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The Paris Commune: A Political Declaration on Politics[1]

The political parties, groups, unions and factions that have claimed to be representative of the workers and the people long maintained a formal fidelity to the Paris Commune. They adhered to Marx's concluding statement in his admirable text *The Civil War in France*: 'Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society.'

They regularly visited the Mur des fédérés, the monument evoking the twenty-thousand shot dead May 1871. Marx again: 'Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class.'

Does the working class have a heart? Today, in any case, little is remembered, and badly so. The Paris Commune was recently removed from [French] history syllabuses, in which, however, it had barely occupied a place. The public ranks are swollen with the direct descendants of the *Versaillais*, those for whom communism is a criminal utopia, the worker an outdated Marxist invention, the revolution a bloody orgy, and the idea of a non-parliamentary politics a despotic sacrilege.

As usual, however, the problem is not one of memory but of truth. How are we to concentrate the political truth of the Commune today? Without neglecting textual and factual supports, what is at stake here is to reconstitute, by means that will be largely philosophical, this episode of our history in its irreducibility.

Of course, when I say 'our' history, it has to do with the 'we' of a

politics of emancipation, the 'we' whose virtual flag remains red, and not the tri-coloured one flown by the killers of the spring of 1871.

Reference points, 1 – the facts

I shall begin with a selection of dated examples. This will form the first part, after which I shall reorder the account according to new categories (situation, appearing [*apparaître*],[2] site, singularities, event, inexistent aspect [*inexistent*] . . .).

In the very middle of the nineteenth century, in France, Napoleon III is in power. He typifies the racketeering and authoritarian balance-sheet of the Republican Revolution of February 1848. This kind of outcome had been practically guaranteed only a few months after the insurrection that brought down Louis-Philippe in June 1848, when the republican petite bourgeoisie consented to, and even supported, the massacring of Parisian workers by Cavaignac's troops. Just as, in 1919, the German social-democratic petite bourgeoisie were to set up the distant possibility of a Nazi hypothesis by organizing the massacre of the Rosa Luxemburg-led Spartacists.

On July 19 1870, the French government, too self-confident and victim to Bismarck's devious manoeuvres, declares war on Prussia. On September 2, the disaster at Sedan occurs and the Emperor is captured.[3] This danger leads to a partial arming of the Parisian population in the form of a National Guard, the internal framework of which is constituted by workers. But the internal situation is in fact determinant: on September 4, after large demonstrations, the Hôtel-de-Ville is stormed and the empire overthrown. But as was the case in 1830 and 1848, power is at once monopolized behind the scenes by a group of 'Republican' politicians, i.e., the Jules Favres, Simon and Ferry ('the Republic of the Juleses' as Henri Guillemin will say), Emile Picard and Adolphe Thiers, all of

whom wish for only one thing: to negotiate with Bismarck in a bid to contain the working-class political insurgency. But they must put people off the scent, so in order to subdue the resolve of the Parisian population they immediately proclaim a Republic, although they fail to specify any constitutional content; and in order to circumvent patriotic sentiment they call themselves 'the Government of National Defence'. Under these conditions the masses leave them to get on with it, and instead join in the resistance, which the long siege on Paris by the Prussians will exacerbate.

In October, in shameful conditions, Bazaine surrenders at Metz with the principal group of French troops. Then, all sorts of little government schemes, recounted in minute detail in the great books Henri Guillemin dedicated to the 1870 war and the origins of the Commune, lead to the surrender of Paris and the armistice of January 28 1871. A majority of Parisians have long been in no doubt that this government is in reality a government of 'National Defection'.

But it is also a government of bourgeois defence against popular movements. Its problem is now to find a way to disarm the Parisian workers of the National Guard. There were at least three reasons why the politicians in power were able to think the situation to their advantage. First, they had managed with great haste to get an Assembly elected that was dominated by rural and provincial reaction, indeed, a sort of *chambre introuvable* of the extreme right that was *legitimist*[4] and socially vengeful. Against revolution nothing beats an election: it is this same maxim that De Gaulle, Pompidou and their allies on the official left will revive in June 1968. Second, the principal and foremost recognized revolutionary leader, Blanqui, is in prison. Third, the clauses of the armistice leave Paris immured by Prussian troops from the North and the East.

Early on the morning of March 18, some military detachments try to seize the cannons held by the National Guard. The attempt comes up against an impressive, spontaneous mobilization in the

workers' *quartiers* by the Parisian people, and notably by the Parisian women. The troops withdraw; the government flees to Versailles.

On March 19, the Central Committee of the National Guard, being the worker leadership that had been elected by the units of the Guard, makes a political declaration. This is a fundamental document to which I will return in detail.

On March 26, the new Parisian authorities organize the election of a Commune of 90 members.

On April 3, the Commune attempts a first military sortie to confront the troops that the government, with Prussian authorization, has redirected against Paris. The sortie fails. Those taken prisoner by the troops, including two highly respected members of the Commune, Flourens and Duval, are massacred. A sense of the ferocity of the repression to come fills the air.

On April 9, the Commune's best military leader, the Polish republican Dombrowski, has some success, notably in recapturing Asnières.

On April 16, supplementary elections for the Commune are held in an absolutely above-board manner and in the greatest calm.

Between May 9 and 14, the military situation worsens considerably in the south-west *suburbs*. The forts of Issy and Vanves fall.

All this while (between the end of March and the middle of May), the people of Paris pursue their lives inventively and peacefully. All kinds of social measures concerning work, education, women and the arts are debated and decided upon. For an idea of the prioritization of issues, note, for example, that on May 18 – the government army will enter Paris *en masse* on May 21 – a vote is held on the number of classes to create in primary schools.

In fact Paris is at once peaceful and extraordinarily politicized. Purely descriptive accounts by witnesses to the scene are rare: the non-militant intellectuals generally support Versailles, and most of

them (Flaubert, Goncourt, Dumas fils, Leconte de Lisle, Georges Sand . . .) make base remarks. None of the intellectuals are more admirable than Rimbaud and Verlaine, declared partisans of the Commune, and Hugo, who, without understanding anything, will instinctively and nobly oppose the repression.

