary time is the nullity of the present in its calculable outcome. The classic revolutionary time, finally, is the future.

But the real political time is the future perfect.

It is in the double dimension of its anteriority and its future that this time implies organization.

Commonly we think of organization in the tension between its expressive function and its instrumental function. It is expressive insofar as it is supposed to represent: in Marxism, classes with political capacity; in liberalism, trends in public opinion. It is instrumental by the mediation of its program, which is that by which it organizes the interests and the consciousnesses. It is a matter of taking hold of the positions of power from which the implementation of the program will give satisfaction to the terms that are being expressed.

This ontology of organization, or of the modern party, which dialecticizes a Leibnizian kind of expressivism and a programmatic theory of political consciousness, is in my eyes absolutely common to all political tendencies, and ordinary Marxism, the old Marxism, introduces no significant rupture on this point. The dialectic here is concentrated to the point where the program, as the juncture of expressivity and instrumentality, of rallied consciousness and the practice of the State, finds itself in its turn subject to general realities in which what it is supposed to express is no longer readable. Because, in the programmatic vision, the State in some way should become the instrument of the instrument that the party is already supposed to be. But it is irrevocably its master, expressing nothing and instead separating itself. The separation of the State is unapproachable from the point of expression. The general tasks of the State fix a series of imperatives for the will in which the sustaining of the bond, by means of terror if need be, is necessarily more im-

portant than the principle of de-linking. But it is in this principle of de-linking that we can root the idea of politics that I for one can see myself wanting.

In the dominant conception, whether liberal or Marxifying, and fascist as well, politics is in reality suppressed. Neither the idea of class nor that of free opinions can take its place. It is the complex of the State and the economy that occupies the totality of the visible. Modern parties, whether they are unique or multiple, receive their real qualification only from the State. Now the State is certainly an essential term of the political field, but in itself it is apolitical. That is the profound meaning that I attribute to the Polish promotion of society. In truth it is not a question of the Hegelian opposition of the State and civil society. It is a question of naming the place for a reconstitution of politics, which has a chance to become operative only starting from the principle of independence with regard to the State, not because the State is the adversary, or the opposite term, but because it is apolitical. Hence a risky and durable intervening configuration, tied to the factory workers, whose only goal consists in trying at all times to preserve the immanent eventality of politics.

Conceptualized in this way, organization is required by way of a decision, not sustained by any structural given of the class type or by any passive given of the opinion type. It is, simply put, the organization of politics, the organization of the future perfect.

VIII. WHAT IS DOGMATISM?

On the side of the prepolitical situation, the intervention by wager requires organization for two reasons. First, because it is a matter, as I said, of interrupting all communication so that the impossible may occur in its historicity. The organized collective body is first of all a constructed deafness to the injunction of established facts. The solitary person's ears are too open. The organized collective alone has the sufficient thickness of an earplug. And, second, organization is required because an intervention by wager is rational only if it has

exhausted the domain of discriminating interventions. Many people come together to ensure that the risk is necessary.

Another little story, the last one.

In my topology of right/left, I suppose that there are three persons: A, B, and C. Person A says: "B and C belong to the same party."

Let us suppose that, avid to know what truth is dissimulated in this assertion, I ask C, "Are A and B from the same party?" There you have a plausible intervention, after all. But what will C answer?

(a) If A is from the left, he has spoken truthfully. So B and C are from the same party.
   — Let us suppose that they, B and C, are indeed from the left. In that case A and B are from the same party, the left. And since C is also from the left, he will answer the truth—that is, "yes."
   — If B and C are from the right, A and B are not from the same party: A is hypothetically from the left, B from the right. But since C is from the right, he lies, so he will affirm that they are from the same party. Thus C answers "yes."

(b) If now A is from the right, his statement is false. Therefore B and C are not from the same party.
   — Let us suppose B to be from the left and C from the right. A and B are not from the same party, but C lies, so he answers "yes."
   — And, finally, if B is from the right and C from the left, A and B are from the same party. And since C tells the truth, he answers "yes."

The answer of C is "yes" in all the possible combinations of belonging. We might as well say that my question discriminates absolutely nothing, nor does it teach me anything about who A, B, and C are. The situation is untouched by my intervention. Perhaps this situation was prepolitical, but I won't know a thing about it.

Let us agree to call a *null intervention* this kind of intervention,

which by asking a question about the situation that produces no effect whatsoever cannot be of any service to qualify the situation.

Let us say that such is the formal matrix of dogmatism. What dogmatism says is supernumerary only in appearance. The indistinction of the answers that it receives establishes that it is only a parasite of the situation, which sends it back to the structural massivity of the count-as-one.

The dogmatic intervention never has the power of the Two. Consequently it is itself the correlate of the structure. The event is in principle lacking from it.

The organization, such as I define its concept, is an apparatus of the event, of risk, of the wager. There is never too much of its collective discriminating science to put a stop to dogmatism and at least not ask from the situation only those questions that are calculable as null and void in their effect.

On the far end of the situation, the organization is in reality not an instrument but a product. It signifies that what has taken place will not have been exclusively the place.

In its propagating fidelity, as a stacked-up series of interventions by way of wagers, the organization leaves open that point by which the suture of the One fails to seal the Two. It is the reflective materiality of the "there is" in its future perfect tense. Political organization is required in order for the intervention's wager to make a process out of the distance that reaches from an interruption to a fidelity.

In this sense, organization is nothing other than the consistency of politics.

IX. DE-SUBLIMATION

What remains to be established is the fact that this process, or this procedure, is not constructive. By this I mean to say that its relationship to the law does not consist in validating the process by the exhibition of an exemplary case. Thus Talbot is not exemplary of

anything. It is a singular inscription from which politics proceeds, and not that which politics would construct so as to prove that it is legitimate.

If we compare the political procedure to logical reasoning, we will see that it is always a form of reasoning by the absurd. In effect, the event, by its power of interruption, comes down to supposing that what is admissible has ceased to be valid. The inadmissible is the major referent of any politics worthy of its name. Politics draws the consequences from this by way of a series of organized interventions, and as long as it encounters no contradiction, that is to say, no obligation to go back and listen to the common noise, it perseveres.

In fact reasoning by the absurd is a form of wager. We presume that, from the hypothesis that denies an initial proposition, there will follow certain inadmissible consequences, which will constrain us to admit said proposition. However, we do not know *when* we will encounter the contradiction. Hence the peril of an infinite deduction.

The wager of politics works in the opposite way. The inadmissible is not what we expect as the outcome but that from which we begin. The political wager presumes that from the intervention, which begins with the inadmissible, the organization will be able to deduce itself according to a succession of actual wagers, thus unfolding in the future perfect tense a radicalism that is never barred by the rock of any law.

Constructive reasoning never encounters the law. It only exhibits a case according to the law, which remains immanent. Nonconstructive reasoning, or reasoning by the absurd, is always an encounter, the encounter of contradiction. We must then either give up on the initial hypothesis or give up on the noncontradiction, that is, on the law itself. If the encounter of the contradiction is always deferred, the nonconstructive reasoning moves deductively in a suspended existence.

Politics places the encounter of an interruption of the law as the principle of its procedure in the form of the event. The successive interventions stand under the wagered hypothesis of a consistent fi-

delity to the event. It is a matter of organizing the opening that from a real event, which is to say an event that is absurd from the point of view of the law, the infinite can proceed. The nonconstructive is thus the natural element of the political process.

Mallarmé summarizes all this perfectly in *Igitur*, speaking of chance: "It contains the Absurd—implies it, but in its latent state, and keeps it from existing: which allows the Infinite to be."

