

“CAN POLITICS BE THOUGHT IN INTERIORITY?” (TRANSLATION)

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Abstract: “Can Politics be Thought in Interiority” is an essay from *L’intelligence de la politique*, one of two book-length works published by the French anthropologist and political theorist, Sylvain Lazarus. The English translation of Lazarus’ first book, *Anthropology of the Name*, was published in October 2015, and while that work can rightly be considered his magnum opus, “Can Politics be Thought in Interiority?” provides a comprehensive, yet succinct statement of the concepts outlined in this much longer text. Broadly speaking, the central concern for Lazarus in this essay, as well as in his work as a whole, is to rehabilitate a form of leftist political theory that maintains the radical edge of previous discourses, without being vulnerable to the violent pitfalls that plagued the various socialist and communist projects of the 20th century, or capitulating to the dominant neoliberal or parliamentary regime(s). According to Lazarus, both the (failed) communist project and the current parliamentary-democratic project—though they espouse widely different ideologies—fall prey to and ultimately fail because of the same underlying structure. For Lazarus, this structure is what he terms “politics in exteriority,” which he defines as any mode of political organization that identifies politics in relation (and only in relation) to a specific “object” or set of objects, whether they be conceptual or empirical. The task of contemporary politics is not, according to Lazarus, to find new “objects” for politics to identify with (to use a current example, to maintain that the site of politics is not the nation-State but in “global citizenship” or the “global society”), but to move toward a non-dogmatic and praxis-oriented “politics in interiority,” which this essay outlines in detail.

It is also worth noting that Sylvain Lazarus’ work has been of crucial importance to the development of the philosophical and political project of Alain Badiou, and alongside Lacan, Plato, and Sartre, can be rightly considered one of the most important influences on Badiou’s thought. Key terms and phrases in Badiou’s project, such as “the name,” “politics without the party,” and “politics at a distance from the State,” as well as assertions such as “politics is rare,” are ideas that have been developed in concert with Lazarus

(during their many years of political and theoretical labour together), and in some cases, that have been culled directly (without alteration) from Lazarus' body of work. As such, "Can Politics be Thought in Interiority?"—outside of its substantial independent merits—will also be an invaluable resource for the ever-growing legion of Badiou scholars who, until recently, have had almost no direct English-language contact with Lazarus' work, and as such, have not been able to get a foothold on one of Badiou's primary influences.

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I.

I will make use of three categories: interiority, subjectivity, intellectuality. These categories, which have different assignments, find their consistency and their efficacy under the jurisdiction of the same, single principle: *people think*.

People Think

People think is my founding statement. First, we state what it is not. It is not a normative statement, a normative conception of people's thought. Such a conception was present in the party form, where the party had the monopoly on thought. It also is no longer the Leninist statement that I examined in "Working Notes on Post-Leninism," according to which consciousness is *consciousness of*. I emphasized that, in Lenin's work, the theory of consciousness presented the possibility of an arrival of the subjective as such, but that this consciousness, being *consciousness of* (antagonism), that is to say, consciousness of the State, was also a consciousness of object. Consciousness of antagonism as condition of the party, this major invention placed the form of organization (for Lenin, the party) under the thumb of a politico-statist logic which limits people's capacity. By advancing the principle *people think*, I set aside this conception of political consciousness. What's more, we are no longer within the problematic of the construction of a party. The conception of politics which rejects the one given in terms of party and State (that is to say, giving itself the State for object) will be called *politics in interiority*.

People think is worthy of everyone. Otherwise, one returns to the Leninist conception of politics, divided into spontaneous consciousness (of the unorganized

people) and antagonistic consciousness (of the organized people), which takes us back to a (Marxist) dualism of the variety: ideology/science.

People think: whether in the framework of a politics *at a distance from the State (politics in interiority)*, or in the framework of a politics *in the space of the State (politics in exteriority)*. In order to make it possible to have politics when people adhere to parliamentarianism, to syndicalism, it is necessary to admit that people who vote, who are syndicalized, also think. The principle *people think* legitimizes a politics in interiority, far from the State, but just as well its opposite, a politics in exteriority. In both cases, there is a thought and a politics.

However, in distinguishing between a politics in interiority and a politics in exteriority, am I not on the path to renewing politics' former division: the bourgeois version, the proletarian version? Absolutely not. In my conception of politics in interiority, it is a question of constructing a politics starting from a process that establishes politics in its own dynamic, and not *simply* by the work of antagonism. When there exists a space in interiority, it develops itself starting from itself and not starting from a "versus." This development, starting from itself, is what one could call a "singularity." The battles, the qualification of adversaries, are in interiority and not issues of a division of the real into friends and enemies.

In interiority/in exteriority: thus, not a division between between spontaneous and conscious, and especially not—regarding politics in interiority—a consciousness of object in the old sense, in the Leninist form of consciousness of antagonism to the State (particularly as antagonism today finds itself in a critical phase of quasi-disappearance). The processes of forms of consciousness, processes of subjectivation, of the political, are of two orders: in exteriority and in interiority—this is a consequence of the thesis *people think*.

This assumes that politics is, in a primary sense, of the order of thought and not of the order of "objective realities," of the objective reality of contradictions, of which the State is the paradigmatic product. Thought is thus not thought of an object, it comes under the jurisdiction of a subjectivation, but for all that it is not without assignment nor precision. We will put it in this form: *thought is relation of the real*. "Relation of the real," and not "relation to the real," this twist of grammar serves to thoroughly underscore that thought does not take the real as object. The non-objectivizing formula "relation of the real" implies that this thought is neither graspable in the categories of true or false, nor in a relation of the subjective to the objective. In this way, *people think* gives an original meaning to the statement: "politics is of the order of

thought.” This postulate depends on a politics concerned with, what we named in “Notes on Post-Leninism,” the *capacity of the masses*.

Politics in Interiority, First Assignment: People Think

Politics in interiority is a politics in subjectivity.