One chronicle is absolutely extraordinary. Its attribution to Villiers de l'Isle Adam is regularly contested and then reaffirmed. In any case, it makes intensely visible the combination of peace and political vivacity that the Commune had installed in the streets of Paris:

> One enters, one leaves, one circulates, one gathers. The laughter of Parisian children interrupts political discussions. Approach the groups, listen. A whole people entertain profound matters. For the first time workers can be heard exchanging their appreciations on things that hitherto only philosophers had tackled. There is no trace of supervisors; no police agents obstruct the street hindering passers-by. The security is perfect.
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> Previously, when this same people went out intoxicated for its *bals de barrière*,[5] the bourgeoisie distanced itself, saying quietly: 'If these people were free, what would become of us? What would become of them? They are free and dance no longer. They are free and they work. They are free and they fight.'
>
> When a man of good faith passes close by them today, he understands that a new century has just hatched and even the most sceptical remains wondrous.

Between May 21 and May 28, the troops of Versailles take Paris barricade by barricade, the final combats taking place in the workers' redoubts of the north-east *arrondissements*: the 11th, the 19th, the 20th . . . The massacres succeed each other without interruption, continuing well after the 'blood-soaked week'. At least twenty thousand people are shot dead. Fifty thousand are arrested.

Thus commences the Third Republic, which is still held by some today to be the golden age of 'citizenship'.

Reference points, 2 – the classical interpretation

At this very time, Marx proposed an account of the Commune that is wholly inscribed in the question of the state. For him, it comprises the first historical case in which the proletariat assumes its transitory function of the direction, or administration, of the entire society. From the Commune's initiatives and impasses he is led to the conclusion that the state machine must not be 'taken' or 'occupied', but broken.

Let's note in passing that the chief fault of the analysis probably lies in the notion that between March and May 1871 it was the question of power that was the order of the day. Whence those tenacious 'critiques' that have become commonplaces: what the Commune supposedly lacked was decision-making capacity. *If* it had immediately marched on Versailles, *if* it had seized the gold of the Bank of France . . . To my mind, these 'ifs' lack real content. In truth, the Commune had neither the means to address them properly, nor in all likelihood the means to arrive at them.

Marx's account in fact is ambiguous. On the one hand, he praises everything that appears to lead to a dissolution of the state and, more specifically, of the nation-state. In this vein he notes: the Commune's abolition of a professional army in favour of directly arming the people; all the measures it took concerning the election and revocability of civil servants; the end it put to the separation of powers in favour of a decisive and executive function; and its internationalism (the financial delegate of the Commune was German, the military leaders Polish, etc.). But, on the other hand, he deplores incapacities that are actually statist incapacities [*incapacités étatiques*]: its weak military centralization; its inability to define financial priorities; and, its shortcomings concerning the national question, its address to other cities, what it did and did not say about the war with Prussia, and its rallying of provincial masses.

It is striking to see that, twenty years later, in his 1891 preface to a new edition of Marx's text, Engels formalizes the Commune's contradictions in the same way. He shows, in effect, that the two dominant political forces of the 1871 movement, the Proudhonians and the Blanquists, ended up doing exactly the opposite of their manifest ideology. The Blanquists were partisans of centralization to excess and of armed plots in which a small number of resolute men would take power, to exercise it authoritatively to the advantage of the working masses. But instead they were led to proclaim a free federation of communes and the destruction of state bureaucracy. Proudhonians were hostile to any collective appropriation of the means of production and promoted small, self-managed enterprises. Yet they ended up supporting the formation of vast worker associations for the purpose of directing large-scale industry. Engels quite logically concludes from this that the Commune's weakness lay in the fact that its ideological forms were inappropriate for making decisions of state. And, moreover, that the result of this opposition is quite simply the end of Blanquism and of Proudhonism, making way for a single 'Marxism'.

But how would the current that Marx and Engels represented in 1871, and even much later, have been more adequate to the situation? With what extra means would its presumed hegemony have endowed the situation?

The fact of the matter is that the ambiguity of Marx's account will be carried [*sera levée*] both by the social-democratic disposition and by its Leninist radicalization, that is, in the fundamental motif of the party, for over a century.

In effect, the 'social-democratic' party, the party of the 'working class' – or the 'proletarian' party – and then later still the 'communist' party, is simultaneously free in relation to the state and ordained to the exercise of power.

It is a purely political organ that is constituted by subjective support – by ideological rupture – and as such is exterior to the state. With respect to domination, it is free; it bears the thematic of revolution or of the destruction of the bourgeois state.

But the party is also the organizer of a centralized, disciplined capacity that is entirely bent on taking state power. It bears the thematic of a new state, the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It can be said, then, that the party *realizes* the ambiguity of the Marxist account of the Commune, gives it body. It becomes the political site of a fundamental tension between the non-state, even anti-state, character of a politics of emancipation, and the statist character of the victory and duration of that politics. Moreover, this is the case irrespective of whether the victory is insurrectional or electoral: the mental schema is the same.

This is why the party will engender (particularly from Stalin onwards) the figure of the party-state. The party-state is endowed with capacities designed to resolve problems the Commune left unresolved: a centralization of the police and of military defence; the complete destruction of bourgeois economic decisions; the rallying and submission of the peasants to workers' hegemony; the creation of a powerful international, etc.

It is not for nothing that, as legend has it, Lenin danced in the snow the day Bolshevik power reached and surpassed the 72 days in which the Paris Commune's entire destiny was brought to a close.

Yet, although it may have provided a solution to the statist problems that the Commune was unable to resolve, it remains to be asked whether in solving them the party-state did not suppress a number of *political* problems that, to its merit, the Commune had been able to discern.

What is in any case striking is that, retroactively thought through the party-state, the Commune is reducible to two parameters: first,

to its *social* determination (workers); and second, to a heroic but defective exercise of *power*.

As a result the Commune gets emptied of all properly political content. It is certainly commemorated, celebrated and claimed, but only as a pure point for the articulation of the social nature of state power. But if that is all it consists in, then the Commune is *politically obsolete*. For it is rendered so by – what Sylvain Lazarus has proposed to call – the Stalinist political mode, for which the unique place of politics is the party.

That is why its *commemoration* also happens to proscribe its *reactivation*.

