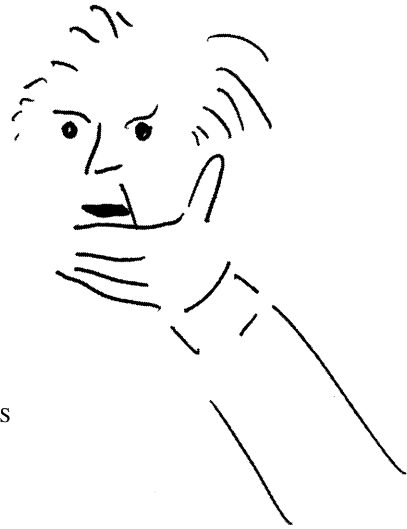


Of an Obscure Disaster* On the End of the Truth of State



ALAIN BADIOU

translated by BARBARA P. FULKS

THE "DEATH OF COMMUNISM"?

Does the evocation of death lead us to a useful name for what we are witnessing? But are we only witnesses? And furthermore, who is this "we" that I ask about, and of whom does it consist? There is no longer a "we;" there hasn't been for a long time. The "we" entered into its twilight well before the "death of communism." Or rather the dislocation of the Soviet party-State is merely the objective crystallization (because objectivity, representation, is always the State, or a state, a state of the situation) that a certain concept of "we" has been inoperative for more than twenty years. Because it was the phrase "we communists," a nominal precision added to "we revolutionaries," which in its turn gave political and subjective force to this "we" construed as an ultimate reference—the "we" of the class, the "we proletarians," never articulated, but which every ideal community posited above itself as historical axiom. Or in other words: we, faithful to the event of October 1917.

When I say "we communists," and even more so when I think of Lenin (it's of his thought that I think, not of his precarious statues, even if no one ever made me say "Saint-Petersburg") or of the Russian Revolution, it is not of the Party I think, a Party I always fought, always held as what it never ceased being: the place of a politics both hesitant and brutal, of an arrogant incapacity. Still less is it a matter of the USSR, despotic gray totality, reversal of October (politics conditioned by Lenin, the insurrectional seizure, later toppled in the police blindness of the State). The decisions resulting from thought, and their contributions to a more or less secret nomenclature, are anterior to the institutional apparatus. The presentation, multiplicity without concept, is never integrally captured in its representation. No, it was not a question of localizable entities, of devices or symbols. There was something there in the thought that could hold us upright. Because it is for thought in general that there was no other "we" conceivable than that of communism's teaching. "Communism" designated the effective history of "us." It is thus that I understood as an adolescent Sartre's gross maxim: "Every anti-communist is a dog." Because every anti-communist manifested thus his hatred of "us," his determination to exist only within the limits of the propriety of himself—which is always the propriety of some property.

Today, the latent universal declaration is that every communist is a dog. But this is not important—or not more important than is the historical stain on a noble word, which is, after all, the destiny of words, especially the most noble: to be stained in blood and mud. It is not important because the figure of "us" to which this word was dedicated is long gone. And thus the word would only cover representation, the party, the State, the ineluctable usurpation, through the mortifying shackling of the One, of what was once the dawning glory of the multiple. "The death of communism" means in the end what is dead in the presentation—the emblematic "we" under which, since October, or since 1793, political thought has conditioned a philosophy of community—must also

die in representation. What no longer has the force of the pure multiple cannot confine for long the powers of the One. We must rejoice in it: it is the mortality of the structural capacities of usurpation.

Thus there is good, if you will, in the order of the State (of things), in a “death of communism.” But for thought it is only a second death. Outside the State, in the very heart of the symbol and the upheaval, “communism” is known as the tomb of a secular “we.”

A remarkable fact attests to this death as second: the “death of communism” is invariably fused with “the breakup of the soviet empire.” That “communism” is thus placed beside “empire” in the destiny of what is mortal proves—since subjectively “communism” designated the universal community, the end of classes, and thus the contrary of any Empire—that this “death” is but the death-event of the already dead.

“Event?” Does death allow itself to come, or to happen, in the form of an event? And what can we say about a second or secondary death? I take death as a fact, a proof of an underlying membership in the neuter plasticity of the natural being. Everything dies, which also means: no death is an event. Death is on the side of the multiple being, of its ineluctable dissociation. Death is return of the multiple to the void from which it is woven. Death is under the law of multiple (or mathematical) essence of being as being, it is indifferent to existence. Yes, Spinoza was entirely right: *Homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat*. There is nothing to think in death, be it of an Empire or the intrinsic nullity of being.

Every event is an infinite proposition, in the radical form of a singularity and a supplement. Each one experiences, not without anguish, that the dislocations in progress propose nothing to us. There was a Polish event during the Gdansk strikes (or even earlier, during the formation of KOR, invention of an innovative path among intellectuals and workers) and the coup d'état of Jaruzelski. There was the hint of a German event in the Leipzig demonstrations. There was, in Russia itself, the uncertain attempt

