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Translated by Tzuchien Tho

THE REVOLUTION,

Infinite Conjunction

Evidently, the axiom of conjunction leaves itself open to be analysed, even more so in that it is always proposed in a compact form.¹ First, in adopting the axiom of conjunction, the political vision of the world is already given in a more primitive axiom: a thought is required in order to provoke material effects. This is nothing, one might say, other than the axioms of effectivity. Certainly, for this same reason, Revolution overtakes [*relève*] politics; but not without a radical displacement.

For in the same movement that they hold true politics as an effectuation of thought, the classical [thinkers] also held this effectuation as impossible. This had been the position of antiquity, which had attested its possibility through Demosthenes or Livy or Plutarch. But the present times are irremediably dualist, in which their malediction resides. Whether in the Greek city or in the Roman Republic, or in the Empire, thought precisely had effects, there was no doubt, whatever the difference that separates these names from history. The present, on the contrary, relentlessly deploys its hard necessity; thought henceforth will no longer be effective (except perhaps when God was involved; hence the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, but this is to leave the political). Absolute monarchies, in the very eyes of those who praise princes, were therefore the places of abasement, that the unhappiness of the times had rendered inevitable. Machiavelli, author of *The Prince*, but also of the *Discourses on Livy*, was read according to this double grid; certain people were only the servants of Louis XIV because they were Republican. Witness Boileau.²

1. Originally published as “La revolution, conjonction infinie,” chapter 2 of *Constat* (Paris: Editions Verdier, 1992).

2. If at least one takes seriously the wish he had to translate Longinus’s *Treatise on the Sublime*. This translation, first published in 1674, had accompanied him throughout his life. One finds there non-equivocal propositions on the relations between liberty and greatness of spirit: “It’s the popular government that nourishes and forms great geniuses....But we....who have learned from our early years to suffer the yoke of a legitimate domination who have been enveloped by the customs and ways of monarchies....who have never tasted freedom”: what usually happens to us is that we are rendered great and magnificent sycophants” (*Treatise of the Sublime*, chapter 35, trans. Boileau). Certainly it is not Boileau who is speaking, nor even Longinus, but an anonymous philosopher to whom Longinus opposes an adversary. But it remains that no translation is ever entirely innocent in a society

The French Revolution said that absolute monarchy—and its variant, enlightened despotism—did not constitute an ineluctable destiny. There was an alternative to Kings; by this fact alone, the axioms of effectivity once again become valid, and this on the very soil of the most powerful and the most realized of absolute monarchies, that is, 1789, even if it is true that by the effects of anticipatory and retroactive temporalizations, 1789 itself requires a preliminary Idea of its own possibility and several anterior testimonies (thus 1776). We understand that in its coming into the world, the discourse of Revolution is proposed in the guise of a return; the conjunction that it articulates is nothing other than the face of the political as the place of a material effectuation of thought—one had imagined it was past; it revealed itself present. As Marx would put it, revolutionaries would not invoke Greek or Latin names except in deploying them in their proper actuality, but, more fundamentally than Marx, we need to hold that, in doing so, they do not give way to an illusion, they would not be constructing a *décor*; they would be rendering homage to themselves, as the heralds of politics as effective thought.³

But nothing ever repeats itself. As effectuation, politics returns from the past, but the operator of effectuation would not itself have any sort of past. To the axioms of effectivity, another has been added: *the only material effect worthy of this name inscribes itself in the register of rebellion*. So, here we find a great innovation; for the ancients, and particularly their philosophers, held rebellion in low esteem. They agreed that it was sometimes necessary—though they had always conceived it as a singular mode: the sort proposed by Harmodios and Aristogiton (but Thucydides judged them without excessive indulgence if we believe L. Strauss).⁴ As for the rebellion of a multitude, it had no acceptable dignity: no ancient ever inscribed the name of Spartacus in the register of politics because it had not been inscribed in the register of thought. In truth, the material effects of thought only find their legitimate accomplishment in an order, a stable form—a constitution. Rebellion could only be by the means of a vanishing term; it is thus always suspect. Since, at its basis, it proposes itself as radically foreign to thought; in its being it could therefore only be an effect.