1. Because the State-object is not its motivation or motor. Politico-statist logic is insufficient for capturing or understanding the capacity of the masses. Therefore, it is necessary to abandon referents given in terms of object, mainly: the State. That politics in interiority is a politics *in subjectivity* is what reveals the possibility of relying on principles other than the expired, old Marxist referents.

2. Because the politics that I propose rests on subjectivations, of forms of consciousness in interiority that it sets out from and that thrive on what people think: *in subjectivity* designates that the doing of politics develops itself based on forms of consciousness that I call in interiority.

Immediately, I specify that “in subjectivity” is to be distinguished from what I understand by “process of subjectivation” or “subjectivations.” In effect, in politics in exteriority (in the space of the State), there are also subjectivations, forms of consciousness, but they are in exteriority. Calling politics in interiority a politics in subjectivity indicates that the subjectivations are, in this case, in interiority: concentrated in a “what one can do oneself,” and not simply in an “against which one struggles.” That politics in interiority is also in subjectivity indicates the subjectivation’s singular nature.

3. Because it is also a politics *which thinks itself*, without the aid of other doctrines: philosophy, history, economics, sociology, etc. The thesis here is that the subjective can not lead to anything but the subjective—the subjective thinks itself according to the subjective. Thus, it is a question of a theory of the singularity of politics. The abandonment of supports or referents exterior to politics, or borrowings from other disciplines, defines the statement *politics is a thought*. Thinking itself, it is a thought. The element of the subjective is an essential part of the machinery—one could call a politics in interiority a politics in subjectivity.

The subjective dimension of politics in interiority is, negatively:

- what rejects the object-subject relation and previous forms of politics with regard to objects;
- what acknowledges the end of the previous referents: of Marxism-Leninism (the Stalinist theoretical formation, repudiated as such), the notion of party and the way in which classism is obsolete (it is no longer operant).

And positively:

- what thrives on the principle *people think*;
- what makes it possible to identify the politics that I propose. Politics is in subjectivity when the subjective is in interiority.

We take an example of what we refer to as *people's thought*: regarding the word “worker”—it is in a process *in interiority*.

The word “worker” was dismissed by a member of Mitterand’s first government, during a strike at Talbot-Poissy in January 1984, when striking foreign workers were attacked with bolts thrown by supervisors, and by the cry “Arabs to the oven”—a noteworthy coalescence of anti-semitism and xenophobia. The member of the government who condemned this strike did so by declaring that it was the work of individual immigrants “unfamiliar with the realities of France,” and in this way, substituted the word “worker” with “immigrant,” opening the period in which the word “worker” disappeared from the official public sphere.

It was discovered again at Renault-Billancourt (now standing on Seguin Island) during a long survey of the OS (*ouvriers spécialisés*, “semi-skilled workers”) of the mountain chains. Here, every person was of foreign origin, and the term “worker” was not used as a sociological characteristic, but came in the form of a *problematic word* designating the function of a person in the factory, given in the statement: “I am a worker. In the factory one calls me a worker, but outside of the factory, one calls me an immigrant because they forgot that I was a worker.” Deciding as to the existence of the word—thus forbidding its disappearance, subjectivating it as what permits a transformation in consciousness of those who pronounce it—is exactly what I mean by *people think*. I draw your attention to the formulation: “outside of the factory, one calls me an immigrant because they have forgotten that I am a worker.” “Immigrant” specifies itself through the forgetting of “worker.” It follows that it is in the factory that the word “worker” functions, which results in two statements for our politics: *in the factory, there is a worker*; and: *make the factory into a political place*. And later: *the factory is the place of the worker*.

As for forms of consciousness in subjectivity, the OS, with whom we had long been in discussion, did not refer to itself as the working class—and not by ignorance, let me tell you—but quite simply because in subjectivity the working class was no longer operant. It was the factory that was operant: as the place of the worker. The rest of Billancourt’s OS easily confirmed this judgement; they judged the situation thus: that the crossing out of the word “worker” opened, among other things, to “widespread LePenism” and to the devaluation of manual labor, the consequences of which we are aware of, especially as regards education.

With this example concerning the word “worker,” we see that an aspect of the work of the masses consists in investigating and opening up the question of *names*. This will make the formulation of prescriptions possible, prescription being defined as: the form that a decision takes and that political will opens to a possible. The prescription can be assembled in a statement—in our example: *in the factory, there are workers, and make the factory into a political place.*

Politics in Interiority, Final Assignment: Politics’ Historical Mode

Politics in interiority, in its assignment to the principle *people think*, produces a politics in subjectivity. In its assignment to *historicity*, it is what makes it possible to grasp the way in which politics exists, when it does exist, as *relation of a politics to its thought*: this is the theory of *politics’ historical mode*. The category of politics’ historical mode is what makes it possible to apprehend a politics in the *singular invention* that it presents, the equally singular practices that it deploys, its hitherto unseen forms of organization.

Historical Mode of Politics in Interiority

Politics in interiority does not appear and does not exist except in the form of a mode.

A mode in interiority can be identified (we can know its nature) by looking for what *thought* has been opened up in the world. This inventive thought is that of the mode’s actors, and can, at certain times, be given by a proper name (Saint-Just, Lenin, Mao, for example). It creates the categories, the notions, the concepts specific to the mode. These categories are singular: the space of their existence, of their efficacy and their functioning is the space and the time of such a mode—because there is, we will see, a space and a time of a mode in interiority. What’s more, the mode’s categories are not utilizable anywhere except in the mode which they created; they are not generalizable. United with the mode—in other words, the categories’ own invention—they are said to be worn out or saturated in their usage and their existence when the mode ceases.

Politics in interiority is sequential and rare: In effect, the theory of politics’ modal existence is also that of its *sequentiality*. Politics is sequential: it does not exist all the

time; a singular politics has a beginning and an end. What's more, the sequences do not link up or accumulate. We say, therefore, that politics is rare.

