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EDITORIAL

-1-

First of all, we'd like to thank you for your comments and encouragement on the first issue of the magazine. Please do not hesitate to send us your comments on this new issue. We're planning a "Readers" section, a first example of which you'll find in this issue.

-2-

This second issue inaugurates the magazine's four-monthly frequency. Stamped with the seal of *Spring* (June), it will be followed by *Autumn* (October) and *Winter* (February).

-3-

In response to certain expectations, let us make it clear that *Longues marches is not a* review setting out a political line or making political proposals. That's not what we're about. It's a research magazine designed to reopen a space of possibilities and renew a communist imagination in a terrible toxic situation that reaches to the very depths of our innermost being.

-4-

For there it is, the overwhelming situation, each day seeming to exist only to add its fatal contribution. Gaza embodies it in its entirety: an unspeakable situation before which the painful indignity of impotence has so far bowed.

-5-

"Ungrateful land, but not totally. We salute the current student mobilization on American, French and British campuses. It is courageously opening breach into the pro-Western consensus that is actively stifling any emerging voices pointing to the colonization of Palestine, denouncing Israel's crimes in Gaza and stating, in the name of Justice, equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis as a basis for policy. With its very foundations called into question, the Western camp is trying to plug the breach with the "democratic" truncheon, when the well-worn instrumentalization of anti-Semitism is no longer enough.

-6-

We know the origins of this overwhelming overall situation: the great reactionary wave which, fuelled by the failure of emancipation policies, rose in the 80s in the guise of a return to the established order after the Red Years, and which today is taking shape in the tragic convulsions of a world with no other compass than the warlike fury of identities of all kinds left to their own devices.

-7-

In this very particular historical environment, swept by the chilling and demoralizing winds of nihilism, we must do nothing less than reconstitute humanity's capacity to assert itself in the process of its division into a politics of Justice based on equality. Wherever there are forces to do so.

-8-

To do this, we need to work on the political imagination, on the concepts and new categories that will provide the language and framework, based on a meticulous examination of historical situations which, even when they failed, sowed seeds of hope, such as the Cultural Revolution. We also need to tackle new issues, such as ecology, by deciphering what can be played out there from the point of view of a politics of emancipation.

-9-

We're not among those who see thinking as a comfortable refuge from a sordid world. It's all about transforming the world. But in the disastrous situation we find ourselves in, with no real points of collective support, it's not enough to resist, because in a reactive posture, it's the enemy who does as he pleases, any more than it's enough to demonstrate, even if it has to be done. It's something else that's at stake, the necessary rebuilding of the walls of the house of emancipation and its foundations.

-10-

The response provided by this magazine is humble but ambitious, uncertain but tenacious. Humble because it does not pretend to provide what is today beyond its reach (a political line, an organization). Ambitious because it sets out to re-found a politics of emancipation suited to the new times. Uncertain, because it claims to be a conceptual bricolage, risking certain constructions that will prove fruitful in some cases, and dead ends in others. Tenacious as any real work process can be.

-11-

This issue features :
- a critical examination of **the 1958-1965 sequence of the Chinese revolution,** based on a dialogue between the militant group *Longues Marches* and Alessandro Russo about his book on the Cultural Revolution - the first step in a task that begins to lift the veil on buried fragments of communist experimentation in the People's Communes and the questions they reveal;
- the continuation of the article on **Zionism** with the detailed deconstruction of its narrative;
- a long Letter from **Brazil** analyzing the political situation, its periodized history, the meaning of the vitiated confrontation between Bolsonarism and Petism (named after Lula's Workers' Party) and the possibilities of escaping it;
- three new contributions on escaping **nihilism**: the point of enunciation in psychiatry, the intimate commitment that Rothko's solar painting can inspire, and nihilism revisited in the light of Kierkegaard;
- the proposal of a "**militant acupuncture**" to tackle and deal with the ecological issue by activating political points in situation;
- in the **arts**, three articles:
  - One pursues the approach to painting through the interplay of colors in the works of Delaunay and Matisse, and the role of the window in this.
  - The second takes us on a journey inside Van Eyck's restored painting, *The Virgin and Chancellor Rollin*, to read a revolution in perspective as discerned by a 21st-century eye.

- The third shows us how traditional vernacular architecture can be creatively mobilized today to reconfigure landscapes and buildings, based on the case of clos-masures, traditional farmhouses in Normandy, and a survey of farmers.

- *"Choses Vues"* reports on a singular Kazakh film, *Assaut*, by Adilkhan Yerzhano, a burlesque human comedy that uses the motive of a popular group's assault on terrorists in a high school to find the subjective conditions for collective action;

- in the *Studies* section, an analysis of the question of the peasant woman as it is seen today in conditions renewed by the capitalist industrialization of agriculture;

- a reader's **letter** ;

- our **announcements**, in particular the invitation to our readers to meet them at the *Tropiques* bookshop (Paris, XIVème) on June 4 at 7.30pm.

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[CHINESE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION]

We publish here the comments, questions and hypotheses raised by the Long Marches group about Alessandro Russo's book Révolution culturelle et culture révolutionnaire, as well as Russo's responses.

Both the questions posed by the group and Alessandro's clear, precise answers inaugurate an exciting, innovative debate on an obscure but revealing period in China's attempt to unseal itself from the concrete foundation of Soviet socialism and invent and sustain a possible path towards communism.

We continue our study of the Chinese Communist Revolution (1958-1976) by talking to Alessandro Russo about his invaluable book.

Cultural revolution and revolutionary culture
Alessandro Russo
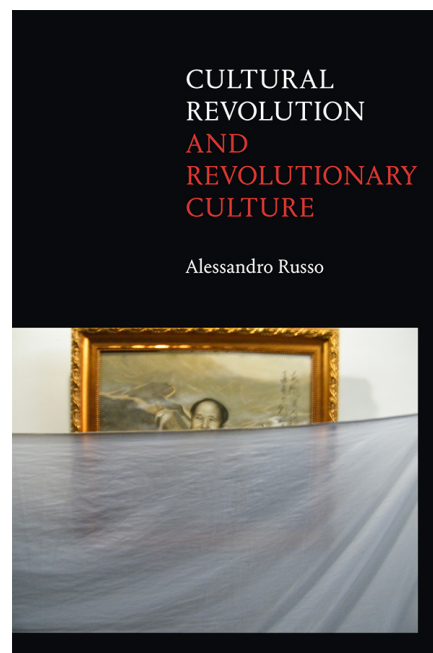
2020 Duke University Press
https://www.dukeupress.edu/cultural-revolution-and-revolutionary-culture

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GROUPE LONGUES MARCHES: *QUESTIONING (2)*

Working notes

Our group is working, theoretically and practically, to find a militant political position in these shapeless in-between times.

The reading and discussion notes that follow are milestones in our own long intellectual journey. They progress, without an assignable end, through repetitions, variations, additions, corrections, inflections and erasures. In so doing, they offer provisional reflections that call for the interlocution of other like-minded voices, especially here that of Alessandro Russo.

Context

Four moments

A. Russo's invaluable book studies the Cultural Revolution, not so much according to an a posteriori reconstituted historical continuity as by separating four key moments, captured from within this vast political history:

I.   his "*theatrical prologue*" (November 1965), bringing back to the forefront a communist conception of the peasants' own political capacity;
II. Mao's political subjectivity (expecting the "probable strategic defeat" [1] of Communist policy) as the reason (from December 1965 to April 1966) for launching the Cultural Revolution (in May 1966);
III. the political obstacles overcome during the most intense phase of this revolution (May 1966 - August 1968);
IV. Mao's final attempts (1973-1976) to carry out a political assessment of the Cultural Revolution on a mass scale.

Militant heritage

This bias, informed by an in-depth knowledge of China's internal political debates [2] , proves particularly fruitful for today's communist militants, who have decided to inherit this Revolution as others had previously inherited the October Revolution and, earlier, the Paris Commune.

> Today's communist militant must start from the latest state of the political questions whose heritage he or she has taken on. On the other hand, to forget, or even condemn, the Cultural Revolution in order to return only to the Leninist Revolution or even the Paris Commune - not to mention those who deliberately drown all revolutionary prospects in the stagnant waters of the French Revolution [3] - is nothing more than a scholastic approach that depoliticizes the communist movement engaged since 1848.

Five specific features of the Communist Revolution

The "symptomatic" approach adopted by A. Russo highlights certain specific features of the *Chinese Communist Revolution* (1958-1976), initiated by the People's Communes event (end of April 1958) and re-launched by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

> We believe that the "*uninterrupted, step-by-step revolution*" carried out in China by the communists under Mao's leadership was periodized in three major strategic stages: "democratic" revolution (1928-1949), "socialist" revolution (from 1953), and "communist" revolution (from 1958). These three types of revolution were linked by overlapping rather than by clear-cut cuts and juxtapositions.

Let's start by listing five characteristic features of this revolution: four are directly associated with the symptomatic moments identified by A. Russo, while the fifth relates more to his general method of historical inquiry.

I. The decisive status of communist enunciation

The "theatrical prologue" moment, which we'll describe in detail below, underlines the particular importance of enunciation in a truly communist revolution: like the two preceding revolutions (and in particular the socialist revolution underway in 1958), the latter cannot proceed by construction ("the construction of socialism"), by state programming and planning; in particular, the statements of the

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[1] Meeting with a delegation from the Albanian Labor Party in May 1966

[2] As a sinologist, Alessandro Russo has direct access to the original texts exchanged at the time.

[3] "*If the French Revolution is a revolution, then the Soviet Revolution and the Chinese Revolution are not.*" Jean-Claude Milner (*Relire la Révolution*; Verdier; 2016)

Communist Revolution are not univocal - we know the decisive importance, during the Cultural Revolution, of statements "left-wing in appearance but right-wing in reality" [4] .

This characteristic, which explains why the [5] theater scene was the spark for the Cultural Revolution, highlights the decisive importance of an ideological ("cultural") revolution upstream of any properly communist political revolution, an ideological revolution understood as a revolution of political enunciation and not just of statements.

II. Mobilization in the face of probable defeat

The intermediary moment (December 1965 - April 1966), when Mao conceived a Cultural Revolution capable of "*giving a little trouble to a probable restoration of capitalism*" [6] , emphasizes a non-nihilistic treatment of defeat: here, the "*twilight*" [7] is not conceived as a time of "What's the point? "but as the moment to consolidate an achievement by burying it, as the last opportunity to bequeath a militant hope by inscribing a final success that no subsequent defeat can undo.

III. A new type of policy, a new type of (organizational) measure

The central moment of the Cultural Revolution (May 1966 - August 1968) was to free the strategic question from its strictly political evaluation: as the Chinese Communist Party proved to be disqualified from taking adequate political measure of this Communist Revolution, it turned out that a revolution of a new type required a political measure of a new type! [8] We'll see how the Cultural Revolution came up against the obstacle of new-style political organizations capable of taking the political measure of it.

IV. A will that merely points out the insurmountable obstacle

In the **final phase** (1973-1976) of the Cultural Revolution, Mao crystallized the Communist Revolution around the question of power, and correlatively around a dictatorship of the proletariat, which had become the revolution's main political unknown. But wasn't it precisely the Chinese "proletariat" that failed to constitute itself as a political class capable of leading this Communist Revolution, launched in 1958 by the peasants and relaunched in 1966 by the intellectual youth (even though the Cultural Revolution was explicitly committed to *proletarian* revolution [9]), so that the Maoist question of the dictatorship of the proletariat refers above all to a reassessment of the Marxist hypothesis of a proletariat?

Mao's political testament thus points, under the sign of a "proletariat" that has become hypothetical and therefore unfit to exercise a class dictatorship, to an insurmountable obstacle without, however, identifying the secret obstruction capable of accounting for the insurmountable nature of this obstacle.

V. A politics of contingency, not just necessity

It seems to us that **the symptomatic method** adopted by A. Russo brings to light the following conviction: the Communist Revolution, even more than previous democratic and socialist revolutions, cannot unfold under the sole regime of a historical necessity (such as that of "historical materialism", convinced of a final victory, scientifically guaranteed by the history of class struggle and economically guaranteed by the development of productive forces).

The Communist Revolution, convinced 1°) that nothing guarantees its victory, if only because "victory" is no longer the right name for the success it aims for [10] , 2°) that this non-guarantee strengthens (not

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[4] In other words, when (right-handed) enunciation does not "reduceplicate" (Kierkegaard) the statement...

[5] A. Russo sees theater as the art par excellence of enunciation: "*underlining subjective intentions in characters' statements is the very essence of theater*" (p. 14). In this way, theatrical enunciation "takes the measure" of the statements in the libretto, just as the musician's interpretation "takes the measure" of the musical statements in the score.

[6] See the above-mentioned meeting with a delegation from the Albanian Labor Party.

[7] "*We are at twilight*" Mao (May 1966, ibid.)

[8] Similarly, in the post-war period, Adorno had argued that a philosophy of *new* music could only be a *new* philosophy of music (reduction of novelty).

[9] Its exact title was *The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution*.

[10] Mao (summer 1965): "*Victory is the mother of many illusions*." (quoted by Malraux in his *Antimémoires*)

weakens) the mobilization to commit to it [11] , the Communist Revolution must therefore learn, more than its predecessors, to deal with the contingent [12] and not only with the necessary - note that, in contrast to a materialism of the contingent, planning, the state touchstone of the Socialist Revolution, unfolds throughout under the sign of an implacable necessity (that of a harmonized development of the productive forces, to which the revolution of the social relations of production remains subordinate).

And indeed, on April 27, 1958, the People's Communes, an unforeseen [13] sputnik in the serene skies of the Second Five-Year Socialist Plan (1958-1962) and the Great Leap Forward, were not the unforeseen contingency that put the political questions of a specifically Communist Revolution on the agenda of socialist China? As we shall see, the Chinese Communist Party was immediately divided over this contingent character, with the right-wing of the Party instead grasping this political emergence as a *necessary* consequence of a state-planned Great Leap Forward.

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With this background in mind, let's turn to a detailed examination of the first of these four moments.

November 1965

The ideological and political issues at stake in Yao Wenyan's criticism [14] in November 1965 of the play *The Deposition of Hai Rui* (written in 1961 by Wu Han [15]) essentially concern the question of the peasants' own political capacity: are Chinese peasants confined to a politically passive position, remaining inescapably subordinate to enlightened leaders who lead them politically by the hand, or are they capable of emancipating themselves by demonstrating their own political creativity?
Answering this question in the affirmative was at the heart of the Maoist path [16] from 1928 onwards: contrary to the directives of the Comintern, the peasants in fact formed the mass political base of the Democratic Revolution (liberated zones, countryside encircling the cities...). But what happened after 1953, when the Socialist Revolution (state-sponsored) planned the cooperative movement, and especially after 1958, when the peasants themselves unexpectedly invented the People's Communes?

In early 1961, Wu Han's play implicitly targeted the dismissal (in September 1959) of Defense Minister Peng Dehuai following his political criticism of the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes at the Lushan Conference (summer 1959).
At this conference, Peng Dehuai, building on the relative failure (acknowledged by Mao himself) of the Great Leap Forward, explicitly attacked the **People's Communes** on four counts. He criticized them for :

- their common ownership of land, which broke with the practices of cooperatives of the first type (sharing work) and the second type (sharing the means of production);

- their questioning of the "socialist" division of labor between agriculture and industry, between tasks of execution and tasks of conception, which de facto challenged the desired "socialist" extension of Stakhanovism to peasants;

- canteens, whose new principle of "*to each according to his needs*" contradicted the socialist principle of "*to each according to his work*";

- last but not least: their political appropriation of military tasks (self-defense militias) was opposed to the "socialist" path of a professionalized Army capable of appropriating the technical

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[11] In the then ubiquitous slogan "*Dare to fight! Dare to win!*", the latter was conditional on the former.

[12] A contingent that cannot be reduced to the famous definition of a "non-necessary encounter between two necessities", and which points instead to the irreducibility of an "it happens...".

[13] On April 27, 1958, the very first People's Commune chose to call itself "Sputnik", in reference to the first Russian satellite of the same name launched into orbit on October 4, 1957.

[14] One of the future members of the Gang of Four

[15] Historian, Deputy Mayor of Beijing

[16] Following Mao's 1927 *Inquiry into the Hunan Peasant Movement*

modernity indispensable to a strategic alliance with the USSR to confront American imperialism in the Cold War.

All in all, **Peng Dehuai** called for a return to a "Bolshevik" construction of socialism, based on state planning subordinating agriculture to industry (and specifically to heavy industry), the countryside to the cities, peasants to workers, so as to ensure the indispensable development of productive forces through a firm "socialist" division of labor.

The political key to Peng Dehuai's critique therefore lay in his denial of any autonomous political capacity on the part of the Chinese peasants in the "socialist construction" phase: their leading role in the Democratic Revolution had been irrelevant since 1953, and the politically adventurous experiment of the People's Communes had to be brought to a firm halt.

To better understand how things could have come to this point politically in 1959 (removal of Peng Dehuai), then in 1961 (Wu Han's play) and finally in 1965 (criticism of this play by Yao Wenyuan - but why did it take four years to criticize this play?), let's unravel this politically tangled story by sketching out a short chronology of the construction of socialism in China from 1953 onwards.

Chronology 1953-1965

- **1953-1957**: First Socialist Five-Year Plan, directly copied from the *Manual of Political Economy* of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Institute of Economics) published in August 1954, following a directive issued by Stalin in February 1952 **[17]** .

    See chapter XLII: *The Economic Regime of the People's Republic of China* **[18]** (in *the* section *Building Socialism in the Countries of People's Democracy* of the third major part *The Socialist Mode of Production*).

    This plan "*favored the development of industry, and heavy industry in particular, over agriculture, and had in fact strongly subordinated the latter to industry.*" **[19]**

- **April 1956**: Following the Khrushchev report (February 1956) in particular, Mao realized the political danger of this "Bolshevik" construction of socialism. He undertook a meticulous critical reading of the Manual and drew up an initial political alternative (*On the Ten Major Reports,* April 25, 1956*)*.

- **September 1956**: The 8th CCP Congress distanced itself from the "Bolshevik" orientation by encouraging the "liberalization" of agriculture.

- **February 1957**: Mao publishes *On the Just Solution of Contradictions within the People*, initiating the ideological campaign of criticism and rectification known as the "*Hundred Flowers*".

- **June 1957**: An enigmatic end to this campaign, which was itself rather enigmatic: what was the political outcome?

- **1958-1962**: Second Five-Year Plan, associated with the launch of the Great Leap Forward (in what economic and political terms?).

    The political content of this plan seems to be a departure from the first, granting greater autonomy to agriculture without, however, politically reorienting the entire socialist planning of the development of productive forces.

- **April 27, 1958**: The first People's Commune is unexpectedly created in Henan by the merger of 27 small cooperatives, with a further 9,300 households or 43,000 inhabitants.

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[17] *"We need a manual of 500, 600 pages at most. It will be a bedside book on Marxist political economy, an excellent gift to young Communists everywhere."* Stalin (*The Economic Problems of Socialism*, February 1952)

[18] "*As it developed, the Chinese people's revolution, which was at first a bourgeois-democratic revolution, was transformed into a socialist revolution, and China entered the period of transition to socialism.*" (2nd edition 1955; p. 668)

[19] Russo, p. 37

- **June 28, 1958**: Mao, still unaware of the existence of the People's Communes, declared [20] : "*It's no good with the Soviet advisors*": Marxism-Leninism had gone from being a "*guide for action*" to being "*taken as dogma*".

- **August 29, 1958**: Beidahe Conference and first official CCP position on the People's Communes. Statement by the Central Committee [21] , in truth contradictory and indecisive: on the one hand, the political novelty, properly communist, of the People's Communes is highlighted [22] ; on the other hand, this novelty is explicitly reduced to a "*logical result*" of the Great Leap Forward [23] , in other words, to a simple extension of the construction of socialism rather than grasped as the eventual opening of a new strategic stage.

  In short, this position takes into account both the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes, even though the former is a matter of state planning, while the latter is a communist invention by the peasants.

- **September 9, 1958**: Mao makes a clear distinction between the two, describing the People's Communes as a "*recent event, which has occurred in recent months*" and which is "*an irresistible movement that cannot be stopped*".

- **December 10, 1958**: The CCP Central Committee now takes clear note that the People's Communes constitute "*an event of great historical significance*", where "*a new social organization has emerged, fresh as morning sunshine.*" [24]

- **December 12 and 19, 1958**: Mao pushes ahead with the People's Communes [25] . "*We had not foreseen the creation of the People's Communes at the Chengdu Conference in April, nor at the Party Congress in May. In fact, they had already appeared in Henan in April, but in May, June and July, we still knew nothing about them. It was only in August, when the Beidahe Conference prepared a resolution concerning them, that we learned about them.*" "*This is a very important event. [...] Certain fortunate events can occur 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 were established throughout the country.* It is true that "*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.*" "*The Constitution is outdated on several points*" but for now, political priority to the development of mass political innovation.

- **April 1959**: Mao relinquished the Presidency of the Republic to Liu Shaoqi (who remained in office until the end of October 1968) to devote himself more fully to the political leadership of the CCP.

  For the first time, Party and State leadership were separated.

- **July-August 1959**: Lushan Conference where, for the first time since 1949, the CCP leadership split politically.

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[20] *"It's not going well with the Soviet advisors*" (Speech during the meeting of the heads of delegation at the second session of the Central Committee following the VIII° Congress; in *Le Grand Bond en avant - Inédits 1958-1959*; Le Sycomore; 1980)

[21] *"Resolution of the Central Committee on the Establishment of People's Communes in Rural Areas*" (*in* Documents of Chinese Communist Party Central Committee - Sept. 1958 - Apr. 1969; Union Research Institute; Hong Kong; 1971)

[22] 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 abilities to each according to his work*" into the communist distribution system "*from each according to his abilities 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.* "

[23] "*People's communes are the logical outcome of the march of events.*" "*The basis for the development of people's communes is mainly the Great Leap Forward, widespread and continuous.*"

[24] *"Press release of the Sixth Plenary Session of the Central Committee*" (*in* Documents of Chinese Communist Party Central Committee; op. cit.).

[25] "(in *Le Grand Bond en avant - Inédits 1958-1959*; op. cit.)

- **September 1959**: Peng Dehuai is deposed and Lin Biao replaces him as Defense Minister.

- **1960**: Apparent end of the Great Leap Forward. Withdrawal of Soviet advisors. Natural disasters. Famine...

- **January 1961**: Wu Han publishes his play *The Impeachment of Hai Rui*. This play, intended for the Peking Opera, indirectly criticizes the recent dismissal of Peng Dehuai.

- **January-February 1962**: "7,000 cadres" conference, drawing up a political assessment of the Great Leap Forward. For Liu Shaoqi, 30% of the famine was due to natural disasters, 70% to man-made errors. But what assessment does the Left offer?

  From then on, Mao found himself marginalized within the CCP.

- **August 1962:** Liu Shaoqi's *Pour être un bon communiste* (July 1939) was republished. At the same time, Mao's writings became difficult to access.

- **1963-1965**: No third five-year plan, even though planning is the mainstay of socialist construction! Apparently, there was no political explanation for this absence.

- **1963**: Mao launched the *Socialist Education Movement*, considered to be the precursor of the Cultural Revolution (cf. sending cadres and intellectuals to the countryside...). The movement was opposed by Liu Shao-Shi, but little more is known about it.

- **June 1963**: Opening of the "Sino-Soviet" controversy with the CPSU.

- **November 1965**: Article by Yao Wenyuan criticizing Wu Han's play.

- **1966-1970**: Surprise reappearance of the plan (the third) after three years without any planning!

In short, a black hole *1963-1965*

Let's face it: the political sequence opened by the Lushan conference appears to us as a gigantic black hole in the political history of the communist revolution launched by the peasants in the spring of 1958.

A. Russo's book captures the Chinese Communist revolution as it emerged from this black hole (late 1965). It highlights the political issues at stake (the political capacity of the mass peasant movement), but fails to provide a detailed understanding of the political conflicts that, for the first time since the end of the democratic revolution, fiercely divided the CCP, making it difficult to understand why Mao, anxious to relaunch a Communist revolution that was visibly bogged down (but how exactly?), stumbling over **"insurmountable obstacles"** (why?), was going to have to go through an ideological revolution whose main mass base was, strangely enough, neither the peasants (where did the People's Communes and the peasant political movement stand at the end of 1965?), nor the workers (in the factories, what did they think and declare about the People's Communes since 1958?) but an intellectual youth (the Red Guards) whose petty-bourgeois class character was going to reveal itself politically... for the worse.

Today, we are inheriting the Chinese Communist Revolution, its inalienable victories and successes, as well as its ultimate failure and defeat in a situation that has become strategically and politically disastrous. For us, there is no other way than to tackle the intellectual task of seeing more clearly into this abyssal black hole. To this end, let's list a few questions.

Four questions

1. The Great Leap Forward

The Great Leap Forward turned out to be a political and economic dead end.

It seems to have been associated with the necessary **"state" decentralization of socialist planning**. But this decentralization seems to have been conducted in a more bureaucratic than political manner,

leading to biased assessments by local managers, with imaginary results directly out of line with planned objectives, and total confusion at the head of the Party-State about the actual economic and social situation in the countryside.

Hence the revelation of **an ideological-political gulf** in this phase of socialist construction within the CCP itself. But why such a gulf, ten years after the victory of 1949? A fortiori, if such a gulf existed in terms of socialism, how can we fail to foresee that it will turn into an abyss once the truly communist revolution is unexpectedly put on the agenda by the peasants of the People's Communes.

What is the precise **relationship between** the Great Leap Forward and the Second Five-Year Plan (1958-1962)? What was the Maoist assessment of the Great Leap Forward? On what political objectives was the CCP ultimately divided? In what way was the Great Leap envisaged as a new stage in the construction of socialism in China? What new transformations in social relations did it bring about in rural *and urban areas*, for peasants *and workers*? Why did the ideological and political obstacles that had been cleared proved impossible to overcome until 1966?

2. Political contradiction between the Great Leap Forward and the People's Communes

There is a political contradiction between the Great Leap Forward and socialist planning, on the one hand, and the People's Communes, on the other, who are putting a communist overtaking of the socialist stage on China's agenda here and now, and initiating the first decline of the socialist state in the countryside.

> While there is such a thing as a "socialist mode of production", politically and economically constructible (such is the challenge of planning) [26] **, there is no such thing as a "communist mode of production"**, and communism is not, strictly speaking, constructible. Are we to conclude, then, that a materialism of contingency puts the order of the day on an inevitable communist bricolage in place of socialist planning that puts engineers' calculations in the driver's seat? [27]

How did the Maoist Left reflect on this political contradiction, which was immediately picked up by the CCP's Right and then exacerbated over and over again? How were the working masses politically seized of this open communist question in the countryside as early as 1958? How were urban intellectual youth politically mobilized, or not, from 1958 onwards, on the overall consequences of this event?

Our lack of knowledge on these points indicates the kind of study we need to undertake.

3. Everything comes in threes...

Doesn't it seem that the Cultural Revolution followed on from **two earlier campaigns**, which were more ideological than directly political: the *Hundred Flowers* (1957) and the *Socialist Education Movement* (1963-?). But on what precise political basis were these two campaigns conceived and directed?

The first campaign was launched at the start of the socialist stage, and thus preceded the eruption of the People's Communes; the second clearly proceeded from it, while at the same time falling under the signifier "socialist" (rather than "communist"), thus indicating the unity of opposites whose name *socialism* is (on the one hand the state construction of socialism, on the other the mass communist movement causing the socialist state to wither).

How did **the third stage of the rocket** - the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) - explicitly build on the foundations of the first two? What were the precise obstacles that these two earlier campaigns aimed to overcome? And if some of them (which ones?) weren't, what new way did the Cultural Revolution plan to overcome them, if it's true that in communist politics, mankind only ever asks itself the questions it can solve?

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[26] See his program inthe CPSU Political Economy Manual...

[27] For the opposition between do-it-yourself rationality and the engineer's planned calculation, see Claude Lévi-Strauss: *La science du concret* (chapter I of *La pensée sauvage*; 1962).

4. A political adventure?

All in all, how can we retroactively assess this event-driven setting of the agenda for a communist revolution?

- A political adventure it would have been better to curb, just as Lenin was able to slow down the insurrection in early July 1917 when he realized that the slogan launched in April "*All power to the Soviets!*" was no longer politically relevant [28], or as he was able, in early 1921, at the end of a devastating civil war, to propose a political step backwards with the *New Economic Policy* (*N*.E.P.)?

- On the contrary, was it the only political solution if we didn't want to bury the communist orientation in China as it had already been buried in the USSR, and if the prospect of "probable defeat" wasn't reason enough to thwart the opening of this new revolutionary stage? But then, what differentiates this decision to embark on a path probably promised to defeat from a simple political flight forward?

Studying this point will be the focus of our next reading of the second moment (early 1966) meticulously analyzed by our friend and comrade Alessandro Russo.

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But let's conclude these reflections with an initial summary hypothesis.

Political obstruction hypothesis

The mathematical light of Évariste Galois

Modern mathematics [29] suggests that a series of *insurmountable* obstacles may denote the inapparent existence of an obstruction capable of accounting for the *insurmountable* nature of these obstacles.

Thus, Galois' theory reveals that, while a polynomial equation does formalize the particular properties of an unknown x, the possibility of solving it (i.e., the possibility of knowing this unknown individually) will in truth depend on the inapparent way in which this equation has secretly grouped its various solutions - in a way, a simple algebraic equation such as $ax^2+bx+c=0$ doubles the apparent fabric of its x's with a secret grouping of its roots. Consequently, if the solution to a given equation comes up against **an insurmountable obstacle** (if the equation proves irresolvable), it's because its grouping mode (its "Galois group") **secretly obstructs** it. The decisive result is that the study of algebraic equations will no longer be reoriented towards solving them (since individual knowledge of the unknown x is no longer as decisive as previously thought), but rather towards identifying the particularities of the collective grouping of its roots. In other words, the focus shifts from the individual identification of the unknown x to uncovering the collective organization of roots.

In this light, let's formulate a (provisional) working hypothesis concerning the insurmountable obstacles of the Chinese Communist Revolution.

The obstacle of material interests for a communist revolution

The obstacles thrown up by the Cultural Revolution **would be insurmountable**, for a communist revolution cannot, like previous democratic and socialist revolutions, be measured strictly against the material class interests of workers and peasants: in fact, once the ordinary needs of collective survival for all (food, housing, clothing, health, education, leisure, security...) have been state-assured (by

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[28] Lenin: *On the words of order* (July 1917; O.C. vol. 25)

[29] Let's not forget that they constitute one of the three intellectual resources of communist thought in the 21st century (along with the history of the Chinese Communist Revolution and French philosophies of the subjects of truth at the end of the 20th century) - see issue 1 of this magazine.

previous revolutions), the communist perspective no longer moves forward in the exact sense of additional material needs to be satisfied. It proceeds in its own right as a project of universal emancipation, putting on the agenda the communist ideas of equality and collective justice (in work, housing, settlement and organization), and the aspirations of all in terms of culture and practice (in the arts and sciences), the attainable horizon of shared happiness between the two halves of mankind (love between men and women) - in short, objectives that must of course be materialized (by revolutionizing social relations), but which are presented as guiding ideas and not reduced to immediate grievances and material interests. Isn't this the very meaning of the ideological revolution of communist education that underpinned the *Hundred Flowers* campaign, the *Socialist Education Movement* and, ultimately, the *Cultural Revolution*?

And this communist project is all the more on the agenda as it is the only one capable of stemming the **inevitable deviation and corruption of socialism** under the antagonistic pressure of a new type of bourgeoisie, eager to exploit acquired advantages for new privileges.

But in this case, there's no reason to consider that the working class, because of its productive concentration in the factories, is naturally in the vanguard of these ideas and this project! This class, like the others, will divide over the communist project itself. And so the hypothesis of the proletariat as a political class emerging from the social class of workers is no longer relevant *to the communist revolution*!

Thus, the insurmountable nature of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" obstacle indicates that **the communist equation cannot be resolved in strict terms of class interests**, and that it must be re-understood not in the perspective of such a type of resolution, but in a completely different way: as the grouping of different political ideas into an overall collective project.

A non-classist materialism of communist orientation

This would expose **the ideological-political obstruction** that renders insurmountable the project of resolving the communist revolution on the strict basis of the material interests of social classes: we need to deploy **a new type of materialism** (non-"classist") of the communist project (against the vulgar materialism that associates any promotion of Ideas with an idealism [30]) and no longer an elementary materialism of immediate material interests[31] : if mass communist movements and communist emancipation are indeed everybody's business, it's because the communist orientation as such is likely to mobilize workers and peasants, common women and intellectual youth, without a leadership that considers itself enlightened needing to dangle any carrot for a social base it deems clinging to its immediate material interests alone!

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[30] and, in so doing, fortifying the Marxist law that "the Idea becomes a material force when the masses seize it".

[31] Alain Badiou 's philosophy, particularly in *Logiques des mondes, is* a valuable intellectual resource for distinguishing not materialism from idealism, but dialectical materialism from what he calls "democratic" materialism.

ALESSANDRO RUSSO: *SOME ANSWERS*

I'd like to make a few notes in response to the observations and questions you have kindly raised on reading the first part of my book. I'll limit myself to five points that seem to me the most relevant: Mao's attitude to the State Plan; the Hundred Flowers; the "communist wind"; the political shock of the Lushan Conference; the controversy over the historical drama *The Destitution of Hai Rui*.

Mao and the State Plan

The most original question you raise concerns the distinction between the Great Leap and the People's Communes. The former, you observe, was decided as part of a state plan, the latter are communist inventions, created by the peasants themselves. This is an important avenue to explore.

The horizon is that of the second five-year plan. When the first five-year plan was drawn up, there was an unconditional acceptance of Soviet planning, whereas the second five-year plan is based on a number of important distinctions from its "big brother".

Mao took an active part in drawing up the plan. In the early spring of 1956, he attended weeks of meetings at central level and made several fact-finding trips to the field, visiting factories and agricultural cooperatives, talking to local leaders at various levels, trying to get a first-hand view of the problems.

Mao never had blind faith in state planning. Mao's many writings between 1956 and 1962 (a crucial period of ups and downs, experimental enthusiasm and inevitable setbacks) enable us to glean a few key points about his attitude to state planning. For Mao, the plan was a "necessity" to be put at the service of the communist political project. Summed up in the abstract terms of the critique of political economy, for Mao, state direction of the economy is ultimately the instrument for applying the law of value, and at the same time limiting it.

An essential and contradictory tool. The exchange of goods, Mao often says, must be an exchange of goods of equal value. This is a point Mao insists on a great deal, especially when, in the great movement to create People's Communes, some of the rank-and-file cadres and even some of the peasant masses go so far as to think that the law of value is outdated and that the exchange of goods is no longer necessary. Mao, for his part, often repeats that the law of value must remain a guiding principle. The problem is how to apply it, and at the same time how to limit it.

Without the law of value, exchange cannot function, in a situation where there is such disparity between industry and agriculture, but also between rich and poor Communes or between brigades or production teams within the same Commune. The exchange must be an exchange of goods, otherwise it becomes an arbitrary requisition of agricultural products.

On the other hand, **the law of value, exchange at equal value**, is the very condition of capitalism. The law of value must therefore be protected, while at the same time limiting the spontaneous tendency of what Marx and Lenin called "bourgeois law" to drift towards capitalism. This is the fundamental dilemma facing Mao over the last two decades.

Indeed, state planning can only limit bourgeois law by sanctioning private ownership of the means of production: by denying it. Affirmative limitation, however, can only come from communist political inventions, what they called "new socialist things" in China.

As for the "state" character of the Great Leap, there's certainly a five-year plan on the horizon, with its Soviet pedigree; but it is, at least in Mao's attitude, a state plan "modified" by experimental openness, an appeal to the political inventiveness of the masses and a rejection of any slavish imitation of the USSR.

In this sense, the climate of the Great Leap is fertile ground for the creation of Communes Populaires. Of course, the Communes are not the result of the plan. They were invented by the peasants of a very poor region, whose material conditions were particularly difficult. It's a novelty to which he gives almost immediate attention, and which he asks the party leadership to follow. All the main central leaders went to see how these first Communes worked.

Although the People's Communes were by no means "planned", they were nevertheless fostered by the desire for broad popular mobilization, which was a key point of Mao's political line at the time. The decision to approve the invention of the People's Communes thus fell within the horizon of possibilities that the Great Leap had implicitly foreseen, or at least accepted in principle: openness to mass political experimentation.

Mao often maintains that **these collective inventions** must be carried out experimentally. As they do not follow predefined models, they necessarily involve mistakes, and these mistakes can and must be corrected by the masses themselves or by the rank-and-file cadres who made them. Contrary to the common image of a utopian despot far removed from real conditions, Mao always stressed that political invention is indispensable, but so is the constant rectification of these inventions. He is not lacking in a solid principle of reality.

Les Cents Fleurs

A fundamental prerequisite for this experimental dialectic of inventions and rectifications is a climate of broad mass democracy, as Mao has always argued with conviction. With the Hundred Flowers campaign, and especially with the theme of "contradictions within the people", the main aim is to stimulate everyone's political capacities, in the sense of a potentially unlimited pluralization of political voices and initiatives. A hundred flowers and a hundred schools, because a single flower, that of the Communist Party, is not enough. Mao literally says to those who advocate preventive censorship: "we want people to think for themselves". "A hundred schools" signifies the many ideological-political possibilities facing the Communist Party. If they criticize us, Mao says, so much the better: it means we'll learn from that criticism, we'll know how to respond to it, and in responding to that criticism, we'll hone our rational dialectical skills.