On this point there is an interesting story concerning Brecht. After the war, Brecht returns prudently to 'socialist' Germany, in which Soviet troops lay down the law. He sets out in the year of 1948 by stopping in Switzerland to get news of the situation from abroad. During his stay he writes, with the aid of Ruth Berlau, his lover at the time, a historical play called *The Days of the Commune*. This is a solidly documented work in which historical figures are combined with popular heroes. It is a play that is more lyrical and comical than epic; it is a good play, in my view, although rarely performed. Now, upon arriving in Germany, Brecht suggests staging *The Days of the Commune* to the authorities. Well, in the year 1949, the authorities in question declare such a performance inopportune! As socialism is in the process of being victoriously established in East Germany, there could be no reason to return to a difficult and outmoded episode of proletarian consciousness such as the Commune. Brecht, in sum, had not chosen the good calling-card. He had not understood that, since Stalin had defined Leninism – reduced to the cult of the party – as 'the Marxism of the epoch of victorious revolutions', returning to defeated revolutions was pointless.

That said, what is Brecht's interpretation of the Commune? In order to judge it, let's read the last three stanzas of the song in the play titled *Resolution of the Communards*:

Realizing that we won't persuade you
Into paying us a living wage
We resolve that we will take the factories from you
Realizing that your loss will be our gain

Realizing that we can't depend on
All the promises our rulers make
We've resolved for us the Good Life starts with freedom
Our future must be built by our dictate

Realizing that the roar of cannon
Are the only words that speak to you
We prove to you that we have learned our lesson
In future we will turn the guns on you[6]

Clearly, the general framework here remains that of the classical interpretation. The Commune is cast as a combination of the social and of power, of material satisfaction and of cannons.

Reference points, 3 – a Chinese reactivation

During the Cultural Revolution, and especially between 1966 and 1972, the Paris Commune is reactivated and very often mentioned by Chinese Maoists, as if, caught in the grip of the rigid hierarchy of the party-state, they sought new references outside of the Revolution of October 17 and official Leninism. Thus, in the Sixteen-Point Decision of August 1966, which is a text probably mostly written by Mao himself, a recommendation is given to seek inspiration in the Paris Commune, particularly as concerns the electing and recalling of the leaders of the new organizations emerging from the mass movements. After the overthrow of the municipality of Shanghai by revolutionary workers and students in January 1967, the new organ of power takes 'the Shanghai

Commune' as its name, pointing to the fact that some of the Maoists were trying to link up politically to questions of power and state in a mode other than that which had been canonized by the Stalinist form of the party.

Yet, these attempts are precarious. This can be witnessed in the fact that, as power had been 'seized' and it was imperative to install the new organs of that provincial and municipal power, the name 'Commune' is quickly abandoned, and replaced by the much more indistinct title of 'Revolutionary Committee'. This can also be witnessed in the centennial commemoration of the Commune in China in 1971. That this commemoration involved more than just commemorating, that it still contained the elements of a reactivation, is evident in the magnitude of the demonstrations. Millions of people march all throughout China. But little by little the revolutionary parenthesis is closed, which is evident in the official text published for the occasion, a text that some of us read at the time, and that a far fewer number of us have conserved and can reread (which has probably become very difficult for someone Chinese to do . . .). The text in question is: *Long Live the Victory of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat! In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Paris Commune.*[7]

It is totally ambivalent.

Significantly, it contains in the epigraph a formula written by Marx at the time of the Commune itself:

> If the Commune should be destroyed, the struggle would only be postponed. The principles of the Commune are eternal and indestructible; they will present themselves again and again until the working class is liberated.

This choice confirms that even in 1971 the Chinese consider that the Commune is not simply a glorious (but obsolete) episode of the history of worker insurrections but a historical exposition of principles that are to be reactivated. Hear, also, a statement echoing Marx's statement, possibly one of Mao's: 'If the Cultural

Revolution fails, its principles will remain no less the order of the day.' Which indicates once more that the Cultural Revolution extends a thread that is linked more to the Commune than to October 1917.

The Commune's relevance is likewise made evident by the content of its celebration, in which Chinese communists are opposed to Soviet leaders. For example:

> At the time when the proletariat and the revolutionary people of the world are marking the grand centenary of the Paris Commune, the Soviet revisionist renegade clique is putting on an act, talking glibly about 'loyalty to the principles of the Commune' and making itself up as the successor to the Paris Commune. It has no sense of shame at all. What right have the Soviet revisionist renegades to talk about the Paris Commune?

It is within the framework of this ideological opposition between creative revolutionary Marxism and retrograde statism that the text situates both Mao's contribution and, singularly, the Cultural Revolution itself, in continuity with the Commune:

> The salvoes of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution initiated and led by Chairman Mao himself have destroyed the bourgeois headquarters headed by that renegade, hidden traitor and scab Liu Shao-chi and exploded the imperialists' and modern revisionists' fond dream of restoring capitalism in China.
>
> Chairman Mao has comprehensively summed up the positive and negative aspects of the historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat, inherited, defended and developed the Marxist–Leninist theory of the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat and solved, in theory and practice, the most important question of our time – the question of consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat and preventing the restoration of capitalism.

The capital formula is 'consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat'. To invoke the Paris Commune here is to understand that the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be a simple statist formula, and that pursuing the march toward communism necessitates recourse to a revolutionary mobilization of the masses. In other words, just as the Parisian workers of March 18 1871 had done for the first time in history, it was considered necessary to invent within an ongoing revolutionary experience – always a somewhat precarious and unpredictable decision – new forms for a proletarian state. What is more, early on in the piece the Maoists had already declared the Cultural Revolution to be 'the finally discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Nevertheless, the general conception articulating politics and state remains unchanged. The attempted revolutionary reactivation of the Paris Commune remains inscribed in the anterior account and, in particular, is still dominated by the tutelary figure of the party. This is clearly shown in the passage on the Commune's shortcomings:

> The fundamental cause of the failure of the Paris Commune was that, owing to the historical conditions, Marxism had not yet achieved a dominant position in the workers' movement and a proletarian revolutionary Party with Marxism as its guiding thought had not yet come into being. [. . .] Historical experience shows that where a very favourable revolutionary situation and revolutionary enthusiasm on the part of the masses exist, it is still necessary to have a strong core of leadership of the proletariat, that is, 'a revolutionary party . . . built on the Marxist–Leninist revolutionary theory and in the Marxist–Leninist revolutionary style.'

Although the final citation about the Party is by Mao, it could have just as easily been by Stalin. This is why, in spite of its activism and its militancy, the Maoist vision of the Commune ultimately

remained prisoner of the party-state framework and, hence, of what I have called the 'first account'.

