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Generic

Long walks
yesterday's communism
communism today review find
your bearings be located find your
way colors nuances
modernity intellectuality looks
longues marches equality
world and worlds collectives
cartography largas marghas
cultural revolution revisited
truths without words fraternity
keep away side steps
formalizations interpretations
nihilistic horizon
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points of existence opinion
columns ancient sources
studies always momentum
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light painting
revolutions again
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work emancipate
theater everywhere measure
interweaving peasants ability
adversity share fork
palestine 21st century
think humanity trust split
decide political ecology
earth! earth! things seen
ukraine hold out possible
obstacles obstructions
inhabit! populate! seminars
beauty from the depths of day
imaginary worlds hopes
desires mathematics
choirs voices philosophy get
organized dialectic open city
bachelard justice now here
perspective window poet
people's communes

EDITORIAL

-1-

A global disorder fraught with threats to humanity is taking hold in every corner of the planet: unbridled globalized capitalism, millions of wandering proletarians, discriminatory policies, rampant fascization, guilt-free war-like subjectivities, crazy adventurers at the head of states, wars prefiguring the camps of a third world war, Earth left to the devastation of profit.

-2-

Simply denouncing this situation leads to impotence and subjective exhaustion. Getting out of it implies being able to oppose it with affirmative statements opening the way to an emancipating set of possibilities, to a policy for all humanity based on equality and justice - in other words, a communist orientation, the absence of which today leaves the field open to cruel devastation.

-3-

After the failure of the socialist states in the 20th century, the communist orientation - the only one capable today of facing up to the dark prospects of contemporary nihilism - is faced with the question of a new stage. Committing to it is a Long March, the title of this magazine, whose aim is to reactivate a communist intellectuality capable of opening up new political possibilities in the 21st century.

-4-

To do this, communist intellectuality needs to clarify the militant legacies it assumes and the intellectual resources it mobilizes.

-5-

To clarify the legacies of the political history of communism since Marx and Engels, and to give decisive importance to its final moment: the *Chinese Communist Revolution* which, from the invention of the People's Communes in 1958 to the final defeat of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, organized hundreds of millions of Chinese people for almost twenty years in a truly *communist* renewal of their two previous revolutions (*democratic* from 1927 to 1949, then *socialist*).

-6-

Mobilize new intellectual resources of two types:

- French philosophies (in the broadest sense of the term: from Bachelard to Badiou, via Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser and Lacan) which, in the post-war period culminating in the 1960s, revived a materialist problematic of the Subject, and can today serve as a basis for militant subjectivations;
- the mathematical thinking that, over the past two centuries (from Galois to Grothendieck, Hamilton, Riemann, Dedekind and so many others), has opened up the vast space of a properly modern rationality - resources that Marx, Lenin and Mao unfortunately neglected, thus depriving themselves of decisive insights into what *orientation and direction, holding one's course in an intrinsically curved world, organizing and measuring the effects of an intervention, dialecticizing the local and the global, interweaving the effectivities and possibilities of a given situation, etc., mean for a modern intellectuality that refuses to surrender to post-modern liquidations.*

-7-

To keep at bay the contemporary nihilism that is the philosophical emblem of the world's current devastation. To do so, we need to set out the "points" made by people who, in their own name and in their own lives, are upholding a singular affirmative position in the face of the nihilists' "not will at all" and "will the Nothing" ¹. A special section will be devoted to these dynamics of subjective existence.

-8-

We'll also be running various sections on the arts, the international situation, labor issues (not forgetting peasant labor), ecological issues on which we urgently need to build a properly communist political position, the arts (in their crucial modern/postmodern division), publications or documents of interest, and announcements of meetings and gatherings.

-9-

Overall, this review would like to contribute to rebuild political confidence in Humanity and in the communist orientation in the 21st century, thus renewing the old communist confidence in the masses and in the Party.

-10-

The magazine will be published quarterly. It will be published simultaneously in French, English and Spanish.

-11-

Our communist magazine shares its title *Long Walks* with the Communist Group of the same name. However, this intellectual journal remains formally distinct from this militant group, with which it nonetheless maintains close ties of camaraderie and occasional collaboration.

-12-

This first issue inaugurates a diversified and extended vision of the necessary refoundation of communist intellectuality.

- Diversified, ranging from the proposal of a theoretical resource based on new points to the analysis of the Chinese Communist Revolution around Alessandro Russo's key book on the Cultural Revolution.
- Diversified, because it combines positions on current international focal points (Palestine, Ukraine) with interventions on color in painting and a radically revisited conception of architecture.
- Diversified because it points to new struggles whose content and forms must be found, such as defying contemporary nihilism and building a political ecology, while at the same time simply taking note of what has been seen.
- Diversification, with a focus on studies work, here devoted to communist orientation and emancipated work.
- Prolonged, because the articles are part of a series spanning several issues.

• • •

¹ Nietzsche (*On The Genealogy of Morals*): "Man would rather will the Nothing than not will at all." [*Lieber will noch der Mensch das Nichts wollen, als nicht wollen.*"]

THREE RESOURCES FOR CONTEMPORARY COMMUNIST INTELLECTUALITY

"Resources"

What resources are needed for a renewed communist intellectuality in the 21st century?

There are bound to be non-political resources for political intellectuality, resources that can be described as ideological, cultural or intellectual: the relative *autonomy* of politics and its own intellectuality from social and state determinations does not exactly constitute *independence*.

This principle is opposed to a strictly autarkic conception of politics and its intellectuality, then conceived as constituting a Leibnizian monad, a pure interiority turned in on itself, without openings ("without doors or windows") and without interaction with its external environment.

A contrario, we start here from two assertions:

1. We need a political intellectuality, i.e. political reflection on political orientations and practices: political action and its own modes of organization cannot do without theoretical reflection.
2. Such a reflection cannot proceed ex nihilo: thinking about the ways in which humanity can organize a collective thought of itself must draw on all the existing modalities of thought engaged by this unique humanity (in the sciences, in the arts, in love relationships and, of course, in its long political history).

The three sources of Marxism

In 1908, on the 25th anniversary of Marx's death, Kautsky put forward the idea that Marxism had synthesized "*German thought, French thought and English thought*" - more precisely, English economic science, French political thought and German intellectual thought (artistic and philosophical).

In 1913, this time on the thirtieth anniversary of Marx's death, Lenin set out "*the three sources and three constituent parts of Marxism*".

- 1 Marxism has a philosophy: materialism, of Greek origin, which Marx perfected into *dialectical materialism* with reference to the German philosophy of his time (that of Hegel and then Feuerbach).
- 2 Marxism has an economic theory (of which the theory of surplus value is the cornerstone) that continues and develops the English political economy of its time (that of Smith and Ricardo).
- 3 Marxism embraces the historically grounded doctrine of class struggle, a doctrine capable of transcending the French utopian socialism of its time (from Saint-Simon to Fourier).

At the start of the 21st century, these two-century-old sources have dried up politically (see, since the 1980s, the obsolescence of historical materialism and the disuturation of politics from philosophy, science and history).

So we have to start afresh.

New resources

For this, we need new sources, which are also sources of a new kind (i.e. sources in a new sense of the word "source"). Let's call them *resources*.

Hence the proposal of three resources for communist intellectuality in the 21st century.

1. No longer French utopian socialism, but **the Chinese Communist Revolution** from 1958 to 1976.
2. No longer German dialectical philosophy, but **French philosophies of the subjectivity**.

3. No longer English political economy, but - in stark contrast - **modern mathematics** (since 1820-1830).

And their knotting ...

These three resources also need to be interlinked, not simply juxtaposed. Indeed:

- in order to take political advantage of modern mathematics, we need philosophy - particularly French philosophies of the subjectivity;
- to take political advantage of the Chinese Communist Revolution today, the insights of modern mathematics can be invaluable: for example (see below) in matters of revolution by adjunction-extension, obstruction, singularities, orientation...
- to take political advantage of French philosophies of the subjective, we need to take into account the Chinese Communist Revolution and its treatment of the ideology/politics relationship.

The aim is to identify new categories of communist intellectuality capable of supporting the emergence of a new political thought on communism in the 21st century.

Intellectual relationships with these three resources

Today, it's difficult to say exactly what intellectual relationship we should have with these three resources, because it depends on the specific nature of each of them.

Thus, for communist intellectuality, the relationship to the Chinese Communist Revolution can take the form of political *lessons* to be learned, whereas its relationship to modern mathematics cannot take such a form: it will be more a question of *reasonings*, i.e. resonances between two rationalities of different types (since communist politics can no longer be conceived of as being scientific); and concerning the relationship to philosophies, we'll talk more about *points of reference*.

Let's take a closer look at each of these three resources.

I - The Chinese communist revolution

As with the other two, the choice of this resource is not self-evident, and is the result of a number of biases that need to be clarified.

1. **First bias:** we propose to understand the Cultural Revolution from the point of view of the 1958 People's Communes.

Note that this disposition is hardly at work in today's militant references to the Cultural Revolution (with the exception of Alain Badiou, Cécile Winter and Alessandro Russo).

2. **Second bias:** we propose to embrace the entire 1958-1976 sequence as a single, properly Communist Revolution.

As we'll see more clearly in this review as we study Alessandro Russo's book on the Cultural Revolution, this helps us to better understand a whole series of questions about this 1958-1976 sequence. For example:

- What exactly was the political relationship between two simultaneous political innovations in 1958: on the one hand, the Great Leap Forward (decided and directed centrally by the Chinese Communist Party) and, on the other, the event-driven, local emergence of the People's Communes (in southern China and soon throughout the country)?
- Why did Mao launch the Cultural Revolution in the summer of 1966?
- Why did he rely mainly on students - the future Red Guards - rather than directly and centrally on workers?
- What's the connection between the failure of the Shanghai Commune at the end of February 1967, leading to the end of the Revolutionary Committees, and the success of the People's Communes?

- Why did political organizations independent of the CCP fail on July 28, 1968 (the end of the Red Guards)?
- Why the last three mass campaigns launched by Mao in 1975-1976?

The working hypothesis here will be to understand all this in the light of the People's Communes, understood as the basso continuo or *cantus firmus* of Communist polyphony throughout this period.

3. **Third bias:** we call this 1958-1976 sequence the *Communist Revolution*.

This appointment is not self-evident:

- she qualifies the whole sequence as *revolution* and thus makes politically affirmative use of this category, rather than, like others, liquidating it;
- it qualifies this revolution as having been intrinsically *communist*, and not just as having been made by communists.

4. **Fourth bias:** this is the name we give to what we claim to be our legacy - today, communist intellectuality implies a return to the category of *revolution*, previously extended to a new type of revolution, called *communist revolution*.

Let's take a closer look.

Political category of *revolution*

Revolution is more than insurrection.

Taking up the category of *revolution* means clearly distinguishing it from the reductive category of *insurrection*.

What was at stake in the various revolutions that followed one another from 1927 onwards in China under Mao's leadership can in no way be understood under the sign of insurrection: it was precisely the failures in 1926-1927 of the urban insurrections in Shanghai¹ and Canton² that led Mao to reorient Communist policy in China towards an interrupted, step-by-step revolution:

- revolution of all the country's social relationships: production relationships (ownership, labor - social divisions -, distribution, etc.), housing and education relationships, organizational relationships, etc. ;
- revolution in three stages: *democratic* (1927-1949), *socialist* (1953...), *communist* (within the former from 1958).

Communist orientation

As detailed in a separate article, communist orientation integrates four dimensions:

1. a revolution in the **social relations of production**, i.e. property relations, social divisions of labor (manual/intellectual labor) and distribution relations, against private appropriation of the major means of production and capitalist management of all these social relations;
2. a revolution in the **social relations of housing**, and therefore in the social divisions of space and the town/country contradiction, against state management of these social relations;
3. a revolution in **relations between peoples and their countries**, and therefore in the divisions of the one humanity into different peoples and countries, against competition between countries, rivalry between peoples and wars between nation-states;
4. *last but not least*, a revolution in the **political organizations** capable of carrying out these revolutions, with a view to wiping out the States and their managerial monopolies.

¹ Three successive insurrections: October 24, 1926, February 22, 1927, March 21, 1927

² December 1927. On the Bolshevik perspective on insurrection, read *L'insurrection armée* by A. Neuberg (1931)

Communist conception of revolution

Let's call it *Revolution*, then, any interweaving of the four revolutionary dimensions in the principle of communist orientation.

This characterization suffices to indicate that such a Revolution cannot be reduced to an insurrection rising up against a bourgeois state to seize power: the seizure of power is not the end of the Revolution but, on the contrary, its point of departure, since the fundamental stake of such a Revolution is the revolution, uninterrupted and in stages, of all social relations.

In this sense, the Bolshevik revolution should really have begun in 1928, when it came to collectivizing the countryside - paradoxically, at the very moment when Stalin declared that "*the Revolution is over*"!

All the same, such a revolution cannot be measured in terms of the development of the productive forces alone (even if it can encourage this³).

"Communist" Revolution

So what legitimizes calling this revolution *communist*, and thus differentiating it from the two previous Chinese revolutions led by the same communists and the same Communist Party?

It's the fact that it centrally touches on the four dimensions of communist orientation, initiating a new type of stage.

In China, such an uninterrupted, step-by-step revolution went through three sequences:

- A. a **democratic** revolution (1928⁴-1949);
- B. a **socialist** revolution (1953⁵ ...);
- C. a **communist** revolution (1958-1976).

Let us note that these three revolutions successively took three different forms:

- the *democratic* revolution essentially operated by **abandonment-displacement** (it began by abandoning the cities and moving to the countryside to create liberated zones);
- the *socialist* revolution operated by **destruction-reconstruction** (it focused on destroying the old State in order to rebuild a socialist State);
- the communist revolution, finally, operated essentially by **addition-extension** (in the countryside, it added - and not just added - the People's Communes to existing socialism, then extended this revolution to the cities - hence the Cultural Revolution proper).

A revolution of a new kind

People's Communes

But how did the People's Communes, who de facto put this communist revolution on China's political agenda, set about revolutionizing social relations in a completely new way?

The People's Communes did this by combining:

³ See Rémy Herrera's book on the development of China's productive forces since 1949: *Dynamique de l'économie chinoise. Growth, cycles and crises from 1949 to the present day* (2021, Éditions Critiques)

⁴ It should be noted that in 1928, two political trends were taking shape, with lasting divisions between the existing Communist parties: in the Soviet Union, the construction of socialism (first five-year plan 1928-1932) under Stalin's declared sign of an "end to the Revolution"; in China, a democratic revolution based on the political emancipation of the countryside and peasants...

⁵ The period 1949-1952 was more a period of transition (the end of the war of liberation on national territory, the conquest of the outlying islands in 1950, and the subsequent Korean War...).

The 1953-1957 period saw China's first Five-Year Plan, based on the nationalization of factories (after the Democratic Revolution, there was still a national bourgeoisie in possession of major means of production), agrarian reform and the widespread establishment of peasant cooperatives (mainly of the first type)...

- a revolution in the **social relations of production** in the countryside, and therefore in the social division of labor, in various ways:
 - revolutionizing property relations by moving from cooperatives to People's Communes, with land collectivization ushering in "ownership by the whole people" (as opposed to state ownership through nationalization).
 - a revolution by transforming the social division of labor (see the brand-new division of tasks within the People's Communes).
 - a revolution by transforming the social relationship between agriculture and industry (the People's Commune providing small-scale industrial work, etc.).
- a revolution in the **social relations of distribution** in the countryside: see the transition from the socialist principle "*From each according to his abilities to each according to his work*" to the communist principle "*From each according to his abilities to each according to his needs*";
 An exemplary example of this transition is the introduction of free canteens for all (the very canteens that are going to be the subject of fierce political battles).
- a revolution in **social housing relations** in the countryside and, in so doing, in the social division of space;
 De facto, the People's Communes tackled the town/country contradiction, which had been exacerbated during the socialist revolution rather than reduced.
- a revolution in **political relations with the state**;
 The People's Commune takes on the (previously state) functions of education, healthcare, social assistance, local administration, militias...
- finally, a revolution in the forms of **mass political organization**;
 The political organization of all this required new forms of mass organization, capable of giving shape to the mass movement for communism, without reducing it to an appendage of the Communist Party.

An unscheduled, event-driven revolution...

This third Revolution (of an eminently modern type, since it was an addition-extension⁶) began with an event in the strict sense at the end of April 1958, which had in no way been planned by the Chinese Communists.

It should be noted that the Chinese Communists, starting with Mao, clearly understood that

- this was an **unexpected event**;
- this was an entirely new stage - a **new kind of stage** - in the uninterrupted, step-by-step revolution that the Communists had been leading in China since 1928.

Let's just illustrate these two points with a few quotes.

"Event"

- "*The People's Communes are a very important thing. The People's Communes will be set up more or less in September. It seems to be an irresistible movement, there's no stopping it. You ask them to slow down, but it doesn't work. We'll need the winter and spring to clear up some issues and strengthen this structure. This is a matter that needs to be handled carefully, positively and enthusiastically. The Big Commune⁷ is a particularity of the People's Communes. It is a recent event, which has emerged in recent months.*" Mao (September 9, 1958)

⁶ All modern mathematics, from 1830 onwards, is a revolution of classical mathematics (XVII^e-XVIII^e) which operates mainly by *addition-extension* (see Galois) and only secondarily by *destruction-reconstruction* or *abandonment-displacement* (see Cauchy).

⁷ The *Big Commune* is a single commune for an entire *xian* (third-level administrative subdivision: *district* or *county*), as opposed to several communes per *xian*. These Communes proved impossible to manage, and were subsequently reduced in size.

- "The movement to create People's Communes which developed in rural China a few months ago must be regarded as **an event** of great historical significance." Communiqué of the 6th Plenary Session of the CPC Central Committee (December 10, 1958)
- "A new social organization has appeared, fresh as morning sunshine." CCP CC Resolution (December 10, 1958)
- "We had not foreseen the creation of People's Communes at the Chengdu Conference in April, nor at the Party Congress in May. In fact, they had already made their appearance in April at Henan⁸, but in May, June and July, we still knew nothing about them. It was only in August, when the Beidahe Conference drew up a resolution on the subject, that they came to light. **This is a very important event:** we have found here a form of socialist construction that will facilitate the transition from collective ownership to ownership by the people, and make it easier to move from ownership by the people under socialism to ownership by the people under communism. It will enable workers, peasants, shopkeepers, students and soldiers to achieve great things; when there are many of us, it is easier to achieve great things. [...] **Some fortunate events come unexpectedly:** such is the case of the People's Communes, whose appearance in April had not been foreseen, and which were not the subject of an official decision until August. Within four months, they had been established throughout the country; now it's a question of rectifying their organization." Mao (December 19, 1958)

"Communist" character

- The aim of the People's Communes, "which combine industry (workers), agriculture (peasants), trade (commerce), culture and education (students) and military affairs (soldiers) into one whole", is "to explore a concrete path **towards communism**", transforming collective property into the property of the entire people, the socialist distribution system "from each according to his ability to each according to his work" into the **communist distribution system** "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs", limiting "the function of the state to protecting the country against external aggression" so that this state "no longer plays any role internally." CCP Resolution on the establishment of people's communes in the countryside (August 29, 1958)
- "Do People's Communes represent **a violation of the Constitution**? The merger of local government bodies with the leadership of the People's Commune has not been adopted by the National Assembly, nor is it mentioned in the Constitution. ⁹ The Constitution is outdated on several points, but for the time being, it will not be revised. When we've outgrown the United States, we'll draw up another constitution. [...] The transition to **communism** will require a period of fifteen, twenty or more years. To establish ownership by the people under socialism, it will be necessary to wait a minimum of three or four years, i.e. until the Second Five-Year Plan, a maximum of five or six years, i.e. until the Third Plan." Mao (December 12, 1958)

II - French philosophies of the subjective

Let's argue that political intellectuality cannot do without philosophy without running the serious risk of intellectual sclerosis and withdrawal.

In so doing, it is no longer a question of providing communist politics with a specific philosophy (as Lenin might have envisaged for Marxism). It's not a question of making the new communist politics conditional on a renewed philosophical materialism. Rather, it's a question of establishing that political orientation in the contemporary world implies orientation in contemporary thought, and that philosophy can make a valuable contribution in this respect.

To this end, let's focus on certain contemporary philosophies: those that highlight the properly subjective dimension of all thought, rather than its objective (attestable and verifiable) adjustment to the

⁸ The first Communes were formed in Henan, from the merger of several advanced production cooperatives. The first was formed on April 27, 1958, in the Suibing district, taking the name "Weoxing" (*Sputnik*); it brought together 27 small cooperatives, with 9,300 households and 43,000 inhabitants.

⁹ The organization of the Communes and the amalgamation of local government administration under the direction of the Commune were not incorporated into a new State Constitution until January 17, 1975.

world as it is. The communist political project involves characterizing possibilities where the contemporary world speaks only of impossibilities. In this way, the objectivity of communist thought proves to be of a new type: its strategic outlook cannot be confined to an empirical or pragmatic conformity to what exists. For all that, this strategic and global ambition is not a utopianism indifferent to what there is; it is intended to be materialist in a renewed sense, as indicated by the slogan "*there is not only what there is*".

In other words, communist politics must be based on a properly contemporary conception of what materialism means, incorporating a materialism of the subjective, and no longer just of reflexive consciousness.

In this sense, the proposal is that, in the 21st century, communist intellectuality should lean on French philosophies that take fresh hold of what subjectivity - individual subjects and collective subjects - means: subjective positions, subjectivations, subjective processes, subjects of anguish, subjects of truths: this is a new kind of materialist leaning for communist intellectuality.

Philosophies in question

What philosophies are we talking about here?

In the first instance, we'll be focusing on the philosophies of Bachelard, Sartre, Lacan and Badiou. But this does not exclude others, more delimited (e.g. Lautman's, more focused on the mathematical work of thought, or Lévi-Strauss's, more focused on anthropology), or more lateral (e.g. Henri Lefebvre's and Louis Althusser's).

Bachelard

Take **Gaston Bachelard's** philosophy: it unfolds in two apparently disjoint, almost parallel strands: on the one hand, an epistemology of modern science, essentially focused on the natural sciences; on the other, a poetics of the imaginary. On the one hand, the notions of epistemological obstacle and rupture (which Althusser would later use to contrast the "pre-scientific" Marx of 1844 with the "scientific" Marx of *Capital*), the idea that law takes precedence over fact (and not the other way round), the knowledge function provided by error; on the other, the primacy of imagination and daydreaming in human apprehension of matter, and in its power to create poetic truths.

All in all, a new type of materialism in which the human subject is the central creator (rather than a receptor or secondary reflection), integrating imaginary work (rather dynamic and traditionally poetic) and symbolic work (rather static and traditionally scientific) to touch the real.

These are all stimulating considerations for conceiving what political intellectuality means today, if it is true that it must interweave in its own way an imagination of political possibilities and a symbolization (linguistic formulation and organizational formation) of what, of these possibilities, must be put on the agenda if the policy concerned is to touch the reality of the situations taken into account.

In this respect, Bachelard's philosophy (like the other philosophies mentioned) can help communists to orient themselves politically in the dialectic of the effectivities and possibilities of the contemporary world, in the relationship of the communist imaginary to its organizational measure, so as to have an effective grip on the situations at stake.

And the others...

All the same, contemporary communist intellectuality can benefit from an endorsement:

- to the philosophical anthropology of **Claude Lévi-Strauss**, for example, to rethink the "anthropological difference" that proponents of a "communism of all living beings" seek to deconstruct, to valorize a materialism of intellectual bricolage against a positivist and scientific conception of materialism, or to better understand the pairing of tragic thought with mythological thought...¹⁰
- to **Jean-Paul Sartre's** philosophy (that of *Being and Nothingness*, probably more than that of *Critical Dialectical Reason*), not least for its dialectics of a priori decision and a posteriori deliberation, of mobilization and motivation, but also for its problematic of consciousness, if it's true

¹⁰ See his "canonical formula of myth"...

that, as Levi-Strauss writes¹¹, "*the critique of consciousness does not logically lead to the renunciation of conscious thought : to make a work of knowledge is to become aware.* " ;

- to **Jacques Lacan's** anti-philosophy, to engage, for example, in a dialectic of the individual subject of anguish and the collective Subject of truths, or even a problematic of the political unconscious.
- to the philosophy of **Alain Badiou, of course**, to whom so many of us are directly indebted for his theory of event and genericity, of Subjects and truth procedures, etc.

III - Modern mathematical thinking

Let's move on to the third resource: modern and contemporary mathematical thought.

This is an entirely new point: indeed, communist political thought has almost entirely ignored modern mathematical thinking!

Marx

Marx's Mathematical Manuscripts

(translation by Alain Alcouffe; Économica; 1985)

1. The *Mathematical Manuscripts* were written in 1881 for Engels, two years before his death. Marx's interest in mathematics began in the late 1840s. The first explicit mention of his mathematical work is in a letter dated January 11, 1858. From the 1860s onwards, his interest in mathematics was constant.
2. For Marx, it was not a question of studying mathematics in order to apply it to political economy. Nor was it a question of formalizing economics mathematically. The *Mathematical Manuscripts* contain no examination of the possibilities of applying mathematics to the social sciences. And when Marx speaks of practice, he means intramathematical practice (mathematical experimentation by trial and error), as opposed to theoretical abstractions.¹² Engels, moreover, criticized him (letter of May 30, 1864¹³) for resorting too much to the practice of numerical examples rather than to general (algebraic) formulations. Marx studied mathematics to relax, in his spare time. He loved mathematics for its own sake, not for its exogenous "usefulness": "*I do algebra to calm my impatience.*" (May 6, 1859) "*The only activity through which I can maintain the indispensable peace of mind is mathematics.*" (November 23, 1860) "*In my spare time, I do differential and integral calculus.*" (July 6, 1863) "*In the intervals, since one cannot write without interruption, I do differential calculus dx/dy .*" (May 20, 1865)
3. His more specific motivation for studying the differential calculus (then conceived as an infinitesimal calculus) is linked to his study of Hegel, who gave great importance to the infinitesimal calculus in his *Science of Logic*. For Marx, therefore, the motivation is philosophical and intellectual, not utilitarian.

¹¹ *L'homme nu ; Mythologiques IV*

¹² There is therefore no empiricist conception of mathematics as a theorization of spontaneous human practice, as opposed to the leftist and then right-wing conception which, during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, unfortunately interpreted Maoist mathematical practice as a simple application of mathematics to physics and economics...

¹³ "*I also doubt that it's practical to deal with things like roots, powers, series, log. etc., even at an elementary level, solely with numbers (without the slightest recourse to algebra and, indeed, without even presupposing elementary knowledge of algebra). However good it may be to use numerical examples to illustrate theory, it seems to me in this case that limiting oneself to numbers makes things less visible than with a simple algebraic $a+b$ approach, precisely because the general expression in its algebraic form is simpler and more visible and, here no more than elsewhere, one can't get by without the general expression.*"

4. Marx essentially studied arithmetic (though he admits to understanding nothing of it: "arithmetic has always remained foreign to me"), algebra and, above all, differential calculus, but in their classical versions, i.e. precisely those that Hegel himself had used: Marx was not familiar with mathematics after 1813.
5. Hegel wrote his *Science of Logic* at a time when mathematical development was at a (relative) standstill between classical mathematics (in crisis) and modern mathematics (not yet engaged), at a time when many great mathematicians were despairing of mathematics.
6. Marx knew nothing of modern mathematics, especially Cauchy's reworking of analysis and differential calculus.