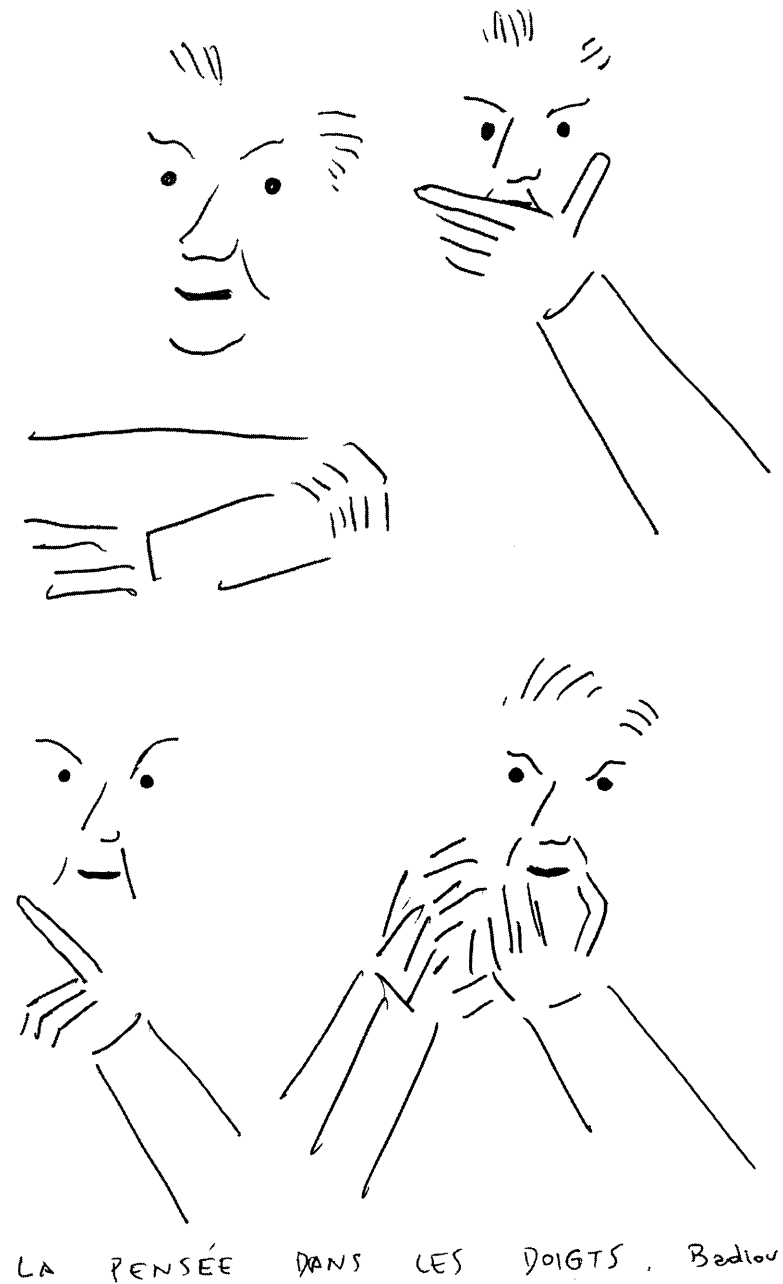
of the Vorkouta miners. But nothing of truth came of these uprisings, so that everything remained undecidable. Then came Walesa, the Pope, Helmut Kohl, Yeltsin... Who will dare interpret these proper names in the flack or the flash of an event-making proposition? Who can cite a single incredible statement, a single naming without precedent in the erosion, both sudden and feeble, undivided and confused, of the despotic form of the State Party? These years will remain exemplary of this: that an abrupt and complete change in a situation does not at all mean that the grace of an event has happened to it. I used to love what we said in the past, to keep a distance from these “movements” on which attention was lavished: “everything that moves is not red” (*tout ce qui bouge n'est pas rouge*). In the serenity of the concept, let's say that everything that changes is not an event, and that surprise, velocity, disorder, may only be simulacra of the event, not its promise of truth. The simulacrum of the “Romanian revolution,” recognized from that time on, is also a paradigm. In truth, only this has happened: that what was subjectively dead must enter into the State of death and finally be recognized there.

As for the rest, how could the “death of communism” be the name of an event, when one notices that every historical event is communist, inasmuch as “communist” designates the trans-temporal subjectivity of emancipation?

Of course the particular figure, constituted in the aftermath of October 1917, of “we communists” was obsolete for a long time. (Since when? A delicate question which does not come from philosophy, but rather from the political, which alone, from the point of the prescription that engages it, conceives the lacunary periodicity of political subjectivity.¹ In any case, in my opinion, at least after May of '68 concerning France.) But philosophically, “communist” is not summed up by the achieved sequence in which that word is applied by Parties, or even by that sequence in which the idea of a politics of emancipation was entirely in debate using that term. From every word that it grasps, no matter how recent, phi-

osophy looks for timeless (immaterial) consonance. Philosophy only exists inasmuch as it extirpates the concepts of historical pressure which pretends to only give them a relative sense. What does “communist” mean taken absolutely? What can philosophy think under this name (philosophy conditioned by a political)? Egalitarian passion, the Idea of justice, the will to break with the accommodation of possessions, the eradication of egoism, the intolerance of oppression, the desire for the cessation of the State. The absolute pre-eminence of a multiple presentation of representation. The tenacious, militant obstinacy, engaged by whatever incalculable event. An adherence to the proposition of a singularity without predicate, of an infinity without determination or immanent hierarchy, what I call the generic,² which is — when the procedure is political — the ontological concept of democracy, or of communism: it’s the same thing.

This subjective form, philosophy notes, has always and forever escorted great popular uprisings when they are not captive and opaque (like everything we see today: nationalisms, fascination with the market, Mafiosi and demagogues raised on high), but rather in free rupture with the being-in-situation, or being-counted, which keeps them in check. From Spartacus to Mao (not the Mao of the State, which also exists, but the rebel Mao, extreme, complicated), from Greek democratic seditions to the world decennium 1966-1976, it is in this sense a question of communism. It will always be a question, even if the word, tainted, leaves room for some other designation of the concept it recovers. A philosophical concept, thus eternal, of rebel subjectivity. I named this, around 1975, the “communist invariants.”³ I will keep the expression, opposed to that of the “death of communism.” And thus, at the moment in which a monstrous, clearly disastrous avatar decomposes (a “State of communism”!) it is a matter of this: every politically foundational event of truth exposes the subject, which it incites toward the eternity of the equal. “Communism,” having named this eternity, cannot serve adequately to name a death.



LA PENSÉE DANS LES DOIGTS. Badiou

I intone here, before the banishment of this eternity that every apologist of commodities prepares, a song of which I am the author,⁴ a song "in the taste of Saint-John Perse," or as they used to say in the grand siècle, "in the taste of the ancients." Written eighteen years ago, it then agreed with public opinion, that of the revolutionaries of the aftermath of May '68, and especially of the "Maos." Published twelve years ago, it had already begun to seem heretical. By the time it was sung on stage seven years ago, it had become mysterious, strangely unyielding. What to say today! Myself, I would retouch it a little. (Surely not, of course, to apologize for its meaning, but because I have less taste than before for Saint-John Perse. Contrary to esthetic nihilism, I hold that convictions and engagements are more durable than tastes. They should be so.) To these variations of coincidence with the spirit of the times, this song opposes its own measure which touches, one will see, the centuries, the millennia. It is thus (and this is why, even absolutely alone, which is not the case, I would murmur it here) an introductory song, the multiple name of what is always to come.

Who thus spoke of solitude?

Vanquished! Legendary vanquished!

I name here your unacceptable.

You: oppressed from time immemorial, slaves of sun-sacrifice mutilated for the obscurity of the fallen. Men of great labor sold with the soil that colored them. Children, who the closing of the farms expatriated in the service of cotton and coal.

Because it's enough to wait and to think: no acceptance, never. Spartacus, Jacquou le croquant, Thomas Münzer.

You: wretched of the earth, Taïpings of the rich soil, Chartists and machine wreckers, plotters in the maze of the suburbs, Babouviste egalitarians, sans-culottes, communards, Spartacists. All kinds of popular sects and seditious parties, partisans of the time of Terror, men of the pitchfork and the axe, of the barricades and the flaming chateaux.

The masses of so many others attempting to finish what they began, discovering in the declaration of their act the latent, separatist thought.

