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OCCASIONAL NOTES ON COMMUNISM

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When opening up a discussion on ‘communism’, be it historical or topical, two illocutionary situations seem possible: either he who expresses himself (and whose words will then be transcribed, if necessary by himself) is included in what the term refers to, or he is external to it.¹ It is understood that in reality each of these situations is extremely complex, divided, and conflicting, not to mention frequently contested. To say ‘the person who is talking to you is a communist’, or ‘as a communist, I will speak to you (of communism)’, here and now, is rather easy (which was not always nor everywhere the case). At first sight, it only slightly defers the question of definition, while charging it with an emotional dimension or a demonstrative intention (besides, it is a profoundly ambivalent one: communists or non-communists – I won’t say ‘anti’ –, who is nowadays most capable of proposing a definition or an analysis? The answer is not evident). Before self-reference would make sense, we will have to come to an answer to the question ‘what is communism?’ (or what are its types?)... In reality (as we know from Nietzsche), the questions ‘who’ and ‘what’ have profoundly distinctive implications. If I start by asking ‘who are the communists?’, I assume there is *communism*, as a practice and an idea, only there (and everywhere) where there are (and have been) *communists* acting and thinking accordingly, either under that name, or possibly under others that might emerge as suitable substitutes. *We have thus already seen* communism (we might perhaps still be able to see it), which does not

mean that we have seen *all communism*, all *of* communism, and which does not in the least answer the question of knowing what we will see in it and will see again if the term holds any historical relevance. Herein lies an uncertainty that could possibly be essential. With the second hypothesis, on the contrary, if I begin by asking ‘what is communism?’, there are only two mutually exclusive possibilities: either communism *has existed*, under a form that we regard as catastrophic or for which we are nostalgic (communists are those who have recognized themselves in this system or have defended it), or communism *has never yet existed*, according to its concept (communists are those who dream of it, or those who try hard to prepare its arrival, possibly to prepare their own transformation into ‘communist men’).²

By introducing myself here as ‘a communist’ among others I therefore want to mark the primacy of the ‘who’ over the ‘what’, for reasons of political and ideological conjunction to which I will come back in the conclusion. Firstly, however, I do so in order to maintain the uncertainty that surrounds the term, by redoubling it with an uncertainty bearing on my own identity. Undoubtedly, the name functions as a sign of recognition. Some old animosities are blunted; we look at them with a sensitivity evoked by the memories of our youth (and once again: the same does not apply everywhere, without leaving the European continent). Or else, do they merely ask to rise up again? Is recognition not simply the inverse of misrecognition? What is certain is that in talking today about communism, we are simultaneously ‘ex’ communists and communists ‘to come’, and the past surely does not pass with a bang. In France in particular, a sharp separation continues to divide those who have belonged (or even still belong) to the ‘communist party’, in the institutional sense of the word, from those who oppose (and opposed) themselves to what they considered a traditional power apparatus (even if this power had been subordinate, or reactive, where the communist party did not identify with the state, but was satisfied with its imitation). But there is nothing simple about this very dichotomy: one could have opposed oneself ‘from within the party’, which was maybe even the only useful way of doing so.³ The alternative groups frequently appeared as substitutes, reduced models, mimetic images of the party, at best ideal renewals of its historical ‘truth’, often founded on the ‘dialectical’ attempt to reunite the opposites implied

by the idea of revolution itself (organization and spontaneity, or guidance armed with theory and self-organization of the struggles). In other words, they were in a way founded on the hope of constructing a ‘non-party party’, exposed to the same aporias as the ‘non-state state’ of Leninist theory. They were thus not entirely ‘outside’... For the time being, I see no way to decide *a priori* on such dilemmas rooted in the past the name of communism is charged with. On the contrary, I think that we should endorse the thesis that *the name covers all* that has been done with reference to it, including the worst and the derisive.