Let's paint a broad picture of Marx as a mathematics enthusiast.

Marx was interested in mathematics as a form of recreation and distraction.

Above all, he studied **classical differential calculus**, which originated with Newton and Leibniz, and focused on the mathematically unrigorous problem of infinitesimal quantities.

For him, **the challenge** was openly to rediscover, in these mathematics, the Hegelian dialectic, in particular the creative potential it discerned in the negation of negation.

Basically, the idea is as follows: for a given function $f(x)$, we "negate" a point correspondence $x_0 \rightarrow f(x_0)$ by altering it by a small difference $\Delta x = x - x_0$ whose effects on f - i.e. $\Delta f = f(x_0 + \Delta x) - f(x_0)$ - are then compared by dividing $\Delta f / \Delta x$.

Then we deny this alteration (the first negation) by making Δx tend towards 0: we have $\Delta x \rightarrow 0 \Rightarrow \Delta f \rightarrow 0$.

At this level, the negation of the negation leads back to the starting point because $x \rightarrow x_0$ results in $f(x) \rightarrow f(x_0)$.

On the other hand, it turns out that the ratio $\Delta f / \Delta x$ tends towards a limit value which is the derivative of $f(x)$ in x_0 : $\Delta f / \Delta x \rightarrow f'(x_0)$. So the negation of the negation has asserted the derivative at both the starting and end points. So the negation of the negation is indeed creative here: it brings to light a datum (the derivative - for example, a speed) that did not appear as such in the function's situation.

The problem is that Marx explores this differential work with infinitesimal quantities whose mathematical status is very poorly established, leading him, for example, to write that $\Delta f / \Delta x \rightarrow 0/0$ and thus to make $0/0$ the symbol of the creative power of the negation of negation, even though this symbol has no mathematical meaning because it is not mathematically defined.

Fifty years earlier, however, **Cauchy** had launched the modern revolution in analysis by completely abandoning the classical problem of infinitesimals and basing it on the new notion of *limit*. This problem solved the aporias of classical analysis (such as the mathematically meaningless $0/0$ notation), while at the same time taking analysis down the path of complex and not just real analysis (I'll come back to this later), which is of considerable intellectual interest to us.

But Marx ignores this (note that Cauchy's work was soon published, so his results were accessible to anyone who wanted them).

We mustn't reproach Marx for this, as he assumed that he was only interested in mathematics for recreational purposes, in much the same way as others are interested in crossword puzzles. But let's not use it, as some Red Guards did during the Cultural Revolution, as a compass to orient oneself as a Communist in the study of mathematics!

Lenin

For his part, Lenin was never really interested in mathematics.

The only mathematical references we find in his philosophical notebooks¹⁴ are always indirect (via what Aristotle, Hegel, Engels and a contemporary philosopher Abel Rey wrote about them).

¹⁴ *Cahiers philosophiques 1895-1916* (volume 38 of O.C.; Éditions sociales; 14971)

Lenin makes no reference to *Marx's Mathematical Manuscripts*, as they were unknown at the time.

His indirect references never go beyond 1801 (Gaussian arithmetic).

All in all, Lenin was interested in philosophical logic (dialectics) at a time when mathematical logic did not yet really exist (it was not until the interwar period), but not at all in mathematics as such.

Mao

Mao, for his part, has always declared himself to be a complete stranger to mathematics, ever since his school days.

The only reference (to my knowledge) that Mao makes to mathematics is in *De la contradiction*, and this reference is in fact to Engels, via Lenin incidentally, all to raise the mathematical dialectic... of plus and minus!

*

Thus, communist intellectuality was entirely deprived of the intellectual enlightenment of modern mathematics, at least until our comrade Alain Badiou came along in the mid-60s to draw Marxists' attention to the emancipatory power of this thought - see his very first interventions in this sense in *Cahiers pour l'analyse* (incidentally, by focusing on the resurrection of infinitesimals¹⁵ by Abraham Robinson in his brand-new *Nonstandard Analysis*).

The proposal here is to take all this as seriously as possible. Let's make it clear.

Modern and contemporary mathematics?

First of all, what do we mean by "modern and contemporary mathematics"?

Periodization

First, let's distinguish:

- **Greek** mathematics;
- **pre-classical** mathematics (IX°-XVI°);
- **classical** mathematics (XVII°-XVIII°);
- **modern** mathematics from the 1820s (analysis: Cauchy; algebra: Abel; geometry: Gauss...) then Galois, Riemann, Dedekind (arithmetic);
- **contemporary** mathematics after the Second World War (Weil-Schwartz-Grothendieck-Langlands), extending modern mathematics into a kind of second modernity.

Classical-modern mathematical revolutions

Let's list them:

- algebra (Abel-Galois)
- geometry (Gauss-Riemann)
- arithmetic (Dedekind)
- analysis (Cauchy)
- in their intricacies: algebraic geometry
- according to new disciplines (topology...) and new intrications (algebraic topology)

¹⁵ See his article *La subversion infinitésimale*

What does this have to do with mathematics?

Let's quickly clarify the type of relationship that communist intellectuality can aspire to with these modern and contemporary mathematics.

Mathematics as thought

First of all, we need to grasp mathematics as a way of thinking (different from mathematical logic¹⁶), and not as a language or a calculatory technique.

This thinking is based on an intramathematical dialectic between formalization (preferably algebraic) and interpretation (preferably geometrical), in order to implement a more general dialectic (greatly illuminated by mathematical logic¹⁷) between reason and calculation.

For communist intellectuals, it's not a question of applying these mathematics to political situations (!), but rather of mobilizing them as a grazing light capable of helping us imagine some interpretative diagonals.

Thinking content

Let's look at fifteen examples of notions that can be mobilized in political intellectuality, and that are illuminated by one or other modern or contemporary mathematical theory.

- 1 **Addition-extension**: as a modern form of revolutions (see the algebraic theory of Galois groups, Dedekind's arithmetic theory of cuts, etc.).
- 2 **R.E.D. (Reconstruction-Extension-Displacement) revolutions**: three ways of revolutionizing a field that can be practiced together (see these three types of revolution in modern mathematical analysis).
- 3 **Regional**: an intermediary notion between the local and the global, allowing us to avoid being locked into the alternative "think global, act local" (see Cauchy's theory of complex analysis).
- 4 **Punctual**: modern rethinking of what point and punctual mean (see, for example, Lawvere's synthetic differential geometry).
- 5 **Singularity**: distinguish between singularity and particularity by coupling singularity and universality (see Hironaka's theory of algebraic singularities).
- 6 **Quaternion**: this concerns questions of orientation (see Hamilton's quaternion theory).
- 7 **Orienting - locating - directing**: this point also concerns orientation problems (see Gauss's geometric theory of curvature and Riemann's varieties).
- 8 **Possible**: this notion legitimizes the statement "there's more to it than meets the eye" (see the theory of complex quantities based on Gauss).
- 9 **Unconscious and unspeakable**: the modern concept is that the constituent is unconscious and is therefore measured by its consequences (see Galois' algebraic theory, synthetic differential geometry...).
- 10 **Measurement**: thinking in modern terms about what it means to measure implies integrating a "distribution" of different conceivable measurements, rather than a single one (see Laurent Schwartz's theory of distributions).
- 11 **Emergence**: this notion embodies the crucial distinction between autonomy and independence, and a new understanding of the infrastructure/superstructure dialectic (see Andr  e Ehresmann's theory of hierarchical categories).
- 12 **Obstruction**: this notion, which is opposed to both obstacle and saturation, allows a situation to be unblocked by extension, not liquidation (see Galois theory).

¹⁶ Modern logic (Cantor, Zermelo-Fraenkel, G  del, Cohen...) classically comprises 1) set theory, 2) model theory, 3) demonstration theory, 4) recursion theory.

¹⁷ See Alain Badiou's work, from *Le concept de mod  le* (1968) to *Logiques des mondes* (2006) and beyond...

- 13 **Intrication:** this notion rethinks multidimensional phenomena (such as the 4 dimensions of communist orientation) by making their different dimensions interact, rather than juxtaposing and adding them together (see Levi-Civita's tensorial algebra).
- 14 **Associations-communities-groups:** the organizational measure of communist politics meets these three forms of collective organization (see Abelian equation theory).
- 15 **Three negations:** the three types of contradiction (between enemies, in adversaries and between friends) are illuminated by the three types of negation (classical, intuitionistic, paraconsistent) formalized by mathematical logic.

Example of complex quantities

Let's give a quick example of the intellectual enlightenment that modern mathematics is capable of when it comes to modern thinking about the possible.

To think of a situation, in the classical era, was to think of what openly, objectively, factually, empirically, pragmatically constitutes it as "a" situation.

In classical mathematics, this could be formalized as the set of real numbers arranged on a straight line: the so-called "real" line.

Modern mathematics extended this situation by formalizing the possible, adding *imaginary* quantities to real numbers to create an extended world of *complex quantities*.

By analogy with Lacan's *Real-Symbolic-Imaginary* knotwork, we can say that algebra symbolizes the complex quantity " $z=x+i.y$ " by knotting an real "x" to a possible imaginary "i.y".

Formally, mathematics will thus move from a static real plane $\mathbb{R} \times \mathbb{R} = \mathbb{R}^2$ to the dynamic complex plane \mathbb{C} due to the intrication between its two components: "real" and "imaginary".

This gave rise to a completely new situation for functions, among other things, which revolutionized differential and integral calculus.

Let's point out a valuable result of this extended rationality: if you take into account the possibilities of a situation and not just its actualities, then a restricted action will ipso facto be endowed with a global scope.

For this reason, let's call a "restricted action" one that links one location to another, however close, via a common thread. In this sense, a restricted action is one that establishes a new intermediate space between the global space of the situation and the local space of departure: a space we'll call *regional*.

So, if this common thread has indeed taken into account the possibilities of the situation and not just its actualities by supporting a regional route, it turns out that it is globally extendable in the situation concerned, i.e. that it is also capable of reaching other points, however far away they may be in the same situation, according to this same common thread, this same leitmotiv.

In other words, complex analysis here validates Mallarmé's directive that restricted action is the cornerstone of modern thought and action.

We understand that it would be intellectually suicidal for contemporary communist thought to deprive itself of the emancipatory treasures that modern and contemporary mathematical thought dispenses in profusion: as Mao would have said, all you have to do is get off your horse and examine this fertile soil to benefit from its encouragement to think broadly and widely. Today, mathematics is one of the most important reasons not to despair politically about humanity. It's just a question of getting down to work on them, which is really within everyone's reach (in line with Jacottot-Rancière's axiom of equality of intelligence).¹⁸

¹⁸ *Le maître ignorant* (1987)

All in all

It is clear from this brief overview that our three intellectual resources are indispensable for rethinking the old pairing of dialectical materialism and historical materialism in the new modernity of the 21st century:

- 1) rethinking **materialism** in the shadow of post-war French philosophies, and adding a materialism of the subjectivity;
- 2) rethink **dialectics in the** light of modern mathematics, illuminating them with the mathematical dialectics of emergence and intrication, algebraic formalization and geometric interpretation, the actual and the possible, obstacle and obstruction, conscious resolution and the unconscious group, etc. ...;
- 3) rethink the **historical** character of this materialism according to the history of the communist orientation rather than that of the state.

In so doing, our three resources can encourage a materialistic and intellectually enlightened confidence in new communist existences within our dramatic¹⁹ XXI° century.

...

¹⁹ *Dramatic* rather than *tragic*, if it's true that the dramatic "happens" event by event (and is therefore sequential in nature, and therefore be overcome), while the tragic "is always there" (and is therefore structural in nature, and can therefore not be overcome). Yet the catastrophes of the 21st century are primarily due to the political failure of the Communist Revolution fifty years ago (and the correlative implosion of socialist states), not to any essentially unsurpassable structure.

[CHINESE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION]

We begin this section on the Chinese Communist Revolution (1958-1976) with a close reading, over several issues, of Alessandro Russo's seminal book *Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture* (2020) on the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

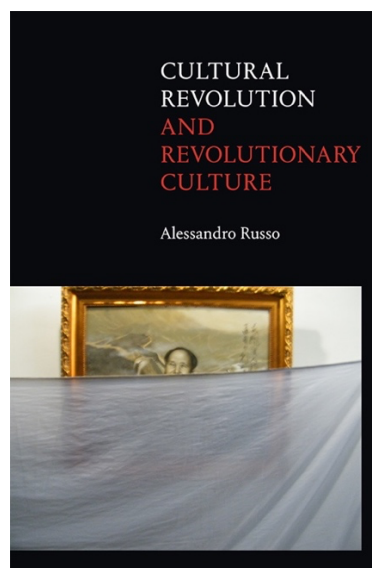
We share his communist conviction that this revolution is "a possible resource for rebuilding an intellectual horizon of egalitarian politics".

We begin our reading of this work here with its *Introduction*, followed by a discussion of its strong hypotheses by the Groupe *Longues marches*.

Each of the book's four main sections will also be presented and commented on in future issues.

Alessandro Russo: *CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND REVOLUTIONARY CULTURE* (1/5)

Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture
Alessandro Russo



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<https://www.dukeupress.edu/cultural-revolution-and-revolutionary-culture>

Back cover

In *Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture*, Alessandro Russo presents a dramatic new reading of China's Cultural Revolution as a mass political experiment aimed at thoroughly reexamining the tenets of communism. Russo explores four critical phases of the Cultural Revolution, each with its own reworking of communist political subjectivity: the historical-theatrical "prologue" of 1965; Mao's attempts to shape the Cultural Revolution in 1965 and 1966; the movements and organization between 1966 and 1968 and the factional divides that ended them; finally, the mass study campaigns from 1973 to 1976 and the unfinished attempt to evaluate the inadequacies of the political decade that brought the Revolution to a close.

Among other topics, Russo shows how the dispute around the play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* was not the result of a Maoist conspiracy, but rather a series of intense, unresolved political and intellectual controversies. He also examines the Shanghai January Storm and the problematic foundation of the short-lived Shanghai Commune. By exploring these and other politico-cultural moments of Chinese confrontations with Communist principles, Russo overturns conventional wisdom about the Cultural Revolution.

Alessandro Russo has taught sociology at the University of Bologna and has been visiting professor at the University of Washington and at Tsinghua University.

Introduction

This book proposes a new way to understand global political turmoil in the innovative 1960s and 1970s. The Cultural Revolution was a crucial turning point for China, but also the moment when a much longer and truly global “revolutionary” era ended. At the same time, it was an attempt to make sense of that history and to find new possibilities within it. That is why at that particular time the event in question had global resonance, and why we should still concern ourselves with it today, since those questions remain unsolved.

To look for a new egalitarian mass politics it is necessary to come to terms with the Cultural Revolution and the 1960s in general. It is actually impossible to find a new path without new ideas about that last great political period, a persistent tendency as regards modern revolutions. A fundamental challenge of every great political cycle is how to reassess the previous great political cycle. For the October Revolution, it was how to reassess the Paris Commune, and for the Cultural Revolution it was how to reassess all the historical experience of socialism from the October Revolution onward. Even for Marx and Engels, a crucial issue was how to evaluate the French Revolution, which they interpreted as the great bourgeois revolution preceding the proletarian revolution that was to come.

The main hypothesis of this book is that China’s Cultural Revolution was a communist movement whose aim was to undertake a thorough reexamination of communism. In essence, it was a radical scrutiny of the existing alternatives to capitalism. As such, the study of the Cultural Revolution must take into account two historical periods: events that began as far back as 1848, when the *Communist Manifesto* heralded the long search for a way out of capitalism, and the unique worldwide political phenomenon of the 1960s, and its Chinese hotbed, one of whose main projects was to rethink the foundations of modern communism.

The mass movements of the 1960s placed at the head of the communist agenda an urgency to reexamine the essentials of modern egalitarian politics by searching for a new beginning and not mere dissolution. Those events are not to be confused with the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, which occurred two decades later. Indeed, the collapse of the USSR and its satellites was ultimately the aftereffect of the mass movements that had radically criticized and finally discredited the political value of state communism.

For their part, the USSR and its satellites violently opposed that critical uprising, labeling as anticommunist the mass movements that criticized the socialist states’ claim to be the indisputable alternative to capitalism. However, it was precisely while indignantly rejecting any doubts about the validity of “their” communism that those very party-states were racing toward a radical crisis, about which they remained in steadfast denial. When they finally started to perceive the danger, it was too late.

Between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when the Soviet bloc collapsed overnight, all those parties disintegrated and their fragments enthusiastically declared that there was no alternative to capitalism. The bureaucrats of state communism, the polemical target throughout the 1960s, were nihilistically driven to neoliberalism, but not before they had vilified and finally annihilated the mass movements that had criticized them. The self-dissolution of twentieth-century state communism is in fact one of the main obstacles to the study not only of the 1960s, but also of the entire historical experience of modern communism.

The other huge obstacle to the study of the 1960s is that in the Chinese epicenter of the decade there is still the largest communist party that has ever existed, and so far the most stable and powerful.

Obviously, it exists at the price of unprecedented paradoxes that further obscure the issue. For the ccp has embraced capitalism with conviction and extreme rigor, while maintaining a substantial organizational continuity with the past, to the point of declaring itself the “vanguard of the working class” and proclaiming communism as its maximum political ideal. The “socialism with Chinese characteristics” label adds a bit of nationalist veneer, part and parcel of which has been a “thorough negation” of the Cultural Revolution, and with it the 1960s, for having hindered not only state communism but also the advent of “capitalist communism.”

The official government narrative that, immediately after Mao’s death, the arrest of Maoist leaders rescued China from chaos and misery was a mere pretext. In fact, the issues at stake were intensely political and the situation was one of neither anarchy nor economic collapse. However, the passage from a mass political laboratory for reassessing communism to unabashed capitalism in the end went exceptionally smoothly and calls for close examination.

Mao repeatedly foresaw that “in China it [was] quite easy to build capitalism.”¹ The main reason was that capitalism is the rule of the modern social world, and socialism was an exception that could exist only if renewed by repeated movements of mass experimentation. The Cultural Revolution was the latest such movement, in its turn exceptional, since its main target was to reassess the nature of the socialist exception. The most farsighted revolutionary leaders were fully aware that a brutal termination of the experiment and a return to the rule of wage slavery was all too likely, yet they were fully convinced of the need to persevere on the path of the exception. As Zhang Chunqiao, one of the main Maoist leaders, said at the trial of the Gang of Four in 1981, “In accordance with the rules of this world, I have long thought that such a day would come.”² This volume will undertake a political reexamination of that exception to the rule of this world.

There are two possible approaches to studying the Cultural Revolution. One, which prevails today, starts from the assumption (often tacitly understood) of a definitive political judgment as the yardstick for assessing those events. In fact, this perspective, being limited to the criteria of the more or less fatalistic contemporary consensus regarding the rule of capitalism, studies the Cultural Revolution inevitably as “thorough negation”—that is, just what it was not, or rather, what it should not have been. This is the tone of most of the studies that have been done in the last decades.³ The present volume explores another path, affirmative but still largely in development, which starts from the idea of a very incomplete knowledge of what the politics of today could be, and studies the Chinese events of the 1960s and 1970s as a possible resource for rebuilding an intellectual horizon of egalitarian politics.

The Cultural Revolution compels us to rethink the conceptual coordinates

and fundamental paradigms of modern political theories and constitutes a decisive test case. The Cultural Revolution traces paths of thought whose uniqueness needs to be examined because those paths did not fully fit the framework of political knowledge in force in the mid-1960s, but in fact, from the beginning posed the urgency to subject that framework to a mass political test.

To study that immense ten-year political process, we need categories appropriate to its singularity, many of which must be built during the analysis itself. We need to build a track to proceed upon. This also explains why in this book there are rigorous analytical parts in which the reader is invited to follow even minute details, and other parts that are attempts to formulate theoretical hypotheses.

This study is based on a detailed examination of declarations made by the protagonists, linked to the time they were made. They are the fundamental units of analysis for all the processes examined. I hope readers will bear with me for the superabundance of quotations I have placed in this book. They

¹ 毛泽东 Mao Zedong, 关于理论问题的谈话要点, 1974 年, 12 月 “Guanyu lilun wenti de tanhua yaodian, 1974 nian, 12 yue” [Main points of the talk on the theoretical problems, December 1974], in 建国以来毛泽东文稿 Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao [Manuscripts of Mao Zedong after 1949] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), vol. 13, 413–15.

² 张春桥 Zhang Chunqiao, 在法庭上的讲话 “Zai fating shang de jianghua” [Speech in court], 1981, accessed April 2019, https://blog.boxun.com/hero/201308/zgzj/15_1.shtml. In Chinese, the statement is 按照这个世界的规则, 我早就想好了有这么一天. “Anzhao zhege shijie de guize, wo zao jiu xianghaole you zHEME yi tian.”

³ An exhaustive synthesis can be found in Roderick MacFarquar and Michael Schoenals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

are cited in order to yield the floor to the variety of voices that spoke up at that decisive moment in modern Chinese political and intellectual history.

On the other hand, since the analytical categories are calibrated on those same political statements, the theoretical perspective constitutes a work in progress. At some points it will be necessary to dwell minutely on nuances, while at others it will be necessary to consider the general horizon and the specific categories in order to examine a single passage. These two registers are integral parts of the project itself.

The volume explores some key passages of the decade, four of them in particular: the historical-theatrical “prologue” of 1965; Mao’s original attitude; the mass phase of 1966–68; and the Maoists’ unfinished attempts to make a political assessment of the decade.

These are relatively short passages, between which, even when there is a temporal contiguity, there are essential discontinuities due to the political stakes, the extent and conditions of the mass involvement, and the balance of power at the summit of the party-state. But what links these different passages is that in each of them the thrust, the political novelties, the hesitations, the oppositions, the obstacles (most often internal), and the efforts to overcome them were essentially about the problem of how to reevaluate what had been in the twentieth century the way out of capitalism, its subsequent impasse, and how to find a new path—in other words, how to rethink the experience of the socialist states, which had been transformed into a bureaucratic machinery that mirrored those of the capitalist regimes, and ultimately how to find a new meaning in communism.

This volume will examine these passages in terms of a general hypothesis about China’s revolutionary decade. They constitute the stages of an immense mass political laboratory, whose problematic nucleus takes on different aspects in its various phases, each of which entails from the beginning a peculiar confrontation between the new political subjectivities involved in the experimentation and the framework of political culture available to the revolutionaries. In this sense, the general topic of this book is the relationship between the Cultural Revolution, understood as the set of those subjective multiplicities, and the revolutionary culture, understood as the cultural framework of politics through which the revolutionaries acted and declared their intentions.

I will start by studying the historical-theatrical prologue (part I, chapters 1–3), namely the controversy over the historical drama *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* in the months preceding the beginning of the mass phase. That controversy, which was supported by widespread involvement of the intellectual public, with thousands of risky, first-person press interventions, has generally been neglected in studies of the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, the controversy was infused with real intellectual and political stakes, namely the urgency for a theoretical clarification about whether “historical materialism” could deal with both the peasant revolts in the history of imperial China and the political role of the peasants under socialism. Although the specific terms of the historical-political-theatrical polemic have remained unresolved, it played a decisive role at the start of the revolutionary decade.

I will then discuss, from two converging perspectives, Mao’s original intentions, one of the trickiest themes in any study of the Cultural Revolution (part II). The last twenty years of Mao’s revolutionary enterprise (1956–76) were marked by a peculiar anxiety about the destiny of socialism, which also propelled his obstinate quest for a new political path (chapter 4). I will argue that his interventions between the end of 1965 and mid-1966 aimed at removing obstacles to the participation of the masses in a critical reexamination of the revolutionary culture and its institutional space (chapter 5).

While the mass phase of the Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1968, is certainly the most studied and best documented in scholarly research, its most enigmatic aspects remain opaque and need to be explored from new perspectives (part III). Two problems in particular require thorough rethinking. One concerns the processes by which the creation of an unlimited plurality of independent political organizations was overturned in the space of two years in a powerful self-destructive drive that deprived those political inventions of value (chapters 6 and 8). The other problem concerns the culmination of this phase, namely the foundation, in the aftermath of the Shanghai January Storm (1967), of the Shanghai Commune and its shutdown after a few weeks with the foundation of the Revolutionary Committee (chapter 7).

The political stakes of the first two years, and the experimentation with new forms of mass organization beyond the horizon of the party-state, radically superseded the space of existing political culture by questioning the value of key concepts. The revolutionaries had to face—within themselves,

clearly— the ambiguities with which concepts such as “class” and even “working class” were used to hinder and suppress ongoing political experimentation. The point I argue is that the new subjective intentions met a decisive impasse in the face of a key concept of revolutionary culture, that of “seizure of power.”

This concept, so central to the revolutionary culture of twentieth-century communism, soon ended by becoming for the revolutionaries a substitute for yet unelaborated new concepts that could enable an intellectual assessment of their political activism. In examining their freshness and courage, as well as their hesitations, backslides, and self-destructive moves, we need to take into account the discontinuities that were opened up by that political novelty in the general framework of political culture and the feedback of that culture on the political inventions.

All those events drove the revolutionaries to reexamine the entire cultural horizon of their own politics. That need appeared most explicitly in the latter part of the revolutionary decade. In the fourth part of this volume (chapters 9 and 10) I will analyze aspects of the large mass study campaigns that took place between mid-1973 and 1976. This final phase of the decade, though in fact marked by strong theoretical intent, has also been, overall, poorly explored. The topics discussed then included not only Marxist-Leninist political theory, in particular the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but also the main currents of ancient Chinese political thought, above all the polemics between Confucians and Legalists.

These study movements intended to lay the groundwork for a mass-scale assessment of events. Mao tried in vain to propose it in the last year of his life, when he stressed the need for a thorough rethinking of the extent to which the Cultural Revolution had fallen short of its aims. An insurmountable obstacle came with the rejection by Deng Xiaoping, then the actual head of government, who mounted a counterattack against the theoretical study movements launched by Mao, especially the one on the dictatorship of the proletariat, and categorically quashed Mao's proposal for a vast campaign of self-critical reflection on the decade.

Deng's early victory consisted essentially in his preventing a political assessment of the Cultural Revolution and at the same time interrupting the theoretical evaluation of twentieth-century communism. Thus, he achieved a decisive result, whose effectiveness continues in China's present-day governmental stability. Impeding the revolutionaries from taking stock of their enterprise was the prerequisite for breaking their subjective determination, sowing political disorientation among the masses, and placing all political decisions firmly in the hands of a government elite that wished to settle accounts with whatever mass political experimentation it labeled as mere chaos and anarchy.

The revolutionary decade ended with the effort toward a vast political assessment the Maoists tried to make, but which remained unfinished, no doubt due to the political and theoretical limits they themselves were trying to overcome. The interdiction to conclude that assessment exercised leverage on these “internal causes.” The coalition led by Deng, in its turn, drew essential resources for its reactive energy from the capacity to impose that prohibition. The fundamental themes of that unfinished assessment, as well as the long-term consequences of its interdiction, constitute the starting point for the theoretical and analytical perspectives of this book.



GROUPE *LONG WALKS*: DISCUSSION

The Groupe *Long Walks* has launched a collective discussion of Russo's book, the introductory part of which appears above. A discussion will accompany each of the chapters to be presented in subsequent issues of the Review, as well as any feedback from Alessandro Russo, thus establishing a public debate on a communist policy for the new times, guided by the balance to be drawn from the Cultural Revolution.