You: marines throwing the officers to the carnivorous fish, utopists of elegiac cities firing the shot in the clearing, Quechua miners of the Andes, gourmands of dynamite. And the African rebels, through successive tides in the colonial stench under the protection of God and the panther shields. Not to forget the one, all alone, who took down his shotgun and, like a wild boar, began resisting the aggressor in the forests of Europe.

Because nothing is lost of what broke the circle. Nothing is forgotten, ever.

Robespierre, Saint-Just, Blanqui, Varlin.

You: deployment in the streets of the great demonstrations of all kinds. Leftist students, girls demanding rights for women, banners of the great clandestine syndicates, old men awakened by the memory of general strikes, leaders of failed coups, workers on bikes.

The few (epochs of counter-current): believers in the just idea in the cellars with manual presses. Futuristic thinkers on the perimeter. Sacrificial consciences white like the Rose. Or even those, armed with long bamboo poles, whose knowledge was for impaling the fattest cops and all the rest was obscure for them. Because from a freedom without dimension comes countless writings.

Marx, Engels.

You: haranguers and warriors of the farmers' leagues, camisard prophets, club women, assemblies and federations, workers and lycée students in grassroots actions, triple union, and grand alliance committees. Soviets in factories and in military campaigns, popular tribunals, great village commissions for the division of lands, the formation of irrigation dams, of militia. Revolutionary groups for price controls, the execution of liars and the surveillance of stocks.

Because meditation cannot stop what reassembles and multiplies. Nothing disseminated remains unchanged.

Lenin, Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Chou En Lai, Mao Tse Tung. All of you. You judge what is lacking and you consider abolition: "Who speaks of failure? What was done and thought was done and thought. In its beginning, its season, its end. Leave to the accountants the tabulation of the results. Because our reign was going to invent a separation, and not establish the heavy office of a duration.

Who will thus exhaust the infinity of situations? Who will pacify the event in which the dice are thrown?

Trust your imperative. Turn away from power. Let the verdict be indifferent for you, and let nothing ever make you give in to it. To necessity.

Let the satisfied go on their way. Let the faint-hearted proliferate. Our intact singularity made this huge hole in the world where, from century to century, the semaphore of communism is planted."

The panoramic light of the semaphore, the illuminating of centuries by the pivoting beam of this searchlight, should all this be extinguished because a mediocre tyranny decided to pronounce itself dead? This is what I do not believe at all.

Let us note this: it was not the enlightened and uplifted masses that decided the end of the State-party, the end of the Soviet Empire. Putting this pachyderm into motion was accomplished by an interior deregulation, at once concerted and without perspective. The affair remains to this day state-controlled from beginning to end. No political invention—or invention of the political⁵—informed the situation. It is of the least interest that millions of people signaled here or there, in the streets and some factories, that they were content with what happened! But, alas, we have not seen that they were thinking about or wishing for the test of something new, without precedent. And how could it be otherwise, if it

is true, as is everywhere affirmed to us, that what the people of Russia, Hungary, and Bulgaria think and wish for is nothing other than what already exists, and has for a long time, in our countries sadly named, one does not know why, "western"? Such a wish can only strengthen the preeminence of the state-ruled, constitutional vision of processes. Elections and proprietors, politicians and speculators: is this the whole content of their wish? It is thus reasonable to entrust the implementation of it to specialists in the bureaucratic maneuvering of apparatus, such as the experts of the International Monetary Fund, and not to inventions of thought. To supplement the soul the Pope can fill the gap. And for a touch of passionate excess, without which the simulacrum of event is far too calm, one can look back to just before the war of 1914 for bestial nationalisms with which to pit some against the others.

If there is no event, it is because it is a matter of the history of States and not at all of the history of politics. This distinction is important. One can easily object that the history of communism intertwined the "soviet" state paradigm with militant subjectivity, and that the dismantling of one decommissions the other. I hold the inverse thesis to be true: militant subjectivity, philosophically received in the form of "us," was outmoded, or inactive, well before the system of the party-State entered into the sequence of its ruin.

What exact role did the "soviet paradise" play in the subjective, that is to say the political, constitution of the militancy called communist? It is a theme of received opinion that this role was important, and that the "revelations"—for example those of Solzhenitsyn—of Stalinist state infamy dealt a fatal blow to the "utopia." But this history does not hold together, as all those demonstrate who attempt to describe a subjectivity (in this case, political) under the categories of fabrication, of errancy, or of illusion. No real political diagram constructed its consistency from the nothingness of a fallacious representation, or had a determining paradigm (a State, or a norm) at its center. October 1917 as event engages certain practical loyalties, but the thought which cements

them depends on the event as such, and not on its statal projection. And what becomes of these loyalties is a tributary, not of propaganda (servile vision of consciousness), but of situations. The destiny of French communism owes its trajectory (disputable, but from a completely different point of view) to the assessment of the war of 1914, then to the Popular Front, then to antifascism and the Resistance, and owes very little to the anarchic and bloody history of the soviet State. Any systematic involvement with the history of this State is repaid, not with additional power, but with painful weakness, and with difficult crises. Just so, Mao, in his recourse in historicity, believed in the Chinese peasantry and the battle against the Japanese invasion, and not in the Russian economy. In subjectivity, the concrete history of communisms (I take them this time in their common identity, that of parties, of groups, of militants, official or dissident) is not opposed to the "paradisiacal" State, which only served as an aleatory objectivization. The most inventive, those who claimed the party as the essential history from which they preceded—Mao, Tito, Enver Hoxha—all finished by breaking with the mother soviet State where they saw that objectivity did not serve even their immediate purpose.

How can I explain to you that this sequence of communism reached its greatest power, including the seductiveness of its thought, between 1930 and 1960, in the epoch of the raging of Stalinist crimes? And it was in its twilight after Brezhnev, the era of "stagnation" when no one was being killed, and when the physiognomy of the state, always a bit repellent, was not unlike that of the United States of the Viet Nam war era, not to mention the Brazil of the guerillas (where, as far as one knows, a superb "market economy" reigned)? Blindness of faith? But why the zenith at that time, when everything was worse, and the subsidence when everything was less bad? Ignorance, that comfortable contingency?

There is a hypothesis at once simpler and stronger: it is that the political history, thus subjective, of communisms, is essentially separate from their state history. The criminal objectivity

of the Stalinist State is one thing; the militant subjectivity of communists is another, which has its own referents, its singular developments, its non-objective prescriptions. Criminal objectivity did not function as a general argument; it always functioned perfectly for reactionaries—read *Tintin in the Country of the Soviets*, a text from 1929, to see how political subjectivity, the sequential "we," was outmoded.