The name, the idea, the spectre

I was just talking about the ‘name’ and its contradictory range. This equally bears on how a name functions, either as an indicator of a concept (we might also say an ‘idea’ or a ‘hypothesis’, as Badiou proposes), or as the ‘conjuring’, in the double sense of the word, of the spectre (according to Marx’s expression in the *Manifesto*, more recently adopted by Derrida, and which could even relate to other eschatological metaphors: the ‘old mole’, etc.). In examining the more or less overlapping uses of these terms, the qualities of which nevertheless remain heterogeneous, we recognize that ‘communism’ has become a floating signifier, whose fluctuations incessantly traverse the complete range of this epistemological, but also political, difference. From this we can primarily infer the absolute necessity of a *critical history* of the name of communism, as a counterpoint to the contemporary renewal of debates on the ‘common’ and ‘communism’. This critical history will assume both the form of a genealogy and that of an archaeology, in that it should simultaneously take an interest in the *origins* of the ‘signifier chain’ that links these two terms (and more generally the set of propositions that aim at extracting the community from its roots in ‘particularist’ traditional communities to turn it into an alternative to modern, statist and commercial individualism), and in the *place* it occupies within historically situated discursive configurations (in particular in the moment when ‘communism’ and ‘communist’ become *political* signifiers). Considerable efforts in this direction have already been undertaken, but these remain partial and limited

to certain languages.⁴ They are especially necessary in order to understand more clearly a phenomenon that nowadays seems quite striking to me: the widespread collapse of the regimes that issued from the October Revolution in 1917 at the end of the 1980’s⁵ has put an end to the ‘evolutionist’ thesis that turns Marxist communism – because it is ‘scientific’, founded on the emergence of a revolutionary ‘absolute’ class, etc. – into the *ultimate form* of the development of the communist idea, whose other forms simultaneously appear as its anticipations or contradictory realizations. There is no historical or political privilege of one ‘communism’ over another anymore. Some years ago, I therefore suggested a genealogical sketch of why the idea of communism ‘returns’ as a spectre to haunt both consciousness and also, henceforth, the contemporary political debate by reactivating different discursive formations from the past, either separately or in diverse combinations. There is ‘socialist’ and ‘proletarian’ communism, of which Marx and his followers have provided a systematic formulation that is today apparently comprised of a politics and philosophy of history without future (but with regard to which I, from my side, do not at all exclude the possibility that it encounters new developments or reveals unexploited potentialities). But there is also, with an equally efficient name, *Christian communism* (Franciscan, Anabaptist) founded on the political interpretation of the evangelical values of poverty and love (clearly prevalent in Antonio Negri), or the *egalitarian communism* we could call ‘bourgeois’ (coming from the radical tradition at the heart of the revolutions of the classical era: the English Levellers, the French Babouvists, whose influence is felt especially in Jacques Rancière).⁶ To tell the truth, this typology is not merely embryonic. It is also dangerously *Eurocentric*, and leaves the question of how the genealogy presents itself in a ‘non-European’ world entirely aside, a world that is re-appropriating the link between its pre-colonial past and its postcolonial present through the conception of ‘alternative modernities’. It leads us to the most difficult question, which is to understand how the ‘messianic’, in other words the theological (or anti-theological) elements of communism multiply and transmit themselves, resisting a periodization that is too simple, elements which Marxism – despite or because of its reference to an ‘end of history’ that would be the result of conflicts inherent to history itself – evidently did not deny, but pompously reformulated. *Deus sive Revolutio...*: the tension is inevitable (which does not mean unproductive) between the

‘real movements’ (in the plural rather than the singular) ‘which abolish the present state of things’ (Marx, *The German Ideology*)⁷, in any case opposed to the dominant order, and the unending process of the secularization of the eschatology that provides this ‘abolishing’ with the characteristics of an end of history, in both senses of the word.⁸