Let me translate: the politicized event by way of the intervention, which is always a throw of the dice, contains the Absurd, the inadmissible, latent in its procedure. And thus the Infinite of the political task is possible.

You will note that the underlying dialectic is that between being and existing. The political infinite *is*, from the fact that the absurdity of the event is by the intervening procedure made unfit for existence, except as latency of the procedure, that is, of the organization itself.

Politics is, from the point of a failure in the count-as-one, the infinite assumption of being that gives a lasting latency to the existence of the Two.

Thus antagonism is not the principle of an assault, but of that which the being of politics contains in the infinity of a wager, having thus the power to overrule existence.

The fact that the infinite is the evental consistency propagated by the intervening risk makes it so that this infinite is never presentable. Inadmissible in its source, politics is unpresentable in its procedure. It is for this reason that it is both radical and interminable. Since there is no stopping point nor any symbol for its infinity, politics must renounce the sublime. It is without a doubt this gesture of renunciation by which, in subjective terms, politics separates itself most profoundly from the revolutionary representation. As we can see in Kant, the sublime indexation of revolutionary historicity is present from the origin. But let us be attentive to what is perhaps the most profound characteristic of the Polish movement, which is the constant internal struggle against the sublimity of action.

More profound and more radical than the sublime is de-sublimation, since the event is not, and does not have to be, the stormy or

stellar plenitude in which the infinite reveals itself. It is rather the inadmissible empty point, in which nothing presents itself, but from where it follows by the absurd that the Infinite has been actualized in the consistent series of interventions.

We are left with the poetic injunction, which itself is sublime, to have to renounce the sublime. The political infinite must set itself aside, separate itself, from all presentation. This is Mallarmé's directive, with which I conclude: "That from the Infinite the constellations and the sea may be separated."

The text of *Can Politics Be Thought?* stems in large part from two talks given in January 1984 and June 1984, as part of the Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique, directed at the ENS by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. I insist on thanking them here. Certain materials have also been issued as articles published in the biweekly *Le Perroquet*, which I codirect together with Natacha Michel.

Of an Obscure Disaster

On the End of the Truth of the State

I. THE "DEATH OF COMMUNISM"?

Will the evocation of death lead us to an appropriate way of naming what we are witnessing? But are we only witnesses? And, furthermore, who is this "we" that I am asking about, and of which something would have to be said concerning what it is? There is no longer a "we"; there has not been for a long time. The "we" entered into its twilight well before the "death of communism." Or rather the dislocation of the Soviet Party-State is merely the objective crystallization (since objectivity, or representation, is always the State, or a state, a state of the situation) of the fact that a certain thought of "we" is inoperative and has been for more than twenty years. For it was the expression "we communists," as a nominal specification added to "we revolutionaries," which in its turn gave political and

subjective force to the "we" that was presupposed as the ultimate referent—the "we" of the class, the "we proletarians," which nobody openly declares, but which every ideal community posited prior to itself as a historical axiom. Or, in other words: we, faithful to the event of October 1917.

When I say "we communists," and even more so when I think of Lenin (it is of his thought that I think, and not of his precarious statues, even if nobody will ever make me say "St. Petersburg"), or when I think of the Russian Revolution, I do not think of the Party, the Party that I have always fought against, and that I always held for what it never ceased to be: the place of a politics that was both hesitant and brutal, marked by an arrogant incapacity. Still less is it a matter of the USSR, that despotic gray totality, the reversal of October into its opposite (politics under the condition of Lenin, the insurrectionary seizure, flipped over into the police blindness of the State). The decisions of thought, and what they entail at the level of nominations that are more or less secret, are anterior to their institutional figures. Presentation, multiplicity without the concept, is never integrally grasped within representation. No, it was not a question of the localizable entities, the apparatuses, or the symbols. At stake was that which has the power of making us hold steady in thought. Because it is for thought in general that there was no other conceivable "we" than under the banner of communism. "Communism" named the effective history of "us." It is in this manner that I, as an adolescent, understood Sartre's vulgar maxim "Every anticommunist is a dog." For every anticommunist thus manifested his hatred of the "we," his determination to exist solely within the limits of the possession of himself—which always means the possession of a few goods or properties.

Today the latent universal statement holds that every communist is a dog. But this is not important—or, rather, it is no more important than the historical staining of a noble word, something that, after all, is the destiny of words, especially the most noble ones: to be dragged through blood and mud. It is not important, because the figure of the "we" to which this word was devoted has been abolished for a long

time now. The word thus no longer covered anything other than the order of representation, the Party, the State, this ineluctable usurpation of what at one time was the dawning glory of the multiple by the mortifying gridlock of the One. "Death of communism" means that in the long run what is dead in presentation—the emblematic "we" under which, since October, or since 1793, political thought conditions a philosophy of community—must also die in representation. That which no longer has the force of the pure multiple cannot preserve for long the powers of the One. We must rejoice in this: it signals the mortality of the structural capacities for usurpation.

And so, if you will, there certainly does exist, in the order of the State (of affairs), a "death of communism." But, for thought, this is no more than a second death. Outside the State, in the very midst of the emblems and the upheavals, "communism" for a long time named nothing but the tomb of a century-old "we."

That this death is but a second death is attested by a remarkable fact, which is a matter of common opinion but nevertheless real: "death of communism" stands in a relation of rhetorical reciprocity to "breakup of the Soviet Empire." That "communism" thus is tied to "empire" in the destiny of what is mortal proves—since subjectively "communism" named the universal community, the end of classes, and thus the opposite of any empire—that this "death" is but the death event of the already dead.

"Event"? Does death allow itself to come, or to happen, in the form of an event? And what is there to say about a death that is a second or secondary death? I hold death to be a fact, an attestation of the underlying belonging to the neutral plasticity of natural being. Everything dies—which also means no death is an event. Death is on the side of multiple being, of its ineluctable dissociation. Death is the return of the multiple to the void from which it is woven. Death is under the law of the multiple (or mathematical) essence of being qua being; it is indifferent to existence. Yes, Spinoza was entirely right: *Homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat.* There is nothing to *think* in death, albeit the death of an empire, nothing but the intrinsic nullity of being.

Every event is an infinite proposition, in the radical form of a singularity and a supplement. Everybody experiences, not without anxiety, that the current dislocations propose nothing to us. There was a Polish event, between the Gdansk strikes (or even earlier, during the formation of the Workers' Defense Committee or KOR, the invention of an innovative *path* between workers and intellectuals) and the coup d'état of Jaruzelski. There was the sketch of a German event, during the Leipzig protests. Even in Russia itself, there was the uncertain attempt on the part of the Vorkuta miners. But there was no truth faithful to these upsurges, so that everything remains undecidable. Then came Lech Wałęsa, the pope, Helmut Kohl, Boris Yeltsin, and others. Who would dare to interpret these proper names in the striking light or glow of an evental proposition? Who can cite a single unheard-of statement, a single nomination without precedent, in the erosion both sudden and weak, undivided and confused, of the despotic form of the Party-State? These years will remain exemplary of the fact that an abrupt and complete change in the situation does not in any way signify that the grace of an event has happened to it. I used to love what we said before to keep our distance from these "movements" so celebrated by public opinion: "Not everything that moves is red" (*Tout ce qui bouge n'est pas rouge*). In the serenity of the concept, let us say that not everything that changes is an event, and that surprise, speed, and disorder can be the mere simulacra of an event, and not its promise of truth. The simulacrum of the "Romanian Revolution," which is now recognized, also offers us a paradigm here. In truth, what has occurred is nothing more than this: what was subjectively dead must enter into the state of death, and finally be recognized there as such.