It is not the revelation of crime, by Solzhenitsyn or any one else, which ruled the political hypothesis of communism ("communism" taken here in the sequence of the "we" of the century). It is the death—again ancient—of the hypothesis which produced the efficacy of the "revelation." Because if the political subjectivity became incapable of supporting itself, in its thought and in its act, in the singularity of its trajectory (and thus also in its philosophical connection to emancipatory eternity, to the invariants), then there is no other referent than the State, and it is true that the criminal character of one State or another can become an argument without reply.

It is not because the Stalinist State was criminal that the Leninist prescriptions, crystallized in October 1917, ceased to orient communism to its temporal eternity. (And for the rest, what rapport exists among these prescriptions, this event, and the Stalinist State, if not that of pure empirical sequence?) It is because there were no more militants of this orientation extant, for intrinsic reasons, purely political, that the Stalinist State, having become retroactively the absurd incarnation of the Idea, functioned as irrefutable historical argument against the Idea itself.

This is why the ruin of the party-State is an immanent process of the history of States. It succumbs to its objective solitude, to subjective relinquishment. It succumbs through absence of politics, singularly of any politics meriting the name of "communist." The anarchic spectacle, confused, deplorable—but necessary and legitimate, because what is dead should die—of this attested ruin is not the "death of communism," but the redoubtable effects of its lack.

THE "TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY"?

Democracy triumphs on the ruins of communism, say our prose writers. Or it is going to triumph. The greatest triumphalists evoke the triumph of a "model of civilization." Ours. Nothing less. Those who say "civilization," especially in the form of a triumph, also proclaim the right of the civilized to their gunboats—for those who might not have understood in time on what side the trumpets of triumph sound. The rights of man are no longer a tired intellectual demand. It is the time for rights with muscle, for the right of intervention. Triumphal movements of democratic troops. The need for war, that obligatory correlate of triumphant civilizations. Iraqi deaths, accommodated in silence by millions, even exclusive of any count (and we know to what extent the civilization of which we speak is a counting one...), are only the anonymous remainder of triumphal operations. Shifty Muslims, after all, non-civilized recalcitrants. Because, take note, there is religion, and there is religion. The Christian and his Pope are part of civilization, rabbis are a considerable part, but Mullahs and Ayatollahs would do well to convert.

And first and foremost, the economy of the market. Because this is the greatest paradox of the times: the "death of communism," the preempting of all Marxist politics, is expressed from the interior of the only true, visible triumph, that of "vulgar" Marxism, that positivist Marxism which affirms the absolute primacy of the economy. Wasn't it the young Marx who, in his Manifesto which, we are told, is only an assassin's scribbles, presented governments as the proxy for capital? It seems that there's not the least doubt about the truth of this assertion.

We are, and this is important, in a moment of confession. That the substantial content of every "democracy" is the existence of gigantic and suspect fortunes, that the maxim "get rich!" is the alpha and omega of the epoch, that the brutal materialism of profits is the absolute condition of every respectable member of soci-

ety—in brief, that ownership is the essence of "civilization"—this is the consensus, after having been, during almost two centuries, the adventurous and slandered theory of the revolutionaries who wanted to end a rather pitiable "civilization." A "Marxism" without proletariat or politics, an economism that puts private wealth at the center of social determination, the rediscovered good conscience of the corrupt, the speculators, the financiers, the governments exclusively preoccupied with supporting the enriching of the rich: there's the vision of the world presented to us under the triumphal banner of civilization.

I think of Robespierre, 9 Thermidor: "The Republic is lost! The brigands have triumphed." It is very true that they are still getting away with it, but never so much as today, in an arrogance that immensely reinforces the defeat, since all of their successive adversaries have disappeared, or so they believe.

The only restraint that I observe, as a chaste tunic passed over a beast's skin, is to have baptized the violent desire of capital "the market economy." What does one observe in the countries of the East in which the "transition" toward the aforementioned market economy is ongoing? That the nerve center of this transition is the desperate search for property owners under the name of "privatization." I don't believe that we have ever seen such a spectacle: countries bent on selling to the highest bidder the totality of their productive apparatus. The melee of the underworld, of the ancient notables or "socialist" apparatchiks, of foreign capitalists, of small businessmen everywhere, ransacking everything and bleeding it dry. Beforehand, one would have led a vast campaign against the obsolete and miserable condition—non-existent, as it were—of all this equipment, so as doubtless to overwhelm the sinister and inefficient bureaucratic management, but even more so to ensure that the auction of the factories, commerce, services, is done at the lowest possible rate.

One does not say, as the Thermidorians frankly did, that the republic is the business of those who possess it. But one shows,

one proclaims, that democracy has as a condition sine qua non the massive existence—and it's of little importance who they are and where they come from—of owners. This is what I call confession. The organic link between the private property of the means of production, and thus structural, radical inequality, and "democracy" is no longer a theme of the socialist polemic, but the rule of consensus. Yes, Marxism triumphs: the underlying determinants of parliamentarianism, its necessary link to capitalism and profit, are what Marxism said they were.

The idealistic French socialists, Jaurès for example, had a program to "complete" political democracy, which in their eyes was founded on revolutionary republicanism through economic democracy. Today they are met with: your "economic democracy" is nothing but bureaucracy and totalitarianism. Political democracy will never be completed, it is uncompletable. It is tied forever to the domination of the proprietors.

Yes, the brigands triumph. Ah! I know well that they only triumph in this moment because other brigands succumb. The terrorist bureaucracies of the East, I detest them. It is not I, it is not we, who have made a pact with the French Communist Party, signed with it a "common program," visited the USSR, chanted Ceaucescu, or attended the movements and the marvels of the renovators, of the reconstructors, of the dissidents and the renegades. For more than twenty years, we fought the Stalinist mode of politics,⁶ not only in the abstraction of its so-called "totalitarianism," but in the real heart of its power, the factory and the collective trade union.

The obscurity and the pain of the moment reside there. That the system of the party-State collapsed, that the Stalinist mode of politics was saturated and moribund, these are excellent things, and they are moreover ineluctable phenomena for which we worked, under the impulse of the events of May '68 and following, in the faithful tenacity of militant inventiveness, which is an inventiveness of thought. But instead of opening to some eventuality from which the deployment of another mode of the political would pro-

ceed, or another singular figure of emancipation (which even here we practice in the name of "politics without party"), this collapse happens under the aegis of "democracy" of the imperial proprietors; that the supreme political advisor of the situation is Bush; that the desire flaunted is that of inequality and ownership, that the rule is the IMF, that the "thought" is only the vain reassessment of the most base and most convenient opinions. If this must be the course of things, it would be, it is true, melancholy.