The recent vision inverts the terms in that it makes rebellion the supreme operator of effectivity. It could dispense with any demonstration. In fact, the greatest revolutionaries often do not propose anything except for the evidence of conjunction as an axiom and rebellion as principle. If a demonstration should then be given, it would have to take into account one remarkable given: random or not, chronology demands that recent events should be deployed in a Galilean universe. This entails

deprived of the liberty of thought, so that Boileau hardly makes efforts to separate himself from his author, outraging certain of his contemporaries.

3. In the immense literature dedicated to this subject, we will retain Revault d'Allonnes, *D'une mort à l'autre* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1989) 80. Also S. Lazarus, "La catégorie de révolution dans la Révolution Française," 25-27.

4. L. Strauss, *La Cité et l'Homme*, 248; Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

great consequences. We will limit ourselves to recalling one of them. According to the Galilean axiomatic in its most established form, the universe does not admit to an exterior and does not admit to any material effects other than through material causes. Following these terms, a demonstration of conjunction should then hold to the interior limits of the universe and to the properties of matter alone. Consequently, the effectivity of thought cannot arrive except through a material force, internal to the universe.

Hence, some will recall that the place of political gatherings were coextensive to the place of another gathering, indubitably internal to the universe and named the social body; they will deduce that the force of political effectivity should find, in this place, its seat of origin and its space of deployment; the name of this deployed force is nothing other than rebellion.⁵ This accepted, the reasoning unfolds itself: if rebellion is that by which thought rediscovers politics anew, that is to say, once again able to bring about material effects, it is because rebellion manifests a force whose material is social. In short, politics, as conjunction, requires a doctrine of the social body that holds the place of its physics and dynamics. Politics as conjunction of thought and rebellion is also a conjunction of the political and the social.

To accomplish this Galileanism, it remains only to mathematize. Marx thought to bring it about by the projection of the social into economics; *Capital* as the Mathematical Principles of conjunction. Having thus more clearly articulated than any other the chain of propositions that permitted him to tie the moments of the conjunction to the heart of the Galilean universe, Marx would have been deserving of becoming the best known doctrinarian of Revolution (the word, however does not so frequently appear under his pen and rebellion was not always his strong suit). In this sense only, but in this sense entirely, the fall of the statues [of the USSR] affects Marx, insofar as it signals something of the conjunction.

Through its logical inversions, the recent vision authorizes some new propositions: *if the most valuable material effects of thoughts are inscribed in the register of rebellion, all other material effects should be evaluated according to the greatest or least homogeneity that they entertain with rebellion; the world in this vision is nothing but the set of prevented, aborted, interrupted, continued, successful rebellions; for this very reason, it is nothing but the set of material effects of thought; if we admit that, seized in its extension, this set bears the name of history, there will be no inscription in history other than in the form of rebellions⁶; if we admit that, seized as an extension, this*

5. From this follows a related consequence: the recent rebellion is nothing but social, under the pain of being disqualified (of not deserving the name of rebellion); it thus distinguishes itself from the ancient rebellions, where it could have reasons other than social. It could, for example, without disqualifying it in any sense, be for reasons of love: such as in the case of Harmodios and Aristogiton; also, in the last of the kings of Rome, brought about by the rape of Lucretia.

6. The corollary is evident: the general type of historical event is the rebellion. Thus, May '68 is or is not an historical event following whether one has seen in it or not the traits of rebellion. Since, in the political vision of the world, there is no rebellion unless it is social,

set takes on the name of politics, the name of politics will not be valid except to the exact extent that it seizes the combination of two quanta—a quantum of rebellion and a quantum of thought,⁷ the two names of politics and history are coextensive; they are not synonymous, etc.

Second, the political vision of the world institutes a system of maximums and minimums. Whoever in effect believes in the possible conjunction also believes that it accomplishes itself at the maximal point (intensively or extensively defined)⁸ of the one and the other conjoined terms. The most heated or the most extensive rebellion is also the most radical or most complete thought; the most profound or the most powerful thought is also the most consequential rebellion.

At the same time, politics touches upon ethics. For, as we know, there is an ethics of the maximum which convokes all being to accomplish the highest point (intensive or extensive) of which it is capable. As the Greeks understood, ethics—to exhaust the field of the possible, at the point of going perhaps to the impossible; to act as an immortal even if we are mortal and because we are mortal—is therefore well anterior to the discourse of the conjunction and owes nothing to it, but it can be combined with it.