The Groupe *Long Walks* is a communist group set up in Paris in the wake of the fiftieth anniversary of May 1968. It combines militant study with a practice of investigation and liaison with the workers of the large factories of globalized capitalism and the inhabitants of shantytowns and social apartheid districts.

1

A political understanding of the Cultural Revolution as a "*communist movement whose aim was to undertake a thorough re-examination of communism*", and a correlative understanding of the intrinsic reasons for its failure and hence its defeat, are an inescapable requirement for anyone wishing, in the 21st century, to revive an egalitarian policy of communist emancipation.

2

Those who decide to embark on this path, however, inherit a considerable difficulty: the 1966-1976 revolutionary decade multiplied political experiments on an unprecedented mass scale, yet failed to establish, in militant interiority, even a minimal balance sheet. In this respect, Mao's political testament ("*Study the dictatorship of the proletariat!*"), far from shedding light on the political problem to be solved, actually helps to reduce the obstacle on which it stumbled.

3

Re-examining, fifty years on, the politically arduous questions brought to light by this revolution thus implies constructing new "*categories adapted to this singularity*": indeed, if it's not a question of liquidating this heritage, nor of dogmatically repeating its testament, but of rethinking this entire sequence for ourselves, then we must also, in accordance with the duality titling Russo's work, deploy a new revolutionary culture able to make the Cultural Revolution intelligible, in its victories as in its defeats. In the course of our reading, we will examine the freely rigorous way in which A. Russo fulfils this task. Russo fulfils this requirement.

4

"*The general theme of this book is the relationship between the Cultural Revolution, understood as the totality of these subjective multiplicities, and revolutionary culture, understood as the cultural framework of politics through which revolutionaries acted and declared their intentions.*" In other words, no revolutionary politics without revolutionary ideology; and no communist politics not only without mass communist movements, but also without communist theory. This, in fact, is the imperative under which we militate.

5

Hence the meticulous attention paid by this book to grasping this political history in its subjective interiority: from a meticulous examination of what its actors said and wrote about what they thought. In this respect, the author's contribution is crucial, particularly in view of his mastery of the Chinese language and, consequently, his access to a wealth of documentation that is sorely lacking in the usual French publications.

6

In his book, Alessandro Russo adopts an original approach that will prove highly fruitful: not a chronological account of the twists and turns of this entire revolutionary decade (rather like our late comrade Cécile Winter did brilliantly in her own book *La grande éclaircie de la Révolution culturelle chinoise. Ouverture à la politique communiste comme urgence et possible*; ed. Delga, 2021), but to proceed by symptomatic and interpretative cuts, distinguishing a few crucial moments - a few "passages" - where the political stakes were tied up, their effective outcome engaging beyond themselves more important durations.

7

Hence his examination of four key moments in the Cultural Revolution:

- I. his "*theatrical prologue*" (November 1965);
- II. Mao's political subjectivity when he took hold of this "prologue" (December 1965 - April 1966);
- III. the most politically intense sequence of the decade (May 1966 - August 1968);
- IV. Mao's final attempts to launch a mass political review of the Cultural Revolution (1973-1976).

We shall see later how fruitful this choice of symptom and the interpretations it gives rise to can be.

8

Taken in the light of the duality that titles this volume, these four moments then engage the following "cultural" or ideological points.

- I) In the revolutionary communist orientation that mobilizes the question of the possible on a strategic scale, ideology - and therefore "culture" - and its own struggles play a decisive role. And in these ideological battles, theater can play a particularly acute role. A lesson for our times?
- II) Today, the political confidence of communists must necessarily confront the deleterious figure of nihilism: the one that assailed Mao as early as 1956 (when he became aware of the depoliticization inherent in "building socialism" along Soviet lines), objecting: what's the *point of relaunching a communist uprising if its strategic defeat is the most likely prospect*? Thus, the fight against nihilism, ultimately political, begins with the ideological struggle.
- III) There can be no effective politics without a political measure of its effectiveness. But if political effectiveness is indeed organizational, then what political measure can be taken of this organizational effectiveness if the communist quality of a political organization can no longer be measured by the iron discipline of its apparatus? What new political measure can be invented to match the brand-new distribution of mass political organizations experimented with during the Cultural Revolution?
- IV) Lastly, and perhaps most crucially, clarification of the political obstacle that the Cultural Revolution failed to overcome, circumvent or destroy requires prior clarification of vast cultural, ideological and intellectual issues. Let's put forward the following suggestion: if an obstacle proved insurmountable in the Cultural Revolution from the spring of 1968 onwards, even though previous obstacles had been overcome, it's probably because it was no longer a simple obstacle, but rather an obstruction, i.e. one that was all the more unnoticeable because it was in fact unnoticeable according to the established and ordinary laws of the situation. In other words, the indiscernible existence of an *obstruction* is symptomatic of an *obstacle* that is discernible but strangely insurmountable (impassable, inescapable, indestructible). Of course, we'll have to come back to what precisely differentiates such an "unconscious" obstruction from a "conscious" obstacle.

9

That leaves us with the main question raised by this fascinating historical investigation: isn't there a risk of reducing the obstacle that has not been overcome (and thereby forcing the real obstruction) by sticking to the decade of the Cultural Revolution rather than incorporating it into the longer 1958-1976 sequence that we propose to call the "Chinese Communist Revolution", a sequence in which the Cul-

tural Revolution intervenes only in the second stage, after the first revolutionary stage marked by the event-driven and unplanned creation of the People's Communes?

In this respect, isn't the 1965 prelude to the 1966-1976 sequence first and foremost the postlude to the 1958-1965 sequence, i.e., the sequence that saw the creative affirmation on a very large scale of the peasants' political capacity, the actual existence of which is precisely what is at stake in this "prologue", ultimately giving it a twilight rather than an auroral turn - see what A. Russo says about it at the end of his examination of this prologue (p. 87): *"the political role of the peasantry in socialism remained the greatest unresolved question in Maoist politics; [...] the failure to resolve [this question] had decisive consequences"* in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution.

We will, of course, return to this essential debate as we continue our reading of this valuable book.

● ● ●

[INTERNATIONAL SITUATION]

We publish here the first part of a series of three articles by Sol V. Steiner on the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

Sol V. STEINER: *ZIONISM IN QUESTION (1/3)*

These articles are not a geopolitical analysis of the situation, but rather points of view and opinions on the situation, since it is essential to think about the situation and its implications if we are to avoid the prevailing doom and gloom.

This first paper will deal with the situation opened up by October 7, 2023: the comeback of the Nakba and the existence of an alternative path. The second will interpret the Zionist narrative in crisis: myths and lies of the Zionist narrative. The third will identify a Jewish singularity freed from the Zionist unitary identity, a Jewish singularity that is out of place and utopian.

To Cécile Winter

THE NAKBA COMES BACK, BUT THERE'S ANOTHER WAY

The real

In a recent article, a social scientist wrote that it's tiresome to repeat, with every explosion, the same fundamentals for those who say they don't understand developments in Palestine and Israel. With each crisis, it's the same astonishment. On October 7, it was no longer a surprise, but stupefaction. A recent France-Culture program interviewed philosophers and sociologists on the question "Why is the situation in the Middle East a trap for thought? A curious question: why a trap, and for whom? Isn't it rather (journalistic) thought that is lagging behind the situation? But what is the situation?

Since October 7, 2023, Zionism has been in crisis; and on the ground, since 2018, another voice exists, that of an organization: *One Democratic State Campaign*.

These two opposing points, at both ends of the Israeli-Palestinian political spectrum, converge in spite of themselves in a situation saturated by accelerating tragedy.

On the one hand, Zionist myths are confronted by the brutality of reality, which is emptying them out, one by one. The situation in Israel is unprecedented: the country's history seems to have begun on October 7, 2023, and the impact of the ideological and military shock has left deep scars. The testimonies tell the story of a country plagued by uncertainty and McCarthyite syndrome.

On the other, a long journey of assessments and practices (since 2012) on the slogan "A democratic state for all" and a courageous political decision have initiated, in 2018, a joint organization where Israelis and Palestinians, progressives and anti-Zionists, are working to build a common future on the recovered land of Palestine. All this, however embryonic, however difficult, however fraught with pitfalls, is part of the desire and reality of the possible country to come.

The situation, while seemingly complex, is not. The earthquake of October 7, 2023 brought together two realities: the Zionist narrative in a state of crisis, and the new situation of a common organization for democratic Palestine.

This paradox interests us because it's working in the right direction.

On the one hand, it widens the rift in the Zionist discourse, and on the other, it reveals the importance of the existence of the other path, that of the *One Democratic State Campaign*.

The existence of another path allows us to grasp the gravity and urgency of the situation. It means understanding that the Nakba, the Arab catastrophe of 1948, is more than ever underway. The all-out war unleashed by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people since October 7 is grim proof of this.

The Nakba: a double curse

The occupation of Palestine did not begin in 1967. Remaining at this date does not allow us to understand the situation and the burning issue: the return of all refugees.

"Long before 1948, the Zionist movement had begun to establish itself by expelling Palestinians from their homes, notably through the massive purchase of land; but 1948, the date of the creation of the State of Israel, was the moment of catastrophe: the mass exodus provoked by the armed actions of the Zionist militias, the burnt villages, the Palestinian peasants and their families thrown onto the roads, and immediately the Israeli decision to forbid them to return, to make this moment of flight a definitive exile. 1948 constituted the Palestinian people as a "community of destiny and resistance". One of today's highlights is the formulation of the thesis - and it doesn't matter if it's a "minority" thesis, the fundamental point is the appearance of its formulation - that the Nakba is as important and as founding for the Israelis as it is for the Palestinians".

Excerpts from the brochure *"Palestinians-Israelis, one country with one state, a seven-point political proposal"* published in 2016.

Revisiting the Nakba is the only way out of the double curse: destruction for some, a colonial fortress bristling with barbed wire for others. The only chance to (re)find and thus invent a possible country, a country to live in.

For the Palestinians, the current situation is the same as those that preceded it. For the Palestinians, the reality of the catastrophe has not changed. It has even been reinforced by the war waged by the Israeli government against them: the continuous bombardment of Gaza - everyone knows that it is impossible to eradicate Hamas, other than to raze Gaza to the ground and displace the Palestinian population. This is what is happening before the eyes of the "international community", afflicted with an obscene and mute blindness. But what is the so-called international community if not the former great colonial powers!

Jeff Halper, anthropologist, co-founder of *One Democratic State Campaign* and coordinator of the Israeli NGO *Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions*, author of a book entitled *War against the people*, explains in an interview:

"The Israeli occupation continues because the world's economic and political elites profit from...it. Israel-Palestine is the microcosm of the whole world. What Israel is doing to the Palestinians reflects the kind of war capitalism must wage today... This is what I mean by the globalization of Palestine."

Over 25,000 Palestinians killed, including nearly 10,000 children; the majority of Gaza's 2.2 million inhabitants displaced. All in all, the deadly toll of the 1948 Nakba exceeded in just two months...

There is currently a semantic battle to name what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank with the settlers. Words, it seems, can no longer say... And yet they aptly name a second Nakba, in progress: after that of 1948, that of 2023.

From myth to reality

For the majority of Israelis, for Zionists, this is an unprecedented shock. The situation sounds like a "nightmare awakening". On October 7, 2023, the Nakba - a repressed past that the Zionist narrative had deliberately erased, invalidated and eradicated from Israeli memories and consciousness, replacing it with the myth that *"Palestinians don't exist"* - returned with a vengeance.

Something broke that day that is still being expressed in hushed tones, between pain and concern: trust in the constitutive principle of the pact between the Zionist state and its people, which posits that Israel is the sanctuary for the world's Jews, a safe haven from the threatening world. All in all, the sig-

nifier Israel, endowed with its central idea "*the security of the Jewish people within the borders of their state*", has been shattered: over 1,300 Israeli deaths in just a few hours, massacred, burned, alone or in groups, including over 800 civilians; over 200 hostages taken to Gaza; an Israeli army absent for almost ten hours; its belated reaction - *where are our soldiers?* Israeli intelligence and government were absent for more than 48 hours; the billion-dollar "electronic" border (40m high, 30m deep to prevent tunnels) was punctured in several places; 1,200 corpses were stored; thousands of people did not know where their loved ones were; two kibbutzes were wiped off the map: the balance sheet borders on absolute disaster.

At the funeral of one of the three Israeli hostages killed by the Israeli army (they showed up with a white flag, bare-chested), his brother uttered these few words: "*after abandoning him, [...] you murdered him.*"

The impact is frontal. The Israelis can't get around it. This is one of the reasons for the trauma. For, behind this disaster, questions as old as the history of the founding of the Zionist state resonate in cascading echoes: how can we be "astonished" by the tragic worsening of the situation, how can we fail to discern its implacable logic, why this repeated "stupefaction" in the face of one catastrophe after another, if not wanting to see nothing of reality, wanting to understand nothing of the situation, if not practicing, indefinitely, the denial¹ of the situation?

Yet the situation is clear: the Gaza wars, the occupied West Bank, the settlers' unpunished violence, the city of Hebron bristling with watchtowers and checkpoints, young Palestinian miners imprisoned without trial for years, Jewish identity as a weapon of secession, the Nakba, a colonial process of uninterrupted expropriation since 1948 that goes by the name of *Zionism*.

We pretend not to see, not to know. We turn away. And are we still surprised? The fundamentals of the situation have been there, in front of everyone's eyes, for 75 years. But "they" are rendered invisible or declared irrelevant, if not "anti-Semitic". Perhaps therein lies the fabrication of denial, the nourishment of myth: an "impediment" to thought, a laziness to cross the ban on criticizing the policy, the state, the name, *Zionism*, on pain of being branded with the worst of insults. The anti-Zionist/anti-Semitic amalgam is placed like a "wall" to render inaudible any critical thought, any alternative to *Zionism*.

The situation, rendered unintelligible, is replaced by a narrative that articulates both a mythology - that of the "return" of the Jews to a sacred "virgin" land - and a discourse on anti-Semitism seen as a prophetic destiny. The myth of a "land without a people for a people without a land" is the basic premise of settlement colonialism, which seeks to justify the appropriation and theft of land. "*Before us, there was nothing*". As for the myth of "return" to a sacred land, its function is to link a national messianism ("*I don't believe in God, but he gave us the land*") with a victimized vision of an eternal Jew.

This mythology was shattered on October 7, 2023. The aggressive deployment of the Israeli army, the massive destruction, the rodomontades of Israeli ministers will do nothing. Mythology has taken a real blow to its narrative. But the return of reality is not a return back in time, as Hamas seems to want. It is not the return of the same in history. Today's reality is the acknowledgement of the existence of another way forward, awaited like "a drop of water in the desert" as one Israeli put it. A word shared by Palestinians and Israelis.

Another way: *One Democratic State Campaign*

Since 2018, there has been another way. It's called *One Democratic State Campaign*: a democratic state with equal rights for all, Palestinians and Israelis, on the land of Palestine.

In 2016, a collective of activists including myself (which has since disbanded), convinced of the strategic importance of the Palestine-Israel question, had written a small book advancing the following statements:

¹ Definition of denial: *unconscious refusal to admit an unbearable situation; refusal to do someone justice.*

Palestinians-Israelis, one country with one state!

A seven-point policy proposal:

- 1) Palestinians-Israelis, one country with one state!
- 2) Put an end to the idea of opposition between Jews and Arabs, which plays into the hands of the Zionist state and other powerful states!
- 3) Support Palestinian unity in all its components: the West Bank and Gaza, refugees in other countries and in Israel itself!
- 4) Put an end to the colonial destruction of the Palestinian people by the State of Israel!
- 5) Right of return for all refugees since 1948!
- 6) Working to separate Israelis from the Israeli state!
- 7) Support and develop discussion and political organization among the people as the only way to build the country and defeat the State of Israel!

This political proposal was the result of a year's investigative work on a market in Aubervilliers and a trip to Palestine-Israel, where we met Israeli and Palestinian activists, some of whom will form the core of the *One Democratic State Campaign* organization in 2018. During this trip, we understood that these watchwords were already at work, on the ground, in a whole network of practical activities that saw us acting in conjunction with each other with the horizon of a common country. All that was missing was a common organization. This has now been achieved.

The manifesto of the *One Democratic State Campaign* states, among other things:

"Liberation requires more than resistance, protest and activism. It requires a political plan that replaces oppressive political structures with a new political system and a new society based on justice, equality and inclusion, but also on respect for the country's diverse national, ethnic, religious and community identities."

Awad Abdelfattah, former Secretary General of the Balad party, is ODSC's coordinator. Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian, and Jeff Halper, an Israeli anthropologist and director of the *Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions* (ICAHD), are co-founders.

One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC), based in Haifa, has a website <https://onestatecampaign.org/en>. It contains their manifesto, campaign, political program, plans and strategies for developing and sustaining this new and tenacious organization, which is gradually lacerating the fabric of disaster and defeatism. *One Democratic State Campaign* carries the future of Palestine.

Difficulties are strong, commensurate with what's at stake.

First, the official Palestinian organizations, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. While it has become commonplace to denounce their corruption, it is still forbidden to refer to them for what they are (the Hamas massacre of October 7, 2023 is further proof of this): organizations that are guardians of the status quo, whose interest is to maintain it, whatever the form, including war, in mirror image of the State of Israel, whose repressive methods these organizations moreover copy. This ban must be lifted.

There is also, on the Palestinian side, a subjective trace of the period constituted as a "national liberation struggle". Even though the situation can no longer be thought of in these terms, a kind of negative identitarianism remains, the paradoxical effect of which is to prevent the different components of the Palestinian people from being considered together. Yet, in order to achieve the unity of the Palestinian people in its various components - the inhabitants of Gaza, the West Bank, the refugee camps or within Israel's borders - and to support the general right of return, we need to consider the situation as a whole and succeed (sixth watchword) in separating the Israelis from the State of Israel. But the "Palestinian identitarians" (including Hamas) are unable to include the 1948 Palestinians (living within the borders of the State of Israel) in their field: mentally endorsing the Nakba, they thus ratify the fragmentation of their people and de facto oppose its political unification.

On the Israeli side, there's the weight of the corpse of the Israeli left, the so-called "peace camp". This left supported the "two-state solution", in other words, the separation of Israelis and Palestinians: *"Every man for himself", "Help us divorce"*, which was not so far removed from the "ethnic" vision of the State of Israel. This submissiveness led to the camp's downfall.

Some time ago, we wrote that the so-called "two-state solution" was an impracticable deception: 1) deceptive, because it allows Zionist occupation and colonization to continue unabated; 2) impracticable, because the two peoples being totally intertwined under colonial domination, it is hard to see how the Palestinians in the "territories" - not to mention the 20% of the "Israeli" population made up of Palestinians - would find anything other than an open-air prison, and soon (as is already the case with the territories) reserves, guarded by corrupt authorities, surrounded by walls and barbed wire, girdled by checkpoints manned by the occupier.

If this left is moribund, a subjective trace of it remains in the form of a "division of tasks" between one side and the other. In its most caricatural form of colonial relationship, this means that the Israelis are in charge of politics, while the Palestinians are in charge of "resistance". But another vision, symmetrical to the previous one and what we might call post-colonial, is no better: *"it's up to the Palestinians to speak, it's up to them to take the initiative; we can only 'support' or 'follow'"*.

On the occasion of October 7, 2023, we saw this position at work in France: when French left-wing organizations wrung their hands to support (or not), in the name of supporting the famous resistance, the Hamas massacres while disagreeing with their policies.

In fact, they're just two sides of the same coin. And here again, all this leads to impotence. While it is not impossible to undertake political work on the slogan *"One country, one state"* among Israelis, it is certain that this work can only be undertaken on the basis of a clear common word proposed by both Palestinians and Israelis.

From myth to reality

For Zionists and Israelis alike, something broke on October 7, and it's still being expressed in hushed tones of pain and concern. The Israelis' amazement, incomprehension and anger are rooted there. How is it possible, *"we who were brought up"* - says an Israeli woman in a testimonial - *"with the certainty that the State of Israel would protect us from any threat, what has happened to us?"*

Is it circumstantial or structural? It's a question that haunts Israelis. Blaming the extreme right-wing government for the disaster can, in part, be justified, but the defeat is too violent not to ask the more serious questions that are beginning to circulate in the testimonies: *are we still safe within the country's borders? What have we done to get here...?*

Indeed, what have they done to get there?

They - the Israelis - never imagined it possible," we read in the various testimonials. Because there's the Wall, the technology, the army, the Iron Dome, the Abraham Accords, which normalize relations with the Arab states under Western aegis, including the silent liquidation of the "Palestinian question"; in short, a whole arsenal that authorizes the "normalcy" of daily life, in kibbutz, town or settlement; a security arsenal next to which the Israelis felt they were living "almost" in peace... untouchable.

How else can we understand the location of the kibbutzes, less than... two kilometers from Gaza, where some kibbutzniks have said they miss "Eden", the little green paradise of the kibbutz... burnt down by Hamas.

Let's recall what Gaza is for those who want to blame Gazans for their situation.

Gaza is a territory, better said a reserve, where some 2.4 million people live, deprived of movement and work, crammed into this 362-square-kilometer territory (40 km long, 12 km wide) that has been subjected to an Israeli land, air and sea blockade for sixteen years, since Hamas took power in June 2007. And the wars in Gaza - 2008-2009, 2012, 2014 - have turned Gaza into an open-air hellhole.

How can it be conceivable to create a "green paradise" just a stone's throw from this "reserve"? how can we live next door to the hell of others? - an existential question, one reason among others why some kibbutzniks support the "rights" granted to Palestinians ... to leave Gaza and be treated in Israeli

hospitals... How to hear the inaudible, i.e. the organization of a youth music festival, less than six kilometers from this... hell? Same questions, same unthinkable.

In the newspaper *Le Monde*, dated Saturday 28/10, a column by Marc Bonomelli tells us that the music festival was more than just a rave party, but "*an avatar of the new Western spirituality*". This festival, called *Tribe of Nova*, develops a series of "*alternative or holistic disciplines, such as modern yoga and energy techniques like reiki and others, but actively participates in practices of movement, dance and music in consciousness*". "*The emphasis is on the idea of tribe, of belonging to a large global family based on shared values*".

One hesitates between amazement and dismay when reading this tribune: "*the new Western spirituality*", all for its own well-being, has gone to experiment its techno "trances" in the Negev desert, under the ears of Gazans, without looking beyond its own enjoyment. "Common values", they say; indecent selfishness that leads to the worst tragedies, we reply.

Unconsciousness, perhaps, but above all the idea infused since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 - "*the Palestinians don't exist*" - which has become a myth, the form of Israeli denial and the device that goes with it: omnipresent security and military force protect and guarantee the lives of Israelis.

Let's be clear. In no way this denial justifies Hamas's deadly attacks. It reflects the concussion that has seized Israel following the collapse of the myth: Palestinians do exist!

This denial, taken up by the Western world as an existential and geopolitical certainty, explains the media's stupid astonishment at the Hamas terror: as if it had arrived, unexpectedly, in an almost serene Middle Eastern sky, where nothing important was to be expected apart from the usual "hassles" at the borders of the State of Israel...

The dangerous thing about mythology is that, when used as a denial of reality, it cannot replace analysis of the situation. The "awakening" of myth is a brutal vertigo.

Note on Hamas

Hamas's bloody, murderous rampage, taken by itself, is carnage. Hamas is no stranger to these expeditious and bloody methods.

In the fratricidal war that pitted it against Yasser Arafat's Fatah in 2007 to seize power in Gaza - between 600 and 700 deaths - Hamas distinguished itself by the brutality of its operations: kidnappings, torture, killing of unarmed prisoners, wounded thrown from the roofs of houses... It was for this reason, among others, that the Israeli government - which wanted to eliminate Fatah politically - financially supported Hamas at the time.

Hamas is an Islamist movement whose aim is to establish an Islamic identity state over the whole of Palestine. However, to hold on to power, it initially accepted a territory currently made up of East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (i.e. according to the pre-'67 borders). With the endless pursuit of Zionist colonization rendering any plans for a Palestinian state obsolete, Hamas was forced to change strategy. It chose the worst: presenting himself as the herald of the Palestinian question, it methodically prepared its massacres in order to lead the Israeli government to all-out war against the Palestinian people.

Interestingly, the continuum of Zionist colonization here creates the conditions for the new political order. Two paths:

- that of Hamas, which, through the carnage caused and the ensuing war, wants to return to the pre-1948 period in order to regain the Islamist hegemony necessary for the realization of its identity project;
- that of a joint organization, the *One Democratic State Campaign*, where Palestinians and Israelis talk together to create the foundations of a democratic state for all, a new country to come.

Hamas's logic of identity has nothing to do with the common future of Palestinians and Israelis on the democratic land of Palestine.

We publish here a detailed chronology of what led to the current war situation in Ukraine.

This chronology, in its rough and dry succession going back to the beginning of the 21st century, aims to disentangle the various political issues that are now intertwined, so as to clarify the perspective of a communist political position.

However, the magazine, which shares Tato Tatiano's conviction that this war can in no way be ours, does not necessarily endorse all the positions and political qualifications personally advanced by the author of this chronology.

More than any other, the political questions posed to communists by the present and future international situation call for diversified and sustained exchanges in this magazine. The discussion on this chronology and what it does or does not reveal as new types of conflict should therefore continue.

TATO TATIANO: *AN ANNOTATED CHRONOLOGY OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE*

Introductory points

- We need to distinguish between three wars: an internal Ukrainian civil war, a Ukraine-Russia war and an EU-Russia war (waged by Ukraine by proxy and involving part of NATO).
 - Between 2014 and 2022, these three wars take place in parallel, with the first and second taking center stage.
 - Between February 2022 and the end of March 2022, the Ukraine-Russia war dominates.
 - Since April 2022, the EU-Russia war (delegated to Ukraine) has largely dominated.

We'll come back to the reasons not to confuse them.

Militant points

- 1 In the absence of a truly emancipatory alternative, the point is not to determine whether or not Euromaidan was right to turn to the European Union, since the alternative of turning to Russia would have been just as problematic. This question is more geopolitical than militant.
- 2 At the end of Euromaidan, Yanukovych should have left in the manner negotiated with the Euro-maidan leadership.
- 3 Things didn't work out that way, and his departure turned out to be a coup d'état.
- 4 The United States is responsible for pushing this coup, while Russia is responsible for provoking the fascist separatists who reacted in this way.
- 5 Internal fascists on both sides, as well as the USA and Russia, are co-responsible for the civil war that followed the coup. The opportunists who subsequently changed their position, from agreeing with Yanukovych to rallying to one side of the civil war, have become accomplices of the previous perpetrators.
- 6 The civil war in Ukraine is driven by two separatist ideas of a Ukraine split in two: on the one hand, a Ukraine "from the West" (of the West) and on the other, a Ukraine "from the East" (of Russia). Against this, we need to support an idea of Ukraine as an emancipated bridge between the western and eastern parts of Europe (and not the European Union!). The country's historical and ethnic diversity, as well as its geographical position, are at the heart of this idea. And this idea of Ukraine as an emancipated bridge needs to be built up with Ukrainians who refuse to orient themselves according to the idea of a West-East separation.

