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Magazine's surrounds

Coming soon

EDITORIAL

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Autumn has arrived, and it's time for the third issue of our magazine, which aims to bring a profoundly new communist orientation to the present day, using modernized intellectual resources (political, philosophical, mathematical)[1] and a greater diversity of contributions from various fields of current affairs, thought and politics.

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The Review continues the examination of the specifically communist sequence of the Chinese Revolution initiated in previous issues.
- The first article locates this sequence in the period before the Cultural Revolution. It assigns it to the struggle between the two paths sparked by the emergence of People's Communes in the countryside in 1958 around communist points put forward by the peasants.
- The second article continues the discussion of A. Russo's book on the Cultural Revolution, in order to identify what our "legacy without a testament" to this revolution might be. It characterizes it as a revolutionary antagonism of a new kind, and takes seriously its claimed dimension of a revolutionary "culture" offering intellectual resources for a new communist culture.

-3-

We salute the tenacity of our regular contributors. Initially envisaged as a series of three articles, Sol V. Steiner's contributions on Zionism, Éric Brunier's on painting and Guillaume Nicolas' on architecture are likely to become regular columns. The same goes for Serge Peker's subjective film reviews in *the Choses vues* section.

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- From Brazil comes a new letter from Diogo Faia Fagundes, attempting to formulate proposals for Brazilian communists in view of the current political situation.
- In the *Escape Nihilisms* section, we've just received from Tunis the echo of three days of successful Rencontres, the program and arguments of which you'll find here.
- Finally, Gerd Aaron Chtob uses an example to argue in favor of updating the age-old issue of the *cine-club*.

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We welcome new sections.
A *Cliniques* column by Reine Cohen on her work as a psychiatrist with street psychosis, with precarious people wandering outside, whose listening constitutes a first "habitat" likely to initiate their return to the world. This work resonates directly with the political and ideological confidence in humanity that we are trying to consolidate.

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[1] See issue 1

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Also new: *Things read*.
We'll be talking about books that we feel are important in terms of the current subjectivities they evoke, or about issues that deserve to be tackled, even though we don't yet have an established political viewpoint on them. To open this section, an article by Marc Fallet on Didier Fassin's recent book *A strange defeat. On consent to the crushing of Gaza* .

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The *Study* section opens with an article by Alain Rallet on the question of the commons, which developed in the 2000s and claims to offer an alternative to the tyranny of the market and the failure of socialist states. The study examines the various (confused) forms of the commons, and measures the gap between the commons and communism.
While François Nicolas takes the mathematical concept of emergence as a starting point for outlining a materialism of emergence. This involves rethinking the links between the conditions of emergence and emergence itself, without the latter merely expressing its conditions, without politics merely reflecting its social roots, without collectives being the direct projection of their individual constituents.

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A new section, *Around the magazine,* aims to stimulate debate on the Revue, its orientations, contributions and readers' reactions. In this issue, you'll find a public presentation of the Revue at the *Tropiques* bookshop in Paris on June 4, 2024, as well as a text by a contributor developing the "*bursts of communism*" she expects from the Revue.

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The issue closes with announcements of a communist Circle, a new season of the *mamuphi* seminar, a Paris exhibition and the release of a music box set.

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Notice to readers who wish to have a paper version of the Revue in addition to the digital version:
- They should send us their request as soon as possible, so that we can have an idea of the number of copies a publisher needs to print, as the unit price decreases with the number of copies printed. Please also specify whether this request concerns back issues.
- We'll send them to you.
- Expect to pay €15 (excluding delivery charges).

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[CHINESE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION]

STUDY OF THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES

Issues

It's a question of clarifying what *communism* can still mean in 2024: *politically* (and not just *ideologically*), and therefore *affirmatively* (and not just as a critique of capitalism, neo-colonialism and imperialism).

At the same time, we need to clarify **the possible tasks of communist militants in the 21st** century, fifty years after the politically strategic defeat of all the communist work courageously carried out on a vast scale in the 19th and 20th centuries.

If Communist militants, today as in the past, are people who :

1)   study *politics*,
2)   link up *politically* with the masses,
3)   organize themselves *politically*,

so let's make a political study of the communist history we've inherited, focusing on its latest state (the Chinese Communist Revolution) with a view to clarifying which mass political liaisons to engage in today from France, and which forms of political organization to envisage. **[1]**

▬

The focus of this study is not the Cultural Revolution [GPCR] (1966-1976), but the earlier phase of the Chinese Communist Revolution [CCR] (1958-1976), a constitutive phase that began to take shape as early as 1956, before explicitly taking shape from 1958 onwards.

More specifically, the study focuses on this **periodization of CCR**:

0)   1956-1957: Opening of the socialist/communist division within the *General Line*
1)   1958-1962: *Great leap forward* and *People's Communes*
2)   1963-1965: Counter-revolution
3)   1966-1976: GPCR (1966-1968, 1969-1976)

> From 1969 to 1985, the UCF(ml) drew on the experience of he GPCR, without really taking into account that the latter was a second phase of the CCR.
>
> The working hypothesis here is that, in order to understand the failure and defeat of the GPCR, and in particular the obstructions it came up against, we need to understand it as the ideological-political relaunch of **what began in China in 1958 under the name "People's Communes"**.
>
> In other words**, the PC event precedes and profiles the subsequent GPCR event**.

I. Lushan (summer 1959) and the three "red banners

The Lushan Conference (July-August 1959) was the **key moment** when the CCR took measure of itself by dividing the Chinese Communist Party [CCP], for the first time since 1935, into two strategic orientations (in terms of building socialism), two political lines, two camps.

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[1] Of course, all this presupposes that communism was more than just a parenthesis in the history of mankind (it's quite an event that it should also be treated as a mere parenthesis, in an obscurantist way). But, as Mao explained to Malraux, as long as there are Communists who do not surrender and hold firm politically, not by rambling sterile dogmas but by inventing fruitful actualizations, capitalism will not have won!

This study will therefore begin by examining the fierce political conflicts brought to light at this conference.

At the time, the proposal, formally consensual within the CCP, was that of the "three red banners (or flags)": the *General Line* [GL], the *Great Leap Forward* [GLF] and the *People's Communes* [PC].

This slogan formulates **the CCP's strategic line** by **collage of three heterogeneous determinations**: by adding them together ("summing them up") without clarifying their entanglement. Precisely, the CCR will bring to light the political contradictions that oppose these three components, and thereby disentangle their political differences.

Firstly, these three "banners" appeared **successively** rather than simultaneously: they were gradually added to, and their differences in political content were only gradually revealed.

- The GL was formulated in 1956.
- At the end of 1957, the GLF began to look for new members, only to declare itself at the beginning of 1958.
- The PCs then burst onto the scene in the spring of 1958 (in the countryside) and the summer of 1958 (in the cities).

Secondly, their political origins are not only different, but **opposed**: the GL and the GLF are CCP initiatives that take the political form of **state planning** (admittedly accompanied by mass movements, but essentially following central directives from above), while the CPs are the result of **event-driven invention** by the masses (the peasants for the rural PCs [RPC] from April 27, 1958, the women of the people for the urban PCs [UPC] from August 15, 1958). So, on the one hand, political initiatives by the Party-State transmitted to the masses; on the other, political initiatives by the masses, against which the Party-State must situate itself.

Let's examine the respective political content of these three disparate components.

General line [GL] and building socialism

The "General Line" designates the ***specifically Chinese line of socialist construction***, a line that was developed **from 1956 onwards** to distinguish itself from the Bolshevik path implemented from 1953 onwards (First Five-Year Plan: 1953-1957) to launch the *Socialist Revolution* that followed the victorious *Democratic Revolution* (1928-1949).

The year 1956

The year 1956 proved crucial for the international communist movement and for the political emergence, under Mao's leadership, of a specifically Chinese socialism.

- In February, **Khrushchev's report** to the 20th Congress of the CPSU opened up the question of Stalin and launched a political assessment of the Stalinist construction of socialism.
- In late October and early November, **the events in Budapest** revealed the existence of deep political divisions within the masses committed to building "truly existing socialism".
- At the same time, **the Suez Canal crisis put** the question of national liberation struggles [NLS] to emancipate themselves from colonialism and imperialism back on the international agenda.

Two socialist paths

Faced with **the Russian path** (Stalinist conception of the socialist revolution, state and dictatorial resolution of the contradictions internal to socialism, Khrushchev's assessment of the NLS as "adventurism"), Mao set about characterizing **a Chinese path** for the Socialist Revolution (April 1956: *On the Ten Great Reports*), a path which, from the 8th CCP Congress (September 1956) onwards, would take the name of **GL**.

This GL puts forward a **dialectical conception** (unity of opposites) of socialist development: industry and agriculture, heavy industry[2] and light industry[3] , city and countryside, workers and peasants, manual labor and intellectual labor, accumulation and consumption. This dialectical unity was formulated (from January 1958) under the general slogan "**walking on two legs**"[4] where the Bolshevik (i.e., Stalinist) path "**hobbled on one leg**" (unilaterally placing industry, and more specifically heavy industry, in the driver's seat, the Taylorism of engineers and the Stakhanovism of workers, the domination of cities over the countryside, discipline and obedience to the Party-State[5] rather than the political capacity of all).

This LG would materialize in new guidelines for the **Second Five-Year Plan (1958-1962)**, programming a more "balanced" construction of socialism.

> To give just one example, the hydraulic works of the first plan were aimed at the overall control of the country's major rivers, while those of the second plan focused on the irrigation, albeit diversified, of fields and crops.

The political question of "*exactly what kind of socialism are we trying to build?*" then leads on to the question of "***how do communists conceive of this socialism to be built***?"

All this will of course divide the CCP: for some (the Right), building socialism means, once property relations have been revolutionized[6] , developing the productive forces [PF]; for others (the Left), building socialism means continuing to dialecticize the revolution of the social relations of production [SRP][7] and the development of the PF according to the principle of an uninterrupted, step-by-step revolution. [8]

Hence, in 1957, an initial "rectification campaign" against the Right, aimed at reactivating the purely political debate on the Communist way of building socialism in China.

Great leap forward [GLF]: forward to what?

At the end of 1957 and beginning of 1958, this reactivation took the form of the GLF, i.e. a "leap", internal to socialism (it was socialism that leapt), a "great" leap because it reflected an acceleration in the construction of socialism, a leap towards a "way forward" that would prove politically ambiguous: was it a question of leaping towards Great Britain to catch up in 15 years (but why leap towards a capitalist and imperialist country?), towards advanced socialism (which has finally arrived, in other words?) or towards communism (but what exactly does that mean?)?

More precisely**, on the one hand,** the GLF presents itself as accelerated economic development of the PFs (i.e., acceleration in the right-wing statist conception of socialist construction), and **on the other hand**, the GLF presents itself as putting new political questions on the agenda: dealing with urban/rural, industrial/agricultural, worker/peasant and manual/intellectual labor contradictions by setting up small factories in rural areas, involving peasants in steel production (small blast furnaces), and marking out the working hours of civil servants and the study time of young intellectuals by quarterly internships in the countryside alongside peasant workers.

GLF Political Division

But the dialectical unity of the two economic sides of the socialist infrastructure (PF and SRP) will increasingly prove politically problematic.

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[2] producer of the means of production

[3] producer of industrial consumer goods

[4] The slogan "walking on two legs", formulated in early 1958, referred to the march of Chinese socialism on its two industrial and agricultural legs, but of course not a march on the two legs of socialism and communism...

[5] As early as 1939, for Liu Shaoqi, being a "good Communist" essentially meant applying the Party line with discipline.

[6] revolution in the ownership of the means of production: see industrial nationalizations and, following agrarian reform, agricultural cooperatives...

[7] SRPs combine three dimensions: the *ownership of* the means of production, the *division of* labor and the *allocation* (or distribution) of the products of labor.

[8] For Stalin, the revolution was declared over in 1928, i.e. once the relations of ownership (of the means of production) had been revolutionized: in the cities (factories) and in the countryside (land).

- **On the "economic" side**, the GLF declared its intention to catch up with Great Britain in 15 years (in three five-year plans, i.e. 1958-1972), which, if you look closely, is a strange communist project: had Great Britain become a "forward" model to be "joined" and then "surpassed"?

  Clearly, this can only mean an advance in the **development of FPs**, and such a conception of the leap then configures the relationship between socialism and communism as a succession of quite separate stages: first, the construction of an advanced socialism (through the accelerated development of PFs authorized by a prior revolution in property relations alone, which leaves the social divisions of labor unchanged); then a communism conceived as a **mythical state and ideal society, pinned to an indefinite horizon**.

  > It should be noted in passing that this acceleration in the development of PFs took the form, quite deliriously, of declarations of ever-increasing production targets: for steel, the first target for 1958 was +30% at the beginning of the year, then 50% in the spring, then 100% in the summer, and finally 200% (i.e. a tripling of production in one year!)[9] .

  > It has to be said that Mao himself allowed himself to become embroiled in these economic extravagances, since he publicly admitted (Lushan, July 23, 1959) that he was personally responsible for the unattainable target set for steel production (a target he admits to having set with a wet finger, since he actually admits to understanding nothing about economics!), even though the consequence of this target was the displacement of no less than 90 million Chinese to steel production! .[10]

- **On the "political" side**, the GLF is going to put the political question of communism on the socialist agenda, an agenda that will tend to inscribe communism no longer as "ahead" of socialism, but as its other leg on which to walk in the present.

  > As we shall see, this second, revolutionary aspect was first grasped in the countryside by peasants, then in the cities by women.

  > Just as he never ceased to fight for the GLF to assume its proper political dimension and not be reduced to an accelerated development of the PFs, Mao was the very first (summer 1958[11]) to take positive note of **the "People's Communes" event** and immediately put its political consideration on the CCP's agenda.

Two conceptions of communism

We can therefore understand that the GLF was the result of an insoluble contradiction between two political conceptions of communism:

- **Either** what we call "communism" designates **a stable state, a society, a social formation** that lies ahead of socialism (just as socialism *lies ahead of* capitalism); in which case, we need to speed up the construction of socialism in order to arrive more quickly at advanced socialism, the only one capable of giving birth (we don't really know how) to the ultimate communist stage - the contradiction then focuses, of course, on the socialist state, the principal actor in the construction of advanced socialism (it is the state that ensures public ownership of the means of production and the consequent economic planning), which would then have to plan... its own demise (like a state becoming neo-liberal...).

- **Either** what we call "communism" designates **a movement, a dynamic, a momentum, a breath, an enthusiasm, a subjective process** - in short, what the Chinese called a "communist wind", the main

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[9] This is how we think we can move from a reasonable *annual* growth rate of 10% to a *monthly* growth rate of as much (a totally implausible target: $1.1^{12} \cong 3$, i.e. a tripling of production in one year!).

[10] It's easy to see why Mao declares himself relieved to have unloaded what has been weighing on his stomach until now, and why the audience was so overwhelmed by this admission:

- *"I'm responsible for the 10 million tons of steel and 90 million people thrown into the battle. This chaos has reached gigantic proportions, and I'm responsible for it. It's when you've had a good shit and a good fart that your stomach feels relieved."* Mao (conclusion to his speech of July 23, 1959).

- *"This speech is like a choking blow to the head. With a heavy heart, no one speaks. We are speechless."* Li Rui (Mao's secretary)

[11] August 29, 1958: CC resolution (Beidahe). December 10, 1958: 6th plenary session of the CC.

characteristic of which was to be **transversal** and **oblique** to the construction of socialism (rather than longitudinal).

This will be the decisive contribution of the PC event that opens the CCR.

People's Communes [PC] and the "communist wind"

In the spring of 1958, the PC event set the political question of communism in China's socialist society in a new light.

> Clearly, the GLF subjectively stimulated the emergence of this event. But I don't think it explains it, any more than the rise in wheat prices in France in the late 1780s explains the French Revolution.

The PCs differs from the GLF because they inscribe the communist perspective no longer *forwards* but transversely (or obliquely), in two ways:

1) as an **extension** of political space via the **addition** of **new oblique directions**: the political dimensions of a properly communist revolution concerning all social relations, not just all relations of production (and not just property relations) but all social relations (and not just production relations);

2) as a new type of political work in this new space: no longer a **construction** stricto sensu, but the communist **activation** of lines of force, composing a generic network capable of irrigating socialist society with communist energy.

All in all, the CPs will show that, while socialism is a construction, communism is a wind, a movement.

> In this respect, it's worth noting that while Chinese agricultural cooperatives are indeed equivalent to Russian **kolkhozes**, Chinese PCs are radically different from Russian **sovkhozes**, i.e. state farms where peasants become agricultural workers.

The hypothesis of our study is therefore that the PCs, selecting as we shall see a few privileged points of intervention concerning the various social relationships, will invent a political work of "**communist acupuncture**" on socialist society.

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To clarify some of the initial points put forward by the PCs, let's first take a detour into the vast question of **collective emancipation in social work**, a question remarkably opened up by Alain Rallet's article in issue no. 1 of our magazine.

II. Alienation and emancipation of wage-earners

The capitalist mode of production places the worker, deprived of all means of production and provided only with his labor force, under **the supervision** of the owner of the means of production.

For the worker concerned, this wage tutelage has three dimensions: an **oppression** that excludes and destroys; an **exploitation** that takes and appropriates; and a **domination** that subordinates and controls[12] . More specifically, in the case of the salaried worker:

1) an *oppression* of its **labor power**;

2) *exploitation of* its **labor force**;

3) a *domination of* his **actual work**.

The interweaving of this oppression, exploitation and domination creates wage **alienation** for the individual worker.

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[12] These distinctions are informed by the work of Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright. See https://secession.fr/relation-exploitation

Let's detail this before examining, in the light of the People's Communes, the political prospects for collective **emancipation** by the workers themselves.[13]

> The following considerations have been drawn from a recent survey of workers at the Foxconn factory in the Czech Republic, conducted by the *Long Walks* group.

Oppression of labor power

In the polymorphous labor power of a given worker, **capitalist oppression cuts out the labor power** that is of interest only to this or that owner of the means of production. The owner then offers to rent *this* labor power to the worker in the form of a wage contract.

Oppression thus restricts the polymorphous power of labor to a workforce calibrated to the needs of the hirer, the private owner of the means enabling the worker to work.

In so doing, during the rental period, the owner in question will treat as pure and simple garbage all the objective (knowledge) and subjective (mobilization) capacities of the salaried worker that will not be useful to him, in short all that of his labor power that will not be exploitable as labor power, inscribed in the social division of labor that suits the hirer.

Exploitation of labor force

Capitalist exploitation is formalized in the wage contract by which this limited labor force is temporarily rented out. The principle is that **the rented labor force is remunerated at its reproduction value,** whereas **the contractually agreed working time will exceed this value** (if this were not the case, the employer, who is not philanthropic but aims to profit from the new employee, would not hire him), so that the employer will appropriate the *surplus labor* provided, with a view to realizing *surplus value*.

In so doing, the employer provides the worker with the means of production (machines and raw materials) and appropriates the products of his labor, which he then sells (in order to realize the surplus value incorporated into the goods produced).

Domination of actual work

For its part, capitalist domination consists in the contractual **subordination of** the work to be performed. This subordination is explicitly enshrined in the Labor Code, which governs the signing of the salaried employment contract between employer and worker. It has three dimensions: **decision**, **control** and **sanction**. Thus:

1) the employer **decides** what work the employee must do;

2) the employer **controls** the work performed by the employee;

3) the employer **may sanction** the employee if his or her work does not comply with the specifications set by the employer.

Intertwining the three

The capitalist guardianship exercised over the worker by wage contract integrates the three dimensions (it is not a simple addition of them):

<p align="center">***Capitalist supervision = oppression ⊗ exploitation ⊗ domination***</p>

Indeed, the *exploitation of* labor power presupposes the *oppression* of labor power (the labor power of which the worker is capable has been previously restricted to the dimensions from which the employer expects to profit). Similarly, the *domination of* labor actually performed presupposes *oppression*, i.e. the contractually agreed use of labor power. Conversely, the *oppression* of the labor power contributed by the candidate for employment is standardized according to the possibilities of *exploitation* and *domination* that the owner of the means of production feels capable of.

As we shall see, the worker's emancipation depends on the **disintegration of** the three dimensions of this alienating supervision.

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[13] Etymologically, to "emancipate" is to take charge of one's life, rejecting a tutelary grip.

Daily *alienation of* the salaried worker

All in all, this infantilizing guardianship configures a *daily alienation* of the salaried worker:

- **alienation**, because his labor power, his labor force and his actual labor are captured by another and directed to ends that are not those of the worker;

- This *oppression*, which drastically restricts what workers can do, this *exploitation*, which imposes working times and rhythms on which they have no say, and this *domination*, which imprisons their living work in a straitjacket standardized according to ends that are not their own, weighs down every working day, hour after hour.

Individual and collective *emancipation*

Emancipation from this infantilizing guardianship will put a liberating disintegration of workers' collective capacities on the agenda.

First, let's *formally* present the **individual** characteristics of such emancipation, before *politically* highlighting its necessarily **collective** dimension, which will then direct us to the historical contribution of the Chinese People's Communes on all these points.

Formal characteristics at individual level

At the individual level, a level that does not distinguish the individual craftsman from the factory worker or the peasant in a cooperative, the worker, by emancipating himself, affirms his own ability to make his work his own:

- by deploying **its labor power** in various specified labor forces: to forge in the morning, to cultivate in the afternoon, to study in the evening, to cook meals, to raise its children, to plan the next day's activity, to exchange the products of its work with others... ;

- by making **his different workforces** and their different products (goods and services) interact: the goods he forges in the morning, those he cultivates in the afternoon, the dishes he cooks, etc. ;

- deciding at all times what and how he works, controlling the results of **his own work** at all times, taking personal responsibility for all his work as well as for himself.

Political features at collective level

But if the prospect of such emancipation is not limited to the refuge of a few, to the retreat of small, inward-looking communities, to the autarkic flight of some hermit, in other words, if this prospect of emancipation is to apply to everyone **- true emancipation cannot be a privilege** - then the social emancipation of workers must be collective, and therefore political.

Hence a triple political perspective (on which the PCs will shed some light).

Political emancipation from collective oppression

This dimension engages the inevitable social and technical divisions of labor: the various individual powers of labor must fit into a collective division of labor forces (no single individual can produce a computer, sauerkraut or even a complete education for a young person from scratch).

Hence the considerable problems of collective discussions, decisions and programming, which we know cannot be resolved at the individual level alone (which could only blame competition between individuals) or at the level of self-management alone (which could only blame competition between production units: see the Yugoslav example). Hence the need for intervention by a planning state[14] , with the considerable political problems that this entails.

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[14] This consideration stems from the following observation: the economy of a country, a fortiori one of China's size, cannot function simply by coordinating productive projects from the ground up (locally and then abroad). If the market is no longer to play its role as a blind regulator of production, it must be centralized to decide on planning orientations. And who better than the State to play this centralizing role?

Political emancipation from collective exploitation

This dimension involves a sustained link between labor forces and their products (goods and services): how do workers share the products of their work: according to labor (and then according to labor time or productivity - piecework, for example), according to needs? How do we distribute what is distributed and what is accumulated, and how do we share consumption and investment? How can we ensure proper equalization between more or less productive production sectors?

As we all know, it's a huge undertaking.

Political emancipation from collective domination

Finally, this dimension of emancipation directly concerns what Alain Rallet rightly calls "**subjectivity at work**", i.e. the fact that the emancipation of actual work (and not just of power or labor power) approaches working time as **lived** time, as **living** time (even before it is ultimately counted as **dead** time, then incorporated into the labor-value of the commodities produced).

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At this point of **daily work, subjectively experienced collectively**, the experience of the CCR and particularly of the PCs provides us with a precious heritage. The current study of the PCs (rural communes of peasants, urban communes of women[15] , factory communes of workers) aims precisely to shed light on all this.

Let's take a look at some of the communist "points" and "meridians" that these PCs promise to bring.

III. Communist acupuncture of socialist society by PCs

Let's put forward some initial study hypotheses.

The RPC (Rural PCs) are going to tackle **the emancipation of peasant workers**; it is in this sense that they are engaging in a specifically communist revolution.

> It's worth noting that the construction of socialism, even when conceived by Mao as a lasting socialist revolution, was organized by the state (via the five-year plans of the socialist state - in fact, it was Chou Enlai, head of the government, who was in charge of presenting the CCP with planning guidelines before the Party submitted them to the People's Assembly).
>
> In this planned construction,
>
> * **divisions of labor** were immutably assigned (labor forces were therefore invariably delimited among the powers of labor: socialist oppression?) ;
>
> * **the distribution of wages and capital gains** was centrally assigned (socialist exploitation through state ownership of the means of production?);
>
> * finally, **the subordination of daily work** to management decisions was maintained (socialist domination?).

The GLF had driven a wedge into this "socialist" set-up (which had all the hallmarks of "state capitalism") through the promotion of "rural industries" (iron and steel in particular), which put the question of polymorphous worker collectives (doing both agricultural and industrial work) on the agenda.

The CLFs will take advantage of this corner to invent a new step towards collective emancipation, in fact a new type of step because it's communist (and no longer socialist): a transversal step that extends the space of the long communist march.

Let's take a look at some of its initial characteristics.

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[15] See Fabio Lanza's work on Beijing's urban People's Communes from August 1958.

Extending collective versatility

The PCs will not only interweave agriculture and industry, but will also put on the agenda "communes" that collectively practice **eight types of collective work**:

1) agriculture

2) industry

3) market services

4) shops and transport

5) education and instruction (crèches, schools, etc.)

6) health

7) regional government

8) popular militias

Hence the transformation

- the division of labor into peasant labor power (**and** thus **oppression**);

- the way dead labor time is divided between consumption and accumulation (i.e. **exploitation**);

- the daily control of living labor (and therefore **domination**).

Communist wind *versus* socialist planning

An important point: these specifically *communist* transformations are less a matter of **planning** (of a new type) than of what the Chinese rightly called "*a communist wind*": the breath of a mass dynamic, concrete and diversified, less centralized than teeming.

Let's assume that these transformations carried by the communist wind operate at **points, activating lines of communist energy** in the socialist body (these lines, which we'll call *meridians* to distinguish them from a front line or strategic line).

From this first diagram
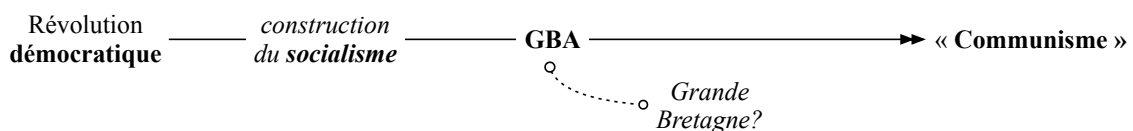
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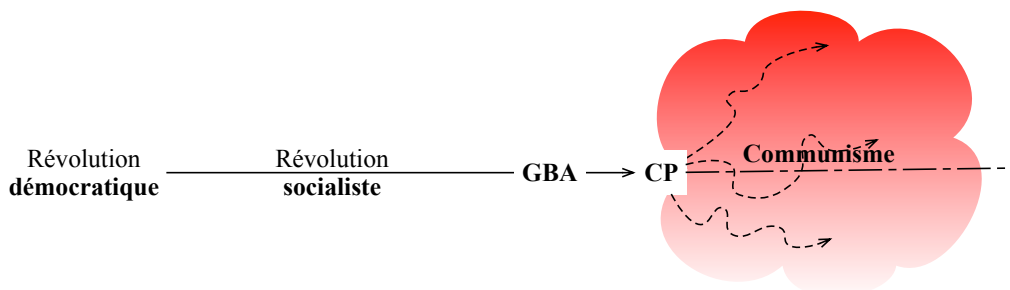
Examples of communist points

The point of the Canteens

The RPCs have set up canteens to free up additional working time by collectively carrying out the tasks of reproducing the population, previously performed in the private domestic space.

Crucially, these canteens **were free of charge for all PC farmers**. This initiative had an ipso facto impact on the distribution of the food products of the peasant collective: it put into practice the idea

that the food produced by the PC, which was used to feed the peasants who had produced it, could not be the subject of commercial exchanges between the worker and his collective.

Hence the implementation, on a limited scale, of the communist principle of "to each according to his needs" in place of the socialist principle of "to each according to his work".

> What's remarkable **is** that **this transformation was by no means the result of a "communism of abundance"** (or even the Bolshevik-style "socialist" idea that we'd have to wait for the development of the productive forces to ensure an economy of abundance before we could consider "moving to communism"), but of an implementation, restricted to the case of peasant-produced food.
>
> The Right violently opposed this point (see the Lushan conference), arguing that what was produced **by** the peasants was not specifically produced **for** them, but above all **for** socialism, and therefore also **for** the cities; and that such a restricted application of a communist principle should not be allowed within the framework of a global, centralized construction of socialism, as otherwise this leftist, adventurist intrusion would spread and contradict socialist planning.
>
> Here we see that a "point" is politically divisive, especially when it comes to its consequences, i.e. the type of meridian it activates.

The polymorphic worker's point in a polyvalent collective

The RPCs will bring into being not only a new type of *polyvalent* peasant collective, but also a **new figure of the individual peasant as a *polymorphous* worker**: agricultural and industrial, manual and intellectual.

Indeed, **the "rural industries"** were not only economic (GLF), but also political: the aim was for peasants to take ownership of the construction of their work tools through the artisanal practice of foundry and ironwork.

> In France today, isn't the Atelier Paysan similarly putting on the agenda the idea of farmers making their own tractors and other production tools?

Moreover, the peasants thus intertwined intellectual work (see "*the dialectic in tomato growing*") with their manual work (agricultural and industrial), an essential entanglement capable of coping with the other entanglement of manual work with intellectual work (for managers and students coming to work in the countryside with the peasants for one term a year): if the peasants didn't practice intellectual work themselves, the movement of intellectuals to the countryside would have been reduced to a simple bullying!

The point of the ordinary woman in the countryside

Through canteens, crèches, sewing workshops, etc., the RPCs will ensure that women in the countryside are no longer confined to the domestic tasks of reproducing labor power, but participate on an equal footing with peasant workers and become polymorphous workers themselves.

●

As we'll soon see, these three points are *seeds of* communism, i.e. they quickly activate "meridians" (lines of energetic force, nerve irrigation) that will operate in the rest of the Chinese social formation, particularly outside the countryside: in the cities themselves.

Communist meridians activated by these points

"No money for food!"

From the summer of 1958, **rural canteens were to be emulated in the cities** (under the impetus of local women who invented urban PCs).

The extension of free food (and therefore of the Communist principle of "to each according to his needs" when it comes to food) will divide the CCP politically.

- On the left, Ke Quinshi (mayor of Shanghai and member of the Political Bureau) formulated the general principle: "*No money for food*!

- On the Right, criticism of this principle (as leftist and adventurist) will be central to the Lushan conference.

For the moment, it's hard to assess all this more closely, although it's true that the tragic question of the **great famine is looming** over the whole debate, a famine whose ins and outs have yet to be clarified: share of natural disasters, of the GBA's delirious excesses, of socialist planning errors, of the overly wild extensions of the CPs, of the GBA's sabotage by the Right, of false statistics invented by bureaucrats, of the sudden retirement of all Soviet advisors...?

"Steelmaking and poetry for all!

The communist point of the multi-skilled worker, put on the agenda by the RPCs, was also to expand rapidly, particularly in the dual form of the slogans "steel for all" and "poetry for all".

There's no need to dwell on the ideological-political breakthrough involved here.

Of course, the study will have to take into account the actual balance of all this (we already know that much of the steel produced in rural blast furnaces was of poor quality and therefore unsuitable for many uses; what about the poems thus generated on a large scale?) but, in any case, we've already seen **that the properly communist conception of work** cannot strictly measure it by its detachable products, by dead labor that can be incorporated into use values: the communist orientation of thought incorporates into the value of work its share of experiences, of attempts and trials, of failures and successes: work that has failed in its separable concretization (a failed dish, drawing or demonstration) is not a nothing but an essential component of the emancipatory process that is in all work!

Women of the people in the cities

Urban PCs are the first extension (the main meridian) of rural PCs.

It's essential that this political extension should be **a matter for women of the people** - the UPCs are under their direction, just as the RPCs are led by peasants (and just as workers are in charge of their Communes of 1967 - Shanghai). In the cities, the women of the people took their cue from the emancipation begun in the countryside by the women of the people. In this respect, the specific points of canteens, crèches and collective garment and repair workshops were to play a key role.

Exploring these seeds is the focus of a forthcoming study in Fabio Lanza's forthcoming book: *Bridge to Heaven. The urban commune movement in Beijing*.

Suites

Resonance and reverberation

Let's posit that the seed-points of communism irrigate the socialist social body (the socialist social formation) in two ways[16] :

- by **resonance**, along a "meridian", a nerve, a line of energy that irrigates-dynamizes-crosses society;

- by **reverberations**, this time between different "meridians", or veins of the same social body-formation.

Three resonances were identified **along three meridians** (the commodity or non-commodity nature of food, the polymorphous nature of the worker, and the emancipation of common women from the domestic sphere).

We sense the reverberations between countryside and town, between agriculture and industry...

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[16] Let's borrow Bachelard's distinction between *resonance* and *reverberation*.

We also need to examine how meridians specific to peasants or women of the people can reverberate towards meridians specific to workers, young people and intellectuals.

It seems we'll have to wait for the GPCR before such communist reverberations are politically put on the agenda. But it's a question worth studying.

Consequences today

Of course, such a study is not confined to the history of the CCR. This is not a historian's study, but that of a communist militant.

In other words, the challenge remains to **uncover a heritage that can be reactivated by 2024 militants** - *reactivated*, of course, not meaning *repeated*, but *taken up again*, in Kierkegaard's sense of "taken up". It's a question of reactivating the existence (ek-sistence!) of collective possibilities and potentialities (which now constitute a communist and generic "heritage" for humanity) by identifying new political "points" in the contemporary world likely to "germinate" a few communist "meridians" of the same kind.

●●●

OUR COMMUNIST HERITAGE IN THE LIGHT OF A. RUSSO'S BOOK ON THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Preamble - Alessandro Russo's issues

Cultural revolution and revolutionary culture
Alessandro Russo
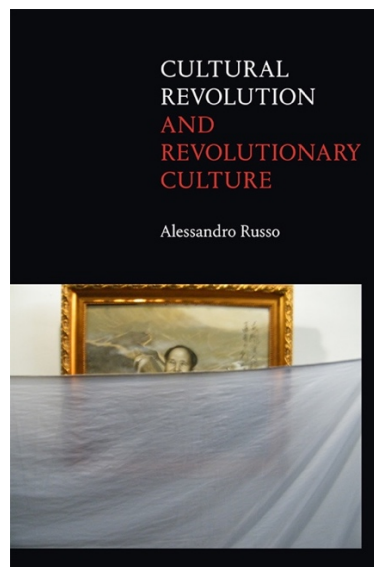
2020 Duke University Press

The orientation of the book is formulated by its title *Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture*: the aim is to examine **the "revolutionary culture" at work in the Cultural Revolution**.

By "*revolutionary culture*", we mean the theoretical network of intellectual categories at the heart of political thought put to the test by the *Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution* [GPCR].

The guiding idea is that the ideological revolution (GPCR) puts on the agenda a **revolution in the "revolutionary culture**" underlying communist ideology.

To clarify the meaning here of the word *culture*, let's posit this:

- *culture* here refers to the **upstream** terrain likely to support the emergence of a specific worldview, a ("culturally") constituted ideology;

- This **cultural terrain**, a condition more than a determination, interweaves **collective** ways of *feeling, speaking and thinking*, which in turn interweave with the **everyday** materials of *working, living and populating*.

A. Russo's discussion of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist categories also mobilizes categories of other kinds: psychoanalytical (Freudo-Lacanian: *superego* and *death drive*...), sociological (Max Weber: *authority* and *power*...) and philosophical (Alain Badiou: *event* and *subject*).

In this book, the historical study of the GPCR is conducted through symptomatic and interpretative **cuts**, distinguishing **four key moments**:

I.   November 1965: its "*theatrical prologue*";
II.   December 1965 - April 1966: Mao's political subjectivity at the heart of the launch of the GPCR;
III. may 1966 - august 1968: the most politically intense period of the 1966-1976 decade;
IV.   1973-1976: Mao's final attempts to launch a mass-scale political review of the GPCR.

> This book is the work of a militant historian, nourished by a firm Sinological knowledge (mobilizing abundant first-hand documentation in Chinese) and opposing the conventional assessment of the GPCR ("total negation" by Deng Xiaoping and his successors) with an intellectuality in subjective interiority to the considerable political stakes of this revolution.

This study provides a valuable counterpoint to Cécile Winter's book *La grande éclaircie de la Révolution culturelle chinoise (The Great Enlightenment of the Chinese Cultural Revolution)*, which covers the entire history of the GPCR more systematically, following Mao's political point of view more closely to its conclusion, whereas A. Russo's book engages in a more autonomous discussion of the Maoist orientation, including its limits, wanderings and dead ends.

For today's communists, for us, studying this book provides an excellent starting point for assessing their own *communist* heritage.

Our heritage?   I - Three hypotheses

Our question: in what precise way(s) does the GPCR constitute **a "great breakthrough"** for communist politics in the 21st century?

Such clarity can only be **paradoxical**, as the PCRG **is** just as *opaque*, sometimes to the point of real *black holes*.

I. A Chinese Communist Revolution in two periods

The bias here is to situate the GPCR (1966-1976) within a broader historical sequence (1958-1976) that we'll call that of the *Chinese Communist Revolution* [CCR], so that **the** GPCR will be understood as the **second great sequence of a single revolution** (in much the same way as 1793 must be understood as a second moment of the French Revolution 1789-1794).

> Let's call this the **GPCR=CCR(2)** hypothesis

The CCR was initiated by the **Rural People's Communes** [RPC] led by peasants (from the end of April 1958), and extended (from August 1958) to the **Urban People's Communes** [UPC] **led by women of the people**.

Hence the first part of the CCR - **CCR(1) ={1958-1965} –** can be periodized as follows:

- 1958-1959: **rise of the People's Communes** (peasants, then women);

- Summer 1959: first major internal political crisis in the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] at the Luxun conference (July-August 1959), leading to the dismissal of Peng Dehuai (September 1959).