The places of the world: How to identify and understand the cessation of a mode in interiority? By a second property of a historical mode of politics. What attests to the reality of a mode is, certainly, its thought, but it is also its adequacy to the creation of *places of politics*. As such, the mode is not only a thought of the sequence—militants, or actors of the mode, create *places* (I will illustrate this point more fully later). For what I refer to as the “revolutionary mode,” the places are the Convention and the *sociétés sans-culotte*; for the “Bolshevik mode,” the Soviets and the party. In the “dialectical mode,” it is new processes, such as the invention of the “people’s war” and the revolutionary army in Maoism. “The army charged with the political tasks of the revolution,” “the army in the service of the people”—these are the places of the mode that I term “dialectical,” and whose proper name is Mao Tse-tung.

Thus, there are a *multiplicity* of places. When one of the places comes to disappear, the mode disappears. Its categories are worn out, and as such one cannot reuse them elsewhere in order to qualify a political invention in a different sequence. This is the thesis of *politic’s singularity*. Each political sequence in interiority is a singular phenomenon. As such, there is no universality of politics. Only a singularity’s thought can realize it.

A historical mode of politics in interiority is thus identifiable, able to be sorted out, by its places and the categories created and systematized by actors internal to the mode. It is what signifies and brings about that we can *identify* a mode of politics by *its thought*, or more precisely, by the *relation of a politics to its thought*. The formulation “relation to its thought” indicates that a politics thinks itself as politics, and thus states what founds itself as political.

We will say that there is a historical mode of politics when one can reflect upon it according to the *relation to its thought*. Insofar as there exists no politics in interiority but modal—politics does not exist except in a sequential fashion—we can propose that *a politics in interiority is a thought*.

Modes of Politics in Interiority and in Exteriority

What I propose is the theory of politics’ modes. *People think* is the appraisal I make of Leninism when, by contrast to politico-statist logic, it opens up the investigation of what people “can do.” It is also the attempt to establish, outside of all idealism, that in the phrase: “the historical mode of politics is the relation of a politics to its thought,”

the thought is a political statement. That politics is a thought is a theory that is obvious after extensive, organized work with the people.

I distinguish two “types” of modes:

- The *mode in interiority*, where people’s thought organizes action, creates new categories and invents multiple places. In the mode in interiority, to say that people’s thought is in subjectivity indicates that it bears on the people themselves, those who will, those who do, and not on structures that one could call objective (classes, State forms, the nature of the economy). We hope to make this clear in the examples of modes that will follow.
- The *mode in exteriority*, in short, is the one where the State reigns. Yet, it will not be apprehended by the analytical description of forms of oppression and domination, of the wealthy and the women and men of power (even though this analysis always has to be done, as we will see), but by the way in which people treat this situation. In other words, it is a question of understanding what people think in a mode in exteriority, what the forms of subjectivation of people in this (malicious) situation are. Exteriority means taking into consideration (in a current mode) or studying (in a closed mode) the modalities of people’s subjectivation. The mode in exteriority will be understood from the question of what people do and think in this mode. Keeping it well in mind that in a mode in exteriority people think in the space of the State. The mode in exteriority is thus in compliance with the theory of the mode as relation of a politics to its thought. However, it is this that distinguishes exteriority and interiority: in a mode in exteriority the point of subjectivation is the State or the party-State, which organizes people’s thought. It is the state that is the referent of the processes of subjectivation. It is in exteriority.

Thus: in the mode in interiority, the point of politics’ subjectivation is the thought of the actors themselves; the process of subjectivation is itself in interiority—in the mode in exteriority, the process of subjectivation is in exteriority: it is the party or the State. As for places, on the other hand, the mode in exteriority does not present itself in a multiplicity of places (as with the mode in interiority), but by the preeminence of a single place, the party or the State. The party or State gives itself as the unique place of the modal sequence in exteriority.

2.

Beginning from the moment when the failure of revolutions and the development of communist parties into party-States repudiates the Leninist program, and from the moment when we finish with classism—that is to say, when the class struggle is no

longer subjectively and politically operant—it is necessary to liberate politics from the problematic of antagonism, and to no longer the give the State-object as consubstantial. We reiterate, it necessitates a new approach to politics, and demands, *from the very beginning*, no longer centering or focusing politics on the State, and beyond that, on the statist form of power. A new politics will be *at a distance from the State*.

The failure of socialism is not simply the failure of its program—the disappearance of classes and the wasting away of the State—it is the failure of a general centering of politics on the State. The objectival vision of politics is also, today and in France, that there is no politics except that of the State apparatus and from the interior of its logics such as they formulate themselves: i.e., to do politics is to enter into parliamentarianism.

The project of politics in interiority is ultimately the research into a new positioning of the question of the State. Namely, how to face the State when one is neither within the hypothesis of a parliamentary opposition nor that of the revolutionary destruction of the State in place? However, no politics in interiority is tenable if it does not place itself in a new position regarding what people's capacity is, and what I call the *possible*. The possible and people's capacity are the two cornerstones of what I call politics in interiority.

Restructuring the category of the possible based on people's capacity, a capacity which is up to date with historical experience (the collapse of socialism), means not beginning with the question of the State. How can people's political capacity come up with formulations adequate to the principle *people think*—this is the work of politics in interiority; that people's forms of consciousness are different than politico-statist logic is its point of departure. If the forms of people's consciousness focus on the use of their capacity, it is right to say that the subjective (of forms of consciousness) is understood based on the subjective (people's capacity).

Nonetheless, practicing politics at a distance from the State in no way means ignoring the central character of the state, but instead, holding the essential question to be: what are people's forms of subjectivity today? It is progress on this point that will reorganize, in different terms, the prescriptions of a new politics for dealing with the State.

“Politics is of the order of thought,” “the subjective is understood based on the subjective,” and “politics in interiority”—these three formulations integrate a new attempt to consider politics after the end of classism and in a space other than that of the State. And, first and foremost, this is to declare that politics does not give itself in the space of an object, whether that be the State or the revolution.

A political process in interiority has as its primary thesis that politics is *a thought*: it depends on people's forms of consciousness and, in that, comes under the jurisdiction of their subjective power. People's subjective power is a thought and not simply the reflection of their material or social situation. But this is not the entirety of the question. It is also a question of a thesis regarding the nature of the irreducibility of this process to all other spaces *except that of politics*, and regarding the necessity of reflecting upon it in its singularity.