- 7 The Ukraine-Russia war primarily serves private appetites, both domestic and foreign, and not the idea of a truly independent country. We therefore need to fight on two fronts: the two fronts on which each of those responsible for the current war are acting.

The NATO-Russia proxy war in the Ukraine serves first and foremost to prepare for a third world war, fundamentally inter-imperialist in character, a war that must be unreservedly opposed. This opposition means remembering that the USA is co-responsible for the Ukraine-Russia war in the same way as Russia, that fascist groups are responsible for the 2014 coup and are the catalysts of the civil war that followed. To the separate vision of "two Ukraines", we must oppose the principle of a single Ukraine as a bridge between two parts of the continent of Europe. The strategic stakes of such an idea go beyond Ukraine, as do the stakes of the idea of a single Palestine-Israel country with a single state; these strategic stakes affirm the possibility of a world without a third world war.

One of the first and foremost tasks of communist militants in Ukraine is not to give in to the obfuscation of the country's history, initiated by the Orange Revolution of 2004, but to oppose it with the true history of the events as they actually unfolded. Only if such a clarification is achieved will it be possible to think about other effective tasks from within the country. Hence this annotated chronology, which aims to make a modest contribution to such a clarification.

Prehistory of Maïdan (2000-2014)

Ukrainian intervention in Iraq

- November 28, 2000: scandal surrounding Ukrainian President Kuchma's alleged murder of opposition journalist G. Gongadze. Recordings of his bodyguard Mykola Melnychenko appear.
- In 2002, Kuchma sold military radars to Saddam Hussein.

From within Ukraine, this intervention is very well received. On the other hand, this intervention is very poorly viewed in the United States: it indicates the real possibility that Ukraine will not only not be part of Nato (as the United States would like), but will even ally itself militarily with Russia.

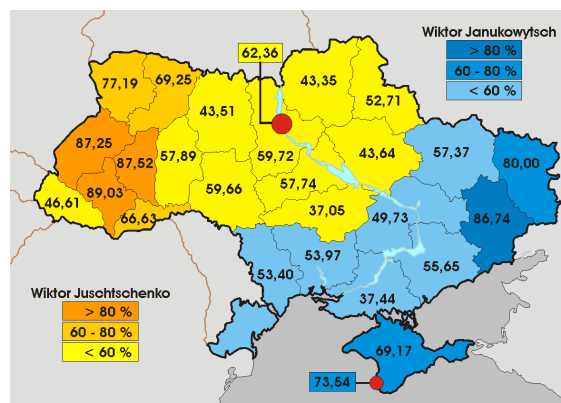
- November 21-22, 2002: Kuchma's Ukraine is criticized at a NATO summit in Prague.
- June 5, 2003: following NATO pressure on Kuchma, Ukraine intervenes in Iraq alongside the United States.

At the same time, Kuchma decided not to stand for re-election in 2004 and appointed his successor: Yanukovych, the same man who was deposed in the coup d'état of February 2014.

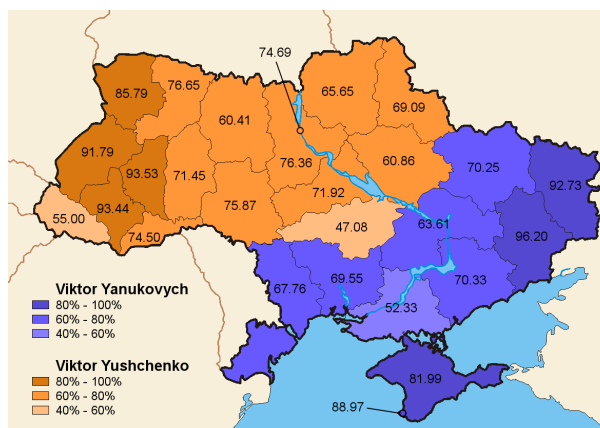
All this led to the so-called "Orange Revolution" of 2004.

2004 elections and the *Orange Revolution*

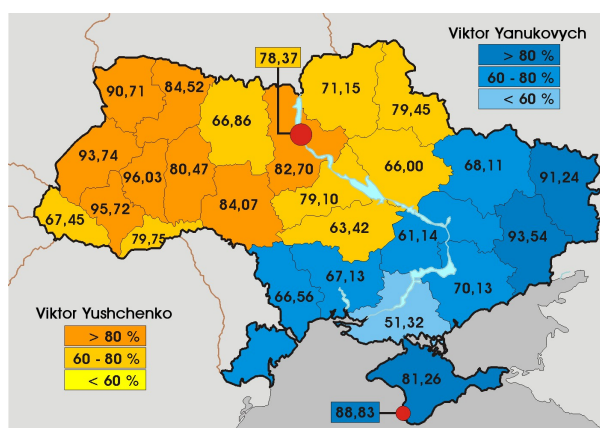
- October 31, 2004: First round of presidential elections. Yushchenko, a pro-Western candidate, and Yanukovych (a candidate supported by Kuchma) go through to the second round, after a first round marked by an enormous diversity of candidates and political parties. Incidentally, this diversity of candidates reflects Ukraine's great cultural and ethnic diversity, which is both a strength of the country and a difficulty to manage politically. The following maps show that Yanukovych is dominant in the east of the country, particularly in the Donbass and Crimea, while Yushchenko wins in the west.



- November 21, 2004: second round. Yanukovych wins by 100,000 votes. The next day, demonstrations sparked off the "Orange Revolution", which, citing irregularities in the vote, wanted to repeat the second round. The body that was supposed to announce Yanukovych's victory unconstitutionally refused to do so and called a new second round.



- December 26: another second round. This time Yushchenko wins.



What's astonishing between these two second rounds is that the major variations in results are to be found in the West and not in the East. What's to say that it's not this new second round that has been corrupted rather than the first? It would no doubt be too much to say that this new second round is in itself a coup d'état (but then, how can we name it?), but the objectives, means and methods used to repeat a second round (which did not satisfy the West) were very much the same as in 2014: a body run by pro-Westerners unilaterally decides to violate the country's Constitution.

My position is that if civil war is going to break out in Ukraine from 2014 onwards, it's the responsibility of the people who brought Yushchenko to power: it was he who made the fascist Bandera a national hero, it was he who tolerated the emergence of numerous far-right, neo-Nazi groups, it was he who established Ukrainian as the only official language throughout the country.

2005-2010 - Yushchenko

- January 23, 2005: Yushchenko begins his presidency and the very next day appoints Tymoshenko prime minister. Tymoshenko is the conservative wife of a gas oligarch; she was imprisoned under Kuchma for corruption; she holds pro-European Union (see her economic interests linked to gas sales) and pro-NATO positions (she is against renewing Russia's access to the Black Sea and in 2007 wrote an article entitled "*Containing Russia*" to this effect). She was dismissed on September 8, 2005, following internal tensions within the government over aggressive privatizations.
- March 26, 2006: parliamentary elections. Yanukovych's Party of Regions (the first winner of the 2004 elections) takes first place with 32.1% of the vote and 186 seats. Conflict.
- August 4, 2006: Yushchenko chooses to cohabit with Yanukovych by appointing him prime minister.
- August 19, 2006: Youri Choukhevytch, member of the Helsinki Group, son of the Nazi fighter Roman of the same name, and leader of the neo-Nazi paramilitary group UNA-UNSO², is named "Hero of Ukraine".
- April 2007: Yushchenko tries to throw Yanukovych out by dissolving parliament and calling for new parliamentary elections. His maneuver failed, as Yanukovych once again came out on top in the elections.
- October 12, 2007: Roman Choukhevytch is named "Hero of Ukraine" by Yushchenko. In October 2009, the Donetsk District Administrative Court requested that this decision be overturned, but Yushchenko refused.
- December 18, 2007: Yushchenko finally reappoints Tymoshenko as prime minister, but she breaks with Yushchenko in September 2008 amid a general economic crisis that will make the country ungovernable.
- July 22 2008: announcement of the future economic agreement between Ukraine and the European Union.

Yushchenko, who was elected to steer Ukraine away from a semi-authoritarian regime, will end up, in his powerlessness to oust Yanukovych, committing his country to such a regime. So, the "Orange Revolution" was not a revolution at all: instead of a revolution, we see that under Yushchenko part of the Ukrainian oligarchy (and exemplarily Tymoshenko and Poroshenko) turned into Western businessmen.

In 2008, Ukraine's request to join NATO exacerbated internal and external tensions.

2010-2014 - Yanukovych

The "Orange Revolution" didn't take: in 2010, Yanukovych, who should have been president since 2005 if the "Orange Revolution" hadn't taken place, ended up winning the elections by a wide margin over Tymoshenko. This reflects Tymoshenko's failure to unify a pro-Western camp that is very much divided into three candidates: Tymoshenko, Yatsenyuk and Yushchenko.

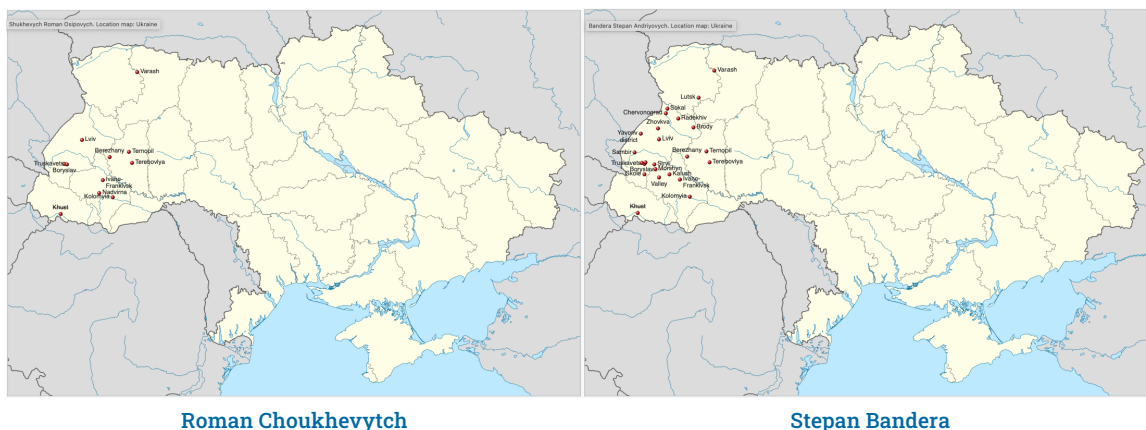
- January 17, 2010: first round of presidential elections. Yanukovych (35%) beats Tymoshenko (25%).
- January 20-22, 2010: in the middle of the second round of voting, Stepan Bandera, the WWII fascist³, is named "Hero of Ukraine" by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko.
- February 7, 2010: second round, won by Yanukovych (48.9%) against Tymoshenko (45.4%).
- April 2, 2010: Yanukovych reopens the proceedings initiated by the Donetsk Court to annul Bandera's nomination as a "hero".

² It was the UNA-UNSO that provided security for Yushchenko and Tymoshenko during the Orange Revolution (*Far-right Group Flexes During Ukraine "Revolution"*, Associated Press, January 1, 2005).

³ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stepan_Bandera

In response to this prospect of cancellation, several towns in western Ukraine made the two fascists Roman Choukhevytch⁴ and Stepan Bandera "honorary citizens".

Cities that decided in 2020 and 2011 to become "honorary citizens":



- January 12, 2011: Yanukovich officially cancels the decision to make Bandera a "Hero" of Ukraine.
- June 24, 2011: Start of the corruption trial against Tymoshenko for signing gas contracts with Russia.
- August 2, 2011: Yanukovich formalizes the cancellation of the decision to make Shukhevytch a "Hero" of Ukraine.
- September 3-5, 2011: the European Union threatens⁵ Ukraine with breaking off its planned economic agreement because of the corruption trial against Tymoshenko, even though the evidence implicating her is clear.
- October 11, 2011: Tymoshenko is sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. The West condemns her imprisonment as politically motivated. Tymoshenko was released on February 22, 2014 during the Maidan coup d'état, and on the same day went from Kharkiv to Kiev to speak on Independence Square.

At the time, the situation was as follows:

- Within the country, the pro-Western bloc is very divided: Tymoshenko, the representative of the openly pro-US current, is not unanimously supported; Tihipko and Yatsenyuk play their own role in the bloc. A climate of pre-civil war is developing.
- Outside the country, Ukraine is capsizing geopolitically towards Russia, even though the latter, which publicly supported Yanukovich in 2004-2005, no longer does so in 2010.

⁴ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Choukhevytch

⁵ <https://archive.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/eu-ukraine-association-deal-might-hit-ratification-112197.html>

Euromaidan and the "Revolution of Dignity" (November 2013 - February 2014)

Euromaïdan (2013)

- November 21, 2013: Yanukovych, through Parliament, rejects⁶ Ukraine's economic agreement with the European Union [EU] in favor of a proposed tripartite agreement including Russia (but hardly specifies the possible points of such an agreement).

Euromaidan began as a student mobilization. The parties of Tymoshenko, Klitschko (*Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform*) and Tyahnybok (*Svoboda - Freedom*) quickly took the lead.

- November 22, 2013: Putin accuses the EU of being behind Euromaidan.
- December 3, 2013: First meeting between Tyahnybok, Yatsenyuk, Klitschko and Western ambassadors.
- December 8, 2013: Svoboda supporters destroy the Lenin statue in Kiev. In Kharkiv, the mayor announces a collection to restore the monument.
- December 10, 2013: the EU rejects the proposed tripartite agreement.
- December 13, 2013: Prime Minister Arbutov requests a revision of the economic agreement with the EU, which immediately refuses. Yanukovych releases two imprisoned demonstrators.
- December 15, 2013: US Senator John McCain comes to give a speech at the Euromaidan stadium.
- December 17, 2013: Putin proposes to sharply reduce the price of gas exports.
- December 31, 2013: 200,000 demonstrators celebrate the New Year on Maidan Square.
- January 1, 2014: 15,000 men march in memory of fascist Bandera.

All in all, we should distinguish the Euromaidan (November 21, 2013 - February 22, 2014) from the "Revolution of Dignity" (February 18-23, 2014) that followed it, and not consider the "Revolution of Dignity" as the last sequence of the Euromaidan - the reasons for dissociating these two events will be clarified in what follows.

February 2014 and "Revolution of Dignity"

- February 4, 2014: undated telephone conversation by Victoria Nuland, US Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, posted on Youtube⁷, inviting the European Union to "go fuck itself" on the Ukrainian issue. This demonstrates the existence of deep political differences on Ukraine between the United States and the European Union.

Iatseniouk heads the triumvirate formed with Klitschko (UDAR) and Tyahnybok (Svoboda) for the future.

- February 17, 2014: Russian Finance Minister Siluanov says the first tranche (two billion out of fifteen) of the loans granted to Ukraine on December 17, 2013 will be disbursed within the week.
- February 18, 2014: 20,000 demonstrators advance towards Parliament, demanding a return to the pre-2004 Constitution. In Lviv, around 1,200 weapons (pistols and Kalashnikovs) are seized by a group of demonstrators.

⁶ <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2014-3-page-109.htm>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoW75J5bnnE>

- February 20, 2014
 - morning: massacre in Kiev of nearly 50 demonstrators and 13 policemen in a dark operation under the false banner⁸.
 - 4.57pm: Interior Minister Zakhartchenko announces that he has signed a decree authorizing the firing of live ammunition at demonstrators. But by this time, the previous massacre had already been completed. The next day, Parliament will kick the Minister out, so the decree will have had no effect.
 - evening: Yanukovych meets with representatives from Germany, Poland and France at the US embassy to negotiate a ceasefire; a Russian representative is present but will not sign the agreement, although he announces that he is not opposed to it. At the same time, Crimean representative Vladimir Kostantinov travels to Moscow to talk about secession; the Tatar leadership in Crimea declares its opposition to this stance.
- February 21, 2014
 - 2.50pm: the Maïdan Square council authorizes the parliamentary opposition (Yatseniouk, Klitschko, Tyahnybok) to sign agreements with Yanukovych on behalf of Euromaïdan.
 - 15h57: With the approval of the EU and Russia, Yanukovych signs a crisis exit agreement with the leaders of the parliamentary opposition, which is unanimously approved but never implemented. The agreement calls for a return to the pre-2004 constitution, early elections before the end of the year, the withdrawal of the security forces from central Kiev and the immediate release of Tymoshenko.
 - 4.06pm: the ultra-right political party *Secteur Droit*⁹ publicly opposes the agreement.
 - 4.40pm: Parliament votes to return to the pre-2004 constitution.

Shortly afterwards, the paramilitary group Parasyuk, which presents itself as non-aligned, announced on the main stage that its armed group (whose stronghold is in Lviv, where the weapons seized on February 18 are located) was opposed to the agreement and gave an ultimatum: Yanukovych must resign by the following morning, failing which he would act "by force" (without specifying what he would do).

Yanukovych is on his way to Kharkiv, where a "Congress of the Southwest and Crimean regions" is scheduled: could Yanukovych already be on the run?
- February 22, 2014
 - 10 a.m.: demonstrators arrive at Yanukovych's main residence; the police have disappeared from the capital.
 - 4.19pm: final televised address by Yanukovych declaring¹⁰ that he remains President, that any decision by Parliament is illegal and that he intends to visit some regions of Ukraine before returning to Kiev.
 - 17:05: Akhmetov, Ukraine's richest oligarch, stresses that a unified Ukraine is more important than ever.
 - 17:19: Parliament launches impeachment proceedings against Yanukovych, arguing that he would have resigned by now.
 - 17:30: Turchynov wrote that Yanukovych had resigned, but soon retracted his statement. Shortly afterwards, Yanukovych was impeached by Parliament, which justified its decision on the grounds that Yanukovych was "incapable of exercising his powers". At the same time, two representatives of this congress, Margelov and Pushkov, declared¹¹ that

⁸ See Ivan Katchanovski's monumental work: *The Snipers' Massacre on the Maidan in Ukraine*, and *Snipers' Massacre on the Maidan in Ukraine and Revelations from Trials and Investigations*.

⁹ https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secteur_droit

¹⁰ <https://archive.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/euromaidan-rallies-in-ukraine-feb-21-live-updates-337287.html>

¹¹ <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-encourages-centrifugal-forces-in-south-eastern-ukraine/#.Vpdqa-%20JOLToA>

they were opposed to a return to the pre-2004 constitution, as such a decision would have to be taken by referendum and not by parliamentary vote "in order to preserve the country and not divide it".

- February 23, 2014: Yanukovych flees to Russia from Kharkiv.
Parliament repeals the law recognizing regional languages (including Russian). At the same time, anti-Maidan demonstrations broke out in Kharkiv, the southeast and Crimea.
- February 24, 2014: Yanukovych is held responsible for the massacres of February 20. The International Court of Justice [ICJ] begins an investigation against Yanukovych for crimes against humanity.
The civil war begins: in Sevastopol, Mayor Osadchy (who is against the separation of Crimea) is replaced by the pro-Russian Aleksei Chalyi. The police refuse a central order from Kiev to arrest the new mayor.
- February 27, 2014: Russian army arrives in Crimea.
- April 7, 2014: seizure of administrative buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk (Donbass region) and self-proclamation of the two separatist republics.

Balance sheet items

- While the Euromaidan took place at the instigation of the European Union (which was looking for leverage for its own negotiations), the "Revolution of Dignity" took place at the instigation of the United States (which aimed to prevent any EU-Ukraine-Russia tripartite agreement).
- The base of Euromaidan was made up of students seeking to emancipate themselves from political figures linked to "the past" and the vacuity of their political positions. This is why the triumvirate was able to take over Euromaidan so quickly and easily, even though it represented the interests of the old oligarchs.
- The sequence February 18-23, 2014 constitutes a coup d'état.
- It is highly likely that several signatories to the agreement with Yanukovych were cynically behind the coup.
- This coup d'état crystallized around the Maidan massacre on February 20, 2014.
This massacre was instigated, from within the country, by part of the Euromaidan organization, made up of pro-European oligarchs and far-right factions¹² and, from outside, by Western forces, obviously including the United States.
- Yanukovych's departure was the result of a coup de force (and by no means a voluntary departure, as we are led to believe): just as peace agreements had been signed, the far-right paramilitary V. Parasyuk who set an ultimatum, leading to the dismissal of Yanukovych by Parliament.
- The oligarchs, both pro-Russian and pro-Western, seem unanimously opposed to a civil war.

This coup d'état set off a domino effect that eventually led to

1. a civil war in the Donbass ;
 2. armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine;
 3. a proxy conflict between Russia and the West.
- The civil war confronts two parts of the Ukrainian population, whose political conflict is historical (its order of magnitude can be counted in centuries) and geographical (see polarization since the Orange Revolution).
 - The Russia-Ukraine armed conflict was born on the embers of the civil war, but must be distinguished from it: the stakes are not the same.

¹² This was attested to in court by the snipers' subsequent confessions and by the testimony of most of the surviving wounded, corroborated by other witnesses, ballistics reports and other analyses...

- Russia's logic in this armed conflict is based on a defensive imperialist posture: as an asserted empire, it sees part of its sphere of influence shrinking, and it responds to this in a strategically defensive manner.
- The proxy conflict between Russia and the West follows an offensive imperialist logic, with the West trying to bring Ukraine into its sphere of influence, thus competing with Russia.
- This coup d'état is in fact being carried out against the European Union, which had every interest in keeping an agreement with Ukraine that was not antagonistic to Russia (see the tripartite perspective) and could thus secure Russian gas supplies. If such an agreement had been reached, the United States' power over the European Union and Ukraine would have been significantly reduced, and we know from reading Brezinski's "The Grand Chessboard" that such a turning point would have been catastrophic for US global domination.

A clear distinction must therefore be drawn between the civil war, the Ukraine-Russia war and the NATO-Russia proxy war in Ukraine¹³. The respective positions must also be carefully distinguished. To sum up:

- Before the 2014 coup,
 - the European Union had no interest in a coup d'état that would jeopardize their gas supply agreement with Russia;
 - the United States, on the other hand, had every interest in such a coup d'état, including the gas issue;
 - For their part, the Ukrainian oligarchs had a vested interest in seeing their side win (Russian or Western), but had no interest in separatism.
- After the coup,
 - Russia had every interest in separatism;
 - The European Union and NATO were divided over these three wars, both politically and economically;
 - pro-Russian oligarchs were forced to sell off their businesses in the separatist zones.

Post-Maidan (February 2014 - February 2022)

Transitional government (February 22, 2014 - May 25 2014)

- March 21, 2014: the economic agreement with the European Union is signed without negotiating the points that Yanukovich was defending (free movement between the EU and Ukraine and the maintenance of certain customs duties to protect Ukrainian agri-foodstuffs). With competition for the Ukrainian market cut short by the Ukraine-Russia war, the European Union is no longer interested in Ukrainian unification, and is taking advantage of its weakness and demand for aid.
- May 2, 2014: Odessa massacre. At least 42 anti-Maidan demonstrators are murdered by ultras. Everything is filmed, but no one is ever convicted. For a whole day, the police do not intervene at the scene of the crime. The massacre was applauded by Secteur Droit and viewed positively by candidate Poroshenko. All this is a sign of the collective denial that the state is going to teach Ukrainians.

Poroshenko (2014-2019)

- May 25, 2014: Poroshenko wins the presidential elections in the first round.
 Poroshenko is an oligarch who had supported Kuchma in 1998, and who continued his career in the 2000s in the Party of Regions, loyal to Kuchma, of which he became vice-president. In 2004, he

¹³ See Ivan Katchanovski's study *The separatist war in Donbas: a violent break-up of Ukraine?*

became the oligarch behind Yushchenko's campaign, countering the influence of his nationalist advisors.

- June 2, 2014: Poroshenko sends the army into battle against the separatist East, in particular with a bombing campaign. The European Union, which has no leverage, is content to ensure a minimal gas agreement with Russia.
- November 27, 2014: Poroshenko announces that he wants to relaunch the procedure for Ukraine's accession to NATO.
- September 5, 2014: twelve-point Minsk I agreements. But failure on September 28: fighting for Donetsk airport resumes.
- February 12, 2015: thirteen-point Minsk II agreements, very close to Poroshenko's fifteen-point proposal made on June 20, 2014. These agreements will not be implemented by either side!
- April 9, 2015: the Rada approves the de-communization law, drafted by V. Viatrovich and neo-Nazi paramilitary Yuri Shukhevych.

Viatrovitch is a revisionist historian who denies the participation of the UPA and OUN in the massacres of Poles and Jews during the Second World War. He defends Roman Choukhevych as an "eminent personality" and claims the legality of publicly displaying the symbol of the Galician SS division.

Choukhevych was elected to the National Assembly on November 27, 2014 until July 29, 2019 under the banner of the Radical Party (far right).

- May 15, 2015: Poroshenko signs a law destroying and banning all Communist monuments in Ukraine.
- May 21, 2015: this law passes through Parliament. Within six months, these monuments are destroyed.
- July 24, 2015: all Ukrainian communist parties are dissolved.

Correlatively, this same law says that former soldiers who fought during the Second World War under the fascist insignia of the UPA, OUN, *Polissia Sich* and *Ukrainian People's Revolutionary Army* (UPRA) now have the status of war veterans and therefore enjoy the benefits associated with this status. As of May 23, 2018, 1,201 of these former soldiers are still alive. At the end of March 2019, the first soldiers are effectively made veterans.

- September 1, 2017: effective entry into force of the Ukraine-European Union economic agreements (the Netherlands having initially expressed its opposition to these agreements in a referendum, then decided to override the referendum result!).
- November 25, 2018: Kerch Strait incident: three Ukrainian ships attempt to pass under the Kerch Bridge; Russia takes 25 prisoners. Tensions rise again. The West demands the return of the ships and prisoners, and access to the Sea of Azov ports (including Mariupol).



- November 28 - December 27, 2018: Poroshenko applies martial law to all Russian-speaking Oblasts.
- February 21, 2019: amendment of the Ukrainian constitution to allow the country to join NATO and the European Union.

Throughout this period, the actions of the Poroshenko government, then those of Zelensky, trivialized the actions committed by extreme right-wing factions (such as the pogroms undertaken against gypsy camps in the Kiev region by hooligans transformed into guardians of public order). The heroisation of figures historically associated with Ukraine's fascist past has had the effect of legitimizing such actions and, even if these figures are relatively distant from effective state power, all this has real effects on the country's population and exacerbates the civil war engaged in since the 2014 coup, if only because all this is used by Russian propaganda to characterize the regime in Kiev as neo-Nazi.

Zelensky (2019 - February 2022)

- March 31 and April 21, 2019: two-round presidential election. In the first round, Tymochenko is narrowly eliminated. In the second round, Poroshenko was supported only in the Lviv Oblast and eventually lost heavily to Zelensky, who apparently benefited from a desire to do away with the establishment.
- May 20, 2019: Zelensky takes office.
- September 7, 2019: return of the 25 prisoners from the Kerch conflict (November 25, 2018) on the occasion of a prisoner-of-war exchange.
- November 18, 2019: return of the three ships by Russia.
- December 9, 2019: Joint de-escalation declaration by France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. The Minsk II agreements remain the official basis for de-escalation.
- December 12, 2019: the Ukrainian parliament passes a law on the status of self-proclaimed republics. On all sides, this vote is taken as an excuse to ratify the non-respect of the Minsk agreements.
- June 12, 2020: Ukraine joins Nato partners' enhanced interoperability program.
- From October 8, 2020 until the start of the Russian invasion, Zelensky reaffirms the importance of NATO membership.
- June 28, 2021: joint military exercises between Ukraine and NATO take place in the Black Sea.