Moreover how could the "death of communism" be the name of an event, when we observe that every historical event is communist, inasmuch as "communist" designates the transtemporal subjectivity of emancipation?

Certainly the *particular* figure of "we communists" constituted in the aftermath of October 1917 has been obsolete for quite some time. (Since when? That is a delicate question, which does not per-

tain to philosophy but rather to politics, which alone, from the point of view of the prescription that engages it, *thinks* the lacunary periodicity of political subjectivity.[1] In my eyes, in any case, it is at least since May '68 as far as France is concerned.) However, philosophically speaking, "communist" is not reducible to the finished sequence during which parties attributed that term to themselves, or to the sequence during which the idea of a politics of emancipation was being debated under this name. For every word that it seizes, no matter how recent, philosophy seeks to find an atemporal resonance. Philosophy exists solely insofar as it extracts concepts from the historical pressure, which would grant them nothing but a relative sense. What does "communist" signify in an absolute sense? What is philosophy able to think under this name (philosophy under the condition of a politics)? The egalitarian passion, the Idea of justice, the will to break with the compromises of the service of goods, the removal of egotism, the intolerance toward oppression, the wish to put an end to the State; the absolute preeminence of multiple presentation over representation; the tenaciously militant determination, set in motion by some incalculable event, to maintain, come what may, the proposition of a singularity without predicate, an infinity without determination or immanent hierarchy, what I call the generic, which is—when the procedure is political—the ontological concept of democracy, or of communism, which is the same thing.[2]

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1. The philosophical statement on these questions is limited to posing the rarity of politics as a generic procedure, its discontinuous existence. This is how I formulated it in my *Theory of the Subject*, translated and with an introduction by Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009): "Every subject is political. Which is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics" (28). The corpus of political statements on this point is very complex. It engages the doctrine, founded by Sylvain Lazarus, of historical modes of politics.

2. The generic, that is to say the status in thought of the *whatever* infinite multiplicity as materiality of a truth, constitutes the most important concept of the philosophical propositions of my book *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2007).

Philosophy finds that this subjective *form* has always and forever escorted the great popular uprisings, precisely not when they are captive and opaque (as is everything that we see today: nationalisms, the fascination of the market, mafiosi and demagogues, all raised up high on the pedestal of parliamentarism), but rather in free rupture with being-in-situation, or counted-being, which reins them in. From Spartacus to Mao (not the Mao of the State, who also exists, but the extreme, rebellious, complicated Mao), from the Greek democratic insurrections to the worldwide decade of 1966–76, it is and has been, in this sense, a question of communism. It will always be a question of communism, even if the word, soiled, is replaced by some other designation of the concept that it covers, the philosophical and thus eternal concept of rebellious subjectivity. I named this, around 1975, the "communist invariants."[3] I maintain the expression, against that of the "death of communism." And—at the very moment when a monstrous avatar, which is properly speaking disastrous (a "State of communism"!), is falling apart—let it be a matter of the following: every event that politically founds a truth exposes the subject that it incites to the eternity of the equal. "Communism," having named this eternity, cannot adequately serve to name a death.

Here, before the prohibition of eternity prepared by every apology for the rule of the commodity, I shall intone a song of which I am the author, a song "after the style of Saint-John Perse" as they used to say in the great century, "after the style of the Ancients."[4]

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3. The theory of the communist invariants is outlined in my little book, written in collaboration with François Balmès, *De l'ideologie* (Paris: François Maspero, 1976).

4. The "chorus of the divisible defeat" is excerpted from Alain Badiou, *L'Écharpe rouge: Roman-opéra* (Paris: François Maspero, 1979). Adapted, the "novel-opera" became the libretto for a very short opera for which Georges Aperghis composed the music, and which has been performed in Lyon, Avignon, and then in Chaillot, in a mise-en-scène by Antoine Vitez, set design by

Written eighteen years ago, it was then in agreement with the leading active opinion, that of the revolutionaries of the aftermath of May '68, and especially of the "Maos." Published twelve years ago, it had already begun to smack of heresy. By the time it was actually sung on stage seven years ago, it had become mysterious, strangely obstinate. And today?! Myself, I am retouching it a little. (Certainly not in repentance over its meaning, but simply because nowadays I have less taste than before for Saint-John Perse. Against aesthetic nihilism, I hold that convictions and commitments are more durable than tastes. They *must* be so.) To these variations in its coincidence with the spirit of the times, the song opposes a measure that is entirely its own and that touches, as we shall see, upon centuries, even upon millennia. It is thus also (and this is why, even if I were absolutely alone—which is not the case—I would murmur it here) a

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Yannis Kokkos, in 1984. With astounding, complex, and violent music, the chorus was sung by all the opera's performers dressed in emblematic workers' uniforms. Pierre Vial traversed the stage, seeking shelter from who knows what storm under an old umbrella. He had the air of an escapee, of a tramp of the eternal insurrections, and, in an unforgettable way, he grumbled, "Communism! Communism!"

Once again this unappeasable grief comes over me with the death of Antoine Vitez. How he was tormented by the "end of communism"! And, nevertheless, how clear was his vision! One must read his text, "Ce qui nous reste" (What Remains for Us), from 1990, so shortly before his death. It is reprinted in the faithful and precious collection prepared by Danièle Sallenave and Georges Banu, entitled *Le Théâtre des idées* (The Theater of Ideas) (Paris: Gallimard, 1991). I would like to cite the eighth statement: "The crime—which one may call to simplify the crime of Stalin but it far exceeds Stalin—is to leave hope in the hands of the irrational, to the obscurantists and the demagogues." But after the consummation of the crime, Antoine Vitez, as always, cuts to the prescriptions, to what he calls "our role": "Sarcasm, invective and predictions, critique of the present, announcement." In these few pages I am, I believe, an interpreter of this "role." There will certainly be many others.

song of announcement, the multiple names of what is always to come.

Who thus spoke of solitude?

Vanquished! The legendary vanquished!

I call here for your refusals to accept.

You: oppressed of times immemorial, slaves of the sun-sacrifice mutilated for the darkness of tombs. Men of great labor sold with the earth whose color they bear. Children expatriated by the enclosure of the fields in the service of cotton and coal factories.

For it is enough to wait, and to think: no one accepts, never.

Spartacus, Jacquou le Croquant, Thomas Müntzer.

You: vagabonds of the plain, Taipings of the rich soil, Chartists and machine wreckers, plotters conspiring in the labyrinth of the workers' suburbs, Babouvist egalitarians, sans-culottes, communards, Spartacists. All people of popular sects and seditious parties, sectarians of the time of the Terror, men of the axe and the pitchfork, of the barricades and burning castles.

The crowd of so many others attempting to have done with what they were; discovering in the declaration of their act the latent and separatist thought.

You: sailors throwing their officers to the carnivorous fish, utopians of elegiac cities shooting in the forest clearings, Quechua miners of the Andes, gourmands of dynamite. And those rebel Africans in successive tides amid the colonial stench, under the protection of God and the panther shields. Without forgetting the one who, all alone, took up his shotgun, as if for wild boars, and began resisting the aggressor in the forests of Europe.

For of that which breaks the circle nothing is lost. No one forgets, never.

Robespierre, Saint-Just, Blanqui, Varlin.