At the end of this sketch of the classical interpretation, and of that which is in exception to it, we can say, then, that today the political *visibility* of the Paris Commune is not at all evident. At least, that is, if what we mean by 'today' is the moment when we have to take up the challenge of thinking politics outside of its subjection to the state and outside of the framework of parties or of the party.

And yet the Commune was a political sequence that, precisely, did not situate itself in such a subjection or in such a framework.

The method will thus consist in putting to one side the classical interpretation and tackling the political facts and determinations of the Commune using a completely different method.

Preliminaries: what is the 'left'?

To start with, let's note that before the Commune there had been a number of more or less armed popular and workers' movements in France in a dialectic with the question of state power. We can pass over the terrible days of June 1848 when the question of power is thought not to have been posed: the workers, cornered and chased from Paris upon the closing of national workshops, fought silently, without leadership, without perspective. Despair, fury, massacres. But there were the *Trois Glorieuses* of July 1830 and the fall of Charles V; there was February 1848 and the fall of Louis-Philippe; and, lastly, there was September 4 1870 and the fall of Napoleon III. In the space of forty years, young Republicans and armed workers brought about the downfall of two monarchies and an empire. That is exactly why, considering France to be the 'classic land of class struggle', Marx wrote those masterpieces *Workers' Struggles in France*, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*.

As regards 1830, 1848 and 1870, we must note that they share a fundamental trait, one that is all the more fundamental as it is still of relevance today. The mass political movement is largely proletarian. But there is general acceptance that the final result of the movement will involve the coming to power of cliques of Republican or Orleanist politicians. The gap between politics and state is tangible here: the parliamentary projection of the political movement attests in effect to a political incapacity *as to the state*. But it is also noticeable that this *incapacity is in the medium term experienced [vécu] as a failing of the movement itself and not as the price of a structural gap between the state and political invention*. At bottom, the thesis prevails, subjectively, within the proletarian movement, that there is or ought to be a continuity between a political mass movement and its statist bottom line. Hence the recurrent theme of 'betrayal' (i.e. the politicians in power betray the political movement. But did they ever have any other intention, indeed, any other *function*?). And each time this hopeless motif of betrayal leads to a liquidation of political movement, often for long periods.

That is of utmost interest. Recall that the final result of the popular movement ('*Ensemble!*') of December 1995[8] and of the *sans-papiers* movement of Saint-Bernard[9] was the election of Jospin, against whom the – empirically justified – cries of 'betrayal' were not long in coming. On a larger scale, May 1968 and its 'leftist' sequence wore themselves out rallying to Mitterrand's aid already well before 1981. Further away still, the radical novelty and political expectancy of the Resistance movements between 1940 and 1945 came to little after the Liberation when the old parties were returned to power under the cover of De Gaulle.

Jospin, Mitterrand and their kind are the Jules Favres, the Jules Simons, the Jules Ferries, the Thiers and the Picards of our conjuncture. And, today, we are still being called upon to 'rebuild the left'. What a farce!

It is true that the memory of the Commune also testifies to the

constant tactics of adjustment that parliamentary swindlers undertake in relation to eruptions of mass politics: the *Mur des fédérés*, meagre symbol of martyred workers, does it not lie on the side of the grand avenue Gambetta, that shock parliamentarian and founder of the Third Republic?[10]

But to all this the Commune stands as an exception.

For *the Commune is what, for the first and to this day only time, broke with the parliamentary destiny of popular and workers' political movements.* On the evening of the resistance in the workers' districts, March 18 1871, when the troops had withdrawn not having been able to take the cannons, there could have been an appeal to return to order, to negotiate with the government, and to have a new clique of opportunists pulled out of history's hat. This time there would be nothing of the sort.

Everything is concentrated in the declaration by the Central Committee of the National Guard, which was widely distributed on March 19:

> The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs.

This time, this unique time, destiny was not put back in the hands of competent politicians. This time, this unique time, betrayal is invoked as a state of things to avoid and not as the simple result of an unfortunate choice. This time, this unique time, the proposal is to deal with the situation solely on the basis of the resources of the proletarian movement.

Herein lies a real *political declaration.* The task is to think its content.

But first a structural definition is essential: *Let's call 'the Left' the set of parliamentary political personnel that proclaim that they are the only ones equipped to bear the general consequences of a singular political movement.* Or,

in more contemporary terms, that they are the only ones able to provide 'social movements' with a 'political perspective'.

Thus we can describe the declaration of March 19 1871 precisely as *a declaration to break with the Left.*

That is obviously what the Communards had to pay for with their own blood. Because, since at least 1830, 'the Left' has been the established order's sole recourse during movements of great magnitude. Again in May 1968, as Pompidou very quickly understood, only the PCF was able to re-establish order in the factories. The Commune is the unique example of a break with the Left on such a scale. This, in passing, is what sheds light on the exceptional virtue, on the paradigmatic contribution – far greater than October 17 – it had for Chinese revolutionaries between 1965 and 1968, and for French Maoists between 1966 and 1976: periods when the task was precisely to break with all subjection to that fundamental emblem, the 'Left', an emblem that – whether they were in power or in opposition (but, in a profound way, a 'great' Communist party is *always* in power) – the Communist parties had turned into.

True, after being crushed, leftist 'memory' absorbed the Commune. The mediation of that paradoxical incorporation took the form of a parliamentary combat for amnesty for exiled or still-imprisoned Communards. Through this combat the Left hoped for a risk-free consolidation of its electoral power. After that came the epoch – about which I've said a word – of commemorations.

Today, the Commune's political visibility must be restored by a process of dis-incorporation: born of rupture with the Left, it must be extracted from the leftist hermeneutics that have overwhelmed it for so long.

In doing this, let's take advantage of the fact that the Left, whose baseness is constitutive, has now fallen so low that it no longer even makes a pretence of remembering the Commune.

But the operation is not easy. It requires that you grant me the patience to put in place some operators and a new *découpage* of events.

The Commune is a site – ontology of the Commune

Take any situation whatsoever. *A multiple that is an object of this situation – whose elements are indexed by the transcendental of this situation – is a site if it happens to count itself within the referential field of its own indexation.* Or again: a site is a multiple that happens to behave in the situation with regard to itself as with regard to its elements, in such a way as to support the being of its own appearing.

Even if the idea is still obscure, we can begin to see its content: a site is a singularity because it evokes its being in the appearing of its own multiple composition. It makes itself, in the world, the being-there of its being. Among other consequences, this means that the site gives itself an intensity of existence. A site is a being that happens to exist by itself.