On the other hand, Mao was aware that the Hundred Flowers did not elicit any sympathy from the party leadership. According to him, no more than 10% of the central leadership agreed, the rest being hostile or deeply skeptical. The Hundred Flowers immediately **got off to a rocky start**, and Mao admitted that of the hundred flowers, no more than a dozen had bloomed.

It's generally said to be a ploy to bring out right-wing positions and then suppress them. The "Hundred Flowers" campaign is effectively closed by an "anti-Right campaign". How can such a radical about-turn be explained? The fact that very few of the Hundred Flowers flowered, and that the same was true of the Hundred Schools, means that the push for mass democracy was thwarted by party cadres, both centrally and locally.

What probably happened in 1957 was that the Hundred Flowers were reduced to a confrontation between just two flowers: an old, let's say bourgeois, political and intellectual elite dating from before 1949, and the new elite made up of Communist Party cadres. This is perhaps a little too sociological a perspective - the political statements of those directly involved would have to be carefully analyzed - but it goes some way to explaining why the Hundred Flowers campaign ended the way it did. If the Hundred Flowers had all bloomed and the Hundred Schools had all expressed themselves, it would not have been easy to suppress them with police methods.

Why does Mao accept that the Hundred Flowers campaign should end in this way and the campaign against the Right begin? When the confrontation boils down to two flowers, we can say that Mao takes a stand in favor of the Communist Party because he hopes that within it a dynamic of mass democracy can be reactivated. However, this was not the intention of the old bourgeois elites. Some political and intellectual figures, those of the "democratic parties" outside the CCP, are resentful of the new Red elite. It's clear that the CCP had **a particularly rigid stance** at the time, but it's not as if the others had any overtures towards the peasants and workers. Members of the old elite saw themselves even more as custodians of superior prerogatives in political and intellectual debate.

The closing of the Hundred Flowers did not close the prospect of a mass movement, which Mao always considered a condition for political invention. In 1958, the creation of the People's Agricultural Communes came from below, and it was the peasants who invented this new political form. Yet, however unexpected this invention may have been, the mass line, and in particular the original path of agricultural cooperation, lay in the background. The CCP had not followed the statist brutality of collectivization in the USSR, mainly because cooperation was based on a major initiative by the peasants themselves. In 1955, Mao published *The Rise of Socialism in the Chinese Countryside*, a

collection of articles and survey reports on inventions made in the countryside under agricultural collectivization. *The "boom"* semantically anticipates the Great Leap.

The "communist wind

As for the obstacles encountered in the creation of People's Communes, there are some that are difficult to decipher. For example, how was the so-called "communist wind" an obstacle? By the way, "obstacle" is an odd name for a communist experiment...

Indeed, for Mao, the so-called **"communist wind" was** an arbitrary negation of the law of value. In practice, the exchange between agricultural production units and the State (but also between teams, brigades and Communes) took the form of requisitions: the cadres decided how much to produce and how much to take from production. Mao opposed all this from the outset. The "communist wind" had nothing to do with communism in the sense that it was about overcoming the differences between town and country, worker and peasant, manual labor and intellectual labor. Communism" became a pretext for unbridled dirigisme. Mao repeated over and over that it was absolutely inadmissible to appropriate peasants' products without paying them. The "communist wind" not only generated great discontent among the peasants, who saw their produce arbitrarily confiscated, but also fuelled an even more perverse dynamic: false statistics.

The central leaders, led by Mao, soon became aware of this phenomenon. Mao intervened on several occasions to say that **false statistics** not only served no purpose and certainly prevented central planning, but worse still, they put intolerable pressure on the peasants. Indeed, in practice, unattainable production targets have been set and then imposed on the peasants by the rank-and-file cadres. The result is a dynamic of bureaucratic competition between the rank-and-file managers, who impose these production quotas and pass them on as already achieved to the middle managers, who then pass them on to the top managers, and from there to the central managers. The result is great discontent on the part of the peasantry, and an inability on the part of the state to fulfill its planning functions in the aforementioned sense. False statistics were not only the result of the arbitrary abolition of equal-value exchange, but turned out to be the "exchange"... between non-existent products.

The political shock of the Lushan conference

The Lushan conference had been planned and organized since the spring of 1959 as a moment to rectify a series of errors in the current movement, but no one foresaw the emergence of such a serious impasse. Mao is very active in preparing the details of this conference. In order to rectify the errors, a precondition Mao sets for all levels of the party is to raise the theoretical level. One of the main objectives is a major study campaign on questions of political economy. Theoretical study campaigns were a recurrent objective of Mao's political initiatives right up to the final years of the Cultural Revolution.

At that time, Mao proposed a **critical study of Soviet political economy**, in order to understand the extent to which this theoretical and practical framework worked or didn't work for the political experimentation underway in China. Between 1959 and 1960, Mao embarked on a meticulous study of the theoretical and practical issues of Soviet planning. In preparation for the Lushan conference, Mao drew up a detailed and diversified program of study at the various levels of the party. The central leadership was to study directly *the Soviet Manual of Political Economy* and Stalin's writings on political economy. Middle-level cadres need more accessible tools, texts that summarize in a simpler way the terms of the economic theory elaborated in the Manual. For basic managers, those who may not even be able to write, study documents need to be written explaining in simple terms that exchange for equal value is unworkable, that inventing false statistics is detrimental to everyone, and that we need to be able to oppose directives from above when they are wrong. The ability to criticize higher levels is a theme Mao has been addressing since the beginning of the conference, and even before.

The Lushan conference began in an essentially optimistic mood; at first, everyone seemed to agree on the fundamental issues. At one point, the confrontation with Peng Dehuai emerges, mixed with a theme that will become the spark of the Cultural Revolution six years later, the reference to the figure

of Hai Rui. He was an imperial official of the Ming era who experienced an unexpected "afterlife", precisely as a result of the Lushan conference. It's unusual that a historiographical reference, which is also largely metaphorical, should have become such a hot political topic. The ideological struggle, which for Mao is always intertwined with the political struggle - indeed, is a prerequisite for it - is particularly marked by contingency; in any case, it is never linear, acquiring its logical coherence in the course of its own development.

It was Mao himself who first mentioned Hai Rui. He mentioned him in the spring of 1959, a few months before the Lushan conference, as a rather abstract "exemplum" of an official who had had the ability to oppose the emperor. Hai Rui was so in the more or less popular cultural imagination. Mao quoted him to exhort rank-and-file cadres not to blindly obey the erroneous directives of senior managers, notably the imaginary production plans at the root of false statistics.

Things then took a completely different turn. In Lushan, **Hai Rui becomes** a **banner** under which Peng Dehuai denies the value of peasant communes and political initiative. Hai Rui is then cited not to criticize upwards, but to criticize downwards all political experimentation. Mao says that Hai Rui has "changed houses", that he was left-wing, that he has become right-wing, but that he only agrees with the Hai Rui who is left-wing.

The **controversy** is actually taking place quite openly, quite differently from the way it is presented by the dominant historiography inside and outside China. The standard version is, as everyone knows, that Mao was a despotic, capricious emperor who, at the first objection of one of his ministers, cut off his head or nearly so. This is absolutely false. It has been proven that Mao waited several weeks before replying to Peng, that he circulated his letter and discussed it at various conference venues.

Peng's position is very clear: the People's Commune movement is nothing but "petty-bourgeois fanaticism". We must return to the "normal pre-1957 situation" and stop all mass experimentation, using military methods. For Peng, there's nothing to rectify, but the People's Communes must be crushed by military intervention. That's exactly what he says: it has to be done in the same way as when the uprising in Tibet was suppressed, or when Quemoy, the small island opposite Taiwan, was bombed. Peng, who presents himself as a defender of the peasants, waving the peasant flag against Mao's despotism, actually wants to bring the peasants back to order by starting a full-scale civil war against them. It's no coincidence that he is attacked as the head of a "military club".

Peng soon finds himself isolated, as everyone understands that he is proposing a catastrophe, the political suicide of the CCP. When Mao replies, and he does so with great determination, Peng capitulates almost immediately, saying that he didn't quite understand what he was saying. The accounts of the Lushan Conference, available for many years, are fascinating and show a situation quite different from what is officially told by the Chinese government and almost all specialized historiography.

However, Peng's letter raises **a crucial dilemma**: what is the role of the peasants in the socialist state? There is no model, because the Soviet model does not foresee any active political role for peasants; collectivization is imposed from above, and peasants can only obey orders. Moreover, the peasants' political role cannot even be the one they played during the protracted People's War.

Finding a unified point of view within the Party to pursue the experiment proves impossible after the Defense Minister's frontal attack. Many disagree with him because he is absurdly adventurist, but it soon becomes clear that Peng reflects a widespread attitude at the top of the Party, an underlying skepticism about the political capabilities of the peasants. Indeed, even dirigisme, the "communist wind", false statistics and all the obstacles encountered by the Communes converge on the unresolved problem of the peasants' role in state socialism. The most widespread opinion at various levels of the Party was that the peasants' role was to produce more.

But **with the Communes**, a real political role emerged: inventing new forms of sociality in the countryside, new political institutions and also new forms of relationship with central power. The fact that the People's Communes have decision-making capacity not only in production, but also in the management of collective life, canteens and schools, and that they even have an armed militia, characterizes them as inventions that move in the direction of what, in Marx and Lenin's vision, should be the reduction of the separation of the military and bureaucratic apparatus from society, with a view to the extinction of the state. On this point, the Party as a whole is extremely skeptical and, in many cases, profoundly opposed.

The Lushan conference ends with the dismissal of the Minister of Defense, but also marks **the end of the whole experiment**. Mao declares that what can continue must continue, that even if only 30% of the collective canteens or popular schools are functioning, it's still a good success, but admits that some parts of the experiment can be temporarily suspended. Mao is forced into a strategic retreat, admits his mistakes, but once again stresses his experimental conception of communism: we are experimenting with something new, so we make mistakes. He says: "we pay our tuition fees" in the sense that mistakes have a price to pay, in order to learn we have to make mistakes, so we pay them, but we have to be able to rectify them.

Mao's strategic retreat immediately breathed new life into positions that denied the peasants any political capacity. More generally, the hierarchical bureaucratic style is back in vogue at all levels. This is clearly seen in the initiatives taken by Mao to revive a bottom-up political dynamic, to which the Party leadership had always been opposed. We can cite at least two: the "7000 Conference" of 1962 and the *Movement for Socialist Education* of 1963-1965.

The "7000" are middle and lower-level cadres who have come to Beijing from all over the country to discuss how to self-criticize the mistakes made in previous years. Mao himself was self-critical. He delivers a famous speech on "democratic centralism", in which he focuses precisely on the question of mass democracy and criticizes the harmful style of leading cadres who cannot bear to be criticized by their subordinates, or even to listen to their opinions.

To mention just one well-known point, at this meeting, the supreme leaders, led by Liu Shaoqi, had prepared a report which they asked to be approved by a show of hands, in principle unanimously. Instead, Mao proposed that the report not be presented and read directly to the plenum, but that it be distributed in advance and discussed in groups in the various sub-committees by these cadres, who were closest to local situations. The report is then corrected on the basis of this discussion, but Mao must pull out all the stops to change a normal procedure for other leaders.

Another of Mao's political initiatives, between 1963 and 1965*, was the Socialist Education Movement*. Here again, his idea was that, starting with mobilization from below, grassroots cadres would develop critical, self-critical skills to rectify mistakes and politically invent new paths. Conversely, for the other central leaders, the Socialist Education Movement is conceived as an operation in which "work teams" made up of middle and senior leaders are sent down from above to discipline the rank-and-file cadres. The point of divergence is always the same: the autonomous ability to correct the inadequacies of experimentation, versus a dirigiste stance.

In any case, **Mao was very isolated**. In the famous summer 1965 conversation with André Malraux, recounted in his *Antimémoires*, Mao told him: "I am alone". Malraux remarks: "You have often been alone", and Mao replies: "I am alone with the masses". Beyond the literary invention, Malraux captures a key point of the situation.

Hai Rui" review

Yao Wenyuan wrote his review of *The Deposition of Hai Rui* around the summer of 1965, just as Mao was telling Malraux that he was "alone with the masses". To break out of his isolation, Mao had no clear plan and very few allies. He did not take the initiative, but supported Yao Wenyuan's essay, promoted by Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao, read it and probably suggested corrections. He evaluates it positively, but neither he nor Jiang and Zhang foresee that it could trigger such a decisive moment.

The subject of the dispute is, as is well known, a historical drama, or rather a Peking opera in the classical style, written by a famous historian, Wu Han, in the aftermath of the Lushan Conference. **The Destitution of Hai Rui** was subsequently reworked and staged in 1962. Without going into too much detail, which is nonetheless fascinating, the Hai Rui that Wu Han depicts has "moved" even further to the right; he is no longer at all the one who was able to oppose the emperor, but he is above all the one who defends the peasants, in this case peasants who, in the drama, are amorphous masses only capable of kneeling before the great official to implore his intervention on their behalf.

As Yao shows in detail, the backbone of the plot, characters and dialogue of this historical drama is the political powerlessness of the peasants and the omnipotence of the officials. Hai Rui is always ready to listen to the plebs' complaints and punish corrupt officials, but he is eventually removed from

office because his enemies, those who oppress the peasants, denigrate him and want to get rid of him.

Yao's text is very well written. The theatrical, political and historiographical aspects are examined with great skill and analytical ability. In addition to using refined philological tools to dismantle the image of the historical figure as a tireless defender of the peasants, demonstrating that he was, on the contrary, as repressive as his own enemies, Yao emphasizes an essential point: *Hai Rui's removal from office* dramatizes the structural powerlessness of the peasants in relation to politics and the state.

It's extraordinary that the questions raised by the criticism of a historical drama should have aroused such intense intellectual and political tension as that which led to the Cultural Revolution.

The first reason has to do with the **intrinsic qualities of theater**, in which the strictly subjective dimension of the characters - what they do and say on stage - is far more important than what they "represent". In this sense, the angle of attack of Yao's critique is properly theatrical. First, Yao analyzes what the characters say on stage, before they "represent" certain social figures. Yao treats the dialogues in *The Deposition of Hai Rui* as political statements. Those of the great official are declarations of political omnipotence, those of the peasants of total impotence.

There's also **a characteristic feature of Peking opera, which** Brecht was so interested in, as an example of "distancing". In Peking opera, the characters, dialogues and movements on stage have little in the way of "naturalism"; in fact, they are highly formalized, which accentuates the subjective stakes of the theatrical situation. It's also worth considering that the idea of criticizing Wu Han's drama initially came from Jiang Qing, who in those years was leading a major reform of the Peking Opera, one that gave rise to the famous "Model Operas" on themes of revolutionary struggle. In the group that initially promoted this criticism, there were certainly evaluations and reflections within the theater. It is likely that Jiang Qing herself inspired this critical angle of Yao's essay.

Yao's critique, precisely by addressing the theatrical terrain directly, succeeds in bypassing the class historicist framework that has constituted **the "obstruction" of Communist Party peasant politics** - the category you propose in your study notes seems very effective here - and which also blocks an assessment of the Lushan confrontation for the left. In the categories of "classism" and "historical materialism", the political subjectivity of the peasantry is non-existent. The internal limitation, or obstruction as you propose, is that in terms of the history of class struggle, the place of the peasantry in socialism is far from obvious. The advanced class is the proletariat, the peasantry is an ally that follows the path opened up by the proletariat and its party. Instead, Yao goes straight to the heart of the matter, examining the statements, or rather the subjective intentions, that the characters declare. Not that Yao excludes the class perspective, but he focuses first and foremost on the characters' subjective positions. In this way, he goes to the heart of Lushan's confrontation six years earlier, which had remained "obstructed" by the classist vision and the laws of historical development.

Wu Han's position is exemplary in this respect. He is perfectly aware of what happened at the Lushan conference - he is in indirect contact with the party leadership - and in the drama he stages much more than the "dismissal" of a minister; indeed, through the "theatrical fable" he captures the essence of the subjective confrontation that took place in 1959, even if he later claims that the drama has nothing to do with this confrontation.

On the other hand, **Wu Han is first and foremost a historian**, and during the controversy opened up by Yao's criticism, he reiterates what he had written about Hai Rui in a long historiographical essay written for the Lushan Conference. Wu defends himself against Yao's criticism mainly with the arguments of "class relations" and "the development of history". In his view, peasants do not represent the new relations of production and therefore cannot, as a "class", promote the "development of the productive forces". Hai Rui, on the other hand, precisely by virtue of his benevolence towards the peasants who beg for mercy, alleviates class oppression and promotes the productive forces, which necessarily implies the progress of History.

It has to be said that **Yao Wenyuan's critique does** not exclude the classist perspective. It puts it on the back burner, manages to circumvent its most paralyzing effects, but cannot exclude it. Which, once again, constitutes an "obstruction" in the ensuing controversy. Let's not forget that there's a great deal of effervescence in the Chinese intellectual world, and that an estimated 10,000 texts reach the newspapers from readers who participate passionately in the debate. It's a great turnout, considering that the topics addressed require a certain historiographical culture. I believe that the debate is stimulated precisely by theatrical openness. This is where the most original positions in this debate come from, namely those that touch on the subjective knots of Wu Han's drama. Criticisms of *Hai*

Rui's The Destitution from a "classist" perspective, on the other hand, hold back the debate, perhaps producing more incendiary "left" articles, but are met with counter-objections from the "right", such as those, mentioned above, from Wu Han on the "development of History" that only "honest officials" and not peasants can promote.

In the final analysis, this is the ideological core of the CCP's policy towards the Chinese peasantry: as a "class", they are nothing, and anything they may have invented a few decades ago, with the creation of new political institutions in the countryside, is nothing but an illusion, a fanaticism that has led to catastrophe. But under the guidance of far-sighted and benevolent officials, who have freed them from the oppression of the People's Communes they themselves had invented in their backwardness, the peasants today can finally make their contribution to the development of the productive forces, that is to say, of History: they can do so by becoming migrant workers, a cheap labor force, constantly moving from one factory to another (the average working time at Foxconn is three months), interchangeable commodities on one of the world's most flexible labor markets, but also one of the most rigorously disciplined.

Hai Rui's dismissal anticipates the fate that China's peasants will face, once their "petty-bourgeois fanaticism" has been eliminated and capitalist domination re-established.

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[INTERNATIONAL SITUATION]

Here we publish Sol V. Steiner's second opinion piece on the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

Sol V. STEINER: *DECOLONIZING CONSCIENCES - ZIONISM IN QUESTION (2)*

The first opinion columm dealt with the earthquake opened up by the events of October 7, 2023 for the State of Israel and Israelis. Among other things, October 7 produced an irreversible gap in Zionism's ideological apparatus between promise and denial. The promise of the new state as a security guarantee "for Jews the world over" has been shattered, while the structural denial of the existence of the Palestinian people reveals a falsified history - including the myth of "return to the sacred land" - the better to conceal the colonial fact.

Decolonizing the Zionist narrative, identifying its flaws, flushing out the multiple twists and turns between mythology and reality - that's the subject of this article.

Note

Hamas has officially and publicly asked the Palestinian people for "forgiveness" for the suffering caused by the murderous war waged by the Israeli state in response to the bloody intervention of October 7, 2023.

The Hamas carnage is proving to be what it is: **the worst possible political impasse** for the Palestinian people, as Gaza has become the scene of unprecedented destruction. The figures are terrifying: in the space of seven months, more than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed. The number of children killed is unknown. Nor do we know how many people were deported or displaced. Famine is setting in. (For my part, I can no longer read testimonies and reports from the field).

Africans have a proverb: "*When you're drowning, hang on to the crocodiles*". Crocodiles are, in this case, very bad "friends" for those trying to control the current. Duly noted.

Opening

"The Palestinian question has returned, under the worst possible conditions, to haunt those who have been denying it for 75 years. Its return affirms a truth that imposes itself as its reality.

No army, no wall, no supremacist fundamental law, no messianic mythology will protect a country that decides, in order to Judaize an Arab land, to erase every trace of the memory of the inhabiting people.

Bringing justice to the bruised, humiliated, despoiled, deported and displaced **Palestinian people** can only be achieved through a process of decolonization of Zionism.

For Israelis who want to live in peace, equality and justice with their neighbor, while respecting identities and histories, decolonizing their history is the key to their future.

1. Jonathan Glazer and the colonial spirit

In an article in Le *Monde* on January 30, 2024, director Jonathan Glazer had this to say about his film The *Zone of Interest*:

> "*We need this catastrophe not to be a calcified moment in history, not to be in an amber bubble, we need it to guide us for the present time. The Höss couple [1] tells us something, for example, about the spirit of colonization. He sees himself as a pioneer of German settlement in the East, of the Lebensraum that was largely inspired to Hitler by the concept of 'American manifest destiny'.*"

---

[1] Nazi couple,Hoss being the Auschwitz camp guard.

Jonathan Glazer's film is not about the extermination of European Jewry, but about what makes it possible to live together over time, in the face of legitimized systemic injustice.

He answers: the colonial spirit. This is a truth that the Zionist narrative has been frantically striving to conceal since its origins. And Glazer continues, unperturbed, as he receives his statuette at the Césars ceremony on February 25, 2024 - the audience here is considerable:

> "*At this very moment, we stand here as men who refuse to let their Jewishness and the Holocaust be hijacked for an occupation that has caused so much suffering for so many innocent people. Whether we are talking about the victims of October 7th in Israel or those of the incessant attacks in Gaza, they are all victims of this dehumanization*.

It is from **this point of view of anti-Zionist Jews** that it seems urgent to me, in the conditions of catastrophe, to express as loudly as possible a Judaism that is autonomous from Zionism and faithful to its idea of emancipation.

This "colonial spirit" is in fact present in the texts of the founders of Zionism - which is why it seems appropriate to quote them - but it disappeared shortly after the founding of the State of Israel in favor of a narrative centered on "the new Jew" to be built for "Eretz Israel".

1-1 Zionist narrative texts

Vladimir Jabotinsky, the first leader of Zionism, in a 1924 article entitled "The Iron Wall", writes:

> "*Any indigenous people will resist foreign colonists as long as they have no hope of ridding themselves of the danger of colonization.* So there is no possible agreement between settlers and the colonized. If no agreement was possible, the only alternative for Zionist colonization was to continue *"under the protection of a force independent of the local population",* of an *"iron wall that the indigenous population could not cross"*.
> The vocabulary is clearly that of the colonial bestiary.

Benny Morris, Israeli historian, in an interview published on January 8, 2004 in the newspaper *Haaretz*, says the following:

> "*A Jewish state could not come into existence without the expulsion of 700,000 Palestinians. They had to be expelled. If the desire to establish a Jewish state was legitimate, there was no other choice. (...) The need to establish this state in this place was more important than the injustice done to the Palestinians by expelling them*."

He continues:

> "*If the end of history turns out to be a disaster for the Jews, it will be because Ben Gurion* [Prime Minister of Israel at the time] *did not carry out a complete transfer in 1948. (...) If Israel's existence is threatened, expulsion will be justified*."

So that's Zionist colonial thinking in itself.

The idea of the injustice done to the Palestinians recurs like a leitmotif in various texts. Zionists know what they're doing and write about it.

Moshe Dayan, Israel's Chief of Staff, at the funeral of a young Israeli killed near the Egyptian border, delivered this speech in 1956, certainly his best-known, which has not aged a day since. It could be addressed to the Israelis of post-October 7, 2023:

> "*Let's not accuse the murderers. Who are we to blame them for their hatred? For eight years now, they've been hanging around in their refugee camps in Gaza, and before their very eyes, we've been settling on their land in the villages where they and their ancestors once lived. We are a generation of settlers, and without steel helmets and cannons we can neither plant a tree nor build a house. Let us not avert our eyes when we see hatred fermenting in the hundreds of thousands of Arabs around us. This is the destiny of our generation, the choice of our lives - to be ready, to be armed, strong and tough, otherwise the sword will slip from our hands and our very existence will go up in smoke*".

This text is a manifesto.

Dayan seems to be addressing those who don't want to understand that the kibbutz, which embodies the beginning of settlement colonialism, cannot plant a tomato in the desert without the intervention of a global security system. Without arousing the hatred of those from whom the land was stolen in order to... plant said tomatoes. The reaction of certain kibbutzim, after October 7 2023, deploring the destruction of the "Green Eden", planted less than ... six kilometers from Gaza, seems to prove Dayan's text right. They still don't want to understand.

How can we speak of a Zionist "dream" if it means chasing people off the land and forcing them to build walls around themselves out of fear of the other they have chased off? Doesn't the use of the word *dream* overlap with the use of the word *nightmare*?

In Dayan's words, there is **the premise of a nightmare to come**, the lament of a Greek tragedy, except that the fatum, in this case destiny, is the singular choice of a settler's life. Dayan makes no reference to a messianic text to justify the choice of this life, under the sign of the sword and the steel helmet. This text is astonishing in its lapidary truth: the "virgin" lands to blossom in the desert exist only in the mouths of the settlers. And the price of this mythology has a name: war.
Socialist Prime Minister Golda Meïr coined this famous phrase in 1969:

> *"Who are the Palestinians? I don't know anyone by that name. They don't exist."*

This is the DNA of Zionism.

1-2 The *Balfour* totem pole

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 states:

> *"Zionism, right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in ancient traditions, in present necessities, in hopes for the future, in a whole far greater than the desires and frustrations of the 700,000 Arabs who live in this old land today."*

With the cynicism befitting the rank of the British imperial power, the Balfour Declaration gave the future Zionist state the blank check it needed for its legitimacy. But it is also a magisterium on the signifiers of colonialism.
The declaration says that Zionism -versus colonialism - is accountable to no one. It is beyond morality. Beyond all justice. It IS, it is Empire, with its mythologies, its messianisms, its will. **This ontological and political totem** justifies the arrogance of the injustice done to the 700,000 expelled Arabs. The Palestinian "Arab question" would be relegated to the "profit and loss" section of the Zionist colonization thus legitimized. Passing of power between the imperial power of England, dominant at the time, and the Zionist state in the making. Since Zionism is quintessentially European, it will be a faithful pupil of European colonialism. Not the least of the twists in the Zionist narrative is to source its legitimacy from the imperial West, which authorized, if not collaborated in, the "Destruction of the Jews of Europe" (Raul Hilberg) through various means and its eloquent silence.

1-3 Under Israel, Palestine

The situation thus named in the texts evokes the title of the fine book (published in 1987) by Ilan Halévy, a Jewish, French and Palestinian journalist and politician of Yemeni origin, who died in 2013, "*Under Israel, Palestine*".
"Under Israel, Palestine" is **the hidden truth of the Zionist narrative**.
It's **the Nakba of 1948** (for the Palestinians) that the messianic mythology of the "land given to the Jews" wants to erase from history and common memory. It's the forced Judaization of historic Palestine to make it a Jewish land. Zionism posits the "return" of all the world's Jews to the so-called ancestral land of Israel as a princeps of its narrative, but forbids any return to those of its inhabitants, the Palestinians, whom it has expelled. This is another of his twists that may explain his (hysterical) fear of anti-Zionism. The idea of "the return of all Palestinian refugees to their historic homeland" is a Zionist nightmare.

1-4 The messianic myth of return

For Zionists, there can be no Zionism without Palestine. No Zionism without a return to Palestine.
Before Palestine, there were attempts to create a "Jewish national home", as Theodor Herzl advocated in the 1880s, to provide security for the world's Jews against rising anti-Semitic perils, in Birobidjan in Russia, in Uganda in Africa, but Zionists weren't interested. For the return to Palestine, the narrative must justify the biblical terms of Jewish redemption and spiritual liberation, and certify its messianic aspect as the real basis of the settlement project. As for **the use of the word "*refuge*", *this is*** an ideological element that makes the link with the historical "Jewish victimization" essential to the Zionist narrative. **The idea of returning to biblical traces** is more important than that of refuge.

> *"With the concepts of negation of exile and return to history, the Jewish Zionist settlement in Palestine will be presented as the restoration of Jewish sovereignty, the return of the Jewish people to a land presented as theirs (and supposedly empty) and as the culmination of Jewish history, the fulfillment of millennia-old aspirations. This approach establishes a continuity, a bridge between biblical times and the present."*
> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin. *Exile and sovereignty. Judaism, Zionism and binational thinking.* 2007. Éditions la Fabrique.

1-5 Palestinians don't exist

To complete the Zionist project, as many Jews as possible had to be brought in.

But to get there, it was necessary to **center the narrative on a** typical **colonial lie**: "*a land without a people for a people without a land*", summed up by Golda Meir's phrase: "*the Palestinians don't exist*".

But in reality, the expulsion, destruction and ethnic cleansing of the inhabitants of Palestine (who do exist) had to be carried out in the name of the myth of a land without people (which assumes they don't exist). This umpteenth twist founded the Israeli imaginary, bottle-feeding generations from the first kibbutzniks to West Bank settlers. It also declines a ferocious law; the double belonging to a mythology and to a reality that contradicts it favors a violent return of the repressed. A harbinger of death to come.

If the Palestinians don't exist in Zionist mythology, then there's another major one: the Jew of exile, the Jew of Galut, against whom the new Israeli state has been built.

2. Israel or double negation

2-1 The denial of exile and the creation of the "new Jew

> "*The concept of the negation of exile, indissolubly linked to that of the return of history, emphasizes a global myth that still contributes today to the development of Israeli consciousness. The negation of exile is the principle around which Israeli consciousness, history and politics have always been shaped*".
> Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin. *Exile and sovereignty. Judaism, Zionism and binational thinking*. 2007. Éditions la Fabrique.

The negation of exile is **the claimed contempt for** the Jew of Galut (*exile* in Hebrew), **the diasporic Jew**: the exilic Jew, the pale and passive Jew of the ghetto, weak and degenerate, orthodox and irrational. "*Rejection of the culture of exile was the common watchword, the solid foundation on which the spirit of the yishuv was built*".

Ben Gurion laid down the rules that would in future dictate the Labor Zionist attitude towards the Diaspora and Galut culture:

> "*You'll need a new tape measure to sort through your old bag. Anything big enough, important enough for our new road, we'll take with us. All that is petty, rotten and stinks of exile, we'll throw away, and it will disappear with the bad legacy of the dead past, so that this past doesn't cast its shadow over our new soul and desecrate our redemption*".
> *Dreams and history*. Amnon Rubinstein. Calmann-Lévy.1985.

The "new Jew" is young, strong, hard-working and productive. Not necessarily religious. Secular and modern. He's the "sabra" of Zionism's new age. He embodies what Max Mordau, an early Zionist, called "muscular Judaism". Shorts and khaki shirt, machine gun slung over his shoulder to protect the kibbutz, singing around the fire - this is the image of the sabra that Otto Preminger's 1960 film Exodus made iconic.

Mordeau will call on Jews to "regenerate" themselves by advocating physical education to turn the sporadic Jew into a strong man.

A copy... of the Ecole des Cadres d'Uriage which, as part of the Petainist national revolution, aimed to regenerate French youth corrupted by democratic decadence (sic).

For Ben Gourion, Prime Minister of Israel since 1955, Zionism is the consecration of biblical Jewish history. Zionism would be realized through the creation of the "new man". For the new man, on "his land" (sic), kibbutzes are built, trees are planted and ...tomatoes are grown. It was Ben Gurion who, with the stroke of a pen, erased two thousand years of exile from Jewish history, abolishing the Talmud and replacing it with the Bible. The word *redemption* remains a religious messianic concept that Ben Gourion "adapts" into national and political messianism.

2-2 Is a Zionist still a Jew?

The colonization of Palestine by a growing number of Jews highlighted **a radical break with the Jewish past. From** the outset, these new Jews no longer wanted to use the term "Jew"; they wanted to be Hebraic. All the institutions adopted the same language; they were Hebraic, not Jewish. Jews arriving in Israel had to forget their language, history and traditions, and learn Hebrew. The characteristics of the new man, the *sabra*, were Hebrew, the kibbutz, manual labor, a return to the land,

a love of newly acquired roots. **The language of Yiddish, the** language of the Yishuv and the Torah, thus banished, will return, but to support the ideology of victimhood.

> "*Jewishness now meant being a Hebrew, loving your land, falling in love with nature, giving tradition a new national and social meaning.*"
> *Dreams and history*. Amnon Rubinstein. Calmann-Lévy. 1985.

This shame of the ancient Jew - the millenarian Jew, the religious Jew, the Communist Jew, the "Yd" Jew - would lead Zionism to designate the diasporic Jew as responsible for the extermination of European Jewry.

> "*I consider the Genocide to be part of a chain of events whose characteristics were already fixed at the beginning of the exile [...] The Genocide is the definitive and absolute proof of the failure of the diaspora. [...] The Genocide is the definitive and absolute proof of the failure of the diaspora*.
> Abraham B. Yehoshua. *For a Jewish normality*. 1981. Éditions Liana lévi.

For Yehoshua, **exile is a "neurosis",** a statement echoed by anti-Semitic propaganda about Jewish "degeneration"**.** Zionism is the only way to live one's "Jewish life to the full", says the writer, who is also a militant member of the late "Peace Now" with his friends, also writers, Amos Oz and David Grossman, the world-famous intellectual trio of the ex-Zionist left.

He is astonished by the still strong attachment of Jews to exile, and the lack of enthusiasm for emigrating to Israel in 1981:

> "*The doors are open, the opportunities are vast, but the immigrants aren't coming. The waves of immigration have brought people in distress: Genocide survivors, refugees from Arab and Communist countries, etc.*".
> *Pour une normalité juive*. 1981 Éditions Liana Kévi

Are the Arab, Jewish and Communist survivors in distress... real Jews?

2-3 There are no Jews in Israel, only Israelis

The answer to the question lies in the statement. The State of Israel is not the state of all Jews, but that of the "new Jew", conceived, constructed and realized against the exilic and universal Jew. **This "new Jew" is now called Israeli, kibbutznik/colon**, inhabiting a land conquered by the expulsion of those who lived there, and asserting a Jewish state supremacy. In Israel, the "new Jews" have become Israelis, citizens of a state called *Israel*. They are no longer Jews from the point of view of exilic history. So we understand the usefulness of the anti-Zionist versus anti-Semitic amalgam. For Zionism, it is necessary to keep the name of the Jewish state at all costs, to preserve Zionism from any systemic attack by "Jewish victimization". Any attack on Israel is called a *pogrom*, and the October 7 attack becomes a new Holocaust.

2-4 Zionism: a double negation of Jewish exile and the Palestinian identity

The Zionist state was built on a double reactive negation: the **negation of the diasporic Jew and the negation of the Palestinian people**. Denial of exile for the former, exile for the latter. This structure of continuity in the double negation induces the refusal of the multiple and sanctifies the primacy of the identity of the One. This double refusal is embodied in the form of a monad based on a simplistic binarism: them and us. Them against us. Us and them. This edifice can only support the spread of racism and anti-Semitism. It is dangerous for the respect of peoples and identities. From this point of view, the diasporic Jew cannot but be anti-Zionist. He supports his brother in exile.

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DIOGO FAIA FAGUNDES: *BRAZIL'S TWO PECULIARITIES OR: HOW DID WE GET HERE?*

Diogo Faia Fagundes, a graduate student in philosophy of law at the University of São Paulo, is a member of the *Long March Brigade* (BLM).

Diogo Faia Fagundes's long letter to us is a highly detailed critical analysis of the political situation in Brazil, its specific features, its history, which he periodizes, and the current vitiated confrontation between Bolsonarism, described as neo-fascist, and Petism (named after Lula's Workers' Party), which has ended up being absorbed into the neo-liberal state and is now supported only by the defensive and therefore weak argument of "reacting to the Bolsonarist reaction". At the end, he sketches out a few reasons to believe that a revival of communist ideas could emerge in Brazil, making it possible to escape the deleterious parliamentary opposition between Bolsonarism and Petism.

Brazil's political situation has held the attention of every outside observer for at least a decade. How could the government led by the Workers' Party (PT), which has lifted millions of people out of poverty, be so easily overthrown by a coup d'état? Is it true that Lula, internationally renowned statesman and once the world's most popular president, was imprisoned for corruption? Why has the prosperous, promising economy of one of the world's so-called emerging countries led to a brutal economic crisis? How did a country with such a strong electoral left become the cradle of one of the world's most reactionary neo-fascist movements, led by Jair Bolsonaro, probably the rudest, most ignorant and least qualified adventurer ever to head any state? And, to crown the saga of the redeemed hero, how did Lula manage to come back triumphant against his adversary?

To understand this dramatic picture worthy of bad cinema, mere journalistic anecdote is not enough. We need to delve deeper. But first, we need to **clarify the current situation**, marked by a new Lula government after the close elections of 2022.

Eight points

1

Lula was not released from prison as a result of a massive left-wing movement. The judicial excesses and partisan nature of the anti-corruption movement that put him behind bars (Operation *Lava Jato*, "*Express Washing*") had long been known. Despite the merits of a militant and persistent current of opinion surrounding the fight for his freedom, the decisive factor in his return to the electoral game was the change in position of a sector of the Brazilian ruling classes.

Having embarked on the candidacy of a dangerous adventurer, part of the upper bourgeoisie began to distance itself significantly from the Bolsonaro government when it began sabotaging the public vaccination effort and calling on its mass movement to defy institutions and flirt with a coup d'état. This excessive and unstable side of Bolsonarism led to the realization that only Lula would be a popular leader of sufficient stature to beat Bolsonaro at the ballot box and prevent an institutional breakdown that would create risks for many people's businesses - including *Globo*, the country's largest media and "culture" group, a veritable monopoly at the forefront of both the campaign to imprison Lula and the battle for his electoral victory over Bolsonaro in 2022.