All in all, Zelensky only kept his promise of de-escalation for a few months. The price to be paid for an economic alliance with the West was, of course, a military alliance, which was, in Putin's words, the last red line before war.

Russian invasion (February 2022 ...)

Timeline

Let's highlight the key events of 2022.

- February 24, 2022: start of the Russian invasion.
- February 27, 2022: Belarus amends its constitution to store Russia's nuclear arsenal. Zelensky agrees to a first round of talks on condition that they take place on neutral territory. The very next day (February 28), such an initial negotiation takes place on the border between Belarus and Ukraine, but to no avail.

The remaining peace negotiation meetings take place on March 3, 7, 10, 14-17, 21, and 29-30. The following points are based on these meetings.

- March 3, 2022: agreement to set up humanitarian corridors, but no change in strategic objectives.

- March 5, 2022: former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennet mediates a ceasefire. According to Bennet, the Western side refuses. Murder of Ukrainian banker Denys Kireyev, one of the Ukrainian negotiators suspected of being a Russian double agent.
- March 7, 2022: the prospect of a ceasefire seems to be strengthening. But Russian operation for control of Eastern Ukraine
- March 10, 2022: first meeting of Ukrainian and Russian foreign ministers, this time in Turkey, with the future of the town of Marioupol at stake. But once again no progress was made.
- March 14-17, 2022: first major step towards a peace process by drawing up a fifteen-point plan - Russia is said to be ready to withdraw if Ukraine abandons its NATO membership prospects. Zelensky supports this initiative. French Foreign Minister Le Drian accuses Russia of pretending to negotiate.
- March 18-19, 2022: vast Russian operation to control southern Ukraine.
- March 21, 2022: despite the impasse, Zelensky declares that he wants to speak directly with Putin, which would symbolically mean a step forward in the peace process.

Little movement from the front in the following days.

- March 29-30, 2022: Le Drian and the Prime Minister of Estonia declare their skepticism about any prospect of agreement. Nevertheless, a significant breakthrough: Ukraine is said to be ready to grant Russia four points (including abandoning NATO membership and making Russian its second official language), in return for which Russia would reduce its military activities around Kiev and Chernihiv.
- April 1 and 5-7, 2022: Russian forces withdraw from the Kiev front, then from the rest of the northern Ukrainian front, which regains its borders.
- April 1, 2022: Ukrainian forces enter Boutcha and discover the victims.
- April 6: Ukraine submits a peace proposal to Russia, which begins to depart from the prospects put forward on March 30.
- April 7, 2022: Zelensky publicly declares his willingness to continue peace talks, even despite what happened at Boutcha¹⁴. Russian diplomat Sergei Lavrov describes the Ukrainian proposal of April 6 as unacceptable.

Russian military advances on the Eastern Front.

- April 9, 2022: Zelensky reaffirms his willingness to continue talks¹⁵. Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson meets Zelensky on the same day. Johnson declares that "Putin is a war criminal, who should be put under pressure rather than negotiate with him" and promises Ukraine "long-term support" even though the possibility of peace negotiations is still on the table.
- April 12, 2022: Putin declares that Ukraine has changed its positions on Crimea and Donbass, rendering the current talks deadlocked and thus assuming the prospect of a long-term conflict.
- November 2022: Zelensky proposes a ten-point peace plan which resembles in every way a capitulation by Russia: return to the borders before the annexation of Crimea, penal persecution and economic retribution... These peace points correspond in fact to Nato's military objectives in the proxy war it is waging against Russia, and not to the actual objectives of the Ukraine-Russia war. What's more, these points are militarily unfeasible, and are directed against the Ukrainian people.

¹⁴ <https://youtu.be/kKXoLqbP3NY?t=333>

¹⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-boris-johnson-business-24cd8742435251d9dd46bcc29302bd13>

Summary

From all this, we can conclude that the Russo-Ukrainian war was the main war only until April, and that the armed conflict which began after April 7, 2022 was not a second phase of the Russo-Ukrainian war, but a transition from a Russo-Ukrainian war to a NATO-Russian war by proxy from the Ukraine. Throughout this period, the West has opportunistically used the Russian withdrawal at the beginning of April 2022 to symbolically turn it into the first Western offensive aimed at weakening Russia. In return, Russia is using all this to consolidate its argument to justify the invasion: it's still all about fighting Nato. After the Russian invasion at the beginning of 2022, the civil war takes a secondary role; the Ukraine-Russia war had the main role at the beginning of 2022, but from April 2022 onwards, it's the NATO-Russia war by proxy from the Ukraine that dominates.

...

[ECOLOGICAL QUESTION]

Camille DUQUESNE AND Marion BOTTOLIER: *OUTLINE OF A CARTOGRAPHY*

The plunge into war, like the ecological problem today, can lead to a form of panic thinking, a despair in the face of what appears to be irreparable, a tragic anguish over the consequences.

How can we not give in to this, and continue to give meaning to the construction of collective thought, and to what we can do, in spite of everything?

To do this, we need to study these questions from the point of view of our communist orientation, in order to identify what these issues can bring us, and what we have to say about them.

With regard to the ecological question, we propose here, on the basis of initial readings, a rough cartography of current ecological currents.

It seems that the general paradigm of the various ecological currents is turned towards future generations, towards what's to come, with the main concern being the Earth that we're going to leave to future generations (Walter Benjamin spoke of the "*role of redemption of future generations*" attributed to the working class by social democracy, thus signing its death warrant). In this case, we look to the future only in terms of a past that will always be better than what is happening and what is going to happen, with the sole aim of limiting the damage, "stopping the disaster". Any possibility of transforming existing relationships (a possibility that is rarely mentioned, by the way) is linked to this idea of a *lesser evil*, and therefore seems to be easily turned inside out, into a nihilism of "*what's the point?*", a conservatism that hardly disguises itself, or a call for a revolution in pure thought, in simple "ontology", in the link between the living - in any case, in a disposition that distances any prospect of real transformation.

The general motive behind these struggles is nothing more than to be able to continue living on this Earth, by seeking the conditions of possibility of this life as the main orientation, the basis on which all decisions should be taken. They thus focus on the importance of simple "life", where humanity is no longer summoned as anything other than the simple sum of human lives, or even as "human nature", and not at all thought of in communist terms as a generic collective, divided upon itself.

The currents calling our era the *Anthropocene*

1

First and foremost, there are the currents of anthropological ecology, as formulated by Bruno Latour and the researchers who follow in his footsteps.

It would seem that for these "thinkers of the living", giving free rein to a sensitive and poetic relationship with things would be enough to help save life on earth. We would have to talk to plants, build bridges, invent a "cosmopolitanism", or include all living things in the parliament of humans, relying on their own "agency". Taking their cue from peoples who have not lived through the industrial era and therefore have a different ontology, these thinkers advocate a change in the way we relate to the living, in order to change the world.

We describe their strategy as one of avoidance - avoidance of politics - in favor of a simple "poetics" of existence considered capable of producing real transformations.

2

At the extreme of this vision, we find a totally nihilistic version in a group such as *Deep Green Resistance*, which calls for the destruction of everything civilization has built up since the end of the hunter-gatherers in order to return to a kind of fantasized primitive humanity:

*"When civilization collapses, nature will rejoice. If we are to survive, we must adopt a biocentric perspective. We must relearn to live in harmony with the earth, air, water and creatures around us, in communities based on respect and gratitude. We look forward to this future."*¹

3

What's left are the militant currents fighting within the apparatus of capitalist-parliamentarianism, who advocate pacifism as a cardinal virtue, with the main aim of being heard at the negotiating table and obtaining from the State regulations that better control the "excesses of capitalism".

See

- Climate marches, Greta Thunberg, Extinction rebellion, etc.
- The "solutionist" currents, which focus on identifying and inventing possible technical and organizational solutions, with no real political roots.

For example, Bellamy and Foster, American sociologists and biologists respectively, take up the idea of economic planning and production regulation, an idea nourished by a deep nostalgia for the socialist state and/or the welfare state, while avoiding taking stock of what socialist states really were and actually became over the course of the 20th century.

But the point is that the ecological issue is not just technical: it's political. And their solutions, while seemingly technical, in themselves entail far-reaching political problems that go far beyond the mere question of their implementation by the state.

Currents calling our era the *Capitalocene*

These currents follow in the footsteps of Andreas Malm², who rejects the term Anthropocene, arguing that climate change is not taking place by virtue of natural laws inherent to the human species.

For example, the history of fossil capital shows that the switch from water to steam didn't happen because water was scarce, less powerful or more expensive than steam, but because coal enabled factories to be located in the heart of a population trained in industrial habits. Coal freed capital from its spatial chains, and steam thus became the capitalist solution to the 1847 law legislating shorter working hours. The switch to fossil fuels was therefore implemented by the owners of the means of production with a very specific aim in mind: that of exploiting the working class to the full for greater added value.

Earth Uprisings

For their part, they intervene along three lines of action: occupation of threatened land, blockades of building sites and industries, and direct and collective dismantling of infrastructures they call *ecocidal*.

ZADs

Here, something interesting is being built: social relationships, relationships to the land, ways of producing, thinking and exchanging that people hold dear and are prepared to defend in the face of the enemy. In turn, this defensive struggle feeds the construction process. In so doing, there is something

¹ <https://deepgreenresistance.fr/principes-fondateurs/>

² *Anthropocene versus history. Global warming in the age of capital*, La fabrique éditions, 2017

affirmative here, a foundation that is precious, an upheaval that has already taken place, a practical reinvention of new relationships. Kristin Ross speaks of³ "defense" as opposed to "resistance":

*"Resistance means letting the state set the agenda. Defense, on the other hand, is rooted in a temporality and a set of priorities set by the local community under construction."*⁴

Over time, the nature of what is being defended here will change, moving from the simple defense of an unpolluted environment or farmland to the defense of new social ties; the struggle will thus produce new solidarities and emotional relationships that will become the new practical assertions to be defended.

In fact, the occupants of the ZAD practice the appropriation of a place as an integral part of the real abolition of private property.

Questions we share

The paradoxical virtue of the ecological question is that it puts political issues back at the heart of the conflict, issues which, for communists, are indeed essential.

1

Concern for all human beings is thus the driving force behind a new transnationalism backed by a different conception of humanity: for most ecologists, humanity designates either a human nature, or simply the sum of human lives, thus becoming difficult to distinguish from the sum of all lives (animal and vegetable). For communists, on the other hand, humanity is a generic collective, divided upon itself.

In this sense, it is completely illusory to think that ecological disasters would affect all of humanity (when we know perfectly well that they hit the poorest of the poor countries hardest, and that the rich in the rich countries know perfectly well how to protect themselves from them) and that these disasters would therefore inevitably lead to the creation of a vast common front to confront them. As humanity is divided on itself, it's pointless to think that only oligarchs and capitalist bosses want capitalism, and that only big polluters are indifferent to the future of humanity on this Earth!

2

For us, the most interesting initiatives are those that invent a new way of living, by asking: what does it mean to live in a shared space, on land, and ultimately on a single Earth? It's worth noting that such assertions of new collective ways of living are not consensual (which is a good sign for their political consistency), and that they give rise to new enemies who come to fight them. But in these situations of defense rather than resistance, the enemies only come second by declaring themselves against a primary political affirmation and invention. This type of situation is politically far more interesting than one in which the enemy has been constituted first, and we come to oppose it by sabotage or dismantling: following the difference introduced by Kristin Ross between *resisting* and *defending*, it is politically more interesting to have to defend one's own politically organized emancipation movement than to have to resist the politically organized initiative of the enemy!

In this respect, the difference between "*living*" and "*inhabiting*" is crucial: issues of "*living*" are politically sterile, while those of "*inhabiting*" are politically stimulating. It is therefore in our interest to focus on questions of inhabiting (which go far beyond the restricted state question of "*housing*") rather than on questions of "*living on earth*".

3

The common difficulty is to link the ecological question to the social question of workers, particularly peasant workers. The hostility to ecological issues that can be found among workers is a natural con-

³ Kristin Ross: *La forme-Commune. La lutte comme manière d'habiter* (La fabrique, 2023)

⁴ p. 73

sequence of the job blackmail that bosses impose whenever ecological constraints are involved. In this respect, one of the sequences in Joris Ivens and Madeleine Loridan's film *Comment Yukong déplaça des montagnes* (*How Yukong Moved Mountains*), which takes place in Beijing's *February 7* locomotive factory, is quite exemplary: the issue of waste recovery of all kinds is dealt with from within the factory itself by the workers who produce it, and not externally and a posteriori by users or consumers!

However, as P. Guillibert⁵ points out, the question of production is a blind spot in ecological thinking, even though, as A. Malm shows, it is at the heart of production that climate disruption has historically taken root.

In view of this, the argument of degrowth, like that of production in line with needs, remains unconvincing, and is presented as a "technical" response to plug a gap.

● ● ●

⁵ Paul Guillibert: *Exploiter les vivants. Une écologie politique du travail* (Éditions Amsterdam, 2023)

FRANCIS ANCLOIS: *COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVES ON ECOLOGY?*

Following on from the cartography proposed by Camille Duquesne and Marion Bottollier, how can we politically re-examine the ecological question as communists?

To this end, we will put forward eight theses likely to guide militant work on this issue.

Eight theses

1. A Humanity

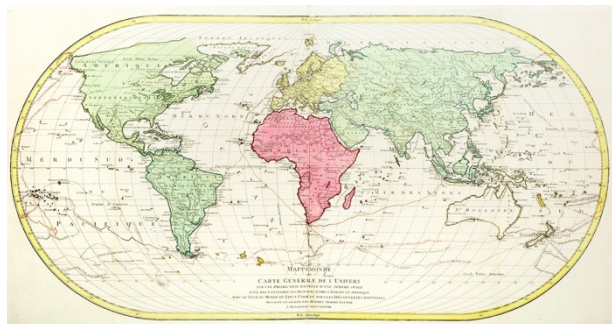
"Communism represents the cause of all humanity" (Engels).⁶

Let's call *Humanity* the collective of human beings (past, present and future) considered as generically capable of emancipating itself from the animal kingdom by producing truths, beauties and justice on an equal footing, joining the world of human beings and thereby extending it.

Inevitably, this collective is antagonistically divided over this characterization of Humanity and the desire to live up to this very capacity: Humanity is the dialectical unity of two frontally opposed positions on what it is capable of.

- Mathematically speaking, this "collective of human beings" is a *class* rather than a *whole*, because strictly speaking, it's not a question here of "totalizing" human beings (which would imply first specifying what "a human being" is, a politically perilous and sterile undertaking, and then being able to list them in their entirety, an absurd undertaking). Humanity is here *described* as collective, *specified* as generic and *characterized* by a capacity whose problematic realization is precisely what determines it.
- *Humanity*, then, is not "*humanity*", that particular animal species (e.g. a talking species) or that singular quality (the one referred to when we speak of "*acting humanely*").

2. An Earth



There is an Earth that makes up a physical globality, which cannot be reduced to a collection of territories, a juxtaposition of soils and subsoils, a sum of climates and atmospheres, an addition of landscapes and continents. In other words, there is an Earth because the Earth is one: it constitutes a single Globe, i.e. a single global system, physically-chemically-biologically coordinated.

⁶ *The situation of the working class in England in 1844*

Let's call *Earth* the global unity of this planet that Humanity inhabits.

- *The Earth* is not "*the earth*", as the agronomists call it, and even less so that of Pétain ("*the earth doesn't lie!*").
- Nor is *the earth* the Greek goddess *Gaia*, matriarchal emblem of a living organism.

3. The relationship between them

Although mankind has inhabited this Earth for almost 200,000 years, it's only recently that we've really come to realize how we interact with it, with this global system with its own autonomous physical laws.

Let's call *ecology* the way we think about these interactions between Humanity as one and the Earth as a whole.

4. Intrication relationships

Humanity-Earth interaction is an *intrication*, a particular mode of interaction that tightens up the old dialectic of an exterior (environment) interacting with an interior ("*external causes operate through the intermediary of internal causes*"⁷): intrication does not maintain the exterior/interior disjunction without indifferenciating it; it joins interior/exterior without merging them.

Let's call two things or two operations *entangled* their cross-interaction, which intertwines the two initially separate interiorities, but does not merge them and merge the things or operations concerned.

For example:

- that to inhabit a place is to make it one's own by taking the time - *one's own time* - to wander through it and occupy it, to wander through it and settle in it, thus interweaving a lived time with a subjectivized space.
- that integrating social ways of working and living in a country constitutes a social way of populating the Earth.

More restrictively, we'll call the *intrication* of an external environment with the things it contains (we'll call it *environment* \otimes *things*) the cross-interaction by which the environment acts on the very interior of the things concerned, thus erasing their initial separation without merging with them.

- Mathematics formalizes intrication by the notion of *tensor*. Hence the decision to note intrication by the sign \otimes of the tensor product. As we'll come back to in the sixth point, this product is not commutative: $A \otimes B \neq B \otimes A$. In other words, intricating A with B is not exactly the same as intricating B with A.
- Architecture thus deploys its own modalities of intrication between the buildings it constructs and the places in which they are located: its primary requirement is to entwine the place with the building (the building being its essential target), while the landscape architect, on the other hand, orientates himself by primarily entwining various human activities with a "naturally" (geographically, geologically, agronomically, climatically, atmospherically) constituted place (his essential target being this place).

⁷ Mao: *On contradiction* (1937)

5. One World

This interweaving of Humanity and the Earth constitutes a single World, beyond the irreducible diversity of situations, countries and particular "worlds" that make it up.

Let's call *the World* the intrication between Humanity-One and the Global Earth.

Communist ecology will be the thought of this *entangled* world.

- This World is not a world in the usual sense (the world of this metropolis or that human activity) or even in the philosophical sense of *Logiques des mondes* (the world as a given "there is", and internally endowed with its own logic of objective existence⁸). Ultimately, our World here is a political creation: one that, supporting the cause of the political unity of Humanity (a unity, it should be remembered, that is violently denied by its internal enemies, and therefore by no means self-evident), undertakes to politically orient this intrication.
- This World is not the integration of Humanity into "a community of the living", or even "a communism of the living" or "biocommunism" - there's an abject version of this problematic that considers "*pigs to be part of the working class*"⁹, in truth in line with a capitalist orientation that now proposes that we "*live and think like pigs*" (Gilles Châtelet¹⁰).

6. Two asymmetrical ratios

Enlightened by tensorial mathematics, we distinguish between Humanity intertwining with the Earth and the Earth intertwining with Humanity.

We'll put forward the working hypothesis: in the contradiction between *Humanity* \otimes *Earth* and *Earth* \otimes *Humanity* (i.e. in the dialectical unity of these two modes of intrication),

- the main aspect of *rural spaces* is the interweaving of Humanity and the Earth;
- the main aspect of *urban spaces* is the inverse intrication of Earth and Mankind.

The consequence of this hypothesis: if, for communists, the town/country contradiction (10,000 years old: the age of the Neolithic) must be reduced, it is not self-evident that it is destined to disappear, on Earth at least, i.e. as long as Humanity has not moved on to populate other planets (1,000 years?), other solar systems (10,000 years?), other galaxies (100,000 years?) and other galaxy clusters (1,000,000 years?).000 years?), other solar systems (10,000 years?), other galaxies (100,000 years?), other galaxy clusters (1,000,000 years?)...

7. An indelible contradiction

If, for us communists, the dialectic between Humanity and the Earth is irreducible, then the dialectic between town and country is undoubtedly just as irreducible: if it must be politically revolutionized - "reduced" in the canonical Marxist formulation - this does not mean that we must necessarily aim for its pure and simple political abolition: the communist orientation is by no means the project of a generalized uniformization or homogenization, starting with the diversity of peoples, languages and countries, which it is in no way a question of erasing!

⁸ Technically speaking: that Transcendental which is a specific object of the world under consideration.

⁹ Proposal quoted by P. Guilibert on page 173 of *Exploiter les vivants* (Éditions Amsterdam, 2023)

¹⁰ In other words, the proposal of "a humanity that would no longer be anything more than the statistical sum of panellized citizens and standing neurons devoured by boredom and envy": G. Châtelet: *Vivre et penser comme des porcs* (Living and thinking like pigs). Éditions Exils (1998); republished by Gallimard (Folio Actuel, 2000).

In other words, revolutionizing the great difference between town and country means transforming the antagonistic nature of the political contradiction between town and country in the capitalist orientation into a non-antagonistic contradiction in the communist orientation.

Let's posit that the one Humanity, politically divided over its capacities and strategic destiny, must politically deal with its major internal differentiations, not to erase them but to emancipate them from intercapitalist competition, rivalry and war, and reorient them according to principles of equality, cooperation and justice.

- Thus, the contradiction between manual labor and intellectual labor must be reoriented (not erased or dissolved) so that it no longer constitutes an operator of hierarchy, domination, subordination and social oppression between separate professions, but rather a duality of ways of working, practiced by each and everyone according to the Marxist perspective of the "polymorphous worker": he who *"hunts in the morning, fishes in the afternoon, herds cattle in the evening, criticizes after dinner, as he pleases, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic"* (Marx, *The German Ideology*).
- All the same, the contradiction between men and women must be politically emancipated from patriarchy and matriarchy (the domination of one sex by the other, according to the general logic that war is inevitable between the two sexes), without being erased or dissolved into some sterile "unisex".
- The same is undoubtedly true of the town/country contradiction, which communist treatment would not aim to erase in the form of those sinister "rurban" spaces that today's capitalism is multiplying. But it's hard for communists to say much more at the moment!

8. At the heart of the Chinese Communist Revolution

If it's true that the Humanity/Earth and City/Countryside dialectics are in some way related to the Workers/Farmers dialectic, then it's clear that the latter dialectic was central to the Chinese Communist Revolution (1958-1976), and that the failure of this Revolution seems to be largely due to the fact that the political obstacles encountered in its revolutionary handling could not be overcome.

Hence the political importance today of putting the communist treatment of these three dialectics back on the militant agenda.

In China, the peasants' own political capacity:

- was an essential political feature of its *Democratic* Revolution (1928-1949).
- was then progressively downgraded during its *Socialist* Revolution (from 1953 onwards), as the "Stalinist" orientation of socialist planning more or less transformed these peasants into agricultural workers on state farms, thereby socially "proletarianizing" them;
- was reaffirmed in 1958 with the invention of the People's Communes, which launched the *Communist* Revolution proper (1958-1976);
- Throughout the 18 years of this Communist Revolution, the peasants had different political statuses: the peasants' own political capacity was successively the driving force (until the Lushan conference in the summer of 1959), only to be restricted by the Party-State Right until the moment (late 1965) when the question of how to take it into account on a large scale was raised again. This led to innumerable political debates (November 1965 - April 1966), culminating in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), in which the political capacity of the peasants and countryside was de facto subordinated to that of the workers and cities, the leading political factor now being redirected towards the political capacity of student youth (Red Guards: summer 1966 - summer 1968) and workers (Shanghai Commune: early 1967);
- In the end, the peasants' own political capacity became the first repressive political target of the return of capitalism to China, since in 1977, the People's Communes were simply eliminated without further ado.

Future prospects?

Let's come to a provisional conclusion on this short stage of our long, oriented march: these theses or working hypotheses, and the contradictions/dialectics they attempt to clarify, could help us think about where precisely we **stand** today in the long political history of communist orientation.

It's clear that we're embarking on a vast project, which for the moment is framed by a wide gap: on the one hand, a factual inventory of existing ecological positions; on the other, an abstract series of highly conceptual proposals, with no concrete militant perspectives to reduce this maximum gap.

The general hypothesis would then be that, at the point where Humanity is today politically rendered, we could, in the terms previously defined, pose this double prescription for our 21st century: not only will there be no true ecological politics other than communist, but, conversely, there will also be no true communist politics other than ecological.

...

[FACING NIHILISM]

PARIS, FEBRUARY 3, 2024: FRANCO-TUNISIAN DAY

(org. Hayet Ben Charrada, François Nicolas, Alain Rallet and Rudolf di Stefano)

mamuphi seminar (mathematics-music-philosophy)

Ircam, Paris (France) - Shannon room

<http://www.entretiens.asso.fr/2023-2024/>**Program****MORNING (10am-1pm)**

- François **Nicolas**: *What is a point to hold?*
- Alain **Rallet** and Rudolf di **Stefano**: *Defying nihilism?*
- Hayet **Ben Charrada**: *Tunisia at the crossroads of languages: Tunisian, French and Arabic*

AFTERNOON (2:30 pm - 5:30 pm)

- Reine **Cohen**: *The point of enunciation in psychiatry*
- Valérie **Lozac'h-Legendre**: *School as a possible place of emancipation*
- Guillaume **Nicolas**: *The point of vernacular architecture*
- Gabriel **Gauthé**: *The point of study for today's intellectual youth*
- **General discussion**

Sales pitch**F. Nicolas: *What is a point to hold?***

The challenge will be to clarify what *point to hold* means.

We'll do this by putting forward ten formal characteristics of the subjective type of point we're concerned with today. We will examine these characteristics in the light of mathematics - those of complex analysis (Cauchy-Weierstrass), topos theory (Grothendieck) and synthetic differential geometry (Lawvere) - and in the shadow of philosophy (Badiou's *Logiques des mondes*).

Strictly speaking, such a formulation cannot be deduced from mathematics and philosophy, but its deployment can be clarified and assured by leaning on them.

1. A point, in the *modern* sense, has **interiority and thickness**; it is therefore no longer, like the *classical* (Euclidean) point, dimensionless. [Grothendieck...]

A *modern* point has an internal composition.

2. Such a point is **constituted by the** particular **space** (situation, world) of which it will become the point; it is therefore no longer a *constituent* of a general abstract space as was the classical (Euclidean) point.

Every *modern* point is a point of a given space from which it originates.

3. Such a point **emerges from an "interior"**, from "its" interior (or micro-situation included in the starting space) as a kind of "conscious" limit of an infinitesimal and "unconscious" Brownian motion (of a microscopic "*neighborhood*"), like the outcropping tip of an iceberg. [Lawvere...]

The *modern* dot is a point, making an exceptional breakthrough in the regularity of the space from which it springs.

4. The type of point we're dealing with is **a point of view**, i.e. a point coupled to a vector: a micro-arrow precisely located in the space concerned.

In our sense, such a point is subjectively invested. In so doing, it mutates from an objective existence in the space (situation, world) concerned to a subjective *ek-existence* that stands (*sistere*) beyond (*ek*) this objective existence, exceeding it immanently.

5. In so doing, such a type of point engages **strict alternatives**: that of its actual existence and *ek-sistence*, and that of the meaning of its vector. [Badiou...]

Such a point is a point of subjective bifurcation, of binary decision.

6. **One makes** such a point **one's own** - this point becomes "one's" point - by embarking with it (to intervene in the given situation according to the prescription formulated by this point) and not by claiming to master it according to some objective examination overhanging the situation concerned.

A point of this kind, which requires a subject's commitment, is a subjective cause.

7. Holding this point as "one's" point initiates **a dynamic**: that of making it work in the situation that constituted it. Holding it therefore does not consist in camping, entrenching or fortifying oneself in it, but in moving in the situation concerned in the direction locally prescribed by its initial vector, so as to trace out a path that the point will not have predefined, but that it will be able to "invent" as it works in the situation. [Cauchy-Weierstrass...]