- 1960-1962: **the decline of the People's Communes** and reactionary. It remains poorly documented and therefore largely opaque; [17]

- 1963-1965: three years of real "**black hole**" (cf. the oxymoron of "socialism without planning"!) concluding the CCR(1).

The second part will be periodized as follows - **RCC(2)=GPCR={1966-1976}** :

- January-April 1966: a prelude already in dispute;

- may 1966: official launch of the GPCR ;

- Summer 1966: mass student movement (Red Guards);

- Autumn 1966: factory workers take to the streets;

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[17] Here's a hypothesis: in 1958, the PC event was politically indistinguishable from the Great Leap Forward [GLF] in the construction of socialism. The confusion, deliberately perpetrated by the CCP Right, between "communist" PCs and "socialist" GLF, made it possible to use the proven failure of the GLF (see its connection with the famine of 1959) to politically stifle the PCs!

- January 1967: **workers' storm** with Shanghai as its geographic center and "the question of power" as its central political issue[18] ;

- February 1967: a *Workers' People's Commune* is set up in the Shanghai factories, soon renamed the *Revolutionary Committee* on Mao's initiative;

- spring 1967 - summer 1968: long political decline of the Red Guards student movement (extreme activism and factionalism), leading to their dissolution in autumn 1968[19] ;

- 1969-1971: political **black hole**[20] of the "Lin Piao" sequence (between his promotion at the IXth Congress in April 1969 and his death on September 13, 1971 following his failed coup d'état);

- 1972: opaque rehabilitation of right-wingers deposed in 1966-1967 (including Deng Xiaoping);

- 1973-1974: anti-Confucius campaign, stimulating in factories the political inventions of "workers' universities" and "workers' theoretical contingents" ;

- 1975-1976: study campaign on "the dictatorship of the proletariat" leading (late 1975) to the second impeachment of Deng Xiaoping, then, following the deaths of Zhou Enlai (January 1976) and Mao (September 1976), the Thermidorian coup d'état (late 1976) deposing the Gang of Four and definitively reinstalling Deng Xiaoping in power.

All in all, a hard-to-decipher succession of enlightening uprisings, suffocating fallouts and "stabilizations" in various "black holes" of the socialist order .[21]

II. A continuous bass: the People's Communes

The entire CCR is deployed over **the continuous bass of the People's Communes** in their three modalities:

- **Peasants' Rural People's Communes** (from the end of April 1958) ;

- **Urban People's Communes led by women of the people** (from mid-August 1958) ;

- Shanghai **Workers' Factory Commune** (February 1967).

The great clarification of the CCR (rather than the GPCR alone) lies in this invention of the People's Communes by the masses concerned (peasants, women of the people, workers).

But this brightening of the People's Communes was immediately coupled with significant **political opacity**.

1) From 1963 onwards, the political destiny of the Rural and Urban People's Communes invented in 1958 turned out to be forgotten, or even foreclosed, even though the peasants' own political capacity (80% of the population!) operated on the principle of CCR (see the "theatrical" episode at the end of 1965).

2) The revival of the CCR by the students, then by the workers during the GPCR, only remotely and purely formally referred to these People's Communes of 1958! Even more surprising, and politically incomprehensible, is the fact that the Shanghai Workers' Commune (February 1967) makes no reference to them at all, preferring instead to refer to... the Paris Workers' Commune (1871), thus covering up the Chinese peasants' own political invention with a historical reference that is inappropriate for a communist revolution in socialism (which, of course, the Paris Commune was in no way). [22]

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[18] See the three Mao-inspired declarations of January 16, 22 and 31 1967.

[19] following the famous meeting (July 28, 1968) between Mao and Red Guard leaders

[20] Failure to revolutionize the CCP, leading to a politically disoriented party.

[21] At first glance, two massive "black holes": those of 1963-1965 (disoriented socialist planning) and 1969-1971 (disoriented Communist Party),a total duration of six years representing almost a third of that of the CCR (1958-1976)!

[22] This type of ideological overlay of the CCR with politically inadequate historical references (to the Paris Commune, the 1848 revolutions, even the French Revolution) continues today with a view to similar militant sterilization.

3) All in all, we find ourselves faced with a CCR that reflects itself through a **compartmentalized split**: on one side - CCR(1) - the peasants and women of the people; on the other - CCR(2)=GPCR - the students and workers!

   It's hard not to think that the failure of the CCR is rooted in this social and political schizophrenia, which, in 1966, revived in the cities a revolution started by the peasants in 1958, a revolution stifled from 1962 onwards without the political results of this stifling being clearly taken into account[23] and without the peasants then becoming players in the GPCR!

III. Failure to identify the obstacles to be overcome

If the CCR was ultimately and radically **defeated**, it was because it **failed** massively. But if the CCR failed, it was because it **stumbled** not so much on simple **obstacles** that it was unable to overcome, but on real **obstructions** which, in the absence of adequate political discernment, could not be overcome or subsumed. [24]

We inherit these obstructions just as we inherit the clarity and opacity, the inventions and black holes of this revolution, unique in human history. It's now up to us to identify these obstructions, so that the communist orientation of the 21st century can be reactivated by addressing them.

> This intellectual task is all the more urgent from a militant point of view, given that the defeat of the CCR has produced undeniable **reactionary novelties** rather than a simple return to the previous state, novelties (which we'll pin down here under the general name of *Socialist State Authoritarian Capitalism)* that are now shaping the competitive future of global capitalism.

Our heritage?   II - Two activation points

The aim of this text is not to provide a full-scale history of the CCR, including the GPCR as its second period. Its aim is militant. To this end, we do not, like C. Winter's book, take Mao's political **testament** as our starting point and endorse it. Rather, we see ourselves as "**heirs without a will**" to the CCR, and it is up to us to declare a precise communist **heritage** that can guide our political work in the contemporary world.

Let's explore this heritage in the form not of a political "line"[25] but of **two points**: the first concerns the assessment of the CCR as a new type of (politico-ideological) revolution, the second concerns a new type of "revolutionary culture" capable of intellectually resourcing communist politics in the 21st century.

I. The CCR as a new type of revolutionary antagonism

The Communist revolution begins with resolute affirmations (see the points added by the People's Communes) which inevitably **give rise to** new negations of various kinds: the oppositions of the *unconvinced*, the *adversaries* and the *enemies*.

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[23] if not in the reductive modality of a new antagonism with class enemies aroused in the CCP by this CCR. But this conception, centering the CCR on the new antagonistic contradiction it has raised in the CCP, bypasses three politically decisive questions (to which we shall return in detail later):

1) this new political antagonism is a new kind of political antagonism;

2) it is so in particular because, in a Communist Revolution, antagonism is no longer the political driving force it might be in a Socialist or Democratic Revolution;

3) the political revolution of **socialist** relations (of work, housing, settlement and organization) is the driving force behind the Communist Revolution, which then creates new, non-existent adversaries and enemies.

[24] The intellectual difference between *obstacles to be overcome* and *obstructions to be raised/subsumed* will be clarified later, with particular reference to the mathematical revolution of modern algebra.

[25] The hypothesis is that the Communist Revolution is of a new type in that it does not progress along a frontline clearly delimiting two antagonistic camps: one thing is the persistent existence of two strategic orientations (and only two: capitalism or communism), another thing would be the continued existence of two political classes structuring a frontline between two camps.

But then, how to relate politically to these different types of political negation? How, in the specific epoch of the Communist Revolution, can **inertia, adversity and antagonism be** dealt **with** in politically diversified ways? If inertia and adversity (*contradictions within the people*) can be reduced by **convincing** opponents of the affirmative power of communist advances, how can the inevitable antagonistic struggle against enemies not pull communist affirmations backwards and restrict them to the double negation of socialist anti-capitalism? In other words, how can we interweave communist affirmation with antagonistic double negation?

> This risk is all the more pronounced as the Communist Revolution operates *within* socialism (through the addition-extension of Communist points), and not head-on *against* it (through abandonment-displacement or destruction-reconstruction).

This question thus touches on the specific political content (at the time of the Communist Revolution) of the **dictatorship[26]** to be exercised over the enemy. This question is **doubly difficult**.

- On the one hand, distinguishing enemies from mere adversaries becomes **more complicated** in the Communist Revolution, i.e. when the enemy is no longer previously identifiable, but emerges in the same collective gesture of opposition as the adversary or the mere reluctant.

- On the other hand, fighting an enemy you've created is **more dangerous** than fighting an enemy whose prior existence is extrinsic: an enemy created by your action emerges from within your project, in the form of an intrinsic antagonism of the "latent civil war" type[27] , which makes the precise delimitation of a "front line" or the creation of "liberated zones" extremely difficult.

<div align="center">●</div>

Let's put it another way.

In a communist orientation, taking political antagonism into account is inevitable (a communist orientation is not - and cannot be - non-violent). But **the inevitability of antagonism is politically corrupting**, because confronting the enemy implies, in a certain sense, **measuring ourselves against him**, and the risk of **taking him as the measure of** our own political capacities - a disastrous error if it is true that political antagonism is rooted precisely in incompatible ways of measuring what really exists and counts for Humanity.

Antagonistic confrontation tends to constitute a shared measure between the two opposing camps, if only because the victory of one is the defeat of the other. But in antagonism between camps of politically different natures (and not in inter-imperialist wars), this sharing also preserves its differentiating part (all sharing is the dialectical unity of a pooling and a partition), if only because "victory" and "defeat" do not have quite the same meaning between communists and capitalists (see the way Mao points out the political danger inherent in "victories").

> During China's democratic revolution (1928-1949), Mao was extremely careful to deal with the contradiction with feudal and colonial forces in a specifically communist way (treatment of prisoners, etc.).

> Similarly, during China's socialist revolution (from 1953 onwards), Mao constantly stressed the importance of limiting the inevitable political antagonism (with capitalist and imperialist forces) by circumscribing enemies to their irreducible core and isolating them from the mere adversaries to be neutralized.

All this suggests that *communist* revolutionary politics must deal with the contradiction between its **constitutive affirmations** and **constitutive double negations**:

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[26] The category of "dictatorship of the proletariat", which points to the terminal enigma of the GPCR, intrigues three questions:

- what is dictatorship (and, correlatively, what is political power)?
- what is the proletariat (and, correlatively, what is the subjective operator of communist revolution)?
- what is the political relationship between the two (and, correlatively, must the communist collective subject also be the operator of dictatorship)?

[27] In 1967-1968, Mao was particularly concerned about the risk of the GPRC degenerating into civil war.

- communist assertions are at the heart of the constitution of a broader people's camp, rallying by adhesion ;

- double negations are at the heart of the relationship with opponents:

    o rallying the Center's inertia ;

    o neutralizing opponents on the Right;

    o enemy isolation. [28]

In this way, communist **assertions** are **constitutive** when **double negations** concern the communist relationship to opponents **constituted** by the preceding assertions.

The risks of corruption linked to the inevitable political antagonism must then be self-limited by a communist policy combining rallying **assertions**, **neutralization** through expansion of its camp and **isolation** through restrictions of the antagonistic camp.

II. Intellectual resources for a new type of communist culture

The obstruction of classism

Examining the specifics of the "socialist factory" (Soviet *Kombinats* and Chinese *Danweis*), A. Russo discusses what he calls "the conceptual chain *worker-plant-class-party-state*"[29] , highlighting its "*circularity as obvious as it is symptomatic*".

Without engaging here in a detailed discussion of its interesting critical understanding, let's call this conceptual entanglement (at the core of canonical Marxism-Leninism) "**classism**" and undertake, at our own expense, to characterize it in order to discern the core of a political obstruction.

> The UCF, in its concluding sequence in the early 1980s, engaged in a radical critique of this classism, which led it, quite rightly, to reject the Marxist-Leninist testament. The point is that this critique ultimately unfolded under the politically disastrous triple sign of insurmountable **obstacle**, irreversible **saturation** and, finally, necessary **liquidation**. [30]

The real political challenge today is to **point out the political obstruction** secretly at work in this *classist* dynamic, so as to reject both ("struggle on two fronts") the sterile dogma of a living classism and the devastating liquidation of any political problematic of social classes declared to be *saturated*.

A conceptual system

Let's formalize A. Russo's conceptual chain as follows:

- on the one hand, the social tandem:

$$\text{ouvrier} \longrightarrow \text{usine}$$

- on the other, the political tandem:

$$\text{parti} \longrightarrow \text{État}$$

- and between the two the bivalent *class* category, turning the set:

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[28] At this point, communist intellectuality must take advantage of the intellectual resources of modern logic and its distinction between classical, intuitionist and paraconsistent negations.
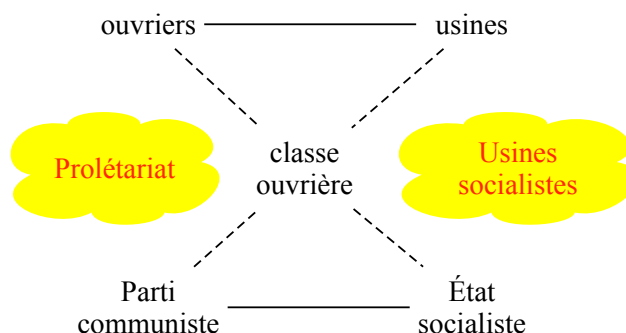
[29] p. 251

[30] See the same liquidating tendencies at work in pre-Galoisian classical algebra in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

ouvrier ——————— usine

classe

parti ——————— État
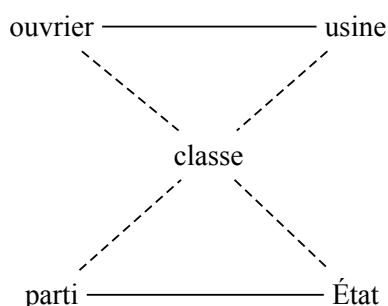
Marxist-Leninist classism completes this conceptual system.

- the political notion of the *proletariat* (as a political class *in itself*, the vanguard of the social class *in itself*)

- and the category of *socialist factory* (as a factory freed from private ownership of the means of production):

ouvriers ——————— usines

Prolétariat   classe
                    ouvrière   Usines
                                      socialistes

Parti ——————— État
communiste   socialiste

The liquidationist path consists of eliminating the *working-class* pivot, so that on the one hand *the Communist Party* and the *Socialist State* merge into a depoliticized Party-State, and on the other, all that's left is an apolitical link between worker and factory, which is then neutralized by reducing it to its anthropological zero: "*in the factory, there's the worker*" (big deal!).

For us, the question is quite different: what is the political obstruction in this entanglement that accounts for its proven depoliticization?

In modern (i.e. Galoisian) algebra, we can know algebraically why the algebraic equation becomes, from a certain polynomial degree, algebraically insoluble, in other words why the algebraic unknown becomes algebraically unknowable. We then subsume the obstruction of individual unknowability by knowing the collective solidarity (the Galois group of the equation) whose inseparation makes individualities unknowable. Thus, classical algebra wanted to **know the unknown**, whereas modern algebra learns **to know the unknowability of the unknown**.

A communist revolution in the category of interest

Can we politically address why classism has become politically sterile, not in order to fertilize it anew, but to incorporate into communist politics a new point to deal with? The hypothesis proposed here is as follows: the obstruction stems from the category of *interest* that underlies, more or less openly, the classist conceptual device, a category of *interest* that the CCR has come to split politically in an irreducible manner.

Indeed,

- On the one hand, **in socialism**, "interest" refers to the material interests common to workers, interests likely to constitute them as a social class: specific interests that set them in opposition to those of the social class of owners of the great means of production, and distinguish them from the various social classes of peasants (poor, middle-class, rich). The Marxist-Leninist idea is that these material interests of the proletarians, i.e. those who have nothing to defend but the existence of their arms, constitute them in the vanguard of political antagonism (and not social antagonism: strictly speaking, workers and bosses are not in an antagonistic relationship, even if their material interests are opposed).

- But on the other hand, **in the communist orientation**, "interest" comes to mean "the overall interests of Humanity", placed at the command post of its politics. But here, *"interest"* takes on a meaning extended to the emancipatory capacities of Humanity, capacities that cannot be reduced to the mere material interests of survival of the human species! The CCR has shown that the social class of Chinese workers has become politically divided in the face of the new communist prospects for collective emancipation, with some of them preferring to preserve the gains of socialism (the material advantages specific to the industrial Danweis, to which other workers were not entitled, in much the same way as in France the workers' aristocracy was able to defend its hard-won privileges against ordinary factory workers).

CCR in socialism reoriented socialism as a political sequence devoted not just to the development of productive forces (based on state ownership of the means of production), but to the reduction of socialist divisions of labor and space, and the decline of the socialist state. In so doing, it implied going beyond the socialist principle of individual profit-sharing ("*to each according to his work*": hence bonuses, piece-rate wages...) to begin to inscribe in a few points the communist principle of "*to each according to his needs*". Such a move beyond specific material interests to a general cause implied an ideological and cultural revolution in the meaning of "communism": **a leap** (and not a transitive continuity) from the socially constituted material interests of the exploited to the subjective interests of the whole, which communist politics must constitute.

A fulcrum

Where, in ordinary human experience, can we find the equivalence of such a qualitative leap from an existing material interest to the subjective interest of creating a new kind of existence, at the price of disrupting the existing regime of material interests? Where can we recognize such a **leap from the interested to the interesting**? [31]

Exemplary in the selfless interest so commonly shown by human beings in children! Their existence, patiently added to by long instruction and education, illuminates the lives of adults in exactly the same measure as it complicates them (contrary to the nihilistic Anglo-Saxon positivism of "Dink": Double *Income No Kids*).

All the same, the dialectical materialism of the disinterested interested party (which the communist orientation puts in command) is opposed to the positivist materialism of the interested party (which a certain socialism puts in command).

For a materialism of free and contingency...

All in all, then, political obstruction resides in this: communist interest is essentially gratuitous, which is not to say that it is a matter of deprivation, or even sacrifice, or, strictly speaking, of self-sacrificing heroism.

To **overcome this obstruction** is to turn such gratuity into a politically central issue for the collective emancipation of humanity. And isn't this exactly what the CCR, and in particular the GCPR, worked towards under Mao's leadership? Hence the need to return to the way in which the CCR was also a revolution in the means of convincing and rallying, in the ways of opposing and fighting.

Hypothesis: subsume the obstruction by constituting a communist materialism of gratuitousness and concomitantly of contingency (and no longer univocally of necessity).

Obstructions versus obstacles

Let's take as an intellectual reference the way in which algebra was able, from 1830 onwards, to overcome the obstacles to its development.

Modern algebra revolution

1

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[31] For the interested party, **the interest** (in the etymological sense of *what makes the difference*, *what is specifically important*) **pre-exists** when, on the contrary, *the interesting party* **generates it**. In other words, *the interested party* manages a **pre-established** interest, while *the interesting party* inaugurates and invents an **enlarged** interest.

From the 10th century onwards, classical algebra was invented with a view to enhancing ancient knowledge (arithmetic and geometry) in the face of the unknown: whereas **ancient** mathematics only worked on the known, to extend the light of the knowable step by step, algebra made a **rational leap into the unknown**: we can **calculate *on* the unknown** (and no longer only on the known) based on known properties of this unknown. Hence the polynomial equations of **classical** algebra, formalizing this algebraic knowledge of the properties of an unknown, equations that we will endeavour to solve in order to come to know the unknown in question.

2

In the 19th century, however**,** this algebraic **unknown** proved to be generally **unknowable** [Abel], as it was indissolubly linked to other similar unknowns [Galois].

In that case, *what's the point of algebra* (whose constituent project [Al-Khwarizmi] was to calculate the unknown in order to make it known)? So, what's the *point of algebra* (if its desire to know the unknown turns out to be impossible)?

Various mathematicians have concluded that algebra **is saturated**, and even, given algebra's central status in all mathematics, that rational knowledge must migrate from mathematics to the natural sciences.

3

The event of **modern** algebra will revolutionize **the motives of its** fundamental **mobilization** (to *know the unknown*) by focusing on **the solidarity between unknowns** [Galois group], which makes them generally unknowable. In other words, a shift in motivation: we have to **abandon** the idea of knowing what is unknowable and **shift** the algebraic desire towards knowing the reasons for this unknowability.

This displacement is made difficult by the fact that the mode of solidarity between the unknowns of the same equation [its "Galois group"] turns out to be intrinsically **secret** (as it is essentially inapparent in the equation that determines the known properties of the unknowns). And, just as knowing a secret does not eliminate its secret nature (Lacan: "*a secret confessed to remains a secret*"), knowing the secret reasons for an unknowability [its *Galois group*] will not eliminate that unknowability.

4

The result is a new kind of knowledge: knowledge that no longer aims to **reduce the unknowable** (like classical algebra, which focused on solving equations to transform the unknown into the known), but to **extend the knowable** onto the irreducible unknowable (modern algebra studies the secret structures of groups).

This new type of knowledge no longer proceeds from a **double negation** (denying the unknowable by making it known), but from an **affirmative relief of** that which advances in a negative guise, in this case the unknowable: **its negative restrictive effect** (on the domain of the knowable) is not **denied**, but **subsumed** (unknowability as such becomes a new stake in knowledge). Thus, by **adding to** the domain of the knowable the structures that obstruct knowledge of the unknowable, algebra will **extend** its rational power, which was thought to be inescapably locked in a dead end and thus "saturated". In so doing, the category of *unknowability* radically changes its status: **its phenomenological negativity** (it appears as a prohibition) **becomes the ontological affirmation** of an extended rationality.

> This eminently modern way of recapturing the negativity of an obstruction as an affirmation of a new space of rational thought links the modern algebra of **the unknowable** to the modern geometry of **the invariant**, to the modern arithmetic of **the irrational**, to the modern analysis of **the infinitesimal**, to modern mathematics of **the infinite**, to modern logic of **the undecidable** and **indiscernible**, to psychoanalysis of **the unconscious**, to modern intellectuality of **the impossible**, to modern music of **the imperceptible** and **unwritable**, and to modern love of **the immeasurable**.

5

In so doing, this modern revolution in intricate algebra:

- **abandonment-displacement**: <u>abandonment </u>of the motif of *knowing the unknown* and <u>displacement </u>towards the motif of *knowing the secret solidarity of the unknowable*;

- **destruction-reconstruction**: <u>destroy </u>algebraic demobilization in the face of the unknowable unknown and <u>rebuild </u>it in the knowledge of secret solidarities;

- **addition-extension**: <u>addition </u>of solidarity groups to <u>extend </u>algebraic rationality.

    While the first two modalities affirm in weak or strong forms of double negation, the third deploys a **fully affirmative logic**.

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[INTERNATIONAL SITUATION]

We publish Sol V. Steiner's third column on the Israeli-Palestinian situation and the question of Zionism.

Sol V. Steiner: *A Jewish singularity outside Zionism*

for Léonor, Jeff Alper

Since the Hamas massacres of October 7, 2023**, Zionism has been in open crisis** over its fundamentals. The crisis is profound because it is unprecedented. The concept of the "promised land" as a "refuge" and sanctuary for all Jews has literally exploded in mid-air.

The first two articles analyzed, on the one hand, the ideological and political significance of the events of October 7, and on the other, the twists and turns of a Zionist narrative in tatters, weaned of its fictional capacity, and the only present alternative of another possible form of justice: "*One country with one democratic state for all*". Before turning in this third column to the proposal of a Jewish singularity, both millenary and contemporary, I'd like to offer some prolegomena around **three points**: the semantics of the "Israel/Palestine conflict", Zionism as a settlement and the impossible, false "democratic" Zionist state.

A. Background

1. There is no "conflict" between Israel and Palestine.

Semantics are important. The way we choose our words determines the intelligence of a situation and the formation of a point of view.

In article after article, op-ed piece after op-ed piece, interview after interview, we hear the same refrain: it's urgent to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian "conflict". Of course, we can speak of an Israel/Arab conflict, from the point where, with Egypt and Jordan at war with the State of Israel, there is a principle of symmetry, country to country, army to army. This principle is irrelevant to the struggle between the State of Israel and the Palestinians. Like all colonial struggles, this one is asymmetrical. **The systemic point of colonial struggle** must be recognized. The expression Israeli-Palestinian "conflict" aims to equate, back to back, a structurally unequal situation, and thus to obscure and parasiticise the real issues at stake in the Israeli state's wars of "defence".

At the risk of repeating ourselves - we have to, because reality is constantly denied here - the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians is one between a colonial power and the colonized.

> "*The Palestinians have never been at war with the Jews; they have resisted a unilateral colonial project whose declared aim is the takeover of their homeland, the transformation of Palestine into Israel and the erasure of the Palestinian people, their culture and heritage. As in the liberation struggle of other colonized peoples, the Palestinians have been forced by Zionism/Israel to fight for their national rights and freedom.*"
>
> Declaration of the Campaign for a Single Democratic State. October 2023*: Stop the genocide in Gaza*

From this point of view, a colonial struggle cannot be identified with a "conflict" between two camps, on the same level, who clash to defend their respective interests. Colonialism is an arbitrary, one-sided process, in which a power decides to invade another people's territory in order to exploit its wealth and people, or to inhabit it. There can be no symmetry of military power between state and people. **Every colonial power is the bearer of asymmetrical violence**. There is a colonizing power and the well-founded resistance of the people. This is the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave. Before the

colonial invasion, the indigenous populations had no reason or interest in fighting. War is the inevitable consequence of colonial invasion.

In this respect, wars to "defend" Israel's territory are, for many, wars to "eradicate" Palestinian resistance, the "intifadas" to Israeli colonial rule. What the Israelis, the settlers, don't want to hear or see, except that they know it only too well, is **the logical nature of a people's revolt against the colonial power**.

> *"Let's not tell ourselves a story. (...) Politically we are the aggressors and they are defending themselves. (...) It's their country, because they live there, whereas we want to come here and colonize, and from their point of view, we want to take over their countries."*

> Ben Gurion, Labor Prime Minister of Israel. Speech in 1936.

2. Zionism is settlement colonialism.

This logic is all the more irrepressible in that Israeli colonialism is settlement colonialism.

Why is there little or no mention of settlement colonialism in defining the particularity of Israeli colonialism? Zionism seizes on this peculiarity to decline all forms of colonialism; there would be no colonialism but the "*messianic return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland*".

Settlement colonialism differs from classical colonialism. Classical colonialism is about plundering wealth, resources and people. After looting, there's the possibility of returning to the metropolis. **Settlement colonialism is existential colonialism**. There is no return to the metropolis. Settlers stay to populate the land by expelling and marginalizing the natives.

> Examples of settlement colonialism: Brazil occupied by Portugal; North America by the United States; South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand by the United Kingdom; Quebec by France.

In this scheme, the inhabitants of the colonized country are doomed either to be physically eliminated, or to be displaced, never to return. The example of the American Indians is edifying.

The "Judaization" of the Arab land of Palestine is the epitome of settlement colonization.

It's the disarabization of Palestine, begun in 1948; it's the transformation of Palestine into a vast expanse of illegal settlements. It's a policy of elimination, of "ethnic cleansing" of the indigenous population, of destroying Palestinian homes and building settlements and infrastructure for settlers.

Judaization means Greater Israel, "*Eretz Israel*" from the Jordan to the sea, with a Jewish identity. To "Judaize" an inhabited land, you need this settlement colonialism.

> Ben-Gurion: "*We don't want Israelis to be Arabs. It is our duty to fight against the Levantine mentality that destroys individuals and societies."*

> One never tires of reading the texts of the founders of Zionism. It's all there.

Eitan Bronstein Aparicio, founder of the NGO *Zocrot*, co-founder and co-director of *De-Colonizer*, an alternative Israeli research center, has produced a map entitled "*Colonialism in Destruction*"[1] . This rigorous and invaluable work lists all the Palestinian, Jewish and Syrian settlements destroyed since the first waves of Zionist migration (late 19ème century) and shows the continuum of the persistence of the colonial settlement project right up to the present day. Nearly 750,000 Palestinians and some 130,000 Syrians have already been displaced. It's about time a map exposed this reality.

The consequences of this situation are twofold.

The current situation.

The occupation of Palestine is irreversible. **The Palestinian state is a complete sham**. The two-state solution is a sham linked to the Oslo Accords, which promoted the systematic pursuit of colonization. Just look at a map. Zionist settlements occupy most of the territory.

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[1] https://www.de-colonizer.org/carte-en-francais

The situation ahead

Palestine's future lies in **a new political structure outside Zionism**, where each identity is on an equal footing with the others. This means that we must already think about the place of Israelis in this new structure. For Israelis will remain. With their history, their colonial memory, their fear and their abilities. In this respect, the example of the ANC in South Africa is widely taken into account by those who are fighting there for the only possibility of justice in Palestine: a democratic state for all.

3. The Jewish "democratic" state: a three-term oxymoron?

On closer inspection, this three-term oxymoron is not as implausible as it seems. It is representative of the contemporary world, presenting itself as the planetary model of the struggle between "good" and "evil". In this sense, **the Palestinian-Israeli situation reveals the ideological disorientation of today's world.**

All the same, a Jewish state, a **nationalization of the *Jewish* name**, now the bearer of an unequal identity, a **fetishization of Jewish identity** in law and constitution, asserting its superiority over other, necessarily inferior identities, a supremacist state presented as "democratic", all this bric-a-brac, we're told, would be a legacy of the Enlightenment, "a gift from Europe to the Jews".

Well, let's take that "gift" at face value. What is it?

This gift of "democracy" reveals, if proof were needed, the Western mode of fabrication of the "democratic space" instituted on the unheard-of violence of colonization and reserved for... the settlers alone. It was this poisoned "gift" - consumed in its entirety by the Israeli state and presented as the symbol of "civilization" against "barbarism" - that legitimized the great Israeli demonstrations against the extreme right. The Palestinians, absolutely absent from the scene, represented the emptiness and inanity of the gift of "Israeli democracy".

How else **can a colonial state claim to be democratic,** if not by concealing the real? Just as we have shown how the symmetrical vocabulary of "conflict" was designed to dissolve the asymmetrical violence of the colonial state, the vocabulary of "democracy" establishes the covering-up of the truth - the Palestinian NAKBA of 1948 - and makes clear the colonial state's wilful blindness, "*the war of national liberation of the Jewish people against the Arab states*".

The "democrats" of all countries can then agree to shed tears of compassion over the 1967 "occupation of the territories" which, being the subject of negotiation between Israel and the Arab states, excludes, de facto, Palestine and the Palestinians. This is the hidden meaning of the Abraham Accords.

"Palestinians don't exist" is the invisibilized watchword of Israeli democracy.

Note 1

The first settlements were the kibbutzniks and their "Garden of Eden" on stolen Arab lands. The secular/religious, left Zionist/right Zionist divisions are nothing but an **ideological artifice** to mask the essential function of the secular national and democratic in the construction of Zionism. Reading Ben Gurion, from this point of view, is perfectly evocative.

Note 2

The arrival in power of the extreme right (religious or not) exposes the colonial system. No oratorical precautions or false democratic pretexts.

The messianic mythology of return is incarnated in reality: today, after the almost complete destruction of Gaza, the "Gazafication" of the West Bank. The systemic violence of the Zionist project is placed like a totem in the public square. It is the sole virtue of the extreme right. It's also the reason for "democratic" hatred of this totem, now out in the open. No one can fail to see. This raises the existential question of why we are in denial.

Israeli society - as the many journalistic forums repeat - is said to be in a state of deep depression. Israel's lesson, well learned, is reflected in the mirror of the West.

B. A Jewish singularity outside Zionism

The ideological and political construction of Zionism is structured around a double negation: the negation of exile as the **negation of the exilic Jew**, but also exile as the result of the **negation of the Palestinians**. This double negation indicates the extent to which the question of exile and the Diaspora is central to Zionism; Zionist ideologists and thinkers have sought, through this concept of the negation of exile, to propose a way forward: that of the "normality" of Jewish existence, as the solution and culmination of its history from **the point of view of continuity, of an interrupted bridge between biblical times and the present day, between the oath on Mount Zion 2.500 years ago, and the creation of the State of Israel.**

For Zionists, Jewish "normality" means a land, a language, a sovereignty, with reference to the ancient biblical sovereignty of the kingdoms of Israel and Judea. Since the norm is synonymous with regularity, with what is found most often, it is clear that the "Jewish normality" of the present is identified with a power, a state, an army of conquest. This recurrence is antithetical to the history of exiled Jews.

Exile and sovereignty are opposing terms. So are normality and singularity.

But the path of exile expresses Jewish singularity. In 1977, in Brooklyn, Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize for Literature (most of his books were written in Yiddish), met Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Begin had criticized Singer for writing in Yiddish, "*the language of the dead, of those who let themselves be led to the slaughterhouse, the language that doesn't even have the phrase* 'Attention'. [...] *How can you command an army in Yiddish!*" insisted Begin. Singer, unperturbed, replied without blinking: "*I recognize that it's not a language invented for generals*.

Indeed**, Yiddish, the language of exile par excellence** (mainly Eastern European Jews), cannot be the language of a warrior army of settlers. Why not? Because exile deals with lack, absence and emptiness; designating the imperfection of the world and postulating the hope of its change, **the concept of exile opposes any attempt to establish "the history of the victors".** Because exile is multiple, singular and plural at the same time, on the move, here and there, because exile is out-of-place, out-of-borders, out-of-land. Because exile is synonymous with atopia.

A Jewish singularity seen as atopy.

So Exile, postulated as the other way. From the point of view of Jewish history and Judaism, **exile is constitutive**. The etymology of the Hebrew word "*exile*" means "galout", which comes from the verb "gala" meaning *to discover*, to *unveil*. If we want to go back to ancient times, we'll start with the patriarch Abraham. After all, it all started with him!

"*Lekh lekha*" is how God addresses Abraham for the first time. Despite the different interpretations given in the Hebrew Bibles, these words were to determine the patriarch's departure. This injunction to leave his homeland, his hometown, his family and go elsewhere is not a "*go away*", but more a "*go for you, go to you, go exist elsewhere*". Where else? In the desert, an anonymous, neutral and unknown place. A move, a crossing that destroys one's bearings, one's original identity.

The exile is a revelation of truth. If truth appears to Abraham, then **God promises him a promise**. Important note: when Abraham leaves the city of Ur, he does so as a free man, recognized by his peers. It was his choice. His homeland, his city, his family - these are his bases of certainty, his foundations of fulfillment. He will voluntarily leave these assured territories to take a step to the side, a step beyond his frontier, his evidence, his "home", for the disquieting strangeness of the other, for the stranger of himself and of the world.

A movement from the unfulfilled emptiness to the fulfillment of the world, with no return possible. In this sense, it is the beginning of historical time, for the Abrahamic exile opens humanity to otherness. From the acceptance of the **emptiness of presence as a condition of existence**. It is this revolutionary truth that the Zionist argument has sought to liquidate, the better to present its own closed, inward-looking path as the only possible one. That of the "ghetto" of the in-between, of the One, of the identity-based, supremacist and inegalitarian "essence". Decided and achieved by a state and the construction of a wall. The history of the multiple singularities of Jewish names is absent. Ratured. If not in the form of victims.

Any attempt to leave the insurmountable place of the foreign forces Jewish singularity to disappear. It is condemned to die. Any policy that denies its atopia renders its practice impossible. This is exactly the basis of the Zionist path.

The Abrahamic exile designates a Jewish singularity, designated for millennia, as a break with the same, a "*rupture of being in front of itself*", a margin of the majority, a multiple and inventive ontology that reinforces, on its permanent qui-vive, the points to be held of equality and emancipation.

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This Jewish singularity is not abstract. It is situational. It is anti-Zionist.

I've lived it since childhood. Of course, my family was called "*we Communists first and Jews second*". So said my mother. No Jewish education whatsoever. But Yiddish was my amniotic language, French a FLÉ[2] ; history, that of the BUND, the first Jewish socialist and secular political party in tsarist Russia, its political future with Lenin and the debate on minorities within the Bolshevik Party. And learning about the emptiness in a little child's life: "*Mommy, my girlfriend has two grandmothers who wait for her when she gets out of school. Why don't I have one?*" The child on her lap, drying the mother's tears, trying to explain, in Yiddish, the immeasurable. The hole, the abyss from which her story emerges. Never a victim. Always with his fist raised. Aragon, poet of the communist gesture, as main interlocutor. But an ineffable sense of incompleteness, of ontic distance, of absence. I was reading Nikolai Ostrovsky's *Et l'acier fut trempé* in high school, and my girlfriends were talking about the Dijon mustard culture one of them came from. A recurring "in-between", a here and elsewhere, a non-coincidence. And when Zionism entered the family debate from 1956 onwards, I knew that the right answer was anti-Zionism. Unequivocal. Like the legacy of my history. Like the realized logic of a place, a place from which I could speak, in truth. With the Palestinians, in Barbès, demonstrating the same day as my parents, in Palais-Royal, for the State of Israel. So it's a struggle between the two paths. How could it be otherwise?

Anti-Zionism today means working, in argument and organization, on a point all the more fundamental for existing in the midst of disaster: **the construction of a new country**, rid of the Zionist political and ideological structure, a democratic state with equality for all, Palestinians and Israelis, side by side.

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[2] *French as a foreign language*

[LETTERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD]

DIOGO FAIA FAGUNDES*: WHAT TO DO IN BRAZIL TODAY?*

So as not to fall into incapacitating jeremiads and chatter from an external, superior point of view - as is often the case in an environment increasingly marked by social media - let's try to formulate some tasks, albeit unpromising ones for those who have little patience and like to delude themselves about the future, for themselves or for others.

Let's make a brutal, dogmatic observation: **there is no politics in Brazil**. Or rather, there is only the politics of capitalism-parliamentarianism, and therefore no politics, because without the existence of distinct, opposing politics, there is only the management of order. Indeed, if we adopt the thesis that politics is not of the order of the invariant (the juridico-state superstructure present in any social formation), nor spontaneous or coextensive with demands, but rather rare, we see no politics at work in today's Brazil.

Of course, there are movements, organizations, social struggles, pressure groups, critical opinions and so on. But is this enough to constitute an effective policy?

On the PT side, there's the "dike of containment" position: being in government to prevent the return of bolonarism, cooking in a bain-marie until the next elections, with modest economic growth, no bold proposals, but perhaps capable of bringing minimal improvement for the poorest. That's the idea. There are two problems: i) is this enough to stop the force of a highly mobilized, organized and ideologized far right? ii) the market is insatiable and demands more "reforms" to overcome the impasses caused by the new fiscal framework and promises of zero deficit. [1]

Let's just say that giving fascism a monopoly on defending popular agendas (such as the fight for constitutional spending floors for health and education, or the defense of indexing the minimum wage to the social security system) doesn't seem like the smartest tactic for dealing with the danger of a Bolsonaro comeback.