(However, it is not assured that this is the course of things. Any statist collapse makes the order of the day incalculable. Thus the fear of the tenants of the "market," visible fear, which is double their propagandist triumph. Nothing can prevent our being seized by what the Russians or the Chinese, for example, are capable of again, upon the crumbling of a maladjusted sequence).

Whatever happens, philosophy considers history from the point of view of its non-existence, which means: there is no Reason in history, and each sequence must be related to what it contains of the singular and of the relative. Today there is the inextricable and weighty melange of the beneficent disinheritance of a usurpation (the statist collapse of "communisms") and of a sort of counter-revolutionary revenge, of an almost intolerant arrogance, even terroristic, of the blackest reaction: that is our era, but it is also a recurrent figure for philosophical subjectivity. We can also anticipate that this troubled situation, in which we, no matter how few we are, see in sum the Evil dancer on the ruins of Evil, creates the forms of historicity that we witness, in thought and in act.

Let's think for example about the collapse, in 1815, of the Napoleonic Empire. Wasn't it justice that the people and the nations of Europe coalesced to destroy this aberrant militaristic construction which had engulfed the world in fire and blood so that the family of a Corsican despot could enter into low-rent monarchies? But wasn't it at the same time the return of the Bourbons, the white terror, the Holy Alliance, and the obtuse denial of the revolution, and Robespierre and Saint-Just (that political thought,

increasingly intense, increasingly inventive) who were treated like criminal fools by scoundrels who brought back their wagons from abroad? We are going to see, we already see, that the Stalinist bureaucratic Empire, whose dissolution is a justice rendered to the people, will serve through its death the obstinate design of the reactionaries: power, finally! to proclaim in the public square that Lenin, and Mao, and once again Robespierre and Saint-Just (because emancipatory political inventions are at the same time irreducible, totally singular, and entirely together in solidarity) were criminal fools.

But there will always be a disbelieving second position to these orchestrations. In order not to yield. To work to disentangle the historical imbroglio, separating the true political from its statist and structural avatars. And to rethrow the dice.

And, among other things, the greatest attention brought from the interior of the political prescription to the game of words will serve our purposes. "Democracy," for example. We must not throw this term to the dogs. Democracy, this would be Bush, Kohl, the Japanese feudal lords converted into managers of trusts, the shifty Mitterrand, Thatcher, Walesa? Let's look closely at this.

"Democracy," understood as philosophy knows it, is a shared word, a contentious word. Some examples of its disparity: for the Greeks democracy is a place—the assembly—of judicial authority, and can be a form of management of decisions of war, which constitutes the permanent core of the popular convocation. The great Jacobins hardly used the word: their purpose was republican, the subjectivity that animated it was virtue. In the liberal proposition, "democracy" designates first of all juridical freedoms, rights (of opinion, press, association, enterprise...). The "classist" revolutionary tradition points out democratic situations, general assemblies, democracy of the masses, but also transitory figures of organization, clubs, soviets, committees of triple union, etc. In contemporary propaganda, "democracy" expressly designates a form of government, parliamentary "representation," whose basic

protocol is the election, and whose locus is the system of the party-States (plural), and whose opposite is the party-State (singular). Let us note that such a system would not have been recognized as democratic by Rousseau (for example), for whom the organized division of the general will creates a system of factions, and for whom the designation of "representatives" puts an end to any subjective demand, thus to any politics.

Since ambiguity reigns, let us distribute the words. What one calls "democracy," the universal triumph of which is celebrated, should be designated with precision as being parliamentarianism. Parliamentarianism is not only an objective or institutional figure (elections, an executive dependent—in very variable degrees—on an elected legislature, etc.). It is also a particular political subjectivity, an engagement, in which "democracy" is a valorizing theme, a propagandistic designation. This engagement has two characteristics:

It subordinates the political to the unique statist locus (the only "collective" political act is the designation of governmental personnel) and, doing this, annuls the political as thought. Thus the parliamentary personage is not a thinker of the political, but a politician (one could easily say today: a "manager").

It demands as regulatory condition the autonomy of capital, owners, the market.

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

The hypothesis recovered through discourse on the triumph of democracy would then be the following: we are, politically, in the regime of the One, and not in that of the multiple. Capital-parliamentarianism is the unique mode of the political, the only one to combine economic efficacy (thus the profit of the owners) and popular consensus.

If one takes this hypothesis seriously, one must agree that henceforth—or at least for all the sequences in progress—

that capital-parliamentarianism serves, by political definition, the whole of humanity.

And if one is content with this hypothesis, if one rejoices that capital-parliamentarianism is the ultimate political form finally found in which the whole of humanity is reasonably fulfilled, this means one judges that this world, where we other "Westerners" live, is an excellent world worthy in humanity's eyes. Or that capital-parliamentarianism is commensurable with the Idea of humanity.

This is precisely what the philosopher will not be able to grant.

LAW, STATE, POLITICS

This what we have just declared: that this world, the one we understand as where we, people from here, pass our days, is at the same time ineluctable and good. We, holders of a thought process which supposes and implies at the same time the perceptible distance from which we cling to the so-called excellence of the course of things. In the passion of propagandistic discourse, the avatars of the Soviet State, or of the Chinese State, are worth nothing in regard to the thinkable; their only function is to oblige the whole of humanity to repeat that, yes, this world (the West, capital-parliamentarianism) is the best of all possible worlds. Because the dominant opinion has been persuaded (with the particularly valuable aid of an unimaginable number of renegades of revolutionary or communist conviction) that to entertain an alternative wish was criminal. This "utopia," which under the name of revolution has governed historical subjectivity from afar since 1792 in France and through the takeover of 1917 in Russia, and of 1949 in China—hasn't the excellence of capital-parliamentarianism established that the will to produce another world, without prior proof of its possibility, only led to crime and collapse? Don't we see entire people aspiring with all their energy, which we tenderly solicit by the display of our magnificence, to share our transcendent goods, in the first rank of which is the economy of financial capital, followed closely

by the system of party-States (plural) with its costly electoral pomp?

This world is so good that, glory without end having scarcely begun, we must protect the system of the party-State (singular), like a piece of meat taken too late from an unplugged freezer, from the hordes of those who confront this excellent world—those who envy its opulence and its freedom. It would be wise to reconstruct the Berlin Wall a little more to the East, so that to the Arabs and to the blacks, who already darkly obsess us, are not added the half-starved plethora of those who have tolerated their condition so long, so passively (because we have been heroic, haven't we; we have never supported anything; we are, as it is said, fierce resisters) the abominable system of communism.

