

**“the future doesn’t last
forever”**

bernard aspe

translated by oliver feltham

“History is sad, because it is time, and it knows that it will be forgotten.”

For some years now we have carried the world in our pockets and handbags. I never would have believed — or I forgot — that it was such a little thing. And that, as such, it was so easy to lose. This is unfortunate, because to find something it has to be somewhere. But if there is no world anymore, where could we go and search for it?

It’s already some years ago now that I wrote this little tale, this enigma, and sent it to a few friends.¹ The idea was to express the disarray into which we have

fallen given the fact that the earth, the originary ark (to reuse Husserl's terms), is threatened.² We are supposed to recognize — faced with this threat — a self-evident duty to save the earth. Those little flyers posted up everywhere — their function is to accustom us to this evidence, and so the paradox it contains is masked: we are exhorted to “think global”, to make “gestures” for the planet. The world, or the entire world — as we said before we learnt that there are several worlds, that there are even an infinity of them — the entire world, of which we are part, is nevertheless amongst us: a little like those sets that are members of themselves, and we know the kind of logical puzzles they provoke. The world can be saved, just like one saves a species that is becoming extinct, just like one can try to save a person, a soldier, a comrade.

The background to this paradox is the most objective assessment that can be made: what is currently underway is the destruction of the world as it is, a destruction that is voluntary for those people who have the capacity to bring it about, or who do nothing decisive to bring it to a halt, which comes down to the same thing; a destruction all the more easy to deny given that nowadays it is universally known. Hence this is a perfectly objective assessment: no scientist could outdo it in terms of objectivity. As it happens, it is a political objectivity. What will be of particular interest for us today is that it is also, inextricably, a historical objectivity.

1. HISTORY ALONE

What is at stake is history. History is sad, Platonov tells us (this is the phrase cited as the epigraph, drawn from *Chevengur*) at the end of the 1920s, at the moment at which one could measure to what extent the revolutionary program was difficult to put in practice, and what its cost might prove to be — even if for Platonov it was not a question of giving up hope.³ At the end of the 1980s Godard spoke to us of the solitude of history. History is alone because it continues whilst having lost what seemed to be inseparable from it, that is to say, its telos, its end. History is alone because it no longer has an end, that end prescribed for it by the revolutionary movement: the horizon of a humanity emancipated from its chains, inasmuch as

that horizon came about through a complete dismantling of the capitalist world and the emergence of an egalitarian society in which the “free development of each” could have been “the condition of the free development of all” (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*).⁴

In the end, history is alone because it is separated from politics. History which is not alone, which is not left to its own devices, is history envisaged as the field and movement of a political accomplishment. Inversely, politics supported by history, supported by the idea of an objective, ineluctable, necessary historical development, is politics which is not left to its own devices because it has found its reason and its guarantee outside of itself — I mean outside the forms of action and the meetings which make up its specific consistency, as we have noted during this seminar. Politics without history is also politics alone.

We have learnt to think politics based on its specific domain, in other words, on its basis alone. We have learnt to separate politics and history — and we must add: so as to save politics. History has been deconstructed, it seems, without anything left over. Politics had to be untied from history so that it did not end up shipwrecked like the latter — this is how we should understand the gesture made by some authors, authors from whom we have drawn some support. Politics had to be saved as subjectivation, and loosened from history; the latter, from that point forwards, being referred to objectivity. Scenes of political subjectivation could only be thought, it seemed, as removed from those historical processes of which they were in no way the expression. Politics which broke with the inegalitarian logic of the police (Rancière), politics “at a distance from the state” (Badiou), is politics which refers to itself alone, which must completely support itself by its own means, and in this manner alone finds its specific consistency.⁵

Hence we admitted the deconstruction of history. However, it should be understood that this deconstruction is not only the result of the impasses of Marxism, nor of the failures of the revolutionary socialist movement, nor of the emergence of new political problematizations that did not find their place inside that movement. The

deconstruction of history is clearly in part a product of these factors I have just mentioned, but it is also the result of active work on the part of the enemy, work which permitted the subjective weave granted by history as element of politics to be undone. If history has been defeated, it is because our enemy has succeeded in destroying it. As Silvia Federici writes, “history as collective project” was the “main casualty of the neoliberal era of capitalism”.⁶ Moreover, to complete this project, it was necessary to attack on two fronts at once.