To those who dislike Lula - and many have their reasons - we can only say: the trend will worsen when the inevitable biological destiny arrives. Whether we like it or not, Lula is a popular leader, in touch with the impoverished masses, linked to the trade union movement, with a trajectory of minimal tension against imperialism (if only because of his refusal to play the role of anti-Cuba leader on the continent). With the **brutal crisis of trade unionism** (not for nothing is the bourgeoisie grateful to Temer, who has wiped out the unions' sources of funding), the end of the old world from which the politician Lula emerged, and the absence of genuine popular leaders within the PT, there doesn't seem to be much reason to be optimistic about the party's future. Of course, it's always possible for new historical movements to emerge in the form of unpredictable events, enabling new leaders and organizations to occupy a similar role in the future. However, it's worth noting that mass political leadership on the left is neither improvised nor very frequent.

This position, of course, is no different from the capitalist-parliamentary consensus of 2016. The proof: none of Temer's or Bolsonaro's reforms are even discussed as reversible, contrary to the abundant promises made during the period of opposition to these governments. But it relies on the modesty of a possibly credible objective (winning the next elections), since there is no other way.

If total and uncritical adherence generally generates nothing good - on the contrary, it prevents us from discussing orientations by taking stock of the past and rectifying mistakes, and thus paves the way for future defeats - **what's left to do? Oppose?**

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[1] To ensure that fiscal targets are met, members of the Ministry of Finance have flirted with ideas involving the end of constitutionally-mandated spending floors for education and health. This idea is supported by a large number of economists interviewed by the press.

Oppositionism

The problem lies in a classic vice known as "**oppositionism**". It consists in believing that politics consists of a *mixture of* agitation and propaganda (more or less doctrinaire, depending on the case) and denunciations, complaints and moans. Trotskyism, which is fertile in the cultivation of this style, has had the misfortune in its history to be well acquainted with the impotence of this posture: denunciations of "leadership crises" generally lead nowhere, limiting politics to the formation of "pressure groups" or, in the worst case, to vague and implausible promises ("*when I'm in government, it will be different!*"). To be honest, it's a culture that tends to favor opportunism.

Of course, this doesn't mean that it's not important to form a critical, questioning opinion of government, or to ideologically influence the country's cultural climate in this respect. But we should be under no illusions about its role. As a result, even if there are left-wing groups - with various differences, but who agree that the country's trajectory is not favorable - who are active or even have elaborate programs, there is currently no policy that indicates the seeds of a possible new strategic direction, beyond mere intentions and proclamations.

This is perhaps inevitable given the current situation - disastrous not only nationally, but also globally - in the midst of the first stammerings of a new politics, with no organization or leader able to present itself as the "vanguard of the proletariat" or make such claims without looking ridiculous.

Millenarianism

In addition to "oppositionism" - which is sterile because it does not serve to produce new, real and affirmative possibilities through slogans that set the masses in motion in a break with order - another increasingly common vice is **prophetic millenarianism**, a classic of the ultra-left.

Given the environmental crises and the urgency of the ecological question, there is a comfortable posture of preaching the imminent apocalypse, whether ecological or economic, without presenting any political alternative. God knows how many leftists weep with joy over crises! The more catastrophic they are, the more promising they are in seducing the public with their preaching and radical aesthetics, which can be useful for selling books and attracting attention, but they tend more towards immobilism and panic (or, conversely, the naïve belief that any movement around the corner heralds the end of capitalism) than a sense of militant urgency.

Once again, you have to be brutal. Politics, in fact, often demands it, which generally repels petty-bourgeois who have a *sense of* nuance and subtlety (many academics make a living of it): anyone who talks a lot about catastrophe without defending and practicing a policy antagonistic to capitalism (which is not a vague anti-capitalism, but a *new communism*) is **irresponsible**. Especially if he condemns unilaterally and en bloc - when it comes to being anti-communist, one abandons the nuances of academics - all past experiences that have actually generated *fear* in the capitalist world (how many times have our prophets managed to do this?), through the most banal and obvious terms and assessments possible. This only serves to **foster an** aesthetic, saleable and even profitable **nihilism**, with an aristocratic flavor.

If the posture of prophetic expectation, apocalyptic or millenarian preaching (one day there will be the Rapture, and capital will dissolve in a flash, with the immediate end of the commodity, the currency, the law, the state, etc.) is another deleterious and classic tic in the history of the Left, a real epistemic obstacle preventing the formation of promising paths. So let's be simpler, with less phraseology: our tasks are more basic, pre-political, and may not seem so enchanting in the short term to those who want quick results.

What do we mean by "pre-political"?

Simply this: before working out a finished program or strategy in the laboratory - which is frankly idealistic when there's no anchor in actual political work that delivers verifiable results - it's better to focus our energies on other indispensable, but earlier things. The strategic path, apart from very general guidelines, can only really be mapped out once a policy exists and has gained in substance and power.

We can list four of these "prerequisites" for the existence of a new policy:

1) the formation of **a** qualified Marxist **intelligentsia** oriented towards a new communism;

2) creating **organic links with the masses**;

3) **integration into existing movements**, which are vindictive by nature (and therefore pre-political) and have the potential to become politicized;

4) the realization of an **intellectual and investigative effort** on the country and the world, as well as on their political organizations and sequences since at least the beginning of the 20th^{ème} century.

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As far as the first task is concerned, it's not just a matter of making critical analyses and opinions about capitalism. **There's nothing easier than saying bad things about capitalism** - even some capitalists do it! - and this has never done any harm to this mode of production. The central task is to create the conditions for a new, assertive, resolute communism. This is only possible with an honest and inventive assessment of the failures and obstacles of the previous communist sequence, inaugurated by the October Revolution of 1917. **The dogmatism of simply defending the past** must be combated, as must the posture of those who think that everything has to be redone, and that there is nothing good to learn or defend.

This will inevitably lead to a degree of isolation at first, as "communism" is still a cursed word. Even intellectuals critical of order are reluctant to give the word new weight and glory. Yet **putting an end to this curse** is our first task, because without order in ideas, it's impossible to have order in organization, as Mao would say. And without effective ideological struggle, no political orientation is possible, according to Mao himself.

2

The second task is probably the most laborious, the most difficult, the longest and the least rewarding (at least in the short term), but it's the most indispensable. It's about **creating links between communist intellectuals and the working masses**, wherever they may be, at work, at home, in society, and so on. The "people's classes" route - despite its limitations, since it's something that can easily be depoliticized - investment in popular education on the periphery, the resumption of the university extension movement (such as the training of popular lawyers and doctors), are the most promising bets in this direction.

It's probably necessary to create a mix of aid organizations (with first-aid services, legal aid, clinics for mental health and addiction problems, organization of community restaurants, literacy and school aid, etc.) and political schools that teach all about the history of the struggle between capitalism and communism over the last two centuries. We need to go back to the Brazilian organizations of the 70s and 80s that focused on grassroots work. We need to study them.

3

The third task is undoubtedly the one that is currently taking shape the most. Accompanying, helping, publicizing and promoting movements such as VAT (*"Life beyond work"*) or *app workers*. Two mistakes must be avoided, however. The first is to **use** movements in an instrumental or opportunistic way, solely to gain support or to take credit for victories. The classic apparatchik, in short. The other is **unthinking support**, simple "support", with no contribution to go beyond the purely protest stage or to formulate slogans capable of unifying, mobilizing and achieving political victories (on the reduction of working hours, for example).

4

Finally, the last task involves a collective effort, both theoretical and experimental. It's not just a question of studying the history of social formations, important though that is, but of **drawing up an inventory, or even an encyclopedia**, of the history of popular movements and emancipation policies over the last century, both globally and nationally.

This **study of the past** must be complemented by **concrete research** (i.e., fieldwork through meetings with the players) into the major issues of contemporary capitalism - the structuring of urban life, contemporary peasantry, major international migrations, the lives and thinking of those living on the

periphery of our metropolises, the structuring of the new world of work, the dispute over raw materials and minerals on a global scale - on the largest possible scale, i.e., potentially and ideally international work.

On a more immediate political level, we should at least look at the most recent historical movements, drawing up a detailed assessment of their failures and limitations. A case in point: the recent insurrections in Colombia (which led to the government of Gustavo Petro), Chile (which led to the government of Gabriel Boric), but also in Ecuador and Peru, where the major mobilizations did not result in left-wing governments. In Brazil, it's still crucial to reflect on June 2013 and the school occupation movement of 2016.

More decisively, however, it is necessary to take stock of the organizations and political struggles that took place during the last decades when the flame of revolution was alive: the 60s and 70s. In Brazil, this means studying both the armed struggle and the organizations that opted for a "peaceful", not necessarily electoral, path. The most interesting were not, in fact, fixed on either of these two well-defined summits.

These decades of intense politicization, with national liberation struggles, the struggle of African-Americans and against the Vietnam War in the USA, the post-May '68 period, new forms of workers' struggle (as in Italy) and the creation of a new communist movement (whose ideas often drew on new references, such as Maoism and the Cultural Revolution) are often poorly studied and understood. Making this study is a necessity and therefore a duty.

Tips and suggestions

Finally, here are a few tips and suggestions for Brazilian communists.

1

Let's not make the mistake of thinking that we already have a ready-made party theory for the communism of the 21ème century. There are simply no examples of successful revolutionary parties in our time, unlike when Marxism-Leninism was a true paradigm. There's no need to wipe the slate clean, but it's ossified dogmatism to believe that the structures of the Third International and the old Marxism-Leninism can fulfill our objectives.

The political, organizational and strategic theory of the third stage of communism has yet to be created, and this necessarily involves understanding why the party-states of the Third International became allergic to communist political invention and failed, as well as understanding the complexity - now obscured and covered by a veil of total ignorance - of the Cultural Revolution in China, the most radical and concrete attempt to create innovation in the Marxist-Leninist field. It is the Paris Commune of the 20th century: a defeat full of meaning and lessons for a new politics. We need to repeat Lenin*'s gesture* and **not just copy a codified doctrine** without creativity: just as he struggled to create a theory and a politics capable of overcoming the problems of the Paris Commune - this is directly behind books like *Que faire* - we need to study the interesting things (and there are many), as well as the fatal and disastrous errors of the Cultural Revolution. Marxism is in its post-Maoist phase.

2

Today, Stalinism and Trotskyism are **conservative ideologies**. The same is true of the dogmatic, militaristic and caricatured Maoism of the organizations inspired by Peru's Shining Path. The groups that have managed to survive on the basis of these references have done so at the cost of either great dogmatic rigidity, becoming cumbersome and incapable of innovation, or an eclecticism and dilution that renders many of these theoretical and political references inoperative or meaningless. Dialogue with these conservative groups must be respectful but polemical, always pointing out the inappropriateness of these obsolete terminologies and references.

3

There are two crucial issues to tackle head-on: **electoralism** and **federalism**.

Electoralism

Anyone who underestimates the corrupting and inertial force of bourgeois state institutions and thinks they can easily protect themselves from its effects is mistaken. Even groups with no electoralist strategy in the history of the communist movement (i.e., anti-revisionists, critics of Eurocommunism, etc.) easily fall prey to the defensive position of orienting their tactics towards maintaining their apparatus when they enter the institutional game. This can even be seen in Trotskyist groups within their unions. We must not underestimate the inertial and possibly conservative contagion of strategies that focus on conquering and maintaining pieces of the state (be they town halls, universities or trade unions). When electoral life begins to dictate organizational time, it's hard to find an effective alternative to capitalism. At least, that's what we've always seen in all our historical experience.

Federalism

Federalism, on the other hand, has become a kind of **spontaneous ideology** of the movements of our time. It is a conception of politics that identifies it with the multiple struggles of social movements organized around their own agendas, forming a kind of convergent synergy between them, in a circuit of positive feedbacks with no further political unity or overall strategic vision. The great modern formulation of this ideology is to be found in intellectuals and activists such as Félix Guattari, who saw in May '68 not a possible new form of political unification provided by the diagonal between intellectuals, workers, peasants and the masses under the mantle of a renewed Marxism, but a fragmented explosion of multiple, dispersed struggles marked by their own self-interested content.

It is this cauldron that forms the soup of contemporary movementism, which operates even in the great historical uprisings. The hypothesis to be raised is that in the case of Chile, this was particularly clear: the sum of partial struggles (by gender, race, education, health, national minority movements, etc.), unified only by the rejection of Pinochet's Constitution, without the existence of a leading political organization capable of creating active popular unity through a global vision of the situation and precise, simple prescriptions, neutralized the struggle for the new Constituent Assembly, which became a large sounding board for fragmented movements.

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These indications have but one aim: to stimulate Brazilian communists to **build the rudiments of a new political path**. This task is still in its early and precarious stages, but some aspects are promising: the enthusiasm of young people for the new communist intellectuals - many of whom are of proletarian origin - who are very popular on social networks, is very encouraging.

But lucidity means not allowing ourselves to be blinded by momentary successes, and not harboring false expectations. The leap we need to make to create an effective policy is enormous. Emerging from contemporary nihilism is no easy task. So let us say, provocatively, with Mao: "*Not having a correct political point of view is like not having a soul*! [2]

So let's fight to have a soul, and thus perhaps support the ambition of less nihilistic eras: salvation and immortality. But we don't need a transcendent heaven. What counts is earthly matter, the here and now.

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[2] This quotation appears in one of the most important political texts in our history: *On the correct handling of contradictions among the people*. But who still reads it and gives it the attention it deserves?

[ESCAPE FROM NIHILISM S]

FRANCO-TUNISIAN MEETINGS: *ESCAPING NIHILISM?*

http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/RFT/2024

Friday, October 4th	Saturday, October 5th	Sunday, October 6
Alain **RALLET:** Video - Text	Hayet **BEN CHARRADA:** • Video (in Tounsi) • Text (in French) Abdelhamid **ADHARI :** Video - Text — Rudolf **DI STEFANO:** Video - Text Walid **FALLEH:** Video Abdelaziz **BGH:** Video	Majid **MAHJOUB:** Video François **NICOLAS:** Video - Text — Hela **BENNOUR :** Video

ALAIN RALLET: *WHY ESCAPE NIHILISM? WHAT CAN WE DO?*

Video: https://youtu.be/RFgiWUgHwW8

Why these words? Why this proposal?

It has taken us, a small Franco-Tunisian group of friends, three years of exchanges and already two Encounters of this type to say them. So, a few minutes won't be too long to present them, so that you can get an idea of what we want to achieve through these third Rencontres in Tunis, and so that we can discuss them together afterwards.

It all starts with the current state of the world.

I think it's easy to agree with what I'm going to say about the current situation. By **the state of the world**, I mean not only what's happening, but also how we experience it, how we feel about it - in other words, how subjective are we? This is a very important element of the state of the world, and it's what we want to act on, because it's about our ability not to get bogged down by the current inhumanity of this world, to escape from it, as we're going to say.

Today's world is chaotic, unstable and dangerous. Every day brings its share of devastation. Every day, criminal policies herald even greater ones.

I'll mention just three: **Gaza, Ukraine and climate change**. The causes are different, but the helplessness and anguish that result are the same.

> **Gaza**: a colonial situation in which Israel survives only through the war for Greater Israel, an endless and cruel war of destruction of a people, the Palestinian people, and their land. With total impunity, Israel continues to expand this war: Gaza, then the West Bank, then Lebanon now, and why not Iran tomorrow? What we feel is that nothing seems to be in a position to combat this self-sustaining war fury. This goes without saying for the West, since they are Israel's allies. But neither have we seen any major popular movements that are equal to the crimes being committed, and even less have we seen any political forces seeking to build a just path for the people.

> **Ukraine** is the second name. Initially, there was popular resistance to Russian aggression. But the war in Ukraine very quickly became a confrontation between powers, between imperialist camps, the Western camp led by the Americans and the Russian camp affiliated to Chinese power. The war in Ukraine is a foreshadowing of the global war that is shaping up between the Americans and the Chinese to share the world. What can we do in this mess, crushed as we are by the prospect of global war? What can we do other than support one side or the other, which would mean participating in the logic of war? Here too, we have the feeling of powerlessness in the face of war's inevitable course.

> **Climate change**. By dint of going straight to it, it's here. It has and will have immense repercussions, starting with the countries of the South and the world's poor. But how can humanity really deal with it? How can we deal with the ecological question? There are a lot of questions and few answers. Hence the fact that, when it comes to feelings, fears, deplorations and a muted but profound anguish dominate. It's as if a fatality had befallen us.

Beyond these three points, which touch on a feeling of being crushed by the global situation, it's easy to find disasters on a smaller scale, but disasters nonetheless, in national, local and even personal situations.

It's not a question of painting everything in black, but of pointing out that if the situation appears so bad, it's because there are no, or no longer any, collective forces that can put forward positive proposals based on the ideas of equality and justice. Or that they are very weak, not on the scale of

the current disasters. We have to take note of this, and not pretend that these forces exist, even if we'd like them to.

At our modest level, we don't accept this situation, we don't accept to be sad and resigned spectators of the criminalization of the world.

But as soon as you want to get out of this situation, make a move, even lift a finger, you meet an enemy: nihilism. That's where we come in.

Nihilism

Contemporary nihilism is a state of mind that consists of :

- to close off any possibility of escaping the disastrous state of the world I have just described, and the feelings it engenders;

- to fight or prevent any positive affirmation showing that it is possible to take other paths, paths of emancipation.

Its weapons, its tools, are to **produce negative feelings**: discouragement, frustration, resentment, resentment, disgust, mental fatigue, apathy, gloom, powerlessness, and ultimately resignation.

Nihilism **is a machine for producing negative subjectivity**, locking you into the overwhelmed, powerless figure of a spectator to the horrors of the existing world.

So that people aren't tempted to imagine and assert that another world is possible, in order to stifle any desire to take the path towards it, even with small things. If you do, you'll be told that "*there is only what there is*" or "*you're agitating in vain!" "or "what's the point?*" or "*you're not thinking about it! "Move along, there's nothing to think about or do, just deal with your negative emotions!*"

It's **a gigantic demoralizing enterprise** that intends to hold people in its grip. Because it's a real hold, a subjective hold.

"*You're demoralized, frustrated, bitter, despondent, that's good, stay in that grip simmering in your negativity juice*": such is the message of nihilism.

So far, I've spoken of nihilism in the singular. We need to talk about it in the plural. Because **there are several versions of** contemporary **nihilism**. When we talk about subjectivity, we can never be precise enough. We need to be precise, because we're talking about ways of thinking, feeling and living - in other words, everything that makes us think or not think, act or not act, commit to a cause or not commit to a cause.

Forms of contemporary nihilism

To qualify the different versions of contemporary nihilism, we'll draw on forms of nihilism already identified in the past by philosophers and found in today's nihilism. These are Nietzche and Kierkegaard.

Nietzsche identifies two forms of nihilism. Both have to do with the will. There is a passive nihilism and an active nihilism.

> **Passive** nihilism means *not wanting anything*. It's about simple animal survival, making do with what's there, finding refuge in the humdrum of daily life, playing dead in the storms without being fooled by them. It means giving up, burying one's head in the sand, like her, to ignore the turbulence of the outside world.

> **Active** nihilism means *wanting nothing*. It's a fascination with destruction, annihilation, the end of the world and the morbid pleasure that can be derived from it. War is on the horizon, long live war! The end of the world is near, let's take part and celebrate! Something will come of it. The passive nihilist is defeated when the active nihilist is electrified by nothingness.

Kierkegaard adds another, even more radical dimension to nihilism, because it undermines any desire to think and act. It's that of *hoping for nothing*, or *hoping for nothing*, or *that hoping means nothing*, has no object. If you hope for nothing, or that there's nothing to hope for, or that hoping has no meaning,

you're an absolute disenchanted with the world. Nothing will move you, even if everything collapses around you. You'll be buried with the epitaph: "He never hoped for anything".

Using these categories, you could have fun creating a portrait gallery of the nihilists around you. It wouldn't be a useless exercise, since we must always know our enemies well, even when the enemy is right in our midst.

But there are better things to do than draw a portrait of nihilists: escape from nihilism.

Escaping nihilism

What does it mean to "escape nihilism"? Why not use other words that are also other modes of action if we don't agree with it: *fight it*, *confront it*, *challenge it*, *criticize* it, *resist it*...?

No, we say "escape", and I'd like to say precisely why, because it conditions what we propose to do next: "hold a point".

To make myself clear, I'll use an analogy.

> I spoke earlier of **nihilism's subjective hold** over us. It's of the same nature as one person's hold on another. How can we get out of it?
>
> It's not that easy. The dominant person holds you by a thousand subjective ties, including, alas, the ties of dependence that you yourself have forged, and not only that person. As long as you remain within this structure of hold, you have no means of getting out, even if you criticize the person, if you know he or she is hurting you, if you complain about him or her... On the contrary, all these complaints will feed the relationship from which you need to get out. You're constantly putting a part back into the machine, which the person oppressing you is going to use to put new parts back in, and so on... To get out of this endless screw, you need to take a step to the side, to derail the screw that's digging, digging inside yourself.

With nihilism, it's much the same: you have to **take a step to the side**. To get out of its grip.

What is a side step?

It's not just about criticizing nihilism. **Criticizing** it is all well and good, and even necessary, but you have to realize that by merely criticizing it, you remain dependent on it, since it determines the content of your criticism. It's like putting a part back into the machine.

Nor is it "**resisting** nihilism". When you resist something, you remain defined by that something. You remain defined by the terrain in which the something encloses you. It's still a negative attitude that doesn't get you out of its grip. Of course, you're going to resist it by refusing its injunctions (to want nothing, to want nothing, to hope in nothing...) and saying "*I don't agree with this hopeless and evil vision of the world that destroys all will and all hope*". So what do you agree with? What do you suggest?

Until you say what you hope for, and make it known to others**, this resistance remains in the grip of nihilism**. It's by saying what you hope for, showing it through your practices and sharing it that you can break out of it. At that point, you're no longer in the space of nihilism. You're in the subjective construction of another world, even if it's through minimal action. This is what we call "stepping aside".

We should never forget that we must always begin by **imagining and stating the positive** propositions, those that go in the direction of confidence in others and in humanity, and that we can move forward in this or that situation. Nihilism (*wanting nothing, hoping for nothing*...) is only there to close off and forbid this possibility. It is always **a negative reaction to the affirmation of possibilities**, to the idea that the world can be something other than what it is, and to the practical demonstration of this idea in a given situation. It's about **overcoming nihilism through the affirmation of possibility**, not regressing into nihilism through denunciations, imprecations and complaints against it.

Caution: don't forget that the sideways step, the positive affirmation that enables us to emerge from nihilism, is taken against nihilism, which is the enemy. It's nihilism we have to get away from. In fact,

it's natural to enter into nihilism by criticizing it and resisting it, but **you can only get out of it by taking a step to the side**.

So what exactly is the famous "side-step" that is necessary to escape the grip of nihilism?

This is what we call "holding a point".

I'd like to finish by saying what we mean by "keeping score" in both general and practical terms.

What is a "point" and "holding a point"?

I'll give a general definition, then come back to each aspect with examples.

Holding a point means:

- *in a particular situation* (the point only applies to that situation, not in general),

- *support a subjective stance* (not theoretical, but experienced by oneself as an inner necessity to be maintained in the situation)

- *that's the object of a prolonged commitment*, that sets your existence apart (it's not a stunt that you let go of afterwards),

- *which develops the image of a possible alternative to what already exists* (we get away from the nihilistic diktat of the impossible),

- *an alternative image that speaks to others* and encourages them to make their own point.

In a particular situation...

It could be in your profession, in your work, in your personal life, your passions, your art if you're an artist... in short, in any human activity. As there is such a wide variety of situations, there is a **vast range of possible points**, of all kinds.

For example, at our second Rencontres in Paris in February 2024, we heard from a nursery school teacher. Here in Tunis, our program reflects this diversity.

Supporting a subjective stance...

It's not a general principle or a position taken by others, but **a point that guides your existence in the situation in question**. You can hold a point without always being aware of it. In that case, it's a subjective step to be able to declare it.

For example, our school teacher argued that her pedagogy with students and her relations with the institution and parents were explained by her conviction that school was a place of emancipation for all her students (free from all social considerations, poor and rich alike), based on a postulate of equal intelligence (all students have the capacity to understand).

Who is the subject of an extended commitment...

It's a question of "holding" the point over time, even if its formulation has to evolve over time as contexts change.

Which develops the image of a possible alternative to the existing...

It's opening up a possibility that didn't seem to exist, even if it seems **tiny** compared to the devastated landscape of the contemporary world. **There are no small successes** in a world overwhelmed by nihilism.

The point made by our school teacher led her to create new pedagogical practices with her students, to challenge the institution's evaluation methods, to define new relationships with parents, all things that pre-classified children not according to the equality of intelligence but according to their social origin.

Image of a possibility that speaks to others and encourages them to hold their own point...

Once the point has been declared, pronounced by the person holding it, its strength lies in the fact that it can **be recognized by others**, not so that they do the same thing, but so that they in turn are encouraged to manifest their own subjective point in the situation at hand, and share it with others. And so on.

That's how I came to tell you about our teacher's point. You can listen to her talk on YouTube .[1]

What to do with all these points?

The aim is not to draw up a "program" that would be the sum of all the points made, but to **create** around them **a network of points**, a network of fraternity capable of reconstituting, step by step, point by point, the perspectives of a rediscovered confidence in others, in humanity, based on singular, inventive declarations, subjectively rooted in the lives of those who enunciate them.

We're well aware that this won't stop Israeli tanks and planes in Gaza and Lebanon. Nor will it prevent a possible flare-up of the war in Ukraine. That's not the point.

We're **realistic**. **But** ultimately **ambitious**.

The aim is to take a few points off the leaden atmosphere of ambient nihilism, to shake up this mortifying atmosphere that leads us to finally accept, powerless, everything that's happening. Because that's exactly what's happening in the world today: the powerlessness to halt the world's criminal drift.

We need to **create a breach in** the blinding wall of nihilism.

By creating a collective subjectivity that could *take shape* from the greatness and courage of the person who, in his or her work, art, scientific activity, relationships, daily life and passions, holds the affirmative force of a point.

By recreating a collective trust in others, in humanity's creative capacity to break down the wall of powerlessness.

Let's start at the beginning. Friends, let's sow our dots!

That's the program for this year's Rencontres.

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[1] https://youtu.be/nTrcNcRqMwo

[CLINICS]

REINE COHEN: PRECARIOUSNESS CLINICS

From madness's habitat to support for wandering

Intervention by the 13 arrondissement EMPP ^{ème}

(Socio-educational executive, Specialized educator, Nurse, Psychiatrist)

2nd Psychiatry Precarity Day

(October 7, 2024 Hôpital Sainte-Anne)

The question of the clinics of precariousness is organized along two axes: precariousness **as a pathogenic agent**, which is overwhelmingly a clinic of trauma, and precariousness **as a symptom**, which is the clinic of what we'll call street psychosis.

We won't be talking about precariousness **as trauma**, where troubles arise from the loss of attachments to a failing or hostile external world. We will not speak of migrants, or of those discarded by a world where the law of the strongest reigns without limit. We will not participate in the replacement of missing words and political action by a discourse and practices that would constitute as a "nosographic" category those whom the world makes sick. In a discourse built on forgetting what presides over the appearance of "disorders", the solicitude of care would cover up the necessary anger against this savage world. These "precarious" people are in fact the *precariousized*, and this name is a political category. In *Les Misérables*, the characters express their subjective resources against that which denies them. The original title of Les *Misérables* was *La Misère*, the kind of misery we can't welcome when it's "the world's" misery, but which we must "take our share of". Victor Hugo is to be commended for subjectivizing his title.

As caregivers, we are naturally called upon to welcome one by one those whose disrupted lives bear the scars of the wounds inflicted on them by the world. Our task is to help them mobilize their psychic resources in the face of the very thing that de-subjectifies them, reducing them to the objects of a fate presented as having no alternative. This space for discussion can only take place in the recognition, without resignation, of what prevails outside, where these subjects disappear to become problems, burdens, populations to be managed.

The habitat of madness, what is inhabiting?

We'll be talking about **precariousness as a symptom**. The original title of this talk was "*What accommodation for madness, what support for wandering?*", but clinical reflection has led us to distinguish between the question of **accommodation** and the question of **housing**. **To live is not just to be housed or accommodated**. To live is to be in a place in which one is inscribed by the succession of layers that introduce both separation and continuity between inside and outside. We all know **people who are housed, but who don't live there**. We also come across those who **live on the streets**, those who don't want to *leave the outside*, who can build a "home" there, but in total discontinuity with the outside world, without the thresholds that organize the transition between their cocoon and the world.

When it comes to "habitat and psychosis", there are three main areas:

- **those who are "inhabited by their psychosis"**, the construction that makes up their backbone, their signature, and who, when it doesn't hold without care, bring this construction to us in consultation (at the CMP);

- **those who live with their psychosis**, with the psychosis that invades their homes, with neighbors talking about them, with toxic products leaking through walls, ceilings and floors, and whose difficulties in cohabiting with their neighbors require the intervention of the ELIAHS (mobile social landlord liaison teams);

- **those**, finally, **who are** in no-man's-land, on the margins, **in the uninhabitable**, those who refuse to step outside, to be included. Let's call this land outside the world, barely clinging to its boundary, *Psychosia*. It is this radically external territory that the EMPP (mobile psychiatric precariousness team) surveys, exposing itself to an improbable encounter, or to its failure.

In preparing this talk, I came across the idea that **the first habitat of the speaker**, of the human being insofar as he is endowed with speech, **is the ear of the person who hears him**, even when he doesn't speak, or not yet. It dwells in the ear of the person who lends it psychic activity. This point explains the well-known fact that, among those who survive on the street, there is a large proportion of former foster children, who have suffered extreme difficulty in building and constructing a bond with that first other, who failed to lend them an ear, to give them a voice.

If we summon the genius of language, we'll say in French that **to inhabit is to have a *toi-t* above one's head**, which must be written with "T" (toît = roof) and without "T" toi = you). Writing in which the "toi" without a "T" is the other who speaks to us, who speaks of our existence before we speak. In religions, we address him by saying "toi". The one in priestly formulas in which the subject speaks "as it is said" and not "as it says". There's a phrase in the Passover liturgy: "*And you too, on this day, will say to your son, as it is* said", an injunction that indicates the debt we contract with the other when we speak.

To what subjection to the Other, to what debt, can they not consent, **those who inhabit the uninhabitable**?

They, who live, as I once read in a text whose references I've lost, "*drunk with space and unaware of time*", they, whom we meet in our streets, their exteriority to our world first arouses in the ordinary passer-by a dull unease that evokes *Das Unheimliche*, that disquieting strangeness of which Freud spoke. *Heim*, in German, means home, *heimlich* means secret, *unheimlich* frightening. **The disquieting strangeness, the familiar strangeness**, bears witness to the encounter with that which, in order to dwell together in the world, we have had to renounce, to endure no longer being one with ourselves.

Clinical encounters and routes

The boulevard's missing man

This solipsism (a position in which there is no reality for the subject other than himself), we have encountered in its most radical form in the person of **Bernard**, the boulevard's missing man.

This man, in his late fifties, used to walk the streets of our territory. People would pass him, chat, offer him cigarettes or coffee. He spoke little, we knew almost nothing about him; to any question, any offer of help, he'd say no. For us, standing in the radical outdoors, physically and psychologically, was sometimes trying. And to meet our fellow human beings, so dissimilar, we wanted to invite them into a sort of wandering home. So we set up a mobile office: a folding table, four stools, a bag with cups and coffee. For some people, this meant a time of meeting that lifted them off the ground.

One day, Bernard was on his bench on the boulevard, and we settled down to spend a moment with him. As he never said "yes" (he could take a cigarette without a word), one of us said "*you're not going to refuse a cup of coffee*? He replied "*no*", and took the cup. We spent a moment there, with the idea that this was the beginning of a welcome. But he disappeared. We couldn't find him, and our searches had found no evidence of his disappearance. We recently learned that he haunts other territories, crosses paths with other maraudes and mobile teams, rests in other temporary halts. **He has**, so to speak, **moved to a new "out of place".**

On that day, we undoubtedly committed two paradoxical and therefore frightening acts for the solipsistic position he (held himself) to: a tangible act - installing a little of our inside in his outside - and a verbal act - inserting his refusal into a question that transmuted it into acceptance. It wasn't premeditated, but it gave us, and still gives us, a lot to think about.

The resurrected Asylum

But to embody, to present, to make present the absence or the nothingness, is something other than saying. In this respect, **Azraël**, the resurrected man from the Asile, is like the other side of Bernard. I've called him that because he's an anagram of Lazarus, a better-known resurrectee. But for Azraël, the words that sustained the encounter were not "*get up and walk*" but "*sit down and talk*".

This was in 1986, when psychiatry in precarious situations didn't exist. For the past seven years, he'd been wandering around the area where I worked, more of a tramp than a hobo. He had lost everything that held his fragile life together: a partner, a child, a job, a home. He arrived at the H.P. where, forty years ago, one would enter as if in a mill, or an inn, being referred by a doctor who wrote to us "*has nowhere to go, has lost everything, seems depressed*". On his arrival, he himself had asked only for practical solutions to his practical distress. Twice, the "practical" answers (foster care) failed. So we had to decide that beneath the social complaint, there was something to do with psychiatry. For several months, **"nothing" saturated his words**: "*I have nothing, I am nothing, I can do nothing, I understand nothing, I think nothing, I want nothing*" and even, when he was totally dependent, "*I ask for nothing*".

For my part, exhausted by this nihilistic tsunami, I finally said to him one day, "*Well, thanks to you, I'm going to become famous. I'm going to write that **I met a nothing and he talked to me**". And then something incalculable happens, and therefore miraculous, even if in the aftermath it becomes legible and makes legible what has preceded and what will follow. He replies, "*It's not the same with you, because I have a place*. From there, a long process began, lasting almost two years, during which he rediscovered what had seemed lost forever, enabling him to ask for and accept the help and assistance he needed to return to the world. His response to my statement, the equivocality of which only became clear to me much later (what did he mean by "place": a shelter for his body, a place for his speech?) is perhaps what led me to the rather bizarre idea of **the habitat in the ear**. It also explains our proposal to distinguish between accommodation and habitat.

The motionless wanderer: with "toi" or without "toît"?

Élise is an enigma. She's a 70-year-old woman whom we've met hundreds of times, without ever really knowing her, or rather without knowing much about her at all.

EMPP meets Élise in 2020 on the platform of metro 14 at *Olympiades*. Her face hidden by graying hair, dressed in oversized clothes, she seems intent on disappearing. A striking paradox: she holds out her hand to beg, then rejects the alms.

Élise was born to a French father and a Vietnamese mother. We don't know if she has any brothers or sisters. When her parents died, she says she voluntarily left her home "*to be freer*". She has been homeless for over twenty years.

At present, she lives in the common areas of a shopping center and adjacent housing. Security guards, residents and shopkeepers make up her circle of acquaintances, constituting a neighborhood that is also an entourage. This concern for her entourage has led to the creation of a WhatsApp group by a local resident, called "SOS Élise", a watch and support group to which our team has been integrated.

Élise's identity had long been unclear and shifting, but persistent research finally led in 2024 to the discovery of a birth certificate, making it possible to set up a legal protection measure and apply for resources.

Élise, while requesting stable accommodation, notably within a religious congregation, refuses all proposals, even when they coincide with her requests. One might think that these requests constitute a link with us, rather than a genuine expectation of satisfaction.

Despite our long-term, regular presence, which she readily accepts, as soon as we mention our role as part of the care team, she immediately goes on the defensive, showing a deep mistrust of any proposal that comes within the idea of care. It has to be said that her psychic state is very stable, even if she adopts a position and style that confuse and worry us.

In the time we've known her, her physical health has seriously deteriorated. Extremely emaciated, she regularly had wounds on her face and skull, probably the result of falls or violence. These injuries led to multiple emergency room visits and two psychiatric hospitalizations, one of which was organized by the EMPP. One winter evening, Élise's life was turned upside down. Discovered unconscious and freezing at 31°, she had a near-death experience; she was able to benefit from the intensive care she needed, and eventually overcame her ordeal. Despite this ordeal and her repeated hospitalizations, her situation changed little, and she was soon back on the streets, refusing all the solutions offered.

Élise's refusal to be accommodated or cared for puts healthcare professionals in a delicate situation. This deeply personal choice highlights the limits of **support**, while underlining the crucial importance of our **presence**.

If we can speak of her as an **immobile wanderer**, it's because, although geographically fixed, it seems to us that she doesn't inhabit our world, but stands in **an enclave**, held by the entourage that has somehow "adopted" her.

The wandering occupant : with "toi" for a "toit" ?

In January 2023, we met 33-year-old **Sarah** at a day shelter for homeless women. Her story, marked by placements from the age of twelve, has led her to an erratic existence, oscillating between the streets and hospitals. Officially living in the provinces, she has a home that she says she cannot occupy, due to the presence of illegal, hostile or dangerous occupants. She arrived in Paris in 2021, where she had previously stayed and been hospitalized as a DIRP (Unknown Address in the Paris region, the new name for the homeless). At the Day Center of the Cité des Dames, she was able to establish a recurring presence, which enabled her to envisage treatment, but the street was catching up with her. Her addiction to crack cocaine, combined with a profound sense of loneliness, made her journey particularly difficult. Despite our efforts to support and stabilize her, Sarah broke away from care on several occasions, living on the streets under a tent that she set up in various places.

Lost from sight between July and December 2023, Sarah reappeared, unrecognizable. The after-effects of her traumatic street experiences were evident: extreme fragility, a more critical psychiatric picture, with recurrent suicidal ideation and violence turned against herself and her environment. Sarah seems trapped in a self-destructive spiral. Every breakthrough is quickly followed by a relapse, **as if the street were inexorably drawing her back**. Despite everything, the shelter is holding up better. She is increasingly in touch with the professionals and, above all, the other residents. At the reception desk, each of them helps her listen to music (on loan from the telephone), comb her hair... They are all learning to live together. But moments of crisis and acts of aggression (suicidal crises, thefts), which frustrate an institutional environment and a family and friends ill-prepared to deal with such situations, eventually lead to her exclusion; this at a time when she is beginning to be enrolled in sector care (CMP) and a housing project is being drawn up.