2

Lula's electoral victory in a very difficult run-off against Bolsonaro (with a difference of just two million votes) was marked by the extreme breadth of alliances, symbolized by the vice-president, Geraldo Alckmin, former leader of the PSDB (the party that was the PT's main opponent before Bolsonaro's emergence) and by the rapprochement with *Globo*. Joe Biden's American stance against any coup attempt by Bolsonaro (since he is a fanatical Trump supporter) has also led the army to hesitate over putschist plans.

This broad arc of support was based on the disjunction "democracy vs. dictatorship", which corresponds to the ideological propaganda of the United States and the "West" towards their enemies.

3

It is also worth noting the **lack of a coherent program** in the electoral campaign. The main emotion mobilized by Lula, apart from the fear of a possible dictatorship, was nostalgia for his first governments. Hardly any proposals were put forward, apart from a vague call to return to the good old days, guaranteed not by a set of articulated ideas, but by Lula's mere physical presence. This was undoubtedly the election in which there was the least debate of ideas or state programs in the last Brazilian Republic.

4

At the head of the government, what are the **initiatives of the new Lula government?**

On the one hand, the return of the old social policies, dismantled by the Bolsonaro government. The state is rebuilding itself after years of intense dismantling.

On the other, the maintenance of the liberal agenda that has hegemonized the country since the coup against Dilma Rousseff (2015-16). This agenda, baptized by the government of Michel Temer (Rousseff's vice-president who took power after the coup) as the "Bridge to the Future", remains intact. None of the "reforms" approved (labor reform, social security reform, privatization of state-owned companies such as the Eletrobrás and Petrobrás refineries) have been cancelled. The economic agenda continues along the same path, aiming to reduce deficits (by obsessing over public debt reduction), reduce the size of the welfare state (social security spending and compulsory health and education floors are once again targeted as obstacles) and attract foreign investment through a good business environment.

The first year of the new administration saw the introduction of a new public spending ceiling, redoubling the commitment to fiscal austerity that has characterized Brazilian economic policy since the economic crisis in the middle of the last decade.

5

The spirit of conciliation and appeasement so typical of Lula has intensified since his release from prison. Instead of a bolder Lula, we have a government with more distant horizons. A case in point is the way the government has dealt with coup plotters (both those who openly attempted the coup of January 7, 2023, and the military who were proven to have conspired against the ballot box and the electoral process): no sanctions have been imposed on military personnel involved in conspiracies. It externalized political disputes against putschists to the judiciary, depoliticizing the issue. Conversely, out of fear of confrontation, the federal administration did not even make a public statement on April 1, the date of the 1964 military coup! While locking left-wing movements into the quarrel over the country's memory, the military remain free to celebrate their version of events, rewriting history as they see fit.

6

The previous point indicates that **the current Lula government is following the same scenario** as its first victory in 2003, when, against the expectations of the left, it cancelled no privatizations and carried out no structural reforms in the country.

As it happens, back then, the neo-fascist movement was not as strong and mobilized as it is today (with governors of some of the country's main states, including São Paulo, as well as a strong presence in the legislature), the international situation was much more comfortable due to the accelerated growth in demand for commodities from China, and Congress (our parliament) had not yet acquired as much strength and economic autonomy as it has today. The divisions in Brazilian society remain strong, as shown by the government's low approval rating (35%), which does not allow it to hope for a return to a period of broad popularity.

7

This situation is worrying because the expectations of the most disadvantaged sectors were high. Frustration with the government - the only immediate obstacle to the return of the extreme right - could lead to a catastrophic situation. Neither the government nor the left-wing parties (which have become appendages of the state) are showing any political initiative and are content to manage a dangerous situation. The intelligentsia is uncritical and generally aligns itself unconditionally with the government in the name of democracy. Fear dominates political subjectivity. Left-wing parties, mere electoral machines, lose their ability to formulate major strategies or programs and are reduced to representing in parliament the demands of "minorities" (women, blacks, gays, lesbians, etc.) and "human rights", in a segmented way, without a global vision of an alternative to the current order.

8

What still makes Lula unique as a political leader are his links with the trade union movement, his close ties with the poorest population (particularly in the northeast, the country's poorest region, from which Lula, like many São Paulo workers, emigrated) and his relatively independent stance on international politics.

However, never before has the Brazilian trade union movement been so weakened (proof of which is the public failure of Lula's May 1st action), while his foreign policy merits are more the effect of rhetoric than coherent articulation in leadership of the subcontinent. These qualities would be lost in the event of Lula's death. His likely successor, Fernando Haddad (a candidate in 2018, when Lula could not run), is a technocratic academic who behaves like a caricature of a Minister of the Economy, obsessed with cutting spending, with no link to the world of work, the poorest population or the more anti-imperialist Latin American left, linked to the Cuban experience.

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These eight points summarize Brazil's difficult situation. They may seem excessively pessimistic, especially in the face of the self-celebratory triumphalism that has marked the position of the Brazilian Left, but they express a disenchanted vision of the Brazilian state's ability to respond to the main desires of the crowds, as well as to eliminate the structural causes that generated the Bolsonaro phenomenon. Contrary to popular belief, the neo-fascist mass movement is not a mere electoral phenomenon, and even less a temporary one.

Methodological issues

To clarify these underlying reasons, let's take **a look at the country's recent history**. This "digression" is essential, as one of the characteristics of the low quality of Brazilian political debate is the absence of a broad vision of the past (which is reflected in the short-term vision of the future). It is therefore necessary to highlight long-term historical trends in the configuration of the Brazilian state and society. However, these trends - whether economic or "social" - are not sufficient to elucidate our problem. At best, they can provide a general framework for understanding existing structures and constraints; at worst, they lead to economic or sociological determinism.

Two singularities

We'll round off the structural view with an analysis of the **political contingencies of recent Brazilian history**.

In our opinion, there are two political singularities that must be understood if we are to have an accurate vision of current Brazilian politics. Any analysis that isolates only one of these two singularities leads to serious errors of political orientation - the most frequent being to emphasize the strength of Bolonarism as an excrescence to be easily expelled, or, conversely, to hypertrophy its dimension, interpreting it as a structural and necessary result of Brazilian social formation.

What are these two singularities?

1

The first was the formation of what we might call **the "Brazilian popular democratic camp" in the** late 70s and early 80s, led by the nascent Workers' Party, but also marked by other left-wing forces, and resulting from workers' strikes, student demonstrations, peasant movements and frontal opposition to the military dictatorship.

This group of political organizations, ranging from public health movements (which are at the origin of today's unified health system, an achievement of the 1988 Constitution) to agrarian reform organizations (such as the famous *Landless Movement*, the MST), to the reorganization of the country's main student organization, destroyed by the dictatorship, the National Union of Students (UNE), constituted the most combative pole of the nascent Brazilian New Republic, giving it its distinctive "social" character.

We underline the fact that this happened in a global context marked by the crisis of socialism and Marxism.

2

The second political singularity is more recent: the **neo-fascist movement led by Jair Bolsonaro**. This is a direct reaction to the PT administrations but, more broadly, to the "spirit" of the New Republic, consolidated in the 1988 Constitution and marked by a rejection of Brazil's military dictatorship.

He is also the fruit of a **series of mass movements** that began in 2013 but took on a more directly right-wing character from 2015 and 2016, as part of the cycle of revolts against Dilma Rousseff. Although Bolsonaro has become the most prominent symbolic and political representative of this movement, it is not limited to him: there are organizations still alive today, such as the MBL (*Free Brazil Movement)*, which are direct products of this cycle of revolts. Broadly speaking, this group of organizations - often in conflict with one another - could be called the neo-fascist camp.

Four movements

The intelligibility of Brazil's political scene is therefore dependent on these "long detours" through the birth, consolidation and crisis of the New Republic, in which two political bodies stand out: Petism and Anti-Petism. Nothing would be more damaging to an analysis of the Brazilian situation than to isolate Bolsonaro from his eminently reactive role, totally dependent on the consequences of the events that sealed the final fate of the military dictatorship.

We distinguish between :

I.   the main trends in the formation and consolidation of **the Brazilian state** (understood in the broadest sense);

II. the main trends of **the New Republic** (1985 to the present), after the end of the military dictatorship;

III. an analysis of the formation and consolidation of the first Brazilian singularity (**the popular democracy camp**) from its emergence to its current state;

IV. an analysis of the **neo-fascist camp**, based on the crisis of the New Republic and in direct antagonism with the camp of popular democracy. At the end of this journey, we will be able to provide some modest guidelines, based on current political work and the assessment of this historical period.

I - Trends in the history of the Brazilian state

We will confine ourselves here to listing a few theses. Clarifying these trends is an imperative for all contemporary political work. One of the essential "epistemological obstacles" in Brazilian politics - even among communists - is the absence of a broad historical vision of the country itself, and the absorption of tasks into the most pragmatic and mediocre immediacy.

Five basic facts

Let's list five facts that are fundamental to understanding the country.

1. Failure to resolve the agrarian question

The country, founded on **export monoculture latifundia**, has never seen any agrarian reform worthy of the name, comparable to that of European countries or the United States, Japan or South Korea (not to mention the examples of socialist countries). Even when major reforms have integrated urban workers (for example, after the "revolution of 1930"), nothing similar has been done in the countryside.

One of the key "basic reforms" of João Goulart's program was prevented by a military coup in 1964. Today's Brazilian agro-industry - one of the country's main economic forces - is the direct result of the "modernization from above" carried out by the military dictatorship, which reformed the old latifundia through public enterprises such as Embrapa, with abundant agricultural credit and subsidies. The result was extreme land concentration (which explains the strength of the landless movement even after the country's urbanization), a huge and chaotic urban exodus (with the formation of large shanty towns and other urban aberrations), the non-existence of a popular and mass domestic market as a lever for capitalist accumulation, and dependence on the export of agricultural products to the world market.

2. The absence of major national benchmarks

Unlike other Latin American countries, which have heroes of the wars of independence who are well recognized by the population (such as Simón Bolívar and San Martín) or strong historical landmarks (the Mexican revolution of 1910), **there are few historical symbols** capable of providing the basis for a strong national feeling.

Our independence, despite major struggles, particularly in Bahia, was led by a Portuguese member of the royal family, and our transition to the Republic was nothing more than a military coup. The construction of a national state project is extremely recent, dating back to the Vargas years, from 1930 onwards. This explains **the very important role played by soccer and popular music** (from the 1950s onwards) in shaping our national culture.

The lack of a national consciousness generates important ideological phenomena, including what we call "*vira-latismo*": a contempt for the country and its people, in the belief that everything that comes from outside is superior. One of the most common and widespread variants of this phenomenon, including among the intelligentsia, is the belief that the country's problem lies not in capitalism or dependence on imperialism, but in the corrupt, lazy and mischievous character of the Brazilian people, or in a "patrimonialism" resulting from the lack of modernization of our political elites and the hypertrophy of the state.

Another effect is the constant attempt to apply foreign models as *ad hoc* solutions: thus, during the monarchy, the French system was copied, and later, with the Republic, it was the turn of the North American model.

Note that there is a real difference with the other BRICS countries: whereas Iran, China, Russia and the Islamic world have cultures and civilizations that go back thousands of years - which enables them to have more coherent autonomy projects - Brazil lacks great strategic vision.

However, it is worth highlighting **the sequences that marked a different idea of the country**: the popular revolts of the 1910s and 1920s - with "tenentism" [1] , modern Brazilian art, the impact of the workers' movement - which marked the end of the oligarchic Old Republic; and the struggle for "basic reforms" throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with an active role played by the communists and popular

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[1] Politico-military movement of young Brazilian officers in the 1920s.

sectors - in particular the creation of Petrobrás. This movement was interrupted by the military coup of 1964.

3. The important role of the military and the bachareis [2]

In Brazil, two corporations have historically carried a disproportionate weight in relation to the rest of the state apparatus, even today: **the army and the judiciary**. The Republic was founded on an alliance between these two strata.

The training of not only the political elite, but also a large part of the backbone of the state, the intelligentsia (including philosophy) and the literati, comes from law schools or the army. In addition to the ideological consequences (valorization of superficial erudition, dilettante and tasteless "beletrism", idealistic and conservative formalism), we suffer the bitter effects in everyday life: the most expensive and inefficient judicial system in the world, an enormous sense of caste among the members of these guilds, which gives them a "moderating role" in moments of political crisis.

Let's not forget that the military supported (in the form of a threat from the army commander!) Lula's arrest and formed the bulk of the Bolsonaro government's composition, including the disastrous Ministry of Health amid the chaos of the pandemic, just as the Supreme Court (STF) judges have acquired a hypertrophied political role, deciding the country's major issues in their offices, under a "neutral" facade. Today, the public knows the names of STF justices more than that of key members of Congress!

4. The adaptability of the ruling classes

Contrary to a popularized myth about our history, **the Brazilian people are not inherently peaceful and resigned**, and even less endowed with a "cordial soul" that would prevent them from desiring and fighting ruptures. However, we must recognize that our national history is marked by pacts and transitions negotiated to avoid any truly structural transformation.

The chameleon-like adaptability of representatives of the ruling classes is truly impressive. Prince Falconeri's maxim in *The Leopard* ("*everything must change so that everything remains as it was*") has perhaps nowhere else in the world such resonance. The military dictatorship itself, unlike other countries on the subcontinent, was not exactly defeated: the military negotiated a slow, gradual and safe transition to a new political regime in which they ran no risk of seeing their crimes punished. Our first president after the military dictatorship (José Sarney) was a president from the party that supported the military regime (Arena)! This characteristic explains why **the country has never come to terms with the tragedies of its history**.

5. The role of slavery

The long period of slavery has not only left deep scars on the black population, in the form of persistent racism (albeit more "veiled" than in the USA), which manifests itself mainly in violent police actions in the Brazilian peripheries and favelas, but has also established as dogma the repudiation of manual labor: there is genuine contempt for jobs considered inferior, which refer to manual activities requiring physical effort.

This clear separation between intellectual and manual work, between those who command and those who obey, is very pronounced in Brazilian society, so that not only is **social apartheid** highly visible, but there are also persistent prejudices and mental attitudes aimed at inferiorizing those who don't have a university degree or who don't work in "managerial" professions.

II - Trends in the New Republic (1985- ?)

Since the popular movements that began the last period of the dictatorship in the late 1970s, forming what we will later analyze as the "popular-democratic camp", a transition has begun in the Brazilian state, marked by the ability of the leaders of the military dictatorship to leave the scene without having to pay for their crimes.

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[2] Law graduates who were part of a minority of highly educated Brazilians occupying important positions in the stateapparatus

The result of the post-dictatorship consensus was crystallized in **the 1988 Constitution**, a highly programmatic document based on the social-democratic ideal of a welfare state. Although the left was in the minority in the composition of the National Constituent Assembly - the PT had only 16 deputies, for example - the country's political climate was marked by the rise of popular movements, a strong predominance of left-wing ideas in public opinion and a rejection of the legacy of the military dictatorship. For a long time, there was no "proud" right-wing in the country: the parties that emerged from the military dictatorship did not deny being right-wing. On the contrary, they even tried to appropriate symbols or names from the opposing camp. For example, one of the parties that inherited the dictatorship was called the Progressive Party (PP)!

This situation lasted until 2015, with **the coup d'état** that gave power to a right-wing marked by street mobilizations and viscerally anti-red organizations. In 2018, it was definitively buried with the election of Jair Bolsonaro. Today, it is trying to rebuild itself, under the symbolic baton of two figures who ran for opposing parties (Lula and Alckmin), under the slogan "*Union and Reconstruction*".

The anti-dictatorship consensus has manifested itself above all in a strong focus on the "social question": income transfer policies for the poorest (the most famous being the *Bolsa Família*, inaugurated in 2003), universalization of basic education, consolidation of the unified healthcare system provided for in the Constitution, expansion of higher education, unprecedented social security for the rural population, linking of social security benefits to the minimum wage, etc.

But this consensus also revolved around the rejection of the military dictatorship's "Greater Brazil" rhetoric and its statist, "autarkic" economic projects. In general, the "national question" and the theme of accelerated state-led industrial development, so prevalent in Brazil from the 1930s to the 1980s, were abandoned with the New Republic. The result was a combination of economic liberalization - in line with the globalization of the 1990s - and social policies, as well as a preoccupation (at least in public discourse, since police violence never stops...) with human rights, diversity and inclusive citizenship.

The social-liberal horizon and human rights ideology formed the ideological mortar that, despite differences, consolidated the country's "modernizing" political core, symbolized by the PT and PSDB (Brazilian Social Democracy Party) duo, which dominated and polarized the electoral scene in presidential elections from 1994 to 2018. Over time, the PSDB moved away from its "center-left" origins and resorted to conservative rhetoric against the PT's dominance in the 2000s, but it's true that it was all still part of the same consensus.

Over time, the New Republic has shown signs of exhaustion and inability to deliver the promised European welfare state, due to trends converging towards a result we can sum up in one sentence: a return to the Old Republic (1888-1930).

The Old Republic was a period when regional political oligarchies ruled a country without national integration or vision. It was all about exporting coffee and ensuring the continuity of a set of regional political forces dependent on export agriculture. While it's an exaggeration to describe Brazil today in these terms, the fact is that the New Republic has become an empty promise due to phenomena such as early deindustrialization (which has severely affected the creation of quality jobs and the quality of life in urban centers) and the specialization of the economy around the agro-export model, based on soybeans, iron ore and other raw products, which are little processed industrially. Agro-industry has become the most dynamic and productive sector of the national economy, while at the same time favoring (and still favoring) the most strongly pro-Bolsonaro regions of the country. The dynamics of agribusiness have increasingly contributed to the strengthening of the far right, in addition to the deforestation and environmental destruction associated with the expansion of the agricultural frontier and mining.

Structural trends

In addition to accelerated de-industrialization, which means that the country is no longer the most promising "emerging country" (as it was in the last century), replaced by the industrial dynamism of the Asians (now including Vietnam) and the strengthening of agrarian-export trends, both of which are at the root of various current social and political problems, we need to consider the structural trends in this cycle of the Brazilian state.

1. The integration of the left into the State apparatus and the loss of dynamism of social movements

There are no longer any electorally viable left-wing parties independent of the state or big business. **The PT has become an appendage of the state** and no longer concerns itself with major strategic and programmatic issues, as it once did. Its main leaders are not mass leaders, but managers or bureaucrats. Its dependence on electoral marketing and money from large private oligopolies (banks, contractors) has given rise to major corruption scandals. The party's electoral orientation drained all its cadres into the state bureaucracy.

The most powerful social movements lost their momentum and became totally hostage to PT governments. The suburbs of the big cities have been abandoned and left to the action of organized crime and the work of conservative Protestant churches. The attraction exerted by the PT in the past, stemming from its novelty and its opposition to traditional politics, has completely disappeared.

2. An increasingly right-wing intellectual environment

Whereas during the heyday of the Brazilian Communist Party, from the mid-40s to the 60s, and even during the harsh repressive period of the military dictatorship, there was a predominance of progressive intellectuals in Brazilian publishing and culture, **the New Republic** has witnessed the curious phenomenon of a Left that is ever stronger electorally and ever weaker in the debates of opinion and in cultural influence.

Although left-wing intellectuals are still numerous, they are increasingly confined to their fields of specialization or to the walls of their universities. The major editorial phenomena **since the 1990s have been** based on ultra-conservative names (such as the "philosopher" Olavo de Carvalho, a great media success and then Bolsonaro's "guru") and journalists and opinion-makers vocalizing a caricatured and outdated anti-communism. Symbolic of this is Veja magazine, the country's leading weekly, which increasingly stands out for its radical opposition to anything resembling an ounce of progressivism.

3. The growth of Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches

Strongly linked to the North American churches, the presence of large Pentecostal churches in the country has grown dramatically since the 1980s. With the connivance of public authorities (including the left), these groups, dominated by unscrupulous mafiosi, are commercial in scope, marked by heavy investment in advertising, television and radio networks. They are guided by theologies that value private enrichment (**the "*theology of prosperity*"**) and political growth against the secular state (**the "*theology of domination*"**), based on themes drawn mainly from the more moralistic aspects of the Old Testament. They elect many members of parliament and have a political project openly based on biblical precepts.

Their expansion into Brazil's peripheries, through state-contracted social assistance and even health services (in the treatment of drug addicts), has altered the country's political and religious landscape, which will soon cease to be predominantly Catholic. While there used to be the basic ecclesial communities of the Catholic Church, linked to **liberation theology** and the PT, there are now churches that elect far-right leaders and have been directly linked to the Bolsonaro phenomenon.

4. Deteriorating political frameworks

At every election in the country, we hear the same mantra: "*we have the worst Congress ever*". And the situation always tends to get worse. The old traditional oligarchies have been replaced by political lumpens concerned solely with gaining support on social networks using the most sensational means.

A predominance of police and military officers promising American-style "*law and order*", religious conservatives seeking to attack the rights of women or homosexuals, social media icons forming fanatical clans marked by a devotional relationship typical of soccer fans, a hyper-ideologization of public debates (a Rio de Janeiro city councillor, son of Jair Bolsonaro, tried to ban vegetarian dishes from schools because they were left-wing....) and **a logic of tribal warfare**, totally depoliticized but highly agitated ideologically, generating a growing sense of wear and tear and lack of seriousness among the country's political cadres.

Indeed, the essential decisions are never thought through and decided by Parliament - which has ceased to be the essential place of the oligarchies to become a mere circus and a source of

entertainment for social networks - contenting itself with ratifying (after releasing money) the projects dreamed up by the economists of the financial markets, the technocrats or the agents of the media.

5. The end of any trace of "national bourgeoisie"

In the national-developmental years (30-80) of the last century, there was much talk of a bourgeois sector interested in developing the domestic market, public infrastructure works, nationalization of the economy, state-owned enterprises and so on.

Today, **the domination of the financial sector** over the entire economy (including "industrial" sectors) is almost total, meaning that all major capitalists are part of the comprador bourgeoisie! Political leaders linked to "national capitalism", such as Ciro Gomes, preach alone in the desert. The power of the financial oligarchies is such that it is practically useless to speak of "ruling classes": strictly speaking, no one runs the nation, since there is only a group of cosmopolitans with no responsibility or territorial ties.

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All this adds up to a scenario marked by ideological debasement, institutional degradation, rural and urban violence (our peripheries are the scene of Western criminal factions and police terrorism, sometimes mixed in the form of "militias") and the erasure of any future horizon. While it is wrong to reduce the rise and strength of the far right to this structural framework alone, we must emphasize the structural trends which, despite undeniable social advances, have generated the political atmosphere favorable to monsters.

We could also describe it synthetically as **an americanization of the Brazilian political system**: increasing predominance of marketing, lobbying and money in political life; idiotic "culture wars" aimed at tribal electoral clienteles; obscurantist televangelism; militaristic discourse of "public order" contrary to the law, with the right to worship individual solutions to crime - i.e., the encouragement of private armament ; even messianic adherence to the State of Israel (confused with biblical Israel, by Pentecostal groups), previously non-existent or residual, has come to form an important part of the country's habitual political repertoire...

III - The first singularity: the emergence and history of the "*People's Democratic Camp*".

In the late 1970s, political events led to the emergence of new political forces. The initial impetus came largely from a highly politicized student movement, with a strong presence of communist, Trotskyist, Maoist and other organizations. These student tendencies were generally the result of a long process of decantation, prepared for a long time by left-wing groups, generally Marxist, which had favored mass work after the defeat of the armed struggle: Marxist-Leninist Popular Action, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Proletariat, communist groupings (PCB, PCdoB, MR8), various Trotskyist groups, Polop....

These groups carried out **fieldwork** on **several fronts**: neighborhood movements (for housing, hygiene, transport, etc.), anti-famine movements (i.e. against the high cost of living) and popular education movements. It's important to point out that a significant part of this work was carried out within Catholic organizations, marked at the time by their adherence to progressive ideas.

The rebirth of the student movement was the kick-off - as is usually the case - that preceded the rebirth of the workers' movement, through strikes that went beyond the simple economic framework, with widespread support and radical methods. This was a unique phenomenon: while there was talk of the crisis of Marxism and the crisis of the labor movement in Europe, a classic labor movement was signaling the final years of the Brazilian military dictatorship!

It's also worth noting the great strength of the left in Brazilian intellectual and cultural life, so that some of the main authors of telenovelas (the biggest cultural phenomenon in Brazilian society) come from the communist movement. A good example is the popular "*Great Social Scientists*" collection from one of the country's leading educational publishing houses, which aims to introduce students to

the classics of the "humanities". In addition to Marx and Engels, traditional names include Lenin, Mao, Trotsky, Stalin and Che Guevara!

It was in **this cauldron** that the country's political life was truly reorganized, with much of this militancy and movement finding its way into the great organizational innovation of the time: the Workers' Party. In the midst of great debate and controversy, the party, led by the trade unionist Lula, succeeded in bringing together a large part of the social thrust of the time, thanks to its ability to federate various (often clandestine and even armed) movements and groupings. We don't want to deny the role of other parties and groups, including Leonel Brizola's PDT (an important leader of the 1960s who had returned from exile), but we do want to stress that the PT was not only the newest and youngest, but also the most radical (in general, more traditional parties, such as the PCB, were wary of a popular movement that could go beyond the framework of the "democratic front" with the anti-dictatorship liberal bourgeoisie) and committed to the new workers' and people's movement, while being more flexible to accommodate those who were not as committed to existing organizations.

There's no question here of retracing the PT's history, and even less of repeating the mythology the party itself tells to legitimize its radical novelty (we'll see that much of the PT's "novelty" died on the beach or didn't pass the test of history), but what is important is that, since at least 1989, this organization has galvanized the virtually uncontested leadership of the Brazilian left. The other parties have only succeeded in being alternatives at regional level (such as the PDT in Rio de Janeiro) and have consciously played a role of subordination and support to a bloc of forces led by the PT - as in the case of the PCdoB, a party with an "Albanian line" which, initially quite sectarian against the PT, quickly became its most loyal ally.

Initially marked by a very strong "workerist" orientation, **the party soon became a national formation**, bringing together popular sectors of the Catholic Church engaged in popular work in the countryside and outlying districts. Taking into account the multiplicity of ideological tendencies within the party - notably the strong presence of Trotskyists - it presented itself as an alternative to both social democracy and varguist laborism (strong in the 1950s and 1960s and represented by Brizola) and communism (associated with authoritarianism). In the Brazilian context of the struggle against dictatorship, the "democratic" quality was strongly emphasized, both ideologically (criticism of Stalinism, Maoism and Castroism) and in terms of internal organization, with a strong "basist" accent (horizontal structures, leaders elected by the rank and file, etc.).

A classic conception of the party dominates: it would be a representative of the working class and its allies (peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, etc.), capable of giving a political project on the State (by winning elections) to the multiple social movements (the new trade unionism, the student movement, the peasant movement, the housing movement, etc.). This configuration, still in force today, is known as the "people's democracy camp". It enabled the theme of the "party of the working class" and the class struggle (albeit in a reformist tone and never aiming at anything like a dictatorship of the proletariat) to remain in force even with the collapse of real socialism and the end of such representations in Western Europe, which saw the end of "classism" in political discourse throughout the 80s and 90s.

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Let's periodize the political evolution of the "Democratic and Popular Camp", the main political phenomenon in Brazil during the New Republic, according to the Party's objective.

To achieve this, we have identified five phases.

1) Anti-monopoly, anti-imperialist, anti-proprietary phase (87-94)

This is the Party's most "Marxist" period, in which the influences of classic left-wing terminology and views are clearly more numerous. The key document is the famous strategic orientation drawn up at the fifth Party meeting (in 1987) - to date the most polished strategic document ever produced by the Party - which can be summarized as **an update of the "Chilean strategy" towards socialism**, a "democratic socialism" through electoral victories accompanied by vast mass movements aimed at reforming the structure of property and power (land reform, urban reform, the fight against private monopolies, democratization of the media, nationalization of the financial system...). Its most successful manifestation was Lula's impressive 1989 campaign, during which the Party consolidated its position as leader of the left.

2) Anti-neoliberalism phase (95-2002)

From 1995 onwards, following the defeat in the first round of voting in 1994, we witnessed an "aggiornamento", in which the figure of José Dirceu (a former militant of the armed struggle with strong links to Cuba) played an important role. The aim was no longer to attack the foundations of Brazil's dependent and authoritarian capitalism, but to build a coalition against neoliberalism, that variant of capitalism marked by privatization, low public investment and the domination of finance. In short, to generate a "productive capitalism", in alliance with the industrial groups that oppose the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), because it has gone too far in opening up trade, deindustrialization and denationalization.

It was a **return to a classic theme of the Brazilian left**, very influential in the formulations of the old PCB: we must support pro-development, pro-nation capitalism against subservient capitalism. With this line, the Party always maintained an apparent opposition to order and mobilized an alliance for "production" against the rentier and predatory sectors.

3) Poverty reduction phase (2003-2015)

Although the anti-neoliberal line was key to the discourse during the years of opposition to FHC and the victorious campaign of 2002, in practice, when the Party came to power, there was a further shift. This was reflected in **a new retreat**: from then on, even the "financial market" and the "rentiers", seen as the villains of development, were part of the alliance, since the main objective was simply to reduce extreme poverty and misery. Economic policy continued under the leadership of the "market" and the neo-liberals, on condition that it enabled the implementation of social policies against hunger and other ills. This is the **victory of social liberalism**.

This social-liberal line shifted to the left after 2006, with the change in the Ministry of Finance. While maintaining the previous government's policy of not cancelling privatizations, as well as the Central Bank's pro-finance policy, greater emphasis was placed on :

a.   real growth in the minimum wage;

b.   growth of state-owned enterprises and public banks, including subsidized credit and domestic content policies.

These two factors, reinforcing the positions of "state capitalism" in the economy, especially Petrobras, together with low unemployment and rising wages (increasing more than productivity and reducing corporate profitability), combined with an independent foreign policy in favor of South American unity (attacked by the media as "Third Worldist"), as well as distrust of social movements, were enough to stir up antagonism on the right. Yes, it**'s the Right that has repoliticized the country**, bringing back antagonism! In this context, we have the coup d'état, fomented since Dilma's victory at the end of 2014, materialized by large mass movements with a very reactionary content.

The idea of the protest leaders (the press oligopoly and the PSDB) was to use the anti-corruption protests, by taking advantage of the economic crisis, to regain control of the government. Little did they know that, by mobilizing anti-protest middle-class masses, they were feeding a resurgent fascism that would devour them... They felled the very tree on which they stood.

4) Anti-coup phase (2015-22)

The years following the coup d'état and Lula's imprisonment were marked by an intense re-politicization of the PT, which returned to a more militant and combative discourse. It even flirted with the idea of a "return to its roots". In general, these years saw the attraction of new militants and the return of old ones. Even parties that had appeared as a split because of the government's social-liberal orientation (as in the case of the Parti Socialism and Freedom, PSOL), moved closer to their original base.

The return to a practice of antagonism with the right and the persecution suffered by the popular camp had the effect of ventilating the atmosphere and giving a radical, anti-system air to the popular democracy camp. It also had the effect of generating illusions about a supposed radicalization and "turn to the left" of the party and Lula, which proved very frustrating for some when, once again at the head of the state, the only turn was in the opposite direction - a further lowering of prospects...

5) Anti-fascism phase (2022-....)

The fight against Bolsonaro marks the latest stage in the evolution of the PT which, with the exception of the brief anti-coup interim, has had a very clear and predictable *telos* for many: constant moderation and adaptation to order, to the point where order itself and the PT have been confused, which explains why Lula has been freed and defended by his former tormentors.

The fight against Bolsonaro has served to justify **a broad democratic front**, even including Rede Globo and former putschists. The aim is no longer to promote reform or even change, but to return to the *status quo ante*: the democratic order crystallized in 1988, the spirit of the "social pact" of the post-dictatorship consensus. A rigorously conservative, even reparative discourse, in the truest sense of the word, in the face of fascist harassment. The problem: the social and political symptoms are not only present, but worsening....

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It's a typical trajectory for social-democratic parties, or even for post-war reformist communism (with the difference that the latter never had the opportunity to take the helm of government...), which nonetheless leads us to draw lessons. The worst mistake would be to ignore experience altogether, as the PT itself arrogantly did in its years of emergence, when it proclaimed itself the total overcoming of the errors of the previous left...

Four key elements of any policy

In order to gather the elements for a more coherent assessment, we need to analyze the way in which the grassroots democratic camp dealt with the four constituent elements of any policy: ideology, organization, movements and relationship with the state.

Ideology

In terms of ideology, the PT was guided by a generic "democratic socialism", always very vague. The many Marxist political tendencies that agitated the party over time became, with rare exceptions, no more than bases for leaders or parliamentarians to gain ground in the internal dispute. The ability to formulate policy and develop strategy collectively reached its peak in 1987 (which is still viewed with great nostalgia by sectors of the Party's left), when there was still a strong presence of leaders of Communist origin in the political leadership. With the renewal of the cadres by a younger generation, less trained in political confrontation and previous political culture, the ideological level has fallen, to which the growing dependence on the State and the major apparatuses has only contributed. In general, the party today is no more than a transmission belt for the government. The main decisions and formulations do not take place within its ranks.

The PT's ideological weakness in relation to other left-wing groups should be emphasized. The PCB, the main left-wing party before the PT, was known for a large number of publications, from mass dailies to interventions in cinema and culture. The PT never came close, even at its best. The party was able to bring together a large number of intellectuals, but these generally worked in isolation and focused on academia, without any collective structure at party level. To defend its point of view, the Party never even had its own national newspaper!

The difference with other major Western left-wing parties, such as the Italian Communist Party or the original German Social Democracy, is enormous. Perhaps partly due to a certain syndicalist "workerism" present in Lula, including a certain anti-intellectualism, or even a tendency to avoid ideological discussions for fear of losing "control", the fact is that this inability to create its own means of communication and training has been fatal for the PT.

Finally, in this context, two things should be emphasized:

- **the enormous confusion surrounding "democracy"**, a word very present in the PT lexicon, which serves both to praise bourgeois institutions and mass organizations, has prevented the party from creating antibodies against adaptation to the electoral and parliamentary game;

- **the wrong view of the Soviet experience**, based on a liberal dichotomy between "authoritarianism and freedom", prevented the Party from repeating the mistakes of social democracy. Proof that an erroneous and confused assessment of past experience, made with categories and frameworks of thought borrowed from the enemy, can be comfortable for the moment but generate serious problems in the future...

The organization

In the organizational field, all the supposedly radical innovations of the early years (active grassroots groups, grassroots control of management, horizontalism...) have been lost.

The verticalization of decision-making and the "cult of personality" around the figure of Lula are much more intense than in the experiments previously criticized (Luiz Carlos Prestes at the PCB).

The experience of the various ideological trends, instead of renewing the party for new political syntheses, has given way to the political liberalism of "independent kingdoms" of parliamentarians who act as sovereigns in their electoral mandates, in a purely gregarious spirit.

Dependence on the big apparatuses (trade union, electoral) and the rhythm of elections have had the most likely end: the hegemony of parliamentary cretinism and short-term electoralism, aimed at maintaining positions already acquired. The very character of "class representation" has been lost, with the crisis of the workers' movement - trade unionism is in tatters - and the lack of renewal of popular leadership.

Movements

From the point of view of the movements, two observations stand out.

On the one hand, **the historical movements that** were originally part of the democratic-popular camp have lost all dynamism and have become, at best, economic cooperatives with an important ideological propaganda role (MST) or, at worst, bureaucratic institutions with no political role (as in the case of the student movement represented by the UNE).

On the other hand, **trade** unionism has never been in such bad shape, with unionization rates so low. Michel Temer's [3] coup d'état on labor reform has wiped out its means of financing.

New movements emerging outside the PT are greeted with suspicion, even repression. An emblematic case was that of June 2013, when the São Paulo government (led by a PT mayor) was unable to dialogue with a movement for free public transport (MPL) that relied on PT flags from the 1980s! In general, the youngest and most interesting movements are distant from or even hostile to the PT.

Relations with the State

Finally, the relationship with the state followed a typical path: from radical criticism to the defense of order. Petism was seen as the main obstacle to fascism, precisely because it was capable of garnering popular support and was "critical" of the defense of order that emerged at the end of the military dictatorship. There are no longer any state programs or reform plans, but a restoration of what is seen, with naive nostalgia, as the beautiful democratic consensus of pre-Bolsonaro days. The main political "decisions" are reforms demanded by the financial market to better manage Brazil's sad and obscene capitalism.

IV - The second singularity: Bolsonaro's fascism

June 2013 marked the beginning of the "New Republic crisis" and the entry onto the scene of a relevant and decisive new political player in the country: **the New Right**. Caution is called for here, however. In general, the official PT narrative is that 2013 was a right-wing movement of the reactionary middle class against progressive governments. This is politically expedient reductionism.

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[3] President of the Republic after the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in May 2016

On this occasion, after several youth demonstrations organized within a left-wing movement called *Movimento Passe Livre* (MPL) - whose aim was to stop the increase in bus fares, with a view to one day achieving free transport - were savagely put down by the São Paulo police, an **unexpected social explosion** took hold of the country. Is it a real event? From the formal characteristics, everything points to yes: unpredictable, explosive, contagious, generating enthusiasm among people who until then hadn't even been interested in politics, and who began to protest and feel like the country's true sovereign authorities.

A series of pulverized demands, generally aimed at improving public services and ending corruption, took to the streets. A spontaneous carnival, with little organization and easily co-opted by reactionary agendas (an anti-party and mainly anti-party nationalism, resurrecting the old anti-communism) was read by "crowd" theorists and "autonomist" intellectuals as the true blossoming of spring, heralding the ultimate end of the party form and heralding horizontality in networks and directionless movements.