This type of point is a point of oriented intervention, not according to an a priori goal to be reached (strictly speaking, we don't know where we're going, even if we know perfectly well in which direction we're moving), but according to a direction engaging movement.

8. Retroactively, **the path traced according to this point** will be the envelope of points of view ("vectors") successively supported, step by step, in the situation.

Holding your ground - in other words, "*standing your ground*" in the situation in question - will be measured by the course you set.

9. Keeping one's point from close to close will enable you to **link two** distinct and initially disjointed (in the situation in question) spatio-temporal **locations** along the same red thread, the same common thread.

In this way, the aim is to create a *region*, oriented by the same guiding idea: the one indicated by the point at the outset, and inventively and flexibly materialized by its path.

10. Achieving this kind of region represents **a subjective victory** over confinement (i.e., confinement in a "local action" that has renounced any real global ambition) and materializes a hope: the point, thus held from one end of the region it has invented to the other, materializes the materialist promise that this (regional) journey can be inventively extended to the global scale of the world concerned.

A point of this kind, infinitesimally local in origin, is the chance, subjectively offered, to *ek-sist* in a given situation by legitimately aiming for a global transformation of this situation: by extending it, by adding a new region materializing the persevering and creative work of an idea, with a global reach, courageously supported from one end of this region to the other.

All in all, the subjective *ek-sistence* thus engaged by this type of point in situation will be based on the courage to *stand firm on one's point*!

A. Rallet and R. di Stefano: *Defying nihilism?*

This event is a continuation of the *Rencontres franco-tunisiennes*, which had the same objective and were held in Nabeul, Tunisia, at the beginning of March 2023¹.

The common **challenge** of these encounters: what to say, how to position oneself and what to do in the face of contemporary nihilism?

Every day, we experience the pain of this grip. Every day brings its share of subjective devastation. Nihilism is no longer just a philosophical horizon; it's also a lived experience in the face of an onslaught of negative events that call into question the very destiny of humanity: pandemics, destruction of the planet by an endless race for profit, local wars heralding a world war between powers, geopolitical upheavals, politicians running headless, growing inequalities... In this threatening context, nihilism thrives, for want of a collective political capacity to formulate and implement an emancipatory path.

Nihilism thrives in two forms identified by Nietzsche. The *passive* form of nihilism ("*not will at all*") is based on simple animal survival, making do with what exists, with what there is, and riding out the storms without even necessarily believing in them. The *active* form ("*will the Nothing*") is driven by a fascination with destruction, war and annihilation, and the morbid pleasure that can be derived from them. Whatever its form, nihilism fosters a generalized mistrust in humanity's ability to rise above its primitive instincts, to build a collective emancipating power.

However, it is not possible today to wage a global battle against it: that would imply a collective strength that is lacking today since the failures of emancipatory policies in the last century. Moreover, the nihilistic outburst was only made possible by these failures.

But that doesn't condemn us to impotence and inaction.

"Keeping nihilism at bay", "*taking a step to the side*" will then designate a subjective position outside the grip of nihilism, capable of reconstituting, step by step, point by point, the perspectives of a renewed confidence in humanity based on singular, inventive declarations, subjectively rooted in the lives of those who enunciate them.

The challenge here is not to formulate a few general principles, but to assume, in a given situation, a subjective position that is the object of a prolonged commitment, courageously keeping at bay the impasses of renunciation, of "*what's the point?*", concretely developing the image of possible alternatives to what exists, even if these possibilities appear minuscule in the face of the devastated landscape of the contemporary world: there are no small victories in a world overwhelmed by nihilism. For the strength of such positions lies in their ability to be recognized by others, not so that they do the same thing, but so that they in turn are encouraged either to express their own subjective point of view in their own field and situation, or to share the point(s) they already hold.

Our aim, then, is not to create a "program" that would be the sum of all the points subjectively held, but to create around them a network of friendship and fraternity that works to get to know and recognize each other by acquiring mutual trust. The challenge is to build a collective trust that will enable us to move on from the greatness of isolation, the greatness of the person who, in his work, in his art, in his scientific activity, in his relationships, in his daily life and passions, holds the affirmative force of a point - and there are many of them, as we know, to move from this greatness to the emergence of a collective force which, while not immediately capable of transforming the general situation, will nevertheless be able to stand up as a subjective force, capable of clearing the leaden atmosphere of ambient nihilism at a few points, of shaking off this mortifying atmosphere.

In doing so, we need to project this shared strength by inspiring collective confidence through the examples we set - limited and circumscribed examples, to be sure, but full of creative modesty and emancipatory potential.



¹ <http://www.entretiens.asso.fr/Defier-le-nihilisme/>

[ARTS]

ÉRIC BRUNIER: *PERSPECTIVES ON COLORS*

I can't precisely date when, in the history of painting, colors took on the constructive role I give them. That doesn't prevent me from asserting that this new role is at the root of pictorial modernity. At some point in the 19th century, a few paintings clearly showed that color variations were what organized them. For a few painters, rare at first, then increasingly numerous, this new force acquired by colors served as a guide. History has turned this into a conflict between color and drawing, on the model of the one that took place in the 17th century within the Académie des Beaux-Arts. It has also schematized it in the opposition between Ingres, the neo-classical master of drawing, and Delacroix, promoted as the leader of the Romantics. But this obscures the fact that Ingres was a great colorist and Delacroix an immense draughtsman.

Two points are worth noting from this brief review. On the one hand, the fact that color has established itself as the main force in the composition of the painting has not meant the suppression of drawing: it has brought to light new principles of composition in which drawing also plays a part. On the other hand, the fundamental point is perhaps less the color event - it is almost always to be rediscovered or reinvented, endangered either by excess or withdrawal - than fidelity to this event: this requires holding on to points and a course.

The reflections that follow identify the traces of this fidelity and the transformations it imposes on both painting and drawing.

These traces can also be measured, this time in writing, by comparing the rhythms of the new song with those of the colors: just as they have imposed themselves against the linearity of design, so a less oratorical style of writing must reflect them. It often occurs to me that it's through writing and reading, especially poetry, that I look at painting. I invite my readers to follow similar exercises.

How colors structure paint

Several images show how colors structure painting.

The first, poetic, unfolds under the gaze of a poet at his window between a here and a there, where the here of the vines becomes empurpled with the trees of the distance, *wie Bäume Blüt umkränzet*, when blood and flower crown the top. The poet has withdrawn to his tower, and the world through the window becomes a blaze to him as he withdraws. One day, he stands in the half-light of his room and the leaves of the vines turn crimson. It's not that they light up in the sunset, but the splendor of the trees, which he perceives from a distance, illuminates them. The colors of a world are also its perspective, the experience of distance. Colors are a flame, whose enthusiastic presence lives on in the disappearance of things that will return, like the cycle of the seasons, the decline and return of daylight, the beating of the tides, the work of men. Colors thunder with the force of revolutions. Here, they realize what the distance promises, because they have been crushed, mixed, blended and applied.

The second shows a geometric structure with no stable axis, no duplicable symmetry, a structure similar to circles in water, to eddies. There is no doubt that painting has developed in a dialectic with what lies beyond, beyond the wall, then the wall, the canvas, beyond the place itself. But this beyond is inherent to the situation of the work and of those who look at it. It is a dynamic, the tension between several points. The relationship between these points forms the perspective. There are several types of perspective: natural perspective, and what geometric painters of the quattrocento called legitimate perspective. Modern geometry has developed new perspectives that are no longer based on optics. All these perspectives are linear. Yet colors also create a form of perspective, a tension between different points. This time, it's more of a chord, almost musical, between the center and what appears distant. The tone is then firmly maintained through each relationship. The figure, the scene, is already being kneaded into new alloys, and materials both abundant and worked can merge, and from the finished figure alone the bridge will be thrown that from the night sky, fleeing, illuminates this new center, this point of attraction, which is the luminous protrusion. There are colored perspectives, expansive like a river whose delta flares out or the roads criss-crossing the contours of mountains, vivid like the garden

with its beds of roses, mallows and lilacs that a couple crosses, as tight as the murmur of a trickle. There are colored perspectives whose beyond awakens like the echo of a physical, pigmentary presence.

The third is linked to common experiences and the physiology of falling asleep. Thin rods of color shoot out from the bottomless darkness of closed eyes. Even when half-asleep, these colorful myriads continue their phosphorescence, dancing past the eyes before fading into the dark, calm depths of the room. The colors appear, only to disappear without allowing themselves to be fixed. Phosphenes are like the ideas that illuminate a night, precise when they spring from sleep, and clumsy, sometimes impossible to straighten when it comes to stopping them in the outline of a sentence. The painter would then be happier than the writer when the task is to fix the indeterminate. His colors come in shades, and his intelligence enhances the one that fades with another that invigorates it. The painter's colors possess two properties. Their value lies first and foremost in their relationships, and they are always susceptible to variation. The vocabulary has recorded this flexibility. The six generic colors - black, white, red, blue, green and yellow - are referred to as tones or shades; the five main blends - gray, violet, orange, pink and brown - are referred to as halftones; and finally, all those colors whose name is first and foremost that of something - fuchsia, amber or azure - are referred to as nuances.

These three images showing how colors structure painting can be summed up in three properties. They are indeterminacy (or variation), relationship and perspective. A color in painting is always indeterminate in itself. It is its relationship to others and to its environment that determines its value. Finally, this relationship opens up a perspective, creating a dynamic between colors and even between planes in the painting. Colors should be seen as moving figures of place.

Two paintings



Self-portrait with palette
Goya (1790-95)
Madrid Academy of Fine Arts



Woman at the window
Friedrich (1820)
Gemäldegalerie Berlin

Modern painting has become fully aware of this particular color structure and has chosen to exploit its resources. The effects are manifold, as a comparison of two paintings will show. The first is Goya's *Self-Portrait with Palette* (1790-95), now at the Madrid Academy of Fine Arts. The second is Friedrich's *Woman at the Window*, dated 1820 and housed at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. What interests me in these two paintings is the proximity of the device used to present the scene. In both cases, a figure is depicted in the foreground, against the light of a window. They are also two small vertical paintings (about 45 cm high by 30 cm wide), from which an impression of monumentality emerges through the strength of the contrast between foreground and background. The pose, and above all the body,

stands out with its variegated colors against an almost uniform background. However, there are three opposites between the two paintings. One is the gender of the figures painted, a man for Goya and a woman for Friedrich; the other is the direction of the gaze, towards the viewer or from the front for Goya, and towards the background for Friedrich; and the last is the window, large in both cases (almost half the surface), but closed and opaque in the self-portrait, open at the bottom with a shutter system for the first third, and closed and transparent for the upper two-thirds in the painting of the woman at the window.

Three oppositions

Let's come back to these three oppositions.

Windows

First, the window. In Goya's work, the window has a lost edge at the top and on the right, with irregular bars made of the same milky-white, almost dirty paste, allowing the broad, generous brushstroke to shine through. This window is merely the white glow of light, whose daylight illuminates not so much the scene as the painting, the making of the painting that is its subject. For the painting depicts a painter at work, standing in the center. While his eyes are turned in our direction, his hand holds a brush, the tuft of which is concealed by the painting on an easel. Yet there seems to be a discrepancy between the brush, held like a pen and engaged in a precise stroke, and the breadth of the broad marks visible on the canvas. What we see is the picture he paints at this distance from doing. When I write that the window gives daylight to the making of painting, I realize that this is not a figure of speech in the painting, but an effectuation. The window in Friedrich's painting is quite different. First of all, it is much taller than it is wide. Its architecture is underlined by regular, fine lattices that form the geometric lines that reveal the window, while its transparency opens onto the distance. In fact, the entire painting seems to be constructed as a succession of parallel planes that fit into one another: the wall of the room, then the niche in the thickness of the wall where the window is set, and finally, a lower part of the window with shutters, one of which is open and through which a woman looks out. In this way, the window metaphorizes the gaze, with its regular diminutions clarifying perspective. It is thus the intermediary between the here of the painting and the there of the representation.

This window is the place of the gaze, where it escapes or is absent for the woman with her back to us. The absence was that of the brush tuft hidden by the painting in progress in Goya's self-portrait. In both cases, an absence is manifest, making manifest the operation of painting: its gestural doing, or its gaze.

Regards

But is it contemplation? Does a painting require us to contemplate? The opposition between the active painter, looking at himself in activity, and the woman at her window, absorbed in contemplating the activity of men as seen through the masts of ships, needs to be overcome. I could say, as Diderot might, that she is looking out onto the quayside of a commercial port, either waiting for a delivery of fabrics from which to make herself a new dress - for it is indeed the dress, whose folds are so many brushstrokes, that is the subject of Friedrich's painting - or that her beauty, her rank, her youth forbid her any active participation in the effervescent life that unfolds on the quayside. Whatever the case, her gaze, even when it's stolen in this scene, is not one of contemplation. Rather, it is the means of a dynamic incorporation through which the painting comes to life, extending from the dress, to the woman, then to the window, to the boats and even to the voyages, which I feel tell us that life is fragile, as is this woman facing this immense window that dominates her, this thick, dark wall, right down to the broad slats of the parquet floor. I don't think, however, that by showing so much in his painting of what separates presence from departure, what separates the here from the elsewhere, Friedrich has given us a new variation on a *memento mori*, that he has turned a genre scene into an allegory. I believe, on the contrary, that the painting of colors, made sculptural by the monumentality of the dress, resonates throughout the painting as an activity, albeit minimal, but measurable against the immensity of the outside world. Here, it's the colors that absorb us into the interiority of the room and the painting, and which, by engaging our eye in ceaseless activity, also push us to continual accommodations that hold the inside and the outside together.

Sexes

The final opposition is that of the sexes, and I've already said a few words about it. The painter's painting, male, active, would be opposed to the contemplative woman. This opposition is worthless. Not only is the difference between the sexes irrelevant here, but there is no difference between activity and waiting. On the contrary, in both cases, the striking feature is the colorful dress, as if the colors of the dress desexualized the representation. The colors of the dress make the woman sculptural, turning her into a body. In Goya's self-portrait, it's mainly red that bursts forth in spaced touches, contrasting with the shaded background. This red both belts the body and borders the painter's jacket. Here too, color emphasizes volume and takes on a form of bodily density. The colors, in harmony with the gesture that spreads them, give body to the painting.

Classical tradition dictates that colors are an ornament of the painting, like the costume of which the body is the design. In these two paintings, the costume has become the body, and the colors are its backbone. They both bear witness to the change that took place at the time of Romanticism, and which was to be amplified by modern painting. What exactly is this change? There's no such thing as paint without color paste, and you can't spread color without forming an outline, an edge. With Romanticism, painting came to be thought of in terms of color rather than drawing. This would be the entry into modernity, when colors think the possible of the painting. Their first victory was to make the finiteness of the painting out of the infinity of colors, to give the here an immensity that could be measured by that of the there. With this event in particular, painting emerged from the tricks of rhetoric. Colors are no longer the flowers that adorn a beautiful phrase. They are the material, combined with drawing, but forming a new discourse.



The poet at his window watches the strange contemporary situation of painting. A long queue has formed in front of the entrance to an ephemeral pavilion displaying works by the painter Kiefer around the poet Celan. He knows that the interior will be dominated by greyness, the black of soot or burns, and a few patches of white and gold. He knows that the crowd will be able to read some of the Romanian poet's enigmatic verses on the immense canvases with their earthy surfaces and thick crusts that the painter's paintings have become. The painter's garb has solidified with the earth. The colors have faded and solidified. He remembers that painting taught him that grisaille paints disappearing bodies, that which the mist invades and that memory polishes like a pebble that it rejects. The fact that today's flower is ash does not prevent a color from silently climbing out of the window. The poet who writes, like the painter who crushes colors and assembles them in the unknown of his canvas, and the one who looks with his whole body, are in full efflorescence at the faded hour.

J.-P. Lefebvre translates the last lines of a Celan poem as follows:

*I put a gem aside for a late bird:
he wears the snowflake on the red life feather;
the grain of ice in the beak, it arrives in the summer.*

Let's hope that painting offers more than just a monumental, oversized case for the colors sparse on the canvas. Let the painter be that late bird wielding a brush with a plume of blood. Let's hope that, although rare, although the era is fading, the brilliance of two nonpareil colors brought together has the brilliance of summer.



Guillaume NICOLAS: *THREE COMMUNIST REASONS TO STUDY VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE*

A section

I propose to write a column on the various issues raised by vernacular architecture that may be of interest to communist orientations.

This architecture can, provisionally, be defined by formulas such as :

- - "architecture without an architect" (Rudofksy, 1964)
- - "Architecture of the people, by the people, not for the people" (Oliver, 2003).
- - "Vernacular is everything that remains peripheral or external to the global flows of capital and everything that, willingly or unwillingly, evades its control." (Frey, 2010)



Bernard Rudofsky
Architecture without architects
 Éd. du Chêne, 1964

It's architecture designed and built¹ by the very people who are going to live in it. It therefore differs from the architecture produced by architects and other construction professionals, whether for monuments (palaces, churches, town halls, etc.) or social housing, where residents have no say in the design.

Historically - since the creation of sedentary architecture in Neolithic times - and geographically - on the scale of the ecumene, the terrestrial expanse inhabited by mankind - vernacular architecture has long been dominant everywhere, both in the countryside and in cities. It's only in the last two centuries that the development of industrial capitalism has been competing with, or even eradicating, this form of architecture, in favor of an architecture of specialized professionals: institutional clients (those who pay and commission - such as housing associations or property developers), architects and engineers

¹ If we consider the complete life cycle of a building, we must also include its maintenance, subsequent transformations and even demolition. In the case of professional architecture, each of these processes eludes the inhabitants.

(those who design by drawing and calculating) and companies of varying size (those who build - see the three international construction majors headquartered in France: Bouygues, Vinci and Eiffage).

Nevertheless, vernacular architecture is still alive and well today, in at least two forms: shanty towns in urban areas, and peasant farms in rural areas.

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I see three reasons for studying vernacular architecture today, from a communist perspective:

- it's a form of emancipatory architecture: "architecture by the people";
- it's an architecture that brings together the issues of living and working;
- it's a question that allows us to think about ecology from a socio-technical angle, particularly around the *low-tech/high-tech* polarization.

An emancipating form of architecture

Vernacular architecture carries an element of emancipation.



PIESIK Sandra (ed.),
Living on the planet. World Atlas of Traditional and Vernacular Architecture
 Ed. Flammarion, 2017

Emancipation from professional managers. Inhabitants of vernacular architecture are not subject to internal rules designed by a landlord seeking to subject their lifestyles to an imposed social norm. Yet this is what happens, for example, to residents of migrant workers' hostels transformed into social residences (Balso, 2017).

Generally speaking, vernacular dwellers have to organize themselves to make decisions concerning the life of the building: its day-to-day upkeep, its inevitable transformations to adapt to changing lifestyles, and its eventual demolition. Depending on the status of the land on which this architecture is built, they can also free themselves from an outside owner to whom they would have to pay rent.

Vernacular architecture also emancipates itself from the designers: architects and engineers. Inhabitants design their own homes in a very different way to professionals. They don't draw up sophisticated plans, nor do they engage in clever optimization calculations, but often start from a "type", an architectural model that is commonly practiced in their historical and geographical environment. They then adapt this type to their needs, even improving it with a few discoveries that contribute to its slow, collective evolution (cf. Correla, 2014).

Finally, vernacular architecture does not entrust its construction to a specialized firm. The building site is a collective social practice, organized by the inhabitants with the contribution of their community. There's nothing to prevent the involvement of a craftsman who has mastered one or other of the more technical aspects of the project, but the latter acts as a supervisor and transmitter of know-how. Unlike the work sites of professional architects, which are subject to the cadence of the site supervisor, vernacular work sites are not just moments of labor, but can be enriched by cultural practices such as song and dance to counterbalance the inevitable drudgery of certain construction tasks. The very division between design and realization tends to be blurred, since some design decisions can be discussed and amended during realization, since realization is not, in the *final analysis*, under the absolute control of design.

Combining living and working

The spatial separation and functional specialization organized by capitalism between housing and factory is often much less clear-cut in the case of vernacular architecture, which tends to blend housing and work. This may be true in the case of urban artisanal production architecture. But it is particularly salient in the case of rural agricultural architecture, which accounts for the vast majority of pre-industrial vernacular architecture and is concerned with production and living (cf. Guindani Doepper, 1990).

Contemporary agricultural architecture is therefore a privileged place to study how a certain type of peasant production can be organized along lines that seek to emancipate themselves from capitalism and invent forms of peasant autonomy and/or collaboration. The way in which the farm is inhabited is then guided as much by personal or family considerations as by questions of agricultural production.

Polarizing the ecological issue

Last but not least, vernacular architecture also tends to contrast with professional and commercial architecture in terms of the technical means and resources it mobilizes. While the latter benefits from substantial financial resources² enabling it to produce, then transport and finally use heavy, energy-intensive industrial materials (concrete being the paragon), the former has to make do with a poverty of means that forces it to resort to local materials, which may be less efficient, but are more virtuous in ecological terms, and which assume the transformation of the landscape that their production entails.

Today, vernacular architecture is part of what we call "low-tech", in the sense of accessible, useful and sustainable. (cf. the Lowtech Lab, for example).

Beyond settling the high-tech VS low-tech question, this point has the merit of putting the technical and therefore material issue back at the heart of the debate, and making it appropriable by local residents, whereas professional architecture tends to confiscate it from them and entrust it to experts.

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Contributions to this section on the study of vernacular architecture will vary in form (conference reports, course presentations, testimonials) and subject (agricultural architecture, squat architecture, etc.).

² It could even be argued that professional architecture is one of capitalism's main outlets, hence the profligacy of resources (cf. Harvey, 2011 or Gaudreau, 2020).

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Guillaume NICOLAS is an architect. He has explored this discipline in a variety of ways: as a *practitioner* from 2005 to 2020 (in an agency and then on his own), as an *activist* from 2014 to 2020 (with the "Ouvriers du monde, architectes de paix" collective, the *École des Actes* and the *didattica* association), as a *teacher* since 2014 (currently at the École d'architecture de Normandie) and as a *researcher* since 2021 (thesis in progress on contemporary agricultural constructions in Normandy).



[THINGS SEEN]

SERGE PEKER: “ *THE BEAUTY OF THE DAY* ”

Le Gang du bois des temples
Film by Rabah Ameur Zaïmeche (2023)

Le Gang du bois des temples opens with a long, circular panorama over the rooftops of Paris. Various monuments scroll by, as does a funfair Ferris wheel with multicolored lights, seen in the distant background. This is followed by another panorama of a suburban housing estate, the Cité du Bois des Temples. The circular horizontality of the Parisian panorama is matched by the gray, homogeneous verticality of the suburban panorama. This opposition acts as a divide: on one side, the city open to the shimmering lights of a funfair Ferris wheel; on the other, the housing estate closed in by the dull verticality of blocks of flats featuring the dreary repetition of identically pierced windows.

Behind one of these windows, a man standing in a narrow corridor appears to be deep in thought. His presence imposes itself on the screen in its mute compactness. Only gradually do we come to understand that this man, in his fifties, is waiting for an ambulance to pick up a corpse. The identity of the corpse and the conditions of its death are, for the moment, as obscure as the scene as a whole. We then enter a church, where the same distraught man attends the funeral of a loved one who remains unknown to us. It's not until our fifty-something meets up with a group of thirty-something friends that we learn that the deceased was his mother, aged over eighty, who died in her sleep. Each member of this group of thirty-somethings remembers the affection and little attentions this woman used to show them when they were children.

Our knowledge is therefore only satisfied once we have traversed the opaque compactness of an enigmatic reality. The world of the city is thus presented to us in a primordial unawareness, a kind of airlock that is necessary before we can orient ourselves. The city is not given to us straightaway. We have to get used to it before we can see it. What we discover is a world woven of affectionate relationships in which love, friendship and the desire to live for oneself and others occupy a central place. The remainder of this long, introductory prologue will simply reiterate what is essential.

Like Robins des bois, these thirty-somethings are going to steal a fortune from a Saudi prince. The fetish effect of this money makes these thirty-somethings feel alive. This effect gives them the impression of another possible life: another life for themselves, their families and their friends. The prince, who resists nothing and can offer himself anything without even opening his mouth, will liquidate the temple wood gang one by one. The last one will be murdered in prison.



While this last survivor is stretching his legs by running around the few square meters assigned to strolling time, wild, bestial cries can be heard coming from the prison windows. The prison is like a rabbit cage. This animality constitutes the heterogeneity of an entire population parked like animals. The city reflects back to its inhabitants only the image of their captivity. I'm thinking of the shot in which the companion of one of the murdered gang members looks out of the window of an RER carriage that takes her back to the city, seeing only her face, captive in its reflection.

The gang's friend, the 50-year-old, will take justice into his own hands by killing the Saudi prince. But just before he is shot, the prince and his steward visit a gallery of paintings depicting the streets of a city. *"I love this light in the background,"* says the steward, pointing to a painting. This light in the background is indeed the light we see in this city of temple wood: the light of love, friendship and loyalty that binds gang members and city dwellers alike. Not a homogeneous light, but a light as multicolored as that of the wheel seen in the distance in the Paris panorama. But it's also a colorful light that provides the backdrop for the Annkrist singer who, in the church, replaces the priest's words at her mother's funeral to sing *"La beauté du jour"* (*The beauty of the day*)¹, love and the *"ardent desire that surpasses us"*.



Le Gang du bois des temples shows us *"the beauty of the day"* through the background light that gradually penetrates the entire thickness of the film. But we still need to feel this *"burning desire"* that allows us to go beyond the obscure compactness of a reality that surpasses us.

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¹ Annkrist song title

[STUDIES]

François NICOLAS: COMMUNIST ORIENTATION

Let's proceed in two steps: first, let's formulate generally what *orienting oneself in a given space (world, situation)* means; then, let's specify what *orienting oneself politically as a communist in the contemporary world* means.

What does *it mean to orientate oneself in a given space?*

Let's first explain what it means to *orientate a given space (world, situation)*, and then what it means to *orientate oneself in it*.

I.a - What does it mean to orientate a given space?**1. Axiom**

The general approach will be to focus on the orientation of a given space in terms of what is supported as possible, in terms of its possibilities and not just its actualities. Correlatively, the operation of orienting a given space is subordinated to the prior decision that in this space (this world, this situation), "*there is not only what there is*", because, in addition to what is effective in the eyes of all, there are also possibilities whose very existence is disputed. Indeed, these possibilities in situation are not unanimously accepted in the same way as effectivities are: these situated possibilities do not constitute indubitable "facts": their existence divides consciences and is affirmed in inevitable adversities.

2. Events

The existence, decided rather than simply observed, of such possibilities attached to a given space stems from an event (immanent to this space) that has brought them to light, in eclipse.

Hence the new global possibility of orienting this space differently, of reorienting it: no longer according to its proven cartography, according to its established order, but henceforth according to these new possibilities that the event in question has fleetingly revealed.

3. Dimensions

Orienting a space in this way, according to the fleeting flash of new intrinsic possibilities, implies that thought unfolds these possibilities in different dimensions, which the orientation operation will then be responsible for adding to the dimension of effectivities, capable of taking the common measure of the whole (of what is effectively given and what is effected).