You: the great processions of all kinds deployed in the streets. Leftist students, girls demanding rights for women, banners of great clandestine trade unions, old-timers awakened by the memory of general strikes, veterans of failed coups, workers on bicycles.

The few (epochs going against the grain): those who maintain the just idea in basements with hand-run presses. Thinkers of the outdated and the to-come. Sacrificial consciences white like the Rose. Or even those, armed with long bamboo sticks, who made a science out of beating the fat cops, while all the rest remained obscure to them.

Because, from a freedom without dimension, writing forms the uncountable.

Marx, Engels.

You: haranguers and warriors of the peasants' leagues, camisard prophets, women of clubs, of assemblies and federations, workers and high school students from grassroots, action, triple union and grand alliance committees. Soviets of factories and military companies, popular tribunals, grand commissions of villagers for the redistribution of land, the filling of an irrigation dam, the formation of militia. Revolutionary groups for the control of prices, the execution of prevaricators and the surveillance of stocks.

For meditation upon what gathers and multiplies will not rest. Nothing is forever disseminated.

Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong.

All of you. You judge what is lacking and you examine the abolition: "Who speaks of failure? What was done and thought was done and thought. In its beginning, its time and its caesura. Leave the weighing of results to the accountants. For what was at stake in our reign was the invention of separation, and not the establishment of the weighty office of a duration.

The infinity of situations, who will thus exhaust them? The event in which the dice are cast, who then will appease it?

Entrust yourself to your imperative. Turn yourself away from power. May the verdict be indifferent to you, and let nothing in you ever consent. To necessity.

Let the satisfied pass on. Let the fearful proliferate. It is our intact singularity which has made this great hole in the world where we, century after century, fix the semaphore of communism.

The searching light of the semaphore, the illumination of centuries by the rare pivoting insurrection of this light, would all this be extinct because a mediocre tyranny has taken it upon itself to announce that it was dead? This is exactly what I do not believe.

Let us note this: it was not the insurrected and solar masses who decided the end of the Party-State, the end of the Soviet Empire. The collapse of this pachyderm occurred through an internal dysfunction, which was both concerted and yet devoid of any perspective. The affair has remained to this day a state affair, from beginning to end. No political invention—or the invention of politics—has punctuated its circumstances.[5] That thousands of people signaled here or there, in the streets and in a few factories, that they were content with what was happening was the least that one could expect! But alas, we have not seen them indicate that they thought and wanted the experience of a novelty without precedent. And how could it have been otherwise if it is true, as we are told everywhere, that what the people of Russia, Hungary, and Bulgaria think and want is nothing other than what already exists, and has existed for a long time, in those countries of ours which are sadly called, who knows why, "Western"? Such a wish can do nothing but comfort the preeminence of the statist and constitutional view of the processes involved. Elections and property owners, politicians and racketeers: is this the whole content of their wish? If so, it is quite reasonable to entrust its realization not to the inventions of thought but to specialists in the maneuvering of the apparatuses, indeed to the experts of the International Monetary Fund. For a little supplement for the soul, the pope is always ready at hand. And for a touch of passionate excess—without which the simulacrum of an event would remain far

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5. *L'invention de la politique* is the title of a book—one of the last ones—of Moses Finley, the great historian of antiquity (in English, *Politics in the Ancient World* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983]). It is a significant point of reference for the theoretical work of Sylvain Lazarus. One can read the commentary that he offers in *Anthropology of the Name*, trans. Gila Walker (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2015).

too peaceful—one will look to history as far back as the war of 1914 to find the means to cast one bestial nationalism against another.

If there is no event, it is because what is at stake is the history of States and not at all the history of politics. This distinction is crucial. It is easy to object that the history of communism tied the "Soviet" state paradigm to the militant subjectivity and that the dismantling of one destroys the other. I maintain the opposite thesis: militant subjectivity, philosophically received in the form of the "we," was obsolete or inactive well before the system of the Party-State entered into the sequence of its ruin.

What exact role did the "Soviet paradise" play in the subjective, that is to say political, constitution of the militancy named communist? It is a major theme of received opinion that this role was central and that the "revelations"—for example, those of Solzhenitsyn—of the statist infamy of Stalinism dealt a fatal blow to the "utopia." But this story does not hold up, just like any story or history that attempts to describe a subjectivity (in this case, of a political kind) under the categories of the lie, error, and illusion. No *real* political figure either organizes its consistency around the nothingness of a fallacious representation or counts a paradigm (a State or a norm) at the center of its determination. October 1917 as *event* no doubt engages certain practical fidelities, but the thought that cements them together depends on the event as such, and not on its statist projection. And the process of these fidelities depends not on propaganda (the servile vision of consciousness) but on the situations. In France the force of the communist reference owes its fate (debatable, but from an entirely different point of view) first to the assessment of the war of 1914, then to the Popular Front, then to antifascism and the Resistance, and finally very little to the anarchic and bloody history of the Soviet State. Any systematic conjunction with the history of that State is repaid, not with an increase in power, but with a painful weakness and with difficult crises. In the same manner, in order to create his own resources in historicity, Mao thinks not the Russian economy but the Chinese peasantry and the struggle against the Japanese invasion. At the level of subjectivity, the concrete history

of communisms (I take them this time in their common identity, that of parties, groups, and militants, whether official or dissident) does not rely upon the "paradisiacal" State, which serves only as an aleatory objectification. Indeed the most inventive, those who attuned the party to the essential history of the place from which they acted— Mao, Tito, Enver Hoxha—all finished by breaking with the matrix of the Soviet State, noticing correctly that its objectivity did not even serve their immediate goals.

How, otherwise, can one explain that this sequential communism reached its greatest power, including in terms of its seductiveness for thought, between 1930 and 1960, that is, in the very epoch in which the Stalinist crimes were unleashed? And that it entered into its twilight from Brezhnev onward, in an era of "stagnation" in which people were no longer killed, and in which the physiognomy of the State, always a little repugnant, nevertheless was comparable to that of the United States of the Vietnam War, not to mention the Brazil of the "gorillas" (where apparently a superb "market economy" now reigns)? What explanation is there? The blindness of faith? But why faith when everything is getting worse, and the weakening of such faith when everything is not as bad? Ignorance, that handy contingency?

There is a hypothesis that is both simpler and stronger: it is that the *political*, which is to say subjective, history of communisms is essentially disjoined from their state history. The criminal objectivity of the Stalinist State is one thing; the militant subjectivity of communists is another, with its own referents, its own singular developments, and its own nonobjective prescriptions. Criminal objectivity only ever functioned as a *general* argument—it has always perfectly functioned for reactionaries; read *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, a text from 1929—inasmuch as political subjectivity, the sequential "we," was already obsolete.

It is not the revelation of crime, by Solzhenitsyn or anyone else, that ruined the political hypothesis of communism ("communism" understood here within the sequence of the "we" of the century). It is the death—once again, the ancient death—of the hypothesis that allowed this "revelation" to have such efficacy. Because if political

subjectivity became unable to support, by itself, in its thought and in its act, the singularity of its trajectory (and thus also its philosophical connection to emancipatory eternity, to the invariants), then there is no longer any other referent than the State, and it is true that the criminal character of this or that State can become an argument without an answer.

It is not because the Stalinist State was criminal that the Leninist prescriptions, crystallized in October 1917, ceased to expose communism to its eternity within time. (And, moreover, what relation is there between these prescriptions, between this event and the Stalinist State, apart from pure empirical consecution?) It is because there were no longer any possible militants of such an exposition, for intrinsic and purely political reasons, that the Stalinist State—once it had *retroactively* become the absurd incarnation of the Idea—could function as an unanswerable historical argument against the Idea itself.