This **festive and highly depoliticized atmosphere**, despite many good intentions, was read in the worst possible light by the public authorities. The federal government, led by the PT, made vague promises (including a political reform that was never more than an intention) and failed to mobilize the energy of the street to approve anything different or that marked an urban reform (after all, much of the demands were due to a genuine revolt against a chaotic and expensive urban life).

What were **the consequences of the movement running out of steam** on an unprecedented national scale? A large part of the anarchist left became radicalized, relying on depredation tactics ("black blocks"), which were highly publicized but politically fairly harmless, and on conflicts with the police. The attempt by the "traditional left" to unify the movements with the demands of the central trade unions has gone awry. The most promising part was involved in the new urban housing movements (such as the *Movement of Homeless Workers*, MTST, led by Guilherme Boulos), or even in agendas against police violence in the suburbs (the "*Where is Amarildo?*" campaign). An echo of this spirit was also seen in the national movement of school occupations by students against the "restructuring" of schools (in reality, the closure of school units) in 2016.

However, the most visible consequence was **the revival of the Brazilian right**. The use of a nationalist rhetoric, in the sense of "*all united against corruption*", strongly opposed to political parties, in particular the PT, identified as the main name of the corrupt "order", the anti-system appeal and the anti-state character, were again triggered in 2015 and 2016 by strong movements in favor of the fall of the PT government. This movement, naively exploited by those who thought they were its natural leaders (Aécio Neves' PSDB, defeated in the 2014 elections), is the true hallmark of Brazilian neo-fascism. It was preceded by years of systematic and patient ideological preparation, with the explosion of right-wing publishing houses, reactionary newspapers, anti-communist agitation and so on. The "philosopher" Olavo de Carvalho and his students, propagators of visceral anti-communism, as well as of the Austrian school of economics (Mises, Hayek), turned the heads of many young people present at the movement, because of their uncompromising criticism of Marxist "statism", automatically associated with the PT, which had already been at the head of the state for more than ten uninterrupted years.

We should speak of "transcendental Udenism" to characterize **the historical conjuncture that gave birth to the new Brazilian fascism**. Why Udenism? It's a reference to the UDN (National Democratic Union), principal opponent of the Labor governments of Getúlio Vargas and João Goulart in the 1950s and 1960s, and agitator of coup campaigns based on accusations of corruption. The logical similarity is striking! Of course, these are very different situations when analyzed more closely, but it's important to read the repetitive structural similarities.

The UDN, led by Carlos Lacerda, led the opposition to João Goulart and the coup of '64, believing that the military would soon return to power after sweeping away the "communists" and that they could finally govern the country in peace. The PSDB came to the same conclusion: by supporting coups based on accusations of banal fiscal and budgetary maneuvers (despite the strong anti-corruption campaign, what legally motivated the impeachment were the so-called "*pedaladas fiscais*", accounting acts that all governments practiced), they thought they would soon be elevated to the level of the federal government. Like UDN, they were swallowed up by the monster they had invented.

Four ideas

This Udenist logic is based on a quartet of interlocking ideas.

Brazil's unique problem, which prevents it from being prosperous, is **corruption**, fostered by the size of the state and by "politicians" in state-owned companies. The economic crisis necessarily stems from a crisis of values.

This corruption is fostered by **amoral "reds"**, who want to perpetuate themselves in power, and even aim to subject Brazil to foreign and international designs (in 2016, it was common to speak of the "São Paulo Forum" conspiracy, led by Venezuela and Cuba, against the countries of the region).

Faced with this calamitous situation, the only recourse remains **the great nationalist demonstrations against the Reds**, displaying a salvific interloper, represented by some certified moral actor (the Armed Forces, the superhero judge Sergio Moro...).

It was in this political environment that **Brazil's neo-fascism** was born, made up of a myriad of different, even opposing, forces, all of which coalesced around the same popular leadership of Jair Bolsonaro. Known for his defense of the darkest legacy of the dictatorship (torture and disappearances) and for his "politically incorrect" style - in fact, a series of reactionary platitudes in defense of morality and good manners - which made him a favorite of sensationalist talk shows, he was a member of Congress with a long career marked by insignificance in the so-called "lower clergy" of Congress.

It should be noted that, unlike classic fascism, Jair Bolsonaro has failed to organize a disciplined party, which has led him to rely on **the Armed Forces, a veritable Party in uniform**, in addition to organized green-yellow militancy via social networks and capillary leaders (religious leaders and communicators on social networks).

Contrary to what optimists believe, this is a political, ideological and mass phenomenon, with no visible expiration date, structured with a single function: to destroy the New Republic and everything it stands for, in particular its "leftism", represented by the predominance of the PT. What would his ideal state project be? We don't know, but it would certainly be a kind of authoritarian reorganization. Unlike classic Nazi-fascism, there is no very clear doctrine - there is clarity only on the destructive side - nor is there a global vision of the world, with the exception of religious and anti-communist clichés. Similarly, unlike the military dictatorship and fascism, there is no economic anti-liberalism. On the contrary, Bolsonaro has adopted an ultra-liberal agenda, represented by his minister Paulo Guedes, in order to appeal to the financial markets, which guarantees him points on the rich side but hinders a government of popular achievements.

Bolsonaro is currently beset by STF investigations[4] into his open coup d'état (he openly campaigned against the ballot box and the election result, as well as planning a coup that didn't work) and his rather vulgar banditry (he even stole jewelry). But **Bolsonarism remains the country's most mobilized and mobilizing force.** The Bolsonarist movement has emerged as an obscurantist reaction to Petism, while the strength of the Lula government lies in the "reaction to the reaction", i.e. a somewhat loose unity, with no clear vision of the future, against the grotesque movement, which was able to catapult a complete adventurer to the presidency, even with several factors working against him in 2018 (lack of TV time and party support, for example).

The forces that supported Lula in 2022 are attempting, against their natural tendency, to create a paradoxical "moderate Bolsonarism", represented by the figure of São Paulo governor Tarcísio de Freitas. This demonstrates the precariousness and fragility of the "democratic front": as soon as the talkative and adventurous excesses of Bolsonarism are contained (a new dictatorship is in nobody's interest, except the most extreme agribusiness hallucinists), the breadth of the coalition that elected Lula will be defeated.

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[4] Supreme Federal Court

V - Future directions

The tone of this text may seem too pessimistic to some, even defeatist. We reject these accusations: while we have little hope of "restoring" the so-called democratic peace of the New Republic consensus, we believe that **there are countless initiatives** moving in different directions, even if they are very embryonic.

One of the most interesting ideological phenomena of recent times is the great popularity that **communist influencers** have acquired on social networks, with highly visual channels and the ability to influence political debate. Although very much marked by an adherence that is more ideological - often nostalgic and in some cases uncritical - than political, focused on defending the legacy of past socialist experiments, **the new generation's political interest in radical, non-standard ideas** is remarkable. Even a certain rehabilitation of Stalin - somewhat caricaturally and problematically - indicates that it is possible to escape the banality of a left characterized by liberal vices.

This novelty is associated with a contradiction generated by PT governments: the expansion of universities has enabled many young proletarians to become intellectuals, trained even in Marxist literature, without there being a guaranteed job or stable career for any of them. The mixture of concrete proletarian class experience with political training and maladjustment to an order that offers few prospects can be explosive, and will certainly continue to bear unexpected fruit.

The ideological situation of young people is therefore favorable to communist ideas. We need to overcome the vices and limitations - notably the ideological character or doctrinal training disconnected from concrete political problems - to make a qualitative leap forward in this dynamic. One way of doing this is to popularize the ideas of the Maoist current of the 1960s and 1970s, which are little known in Brazil. In our view, Mao Zedong's critique of Soviet socialism, as well as the (admittedly failed) experiment of the Cultural Revolution, are little known in Brazil. Here, the "red years" (the 1960s and 1970s) were marked more by **the influence of Guevarism** than by the ideological and political influence of the most radical and innovative aspects of Maoism. To complicate matters, Brazilian Maoist organizations were generally influenced by the violent dogmatism of the Shining Path. It was also for this reason that we organized a digital course on Mao Zedong thought, which had a good impact.

Another way is to **revisit Brazilian history** in order to overcome abstract indoctrination. A major effort to get to know the national reality, the history of popular struggles in Brazil and Latin America, must be undertaken in order to reconnect our current unresolved problems with the efforts of past generations. In particular, we need to pay attention to the initiatives of groups that have been self-critical of the armed struggle without, however, committing themselves to electoral and "democratic" legalism, which led them to direct their attention and actions towards mass work in the 70s and 80s. These initiatives, particularly those aimed at **popular education** (in which we should also learn from the methods of Catholic militants) and university assistance and outreach (the various experiments in linking university students with the people, developed over the years), deserve careful study.

Still on a more directly ideological level, it is necessary to point out some very popular but harmful conceptions:

a. Movementism and "federalism", which consider that the sum of segmented struggles (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) or sectoral movements can provide a certain political alternative. A **critique of the ideology of "social movements"** should show what this has led to after so many years of the traditional division of labor (movements do social struggle and parties do politics): reinforcing the harmful tendencies of Petism.

b. Democratic socialism", espoused by Guilherme Boulos's PSOL and magazines such as *Jacobin*. In practice, this is an attempt to **"return to the origins" of the authentic PT**, ignoring the fact that the misuse and misdefinition of the word "democracy" has led to countless illusions and deviations in the PT. In Boulos's case, there is an attempt to repeat the PT experience, without the same original qualities (the rise of popular and workers' movements in the 80s). Criticism of the electoral cretinism implicit in these conceptions must be firm.

c. **Criticism of the "anti-fascist" vision** that intends to bounce back against the Bolsonist political force, which is in a position of electoral strength, must also be firm. This type of vision can only lead to fear of innovation and the creation of new political alternatives.

On a more directly organizational level, conditions are not yet ripe for large mass organizations or centripetal forces (as the PT was in its early days). This will depend on unforeseeable events and the rebirth of popular movements. However, there are already some extremely interesting initiatives **linking the intelligentsia with popular sectors**. This mass link, currently very precarious, is an indispensable condition for any political renaissance.

One of these is the "*cursinhos populares*"**5** , which aims to offer free courses in favelas and suburbs. Many of these courses are becoming increasingly popular. Although their content is limited due to the focus on university entrance exams, they are an important means of creating mass links.

Other interesting mechanisms of this kind are the experiments with "solidarity kitchens" and other forms of social assistance in the style of the "Black Panthers", with networks of solidarity in the face of the most urgent demands of everyday life. However, they must always be accompanied by a real effort to politicize them, so that they don't turn into mere philanthropy or a clientele exploited by people eager to make an electoral career.

Finally, **two of the most recent experiences of our time** are the attempts at self-organization by platform app drivers, with strikes and the formation of leaders clearly aware of exploitation, despite the strong presence of the ideology of "entrepreneurship", and the rejection of 6 x 1 working hours (i.e. six days on and one day off), which are present in the movements of young people tired of a life devoted solely to boring, meaningless work. Even if these are "reformist" movements, they allow for experiments in struggle which, if successful, could open up margins for the accumulation of forces towards something new - especially if a campaign to reduce the working day at national level or progressive labor regulations are successful. There is cause for optimism whenever the grueling, exploitative pace of work is rejected!

<div align="center">Dare to fight, dare to win!</div>

<div align="center">●●●</div>

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5 *"popular courses*

[ECOLOGICAL QUESTION]

FRANCIS ANCLOIS: *PROVISIONAL DOCTRINE OF MILITANT ACUPUNCTURE*

I - Advance/Delay

To ask the ecological question is to note, in this field as in others, that the Communist orientation has fallen a few decades behind.

The point is all the more striking given that this same communist orientation was, on the contrary, many steps ahead in the early 1960s: in fact, **the People's Communes** (the very Communes which, in 1958, had launched the Chinese Communist Revolution by initiating the communist decline of the socialist state) had already been confronted in 1960 with serious natural disasters (drought, typhoons, etc.), the political handling of which (in particular, internal instrumentation by the new State bourgeoisie and external by the USSR) was to lead to a terrible famine. Hence the **Cultural Revolution**, which extended a communist approach to *ecological* issues to cities and factories.

> To illustrate the "ecological" concern that animated the Cultural Revolution at its very heart, i.e. among factory workers, let's recall how the sequence devoted to a Beijing locomotive factory in the films *Comment Yukonga déplaça des montagnes (How* Yukong *Moved Mountains)* by Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan [1] details how the issue of recycling waste of all kinds was dealt with from inside the factory and by the very workers who produced it.
>
> In this way, they set out to recover :
>
> - metal scrap for melting into ingots,
>
> - wood from old railcars into chipboard,
>
> - cotton from used wagon buffers,
>
> - oil using centrifuges,
>
> - the coal dust was transformed into fuel by dust collectors, which could then be distributed free of charge to the workers;
>
> And to achieve this, workers' mobilization extended to retirees who returned to *their* factories to take part in these recovery workshops.

For the Communists, **twenty years of advance turned into fifty years of delay**, following the failure of the Chinese Communist Revolution, which was disastrous for all humanity, not just China.

Let's set about resurrecting **this political fulcrum today**. Hence the proposals that follow.

> As you can see, taking "ecological" issues seriously from a specifically communist point of view involves a painstaking process of clarifying the political issues at stake, with a view to identifying some militant perspectives for intervention, without getting bogged down in mere critical analysis. Hence the length of the work that follows, detailing the effects of the interpretative break that the communist orientation proposes to make in the terribly tangled problematic of ecological questions.

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[1] See the film *One woman, one family, daily life during the Cultural Revolution in China* :
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0atLFrycmtE&list=PLmWIzkZdt24-UdXuSWmjEgdSD9jekPk8s&index=6

II - Situation

History

Since the late 1970s, three political trends have emerged simultaneously:

- the evaporation of all genuine **communist politics** and the consequent implosion of socialist states (supposedly intended to be "transitional");

- the global deployment of **neo-liberal policies** [2] ensuring their planetary hegemony;

- the creation of a **political** ecology reactivating the old pairing of anarcho-syndicalism and social democracy to form a parliamentary alternative to neo-liberalism.

Thus, for almost fifty years, political ecology and communist politics have been "contravariant" (the former growing as the latter fades), while political ecology and neo-liberal politics have been "covariant" (their parliamentary opposition sustains them in concert). [3]

Our question

In this political situation, let's ask ourselves how, in the 21st century, the communist orientation can - must - politically seize upon "the ecological question", a question that today agitates parliamentarized Greens, non-violent collectives and anarchist activism, in much the same way as, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, communist politics made its own "the social question", which then agitated (German) social democracy, (French) utopian socialism and (Russian) anarchism.

The answer to this question is twofold:

- **a Marxist problematization**: what does "the ecological question" mean politically *for communists*?

- **a communist proposal**: how can the communist orientation make such an *ecological question* its own politically, *in particular by linking it to the social question (understood as that of the division of Humanity* into opposing social classes: dominant/dominated...)?

  Acknowledging our current inability to constitute a political line in the strict sense of the word, the proposal will be put forward under the playful sign of *militant acupuncture*.

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[2] We need to distinguish between liberalism(s) and neo-liberalism(s).

Briefly put, there have been two forms of **liberalism**:

- in the 18th century, the English classical liberalism of Locke, Smith and Mill (at a time when the bourgeoisie did not yet see itself as a "political class");

- then, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, a fighting liberalism enjoining the new bourgeois states to adopt a *laissez-faire* approach (based on neoclassical economic theory: Walras...).

The **neoliberalism that** followed also took two successive forms:

- after the 1929 crisis (which reflected the failure of laissez-faire liberalism) and from 1938 (Colloque Lippmann in Paris), a neoliberalism (Hayek, Chicago School...) opposed to Keynesian capitalist regulation (which faced socialist "threats");

- then, from the mid-1970s onwards, the neo-liberalism of the oligarchy (which prevails in the 21st century).

For a detailed analysis of these (neo)liberalisms, see the first part of Bernard Billaudot's latest book: *Néolibéralisme, mondialisation et écologie* (Classiques Garnier, 2024).

[3] The *contravariance* of A and B can be formalized mathematically as a *product, which*, formulated in arithmetic terms of *multiplication*, will give **AxB = constant**. Here: *(political ecology) x (communist politics)* $\cong$ *constant*.

The *covariance* of A and C can be formalized as a *quotient*, which, formulated in arithmetic terms of *division*, will give **A/C = constant**. Or here: *(political ecology) / (neoliberal politics)* $\cong$ *constant*.

III - Marxist problematization

Basic reminders

The classical Marxist orientation starts from the social relations (of production, distribution, exchange and consumption [4]) as they prevail in the capitalist system:

> *"In the social production of their lives, men enter into determined relationships, necessary and independent of their will, relationships of production which correspond to a determined stage of development of their material productive forces. Together, these relations of production constitute the **economic structure** of society, the real basis on which a **legal and political superstructure is** built, and to which specific **forms of social consciousness** correspond. The mode of production of material life **conditions** the social, political and intellectual life process in general."* [5]

In the capitalist framework, these social relations take the privileged form of market exchange relations, i.e. between commodities whose exchange value corresponds to the labor time socially necessary to produce them, i.e. to reproduce them.

> Two key points here:
>
> - By definition, all goods and services are *socially reproducible*, i.e. their production must be socially reproducible. [6]
>
> - The exchange value of this commodity is *socially determined*: it corresponds to its labor value, measured by the labor time *socially* necessary to reproduce it, and not by the labor time *individually* necessary to produce this or that copy. [7]
>
> In other words, the "social determination" of commodity production (a determination that is, of course, always relative to the given state of a given society) puts the social reproduction of the production process in the driver's seat: there is no commodity production that is not reproducible, and the evaluation of this production is based on the social value of this reproduction.

Hence, in capitalist societies, (neo)liberally normalized by market exchanges, **blind spots** [8] concerning the reproduction of social relations, since the labor socially necessary for the various market (re)productions is evaluated by reducing it to the only labor giving rise to market exchange (thus forgetting all other unpaid labor). Capitalist logic measures social relations solely in terms of commodity relations, and thus measures the reproduction of conditions of production only in terms of what commodity exchange measures (in a given social state, of course).

All in all, the logic of capitalism is **forcing** its way out of its own mental space:

1) the non-market, unpaid human labor required for the social reproduction of the labor force and thus of the human beings who embody it: in this case, primarily non-market domestic labor

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[4] *Introduction to the Grundrisse,* 1857 (*Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; La Geme; éd. sociales; 2014, 2021; p. 38)

[5] *Contribution to the critique of political economy* (id.; p. 63)

Note that Marx is speaking here of **conditioning**, not of determination, still less of the implication of cause and effect: the superstructure **emerges from** the infrastructure, thus enjoying **relative autonomy** (i.e. relative to its degree of dependence on its infrastructural *conditions*).

[6] A work of art, unique by definition, is not a commodity; nor is an individualized service that can only be rendered by a given person, even if the production of such a work of art or such an individualized service can always give rise to financial compensation (commissions for a work, compensation for the service rendered, etc.).

[7] The gap between *individual* and *social* productivity gives rise to *relative* surplus value.

[8] As we'll come back to in a moment, these "blind spots" stem from the fact that the general monetary equivalent measures all existence in terms of its market value, thereby making invisible many social existences: those that do not give rise to any market exchange, yet are socially decisive. In other words, the blind spots of the **capitalist** point of view stem from the fact that social relations are essentially measured in terms of market relations.

As we'll come back to, the **bourgeois** point of view, being political and not just economic and social, is ideologically interested in these blind spots...

(private work, mostly performed by women) mobilized for the social reproduction of the labor force;

2) the natural (physical-biological) reproduction of natural resources (raw materials, energy resources, fertile land, etc.) mobilized in social production (capitalist evaluation here only takes into account the labor time socially necessary to extract them and make them available to the production process).

These **two foreclosures** are of the same type, since they both ignore the non-market reproduction of resources, both human and earthly, resources which nonetheless constitute the material conditions of the social processes of production: when Marx posits that "*the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process* in *general*", we have to make sure upstream that this mode of production (of material life) is indeed a mode of reproduction (of this material life), otherwise the whole "*social, political and intellectual life process*" itself becomes difficult to reproduce!

Obstacles

To reproduce its resources (human and material) socially, capitalism has for a long time been able to carry out a **double outsourcing process**:

1) externalization of the market system through the indiscriminate use of domestic work (social but non-market and private work) to socially reproduce the human resources (exploitable workforces) it needs;

2) geographic outsourcing through the plundering of new, non-Western territories (raw materials, land, etc.). [9]

But since the great strategic turning point (at the turn of the 1970s-1980s) of the new neoliberal globalization, this double outsourcing has encountered a double obstacle:

1) **The widespread exploitation of women's work as wage-earners** restricted the social availability of non-market domestic labor. Capitalism overcame this obstacle in its own characteristic way: by commodifying the products of domestic labor (ready-made meals, ironing and sewing shops, etc.) and paying for this labor (home service companies: housekeepers, home care, etc.); hence the importation of foreign labor to incorporate this former private domestic labor into the new capitalist social relations.

2) **The geographical extension of the land to be brigandized runs up** against the physical limits of the Earth. Once again, capitalism overcomes this obstacle in its own way:

   - by compensating for quantitative expansion through qualitative intensification (fertilizers, GMOs, etc.);

   - by deepening the predation of the subsoil (more and more pronounced drilling...);

   - by taking advantage of marine subsoils rather than just land.

"Limits?

Let's take this opportunity to remind ourselves that *limit in* no way means *finitude*, and that in modern thought [10] , *infinity* in no way means *unlimited*: suffice it to recall that between 0 and 1, there is a (bounded) infinity of numbers (rational or real)! In contrast to theological thinking, which associates a single Infini-God with the limitlessness of an integral Totalisation, modern thought moves within an infinity of different infinities [11] , all intrinsically limited.

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[9] At this point, Alain Rallet reminds us of the debate on imperialism and war introduced by Rosa Luxembourg's *Accumulation of Capital* at the time of the First World War. Her thesis was that capitalism could not function without the outside world, i.e. without areas not regulated by it. Opposing her were those who believed that capitalism could live without expansion (Otto Bauer), or with expansion but operating solely from within itself (Kautsky), which implied that, since imperialism was not an intrinsic necessity, an alliance with the national bourgeoisie was possible.

[10] In this respect, the intellectual resources of modern mathematics are particularly decisive.

[11] See here *L'immanence des vérités* by Alain Badiou (Fayard, 2018)

> Confusing limit and finitude means deliberately limiting the infinite to what the Greeks called *the potential infinite* [12] and reclassifying humanity into what Hegel called *the bad infinite* by excluding *the actual infinite* or the *good infinite*.
>
> Where resignation to oppressive finitude confesses its intellectually regressive and politically reactionary character.

Contemporary neoliberal capitalism therefore seems perfectly capable, with its own internal resources, of overcoming the obstacles posed by the physical limits of its outsourcing. [13]

> And don't we see how capitalism knows how to take advantage of the new material necessities that ecological crises bring to the fore: it knows perfectly well how to invent new ways of profitably exploiting human labor to produce (at least for those who can afford it):
>
> - breathable **air**, without which human beings die within hours: see the market for purified and conditioned air...
>
> - drinkable **water**, without which humans die within a few days: see the bottled and containerized water market...
>
> - edible **food**, without which human beings die within a few weeks: see the "organic" market...
>
> - **the** immunizing **microbiological** without which human beings die within a few months: see the pharmaceutical market for medicines and various supplements...
>
> - sexual **fertility**, without which the human species would disappear in a century: see the market for oocytes and spermatozoa, as well as that for "carrier wombs"...

Obstruction

The precise point at which the ecological question becomes an obstacle to capitalism, rather than simply a series of obstacles, the point that structures what is commonly referred to as the *Capitalocene*, is the confrontation of two incompatible realities.

- **The Earth is more than just a heap of resources**; more than just the sum of land, subsoil, seas and atmosphere; more than just the sum of air, water, plants and animals, bacteria and viruses required for the material (physical-biological) reproduction of human life. The Earth is a global system, physically and biologically autonomous (albeit dependent on the solar system, our galaxy, its cluster and ultimately the rest of the Universe). This global system is materially coordinated by its own endogenous laws. [14] So any series of interventions on the separate elements and parts of this world-Earth have natural (physical-biological) global effects, of which the current climate degradation is the most obvious material translation.

- In the face of this, we know that capitalism acts on this world-Earth with **its own endogenous laws**, whose essentially greedy subjective nature remains totally heterogeneous to the physical-biological laws governing the world-Earth: indeed, these capitalist laws are, on the one hand, laws of domination, exploitation and oppression that divide humanity into opposing social classes, and on the other hand, laws of competition, rivalry and war that pit the dominant classes against each other. Strictly speaking, there is no world-capitalism [15] other than a world of commodities!

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[12] *Potential* infinity concerns the finite, which can be extended indefinitely by adding a new element (so we can always extend the list of positive numbers 1, 2, 3, 4...), whereas *actual* infinity thinks of the simultaneous existence of this infinitely populated set of natural numbers by naming it $\mathbb{N}^+$.

[13] In the 20th century, there was a significant difference between capitalist and socialist countries: the latter did not outsource land use outside their countries, but continued to farm within their own borders.

[14] Let's say, in the philosophical vocabulary of Alain Badiou's *Logiques des mondes*, that this Earth-system makes the world according to its own physical-biological *transcendental.*

[15] History is no stranger to the fantasy of a world-capitalism: it was the fantasy of Kautsky's super-imperialism at the time of the First World War; since the end of the 20th century, it has been the fantasy of "the international community" (pretending to organize itself in a disparate and inconsistent procession: UN-IMF-FAO-WTO-COP...), a fiction which today is shattered by the globalized rivalry of the oligarchies.

"World?

So what exactly do we call *the world*?

Let's mobilize the resources of philosophy (in this case, Alain Badiou's [16]) and mathematics [17] , and pose this synthetic characterization [18] : a world is a delimited place, infinitely populated by an infinity of relations between an infinity of inhabitants, closed in on itself [19] , endowed with a topology [20] and provided with an intrinsic logic of existence measuring the degrees of appearing in this world[21] .

As such, let's detail the differences between a simple situation and a world, i.e. let's specify the ways **in which a world is a situation of a particular type**.

Internal operator measuring appearances

Let's simplify: to exist in a world, to be an inhabitant of it, is to appear in it with more or less intensity [22] . What makes a simple situation a world in the strict sense is that, in this world, the degrees or intensities of existence or appearance [23] are intrinsically normalized by an internal operator: a world is logically constituted around a normalized regime of existence.

Let's posit here [24] that a world is an infinite situation of a particular kind [25] : a world differs from a situation (of course infinite) essentially in that it is 1) closed in on itself [26] and 2) intrinsically endowed with an internal and explicit operator [27] that measures what it means to exist or appear there.

Let's look at a few examples of such worlds, each with its own measure of appearances.

- **Music** is a world populated by pieces of music whose audible existence is measured according to a musical script - since the Middle Ages, the world of music has been centered on its own operator: the ***solfeggio***.

- **Mathematics** is a world populated by mathematical discourses measured by their demonstrability - since the Greeks of the 5th century B.C., the mathematical world has existed centred on its ***demonstrative*** logic.

- A given male-female **love** makes a world of infinite encounters shared by two, measured against the incommensurability [28] of both sexes - a world of Love thus exists, centered on its gendered logic of ***incommensurability***.

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[16] *Logiques des mondes* (2006) and *Topos* (2024)

[17] In this case, the theory of topos (Grothendieck's mathematical topos of bundles and Lawvere's elementary logical topos).

[18] The assumption here is that a world can be mathematically formalized as a topos.

[19] You don't get out of it by intrinsically composing relationships between inhabitants: every composition of existing in this world also exists in this world.

[20] structuring its neighborhoods, its open or closed parts, the borders separating them...

[21] Badiou calls this *transcendental*, and categorical mathematics a *classifier of sub-objects*.

[22] So, for example, to be *invisible* there is to be non-existent, and vice versa.

[23] Be careful not to take the *appearance* (or *being-there* that dialecticizes itself to *being*) for a mere *appearance* (which would then be opposed to a supposed *essence*)!

[24] The distinction I propose here between *situation* and *world* does not exist in Alain Badiou's *Logiques des mondes*.

[25] Just as, mathematically speaking, a topos is an infinite category of a very special kind.

[26] Mathematically speaking, we don't emerge from a topos-world through the limits and colimits of its existing elements, or through their exponentiation (i.e. by taking into account the parts, i.e. the groupings and collectives between existing elements).

[27] In a given world, the consistency of forms of existence mathematically takes the form of a Heyting algebra. In a topos-world, the existence of this algebraic object is inserted, as it were, between the existence of an *initial* object and that of a *terminal object*. Hence Alain Badiou's reference to it as a *central object*

[28] Lacan formulates this *incommensurability* between the sexes as "*non-rapport*"...

- **Capitalism** is a world of commodities and their exchange, measured in terms of a general monetary equivalent - the world-capitalism is thus centered on its commodity logic, measuring everything in this world in terms of a *general equivalent* (money). [29]

"Political world"?

But what of a possible political world? The question is far more delicate, for **politics only exists in** (political) **antagonism**: in a sense, in Humanity, politics only exists because social Humanity divides itself antagonistically into oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited, classes dominating other social classes. When this social antagonism then takes political form - in other words, when latent antagonism declares itself politically, and social adversaries constitute themselves as political enemies - this political antagonism will be made explicit in two contradictory political norms about what exists: what does not exist for one will over-exist for the other [30] ; the margins of one will become the centers of the other [31] ; the nothing of one will be the whole of the other [32] .

So, in political antagonism, strictly speaking, there is not - there cannot be - a world common to both sides. [33]

●

The ecological question of the Capitalocene is thus this: on the one hand, the Earth does indeed form a physical-biological world, the Earth-world; on the other hand, if capitalism is globalized, it cannot, strictly speaking, form a world other than a world of commodities (and therefore also of waste) - in other words, for Humanity as such, the overlap of the Earth-world by capitalist globalization does not make a world! The capitalist orientation cannot therefore coherently organize its commodity relations with the world-Earth, even as its globalization modifies the internal equilibrium of this world-Earth.

Forward flight

Hence capitalist ecology, far from attenuating the deleterious effects of capitalism, accentuates them. It does so simultaneously on both sides of capitalism's socio-political orientation: on the one hand, competition and war between rivals; on the other, oppression and exploitation of the dominated.

- Capitalism is "greening" its **brigandage of the world-Earth in an** ineluctably anarchic way, at the whim of competing oligarchic greed, which is exacerbated and in no way softened - as current world events attest at their leisure.

- Capitalism "ecologizes" its **exploitation of salaried labor** into an inescapable logic of social separation, of separate social development, as much as **social apartheid**, between the exploitable integrated and the unproductive left-behind, who will be parked in reserved zones and banished to the suburbs of the prosperous West. It's clear that the ecological orientations of neoliberalism accentuate this separation: between those who benefit and those who pay the price, who are then singled out in the same way as the poor have always been singled out: as lazy, stubborn and retarded!

  It's worth noting that this social apartheid takes the form of **fractal zoning** (i.e., on all scales): it's no longer just a continental distribution on a vast scale across the globe, but a separation on all geographical scales: between countries on the same continent, between regions in the same country, between cities and towns in the same region, between cities and suburbs in the same

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[29] For us, this is an essential correlation: capitalism does not create a world for human beings, whose transactional dimension it only knows, based on the commodification of their "labor power". In other words, for the world-capitalism, a human being appears only insofar as he or she can be commodified. This means that human beings who cannot be exploited, or more generally, who cannot be integrated into the capitalist regime of exploitation (as guards, for example), are considered non-existent.

[30] The proletarians invisible in bourgeois society were to become the central players in the communist project.

[31] The factories, social places excluded from any politicization by impenetrable enclosures, became the focal points of Communist politics.

[32] *"We are nothing. Let us be everything"* (*The Internationale*)

[33] Hence the post-World War II theorization of a Cold War between two "worlds", and the insertion of a "Third World" between the two.

urban area, between neighborhoods in the same city, between housing units in the same neighborhood, and even, in some cases, between floors in the same housing unit.

This headlong rush is reflected in the virtual disappearance of the **bourgeoisie**, which used to see itself as a political class, in favor (!) of simple **oligarchies**, whose model has become the real estate developer (Trump) or the investment banker (Macron), oligarchies that run countries as if they were companies, on the model of "Start-up Nations".

In the age of oligarchic neoliberalism, the "social question" takes on a new meaning: no longer just the question of the different social classes in the production process and in the ecological crisis, but also the question of separate social development, on every scale, between the integrated and the left-behind of capitalist development, between the exploited and the unexploited.

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Social classes and political classes

The bourgeoisie constitutes itself as a **political class** by politically organizing the reproduction of capitalism, rather than simply profiting from it: by directing a state that is not merely an apparatus for repression and the maintenance of proprietary order, but one that takes charge of the social reproduction of this capitalist order. The bourgeoisie as a political class thus asserts a specifically bourgeois conception of the **people**, valuing, for example, the greatest common divisor of individual interests ("*everyone has the chance to become an entrepreneur*"). Thus, "*the more a dominant class is able to welcome into its ranks the most important men of the dominated class, the more solid and dangerous is its oppression*" (Marx).

Let's take a closer look at this crucial difference between **social classes and political classes**, the latter of which can "emerge" in relative autonomy from the former, just as ideological-political superstructures emerge in relative autonomy from the economic infrastructures that condition them.

> A socially entangled jumble of infinitely different situations can become a political world when a political class comes to dominate it, unifying it under the sign of an ideology with universal ambitions.

> A **ruling** class is a social class that has constituted itself as a political class:

- a social class measures everything and every relationship solely in terms of its own **interests**;

- a political class measures everything and every relationship by the **ideas** it forges to give its own interests a universal form, giving reason for existence to the people and society it wishes to dominate.

> "*Each new class that takes the place of another that dominated before it must necessarily, if only to achieve its ends, present its interest as the community interest of all members of society, i.e., expressed ideally: giving its thoughts the form of universality, presenting them as the only rational and universally valid thoughts. From the outset, the class that makes the revolution, if only because it faces a class, enters the scene not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society. [...] As a result, its victory also benefits many individuals of other classes [...] insofar as it puts these individuals in a position to rise above the dominant class*." (Marx, *German Ideology*) [34]

> "*Even when a man without wealth obtains credit as an industrialist or merchant, it's because we trust that he will behave like a capitalist, appropriating unpaid labor with the help of loaned capital. We give him credit as a potential capitalist. And even the fact, so much admired by apologists for political economy, that a man without wealth but energetic, serious, capable and well-versed in business can in this way transform himself into a capitalist [...] nevertheless reinforces the domination of capital, by broadening its base and enabling it to recruit ever new forces from the social bedrock on which it rests. Just as in the case of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, recruiting its hierarchy from the best minds of the people, regardless of social condition, birth or wealth, was one of the principal means of reinforcing the clergy's domination and keeping the laity under the bushel. The more a dominant class is able to*

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[34] GEME, trans. Jean Quétier and Guillaume Fondu (éd. sociales, 2014; p. 133-135)

welcome into its ranks the most important men of the dominated class, the more solid and dangerous is its oppression." Marx (*Capital*, Book III, chapter 36) [35]

In short, a political class is not simply a social class: in particular, the **bourgeoisie** is not simply the **bosses**, nor is it simply a mafia of looters or an armed league of gangs who impose their own "order" with no frills, without burdening their oppressive regime with any "idealization".

Today's disastrous consequence: just as situations dominated by pure and simple bandits constitute chaos that in no way deserves to be called "world", so situations dominated by unstable cartels of rapacious oligarchies, with no real political classes capable of dominating "their peoples", cannot be called "world". [36] just as situations dominated by unstable cartels of rapacious oligarchies, with no real political classes capable of dominating "their peoples", cannot be called "world", but at best constitute separate development and social apartheid.

Oligarchies

It's clear today that there are no longer any political classes concerned with making the world in their own interests.

- Admittedly, there are still - more than ever - **workers** on earth (hundreds of millions of them!), so there is still a social class of workers, but there is no longer, strictly speaking, a **proletariat**, if it's true that the consistency of this political class imploded during the Cultural Revolution [37] ;

    The political horizon of communism is properly obstructed by the failure of the Marxist hypothesis of a political class called the *proletariat*. This obstruction has still not been politically subsumed. The whole purpose of this review is to take clear note of this, and to plan political action accordingly.

- Strictly speaking, there are no longer any **bourgeoisies**, if it's true that since the fall of the Berlin Wall, they have rapidly shrunk and retreated into mere unstable coalitions of rival oligarchies.

    The only exception, perhaps, is Xi Jinping's China, which seems to be exploring the possibility of a **new kind of bourgeoisie**, armed with a new kind of ideology, promoting its state monopoly capitalism under the explicit banner of a common good for the whole of China, for its entire people and hence for the whole of humanity. But can such a novelty be sustainable and exportable? Claudia Pozzana and Alessandro Russo [38] highlight the extreme peculiarities of this model [39] which seem to preclude its generalization, and which, for a start, cannot even be exported to Hong Kong or Formosa. [40]

An alternative

At this point, how can we break the deadlock of the Capitalocene? A strict alternative is taking shape.

- **A first orientation** proposes that we humans integrate into the world-Earth, joining with other "living beings" to form [41] the new group of "Earthlings" capable of extending a world-Earth problematic that no longer separates Nature and Culture.

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[35] Éditions sociales (1970): volume II, p. 260

[36] See, for example, Japan's *Seven Samurai* or China's Warlords. See today's paroxysmal situation in Haiti and many African countries.