Marx’s communisms

It is no less vital to face anew the question of ‘Marx’s communism’ (rather than that of communism according to Marx, exactly because, corresponding to the primacy of the question ‘who?’, it should be related to the issues of illocution and to the changing conditions of its enunciation in a differential manner). Revisiting the complexity of these questions in the form of exegetical conflicts would have been the most evident result of the effort of reading and interpreting the Marxisms of the XXth century that we inherited and continue to make use of. In counterpoint to all ‘reconfiguration’ (Bensaïd 2010), this complexity now more than ever demands a prolonged deconstruction that exposes its aporias (the historicity of thought is formed by aporias). In continuity with past interpretations, I will sketch two examples.

The first refers to the way the perspective of communism was announced at the end of *The Communist Manifesto* from 1848. All that is difficult and important here is concentrated in the way the final chapter articulates two elements that are seen as equally essential to the ‘action program’ that it defines (the final chapter being reduced to one page, ‘Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties’, from which we notice that it identifies with the point of view of the ‘who’ question: what do communists do in this particular moment, and, consequently, who are they, how do they recognize each other?). On the one hand, it gives primacy to the social question of the *forms of property*; on the other hand, it emphasizes the need to work towards an *internationalization* of democratic struggles. As we know, it is also on this basis that the ‘First International’ is founded in 1864. The perversion of internationalism has led to the constitution of ‘socialisms in one country’ and a

‘system of socialist states’, claiming to follow Marx (as allies or rivals). Together with the (at least apparent) decay of anti-imperialist struggles and the increasing difficulty of simply identifying their opponent, but above all perhaps together with the identification of the financial crisis with a ‘structural’ crisis of capitalism that has now really reached its ‘highest stage’ with financial globalization, this perversion has brought about a tendentious reversal of the hierarchy of these two terms in the current discursive formation in which a group of intellectuals returns to the ‘communist hypothesis’: the reference to property prevails over the reference to internationalism. One might suspect that my position is that there is no choice. Here we have two elements of our representation of communism that are irreducible. However, we are obliged to investigate the reasons that underlie Marx’s conviction that the abolition of private property and of the separation of humanity into nations (and hence into the state, given their institutional autonomization) belong to one single ‘real movement’, or correspond to the same tendency of contemporary history, and to contemplate how these reasons are transformed today.

Marx thought there was a common ‘base’ for both tendencies, constituted by the existence of the proletariat as a radically exploited class that is at the same time excluded from the bourgeois society the reproduction of which it assured, or better yet by the existence of the *proletarians*, to whom he assigned the ‘dissolution’ (*Auflösung*) of the conditions of existence of bourgeois society. In other words, what seemed essential to him was a process of collective subjectivation, ‘ontologically’ grounded in an objective condition, but having an essentially *negative* character that aptly expresses the conjunction of the two categories that he uses (since *The German Ideology*) to mark the position of the proletarians on the threshold of history: *Eigentumslosigkeit* or the radical absence of property (that is why ‘the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains’) and *Illusionslosigkeit* or the radical absence of ideological illusions concerning the nature of the communal relation in bourgeois society, in particular of national illusions (that is why ‘the proletarians have no fatherland’, no more than they have a religion). This brings us back to thinking about a point of inversion where the different negations meet, rather than discussing the tendencies of transformation of the social structures at work within capitalism. The virtually communist proletarians are a ferment of

its dissolution at the same time that they feel its effects in their 'being'. 'Consciousness' (*Bewusstsein*) is nothing else but 'conscious being' (*das bewusste Sein*). When their revolution breaks out as a result of the maturity of contradictions, what will appear with them is the *inverse* of capitalism rather than its outcome.