This is why the ruin of the Party-State is a process immanent to *the history of States*. It succumbs to its objective solitude, to its subjective abandonment. It succumbs by the absenting of politics and, singularly, of any politics deserving the name "communist." The anarchic, confused, and deplorable spectacle of this ruin—which is nevertheless necessary and legitimate because what is dead must die—attests not to the "death of communism" but to the immense consequences *of its lack*.

II. THE "TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY"?

Democracy triumphs on the ruins of communism, so say our essayists. Or it is going to triumph. The greatest triumphalists evoke the triumph of a "model of civilization." Ours. Nothing less. Whoever says "civilization," especially in the form of a triumph, also proclaims the right of the civilized to their cannons—over those who might not have understood in time on what side the trumpets of triumph make themselves heard. Human rights are no longer a tired intellectual demand. It is time for muscular rights, for the right of

intervention. For the triumphal marches of democratic troops. If needed, it is time for war, that obligatory correlate of triumphant civilizations. Deaths among the Iraqis, laid down in silence by the thousands, excluded from any count (and we know to what extent the civilization of which we speak is accountable . . .), are only the anonymous remainder of triumphal operations. Shifty Muslims, after all, noncivilized recalcitrants. Because, take note, there are religions and religions. The Christian religion and its pope are part of civilization; the rabbis could be included, but mullahs and ayatollahs would do well to convert.

And first and foremost, to convert to the market economy. Because this is the greatest paradox of the times: the "death of communism," the obsolescence of all Marxist politics, is expressed from within the only true and visible triumph, that of "vulgar" Marxism, that positivist Marxism which affirms the absolute primacy of the economy. Wasn't it the young Marx who, in his *Manifesto*, which, we are told, is only an assassin's scribblings, presented governments as the proxies for capital? It seems that nobody has the least doubt about the truth of this assertion anymore.

We find ourselves, and this is important, in a moment of avowal. That the substantial content of every "democracy" is the existence of gigantic and suspect fortunes, that the maxim "Get rich!" is the alpha and omega of the epoch, that the brutal materiality of profits is the absolute condition of every respectable membership in society—in brief, that ownership is the essence of "civilization"—this is the consensus, after having been, during almost two centuries, the adventurous and slandered thesis of the revolutionaries who wanted to put an end to such a pitiable "civilization." A "Marxism" without proletariat or politics, an economism that puts private wealth at the center of social determination, the recuperated good conscience of the financiers, the corrupt, the governments exclusively preoccupied with supporting the enrichment of the rich: there you have the vision of the world presented to us under the triumphal banner of civilization.

I think of Robespierre, on the 9th Thermidor: "The Republic is

lost! The brigands have triumphed." It is very true that they haven't stopped winning ever since, but never so much so as today, with an arrogance that is immensely reinforced by the defeat and then the disappearance (or so they think) of all their successive adversaries.

The only restraint that I observe, as a chaste tunic passed over a beast's skin, is to have baptized the violent desire of capital "the market economy." What does one observe in the countries of the East in which the "transition" has begun toward the aforementioned market economy? That the neuralgic center of this transition is the desperate search for *property owners* under the seriously adjusted name of "privatization." I do not believe that we have ever seen such a spectacle: countries bent on selling to the highest bidder the totality of their productive apparatus. The mixed rabble of the criminal underworld, of ancient notables or "socialist" apparatchiks, foreign capitalists, or small business owners everywhere, ransacking everything and bleeding it dry. Beforehand a vast campaign would have been initiated against the obsolete and miserable condition—or the inexistence, as it were—of this entire equipment, doubtless so as to overwhelm the sinister and inefficient bureaucratic management, but even more to ensure that the auctioning off of the factories, businesses, services would be done at the lowest possible rate.

One does not say, as the Thermidorians were frank enough to do, that the republic is the business of the owners. But one shows, one proclaims, that a *conditio sine qua non* of democracy is the massive existence of property owners—and it matters little who they are and where they come from. This is what I call the avowal. The organic link between the private property of the means of production—and thus structural, radical inequality—and "democracy" is no longer a theme of socialist polemic but the rule of consensus. Yes, Marxism triumphs: the underlying determinations of parliamentarianism, its *necessary* link to capitalism and profit, are exactly what Marxism said they were.

The idealistic French socialists, Jaurès for example, had a program to "complete" political democracy, which in their eyes was founded on revolutionary republicanism, through economic democ-

racy. Today they have their answer: your "economic democracy" is nothing but bureaucracy and totalitarianism. Political democracy will never be completed; it is uncompletable. It is tied forever to the domination of the proprietors.

Yes, the brigands triumph. I know well that they triumph in this moment only because *other brigands* succumb. I detested the terrorist bureaucracies of the East. It is not I, it is not we, who made a pact with the French Communist Party, signed with it a "common program," visited the USSR, chanted "Ceauşescu," or expected miracles and marvels from the renovators, the reconstructors, the dissidents, and the renegades. For more than twenty years, we fought the Stalinist mode of politics, not only in the abstraction of its so-called totalitarianism but in the real heart of its power, the place of the factory and its capture by the trade unions.[6]

It is here where the painful obscurity of the moment resides: the fact that the system of the Party-State collapsed, that the Stalinist mode of politics was saturated and moribund—these are excellent things, and they are moreover ineluctable phenomena for which we worked, under the evental impulse of May '68 and its aftermath, in the faithful tenacity of militant inventiveness, which is an inventiveness of thought. But the fact that instead of opening to some eventality from which the deployment of another mode of politics would proceed, another singular figure of emancipation (which is precisely what we practice here under the name of "politics without party"), this collapse happens under the aegis of the "democracy" of the imperial owners; that the supreme political advisor of the situation is Bush; that the desire flaunted is that of inequality and ownership, that the rule is the IMF, that "thought" is only the vain repetition of the most basic and most convenient opinions: if all this were really the course of things, what melancholy this would truly be.

(However, it is *not* assured that this is the course of things to

6. Within the framework of the theory of modes of politics (cf. note 1), we designate as "Stalinist mode" the nodal configuration of the politics of the French Communist Party. The central theme of this mode is that politics is the party.

come. Any statist collapse makes the incalculable the order of the day. Hence the fear of the advocates of the "market," a visible fear, which is but the double of their propagandistic triumph. Nothing can prevent that after the crumbling of one maladjusted sequence we suddenly become *seized* by what one particular people, the Russian or the Chinese, for example, are capable of doing again.)

Whatever happens, philosophy considers history from the point of view of its inexistence, which means there is no Reason in history, and each sequence must be related to what it contains in terms of the singular and the relative. That today there is the inextricable and weighty mix of the beneficial disinheritance of a usurpation (the statist collapse of "communisms") and of a kind of counterrevolutionary revenge, of an almost intolerant and even terroristic arrogance, of the blackest reaction: this certainly defines our time, but it is also a recurrent figure for philosophical subjectivity. We can also anticipate that this troubled situation, in which in sum we see Evil dance on the ruins of Evil, prepares the forms of historicity of what we are witnessing, in thought and in act, no matter how few we are.