The whole point will be to argue that March 18 1871 is a site.

So, at the risk of repeating myself, I shall go over once more, with a view to a singular construction, all the terms of the situation 'Paris at the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870'. We are in the month of March 1871. After a semblance of resistance, and shot through with fear of revolutionary and worker Paris, the interim government of bourgeois 'Republicans' capitulates to Bismarck's Prussians. In order to consolidate this political 'victory' – very comparable to Pétain's reactionary revenge in 1940 (where preferring an arrangement with the external enemy to exposure to the internal enemy) – it has an assembly with a royalist majority hastily elected by a frightened rural world, an assembly that sits in Bordeaux.

Led by Thiers, the government hopes to take advantage of the circumstances to annihilate the political capacity of the workers. But on the Parisian front, the proletariat is armed in the form of a National Guard, owing to its having been mobilized during the siege on Paris. In theory, the Parisian proletariat has many hundreds of cannons at its disposal. The 'military' organ of the

Parisians is the Central Committee, at which assemble the delegates of the various battalions of the National Guard, battalions that are in turn linked to the great working-class *quartiers* of Paris – Montmartre, Belleville and so forth.

Thus we have a divided world whose logical organization – what in philosophical jargon could be called its transcendental organization – reconciles intensities of political existence according to two sets of antagonistic criteria. Concerning the representative, electoral and legal dispositions, one cannot but observe the pre-eminence of the Assembly of traditionalist Rurals,[11] Thiers's *capitulard* government, and the officers of the regular army, who, having been licked without much of a fight by Prussian soldiers, dream of doing battle with the Parisian workers. That is where the power is, especially as it is the only power recognized by the occupier. On the side of resistance, political intervention, and French revolutionary history, there is the fecund disorder of Parisian worker organizations, which intermingles with the Central Committee of the twenty *quartiers*, the Federation of the Trade Unions, a few members of the International, and local military committees. In truth, the historical consistency of this world, which had been separated and disbanded [*délié*] owing to the war, is held together only by the majority conviction that no kind of worker capacity for government exists. For the vast majority of people, including often the workers themselves, the politicized workers of Paris are simply incomprehensible. These workers are the non-existent aspect [*l'inexistant propre*] of the term 'political capacity' in the uncertain world of the spring of 1871. But for the bourgeoisie they are still too existent, at least physically. The government receives threats from the stock exchange saying: 'You will never have financial operations if you do not get rid of these reprobates.' First up, then, an imperative task, and a seemingly easy one to carry out: disarm the workers and, in particular, retrieve the cannons distributed throughout working-class Paris by the military committees of the National Guard. It is this initiative that will

make of the term 'March 18' (a single day – such as it is exposed in the situation 'Paris in spring 1871') a site, that is, that which *presents itself* in the appearing of a situation.

More precisely, March 18 is the first day of the event calling itself the Paris Commune, that is, the exercise of power by Socialist or Republican political militants and organizations of armed workers in Paris from March 18 to May 28 1871. The balance-sheet of this sequence is the massacring of many tens of thousands of 'rebels' by the troops of the Thiers government and the reactionary Assembly.

What is, exactly, in terms of its manifest content, this beginning called March 18? Our answer is: the appearing of a worker-being – to this very day a social symptom, the brute force of uprisings, and a theoretical threat – in the space of governmental and political capacity.

And what happens? Thiers orders General Aurelles de Paladine to retrieve the cannons held by the National Guard. Close to three in the morning a coup is carried out by some select detachments. A complete success, so it seems. On the walls an announcement by Thiers and his ministers can be read; it bears the paradoxes of a split transcendental evaluation: 'Let the good citizens separate from the bad; let them aid the public force.' Nevertheless, by eleven in the morning the coup has totally failed. The soldiers have been encircled by hundreds of ordinary women, backed up by anonymous workers and members of the National Guard acting on their own behalf. Many of the soldiers fraternize. The cannons are taken back. General Aurelles de Paladine panics, seeing in it the great red peril: 'The Government calls upon you to defend your homes, your families, your property. Some misguided men, obeying only some secret leaders, turn the cannons kept back from the Prussians against Paris.' According to him, it is a matter of 'putting an end to the insurrectional Committee, whose members represent only Communist doctrines, and who would pillage Paris and bury France'. All to no avail.

Despite being without veritable leadership, the rebellion extends, occupying the whole city. The armed workers' organizations make use of the barracks, public buildings, and finally the Hôtel-de-Ville, which, under a red flag, will be the site and symbol of the new power. Thiers saves himself, escaping via a hidden staircase. The minister Jules Favre jumps out of a window. The whole governmental apparatus disappears and sets itself up at Versailles. Paris is delivered to the insurrection.

March 18 is a site because, apart from whatever else appears here under the ambiguous transcendental of the world 'Paris in spring 1871', it appears as the striking, and totally unforeseeable, beginning of a rupture (true, still without concept) with the very thing that had established the norm of its appearing. Note that 'March 18' is the title of a chapter from the militant Lissagaray's magnificent *History of the Paris Commune of 1871*, published in 1876. This chapter is concerned, naturally, with the 'women of March 18', the 'people of March 18', attesting to the fact that 'March 18', now a predicate, has come to be included as an essential element in evaluating the possible outcomes of the day's turn of events. Lissagaray sees clearly that, under the sign of an eruption of being, the fortuities of March 18 have brought about an immanent overturning of the laws of appearing. Indeed, from the fact that the working people of Paris, overcoming the dispersion of their political framework, prevented a governmental act carried out with precision and rapid force (the seizure of the cannons), results the obligation that an unknown capacity appear, an unprecedented power by which 'March 18' comes to appear, under the injunction of being, as an element of the situation that it is.

In fact, from the point of view of well-ordered appearing, the possibility of a popular and worker governmental power purely and simply does not exist. This is the case even for the militant workers themselves, who use the vocabulary of the 'Republic' indistinctly. On the evening of March 18, the members of the Central Committee of the National Guard – the only effective

authority of the city whose legal tutors have absconded – remain more or less convinced they should not be sitting at the Hôtel-de-Ville, reiterating that they 'do not have a mandate for government'. In accordance with our conception of 'the Left', this amounts to saying that they balk at breaking with it. It is only with the sword of circumstances hanging over their heads that they end up deciding, as Édouard Moreau – a perfect nobody – will dictate to them the morning of March 19 to 'proceed to elections, to provide for the public services, and to protect the town from a surprise'. With this act *nolens volens*, they directly constitute themselves, against any allegiance to the parliamentary Left, as a political authority. In so doing, they invoke 'March 18' as the beginning of that authority, an authority as a consequence of March 18.