[37] See our discussion with Alessandro Russo on the Cultural Revolution.

[38] See *Facing WW4:* **https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstreams/4652942d-3301-4bbe-9e79-7e0e4d4d5649/download**

[39] Dual authority (classic capitalist *prescriptive* authority and specific *interdictory* authority pledged by a party-state comprising over 5% of the population).

[40] A correlative and consoling hypothesis: could such a new type of Chinese bourgeoisie become contemporary with a new type of Chinese proletariat?

[41] By adding "parliamentary", Bruno Latour would specify...
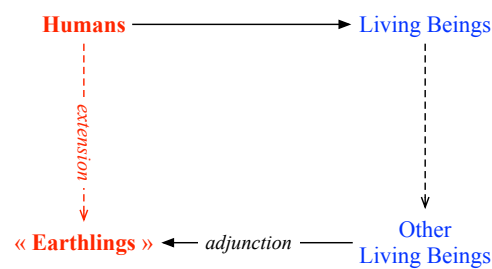
This orientation could be supported by monotheistic religious orientations, capable of guaranteeing the overall compatibility of the project through the existence of a benevolent Transcendence simultaneously creating all the terms of the problem: Humanity, Earth and Nature.

- **The other orientation** aims to build a world-humanity, capable of collectively organizing a politically emancipated (and no longer simply destructive) relationship with the world-Earth. This is the point at which the communist ecological orientation can assert itself.

As we pointed out in our introduction, this communist orientation is not starting from scratch. Humanity proved that it was capable of making a lasting break with capitalism, not so much in the form of state socialism (which ultimately turned out to focus on building a socialist state, only to stunt itself inevitably into state monopoly capitalism) as in the form of the Chinese Communist Revolution (1958-1976), so much so that since then, "*Our universe is no longer the same. China has become a Commune.* [42].

As we all know, this breakthrough out of capitalism was fiercely resisted and eventually had to recede. However, this breakthrough remains the "*great lightning bolt" of* Cécile Winter's book [43] and, at the beginning of the 21st century, it shows us, as the Paris Commune did at the beginning of the 20th, that humanity is not eternally condemned to capitalism, but can overcome it and go beyond it.

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How, then, can we take up this ecological question as communists, when no communist policy today seems conceivable on a large scale, given the immense human, social and political disasters that the Capitalocene is generating for humanity as a whole?

Our proposal here is as follows: in the absence of a conceivable political line, organize the militant assertion of a few political **points** likely to breach the dominating hegemony of oligarchic capitalism.

Let's take a look at this work of activating **points** in situations, under the name of **acupuncture, in** order to **bring** organized communist points of view to bear on different contemporary social situations.

IV - Proposal communiste

Let's take a look at

1. This is what is now obstructing - we hope temporarily - the prospect of a properly communist political line.

2. The alternative proposal of militant acupuncture.

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[42] See Aragon (*Le roman inachevé*; 1956), sung by Léo Ferré: "*Je chante pour passer le temps // J'ai vécu le jour des merveilles / Vous et moi souvenez-vous-en / Et j'ai franchi le mur des ans / Des miracles plein les oreilles / **Notre univers n'est plus pareil** [...] Nous avons fait des clairs de lune / Pour nos palais et nos statues / Qu'importe à maintenant qu'on nous tue / Les nuits tombent un à un / **La Chine s'est mise en Commune**".

[43] *La grande éclaircie de la Révolution culturelle chinoise* (Éd. Delga; 2021)
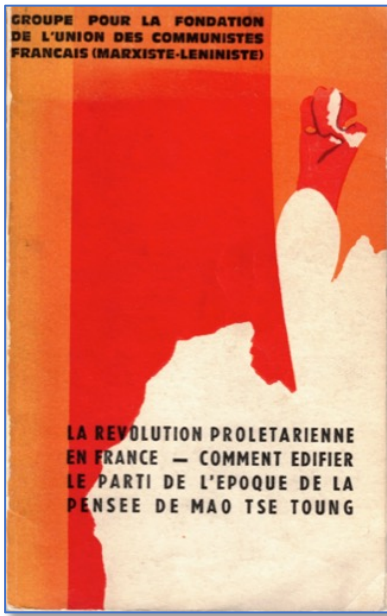
IV.1 - No political line!

The current situation of the communists is characterized negatively by the impossibility of determining, strictly speaking, a communist line of political intervention in the situations where it is necessary for them to intervene.

"Political line?

What is a political line?

We will assume that 1) a political line entangles the four dimensions of revolutionary intervention in a situation (political confrontation with the social antagonism of collective ways of working, living, populating and organizing) and 2) that it entangles them by formulating the red thread, the *Leitfaden* (guiding thread), the *instress* (intension) likely to order this entanglement according to a main focus. **44**

Let's take **the example of the UCF(ml) constitution as** formulated in its February 1970 launch brochure**.**

Its table of contents sets out the movement: communist militants start from an event-driven situation (May '68 in France), politically declared (rather than socially observed), knotted around "*the question of the Party*" and then explored in this light according to its different components, social (factories, youth, peasants) and organized (revolutionary committees and groups, bourgeoisie, revisionism) to end up with the organizational proposal of a Group carrying in France "*the political question of a Party of a new type within the masses*".

Here, the political line is drawn, not by the sum of its components, by the addition of dimensions or by the convergence of movements, but by the **projection of a preliminary political decision** (cf. point I.1: "*Since May '68, the question of the Party has been posed in the masses*"), a projection in all the dimensions of the situation in France, which will be set out linearly (discourse obliges!) in a succession of chapters, the conclusion of which will bring together the native entanglement: "to *create the organization that will hand over to the working class and the people the building of the Party*". In this way, the political line is anchored in the **decision to focus on a particular** issue (the question of a Party "*from the era of Mao Tse-tung's thought*"), and in the **introductory bias of a synthetic point of view** capable of shining through in France in many mass situations.

It should be noted that the world-France is here politically given by the existence of a dominant bourgeoisie (chapter V), with which it is a question of competing to revolutionize this world and give it

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44 Mathematically formulated, we would say: by giving this entanglement the synthetic form of a specific quaternion.

a foundation of a new type ("*Le monde va changer de base*"). The political line then proposed puts the new type of political organization in the driver's seat, i.e., plans to initiate the revolution of this world by endowing it with a new central operator, able to assume in France the centralized ambition of this global revolution.

Today...

Today, none of this would make sense, in the absence not so much of the mass movements that proliferated at the time, but of any Idea bearing a political horizon that could be shared on a large scale: nothing, clearly, that would take the place today of the starting point *that* was "*mass enthusiasm for socialism*" [45] and that would allow us to root ourselves, as we did then, in the conviction that "*our enthusiasm is great and justified*" [46] because "*strategically and tactically, the situation in France is excellent for the revolutionary camp*" [47] .

Political "*Points*"!

If we can't today aspire to a political line for communist intervention in different locations [48] (especially outside France [49]), we need to invent a new kind of political and militant problematic, **this time starting from points** - points necessarily of a new kind (as they are no longer points of a given line [50]) capable of weaving a network, a bit like tracing a graph from its vertices.

In doing so, we need to invent militant interventions in situations (which are not worldly), by imagining **what** we propose to call **militant acupuncture**, which can be an invaluable safeguard against dogmatic perils, particularly threatening in times of disorientation.

> "*To dream of the indefinite prolongation of dead things and the government of men by embalming, to restore dogmas in poor condition, to gild shrines, to recreate cloisters, to rebuild reliquaries, to rememorize superstitions, to refuel fanaticism, to reshuffle pins and sabres, to reconstitute monasticism and militarism, to believe in the salvation of society through the multiplication of parasites, to impose the past on the present, all these seem strange. Yet there are theorists for such theories.*" Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*)

IV.2 - Activist acupuncture

> "*It seems to me that the world can be experienced as the hieroglyphic square of a chess problem, where a secret mechanism is buried, dissolved in appearance, - where a certain focus uncovered overturns for the mind the power of the pieces, the perspective of the squares, like a blow to a kaleidoscope. All you have to do is place the piece on the square that nothing indicates, and everything changes. [...] For a long time now, I've had the idea that there's a point in [this world] from which everything can be discovered, a certain lever that gives you a grip on it. We could envisage a very material search for the attachment points of life, the nerve centers of the planet, a kind of telluric acupuncture.*"

> Julien Gracq (*Un Beau ténébreux*)

> "*The aim here is to investigate a few key points. Hence the deliberately discontinuous nature of this work, detailed on some issues, elliptical on others. It could be seen, if you like, as an attempt at 'theoretical acupuncture'.*"

> Robert Linhart (*Lenin, the peasants, Taylor*)

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[45] p. 11 of the brochure

[46] p. 129

[47] p. 11

[48] Such locations, which the line produced by intersecting different socio-political components, were then called "*fronts*": see "*the factory front and the neighborhood front*", which constitute the last developments (VII.4.A and B) of the perspective.

[49] For today's communists, the imperative to get out of France and Europe is decisive.

[50] See, for example, *the 25-point letter on the line of the international communist movement* (June 14, 1963 reply from the CCP to the CPSU).

In a given social situation, let's assume that activist acupuncture work consists in **activating political viewpoints,** i.e. **adding** (and not only **adding**) activist viewpoints adjusted to the initial situation, so as to politicize it and thereby extend it.

What does "adjoin" mean here, and what are the "political points" that can be adjoined in this way?

"Adjoin"?

Adjoining is much more than adding:

- to **add** is to increase the situation by one more element, to simply affix a new term next to the previous ones, to stretch a list (we add a room to an existing building by attaching an annex to it; we add an element to an existing directory);

- **to adjoin** [51] on the other hand, is to put the added element in systematic relation with all the elements already existing in the situation, to compose it with all the constituents of the situation; to make it interact with all the terms of the situation.

  For example, the adjunction of a watchword to the situation it has taken hold of will mean making it the central point of that situation, a point on which all the protagonists will have to decide, which of course presupposes that the point in question - the watchword in this case - will indeed have the capacity to become central to the situation (and that it will therefore not be just another demand to be added to the list of grievances). [52]

"Points"?

A political point of view thus likely to be added will be **a communist point of view** on the situation concerned, operating as a kind of focus radiating a new effective political capacity.

Let's put forward four points that are likely to make political news in situations where this or that ecological issue arises.

V - Four points

Let's take a closer look at the first, most general point, and briefly mention the other three (we'll come back to them in future issues).

a) The political point of Justice

The most fundamental point concerns the ideological-political need to reaffirm political confidence in **Humanity as such**, i.e. in a Humanity antagonistically divided over what it is or isn't collectively capable of.

How? By building up political points of Justice within situations, not exactly to reform or revolutionize them, but to crack them politically, as it were, to pierce the leaden blanket that today covers these situations.

A point of Justice will thus be a point that concretely affirms, in a given situation, the political existence here and now of such a Humanity in action.

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[51] The mathematical idea of *adjunction* came from Évariste Galois in 1830.

[52] The arithmetical paradigm is the adjunction of the irrational number $\sqrt{2}$ to the set $\mathbb{Q}=\{q\}$ of rational numbers: the simple addition would merely accrete it ($\mathbb{Q}+\sqrt{2}$) whereas the adjunction makes $\sqrt{2}$ interact with all q to extend the body $\mathbb{Q}$ into the new body $\mathbb{Q}[\sqrt{2}]=\{q+q'.\sqrt{2}\}$.

Affirming the existence of Humanity as such can be done in many ways: artistically [53] , scientifically [54] , lovingly [55] . We are interested here in the specifically political forms of such an affirmation.

Let's take a closer look at the political idea of ***Justice***.

What, for the communist orientation, "Justice" is not.

It is not:

- the property of what is "just" [56] , not only because Justice is not justness (that of "just ideas", i.e. adjusted [57]), but above all because *Justice* here designates a political principle that cannot be measured in terms of qualities affecting different nouns ("just" decision, "just" action...);

- a matter of "judgment", particularly in its legal sense, involving the law and the judicial system (courts, penalties, etc.);

- the philosophical concept of a virtue (often associated with courage).

In the communist history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the idea of Justice was little used as an affirmative political principle.

- Instead, **Marx** treats it as an idealistic, ideologically frivolous notion, which he links to French utopian socialism. It should be noted, however, that in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), it was from these French utopian socialists [58] that Marx took the communist principle of "*From each according to his abilities to each according to his needs*", the very principle that formulates communist justice in the relationship between production and distribution.

- **Mao** referred to the issue of Justice only when discussing the state apparatus of the same name (law and courts...), or during international exchanges, formulating agreed-upon wishes ("*peace and justice* throughout *the world...*").

- Only **Lenin** gives it a political right: as a political idea, specifically contributed by the masses, and therefore as a kind of "*communist invariant*"[59] that the Bolsheviks must receive politically from the hands of the popular masses.

  Two examples.

  "For Mr. Pechekhonov [of the populist Socialist Labor Party], "justice" is just a word. But for the mass of semi-proletarians, for the majority of the petty bourgeoisie in the cities and countryside, ruined, extenuated, exhausted by the war, it is not a word, it is the most poignant, the most burning, the most important question, the question of death by starvation, the question of a mouthful of bread. [...] Justice is an empty word, say intellectuals and scoundrels inclined to declare themselves Marxists, under the noble pretext that they have "seen the small sides" of economic materialism. Ideas become a force when they take hold of the masses. And it is precisely now that the Bolsheviks [...] are embodying through their politics the idea that animates countless masses of workers throughout the world." (October 1, 1917 - *Will the Bolsheviks keep power?*)

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[53] Joseph Conrad: "*Art may be defined as a resolute attempt to do the highest justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, multiple and unique, which underlies all its aspects.*" (*Le nègre du Narcisse*, Preface).

[54] Mathematics,for example, does justice to humanity's collective ability to live rationally in the infinite.

[55] A love that does justice to Humanity's own capacity (a capacity that distinguishes it from the pure animality of males and females) to activate the irreducible difference between the sexes as a happy power of equality.

[56] just as *Truth* is not the property of that which is *true*, *Equality* is not that of that which is *equal*, or *Woman* that of that which would be *feminine...*

[57] From the point of view of rightness, the opposite of *right* is *wrong* (as not conforming to a norm) and not *unjust*.

[58] In this case, Étienne Cabet ("*To each according to his needs. De chacun suivant ses forces*" (*Voyage en Icarie*, 1840), a disciple of Saint-Simon ("*À chacun selon ses capacités, à chaque capacité selon ses œuvres*").

[59] See Alain Badiou *De l'idéologie* (1976)

"*Every mobilized worker or peasant knows what he is fighting for and is ready to shed his own blood for the triumph of justice and socialism*." (May 14, 1920 - Speech near Moscow)

Let's assume, then, that in the communist orientation, *Justice* is the political target of a communist work that proceeds from its axiom of Equality, a work that aims to add some Justice to the situations it deals with.

Égalité → *politique communiste* → **Justice**

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- In this scheme, *Equality* names a **point of departure**: a preliminary affirmative decision concerning human beings, the elements of an individually fragmented Humanity: equality of each and all. *Equality* is the **source-principle** of communist politics, the one that constitutes it and that it implements politically.

- *Justice*, on the other hand, refers to a **result** that this time concerns Humanity as a generic power, as a collective capacity (inwardly disputed) to emancipate itself from its animal prehistory. *Justice* is the **target** principle of communist politics, the one it builds step by step, point by point, situation by situation.

- *Politique communiste* then names **the** militant **operator** materially inscribing, in a given egalitarian situation, some point of Justice, i.e. some concrete affirmation of a Humanity effectively emancipating itself according to a specified act.

All in all, the Communist orientation is backed by Equality to build a policy of Justice.

In so doing, *Justice* designates a network of points in situation, rather than a systematic regime or an instituted state (such as a communist society that has become "just").

Let's look at **three examples of** such points, which place the Communist goal of an emancipated Humanity under the sign of circumstantial Justice.

- The popularly accepted principle: "*If you don't work, you don't eat*" becomes an affirmative communist principle of social production and distribution: "*From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs*". [61]

- The UCF's slogan in the face of redundancies in Mitterrand-era France in the 1980s: "*One month's pay for each year of seniority!*" was intended to do justice to the workers' lives spent working in factories when they closed.

- In a militant project in a Moroccan shantytown (2019-2023), the *Longues marches* group, faced with the prospect of outright destruction of the shantytown, proposed the following slogan: "*Our shacks are not waste. Indemnities of so many Dirhams per room or shack destroyed!*", a slogan that aimed to do justice to the people's existence, having created their own forms of dwelling in cities from which the state now wants to drive them out.

This would mean dealing with various ecological issues under the banner of Justice, i.e., according to precise points that would orient these issues towards humanity as a whole. It's up to us, of course, to work on this politically through appropriate mass links.

b) The political point of social classes

As we all know, humanity is divided into social classes, and the fact that there are no real political classes today (neither real bourgeoisies nor a proletariat, the two things being obviously linked) doesn't change a thing. Any treatment of a given ecological issue by Justice therefore implies

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[60] This dynamic is antagonistic to capitalist politics, which, in its "left" parliamentary version, circulates from individual inequalities to a few equities (standardized by supposed "merits") via appropriate contractual policies:

inégalités → *politiques contractuelles* → équités
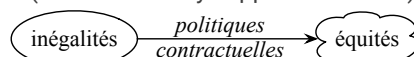
[61] Remember that this *communist* principle differs from the strictly *socialist* principle of "*From each according to his ability to each **according to his work**".

intersecting it with the **social issues that run through the situations concerned**: whether it's a question of air, water, food, climate, work, housing or health, it's essential that the issue be re-examined according to the social divisions that run through it, so that any ecological initiative is both an orientation and a mass decision on these existing social divisions.

c) The political point of antagonism

Humanity is not only socially diverse; it is also antagonistically divided, strategically between two paths - *capitalism and communism. When it comes to* ecological issues, these antagonisms proliferate, whether between social classes, between town and country, between agriculture and industry and, with maximum intensification, between countries and continents. Here again, it is important to measure any ecological issue by how **effectively** it **deals with these antagonisms**: any ecological initiative must take account of the enemies it constitutes and the political antagonisms it engages; conversely, any consensual initiative can only forclore the antagonisms that operate at the very principle of any ecological issue.

d) The political point of Africa

Then there's the most detailed of the four points, and the one that most immediately concerns activists in France and Europe: the proposal is to evaluate any ecological policy in terms of how it will or will not affect Africa. To do this, we need to carry out long-term mass surveys in a number of countries on this vast continent, to find out how ecological issues affect the African masses, especially workers, peasants and women.

Africa, so close and so intertwined with our own country and our own continent, condenses the social, ecological and political contradictions of our times: on the one hand, it is plundered by all the rival imperialisms of the West and East, treated as a dumping ground for the waste products of globalized capitalism, zoned and fragmented at will by predatory oligarchies, handed over to the "Warlords" following the decomposition of neo-colonial states ; on the other hand, its popular resources are immense, on the scale of the peasant resources available in China in 1927 (resources which the Bolshevik communists despised and which Mao was able to build into the popular base of the Chinese revolution). Perhaps the time has come for the communists of France and Europe to undertake in Africa some equivalent of the investigation carried out by Mao in early 1927 on the Hounan peasant movement [62] in order to constitute the African masses as a singular political measure of the planetary treatment of ecological questions.

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[62] Mao Zedong: "*Report on the Hounan survey of the peasant movement*" (March 1927*)*

https://vivelemaoisme.org/mao-zedong-rapport-sur-l-enquete-menee-dans-le-hounan-a-propos-du-mouvement

[FACING NIHILISM]

REINE COHEN: THE POINT OF ENUNCIATION IN PSYCHIATRY

We publish here Reine Cohen's talk given at the Franco-Tunisian meeting *Faire face au nihilisme?* (February 3, 2024, Ircam, Paris) [1] .

I

The so-called "*human sciences*", which can also be referred to as "*praxis and theoretical disciplines of the parlêtre or speaking subject*", are established and exercised in the planes where what I'll call the "*knottings-representations*" between :

- the subject and himself (allowing him to identify and recognize himself),

- the subject and its others (its relational modalities),

- the subject and the world (its position and orientation in the world inhabited by its fellow human beings).

What psychiatry and psychoanalysis have in common is that, on the one hand, they are established in this one-by-one field, and on the other, they are summoned by the impasses that these knotwork-representations encounter and constitute.

Symptoms and disorders

They differ, however, in that

- **psychoanalysis** stands on the side of the construction of these knottings whose impasses give rise to subjective **symptoms**;

- **psychiatry** is called in where these impasses cause **trouble**.

Disorders and symptoms can be seen as symmetrical appointments: objective and external in the case of psychiatric disorders, subjective and internal in the case of psychoanalytic symptoms.

Remember that "*disorder*", in its current use in psychiatry, is the translation of "*trouble*", brought up to date (or disgusted) by the DSM [2] , in the 80s. This manual's designation of the patient as "*with disorders xxx*" connotes a grammar that assigns him or her to his or her object complement ("what he or she has") rather than to his or her subject attribute.

As a psychiatrist I could define my position as constituted by the desire (is this the name of my point to hold?) to support, with each patient I receive, **the possibility of the passage from objective disorder to subjective symptom**.

II

The fact that the horizon of psychiatry is this passage (from the outside to the inside of the representation of what affects the subject) makes it a paradoxical discipline of medicine, organized along two axes.

The first axis stands between :

[1] http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/2023-2024 - Video: https://youtu.be/XyvqxA3-LeY
2 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*

- medical knowledge about symptoms, the knowledge that authorizes, organizes and supports therapeutic intervention in the medical sense;

- the production of the subject position from the unawareness of the situation, a production that in a sense orients psychic life towards a horizon, tuned to what is, but open to what may come to be.

The second axis lies between :

- the doctor's authority, the basis on which he or she can punctually deal with what appears to be unbearable, in what is disturbing;

- the freedom of the subject-patient, a conquest under construction, which attempts to loosen the "*there's only what there is*" ligatures in which the subject remains caught, petrified, mortified, ligatures which nevertheless enter into what holds his unity together and oppose psychic fragmentation.

These two axes are to be thought of as knotted threads, whose knot must be able to slide. Their mobile knotting is underpinned by the link and separation between utterance and enunciation.

III

I'd like to come back to the three knotty representations I mentioned as constituting the field of the "parlêtre". I'm going to venture an intuition, which you can tell me if it speaks to you.

These three knottings are tied together, perhaps in Borromean fashion. Shouldn't contemporary nihilism, beyond the field I'm concerned with, be thought of or recognized as the effect of an untying between these three knottings-representations? Perhaps this would shed some light on **the sinister figure of the modern individual**.

As far as psychiatry is concerned, even if this can be found in other fields, I would describe as nihilism, or the effects of nihilism, anything that **reduces the subject to his objectivity**; anything that, by relating to the subject's psychic life as an objective exteriority, puts him out of condition, out of position, to think about and appropriate the habitat of his existence.

I've been known to propose the following definition of psychoanalysis (the cure): "*psychoanalysis is a proposal for constructing, in thought, a space in which to think about how one inhabits one's own existence. And sometimes, it turns out, it's in this space of thought that we live. So, the analyst is the one who, in absent presence, lends his or her space of thought, while waiting...*".

IV

Encountering the question of nihilism

What about the encounter with the question of nihilism in the practice of psychiatry?

In the first place, it arises in the clinical space as such, in different ways of organizing the instances of the negative: repression, denial, denial... on the side of the "grammatical" or scriptural mechanisms, so to speak; depression, mania, melancholia, psychosis, delirium, conversion... on the side of the tableaux.

This encounter is therefore not problematic in itself, since it constitutes the material to be welcomed and worked on in the clinical encounter. And experience shows that if we hold fast to this point, the work is possible. What point exactly? That **what often presents itself as "Nothing"**, as nihilism, as nihilistic demand, in the subject's discourse and/or position, **is something**, sometimes an I-don't-know-what, that has an a priori unknown consistency, that needs to be unfolded and made to cause, in every sense of the word "cause".

I'm going to evoke a situation that was inaugural for me, since it was the encounter with the first patient with whom I grappled over the long term with the question of nothingness (I can say today that nothingness was a question for me, whereas for him it was a destiny).

It's about a man who, having lost everything that made up his tangible life - job, partner, child, home - over the course of several years of wandering, finally arrives at the psychiatric hospital to ask for asylum. In those days, all you had to do to be accepted was turn up. Since then, water has flowed under the bridges where those who no longer have a place to anchor themselves in the world live.

So we take him in, and for this man who has lost everything, we offer substitutes: foster care, a practical solution to his wandering and his explicit request for "room and board". Twice, this solution failed, and the patient returned to hospital. This leads me to the conclusion that, since the "social" responses have failed, we must consider that the request is addressed to psychiatry, an imperative that for me takes the following form: "*whoever addresses psychiatry knows what he is doing*" [3] .

This was the start of an attempt to work with him that would last, and that I would have to endure, for several months. I see him several times a week for interviews, during which I'm overwhelmed by the fact that he's invaded by nothing: *he's nothing, he knows nothing, he can do nothing, he thinks nothing, he wants nothing, he says nothing*, and even though he's totally dependent, *he asks for nothing*. I hang on, trying to find something (to prove that where there seems to be nothing, there is something!), until one day, exhausted (I'd come out of the interviews like I'd been in a boxing match), I couldn't take it any more, so I said to him, mockingly: "Well*, thanks to you, I'm going to be famous*"; he was astonished - "*Yes, **I'm going to write an article explaining that I met a nothing, and that he spoke to me***". And then something incalculable happens: he looks at me and says: "*with you, it's not the same, because with you, I have a place*". And from that moment on, a two-year process of reconstruction of his history began, enabling him to live his own life in his own name, no longer the social and psychological wanderer who had shown up on our doorstep. Based on this work, I wrote my thesis entitled "*Les SDF en psychiatrie, comment ne pas s'en débarrasser?*" (*The homeless in psychiatry: how not to get rid of them*), in which I argued that there are no social cases in psychiatry, but psychiatric cases, a point I have not changed since.

The question of suicide

Another figure of the negative, a radical and emblematic figure of nihilistic destruction, which often crushes the exercise, is the question of suicide, on which I'd like to make three points.

- When suicide succeeds, it abolishes the question. To quote Lacan in *Télévision* [4] : "*Suicide is the only act that can succeed without failure. If nobody knows anything about it, it's because it proceeds from the bias of not knowing anything*". It took me twenty years to understand this: the **question of failure** refers to the missed act, which opens up to interpretation by the subject, and suicide is the only act that excludes all interpretation, and therefore all failure. Effective suicide abolishes the space of clinical practice, leaving us reduced to trying to reconstitute the scraps of an imaginary and inoperative knowledge.

- When it is unsuccessful, suicide is the manifestation of the subject's critical invasion by that which negates him, a negation which he can evade in his utterance, even if it is an affirmation of the negative, provided it is heard. This is the point we need to work on.

  In my forty years of practice, I've had a few patients under my care who have attempted suicide. I've often **felt a certain anger** towards them, especially in the case of medicated suicide attempts - after all, you can't just accept being an unwilling accomplice in a crime you're trying to prevent. This anger may have been a sign of my presence in the space of relationship, of my invitation to the survivor to come and take his place in that space, and led to a relaunch of the work.

- As far as the idea of suicide is concerned, we need to distinguish it from both the suicide attempt and the idea of death. **The idea that it would be better to be dead is an imaginary representation** which, it seems to me, is akin to "better not to have been born", a protest against the unbearability

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3 This point has wider resonances. The discovery of the Freudian unconscious is established in the space where, breaking with the "*Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing!*", every subject is summoned to answer, as regards what concerns him, for what escapes his conscious knowledge, and therefore for his acts, even if he is unaware of their motives.

4 Jacques Lacan, *Television*, Éd du Seuil, 1974, pp. 67-68

of existence. Beckett's work is full of "Oh, to end it all...", and there's nothing to object to. All we need to do is try to define this unbearable so that it doesn't completely invade the field of desire. As for the suicidal idea as such (which is referred to, in prevention procedures and good practice guides for emergency physicians, as a "suicidal project" or even as a "scripted project" to be systematically sought out!), my position is that it should be treated as **an idea "like any other"**, i.e., starting from the enigma it must constitute for the listener, an indispensable condition if it is to become an enigma for the subject and encourage him/her to pursue his/her attempt... to elucidate, of course!

About enunciation

Encouraging **us** to continue requires **that enunciation**, as a speech act, is not captive to **the statement** it produces. There is no last word, no final totalization of saying in saying. The point must be made (is it the same point?) that **saying is an act that can contradict, or at least limit, the scope and weight of what is said**; forgetting this dimension, in whatever form, leads to an escalation that precipitates acts, on the part of the caregiver and/or the patient.

> I remember a recent setback with a patient for whom I wasn't terribly worried, but who was going through a difficult time. He arrived at my consultation and announced that he had tried to hang himself a few days before. His confused explanations about motives and circumstances tempered my concern. He finally tells me he's going to try again and leaves my office. I bring him back without much difficulty and call in a nurse to "back him up". This decision, which testifies to the fact that I've stopped trusting the dual situation we were in, probably prevents him from unfolding what his announcements were about, and leads to an escalation in which I end up doing something that's not done: I lock us in my office. Apart from the ridiculousness of my position, this was completely contradictory to what I expected from the continuation of the interview, namely that the patient would "change his mind" by agreeing to unfold what he was saying beyond the apparent meaning. And, of course, the constraint made any movement of speech impossible: **he was locked in his statement**, I was locked in with him, he pretended to be threatening, reinforcements arrived, he left, going to replay elsewhere his "*stop me or I'll do something terrible*", which was resolved by a brief hospitalization.

We were then able to return to the issues at stake in this rather convincing sequence, which showed that there is no need to confuse "*taking* a word seriously" with "*taking* it literally" when listening to a word.

It's a distinction that takes time. In the emergency department, where patients presenting with suicidal ideation are the first to be seen, I would hold the interviews long enough for the statement to shift on the line of enunciation, even if it was in the form of a "*that's not what I meant*", which then allowed an "*I'm willing to hear what you want to say*" and an escape from the fixity of petrifying statements.

To stoically endure confrontation with the tormenting work of nothingness, nihilism and annihilation is our function, the subject of our work. We mustn't panic, and we must bear in mind that, however black and negative the statements may be, **all words are words of the living**. Of course, we mustn't let this other person who's there and talking off the hook with too many paving stones in his or her bag; we have to clear the way for him or her to be able to set off again.

V

Participate

What's more problematic: the psychiatrist's participation in the patient's nihilistic or annihilationist movement.

Participating in the patient's nihilistic movement is precisely a matter of **giving exaggerated consistency to statements of the negative**, which bog down any possible movement of enunciation. On this point, there's cause for concern, because, particularly where suicidal risk is concerned, this is what young psychiatrists and doctors who receive patients in emergency departments are massively

trained to do (in the name of "*patients' rights*", "*health democracy*" and the "*precautionary principle*", everything that points to the obligation to respect and protect others by taking what they say at face value), where the order is to hospitalize anyone who mentions suicidal ideas. In addition to the fact that we obviously don't have the means to follow these instructions, due to a lack of places and staff, this protocol formalizes the transmutation of a statement into an act; we treat the suicidal idea as an act, we oppose it with another act, hospitalization, and **what disappears is the word insofar as it is addressed**. Giving too much consistency to the negative, instead of considering that every negative statement is an affirmation of the negative with which we are grappling (an "*I affirm that no*"), is a technical error. More seriously, it's a lack of trust, which is an ethical fault, since **the only ethics in our practice is an ethics of trust**. Without it, we water, we concrete, we lock up, patients survive; but living is something else, it's keeping affirmation and negation woven together (the unravelling of which leads to the sometimes fatal tipping point of manic-depression). Confidence is what enables us not to add our anguish to that of the patient, to remain firm in the storm, to hold on to the conviction that as long as he's there and talking, things will go on. Not that we shouldn't sometimes act, but only if we've exhausted ourselves, if we've reached the end of the possible movement in the space of speech; and that's the practitioner's commitment (apart from the "logistical" questions - available time and space - that constrain his or her practice) that alone decides this.

As far as the psychiatrist's participation in the annihilation of the patient as subject is concerned, there is a contemporary and spreading figure of the organization of the distribution of "knowledge" between medical discourse and the speech of subjects: this figure engages the question of diagnosis and its use on the one hand, and the question of the contemporary status of experts on the other.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis and its use in psychiatry is **a central issue**, which organizes the respective positions of patient and psychiatrist, and has an impact on the clinical situation.

Not so long ago, psychiatrists didn't give their patients a diagnosis. It can be argued that a patient who learns he has pneumonia does not alter his pulmonary status. On the other hand, when a patient receives a psychiatric diagnosis, it modifies his psychic state, including his representation of his psychic state. And this is quite apart from the question of the possible seriousness of the diagnosis, because it aligns the subject's internal representations with "objective", external designations. The diagnosis becomes the representative of relevant knowledge, or of contested knowledge, and by becoming a kind of common object, an object of agreement or disagreement, an object of exchange or rivalry, it abolishes the distinction between spaces of discourse. This movement doesn't just concern psychiatry, it concerns the whole world, and has done so for some time: it's about the **decompartmentalization of discourses**, which means that, since everyone is at home in all discourses, no one is at home in his or her own discourse.

This is problematic for two reasons: on the one hand, patients are increasingly asking to have "their diagnosis", which is very cumbersome in clinical work; on the other hand, "*health democracy*" (which has a dedicated office at the ARS and is supported by the HAS [5]) demands that when a patient asks for his diagnosis, we give it to him. Well, **diagnoses are like medicines**: if I think it's going to harm them or misuse them, if I think it's going to kill them (psychically at least), I don't give it to them. Over the years, I've cobbled together strategies to **avoid this request**, to explain why I refuse, to tell the patient that it takes me longer to refuse than to accept, and that the time I devote to this, he can recognize its value. Nowadays, when a patient asks me for a diagnosis, I say something that's not unrelated to the definition of psychoanalysis I was proposing: I say that the diagnosis allows me to know which neighborhood he lives in, the neighborhood of the anxious, the depressed, the schizophrenic, and so on. Of course, the architecture isn't the same in all neighborhoods, there are some you can get out of, others where it's more difficult, you can even live at the crossroads of several neighborhoods (it seems that borderline states are where they live); but what interests me in the work, beyond knowing where he lives, is that he invites me into his home, I've sometimes said (and it's never been equivocal, nobody's ever invited me for a coffee!), because if you understand how you live, then even where you are, you can live differently. And that's something most patients hear.

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5 *Agences Régionales de Santé (Regional Health Agencies)* and *Haute Autorité de Santé (the French* National *Authority for Health)* are the guardians of the "right to health", a right with no real content, but they neglect to provide the means to effectively organize the right to care.

There's a patient of mine, with whom the work was a tough battle for about three years, a battle which I now understand was about her difficult separation from a representation of herself completely, or almost, colonized by the psychiatric gaze, which had sustained and bordered her since early adulthood. In fact, her time was almost entirely devoted to care, and despite the fact that she lived independently, she was unable to inhabit her existence outside the psychiatric gaze, which of course testified to a paradoxical effect of care. Gradually, her dependency eased, and for over a year now, she has been detached from it, as well as from her addiction to drugs and medication. She was also, of course, addicted to diagnosis. When she obtained a discharge report from a care institution where she had been treated for several years and from which she had been able to separate, and which had been sent to me and which included diagnostic mentions, she was offended that people could "*throw diagnoses in people's faces like that*". In my bewildered silence, she perceived the comical nature of the situation: "*Is that why you never wanted to answer me when I asked for my diagnosis*? Yes, that's why it had to come to this. To the point where, confronting her anguish without immediately resorting to "tranquilizers", she can ask me why she's inflicting this torture on herself, and hear me reply that she's succeeding in taming the unbearable.

Refusing to give patients what they ask for, in order to escape their necessary solitude, is a frustrating but potentially liberating act.

Expert centers

Another side of psychiatry's participation in the movement to annihilate patients' subjectivity is the proliferation of "expert centers", a mechanism with which I have no connection, but which has powerful nihilistic effects.

These agencies, which take over a large part of the budgets and provide the supervisory authorities with the resources for the protocols that must be imposed on workers in the field, do not treat patients. They receive them, either at their request or on referral from the psychiatrists treating them, to **assess** them "objectively" according to standardized protocols, then issue expert opinions on the diagnosis and treatment to be implemented. The treating psychiatrist is then (not) free to apply the instructions and implement the recommendations.

Several of my patients have had dealings with these centers: one, seen at her request, had to fill in a protocol in which she ticked 498 answers to closed questions; another, referred by a practitioner who had previously seen him, showed me, not without humor, the conclusions of a workup which stated that, although he was clinically asymptomatic, the recording of old symptoms made it possible to make the diagnosis of XXX (explicit dismissal of the clinical dimension and revocation without appeal of the possibility of any favorable evolution). Finally, and most seriously, one of my patients presented to the emergency department in my absence, suffering from an upsurge of anxiety and depression, and was taken on by a practitioner who usually works in the *expert center for the diagnosis of autistic disorders in adults*. This practitioner duly takes care of the patient's complaints, but, finding his presentation and contact peculiar, calls him in for an autism assessment. Shortly afterwards, the patient received the report of the assessment and disappeared from my consultation, despite my reminders. Contacted by this zealous practitioner who wished to "discuss this patient with (me)", I informed him of the unpleasant effects of his intervention, and of the restraint he should have shown before intervening where there was no urgency and where the patient had asked for nothing. I hear myself reply: "*We have screening and referral missions, and patients don't know they're ill, so they can't ask*" (Dr Knock would have agreed, anyone who's not that unwell is unknowingly ill!). The patient didn't get back in touch with this expert, who suggested that I ask him to come back and see me, so that I could resume treatment in line with his recommendations! I can only make unverifiable assumptions about this patient's absence - loss of confidence in care, at least.