In addition to her ambivalence, the "administrative" obstacles to accommodation projects give us a hard time: she has a lease in the provinces, which the guardianship judge refuses to terminate as long as she has no accommodation, but the accommodation we are trying to set up with the "*Un Chez Soi d'Abord*" (A Home First) teams is only for people without housing. So we have to negotiate valiantly, convinced that the clinical situation must take precedence over procedural frameworks.

In September 2024, Sarah was finally accepted into "*Un Chez Soi d'Abord*". We call on all our partners in precarious employment to find her and tell her that housing is waiting for her.

The tenuous link with the EMPP holds, we put up with her absences, maintain our proposals and manage to arrange for her to take her medication at the CMP. Finally, Sarah has been in regular contact with the CDD for seven months, which is a significant step forward. It's the first time she's endured such a long period without disappearing. The housing project has been a real driving force for her, offering her a perspective for the future and reinforcing her motivation. This success is the fruit of close collaboration between the EMPP, the CDD and the CMP, whose links have enabled the construction of **a "discontinuous continuity"**, i.e. a flexible articulation, capable of containing the attacks on the framework that are one of Sarah's symptoms.

We hope that the proposal to have a "home", built from care and encounters with Sarah and not just in the space of "social law", will enable her to **really live**, and no longer be the vagrant occupant of places she can't manage to invest.

From closed to open: an itinerary of hospitalities

The transition from working as **a nurse** in a closed psychiatric ward to working as an EMPP nurse led the team's nurse to question the differences between these roles, and more generally the main differences between caring for people suffering from psychiatric disorders on the outside and in closed hospitalization.

EMPP nurses work in the field, with precarious populations living on the streets, in shelters, or in various daytime structures (ESI, halts, etc.). When these people suffer from psychiatric disorders, they are often far removed from the traditional healthcare system. The aim is to reach out to these individuals, who have no access to, or do not wish to benefit from, existing health services.

Nursing work in the EMPP is non-institutionalized and fairly informal, whereas in a closed psychiatric unit, interventions take place in distinct, identified areas (closed rooms, open rooms, common areas, infirmary), which determine the working methods. The environment is highly institutionalized, with strict safety and care protocols.

In a closed hospital environment, patients are admitted under duress, which can lead to conflictual relations with caregivers. Nurses can sometimes impose care. The aim, in the long or short term, is to enable the patient to understand that care is necessary to improve his or her condition. The nurse needs to establish a long-term, sympathetic listening relationship, but the urgency of the situation can sometimes hinder this process. On the other hand, the relationship between **EMPP** nurses and patients is based on an assumption of agreement. Patients are not in a situation where they are obliged to provide care, so the aim is to create a bond of trust. Patients are often reluctant to undergo psychiatric care, which they see as stigmatizing, and those living in precarious conditions may perceive it as an additional problem. It's vital to give them the time they need.

Whereas in the hospital environment, nurses work under medical supervision, within a framework strictly defined by law (notably the law on hospitalization without consent), **EMPP** nurses enjoy considerable autonomy in managing their work. They have to adapt to the realities of the field, and work in coordination with various players. Their role is primarily focused on prevention, care and psychosocial support. They assess patients' situations, identify their mental health needs and refer them to appropriate care structures. Interventions may include street consultations, visits to shelters, impromptu encounters, such as during "maraudes", and the aim is also acceptance of care and social assistance, but without the support of mainstream care structures.

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Having identified the differences between these two care situations, it's worth defining the points that define the framework within which an EMPP nurse can support people who are wandering.

- Physically **go where people are** and adapt to their living environment. You can't just wait for people to arrive, you have to actively reach out to them.

- For migrants suffering from mental illness, adapt your approach to take account of each person's beliefs and customs. It's important to **recognize their history prior to their arrival in precarious circumstances**, and to avoid an exclusively "Western" approach.

- Put people's needs at the center of the exchange, without judgment. Create a space of trust and security to facilitate access to care. Offer and **negotiate care**, even if it takes time.

- Patience and negotiation (more than force and rage): negotiating care can be a long process. Don't expect an immediate result, but **work patiently** to reach an agreement.

- Put up with refusals of care and missed appointments. **Continue despite fluctuations**.

- Having a diverse network of professionals is invaluable for **obtaining different points of view** on more or less complex situations and finding solutions collectively.

These positions ensure respectful, effective and humane support. As Patrick Declerck put it in his book *Les Naufragés*: "*Sometimes all it takes is a gesture, an attentive ear, for a broken man to rediscover for a moment the desire to move forward*.

Accompanying wandering, maintaining permanence in impermanence

What guidance do these encounters and experiences give us in the singular task of accompanying wanderers?

The walls of the hospital contain patients, and allow caregivers to localize their decisions and actions. They assure us that we know where to find those in our care. They are the framework that welcomes, protects and prescribes. The request for care, which underpins our work, is backed up and guaranteed by the tangible framework, whether the patient is admitted for free care or at the request of the third party concerned, privately or legally. The body, enveloped, held, contained and located within the

frame, is recognized as the "patient's body" in a presence and stability that enable the constitution of a place and a time for encounter, allowing projection into a certain continuity of the link, i.e. of care.

But with those who are "out there", with no concerned entourage, without creating a public disturbance, with no demand for care, what constitutes the space-time of the encounter? And those, like Sarah, who, while seeking care, are unable to settle down, wandering far from the places where they should "go" (would this be a surrender?), how do we meet them? How can we, as caregivers**, make impermanence permanent**?

This question arose in a specific circumstance, namely when the *Reception Hosting Insertion* psychologists were asked by the Day Center teams to be on hand to receive people in distress who passed through their doors. This led to **a moment of collective anguish**, after several attempts to set up an office were thwarted by the absence of wandering subjects. The experience of confronting the emptiness of this absence goes beyond the absence of bodies; with fixed wanderers like Élise, whose presence is so enigmatic, it's difficult to situate ourselves as caregivers: to care for whom, to care for what? Élise, like a few others, it was only when her body gave us sufficient cause for concern that we allowed ourselves to force her refusal, to bring her, briefly, into a care system and offer of care. But she didn't take it.

The fact that she, like so many others, has not seized this opportunity raises the question of **the legitimacy of our interventions**, when faced with those who ask nothing of us in the field of care, or even who demonstrate a determined refusal in the face of all our attempts. What is our legitimacy in the face of what appears to be their freedom, and what kind of freedom is it? The freedom to show that they are not one of us, that they do not belong to this plural.

In the film *Gravity*, there's a scene that fixed for me the representation of **the psychotic figure of freedom**. George and Sandra are disarrayed from their place of refuge, the space station, but attached to each other. They no longer have enough fuel to return to the station. George cuts his moorings and is instantly sucked into the vacuum of space. A striking figure of a freedom that is not caught up in any alienation, that makes the subject disappear without a trace from the world whose mark it refuses to bear. But our own freedom stems from a desire and a conviction that we are not free to escape: that **they are ours**. Together, in this shared desire, which preserves us from what might otherwise take on an erotomaniacal or persecutory tone, we persevere. What we tell ourselves, for example about Élise, is that she hasn't grasped our proposals, not yet. **We persevere**.

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[Aʀᴛs]

This is Éric Brunier's third study of this pictorial modernity (initiated by Delacroix and continued by Manet) that he calls *CouleurS*, the relative autonomy, on canvas, of pictorial relationships between colors emancipating themselves from the tutelage of drawing and its contours.

This study takes the form of a prose investigation, in which prosodic enunciation strives to subjectively embrace the pictorial discourse of the painting (François Wahl) rather than examining it from a distance according to an objectifying, positivist captation.

Indeed, for Éric Brunier, the focus of his study is the pictorial gaze, the very thing that interweaves the viewer's eye with that which the canvas gives form to in the painting.

A *reduplication*, then (if it's true that we can only speak of the subject of *painting* as a subject transfixed by a pictorial gaze - a singular gaze that gives nothing back to the ordinary gazes cast on the common things of the world), which implies reading these literary texts by embracing the twists and turns of prose, just as a gaze cast on a painting embraces the twists and turns of pictorial discourse materialized by the canvas: in literature, as in the arts, knowledge, and therefore appropriation, can only be initiated by subjective capture.

Éʀɪᴄ Bʀᴜɴɪᴇʀ: *Mᴀɴᴇᴛ ᴀɴᴅ ᴛʜᴇ ɪᴍᴍᴏʀᴛᴀʟɪᴛʏ ᴏғ ᴛʜᴇ CᴏʟᴏʀS*

Another Manet

The tenacity of a glance, albeit hastily cast, indicates to me the content of Manet's painting. **This tenacious glance** that the painting casts, which regulates the way I dispose of it, has to do with a triple alliance. Like the steps of a modern ballet, in which bodies cross, brush against each other, come together and then twirl, each to its own rhythm, according to an internal, secret motif, the still paintings show figures in the exploit of a new apparition, such as the woman with a guitar emerging from a café eating cherries (Fig.1), such as the maid bursting in with her bouquet *for Olympia* (Fig.2), or such as the two women, one standing, her hands fiddling with gloves, and the other seated, her forearm resting on the *Balcony* handrail (Fig.3). While my gaze hasn't yet been able to take in their presence, and my attitude hasn't yet adjusted to theirs, it's **the instability painted in the painting** that governs my swaying: I hesitate, I wonder, and then I'm carried away by the firm decision to stare at them without restraint.

The same is true of Manet's brushwork, which frankly spreads its macules, signals its presence in patches of color and, nevertheless, knows how to be discreet by hugging the flesh of the courtesan in *Olympia* (not to mention the brown ring that takes longer to appear to me). In *Le Balcon*, **the tint, though black**, illuminates the darkness of a salon through the almost sculptural work of the modeling, or becomes the equivalent of the house painter's in the acid green of the railing. And it's **this contrasting sway** that makes us feel the thick heaviness of a gray skirt, whose airy frou-frou can be heard.

The colors in Manet's paintings always seem to me here massive, heavy as lead, and there lifted by the flutter of the hand. At one and the same time, there is an affirmation of the pictorial paste and the disappearance of this same paste thanks to the multiple processes of representation. There is both *CouleurS*, a new orchestration of hues emancipated from the rules of drawing, and coulures, bursts of colored matter, hastily discarded stains.

Manet clearly understood that the visible effect of painting, the evidence of what it paints, is not just a matter of accurate drawing. He uses these various techniques without seeking to harmonize them. This is not the proof of an incoherent work, of eagerness or exalted improvisation. This way of **making the painting waver**, of dragging it along in a whirlwind, ultimately complicates the women's gaze. It's at once furtive, as if in passing, and invested with my restraint, a gaze that's stealthy and steady, almost haughty, luminous and impenetrable. A gaze that is brief but extended to the whole face, even reverberating across the canvas, as in this *Portrait of Victorine Meurent* (Fig.4) (the same model as *La Chanteuse des rues* and *Olympia*).

Fig. 1 The Street Singer, circa 1862
(© Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

Fig. 2: Olympia, 1863,
(© Orsay, Paris)

Fig. 3: The Balcony, 1868-69
(© Orsay, Paris)

Fig. 4: Portrait of V. Meurent, circa 1862
(© Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

These paintings create **a face-to-face confrontation between two gazes**. And they are also portraits of a confrontation with another, either because they are looking at themselves, or because the painter has frozen his own gaze in them.

In the tightly framed portrait of Victorine Meurent, I have the relief of her head, with the kerchief clasping her abundant hair in the shadow of the nape of her neck, and the nose and chin as if crushed by a pane of glass, I have the volume of a head I could clasp with my hands, and the surface of a face. The portrait is concentrated in a strained, almost piercing gaze, and from the head I have magical access to the whole body that supports it. Her gaze is a living torch, marching ahead of passers-by, whose flame no sun can extinguish. The more I look at her, the more she appears to me and the more she flees. Painting fast, using swift, bold colors, and painting the sparkle of a woman whose very act of posing is an act of affirmation.

In the same way that a face immortalizes an encounter and preludes a definitive moment, *CouleurS* is the body-accord between the material hue, the pigment mixed with oil and its trace on the canvas, or better still, its writing, its notation. *CouleurS* masons the neck, the chin, even the lips, hemmed in shadow, and carries the combed caress of light and dark. The face promises a sensitive encounter and displays the black ocean where the other has withdrawn. The portrait is that of a person and a mask. But let the painting invite me in, and so **I dive in, drawn by what lies there of azure and sky immense** but round but enclosed by a background of brown opacity.

When I look at a Manet painting, I make the assumption that the painted figure still retains the model's gaze**,** that **the screen is crossed**. We stare at each other. And I also envisage that **painting has itself become a gaze**, that **the seizure** these paintings paint **is as much that of the characters as it is mine**. The agitation and movement of painting is also an upheaval that affects me. The gaze is not one. It multiplies in direction, intensity and mobility. This multiplicity then becomes the subject of Manet's work. I stare at his frozen pupils and envisage a mobile body.

Modernities, Manet

A common narrative is that modernity was born on the ruins of the Romantic ideal. The naïveté of the old world, where the beauty of the body reigned, the harmony between nature and humanity continued, charity and generosity were equally widespread, proved inaccessible. Artistic modernity would have replaced this idealized image of the world with the real existence of class and gender struggles. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil)* are the result of this shift. They are both a cruel testimony and a complaint. Hence the ambivalence in the collection of its twilight motif, the melancholy of the setting sun of new times and the sadism of the poet growing claws.

The poetic world in which Baudelaire struggles, however, has retained its bite, and I want to see in it the real horizon of his poetry. His poetry not only captures the ravages of capitalism, it also produces its trials. His anger is necessary, and makes it clear that no poem can resign itself to the realism that exists. If *Les Fleurs du mal* depicts a world where largely imaginary melancholy and sadism touch us, it's because his poems have brought about a real transformation of poetry by backing it up on the one hand with **the music of words**, and on the other with the vignette of the soap opera. This **verbal music** has the consistency of colored strokes, and the soap opera develops in the arabesque of his narratives. The imaginary representation he develops of the Romantic world lends greater weight to the task he has set himself of transforming poetry for real.

This is also the task he sets for The *Painter of Modern Life*, which he sums up in a paradox: he draws "*the eternal from the transitory*". Later, in this essay, we read: "*for all modernity to be worthy of becoming antiquity, the mysterious beauty that human life involuntarily puts into it must have been extracted.*" **To draw the eternal from the transitory** in a painting or a poem is not to copy or record what existence presents, but to imagine how this occasional presence, this circumstance can transform the various arts. Each art form, according to Baudelaire, is measured by its capacity to transform itself. This is revealed when, through the fleeting image of contemporary existence, an eternal form is revealed. In his poetics, he uses the metaphor of alchemy. But the image is deceptive: the transformation is not aimed at the world described, but at the poem itself.

According to some, Manet put Baudelaire's poetics into pictorial form, transforming painting by painting "modern" subjects: a street singer leaving a café, middle-class people on their balconies watching a street show, and a modern Venus painted like a store sign. But Manet didn't limit himself to drawing subjects from the street and contemporary life. He also transformed the way he painted them.

> *Olympia* would give nineteenth-century painting its "representation" of beauty. The feminine ideal is presented in the raw flesh of nudity, and the academic nude is reduced to the level of a commodity. This approach to Manet's work is the result of a social history of art. This history is often content to see paintings as reflections of social conflicts, and the evolution of painting is both technical and conditional on social evolution. The social history of modern art, for which Baudelaire and Manet are the touchstone for poetry and painting, is uninterested in the dynamics of each art form. The ability to intervene is shifted from the work to the reader or viewer, to the judge, since the work is no more than a mediation between the context in which it was created and the reader or viewer of that world. Such a history turns modernity into an interrogation of value. It sees Manet through the lens of Baudelaire, who is said to have turned waste into art. The painter is then made the first of the moderns and postmoderns, being as much the ancestor of Duchamp and the ready-made as of Jeff Koons and the glitter of provocation. To present Manet in this way is to remove from his work **all its power to transform the viewer**.

Yet Manet is also the starting point for the so-called "formalist" (or modernist) discourse on art, which Duchamp would have disqualified in advance. In Greenberg's words, modernists attribute to Manet **the frank manifestation of the surface through which painting is made**. Manet's contribution to modernity lies less in the eloquence of his subjects than in his style. Already, some of the painter's contemporaries were shocked by this overly rushed style, or on the contrary, were enthusiastic about it. It was Mallarmé who formulated this new way of painting, calling it the "*pollen of the flesh*". It no longer consists, as Baudelaire wanted, in an encounter with the eternal or the ancient. It's more than the blush and ointment that make nature's stains disappear from the complexion. The pollen of flesh has taken its effects from make-up, but displaced into a mental operation, into the symbolicity of the pictorial act that immortalizes an instant. The occasional is associated with the absolute by the very

fact that painting suspends the transitory. The pollen of the flesh is first and foremost the special complexion of the woman, a being of the interior and of the night, seen in the light of day. It's about painting her, as her appearance, vivid and simple, haunts the imagination. It means painting the air that surrounds her, even though no hue exists to paint its transparency. Lightness or accentuation of paste make up for the lack insofar as they mark not only the features but also the place where the atmosphere is held.

Mallarmé's Manet is Impressionist in appearance only, a painter of plein air and the submission of painting to the optical divisions of color. He is modern because he subjects painting to its own rules, of which the woman's face is the embodiment, because she is still socially the being of the interior and of the night, but, imaginatively, already in the open air. The open air, i.e. painting the transparent atmosphere with colored divisions, finds its full justification in Manet's interior paintings. The operation is mental, abstract and geometric. The division of colors and the affirmation of pictorial material are held together in a meditative realization where the particularizing selection of the frame merges, for a moment, with the mirage of a natural or mundane scene.

Whereas classical painting, thanks to linear perspective, takes me into a world regulated by transcendence opposed to earthly finitude, modern painting, with Manet, seems to **bring a hidden infinity out of the contemporary, transitory world**. What makes Manet's paintings so singular depends less on their motif than on their ability to fix an instant. Manet has singled out painting for its ephemeral point of appearance. He paints illuminations.

And so it is with this *Chanteuse des rues*, at once a representation of a being whom the world of the 19th^{ème} century likened to a ragpicker, a modern subject in the Baudelairian sense par excellence, and, with her neat dress, a coquette emerging from a café. Everything in this painting seems to proceed from the in-between, the figure standing on the threshold, out but not quite out since, strangely, a door has been left open, on his way out but stopped since his two feet on the ground indicate an immobile posture, the dominant grey hue between dog and wolf, and these hands, the busy left barely supporting cherries in a paper cone, clutching a guitar by its neck and pinching the skirt to lift it, opposite the delicate right, which is holding two cherries to its mouth. On the pallid, over-lit face, this bright spot of red. In the gray, fading day, color. The figure seems to be a being of the night, made up by the red of the cherries. But the vertical eyebrows are shadows under which the eyes are excavated.

Manet's painting transforms a social subject, perhaps even a moral vignette, into a pictorial subject, a lesson in color. The two drops of red that have momentarily passed from the cone to the mouth, that the hand has taken from a chaotic multiplicity, are like the translation of colors from the palette to the canvas. The hand itself seems to apply them to the face. Certainly, as Baudelaire wrote of Delacroix's paintings, the imagination has already completed the scene even before the painting has been perceived. Manet, like Delacroix, provokes a synthetic rather than analytical vision, in which the totality of the painting's effects exceeds its parts.

There is a work of painting, just as there is a work of dreaming, according to Freud. Like the bedroom, the painting is double: the walker finds what he has already seen, a scene from Parisian life, but recomposed, arranged according to new coordinates. But if he is careful, he may also encounter the unexpected, which has no connection with his strolling life. Stopped, **he watches the work being done in the painting and in himself**.

Dreams thus accomplish a double task. It kneads and stirs up the detritus of daytime life, and provokes those imaginary yet lucid impressions that awaken and free us from gravity. The dream, like the hand on the palette, like the eye of the flâneur on the canvas, separates and assembles. The painting is then a lacunar, perforated surface that already envelops you. The intriguing detaches itself from the banal. A hieroglyph appears, to be studied and followed, incomprehensible at first, then sustained, and precise in its action and effects. At first, the colors seemed a flattering blend that enveloped you. Then, the hand conjured up a phrase of the visible that appealed to your sensitive imagination. *La Chanteuse des rues* is not a downgraded existence, a reject to provoke pity or the seductive appeal of an equivocal woman. It doesn't simply reward patient contemplation with the brilliance of color. It shows **the possible path of incorporation into the visible**, providing the impetus for progress.

The colored spot and the look

A figure stares at me. A silent call or the impenetrable wall of a mask. Human beings, animals or even paintings, those who feel they are being watched look up in turn. Envisioned, he also envisions this other. Conversely, Manet's painting mysteriously responds to the movement of the crowd's eyes through the vibration of the canvas.

Walter Benjamin identified the attraction that the gaze exerts on the other with the *aura*, the appearance of a distance as close as it may be. This refers to an indolent gaze, frozen or petrified by the presence of the natural dream, when impassivity and illusion merge. In previous articles, I have indicated that *ColorS* is the opposite movement, an apparition as close as it may be, **a glimmer of the distant**. The gaze is then awake, lucid because materially localized. The cherries that the street singer brings to her mouth draw us out of the abyss of her gaze and animate her pallid face, while the fleshy, pink mouth of Victorine Meurent's portrait, whose circumflex design recalls that of the eyebrows and the knot on her hair, asserts her stubborn decision.

The ability of *ColorS* to make an imaginary element in the distance appear to the eye with the same brilliance as an illuminated element in the foreground, without disrupting any relief effect, stems from the optical division of colors, which made it possible to tint the atmosphere. Its most famous initiator is **Delacroix**, whose "flochetage" technique consists of juxtaposing small touches of pure color to obtain a half-tone by optical mixing. Open-air painting, in which the surface of the motifs vibrates under the effect of changing light, corresponds to the division technique and even allows for its deepening. With this technique, hues are recomposed in the eye, and the optical mixing that takes place in the air results in brighter hues. The atmosphere surrounding the subject reinforces the harmony between the technique and the painted motif. After Delacroix, this technique was developed by certain Impressionists and then by the Divisionists, whose artistic merit seems to lie in imitating the flow of perceptions. Manet's painting is sensitive to it, and sometimes even uses it for a different purpose. Manet did not subject his painting to a single technique.

This proliferation of colors in a shimmering ensemble for the eye has developed to such an extent that even **Ingres**, the painter who is said to be all about drawing, succumbed to it. All his life, he painted portraits of high society women, some of them in dresses that multiply color combinations. When it's not the costume, it's the draperies and sheets surrounding his subjects that are the medium for these exercises in high color.

In his portrait of *Madame Moitessier* (1856, National Gallery, London) (Fig. 5), where the model wears a white dress with variegated flowers, gray paint dulls the folds in the shadows. Ingres did not use the "flochetage" technique, but the bunches of fabric in the dress juxtapose numerous hues. Yet in the foreground of the painting, Ingres has left a stain that nothing in the composition explains. The stain is what appears and stops the infinite proliferation of colors.

In a painting like *The Reading* (Fig. 6), an infinite variety of colors proliferates, seemingly unstoppable. Traces of paint multiply their exuberance. However, in this endless variation, one touch stands out: the blue stain on the model's back. Taken as a detail, it blurs the overall figure, rendering the painting "illegible". It is both locally insignificant and globally structuring: it is projected onto the newspaper held by the model, and is reflected in an attenuated way on her face. It brings a distance into the foreground. It focuses my imagination on the hidden side of the newspaper, at the very point where the reader's gaze is concentrated. In this way, Manet was able to **render a look through a stain**, to compose material and notation in color, to create a *ColorS*. So, in this painting, color exists in **three forms**: as a linking element, fusing the gray of the newspaper in the foreground with a hanging or window behind it; as a division of greens, rendering the vibration of foliage; and as the tracery of a gaze.

Manet's painting thus works within *ColorS* to **divide and articulate** what in it is the radiation and vibration of the surface and what in its paste materializes a trace. The latter is not a drawing, just as Pollock's coulures, de Kooning's sweeping gestures or Soulages' striations are not drawings.

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Manet thus articulates **two moments** of poetic and pictorial modernity, which would develop in **two directions**: on the one hand, **modernist reductionism**, which by dint of narrowing its field became saturated, and on the other, **critical modernity**, which we now know leads to the dead-ends of postmodernity. But Manet's work itself stands **upstream of this division**, dividing color according to its optical dynamics and its material capacity to trace a gaze. He thus continues the emancipation of *ColorS* from narrative, and adds complexity to our understanding of it. He inaugurates new

possibilities in what initially appeared as a limit of painting, a limit of the visible. To better convince us of the modernity of his work, he has concentrated his efforts, almost exclusively, on contemporary subjects that confound the major genres of painting. Rather than being directed against drawing, Manet's paintings seem to attack pictorial genres with their rhetoric. With him, we must conclude that **modernity is truth removed from the artifices of eloquence**. He is the one who teaches us to look at painting, to **look at** it for what it is and **how we become one with its appearance**.

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This is the third part of Guillaume Nicolas's architectural study of Normandy's clos-masures.

Guillaume NICOLAS: *THINKING ABOUT THE INTERWEAVING OF HOUSING AND WORK IN AGRICULTURE*

Preamble

Study peasant agriculture in France and criticize the widespread industrialization of production methods

This article discusses the relationship between the activities of living and working. It follows on from the work of the *Longues marches* group, which initiated political investigations on a global scale, on the one hand into the places where the masses live - slums - and on the other into their places of work - factories. It then occurred to me that the places on which I conduct my own academic research - contemporary farms in Normandy **- are places where living and working are closely associated**. In particular, farms that are part of the neo-peasant internationalist political project[1] seem to me worth studying.

One might immediately object that this is an exceptional situation, since agricultural work is anecdotal in France today[2] and that the situation needs to be considered on a global and mass scale. However, on a communist horizon, it seems to me that the share of agricultural work (or rather of a certain type of work - see below) should be drastically revalued upwards[3] to ensure a fair and healthy diet[4] . In this sense, the question of agricultural labor should not be systematically pushed into the background, behind that which takes place in factories, under the guise of non-representativeness of the masses. For a number of players, the future of the masses in France also lies in agriculture.

Moreover, the writing of this article, which coincides with the publication of a "map of ecological thought"[5] , leads me to openly assume a **critical stance towards industrial modes of production**. Here, I am touching on a taboo of Marxism by envisaging a (partial?) exit of agriculture from this mode of production, by questioning the division of labor and by considering more artisanal, even non-commodity production, in a perspective of non-consumptive subsistence[6] . In doing so, I immediately expose myself to criticism, as this petty-bourgeois ideology would be idealistic. It couldn't possibly apply to working-class neighborhoods: a single mother with several precarious jobs, exhausted and barely seeing her children in the morning and evening, couldn't possibly indulge in these subsistence practices. This is true as our society is organized. However, others like me are writing from working-

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[1] A project supported in France by the Confédération Paysanne union and at the international level by the *Via Campesina* movement.

[2] According to INSEE, agriculture accounted for just 2.5% of employment in France in 2018. This is followed by construction (6.7%), industry (13.3%) and the service sector (76.1%). The breakdown of GDP is similar in 2022 between agriculture (1.8%), industry (17.8%) and the tertiary sector (70.32%), according to statista.com.

[3] I'm following in the footsteps of Atelier Paysan and its manifesto *Reprendre la terre aux machines*, *Manifeste pour une autonomie paysanne et alimentaire*, Le Seuil, 2021.

[4] See the conclusion of Alain Rallet's article "*Anatomy of the peasant question today*", *Longues marches,* issue 2, June 2024.

[5] Map downloadable here and produced by the new magazine *Fracas* (born of a split from *Socialter* magazine, the new magazine aiming to be more politically radical) and by journalist Thomas Wagner, creator of the *Bon pote* media.

[6] Geneviève PRUVOST, *La subsistance au quotidien: conter ce qui compte*, La Découverte, 2024.

class neighborhoods, and envisage **the possibility of an authentically grassroots ecology** in which subsistence would have its place .[7]

On the other hand, the capitalist industrial mode of production closely associates two types of objectives: i) productivity gains (which communism could only wish for) and ii) an increase in capital through investment in production tools. These financial investments, which serve to remunerate capital, demand returns on investment and a headlong rush[8] towards *endless* industrialization, in both senses of the word: with no time limit and no objective other than its own development. From being a means to an end, industry becomes an end in itself. Technology loses its social and political grip.

My hypothesis is that, if capitalism is not an unsurpassable horizon for humanity, there's no reason why the industrial mode of production, which is intimately linked to it, should be. If, contrary to the words of an American president, our way of life is negotiable[9] , then so must be our mode of production. And we should be able to think about this in communist friendship without immediately being branded a Malthusian petit bourgeois.

Clearly, the shift to these new modes of production raises enormous questions. Socialism had to face them. It's just as clear that we mustn't fall into abstract idealism, but base ourselves on existing material and concrete experiences, with all due lucidity as to the conditions for their realization. But I believe that we must be able to envisage these paths, if only because **new types of farmers** are claiming and practicing them.[10]

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After this long but necessary preamble, let's turn to the question of the knot between living and working.

Housing is an invention

Although housing is as old as humanity itself, **it was invented by industrial capitalism in the 19th century**. Housing for the working masses was based on the principle of **strict separation from the workplace**, embodied by the factory[11] . This conception and practice of housing thus differed from those of pre-industrial society, with its artisan workshops and later factories, historic towns and suburbs, where people lived at or near their place of work. This invention of housing went hand in hand with **social norms** stemming from and promoted by the bourgeoisie, embodied in housing regulations that authorized and, above all, prohibited a certain number of activities. In this sense, housing is a **tool of** social **prescription**, control and, possibly, sanction. **The logic of** the contractual **subordination** of salaried work, decided, controlled and sanctioned by the employer, is extended here.

While living and working are spatially **separated** in industrial capitalism, they are **united** by the same logic of subordination of the worker/tenant to the employer/landlord. This is particularly striking in the case of the Sonacotra migrant workers' hostels, which have become Adoma social residences[12] . Let's draw a parallel here with the criteria of wage tutelage identified in the article in this same issue on Communes populaires .[13]

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[7] Fatima OUASSAK, *Pour une écologie pirate, Et nous seront libres*, La Découverte, 2023.

[8] On this subject, see for example the book by Nelo MAGALHAES, *Accumuler du béton, tracer des routes, Une histoire environnementale des grandes infrastructures*, ed. La Fabrique, 2024.

[9] It's worth noting that George Bush uttered this phrase in 1992, not in the face of the communist threat, but in the context of the Rio "Earth Summit", in the face of the risk of binding international agreements on the environment.

[10] cf. the organizations already mentioned: Confédération Paysanne and Atelier Paysan in France, Via Campesina internationally

[11] Paul LANDAUER, "*La fin du logement*" in *Habiter. Imaginons l'évidence*, Dominique Carré, 2013, p. 3438-.

[12] Judith BALSO, "*From hostel to 'social residence'*", d'*Architectures*, n°251, March 2017

[13] Part II: *Alienation and emancipation of salaried workers*

	WORK	LIVE AT
oppression of the **power**	work is polymorphous	housing is polymorphous, and capitalist oppression reduces it to housing.
exploitation of **strength** (via contract)	labor hire contract	apartment rental contract
domination of **activity** :	**the employer :**	**the lessor :**
• by **decision**	• *decides* the job;	• allocates the accommodation and *decides on* the internal regulations;
• per **control**	• *checks* the work done;	• (through the janitor and then the remote surveillance system) checks whether the way of living is compliant;
• by **sanction**	• may *sanction*.	• may *sanction*.

Continuing this history of housing in the 20th century, modern urban planning then established this spatial separation as a standard and applied its principles at the time of Reconstruction and then in the extension of cities. The *Athens Charter*, finalized in 1933 but published in 1943[14] , prescribed the **separation of major urban functions**: living, working, leisure and traffic. The necessary separation of uses would no longer take place on the scale of a room or a building, or even a block, but on the scale of urban zones, which would henceforth be monofunctional. It was on the basis of these theoretical principles that, from the 1950s onwards, France gave birth to large housing estates built *ex nihilo* and to dormitory suburbs, whose name reflects their monofunctionality. This ideology is also at the root of urban transport congestion and the waste of individual time and collective energy spent taking the metro or train from work to bed.

In reaction to this functionalist approach, post-modernism emerged at the turn of the 1975-80s, invoking the **cohabitation of urban functions on a neighborhood scale**:

> "Any intervention in the European city must create what has always been the city: streets, squares, avenues, blocks, gardens... in other words, "neighborhoods". On the other hand, any intervention in the European city must banish urban roads and freeways, monofunctional zones and residual green spaces. There can be no "industrial" zones, no "shopping" zones, no "pedestrian" zones... but only neighborhoods that include all the functions of urban life."

> Barey André, Culot Maurice, Lefèbvre Philippe (1980), Brussels *Declaration* [15]

This criticism was echoed in French public policy with the creation of new towns. But the country's de-industrialization was already underway, and these new towns barely integrated the tertiary service economy in terms of employment.

As a new and contemporary **point**, we had to wait another forty years[16] to realize that the principle of separation of urban functions had obscured another separation, that of **the progressive exclusion of agricultural production from urban space**. Its corollary was the advent of **agricultural specialization in a rural world** that had previously also been functionally mixed, as sociologists have pointed out: "*In the space of a century (19th century), the French countryside, a demographic, artisanal, industrial and agricultural anthill, was to become a peasant ghetto, in a movement that was highly coherent on three*

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[14] from the 1933 International Congress of Modern Architecture, published by Le Corbusier in 1943

[15] André BAREY, Maurice CULOT, Philippe LEFEBVRE, *Déclaration de Bruxelles*, Éd. AAM, 1980. Quoted *by Geoconfluences. https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/declaration-de-bruxelles-1980*

[16] as evidenced by the exhibition *Capital agricole: chantiers pour une ville cultivée* at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in 2018

levels: economic, political and ideological. [17] The homogeneity of the sociology of rural occupations has since been tempered in two ways. On the one hand, the motorization of agricultural work and the last rural exodus after 1945 led to the disappearance of peasant societies[18] . On the other hand, since 1975, the rural population has begun to shrink under the impact of rurbanization, which has seen a proliferation of housing estates in rural areas. **As a result, farmers are now very much a minority in the countryside.** But the fact remains that, in terms of surface area, farmers manage the majority of rural land through their labor, and that agricultural labor is struggling to win back the towns.

Today, we are faced with a **double spatial separation**: on the one hand, on a city scale, between work and housing; on the other, on a territorial scale, between the countryside, the exclusive place of agricultural work, and the city, whose new model is that of the metropolis[19] , which no longer produces any of its own food.

Faced with these vast questions, I propose to shed a little light on the subject by studying traditional Norman farmhouses - the clos-masures (for a detailed presentation, see my article in issue 2 of the magazine).

Living and working on a Normandy farm today

I propose to proceed in two stages.

> First of all, I'd like to present **some of the findings of my survey** of some forty farmers. As the subject matter of these interviews has not yet been fully analyzed, I will focus on a few themes raised by the situation, most of which tend to assume a separation between living and working.

> Then to **compare two farms** differently transformed, one by the president of the Jeunes agriculteurs de Seine-Maritime, a union affiliated to the FNSEA, the other by the spokesman for the Confédération paysanne in the same department.

But first, **a historical perspective is needed** to contextualize the contemporary situation. Xavier Noulhianne[20] , a former engineer in the pharmaceutical industry, has now become a goat and sheep farmer. In *Le ménage des champs*, he analyzes the dominant agri-food system in the light of his own experience. As a preamble, he reconstructs the institutional history of the relationship between the family and agricultural work. This historical investigation is stimulated by his own experience: "*the prospect of working as a couple made it possible to turn the choice of 'working in agriculture' into a choice of 'living in agriculture'. (...) The surprise was to discover that the emphasis on the couple as the basic unit of the agricultural unit, the farm, dated only from the beginning of the industrialization of agriculture in the 1950s*."

He tells the story of this family/work relationship in four stages:

1) the pre-World War II model: "***family farming, with three to four generations*** *living under the same roof and each participating in the* farm *work according to his or her ability*";

2) the model of the major agricultural orientation laws of the 1960s, which structured the industrialization of production: "*the model farm as a farm of two HWUs (human work units):* ***the*** couple";

3) In the 1990s, "*the notion of the* ***'farm manager'*** *came to the fore, in which the couple no longer worked together, but in which 'Mr' was a farmer, and 'Mrs' worked outside the farm*", because it was now possible to do the work alone, and there was no income for two;

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[17] Bertrand HERVIEU and François PURSEIGLE, *Sociologie des mondes agricoles*, Armand Colin, 2013, quoted in Augustin ROSENSTIEHL, *Capital agricole : chantiers pour une ville cultivée*, Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 2018, p. 52

[18] Henri Mendras, *La fin des paysans*. Suivi d'une réflexion sur la fin des paysans vingt ans après, Actes Sud, 1984 [1967].

[19] See the critique of the metropolis made by Guillaume FABUREL, a geographer claiming a Marxist culture, in *Les métropoles barbares*, ed. Le passager clandestin, 2019.

[20] Xavier NOULHIANNE, *Le ménage des champs: chronique d'un éleveur au XXIe siècle*, les Éditions du Bout de la ville, 2016.

4) the latest trend since the 2006 law: "**the** *notion of* **'agricultural entrepreneurship'***. These farmers are no longer really concerned with production issues on their farms. These issues are delegated to a crop manager, if not simply outsourced. Their skills: valuing their raw materials on the international market, analyzing world prices and the problems of transnational transaction flows*."

Some survey findings

Most of the farmers surveyed live and work on their farms. The statements that follow are therefore more concerned with the difficulties this meeting raises, and highlight the advantages of the principle of separation. It's worth noting, not a bias, but a specificity of my survey method: each clos-masure surveyed is systematically a farm workplace. Whether or not it is also a place to live comes second. The description that follows is therefore organized according to the location of the habitat. **The separation between work and habitat** takes place at three spatial levels: at **the territorial level** (we live in the Normandy territory but outside the village), at **the village level** (we live in the village but outside the farmyard) or at **the farmyard** level (we live in the farmyard but outside the space dedicated to work).