In other words, orienting a given space (a world, a situation) according to its new, event-driven possibilities implies conceiving it as a space extended to dimensions of a new type (those of different types of possibilities) added to an initial dimension measuring overall effectivity in this space.

The precise formalization of this type of extended space is a matter for modern mathematics: that of complex magnitudes ($1+1=2$ dimensions) and that of quaternions ($3+1=4$ dimensions). We'll take a closer look at this formalization in the next issue of the magazine, focusing, for reasons we'll come back to later, on the second, more extensive case: that of $3+1+4$ dimensions.

For the moment, let's remember that we're talking about interweaving a 3D "vector" with a "scalar" measure of effectivity in these three vector dimensions: the simplest image of this is modern space-time, which intricates the three ordinary dimensions $\{x, y, z\}$ of classical physical space at a time t parametrizing the set $\{[x, y, z]+t\}$, so as to take a global measurement according to the synthetic norm $x^2+y^2+z^2-c^2t^2$.

We'll see how, for humanity as a whole, the communist orientation thus interweaves 4 ($3+1$) ways of emancipating ourselves from capitalist domination by revolutionizing, in the contemporary world, the different ways of *working*, of *inhabiting* a country, of *populating* the earth according to

norms other than those of capitalism, of commodity and monetary exchange, of profit and competition, and finally of organizing politically to collectively govern this general revolutionization, capitalist norms of commodity and monetary exchange, profit and competition, and finally *to organize* politically *in* order to collectively govern this general revolutionization (indeed, in politics, organization is the measure of effective political work). All in all, we'll posit that humanity *orientates itself* politically by intriguing the revolution, uninterrupted and in stages, of these 3+1 social activities:

orientate: (work ⊗ live ⊗ populate) ⊕ organize.

I.b - What does it mean *to orientate in a pre-orientated space*?

In order to orient oneself (an individual or collective *self*) in a space previously oriented according to the preceding principles, we must first find our bearings and situate ourselves within it.

The next step is to determine, on the basis of an overall strategic perspective, which immediate direction to turn in, and to initiate action from that point.

The interweaving of these two times configures a localized vector in a globally oriented and strategically apprehended space.

Orienting oneself in no way implies determining, at the point at which one is located, a complete detailed route, a fully traced path leading to some precisely located term in the space in question. Rather, it's a matter of moving from one point to the next, being able at all times to determine, in the light of a global compass, which local direction to adopt according to the orientation strategically adopted. Finding one's bearings is therefore a matter of constant invention, not just comprehensive planning and programming.

All in all, orientation in a given space involves:

- to orientate this space globally (by the intrication of 3+1 meaningful dimensions);
- to situate itself in this oriented reference frame;
- to determine a local direction, a starting point for a strategically-configured intervention.

Two formal complements

Before turning to communist orientation in the contemporary world, let's take a look at two formal complements that modern mathematics teaches us.

A principle of self-limitation

Not every given space is orientable, and some spaces are intrinsically unorientable (the simplest mathematical example is the Möbius strip).

The immediate consequence for us is that not every situation can be politicized! ¹

In particular, not every subjective situation is subjective (especially since subjective structures are often Moebiusian!).

A principle of binary opposition

If a space is orientable, then it is orientable in two (and only two) opposite ways. ²

No less immediate consequence for us: if a social situation is politicizable, then it is so according to a strictly binary logic of two opposing paths: *capitalist/communist*.

¹ Similarly, not every situation is "sexually" orientable (the division of the two sexes does not necessarily have an orienting function in every situation in which it operates).

² The mathematical idea is this: if there is an orientation, then the scalar dimension (measuring uniformly the dimensions of the possibilities) allows us to derive a determinant (for the matrix of all the dimensions of the space in question), which is a positive or negative number (if it were zero, the space would not be orientable). So every orientation leading to the determinant Δ corresponds to an inverse orientation corresponding to the determinant $-\Delta$.

Caution: let's not draw from this essential binarity the false idea that it would suffice to clarify the specific characteristics of the capitalist orientation to obtain, by simple inversion, the antagonistic communist orientation! Indeed, while in classical mathematical logic, double negation is equivalent to affirmation (*minus*minus=plus*), this is no longer at all the case in the logic of a world or situation, so that anti-capitalism alone cannot constitute the communist orientation: the strict ideological inversion of the major capitalist determinations (competition → cooperation, subordination → autonomy, dependence → independence, exploitation → self-management, etc.) is in no way sufficient to characterize the communist path in a politically effective way.

Precisely, we're going to see how anti-capitalism (which has been a *constant* of communist politics since 1848) has historically been concretized and deepened in three successive affirmative *variants of the* communist orientation, even though this same communist orientation has never ceased to display its anti-capitalism in 3+1 invariant dimensions:

- 1) abolition of private ownership of the (major) means of production and land;
- 2) resolving major social and spatial divisions (manual and intellectual labor, town and country, etc.);
- 3) internationalist rejection of competition, rivalry and wars between peoples and countries;
- 4) State decline.

What does it mean to *be politically oriented in today's world*?

We'll confine ourselves here to examining what it means to *orientate the contemporary world politically*, deferring to other developments the examination of the other two questions, less general but no less difficult, which this time make up an ***orientate oneself*** :

- where do we, the communists of this magazine, stand in today's politically oriented world?
- In this location, which local direction will they turn, and in which direction will they commit their own intervention in relation to their overall strategic orientation?

Introductory remarks

Policy

Here, *communist orientation* is understood as a *political* orientation: it's about directing the *political* work of communists to organize a revolutionary transformation of the contemporary world based on a strategic emancipation of Humanity. In other words, communist orientation concerns *militant* thought (and not purely speculative or geopolitical thought) aimed at the *political* reorientation of the contemporary world.

Adversity

Every political orientation is constituted in adversity to another political orientation: there is no politics except against another politics (politics is the site of adversity, ultimately of antagonism between two paths that share Humanity's conception of itself).

In this way, the communist orientation takes the measure of its own assertions, as well as its ability to re-characterize the antagonistic capitalist orientation.

The importance of this point will be seen in the third stage of communist orientation: the Chinese Communist Revolution's (1958-1976) deepening of the meaning of capitalism within "socialist construction" went hand in hand with the deepening of the meaning of communist politics.

Let us note in passing the essential asymmetry in the binary opposition of these two paths: the communist path does not aim to "build" "an" established communism, in the same way as a Party-State has built socialism in a single country. The political asymmetry of the two paths is also re-

flected in the asymmetry between state and mass politics: it is by no means enough to criticize state politics in detail to be in a position to organize mass politics!

Epocally uncovered possibilities

In line with our initial axiom, the political orientation of the contemporary world will be based on a regime of possibilities, event-driven.

In other words, such a political orientation will vary with the times, as events unfold. It will vary in the dialectical unity of its own affirmations and its critical characterization of the capitalist orientation at work in its own time.

Three stages

For simplicity's sake, we'll distinguish three successive stages in a constant communist orientation, depending on whether this orientation is based on the possibilities on the agenda:

1. by the **Paris Commune** (1871): *Marxist* orientation at the crossroads of the 19th and 20th centuries;
2. by the **Russian Revolution** (1917-1921): *Marxist-Leninist* orientation at the heart of the 20th century;
3. by the **Chinese Communist Revolution** (1958-1976): a distinctly *Communist* orientation for the 21st century.

Let's outline these three stages.

A - *Marxist* orientation after the Paris Commune (late 19th - early 20th)

In the 19th century, the *Paris Commune* (1871) highlighted the real political potential of workers' insurrections to revolutionize social relations:

- social relations of work under capitalist domination: elimination of night work and competition between workers, reorganization of workshop work, organization of vocational training linked to the workshop...
- of social relations in urban areas under the domination of the bourgeois state: requisitioning of housing, rent moratoriums, secularization of hospitals, compulsory, free and secular schools for all (including girls)...
- international relations between proletarians and intellectuals: non-nationalist composition of governing bodies, "universal" republic...
- organizational relationships in the new type of politics: no separate military and state apparatus, mass-scale political organization, revocable election of all posts...

The communist orientation immediately outlined by Marx will take note of these new possibilities brought about by the event, but will intervene politically by adding to them the possibilities which, dramatically, were not implemented:

1. putting an end to private ownership of the (major) means of production - this concerns the first dimension of the communist orientation (revolutionizing social relations in the work of production);
2. being on the offensive on a national scale, without being confined to the capital - this concerns the second dimension of communist orientation (revolutionizing social ways of living in the country, by addressing worker/peasant and town/country contradictions);
3. destroy the bourgeois state (in particular its monetary and financial apparatus: the Banque de France) - this concerns the last dimension of communist orientation.

Hence the Marxist orientation, drawing on all the possibilities revealed by the event (those that were implemented as well as those that were not), outlines a strategic perspective aimed at organizing future communist revolutions that go beyond the stage of a simple insurrection that is inevitably defeated, to take on the destruction and reconstruction of the state, effective revolution in the modes of

ownership of the major means of production, the handling of major contradictions on a national scale, etc.

B - Marxist-Leninist orientation after the Russian Revolution (at the heart of the 20th century)

The event of October 1917, re-emphasized as "Marxist-Leninist"³, put new political possibilities on the agenda of the whole of humanity: those of the effective construction of socialism on the scale of a given country, based on the political intrication of a Communist Party leading a socialist state.

In so doing, these 3+1=4 dimensions of communist orientation are reassessed.

1. **Work?** Now that private ownership of the major means of production has been abolished (their collectivization - forced in the countryside - taking the specific form of nationalization and hence state control), the socialist revolution in social production will focus on the development of the productive forces, considered a prerequisite for revolutionizing social relations of production other than those of ownership. The social relations of labor were not revolutionized: the engineer was given prominence in the social division of labor (design/execution work) and Stakhanovism was promoted (maximum productivity of execution work); large-scale use was made of forced labor (gulags, etc.).
2. **Living?** The revolution in the great divisions of the country (workers-peasants, industry-agriculture, cities-countryside) is here subordinated to the previous objectives of productive development: industrialization (with primacy given to heavy industry) is politically placed in the driver's seat; the political unity of workers and peasants is oriented towards transforming peasants into workers on state farms (see their proletarianization as salaried agricultural workers in sovkhozes); the imperative to "feed the cities" legitimizes the subjection of the countryside to the cities (see the concomitant introduction of an internal passport to state-manage transfers from the countryside to the cities).
3. **People?** After the failure of "Leninist" workers' insurrections in other countries (1920s: Europe, China...), internationalism focused on building Soviet socialism in a single country, intended to provide the exportable model for future socialist revolutions in other countries (China, Vietnam, Algeria...). Hence an International (the *Komintern*) with the USSR as its vanguard and head.
4. **Getting organized?** The political organization of this construction of socialism takes the firmly centralized form of a Communist Party directing the policy of a socialist state: all policy is filtered through the Party's preliminary sieve, which then directs it towards the state apparatus and informs (through agitation-propaganda) the working and peasant masses.

So this Marxist-Leninist orientation - as formalized by Stalin - takes note of the possibilities brought to light by the *October 1917* event, and deduces effective consequences both in terms of extensions (in the USSR) and generalizations (in other countries).

As we know, in 1927, Mao opened up a completely different "Marxist-Leninist" political perspective in China, abandoning the strategy of workers' insurrections in the cities and focusing political organization on the peasant masses, with a view to a protracted civil war in the countryside, supported by liberated zones; in this Marxist-Leninist approach, mass political work took precedence over state work.

C - Communist orientation after the Chinese Communist Revolution (late 20th - 21st century)

Let's call the entire 1958-1976 sequence the *Chinese Communist Revolution*, which began with the unplanned event of the People's Communes (invented on April 27, 1958 by peasant cooperatives in southern China), continued from the summer of 1966 with the event of the Cultural Revolution, and ended in dramatic defeat in 1976.

This event puts on the agenda of the whole of humanity an intricate set of specifically communist political possibilities, revolutionizing not only previous conceptions of capitalism and socialism, but

³ See Stalin from the late 1920s onwards...

above all the conception of what communism means in terms of actual politics (and no longer an ideal society shining on the horizon of a brighter tomorrow).

5. **Work?** The Chinese Communist Revolution has put on the agenda the political possibility of revolutionizing the social relations of work beyond the mere transformation of formal property relations⁴ by revolutionizing the major social divisions of labor between design and execution work (see the triple union committees of workers-technicians-administrators in the factories, which organize political cooperation in the inevitable technical division of labor), between manual and intellectual work (manual and intellectual work becomes everyone's business), between worker and peasant work, between production, training and national defense (peasant-worker-soldier unity...)). Emphasis on free voluntary work "in the service of the people". Gradual, differentiated transformation of property relations (for example, the entire people's property of the People's Communes is not state property).
6. **Living?** The Chinese Communist Revolution put on the agenda the political possibility of revolutionizing the social ways of inhabiting a given country, by revolutionizing the great social division, stemming from the Neolithic period, between town and country: the People's Communes organize small factories in the countryside, workers from the big cities, like soldiers and students, move to the countryside for work placements...
7. **Populating?** The way in which the Chinese Communist Revolution put the political possibility of revolutionizing the different ways of populating the earth on the agenda is more subtle: it concerns the new relationships established between the different peoples inhabiting a China-continent⁵ but also the type of political support given by Maoist China to neighboring Vietnam (unfailing political support while refusing the militarization into which the USSR wanted to commit it⁶). It also concerns the "ecological" preoccupation of the peasants and workers of the Cultural Revolution⁷: the one Humanity inhabiting the one Earth must assume its intrication with its environment, in other words the intrication between intrinsic social determinations and extrinsic environmental determinations.
8. **Organizing?** In this respect, the Chinese Communist Revolution is exemplary, for it put on the agenda the real possibility of organizing a properly Communist (and no longer "socialist") policy on a mass scale, without subordinating it to the tutelage of a Communist Party, and without measuring it against the governmentality of a socialist state: the invention of the Peasant People's Communes (even more so than that of the Shanghai Workers' Commune) is decisive here, as it revolutionizes, in addition to the possibilities mentioned above, the possibility of limiting the extension of the socialist state, or even of making it wither away, by endowing rural collectives with a collective political capacity in matters of education (schools and universities), health care (hospitals and dispensaries), public works (roads...), communal food supply (canteens), military training (militias), general administration, and so on. But the entire Cultural Revolution was also an attempt to pluralize mass political organizations, to distribute them without subordinating them to the Party apparatus.

⁴ Just as Marx distinguished between the *formal* and *real* subsumption of labor by capital, the former taking place without any transformation of the labor process (wage labor in the home) while the latter is accompanied by a reorganization of the labor process (regrouping in the factory), we should distinguish between *formal ownership* and *real appropriation* of the means of production...

⁵ In the series of twelve documentaries *Comment Yukong déplaça les montagnes* (1972-1974; 13:20) by Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan, see the exemplary Communist policy followed with the Ouigours (now the darling of Western imperialism, but despised in the 1960s-1970s when Maoist China organized their political autonomy!)

⁶ On this and many other points, read Alessandro Russo's indispensable studies.

⁷ In *Comment Yukong déplaça les montagnes* (*How Yukong Moved Mountains*), we discover that the People's Communes and the Cultural Revolution, in the name of the people's fight against waste and communist concern for future generations, invented the "ecological" issue twenty years before anyone else, and implemented it by giving priority to its direct practice by workers and peasants on their production sites (and not, as in the West, a posteriori by consumers faced with the distribution of goods produced in factory-caserns).

See in particular, in the documentary *Une femme, une famille - Pékin*, the different ways, in Beijing's February 7 locomotive factory:

- to recover scrap metal and melt it into ingots, wood from old railcars and transform it into chipboard, cotton from used railcar buffers, oil from centrifuges, and coal dust from dust collectors that transform it into fuel, which is then distributed free of charge to workers;
- to mobilize the retirees who return to the factory to organize these recovery workshops...

Our communist orientation in the 21st century must henceforth proceed from this political interweaving of 3+1 possibilities, and not be limited to those opened up in the 19th century by the Paris Commune and in the 20th century by the October 17 revolution. The long march of humanity's political emancipation depends on starting afresh from new possibilities!

Contemporary political orientation?

Let's summarize the dimensions of the two antagonistic political orientations, *communist* and *capitalist*.

	Communist orientation				Orientation capitalist
	1st stage	2nd stage	3rd stage	<i>Anti-capitalist Criticism</i>	
I. WORK	Abolish private ownership of the major means of production and land	State ownership of means of production and land Primacy to the development of productive forces	Gradual transition to different forms of collective ownership Cooperation in the indispensable technical division of labor Manual and intellectual work for all Reducing the social division between design and execution work Promoting free voluntary work	<i>Abolition of private property</i>	<i>Domination through private property:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor exploitation • Labor subordination • Worker oppression Hierarchical divisions and separations of work
II. LIVING AT	Housing revolution	Cities subordinate the countryside. Internal passport limiting rural → urban transfers	Bridging the rural-urban divide Rural and urban habitat revolution	<i>The end of major social divisions</i>	Increasing urban domination of the countryside Private property and the commodification of land and housing Living : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduced to housing • governed by the State • dominated by owners (of land and housing)
III. PEOPLE	International Association of Activists	The USSR is the international socialist vanguard.	Equal cooperation and emulation between peoples and countries Ecological concern intertwined with concern for the one Humanity and the common Earth	<i>Internationalist opposition to rivalry, competition and war between peoples and countries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rivalry between nations • Competition between countries • Antagonism between imperialisms
IV. GETTING ORGANIZED	Communist self-organization	Communist Party, vanguard of the socialist state	Distribution of mass-scale political organizations	<i>State decline</i>	State management separate from people's lives. State imposed private property State violence of the established order

These four dimensions are not so much juxtaposed as intertwined, in two ways:

- the fourth dimension takes a synthetic measure of the overall effectiveness of the transformations, depending on the political way in which they are organized;
- the first three dimensions interfere with each other: the relative autonomy of each interacts with that of the other two. In this way, for example, social relations of work linked to social relations of habitat induce a social way of populating a country, and thus of relating to other ways of populating the Earth.

The communist orientation thus rests on a collective confidence in the infinite powers (intellectual and physical) of the masses of humanity engaged in all these social relationships.

Triple ideological determination

Upstream of all this, the desire for a communist political orientation and the imagination of the possibilities capable of characterizing it ideologically presuppose three essential determinations:

1. **confidence** in humanity (in its capacity, in the long term⁸, to deal with its constituent division between collective emancipation and tribal animality) and in communist political orientation on a mass scale;⁹
2. **a hope**, materialistically based on political victories already won and which subsequent defeats or failures tend to cover up without cancelling them out;
3. **a desire** to share this confidence and hope with the whole of humanity, through an extended mass connection.

• • •

⁸ This confidence lies in each communist's ability to subordinate the reduced time scale of his or her individual militant life (a few decades) to the time scale of the actual transformations of humanity as such (a few centuries).

⁹ In Maoism, this dual trust was formulated as "*trust in the masses and trust in the Party*".

Alain RALLET: *WORK AS AN EMANCIPATING ACTIVITY IN THE FACE OF NIHILISM*

This text was presented at the *Rencontres franco-tunisiennes* de Nabeul "*Défier le nihilisme*" on March 1, 2023. Work is generally identified with an activity burdened by structures of exploitation and oppression, from which no emancipatory resource seems able to emerge apart from its momentary interruption by collective movements. The ideology of "work values" then comes to cover this tomb of emancipation practices with the redemptive significance of effort and sacrifice. The aim of this article is to show how work as an activity can stand at a distance from contemporary nihilism, when it is supported by an emancipatory subjectivity.

From work to nihilism

To clear up any misunderstandings, let's start by distinguishing between two things: employment and work.

Employment means having a job. It can be described by a type of job, or by the skills required. It can also be approached through its opposite, unemployment: being deprived of a job. The issues of employment and unemployment are very important, particularly in Tunisia, where unemployment, including graduate unemployment, is depriving Tunisian youth of prospects and forcing them to find their future elsewhere, at the risk of their lives. This is a serious issue. To talk about it, you need to have carried out a survey, gathered sensitive information and, of course, taken stock of it.

But that's not what I'm going to talk about directly. Or rather, I'm going to talk about it from a certain, subjective angle: the dignity of having a job and the social recognition it brings. To be unemployed is, of course, to have no resources, to be condemned to poverty, but it's not just that. It's also about feeling you no longer have a place in society, a social identity, it's also about self-deprecation, losing self-confidence, no longer being able to envisage the future, it's depressing. This shows the central role of work in our subjective make-up. And that's what I want to talk about.

What does it mean to talk about work?

To talk about work means to talk about it **as an activity**, that is to say, of what constitutes us as subjects through our work gestures, our work practices, the cooperation and solidarity we forge with others, of work as a place where a collective is constituted, of the thought that goes into it, of the transformations it brings about in social values ^{1^{er}} such as equality and fraternity - in short, of an entire political universe.

The activity of work as a material practice inserted into a particular social context - the workshop, the factory, the office - and serving or not the emancipation of humanity. For, in the end, work is what links the small (what we actually do, our gestures and attitudes at work) with the large (what we aspire to in our work, how we represent and transform the world).

The essence of nihilism is to prevent the connection between the small, concrete practices of work and the large, the idea of thinking about work, about a different organization of work that would emancipate it. Once the connection has been broken, the worker is doomed to eternally repeat the same gestures, enslaved to the wearisome rhythm of cadences, suffering stupid orders, putting his intelligence in the closet.

How is work as an activity related to contemporary nihilism?

One aspect of nihilism today is to declare that there is no longer any need to transform work as the condition and form of human emancipation.

This means expecting nothing from work, wanting nothing from work beyond what it is in this capitalist society. What is labor? On the one hand, an object of exploitation, an instrument in the service of profit production; on the other, a subjugation of the individual, of his personality, of his capacity for

self-fulfillment. Work, which is overwhelmingly wage labor, could be nothing other than what capitalism makes of it.

Marx described very well what capitalism objectively does to labor.

On the one hand, labor is an instrument of exploitation. Exploitation is the fact that the capitalist is able to appropriate part of the value created by the worker's labor, since he owns the means of production and therefore has the product of the worker's labor at his disposal. All he has to do is pay the worker less than the value he has created. The aim of production is then to accumulate this profit endlessly. At the subjective level, the worker finds himself dispossessed of the product of his labor, and enslaved to a purpose that is not his own, but that of the capitalist. They work for someone else. Work is no longer a free activity, but is caught up in this social relationship of dispossession.

On the other hand, and relatedly, work is carried out under a contract of subordination. By signing this contract, the employee abdicates all right to define what he or she will do (what tasks and in what work organization), how he or she will do it (no autonomy, under strict control of the employer) and how he or she will be evaluated and punished. The powers of work assignment, control and evaluation/sanction are concentrated in the hands of the capitalist employer. This is what Marx called factory despotism or barrack discipline. Exploitation takes place within a framework of domination (enabled by the contract of subordination). For the employee, the dispossession of part of the value of his work is matched by the dispossession of all power and autonomy in the conception and execution of his work. He is no more than an executor at the service of a purpose that is not his own. This is what Marx calls the alienation of work.

Living labor, his labor, the labor he performs, the labor he deploys with his energy, his skill, his intelligence, his being, his subjectivity, is transformed into a result (the product of his labor, the machines) that not only escapes him, but "*stands up to him like a foreign power*", as Marx puts it. In this way, the machines produced by labor and incorporating the worker's know-how and skill are transformed into mechanical monsters, stripping labor of its interest and enslaving it to a predetermined rhythm, set by a production line that takes the place of workers to dictate their cooperation.

Can we escape this situation, and what does it mean to escape?

Can we, from the very depths of a situation of exploitation shrouded in barrack discipline, be willing and able to emancipate ourselves from it, in other words, to manifest and assert *the seeds of the power of living labor itself*?

To emancipate oneself means to emancipate oneself at some point, somewhere, however small, from this foreign power that stands in front of workers and imposes a purpose on their work that is not their own. To no longer be under its sway in one way or another. Not totally, because work continues to be a subordinate relationship. But through something that escapes this domination at certain times, in certain forms.

I'm talking about germs, i.e. gestures, attitudes, words and statements that, in the workplace, inaugurate the possibility of work as an activity being something other than what it is today. The challenge to nihilism begins with such a demonstration. We need to find the forms and ingredients of this demonstration.

So it's not a question of imagining a totalizing alternative to what exists, of opposing a utopia, liberated work in an ideal setting, a phalanstery as in the 19^{ème} century, in who knows what tomorrow, with who knows what forces. No, it's here and now, in the soil of what is, that we must find the seeds of emancipation, and not in the delirious and inoperative description of an earthly paradise charged with illuminating poor devils at the bottom of the pit. Paradoxically, the utopian projection of a way out of poverty is rooted in a mistrust of workers' ability to build their own concrete paths to emancipation. Utopia is the defeat of transformative thought and practice.

After clarifying what I mean by emancipation (finding gestures and words of emancipation at work), I return to contemporary nihilism, i.e. the forms taken by the declaration that this emancipation is impossible in the place and time of work.

The two forms of nihilism linked to work

In truth, there are two complementary forms of nihilism: a classical one, which I won't go into here, and a more contemporary one, which I'll focus on because it's more recent.

To challenge contemporary nihilism in relation to work is to challenge these two forms, i.e. to outline a way of contesting and combating them, by affirming a path that consists in finding *in* the activity of work itself, in the conditions in which it exists and which I have recalled, the subjective and thought resources to lay the seeds of emancipation.

I'll sum up these two types of nihilism with two well-known statements: "*work to consume*" and "*don't waste your life earning it*".

Consumer nihilism

The first form of nihilism relating to work is not so contemporary as it has accompanied the development of capitalism since the end of the 19^{ème} century. This is the trade-unionist way, or what has been called in the Marxist tradition, the trade-unionist way. What does it involve? Briefly put, it consisted in confining the issue of emancipation at work to the question of exploitation, i.e. to the negotiation of wages and working conditions. It negotiated wage rises, leaving the end of exploitation to a theoretical tomorrow, as close as possible to electoral victories, and as far away as possible to the promise of a work-free society, with machines having replaced men.

In so doing, it legitimized the existing social order in the factory, seeking only to mitigate its negative effects and make it tolerable for workers. It has become so much a part of the capital/labour relationship that it has become the regulator of capitalism, always tempted to compress wages to the lowest possible level, or to degrade working conditions and workers' health, to overexploit labour power at the risk of cutting off the branch on which it is sitting. Unions have become institutionalized to fulfill this role and, in some countries like France, have even become part of the state apparatus. There is no emancipation here, in the sense in which it has been defined as a breakthrough in the existing order and the ability to lay the seeds for it.

I'd call this path **consumerist nihilism** (to live is to consume, to live better is to consume more).

For consumption to function as the ultimate horizon of our time, for it to be the ultimate goal and reason for living in our society, whether as a reality or an illusion, for the desire for the West to be a desire for consumer goods, it was necessary to guarantee a certain level of salary and to grant the necessary consumption time (limitation of working hours) to a part of the population (the *insiders*) and to make the others without means (the *outsiders*) salivate. This was achieved within the framework of social struggles that raised wages and thus facilitated access to consumption. The two-sided wage-earner/consumer system, the foundation of the so-called middle classes, has become a pillar of the existing order in developed capitalist societies, and functions as a model for others. This system can be described as nihilistic, because it blocks any prospect of emancipation through work other than access to consumption.