■

From what I have argued, I draw three directive statements (plus one, deduced from it) of practice as I wish it to be, to confront nihilism:

- **Fire on the expert centers** that rob healthcare services and methodically organize the de-subjectification of patients and caregivers, and thus the abandonment of the living clinic of the subject;

- **Rejection of diagnosis as an object of exchange**, transaction and negotiation between patient and doctor, whose circulation abolishes the necessary separation of discourses and places;

- **Pre-eminence given to enunciation** over statement, always;

- Under these conditions, **the doctor's authority** (i.e. the regulated application of his knowledge) can and must be exercised when symptoms become so pervasive that no further enunciation can be constructed; but this authority must only be exercised reluctantly, without the exerciser enjoying it.

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JOSEPH AKASSANNE : *A SUBJECTIVE PLUNGE INTO THE WORLD OF ROTHKO*

Escaping from nihilism requires subjective resources, in particular the ability to pierce the formidable thickness of what exists through affirmative gaps that shed new light on situations. The origins of these resources are multiple and sometimes mysterious. In reading the article below by Joseph Akassane, we were struck by the extent to which the dazzle of a painting can lead to a subjective commitment, in the author's own words, to the founding of a subjectivity of commitment.

Preliminaries

It is important to me to revisit in words **the exhibition organized in 2024 by the Fondation Louis Vuitton on the work of Marc Rothko**. It is dear to my heart in the sense that I would like to be able to give an account in words of the intense emotion I felt on discovering this work, which allowed me to abstract myself from the unbearable place that is the Louis Vuitton Foundation. There were two stages in this exhibition that preceded the emotional shock. These two phases follow the order of the rooms, which in turn correspond to the chronological order of Rothko's creation.

First phase or first room: the figurative phase, devoted to underground subway scenes, portraits and the representation of a family. Three elements stand out for me in these paintings: the desire to shatter the unity of the family as a basic element of the established social order (father, mother and child are nothing but fragmented bodies), the representation of humanity enclosed in an underground world where long, wiry bodies as dull as light merge and merge with walls and pillars and, thirdly, the desire, in certain canvases of rails and railroads, to find a vanishing point through which to escape from this inert, suffocating world.

Second stage or second room: the mythological phase, where a broken narrative presents floating forms, almost all of them incomplete. Some evoke Bosch, others Miro. Rothko is clearly still searching for his way. But the essential thing in this room is the vibration of the figures. The forms come alive, dance, spin and twirl, as if the vanishing point of the first room had found its opening in a vibratory movement. This phase is still only a gestation period, when certain biomorphic figures seem to float passively in the neutral background of an amniotic fluid.

Third stage: the opening, the shock of dazzlement. Unlike the other two, this third stage is no longer a phase, but the accomplishment of a work that has transformed vibration into the production of light. This third stage has done the impossible: crossed the boundary of a beyond that had previously only been put into perspective.

The third stage: dazzle.

It was a striking **moment** when, entering a room featuring only canvases made up of rectangular strips of different colors, all organized along a vertical axis, I was literally dazzled by the intensity of a purely pictorial light. As Daphné Bétard says in an article on Rothko, this painting *"catches the eye and leaves you speechless"*. This moment is presented by critics as Rothko's transition to absolute abstraction. I claim, on the contrary, that nothing is more concrete than this purely material painting.

That **this painting leaves us speechless** is a provocation to say, just as Spinoza's definition of substance in the section dealing with "*On God*" is a provocation to think. Replacing substance by painting and paraphrasing Spinoza, we could say: by painting, I mean that which is in itself and is conceived by itself, i.e. that whose concept does not need the concept of another thing to be formed. Divine, then, is Rothko's painting, which, leaving us speechless, compels us to speak and thus to think it. But to think it, we have to see it, precisely where its light blinds us. To speak, to see, to think, it was enough to move from one room to another for me to feel involved in Rothko's painting.

See to say that the light in these canvases seems to come from everywhere as well as nowhere. From everywhere, i.e. from the surface color rectangles as well as from those of the background or intermediate strata. Or, to put it another way, all the strata interact with each other in a retroactive way to produce a **dazzling effect** in a single canvas, such that Rothko himself claims that the light in his canvases is capable of radiating in total darkness. We could speak of **a democracy of painting in that** these color rectangles, whatever their dimensions and their place in the thickness of the strata, are all of equal value. They all equally produce a light that passes through them, just as the light produces each of them separately. Nothing stops the light, the opening has no limits. No vanishing point, no perspective, but a point of infinite light production. From one canvas to the next, light always shines through Rothko's immense universe. So many canvases, so many stars.

Yes, so many stars, except that these stars are speaking stars, or at least stars we need to make speak. Rothko himself tells us: *"I think of my paintings as dramas; the forms in the paintings are performers, born of the need to have a group of actors capable of acting dramatically without embarrassment and interpreting gestures without shame."*

Fourth stage: dramatic action.

Setting the scene and characters.

1- No 18, 1951, oil on canvas, 207 x 170, 5 cm, coll. <u>Munson or Muson Museum</u>

- In the lower part of this canvas, a large white rectangle occupies two-thirds of the picture.
- A vermilion-red rectangle occupies the upper third.
- This same vermilion-red rectangle is crossed at the bottom by a narrow white band almost as sharp as steel, with two black stripes at each end. Shades of grey, as if absorbed by capillary action from the black ends, diffuse along this white band.

- A very thin blood-red line sharply separates the large white rectangle from the large vermilion-red rectangle.

- With the exception of the lower edge of the large vermilion-red rectangle and the upper edge of the large white rectangle, all other edges fade into a light orange background.

1. The drama.

A lack, a disappearance, a character entrenched beneath the light orange veil that forms the background to all these rectangles. The cutting edge of the steel bar luminously cuts this entrenchment into the vermilion-red flesh. The same guillotine bar luminously marks the mourning of this disappearance, its two black ends acting as announcements. Burnt by the light, the black becomes grey ash along this sharp bar. The large rectangle below, like an immense cloud, covers this dramatic event. The very thin blood-red line bears witness to this bloody tragedy.

A dramatic turn of events: the edges of all the rectangles (with the exception of the top edge of the large white one and the bottom edge of the large red one) absorb and phagocytose, through their multiple dendrites, the colors of the rectangles closest to them, first and foremost the light orange veil that vaporously covers the bloody drama of the loss wrought by the guillotine cut of the long steel bar. This phagocytosis, like an urgent transfusion, suddenly brings the flesh back to life, and the missing man reappears in the dazzling light of all those assembled rectangles. But this narration of the drama in two successive phases distorts the reality of appearance and disappearance, which cannot be dissociated by their conjunction. Their simultaneity is as invisible as the intervals of light. The instant is the only out-of-time that suits them. What appears was already there, and what disappears has already appeared. A lifetime would not be enough to pursue this path with all Rothko's canvases. The vanishing point of perspective has now been transformed into **a point of opening for a light produced by the unbounded space of paint-matter**. This is another definition of the point than that of the intersection of two straight lines. This point, which is no longer the vanishing point of Rothko's earliest canvases, is nonetheless a point of perspective. But then two questions arise: what exactly is this point? And what does it put into perspective? I propose to answer these two questions by adapting my gaze to a pair of Hegelian spectacles.

A nodal point

In other words, the **triad**: size and layout of a rectangle, the painter's gesture, choice of color and intensity for a rectangle. This triad constitutes a nodal point in that the choice of a rectangle's size and layout, as well as the choice of its color and intensity, are both linked to the painter's gesture. This gesture goes beyond the previous color rectangle, thereby negating it. But the new rectangle, once laid, becomes in itself the negation of the painter's gesture. The painter's gesture being the affirmative act which, through a double negation, produces a confrontation between two color rectangles, each of which is external to the other, while internalizing the same painting gesture. Each rectangle is qualitatively what it is in exteriority to the others. The appearance of one makes the other disappear, but the reverse is also true. **The disappeared reappears through the disappearance of the appeared**. This contradictory movement of the rectangles outside each other is due to the internalization in each of them of the same gesture-painting. The result is a contradictory movement that, like two stones rubbed together, produces a spark from which light emerges. The very fine blood-red line can be seen as the sparkling line created by rubbing the large white rectangle against the flesh-red rectangle. The multiplication of sparks creates a strong luminous intensity that suddenly catches the eye. Infinity is the gesture-painting itself, the affirmative act of continual passage through all gestures-painting. This continuity is matched by the discontinuity of the rectangles. But it is **the gesture-painting** itself that, as an affirmative act, is infinite in and of itself. It is in this way that it is the point, and it is in this way that it puts into perspective the same infinity of points that emerge from space while at the same time constituting it. Creation is ordered by the implosion of points, producing the astonishing sensation of seeing in perspective all those flat-painted rectangles in Rothko's paintings.

2. Black canvases.

Nothing to see but black, at least in appearance. Just long enough for the eye to slowly adjust to the imposing presence of this black, which appears to be colorless. But little by little, the eye penetrates this darkness and discovers a thousand shades of dark blue pulsating in the black, illuminated as much as the black illuminates them. This is how **black becomes color-light, or the color of colors**.

Looking at these black canvases, I think of a room in the Berlin memorial dedicated to the extermination of European Jewry. A dark, gloomy room, but one in which each step makes a sound in the dark that is singularly different from all the other sounds of all the other steps.

Unlike Soulages, who, like the stonemasons of Romanesque churches, has the art of appropriating light external to his material through his blacks, Rothko's blacks produce their own internal light through their material.

3. Blacks and greys.

From Rothko's last period, these blacks and grays were originally intended to frame Giacometti's *Walking Man,* a bronze from 1960, in the same space.

Giacometti's *Walking Man*: the gap between two joined legs at the intersection of the pubis.

Rothko's blacks and grays: the gap between two colors joined at their intersection. But if you look closely at these two colors, neither black is really black nor gray is really gray. As the American painter Robert Motherwell observed, both are simply combinations of greys and browns.

If we now put Giacometti and Rothko in correspondence, we obtain the **equation**: the distance between two legs for the same pubic junction equals the distance between two colors made of multiple combinations meeting at their intersection. Or, alternatively: the two colors are separated from each other by multiple combined shades, and join each other by their proximity.

This impossibility of separating the gap and the junction of the two closest colors, yet multiple in themselves, is the beauty of these black and gray canvases.

To conclude.

Walking through this exhibition devoted to Rothko made me feel like an astronaut carried by a multidirectional light in a universe where every limit is there only to be surpassed.

Appearance, disappearance, lack and fullness, combine and dissociate in the same creative gesture, through which light penetrates the sparkling brilliance of this solar painting from every pore.

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# FRANÇOIS NICOLAS: *KIERKEGAARD AND NIHILISM*

1848 !

At the beginning of 1848, fifty years after the term "*nihilism*" first appeared in France [6] but twenty years before it took on a political meaning in Russia and forty years before it found a philosophical meaning with Nietzsche, Kierkegaard clarified his own conception of nihilism by defining it, for the purposes of his Christian anti-philosophy, as the "*sickness unto death of despair*" [7].

> Kierkegaard established his doctrine **in the same year as the *Communist Manifesto*,** so that 1848 saw Christian existentialism and Marxist communism competing to actively confront nihilism [8].

Kierkegaard's position sheds light on nihilism from **a different angle than Nietzsche's** [9] : not only does he give a different characterization of what *nihilism* means, but he also sets out a different thematic approach to dealing with it affirmatively. Hence the interest of this section in examining this Kierkegaardian orientation of thought. We'll take this opportunity to discover how unexpected resonances emerge between the Christian anti-philosopher Kierkegaard of the 19th century and the communist militant Mao of the 20th.

"The sickness of despair"
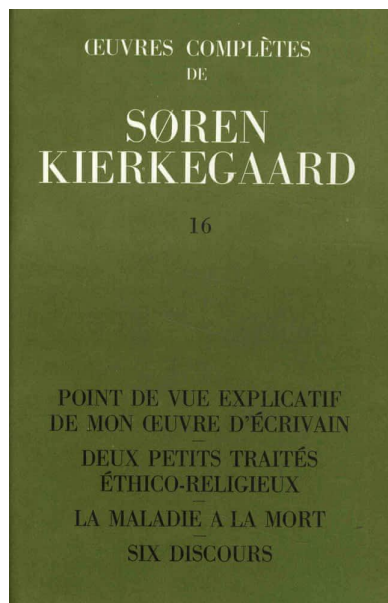
In 1849, under a pseudonym, Kierkegaard published "*The Sickness Unto Death",* improperly translated into French as "*Traité du désespoir*".

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[6] Jean-Baptiste Cloots (1793): "*The republic of human rights, strictly speaking, is neither theistic nor atheistic; it is nihilistic*". On the history of this notion, see Michèle Cohen-Halimi and Jean-Pierre Faye: *L'histoire cachée du nihilisme* (La fabrique, 2008).

[7] And not, therefore, by calling it "nihilism". My working hypothesis is that Kierkegaard is naming "the same thing" here.

[8] Here, for example, is how Kierkegaard understood this rivalry at the time: "*What Communism makes such a big deal of, Christianity takes for granted, namely that all men are equal before God, and therefore in essence equal.*" Kierkegaard (Diary, January 29, 1848)

[9] For whom, moreover, Christianity was merely a passive form of nihilism.

" The Sickness Unto Death"

The deathly sickness **10** referred to here is despair **11** .

More precisely, it is an "illness *ad mortem*" (as in "amour *à la folie*"), i.e. a disease leading to death without being exactly a fatal disease (just as *amour à la folie* is not exactly a fond love or André Breton's *mad love* **12**). Let's say it's **a sickness-for-death** which, like being-for-death, measures everything by death. The sickness unto death thus has death as its yardstick.

Three shifts

Kierkegaard's text is philosophically highly entangled, according to his own categories of thought: *body, soul and spirit; paradox and uniqueness; individual and self; aesthetic, ethical and religious stages; genius and apostle; being-there, life and existence*...

Without embarking on a detailed philosophical analysis of this essay, let's summarize what's of direct interest to us: the way in which Kierkegaard displaces the Nietzschean problematic of nihilism, going against the grain of chronology.

It will do so in three ways:

I.   by substituting the "***hope"*** question for the "*want"* question;

II.   by distinguishing a third form of nihilism **13** which we propose to call *nihilism of **neutralization*** (this form in fact neutralizes the verb, once the alternative of its *active* and *passive* paths has been neutralized);

III. by refocusing the subjective core of nihilism, via this new form, on a reactive logic: that of ***despair***, which is then opposed (*de-hoped for*) to a primary *hope*, the very hope that must be reactivated in the face of nihilism.

I. *Hope* rather than *want*

First shift.

The nothingness of nihilism is coupled by Kierkegaard to a *hope* and not, as in Nietzsche, to a *will*. Where Nietzsche examines the pathologies of *will-[the]-nothing* and *not-will*, Kierkegaard examines the diseases of *hope-[the]-nothing* and *not-hope* (or *hope-in-nothing*).

Thus, for Kierkegaard, what is at stake in subjective constitution is no longer the will (a faculty whose psychological uncertainty is well known, but which Nietzsche philosophically magnified in his *Will to Power*), but hope in its specific form of ***expectation** [espérance]*, which we must carefully distinguish from ***hope** [espoir]*.

> *Hope [espoir]* hopes for victories to come from persistent defeats. Hope for a brighter tomorrow from a past and present made of sweat and tears.

> *The expectation [espérance],* on the other hand, is that a localized success already achieved will have the global extensions it potentially brings.

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10 more precisely,"maladie *ad mortem*" (as in "amour *à la folie"*), i.e. a disease leading to death without being exactly a fatal disease (just as *amour à folie* is not exactly a fond love or André Breton's *mad love*).

11 to be understood as the *fact of despairing*; but beware: no more than the verb *to hope*, the verb *to despair* differentiates hope from hope. As we'll come back to, for Kierkegaard, it's a question of despair rather than hopelessness (since hope itself turns out to be secretly akin to nihilism).

12 And isn't it true that a mad love like Sören Kierkegaard's for Régine is, in fact, a dead love? See Yves Depelsenaire: *Une analyse avec Dieu. Le rendez-vous de Lacan et de Kierkegaard* (Bruxelles ; éd. de La Lettre volée ; 2004 ; p. 26)

13 More to the point, Kierkegaard is going to exalt a third form of nihilism, which is not central to Nietzsche and remains more latent in him.

Expectation [*espérance*] therefore proceeds from a subjective success that has already occurred and been attested, while expectation relies on an objective future victory that nothing can guarantee.

Hence, as Paul de Tarse writes [14] , expectation does not deceive [15] when hope is essentially the bearer of illusions.

In so doing, the subjective question posed to nihilism is no longer so much "*to want?*" as "to *hope?*" [16] .

II. Three forms of nihilism

Second shift.

Where Nietzsche primarily contrasts two forms of nihilism (the *passive* form of a not-will and the *active* form of a will-[the]-nothing), Kierkegaard more clearly distinguishes three forms: not only not-hope and hope-[the]-nothing (i.e., hoping for death, destruction), but also a third form, upstream, which does not espouse the question "to *hope?*" but ignores or dequalifies it [17] , a form that could be formulated as follows: "*hoping is not a question, because **hoping is nothing***".

"It is precisely a form of despair not to be desperate, or not to be aware of being so. [...] Not to be desperate can mean precisely that one is."

"Ignorance of despair so often eliminates it or transforms it into non-despair that it can, on the contrary, be the most dangerous form of despair." [18]

This new displacement draws attention to a (subjective) form that de-subjectifies the very idea of hope: the question "to *hope?*" is no longer even posed, it calls for no answer but only ignorance and oblivion in favor of a life that spares itself this concern:

"This way of living without becoming clearly aware of being determined as a spirit, this pretended contentment with life, is precisely despair."

For Kierkegaard, therefore, there are three valuations of nothing:

1.   not hope at all or hope-in-nothing;

2.   hope [for the] nothing;

3.   hope is nothing.

In the first two, "nothing" is the object of the verb *to hope* (the verb is thus without object, it is hollowed out, but it is not denied as such, if it is true that emptiness is not nothingness), while in the third, "nothing" affects the verb *to hope* as such.

To put it a little differently: the first two forms of nihilism concern **statements**, the third affects **enunciation**, which becomes clearer if we rephrase them as follows:

1.   when it comes to hope, there's nothing;

2.   when it comes to hope, there's only nothing;

3.   the very matter of hope is nothing.

Let's take a closer look at this third form.

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[14] *Letter to the Romans*, chapter 5, verse 5

[15] As anguish (Lacan) is also "that which does not deceive", we sense that true hope will necessarily require courage - the only courage capable of dealing with the anguish in question.

[16] At the end of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asked: "*What can I know? What must I do? What am I allowed to hope for?*"

[17] In so doing, for the purposes of this demonstration, I'm merging two subjective figures (the one who openly denies the "hope" question, and the one who ignores it without even being aware of it) into a single subjective logic that we'll call **neutralization**, with little distinction between active neutralization ("deny") and passive neutralization ("ignore"). I'll allow myself this simplification in the considerations that follow, highlighting the fact that all nihilism is really no more than a second reaction to a first affirmation.

[18] Like all quotations without further clarification, these are from "*Sickness Unto Death*".

A nihilism of subjective neutralization

Here, the nihilistic statement displays the nothingness of hope ("to hope is nothing!"), leaving a trace of its enunciation in the statement in the form of a "ne" (which distinguishes the two statements: "to hope is nothing" and "to hope is nothing")**.** In other words, the subjective enunciation performs an operation of negation, the result of which is recorded in the enunciation: at the end of this operation, the result is not simply an objective statement ("hoping is nothing"), but a subjective effect.

Reduplication

Here we see that enunciation is subjectively intertwined with its utterance, and that by reducing it in this way, it locks in "nihilistic" subjectivity.

> Here, then, we find **the subjective importance of the Kierkegaardian principle of *reduplication***: reduplication subjectively accords the position of enunciation to the statements it formulates - Kierkegaard borrows his prime example from Pascal: to speak, *in subjective truth,* of humility implies speaking of it humbly and not arrogantly. [19]

Nihilism of the neutral

Let's call this third form of nihilism that of the *neutral* [20] (dynamically understood as *neutralization*).

> We know **the ideological importance of a modern figure of the neutral**, particularly in a certain type of literary modernity [21] . But it would be inappropriate to systematically equate this figure with a nihilistic problematic [22] . Let us therefore defer to other studies a detailed examination of the various ways in which this nihilism of the neutral can infiltrate, corrode and corrupt different intellectual problematics of the neutral.

Let's also leave aside the delicate question of how this third Kierkegaardian modality of nihilism reverberates in a third Nietzschean modality [23] , to examine how Kierkegaard escapes from these three nihilisms by identifying their common reactive logic.

III. The reactive nature of nihilism

Third shift.

Its principle is as follows: the various nihilisms endow their own negations with hyperbolic forms - those of "nothing" - the better to assert that, in truth, they deny the existence of perfectly situated subjective possibilities. In so doing, **nihilism turns out to be a denial**. A valuable consequence of this is that the subjective disqualification of nihilism will not be achieved by denying its denial, but by starting afresh from the possibilities it secretly denies, by taking up again [24] what it is striving against.

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[19] In the second half of the 20th century, the philosopher and composer Adorno similarly arguedthat the philosophy of *new* music he was calling for had to be a *new* philosophy of music: Indeed, according to him, there was no way of philosophically grasping the new music (that of Schoenberg and Stravinsky...) with the old philosophical orientations of Aristotle, Descartes or Hegel; to philosophically enunciate on the new music, a new philosophical position of enunciation was required. Adorno took on this requirement, drawing on a new philosophical orientation that he called "negative dialectics", which he saw as apt to characterize the new music as "informal music": thus, philosophically, the new "negative dialectic" enunciation reduced the statement to a new "informal music".

[20] *Neutral* (from the Latin *ne-utrum*, meaning a "neither the other" in addition to a previous "neither the one") designates a "*neither the one nor the other*", which here takes the form of an "active nihilism, passive nihilism".

[21] Maurice Blanchot, Roland Barthes...

[22] Starting with music, which doesn't practice male-female contradiction any more than it practices antagonism, and in so doing effectively neutralizes them: a musical work may musically formalize the difference between the sexes (opera music) or antagonisms (battle music), but by musically naming the unity of the opposites concerned, it will not itself divide itself sexually or antagonistically!

[23] Is the entanglement of nothing with hope the same as that of nothing with will? What is the exact subjective scope of neutralizing the will as such?

[24] We know the importance of Kierkegaard's notion of *reprise*, often mistranslated as "repetition".

The powerlessness of resistance

In the first place, for Kierkegaard, any **oppositional** posture of resistance to nihilism would de facto be tantamount to granting it some preeminence and, in so doing, would lead to self-enclosure in a sterile negation of nothing (isn't it true, after all, that the declaration "there is not only nothing" in fact mobilizes... nothing!).

Choosing to oppose nihilism by resisting it would therefore mean adopting **a reactive posture** from the outset, as much as a subjectively defeated, victimized and ultimately sterile orientation.

> The **difference between *resistance* and *defense*** in the face of an adversary or enemy is **clear**: to resist is to make the enemy master of the game (in terms of stakes, space and timetable), giving him the initiative and positioning ourselves to react secondarily to his action; to defend, on the other hand, puts our own stakes in the driver's seat, so that we retain *strategic* control of how, where and when we *tactically* wage battle.

Nihilistic reaction

According to Kierkegaard, to escape this tutelage of nothing, to emancipate oneself from it, we must turn the tables and realize that **nihilism is itself nothing more than an opposition**, a resistance to primary affirmations; and it is precisely because nihilism is itself nothing more than such a reaction that reacting to this reaction cannot energize any subjective existence other than that of the victim.

To deal with nihilism, we must therefore not start from it, but rather from what it implicitly reacts to.

> *"If there were nothing eternal in man, he could never despair*.

> *"Despair consists in having spiritually castrated oneself*."

Asserting possibilities

The primary assertions that nihilism (in its three forms) resists concern *subjective possibilities* rather than objective facts: in nihilism, everything hinges on **the question of possibilities**, and therefore, correlatively, on that of necessities.

> *"Freedom is the dialectical spring of possibility and necessity. [...] The possible and the necessary are equally essential to becoming. [...] A self devoid of possibility is hopeless, and so is a self devoid of necessity. [...] To lack possibility is to be mute. Necessities are like pure consonants; to pronounce them, you need a supply of possibility. [...] When a man abandons himself to despair, finding him a possibility is the only way to salvation. Once found, the despairing man can breathe again, for without possibility, man cannot breathe, so to speak. [Possibility is to the self what oxygen is to breathing.*

This kind of statement about possibilities is precisely what raises expectations, because to hope is a matter of possibilities, as much as of imagination (without imagination, there are no possibilities) and infinity (every possible stands out against the dizzying backdrop of an infinity of possibilities).

> *"Imagination is the medium that gives to the infinite*."

> *"The lack of infinity is the despair of being limited and bounded [...] It is the despair of finitude. [...]"*

The possible is not the probable

In so doing, Kierkegaard draws our attention to the difference between the *possible* and the *probable*.

> *"The down-to-earth, shopkeeper mind conforms to a certain amount of vulgar experience about the way things happen, about eventualities, about the usual incidences, whether you're a cafe owner or a minister. [...] He believes he has the possibility at his disposal, that he has captured its immense elasticity in the trap where the madhouse of the **probable**, he believes he has it prisoner, he walks it on all sides locked in the cage of the **probable**. [...] Imagination must tear man away from the atmosphere of the **probable**, from the parrot-like maxims of banal experience*."

The probable locks the possibilities in the trap of a calculation; it places their imagination under the supervision of the repeatable and the verifiable, it traps the infinity of possibilities in predictive deliberation; it absorbs the courage to face the agonizing vertigo of infinite possibilities by speculating on the risks incurred [25].

> Wasn't it precisely for this reason that, in the mid-1960s, Mao could consider that the prospect of the **probable** *defeat of* the Cultural Revolution [26] in no way cancel the **possibility** of its political *success*?

Dare to succeed!

If hoping is a matter of possibilities rather than probabilities, it's because we also need to distinguish between **successes** and **victories**: the possibilities validated by a *success* give cause for hope, whereas the possibilities opened up by a *victory* remain burdened with illusions.

Thus, for Kierkegaard, what matters is **success**: indeed, in 1848, he devoted an entire speech to the subject, entitled "*The Joy of Thinking that Adversity is Success*" [27], in which Kierkegaard understood adversity in an existential sense, so that the success in question would be the result of an inner process, the success of which would be achieved *on oneself*, not on another. By contrast, the failure of despair will likewise be the result of an existential interiority:

> "*Despair about a thing is not true despair. [...] Despair about oneself is the formula for all despair.*"

> Just as hope is a deceptive calculation when expectation is a confidence "that does not deceive", despair (in a calculation that proves to be false) will be subjectively less serious than despair (this time out of mistrust in a subjective capacity that is nevertheless proven).

Conversely, **victory** is won over an outside adversary, so that it is, *nolens volens,* a process fraught with illusions, since what is won is always open to question at a later date by the vanquished adversary or by another taking over from him.

Success is an internal subjective achievement won over oneself; victory is an external objective triumph won over another [28]. Success produces hope; "*victory is the mother of many illusions*" (Mao!) [29].

> Let's extend for a moment the unexpected connection between 19th-century Christian existentialism and 20th-century Marxist communism.

Success-failure/Victory-defeat as seen by Mao

A year before the Cultural Revolution (August 3, 1965), Mao opened up to Malraux [30] about the probable relativity of victories and the possible virtues of defeats:

"We have benefited from our defeats] *more than we expected. In some respects, the Long March was a retreat. Yet its results were those of a conquest because everywhere we went, the peasants understood that we were with them.*"

"*Victory is the mother of many illusions. If the contradictions we owe to victory are less painful for the people than the old ones, fortunately, they are almost as deep.*"

"*Our revolution can't just be the stabilization of a victory.*"

Thus, a defeat by the enemy can be a revolutionary success, and a victory a failure.

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[25] See, for example, the deplorable "*public policy of harm reduction*" in state management of drug addiction.

[26] See Alessandro Russo's invaluable book on the Cultural Revolution.

[27] playing on the euphony of the Danish words *Modgang* (adversity) and *Medgand* (success)

[28] You *pass* an exam, *pass* a test or *win* a contest or competition.

[29] Of course, this does not constitute praise for defeat!

[30] André Malraux: *Antimémoires* (*Le Miroir des limbes*; Pléiade; pp. 421-447)

There are two main policy lines:

- that of non-antagonistic contradictions within the people: that of successes and failures, and therefore of expectation;

- that of antagonistic contradictions with enemies: that of victories and defeats, and therefore of hope.

These two orthogonal axes can be diagrammed as the following quadrilateral:
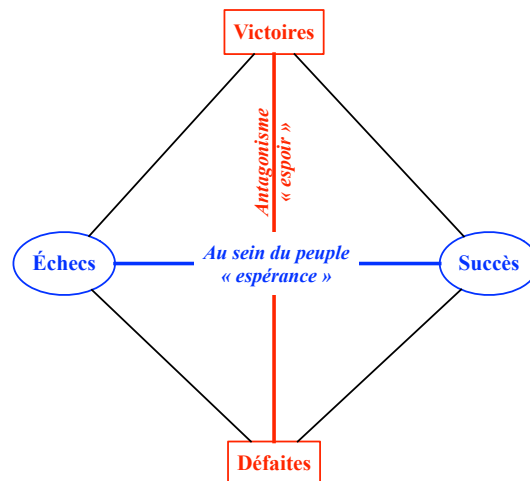
At the risk of oversimplification, let's illustrate the four sides of this quadrilateral with the successive sequences of the Chinese revolution:

1   1927: **defeat** and **failure of** workers' and urban insurrections;

2   1928-1948: **defeats** and **successes** of the Long March and the strategic defensive;

3   1949: final **victory** and ultimate **success** of the Democratic Revolution;

4   1950 -1957: **victories** in a "construction of socialism" gradually corrupted by the political **failures of** the communist orientation;

5   1958-1976: **success** in a communist revolution that gradually proved to be **defeated**.
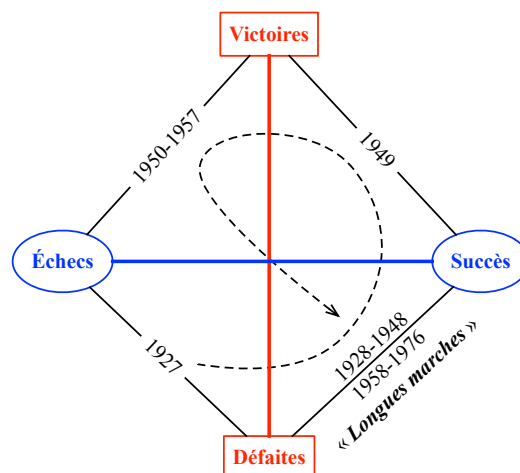
A global problematic of the "**long walks**" [31] will be inscribed on this last side: that of defeats which, in perseverance, nevertheless become successes (successes or conquests) worthy of being strategically defended.

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[31] Chou En-lai to Malraux: "*In 1949 we began a new Long March*."

The two correlates of expectation

In so doing, expectation [*espérance*] proves to be an in-between, the passage from a primary trust to its target: universalizing sharing.

1. Confidence, upstream from hope

For Kierkegaard, expectation is rooted upstream in confidence: more precisely (see Paul of Tarsus [32]), expectation is founded on **a *proven* confidence**, i.e. a confidence put to the test with perseverance and validated by some success, for which expectation then retains not so much the simple objectifiable result (always liable to become corrupted or erased) as the subjective process that led to it.

> All the same, for Mao, the victory of 1949 could be misleading if we measure it essentially in terms of the new socialist state that had been set up, and which was still liable to revert to capitalism (in the form of state monopoly capitalism). On the other hand, it gives reason to hope in the political confidence in China's peasant masses, a confidence that had been tested with perseverance over twenty years, and that Mao would have to put to the test again and again with the new People's Communes and their immense political consequences.

So expectation rests on the foundation of success that persevering confidence has built.

2. Sharing, downstream from hope

This expectation will then be put to the test by a downstream process that aims to share this confidence on a large scale, making it a success for all, everyone's success.

> Paul of Tarsus calls this sharing *charity*; Mao calls it *fraternity*: "*We brought expectation. We have won over the people by developing hope [33] , trust and fraternity*." (Mao to Malraux, August 1965)

Hope thus has consequences: hope commits us to **transmitting on a vast scale the confidence from which it springs**, because this transmission will be the very movement by which success, locally won, will test its potential global reach.

In short, nihilism is despair.

Nihilism thus proves to be a reaction to these possibilities in act (possibilities of trust, expectation and universalizing sharing [34]): nihilism thus backs its subjective force with a negation of these possibilities, so that its three modalities of *nothingness* originate in circumstantial negations:

- to hope for nothing possible and subjectively resign ourselves to the probable and the actual;
- to hope for the end of the dizzying torment of possibilities and thus the end of questioning;
- neutralize this questioning to simply survive as an earthly animal.

In this sense, the nihilism of hope operates upstream of the nihilism of will: it is because we despair that we no longer want anything, that we want nothing, or that we no longer want to will; **the negation of expectation introduces the negation of will**.

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[32] "*We put our pride in our very distresses, knowing that distress produces perseverance, perseverance tested faithfulness, tested faithfulness hope.*" (Romans, 5, 3-4)

[33] I'm not sure that the translation (of which Chinese terms, by the way?) is very attentive to the French difference between *espérance (expectation)* and *espoir* (hope)

[34] Here we find Kierkegaard's three so-called *theological* virtues of Christianity: *faith, hope and charity*.

The courage to hope in Humanity

"We won the people over by developing expectation, trust and fraternity."
Mao to Malraux (August 1965)

"Reviving communist expectation means first of all revisiting the reasons for its collapse."
Emmanuel Terray (February 2014)

Today's lesson for us, militants in the cause of communism: facing up to nihilism cannot be done by denying its negation, reacting to its reaction, resisting its resistance, but by affirming our own materialist principles of trust, those whose persevering implementation will allow us here and now to hope to be able to share communism's first political successes on a large scale in the contemporary world. The decisive subjective point therefore concerns courage: the courage to hope, or more precisely, **the courage to hope in Humanity** (at the very moment when it is dramatically tearing itself apart [35] over its own capacities for collective emancipation, and at the very moment when this tearing apart raises terrible anxieties), to hope in its capacities, collectively at work here and now:

- To hope **musically** in Humanity, in the creative affects of its sensitive thoughts;

- To hope **mathematically** in Humanity, in the creative ideas of its intelligible thoughts [36] ;

- To hope **lovingly** in Humanity, in the creative capacity of its differentiation into men and women;

- To hope **politically** in Humanity, in its collective power of emancipation, ultimately revived by the Communist Revolution that the Chinese People's Communes have put on the agenda. [37]

Irony

There remains a *secondary* relationship to nihilism, but one that is nonetheless not negligible: irony, the irony that Kierkegaard often praised. The best way to directly disqualify the reactive figure of nihilism is to use irony, as Pascal did so well in his *Provinciales* with regard to the Jesuits, whom he saw as the Christian emblem of passive nihilism [38] . Following Marx's ironic comment in *Le 18 Brumaire de Louis Bonaparte* (1851) on the active nihilism of the French bourgeois, who exclaimed "*Rather a dreadful end than endless dread!*" So let's conclude by ironizing the recent nihilistic graffiti in Nanterre: "*Another end of the world is possible*" [39] as Goscinny and Uderzo had fun doing with the "pirate" Redbeard, grand chief of the "rebels" on the high seas:

Let's scuttle ourselves. The result will be the same and we will avoid some slaps

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[35] Rather than *tragic*: the upheavals of the 21st century are eminently circumstantial; they have to do with what happened at the end of the previous century: terrible strategic failures and defeats that temporarily obstruct collective horizons, but do not erase the immense collective successes already achieved. So let's not place our legitimate anxieties under the insurmountable seal of a tragic destiny!

[36] *"The sole aim of science is the honor of the human spirit"* Jacobi (letter to Legendre, July 2, 1830)

[37] *"Reviving communist expectation means first of all revisiting the reasons for its collapse*." Emmanuel Terray (February 2014)

[38] For him, *active* nihilists were *libertines*.

[39] See Patrice Maniglier's unexpected praise of it on July 3, 2016: *"Une autre fin du monde est possible". Reading a graffiti from Nanterre*" - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWzghIXH1dg

[ARTS]

ÉRIC BRUNIER: *PERSPECTIVES ON COLORS (2)*

Delaunay

Colors, when they are only internally related, have the power of a figure. I call this ***CouleurS***.

Some, after Newton, and depending on the same principle, deepened the experiment where light is broken down into colors or, conversely, synthesized, either in lenses or in the eye from a rotating disk: the optical experiment generates colors and light is the cause of the eye. In this way, their debates standardize the agreement or laws by which colors come together.

But another experience, from which we are still contemporaries, shows that **colors generate vision**. All it took for mankind was electricity, for the city to be illuminated by advertising hoardings, illuminated and flashing signs, the curved metal mouths of the metro, and for dresses and costumes to spin in rhythm on sidewalks and at balls.

Whereas illuminating the city, transforming it, deciding in a painting that colors are a vision creates a world. And so, around 1912-1913, a new discourse in painting began to emerge. And yet, when Robert Delaunay paints what he calls his "coup de poing" (Fig. 1), while seemingly far removed from the world, he is pictorially implementing these vision-generating colors. It's not that the target painting hits the eye without giving it anything, on the contrary: it affirms the power of colors to create vision.