Let us think for example about the collapse, in 1815, of the Napoleonic Empire. Wasn't it justice that the people and the States of Europe coalesced to destroy this aberrant militaristic construction, which had engulfed the world in fire and blood so that the family of a Corsican despot could establish itself in tin-pot monarchies? But wasn't this at the same time the return of the Bourbons, the white terror, the Holy Alliance, and the obtuse denial of the revolution, the denial of Robespierre and Saint-Just (what was most intense and inventive in political thought), treated like criminal fools by scoundrels who were trucked back from abroad? We are going to see, we already see, that the Stalinist and bureaucratic empire, whose dissolution is a form of justice rendered unto the people, will serve through its death the obstinate design of the reactionaries: to be able, finally, to proclaim in the public square that Lenin and Mao and once again Robespierre and Saint-Just (because emancipatory political inventions are at the same time irreducible, totally singular, and altogether in solidarity with one another) were criminal fools.

But there will always be those who will not believe even for a second in such orchestrations. Those who will not yield. Who will want to disentangle the historical imbroglio, separating true politics from its statist and structural avatars. And who will once again throw the dice.

In this sense it will serve our purpose, among other things, to pay the greatest attention, from within the political prescription, to the game of words. "Democracy," for example. It is out of the question to leave this term to the dogs. Democracy, this would be Bush, Kohl, the Japanese feudal lords converted into managers of trusts, the shifty Mitterrand, Thatcher, Wałęsa? Let's look more closely at all this.

"Democracy," if we limit ourselves to what philosophy might know about it, is a word of division, a litigious word. Some samples of its disparity: for the Greeks democracy is a place—the assembly—of the magistrates, and above all can be a form of the management of decisions about war, which constitute the permanent core of the popular convocation. The great Jacobins hardly used the word: their purpose was republican, the subjectivity that animated it was virtue. In the liberal proposition, "democracy" designates first of all juridical freedoms, rights (of opinion, press, association, enterprise, etc.). The "classist" revolutionary tradition puts forward democratic *situations*: general assemblies, the democracy of the masses, but also transitory figures of organization, clubs, soviets, committees of triple union, and so on. In contemporary propaganda, "democracy" expressly designates a form of government, that is, parliamentary "representation," whose basic protocol is the election and whose locus is the system of the State parties (in the plural), the opposite of the Party-State (in the singular). Let us note that such a system would not have been recognized as democratic by Rousseau (for example), for whom the organized division of the general will creates a system of factions, and for whom the designation of "representatives" puts an end to any subjective demand, thus to any politics.

Since ambiguity reigns, let us divide the words. What is called "democracy," whose universal triumph is celebrated, should be des-

ignated with precision as *parliamentarianism*. Parliamentarianism is not only an objective or institutional figure (elections, an executive dependent—in very variable degrees—on an elected legislature, etc.). It is also a particular political subjectivity, an engagement, in which "democracy" is a valorizing theme, a propagandistic designation. This engagement has two characteristics:

- It subordinates politics to the sole statist locus (the only "collective" political act is the designation of governmental personnel) and, doing so, annuls politics *as thought*. Thus the fundamental character of parliamentarism is not a thinker of politics, but a politician (one could easily say today a "manager").
- It demands as its regulatory condition the autonomy of capital, of the owners, of the market.

Let us agree, then, to call our democracy, for clarity of description, *capitalo-parliamentarianism*.

The hypothesis covered by the discourse on the triumph of democracy would then be the following: We are, politically speaking, under the regime of the One, and not in that of the multiple. Capitalo-parliamentarianism is the tendentially unique mode of politics, the only one to combine economic efficacy (thus the profit of the owners) and popular consensus.

If one takes this hypothesis seriously, one must agree that henceforth—or at least for the entire sequence currently in progress—*capitalo-parliamentarianism serves as the political definition for the whole of humanity*.

And if one is content with this hypothesis, if one rejoices in the fact that capitalo-parliamentarianism is the political form at last discovered in which the whole of humanity is reasonably fulfilled, this means that one judges that this world, where we other "Westerners" live, is an excellent world, worthy of humanity. Or that capitalo-parliamentarianism is commensurable with the Idea of humanity.

This is precisely what the philosopher could never grant.

That this world—the one we understand as the place where we, people from here, pass our days—is at the same time ineluctable and good, this is what in the end we are summoned to declare: we, holders of an exercise of thought that both supposes and implies the noticeable distance that we keep with regard to the supposed excellence of the course of things. In the passion of propagandistic discourse, the avatars of the Soviet State, or of the Chinese State, are worth nothing in regard to the thinkable; their only function is to oblige the whole of humanity to repeat that, yes, this world (the West, capitalo-parliamentarianism) is the best of all possible worlds. Because as far as the impossible is concerned, the dominant opinion has been persuaded (with the particularly valuable aid of an unimaginable number of renegades of revolutionary or communist convictions) that to entertain its wish was criminal. And hasn't the excellence of capitalo-parliamentarianism been established by the fact that the will to produce another world, without much prior proof as to its possibility, that "utopia" which under the name of the revolution has long governed historical subjectivity—since 1792 in France, via the seizure of power of 1917 in Russia and of 1949 in China—led nowhere but to crime and ruin? Don't we see entire peoples aspiring with all their energy, which we tenderly solicit by the display of our magnificence, to share our transcendent goods, in the first rank of which is the economy of finance capital, followed closely by the system of State parties (in the plural) with its costly electoral pomp?

This world is so good that no sooner do we witness, like a piece of meat taken too late from an unplugged freezer, the end without glory of the Party-State (in the singular) which confronted it than we must nevertheless protect it, this excellent world, from the hordes of those who envy its opulence and its freedom. It would be wise to erect the Berlin Wall again a little more to the East, so that the Arabs and the blacks, who already darkly obsess us, would not be

joined by the half-starved plethora of those who have tolerated at home, so long and so passively (because we were heroic, weren't we; we never put up with anything; we are, as is well known, fierce resistance fighters), the abominable system of communism.

There is evidently a small problem: if this world must be protected from the barbarians (repentant Albanians as well as "fanatical" Muslims), this is because it is not a world but rather a simple fragment that only assures the stability of its surroundings by severe classificatory regulations as to who has the right to live in it. And if it is not a world, what authority of universal signification can its inhabitants invoke to proclaim, by the force of arms if needed, their rights and duties to the others?

The communist world, bloody and inert, could claim to be *the* world, because its Idea, no matter how quickly its degradation became evident, was that of emancipation. Is it possible to substitute this claim with that of the marketplace and the property owner? There is a difficulty in equating Robespierre and César Birotteau, Varlin and the Panama Canal, Lenin and Mitterrand, Mao and Mitsubishi, even among those spirits who find the political police—which is what the proletarian Idea was reduced to in the end—so repugnant that they become the converts of the municipal ballot box. If our world is called to become the world, of what Humanity does it proclaim the over-existence, apart from the one which the accounting rules, devoid of any action of thought, continue forever to distribute in the ghettos, where the only choice is between the substantialist bickering of the tribe and the universality of money?

The ideologue, this charming character who assures the semblance of the circulation of ideas once the circulation of capital is guaranteed, here takes the stage and tells us that universal Humanity of which you declare us incapable establishes its concept in *the Rule of Law*. The State of law and human rights—this is what we propose to the whole of humanity to guarantee its existence as Subject of its own destiny.

Let us take this proposition of the ideologue seriously. Is the modality of the Law what replaces revolutionary eschatology? Is this how our world honors its claim to be valid, for all of humanity, as the future becoming of the world? Is the Law, the juridical name of liberty, what makes capitalo-parliamentarianism commensurable with the Idea of humanity?