Living outside the village

Today, the development of road infrastructures and agricultural machinery means that some farmers no longer live in the village whose land they farm. As a result, they can travel up to 50 km from home for occasional work in the cultivated fields. The mayor of one of the villages studied (herself the wife of a farmer living and working in the area) notes that this type of farmer, because of his uprooting, tends not to take care of the landscape and trees in particular. In the event of conflict with local residents, it is then the town hall that acts as intermediary between the farmer (a non-resident worker) and the inhabitants (most of whom do not themselves work in the village where they live).

Living outside the "clos-masure"

Clos-masures provide a privileged living environment adapted to the environment (see article in issue 2 of the magazine). They are also buildings in which family history is built up, often going back two or three generations[21] . Farmers are therefore attached to them, and most of those we met live in their "clos-masure" and work the plain land that used to be attached to it. In a few cases, however, certain factors have prompted farmers to leave the historic clos-masure.

The most general reason is that the new generation of farmers refers to a rhythm of life that is increasingly aligned with that of the general population. This rhythm is notably marked by **the break between work and** *free time*. It's a time of leisure (or associative activities) in the evenings, at weekends and on vacation. These images are conveyed as much by the *mainstream* media, especially television, as by the professional mix of people now living in the countryside. This makes it harder for young farmers to accept the idea of working hours when their friends in the secondary or tertiary sectors have this precious free time. This **break in life rhythms** is logically accompanied by a desire for **spatial separation, between work and home**. Because of the family's attachment to the historic farmhouse, this desire is not systematically fulfilled. But a number of factors contribute to the changeover.

The end of the model of the couple constituting two HWUs (human work units - see above) is surely a determining factor. Most of the time, it's the wife who works outside the farm, sometimes in the wider world of agricultural consultancy (banking, management, etc.), often in the service sector. In such cases, "Madame" doesn't necessarily want to live at the heart of the farm, amidst the to-and-fro of tractors and semi-trailers. As the homes in the clos-masures are not very much in line with the standards of "modern" comfort (in terms of light, heating, size and distribution of rooms, etc.), she soon convinces her farmer husband to leave the clos-masure and live in a house nearby. Lastly, she may be all the more keen to leave the farm as it is sometimes difficult for her to accept living within the walls of her mother-in-law, who has herself moved nearby to the new house she had built in anticipation of her son taking over the farm.

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21 In reality, family history rarely goes back further than this, as clos-masures were historically leased by farmers. Those who prospered without owning their own property were obliged to move to another farmhouse to expand, and thus to relocate with their wives, children and grandparents.

The last hurdle to jump in order to leave the agricultural workplace **for** good is that of **livestock farming**, particularly dairy farming (cattle, sheep or goats). This type of farming requires a permanent presence on the farm to supervise the herd, milk (7 days a week, 365 days a year) and ensure calving (often at night). The advent of the leisure society described above, combined with the low wages paid to livestock farmers by the agro-industrial system, has led the vast majority of farmers to turn their backs on livestock farming and specialize in large-scale lowland farming. This type of farming is well suited to the distance between home and work (see "Living outside the village" above).

Another point, slightly more anecdotal but nonetheless significant, concerns the development of **an entrepreneurial and managerial spirit** among farmers. Seasoned in accounting depreciation tables and concerned about the good health of their business[22] , some of the new generation of farm managers now see the house as a property, an asset, which can be sold if necessary. The situation of clos-masures enclosed in their embankments is clearly **an obstacle**, as such a house in the middle of the farm would not be saleable to a third party.

A final reason to leave the farmhouse is when it fills up with sheds as the business expands, to the point where the house is squeezed in. As one farmer put it: "*People lock themselves into farmhouses, they lock their houses into buildings*. It's worth pointing out that building construction follows the company's economic and capital growth.

Clos-masure being filled in by sheds.

Separation inside the "clos-masure"

The final level of separation between living and working takes place inside the farmhouse. The distancing of the home from farming activities had already begun in the 1980s[23] . But an architect specializing in farm buildings notes that "*more and more, there's a private garden, there are things around the house to isolate the house from the rest of the farm.*" By entering the consumer society[24] , farmers have turned away from their ability to produce their own food. From being productive, the farmer's vegetable garden has been aligned with the model of the detached house to become an unproductive place of enjoyment.

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[22] In this respect, it is significant to note that Arnaud Rousseau, the new president of the FNSEA, did not study agriculture or agronomy, but business.

[23] Christian Moley (ed.), *Processus d'évolution de l'habitat rural en Pays de Caux,* Plan Construction, 1980.

[24] In other words, the ability of farmers to buy not their own production, but that of the agro-industry.

This **distancing** now seems to be a matter of course, and revolves around the changing relationship between machines and animals. Mechanization, or more precisely motorization[25] , began in the 1950s with the arrival of the first tractors. Their development led to the disappearance of animal traction, mainly by horses. As a result, the proximity between **man and machine** increased, while the relationship between **man and animal** evolved from one of work to one of exploitation (the animal as material in intensive farming) or purely affective (the animal as companion-child) .[26]

Machine inflation: "no more tractors passing at 5 meters from our house !"

As far as the relationship with machinery is concerned, this account by a farmer who runs a 330-hectare farm sums up the historical inflation of agricultural machinery:

> *"We created this hedge because all the tractors used to pass in front of it. So we tried to recreate the setting...*
> *- Yes, the arrival of machines makes a lot of noise...*
> *- It makes dust. It was fun at first, it was a party, but now... Mom had already imposed... not imposed but... We'd rerouted the roads so it wouldn't go past the foot of the house. And when my wife arrived, she said "no, no, it's okay, tractors passing at 5 meters, it's over!"."*

To give you an idea of the scale of the phenomenon, here's how the farmer, who also employs four people full-time, describes it: *"We have 7 tractors, the sprayer... well, we have a lot of machines. There are many, many machines."* The farmer has therefore recreated a second enclosure within the clos-masure's first plant belt, to protect his house from the nuisance of the pace of farming integrated into the agri-food system.

Plant belt recreated inside the wall to separate the inhabited part from the worked part.

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[25] We need to distinguish between **mechanization**, in particular animal-drawn hoe farming, the fruit of the first agricultural revolution of the Modern Era in the 19th century, and **motorization**, with the tractor as its standard-bearer, the fruit of the second agricultural revolution that spread after the Second World War. Cf. Marcel MAZOYER and Laurence ROUDART, *Histoire des agricultures du monde : du néolithique à la crise contemporaine*, Seuil, 1997.

[26] Charles STÉPANOFF, *L'animal et la mort : chasses, modernité et crise du sauvage*, La Découverte, 2021.

Pets out of the house

The other factor is the place occupied by the animals on the farm. As the specialist architect already mentioned explains: "*When I first started out, I had to get my car as close to the house as possible to get home. On some farms, the animals would circle the house. It was mud everywhere.*"

So, in addition to machines, animals are now kept away from the home. It's a reflection of the change in mentality imbued with a sanitized urban culture. Today, most farmers have graduated from agricultural engineering schools - all located in urban areas on campuses where asphalt and mown grass reign supreme. One of them even has the slogan "*An engineering school in the heart of the city*".

It also reflects the **rationalization of intensive livestock** farming, which, by increasing herd size, complicates cohabitation with humans and makes it necessary to allocate specific areas to them.

Separation factors

To sum up, the factors that tend to separate living from working in the agricultural world are :

1) The development of motorization, making it easy to bridge distances with farm machinery

2) The leisure society model

3) The cohabitation within the family of people who do not work in agriculture

4) The gradual disappearance of livestock farming

5) The development of accounting logics aligned with the entrepreneurial farmer model

6) Company growth

7) The non-productive pleasure garden model

8) The end of the animal-worker in favor of the animal-matter and the animal-child.

It is astonishing to note that each of these factors is point by point opposed to **the neo-peasant path** promoted by the Confédération paysanne and in particular its spokesman, Mathieu Grenier :

1) Criticizing the overpowering power of machines and defending low-tech

2) Criticism of the wage-earner's fixed relationship with time and the reinvention of rhythms: "*You can't have a monolithic model of life: wage-earner, work time, leisure time, weekends. We've got to get away from... we've got to explode that concept.*" (Mathieu Grenier, spokesman for the Confédération Paysanne in Seine-Maritime)

3) The occasional participation of eaters in the production effort

4) Maintaining extensive livestock farming as a *sine qua non* for the ecological balance of agricultural production

5) Going beyond pure accounting logic and defending a kind of spirituality of work

6) A ceiling on the size of the farm to give others the chance to set up in business

7) The non-separation of beauty (pleasure) and utility

8) Defending the human-animal bond at work.

Milking robot VS cooperative working

Let's take a look at how these oppositions are reflected in the work and homes of two farmers with opposing political profiles: Pierre-Olivier Etancelin, president of the Jeunes Agriculteurs (JA) in Seine-Maritime, and Mathieu Grenier, spokesman for the Confédération paysanne (Conf') in Seine-Maritime.

I don't have the time or space to expand on this here. In broad strokes, let's say that the JA president's position translates into the following in terms of work:

• investment in a milking robot (150,000 euros) to reduce weekend on-call time - while still having to respond continuously to robot alerts on the smartphone;

• the inherent increase in herd size to ensure the robot's return on investment;

- the move away from the animal-worker towards the animal-matter;

- increasing the size and number of sheds to house the animals.

In terms of living, the formula the farmer uses to describe the organization of his farm is symptomatic:

> *"See there, the building there? That was a boundary. All that was there in my great-grandfather's time was grass and apple trees. And on the other hand... With him, a desire to be far enough away from the dwelling house because it still has its charm. And not to alter its character. So, we put the whole industrial part as far away as possible."*

Here, he acknowledges the aesthetic contradiction between work activities - which he himself spontaneously describes as industrial, the place where animals are exploited - and living, the place where animals are protected. This is typical of the principle *of exploitection* (which merges the terms "exploitation" and "protection"), a concept developed by Charles Stépanoff[27] to highlight the fact that protection and exploitation proceed from the same logic: certain specimens must be (over)protected in order to better destroy all the rest through (over)exploitation.

Clos-masure of the president of the JA: clear separation between the inhabited part, on the right, and the "slightly industrial" worked part, on the left.

For his part, the Conf' spokesman certainly doesn't sleep with his cows, but accepts the idea of cohabitation.

> *"It's important to remember that agroecology is part of the living world. It's fundamental, we live with animals. Frankly, if we replace all farms with methanizers and then lose this contact with animals... Well, it's horrible! And then there are people who say "a farm without animals isn't a farm" or "when you stop breeding, there's no life left on your farm". It's true, there's a lot of great stuff about relationships with animals. An anthropologist wrote his thesis on human-cattle herds[28] . In fact, he considers the breeder to be part of the herd. He talks about the expansion of*

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[27] Charles STÉPANOFF, op. cit. 2021 - himself inspired by Keith THOMAS, *Dans le jardin de la nature : La mutation des sensibilités en Angleterre à l'époque moderne (1500-1800)*, ed. Gallimard NRD, 1985. You can also look at the theme of sure Guillaume B.

[28] Jules HERMELIN, *La fuite en avant des troupeaux humains-bovins*, EHESS thesis, 2021

farms in Brittany, and the modification of the human-cattle herd. And in particular, herd expansion forces you to go digital. Because you can't manage all the information on your own. You need digital tools. And that changes your relationship with the animals.

Above all, unlike the JA who is isolated with his milking robot, the neo-farmer develops a collective working method to overcome the real constraints of daily milking:

"When it comes to work, it's a question of organizational choices. You can't be a breeder on your own. Today, when you're a breeder, you have to be a partner or a salaried employee to avoid doing all the on-call work. Otherwise, for me, it's not sustainable. So today, there are 6 of us and 5 milking. So we can go on vacation. We have one weekend out of two... "

Let's anticipate the criticism: while in the statutes, some of the workers (in reality, female workers) are salaried employees, their employer, Mathieu Grenier, seeks to overcome the obstacle of subordination inherent in salaried employment. For example, he welcomes one of his employees' career plans to his farm. This employee is only a part-time cowherd and has developed an independent bakery business in one of the farm buildings.

Separating living and working on what scale?

To conclude, let's share these two powerful images proposed by Sébastien Marot to imagine, by forcing the line, the future of town-country relations[29] .

In the first scenario, agricultural work continues to be digitized, robotized and genetically transformed, in line with the third agricultural revolution promoted by Macron. In short, agriculture continues its *high-tech* headlong rush. Its corollary is, on the one hand, the continuing desertification of the countryside, and on the other, the high level of capital invested and controlled from the metropolises. The visual contrast of spatial separation in this scenario is strikingly similar to the separation in the clos-masure of the president of the Jeunes Agriculteurs.

Incorporation" scenario, technological and capitalist headlong rush
Drawing by Martin Étienne, from the book by Sébastien Marot

Sébastien Marot proposes three other scenarios. Two are variants of an attempt to merge town and country (agricultural urbanism and urban agriculture). The last scenario, diametrically opposed to the first, advocates "a high degree of local autonomy (i.e., a subsistence economy taking advantage of the specific qualities of place and environment)." The imaginary of this scenario is indeed libertarian municipalism "which aims to transform territories into confederations of self-managed worlds or communes."

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[29] Sébastien MAROT, *Taking the Country's Side*, Lisbon Architecture Triennale, 2019.

Secession" scenario, a high degree of local autonomy based on libertarian municipalism
Drawing by Martin Étienne, from the book by Sébastien Marot

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As suggested by the editors of *Longues marches*, a study of China's Rural People's Communes[30] would surely, by way of contrast, shed useful light on what is "in common" with this **anarchist-inspired scenario**.

This **leap of scale** between the clos-masures and the territory leads me to conclude with a question. If the separation between work and habitat seems necessary, their severance, organized and accentuated by capitalism, is inhuman. Put another way, if one divides into two, unity is part of the condition of the dialectic. So what is **the right scale of separation** to make unity (i.e., human life as a whole) livable and desirable?

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[30] Jan MYRDAL, *Un Village de la Chine populaire*, followed by *Lieou-lin après la Révolution culturelle*, ed. Gallimard, 1972

[THINGS SEEN]

SERGE PEKER: *THE SPIRIT OF CINEMA (IN FOUR FILMS)*

DECLARATION

When *Longues Marches*[1] was launched, the question was raised as to what was expected of it. My answer was that the magazine should target the various bursts of thought that could be spotted in the most diverse fields.

As part of the "*Things Seen*" section, and more specifically "*cinema*", I would say that I expect myself to present what I would call: **the spirit of a film in all its bursts of thought**. *Spirit* being the word that comes to mind when a glimmer of universality seems to sparkle in the blinding compactness of a film.

This spirit is what comes to haunt me, somehow ordering me to engage in the blinding weave of images in which it waits for me to bring it out of its obscurity. My commitment is successful only if the spirit materializes in the real presence of the idea. This **subjective journey** is as much about discovering this precious material as it is about discovering myself. This journey and its retroactive effect of discovery, whose sensitive trace remains in my own astonishment, seem to me to be the best way of **bringing to everyone what reaches me**.

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[1] See the *Autour de la Revue* section in this issue*.*

Vitalina Varela: the spirit of love

Film by Pedro Costa [2]

The film opens on a large black screen. But is it really an opening at all? More like a blanket of black sealed over the light. In this blackness, blacker than all black, the gaze sinks and loses itself, until it gradually discerns a vague, uncertain outline that advances into the darkness to become a human silhouette, behind which emerges a long cluster of black men. Bent over, heads bowed, their steps heavy and slow, some handicapped, they nonetheless form a procession that progresses in the darkness along the wall of a cemetery. From this wall, the crosses of a few tombstones protrude, from which these silhouettes seem to have emerged. The procession disperses in deathly silence, and the men slowly wind their way through the twisting gutters of a network of dark alleyways, each heading for some old iron door that looks like the clasp of a sepulchre. Flames rise from a cauldron as if on an underworld night.

Cut by the appearance of a title: ***Vitalina Varela.*** This name like a jet of light against the black background of the screen.

Night, again and again, thick, dense and sticky. On an airport runway, a ladder is secured to a plane door. Close-up of bare feet descending the steps. Back on the runway. The woman who has just stepped off the plane is by no means barefoot. Having come to Portugal to reunite with her husband, the woman is greeted by a mob of black women airport employees holding brooms and buckets. One of them tells her that her husband has already been dead and buried for three days. *This country is not for you, you'd better go back to where you came from,"* this group of women tells her like a chorus out of the darkness. But Vitalina Varela isn't going back to Cape Verde, the country she came from. On the contrary, she has decided to make a permanent home for herself in the brick-and-sheet-metal shelter where her husband used to live, and which reflects the image of this district of Lisbon, where a whole world from Cape Verde or other former Portuguese colonies survives miserably by dealing, stealing, rubbish or earning a pittance for a job in maintenance, sweeping or cleaning.

The arrival of Vitalina Varela imposes a singular light that makes a radical break with the sombre, silent presence of this migrant humanity. Like a thin, curling silver strip, this light seems to radiate from Vitalina's own body. As if by alchemical transformation, the halo of light surrounded by the darkness of her husband's photographs, held by two candles, seems to have transformed this silver lamella into a fiery golden light. If Vitalina's body is able to radiate this light, it's because **a spirit**

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[2] Directed by Pedro Costa, the film was co-written by Pedro Costa and Vitalina Varela.

inhabits it. That spirit is the **love** Vitalina retains for a man who, forty years ago, brutally abandoned her. But this man, even before dying of illness, was, as the priest tells Vitalina, immediately corrupted **by the poison of Portugal**. The poison that makes this migrant humanity so much like the living dead in this district of Lisbon. It is this living-dead survival that Vitalina Varela refuses, just as she refuses not the death of her husband but that of her love, which, like a spirit, haunts this woman's body. And it is through this spirit that light radiates from Vitalina's own body. This spirit speaks only in whispers. The voice, as an organ, is only a substitute for it. *Why were you a coward? Why did you disappear without having the courage to confess your departure to me? Why did you abandon this ten-room house near the jagged peaks of Cape Verde, which, by the sheer strength of the two of us, we were building?* But the spirit of the beloved, of course, can only listen in silence. *I have nothing to do with cowards, with these drunken, submissive men who vegetate without asserting themselves in this migrant neighborhood,"* she will say to the priest of the abandoned, dilapidated church in this district of Lisbon. This is a voice from within, not from without, like the one, for example, that orders the gossiping men who have taken over her house to go home immediately. This voice from within is that of **a shared love**. It is this shared love that Vitalina revives by speaking to the spirit of the deceased. She expects forgiveness, which she can only hear in silence. **This spirit of love** is also what gives Vitalina the strength to restore the house where her husband lived during the long forty years of their separation. Connected by love, but no less truly separated, this woman's body and spirit are like two distinct instruments harmoniously playing a magnificent love song in the silence of a world walled in by night.

Vitalina is a woman who exceeds the limits of the miserable conditions imposed on migrants from the former Portuguese colonies. The scene in which she stands alone on the roof of her husband's house, putting back the tiles and tarpaulin in the face of a storm, is astonishing. This requires strength to match her courage. Even if the film, with its bare feet on the airplane steps, takes as its mythological backdrop the credo of Christ's descent into hell, the high (the house on the Cape Verdean peaks or Vitalina on the roof) is not opposed to the low in a Christian or moral framework, but as a passage from the invisibility of migrants to the emergence of a real life through the refusal of submission. In this sense, Vitalina Varela is what I would call **a proletarian heroine**. To the damned of the earth, to those who are nothing but the refuse of an order of profiteers, she affirms through her courage to act that there is no other possibility in this world than to **confront the impossible as the only condition of existence**. So it's not so much faith that she restores to the local priest, a fellow Cape Verdean suffering from a sickly tremor, but **the courage to live**, to face up to the situation and to raise his head. By forcing him to say mass for her and her deceased husband, she pulls him out of his dereliction. Vitalina Varela's courage and strength is a counter-poison to what the priest calls the poison of Portugal, of which her sickly trembling is a symbolic symptom. The wife of this couple, friends of Vitalina's, is also ill to the point of death, and is forced to glean her food from the garbage cans of supermarkets.

The film closes by opening on the time of a young couple found on the heights and in the full clarity of the green mountains of Cape Verde, where Vitalina Varela and Joaquim de Brito are both working to build their future ten-room house. Ten rooms! A staggering number! A veritable palace of love, or ten as an extraordinary number that could just as easily be a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand or a million. In truth, **this ten** replaces any number and is simply **the number of love**.

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Mambar Pierrette.

Film by Rosine Mfetgo Mbakam

In Daoula, a town in the coastal region of Cameroon, families are getting ready for the start of the new school year. Mambar Pierrette (Pierrette Aboheu Njeuthat), a seamstress in one of the two poorest parts of town where she lives with her youngest son and ailing mother, is under pressure from the mothers to produce the obligatory back-to-school uniforms as quickly as possible. Whether party dresses or somber widowhood gowns, she also has to meet her customers' orders. Unluckily, obstacles accumulate, such as the breakdown of her sewing machine, the theft of her savings by a mototaxi, the cutting off of her electricity supply for non-payment and the flooding of her home-workshop by heavy downpours.

Constantly framed by Rosine Meftgo Mbakam's camera, Mambar Pierrette is like a **kind of monad** in which all the difficulties of living in this country of Cameroon, a country once divided, after colonization by Germany, between a British protectorate and a French protectorate, are wound up and interlocked. Power is in the hands of a dictatorial President who, as we learn from Pierrette's brother, offers two thousand five francs to anyone who attends his meetings. While the brother, a worker who has resigned from a deceitful company that for eight years has dangled the possibility of a contract in front of him, seems interested in the money, Pierrette refuses to take part in the meeting, as the money in no way compensates for the hours of work she has lost.

From Pierrette's clientele and passing friends, we learn that the country is riven by galloping inflation and cultural misery. *There's no more art in Cameroon"*, says this classical dance artist to Mambar Pierrette, who is now forced to earn a few pennies clowning for street children. After this terrible statement on **the disappearance of art in Cameroon**, he himself disappears into the narrow muddy alleyway of Pierrette's studio home. But where does this disappearance come from? Which diabolical Dr. Mabuse is the dictator President's slavish agent? The clown dancer's reaction to the white mannequin in front of Mambar Pierrette's door, which serves as a display case for his latest creations, reveals the absent manipulator of the dictatorial president. Through the blinding green eyes of this white display mannequin, the predatory presence of the white imperialist powers vampirizing Cameroon and Africa in general can be seen. The rain forced Pierrette to undress the mannequin, which the clown observed while expressing his fear of this thing which, he tells us, gives him the impression of disappearing. *In Cameroon, everyone dresses up,"* say Pierrette's neighbors, shocked by the mannequin's nudity. This feeling of obscenity, like the dancer's horror, undoubtedly stems **from the same truth being laid bare**.

In the face of so much adversity, Mambar Pierrette neither disarms, nor admits defeat, nor gives in to the passivity of despair. The beauty of this film lies in **a certain paradox** between this woman constantly held within the frame of a shot and what, within that frame, never ceases to overflow with her troubles, misfortunes and catastrophes. A frame in which her corpulent figure imposes as much as she herself imposes by her tenacity to always find a way out. Neither **hope nor despair** inhabit Mambar Pierrette. Only the thought of constantly having to find a way out of every situation that, on the face of it, seems to put her at an impasse. There are never any tears in Pierrette's eyes, only the

superb smile that transforms her face at the sight of her friend, the dancer, clowning around in the alley for a bunch of kids. All it took was that smile to **transform her face into a youthful resurrection** that makes her touching. At the height of her worries, she goes so far as to suggest to one of her customers, disillusioned by a lover who prefers Canada to her, that she don the dress specially ordered for the handsome man and party with her in a Daoula dance hall. Pierrette evacuates and sweeps away misfortune, just as she does with water after her house floods. If Rosine Mfetgo Mbakam's camera keeps her within the confines of the frame, Pierrette constantly frees herself from it by **confronting reality**, and thus manages to carry out her orders.

Contrary to what our clown-dancer friend says, art isn't quite dead in Cameroon, because there's still a Mambar Pierrette capable of creating dresses as brightly colored as her life. These dresses fit so perfectly that Pierrette's customers find fittings unnecessary. **Crossing reality, moving beyond it and cutting just right** - these are the three imperatives that order Mambar Pierrette's life.

"You love money," her customers tell her as they pay her. These words would be meaningless if understood as a love of money for money's sake. What I mean by this phrase is that Mambar Pierrette loves life, and that this life depends on money, which alone ensures her survival, and without which she couldn't pay for the electricity needed for her sewing machine. The athletic man who accepts the payment and turns on the power doesn't even glance at Pierrette. For this agent of a privatized electricity company (electricity in Cameroon is in the hands of an American group), only the money he is paid exists. Mambar Pierrette remains invisible to him. Rosine Mfetgo Mbakan's film manages to give the character of Mambar Pierrette **an existence as intense as the torrential rains** that flood Daoula.

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Dahomey

Documentary film by Maty Diop
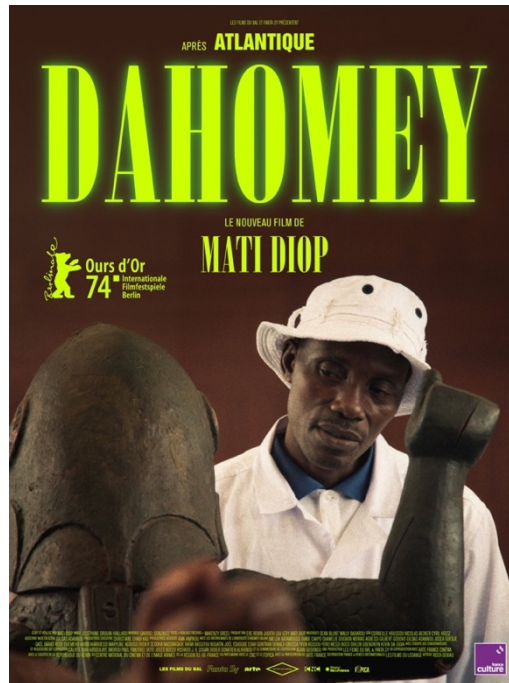
Returned by France in 2021, twenty-six royal treasures from Dahomey are about to leave Paris and return to their homeland, now Benin. These works, along with several thousand others, were looted during the invasion of Dahomey by French colonial troops in 1892.

I) The idea

Maty Diop's documentary follows their repatriation from the Quai Branly to their arrival in Cotonou. But what is the restitution of looted works of art to a formerly colonized country? Is it a simple restitution by one state to another, or is it an opportunity to restore to a people its history, its cultural past and its present reality? The idea behind Maty Diop's film is that all true restitution includes the integral **restitution to a people of its** historical and present **truth**. It is then **the people** who **are restored to themselves**.

In keeping with the country's cultural history, Maty Diop drew her inspiration from the Voodoo cult, of which the kingdom of Dahomey was the cradle. Following in the footsteps of this cult, the film institutes an artistic, rather than magical, procedure for communicating with the invisible world through the spirit. This procedure involves **grafting a spirit into the material of an object**. The object becomes a subject capable of communicating with the invisible world through the spirit of cinema. The object in question is work number twenty-six, a statuette representing Ghézo, the great king of Dahomey in the mid-nineteenth century.

II) Quai Branly.

Like any subject, this work becomes an "I", that of number twenty-six, still present at Quai Branly but on his way to Benin. By becoming a subject, the statuette emerges from its long night of wandering shadow in a foreign land. Black, nothing but a black screen, that's how the film begins. A blackness that immediately draws us into **the statuette's long night**. As it speaks, it becomes a subject, and the black takes on a light, not of the museum but of the mind. But her identity has disappeared, like those of all those from Africa who can only work in Europe by buying false papers. Anonymous, this "I" or spirit becomes, beyond Dahomey, all the spirits of Africa, forcibly expatriated by a colonial power and plunged into the night of their non-life. This "I" is but the ghost of what he was when he was King of Dahomey. This ghostly presence-absence can eventually be perceived by the slight flutter of a white curtain lifted by a draught in the museum corridors. Her voice produces a cavernous echo in which

seems to resonate those millions of silent voices expatriated from Africa at the time of slavery, then of the First World War, and today of the proletarians who have become undocumented. Bewitching is this voice, and magnificent is the poem of its shadowy life, co-written by Haitian poet Makenzy Orcel and Maty Diop.

III) Departure.

Number twenty-six, like the other twenty-five numbers, is carefully crated for departure to Benin. Lying in its crate, the statuette has all the air of a deceased person being placed in a coffin for its return to its native country. With the twenty-six crates closed, the works are ready to leave. As if in a funeral ceremony, the camera follows their long procession through the museum corridors. Placing them in the plane's hold evokes images of the return of the coffins of American soldiers who fought in Vietnam. Superimposed on this are images of the African soldiers enlisted by the French army in 1915, who died by the thousands in the horrific slaughter at Verdun.

IV) Arrival in Benin.

The plane is about to land, and as if in counterpoint to the works locked in their crates, the deep blue of the Beninese sky opens them up to **the light of their restitution**. On their way to the Musée Historique du Dahomey, they make an obligatory stopover at the current Presidential Palace. If the State is seeking to benefit from the restitution of the works, it is also and above all seeking to defuse them of **their capacity to restore a people to its integrity**. The large-scale demonstration along their route from the airport to the palace is both a spectacular state festivity and the great popular celebration of a people rediscovering their history, one might almost say their ancestors.

When the coffin-box of number 26 is opened, the museum's curators, dressed in white coats like forensic pathologists or Dr. Frankenstein, take stock of the statuette's condition. Unlike Frankenstein, King Ghézo is half-resurrected even before the box is opened, for in returning to his homeland, the spirit is brought closer to his body. He is now able, through splendid photography, to **capture the new sensations of being in his homeland**. The **subject-camera** delves into the exuberance of the flora, wanders the streets, rediscovers the smell of the port and the faces of his people. But the state is lurking. From the top of the presidential palace, the military keep a watchful eye on the streets. As for the local tribal chiefs, they are welcomed into the palace like heads of state.

V) The great student debate at the University of Abomey, former capital of Dahomey.

Maty Diop brought together students from the University of Abomey to discuss their views on the restitution of works of art. Listening to these students, one quickly comes to the realization that any exhibition of a work, and more specifically of a work plundered by colonialism, is not without a political choice. The place, the set-up, the scenography, the lighting and the information provided all play a part in this choice. With their French creolized by Benin's multilingualism, it's difficult to understand everything these students say. But **this "not understanding everything" is just as important as what we do understand**. As a sounding board, it allows us to perceive what's missing, **that invisible potential for visibility,** so that the people of Benin can, through restitution, be restored to their integrity. It resonates outside the university walls, echoing in the silence of faces. It is reflected by scopic vision or correspondence, in the face of this woman contemplating the statuette of Ghézo placed back in the showcase. It combines with music to radiate in a polyphony of sound-images.

One of the film's final scenes shows the silhouette of a man smoking a cigarette and walking at night beside the ocean, that monster or abyss that takes in, engulfs and rejects. A voice-over, that of the statuette, accompanies the man's walk. The spirit-subject has left its object and taken on flesh. The incandescence of the cigarette evokes a volcano, dormant but potentially awake, as is this Ghézo king in a showcase in the Abomey museum. The lights go out one by one, the statuette returns to the night, but the spirit is still there, and will continue to haunt the museum's enclosed space. Let it leave its object and take flesh, and a whole people will awaken in volcanic incandescence.

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Viet and Nam

Film by Minh Quy Truong

Viet and Nam are a loving couple. Both are miners who descend a thousand meters underground every day to dig and collect hundreds of shovelfuls of coal in the dark. Cadence, insecurity, repetitive gestures: the film begins by introducing us to the harsh reality of a miner's work. Then comes the moment of their break, when Viet and Nam lie side by side in the hollow of a coal-filled shaft. The scene ends with a still shot of a long kiss, in which the two soot-covered men look so corpse-like that they seem united in death.

This opening could lead one to believe that we're in the queer film of the day, with a romantic love story at its heart. Let me say right away that this is not the case. From queer to fantasy, from the supernatural to dreams and pure formal beauty, this film is **a patchwork of genres**. Far from being a lack of mastery, this mixture, to which we must add that of temporalities, has as its central point the search for a unity through which to **think the story of the unification of North and South Vietnam**.

Nam reveals to Viet that he wants to leave Vietnam for the West, but not without first finding his father's remains. A Vietcong veteran, an old family friend, tells Nam and his mother that his father has been buried ninety centimetres underground, on the spot where he fell. Nam, Viet, his mother and the family's old friend set off together in search of the father's buried remains. A search that goes hand in hand with the **creation of this new unit** capable of reconsidering the history of Vietnamese unification. Or **the "and" as the film's sole, enigmatic subject**. This search for unity brings *Viet and Nam* curiously close to Mati Diop's beautiful film *Dahomey*.

But how to find unity? How to find one's bearings in this disorientating *Viet and Nam*? So disorienting that the characters themselves have trouble finding their bearings. "*Where's the border?*" ask Viet and Nam, looking at a map. And when Nam thinks he's crossing into Cambodia, Viet tells him he's crossed into Laos. The film doesn't give us a direction, but a means: the pickaxe. **You have to dig deep to** find the way, **not on the surface.** The surface is that of fake unity or museum reconstitution. Take, for example, this surprising visit to a museum where a battlefield with life-size soldiers has been reconstituted. This unity is that of **a Vietnam of representation** that masks and closes the hole or crack through which one can slip to think of a completely different kind of unity. Several paths converge towards this crack or hole. The first is **unity as the absence of unity**. It constitutes a void through the self-cancellation of genres. Nam, for his part, has two possible paths. The first is his mother's dream. A dream in which she has a very precise image of the place where her husband is standing, who visits her every night in a dream. The second is the shaman's indication of the precise

location of the father's remains. Nam, her mother, Viet and the father's old comrade-in-arms go to question the shaman. "*You have to have faith*", she tells all the families who have also come to question her about finding the remains of their loved ones. **What I mean by this word "*faith*" from** the shaman's mouth is the courage for everyone not to give in on their desire to find the remains of the disappeared. In any case, the shaman points to the site of the father's remains. Nam and Viet take a pickaxe, dig and discover shreds of human flesh mixed with charcoal soil. Taking this earth between her fingers, the shaman also finds the father's pocket watch. This watch, as a symbol of stopped time, or dead time or time zero, coordinates with the absence of unity. Now that these remains have been found, they must search for the place corresponding to the dream in which the mother sees the father again. It's worth noting that, each time, this place is given extremely precisely: **it's there and nowhere else**.

Nam finds this place of dreams in the forest. It's all there: the tree and its crack, behind which the father stands and which Nam discovers to be nothing more than a hole in the ground. **A black hole as the precise location of the real father**, real, of course, insofar as he's dead. **This being of the father as a simple black hole** is placed exactly at the point where the "*and*" of *Viet and Nam* could be crossed out, to be replaced by the weld of a Vietnam united under the banner of brotherly love. This **reversal of the lovers' love into brotherly love** is made possible by the fact that, apart from the long kiss that welds Viet and Nam's mouths together, no sexual act is even suggested in the lovers' relationship.

Now, as Nam wishes, all he and Viet have to do is leave the country. But the only destination for the container hiding these two stowaways will be the sea, where it will float like an island lost among the dark waves. An island with no south or north, lost and disoriented, floating blindly as the family's old friend, panic-stricken, must have killed the father by unloading his machine-gun magazine blindly. The "*and*" in *Viet and Nam* is the **blind spot** from which to re-visit the history of the Vietnam War. In the meantime, like Oedipus, we can only walk blindly in a Vietnam as buoyant and disorientated as the rest of the world. In the same container, Nam and Viet, face and torso covered in soot, lie side by side. This scene, with a slight variation, repeats the scene from their break as miners, with the same long kiss where the two seem united in death. Behind them, a charcoal background punctuated by tiny sparkling particles. These sparkles like the luminous remains of the millions who died in the fratricidal forty-year war between North and South.

Beyond the tragedy of the lovers, *Viet and Nam* traces a path through the present confusion of today. It passes through **a crack in the present** to think about the impossible reality of millions of dead flesh mixed with charcoal soil and presented by their brilliance against a background of subterranean night. These millions of shimmers are superimposed on those of the monstrous frogs that, as the old Vietcong fighter recounts, covered the corpses on the road to battle. The horror is even the final beauty of this kissing scene. It stamps **the inhuman** on the fact that there can only be a Vietnam united by brotherly love if we have the courage to face up to the horror of heterogeneity.

"You have to believe," says the shaman. Yes, you have to believe, but in the sense of not giving in on your desire to achieve a unity of Vietnam other than the one built on more than four million dead, forgotten and erased from history. To the factitious museum memory of Vietnam, *Viet and Nam* opposes the imperative **of not forgetting oblivion**.

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GERD AARON CHTOB: *BROKEN MOMENTUM (1)*

Two documentaries on Communist China

Les ateliers Varan is a documentary film school created at the dawn of the 80s under the impetus of the great Jean Rouch, who was "chargé de mission at the Musée de l'homme" (Jean-Luc Godard) and who, in 1978, proposed to the authorities of the Republic of Mozambique, who had invited him and other filmmakers to film the country's ongoing changes, that they train Mozambicans in Paris to film the reality of their country themselves.

On Sunday, September 15, 2024, at around 10 a.m., as part of the *Dimanches de Varan* program, the inaugural session of a quarterly cinéclub dedicated to documentaries will be hosted by Samir Ardjoum, former artistic director of the *Rencontres Cinématographiques* de Béjaia (from 2011 to 2014) and helmsman of the *Microciné* channel on a sprawling video-sharing platform, the superpower of today's absolutized capitalism.

For this first session, Samir Ardjoum has invited former *Cahiers du cinéma* editor-in-chief (2003-2009) and former *Mediapart* contributor Emmanuel Burdeau, who now writes a column on *Mediatv* and hosts a podcast, *Spéculations,* for the Nantes-based magazine *So film*. For this first screening, the two men chose **two documentaries** that show Communist China at the dawn of the 70s, a few years before Mao's death: *Chung Kuo* **(China) by Michelangelo Antonioni** (1972, released on September 13, 1973 in France) and *Comment Yukong déplaça des montagnes* (shot in 1972 and 1973, released on March 10, 1973) **by Marceline Loridan and Joris Ivens**.