Participants in this movement defend wage-labour, which, it should be remembered, is based on a relationship of subordination between the employee and capital. Unionists cling to the wage system like a mussel to its rock. They are unable and unwilling to imagine anything else, because they have built up their clientele on the basis of the employee/consumer. There are even those who are a little more radical, like sociologist Bernard Friot, who put forward the idea that the wage-earner is "*a revolutionary power capable of combating capital's stranglehold on labor*" (Bernard Friot, *Puissances du salariat*, Paris, La Dispute, 2012).

Consumerist nihilism is the target of the other nihilism linked to work. As a result, challenging nihilism on the question of work is a struggle on two fronts, the second front being no less important than 1^{er} because of the new clothes in which it presents itself, although it can be traced back to ancient roots

such as Lafargue's famous *Droit à la paresse* (*Right to Laziness*) dating back to 1880¹. It remained marginal for a long time, but has become more active in the last thirty years or so.

The nihilism of secession

I'll call it **secession nihilism**. There are many variations, some more subtle than others, but I'll summarize the main idea.

It's no longer a question of melting into the existing order, as in consumerist nihilism, but of advocating secession from the sphere of work by valuing non-work activities as the only emancipating activities, those in which subjects can truly realize themselves.

This nihilism is based on criticism of the former.

In fact, he criticizes the tradition of the workers' movement, which, by focusing opposition to capital on the strict terrain of exploitation, has effectively trapped emancipation in the illusion that it can be achieved within the framework of work. **Emancipation does not consist in liberating work, but in freeing ourselves from work.** On the contrary, we need to "disenchant work", to borrow a phrase from sociologist Dominique Méda, one of the main inspirers of this movement. "*The problem is not to give the form of work to an ever-increasing number of activities, but on the contrary to reduce the hold of work to allow activities with radically different logics, sources of genuine autonomy and cooperation, to develop*". (D. Méda, *Le Travail, une valeur en voie de disparition?*, D. Méda, Flammarion, coll. "Champs/Essais", 2010).

Men realize their creative capacity, and therefore self-fulfillment, in non-work activities. "*Stop wasting your life earning it*" is the popular version. This has given rise to the theme of the "End of Work" (title of the American essayist Jeremy Rifkin: *La fin du travail*, 1995, La Découverte/poche) as an emancipatory aspiration.

Two interpretations of the "end of work"

The "End of Work" can be interpreted in two ways.

In the first sense: as machines replace men, the work required to produce wealth will be drastically reduced, occupying a smaller proportion of time and therefore no longer having the central place in society that it does today.

It also means, in a broader sense, that work can no longer be the horizon within which we think and live emancipation. It is no longer the central value of society. In the 80s, existentialist philosopher André Gorz was the thinker behind this dual end of work as a central resource in production, as the ideological horizon of emancipation, and as a social value (D. Méda titles his book "*Le travail, une valeur en voie de disparition*"). Gorz drew a logical conclusion with his book *Adieux au prolétariat* (Ed Galilée, 1980).

All this is fuelling a major trend that sees time away from work as the means to emancipation. I'd like to explain why I think this is a nihilistic position. After all, we'd all agree that the less time we spend dead-heading at work, the more we'll devote to noble activities outside of work, and the more we'll realize our potential in creative, artistic, amorous, scientific, political activities... Marx strongly emphasized this point. That's not the point.

¹ "A strange madness possesses the working classes of nations where capitalist civilization reigns... This madness is the love of work, the moribund passion for work, pushed to the point of exhaustion of the vital forces of the individual and his progeny.... The proletariat, the class which, by emancipating itself, will emancipate humanity from servile labor and turn the human animal into a free being, the proletariat, betraying its instincts and ignoring its historical mission, has allowed itself to be perverted by the dogma of work. Its punishment has been harsh and terrible. All individual and social misery was born of its passion for work". Lafargue, *Le droit à la paresse*, 1880.

Lafargue was not only a gifted pamphleteer, but also a tireless organizer of early workers' struggles, a spirited internationalist, and to whom we owe two great, little-known gestures: his suggestion that the French tricolor flag should only bear the color red, for which he was expelled for life from the University of Paris. And he was one of the few to take a stand against colonial conquest in the 1880s, in particular denouncing the conquest of Tunisia in 1881. Jean Jaurès, Lenin and Alexandra Kollontaï all spoke at his funeral.

The question is, what do we mean by work?

Because it's hard work, often considerable effort, to carry out these creative activities. It's manual work, because you're handling objects, and intellectual work, because you have to overcome complex, difficult questions. To designate these activities as outside work is to equate them with pure enjoyment. Of course, there is an enjoyment to be had in carrying out fulfilling activities, but this enjoyment is not only not without work, but is to be found *in* the work itself, a work from which we derive pride and satisfaction, a work that is no longer experienced as a sacrifice, but as self-valorization.

Marx reflects that, far from being a "grisette's amusement" as Fourier thought, "*truly free work, musical composition for example, is devilishly serious, requiring even the most intense effort*" (Marx, *Principes d'une critique de l'économie politique*, Œuvres, t 2, La Pléiade, p 289).

The nihilism I'm talking about lies there, in the attempt, with "the end of work", to establish the reign of effortless enjoyment, in short to assimilate emancipation with the finite world of hedonism. In short, to equate emancipation with the finite world of hedonism. In short, to propose an adulterated utopia that is all the more harmful because it in no way corresponds to the dangerous world in which we live, and which requires us to make considerable efforts in terms of thought and action.

So I maintain that emancipation comes through liberation from work at the heart of work as it is, even if it means radically changing its purpose, and not through a utopian flight to a world of enjoyment outside work.

The concept of alienation as a theoretical node

The shift from *the choice to liberate work to the choice to liberate ourselves from work* is rooted in our handling of the concept of alienation. Indeed, we need to examine it in order to come to what, for me, is the decisive factor in continuing to want to liberate work, and to consider that emancipation from work starts from this desire, even if it is not reduced to it.

It's about making subjectivity at work, what it feels like to be at work, the starting point for any emancipatory perspective. Yet the 2 types of nihilism ignore or circumvent subjectivity at work, and this is what they have in common. To see the root of this, we need to examine the notion of alienation.

Alienation is a concept developed by Marx to characterize what becomes of labor as a human activity in capitalism. He developed a 1^{ère} version of it in his early writings *The Manuscripts of 1844*. The notion subsequently evolved in his later writings, *German Ideology*, *Gundrisse* and *Capital*.

But he maintained it, even in a different form. I think it should be maintained against its denunciation as Marx's idealist thought. This denunciation ended up eliminating the subjective component of our relationship to work, this elimination being the foundation of the two types of nihilism, the consumerist which precipitates the wage-earner into the consoling arms of consumption ("it doesn't matter that you're suffering, you'll be able to consume"), and the secessionist which tells him: "enjoyment, get lost!", where? outside work!

So what is alienated work?

In the 19th century, work took on a contradictory meaning.

On the one hand, by transforming nature to make the world human and habitable, work enables man to realize himself, i.e. to assert his creative abilities and personality, as well as to build sociability and form society, since he works in cooperation with others. Among all human activities, then, work plays a central role in existential fulfillment. "*Work is the essence of man*", say Hegel and German philosophy.

But work becomes something quite different with capitalism. It becomes a means of producing market value and wealth, appropriated by the owners of capital. Labor becomes a commodity sold on a market in the form of labor power, and an abstract measure of the value of the products created by this power.

Living work is diverted from its purpose. It is no longer a fulfilling expression of the self and of a supportive relationship with others, but a means of creating wealth for others in production sites where the worker is enslaved to what the capitalist demands of him or her. Work is alienated: it deprives the worker of the possibility of self-realization and of transforming the world in his or her own image, by placing his or her creative faculties at the service of a mind-numbing purpose that is not his or her own.

How can we free ourselves from alienation at work?

The nihilist "end of work" thesis is a radical one: there is no possible emancipatory way out within work. To support this thesis, we need to show that work itself is alienating, not just wage labor, but all "work". Emancipation means reducing as much as possible the work required to meet the material needs of life, and devoting ourselves to free activities, free from what work does.

As I said earlier, this is a critique of the nihilist alternative. It is criticized for having set up work as the central value of society (the wage society), even though it is in itself alienating, and for having made work the human activity that absorbs all of humanity's emancipatory capacity. Salvation lies outside work.

There's no point in spending any time criticizing this carefree approach and subsequent proposals such as universal income, or pointing out that it is in line with consumerist nihilism, since it invents a world of enjoyment without productive constraints. What I'm interested in is following the reasoning that justifies all work as alienating, i.e. as offering no emancipatory resources to workers. Move along, there's nothing to see. Look elsewhere, in consumerism or artistic activity.

To do this, we need to start again from the critique their (most sophisticated) theorists make of Marx's notion of alienation, particularly the young Marx.

For Marx, work is the essence of human being, and alienation means that work in its salaried form cannot be what it should be, but its opposite. To restore work to its true nature (human fulfillment), we need to get out of wage labor, out of the framework of capitalism. By freeing work from this straitjacket, people will rediscover their emancipatory capacities.

What the apologists for the end of work contest in this scheme, which they deem utopian, is that Marx attributes to work an essence, an anthropological value (independent of historical time) that would have to be rediscovered once the capitalist straitjacket had been lifted. Yet, they argue, this vision of work as the foundation of human emancipation only emerged in the 19th century. Marx idealized it, which led him to propose as an implicit model of work the work of the craftsman who, not being separated from the product of his labor and remaining master of his work, retains its emancipatory potential. They even deny that this ideal model ever existed.

In their view, Marx's emphasis on a return to a liberating essence in the concept of alienation contributed, through the development of workers' struggles, to the glorification of work and its installation as the central value of society, by perpetuating it. This was demonstrated by the perpetuation of alienated forms of work (Stakhanovism in the Soviet experience) once private ownership of the means of production had formally disappeared.

So we need to disenchant work itself. Disalienation means emancipation from work. All work is alienating (even if it may be necessary) because it subordinates work to productive efficiency and prevents us from pursuing fulfilling activities (not subordinated to productive activities). Gorz thus equates capitalism with the intervention of an economic rationality defined as subordinating human activity (called work) to productive efficiency. Emancipation requires the development of human activities that are not subordinated to a productive purpose.

The result is that work itself cannot be a source of emancipation. As I said earlier, this nihilism of secession shares this point with the other nihilism. This is what makes them complementary and convergent. The difference is that one aims at integration into the existing order (the wage/consumption deal), the other at comfortable secession (because these labor dissidents will have to be fed).

The door is narrow for a path of emancipation linked to work, capable of cutting a path between the 2 powerful jaws of consumerist nihilism and secessionist nihilism.

Where can it come from and how can it develop?

From alienation to an emancipating subjectivity at work

We have to start from a point that is completely absent from both nihilisms, that of subjectivity at work. To escape from contemporary nihilism is to start from this subjectivity.

It is absent from consumerist nihilism, because it does not take into account work as a human activity in which man seeks to fulfill himself and connect with others. Instead, it sees it as a sacrificial means

to consumer status. It's an alienation that trade unionism doesn't seek to escape, but to cover up with the consoling veil of consumerism via wage bargaining. Subjectivity at work, what employees actually experience and feel at work, is not an issue for trade unionism, except by objectifying it in institutional negotiations on working conditions. As for the nihilism of secession, subjectivity at work as a source of emancipation is out of the question. Caught in the stranglehold of a productive finality, work cannot be a human activity in which people can achieve self-fulfilment.

Intense and creative subjectivity at work

There's an intense subjectivity at work. Workers deploy their cognitive capacities, seek to express themselves in their work, solve problems, imagine solutions, play with oppressive rules, in the quest to find meaning in what they do. And not just on an individual basis, as they seek to coordinate better within and between teams, to assert worker solidarity, to form a work collective.

They create and try to preserve margins of autonomy in their work, even though it is prescribed by the boss. They find in it sources of affection, pride in a job well done, a sense of the usefulness of their work, the demonstration of manual or intellectual skills, recognition of gestures of solidarity, revolt against injustice, the despotism of bosses... You really have to be a nihilist not to see in these practices and affects the material basis of a possible emancipation, not referred to anything other than itself, the consolation of consumption or the fantasy of enjoyment without work.

All this goes to show that alienation persists in the new conditions of large-scale industry, not because of an idealistic, backward-looking conception of work that needs to be rediscovered. It's due to the fact that the creative capacities of workers clash with the barrack discipline that limits their autonomy, and with machinismo, which stands as an alien power dominating not only their individual work, but also destroying work collectives by replacing their cooperation. Marx described this process in detail in *Capital*, but with the emphasis on alienation and less on the possibility of escaping it.

If we take the point of view of the emancipation of labor as we do, and not that of the description of domination as Marx does, we have to start from what is irreducible to domination.

Starting from this subjectivity

What's irreducible to domination is that workers have their own subjectivity at work, determined by their intelligence, their desire for autonomy, to be master of their own achievements and to achieve fulfillment in their activity. Yes, it's about affirming human qualities, and that's why workers won't accept an animal degradation of their work in production.

It's not because we assert these qualities that we desire a return to the lost purity of a fantasized craft, but because these are the subjective, real foundations on which to build a work emancipated from factory despotism. By avoiding a subjective approach to work, where human intelligence and the creative capacity to find new paths are expressed, nihilists of all stripes show that they have no confidence in mankind and, by not trusting mankind, close off any prospect of emancipation. Their perspective is to find a form of enjoyment in the existing order.

I would add that today, subjectivity at work is at the center of attention. All we hear about is the flight from work, the great resignation in the USA, the crisis in the attractiveness of work, the loss of meaning in work, etc. Nihilists try to deal with these problems by raising wages and working conditions, or by glorifying the return to artisanal work (making good ecological bread rather than working in finance)².

But, being subjective in nature, the crisis goes deeper. I interpret it as the fact that capitalism has intensified work, imposed a delirious dictatorship of time and devitalized work collectives through digital coordination, reducing the autonomy and solidarities in which workers could still individually and collectively manifest their own power. Pressured by contemporary capitalism, which denies them any autonomy and even any breathing space of their own, they are like panic-stricken fish seeking salvation outside the fishbowl. Where is the meaning? But where is the meaning?

Starting from subjectivity at work to build emancipation at work - but how?

² Proposing the production of good artisan bread as a form of emancipation: the ironic fate of Marx's critique of the supposed idealism of the notion of alienation.

The three subjective stages of emancipation at work

I'll distinguish three attitudes to subjectivity at work.

The complaint

The most immediate attitude is that of complaint and denunciation, in which the suffering of bodies at work and the bitterness of minds mutilated by the relationship of subordination are poured out. It would be wrong to neglect it, as this subjectivity goes beyond the reactive status of the complaint.

It allows you to unload your heavy subjective burden and, at the same time, free your mind. Mao's advice to militants: *"Unload your burden to free your mind, and restart the machine"*. Relaunch your own machine, but also that of others. By giving a sensitive, and therefore transmissible, form to the singularity of exploitation and domination, it functions as the constitutive principle of a workers' fraternity. It becomes possible for working-class humanity to recognize itself as such in the sensitive expression of the inhumanity inflicted upon it.

The resistance

Second subjective attitude: resistance to the suffocating domination of the factory.

"Where there is oppression, there is resistance", said Mao. This is a social law before it is a political one: any situation of oppression sows the seeds of resistance. But the link is not mechanical, as resistance is both activated and inhibited by oppression. This is particularly true in oppressive, totalizing environments such as factories, which are legally founded on the impossibility of insubordination, and materially on the absolute control of time and work.

The question, then, is what makes it subjectively possible to escape. Resistance may correspond to the observance of an individual ethical rule, but left to its own devices, it only leads to a sacrificial figure. The point is that resistance only makes sense and can only exist on a collective scale, however minimal. We need to find support and solidarity. At work, exemplarity is collective. This is why the subjectivity of resistance seeks to interrupt the totalizing order of the factory through gestures or movements (walkouts, strikes, occupations, etc.) that test a collective capacity to limit the hold of capitalist domination over work.

But the subjectivity of resistance only partially escapes the oppression that gives birth to it. It remains fundamentally defined by its reactive nature and negative stance. To such an extent that oppression can use it as a regulator of its order, of the flexibility to be given to its limits to make it tolerable. The trap of an order possibly revitalized by what tries to escape it is very clear in the example of workers who try to suggest to management another way or organization of work that is both in line with their irreplaceable knowledge of the work and effective in terms of the quality of the work and its results. Worker creativity (idea box, "participative management") is then absorbed as an instrument of productivity, enslaved to a logic of profit. In her book, *L'insoutenable subordination des salariés* (Ed Eres, 2021), sociologist Danièle Linhart calls this the Curse of *"workers who consolidate the domination and exploitation they suffer by trying to escape them"*.

An emancipated vision of work

The only way out is to dialecticize the irreducible trace of worker autonomy left by the subordination of work with the construction of an emancipated vision of work, a political vision of work. This is the third stage.

I'm just scratching the surface of the idea, sketching the broad outlines. It's worth developing another point, the most difficult of all.

How can we move from the expression of a personal subjectivity grappling with the alienated nature of its work (awareness of a job well done, reaction to discrimination in the workplace, repressed imagination of a solution to a productive problem, clear vision of self-managed coordination within a team or between teams, desire for a product more useful to society...) to statements, declarations that transform the subjective point felt in a particular situation (a workstation, a workshop, a company, a sector...) into a principle, a point of universality, an overall idea in which other people who have not experienced this particular situation but share the statement expressed can recognize themselves. In this way, a force can be built up that can assert an overall point of view on work, and be a real force for transforming work situations, even in a context of domination.

How do we make the transition from subjectivity at work to political statement?

Through collective thought and action. Of course, we need activists for this, because it doesn't happen by itself. It's a job, a job that is not alienated, since it serves no other purpose than that of emancipation.

The point of passage between subjectivity at work and a political statement on work, that which turns a particularity into a generality, a singular into a universal, is when subjectivity manages to enunciate something liberating and emancipating about the organization of work. The capitalist organization of work is what concretely alienates labor. It is based on two main principles: the division of manual and intellectual labor, and the separation of management and design tasks on the one hand, and execution tasks on the other.

Do the exercise: all the identifiable forms of frustration that give rise to your subjectivity at work stem from the fact that your aspirations, your faculties, ultimately come up against this division of labor, and are crushed by it. Emancipation therefore requires some form of retreat from these 2 major types of division. Attacking them means not only resisting them, but setting out concrete ways of abolishing them, since true emancipation begins with the affirmation of another possible world, arising not from heaven, but from the bowels of the existing world, through the patient and enlightened work of those who find in it the means to challenge contemporary nihilism.

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[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

PHILOSOPHY AND MATHEMATICS SEMINAR**Monday, March 11, 2024 at 6 p.m.**

École normale supérieure, 45 rue d'Ulm, Paris (France) - room W


<https://philmathulm.hypotheses.org/>

François Nicolas: *Mathematics, a heterophonic disciplinary chorus?*

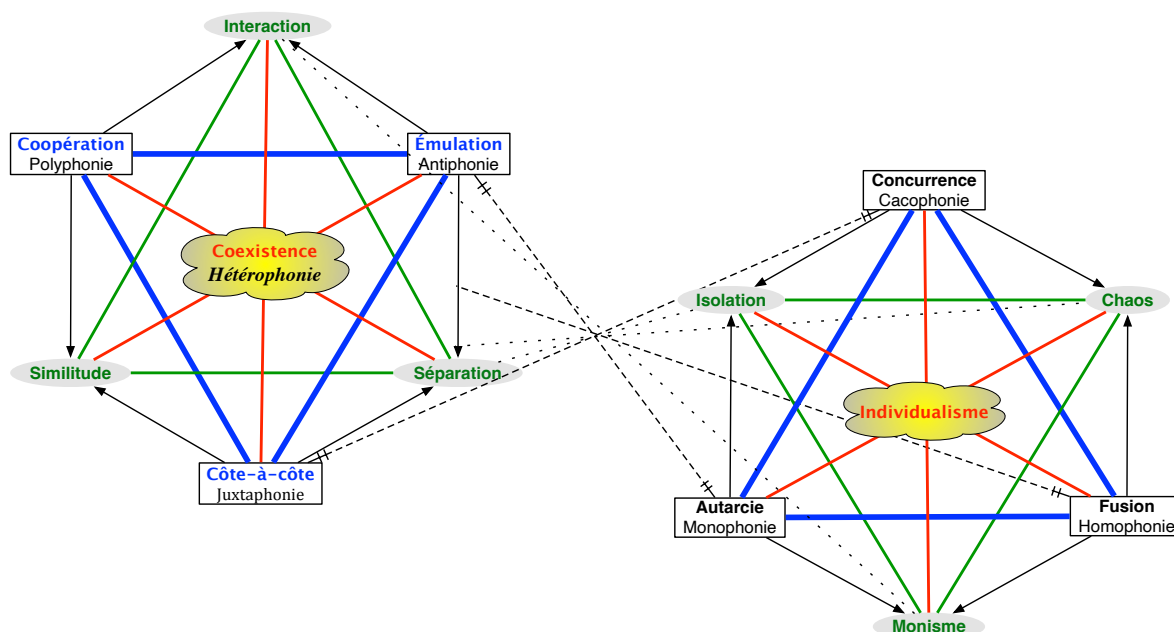
For over twenty years, Ircam's *mamuphi* (mathematics-music-philosophy) seminar has been exploring the ways in which musical intellectuality (*i.e.* musician reflection on musical thought) can be illuminated by mathematical thought in the shadow of philosophy.

In the particular shadow of Bachelard's philosophy, which, in his *Poetics of Space*, distinguishes between the "resonances" and "reverberations" of the poetic image, the former operating by dispersion along a horizontal plane (with them, "*we hear the poem*") and the latter by vertical deepening (with them, "*we speak the poem*"), this seminar examines the resonances and reverberations of mathematical thought in music: on the one hand, the "reasonings" (*i.e.*, *resonances between different types of reasons*) of mathematics in musical intellectuality, and on the other, the reverberations of mathematics through mathematical theorizations (or formalizations) of a musical model. on the one hand, the "*raisonances*" (*i.e.* resonances between different types of reason) of mathematics in musical intellectuality, and on the other, the reverberations of mathematics through mathematical theorizations (or formalizations) of a musical model.

For this Philosophy and Mathematics seminar, I'd like to examine an opposite hypothesis: that of possible reasonings circulating this time from musical intellectuality to mathematical thought, in other words, the possibility of musical *reasonings* in mathematics.

I will explore it from the musical category of *heterophony*, which designates the intertwined coexistence of three types of vocal collectives - *polyphony* (where musical voices are in *cooperative* relationships), *antiphony* (voices in *emulative* relationships) and *juxtaphony* (voices in peaceful *side-by-side* relationships) - contrasting each of these types with their degenerate choral form: homophony (voices in *fusion* relationships), *monophony* (voices in *autarkic* relationships) and *cacophony* (voices in *competitive* relationships).

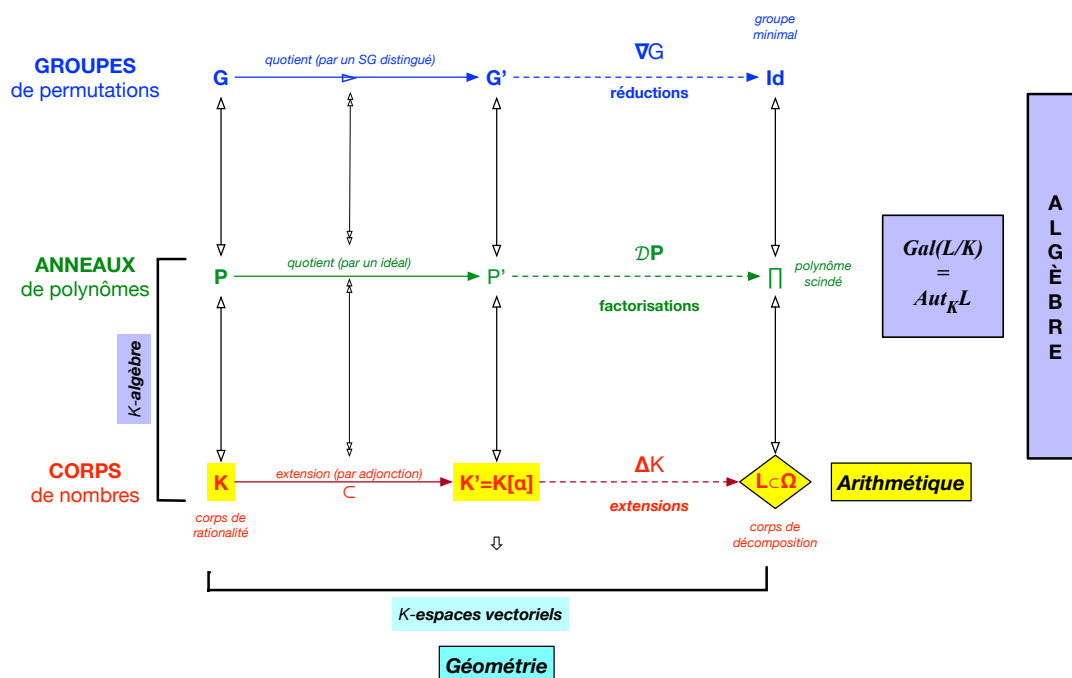
This heterophonic knotting, like the knotting of its degenerate dual, can be formalized in two logical hexagons of oppositions, forming the bases of two inverted pyramids:



After a detailed presentation of this musical problematic through examples taken from my own compositions, I will ask myself to what extent mathematical discourse can then be reflected as composing a heterophonic choir with four (or five) disciplinary voices: *arithmetic*, *geometry*, *algebra*, *analysis* (and *topology*).

We'll explore this hypothesis with another series of examples.

- The **Galois correspondence** will thus be interpreted as a *polyphony* of three algebraic voices linking contrapuntally (by "contrary movements") the two extreme voices - the extensions of *bodies of numbers* (playing the role of the *cello* in a string trio) and the reductions of *groups of permutations* (the *violin*) - via the median voice (the *viola*) which quotients and factors in the *ring of polynomials*.



- All the same, doesn't Arnold's **topological** demonstration of Abel's **algebraic** impossibility theorem¹ compose a *polyphonic counterpoint* between Galois groups and monodromy groups?
- We'll also be asking to what extent the **three** algebraically formalized **logical negations** (classical, intuitionistic and paraconsistent) (Boole, Heyting, Brouwer) and the **three types of integral** (Riemann, Lebesgue and Kurzweil-Henstock) are *antiphonal*.
- What then of **algebraic geometry**: "two voices in one" (Mozart, Schumann, Schönberg...) rather than *monophony*?
- What about **Grothendieck's** theory of **bridges between topos**: *homophony*?
- What about the indifference of this or that mathematical discipline, continuing to dig its own furrow while remaining deaf to the new approaches of other disciplines: refusal of the disciplinary collective by *monophonic* or *cacophonous* isolation?

The aim of such an examination is not, of course, to illuminate mathematics with musical thought, but rather to shade it musically.

Above all, for the duration of an evening, we'll be tinkering (in the sense that Claude Lévi-Strauss contrasted the inventive self-confidence of the tinkerer with the blind belief of the positivist engineer - Xenakis!) with a fraternity of thought between *working mathematicians* and *thoughtful musicians*.

...

¹ See the *mamuphi* lecture (January 13, 2024) by Martin Gonzalez: *The topological reason (V.I. Arnold) for Abel's impossibility theorem* (<https://youtu.be/kEFAh1Kf7wY>)