Regardless of all the goodwill with which the philosopher discusses a claim of the ideologue, he cannot escape the need to divide what the other gathers under the "popular"—that is to say, journalistic—vocation of his argument. The category of Law, such as the ideologue handles it, functions as a circulating category between politics and philosophy, and this is what allows it to be at the same time volatile and urgent, erudite and organized.[7] Law functions as a theme of speculation (see Hegel), but also as a cover for the big stick (see Panama or the Gulf). It is the discursive interstice between the ideal and the real of great powers.

I speak here as a philosopher instructed by the idea that, as I argue, the fusion between philosophy and its political condition ruins both.[8] We can see this by the fact that this fusion carries in our century a memorable name: that of Stalin, the authentic inventor of Dialectical Materialism as the central philosopheme of political subjectivity. In actual fact, the idea that the identification of philosophy and politics, their identification *qua forms of thought*, possesses no

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7. I borrow the concept of a circulating category from Sylvain Lazarus, who uses it to show how, in certain historical modes of politics, categories (like "revolution" and "class") function simultaneously in subjectivity (thus as political categories) and in objectivity (as historical categories). See, for example, his text *Lénine et le temps* (Lenin and Time), published by Conférences du Perroquet.

8. On this point I refer to my *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). To designate the effect of the eclipse of philosophy that results from the overvalorization of one of its conditions, to the detriment of the others, I use the word "suture." In its Stalinist version, Dialectical Materialism is a total suture of philosophy to politics.

reality other than a police reality, or even a criminal one, has been established since at least, let's say, book 10 of Plato's *Laws*.

I'm not in a position to consider *directly* the political side of this *Janus bifrons* that is the contemporary apologetic of the law. To do so would require the mobilization of a whole arsenal of categories forged by political thought-practice, of which I am, moreover, a militant.[9] However, here I call on myself in this proclamation of polymorphous thought only in the guise of the philosopher.

I should then modify somewhat the question I pose to myself as an echo of the one that the ideologue proffers. This question becomes: What are the *philosophical* implications of the supposition, so common today, according to which the Law would be a fundamental category of politics, even the category through which we could relay a defunct revolutionary universalism?

No one would dream of denying that the Law is a very important category of the *State*. In the East, in the countries that try to construct something other than this strange composite of a dead Idea and economic insolvency, from which they have realized that it was too late to salvage anything, one of the pressing demands that is expressed, especially by the intelligentsia—including, we should note, the numerous strata and substrata of the apparatuses, or their remnants—is that of the State of Law or the Rule of Law. And this is also the norm that the West identifies with democracy and, at least through the figure of its ideologues, makes into the line of demarcation for its own judgments.

But what is a State of Law?

In the ontology of historical multiplicities that I propose, the State, thought of as the state of a situation, is precisely what assures the structural count of the *parts* of the situation, the situation that

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9. Whoever is interested in the properly political side of the question may refer to the documents of the Political Organization (*Organisation Politique*): the *Letter of the Secretaries of the Political Organization*, the *Journal* of the Political Organization, and several brochures.

generally carries the proper name of a nation.[10] To say that such a given state, that is to say such an operation of counting, is a State "of Law" in fact means that the rule of the count *does not propose any particular part as paradigm of being-part in general.* In other words, no subset, such as the nobility, the working class, the Party of the class, the "well-off," or the religious, and so on, is mentioned as having a special function as to the operation through which the other subsets are enumerated and treated. Or again, no *explicit privilege* codes the operations through which the State relates to the subsets delimited in the "national" situation.

Since the state count is not validated by a paradigmatic part (or Party), this count can be validated only by a set of rules, the rules of law, which are formal inasmuch as they do not consider, as a principle of their legitimacy, any particular subset, but rather are declared valid "for all," which means for all the subsets that the State registers as being of the subsets of the situation.

It is often believed that the rules are valid for all "individuals," and one thus opposes the democratic reign of individual liberty to the totalitarian reign of a self-proclaimed faction, the Party and its leaders. This is not the case: no statist rule in fact concerns this infinite particular situation that we call a subject or an individual. The State has no relationship except with parts or with subsets. Even when it appears to deal with an individual, it is not the concrete infinity of this individual that it considers, but this infinity *reduced to the One of the count*, the subset of which this individual is the only element, what mathematicians call a *singleton.* The one who votes, who is incarcerated, who contributes to Social Security, and so on, is listed by a name that is the name of his singleton, and not the account of him as an infinite multiplicity. When the State is a State of Law, this means only that the relationship to the individual-

10. I developed the general theory of the state of a situation as metastructure of the presentation of the Multiple in *Being and Event*. This development begins in the eighth Meditation. The example of the State in the historico-political sense is treated in the ninth Meditation.

counted-as-one is made according to a rule, and not through an evaluation in which a privileged subset is the norm.

Thus the distinction between a politics defined by the State of Law—a politics called democratic—and a politics defined by the Party-State—a politics called totalitarian—never had its principle in the relationship between the State and its concrete individuals. In all cases *this relationship is abstract.* It passes through the putting-into-one (*mise-en-un*) of that infinite multiplicity that is an "individual" situation. The distinction bears on the law of the count that supports the operation of the State: a system of rules, on the one hand; an incarnation of an Idea in a particular subset, on the other hand.

A rule, whatever it may be, cannot by itself guarantee an effect of truth, because no truth is reducible to a formal analysis. All truth, being at the same time singular and universal, is certainly a regulated process but is never coextensive with its rule. To assume, like the Greek Sophists or like Wittgenstein, that rules are the "basis" of thought—inasmuch as thought is subjected to language—inevitably discredits the value of truth. And in fact this is the conclusion of both the Sophists and Wittgenstein: the force of the rule is incompatible with the truth, which is then nothing but a metaphysical Idea. For the Sophists there are only conventions and relations of force. And for Wittgenstein, there are only language games.

If the existence of a State of Law—hence the statist empire of rules—constitutes the essence of the *political* category of democracy, the result is this crucial philosophical consequence, according to which *politics has no intrinsic rapport with the truth.*

I state: philosophical consequence. For it is only in a philosophical space that such a consequence can be named. The State of Law does not have any *internal* legislation apart from its own functioning. This functioning does not proclaim on its own the rapport that it sustains with the philosophical category of Truth. Only philosophy, which is under the condition of politics, can say what is the rapport of politics to truth, or more precisely, what is politics as a truth procedure.

To say that the core of the meaning of politics is in the Law inevitably implies that a philosophical judgment on politics declares the radical exteriority of politics to the theme of truth. If the State of law is the "basis" of political aspiration, then politics is not a procedure of truth.

The empirical evidence will confirm the logical inference.

The parliamentary states of the West do not lay claims on any truth. Philosophically they are, so to speak, relativist and skeptical states, not by chance or by ideology but intrinsically, since their "basis" is the rule of law. This is the reason why these states freely present themselves as "the least bad" rather than the best. "Least bad" means that, in any case, we are in a domain, that of the statist functioning, which has no direct rapport with any affirmative norm, such as the Truth or the Good.

The reader will have noticed that the same did not apply to the bureaucratic socialist and terrorist states, which rejected explicitly the rule of law as purely "formal" ("formal" liberties, etc.). It is clearly not a question of defending these police states here. But it is philosophically necessary to see that the identification of these states with politics (the politics of class, communism) did not have as a consequence the annulling of the function of truth of politics. In fact these states, founding the count of the parts of the social whole on a paradigmatic subset, announced forcefully that *this* subset (class, the Party) maintained a privileged relationship to truth. The privilege *without rule*, or even very obviously unruly, always has a protocol of legitimization that touches on content and values. Privilege is substantial and not formal. As a consequence the states of the East have always claimed that they concentrated the reign of a political truth in their police apparatus. These states were *compatible* with a philosophy which states that politics is one of the spaces from which truth proceeds.