The militants of the economy first succeeded in finding a way around the factory as a site of political organization by expanding productive life and carrying out an indoctrination into work outside actual workplaces — thus accomplishing a movement which has been there since the beginning as Jason Moore has shown, but which didn’t always have the same reach nor the same depth. At the same time, strategies have been rolled out, one after another, which have been decoded as the “colonization of the lifeworld”, as the society of the spectacle, and, to put the cherry on the cake, as the set of neoliberal strategies for guiding subjective behaviour (Foucault, Chamayou).⁷ The 1960s revolts took quite seriously the fact that one had to revolt also against the fabrication of life, against the ways in which power acts on the very conduct of life. These too were revolts that neoliberalism intended to circumvent. It was no longer sufficient to give work a psychic role that it never had before the liberal revolution; it was no longer sufficient to complete that quite narrow horizon by the invention of leisure activities with prescribed content; it was necessary to enter even more intimately into life and colonize the space of ascesis, the space of the work of the self on the self (the “self” being as much individual as collective). It was no longer sufficient to construct the timeframe and the appropriate places for what lay outside work (holidays); it was now necessary to control time in life’s most intimate moments, and undo the hold that remained for subjects upon themselves, that is, the capacity, which could define the subject as such, of being able to elaborate their own consistency. No wonder that the most widespread pathology of our time is precisely that of actively renewing our own inconsistency under the pretext of verifying it.

Perhaps we have not yet sufficiently explored the relationship between these workarounds and the fact that they were brought about by *one and the same movement*. The militants of the economy, it seems, had learnt Simondon's lesson about invention: a problem is only solved if it is solved in at least two ways at the same time.

In this seminar we have often spoken of this double solution from different standpoints — I only mention it today to underline one of its effects: a victory of the enemy over history as collective project, as matrix for political subjectivation. To undo the very idea of a political projection of a desirable and radically different future — yet one of which we would have an image, an idea — is to bring about the erasure of any horizon of expectation (Koselleck), and as such the absence of any perspective sufficiently charged with promise to enable subjects to hold on amidst the uncertainty of a present which does not resemble in any way the desired future. What takes the place of this erased horizon is catastrophe — as Rancière has shown for intellectual discourse — with the place made for the “Shoah” for a certain period, and today for the end of the world.⁸ It is history without History, yet it retains from History the necessity of being constructed via the end; however, the end is solely conceived of as a terminal point, and not at all as a goal. There is no longer any end possessing meaning, there is an end of everything, which is underway, an endless end, a progressive or perhaps sudden destruction. “End” is therefore no longer a synonym of *telos*; it's only a matter of the end of the story. In any case, what we do have are *stories*, in the plural (*histoires*), that's all we have: which means that we interpret what happens to us on the basis of the end conceived solely as a terminus. History is always what begins via the end, via the projected end — this is one of the reasons why a “love story” (*histoire d'amour*) is an oxymoron. (Another reason is that love is trial, and the pathos of trials doesn't suit stories).

History today is thus nothing more than the promise of the end; otherwise, history is confused with reportage that lots of things are “happening”. At this moment, for example, in Gaza, the programme of the extreme right is being carried out:

emptying Gaza, by massacring a large part of its inhabitants, and by destroying the environments that sustain the lives of those who might have the intention to stay; and all this with the tacit and hypocritical approval of Western states. But the problem is not that of the history of military or state powers and those that mimic them — nobody doubts that that history, unfortunately, has not come to an end and continues. The powers that matter to us are those of political subjectivation; and it is subjective time which is blocked, the time of political subjectivity of the kind that we have been trying to outline and solidify.