Fig. 1 Simultaneous disc, Robert Delaunay, 1913 (private collection)

Fig. 2 Electric prisms, Sonia Delaunay, 1913 (© Musée d'art moderne, Paris)

The Delaunays, for Sonia painted with the same skill and conviction (Fig. 2) developed their work according to the two directions of this approach: on the one hand, colors participate in the vitalism of the big city, its décor, its rhythm, and painting is a means of reinforcing this by imposing its colors on book covers, dress fabrics and even car bodies; on the other hand, *CouleurS* painting elaborates a subjective vision, internal to the world of painting, it makes the surface of the painting infinite and proposes incorporation into it. The experience is no longer one of vitalism, symbiosis or dispersion. It is the **enlargement of the possible**, an integration into the unknown. This explains why each painting is new, and why the search is always subjective.

The city, shop windows, closets and iron-and-glass architecture showed painting that it could act in a theater other than that of literature. Painters and commentators spoke of the music of colors, because within the painting there was a concert.

Even if Delaunay doesn't use this metaphor, the concert takes place, non-musically. A **concert of colors** only, which he calls "simultaneous contrast". Just as a score links the instruments of an orchestra, contrast links colors. The operation is abstract. On the disc, it's based on the symmetry of opposing arcs of rust and blue converging on the center, and again, through flashes of yellow, it guides the eye towards the periphery. In all this, Delaunay appropriates the city's ongoing transformation to painting.

For this is linked to the figure of the painted window, of looking through it. The *ColorS* invents a world just as the painting reveals the world. In the first issue of this magazine, I showed that the window in the Romantic painting performs the dialectic of near and far. *I inhabit a world that collects the infinite as a function of my withdrawal*, these paintings said. With Delaunay's Symbolist windows, **the dialectic is that of the sun and things**. A dialectic of habitat is succeeded by a dialectic that organizes the existence of colors. Out of retreat, the work calls for intervention, and says: *Let's see to see.*

Let's seek to see

"Let's see to see", Robert Delaunay wrote in 1912 for the article "La Lumière" in *Der Sturm* magazine. *Let's see to see* is the motto he puts into practice in *Les Fenêtres*, a series of twenty-two paintings in progress.

Let's see to see doesn't stop at the exaltation of the sensitive eye, at the warm hedonism of decor plastered with vulgar colors, at the cold rigors of tightly interlaced washed shades, for it posits equality: the sensitive eye is a mathematics.

Let's try to see. Since the Impressionists' new painting, it's been rumored that colors have been soaked in the fairy-tale, everyday springs of outdoor radiance; the luminous innateness of day suggests on canvas the flutter of a wing stroke; the signs are proven material.

Let's see to see is not an appeal to perception and consciousness**,** but an invitation to **poetize from the art of painters**: the art of rhythmic surfaces where the Eiffel Tower is a simulacrum of height, where the rails indicate length, where the Ferris Wheel spins like a propeller disc. It's not enough for the painting to replicate the relationships of finite objects in a rotating kaleidoscope of height, length and depth. If proportions are necessary, if juxtapositions are sharpened, the clarity of colors creates rhythm between them, forms the alloy that makes their revolutions infinite. Dynamism in new paintings. Centrifugal curves in the untraced orb of colors, none of them describing anything as they all interact.

Let's try to see, through sensitive and formal colors**, how the people organize themselves, moving forward into reality** to create an ode to it. Cendrars, more than Apollinaire, will have succeeded in putting himself in **the poetic school of this painting** when he wrote in "Contraste" (reprinted in *Dix-neuf poèmes élastiques*, 1919): "*The windows of my poetry are wide open on the Boulevards and in its windows / Shine / The gems of light*." Through the windows we see the accordion of the sky, and voices crackle, and in the rainbow the midnight dissonances. Nationalism clashes at every corner, and already it's fizzing. Soon there was no Futurism, no Simultanism, not even the Esprit Nouveau, whatever Apollinaire called it.

And yet, **a poet had come** with his colorful vowels to show that even in the newspaper clippings, today shines. **A painter came** in his radiant windows to expose the sun. All is illuminated and clarity is the Subject, an index to Eternity. When the window-eye perceives light, everything takes on color. When the painting is in the dominant *ColorS*, the eye is the window, the soul is outside.

Modern windows

The Delaunay's *Windows* and *Prisms* affirm the existence of colored painting, abstracted from all imitation. If the simultaneous contrast diffracts into a window, it's because the latter reveals an architecture, perhaps a geometry, of colors.

The window: a figure of speech

The window is certainly a way of **metaphorizing the operation of painting**.

In the classical manner, it's the imaginary gaze on the world that is metaphorized in this way, a kind of traversing power of the gaze. In front of a classical painting, I imagine seeing through the pierced wall of my situation a world where men have colored wings, where golden rain falls between the thighs of a woman lying down. I imagine an infinity that comes to me from outside.

In modern painting, the metaphor of the window is concerned with pictorial symbolism. **The painting is first and foremost a frame**, a self-limiting, oriented surface. There is a top and a bottom, a left and a right, width and height. From the very first touch of color, there is depth. This defines **the territory of the colors**, a kind of diagram where they coordinate. Here, in Delaunay's painting (Fig. 3), the surface is almost an oval, with several profiles of the Eiffel Tower appearing simultaneously. All the concrete operations of painting are as finite as its surface. In the center of the canvas, the slightly vaporous material of a creamy rendering, covering a soft leaf green that it then dulls, and this beige then covered by the rapid brushing of an even softer green. The cream rectangle is edged with cobalt blue, various shades of green and white. The flat areas of color are figures, often with acute or right angles. But the splitting of the surface, which would be a tedious operation, like the inventory of the elements of a finite whole, opens onto colorful and coloring relationships, opens onto *CouleurS*. These are internal echoes, recompositions, movements. **The canvas** is not just a crumpled, stretched surface where colors collide. It's **a deep world** where a creamy patch turns green. And this execution is inexorably accomplished with precise, meticulous gestures, or more ample, almost blind ones, gestures guided solely by the neighboring colors and the very general canvas of the Eiffel Tower, which repeats and fragments. There's no imagination here, just the labor of a weaver. The window is the name of the structure by which the painting unfolds within the limits of a surface and points skyward.

Fig. 3 Windows open simultaneously, 1ère part, 3e motif, Robert Delaunay, 1912
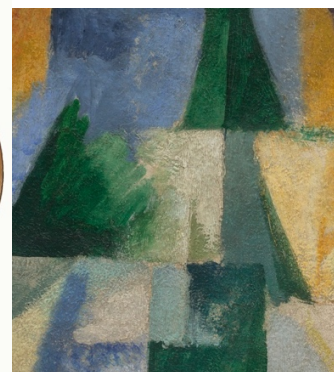(© Guggenheim, Venice)

Fig. 4 Delaunay, detail

So the limit is only apparent. It is forced by the colors. In my first text, I showed how this forcing could be achieved by the emergence of colors in the foreground, in the interior, forcing the gaze towards the distance where all possible colors blaze and from which the painting, in its interiority, gathers fragments. This forcing was achieved through the contiguity and localization of colors. In Delaunay's case, it's achieved by tilting surface interactions into depth.

The window names, that is to say, it figures, it semantizes an operation specific to painting, which from the multiplicity of colors creates a unity: a painting with limited, framed edges. The painted window is a pictorial equivalent of the noun *window*. It's **an assumed name**, because the pictorial operation is not nominal. It doesn't let itself be named, although it lets itself be seen; and what it lets be seen, the painter has decided to call *window*. We must be wary of the name, of the metaphor it creates, and return to visibility, because not all painted windows represent the same operation.

For the modern style, I would summarize them according to **two dynamics**: that which starts from external multiplicity, essentially colored, and captures it in the unity of a surface. This is what Goya and Friedrich did, and what Matisse does (Fig. 5). In this way, the window acts as a focus, a lens, and in Matisse's work, the brilliance of open-air light creates a black blindness that obscures forms. The

other dynamic is the opposite. It starts from the closed situation of painting, the picture as framed and limited as a window; and either repeats this situation, as O'Keeffe does (Fig. 6), or opens it up, inscribing another multiplicity, as Delaunay does (Fig. 3).
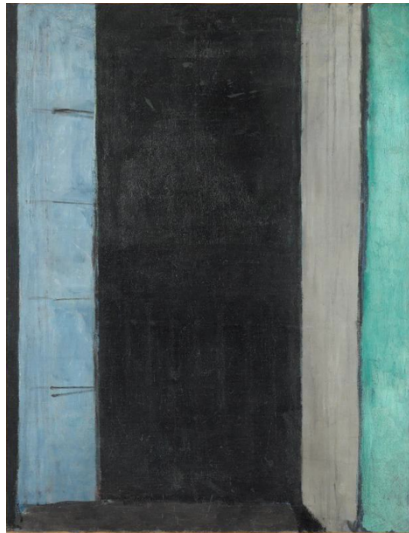

Fig. 5 French window in Collioure, Matisse
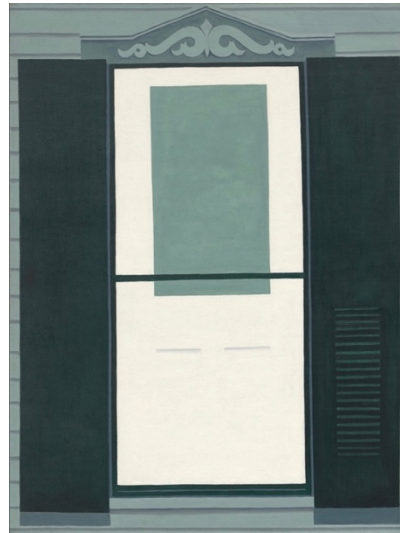(© Centre Pompidou, Paris)

Fig. 6 Farmhouse door and window, O'Keeffe,1929
(© Moma, New York)

It's interesting to note the **relationship of these three works to the multiple**: the window motif is recurrent in Matisse's work, and the *Porte-fenêtre à Collioure* painting is a high point in his production, a borderline case. As far as I know, O'Keeffe has only one example of this motif. It's a dead end or a sclerotic situation. For her, colors are subject to the force of light cutting. In this way, her painting is akin to the photogram process, and not part of the dominant *CouleurS*. Finally, Delaunay developed a pictorial meditation in the *Window* series, based on the primacy of color over the appearance of objects, which led him to abstraction.

Division

The comparison between Matisse and Delaunay also leads to the identification of two orientations in the **relationship between painting and decoration**. As early as 1912, Delaunay saw in the rhythmic unity of the painting an element superior to architecture, without however emancipating himself from easel painting. The large-scale decors he produced from 1930 onwards sought to limit the experience of space from within the painting. However, this decorative development lacks the hypnotic force of the small paintings of the 1910s. Matisse, for his part, made decor the very subject of painting, opening up new perspectives.

It's important to understand that **the modern painted window is twofold, divided**. On the one hand, it **mediates between inside and outside**, leading to the invention of a decorative subject in Matisse's painting. This invention is linked to the brilliance of black, the dazzling black. The price to pay is that painting loses all its capacity for transitivity. On the other hand, **it is a resonance,** evident in Delaunay but also in the Italian Futurists, of painting's relationship with the world of engineering, with the modern way of constructing the world.

Window is the manifest figure of the relational structure of colors, which I call *CouleurS* to emphasize the situation where every color, even a single one in the case of monochrome, is in relation with others. This *CouleurS* intervenes in the world to think of it as relations. Painting thus retains its transitive power. In Delaunay's painting, the relational conception of color resonates with the engineer's work, as shown by the profile of the Eiffel Tower, whose metallic latticework is extended to the latticework of colors. This means that ***ColorS* is geometrized**, that it unfolds on the surface, not as a decomposition of the light spectrum, but according to the extension of geometric relationships. Delaunay is well aware that the shape of the tower is the result of an engineer's calculation. For him,

it's a question of replacing the divisionist technique with the colored grid, and inventing a new color painting that echoes the new times.

Delaunay's colored windows are a medium through which *ColorS* passes, where it acquires a new dimension: the simultaneous contrast on the surface adds to the illumination in depth, through the interplay of laminated facets. The painting thus exemplifies **painting's ability to present itself as a plane,** even as the strength of the colors, through their density and saturation, creates relief. This is heightened by the fleshy, almost goose-flesh treatment of the coloring matter. But it also comes from the supple, broken weave of the lines by which the colored patches come together. The Eiffel Tower, with its curving spire and splayed pillars, moves in and out of the picture. Its form is like the lettering that cubists Braque and Picasso introduced into their paintings, a metonymy that looks out on a world. Non-objective colors are letters too, but in the sense that other letters appear on the canvas. Abstract letters and iconic letters respond to each other, marking the painting in the same way as a character on a sheet of paper, and weaving it like a text. The sensitive and the abstract respond to each other. Delaunay's paintings reveal **a pictorial discourse on architecture**, on the work of the engineer who is the symbol of the new world. He militates for a Humanity of sensitive and rational relationships.

What is sky? asks Delaunay's painting with its pointing arrow. It's there, in what men build," answers the *CouleurS*.

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Delaunay's *windows* are not decorative objects or technical devices. They name **an environment**, one in which rain or sunlight sometimes trickles down onto the pane. In these windows, the two sides of the glass - that of the world and that of the gaze - have mixed their light with the growing half-light.

Fig. 7 Untitled, Simon Ling (© Greengrassi galery)

Windows today are paintings made in the street, the long gaze on the picturesque world, when some stroller or a child at play calls Simon Ling (Fig. 7) on what he is looking at, brush in hand in front of his easel. Open-air windows possess both **the brightness of daylight and the permanence of things**.

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HUBERT GAND: *LA VIERGE AU CHANCELIER ROLLIN OR A 15TH-CENTURY PAINTING SEEN THROUGH 21ST-CENTURY EYES*

There are three reasons why I'm writing about *The Virgin and Chancellor Rollin*, painted by Yan Van Eyck between 1430 and 1436. The first is that the painting is splendid; the second is that it has just been restored; the third, and not least, is that this 62 x 66 centimeter panel achieves something of a Copernican revolution in its presentation of perspective.

At first glance, **the painting** appears to be just another religious work. Based on the classic theme of medieval paintings, a man, Chancellor Rollin, kneels on his prie-Dieu to pray to the Virgin Mary to intercede on his behalf and open up Paradise for him. Opposite him, but at a distance, the Virgin, seated on a cushion-covered bench, holds the infant Jesus on her lap, gesturing a blessing with her right hand. Above the Virgin, an angel with rainbow-colored wings holds an imposing golden crown adorned with multiple diadems.

The scene takes place in Chancellor Rollin's private chapel. The chapel's floor is paved with a multitude of tiles, white, grey or decorated with polychrome hexagonal motifs. Squares and hexagons are passages to the circle that symbolizes the Celestial, circles also present on the chapel's marble pillars. Three tall, imposing arches open onto a landscape, from which we see a garden adjoining the

loggia, then a bridge spanning a river, which itself extends into the distance, a bluish mist enveloping snow-capped mountains. Two small figures stand on the bridge, one of them leaning over a crenellation, looking at who knows what on the surface of the water. The bridge links the Burgundian market town to the city of churches and bell towers of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Apart from Mary, the Infant Jesus and the angel, he's just a powerful character, a businessman, a financier and, to put it bluntly, an upstart who has made it to the top of the Burgundian state through his shenanigans. For this grand bourgeois, everything can be bought, including Paradise. The chapel and this commission for the painter were the price he paid. With his hard gaze and the monkish haircut he's had made for the occasion, Chancellor Rollin is anything but comely. Looking straight ahead, he can't see the Virgin. In fact, she could only appear in the vision of an ecstatic gaze the exact opposite of his own. If, moreover, we accept that he's not delusional, this Rollin sees nothing but what's in front of him. Only Van Eyck can see the Virgin, or more accurately, discover her touch by touch, but only in the aftermath of his brush passing through a certain creative niche comparable to those cut out on the bridge. In addition to wanting to buy his place in Heaven, Chancellor Rollin also has the luxury of buying a canvas by one of the greatest painters of his time. A canvas he believes will guarantee him a glorious posterity. For a man from a bourgeois family enriched by inheritance, nobility is a must, and to celebrate his glory, he has specially donned a brocade gown woven with gold thread, as worn by the Duke of Burgundy. He shows off in all his splendor, as would the peacock on his left in the small garden, if it were doing a cartwheel. But does Rollin know that when the peacock does a cartwheel, it also reveals the naked side of its ass? Next to the peacock, symbolizing immortality, are magpies surrounding a large white lily, symbolizing death and thus neutralizing the immortality represented by the peacock.

The angel, the Virgin and the Infant Jesus appear only to those contemplating this canvas. Rollin sees nothing of them. The eternal beauty of this work therefore belongs to a realm foreign to Rollin. Before examining the source of this beauty, we need to look at the contrasts between the appearance of this group and the depiction of the Chancellor.

First of all, neither the Virgin nor Baby Jesus have eyes for this man of power. The Virgin's gaze is lowered to the ground, and Jesus' is marked by a certain squint that makes him squint squarely at the opening of the arches. Next, the great simplicity of the Virgin's red cloak, which opens out towards the ground in multiple folds, contrasts with the rigidity of the chancellor's brocade garment, which falls as heavily as a curtain without a single fold. Last but not least, the beautiful oval face of the very young Mary contrasts with the hard square face of the kneeling fifty-something, to which the monk's haircut, missed by a wide indentation, adds an almost comical note.

All these oppositions still don't tell us where the beauty of this canvas comes from. To locate it, we need to turn in the direction of the blessing hand of the Infant Jesus seated on his mother's lap. His hand and squint direct us to one of the two figures standing on the edge of the bridge spanning the river separating the two towns. Having stuck his head through one of the bridge's crenellations, this little figure with his back to Rollin isn't looking at anything in particular. In any case, what he's looking at eludes us and remains enigmatic. What we see, however, as we bend over the river bridge like him, is the infinite multitude of ripples and roundels that keep reforming on the surface of the water. It is there, through the crenellation of the bridge and in this multitude, that the source of creation lies.

In the middle of the river, an island. An island or a "he", not an I or a me, but the anonymous "he" of the creative touch. Anonymous in the sense that it escapes Van Eyck himself to be that of another. All that reaches the painter's consciousness is the modest "I do what I can" that Van Eyck likes to say when discovering his work, and which he has made his motto. But no sooner has the brush made its touch than, in the same instant, the distance separating the finite from the infinite disappears. This is how I see the irreducible gap between the celestial golden crown worn by the angel's hands and Mary's blond hair flowing towards her neck in multiple braids. This fragment of finiteness can be as microscopic as the two or three millimetres of a bird's spread wings, almost completely drowned in the misty immensity of a uniformly blue-grey sky. A sky on which the many jagged peaks of the snow-capped mountains bite.

This raises the **question of the river's course**. Does it follow the hollowing out of the perspective, and thus flow towards the background, or does it flow towards the chapel? To force the issue, I've decided to assert that the river's course, from its source in the mountains, flows towards the chapel. Such a decision implies that this course follows the opposite movement of the perspective, moving from the front towards the back. Such a decision is not neutral with regard to the spontaneous tendency of perspective as mimetic representation, nor is it neutral with regard to the painting itself in its pure

materiality, as all the bluish grays of the mountains and sky rise towards the chapel, presenting in their limpid transparency all the color oppositions of the foreground surface. All that's left is for the eye to work them as it might work them for any non-figurative painting. This decision would imply a Copernican revolution in both representation and painting.

In terms of figuration, *La Vierge au chancelier Rollin* is like a canvas stretched between the two extremes of the infinitely large and the infinitely small. Our eye, like the river, follows the course of a creation originating in the jagged peaks that bite into the immensity of the homogeneous blue-grey sky. Added to this immensity, as if included in its infinity, is the infinitesimal multitude of ripples and roundels formed on the water's surface. Pascal could perfectly well say, looking at this painting, that Jan Van *Eyck*: "*Wished to paint not only the visible universe, but the immensity that can be conceived of nature within the confines of this shortened atom.*"

But then what becomes of Rollin, who seeks only to ensure the eternal posterity of his social success and his access to Paradise? This *Virgin to Chancellor Rollin,* associated with Pascal's pen, responds in unison: "*A nothingness with regard to infinity, a whole with regard to nothingness, a middle ground between nothing and everything.*"

That Rollin is nothingness, the great white lily testifies by its symbol of death. But if we place ourselves in the middle, just between nothing and everything, on this island in the river, we join the "it" that never ceases to transcend death, eternally reviving the *Virgin and Chancellor Rollin* for every gaze that contemplates her.

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Guillaume NICOLAS: *VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE (2) - THE CASE OF CLOS-MASURES*

Following the announcement in issue no. 1 of the *three communist reasons for studying vernacular architecture,* I propose a monographic study to discuss these reasons, which are, for the record:

- "an emancipating form of architecture",
- The "crossroads of living and working",
- "polarizing ecological issues".

The case in point is that of the *clos-masures*, the traditional Normandy farmhouses of the Pays de Caux region.

In fact, we're going to study **two** objects simultaneously: on the one hand, historical, pre-industrial clos-masures, as described in the literature and whose origins date back to the Middle Ages, or even Gallo-Roman times; on the other hand, clos-masures in their current configuration, as uncovered by a field survey I carried out between 2022 and 2023 among some forty farmers in Seine-Maritime (76). This double reading allows us to consider vernacular architecture not from a nostalgic angle (traces of a peasant civilization that has now disappeared), but from a contemporary perspective.

The study will be divided into **three articles**, each corresponding to one of the three reasons set out in the opening article.

To begin with, I propose to approach clos-masures from the angle from which they first appeared to me: *ecological* vernacular architecture.

Circumscribing the ecological question

As a science, *ecology is the* study of living beings in relation to their habitat (*oîkos*) and environment. By extension, **architecture can be said to be ecological** insofar as it is built and inhabited by human beings in close relationship with the natural and cultural conditions of their environment, in this case the Pays de Caux.

And if the ecological question is so present in contemporary discourse, it's because our era is experiencing a crisis in the relationship between living beings - starting with us humans - and their environment: climate disruption, falling biodiversity and increasing scarcity of natural resources [1] , all generated by productivist capitalism.

I think it's important to stress here that, while capitalism is indeed responsible for this new geological era - the *Capitalocene* rather than the *Anthropocene* - it's also important to note that it's **the modern phase of capitalism**, linked to productivist and extractivist industrialization, that is the reason, and not a primitive capitalism dating back to the late Middle Ages. [2]

We're also interested in pre-industrial vernacular architecture because we want to find out how people of the time managed to create ecologically virtuous architecture using rudimentary means that required a certain amount of situational intelligence, This was in contrast to the laziness of industrial bulldozing, against the modernist doxa of a clean slate, and against the *international style of* using concrete and air-conditioning to create so-called free forms.

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[1] To be more rigorous and exhaustive on its indicators, we would have to consider the environmental crisis from the angle of nine planetary limits: climate change, biodiversity erosion, disruption of the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, changes in land use, the freshwater cycle, the introduction of new entities into the biosphere, ocean acidification, ozone layer depletion, increased aerosol presence in the atmosphere.

[2] **Contemporary communism** should therefore, in my view, take charge of its own critical analysis of productivism. If communism aims to develop the productive forces in order to increase the use values useful to the population, then *the* question of *utility* should be constantly at the center of debates, and considered in the broadest sense in order to keep production in its place, as a means, and not as an end in itself (which could be one definition of *productivism*).

I therefore propose to approach the ecological subject by examining the three themes mentioned above - **climate, biodiversity, resources** - analyzing how these clos-masures are historically adapted to their environment, and how today's farmers are trying to readapt them to the era of ecological crisis. The conclusion will attempt to put forward some ideas on the polarization of ecological issues.

Environment of the Pays de Caux

The Pays de Caux is both a *natural region of* Normandy and a *traditional country* [3] . Geographically, it forms a sort of triangle between Rouen, Le Havre and Dieppe, bounded to the north and west by the English Channel, and to the south by the Seine. Its eastern boundary is less clear, but it is bordered by the Pays de Bray (itself defined by its geology, a buttonhole). The geological situation is summarized in the *Wikipedia* article dedicated to the region:

> *"The Pays de Caux is a vast sedimentary plateau with a gently undulating surface. It rises gently to the east, from an altitude of 100 to 180 meters. It ends with the most beautiful set of high cliffs in France, reaching a height of 110 meters at Cap Fagnet, in Fécamp. These are veritable vertical walls of chalk and flint.*

Bordered by the sea and situated at altitude, the Pays de Caux is subject to strong, regular winds. Above the chalk and flint lies a thick layer of silt, making this region one of the most fertile in France. To complete the picture of natural elements, water is regularly present in the form of abundant rainfall. But it doesn't stay on the surface, penetrating rapidly into the soil (green water) to reach the very deep water table, making the plateau a surprisingly arid place, with no rivers or ponds (blue water). The Pays de Caux is, however, dotted with a number of small valleys at the bottom of which rivers flow and where the main towns are located.

Living on the plateau

How did the Cauchois come to live on this plateau?

They first cleared it to reclaim land from the forest and cultivate it. So much so that today, **the Pays de Caux appears to be an *open field***. However, trees are present in two forms. **The first**, more or less natural, is the woodland preserved and maintained on the least arable land, particularly on the valley sides. **The second**, totally artificial, is our famous *"clos-masures". In* summer, when the trees are full of leaves, Cauchois farms take on the appearance of a small wood. In reality, it's a fairly dense plantation of trees that encircles the farm and defines the *courtyard* in which the buildings are grouped and scattered. These trees are planted at the top of a two-metre-high embankment which, like a wall of earth, surrounds and encloses the farm and gives it part of its name.

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[3] This double definition underlines the fact that the unity of *countries,* an eminently cultural entity, was historically based on geographical homogeneities. And so culture had nature as its foundation (or infrastructure, as we would say in Marxist parlance?).

Landscape of the Pays de Caux *plain* (photo CAUE 76)

Climate

This planted embankment fulfills a number of roles, two of which are particularly climate-related: it creates a microclimate inside the farmhouse, and helps manage water that runs off the surface during heavy storms, when the soil is temporarily waterlogged. In detail.

The height and density of **the trees** on the slope create a windbreak hedge whose effect can be felt for fifteen to twenty times the height of the trees, i.e. for around 450 metres. In winter, temperatures inside the clos-masure are therefore milder, and in summer, the shade and reduced wind speed maintain a refreshing humidity. This microclimate makes it possible to graze part of the herd in the courtyard, to grow apple trees that would otherwise be blown away by the wind, and to protect the roofs of the buildings, which were historically thatched. The planted embankment, both artificial and vegetal, is therefore the basis for differentiating farming practices between the *plain*, where cereals are grown, and the *courtyard*, where livestock is raised and people live.

The lower part of the system, **the embankments**, also acts as a barrier to water run-off. Historically, they were used to create precious ponds in the courtyard for livestock, for making cider, a daily beverage in the absence of drinking water, and for fire-fighting purposes. But the embankments also play a collective role on the plateau, helping to prevent mudflows in the valleys and agricultural soil erosion.

A walled garden seen from the outside, from the *plain* (photo Département 76)
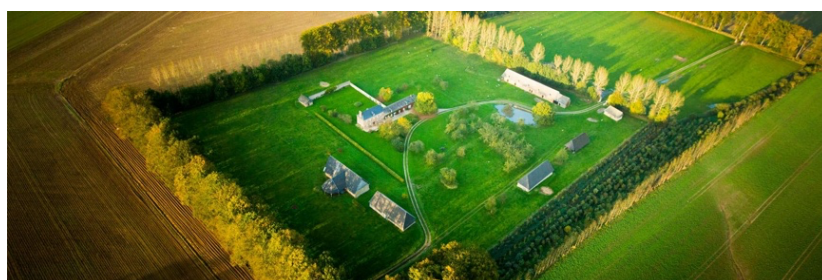
The *courtyard*, the interior of a walled garden (photo Département 76)

Biodiversity

Another role of the planted slope is that of an **ecological niche**. Unlike the hedges of the bocage, they are not continuous, as the clos-masures are disjointed on the plain. However, they do act as Japanese steps [4] enabling species to cross the open space of the plain.

This question refers to the interest that agro-ecology takes in hedges in general, as a habitat for wild *auxiliary fauna* (insects, birds, reptiles), useful to crops for practices that do without synthetic "phytosanitary" products (historical vernacular agriculture, organic farming today).

On a more domestic level, and in connection with the climate issue, the embankment provides useful protection for the cows and farmyard animals that live inside the enclosure, a type of wildlife that is now disappearing completely from specialized, productivist farms.

Resources

Historically, building on this plateau required neither abundant stone nor straight-trunked coniferous forests, but rather deciduous trees with rather irregular, gnarled trunks resulting from land clearing; clay and flint extracted from the soil because they were counter-productive for agriculture [5] ; and straw from cereal crops - all the ingredients needed to build half-timbered houses filled with cob, with a masonry base and thatched roof.

Before the arrival of drinking water, apple trees planted in the courtyard of the clos-masure provided the daily beverage (a much lower-alcohol cider than today's). Ponds, artificially created at low points, were the only water reservoirs.

As for the trees on the embankment, their trunks could be used to replace a defective piece of framework, and their branches, regularly pruned, provided the necessary firewood.

A planted embankment seen from the plain side

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[4] *Japanese steps* refer to the stone slabs, punctual and disjointed, laid out in the grass and on which you walk without getting your feet dirty.

[5] Pure clay (without silt) is waterproof and not very fertile. It is used to line the bottom of ponds and make them watertight, or for raw earth construction. Flint, also present in the soil, is extracted during ploughing and used in construction. Elsewhere in France, the large quantity of stones extracted from the soil by ploughing explains the construction of low walls around the edges of agricultural plots.

What's the situation today?

Before turning to the contemporary question, I'd like to say a few words about the evolution of clos-masures in the 19th century. This period saw both major technical changes and, on the whole, minor architectural ones.

In agronomy, **the first so-called *forage* revolution** - i.e. the replacement of fallow land with edible clover by cattle - led to an increase in agricultural yields, the replacement of sheep farming by cow farming, and the conversion of part of the plain to grassland for cattle.

In the world of building materials, **the railroad made it possible to** replace thatch with slate for roofing, and half-timbering with coal brick. Water could then be collected in cisterns, reducing the role of ponds.

But, overall, the courtyard-plain configuration has remained the same. The buildings have remained more or less the same size (limited by the span of the wooden frames). The sheepfolds have been replaced by stables. And in the end, rather than endangering the landscape, these changes have reinforced the clos-masures as a way of living in the Pays de Caux, notably with the planting of large beech groves on the slopes.

The major upheavals came in 1945 and especially 1960 with **the second agricultural revolution,** that of *mechanization* and the *chemization of* inputs (fertilizers, pesticides). These developments, coupled with cheap energy, helped to make the clos-masures lose their raison d'être. Starting with their planted embankments:

- Coal, then oil and gas, replaced wood for heating. The slope has lost its role as a resource.

- Large, *free-stall* cowsheds have replaced dark, narrow barns. With most of the herd's feed coming from buildings and siloed corn, cows are less and less likely to be out in the yard. The embankment has lost its role of protecting the herd.

- The arrival of the drinking water network, coupled with campaigns to uproot apple trees to combat alcoholism, meant that the embankment lost its function of protecting the orchard.

- The steel or fibrocement (formerly asbestos-coated) sheets that make up the roofing and cladding of today's large-scale hangars are now easily protected from the wind: all that's required is to multiply the number of fastenings per sheet, something that's hardly possible with slate and even less so with thatch.

- Finally, the widening of roads to allow the passage of ever-larger farm machinery, and the increased turning radii of trailers, have actively contributed to the razing of part of the embankments.

Faced with this observation, it's tempting to simply acknowledge the obsolescence of the clos-masures, and not feel sorry for a dying folklore with potentially reactionary overtones.

Except that...

Some of the farmers we met during our field survey, close to or even active in the Confédération paysanne (founded in 1987), take a different view of the history of agricultural modernization and the ecological crisis. While asserting a progressive and ecological vision of agriculture (notably in solidarity with farmers in the Global South, unlike, for example, the third far-right-related union, Coordination rurale), these farmers take **a critical view of the dominant capitalist agricultural model**.

Rather than taking the question by the theoretical horns, let's take a look at some of the practices encountered today among these new-style farmers (in the sense that they claim to be farmers in the world of the 21st century, with no identity-based withdrawal).

Defending the embankment wood

"What do we do with trees and hedges? Our ancestors knew how to do things very well. They didn't waste anything. From the noble part of the tree to the end. The branches were used to make brooms and bundles, and to boil the pot. Boiling the pot means heating yourself and

washing your clothes with it. I'm not at the stage of asking my wife to rewash the laundry in the pot. But in the end, that was it. Nothing was lost.

At one time, the electricity fairy arrived, the nuclear fairy, a button, all that, it was simple. We went for modernism. I'm all for modernism. But what about all those uses that have disappeared? And so we gave up, because most of these things, this biomass that never stops growing, could no longer be recycled. And I'm a farmer, I'm a producer. What I often say to students and farmers is: "You are producers of carbon, of biomass, of whatever kind. And when I look around me, I see biomass everywhere, I see energy everywhere. I see it on the side of the road, lying around because it's been abandoned. I'm capable of calculating the liters of fuel lost in this little game and the substitution it could generate.

Our job as farmers is simply to nurture nature and encourage it to express itself even more.

Philippe Dilard, organic farmer, founder of Cuma Haies'nergie et territoire

Convinced of the ecological and landscape benefits of trees and hedges, dairy farmer Philippe Dilard, who also calls himself an "energiculteur", has set up a CUMA (Cooperative for the Use of Agricultural Equipment) to develop a value chain for the wood obtained when maintaining the hedges and slopes of the clos-masures: firewood chipped into chips, including for collective boiler rooms in the communes of Neuchâtel-en-Bray and Saint-Saëns, but also timber with the acquisition of a mobile sawmill. Thanks to this initiative, the embankment has regained one of its original functions, modernized for today's tools and working conditions.

This is a far cry from a fixed, identity-based vision of the embankment (where only the historic beech would have the right to exist).

Defending dairy farming

"In terms of agro-ecology and everything that lies at the heart of the organic project, milk is all about the diversity of systems and the crop-livestock alliance. There's no way around it. From an agronomic point of view, we won't have any fertility without the link between the two. So it's absolutely essential to maintain that. So I wouldn't dream of abandoning milk. All the people who think about agroecology say that you have to put livestock back into the system.

(...) We're looking for the most economically efficient system possible. And our strategy is one of low-input farming: an extensive system, with very few expenses, simplifying the system to death, so that we don't spend our lives on the tractor feeding, distributing feed and mulching in the buildings. Hence the fact that the cows are outside as much as possible. At the moment, my cows are outside, even at night. So we're down on milk production, but we've got a margin, normally, that we can pass on."

Mathieu Grenier, organic farmer, spokesman for Confédération paysanne 76

For Mathieu Grenier**,** this is non-negotiable: "**There can be no agriculture without livestock**. The livestock in question is extensive. This presupposes a reasonable farm size ("ideologically, we don't want to expand, unless it's to set someone up"). And cows that get out of the buildings and give raison d'être to the clos-masure grassland. Even if it means producing less.

Defending the orchard

"As a child, I saw my grandparents still making chicken. They were farmers. But as things went on, they gave up everything they were doing. And then, they only made cereals. Chicken is too easy. You can get it ready-made at your local supermarket. Why bother plucking it? So, in fact, they gave up to give themselves some free time. They had some free time.

(...) Organic farming wasn't particularly obvious at first. Afterwards, when I started market gardening, I said to myself "I'm not going to go into conventional market gardening".

The year before I moved in, I talked to a retired guy from Jumièges who had his grandchildren in his orchard. And he forbade one of his grandchildren to eat an apple from the orchard and ate it directly. Because he knew what he'd put on it. And I'd had my daughter just the year before I moved in. I said to myself, no, I can't forbid my kids to eat something. And then, having been

immersed in the big farms where it's all gravy [fertilizers and pesticides], where the only interest is profitability...

Today's farmers don't know how to feed themselves. Tomorrow, if there's a crisis, they don't know how to eat. My old bosses wouldn't even eat their potatoes. Because... a fair return for the price. I thought that was a bit weird. You at least have to know how to eat.

Ludovic Jourdain, organic market gardener

Ludovic Jourdain's state of mind is in line with that of a number of farmers who want to take **back control of the way they produce**, starting with feeding themselves. This means giving new meaning to the orchard (in the form of apple trees, but also with other fruit trees) and the farmyard.

Accommodating historic buildings

A final example, less agricultural and more architectural, is that of historic buildings. Specialized productivist agriculture and its battalions of giant farm machines don't know what to do with these buildings, which are too small, too low and too narrow. The tendency is to raze them to the ground and replace them with large sheds that often appear as warts in the landscape. However, old buildings can be refurbished for contemporary farming uses, such as workshops for processing production (cheese and cream production in a dairy, wheat processing into bread in a bakery) or for direct farm sales. The modest means available to farmers sometimes force them to build their own homes, which is more akin to a do-it-yourself project than a masterpiece from the Compagnons du Tour de France.

If we take this logic to its logical conclusion, it's the **control of debt** that lies behind it. Indeed, the proponents of technological innovation will justify the means (sheds and machines) by the end (increasing production), leading to a spiral of indebtedness. This was precisely what the Défis ruraux (now known as *Civam*, also known as "the Confédération paysanne's Chamber of Agriculture"), refused to do when advising farmers on bringing livestock buildings up to standard in the 1990s and 2000s. Rather than building everything new, they looked for simple solutions that made the most of what already existed, so as not to lead to uncontrolled debt. Even if this meant sacrificing optimum working comfort.