It seems to me that what is lacking today in order to think of communism in these terms is not so much the negativity corresponding to the existence of the proletariat (which has never entirely disappeared and is re-constituting itself on a massive scale, even in the 'centres' of the world economy, with the dismantling of the institutions of social security, although these new conditions of exploitation should be studied with care). Nor is it the illusionary, or more correctly the 'ideological', character of the representations that cement national, and more generally 'communitarian' formations. Rather, it is the possibility of considering the critique of property and that of the nation as automatically convergent, and *a fortiori* to anchor both in an ontology, albeit a 'negative' one. For this reason, even the political identity of communists who answer the question 'who?' (that practically articulates the critique of the *homo oeconomicus* and of xenophobia and nationalism – certainly in the same way as of several other phenomena, especially patriarchy and sexism) cannot any longer be determined by deduction or supposition. Neither can it be 'found' in experience (as Marx and Engels, from their particular perspectives, expected in the 1840s to 'encounter' proletarians in Germany, France and England who incarnated the negation of the existing state of things).⁹ Rather, it has to be the object of an aleatory and in any case hypothetical *political construction*.

Let us now move, again very rapidly, to a second theoretical configuration of Marx's thought, that is also marked by an extremely strong tension: the one that is articulated in *Capital*, or rather in its margins. Based on an analysis of the economic structures of bourgeois society (the generalized circulation of commodities and the valorisation of products of human labour in exchange, the exploitation of the paid labour force and the industrial capitalist revolution), Marx again sets out to think its negation. Let me point out that here, from a logical point of view, *the question 'what' again tends to prevail over the question 'who'*, or rather, it returns

in the form of a hypothetical proposition: if the contradictions of capitalism evolve according to a certain 'historical tendency' towards socialization, then communism, presenting itself as a negation of the negation (designated by Marx at the end of *Capital* as the 'expropriation of the expropriators'¹⁰, a name itself loaded with messianic as well as political resonances), will exhibit the structural features of a common production (and reproduction) of the means to satisfy fundamental human needs (material and spiritual, or 'cultural'). Let me also point to an essential aspect of the confrontation of Marx's thinking with its implementations by 'Marxism'. Marx does not reason in terms of *phases* or *stages* of an evolution, in which the 'transition' from one stage to the other would be conditioned by crossing established borders (in the quantitative or qualitative development of the productive forces, in the transformation of institutions, or in the degree of consciousness). He thinks in terms of historical *tendencies* (and, where applicable, in terms of 'counter-tendencies', as Althusser has pointed out) whose modes of realization must remain relatively undetermined. That is why, if there is a nominal definition of communism, there can be no representation of it, neither as an anticipation nor as a program. But this negative characteristic that has frequently served to set aside objections and also to justify the 'socialist' practices of reinforcing the statist forms in contradiction with the idea of communism, should not prevent us from identifying another internal tension. The attempts to update Marxist communism in times of globalization and its crises will not be able to escape the need to reconsider its roots (that is to say, the 'axioms' that sustain it), which is the least we can say.

Here, one should fully agree with Jacques Bidet's intuition, developed in several works since *Exploring Marx's Capital* (1985)¹¹, even if one could argue about this or that aspect: in *Capital*, Marx did not study *one* but *two* distinct structures, both stemming from the critique of political economy, but having divergent logical and therefore political implications, even if historically one encounters them in *combination*. The one concerns the circulation of commodities and the 'value-form', the other the integration of the labour force into the production process under the directive of capital and under conditions that enable its indefinitely expanding accumulation (hence exploitation and its diverse 'methods').¹² But the implications of each structure for conceptualizing the tendency towards com-