Politics is posed here as having its own field of thought which cannot be, without it disappearing, subordinated to an exterior field, whether that be philosophic, economic, or historical. Thus, it is a matter of thinking politics based on itself and not starting from other disciplines: politics has its own intellectuality. Consequently it is necessary, in order to subscribe to this demand (thinking politics through itself), to think it in subjectivity in a manner that never makes it into an object. Thinking it as thought, and not as object, is what I call proceeding by a process in subjectivity.

We claim the following: There is no politics in general. Politics corresponds neither to invariants nor to the structures of societies. There is no politics except in exteriority or in interiority. The latter is exceptional. To say that there is a thought authorizes not needing the State, power or history in order to identify it. Claiming it to be in subjectivity is to identify it outside of social assemblages, classes, social conflicts, the question of power, and thus outside of everything that we are accustomed to designating as political or "fully political." Politics is never everywhere; it is not the management of the State, of the affairs of the State. The State is distinct from politics, and included therein are the transformations that we have been speaking of. The State gives itself as permanent and as an invariant of modern societies. Maintaining that politics is of the order of thought establishes politics as *singularity*. That politics comes under the jurisdiction of singularity, it is this that will satisfy the notion of *politics' historical mode*.

Why say that politics is a thought and not be content with the category of consciousness as envisioned by Lenin? I repeat: Lenin invented consciousness in politics. That consciousness is a *consciousness of antagonism*. That is to say, of an antagonism of *subjectivity*. This means that the party seizes it, that the objective contradiction becomes consciousness. We can measure the difference from Marx, according to whom the material conditions of existence *determine* forms of consciousness. Consciousness exists already according to Marx, but it is an effect, it is determined by the material conditions of existence. According to Lenin, there is no determination, there is a condition. And for the first time, a subjective dimension appears.

In that case, was it possible to imagine, beginning with Lenin, a consciousness without *of*, to give the subjective a vaster and much more indistinct domain than the simple consciousness of (antagonism), consciousness guaranteed according to the point of view of class? Can politics come *entirely* under the jurisdiction *of consciousness* and can it employ the category of *consciousness without object*, without specification?

A de-objectification of the category of consciousness seems possible to me. I no longer think it. Consciousness is no longer the central category of politics. To the extent that I continue to judge that politics is of the order of the subjective, we will come to see that I propose understanding it otherwise: by politics' historical mode, that is to say, by a relation to its thought. Only the confusion between politics and history, politics and State, authorizes believing in the permanence of politics. There are, therefore, no politics that are not singular.

Each mode is a singularity. In this way, the following theses: “politics is of the order of thought” and “politics is thinkable” are equivalent, not in general aims, but in a problematic of singularity whose ultimate point is the characterization of politics as mode.

The existence of a political sequence—that is to say, of a historical mode of politics—shows itself in multiple ways:

- By the creation of places, as we mentioned. These places are not “physical” places. A place is not a statement of localization, but of delocalization; politics no longer identifies itself by parties, classes and States, but in modes in interiority, by forms of presence to themselves: assemblages, processes, other forms of organization. The mode ceases when one of its places comes to disappear. All politics in subjectivity has *some* places, which are its spaces of crystallization, where it deploys itself and exercises itself. The end of the sequence is its cessation and not its defeat.
- The mode in interiority incarnates the lacunary existence of politics insofar as each mode characterizes itself by a singular category, and not by means of a permanent structure. One sees clearly that the sequential and the non-objectival go hand in hand. The work of the mode's identification takes place by the identification of the politics' thought and by the dating of its sequence. One could say that a historical mode of politics is *in interiority*, on the one hand, when in an historical period one can isolate a sequence when a politics' thought exists and when the relation of this thought to the sequence is shown, and on the other hand, when there are a multiplicity of places.

As for political thought in exteriority, its principal assignments are:

- The state and power, presented as the system founding modern politics and as the real of politics. State and power are regarded as the concepts through which the political real must be apprehended.
- Classes, either as system, or as political subjects in their contradictions or in their antagonism.

We could say that a mode is in exteriority when politics is assigned to a single place, generally the State (for example, parliamentarianism) or the party (Stalin's party-State) and when all thought is under the rules of the State or the party, and when political work shows itself in the form of oppressive singularities. Subjectivation, in that case, is in exteriority. There are two forms of subjectivation. In exteriority: it reveals itself as cohesion, adhesion. In interiority: it reveals itself as opening up a possible. We turn to the former.

The principle *people think* is not a an angelism. *People think* can apply itself to criminal politics, Nazism for example, which is a mode of politics—the kind of politics I will not deal with here. In the Nazi case, people adhere to the program's thought, sharing it, living and dying for it. The rallying falls under the jurisdiction neither of madness, nor of fascination, nor the absoluteness of coercion. Thus, one can say that this rallying “in thought,” in subjectivation, is likewise singular. Such a mode's relation of the real is what in it organizes domination: terror and concentration camps, permanent war and extermination.

In the USSR, it is undeniable that one knew, in forms singular and distinct, a rallying behind the Stalinist state. It is this that has permitted the most reactionary theoreticians, at a far remove from any thought of what singularity this is, to place Nazism and Stalinism in parallel and to attempt to validate the equation Hitler=Stalin. In both modes, certainly, the point of subjectivation is in exteriority: adhesion to Hitlerian criminal politics or to the Stalinist terrorist State. And in each case, subjectivation does not bear directly on people's capacity, but mediately through the intermediary of the Nazi State or of the Stalinist State, to which this capacity is identified. In Nazism: racialism, identification of politics with total war; and in Stalinism, without relation or measure: socialism in one country and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In a mode in exteriority, criminal or not, it is the States that are the *operators* of the political track. It is because the point of subjectivation exists in exteriority in the different cases—including contemporary parliamentarianism in France (a state that is fortunately not massively criminal)—that we can examine them in such a mode, and consequently, as relation to a thought.