In the parliamentarianisms of the West as in the despotic bureaucracies of the East, politics is in the last instance confused with the management of the State. But the philosophical effects of this con-

fusion are opposite. In the first case, politics ceases to be on the order of truth, and the "reigning" philosophy is relativist and skeptical. In the second case, politics prescribes a "true State," and the reigning philosophy is monist and dogmatic.

Thus we can explain that in the parliamentary political societies of the West, philosophy is held as a "supplement of the soul" whose arbitrariness corrects the regulated objectivity of opinions, an objectivity which is that of the laws of the market and of financial capital, and around which a strong consensus is organized. By contrast, the voluntarist and police arbitrariness of the political societies of the East projected itself in the false necessity of a state philosophy, namely, Dialectical Materialism.

Basically the Law is like a center of symmetry, which disposes in an alternating fashion two terms: the State (if one supposes that this is where politics is concentrated) and philosophy. When the Law—hence the force of the rule—is presented as a central category of politics, the parliamentary State or the State parties (plural) is indifferent to philosophy. Inversely, when the bureaucratic State or Party-State (singular) advocates a philosophy, which is that of its legitimacy, one can be assured that it is a State of nonlaw. This reversal constitutes the formalization, by the pair State/philosophy, of the opposing relationships which the statement "Politics is realized in the State" maintains with regard to the pair politics/truth, according to whether the form of the State is pluralist and rule-governed or unitary and party-governed. In the first case, the rule abolishes all truth of politics (which is dissolved in the arbitrariness of number, in voting); in the second case, the Party declares that it possesses the whole truth, thus becoming indifferent to any circumstance that affects the count or the people.

Finally, however opposed the maxims may be, the result negatively affects philosophy, which goes down, in the first case, as a pure supplement of opinion, and in the second, as an entirely empty statist formalism.

One can be even more precise. The submission of politics to the

theme of Law in parliamentary societies (that is to say, in societies regulated by the ultimate imperative of financial capital) results in the impossibility of discerning the philosopher from the sophist. This effect of indiscernibility is crucial: since the political condition of philosophy allows one to establish, within the thematic of law, that rules are the essence of democratic discussion, it is impossible to oppose the philosophical dialectic (the dialogic detour of Truth) to sophistic logomachy (the brilliant game of conventions and power plays). As a result it is common for any skillful sophist to be taken for a profound philosopher, so much the more profound as the denial that he opposes to any pretension of truth is consistent with the political condition as presented under the formal sign of law. Inversely, in bureaucratic socialist societies it is impossible to distinguish the philosopher from the functionary or even from the policeman. In the end, philosophy tends to be nothing other than the general discourse of the tyrant. With no rule to code the argument, pure affirmation takes its place, and finally the position of enunciation (therefore the proximity to the State) is what validates the "philosophical" statement. So any apparatchik or head of State can pass for a philosophical oracle, since the space from which he speaks, the Party-State, is presumed to concentrate the whole political process of truth.

One can thus claim that the *common* effect of regimes that incarnate politics in a paradigmatic subset of the multiple nation, and of those that disseminate it through the rule of rules, is an effect of indiscernibility between philosophy and its competing "doubles": the eclectic sophist, on the one hand, the dogmatic tyrant, on the other. Whether politics claims the law as its organic category or denies it any validity in the name of the meaning of History, the effect on philosophy is that of an indistinction, and finally of a usurpation: on the public scene the original *adversaries* of its identity, the sophist and the tyrant, or even the journalist and the policeman, declare themselves philosophers.

It is thus clear that concerning the law the only philosophical statement that can save philosophy as such and authorize one to dis-

cern it from the forms of its corruption is the following: The law should neither be put at the center of politics nor excluded from its field. In reality, the law and the nonlaw, which are obligatory references of the State, *are not categories of politics*. They are intrinsically statist categories. But politics, inasmuch as it is a condition of philosophy, is a subjective process of truth. It does not have the State either as its original stake or as its incarnation.

Finally, what the societies of the East and the West had in common was the identification of politics with the State as the only effective locus for these societies of the political procedure, because the latter was identified with the question of power. But the essence of politics, such that philosophy can trace its concept as a condition for its own exercise of thought, politics as the collective's free activity of thought under the effect of always singular events—*this* politics cannot in any way be reduced to power or to the question of power. The essence of politics is the emancipation of the collective, or again, the problem of the reign of liberty *in infinite situations*. Now the infinity of situations, in which the destiny of collective thought is played out, is not commensurate either with the authority of the rule or with the authority of a part, or a Party.

One can certainly prefer the State of Law (which means also and above all the final authority of financial capital, today called "market economy") to the police Party-State. The pitfall would be to imagine that this preference, which concerns the objective history of the State, is really a subjective political decision. The mechanism of this trap is well contained in the word "law," which seems to circulate between the objective (the rules of the State, the Constitution, the pluralism of parties) and the subjective (the right to opinions, the right of property, the rights of entrepreneurship). In reality, law is the proper category of a type of State, and its subjective prescription is no less authoritarian than that of nonlaw. Because the Law is maintained as a category of political subjectivity only in the form of a consensus, which confirms, validates, and reproduces the fundamental pair of the economy (financial capital and the market) and representation (parliamentarianism). Any discrepancy in relation-

ship to this consensus is sanctioned by *indifference*. An indifference that singularly affects philosophy.

There is no way of deciding politics in the framework of a preference for the law, which is only a (legitimate) statist preference. The history of politics, made of decisions of thought and of risky collective engagements, is entirely different, I repeat, from the history of the State.

What the spectacle of the world ultimately suggests to the philosopher—a spectacle that is in no way the philosopher's *object* but only the indistinct space from which *some* truths may proceed as the condition for the existence of that place of thought which is philosophy—is that the crisis is *general*. It is not only the crisis of the Party-State of the East; it is also the crisis of the State parties of the West. Because it is a matter of the turmoil the world is thrown into once the thousand-year-old statement that identifies politics with the State has exhausted its effects. It has exhausted them precisely because they were inscribed all the way into the very heart of the emancipatory will. The end of this monster, State communism, in its fall carries with it and takes the life out of all political subjectivity that would pretend, either under the revolutionary theme or under the theme of the law, to solder the statist constraint onto the liberating universality.

From this point of view, in the countries of the East as in those of the West, the history of politics *commences*. It barely *commences*. The ruin of any statist presentation of the truth opens this commencement. Everything remains to be invented. The law, for its part, invents nothing, except for the passage to this other objective condition of politics, which is another form of the State. Philosophy should keep its distance from this new condition as well as from the previous one. The sophist is no better than the tyrant. The destatification of the Truth remains for us a program of thought.

Philosophy should register as a condition of its practice, de-linked both from the service of the tyrant and from the versatility of the sophist, that politics begins inasmuch as it is the *effective* thought-practice of the withering away of the State. The point at which a

thought subtracts itself from the State, inscribing this subtraction in being, makes the entire real of a politics. And a political organization has no other end but that of "holding the step that was won"—that is, of giving a *body* to the thought which, collectively re-membered, was capable of finding the public gesture of the insubordination that founds it.

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ALAIN BADIOU is René Descartes Chair and Professor of Philosophy at The European Graduate School and the author of numerous books, including *Being and Event*; *Theory of the Subject*; and *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*. BRUNO BOSTEELS is Professor in the Department of Latin American and Iberian Cultures and the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University.

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