Former cellar converted into bakery and wood-fired boiler

What lessons can communist architects draw from all this?

Contemporary farmer-peasants (whom I oppose to farmer-capitalists) therefore value the elements that make up traditional vernacular architecture, not so much for their identity as for their economic and ecological usefulness. They lament the wasteful removal of trees from embankments, and are building new economic value chains for them. They defend the maintenance of the soil's agronomic qualities through the cycles of living organisms (livestock farming and therefore the meadow in the Clos Masure courtyard), rather than the cycles of petrochemicals. They refuse to become dependent on agro-industry and supermarkets for food, so they plant orchards and maintain a farmyard. Without making them part of their heritage, they give meaning to and update the old buildings, investing in them in a measured way.

Through their eyes, and in their hands, **vernacular architecture, and in particular** clos-masures**, are therefore not disqualified in the 21st century** if we can recognize their ecological virtues and try to reinvent their uses and a contemporary economy**.**

All this paints a different picture from the dominant narrative. This was already the lesson of Bernard Rudofsky in 1964, when his *Architecture sans architecte* brought the vernacular to the fore to escape the hegemony of modernist discourse [6] . It was also the reading of technical historian David Edgerton in his *What's New*? which deconstructed the ineluctable nature of technical trajectories to temper the usual linear narrative centered on a few innovations and to highlight other, less visible techniques concealing "*considerable potential for renovation*" [7] .

As proposed by another historian of technology, François Jarrige [8] , but also by a farmers' collective, l'Atelier Paysan [9] , all this advocates for **positioning technical issues at** the center of debates (and not in the hands of specialists) **as a political battlefield**. The struggle waged by the movement *Soulèvements de la terre* (Earth Uprisings) against mega-basins is a good example of this in France. And rather than giving in to the sirens of *high-tech*, the Trojan horse of capitalism, it's a good idea for communist architects to familiarize themselves with this vernacular socio-technical environment, where innovation is as much technical as it is social.

To think about the ecological crisis and the (technical) means to remedy it, it therefore seems useful, to follow Andreas Malm, to advocate "*the utility of opposites*" and to "*praise polarization*" [10] . As food for thought, let's launch a few fertile dualities to be dialecticized: technology/social, engineering/tinkering, specialization/polyvalence, quantity/quality, performance/robustness [11] .

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[6] Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects*, éd. du Chêne, 1964 - See article in issue 1 of *Longues Marches*

[7] David Edgerton, *What's new? Du rôle des techniques dans l'histoire globale*, ed. du Seuil, 2013

[8] François Jarrige, *Technocritiques, Du refus des machines à la contestation des technosciences*, ed. La Découverte, 2014

[9] L'Atelier Paysan, *Reprendre la terre aux machines*, ed. du Seuil, 2021

[10] Andreas Malm, *Avis de tempête, Nature et culture dans un monde qui se réchauffe*, ed. La Fabrique, 2023. See in particular chapter 6 "De l'utilité des contraires: éloge de la polarisation". "The political war against an ever more mortifying ruling class requires textbooks full of dualities."

[11] On this last point, see Olivier Hamant, *Antidote au culte de la performance. La robustesse du vivant*,
Collection Tracts (n° 50), ed. Gallimard, 2023

[THINGS SEEN]

SERGE PEKER: *TAKING STOCK*

Assault
Film by **Adilkhan Yerzhanov (2023)**

Assaut, by Adilkhan Yerzhanov (2023)**, is **a kind of UFO** that has landed on the cinema planet without warning. Let's just say that it comes from far away and from a cold, not to say icy, region. Far away, that is, from Kazakhstan, a vast landlocked country in the heart of Central Asia, which, seen from Europe, seems separated from the world. Although filmed in Kazakhstan, the action takes place in a fictitious region, a vastness of ice, snow and cold that also seems cut off from the world.

In addition to the fictitious nature of the region, any dramatic action is systematically neutralized by **situational comedy**. For example, the terrorists, dressed in grotesque masks, straddle a cable laid across the corridor of a high school, all the while going behind the backs of the principal and janitor, who have eyes only for the cable and its consequences on the passage of students.

The theme of separation undermines the film from its very opening. A mathematics teacher is lecturing a class of teenagers. A woman, for some reason, asks him to leave by waving at him through the glass wall separating the classroom from the corridor. As the man remains deaf to this voice reduced to speaking only in signs, the woman insists and persists. The teacher finally leaves the classroom.

Then begins a violent break-up scene in which the woman, who turns out to be his wife, asks him to take back his child, who is currently in the classroom. The man not only refuses, but threatens her with the police. The woman leaves the school without giving up custody of her son. Needing to regain his composure, the teacher leaves his students and classroom, but not without locking the door. Going out for a cigarette, he learns that the school has been taken over by terrorists, but fortunately the students have been evacuated.

A certain amount of time passes before the teacher confesses that his pupils are locked in his classroom, through no fault of his own. The students are taken hostage without any demands on the part of the terrorists, whose actions appear devoid of any purpose. **Humor, discrepancy and lack of purpose** systematically defuse the action's narrative.

With the school totally cut off from the outside world and the army unable to arrive for at least three days, only the school staff and the local policeman are left to attempt an assault. While the men put the delivery of the students solely on the policeman's shoulders, the teacher's wife asserts that she

will take part in the assault to free her son. Her intervention forces the men to follow her. As we shall see, her role will continue to be as essential as it is decisive. The assault group thus consists of seven men and one woman. They go to ask for help from local workers on an oil site, but their leader refuses their support on the grounds that it's not their job. The small assault group is left to fend for itself.

The essence of the film lies in the preparations for the assault. The actual assault is limited to a very brief final scene. This preparation immediately comes up against the primordial obstacle that everyone, except the woman, is separated from the others by **an identity constitution that generates contempt**. *I can't stand my partner, and I don't want to be with him*," says one of the group as they form a tightly packed column.

The intelligence of *Assaut* lies in its **backwards trajectory**. The assault isn't so much about storming the high school as it is about storming the narcissistic egos that separate each of us from each other. In a scene as dramatic as it is burlesque, the film sets out to show us the world in which all these identity separations crystallize. In preparation, the group draws an exact map of the school on the snow. Using this plan, they then examine all the possibilities for storming the school. This **pure virtuality of logical possibilities**, in which each person gives his or her opinion, is quite comparable to what you'd get on a computer screen.

But this purely virtual aspect of the possibilities, possible doors and passages, only leads to certain death. The comedy comes from the fact that the men come up against a line drawn in the snow with the real impression of bumping into a real door or wall, and facing certain death. Death is thus inscribed in the logical apparatus of this virtual montage, just as it is inscribed in the purely digital logic of our world's various thought-impeding machines.

Another clownish situation is when they cover themselves with sheepskins, crawling on all fours to avoid being noticed. Only the woman finds the solution. The idea is not to use the multiple passages and entrances virtually provided by the plan drawn on the snow, but to think of a way out from outside the school. The idea is to shoot a terrorist as he passes in front of the glass door giving access to the school. Shooting him will then clear a passageway and ensure the assault. But the aim has to be right! And only a woman can do that. It has to be said that she has already hit the nail on the head by targeting an idea that lies outside the structurally designed virtual possibilities.

Now that the idea has been found, it's time for **everyone to unite with the others**. So the group needs to take stock. Taking stock, then, means taking on the selves that separate each of us from the others. To this end, each member of the group will bear witness, for him/herself and for others, to what the representation of the self conceals and covers up. This work is done by speaking *out*: "*It's true, I've been nothing but a coward, it's true, I'm nothing but an alcoholic, it's true, I'm irresponsible, or it's true, I'm nothing but a liar...*". But what's true isn't so much what's said as what's said. In the final analysis, it doesn't matter what is said; **it's speaking for oneself and about oneself that is true**. Even a mute voice can still speak through signs: like the teacher's wife, separated from her husband by the glass wall of the classroom.

The group can only reach its target if each individual is able to target his or her self through the element of a word capable of crossing it to open it up to the authentic presence of a meaning that is absent but yet to come. This is when **each person becomes the equal of all**. Through this equality, the group can finally find a unity that alone could enable it to take on the terrorists. The attacker can only achieve his goal by turning in on himself, opening him up not to his point of departure, but to an unknown source. This is the opposite of the logic of linear functions, which always go from A to B and then from B to C... without looping.

In this way, Yerzhanov introduces us to a different kind of mathematics from that certainly taught by the unfortunate teacher. At the same time, **this mathematics draws a space other** than the one represented in the snow by the plan of the school. This space is all the more different because it cannot be represented. So the group had to make a point to find its unity. But the point is also the subject passing through and moving to the side of the open, only to disappear into the repository of statements: it's true, I'm just a coward...

The assault will be a victory. This is the logic of things, or more precisely, the logic established by the idea targeted by the professor's wife. He leaves the child with his mother. The army, which unlike the classic cavalry charge will only arrive when everything is over, will teach the attackers that, whatever the conditions, civilians are forbidden by law to kill. The battalion commander then gives them a choice between prison and renouncing victory. It's like **a demonstration by the absurd of the inconsistency of the law when it forgets that it is conditioned by reality**.

Through the window separating the mother and son on the bus, the boy places on his face one of the ghostly masks used by his attackers. Painful and cruel, the separation falls like an inevitable fence, limiting a solitude haunted by this final figure of the son. What's left for the father is the possibility of turning in on himself for a new assault, opening the way to a word in which the son becomes the sole ghostly witness. The loop remains open, but only if we come **full circle**.

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[STUDIES]

Alain RALLET: *ANATOMY OF THE PEASANT QUESTION TODAY*

The peasant question is a classic of communist revolution. But it has always been caught in the crossfire between its strategic political importance and the fact that capitalism has made it a thing of the past.

That of its **political importance,** since it was necessary to recognize the revolutionary significance of certain peasant uprisings (Engels, *La guerre des paysans,* 1850) and the need for an alliance between workers and peasants to structure the people's camp in the conquest of power. We know that the construction of this alliance met with very different political fortunes, sacrificed on the altar of industrialization in the Soviet Union in the late 20s (Robert Linhart, *Lénine, les paysans et Taylor*, 1976, Seuil), the political and territorial basis of China's long democratic revolution (1927-1949).

That of their **gradual elimination** by capitalism, for, by penetrating agriculture as it does other sectors, capitalism establishes the reign of large farms, industrializes production and tends to eliminate the poor peasants who are the layer of the peasantry likely to form a revolutionary alliance with the workers. Emerging from feudal subjugation and destined for extinction by capital in the Great Gallery of Historical Evolution, peasants have a fleeting class-being. This is why they have always been the victims of suspicion and doubt about their political capacity. Alessandro Russo shows that the question of the peasants' political capacity was at the heart of the controversy that triggered the Cultural Revolution.

What's the situation today?

The question is posed differently in developed capitalist countries than in developing ones (India, Brazil, Africa, China...). The elimination of poor and middle-income peasants is far from a foregone conclusion in the latter countries, and hence on a global scale. It takes specific forms from one country to another.

In developed capitalist countries

In developed capitalist countries, the elimination of poor and even middle-income peasants is well advanced, if not irreversible.

In Europe, the capitalist transformation of agriculture began in 1962 with the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), subordinating production to agricultural markets. It accelerated with the Mansholt Plan (1968), explicitly aimed at eliminating a significant proportion of farmers in order to reduce the surpluses generated by the CAP's productivism. In France, capitalist modernization was implemented by the Pisani laws in the early 60s, with the collaboration of the farming unions.

The transformations were brutal and radical. Until then, under the aegis of the Third Republic, the bourgeoisie had sealed a pact with the peasantry centered around smallholdings guaranteeing an ancestral attachment to the land, the family character of the farm (no or few workers) handed down from generation to generation, and limited, non-specialized production (mixed farming and poly-breeding) serving family consumption and supplying a local market area, with the village as its cultural horizon. This is what has been called the "peasant civilization", with farmers defined and perceived as "peasants", bearers not only of a mode of production but also of the ideological values associated with it (attachment to the land and nature, family-centeredness, hard work punctuated by the seasons, low equipment, limited social horizon...).

The "agricultural revolution" of the 1960s: a break with "peasant civilization"

The agricultural revolution of the 1960s shattered this age-old civilization and brought about the "End of the Peasants" (Henri Mendras, *La Fin des Paysans*, Seuil, 1967). It did so with apparent continuity, as it preserved the family farm model. While the average farm size increased, large-scale farming did not become dominant. Production continued to be mainly the work of the married couple, sometimes with the help of a farm hand. But capitalist modernization has completely transformed this family production framework, making it subservient to downstream markets, upstream input suppliers (seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) and agricultural machinery manufacturers through the mechanization of production.

Formally independent, **the farm** has found itself caught in a vice of market relations dominated by the agri-food industry (substitution of international and European markets for local production to feed the population and farm animals), the chemical industry and the agricultural machinery industry, to which we must add the hold of the banks on farmers to finance the increase in capital required by this transformation.

These relationships, which encircle the farm, are all means of extracting the surplus created by farmers' work (the excess of the value of their production over their consumption). They dictate what they must produce according to the price signals sent out by the markets, and under what profitability conditions, which is what the banks that finance them look after. Their entrepreneurial independence - for they are no longer called "farmers" but "farmer-entrepreneurs" - is an illusion. Their subordination to the food industry, supermarkets and banks is so obvious that it has ceased to fool them. One of the characteristics of recent farmers' movements is that they turn not only against the state scarecrow, but also against the agri-food industry (insofar as they are not involved via cooperatives or shares in the capital of this industry), supermarkets or banks.

The "Peasants Workers" at the heart of the new agricultural model

Increasing labor productivity was the main objective of this transformation. At a time when it was very low and struggling to feed the population, agricultural labor productivity was boosted by the use of phytosanitary products, the selection of seeds and species, the geographical specialization of production and regions, and increased tenfold by mechanization, to the point where vast markets could be served with a much-decreased workforce.

In the 1970s, there was a debate about the class nature of this transformation. Wouldn't "peasants" have become "peasant-workers" analogous to factory workers, due to the extortion of surplus labor by a means other than the wage relationship (Amédée Mollard, *Paysans exploités. Essai sur la question paysanne*, PUG, 1977)? Bernard Lambert, an agricultural union leader from the Catholic Socialist movement in Brittany, borrowed this banner to develop the "**Paysans Travailleurs" movement in the aftermath of May 1968** (*Les Paysans dans la lutte des classes*, 1970, Seuil). His aim was to shake agricultural unionism out of its corporatism by reaching out to young people and workers. For a time, he refreshed agricultural unionism by pointing out the now-capitalist nature of production relations in agriculture, and by getting involved in the movementist causes of Lipp and Larzac, but he did not succeed in getting the "Paysans-Travailleurs" out of their unionist gangue by, for example, developing a political alliance with workers in the agri-food industry, who are very numerous in Brittany. The "Paysans Travailleurs" movement remained in fact a trade union movement, with no real political novelty, but it did pave the way a few years later for the creation of today's Confédération Paysanne, which defends an alternative form of agriculture to industrial farming.

The ambiguous duality of "Peasants Workers Entrepreneurs"

Returning to the nature of production relations in this capitalism-influenced agriculture, let's emphasize its ambiguity, which stems from the fact that it takes on two different aspects. On the one hand, there is unquestionably a phenomenon of exploitation in the sense of the extortion of surplus labor (excess of the value created by the farmer's labor over that of his remuneration). As in the case of salaried work, this is achieved by lengthening the working week (which, unlike that of salaried workers, is not limited by the labour code and is often in the region of 70 hours) and increasing labour productivity, in a way equivalent to Marx's absolute and relative surplus-value.

Let's continue the analogy: the extortion of surplus labour is enabled by the **farmer's loss of control over his work process.** He has lost control over what he produces, which is dictated by the "market" [1] , how he produces it (organization of work, use of chemical inputs and machinery imposed by productivity standards), to whom he sells it and at what price. All that remains is for him to be a worker, a "working peasant".

But unlike an employee, he advances capital. He has to raise it from his own funds (mainly from family inheritance) and from a bank loan. He uses it to acquire or expand the land on his farm, buy inputs and machinery (possibly pooled through cooperatives), cope with the vagaries of the weather, and sometimes invest in distribution channels via producers' cooperatives. If he doesn't use a salaried worker (a frequent occurrence), he doesn't exploit anyone except his wife, whose work was not legally recognized [2] . He must, however, advance capital, put it to work in a production process and sell it on the market. He is therefore caught up in a logic of capital valorization and, like all capitalists, in a logic of capital accumulation, as the competition he faces from other producers forces him to expand his farm, mechanize his activity, specialize his production and find new markets.

For accumulation to take place, all the surplus labor created by the "Peasant Worker Entrepreneur" must not be appropriated by bankers, agri-food industrialists and distributors, so that a profit margin remains. But since the farmer has no control over market relationships, the only way he can make a profit to invest is by limiting his remuneration and worsening his working and living conditions. The "Peasant Worker Entrepreneur" only survives as a capitalist by self-exploiting as a worker. This internalized separation explains the high number of suicides among farmers (more than 2 a day in France, according to the Mutualité Agricole, particularly among poor farmers). The farmers' adage "*live poor to die rich*" sums up the PTE situation.

Growing peasant heterogeneity as a result of the agricultural revolution

As a result of the leap in productivity, the number of farms has fallen dramatically (from 1,600,000 in 1970 to 380,000 today), as has employment. In 1970, there were 2.4 million jobs in agriculture (including 2.0 million farmers and 400,000 employees), i.e. 11.4% of total employment, compared with 619,000 today (273,000 employees and 346,000 farmers), i.e. 2% of total employment.

Growth in the number of farms and their average surface area in mainland France
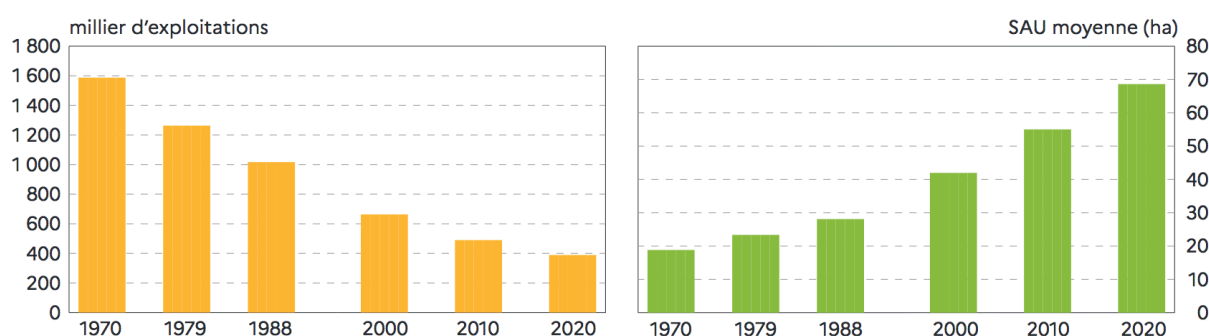
But the agricultural revolution has considerably widened the heterogeneity of the farming environment, under the apparent domination of the average farm (currently 69 ha). There have always been large, medium and small farms, but these differences were due to the history of land ownership in each region and the nature of the crops grown. Endogenously, agricultural capitalism is now driving the concentration of production on large farms.

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[1] The "market" is not the fantasized free meeting of supply and demand, but an institutional construct of States (European agricultural markets with the CAP) or of the world's major agricultural commodity exchanges (the *Chicago Board of Trade* for wheat, the *New York Mercantile Exchange* for cotton, etc.).

[2] In France, it wasn't until 1980 that women acquired the status of "co-exploitante", i.e. the right to manage the farm in addition to the recognition of their participation in farm work.

Farm size (France, 2020)

Farm size	number	%
Micro < 14 ha	100.000	26,3
Small between 15 ha and 50 ha	100.000	26,3
Average between 50 ha and 140 ha	100.000	26,3
Large-scale farming > 140 ha	80.000	21
TOTAL	380.000	100

Large farms account for 40% of farmland and 46% of employment. These are the only farms whose numbers are increasing. This differentiation is also reflected in agricultural income [3] . There is a ratio of 1 to 10 between the income of the lowest 10% (€15,000/year) and that of the highest 10% (€150,000/year). The same order of magnitude is found between types of farming (it's better to raise pigs than cattle for meat) or types of crop (it's better to be a winegrower or cereal grower than a cattle farmer).

In this race to accumulate more and more, **the race is on to the back of the pack,** as in the mountain passes of the Tour de France. Although already greatly reduced, the non-salaried farming population is set to continue shrinking: half of all farmers will retire by 2030, and 2/3 have no designated successors. By 2030, only 1% of farmers will be left (Bertrand Hervieu, *Une France sans agriculteurs*; Presses des Sciences Po, 2022). The capitalist transformation of agriculture is not over. A second revolution is underway.

Towards a second agricultural revolution

The industrialization of agriculture is breaking the ideological-political lock on the family farm. The peasant model had been attacked from both upstream and downstream edges, surviving in the illusory form of capital self-valorizing through hard family labor. This model has been marginalized by the extension of the capitalist industrialization of agriculture to domestic markets (food for the population and livestock), which had long been protected from competition on world markets by protectionist rules (India, Brazil, Europe...) and/or guaranteed prices for farmers (Europe, India). This is the main reason for recent peasant movements around the world.

The guarantees that ensured the continuity of the family farming model are being shattered under the pressure of increasing market internationalization. **In India, Brazil and Africa**, traditional agriculture is being hit hard by globalized competition for agricultural products, threatening the poorest populations who used to rely on local subsistence farming for their food supplies. Food models are also being transformed, enslaved to the products of multinational agribusinesses.

In Europe, the transition began in 1992 with the end of guaranteed prices for farmers (they were guaranteed a minimum price if they were unable to sell their produce on the market). Since then, subsidies have been granted on the basis of the surface area farmed, to the advantage of larger farms.

The marginalization of the family farm is achieved through **the concentration of land ownership**. Family ownership is no longer passed on in the same way as in the past, because the successors cannot afford to buy and expand the farm to bring it up to new competitive standards, or no longer wish to live with the stress of the ETP. The land is therefore sold on succession. As the capital required is beyond the reach of young people wishing to set up in business, land is increasingly being bought up by investors who do not necessarily belong to the farming world. They do so in the form of agricultural development companies or public limited companies [4] .

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[3] On average, this income represents only a third of farm household income: 20% comes from income from land assets and the remainder (just over 45%) from spouses' salaries.

[4] Cf Terre de Liens, *Land Ownership in France*, 2023

https://ressources.terredeliens.org/les-ressources/la-propriete-des-terres-agricoles-en-france

The trend is very rapid [5] . Companies with capital open to non-agricultural investors now farm 15% of France's utilized agricultural area.

A capitalist model for the organization of agricultural activity

The transformation of family farms into companies is not limited to land ownership. It is also affecting production, with the development of agricultural contractors to whom all or part of the production tasks are delegated. **The use of production subcontractors** has thus multiplied, even for medium-sized farms. While the number of self-employed farmers is declining rapidly, the number of salaried employees and temporary workers working for agricultural contractors has increased (+23% between 2000 and 2016). Half of the 730,000 people (salaried and non-salaried) working in agriculture do not belong to farms.

The transformation of farms into businesses also applies to technical services and the commercialization of agricultural products. Thus, in place of a traditional agricultural model (that of the family farm) where the farmer owned the land, directly implemented production as part of a conjugal work process, and sought to add value to his products on the market, A model analogous to industrial capital is developing, in which capital investors own the company and decide on the direction of production according to an expected financial return. Agricultural production and its management are entrusted to an operating company, which subcontracts certain production tasks, while technical services and marketing are delegated to specialized companies.

How does all this fit together? On the one hand, through holding companies with shares in the various types of company, and on the other, through control of the land by the financial companies that bought it. Controlling the land means being able to decide what production will ensure the profitability of capital on world markets. It is to be expected that the giants of the agri-food industry, and even supermarkets, will take control of these companies and integrate them into their value chains. Agriculture is becoming a capitalist industry under the aegis of the agri-food industry.

High labour productivity, few farm workers, capital profitability issue

The aim of the current agricultural revolution is to increase labor productivity in order to ensure the competitiveness of agricultural products on global markets. Hence the implosion of the previous production model, the concentration of land ownership and the industrialization of production methods. The result is a small number of farm workers, out of all proportion to the growth in production. Productivity gains were due not only to the instruments of the previous revolution (mechanization, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.) but also to the capitalist reorganization of the entire agricultural sector.

Today, however, productivity is tending to stagnate, creating strong pressures on the profitability of capital and hastening the elimination of the most fragile farmers. **The stagnation of productivity** can be explained by the capital-intensive intensification of production brought about by the previous agricultural revolution. On the one hand, the mechanization and intensive use of chemicals of agriculture have devastated agricultural ecosystems and accelerated climatic hazards. On the other hand, intensification has increased the weight of fixed capital (land, machinery, inputs) in relation to value-creating labor alone, driving down the rate of profit. This is an illustration of the Marxist explanation of the falling rate of profit [6] . To remedy this situation, competition drives capitalists to enlarge farms, mechanize more and multiply chemical inputs, which increases the problem of profitability by raising the ratio of fixed capital to wages.

This second agricultural revolution is not unique to agriculture in developed countries. Similar features can be found in developing countries, even if the agricultural revolution is still mainly confined to the

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[5] It was all the more rapid as the purchase of land by these companies enabled them to bypass the control exercised by the SAFERs (Sociétés d'aménagement foncier et d'établissement rural) over land transactions, since land purchases were no longer made through individual transactions but through the purchase of shares in which the value of the land was diluted among the company's other assets.

[6] If **c** is fixed capital, **v** is capital in the form of wages and **P** is profit, the rate of profit **t** is written as t = P/(c+v), i.e. $t = \dfrac{P}{v(\frac{c}{v}+1)}$ capital intensification raises c/v and thus lowers the rate of profit.

export sector. But the model of the family farm serving the domestic market is also beginning to be affected by market globalization.

In developed countries, three forms of agriculture currently coexist:

- **the capitalist firm** described above (or "firm agriculture": François Purseigle, Geneviève Nguyen, Pierre Blanc, *Le nouveau capitalisme agricole. De la ferme à la firme*. Presses de Sciences Po, 2017);

- **the family** farm, which remains but is no longer dominant (in France, 30% of farms, 28% of production);

- **micro-enterprises** (market gardening, small-scale livestock farming, organic produce, short circuits, etc.), which are not very important in quantitative terms, but are a source of innovation in relation to food and the ecological concerns of the middle classes. They are often subsidized or encouraged locally.

Three symbolic recompositions of the countryside

The second agricultural revolution brought about three symbolic breaks in the representation of peasants and the countryside:

- *"**Feeding the population**"* was the social legitimacy of the peasantry. The first agricultural revolution made this its goal (CAP in Europe, green revolution in various countries); the second subordinates the objective of meeting food needs to the profitability of capital.

- *"**The land belongs to those who work it**"*. The first agricultural revolution shook up the ancient "peasant civilization", but established the family farm model as the dominant mode of production; the second disconnects land ownership from work. Land no longer belongs to those who work it. It is less and less inherited.

- *"**Farmers are in the country, city dwellers are in the city**"*. Farmers are now in the minority in the countryside (7% of working people in towns with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants are farmers in France). Workers are the largest social group. The residential function of the countryside (people working in the city, retirees, second homes, etc.) outweighs its agricultural production function. Rural and urban lifestyles have become culturally more similar. But the countryside is characterized by a specific way of living, distinct from that of the city.

The globalization of the peasant question

The peasant question itself, which concerns millions of peasants, is now being played out on a global scale, with the globalization of agricultural markets on the one hand, and similar questions being asked of the peasant masses on the other.

India, Brazil, Africa

In India, impressive peasant movements have laid siege to cities, notably the capital New Dehli, in 2020-2021 and more recently in February 2024, with violent clashes with the authorities (700 peasants dead since 2020). It is the main opposition force to the Modi regime. Most peasants are poor: 86% have farms of less than 2 ha, and 126 million of them own farms of 0.6 ha each. They are heavily indebted and victims of pollution resulting from the chemization of agriculture brought about by Nehru's famous Green Revolution in the 60s, particularly in rice and wheat cultivation (Punjab, Haryana). Their incomes continue to fall, as prices once guaranteed by the State have been handed over to the market by Modi, and thus to agribusiness. He had to back down and reverse the liberalization of prices for rice and wheat, but farmers are demanding the return of guaranteed prices for all products, as well as India's disconnection from the WTO. This is in line with the demands of the recent farmers' movement in Europe ("guaranteed" minimum prices and disconnection from the world market).

In Brazil, there are two types of agriculture: one is capitalist, driven by agribusiness and made up of large, export-oriented farms employing little manpower in relation to the capital invested; the other is

"peasant", based on family farms and intended to feed the Brazilian population. The latter is predominant in areas with a large farming population, where not everyone can find land, and where land is under-exploited by large landowners, hence the historic land occupation movement of the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra). Peasant agriculture employs 14 million people, or 60% of agricultural workers. Conflicts over land are extremely violent, whether they concern the division of territories between the two types of agriculture, or the advance of the "frontier" of capitalist exploitation in Amazonia, to the detriment of the Indian population and workers who are close to a situation of slavery. Under pressure from Bolsonarism and agro-industry, the MST has put land occupation on the back burner and embarked on agro-ecology around cooperatives serving quality produce to the urban middle class.

In Africa, agriculture is predominant. It is the main activity of 80% of the continent's population. Africa is destined to play a major role in world food supplies, as it possesses 60% of the world's available agricultural land (particularly in the DRC). As a result, its land is the object of intense imperialist covetousness, particularly on the part of China, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, who are pursuing an aggressive policy of land purchases. Africa is said to have sold $100 billion worth of land since 2000. As in Brazil, there are two types of agriculture, one focused on export crops (corn, coffee, cocoa, etc.) and the other on small-scale farming. Investment by governments and international donors has favored modern agriculture. Peasant agriculture is in a precarious situation, growing food crops exposed to the vagaries of climate and political unrest. Malnutrition and hunger are widespread. Efforts to overcome this situation are threatened by climate change, which is occurring faster than elsewhere. The ecological question is a key political issue for African agriculture.

In China

In the **late 1970s**, the Deng Xiao Ping regime decollectivized agriculture, retaining collective ownership but distributing land use rights among peasants. Today, 200 million peasants work on plots averaging 0.65 ha. Their extreme poverty forces family members to go and work in the towns. Every year, 15 million rural dwellers leave the countryside, moving back and forth between town and country for lack of urban residency permits. At first, until the beginning of this century, agriculture was neglected, serving as labor for the rapid rise of urban capitalism.

The Chinese government was forced to change its policy to feed its population (20% of the world's population for 9% of arable land). Initially, it relied on internal accumulation in Chinese agriculture along the lines of *"take less, give more and free up initiatives"*, encouraging the rapid concentration of farms and increased productivity by guaranteeing prices and subsidizing mechanization and inputs. But the fragmentation of farms and the extent of pollution in rural areas kept costs high and limited the ability to feed China's rapidly growing population. In the **2010s,** China embarked on a policy of importing products and aggressively purchasing land, commercial intermediaries and agri-food processing companies abroad, all under the aegis of state capitalism. China's millions of peasants are thus competing with foreign products, and kept out of the hands of state-sponsored agricultural capitalism.

Conclusion

Although farmers' situations differ from country to country and continent to continent, the peasant question revolves around four major issues.

1. Farmers' access to land.

Despite the fact that capitalism's penetration of the agricultural sector has had the effect of emptying the countryside of its population by considerably increasing labor productivity, there are still masses of poor peasants who cannot be absorbed by urban industrialization all at once, even when it is carried out at breakneck speed, as in China. Yet these masses of peasants do not have access to land, i.e. in conditions that would ensure their survival under another type of agriculture. Their access to land cannot be through individual ownership. The model of the family peasant farm is a thing of the past, and can only serve as a stepping stone towards the invention of new forms of collective ownership.

2. Feeding the population

Feeding a country is presented as the mission of the peasantry and the foundation of its social legitimacy. By raising the productivity of the land's labor far beyond what could be achieved by subsistence agriculture, capitalism boasts that it is much better able to fulfill this objective and cope with the world's growing population. But by destroying the traditional agriculture that is the basis of the population's diet, capitalist penetration of peasant agriculture by the export sector model is making it harder for the poorest to feed themselves. According to the World Bank, the lives of 205 million people in 45 countries are at risk due to lack of access to food. The industrialization of production is also increasing the share of processed products in food consumption, creating public health problems in all countries.

3. The environmental issue

Both modern intensive agriculture and traditional farming with rudimentary techniques, as well as urbanization patterns, are destroying agricultural ecosystems. Added to this are the growing effects of climate change, which pose a major threat to agriculture.

4. The town/country relationship

In some countries, 60% of the working population lives in rural areas. But urbanization is rampant, and the rural exodus is significant. The countryside is still dominated by tradition, but villages are being transformed by new agricultural production methods and emigration remittances. Even the Indian village is no longer what it once was. In developed countries, peasants have become a minority in the countryside, and an increasing proportion of their work involves preserving and developing "natural" spaces. As in less developed countries, the new town/country relationship is a point of investigation.

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[READER LETTERS]

ÉRIC BRUNIER

Many thanks to Éric Brunier for his reflections, which have stimulated the *Longues marches* Communist Group's new considerations on the ecological question outlined above.

Let's hope this type of exchange becomes more widespread!

The two articles in the previous issue dealing with ecology bear witness to both its importance and the difficulties it raises. They also pointed out the particular position and exploratory aspect of ecology in a communist orientation. Their thesis is that today's communism is ecological. The first article clearly showed the imbroglio of this question in contemporary thought. The second, with its theses, attempted to identify some guiding principles. Basically, these are quite simple: we need to **take into account both the Earth as a whole and humanity as a community** (which was approached through the idea of a generic Humanity). Based on mathematics, the idea would be that the entanglement between Earth and Humanity constitutes a World. But given that we don't end up with the same result (that we don't get the same product) depending on whether we go from Earth to Humanity, or vice versa, is it really the same World? I have no answer to this question. Here are a few points to help you think about it.

It's not a question of opposing situations, with humans living in the city and those living in the country, but of thinking that **there are already long-standing realizations of these two entanglements in town and country**. I'm thinking, for example, of allotments in towns, or of towns that are in the country (towns on the outskirts of big cities that "grow" in the country). This last example, whose inhabitants' integration problems are often pointed out, shows the antagonistic logic that prevails in their construction and development. The capitalist logic of urbanization, which pits town against country. Nevertheless, it might be worthwhile to take a look at how these allotments (now often reclassified as allotments or shared gardens) work, and see whether the way they interweave the countryside and the city is a source of emancipation, in both urban and rural situations, in Amiens and Goussainville, for example.

The other movement, that which integrates the Earth with Humanity, i.e. in the terms of the previous article, which turns the Earth's external causes into Humanity's internal causes, is for me much more difficult to grasp. This is part of what the first article referred to as the Anthropocene. Also, the small industries developed by peasants in the Communes populaires could be a testimony to this concern, this time in the situation of the countryside.

What emerges from all this is that not only is there **a dissymmetry** in the entanglement between Humanity and the Earth, but that **this dissymmetry is expressed differently** depending on whether the situation is urban or rural. This letter thus invites us to make an already complex situation a little more complex, and above all to point out that part of the ecological question is already present among workers in the form of vegetable gardens.

Moreover, as other texts in the journal (on work and vernacular architecture) also invite us to do, the question of emancipation in relation to this dialectic can be thought through from **the notion of work**. J. P. Vernant once published an article ("*Travail et nature dans la Grèce ancienne*", 1955, reprinted in *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*) that shed light on the distinction between two words and **two concepts of work,** depending on whether or not it is creative. This led to a differentiation between *prattein* (whose end is inscribed in itself) and *poiein* (transformation aimed at exteriority). The most interesting point was Vernant's thesis that the abstract definition of work in capitalism led to the erasure of what he called the "heterotopic" relationship between production and use. What the Greek language was saying, then, was that there was room for an Idea in work, and that even the alienated work of the craftsman found its emancipation in the use that another made of the product. **Ecology would therefore rematerialize work** (whether of the earth or of industry) according to its use.

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[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

PUBLICATION: *TOPOS* BY ALAIN BADIOU

https://www.editions-hermann.fr/livre/topos-alain-badiou
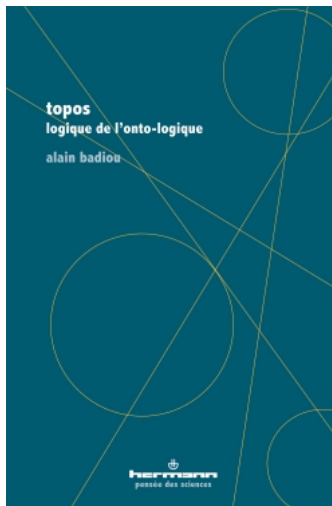
Back cover

Alain Badiou's copy of the typescript of his hand-drawn primer on **the mathematical theory of categories** long remained the only working tool for the small group of people who attended his Saturday morning seminar in the 1990s.

Published with its companion text *Être-Là ou Mathématique du Transcendantal*, *Topos* remains an essential source of information on one of the most decisive and challenging sequences in Alain Badiou's philosophical trajectory.

These two texts complement his previously established ontology of set theory with a logical phenomenology linked to the mathematical theory of categories.

Set theory and category theory open up distinct paths for all the decisive questions concerning the thought of being (acts of thought, forms of immanence, identity and difference, schools of logic, infinity, unity or plurality of universes, etc.) by setting out different conditions for philosophy.

Finally, for non-specialists, these two texts provide a clear and stimulating introduction to these crucial areas of contemporary mathematics, thanks to the genius of Alexandre Grothendieck.

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