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

The communist world, bloody and inert, might pretend to be the world, because its Idea, so obviously discredited, was that of emancipation. Is it possible to substitute for this pretension that of the marketplace and property? There is a difficulty in conceiving of Robespierre and César Birotteau, Varlin and the Panama Canal, Lenin and Mitterrand, Mao and Mitsubishi as equivalent, even considering the spirit in which the political police, who epitomized the end of the proletarian idea, so loathed themselves that they gave themselves over to the scrutiny of their neighbors. If our world is called to become the world, what kind of Humanity will survive? Will it not be forever one of accounting rules, devoid of any action of thought, distributed in ghettos where one can only choose between the substantialist chicanery of the tribe and the universality of money?

The ideologue, this nice personage who assures us of a semblance of the circulation of ideas, once the circulation of capital is guaranteed, enters on the stage and tells us: this universal Humanity of which you declare us incapable has its concept established in Law. The State of law and the rights of man — this is what we propose to the whole of humanity whose existence as Subject of its destiny can be assured.

Let's take this proposition of the ideologue seriously. Isn't the modality of Law a substitute for revolutionary eschatology? Is this how our world honors its pretension of value for humanity as the future of the world? Law, the juridical name of liberty — is this how capital-parliamentarianism is in effect commensurable with the Idea of humanity?

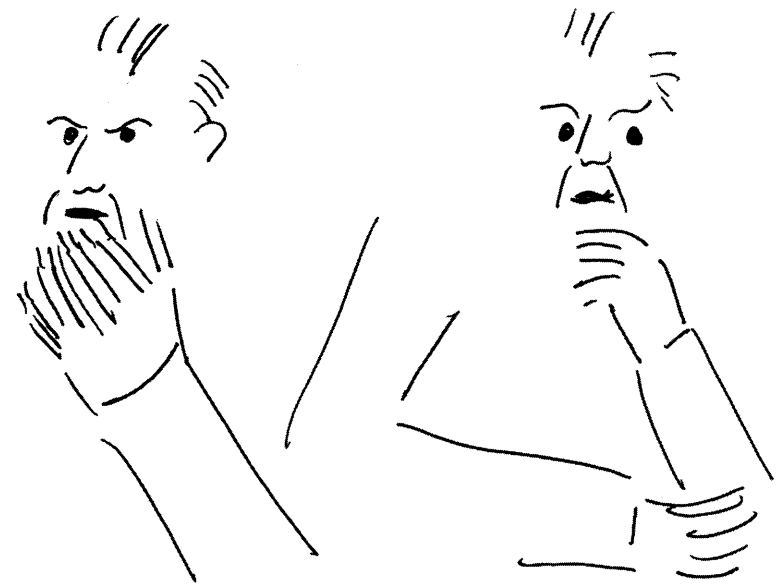
In whatever way the philosopher attempts to discuss, with good will, the proposition of the ideologue, he cannot evade the necessity of noticing what the other implies in the proposal with the term "popular" — that is to say, journalistic. The category of Law, such as the ideologue handles it, functions as a category vacillating⁷ between the political and the philosophical, and it is what lets him be at the same time volatile and urgent, erudite and organized. The law functions as a theme of speculation (see Hegel), but also as cover for the big stick (see Panama or the Gulf). It is the discursive interstice between the ideal and the real of powers.

I speak here instructed by philosophy, as I see it,⁸ regarding how the fusion between philosophy and its political condition ruins both. We see what this fusion brings in our century with a memorable name, that of Stalin, the authentic inventor of Dialectical Materialism as the central philosopheme of political subjectivity. In reality, the identification of the philosophical and the political, their identification as thoughts, has only an enforcement, not to mention a criminal, reality, established since — at least — let's say book X of Plato's Laws.

Thus I'm not in a state to consider directly the political side of this Janus *bifrons* which is the contemporary apologetic of



Badiou à Jussieu R-1-
2003



the law. The entire mobilization of an arsenal of categories forged by political thought-practice of which I am, moreover, a militant, would be necessary.⁹ I can only call myself of the species philosopher in this proclamation of multiple thought.

I should then modify somewhat the question I pose to myself about what the ideologue proffers. This question is: what are the philosophical implications of the supposition, today so common, according to which the Law should be a fundamental category of the political, even the category through which we could relay defunct revolutionary universalism?

No one would dream of denying that the Law is a totally important category of the State. In the East, in the countries which try to construct something other than this strange composite of a dead Idea and economic insolvency—from which they have realized that it was too late to salvage anything—one of the pressing demands expressed, especially by the intelligentsia—and understood, we should note, by numerous strata and sub-strata of the apparatuses, or their remnants—is that of a State of law. And such is also the norm, the line of demarcation that the West identifies as democracy, and from which it, or at least its ideologues, draws judgements.

But what is a State of law?

In the ontology of historical multiplicities that I propose,¹⁰ the State, thought of as state of a situation, is what assures the structural accounting of the parties of the situation, a situation which carries generally the proper name of a nation. To say that a given state, that is to say a given accounting operation, is a State “of law” means in fact that the rule of accounting does not propose any particular party as paradigm of the party-being in general. In other words: no sub-set, such as the nobility, or the working class, or the Party of the class, or the “property owners,” or the religious, etc., is mentioned as having a special function as to the operation through which the other sub-sets are enumerated and treated. What’s more, no explicit privilege codes the operations through which the State

relates to the sub-sets delimited in the “national” situation.

Since state accounting is not validated by a paradigmatic party (or Party), it can only be validated by a group of rules, the rules of law, which are formal inasmuch as they do not consider, as a principle of their legitimacy, any particular sub-set, but rather are declared valid “for all,” which means for all the sub-sets that the State records as being of the sub-sets of the situation.

One often believes that the rules are valid for all “individuals,” and one opposes the democratic reign of individual liberty to the totalitarian reign of a self-proclaimed faction, the Party and its leaders. It’s nothing like that: no state rule in fact concerns this infinite particular situation that we call a subject or an individual. The State has no relationship except with parties, or with sub-sets. Even when it appears to be a matter of an individual, it is not the concrete infinity of this individual that is considered, but this infinity reduced to the One of the account, the sub-set of which this individual is the only element, what mathematicians call a singleton. The one who votes, who is imprisoned, who contributes to Social Security, etc., is listed by a name that is the name of his singleton, and not an accounting of oneself as infinite multiplicity. When the State is that of law, this means only that the relationship of the individual counted as one is made according to a rule, not through an evaluation in which a privileged sub-set is the norm.

Thus, the distinction between a politics defined by the State of law—a politics called democratic—and a politics defined by the Party-State—a politics called totalitarian—never had its principle in the relationship between the State and its concrete individuals. In all cases, this relationship is abstract. It passes through the *mise-en-un* of infinite multiplicity that is an “individual” situation. The distinction has bearing on the law of accounting which supports the operation of the State: a system of rules on the one hand, an incarnation of an Idea in a particular sub-set on the other hand.