munism and the forms of its realization are totally different, alternatively brought up by Marx in different texts (notably in the descriptions in *Capital* of ‘commodity fetishism’, on the one hand, and of ‘cooperation’ or ‘polytechnics’ on the other).¹³ On the one hand, the expropriation of the expropriators is essentially thought of as the abolition of the market (or of its domination of the whole of society), as the constitution of a non-market community or a ‘free association of producers’, transparent to itself (not mediated by the ‘real abstraction’ of money), that is to say as the self-organization of social life. On the other hand, it is thought of as the ‘collective appropriation’ of the means of social production that, according to the expression in the penultimate chapter of *Capital*, recreates ‘individual property based on the [socializing] acquisitions of the capitalist era’. On the one hand, it is the division of labour (that is to say the division of the branches and units of production) on the level of the whole of society that is central; on the other hand, it is the relationship of individuals to their means of labour, to co-operation and their own physical and intellectual capabilities which can only be realized in co-operation. Although these are not incompatible, they are not the same, and they may even require antithetic political and cultural conditions (concerning the role of the *state*, the institutions of public law, education and so on). Here we find both the deep ambiguity and the reasons for the powerful influence of the modern notion of ‘socialism’ and of the relation it has established to ‘communism’, especially in Marxism. By suggesting a fusion or a totalisation of both problems, identified with the idea of a ‘scientific socialism’¹⁴, Marxist (socialist, proletarian) communism has lastingly pushed other communisms, linked to ideas of justice or equality, away into a utopian or pre-historical limbo. But this also accounts for the theoretical (and hence political) frailty of this spectacular construction today. Certainly, one could always work towards connecting the problems of the ‘common’ (on which different strands of ‘non-orthodox’ institutional economics have developed their ideas before Negri, who obviously comes across as convincing, but has also been asked to specify his views)¹⁵ with those of the ‘intellectualization’ of labour (and its limits, or its complement in the form of new alienations in the computerized age). We cannot, however, take for granted that the evolution of property and of the trans-individual relationship or the community tend toward the same result (except on account of a speculative, ‘ontological’ assumption). Here again,

it is possible that revisiting the problems posed by Marx and assigned by him to the ‘communist’ overcoming of politics in bourgeois society (or even of its anthropology) requires us to shift from the point of view of necessity to the point of view of construction and of its aleatory historical ‘conditions’.

Communism or populism

In conclusion, I merely want to bring up one last aspect of the debate (partly self-critical, of course) that we are trying to engage in with the names, ideas and spectres of communism, in an effort to continue to be their carrier. This aspect is, however, an unavoidable one, since, one way or the other, all the previous dilemmas imply a differential relationship with the state, and hence raise the question to what extent communism is *an alternative to the state* (or to *statism*). Here, Marxist communism recovers a ‘dialectical’ superiority over other figures that can be placed under the same name, since it has attempted not to describe ‘abstractly’ or ‘ideally’ a society without state, but to analyse the transformation of historical conditions that prevent class society from being able to do without the state (or that make state intervention necessary in order to overcome the conflicts that characterise it). More profoundly even, communism focused on the *practice* in the context of which the state as a *form of domination* (‘state power’, the ‘state-machine’) is confronted with its opposite – so that communism is not only a goal or a tendency, but a politics and even a *political relation* (the one pointed to by the Leninist expression of a ‘non-state state’)¹⁶. But this superiority is ironic, and even has an extremely bitter taste, for reasons that lead us to examine communism from an internal perspective as well as from the angle of historical circumstances. The idea of a *communist politics* that would simultaneously be an *anti-politics* (an overcoming of the ‘bourgeois’ forms of political practice, a reversal of its relation to the state, understood as either ‘constitutional’ or ‘instrumental’) and that would as a consequence only intervene in the field of existing politics (marked by institutions, ideologies and communitarianisms) in order to displace, to transform or to subvert it, has *de facto* ended up serving these bourgeois forms to the highest degree;

in the best case, the liberal forms, in the worst, the totalitarian forms to which it has itself made a notable ‘creative’ contribution. Today, the time has passed to see this antinomy as a tragic misunderstanding. We should instead ask ourselves what Marxism is still lacking in order to attain the capacity to distance itself from its own historical realizations, divided between powerlessness and perversion. In accordance with a method that I have employed elsewhere, I still think it is useful – if not sufficient – to do this starting from an internal critique of the aporias of Marxism as the construction of a ‘concept of politics’ (in other words, I continue to believe that this concept, insufficient or lacking, is not arbitrary).¹⁷