The reason for this choice is that these two films were important in the career of Serge Daney, one of the leading lights (after and with André Bazin) of French film criticism. Burdeau, preparing an intellectual biography of the "cinéfils", chooses two films he doesn't seem to know very well, but which were important to the former editor-in-chief of Cahiers du cinéma. Why were they important? Because Serge Daney took over the editorial reins in 1974 at a time when not many people wanted to run the magazine, which had almost disappeared after the failure of the cultural front launched at the Avignon Festival in 1972 at a time when it was undergoing its great Maoist turnaround and experiencing a period of theoretical effervescence. But also because the critic's view of the two films evolved when he had a desire to go elsewhere at the end of what he later called "*our non-legendary years*". A journalistic, stylistic and political elsewhere, perhaps?

Birth of a cine-club

The birth of a cinéclub is always a moving moment. People get together to share cinema. When it's a double bill, **spectators work collectively to establish relationships between films**. The programmer, on the other hand, **puts together a montage of** works that may have no obvious link between them. This was the founding gesture of Henri Langlois, the Smyrna-born father of the Cinémathèque Française. On the same evening, "*the dragon watching over our treasures*" (as Cocteau called him) showed a film by Murnau and another by the young Garrel, whom he presented as the new Murnau.

Far from being an outdated practice, **the cine-club is a new idea** to be revived, extended and reinvented in the age of *home cinema* and *streaming*, with their standardized, soulless products. What could be more urgent today than to found cine-clubs to revive what has been burnt or forgotten, and **revive a people of spectators**?

On this Sunday morning, director Yves de Peretti, who teaches at the Varan workshops, kicks off the session - very well indeed - by evoking both the Chinese momentum and the winds of immense hope of the 60s and 70s, which he and others in the audience experienced as militant documentary filmmakers, and a younger audience who only know the globalized version of China and its state monopoly capitalism, and who come to Varan to learn how to see and make films.

This - will take a special form. We'll be showing extracts rather than full-length films. This choice is perhaps debatable. Antonioni's film, divided into three parts (Peking, Henan province and Shanghai) lasts 208 minutes, while the Loridan-Ivens couple brought back twelve films from their trip to China in

1972 and 1973, each lasting 763 minutes. In 1976, the films were screened in four three-hour sessions.

"Two filmmakers, two moods".

Before showing two extracts from each film, Samir Ardjoum asks the former editor-in-chief of *Cahiers du cinéma* - who forged an astonishing theory of subtle cinema in the 2000s - about his relationship with each of the two filmmakers, himself admitting to knowing Antonioni better than Ivens and Loridan.

"It's really two filmmakers, two atmospheres," jokes the latter, answering the former. Emmanuel Burdeau claims to know the Italian filmmaker well. He places *Chung Kuo* in Antonioni's oeuvre between *Zabriskie point* and *Profession reporter,* the Italian filmmaker's years of travel initiated by *Blow up*. He's much less familiar with Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan, of whom he says he's only seen two films: *Yukong* in an international version found "under the table" on the Internet, with a rather docte voice-over in English that covers everything, and their last film, *Histoire de vent (1988),* the cinematic testament of the flying Dutchman. *My perception*," he continues, "was *of a cinema that was too ideologically marked. A rather weak relationship, then*."

The man from *Microciné* relaunches: "*You're discovering Loridan and Ivens' film in 2024. Do you think this kind of film can still be made today?*" "*I found it a very difficult film to watch. I couldn't concentrate. Everything is really covered up. To access the film, it's very hard because it's a film that's the glory of China and then, how long is it!*" Laughter from the audience.

A Chinese village and a silent dance

When asked by the film club organizers, viewers logically chose to start with the Italian master of modernity.

They first discover a sequence shot in a poor, remote mountain village, in which villagers see Europeans and a film crew filming them for the first time. A brief, brutal blackout interrupts the sequence. A blue card with yellow letters from RAI appears. Upbeat music plays. Off, schoolchildren start singing in chorus a song to the glory of Tiananmen Square, while Chinese people, young and old, in the same square, on a day in May 1972, are shown in close-ups, while the title of the film and the names of the director and his prestigious collaborators (the great director of photography, Luciano Tovoli, and, as musical advisor, Luciano Berio) appear.

We then discover the square, the heart of the "middle country" (*Chung Kuo*'s meaning), its tutelary figures (Marx and Engels in a pano, Lenin and Stalin, then Lenin alone and finally, Mao seen from further away before the camera taps again) and the historical event it is passing through, the Cultural Revolution, before being whisked along the adjacent avenues, passing - despite the ban on filming - in front of Mao's house to ride at cyclist's pace towards the hard-working, but not inhuman, Chinese. Beijingers on bicycles look poor, but not miserable. They know neither luxury nor hunger. "*We are struck by their quality of life, so different from our own88 *", says the voice-over. There's no sense of **haste or stress**.

The sequence ends when, at dawn, in the shadow of the ancient Tartar walls, men practice in groups, an extraordinary moment, Qi Qong (气功), a gymnastic, dance and ceremony that disciplines the body and strengthens the spirit, an ancient tradition that the rulers wanted to abolish as a residue and superstition of the past. These men dance silently in the murmur of the city as if listening to an inner music. **Documentary mastery.**

A political gesture?

Then, much to the surprise of the animators, a fussy viewer intervenes to point out that the order of the sequences is not *Chung Kuo*'s own. The Beijing sequence opens the film. The visit to the Chinese village comes much later in the second part, shot in Henan province after 94 minutes of film.

Samir Ardjoum apologizes profusely and quotes the first text written by Serge Daney about Antonioni's film, *Une auberge espagnole singulièrement silencieuse*. As it happens, it was the critic's first article for a fledgling newspaper, *Libération*, on Thursday October 4, 1973. The article had previously been judged dogmatic by E. Burdeau, who based his opinion on what Daney himself would say a few years later.

> *"Politics, in a film, is not just political speeches; it's also, and above all,* the choice of what *is shown, the order in which it is shown (edited), the relationship between what is shown (by the image) and said (by the sound), and so on. Antonioni could always say:* I only filmed what I saw, in the order I saw it; *he would only have built a sumptuous* Spanish inn.*"*

The two men agree: in 2024, Antonioni still shows Communist China, but does not judge it. "*It's a political gesture*.

In October 1973, Daney criticized the filmmaker for having made an aesthete's film in which we don't hear the Chinese but the voice-over written by Andrea Barbato, a RAI journalist who presented the news at the time of the American moon landing, and a member of the PSI working at La Stampa.

Re-staging?

The subtle critic who contributes to *Media* then reads the beginning of the article entitled *La remise en scène (Notes)* that Daney wrote three years later, in July-August 1976, in a special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* (no. 268-269) entitled *Images de marque*. This opening is dedicated to the opening of Antonioni's film:

> *"Deceptive intent and despicable procedure*

> It was under this title that a commentator in the Renmin Ribao ("***People's Daily***") castigated Antonioni's film ***Chung Kuo*** in 1974. The arguments were sometimes bizarre. Judge for yourself (this is Tiananmen Square):

> > *"The film gives no overall view of this place, and removes all the majesty of the Tiananmen Gate, which the Chinese hold so tightly. Conversely, the author saves no film to film small groups of people in the square, sometimes from afar, sometimes up close; sometimes in front, other times behind; here a swarm of faces, there a mesh of feet. He has deliberately transformed Tiananmen Square into a disorderly fair. Doesn't he intend to insult our great homeland?*"

> (The answer to this false question is, of course, yes)

> Two complaints, then:

> - Through an exaggerated multiplication of shots and angles, Antonioni breaks things up to his heart's content (thus disrespecting, denigrating and insulting).

> - He doesn't reproduce the official, emblematic image of the square, its "brand image". He does the same thing when he films the Nanjing Bridge: "*In filming the great Nanjing Bridge over the Yangtze, that magnificent modern bridge, he deliberately chose very bad angles, giving the impression that it is crooked and unstable*." The image that deviates from the brand image is supposed to be defamatory. Or: not filmed = refused, refused = contested.

> There are cut-out images that are supposed to be whole, and there are images that are supposed to be there but are missing.

> Third reproach: "*In terms of the choices he made during shooting and editing, he hardly filmed the good, new and progressive images, and if he did, it was rather for show and to cut them after the fact*": in other words, the "good, new and progressive images" don't have to be constructed, but are already there, already given and to be reproduced. Cinema's mission: to *set the scene again?*

For a filmmaker, to re-stage," Burdeau aptly explains, "is not to displace, but merely to reproduce, to attest, to counter-sign existing brand images. Antonioni practices cinema as **a phenomenological art of surveying** signs and surfaces, a calligrapher's art that catalogues gestures, faces and habits in London, Los Angeles, the African desert and Andalusia.

What about China?

Decidedly inspired, Daney's future biographer recalls that these were years of immense interest in China, and also that from Thursday April 11 to Saturday May 4, 1974, right between the two films, Roland Barthes accompanied the *Tel Quel* delegation comprising Sollers, Kristeva, Pleynet and Wahl.

From this trip to China, Barthes wrote a famous article published in *Le Monde* on Friday May 24, 1974, *Alors, la Chine?* The following year, this text was reprinted in a booklet published by Christian Bourgois, with an afterword*:*

> *"We set off for China with a thousand pressing and, it seems, natural questions: what about sexuality, women, the family, morality? What about the human sciences, linguistics, psychiatry? We shake the tree of knowledge for the answer to fall, so that we can return with what is our main intellectual nourishment: a deciphered secret. But nothing falls. In a sense, we come back (apart from the political answer) with: nothing.*

In the spring of 1974, China was, for Barthes, who regretted having to pay for the trip, **an unanswered question**, a nothing that plunged the visitor into expectation: "*one questions oneself*", occupying the function of "hermeneutic subject". China resists interpretation, and knowledge is "*silently declared irrelevant*". All he brings back from the Middle Kingdom is **praise for blandness**. In *Les carnets d'un voyage en Chine,* co-published by Bourgois and IMEC, he even writes: "*When I reread my notebooks to make an index, I realized that if I published them this way, it would be exactly Antonioni. But what else could I do*?

Selfishness and its neuroses

> *"The filmmaker of "incommunicability"...*

> A great filmmaker, a well-known aesthete - *Chung Kuo* is, of course, a beautiful film to look at - Antonioni is also known as the filmmaker of "incommunicability". Whether he's filming the peasants of the Po Plain or American youth, it's precisely this distancing that interests him: standing on the surface of things, finding them incomprehensible (i.e., not giving oneself the means to understand them) and making - ultimately - beautiful fetishes of them. Aestheticism and "incommunicability" often go hand in hand.

Burdeau interrupts his reading of Daney's first article to characterize the paragraph that follows as "*epochal lines*":

> China, however, is precisely the opposite: communication restored, egoism and its neuroses combated. How can the filmmaker of difficult communication film a country whose main problem is not communication? Is Antonioni talking about China, or is he too distancing himself from it?

"It's all there: incommunicability, salle Pleyel exoticism, zoo" (SD)

When Samir Ardjoum finds the second excerpt, which shows the inhabitants of a mountain village, difficult, and notes that Antonioni's gaze changes, his interlocutor points out that the sequence is an exception in the film's economy, where the Chinese are filmed in passing, where they themselves only pass by, offering themselves to the camera without really looking at it and sometimes trembling imperceptibly - like honest people, as Godard said of Bernard Maris. **It's an entomologist's eye that catches the creatures in the camera's trap** in a moment - rare for this filmmaker - of pure cruelty. The voice-over notes that the villagers are embarrassed to see a Westerner for the first time. However, the

fussy viewer or not may also think that what's embarrassing them is the camera. Burdeau notes a very disturbing moment of slip of the tongue, when the voice-over pretends to be astonished that the foreigners are also Italians, demonstrating a largely Western-centric vision.

Cine-club delight: a female spectator intervenes to praise this fascinating sequence.

> *"It's like being in a ghost film. You say they're extremely embarrassed, but they're also completely fascinated by the camera or by the Westerners who are there, by the rather large crew... I'd have liked to have seen ten minutes more. I find that very, very rare in cinema. Total silence and presence-absence.*

Another praises Tovoli's splendid image. A professional ethnologist apologizes for interrupting Emmanuel, who wants to talk about the importance of the gaze in this sequence:

> *"In the voice-over, it's said that the village chief wanted the elderly and the badly dressed not to be there. I find this extremely interesting. We can indeed deduce that the village chief briefed the inhabitants. So, in the fear you can read on their faces, it's not just a fear of the camera. I see a kind of struggle between the fascination of an arriving Western film crew and the fear of the authorities who have said: "Only certain people may appear in the picture!*

And the lady admires - in a beautiful peroration - something magnificent about the looks exchanged between the Westerner and the foreigner, and very political about the fear of authority and the weight of the regime.
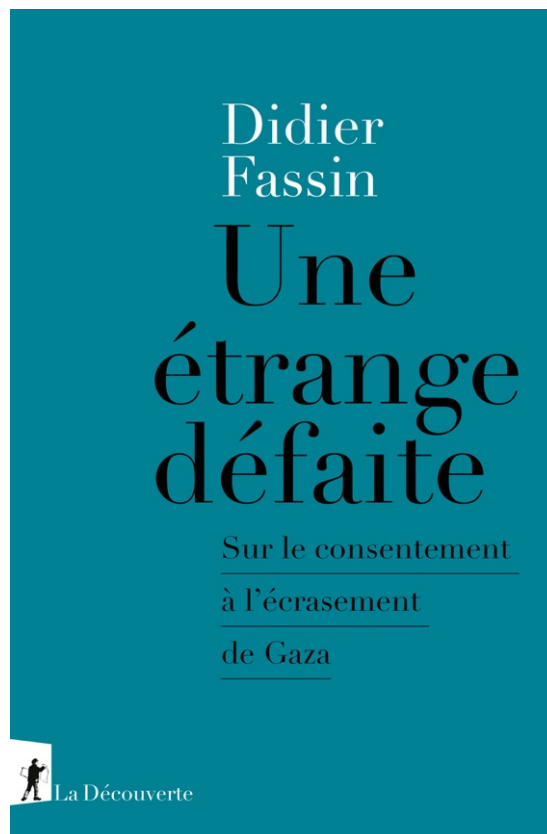
To be continued.

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MARC FALLET: *A STRANGE DEFEAT. ON CONSENT TO THE CRUSHING OF GAZA* (D. FASSIN)

Note on Didier Fassin's book:

A strange defeat. On consent to the crushing of Gaza (La Découverte, 2024)

We must begin by saluting this work.

He dares to confront the leaden blanket imposed by the West on the destruction of the people of Gaza and their territory by the warlike and murderous madness of Israel, which intends to create a regional vacuum around itself in order to establish a Greater Israel. He methodically deconstructs the workings of Western propaganda and its media, with a talent for writing that is unmistakable. He does so with abundant documentation (reports, articles, statements, historical reminders...) that supports and illustrates each of his arguments.

The effectiveness of the blows dealt to Western propaganda and its media can be gauged from the two unworthy, partly unsigned articles in *Le Monde* attacking this book and its author over a few so-called factual errors (in which the authors of these articles have themselves fallen flat on their faces), without taking any position on the book's content. A crude tactic that has undoubtedly won Fassin new readers.

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One reservation, however, has to do with the unfulfilled promise of the book's title and subtitle.

Title: *A strange defeat*

The title refers to Marc Bloch's book examining the roots of the collapse of French power in May 1940. But in this case, **whose strange defeat?** The people of Gaza, the Palestinian people? No, says Fassin, it's a moral defeat, not a military one. But of whom? Western states (countries). This introduces a serious bias in relation to the analogy made with the title of Marc Bloch's book. It's as if Bloch's title deplored the "moral defeat" of those who applauded or allowed the German invasion to take place. The title is therefore singularly inadequate.

Subtitle: *On consent to the crushing of Gaza*

This inadequacy is explained by the meaning given to the subtitle *Sur le consentement à l'écrasement de Gaza (On consent to the crushing of Gaza)*. The use of the **notion of consent** shifts the discussion to the realm of subjectivity.

First sentence of the book: "*Consent to the crushing of Gaza has created an immense gap in the moral order of the world*". Fassin goes on to explain that there is a passive consent (to allow Israel's devastating bombardment of Gaza) and an active consent (to support it by recognizing Israel's right to defend itself).

But **whose consent?** In the book, it's the Western states and their unarmed arm, the media. The Western states and their media either let Israel do it, or supported it. That much is obvious.

Does this disturb the "moral order of the world"? Not at all. Even if they have always been careful to cover up their armed interventions - yesterday with a civilizing mission, today with human rights and democracy - these powers have never been much concerned with morality. There are no morals in geopolitics. Their consent to the crushing of Gaza is part of their "*a-moral world order*".

What, incidentally, **are the reasons for the** Western states' **consent** to the crushing of Gaza? The book suggests two at the very end. First, there is the obvious historical guilt of European states for the extermination of European Jewry, especially Germany. Fassin puts forward a second, no less obvious, geopolitical reason, of paramount importance to the Americans: the pivotal role played by Israel as an advanced instrument of Western imperialism in the Middle East, as part of an alliance with certain Arab states (the Abraham Accords) against Iran.

Despite the bludgeoning of Western propaganda and the ban it imposes ("*anti-Zionism = anti-Semitism*"), **there was no consent from the people to the crushing of Gaza**. On the contrary, there has been growing sympathy for the Palestinian people, growing indignation at the criminal operations carried out by the Israeli army, a subjective shift that will leave deep scars that Israel will find hard to recover from. In this respect, there have been public demonstrations, university occupations and intellectual statements against the crushing of Gaza, which Fassin describes in detail in his book and which show, albeit in a minority, that there has been no "consent" on this side.

There was and is something else on the peoples' side, and it has nothing to do with "consent": the **feeling of powerlessness** to influence the drama of Israel's massacre of the people of Gaza, to confront nameless horrors, to be the overwhelmed spectators of a descent into hell orchestrated by a warlike madness left to its own devices.

The book doesn't deal with the subjectivity of powerlessness, its reasons and its forms. That's not what it's about. Too bad, because that's where the real pain lies, the **real subjective question**. Its treatment would require other methods: a political inquiry into the forms of subjectivity relating to the crushing of Gaza.

Where we would undoubtedly discover that, beyond the barrage of Western propaganda, beyond the current non-existence of major progressive movements as in the days of opposition to the Vietnam War, the real root of impotence is the absence of organized forces supporting in Palestine, as here, the only just strategic orientation (a state treating Palestinians and Israelis equally). An orientation that October 7 and the crushing of Gaza have considerably reversed.

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[STUDIES]

ALAIN RALLET: *THE QUESTION OF THE COMMONS*

Nothing has become more common today than the use of the terms "common good", "common property", "common", "common"..., at a time when capitalist globalization is methodically privatizing all areas of activity, both tangible and intangible, social and intimate.

"Natural commons", "knowledge commons", "digital commons", "urban commons", "health commons"...: today, it seems possible to see "commons" everywhere, including in the discourse of state authorities. What is at stake in this semantic proliferation and discursive agitation? Is there anything to be learned from it?

In particular, how does it relate to the question of communism as we understand it? Is it a way of forcing it, of rendering it inactive in favor of a politically devitalized category of the common, a harmless playground for the urban petty bourgeoisie ("to each according to his common"), an existential counter-fire to the liquefaction of humanity by the competition of all against all? Or a diabolical resurgence of communism in a collective unconscious that thought it was over?

I think we need to take a closer look at the emergence of the "common" in our time, because it raises questions, albeit very obliquely, about the relationship between the common and communism.

The common, from a reactive symptom to the construction of a political ideology

It's a symptom of current times, taking the obvious place of a void left by the double collapse of the socialist and welfare states. This collapse leaves all social activity to be atomized by the market, in the absence of any state capacity to protect it. The result is the disappearance of any representation of a political space that would be "common", i.e. one that would symbolize political action to manage, in the name of a common interest, collective resources withdrawn from the market.

However, the issue of the "common" rose from the ashes at the beginning of the 21st century.

Firstly, within capitalism itself, there are still **forms of collective organization of economic resources** that are not driven by the market or the state. Many of these forms have disappeared or been perverted by capitalism (cooperatives, mutual societies, etc.), but a certain type of good - the **"commons"** - continues to be collectively managed because of its characteristics.

At a time when the extension of privatization to everything leaves no vital space between the concentration of capital and consumerist individualization, the claimed existence of collectively-managed commons seemed like the divine rebirth of a legitimacy thought to have been lost. Stories, experiments, charters and theoretical justifications sprang up, which, through reciprocal emulation, led us to speak of a **"return of the commons"**[1] .

Another symptom of this "comeback", but in a more directly political way, is **the reappearance of mass movements with a global perspective in the early 2000s,** first with the alter-globalization movement and then with the uprisings of the 2010s ("Arab revolutions", square occupations...).

These movements did not use the common as an emblem, although in some countries (Latin America, Spain) they were associated with experiments in collective self-management (Mexico City, Barcelona, Madrid). But **the flag of the common** has been used by certain ideologues[2] to cover these movements with the prospect of a new "revolutionary" path between the current tyranny of the market and the state disillusionment of the past century. The political sublimation of these movements by the flag of

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[1] Coriat B. (ed.), *Le retour des communs. La crise de l'idéologie propriétaire*, Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2015

[2] Cf Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's books, notably *Commonwealth* (2009, Harvard U.P.) and in a more consistent way Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval's book : *Commun. Essai sur la révolution au XXIème siècle*, La Découverte, 2014.

the common has today declined with them, so that it now mainly envelops the development of popular experiences of collective self-organization (Chiapas, Mexico City, water management in Naples, ZADs...).

But the common is not just a reactive symptom. It's also an ideological construct that, for us, questions the category of communism, here and now, as it crosses questions with communist experiences in political history (from the Paris Commune to the Chinese Communes Populaires), just as it poses the unresolved question of the nature of the state in its form of decay.

This point will be dealt with in a later article, this one devoted above all to identifying what is presented through the category of the common, or rather categories of the "common", the "commons", "common goods"... It's all particularly confusing indeed.

There are different approaches and definitions of these categories. Cutting through the thicket of commonalities, **we distinguish five versions**:

- The Common Good or the Commons
- The natural commons
- The common as a political principle
- Modern" commons
- The commons as a social construct and institutional project

The Common Good(s)

The capital letters indicate that these are assets of a nature superior to the interests of individuals or social groups. They belong to the Heritage of Mankind, embodying its common biological destiny. These are primarily the environment (pollution, water, climate change, pandemics, etc.), to which moral categories are sometimes added (health, education, etc.).

They refer to a supposedly consensual humanity, not the divided one envisaged by the communist orientation with regard to the political issues of equality and justice. To make them the commons of all humanity, we need to objectify them through natural entities of indisputable character: we all need to breathe, to have access to water, not to destroy the planet... The need to protect the commons can be understood at all levels (global, national, local).   (global, national, local).

As their protection goes beyond the interests of particular communities[3] , a supra-community, de facto state authority is needed to ensure this[4] . This position is, however, compatible with capitalism, as it may involve regulating the interplay of private interests through incentives or regulations .[5]

The natural commons

This approach is already more relevant to us, as it touches on the question of ownership and collective action. **These commons are natural resources** (forests, irrigation systems, pastures, fisheries, etc.) **that are managed collectively by a community that distributes the rules of access and use**. These commons have always existed, but they were greatly reduced by the enclosure movement in England in the 18th century, i.e. by the establishment of exclusive private property rights on communal land that had previously been freely accessible. However, they still exist today, as shown by the work of American political scientist Elinor Ostrom .[6]

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[3] a (ecological) community may well want to save water, but not the local farmers or tourist industry.

[4] We will then lament the absence of a global state that is commensurate with the ecological threats to the global commons.

[5] This is the view of Jean Tirole in his book *Économie du bien commun* (PUF, 2018), which, under the guise of a common good (air quality), is in fact selling the liberal solution of the market (rights to pollute).

[6] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*, Cambridge U. P., 1990

The persistence of the natural commons has given rise to a debate on the extension of property rights to all resources. For bourgeois economic theory, the establishment of a property right over a resource is the condition for its exploitation by a capitalist. Indeed, if such a right does not exist, the capitalist runs the risk of not having a monopoly on its use, which will adversely affect the profitability of his operation. He will therefore not invest. Before a resource can be exploited, (private) property rights must first be granted.

"The tragedy of the commons"

The argument has been used to proclaim the inanity of all common property. This was done by ecologist Garett Hardin in an article entitled "*The Tragedy of the Commons*" published in *Science* in 1968.

Hardin takes the example of open-access pastures on communal land. Being open access, the pastures are threatened with over-exploitation, as each farmer will herd his flock there, satisfying his immediate interest without contributing to the upkeep of the pastures. Common ownership therefore leads to **collective ruin**. Hence the need to enclose the land and entrust its management to an owner who will take care to maintain it, since it is the means of production that ensures his income.

Hardin'**s reasoning is specious**, because it doesn't occur to him that the peasants, who are no fools, have been able, through communal power, to enact rules of use that are binding on all and preserve the pastures. Ownership and use are two different things. Just because ownership is communal does not mean that access is free.

Hardin's thesis awakened the ardor of supporters of the economic legitimacy of common property. Elinor Ostrom has shown with many examples that resources can be pooled in a sustainable way when a community organizes itself to elaborate and enforce a set of rules for access, use, control, sanctions, disposal of goods... called a "*bundle* of *rights*" applying to these resources.

The commons according to Ostrom

Initially, Ostrom assigns the "common" to a particular type of good with two properties.

The first (known as **non-excludability**) is the impossibility or difficulty of excluding someone from the use of a good, because there is no technical or tariff barrier preventing them from doing so[7] . For example, access to groundwater or to fish in a marine fishery. If you can't exclude someone from the use of a good, there's no market possible, because no one will agree to pay for the use of a good from which they can't be excluded (*stowaway* phenomenon). The market solution is out.

The second property is *rivalry* in the use of the good when its quantity is limited: if I take water from the water table or fish from the fishery, there will be less left for others. This is the case for many natural resources. The shared management of this resource can then be regulated by the allocation of usage rights, if there is a collective authority capable of distributing them. Shared management of the natural commons thus appears to be a superior solution to the market for this type of good.

Ostrom goes further, however, because the **"commons"** is both **a type of good** (a good with the two previous properties and, as such, able to be shared between the members of a community) and **a way of** managing **it** (an ad hoc form of "governance", i.e. a set of rules implemented by a power structure internal to the community).

In this duality of the common, which articulates the *objective* properties of a type of good with the *subjective* construction of "acting in common", the emphasis inevitably shifts to the second term, ultimately recognizing *that what is common is that which is under the governance of a collective actor*, beyond the objective nature of the good.

This shift gives the common another dimension, making it an alternative to the state and the market on a social scale, a third way that will be seized upon by the ideologists of revolutionary renewal at the dawn of the 21st century, far beyond the canvas initially woven by Ostrom.

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[7] non-excludability is very relative. Capitalism has no shortage of imagination when it comes to re-establishing excludability by erecting technical barriers or creating artefacts (rights to pollute).

The shift in commonality from one type of good to *acting in common* has two aspects.

On the one hand, it emphasizes the construction and operation of a democratic structure of governance. This is essential if we are to assign the common good to an alternative path between the monetary tyranny of the market and the bureaucratic tyranny of the state (welfare state or socialist state).

It also enables the extension of shareable resources to goods other than the natural commons. This is essential if we are to extricate the commons from its naturalistic niche, and make it the basis of a political alternative tinged with modernity.

The combination of these two elements paves the way for the common good as a political principle.

The common as a political principle

First aspect: the commons is "*an institutional form of self-government, distinct from self-management limited to the administration of things, enabling the free deployment of acting in common*" across all sectors (Dardot and Laval, 2014).

Self-government means that users of the commons participate in the construction of the rules that apply to them, and in the power structure that implements the rules. There must be simultaneous **co-decision** on rules, **co-obligation** on duties and **co-realization** on practices. The common, understood in this way, is supposed to open up a **third way between the market and the state**, one that is neither that of the dissolution of politics in the economy (a managerial perspective subservient to the market), nor that of the tyrannical statization of the social and the economic.

This path is presented first and foremost as an assessment of the **socialist states**, where the nationalization of property captured the common by separating workers and peasants from any real power over the use of pooled goods, although Dardot and Laval say nothing about the communist experience of the Chinese People's Communes[8] . The need for this third way also stems **from criticism of the welfare state**[9] , which has divested people of democratic management of social needs (social protection, public services), entrusting it to bureaucratized bodies. This path requires a shift from "public services" to "common services", involving the population in the construction of public policies and the steering of organizations.

This "*self-institutionalization of society*" raises many problems, which will be discussed at the end of the article. This discussion focuses on **the enigmatic question of the decline of the state**.

But let's move on to the second aspect that underpins the commons as a contemporary political perspective: the extension of the realm of the commons to goods other than natural resources, to goods contemporary with the current stage of capitalism.

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[8] By reiterating the vulgate on the criminal nature of the Maoist political experiment, they avoid examining what the People's Communes have attempted. The management of water in Madrid appears to them as an experiment that was otherwise foundational.

[9] The disappearance of the welfare state in Western societies, due to a lack of resources and the threat of revolution, is certainly more disturbing to middle-class subjectivity today, and certainly to their adherence to parliamentarianism, than the long-standing failures of socialist states.

Modern "commons"

Thanks to them, the common gains access to the legitimacy of a "modernity" free of green pastures.

The knowledge commons

First, there **are the "knowledge commons"**. This is not a new idea. It consists in saying that knowledge (science) is a common work that operates by aggregating new ideas that enrich its previous state. This process can only take place if new ideas circulate freely, without being subject to private appropriation. The body of knowledge constituted by all the contributions that have produced it must belong to humanity as a whole.

The point here is that, unlike the natural commons, the "knowledge commons" are not exhausted by their use**; on the contrary, they are enriched by their free access and intensive use**. This intrinsic dynamic is threatened, however, by capitalism's attempt to extend the reign of the commodity to activities that were previously outside its scope. Knowledge has not escaped this. To do so, it was necessary to apply property rights to it (known as *intellectual property rights*, such as patents for inventions or copyright for artistic works). Since the 1980s**, the privative appropriation of knowledge objects, described as "new enclosures",** has continued to expand under American impetus: patentability of living organisms, software, knowledge bases, commercialization of scientific publishing...

Faced with these "new enclosures", activists of the commons have sought to preserve **the inappropriate nature of knowledge** and works, either by challenging the possibility of making them the object of property rights (in opposition to patents on genes), or by devising licenses (free or *open source* licenses for software, *creative commons* for cultural works) that allow more flexible circulation of content than proprietary licenses, according to the uses authorized by their producers (rights to share, modify, commercialize without or with modifications...).

The digital commons

The liberation of knowledge from its control by property rights extends to other goods with **the advent of digital technology**. The digital age is producing a new kind of commons.

Firstly, **digital goods** are dematerialized and **can be reproduced at low cost**. For this reason, they are not rival goods like the natural commons, which are limited in quantity and destroyed by consumption. On the contrary, the fact that they can be shared, thanks to their cost-free reproduction, gives them greater use value, like a music file that has been duplicated on a mass scale, thus attracting a wider audience.

Networks also extend the possibilities of co-producing and co-using digital goods, with everyone being able to be both producer and user, as in the case of Wikipedia. **It is the social interaction organized by the network that creates use value**, whereas it destroyed it (via rivalry) in the case of natural commons.

This new situation gave rise to a number of illusions in the 2000s. In particular, it fuelled the idea of a modernity of the common, refounded by capitalism itself, while at the same time providing the means to escape it, thus reactivating Marx's famous thesis that capitalism itself creates the conditions for its overcoming.

Overcoming towards what? Towards an interactive society of the common opposed to the predatory society of capitalism.

The Hardt/Negri variant of overcoming capitalism through the commons

The most ideological formulation was given by Hardt and Negri in *Commonwealth* (2009). Hardt and Negri deploy a techno-Spinozism that leads to a vulgar Marxism immersed in a Proudhonian bath. A device that heralds the overcoming of capitalism by the "*communism of the multitude*".

- **Techno-spinozism**: the dynamics of capitalism and profit are no longer dominated by material production, but by **the immaterial production of social interactions**, where the intersubjectivity and collective creativity of individuals are mobilized through widespread connection. Already at work in the care, education, knowledge, exchange and communication professions, this trend has been boosted tenfold by the Internet, which is establishing a network society. In this way, it produces the common, i.e., a sociability and collective intelligence based on the power of a connected multiple.

- **Spinozist** in the sense that this vitalist tendency is a force immanent to capitalism, springing from its productive bowels and irrepressibly self-developing.

- **Vulgar Marxism**, as it was called in the '70s to describe an anti-dialectical vision of Marxism, according to which the vital momentum of the productive forces driven by technical progress embedded in the accumulation of capital, and engendering the growing socialization of production, shatters the envelope of capitalist relations of production based on the private appropriation of the means of production. In the name of which, capitalism proves to be the gravedigger of itself by developing the forces that organize its overcoming. Hardt and Negri offer us a remake of the thesis that **the history of every society is the history of the struggle of productive forces against the relations of production**. The proletariat as the force that gives birth to communism is succeeded by immaterial workers, emancipated vectors of the multitude that populates communism à la Negri.

- Finally, it substitutes a **Proudhon-style** problematic ("property is theft") for Marx's characterization of capitalism as a social relationship centered on the extortion of surplus value in production. **Predation has replaced exploitation**. Hardt and Negri emphasize the illegitimate capture by capital of the products of labor produced in common for the common good. This capture takes place through the privatization of the means of production.

Hence the emphasis on the question of property rights, which are opposed to the subversion of capital by the common. An institutional framework based on common ownership would liberate the power of the common intrinsically contained in the development of the productive forces. **Our focus on the juridical** will provide an opportunity to discuss the significance of today's resurgence of a contestation of private property that is also to be found in Piketty's *Capital and Ideology* .[10]

But there is another political approach to the common than this ideological fresco of a new social subject (the being-in-common) that has emerged from the technological bowels of capitalism to herald the era of a communism of the multitude.

A constructivist vision of the commons: from their social use to their institutional insertion in a Federation

At the heart of the political approach to the commons is the desire to establish a possibility: that of the ability of individuals to take collective action to share or co-construct common resources, by means of a system of rules and an ad hoc "governance structure", against the double closure represented by the commercial atomization of the commons, on the one hand, and its nationalization, on the other.

The militants of the common experience it as an alternative to what there is, a reconquest of collective initiative subjectively assumed as such in a world that closes off the possibility of it.

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[10] Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*, Seuil, 2019

But there are many ways of living it. A social way, a more political way.

Building a social space

One way is to simply create a "liberated" social space that is self-sufficient, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by digital technology to facilitate the coordination needed to transform individual contributions into a collective object (product, service).

Initiatives have spread both locally and globally. This is what was (mis)called the "sharing economy" or "collaborative economy" in the 2010s.

On a local scale

On a local scale (or trans-local with a unifying support), they correspond in fact to the old logic of the associative world but give it more scope: shared gardens, parent crèches, cooperative grocery stores, local car-sharing, exchange of services and knowledge, various bartering, mutual aid, short farmer/consumer circuits, cooperative repair workshops...

Although they do not threaten the market order, some of these initiatives have been rivalled by platforms (Airbnb, Le Bon Coin, training platforms, local services, etc.) which have seen the opportunity to develop a business by **commoditizing social interaction**.

On a global scale

Capital's subversion is even stronger in the fields covered by global commons operators: software such as Linux, Framasoft, LibreOffice, Firefox (Mozilla), databases (*Open Food Facts*) or maps (*OpenStreetMap*), encyclopedias (Wikipedia)... These operators occupy a significant place in their field[11] but have difficulty resisting capital's infiltration because of their financing needs. Indeed, even if these platforms rely on (partially) voluntary contributions, they require heavy investment in infrastructure and maintenance, which cannot be financed solely by the donations collected by the non-profit Foundations that oversee them.

Infiltration takes many forms: contributions mainly from developers employed by GAFAMs (as in the case of *open source* software), the transformation of non-profit organizations into for-profit ones, platform takeovers (such as the Github software development platform bought by Microsoft), entry onto boards of directors, and very generous donations. Wikipedia is resisting by only accepting individual donations, but has recently developed a professional branch of paid services for rapid access to its database for major Net players (including Google) who re-use its content.

The Commons of Capital

In short, **capital's penetration of what were presented as "digital commons" seems inevitable**. So much so, in fact, that it has become customary to speak of the **"Commons of Capital"**[12] and of a new "tragedy of the commons", this time brought about not by the exhaustion of the commons itself, as in the case of pastures (Wikipedia and Firefox are, on the contrary, doing all the better for being intensively used), but by the exhaustion of its financing.

Platform capitalism[13] can thus develop an economy of "cooperation" and "sharing" for its own benefit, by becoming the collector and aggregator of multiple, more or less voluntary contributions, which it exploits[14] . The multitude is no longer the vibrant subject of an overcoming of capitalism, but the production factor of a specific form of capitalism, "*crowd-based capitalism*"[15] .

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[11] A significant part of the Internet's software infrastructure is supported by *open source* software.

[12] Lionel Maurel, *Are Digital Commons doomed to become "Capital Commons"*?. https://hal.science/hal-01964963/document

[13] Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, John Wiley & Sons, 2016

[14] S.M. Petersen, "*Loser generated content: From participation to exploitation*", *First Monday*, Vol. 13, 3, 2018

[15] Arun Sundararajan, *The Sharing Economy*, MIT Press, 2016

A political-institutional construction: the Federation of the Commons

As we can see, the common, envisaged as pure social expression, ends up mired in the reefs of capitalism .[16]

But there is **a more political vision**, aware of the impasses outlined above, and seeking to set out the conditions and forms of a generalized Society of the Commons, born of social initiatives (the diversity of the commons) but absorbed neither by capital nor by the State, "self-governed" at every level, from local to global, and thought of as a revolution of our time.

It is formulated in Dardot and Laval (2014) .[17]

It's an exclusively theoretical, constructivist vision that aims to achieve general coherence by tackling the difficulties raised by the desire to make the common an alternative project to capitalism.