A rule, whatever it may be, cannot by itself guarantee an effect of truth, because no truth is reducible to a formal analysis.

All truth, being at the same time singular and universal, is a regulated process, but is never co-extensive to its rule. To assume, like the Greek Sophists did, or like Wittgenstein did, that the rules are the “basis” of the thought—inasmuch as thought is subjected to language—inevitably discredits the value of truth. Moreover, this is the conclusion of the Sophists as well as of Wittgenstein: the force of the rule is incompatible with the truth, which is then only a metaphysical Idea. For the Sophists there are only conventions and relationships of force. And for Wittgenstein, there are only language games.

If the existence of a State of law—as the statist empire of rules—constitutes the essence of the political category of democracy, the result is this crucial philosophical consequence which is that the political has no intrinsic rapport with the truth.

I state: philosophical consequence. Because it is only in a philosophical space that such a consequence can be named. The State of law only functions as internal legislation. This functioning does not proclaim beyond itself the rapport that it sustains with the philosophical category of Truth. Philosophy and only philosophy, which is a condition of the political, can say what is the rapport of the political to truth, or more precisely what of the political is a procedure of truth.

To say that the core of meaning of the political is in the Law inevitably involves a philosophical judgement on the political, declaring the radical exteriority of the political to the theme of truth. If the State of law is the “basis” of political aspiration, then the political is not a procedure of truth.

The empirical evidence confirms the logical inference.

The parliamentary States of the West do not claim any truth. Philosophically they are, one might say, relativist and skeptical States, not by chance or by ideology, but intrinsically, since their “basis” is the rule of law. This is the reason that these States freely present themselves as “the least bad” rather than the best. “Least bad” means that in all ways we are in a domain, the statist func-

tioning, which has no direct rapport with an affirmative norm, such as the Truth or the Good.

We notice that the same didn’t apply to the bureaucratic socialist and terrorist States which rejected explicitly the rule of law as purely “formal” (“formal” liberties, etc.). It is clearly not a question of defending these police States here. But it is philosophically necessary to see that the identification of these States with the political (the political of class, communism) did not have as a consequence the annulling of the function of the truth of the political. In effect these States, founding the accounting of parts of the social whole on a paradigmatic sub-set, announced forcefully that this sub-set (class, the Party) spoke to the truth of privileged relationships. The privilege without rule, formerly obviously deregulated, always has a protocol of legitimization that touches on content and values. Privilege is substantial and not formal. As a consequence, the States of the East have always claimed that they concentrated in their police apparatus the reign of a political truth. These States were compatible with a philosophy which stated that the political is one of the spaces from which truth proceeds.

In the parliamentarianisms of the West as in the despotic bureaucracies of the East, the political is in the last instance confused with the management of the State. But the philosophical effects of this confusion are opposed. In the first case in which the political ceases to reveal the truth, the “reigning” philosophy is relativist and skeptical. In the second case in which the political prescribes a “true State,” the reigning philosophy is monist and dogmatic.

Thus we can explain that in the parliamentary political societies of the West, philosophy is held as a “supplement of soul” in which its arbitrariness corrects the regulated objectivity of opinions, an objectivity which is that of the laws of the market and of financial capital, and around which is organized a strong consensus. While the voluntarist and policed arbitrariness of the political societies of the East were outlined in the false necessity of a philosophy of State, Dialectical Materialism.

Basically, the Law is like a center of symmetry which disposes in an alternating fashion two terms, which are the State (if one supposes that it focuses on the political) and philosophy. When the law—in the force of the rule—is presented as a central category of the political, the parliamentary State or the party-State (plural) is indifferent to philosophy. Inversely, when the bureaucratic State or party-State (singular) advocates a philosophy, which is that of its legitimacy, one can be assured that it is a State of non-law. This reversal constitutes the formation, by the pair State/philosophy, of the opposing relationships which the statement “the political is realized in the State” leads to in regard to the pair political/truth, according to which the form of the State is pluralist and rule-governed, or unitary and party-governed. In the one case, the rule abolishes all truth of the political (which is resolved in the arbitrariness of the name, suffrage); in the other case, the Party stops the whole truth, becoming thus indifferent to any circumstance that affects the name, or the people.

Finally, however opposed the maxims, the result negatively affects philosophy, which is swallowed up in the one case as pure supplement of opinion, and in the other case as entirely empty statist formalism.

One can be even more precise. The submission of the political in parliamentary societies (that is to say, regulated under the ultimate imperative of financial capital) to the theme of law results in the impossibility of discerning the philosophy of the sophist. This effect of indiscernability is crucial: since the political condition of philosophy allows it to establish, in the thematics of law, that the rule is the essence of democratic discussion, it is impossible to oppose the philosophical dialectic (dialogic detour of Truth) to sophistic semantics (brilliant game of conventions and power plays). The result is that any skillful sophist can be taken for a profound philosopher, and he is even more profound if the denial he opposes to any pretension of truth is consistent with the political condition as it is presented under the formal sign of law. In-

versely, in bureaucratic socialist societies it is impossible to distinguish the philosopher from the functionary or even the police. Philosophy is nothing other than the general topic of the tyrant. With no rule to encode the argument, the pure affirmation takes place and finally the position of enunciation (therefore the proximity of the State) is what validates the “philosophical” statement. So any apparatchik or head of State can pass as a philosophical oracle, since the space from which he speaks, the party-State, is assumed to concentrate all the political process of truth.

One can thus claim that the common effect of regimes that incarnate the political in a paradigmatic sub-set of multiple-nations, and of those that disseminate it in the reign of the rule, is an effect of indiscernability between philosophy and its concurrent “doubles”: the eclectic sophist on the one hand, the dogmatic tyrant on the other. Whether the political claims the law as its organic category, or denies it any validity in the name of the meaning of History, the effect on philosophy is that of an indistinction, and finally of a usurpation: on the public scene the inherent adversaries of its identity, the sophist and the tyrant, or even the journalist and the policeman, are declared philosophers.

It is thus clear that concerning the law the only philosophical statement which can save philosophy as such and authorize one to discern what corrupts it is the following: the law should be neither put at the center of the political, nor excluded from its field. In reality, the law and the non-law, obligatory references of the State are not categories of the political. They are intrinsically statist categories. But the political, inasmuch as it is a condition of philosophy, is a subjective process of truth. It is neither the original stakeholder nor incarnation of the State.