However, there is one other motive that drives me to test the principle *people think* in a mode in exteriority. It is clearly the question: is there a relation of people to the

state other than that of adhesion, in a space where the state is referential? What then of people's capacity, if they pose this question to themselves. What then of the possibility of a liberating politics (to reclaim this term from the era of the 1917 revolution) in a mode in exteriority?

Based on the crises and expirations of classism, the category of antagonism (to the State), and finally, of revolution (seldom on our horizon in these days of 1985) one could have easily concluded, and many did, that the people, the masses, the classes, having on the whole renounced revolution and antagonism, signaled either their consent to domination, or at best, their impotence. It is essential to argue for a position other than that of adhesion and impotence. It is essential to insist on the subjective, including the relation of classes to parliamentarianism, otherwise the presumption of a rupture is impossible. The only argument in favor of the possibility of a rupture with the order of things is that the subjective exists, even if it is as adhesion to the order of things. If people think, then *another* subjectivation is possible.

We recap briefly. Politics in *intellectuality* (of which I have not yet spoken, but will say a few words here), in *subjectivity*, and in *interiority* are formulations that do not exclude one another, but that distinguish their assignment or their destination:

- intellectuality has for its assignment militant practice, it is conceptual elaboration;
- subjectivity has for its assignment the principle *people think*;
- interiority has for its assignment the existence of politics, knowing the mode's theory and testing the thesis *politics is a thought*. Therefore, it is a question of formulating a political thought of politics, and of putting politics, including what we do, to the test of its own thought.

To resume, I will say henceforth: my enterprise is that of a political thought of politics; putting politics to the test of its own thought; making a relation of politics to its thought a framework for testing and analyzing politics, and submitting politics (that we create) to the test of its thought in interiority.

3.

A Few Historical Modes in Interiority:

The Classist Mode

With the *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, what I term the "classist mode" of politics announces itself. We repeat yet again: to identify a mode is to identify its

political categories—in other words, its politics' thought, but also the dates of its appearance and saturation.

First, it is necessary to note that in the 19th century the category of class is dominant. The political theses specific to Marx do not reside in the usage of the category of class (which was not invented by him, as he emphasizes, but by historians) nor even in the invention and usage of the categories which are attached to him: the dictatorship of the proletariat and communism. The key point is the following: the *Manifesto* proclaims a politics where history is the category of politics. In its usage by the classist mode, *the laws of history*, of which posterity will make ample use of, do not yield to the present in its relation to the future.

This thesis must be grasped in its force, or in its apparent paradox: history, the one which Marx called “history of class struggle,” is not only objective or descriptive—to which the thoroughly posterior and largely Stalinist idea of “historical materialism” or history as science attaches itself. For Marx, history is above all a category of politics, that is to say, what I call a prescriptive category (I remind you that the prescriptive is what opens a specific possible).

How is this thesis to be justified?

First of all, it is necessary to see that history, in the class-dictatorship schema of proletariat-communism, is not simply, nor even primarily, history of the past, but history *of the future*. This is what Marx's adversaries refer to as his “prophecy.” What Marx announces is that history bears on the present and on the future. Beginning with what exists, it reveals what a rupture with what exists could be. As such, it tips over into the prescriptive, giving the name of history a political character.

It is without doubt that Marx knows how to be a historian, with talent and profundity, when it is a matter of the past and the present. But the category of history becomes prescriptive when it is a question of the future. Conjoined to the category of classes, dictatorship of the proletariat and communism, history becomes a project of rupture with the existing order.

In the *Manifesto*—so that an identical categorical register can thus cover the past, the present *and* the future—it is necessary that history functions as a *form of political consciousness* in order for this relation of thought to time to be possible. It is this historical consciousness, covering the past, present, and future, that characterizes the interiority of the classist mode.

The essential consequence of this conception of history is that, in politics' classist mode, there is no “class party.” Those who Marx calls “communists” are nothing but a fraction of the working-class parties and, more exactly, of the revolutionary

movement. What supports the unity of history and politics is not at all the party, but the *movement*.

Regarding this crucial point, we cite a few passages:

“...the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things.

In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question...(chapter IV).”

During the movement, the function of the communists is regulated by the prescription of historical consciousness; they are the ones who bring history to bear on the future:

“The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.”

History and politics in the unity of the present and the future are what the communists, who are the militants of the classist mode of politics, guarantee the unity of in consciousness.

In this way, history is that by which a politics, in and by movement, relates its thought to itself. History is the central category of thought in politics’ classist mode.

Yet, the category of the revolutionary movement is essential as history’s figure of the present. It is, in the interior of the classist mode, what permits the linking-up of the terms, first pair by pair, then taken all together: present/future, history/politics, immediate interests/communism.

Today, despite the crisis of the mode’s categorical referents—class, dictatorship of the proletariat or communism—the notion of “movement” parades the same pairs around, making it into a *circulating* category (an epithet that I oppose to “singular”) which allows a facile optimism to unify different processes. This demonstrates that categories have no true political force except in their connection to a mode (here, the classist mode), and can, when disconnected, continue to exist as obscure and disappointing representations.

The situation in 1871, after the Paris Commune, closed the classist mode which had begun in 1848 with the publication of the *Manifesto*. This closure, registered by Marx, stemmed from what is so evident: namely, that the revolutionary movement, in its most frequently deployed form, is not the place where the communist political prescription succeeds in affirming itself. With the Commune, the categories of the revolutionary movement and the communist portion of that movement (which are the mode’s places) are saturated.

I would add that it is after the Commune that parties in the modern sense of the word appeared, connected to the parliamentary State and completely different from what Marx meant by the communist portion of revolutionary movements. While aligning themselves with a class problematic, or even a kind of class, these parties—whose model is German social democracy—are in reality statist organizations, internal to the State and the subjectivations that are connected to it. The rallying of the SPD in Germany and the SFIO in France to the *Union sacrée* in 1914 fully exposes their homogeneity with the State, and liquidates the class nature of these parties.