Basically, the commons are multiplying and extending to all areas of activity, including business and public services. Common means co-production or sharing of common resources decided by the users themselves within the framework of a governance structure that allocates rules of use through collective deliberation. There is no exclusive right of ownership, which would be that of the common structure or of an owner, but a decomposition of the right of ownership into various rules of use .[18]

This multiplication of commons poses well-known problems. Each pursuing its own interests, they can be detrimental to the interests of others, and conflict with a higher-order interest, that of a wider community (regional, national, global). They must therefore be part of a hierarchical but self-instituted structuring of the commons at the various possible scales, up to and including a Federation of the World Commons, avoiding at every level any temptation to state control, so as not to deprive the[19] *commoners* of their power. The federative inspiration is explicitly Proudhonian (a federation of free associations).

The most remarkable thing about this utopian construction is that it never deals with antagonism. For this reason, it overlooks the transformation of social relations of production to which the institutional scaffolding of the Federation of the Commons should be linked.

Starting with the capital/labor relationship and its different dimensions (manual/intellectual labor, design/execution work), which must be revolutionized if workers are to emancipate themselves from relationships of domination and oppression. The antagonism that lies at the heart of this transformation is evacuated in favor of the constitution of the company as a "democratic institution", with workers taking part in the decisions that affect them. Nothing is said about the political divisions that the prospect of such a transformation entails, or how to deal with them. Nor is there any discussion of the issues of inhabitation and contradictions within the people.

This is where the linguistic limits of the notion of the "common" come into play, as **there is nothing a priori common in the subjective division of positions with regard to situations of antagonism or contradiction within the people**. **The fetish of the common** covering up the division of humanity in the situations it has to face leads to the occultation of political work in favor of **the fetishization of a deliberative form** divorced from the real issues at stake. Collective deliberation is no longer **the** political **work** of emancipation, but **a form**, a procedure whose observance symbolizes the third way between the market and state control.

As a result, the common is first and foremost an institutional construction. When Dardot and Laval seek to recover "the greatness of the idea of revolution", they assign it to a "self-institutionalization of society", not to a transformation of relations of production to which "self-institutionalization" would be subordinate.

Generally speaking, the literature on the commons focuses mainly on the varied construction of institutional arrangements, the importance of rules of use and the capacity of law to accommodate them. What emerges **is an institutional obsession** turning in on itself, i.e. on its internal procedures, detached in any case from the divided nature of the real stakes of political transformation.

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[16] This was already the fate of the cooperatives and mutuals created in the 19th century.

[17] See in particular their nine proposals and their conclusion on "*rediscovering the grandeur of the idea of revolution*".

[18] The common is thought of as "inappropriable".

[19] user communities

Conclusion

This leads the literature on the commons to a paradox: **where does its focus on the institutional lead**, even if it is "self-instituted" ?

To throw ourselves into the arms of an implicit statism, not the abhorred one of the late Socialist States, but the permeable one of the parliamentary state. For who can guarantee the interlocking mobile sculpture of a Federation of the Commons suspended in mid-air, and anchor it to reality if not its inscription in state law? Indeed, the only "political" gestures cited in this literature, in addition to the founding initiatives of the commons, consist in getting the commons admitted into law .[20]

In Italy, for example, following a collective experience in water management in Naples in the 2000s, a debate ensued on the possibility of incorporating the notion of "common goods" into the Civil Code and giving legal status to participatory management by residents in certain segments of urban policies.

The jurisdictions of the Parliamentary State are in the background of self-institutionalized commons as the Central Bank for banknotes. Where there is no longer a state, as on a global scale, self-instituted global commons float in a vacuum. The search for complementarity between the commons and the parliamentary state is recognized and practiced as the only political outlet.

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[20] attempts with limited success, as property rights are not to be trifled with.

[MATHEMATICAL RESOURCES]

FRANÇOIS NICOLAS*: THE MATHEMATICAL CONCEPT OF EMERGENCE*

To shed some **mathematical** light on the notion of **emergence**, I'll take as my starting point a mathematics lesson given ten years ago as part of the *Qui-vive* sessions co-organized with Rudolf di Stefano at Pantin's ciné 104 from 2012 to 2016: *La notion d'émergence, éclairée par un théorème d'A. Ehresmann (1996)* [1]

One question

Under what conditions can a new structure emerge on the basis of a first structure? Not how can a new structure replace an old one, but rather how can it be superimposed on it and become (relatively) autonomous? In other words, how can a **superstructure** emerge on top of an **infrastructure**?

This question, formulated in the abstract, can be answered in many different ways.

- Think of traditional Marxism, which stratified socio-economic infrastructure and ideological-political superstructure.

- Think of how individual consciousness can emerge in a brain on the basis of neuronal exchanges.

- Think of those truly collective phenomena - groups, crowds, teams, organizations... - whose own logic emerges on the basis of individual behavior.

In each case, the notion of emergence is based on the idea that the higher order is not transitive to the lower order, that it cannot be reduced to the combination of what goes on below: we can no longer understand the phenomena of the collective superstructure by simply breaking it down into its infrastructure. [2]

As we shall see, what is at stake here is a conception of emancipation through the entanglement of a higher level, a new scale, rather than through detachment from the lower level.

A glossary...

Let's fix a little lexicon: we'll say that the players in the infrastructure are **individuals** and those in the superstructure are **collectives**.

To say that a proper order emerges in the superstructure is to say that relations between collectives can be (relatively) autonomous from relations between individuals. And to say that they are **autonomous** is to say not only that they are different, but that they are not composed in the same way as the former, that relations between *collectives* cannot be deduced from relations between *individuals* (constituting the collectives in question).

- For example, many relationships between two sports teams will no longer be intelligible by breaking down the teams into their individual parts, but will derive from a group logic that cannot be reduced to a combination of individual behaviors.

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[1] *Qui-vive*, September 26, 2013 - Ciné 104 de Pantin. This lesson appeared in *Quadrature* magazine n°106 (October-November-December 2017**)**: http://www.quadrature.info/produit/numero-106/

[2] The notion of emergence is thus a bar to the Cartesian method of **reduction**, which consists in breaking down a problem into its simple constituents: as we shall see, the emergent superstructure is not intelligible simply by breaking it down into the elements of the infrastructure.

- In the same way, many of the relationships between different phenomena of consciousness *in the same brain* will no longer be intelligible as simple relationships between the neuronal zones concerned: the phenomena of consciousness will indeed retain their neuronal basis, but their own logic will no longer be analyzable according to a simple neuronal logic.

The notion of emergence thus establishes a (relative) **separation** between hierarchically correlated orders: the superstructure may be the concern of collectives made up of individuals, but the relationships between these collectives emancipate themselves from the relationships between individuals to compose a new space endowed with its own (relatively) autonomous logic.

Our question is: under what conditions can such an emergence occur?

Here, we'll deal with just one of them: a *necessary* **condition** for this type of emergence, a condition that contemporary mathematics has clarified in the form of a theorem by Andrée Ehresmann.

A theorem

This theorem is recent - dating from 1996 - and is the work[3] of a French mathematician[4] specializing in category theory.

Let's present the main idea here, without going into the technical details, which are intuitively accessible.

Formulations and formalization

Technically formulated, this theorem says exactly this (in the technical language of the mathematics concerned):

"In a hierarchical category, the Principle of Multiplicity is a necessary condition for there to be objects of order of complexity strictly greater than 1."

Let's rephrase this in our lexicon: for superstructural relations between collectives to be (relatively) emancipated from infrastructural relations between individuals, there must be collectives that collectivize, under the same name, entirely different and disjoint groups of individuals; groups, entirely independent in the infrastructure, must be "represented", in the superstructure, by the same (super)-element.

Let's formalize this.

Let's start from a starting point - our future *infrastructure* - made up of individuals linked together by various relationships .[5]

Let's assume that, in this situation, **every part has an element that will represent it**: let's say an element that exemplifies the properties common to the different elements of this part, a specified element that concentrates the trait differentiating this part from any other - to follow the sports metaphor, a kind of team captain, exemplifying the sporting qualities specific to this team. Let's call this lighthouse element, which sums up the part in question, its *boundary* element.[6]

Now let's build **a new situation** composed solely of these boundary elements and their reciprocal relationships - in our sporting image, a gathering of team captains. This will be our new *superstructure*.

Let's draw this hierarchical superposition - the infrastructure is at the bottom and the superstructure is built *on top of* it:

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[3] in collaboration with biologist J.-P. Vanbremeersch

[4] Andrée Ehresmann, née Andrée Bastiani (1935)

[5] They are normally oriented, but at our elementary level we can overlook this point at first.

[6] or *colimite*, but we won't go into this distinction here (which refers to the orientation of the relationships - "morphisms" - concerned).
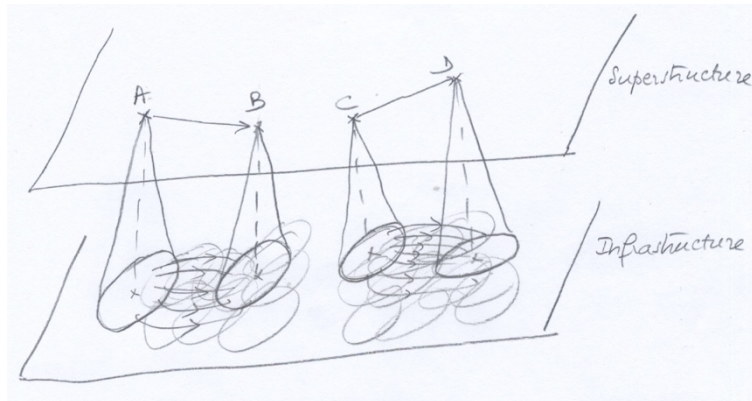
A priori, superstructural relationships between boundary elements **can be decomposed** according to the infrastructural relationships between the elements concerned. Thus, in our diagram, boundary elements A and B are connected (in the superstructure) because their collective bases are connected (in the infrastructure); the same applies to C and D. On the other hand, A and B on the one hand, and C and D on the other, are unrelated (in the superstructure) because their respective bases are unrelated (in the infrastructure).

A priori, then, superstructure remains **transitive** to infrastructure, since relations from above can be decomposed and analyzed in relations from below. [7]

What our theorem tells us, then, is that the situation changes completely if there are boundary elements that are at the same time the boundary of two entirely separate parts of the infrastructure:
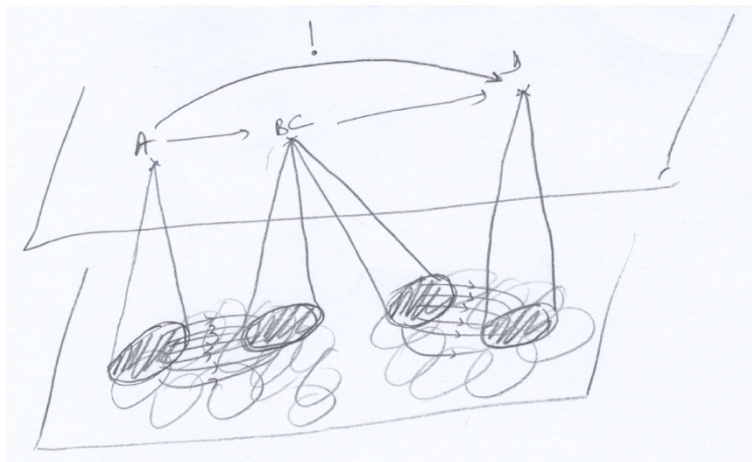
Here, elements B and C have become **merged** (in the superstructure), while their collective bases have remained **separate** (in the infrastructure).

> To do this, imagine a gathering of the 50,000 people in France who like to call themselves *President* (from the President of the Republic to the President of some trade-union council), and imagine that the same person in this gathering happens, by the greatest chance, to be twice President, or more precisely, to be simultaneously President of two completely unrelated collectives: for example, President of a building on one side and President of an association on the other. This is an example of what we'll call a *polyvalent* limit-element or, to use the theorem's expression, a *multiple* limit-element. [8]

What happens then? What happens is that the network of superstructural relations between boundary elements will ipso facto be endowed with specific relations that will no longer have a strict equivalent in the infrastructure.

So, in our previous diagram, not only does A remain linked to BC (through B) and BC to D (through C) in

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[7] This is an intelligible organization based on Cartesian principles of *reduction* by decomposition into simple elements.

[8] The same element of the superstructure is bounded by two separate parts of the infrastructure.

the superstructure, but A is now linked to D through the composition of the two previous links (A→BC and BC→D ⟹ A→D), even though the collective bases concerned continue to ignore each other in the infrastructure.

The theorem then tells us that the existence of such *multiple* boundary elements is a **necessary condition** for **the emergence of** a (relatively) autonomous superstructure, (relatively) emancipated from the infrastructure and thus (relatively) incomprehensible from its base alone.

Three images

1) We can imagine this emergence as a result of **crumpling**: let's imagine a patchwork made from disparate fabrics, and give each of its pieces the shape of a cone by stretching its center upwards. Now bring some of these vertices so close together that they merge, thus connecting, through their vertices alone, pieces that were entirely disjointed in the original fabric. The resulting superstructure, made up of the individual peaks, will resemble our emerging order, as new relationships emerge that have no equivalent in the basic patchwork.

2) All the same, our assembly of Presidents will report such and such a sports collective and such and such a residents' collective from the top, even though at their base, the individuals concerned share no activities and hardly even know each other.

3) Let's take a third image: that of **a field of reeds**. The end of each reed can be seen as the boundary of the piece of land that encloses the root of each one, fertilizing and hydrating it. As long as each reed remains upright, or as long as all the reeds maintain the same inclination, the superstructure of the field - that upper surface that we perceive globally because we can't discern the soil: its "canopy" - will faithfully reflect the infrastructure of the soil. But if the wind gets in the way and crumples this field, the appearance of this surface will give rise to shapes that can no longer be related to those of the ground - Japanese cinema loves to play with these images:

(*Onibaba*, Kaneto Shindō - 1964)

We could multiply images, for example of music: if a collective of notes is a chord, then the upper pitch of this chord may be in the position of limit-element, and the melody that results from the relationships between these upper notes will occupy the position of superstructure in relation to the harmonic infrastructure, and, under certain conditions, this melody may in fact be (relatively) autonomous from the harmonic sequences that nevertheless continue to generate it.

This process can **be** summed up by saying that this type of emergence **opens access to a new** structure by the very fact of **closing access to the old one**. So, to open on one side - in this case, upwards - you have to pay the price by closing on the other - in this case, downwards.

To open up to a new situation, you have to close the old situation in on itself; you have to burn some of your vessels, so to speak, in order to be able to emerge, without return, into the new situation.

In the case of a given forest, for the **canopy** at its crest to become (relatively) autonomous, the terrain at its base must in return partly withdraw into its own secrets.

A materialism of emergence

This theorem - and this is what makes it so interesting - engages **a materialism of emergence**: there is indeed a rational hierarchy of nested orders, and just because an order rests on a given material basis does not mean that its own logic is strictly deduced from the first.

- In this way, music is based on acoustics, although its own laws are not strictly derived from them.
- The same goes for politics in relation to the social collectives it mobilizes.
- All the same, more generally between subjects made up of collectives of individuals: the psychological, sociological and anthropological laws that prevail between the human individuals concerned (those who belong to the collectives under consideration) no longer fully account for what happens in the sphere of collective subjects proper, particularly in terms of intersubjectivity.

Relative autonomy!

The essential point is that the **autonomy** we've been constantly talking about here is not absolute, but **relative**, because the superstructure's own laws are not *independent of* the infrastructure's own laws. It goes without saying that there could be no superstructure without an infrastructure to underpin it! And, of course, a whole series of infrastructural laws continue to have an influence - a projection - on the superstructure.

> Take the image of a rainforest canopy. It will no longer accurately reflect the system of rivers that irrigate the soil, but it will retain traces of, for example, a large river that flows through it.

This theorem thus gives rise to **a materialism of *relative* autonomy**, an autonomy that remains dependent on the conditions of its emergence (its infrastructure, its material base) - in this sense, it is not *absolute* autonomy, nor *independence* - but nonetheless capable of interweaving these conditions with another world, organized according to its own laws.
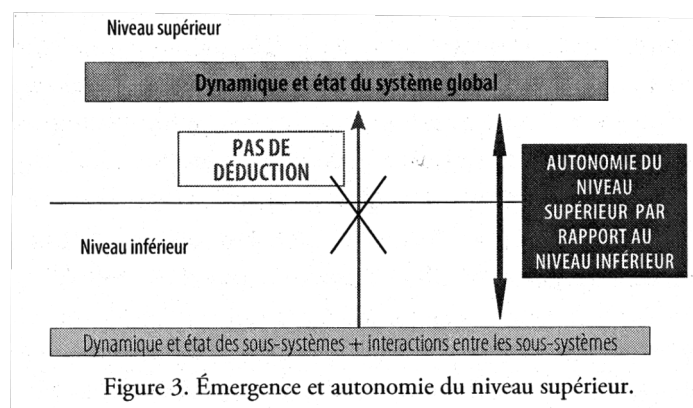

Figure 3. Émergence et autonomie du niveau supérieur.

Sébastien Poinat: *Quantum mechanics.*
(Hermann; *Visions des sciences* series; 2014)

Feedback?

Such materialism raises a question to which our theorem does not provide an immediate answer: how do the relatively autonomous laws of the superstructure retroact on the primary laws of the infrastructure? Since the autonomy of these laws is not absolute - the superstructure remains *dependent on* the infrastructure - how is the infrastructure affected in return by this emergence?

To return to our examples,

- how is the forest floor affected in return by autonomous exchanges within the canopy?

- how can relationships within a human collective be affected in turn by the fact that their representative is also the representative of a completely different kind of collective?

- regarding the human body, how does the emerging mind retroact on the endogenous functioning of the body, not only by overtly commanding it to perform this or that activity, but also by some subconscious or unconscious phenomenon of a psychosomatic nature?

Understanding these feedbacks would require another mathematical study, this time detailing Andrée Ehresmann's mathematical theory of hierarchical categories.

Two extensions

This **mathematical** approach to emergence can be linked to two complementary **physical** approaches, which shed light on emergence phenomena on a human scale from two angles: upwards (astrophysics) and downwards (quantum mechanics).

Let's just point out the logic of their thinking.

Scale relativity

The theory of *scale relativity*[9] takes into account the fact that between phenomena nested at different scales (extending from the microscopic to the macroscopic via the mesoscopic - our scale), there is no continuity but **jumps** (on either side **of thresholds** that can be indicated by a universal constant).

Are the thresholds in question based on a strict logic of emergence (as outlined above), or do they also involve other logics? This is the question that quantum mechanics sheds light on at the subatomic level.

Quantum entanglement

The strange but now well-established experimental phenomenon[10] of *quantum entanglement* indicates that, at the subatomic scale, the logic of emergence is not the only one to distinguish itself from that of **reduction**.

> *Reductionist* logic can be illustrated by the second Cartesian rule of method[11] : "*divide each of the difficulties that I examine, into as many parts as it is possible and necessary to solve them better*".

Emergence is opposed to this logic, since the emergent phenomenon cannot be "reduced" by "dividing" it according to the components that support it, since *the synthesis* it constitutes cannot be understood *analytically* by summing up its constituents.

Quantum mechanics makes it clear that the intellectual game is played in threes, since, like **emergence**, **entanglement** is opposed to **reduction** but distinct from the former.

> To put it simply, *entanglement* is the name of a close and lasting **interaction** that is not the simple confusion (of co-limits) at the root of emergence. In other words, entanglement is not, like emergence, a "*two merging into one*", but an interweaving, an imbrication, an ajointement, an entanglement where each component does not lose its individuality while losing its independence [12] . In this way, the multidimensional phenomenon generated by the *entanglement* of different components will no longer be intelligible by "factoring" it into separate "dimensions" .[13]

We're dealing here with a **three-term dialectic**, formalized in a logical hexagon of oppositions:

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[9] See the works of astrophysicist Laurent Nottale: *La relativité dans tous ses états* (Hachette, 1998); *Des fleurs pour Schrödinger. La relativité d'échelle et ses applications* (with J. Chaline and P. Grou; Ellipses, 2009).

[10] See the Nobel Prize awarded to Alain Aspect in 2022

[11] *Discourse on Method*, Part Two.

[12] This type of entanglement is formalized mathematically by a **tensor** product ($\otimes$), which differs from the **Cartesian** product ($\times$), which allows a *reduction* by *factoring* the product according to the different dimensions of which it is composed.

[13] See pp. 255 ff of the mentioned book by Sébastien Poinat: *Mécanique quantique. Du formalisme mathématique au concept philosophique* (ed. Hermann; coll. *Visions des sciences*; 2014).

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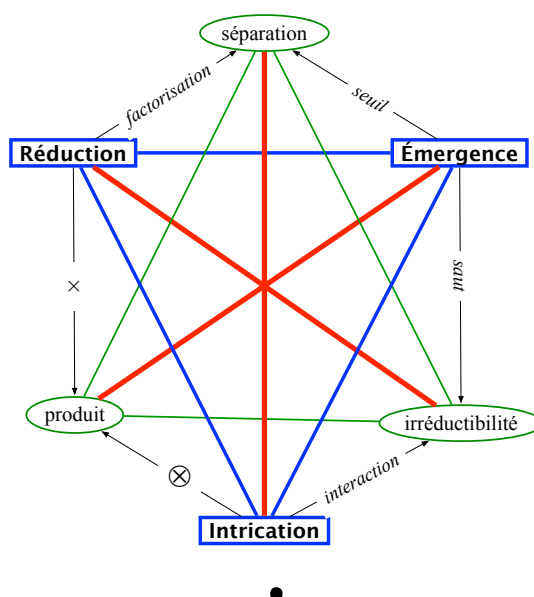
The intellectual stakes of all this are vast, especially for us communists concerning the relationship between *social* relations and *political* relations:

- Marxist-Leninist "classism" is clearly a problem of *reduction* (the intelligence of class political relations is "reduced" to that of class social relations);

- on the other hand, the contemporary communist orientation maintains that **political relations are *irreducible* to social relations** (the very social relations that communist politics aims to revolutionize)[14] . As a result, communist politics will follow a logic of *emergence* or a logic of *entanglement*, depending on whether it names **a** militant **point** (which *emerges* from social relations) or **a region** of revolutionary culture (which *entangles* different types of social relations).

To be continued.

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[14] *Modern* communist politics stumbles over *the irreducibility* of its relationships, just as *classical* algebra stumbled over *the irresolubility* of its equations and *the unnameability of* their roots.

All that remains is for communists to find the affirmative way out of this obstruction, just as Galois found the way out of algebra with the concept of the *group* (which names the infrastructure that binds roots together, thereby rendering them individually unnameable).

Let's remember Galois' modern lesson: **we can name the unnameable**!

[AROUND THE MAGAZINE]

PARIS MEETING ON JUNE 4, 2024

Video: **https:**//youtu.be/IkDNdYRAyuU
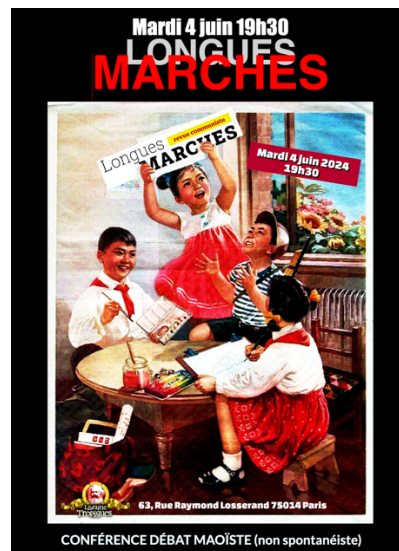
Introduction to the evening

This is more an introduction to our discussions this evening than an exhaustive presentation of the Revue.

Type of magazine

We'll start by saying what it isn't, to clear up any misunderstandings and better define its purpose.

It's not an organizational magazine supporting a political line with its watchwords, mass work and organized forms. That's not what we're about. Its aim is to contribute to the reconstitution of a creative communist political intellectuality, enabling us to find our bearings in today's dramatic times by creating the reflexive and subjective environment necessary for the resurgence of an emancipatory politics. The Revue is a call for the production of this intellectuality.

It is not, of course, an academic journal developing a theory separate from political issues.

This is not a magazine whose aim is to criticize contemporary capitalism or comment on the turpitudes of parliamentarianism. We don't shy away from developing a critical understanding of globalized capitalism and its political adventures, since this is so necessary to the affirmation of an emancipatory politics that is political against politics. It is also lacking in many areas where we have fallen considerably behind in our thinking. But critique is not an end in itself, since all critique remains caught up in the politics it denounces until it has served to construct the positive statement that allows it to escape.

Nor is it a dogmatic magazine, rehashing old intellectual frameworks applied to a political situation that is no longer the one for which they were designed. We are clearly in a new stage of communist orientation, after the founding stage of the 19th[ème] and the revolutions that gave birth to socialist states in the 20th[ème.] This new stage implies new intellectual referents, new questions and new concepts.

Three convictions

Three convictions justified the decision to create this magazine: a sense of urgency, the imperative to make an effort, and the existence of points of support.

The emergency

We don't need to paint a long picture of today's world to justify the sense of urgency that led us to create the Revue. **A collective powerlessness** with profound effects on individual subjectivities is dramatically exposed to criminal policies (Gaza, premise of a world war) and to the bestial, limitless privatization of the world. The reasons for this situation are well known: the disappearance of any organized emancipatory political horizon. Unhindered, the reactionary conflagration feeds on itself to dangerous intoxication. There really isn't much time left to contain these intoxications by reopening the mobilizing horizon of an emancipatory politics. We have been called upon to do just that. To leave behind the lament and geopolitical commentary that remain internal to the current state of affairs. To think that this task can mobilize ardor other than our own.

The effort

Redeploying a communist orientation appropriate to this century is an immense task facing humanity. We're only at the beginning, but we're already measuring the effort and resources this entails. All the more so since, as we have already pointed out, we **are lagging behind**.

A delay, first of all, in taking stock of the communist experience of the 20th^{ème} century, not so much the critical characterization of this experience (the nationalization of revolutionary politics and the absence of communist perspectives in the building of socialism in the Soviet Union and China) as the absence of any assessment of the communist elements experimented with in the communist sequence (1958-1976) of the Chinese revolution[1] .

A delay, then, in defining a communist orientation that could be opposed to the political orientations of contemporary capitalism. We're lagging behind on work that produces its own orientation on ecology, war, new forms of exploitation, the social division of space, relations between peoples... What is an emancipatory orientation on these points? The Revue proposes to work on this, and to invite others to do so, in all possible forms: contributions, discussions, new columns. Building step by step a tool for a new communist reflexivity.

Five points of support

The effort may seem Promethean, but we're not starting from scratch.

1

Renewing the famous three sources of Marxism, we have proposed to back up communist political intellectuality **with three contemporary resources**: political history, namely the communist invention of people's communes in China; French philosophy of the subject, from Bachelard to Badiou; modern mathematical thought, ignored by Marxism but producing relevant dialectical concepts.

2

Second point of support: taking advantage of **all existing modes of thought** (sciences, arts, politics, love). Hence the diversity of sections, ranging from pictorial modernity to a close examination of political events.

3

Third point of support: the **international dimension** of the Revue. From the outset, it is vital to place the work of elaborating a new communist orientation within an international framework, not only in terms of the subjects covered, but also in terms of the nature of the contributions, the organization of discussions as we have begun to do with A. Russo, a focus on burning or instructive situations, and finally the audience, as the Review is translated into four languages.

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[1] With the notable exception of a few remarkable works, such as that by A. Russo discussed in the first three issues of the Revue.

4

Fourth point of support: the indispensable **study work**.

5

A final point of support: to place the Revue under the sign of an **exploration of the subjective**. Let's develop it.

A contemporary communist subjectivity

What can communist subjectivity be today? We know that this is a decisive factor in commitment, and the condition for the emergence of militants in this cause, particularly in the younger generation who have not gone through the previous stage of communist orientation.

Communist subjectivity has different dimensions.

A **strategic dimension** that gives meaning to our commitment, and involves the reconstitution of communism as a space of possibilities here and now, and not as a dubious utopia. We need to find the content and the forms.

A **collective dimension** too, where the collective is not assigned an objective content - class interest, as in the Marxist tradition - nor does it derive from an organizational guarantee, but consists of a particular form of subjectivity. What might these forms of collective subjectivity be today? How might they emerge?

On this point, we have a working hypothesis that has found its way into the Revue's "***Échapper aux nihilismes***" *(Escaping nihilisms*) section, which we advise you to follow closely. In a situation where collective hope, once so strong but now defeated by the failure of the period of socialist states and the absence of its balance sheet, leaves a disoriented humanity on the sand, it is futile to expect an overall response commensurate with the subjective devastation of the contemporary world. Today, there are neither the forces, nor the organization, nor even the collective confidence to support humanity's ability to reassert itself as an emancipating power.

We need to **change the scale** on which this power manifests itself. Let's be materialistic: today, this power is rooted in individual subjectivities. For there are always, and sometimes more than ever, people who, in a given situation, hold an affirmative subjective position of emancipatory scope in their life, work or various activities. This is what we call "**making a point**". Its particularity is that it is held by a particular person in a singular situation, but recognized by others for its emancipatory power, even if they are not themselves in that situation. The point made crystallizes a singular universality which, by demonstrating a capacity to exclude oneself from the "there is only what there is", encourages those who recognize themselves in this point to make their own point. In this way, the resonance of one subjectivity on another creates not a program to be realized, but a dynamic network of points that enables us to creatively face up to the ill wind of nihilism, a network of points that enables us to ek-sist in a relationship of collective trust founded on the commitment of individual subjectivities. In this connection, we have spoken of "**militant acupuncture**".

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Urgency, effort, points of support: it's a question of building something that will be the contingent result of contributions, interpellations, discussions, intellectual openings that will turn out to be some productive and others unproductive, what Lévi-Strauss calls an intellectual **bricolage** as opposed to the engineer's beautiful ordering. **Make do with the means at hand, but do it**.

Let's tinker together.

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Reine Cohen

To say what I expect from *Longues Marches*, I have to start from what I grasp and what grasps me in the communist idea: **the idea of humanity** as we see it, as we desire it, in its capacity to emancipate itself from relations of domination.

These relations of domination as the only mode of organization characterize the human species, and not what we believe deserves to be called "*humanity*".

Human species: one of many animal species, whose over-power, exercised with no horizon other than the "natural" law of the strongest, makes it the most fearsome, the most predatory, the most destructive. An animal species, therefore, entirely determined by its biological being.

What organizes the passage between "I" and "we" defines **humanity** in incompatible directions, between which we must choose.

J. Chapoutot, in his book *La révolution culturelle nazie (The Nazi Cultural Revolution)*, argues that the Nazi gesture is the replacement of the cultural paradigm by the biological paradigm.

The biological paradigm reduces humanity to the human species, an animal species divided into sub-species, races, whose specimens, individuals, are merely identical copies of the realization of their genetic program. The history of this disaster becomes legible from this thesis, outside the petrifying, thought-sterile theme of *Absolute Evil*.

Against the biological paradigm, which describes humanity as defined by the realization of the biological processes of its permanence as reproduction (or of its reproduction as permanence), we will argue for the decisive character of psychic and political **symbolization processes** (which may also be called "processes of 'de-naturation' or 'de-naturalization'"), which are supported by :

- on the one hand, **the humanization of the little "human animal"** (a fictitious animal from a pre-human state prior to the entry into language), which enables the emergence of subjects, woven into the gap between identity and otherness that binds them to themselves and to others;

- on the other hand, **the emergence of a** compound **plural**, woven of singular links (distinct from the plural-of-the-species, "we" constituted of and reduced to the addition of equivalent specimens), a constituent plural from which a "we" of another kind is enunciated, the one that sustains, for example, François Villon and his *Frères humains qui après nous vivez*.

I'm reminded of comments I heard, in my professional sphere, which linked the plural to the biological (at a time when "biological psychiatry" - a veritable oxymoron - was beginning to spread its influence in discourse). Two distinct interlocutors uttered these unforgettable phrases: "*There's no incompatibility between psychoanalysis and neuroscience, we all agree, we talk with molecules*" (said by a psychiatrist, university professor, calling himself a psychoanalyst); and "*In any case, it's recognized, we're great primates*" (said by a young intern, nurtured on biological psychiatry). I remember their embarrassed perplexity when I asked them, each time, if they could say the same sentence in the first person singular. Convincing language experiment: they couldn't.

Humanity's *becoming-Humanity* is the (interminable?) process by which it overcomes its animal nature, the condition for its power not to be doomed to destruction.

The fact that the communist idea, in its broadest sense, has made sense for the whole of humanity has led to victories, the victories of the revolutionary era.

This epoch (does it coincide with the modern era, which is also said to be coming to an end?) was one in which, on a general scale, the hypothesis of a way out of relations of domination was supported; even in localized and time-limited emancipation processes, what happened (great and small revolutions, popular movements, wars of liberation, etc.) made sense for humanity as a whole. For the time being, this era is over. No doubt the problems posed by victories have not been resolved; perhaps victory brings with it, "naturally", "spontaneously", an intoxication that interrupts, through the installation in the excess of enjoyment, or even in the enjoyment of excess (would this be an acceptable designation of domination?), the interminable process of becoming-human (in tiny, ridiculous terms, we remember the "*we won!*" of May '81, sung there by many who hadn't fought much of a battle and were delighted to no longer have to). A book written in 1984 by Jadwiga Staniszkis, about what was happening in Solidarnosc's Poland, was entitled *La Révolution autolimitée*. As far as I remember, it was more a question of the movement's tactics to avoid coming into head-on conflict

with the authorities, to take account of the dissymmetry of power. But the title comes back to me, as if in the background of the question that, it seems to me, remains unanswered: "**What to do with victory?** I'm also reminded of this passage from Alain Badiou's *L'Écharpe Rouge*, in the chapter/movement/scene entitled *Chœur de la divisible défaite*:

> *Once again, our efforts were unable to force the terms of the dispute to cross*
>
> *The threshold of the reversal of their places*

Is this reversal of positions the name of the "necessary stage" of the Socialist State, whose installation, in the name of Marxism, stands in the way of the abolition of classes and the State? Is this what led to what Mao called "the bourgeoisie in the Party"; is it the internal cause of failure, which the Cultural Revolution failed to undo on a sufficiently large scale? I confess here (after all, we're among friends, among almost-friends, among future friends, perhaps) that it took me a ridiculously long time to **understand the name "*Cultural Revolution*"**, caught up as I was in the usual historical meaning of the word Revolution, which summoned violent, armed confrontation; The term "cultural" refers to a **revolution that first and foremost mobilizes the means of thought**, that supports the existence of thought, which can become collective, articulate and transformative, in places where thought was thought to be non-existent or unrecognized, among the people, among the "uneducated". This may well have been the source of the hostile mistrust attributed to the GPCR towards intellectuals and the literate: those for whom thought, more than a generic human capacity, established a privileged status and place in the organization of power relations.

But today, there's no victory in sight. Further on, in the same *Chorus of Divisible Defeat,* we read:

> *It's the shared hour of reckoning and knowledge, the time of tension for the vanquished,*
>
> *The bad thing about failing turns into the fighting excellence of knowledge.*

And further still, at the very end of the *Chorus*:

> *It is the tenacious popular memory that makes this great hole in the world through which, century after century, the semaphore of communism is planted!*
>
> *People of all times! Of all places! You are among us!*

We need to take stock of the failure of revolutions, without giving in on humanity as constituting itself in its own emancipation movement.

On a global scale, the state of power relations between orientations with regard to **what we call humanity** today seems desperate. Almost everywhere, the "natural law" of force reigns almost exclusively, and its ravages: the ravages of individuals of the human species, whose "weakness" renders them worthless in the eyes of the dominant (*there are those who have succeeded and those who are nothing*, said Macron, one month after his enthronement); the ravages of other species and, more globally, of nature, which the masters *of the species-masters-of-the-world* appropriate or destroy without limit. However, humanity, as an individual and collective subjectivity that distinguishes itself from its biological determinism (to distinguish oneself from it is not to deny it), consists precisely in the ability to support and work towards the possibility of what is declared "objectively" impossible.

Hugo writes in Volume IV Les *Misérables* (*l'Épopée rue Saint-Denis*):

> *He (Marius) was obliged to make an effort of mind to remember that everything around him was real. Marius had lived too little to know that **nothing is more imminent than the impossible**, and that **what must always be foreseen is the unforeseen**. He was watching his own drama as if it were a play he didn't understand.*

Today, in a world devastated by the violence of domination, there are places, practices and subjects that constitute, sometimes unwittingly and without explicit reference to the communist idea, **"shards of communism"**. These shards, creations in excess of their objective conditions, bear witness to humanity's dedication to life beyond survival, in other words, to surpassing the biological destiny of the species. Art and science addressed to all, teaching and care under the axiom of equality in humanity, these shards, among others, demonstrate that any gesture of creation in excess over its author opens up, for the recipient of this gesture, the prospect of an excess over itself.

Humanity is also the name of the history of this name. In the world of the human species, a world without history, a world consumed in a disoriented present, where **the duty of memory is in reality the sarcophagus in which lies the mummified**, mortified **history** of an absent humanity, there are traces of

what humanity has been, and therefore still is, capable of. Traces of attempts, successes, reversals, dead ends. Necessary lessons for future beginnings. Each of us, alone, has lived too little to know, but the knowledge that traces hold is gigantic.

So that's what I expect from *Longues Marches* magazine. That, in the precariousness of a present stammering with the imminence of the impossible, **the shards of communism** be collected. That the scattered traces are inscribed, revived, so that we don't witness our own drama as if it were a play we don't understand.

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[ANNOUNCEMENTS]

The *Long Walks* group 2019-2023) has decided to transform itself into a *communist Circle*. The magazine is delighted to pass on the announcement of this collective initiative, adding to its own communist perspectives.

COMMUNIST CIRCLE *LONG WALKS*

Launch, Thursday, October 31, 2024 (Paris, 8pm)

- Marion Bottollier, Camille Duquesne, François Nicolas -

1

In our contemporary world, communist political perspectives are torn between a **doctrine** that can still be assumed and an old **strategy that** has been torn to shreds. Thus, those who wish to maintain a subjective communist determination today find themselves torn between two types of heritage:

- an **affirmative** heritage: the Leninist heritage of the Russian socialist revolution and the Maoist heritage of the Chinese communist revolution;

- a **negative** legacy: the Marxist legacy of "classism"[1] , of the "proletariat" hypothesis and its "dictatorship", then of the "Communist Party/Socialist State" tandem.