One might think that the project of a communist (anti-) politics is inseparable from the way the element of contradiction inherent in the ‘anti-capitalist’ project of a *radical socialism* has been thought (or should have been thought), in particular when it comes to resorting to sovereignty and its repercussive effects. However, from this point of view, historical communism only pushes to the extreme or reproduces under new historical conditions the antinomy that haunts the idea of popular sovereignty since the beginning of the ‘second modernity’, to which its models go back (in particular the French Revolution, but also the English Revolution): The sovereignty of the state that ‘monopolizes legitimate violence’ (*Gewalt*) is referred back to the sovereignty of the revolution, of which one could say that it exercises a ‘monopoly of the power of historical transformation’.¹⁸ But the reversal of a rebellious or revolutionary popular sovereignty into a statist sovereignty is much more inevitable than the opposite if there is no category of revolutionary politics (and in particular of a revolutionary politics *of the masses*) that would situate itself at a distance from notions of rebellion, constituent power, the ‘transformation of social relations’, the ‘democratisation of democracy’ and so on. Here we see the weakness of the elegant ‘resisting’ expression used by Bensaïd: ‘Saving communism from its capture by the bureaucratic reason of state.’ (Bensaïd 2010) As if the antinomy was not internal. Communism would not be the name for a messianic radicality, capable of leading socialist politics beyond the regulation or the correction of the ‘excess’ of the market, of again putting into question the forms of property, and of reviving the more or less idealized traditions of justice and

equality, if it did not bring both the worst, that is to say totalitarianism, as well as emancipation.

For this reason, I think it is not useless to attempt to reverse the perspective. Instead of thinking of communism as ‘surpassing socialism’, we should consider the modalities of a bifurcation at the heart of revolutionary discourses that in their confrontation with the state share a reference to ‘the people’, and thus provide an *alternative to populism*. This problem is, for other reasons, significantly topical.¹⁹ We should critically work towards the reference to the *community* that remains essential to communism without purely and simply coinciding with it (communism has always been both a *critique of the community* as well as an attempt to revive it, or to elevate it to a universal level).²⁰ It is from this perspective that I here suggest to, in a way, turn the aporia of communist politics as a dialectic of the ‘non-state state’ around, by seeing it not so much as a radical supplement to socialism but rather as a paradoxical supplement to democracy (and democratic practices) capable of altering the representation that the people has of its own historical ‘sovereignty’: this is another interior (or rather: an *internal alteration*) of populism, or the critical alternative to the becoming-people of anti-capitalism as well as, in certain historical-geographical conditions, of anti-imperialism.²¹ It is thus evidently much more a matter of *action*, intimately related to the conjuncture, than of an idea or a model. Hence I return to my point of departure, to the primacy of the question of *who the communists are*: what ‘do they do’ in the heart of the historical movement? Instead of: what is communism ‘yesterday, today, tomorrow’? All this, as we have seen, is yet to come.

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¹ This article is based on a lecture held on January 22, 2010 at the Université de Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, in the context of the conference 'Puissances du communisme', organized by Daniel Bensaïd and the Société Louise Michel. Daniel Bensaïd passed away on January 12. I have written this essay in memory of our colleague who has been a close friend of mine for over forty years, regardless of our organizational affiliations and even because of our diverging interpretations of the same tradition of thought and action.

² It may not have been pointed out enough that there is here a difficulty stemming from the coexistence of utopianism and a thesis of historical immanence (also, evidently, within Marxism): the question of knowing whether, 'in realized communism' (the regime of perfect equality, or of the primacy of common interests over individualist competition, or the withering away of the state, etc.), subjects could still call themselves 'communists', is profoundly enigmatic. Could the thesis outlined by Marx concerning the revolutionary proletarians, namely that they prepare their own disappearance, be extended to communists in general?