At the interior of this latter sequence, the appearance of the Bolshevik political mode between 1902 and 1917—the mode to which the name Lenin is attached—will give yet another meaning to the category of party: the statement “classes are represented by parties” will no longer be an historical, expressive, or descriptive statement, but a prescriptive statement. For Lenin, politics is conditional, and the party is nothing but the indicator of the condition’s existence.

In the end, the overwhelming concern of the *Manifesto* is three-fold:

- It brings about a mode of politics, a mode in interiority, the classist mode, which organizes in consciousness a fusion of history and politics.
- It identifies the sequential nature of the theme of the “revolutionary movement,” which has no authentic political meaning except at the interior of the classist mode and whose political power disappears with the Paris Commune.
- We note that no mode of politics in interiority ever validates the theme “class party.” Regarding modes, we have, according to Marx: the fusion of politics and history, and, according to Lenin: conditional politics. According to Mao Tse-tung, it will be the modification of antagonism by the dialectic of development. For him, the theme of the class party remains attached to modes of politics in exteriority, and particularly to the Stalinist mode of politics. This point is of the greatest concern for those who, like us, are seeking to prescribe a politics without party.

The Bolshevik Mode

I will be brief here, having already brought up Lenin quite a bit. The sequence of the Bolshevik mode began in February 1902 with the publication of *What is to be Done?*² and terminated in October 1917. On the other side of this date, we see the statisation of the party. The party and the Soviets, which are the places of the mode, disappear and become State apparatuses.

This mode is not characterized by consciousness of antagonism, as one might expect given the importance that I attributed to it in “Notes on Post-Leninism,” but as *the conditional mode of politics*. Therein resides Lenin’s thought and its singularity.

(Proletarian) political capacity is neither innate, nor spontaneous, nor structural, but in its obligation to state its own conditions of existence. This condition convokes the party, but the party is not the expression of a class, it is itself conditional: it does not forge itself except as proportionate to consciousness of antagonism—a condition which is also that of the revolutionary perspective.

Consequently, this conception is contrasted with the spontaneous or expressive vision of the political and of the social. The proletarian revolution, the antagonism with the existing social and political order, certainly frames the Leninist thought of politics but does not establish it in its singularity. This singularity resides in what I call politics’ conditional mode.

The party is under the condition of consciousness of antagonism, which is subjective. But this is in no way a guarantee as it is according to Stalin. The condition of the party, in other words, what formulates the party, is the condition of its adequacy to situations. Here, we are very far from the way in which the parties of socialist countries have functioned in their becoming State-parties.

The Dialectical Mode

The dialectical mode—and here “dialectical” is, as we will see, paradoxical—is the mode of revolutionary war whose proper name is Mao Tse-Tung. It makes itself heard from 1928 to 1950, which is to say from the publication of “Why is it that Red Political Power can Exist in China” to the beginning of the Korean War, when the modalities of the revolutionary war came to an end.

In this mode, the relation of politics to its thought occurs in the category of *principles*, which help to understand contexts and situations.

According to Mao, there exists a process regarding knowledge whose central category is “principle.” There exist a multiplicity of principles, all designed to treat situations. As an example, let’s take one of the texts on war: “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party” (chap. II, of *Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*, 1936). Exposed there are the principles of war, of the revolutionary war—whose system is the “Long March,” the principles of encircling villages by campaigns—and the principle of the revolution in China. Immediately, the principles are considered in relation to their time, their context. We do not have a dogmatic sense of principle: principles change, and they change because the situation changes. It is not the principles of history that act, but those that permit treating situations:

complex situations, dramatic circumstances. Here, the dialectical mode is de-historicizing. And de-historicizing, in that, by subordinating history to the masses, this strictly Maoist category, it makes history disappear in favor of what Mao called “enthusiasm for socialism.” Enthusiasm for socialism is not (only) that of a “radiant future,” but a singular theory of development (here, a term that is in no way economic), registered from now on in the forms taken by the army: not only military force, but practicing the work of the masses, which is obligatory. The situation is “complex.” It is the general situation and the situation of the parties. “Work of the masses” and “situation” form a couple according to Mao. It is starting from this couple that principles are formulated. “The situation is variable,” requires diverse principles which make treating it possible.

But the most general principle which interests us, having to do with development, is the following: “the new is created in the struggle against the old.”

Thought is largely assigned to the elaboration and formulation of principles. It possess a great mobility: this is its continual appearance, and gives the utmost attention to what changes, to the “new,” the sign of a non dogmatic touch. The rule of elaboration and the process of a principle’s formulation, focusing on the new in its opposition to the old, organizes a relation of the subjective to the objective, which is to say a relation of thought to what Mao calls “objective reality.” It is thus a dialectic. The dialectic brought about by the accumulation of sensible knowledge, and by leaping toward the concept, is named “investigation.” The goal is identifying politics as knowledge.

We are thus in a process of knowledge. Political knowledge is specific, Mao will declare, to those who rally to dialectical materialism—that is to say, to Marxism, which is to say, to the proletariat. Dialectical materialism differs from all others: 1) because it serves the proletariat, 2) because it is based on practice.

It has a class assignment: Mao essentially says that our tactics and our strategy cannot be utilized by anyone but us—“no army opposed to the people can utilize our strategy and our tactics.” Tactics or principles of the party (of battle, of engagement), strategy or the principle of the whole, these principles do not “circulate.” These are the principles of politics. Here, politics has principles.

I term *dialectical mode* this relation of a politics to its thought.

Why appoint “dialectic” to this mode and not have it identified by Marx or by what I call the Bolshevik mode? Marx announces a dialectic, but appointed to the question of materialism and to the inversion of Hegel, though I diverge with him on this point. In Lenin, there is a dialectic of bourgeois/proletarian contradictions and an arrival of a non-dialectizable subjective (consciousness of). Added to this is the

existence, according to Lenin, of a gap between history and politics, a gap that the party is committed to diminishing by seizing power, and thus changing history.