Hence it is essential to understand that March 18 is a site because it imposes itself on all the elements that help to bring about its existence as that which, on the basis of the indistinct content of worker-being, 'forcibly' calls for a wholly new transcendental evaluation of the latter's intensity. The site 'March 18', this empirical 'March 18' in which is dealt out the impossible possibility of worker existence, is, thought as such, a subversion of the rules of political appearing (of the logic of power) by means of its own active support.

The Commune is a singularity – logic of the Commune, 1

As to the thought of its pure being, a site is simply a multiple that happens to be an element of itself. We have just illustrated this by the example of March 18, a complicated set of peripeteia whose result is that 'March 18' gets instituted, in the object 'March 18', as the exigency of a new political appearing, as forcing an unheard-of transcendental evaluation of the political scene.

Yet a site must be thought not simply in terms of the ontological particularity that I have just identified, but also according to the logical unfolding of its consequences.

Indeed, the site is a figure of the instant. It appears only to then disappear. Veritable duration, that is, the time a site opens or founds, pertains only to its consequences. The enthusiasm of March 18 1871 is most certainly the founding of the first worker power in history, but when on May 10 the Central Committee proclaims that to save the 'revolution of March 18, which it had begun so well', it would 'put an end to controversies, put down the malignants, quell rivalry, ignorance, and incapacity', its boastful desperation betrays everything that had appeared, by means of the distribution and enveloping of political intensities, in the city for the past two months.

That said, what is a consequence? This point is crucial for theorizing the historical appearing of a politics. I'll obviously have to skip over the technical details of that theorization for now. The simplest thing to do is to fix a value for the relation of consequence between two terms in a situation by the mediation of their degree of existence. If an element a of a situation is such that the existence of a has a value of p, and if the element b of the same situation exists to the degree of q, we can postulate that b will be a consequence of a in equal measure to the dependency of these intensities, or, if you like, their order. If, for example, on the scale measuring the intensities of existence proper to a certain situation, q is greatly inferior to p, we can validate the dependency of b to a.

We can say, then, that a consequence is a strong or weak relation between existences. The degree to which one thing is the consequence of another is never independent of the intensity of existence they have in the situation under consideration. The aforementioned declaration of the Central Committee of May 10 1871, then, may be read as a thesis on the consequences. It registers:

- The very strong intensity of existence on the day of March 18 1871, the day of that revolution that had 'begun so well'.
- The implicitly disastrous degree of existence of political discipline in the worker camp two months later ('bad will', 'rivalry', 'ignorance,' 'incapacity').
- A desire (though unfortunately abstract) to bring the value of the consequences of the politics in course level with the power of existence of its disappeared origin.

A site is the appearing/disappearing of a multiple whose paradox is self-belonging. The logic of a site involves the distribution of intensities, around the vanishing point, in which the site consists. So, then, we shall begin at the beginning: what is the value of existence of the site itself? After which we can proceed to consider what can be deduced as regards its consequences.

The value of the site's existence cannot be prescribed from anything in its ontology. A sudden appearance can be no more than a barely 'perceptible' local apparition (it is pure image since there is no perception here). And further: its disappearing cannot leave any trace. Indeed, it may well be that ontologically taking on the marks of 'true' change (self-belonging and disappearance in the instant), a site is nevertheless, owing to its existential insignificance, hardly different from a simple continuation of the situation.

For example, on Tuesday May 23 1871, when nearly the whole of Paris is at the hands of the Versaillais soldiery – who shoot workers by the thousands on staircases all over the city – and the Communards, who fight barricade by barricade, no longer have any military or political leadership, the remainder of the Central Committee make their last proclamation, which is hastily stuck up on a few walls and, as Lissagaray said with sombre irony, is a 'proclamation of victors'. The proclamation calls for the conjoint dissolution of the (legal) Assembly of Versailles and the Commune, the retreat of the Parisian army, a provisional government entrusted to the delegates of big cities, and a reciprocal amnesty. How

to qualify this sad 'Manifesto'? Owing to its sheer incongruity, it cannot be reduced to the normality of the situation. This Manifesto still expresses, be it in a derisory way, the Commune's self-certitude, its just conviction of having marked the beginning of a new politics. This document is something that, although the wind of the barracks will carry it *aux oubliettes*, can be legitimately held to be one of the site's elements. But in the savage dawn of the worker insurrection, its value of existence is very weak. What is in question here is the site's singular power. This Central Committee manifesto can of course be ontologically situated in that which holds the evental syntagm the 'Paris Commune' together, but as a sign of decomposition or of powerlessness it leads the singularity of this syntagm back to the margins of a pure and simple modification of the situation, or to its simple mechanical development, and is lacking in veritable creation.

On this point, let's cite the terrible passage dedicated to the Commune's last moments by Julien Gracq in *Lettrines*. I included this extract in the preface to my *Théorie du sujet* in 1981 as an indication that all of my philosophical efforts aimed to contribute, however slightly, to preventing us (as the inheritors of the Cultural Revolution and May 1968) from becoming '*dealers in herring vouchers*'.

Gracq had been rereading the third volume of the autobiography of Communard leader Jules Vallès titled *L'insurgé*. Here is a fragment of his commentary:

> Marx was indulgent of the leadership of the Commune, whose shortcomings he had perfectly seen. The revolution also had its Trochu and its Gamelin. Vallès's frankness consternates, and might cause one to take horror at that proclamatory leadership, those chand'vins revolutionaries, on whom the barricaders of Belleville spat as they passed by during the last days of the blood-soaked week. There is no excuse to lead the good fight when one leads it so lightly.