³ But we know that the more efficient it was, the less it was tolerated... And I am thinking here about the long and obstinate story of the Italian collective behind the newspaper *Il Manifesto*, around Rossanda, Pintor, and their comrades, rather than the ephemeral movement 'Pour l'union dans les lutes', in which I participated myself between 1978 and 1981 (see Balibar, Bois et al. 1979).

⁴ It is regrettable that the great work of Jacques Grandjonc (1989) is not better known and distributed; it is a contribution of major importance. It opens up the question of how to characterize the eccentric place of communist discourse within the constellation of the political tendencies of modernity that emerges after the double 'revolution' (the industrial 'English', and the political 'French' Revolution) at the turn of the XVIIIth century (Balibar and Wallerstein 1992): communism breaches this constellation (in particular through its association with 'socialism') and at the same time remains partly exterior to it (by its reference to an image of history other than that of 'progress').

⁵ But not of all regimes, far from it: Cuban Castroism continues to resist pressure from the USA, even finding significant backing in the 'Bolivarian revolution' in Venezuela and other movements under way in Latin America, whereas in China the communist party exerting the monopoly of power has become (for how long?) the organizer of capitalist accumulation and of the conquest of the global market. On the first issue, see the remarkable article by Boaventura de Sousa Santons (2009).

⁶ See É. Balibar, 'Quel communisme après le communisme?', presented at the conference 'Marx International II: *Le capitalisme, critiques, résistances, alternatives*', Université de Paris 10 Nanterre, October 1998, and again at the colloquium of the newspaper *Il Manifesto*, Rome, December 1998; first published in Kouvélakis 2000.

⁷ Lucien Sève in particular privileges this 'definition' of communism (Sève 2007).

⁸ In this respect – and in continuity with an entire portion of Daniel Bensaïd's recent work – the invitation to the conference to which this article goes back contained a spectacular illustration, by referring to a phrase by the poet Freiligrath (who participated in the 1848 revolutions, and was a close friend of Marx and Engels) that Rosa Luxemburg cited at the end of her last article, in which she describes the crushing of the Spartacist revolution by allegorically putting into the mouth of the revolution the declaration of

its indestructible character: 'I was, I am, I will be' (Luxemburg 1919). Since Luxemburg is 'Marxist', many commentators believe that the point is to register the communist revolution as a *dialectical process* coextensive with history, starting before capitalism, traversing its contradictions and carrying it beyond itself. It is almost the exact opposite, as is well shown by the context of Freiligrath's words: 'O nein, was sie den Wassern singt, ist nicht der Schmerz und nicht die Schmach -/Ist Siegeslied, Triumpheslied, Lied von der Zukunft großem Tag!/Der Zukunft, die nicht fern mehr ist! Sie spricht mit dreistem Prophezein,/So gut wie weiland euer Gott: Ich war, ich bin – ich werde sein!' (*Die Revolution*, 1851) It is the 'triple prophetic' announcement of the 'great day' of a redemption to come ('as erstwhile your God'), the imminence of which is continuously confirmed by the atrocities of the present. The theological reference is to the way Moses makes God announce his own eternity.

⁹ Some today imagine to have 'relocated' them in the person of the immigrant without papers or the 'new nomads' (speaking once again in their place, which is not doing them a great favour).

¹⁰ This strange formula, which is primarily strange from a linguistic point of view as I have noted elsewhere, does not only echo a terminology going back to the French Revolution (the denunciation of the 'monopolisers'), it also reproduces a biblical scheme of redressing the injustice suffered by the chosen people: 'you will oppress your oppressors' (Isaiah 14:1-4 and 27:7-9). We can compare it with another almost contemporary repetition in chapter XXXVII of *Moby Dick* by Melville (1851): 'The prophecy was that I should be dismembered; and – Aye! I lost this leg. I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one.' (For more on the affinities between Marx and Melville, see J.-P. Lefebvre's introduction to the new translation of the first book of *Capital*, ed. J.-P. Lefebvre, PUF, 'Quadrige', 1983.)