Hence the abyss between maintained revolutionary prospects and strategic obstructions, an abyss all the more distressing in that it is not a gap between ends and means, but a gulf between **possibilities and effectivity**: how can we envisage revolutionary "possibilities" (the urgency of which is obvious) when the "effective" social forces to engage them appear non-existent, not by simple historical chance but by structural consequence?

So, anyone who wants to pick up the militant gauntlet of communism today finds himself like a traveler, equipped with a compass and a sextant, discovering himself lost in unknown territory and devoid of any map!

2

Almost everything has to be taken up again: a huge project for humanity, which should keep it busy for a few decades, in a world otherwise given over to banditry, wars, natural disasters and nihilistic vultures.

But the "almost" is of the utmost importance to us here: we're not starting from scratch!

- It's possible for everyone to start afresh from the legacies they have the courage to assume: **militant** legacies from two centuries of political communism, **intellectual** legacies (philosophical and cultural), **existential** legacies (personal figures and references)...

- As far as the people behind this appeal are concerned, they are also starting from a fruitful experience: that of the **Groupe *Longues marches* (2019-2023)** which, investigating the contemporary world among women in shantytowns (Morocco) and workers in large factories (Czech Republic), was able to verify 1) the existence of immense subjective resources of

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[1] **Classism**" is the idea that the social struggle between different social classes is expressed (represented or reflected) *politically* as a struggle between two political classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

On the contrary, the two politically antagonistic paths of capitalism and communism emerge in relative autonomy from their social bases, with a properly political path advancing by definition as the bearer of a vision of humanity as a whole, irreducible to the particular interests of the different social forces that support them.

emancipation among the popular masses and 2) for intellectuals, the ever-present political relevance of a militant link to the women of the people, workers and peasants of the five continents.

3

In other words, on the brink of the abyss, we're not entirely helpless. And what this Cercle Communiste is all about is building **on** these **points of support**.

Admittedly, a fulcrum is a point, as much as it is a microscopic epsilon. But an infinitesimal point can be doubly grasped as a global resource:

- *statically*, as a solid *point of leverage* from which, like Archimedes, to lift, if not the whole world, at least the lid that obstructs its potential treasures;

- *dynamically*, as a *differential point* (tiny arrow) capable of acting as the salt of the Earth, the clinamen of hope, the tangent of revolutionary impulses, the germ of emancipatory functions...

In all modern rationality, such points can thus constitute firm points of militant knowledge, in the very place where all former knowledge has collapsed - didn't Kurt Gödel say that, since the 1960s[2] , we have become capable of **knowing and speaking in truth about something about which we otherwise know nothing**: hasn't "communism" become such a type of "thing" that we can know subjectively, even though objectively we know very little about it?

4

The ambitious aim of the Communist Circle *Longues marches* is to collectively engage in a process of reflection, study and occasional intervention, **with** a view to **bringing the question of communist political orientation to life in the contemporary world**.

1) Collective **reflection on** current political issues (movements of different social classes, local-regional-global wars, ecological issues, ideological and cultural trends, etc.).

2) **Studies** (communist magazine *Long Walks*, new publications, theoretical and intellectual issues of all kinds)

3) **Occasional interventions** in existing movements to bring our questions to life (probably primarily in mass ecological movements, in France and Europe, but also in Africa, to build up a properly communist political point of view on current ecological issues).

5

The collective work of such a circle does not mean strict political organization.

In practical terms, this means **meeting once a month** - on a fixed day (e.g. *first Thursday of the month*), at a fixed time (e.g. 8-10 p.m.) and in a fixed place (a priori the Paris venue of the first meeting) - with open participation (by free invitation) and a regularity left to each individual's discretion (according to personal interests and availability).

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[2] At the time (1975), he was referring to the *forcing* method invented by Paul Cohen in 1963: "*Forcing is a method to make true statements about something of which we know nothing.*" (*Forcing is a method to make true statements about something of which we know nothing.*)

MAMUPHI SEMINAR **2024-2025**

mathematics - music - philosophy

The seminar takes place AT IRCAM (1 Place Igor Stravinsky, 75004 Paris).

Season 2024-2025

http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/2024-2025

Youtube channel

October 12, 2024	Karim **Haddad**	Michel **Tombroff**
November 9, 2024	Petra **Cini**	Martin **Kaltenecker**
December 14, 2024	Camille **Lienhard**	Alain **Franco**
January 11, 2025	Martin **Gonzalez**	Guillaume **Laplante-Anfossi**
February 8, 2025	*Categories ⊗ Philosophies*	
March 8, 2025	Marc **Saint-Paul**	Frederico **Lyra**
April 5, 2025	François **Nicolas**	Clément **Arlotti**
May 10, 2025 (Salle Stravinsky)	On the occasion of the third volume *of mamuphi* : meeting with the *mathematical cafés*	

Saturday, October 12, 2024

Karim HADDAD

This book proposes a new approach to the practice of writing musical time, based on a concept of notation dedicated to the writing of duration, rhythm and musical form.

*This new **concept of Temporal Unity** opens up a number of questions and issues along three axes: notation, operability and quantification. The aim here is to develop **a grammar of musical time**, covering syntax, representation, a rhetorical device for rhythmic transformation, a "mise-en-temporalité" in relation to "compositional unity" and its implications in the formal domain.*
This comprehensive study of Time Unit structures is based on a number of personal works. It explores the path of a work's conception, from its sketch to its final realization, through "right" quantification, preserving the integrity of the musical discourse.

Michel TOMBROFF

Art and mathematics have maintained an intimate relationship since time immemorial, as demonstrated by the works of Leonardo da Vinci, Béla Bartók, Bernar Venet, Roman Opalka, Manfred Mohr, Ryoji Ikeda, Hollis Frampton, Shigeru Onishi and many others.
*Since the mid-sixties, however, this relationship has begun to weaken, and a certain distance has been established between these two creative fields. The author takes us on a journey to discover the reasons for this **bifurcation between art and mathematics in the postmodern era**, and identifies **a prime suspect: infinity**.*
For this investigation, he draws on the thinking of philosopher Alain Badiou, in particular the concept of inesthetic, an original knot between art and thought centered on those of being, event, truth, subject and ... infinity.

# Saturday, November 9, 2024

Petra CINI

Many composers have used mathematics in their works, but what happens when a composer decides to represent the meaning of mathematical objects and the sensations that can be found in them, instead of focusing on their direct application or transposition? My work answers this question by creating a bridge between the metaphors of mathematics and those of music.

In this seminar, I will present my compositional methodology, which focuses on the creation of musical metaphors for mathematical groups analyzed through the prism of notions of violence and purity.

I will discuss the working process for the pieces Étude No. 4, commissioned by Ensemble Klang, and SO(3) ÉTUDES, whose metamathematical framework was developed in collaboration with mathematicians Raf Bocklandt and Eric Opdam from the University of Amsterdam. In addition, I will give an overview of the development of a new piece for the Dutch collective Nieuw

Amsterdams Peil, scheduled to premiere in the NAPzak 2025-2026 season at Muziekgebouw-Amsterdam.

Martin KALTENECKER
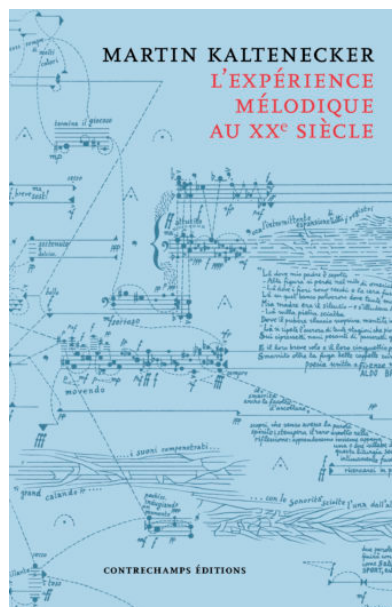
The question of melody is rarely addressed in commentaries on music, and even less so in the XXe and XXIe centuries, where it is denied even the fact of existing. It's true that the object itself is difficult to define or to fit into schemes: it's associated with a gift that is not equally shared... Didn't Wagner himself tell his detractors in advance that "the end of beautiful melodies"?

*In this book, Martin Kaltenecker begins by identifying **four types of approach** - phraseological, energetic, gestalt and thymic - and outlines **a brief genealogy** of melody, before surveying **the repertoire of the XXe century** and detailing the different conceptions and melodic forms developed there. It focuses on both "progressive" and "conservative" composers, "central" and "peripheral" trends, offering a history of modern and contemporary music through the prism of melody. The various chapters include inserts in which a particular work is discussed in greater detail.*

This study is based on a rich bibliography in different languages and includes numerous musical examples. It offers a synthesis unrivalled in music literature.

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Camille LIENHARD
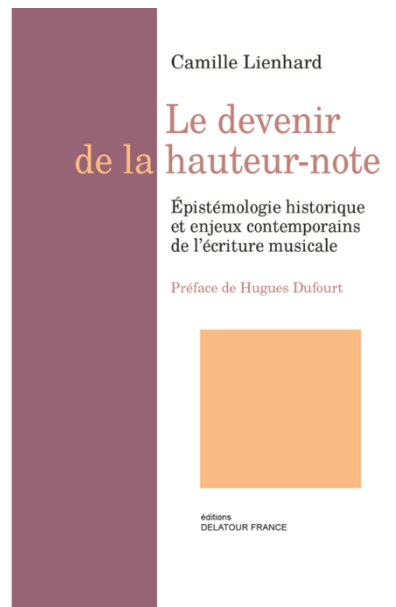
*In the second half of the 20th[e] century, Western scholarly musical modernity extended its thinking to the timbre scale, apparently overturning the hegemony of the pitch parameter. And yet, in more ways than one, this upheaval took place in a roundabout way, without abandoning the correlate of the note and classical lutherie. If **the pitch-note** - a historical concept associating an acoustic parameter with a symbolic representation - remains, in what logical and perceptive terms is it now attached to the sound phenomenon? What does the choice of such a mediation of timbre through writing say about the relationship between this modernism and its essential ambition of advanced rationalization of the material?*

*This questioning is the starting point for an **epistemological investigation** into the links between pitch-note, as the operative foundation of Western musical writing, and the sound rationality of musical modernity and its progress, through the evolving issues of philosophy, science and cultural history. Such an investigation questions the future of Western rationality itself. This book proposes a genealogy of the structuring functions acquired by the pitch-note in the course of a process of logical grasp of the sound field, from the Middle Ages to the XX[e] century. The instrumental writing of complex sound is then defined by the perceptual subversion of the classical pitch-note and the emergence of so-called mediating functions. This mutation then touches on an aesthetic and metaphysical problematic: the overcoming of material through a dialectic of non-identity, envisaged from the perspective of Theodor W. Adorno.*

Alain FRANCO

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TWO PARIS EXHIBITIONS

Éric Brunier: *De-figuring modernity*

Orangerie exhibition

The aim is to set out a few reasons to go and see the exhibition, which runs at **the Orangerie des Tuileries until January 27, 2025**. There are three of them.

The first, and simplest, is that this exhibition brings together a number of important works from the first half of the 20th century, providing a synthetic overview of modern art between Cézanne and Picasso, from 1880 to 1950. Its merit, concentrated around a few masterpieces, lies in the fact that it does not develop a talkative discourse, nor a plethora of documents that would disrupt the encounter. The exhibition focuses on six names: **Cézanne, Matisse, Braque, Picasso, Klee and Giacometti**. Even if the works of Picasso, Klee and Giacometti are the only ones present in number, it is important to link them with those of Cézanne and Braque. There are two works by Cézanne, a portrait and a still life. Between them, they define the situation that painting had to face: the reduction of illusory depth and figuration. These two aspects are two sides of the same coin. Reducing the illusion of depth means gradually leading the painting to abandon the effect of roundness to give the feeling of a bas-relief; and concerning the figure, it means replacing the portrait of a head with a mask.

The second reason is that this exhibition, thanks to the works it brings together, has a discourse on modernity. This discourse is the result of the choice of Heinz Berggruen. First and foremost, he was a German immigrant art dealer who opened a gallery in Paris in 1947. His personal collection was based on the works of the artists he worked with. It is not directly linked to the works he sells as a dealer. He built it up over the years, selling certain works and buying new ones to complete it, giving it the coherence, not of exhaustiveness, but of **a vision of modernity**. In the exhibition, we can guess that he was looking at his relationship with figuration in a painting.

The third is a consequence of the first two: this exhibition makes a strong statement about modern art, albeit an extremely partial one. It is not a historical discourse. The collection and the exhibition are made up of biases. This last point, of course, revolves **around figuration**.

Before attempting to explain how the exhibition concretely articulates the two aspects of the figure and spatiality, and how they transform painting, I'd like to sum up its exceptional character: there are few works (around a hundred), they essentially show two artists, each absolutely focused on what is going through him, and this is a rare opportunity in this period of major exhibitions; finally, it presents **a diagonal through pictorial modernity**, stretched by **the two themes of space and the figure.**

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For patient readers, I'll take a closer look below at the two highlights of this exhibition, focusing on three names: Klee, then Picasso and finally Cézanne.

Space: ~~perspective~~ and *all-over*: Klee

Through the variations in Klee's painting, the exhibition shows that one of the challenges of modern painting is to switch from the creation of a three-dimensional illusion in the plane, thanks to linear perspective, to the grid and *all-over*. This is the name given to the process of continuously covering the canvas with modules that can be repeated ad infinitum. The technique is associated with American Abstract Expressionism, and in particular with Pollock from 1947 onwards. Based on Klee's work, I suggest another approach to this new spatial construction in painting. What's important is not that the painting has a seemingly infinite module, but the erasure of linear perspective, which is inoperative in terms of what it presents, **and** the production of a space with multiple orientations.

In *Perspective de la salle à la porte sombre,* 1921 (Fig.1), using a delicate technique of transferring oil paint onto paper and watercolour, Klee suggests a space in depth, with lines converging on a single vanishing point. But this imaginary space is only home to the skeletons of stereometric objects. The room is not inhabitable, and the center line, which ends in a circle with five inner radii, is less a

vanishing point in depth than a vertical line parallel to the picture plane. The halo of brown watercolor that surrounds the drawn room also creates the feeling of looking at a scene through a keyhole, even though there is only a dark, brown plane at the other end of the viewfinder. Here again, **the eye is brought back to the plane**. My hypothesis is that this is not simply a demonstration of the emptiness of linear perspective. This little painting replaces the projection of vanishing lines with the transfer technique of tracing surface lines.

> The technique, similar to lithography, involves applying a sheet of paper to a pre-inked surface, then drawing with a stylus. The more pronounced contact will then print its shape upside down; the black lines appear to us. Brown watercolor is then applied to the drawing.

In this work, the imagination of perspective projection is stripped of all content. The brown rectangle in the background stands obtusely closed and frontally vertical. It is the work's subject and its void. **What classical painting has long concealed** (the central void from which its illusory space derives), **modern painting shows**. The perspectival device is a puppet theater. But I wouldn't limit Klee's work to this clever denunciation. He substitutes a real projection for an imaginary one, and on closer inspection, it is the painter's bodily operations that are projected onto the drawing. Not only was the drawing done upside down and laid flat, but we can see that Klee turned his sheet in its horizontal format to draw and write certain parts with the arrow on the ground and the lettering.

This type of research is related to *Cave dans la roche*, 1929 (Fig.2), which reconciles both **a centrifugal construction and a centripetal dynamic**. Centrifugal, because the superimpositions of horizontal colored bands are of different lengths, tapering from left to right. These bands are the width of a paintbrush, and vary from pale yellow to dark green. Six shades are noticeable. Their horizontal narrowing results in three vertical stripes, getting darker and less high, leading the eye to the darkest rectangle. This rigorous construction is countered, however, by the variation in hues, which open up the surface and create a shimmering effect. Here again, **our gaze is divided** between the optical fusion of colors, their infinite variation, and the abstract architecture of the painting, which serves as a stopping point for this variation. The painting is indeed *all-over*, but it doesn't propose an infinitely variable motif, extending through juxtaposed repetition. It's not a decorative motif. **An empty element**, perhaps a neutral one, **holds the** diffuse color **from within**.
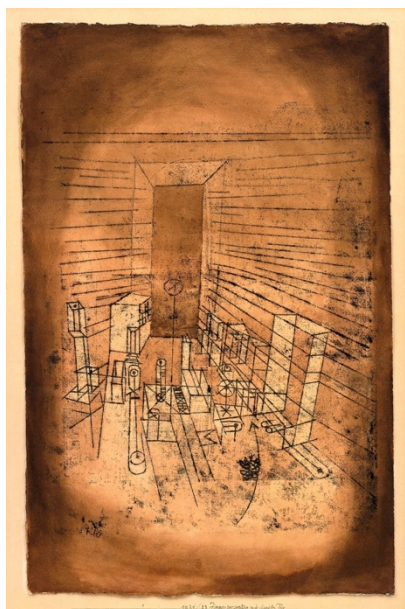

Fig. 1 - Klee*: Perspective of the room with the dark door* (1921)

Fig. 2 - Klee: *Cave in the rock (*1929)

Figure and mask: Picasso

The exhibition features a superb wall of Picasso portraits painted between 1930 and 1950. All these faces are disfigured and look at us strangely. They paint **the pictorial anxiety, the unknown** that must have kept Picasso working indefinitely. In Clouzot's *Le Mystère Picasso*, we see how a painting contains several stages before reaching its final form. The finished painting is said to be a "*sum of*

destructions". But don't be fooled by the expression: **the painting is not the sum of** the paintings below, the hesitations and the repentances. **It is** the culmination, **the summit**. It is, if you like, an eruptive, apparent peak that makes the painting a state of its own metamorphoses. So, these heads are disfigured by painting, not by Picasso's vision of women, still less by the atrocities of the 20th century. They are disfigured by the very thing that lies at the heart of Klee's work: the operational impotence of perspective, and **the need for a new construction in search of an image**. With the human figure, Picasso continues to assert the illusion of relief in painting, and it is this relief that disfigures the heads. This is a point that goes against the grain of discourse on pictorial modernity, and one that needs to be explored in greater depth. Here, I'm only attempting to understand the phenomenon by comparison.

In Cubist paintings, mainly still lifes and heads, the relief effect was produced by the interweaving of colored planes, less and less colored in fact, in order to further reduce the illusion of depth, the effect of a ronde-bosse around which one can mentally rotate as if around a sculpture. Perhaps at this point, painting's ability to render the integrity of the visible was threatened.

The exhibition compares *Still Life on a Piano*, 1911-12 (Fig.3) and *Large Reclining Nude*, 1942 (Fig.4). Both paintings are horizontal in format, and demonstrate the power of geometric and linear structure over the entire surface. In *Still Life*, however, the body - the body of the piano, for example - is **fragmented**. In the *Nude*, on the other hand, despite the excessive geometrisation, the body presents a **unity**. I thus understand that in Picasso's pictorial logic, figurative unity is necessary because it highlights the relief effect. In *Still Life*, we can sense that the relief structure is tending to fade away to make way for material relationships, which will be pursued by the various collage processes. The problem is that these relationships don't stop, they fade. For something to happen, **the painting has to be held from within**, in other words, limited and defined. Picasso's strength, his very audacity, is to return to the figure long before the return to order of the '30s, in order to **hold its interlocking planes from within the painting**.

Here's how I explain this need for relief and figure: to paint a face or a head is to paint a relief and therefore an orientation in space. For a long time, the body in space was treated through modeling, through the effects of lighting within the painting, which distributed light and shadow. This is partly what operates in *Still Life*. Gradually, painting began to **treat the relief of bodies through orientation** (hence the presentation of the face in front and in profile). The aim was to make the painted body exist for another body, that of the viewer, and not just for the light within the painting. The challenge, then, is not only to make a body exist in painting, but to **make the viewer's own body required** by the painting's gaze.
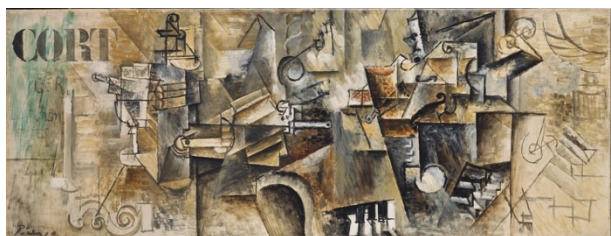

Fig. 3 - Picasso: *Still life on a piano* (1911-12)   Fig. 4 - Picasso: *Large reclining nude* (1942)

Cézanne and the incompletion

Cézanne's two paintings, a still-life study in watercolor, 1885-95 (Fig.5) and a *Portrait de Mme Cézanne*, 1885 (Fig.6), impose the double evidence of what is painted and of incompleteness. According to some, Cézanne painted the "*drama of pictorial integration*", i.e., the stroke-by-stroke decisions required to complete the painting. However, the two paintings testify to **another form of incompletion**, before the dramatization of doubt. Here, it's a question of painting with reserve, of **asserting reserve as the power** that stops painting. Its effectiveness is linked to the astonishing

aspect that the same hue, beige paper or ecru canvas, can produce the protrusion (for the apple) or, going beyond the impassivity of a mask, the volume of a bun. In this way, **incompletion is** less a doubt, a hesitation, than **an evidence**.

Fig. 5 - Cézanne: Still life study (1885-95)

Fig. 6 - Cézanne: *Portrait of Mrs Cézanne* (1885)

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This exhibition shows both the unravelling of modern painting with figuration and the excess of the latter in relation to pictorial construction. Because **figuration is not entirely constructible**, it imposes the desire for ever-renewed pictorial work. Rather than opposing abstraction (construction, geometry) and figuration (likeness), she links them dynamically. She puts forward the idea that modern painting explores **the contradiction between space and relief**, the challenge of which is to **involve the painter's and viewer's real bodies**, the better to bring them into her World.

Pollock exhibition

Coincidentally, **until January 19, the Musée Picasso is hosting** a group of early paintings by **Jackson Pollock**, in which precisely this same dialectic is at work, leading to the brilliant solution we know so well. It's important to understand that painting, no more than any other field, doesn't evolve by finding technical solutions to problems. At the root of every change is a desire, and **the desire of painting**, even in the modern, abstract situation, seems to be **that of the relief in truth of a figure**.

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RELEASE DATE: *HÉTÉROPHONIES* BOX SET (TRITON)

2 CDs (*Duelle* and *Petrograd 1918* by F. Nicolas) + 1 DVD (*Cantus Firmus* by J. Seban)
Éditions Triton: https://disques-triton.fr

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PRESENTATION AT IRCAM

Saturday, May 4, 2024

Screening of the film **Cantus firmus** (2024; 25 min.)

Broadcast of the oratorio **Petrograd 1918** (2021; 80 min.):

1. *Nuits de Petrograd* (15 mn)
2. *Soulèvements* (13 mn)
3. *Paroles* (12 mn)

> **Score - Slides - Video 1**

Continued broadcast of **Petrograd 1918**

4. *Longue marche* (18 mn)
5. *Aube* (16 mn)
6. *Postlude* (6 mn)

New projection of **Cantus firmus**

> **Video 2**

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PASSBOOK

Heterophonies

In contemporary music, *heterophony* refers to a collective of voices alternating between **polyphonic** cooperation, **antiphonic** emulation and simple **juxtaposition**. In so doing, heterophony opposes the rivalry and cacophony of competing voices, as well as their standardization into the single voice of a homophony.

This *modern* form of collective extends musical discourse: from that of *Baroque* polyphony (a collective carrying a shared idea, in the monothematic fugue) and *Classical* emulation (discourse divided in two, according to the twin-thematism of the sonata) to that of *Romantic* coexistence between new collective forms of consciousness.

In this boxed set, the combination of two musical works and a film reflects this heterophonic orientation, in at least three respects.

Firstly, each of the two compositions *Petrograd 1918* and *Duelle* composes an internal musical heterophony.

Each of them **then** extends this *musical* heterophonic in two ways:

a) by *spatial* **heterophony** between music performed in real time and pre-recorded music projected by a sound source grouping together different loudspeakers (twenty - the *IKO* icosahedron - or six - the *Timée* cube);

IKO   Timée

b) by *artistic* **heterophony** between musical discourse and poetic discourse (here recited).

Finally, the boxed set itself, juxtaposing these two musical works with a film *Cantus firmus* taking *Petrograd 1918* as its subject, offers an artistically extended antiphony between musical and cinematic discourse.

All in all, the title of this box set suggests the possible artistic resonances and extra-artistic repercussions of this musical notion of heterophony. May this initiative fertilize the proliferation of **new kinds of human collectives**!

Two musical works

The two Ircam commissions, *Petrograd 1918* and *Duelle*, composed twenty years apart (2001-2021), pursue the same compositional quest.

Three joint decisions

Embracing a long poem

Both works take a long poem as their starting point (respectively *Douze* by Alexandre Blok and *Creuse espérance* by Geneviève Lloret), embracing it not by singing it, but by musically embracing the sound flow of the recited poem.

> What's the point of musically mobilizing a poem in this way?

Because of the creative resources of a "*communion of the arts*", understood here, in contrast to their Wagnerian fusion into a single total Art, as a collective of arts in fertile cooperation and emulation, which allows us to "*conceive of one art in the form of another*" (Proust) and to "*achieve one art through another*" (Roland Barthes).

In our case, it's a matter of the composer *conceiving music in the form of a* given *poem*, so that the listener can *reach the music through the poem* in question.

Electroacoustic source

The aim is not to reactivate the old melodrama genre, but rather to use pre-recorded poetic words to integrate traditional instrumental music with the **new type of sound source** (*icosahedron-IKO* or *cube-Timée*) that computerized electroacoustics now provides for contemporary music.

The compositional challenge is to **extend the musical discourse by adding musical sound images** (those radiated by this source), in much the same way as a world is extended by projecting images of itself (drawn, painted, photographed or cinematographed images).

In fact, such an acoustic source is not, strictly speaking, a new musical instrument capable of discourse, but configures a projector radiating acoustic images of discourse, and this via two operations:

- on the one hand, by grouping the loudspeakers (which usually encircle the auditorium) at **a single point on the stage**, so that they can interact with the musical instruments on an equal spatial footing;

- secondly, by being computer-controlled so as to radiate **sound around it in a variety of directions** (like a musical instrument), rather than simply projecting sound uniformly in front of it (like a simple sound-amplifying loudspeaker).

In this way, the sound action of this electroacoustic source can be **subordinated** to the musical logic of the instruments (when, conversely, loudspeakers surrounding a hall subordinate the musical discourse to a purely acoustic logic of amplification).

Elementary instrumental training

Both compositions use a minimalist instrumental line-up (live piano and disklavier for *Petrograd 1918*; piano, violin and vocals for *Duelle*), thus streamlining the heterophony between pre-recorded *poetic* voice, the *acoustic* voice of projected musical images (*IKO* or *Timée*) and the *musical* voice of traditional instruments.

Similar compositional orientations

Both *Petrograd 1918* and *Duelle* share common compositional orientations.

Musical discourse

First of all, music is - and *must* be - **discourse**, not atmosphere, climate or environment. In fact, music is **subjective existence** (*ek-sistence*), discourse and conversation. Musical enunciation thus proceeds from **subjectivation**, not from the objectifying presentation of an acoustically "natural" situation. And it is precisely because it is a **subjectivized discourse** that music is addressed to a potential listener, whom it arouses and calls upon, not with a view to the listener's physiological integration into a natural phenomenon, but to his or her motivated incorporation into a collective of voices.

Moreover, *musical discourse does* not automatically mean *narrative*: music is not anchored in an extramusical meaning; and if the restored poetic discourse does graft extramusical referents onto the music (in particular via the narrator's interventions in *Petrograd 1918*), it is, as previously indicated, to better "*reach the music through the poem*".

Heterophonic speech

In both works, the musical discourse is **heterophonic**: it mobilizes numerous voices, making them musically compatible through a varied interweaving of polyphonies, antiphonies and simple adjacencies - cf. film documents C and E.

Harmonic discourse

This musical compatibility is ensured not only by overall rhythmic control, but above all - and this is a more specific feature in the context of serial writing - by **overall harmonic control**.

There are two ways of doing this: by structuring the musical discourse through **vast harmonic fields** or through **chorales**, such as the five-voice chorales that conclude the *Aube* (V) section:
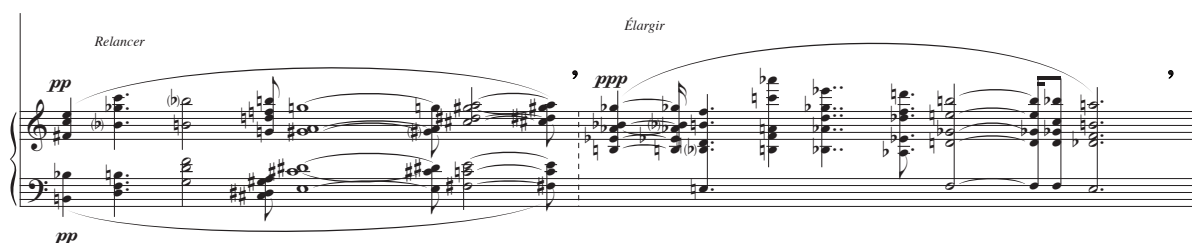
Rainbow series

These two harmonic domains are further structured by **"rainbow" series** (twelve-tone series comprising the eleven chromatic intervals) whose harmonic potential is perceptually enhanced by freezing their pitches (whereas the usual treatment of series, by transposition as well as by reversal and retrogradation of intervals, tends to dissolve the auditory perception of this potential).

How to listen to these two recordings

Restoring the spatiality of these heterophonies in a simple stereo recording is a challenge. Ircam's sound engineers (Sylvain Cadars and Olivier Warusfel) took on the challenge, using SPAT software. Our warmest thanks to them for their invaluable work in stereophonic restitution!

A - *Petrograd 1918* (2021)

This Ircam commission (for piano and narrator, disklavier and electro-acoustic device projected by the IKO; 80 minutes) on a text by Alexandre Blok (*Douze,* 1918) was recorded at Ircam (Espace de projection) by Florence Millet and Inès Nicolas (musical assistant: Carlo Laurenzi; artistic director: Cécile Lenoir; sound engineer: Sylvain Cadars).

Composed **of six parts** (I. *Nights*; II. *Uprisings*; III. *Words*; IV. *Long march*; V. *Aube*; VI. *Postlude*), this work was conceived on the basis of a larger musical album, sketched out in twelve tableaux corresponding to the twelve poems making up the broad poetic fresco *Twelve* written by Alexander Blok in early 1918.

Petrograd 1918 turns out to be a collection, initially unplanned, of six leaves from an unfinished album (an album that never saw the light of day because it was part of a vast theatrical project, involving cinema, that never came to fruition - see film document C). In this project, each of Blok's twelve poems was interwoven with one of the twelve studies previously realized on the young Boulez's *Notations* for piano (1945), studies which reharmonized and heterophonized the too strictly dodecaphonic logic of these *Notations* (in total, *Petrograd 1918* and its six folios mobilize only the first and tenth of these twelve studies).

Poem *Twelve*

Alexander Blok's long poem, in twelve parts of very unequal dimensions, presents **twelve Red Guards**, almost all anonymous, crossing Petrograd by night at the end of January 1918. Three months after the success of the Bolshevik uprising in October 1917, the situation in Russia had become chaotic, with the prospect of a civil war (fueled by an anti-Bolshevik coalition of all European states) that would ravage Russia for three years. The narrator's interventions expose the contemporary subjective significance of this historically uncertain sequence.

For the reasons outlined above, *Petrograd 1918* explicitly uses only two (the first and third) of Blok's twelve poems. Each is then presented in a heterophonic assemblage of **four languages**: Russian, French, German and English.

A rondeau

The general form of *Petrograd 1918* in six parts is that of a **Rondeau alternating three verses and three choruses**:

- the verses are centered on the idea of heterophony: **heterophonies of Russian music** (I - *Nuits de Petrograd*), linguistic voices (III - *Paroles*) and instrumental voices (V - *Aube*);

- the refrains (II - *Soulèvements*; IV - *Longue marche*; VI - *Postlude*) present an extended form of the piano-instrument, a form we'll call "***glorious piano***" (isn't the Glory of a thing the manifestation of its being?), since the musical interweaving of a piano-live, a player piano (disklavier) and a recorded piano (broadcast by the IKO) manifests a pianistic Body of a new type.
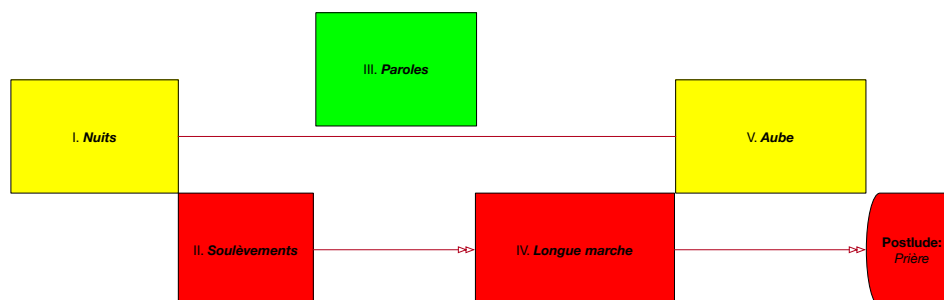
An oratorio

All in all, *Petrograd 1918* composes a secular modality of oratorio, whose prayer is addressed to humanity as such - see the reciter's address at the opening of the *Postlude*: "***Human brothers who before us lived, we beg you to encourage us***". All in all, isn't the musical hope at work in *Petrograd 1918* to encourage today's listener to actively trust in **the heterophonic capacities of contemporary humanity**?

Documentation

For documentation on *Petrograd 1918*, see: **http:**//www.entretemps.asso.fr/Petrograd1918

See also the following eight documents on the DVD.

Eight film documents

If *Cantus firmus* is the canopy of an immense forest of rushes (hundreds of hours!), the footage included in this boxed set is not intended to document its genesis: Jean Seban's meticulous cinematography erases the traces of his hard work, the better to heighten the epiphany of each shot.

The eight documents, taken from the rushes to which Jean Seban has kindly given us access, aim to inform the musical work of composing, performing, recording and editing in *Petrograd 1918*, with a view to intensifying musical understanding.

Two documents (A and B) introduce pianist Florence Millet and narrator Inès Nicolas; two documents (C and D) present what *rondeau* and *cantus firmus* mean in *Petrograd 1918*; and the last four (E, F, G and H) detail the collective musical work for the rondeau's three "heterophonic couplets" (I. *Nuits*; III. *Paroles*; V. *Aube*).

Prayer to humanity

Human brothers who lived before us,
Don't harden your hearts against us,
Because let's continue your adventure on
our own
And you'll know to thank us.
You see us tied up without respite,
All hard at work, hope fed,
And this devoured and rotten present.
All our lives, suffocated, trashed.
No one laughs at our condition;
Please give us your support!

If brothers clamor for you, no need to
Have disdain, though we sit
On your ashes. However, you know
That not all men have acquired rest;
Excuse us, as we're in a trance
Because we're afraid we'll get married.
May your support mean nothing to us,
Saving us from a depressing ditch.
We're straight, we're soulless,
Please give us your support!

The night would like to fold our hopes,
A dark spell makes our arms wither;
And the enemy makes us all despair,
Take away our pensions and shelter.
To no peace are we admitted;
Then here, then there, as the wind varies,
To his ceaseless pleasure, he carries us
along,
All out to confuse us.
Be a friend of our brotherhood,
Please give us your support!

Humanity, which on all has maistrie,
Don't be afraid of our lordship;
We have nothing to pledge on
abandonment.
Men, here is no mockery;
Please give us your support!

B - *Duelle* (2001)

This Ircam commission (for mezzo-soprano, violin, piano and electro-acoustic device projected by *Timée*; 45 minutes) on a text by Geneviève Lloret (*Creuse espérance*, 2000) and poems by N. Sachs, A. Akhmatova and E. Dickinson, was premiered on June 13, 2021 at Ircam as part of the *Agora* festival by Marie Kobayashi, Nicolas Miribel and Fuminori Tanada (musical assistant: Éric Daubresse).

The recording featured in this boxed set is that of this creation.

Creuse espérance poem

This poem by **a mother** dealing with the anxieties of her autistic son deploys a duality of positions, with the mother splitting herself into two in order to better consider what is happening to her in the form of an interlocution, a dialogue, a duel. The Greeks called this singular plural that brought together two people (the "we" of a "you and me" or the "they" of a "her and him") a *duel*, the true plural, the universal, being inaugurated for them by the number *three*.

A *dual* mother, then, but also **a chorus of mothers**, as G. Lloret's text is combined with poems by Nelly Sachs, Anna Akhmatova and Emily Dickinson, read in German, Russian and English respectively by three other women. "*Wir Mütter*" (*we mothers*): this leitmotif from a Nelly Sachs poem binds together this bouquet of texts.

The poem *Creuse espérance* is presented here according to its author's recorded reading: a simple reading, devoid of sentimentality and pathos, without expressive effects or intentions, thus restoring the text's own force and inner energy, making it a sensitive thought, not an autobiographical outpouring.

A rondeau

The work is in **twelve parts**: after a brief introduction, a vast rondeau alternates between four "refrains" (whose polyphonic density increases steadily as their duration shortens) and three "couplets", each revolving around the pairing of an instrument and a foreign language (successively harpsichord and English, flute and Russian, violin and German).

The work culminates **in a "*crux*"** (part 9), in which song and words, instruments and *Timée* are finally tied together. This leads to **a climax** (part 10) in which the narrator's voice is incorporated into the *violin* instrument, and then to **an electroacoustic cadenza** of the *Timée* (part 11), which recapitulates the instruments (piano, harpsichord, flute and violin) with which she has so far conversed, drawing up a series of "portraits" - it should be noted that the beginning of this cadenza is repeated in *Petrograd 1918* as the opening of its fifth part (*Aube*), thus linking this new work to the previous one twenty years later.

Duelle concludes (part 12) with a lyrical necklace of four languages, mounted on the small instrumental ensemble and fanned by a whirlwind of breaths.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Refrains	Intro	R1		R2		R3		R4		Climax		Postlude
Couplets			C1		C2		C3		Crux		Cadence de la *Timée*	

Documentation

For more information on *Duelle*, please visit: **http://**www.entretemps.asso.fr/Duelle

PREVIOUS CD (TRITON)

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