Yet, for Mao, the thought is not that of a balance, whatever that may be, between politics and history. History is absented in favor of the law. No hope of fusion between politics and history ever shows itself. And at the same time, there exists a political optimism, not the historical optimism of “the day after” which lifts one’s spirits, but a political optimism whose category is the masses, the “popular masses.” A new category. Not to be understood in the blissful sense in which this term was taken, but as a process where the category of the masses subordinates itself to history.

The masses are grasped in the process of practice and statements. It is in this cycle that the principles of thought and of practice are formulable. The masses, for Mao, do not make history, they *are* history. To such an extent that they are more than history. The history that persists nonetheless is the history of systems: we find historical theses on imperialism (Mao claims that it binds all), or on the USSR. However, history in Marx’s sense, in its active function as “maker,” has disappeared. Hence this new optimism, which calls itself “confidence in the masses.” Confidence because—“the masses have...a vast reservoir of enthusiasm for socialism.” Not for history. The dialectical mode de-historicizes.

The dialectical mode is the one in which the category of the masses is essential. But what is the process of the dialectic? This dialectic is not between the parties and the masses. An yet, “it is necessary to have confidence in the masses,” and “it is necessary to have confidence in the party.” Nothing can take place without the party, even if there are cases of rebellion against the party, as during the Peng Dehuai affair. Certainly, the party is important, but it neither identifies the mode nor the dialectic. The dialectic is *that of knowledge, of thought and of objective reality*. And it is a dialectic which places in relation and in conflict two subjectives: “thought,” to be sure, but also “situation.” The situation is not only objective reality, it is *objective reality in situation*.

As such, the dialectic must proceed through situations on a grand scale: war, the wars, from which one can formulate principles which are the categories of politics in war, or rather of politics in the *situation* of war. It is in this way that “The red army is an armed organization charged with the political tasks of the revolution” must be understood as one of the central theses of the party. The army practices the work of the masses, it nourishes enthusiasm for socialism.

No situation can give up on the the principle of the masses. The dialectical mode is what bases itself on human capacity if political capacity is mobilized. In order to mobilize this political capacity, the necessary apparatus is the masses, the people, the party, the classes. Why? Because here we are at the heart of the theory: the theory of

development. The latter authorizes a transformation of the category of antagonism; it is not conceived as a frontal attack, the brutal fall of the State in place, nor as insurgencies conducted against it, but as transformation and as the partial passage to socialism: “liberated areas.” Thus, in the place of the theory of the class’ antagonism to the State, or of a thought given in terms of historical stages (urban insurrection, revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat), the development is, by way of people’s war, that of socialism.

The masses subordinate themselves to history, we are in the realm of neither Marx nor Lenin. Antagonism takes on another meaning: it is transformation and localized construction of socialism in the form of liberated areas. In the dialectical mode, the struggle between bourgeois and proletariat (without forgetting the struggle against feudalism) gives itself under the species of *movement*. Movement (development of socialism) becomes one of the categories of the mode’s thought and of politics’ thought. The dialectic is grasped as the axis of the passage from feudalism and the bourgeois to socialism. The passage to socialism is effectuated neither by insurrection based on the 1917 model, nor by a toppling over of the bourgeois State in the proletarian State, but by the growing movement that the liberated areas have embodied. The principal notion becomes that of development and un-development, of “what develops and what un-develops.” The dialectical mode is thus that of the dialectic between developing and un-developing. *Movement, transformation, development* are the categories of the mode’s thought. The category of the masses can be understood as the point of the mode’s subjectivation.

The non-central place given to antagonism is therefore essential for identifying this mode in interiority. There exists a positivity in the dialectical mode, which focuses on the new meaning of antagonism: it can not do everything, it needs the concept of the masses in order to rework it. Antagonism is not transformation unless the practice of the masses is different than traditional antagonism and frontal assault. Here, we have the practice of socialism in the liberated areas, and in the relation of the army to the villagers and to the people in general; and the personified antagonism of war.

Materialism subsumed by the dialectic of development proper to the mode avoids all objectivism. The reality is that there exists non-antagonistic contradictions that Mao called “contradictions at the heart of the people.”

Dialectical also because it rests on a new theory of contradiction; the mode has at its center a dialectical materialism of transformation distinct from the Stalinist theory of contradiction. The position of the mode’s real is in subjectivity: it is the function given to the category of the masses.

It is thus *people's war*, regarded as a factor of development and transformation, that identifies the mode and which is the privileged place of the dialectic. It is a dialectic of development, in the framework of a Marxist theory of contradictions, which Mao reworked from end to end. The places of the mode are those of the revolutionary war: the army, the party, the united front. The temporal limits of the mode go, as we mentioned, from 1928 (the year of “Why is it that Red Power can Exist in China?”) to 1950 (beginning with the Korean war, when the modalities of the revolutionary war ceased). I would like to conclude with a saying Mao often repeated: “the question of which wins out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really solved.” And he adds that a hundred years will not be enough.

A Mode in Exteriority: The Parliamentary Mode

I call “parliamentarianism” the historical mode of contemporary politics dominant in France since 1974. By this term I do not mean to indicate the multipartyism that claims to be democratic. Parties are statist formations dedicated to the alternation of power and are not representative (of classes and their specific interests).

Incidentally, a historical mode of politics, even though it has the State as its center and its place, is something completely different than a *form of the State*. The juridical and constitutional dimension, the separation of powers, the acknowledgement of freedom of opinion, association, etc. are the structural characteristics of the State. It does not identify the parliamentary mode.

Henceforth, I will call “parliamentarianism,” not the form of the State, but the forms of consciousness subject to a singular configuration that one can isolate based on its statements and its declarations. Parliamentarianism is *consensual* and *functional*.

The Consensual State

Parliamentarianism is a mode in exteriority. That means that it denies that politics is a thought. Its conception of politics is that it is not a thought, but rather, that politics is constitutive of an opinion about the government. Parliamentary political parties are the organizers, in consciousness, of such opinions. From this point of view, parties do nothing but organize the subjective dimension of the State. It follows that parliamentary parties are not political organizations, but statist organizations. Parliamentarianism, as politics in exteriority, allows itself to be described as a function of the party-State (plural).