Or rather, it should combine itself with it. For however little we believe in the conjunction in politics, only politics can propose to the ethics of the maximum an appropriate space of exercise. In return, only the ethics of the maximum is capable of giving a representable substance to what, without it, would be at most a structural point: the point at infinity where the parallel lines of thought and material effects cross. Once again, we understand that in its emergence, the political vision of the world, invokes antiquity. Far from constituting an inert *décor*, the Greek and Latin names substantiate the political postulation of the Revolution and animate its essential geometry: Plutarch fed with figurative representations Desargues' axiom in politics. At the same time, the conjunction becomes the form where we will, from now on, inscribe ethics. More exactly, in the register of the conjunction, politics *is* ethics and ethics *is* politics.

we need to necessarily decide on the existence or the non-existence of a social movement in May. We know that, in accord with this general model of analysis, the keepers of this political vision were in disagreement over its application. In particular, over what constitutes an authentic social movement from whence the figure of rebellion and revolution are born in tandem with one another. The critical role of May '68 resides in the fact that it might be the last episode of having presupposed the formal exigencies of the political vision of the world. Of course, we can also argue that in May '68 we had nothing but the form of the historical event—and not its substance; but the general logic remains similar: in this sense we hold that, in May '68, we had the form of rebellion and the form of social struggle, but not their substance.

7. Leftism consists in seizing these quanta as intensities. From this follows the corollary that characterizes it: Politics is an intensity.

8. Regarding also the ethics of the maximum, leftism chooses an exclusively intensive interpretation, whereas Stalinism is a strictly extensive reading.

Whence it follows that, for thought, politics so often takes up the language of convocation and that, for politics, thought finds itself required. In the ancient world, governed by axioms of effectivity, there is nothing of the sort, since politics was the natural place of thought. Convocation and petition: all this is recent and comes from ethics. This, by definition, enunciates commandments; politics, being identified with it, becomes by right of inheritance, the place of commandments. Reciprocally, there are no acceptable commandments other than in the place of politics. More precisely still, politics is the commandment that subsumes all others.

The first authors of the conjunction could have believed that in this way they have returned to Sparta and Rome. But antiquity will not return.

This is not only because this recent vision has introduced rebellion. The effect is nonetheless devastating: if there is no ethics except for politics, and there is no politics except for in the conjunction, then there is no ethics except through rebellion. In short, Plutarch becomes incomprehensible at the same instant when we might believe in his resurrection: insofar as there are heroes, the heroes that we speak of are not rebels; insofar as they are rebels, they are not heroes.

But there is something more decisive; the definition of maximum has itself changed. Into this, the recent vision has introduced a correction: *there is no maximum*, it says, *other than infinity*. Let us leave aside, as a direction for more complete analyses, the question of a co-belonging between the infinitist interpretation of ethics and the constitution of the universe of science. We will remain content in recalling this scansion: from now on, the ethics of the maximum is decoded as an ethics of the infinite.

After 1789, a thinking being will be convoked by ethics to think maximally, but this, this is to be revolutionary and to be revolutionary is to push politics to its maximum. An acting being will be convoked by ethics to act maximally, but this, this is to be a rebel, and a rebel does not accomplish himself as rebel except by a maximal thought. In this, a maximal thought is, at the horizon of Revolution, a political thought. There is maximality insofar as there is conjunction, and there is conjunction insofar as there is maximality. But the maximums of thought and action are infinite. The name of this infinite by which the conjunction is accomplished, is freedom [*liberté*].

Something in the human being responds here. We would most often say that it is a question of something of the order of willing (an infinite willing, a willing for the infinite, we can hold that virtue designates nothing else). The thesis of the infinity of the will thus reveals itself decisive.

The Revolution requires the will and, reciprocally, the will does not perfectly accomplish itself except in a Revolution. We thus understand that the revolutionary willing should traverse the figures of the infinite, at the first rank of which one must count, in the modern configuration, death.

Philosophy has been affected by this. It finds itself convoked by conjunction, but this, this was firstly to respond to the urgency of the infinite. More than anyone else, Hegel appeared to have satisfied the convocation ("a thought which withstands death"); as logical doctrine of the infinite, the dialectic becomes thus indispensable; at the same time, it proposes itself as sufficient to the requisitions of ethics, since this latter was the ethics of the infinite. The name of ethics itself becomes superfluous. As such, after 1917, reality appeared to propose the victorious proofs of the ethical infinite; that, by means of the dialectic, there were henceforth places where the infinity of a will would be exercised in a visible fashion, this is the greatness and the malediction of the USSR and China.