¹¹ Bidet 2006. See also, in particular, Bidet 1999. It is important to confront in detail Bidet's analyses with those of Moishe Postone, who also questions how Marxism has traditionally articulated the commodity form with exploitation, but focuses on the critique of the category of 'labour', which, as he shows, is the site of an ambiguity between political economy and its critique (Postone 1993).

¹² My terminology diverges, in fact in a minor way, from Bidet's on this point: he uses the term 'meta-structure' to describe the circulation and the form of commodities (of which he shows that it realizes itself either in a commodity form or in a planned form, or in a combination of both) and calls the mode of production a 'structure'. I prefer to speak of two structures (corresponding to what Marx considered as the 'two discoveries' of his critique of political economy: the secret of the money form, the secret of the production of surplus-value), and to say that Marxism (beginning with Marx himself) engages in the construction of diverse philosophical 'meta-structures', allowing us to think of these two structures as identical, or as inscribed in the same dialectical development. Yves Duroux developed a similar idea in the course of a seminar organized by Althusser, published in 1955 as *Lire le Capital* (*Reading Capital* (1970), Verso, 1997). This divergence does not affect the fundamental issue, which is the epistemological *duality* at work in the Marxist critique of political economy.

¹³ To which we can also add, in their essence, the texts of the *Grundrisse* from 1858 on the ever more important role of science in the production and construction of the *General Intellect*, taken up by Negri's conception since his 1979 commentary *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* and up until his recent work with Michael Hardt (Hardt and Negri 2009).

¹⁴ This is a redundant expression: 'science' points precisely to dialectics, meta-structure or meta-theory of history, aimed at identifying the two aspects of the problem of communism, by grounding both of them in the tendencies of the evolution of capitalism, at least hypothetically, since in practice planning and self-organization do not go well together.

¹⁵ As one may recall, the Nobel Prize for 'economics' has recently been awarded to the work of Elinor Ostrom (Ostrom 1990).

¹⁶ That is to say, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in its Leninist meaning, which is much more complex than one would like to think (and than this oxymoron would suggest). Among the protagonists of the new debate on communism, it seems to me that Slavoj Žižek is the only one who takes the necessity of reexamining this aspect of the Marxist heritage seriously, at the price of what we could call an extreme autonomisation of the ideological superstructure, corresponding to the autonomisation of the productive forces in Negri's thought; see in particular Žižek 2008. For this reason alone, a com-

parative reading of these authors is of considerable interest as it allows assessing the irreversible *disjunction* of Marxist theorems. I intend to come back to this elsewhere.

¹⁷ See Balibar, Luporini and Tosel 1979; Balibar 1997 (partly translated as Balibar 2002); Balibar 2010.

¹⁸ The proletariat as a revolutionary subject is in many respects no more than a ‘people of the people’, freed from its capture by the representative democratic forms of bourgeois society: Žižek in particular is very well aware of this, as he continuously goes back from Lenin to the model of Robespierre (at least to his formulations: ‘Citizens, do you want a revolution without revolution?’). I myself have used it abundantly in my book *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, 1977.

¹⁹ But it is no doubt appropriate to point out that all that it evokes is not directly incorporated in the name of ‘communism’: this is particularly true for the elements of a critique of sovereignty and of the democratization of democracy contained in feminism...

²⁰ The debate which took place between 1983 and 1990 between Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot remains an important reference here (Nancy 2004; Blanchot 1988). It is also the starting point for a significant part of the thought of Agamben (1993) and of Derrida (1997).

²¹ At this moment, the discussion that should be privileged here is with the theorists and organisers of the new revolutionary powers in Latin America: Alvaro Garcia Linera in particular (2008; and the review of Muller (2010)).