Finally, what the societies of the East and those of the West had in common was the identification of the political with the State as the only effective locus for these societies of the political procedure, because the latter is identified with questions of power. But the essence of the political, such that philosophy can trace there

the concept as condition of its own exercise of thought, is the political as free activity of collective thought under the effect of always singular events; this political is in no way power or the question of power. The essence of the political is the emancipation of the collective, or better yet, the problem of the reign of liberty in infinite situations. Now the infinity of situations in which the destiny of collective thought is in play is commensurable neither with the authority of the rule nor with that of a party or a Party.

One can of course prefer the State of law (this means also and especially the final authority of financial capital, today called "economy of the marketplace") to the police party-State. The pitfall would be to imagine that this preference, which concerns the objective history of the State, is really a subjective political decision. The mediation of this pitfall is well contained in the word "law," which seems to circulate between the objective (the rules of the State, the constitution, the pluralism of parties) and the subjective (the right to opinions, the right of property, the rights of entrepreneurship). In reality, law is the proper category of a type of State, and its subjective prescription is no less authoritarian than that of non-law. Because the law is only maintained as a category of political subjectivity in the form of a consensus which confirms, validates, reproduces the fundamental pair of the economy (financial capital and market) and representation (parliamentarianism). Any discrepancy in relationship to this consensus is sanctioned by indifference. Indifference which singularly affects philosophy.

Determining the political could not be done in the framework of a preference for law, which is only a (legitimate) statist preference. The history of the political, made of decisions of thought and of risky collective engagements, is entirely different, I repeat, from the history of the State.

Which suggests finally to the philosopher the spectacle of the world—a spectacle which is in no way its object, but only the indistinct space from which conditions may proceed, so that this place of thought which is philosophy, some truths, might exist: it is

that the crisis is general. It is not only that of the party-State of the East, it is also that of the party-States of the West. Because it is a matter of the world in turmoil, where the thousand-year-old statement which identifies the political with the State has exhausted its effects and been discarded. It has exhausted them precisely because they were borne straight to the heart of the emancipatory will. The end of this monster, the communism of State, carried away in its fall and devitalized all political subjectivity, which claimed, either under the revolutionary theme or the theme of law, to join statist constraint to liberating universality.

From this point of view, in the countries of the East as in those of the West, the history of the political is beginning. It has scarcely begun. The ruin of any statist presentation of the truth marks this beginning. Everything is to be invented. The law itself invents nothing except passage to this other objective condition of the political, which is another form of the State. Philosophy should keep its distance from this new condition as well as from the other. The sophist is no better than the tyrant. Separating the State from the Truth remains for us a program of thought.

Philosophy should proclaim as condition of its practice, having been released at the same time from service to the tyrant and from sophist versatility, that the political now begins, inasmuch as it is effective practical-thought of the fading away of the State. The point at which a thought is subtracted from the State, inscribing this subtraction in the being, makes the entire real of a political. And a political organization has no other end but that of "holding the step that was won"—that is, endowing a body with the thought which, collectively remembered, could find the public gesture of the rebellion which founded it.

1. The philosophical statement on these questions is limited to posing the rarity of the political as generic procedure, its intermittent existence. That's how I formulated it in my *Théorie du Sujet*, Paris: Seuil, 1982: "Every subject is political. This is why there is not much subject and not much political." The body of political statements on this point is very complex. It engages the doctrine, founded by Sylvain Lazarus, of historical modes of the political.
2. The generic, that is to say the status in thought of whatever infinite multiplicity as materiality of a truth, is the most important concept of the philosophical propositions of my book, *L'être et l'événement*, Paris: Seuil, 1988 (*Being and Event*, London: Continuum Press, forthcoming).
3. The theory of the communist invariants is outlined in my small book, written in collaboration with François Balmès, *De l'idéologie*, Paris: Maspéro, 1976.
4. This "chorus of the divisible defeat" is excerpted from *L'écharpe rouge*, novel-opera, Paris: Maspéro, 1979. Revised, the "novel-opera" has become the libretto of a short opera, for which Georges Aperghis composed the music, and which has been performed in Lyon, Avignon, then in Chaillot, in a mise en scene by Antoine Vitez, set by Yannis Kokkos, in 1984. The chorus, with astonishing music, both complex and violent, was sung by all the opera performers in symbolic workers' uniforms. Pierre Vial traversed the stage, sheltering himself from who knows what storm, with an old umbrella. He had the air of a survivor, of a tramp of eternal insurrections, and he grumbled, "Communism! Communism!" in an unforgettable way.

Once again I'm overcome with unappeasable grief over the death of Antoine Vitez. The "end of communism," how it tormented him! And how, nevertheless, he saw it in all its clarity! One must read his text, "Ce qui nous reste," from 1990, shortly before his death. It is reprinted in the faithful and precious collection by Danièle Sallenave and Georges Banu, entitled *Le théâtre des idées*, Gallimard. I would

- like to cite the eighth statement: "The crime—which one can call it in order to simplify the crime of Stalin, but it goes beyond Stalin—is to leave hope in the hands of the irrational, to the obscurantists and the demagogues." But after the consummation of the crime, Antoine Vitez, as always, provides prescriptions. To what he calls "our role": "Sarcasm, invectives and anticipation, critique of the present, declaration." In these few pages, I am, I believe, an interpreter of this "role." There are many more of them.
5. *L'invention de la politique: Démocratie et politique en Grèce et dans la Rome républicaine*, Flammarion, is the title of a book—the last one—of Moses Finley, the great historian of antiquity. It is a significant reference for the theoretical work of Sylvain Lazarus. His commentary can be read in *L'anthropologie du nom*, Broché.
 6. In the cadre of the theory of modes of the political (cf. Note 1), we designate as "Stalinist mode" the configuration of the politics of the PCF (French Communist Party). The central theme of this mode is that the political is the party.
 7. I borrow the concept of circulating category from Sylvain Lazarus, who used it to show how, in certain historical modes of the political, categories (like "revolution" or "class") function simultaneously in subjectivity (thus as political categories) and in objectivity (as in historical categories). See, for example, his text, *Lénine et le temps*, published by Conférences du Perroquet.
 8. On this point, I return to my *Manifeste pour la philosophie*, Paris: Seuil, 1989 (*Manifesto for Philosophy*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). To designate the effect of eclipse of philosophy that leads to the under-valorization, to the detriment of others, of one of its conditions, I use the word, "suture." In its Stalinist version, Dialectical Materialism is a total suture of philosophy to the political.
 9. Whoever is interested in the political bias of the question can refer to the documents of the Organisation Politique: the *Lettre des secrétaires de l'Organisation Politique*, the *Journal* of the Organisation Politique, and other brochures.
 10. I developed the general theory of the state of a situation as metastructure of the presentation of the Multiple in *L'être et l'événement*. This movement begins with meditation 8. The example of the State in the historical-political is dealt with in meditation 9.