> A kind of atrocious nausea arises while following the *Ubuesque* masquerade, the pathetic disorder, of the last pages, wherein the unfortunate Commune delegate – no longer daring to show his sash which he clasped under his arms in a newspaper – a sort of incompetent district official, of petroleur Charlot leaping between shell blasts, incapable of doing anything at all, treated harshly by the rebels who bare their teeth, wanders like a lost dog from one barricade to another distributing in disorderly fashion vouchers for herrings, bullets, and fire, and imploring the spiteful crowd – which was hard on his heels because of the fix into which he had plunged it – pitifully, lamentably, 'Leave me alone, I ask you. I need to think alone.'
>
> In his exile as a courageous incompetent, he must have sometimes awoken at night, still hearing the voices of all the same series of people who were to be massacred in a few minutes, and who cried so furiously at him from the barricade: 'Where are the orders? Where is the plan?'[12]

So that this kind of disaster doesn't arise, the appearing of the site must have a force of appearing that compensates for its evanescence. Nothing has potential for an event [*est en puissance d'événement*] but a site whose value of existence is maximal. This was the case in all certainty on March 18 1871, when, women at the front, the working people of Paris forbade the army from disarming the National Guard. But it is no longer the case concerning the Commune's political leadership as of the end of April.

We will call a site whose intensity of existence is not maximal a *fact*.

We will call a site whose intensity of existence is maximal a *singularity*.

You will notice that the repressive force of the Versaillais is accompanied by a propaganda that systematically desingularizes the Commune, presenting it as a monstrous set of facts to be (forcibly) returned to the normal order of things. This results in

some extraordinary statements, such as the one published in the conservative journal *Le Siècle* on May 21 1871, right in the middle of the massacre of workers: 'The social difficulties have been resolved or are in the process of being resolved.' It could not have been better put. On the other hand, as early as March 21, only three days after the insurrection, Jules Favre was given to proclaiming that Paris was at the mercy of 'a handful of villains, holding above the rights of the Assembly I don't know what kind of rapacious and bloody ideal'. In the appearing of a situation, strategic and tactical choices oscillate between fact and singularity, because it is, as always, a question of relating to a logical order of circumstances.

When a world finally comes to be situated – from what becomes of the site in it – and is placed between singularity and fact, then it is down to the network of consequences that it comes to decide.

March 18 and its consequences – logic of the Commune, 2

A singularity diverges further from simple continuity than a fact because it is attached to an intensity of maximal existence. If, now, we are further compelled to make a distinction between weak and strong singularities, it is so that we can establish the consequences woven by an evanescent site with the elements of the situation that presented it in the world.

To be brief, we shall say that *existing* maximally for the time of its appearing/disappearing accords a site the power [*puissance*] of a singularity. And further, that to *make (something) exist* maximally is all the force such a singularity has.

We shall reserve the name of event for a strong singularity.

A few remarks are in order about the predicative distinction strength/weakness as it applies to singularities (that is, to sites whose transcendental intensity of existence is maximal).

Now, it can be seen that in work of the nature of the appearing of truth, the Paris Commune, crushed in blood in two months, is nonetheless much more significant than September 4 1870, the date when the political regime of the Second Empire collapsed and the Third Republic – which lasted seventy years – began. This in no way relates to the actors: on September 4 it was also the working people who, under a red flag, invaded the square of the Hôtel-de-Ville and, as Lissagaray recounted so vividly, caused the officials to go to pieces: 'Important dignitaries, fat functionaries, ferocious Mamelukes, imperious ministers, solemn chamberlains, moustached generals, shake pitifully on September 4, like a bunch of weak hams.' On one hand, then, we have an insurrection that establishes nothing of duration; on the other, a day that changes the state. But September 4 was to be confiscated by bourgeois politicians primarily concerned to re-establish the order of property, while the Commune, Lenin's ideal referent, will inspire a century of revolutionary thought, thus meriting the famous evaluation Marx gave of it before its bloody end:

> The Commune was . . . the initiation of the Social Revolution of the 19th century. Whatever therefore its fate at Paris, it will make *le tour du monde*. It was at once acclaimed by the working class of Europe and the United States as the magic word of delivery.[13]

Let's posit then that September 4 is a weak singularity, because it is aligned on the general development of European states, which converge on the parliamentary form. Moreover, let's say that the Commune is a strong singularity because it proposes to thought a rule of emancipation, and is relayed – perhaps against the grain – by October 1917 and, more specifically, by the summer of 1967 in China, and May 1968 in France. For is it not only the exceptional intensity of its sudden appearing that counts (i.e. the fact that they have to do with violent and creative episodes within the domain of

appearance) but what, over time, such evanescent emergences set up by way of uncertain and glorious consequences.

Beginnings can, then, be measured by the re-beginnings they authorize.

It is in that aspect of a singularity which continues by means of the concentration, external to it, of its intensity that we can judge whether an aleatory adjunction to the world warrants being considered – beyond facts and continuities – not just as a singularity but as an event.

The Commune is an event – logic of the Commune, 3

Everything, then, depends on the consequences. And note that there exists no stronger a transcendental consequence than that of making something appear in a world which had not existed in it previously. This was the case on March 18 1871, when a collection of unknown workers were thrust to the centre of the political scene, workers unknown even to specialists of the revolution – those old surviving 'quarante-huitards' – whose inefficient logomachy unfortunately did much to encumber the Commune. Let's return to March 19, and to the first declarations made by the Central Committee, the only accountable organ to emerge from the March 18 insurrection: 'Let Paris and France put together the bases of an acclaimed Republic with all its consequences, the only government that will close forever the era of invasion and civil wars.' By whom is this unprecedented political decision signed? Twenty people, three-quarters of whom are proletarians that the circumstances alone constitute and identify. Right on cue with the well-worn theme of 'foreign agents', the governmental *Officiel* complacently asks: 'Who are the members of the Committee? Are they communists, Bonapartists, or Prussians?' Instead, they were yesterday's inexistent

workers, brought into a provisionally maximal political existence as the consequence of an event.

Hence, we can identify a strong singularity by the fact that, for a given situation, it has the consequence of making an inexistent term exist in it.

In more abstract fashion, we will posit the following definition: *given a site (a multiple affected with self-belonging) which is a singularity (its intensity of existence, as instantaneous and as 'evanescent' as it may be, is nevertheless maximal), we will say that this site is a strong singularity, or an event, if, in consequence of the (maximal) intensity of the site, something whose value of existence was nil in the situation takes on a positive value of existence.*

So, what I'm basically saying is that an event *has, as a maximally true consequence of its (maximal) intensity of existence, the existence of an inexistent.*

This obviously implies a violent paradox. Because if an implication is maximally true and so also is its antecedent, then its consequent must be; we thus come to the seemingly untenable conclusion whereby, under the effect of an event, the inexistent aspect of a site comes to exist absolutely.