Parliamentary political subjectivation does not fall under the jurisdiction of the principle *people think*, but under the principle *people have opinions*. The vote, which is the point of institutional articulation between the subjective of opinion and governmental objectivity, is the only essential political act of Parliamentarianism. In this sense, voting is always, regardless of the intentions of the voting, a subjective rallying essential to the parliamentary mode. This is why all real political ruptures with this mode prescribe, not exactly abstention, but the non-vote.

The vote in no way serves to “represent” opinions. The articulation between the subjectivation of opinion and the government is not representative. The vote is the sign of an adhesion to the State which renews it as such, regardless of the competing parties. The consequence of this is that, regardless of the “political philosophies” that the competing parties—the organizers that have an opinion regarding the State—espouse, there is never but *one* unique *politics*. The diverse array of political coalitions that are found in France continues to attest to this.

The Functional State

The State can be called functional when it no longer pretends to be representative of the social body, and identifies itself by demonstrating statist technical expertise and its coercions (decisions are always presented as correct technical decisions). The functional has no relation except to the State as such. “Functional” means, consequently, that the State is no longer in antagonism and that it is no longer within the programmatic: the end of the programmatic, which dates from the first years of Mitterrand, is the end of the idea that, through a set of promised or proposed actions, one can orient the State and its choices through its politics, which it gives to itself as possibles. “Functional” indicates that the State’s field of possibles is very limited and that, little by little, the forms of prescriptions on the State disappear. To the functional corresponds a “consensual,” which presents the inaccessible and separated State in its authoritarian and repressive aspect, and which has as its goal outlining the restricted and constrained space left to the field of consciousness.

Technical expertise, as essence of the functional and consensual State, is essentially of an economic valence. The functional State is by no means the State of capital, capital which finds itself dealt with separately—this is the same meaning that one can give to the word “economy”—but rather it is the State that interiorizes its demands, and those of the crisis, by making them into objects of faith. When all is said and done, the consensual consists in leaving to the economy a part of the domain of politics that falls under the domain of the State and the government, and reducing the subjective

space not to the economy—and this is the paradox—but to statist values, arguing for the external nature of the economy, even though a significant part of the decisions bearing on the economy fall under the jurisdiction of statist politics. The consensual void empties out the prescriptive dimension of statist actions, while proposing to concentrate opinion not on the State's real politics, but on its functional aspect, presented principally under the form of moral values.

As it functions, the State must have at its disposal a majority of the professional political personnel descended from the parties. The vote is destined to produce such a majority, and the voting system ensures it. We claim that, in the unity of a function, the vote transforms (without exhibiting this transformation) the pluralist subjectivations of opinions about the government. In truth, such a transformation excludes all representation. As it demands consensus at the same time that it produces it, the State does not have to have any program, because every program assumes that it is the expression of a particular group (for a very long time, of a class). The vote transforms the vague programs or promises of the parties (transitory organizers of opinions about the State) by the authority of a consensus.

The parliamentary State is regulated *from outside* by capital. It is not the State of capital (in the sense of a representation of class), but it supports regulation. The autonomy of the economy is that based on which the State's norms are forged, and also based on which it attempts to subject opinions to the *unity of the functional* and the totality of the consensual. One can also say that the economy is that based on which the government establishes a sphere of necessity. It is always from the economy that what one is "obliged" to do, and above all, to endure, announces itself. That that the entirety of the parliamentary State's propagandist work is to convert these necessities into subjectivation, this is what concentrates the exteriority of regulation by capital.

Finally, parliamentarianism takes a stance on the places that have been identified by other modes of politics, or by itself.

Regarding the factory, it proclaims that it is the place of the current moment (for the PCF, it was the place of the class collective; for us, it is a political place). The place's identity is prescribed by the period of the work day, itself assigned to the production of merchandises. It is what maintains the preference given to the word "enterprise" over the word "factory." Mitterrandism has as its principal function eliminating the statement (proper to the PCF): *the factory is the place of the collective of classes*, and combatting the statement (of *l'Organisation politique*): *in the factory, there is the worker*. For parliamentarianism, there is no one in the factory (no one who is politically significant). There is only production. Beginning with Mitterrandism, the parliamentarist conviction thrives on the eradication of the faces of the working.

As for the country, parliamentarianism declares that it is defined by “the French.” This identification of the country by the juridical notion of nationality has for its real a permanent network of surveillance and persecution of the “non-French”—and as the urban youths say—of the “*Français de papier*” (“the French on paper only,” i.e., those who have recently acquired citizenship or whose parents are of foreign origin). The central statement of parliamentarianism in this situation is: *there is an immigration problem.*

Regarding the national question, parliamentarianism continues to take into account its total caving in before the Nazis. The recurring Pétainism (including the vomit that is the entire succession of presidents standing on that felon’s grave) aims to forbid all open discussion about the extreme instability of parliamentarist consciousness regarding what concerns the country; and more generally, to forbid anything that sheds light on the fact that, in France, references to the nation-State (and to its byproduct, “the French”) have been repeatedly used to cover up (1940 and 1958, the Algerian War) the collapse of the parliamentary State in ignominious conditions.

Against all of this, we declare that the country is the entirety of those that live there, that there is not an “immigration problem,” that we cannot politically identify this country without its factories and without the faces of its workers, and that the reality of Pétainism has been a subjective collapse of the parliamentary State—in its old meaning of representative multipartyism—that hands the country over to the Nazi army.

All attempts to outline a politics in interiority, or a politics as thought, demand a radical rupture with parliamentarianism. Such a rupture cannot be a simple fact of opinion (mumbling, moaning, declaring that everything is going wrong, going on about politicians, refraining from humor, gossiping about the “crisis of civil rights,” being ecologically minded, desiring to rebuild the left, to reform the PCF, by appealing to the Republic, and other nonsense). A materialist rupture demands that we create, against parliamentarianism, a non-parliamentary politics. The name of this creation is: *Organisation politique.*

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