And indeed: the unknown members of the Central Committee, who were politically inexistent in the world the day before, come to exist absolutely the same day as their appearing. The Parisian people obey their proclamations, encourage them to occupy the public buildings, and turn out for the elections they organize.

The paradox can be analysed under three headings. In the first place, the principle of this overturning of worldly appearing from inexistence to absolute existence is a vanishing principle. All the event's power is consumed in the existential transfiguration. As evental multiplicity, March 18 1871 has not the least stability.

Secondly, if the inexistent aspect of a site must ultimately capture, in the order of appearing, a maximal intensity, it is only to the extent that this intensity henceforth take the place of what has disappeared; its maximality is the subsisting mark, in the world,

of the event itself. The 'eternal' existence of an inexistent consists in the trace [*tracé*] or statement, in the world, of the evanescent event. The proclamations of the Commune, the first worker power in universal history, comprise a historic existent whose absoluteness manifests the coming to pass in the world of a wholly new ordering of its appearing, a mutation of its logic. The existence of an inexistent aspect is that by which, in the domain of appearing, the subversion of worldly appearing by subjacent being is played out. It is the logical marking of a paradox of being, an ontological chimera.

Destruction – logic of the Commune, 4

Lastly, an inexistent aspect must come again within the space in which existence is henceforth held together. Worldly order cannot be subverted to the point of being able to require the abolition of a logical law of situations. Every situation has at least one proper inexistent aspect, and if this aspect happens to be sublimated into absolute existence, another element of the site must cease to exist, thereby keeping the law intact and ultimately preserving the coherence of appearing.

In 1896, adding another conclusion to his *History of the Commune of 1871*, Lissagaray makes two observations. The first is that the band of reactionaries and workers' assassins of 1871 is still in place. Parliamentarism playing its part, it has even been augmented with 'some bourgeois fiefs who, under the mask of democrats, facilitate its advances'. The second is that the people henceforth constitutes its own force: 'Three times [in 1792, in 1848 and in 1870] the French proletariat made the Republic for others; now it is ripe for its own.' In other words, the Commune event, begun on March 18 1871, did not have the effect of destroying the dominant group and its politicians. But something more important was destroyed: the political subordination of workers and the people. What was

destroyed was of the order of subjective incapacity: 'Oh!,' exclaims Lissagaray, 'they are not uncertain of their capacities, these workers of the country and the towns.'[14] The absolutization of worker political existence (the existence of the inexistent), convulsive and crushed, had all the same destroyed the necessity of a basic form of subjection; that is, the subjection of a possible proletarian politics to the scheming of (leftist) bourgeois politicians. Like every veritable event, the Commune had not *realized* a possible, it had created one. This possible is simply that of an independent proletarian politics.

That a century later the necessity of subjection to the Left has been reconstituted, or rather reinvented under the very name of 'democracy', is another story, another sequence in the often tormented history of truths. It remains the case that where an inexistent aspect (worker political capacity) was held in place, the destruction of what legitimated this inexistence (subjective incapacity) came to pass. At the beginning of the twentieth century, what occupies the place of death is no longer worker political awareness [*conscience*], but – even if it was not yet realized – the prejudice that classes are natural in character, and that it is the millenary vocation of proprietors and the wealthy to conserve social and state power. The Paris Commune accomplished this destruction for the future, even in the apparent putting to death of its own super-existence [*surexistence*].

Here we have a transcendental maxim: if, in the form of an evental consequence, what was worth nothing comes to equal the whole, then an established given within the domain of appearing is destroyed. What had sustained the cohesion of a world is struck with non-existence; such that, if the transcendental indexation of beings is the (logical) base of the world, then it is with good reason that it must be said: 'the world shall rise on new foundations'.

When the world is violently enchanted by the absolute consequences of a paradox of being, the whole of the domain of appearing, threatened with the local destruction of a customary

evaluation, must come again to constitute a different distribution of what exists and what does not.

Under the eruption being exerts on its own appearing, nothing in a world can come to pass except the possibility – mingling existence and destruction – of another world.

Conclusion

I believe this other world resides for us in the Commune, yet altogether elsewhere than in its subsequent existence, what I have called its *first* existence, that is, in the party-state and its social worker referent. Instead, it exists in the observation that a political rupture is always a combination of a subjective capacity and an organization – totally independent of state – of the consequences of that capacity.

Further, it is important to argue that such a rupture is always a rupture with the Left, in the formal sense I have given to that term. Today, this amounts to saying a rupture with the representative form of politics, or, if one wants to go further in the way of founded provocation, a rupture with 'democracy'.

The notion that the consequences of a political capacity are obligatorily of the order of power and state administration belongs to the first account of the Commune, not to the one that interests us. Instead, our problem is rather to return – prior to this first account (prior to Lenin, if you will) – to what was alive but defeated in the Commune: to the fact that a politics appears when a *declaration* is at one and the same time a *decision as to the consequences*, and, thus, when a decision is active in the form of a previously unknown collective discipline. Because we must never stop recalling that those who are nothing can only stick to a wager on the consequences of their appearing in the element of a new discipline, a discipline that is a practical discipline of thought. The Party in Lenin's sense certainly comprised the creation of such a discipline,

but one that was ultimately subordinated to constraints of State. Today's task, being undertaken notably by the Organisation Politique, is to support the creation of such a discipline subtracted from the grip of the state, the creation of a thoroughly political discipline.

The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?[15]

Why?

Why discuss the 'Cultural Revolution', the official name for a long period of serious disturbances in Communist China between 1965 and 1976? For at least three reasons:

1. The Cultural Revolution has been a constant and lively reference of militant activity throughout the world, and particularly in France, at least between 1967 and 1976. It is part of our political history and the basis for the existence of the Maoist current, the only true political creation of the sixties and seventies. I can say 'our', for I was part of it, and in a certain sense, to quote Rimbaud, 'I am there, I am still there.' In the untiring inventiveness of the Chinese revolutionaries, all sorts of subjective and practical trajectories have found their justification – to change subjectivity, to live otherwise, to think otherwise: the Chinese – and then we – called that 'revolutionization'. Their aim: 'To change the human being in what is most profound.' They taught that in political practice, we must be both 'the arrow and the bull's eye', because the old worldview is also still present within us. By the end of the sixties, we were present everywhere: in the factories, in the suburbs, in the countryside. Tens of thousands of students became proletarian or went to live among the workers. For this too we had the phrases of the Cultural Revolution: the 'great exchanges of