We are stuck in a present without horizon, and there we repeat the gestures that confirm our impotence. Repetition and blockage provide satisfaction — a satisfaction which is not experienced as such, which is the definition of unconscious enjoyment (*jouissance*). Yet we thought that we had come to the end of our analysis. Indeed we thought we had been liberated from the fantasy contained in our old relation to History inasmuch as we thought we had been liberated from the ultimate figure of the consistency of the Other, the place it all comes together, where it is written — “it”, experience, meaning. In other words, we can summarize the deconstruction of history by saying that history was unveiled as a non-theological substitute of the Other. We had to admit that this Other was just as inconsistent as that of religions. But this admission did not liberate us in any way from the cunning enjoyment that was bound from that point onwards, as already noted, to the active renewal of our impotence — on the contrary, it is what fastened us to that enjoyment. Perhaps this also happened because we can’t stop ourselves from addressing the Other, including in our personal and intimate relationships: we demand the other to be the Other. But then we can only end up verifying that in the place we want the other to be, there is nobody. This is good to know, but right away I’d point out that this is not the last word concerning what we call our relationships.

2. TELEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF NATURE

In this manner we have learnt to think that the condition for thinking anything

whatsoever, and above all history and politics, is ridding oneself of the idea that there is, that there would be a *telos*. The target of the deconstruction of history is always the teleology that is immanent to it. “Presence” gave rise to such an obsession amongst the thinkers of deconstruction, but in the end this was always the self’s presence to itself understood as the aim of a process, whether it be a process of thinking or a historical process — or the unity of the two, which is what Hegel posited as his contribution.

So we admitted the deconstruction of teleology. Yet I would like to propose a thought experiment to you: say we approach things the other way around, in the opposite sense. Instead of starting from this basis, let’s start from the idea that historical teleology, such as the teleology underlying Marx’s analyses for example, was true — but that what had to happen, necessarily, did not happen. There was a historical necessity, but the revolutionary movements did not succeed in accomplishing it, in making it effective. The meaning of History should be understood as missed teleology; this makes us see that what should have taken place did not take place, and that a limitless catastrophe is unfolding from that not-having-taken-place. We need to think a teleology whose effectivity has been suspended — the catastrophe that we are living through has inserted itself within that suspension. It was true: the revolution, at first proletarian and then working-class, and then in a wider perspective outlined by a heteroclite revolutionary movement, no longer solely centered on the figure of the worker, was indeed a historical necessity. But the proletariat failed, the workers’ movement failed, just as the more mixed insurrectional movement that extended the latter. The result is that the power of destruction is today in the hands of those who never should have possessed it in the first place. This is what Benjamin already told us long ago: we should have stamped out the fuse that the bourgeoisie lit before the catastrophe was irremediable (Tronti took up this idea, and in turn Frédéric Neyrat developed it by insisting on the importance of the relationship to what does not happen in *Le cosmos de Walter Benjamin*).⁹ But the capitalist class remained in power, and possesses what it should never have kept its hands on.

What we need to think is thus a historical necessity that has been verified without having been accomplished, and perhaps verified by the very fact of not having been accomplished.

It is in this sense that we can begin to understand what it could mean to say that history is returning: it returns as the insistence of what didn't happen. Yet one should immediately emphasize that if history is returning, it is after having undergone a transformation. Nature has no history, Hegel said, and Badiou said the same thing almost two centuries later. But for some time now we know, on the contrary, that nature also has a history, and that this history is strictly inseparable from human history. One could even say that in this entanglement of natural and human histories, nature has taken in charge the verification of the well-foundedness of what was supposed to have been accomplished, in the shape of the revolutionary project, by human history. It so happens that this verification is purely negative: the proof of the necessity of the historical accomplishment of the revolutionary project is the disaster that has followed the failure of that accomplishment.

As Marx already underlined, capitalism is constitutively a machine of destruction, and what's more, today it is a machine that is racing out of control. The truth about the essence of capitalism has been revealed for a long time now, and this essence is a unity, but it has two aspects: there is setting to work, and there is destruction — destruction via setting to work as a global effect, just as much as a local reality, setting to work standing alongside the necessity of destructions, destruction so as to relaunch setting to work. (Look up the article in *Le Monde* last week about the “slaughter” represented by workplace deaths in France, and in the opinion column of the 12th November 2023 the World Health Organization estimates that one death in four is due to “avoidable” climate factors).¹⁰ No doubt the unity of destruction and appropriation I am speaking of here is quite close to, or inspired by, what Elise Gonthier-Gignac proposed naming the “capture of the outside”, which aimed more precisely at the unity of integration and banishment. (Let's say that this is an open question: does this couple of setting-to-work and

destruction allow us to grasp the capture of the outside — given that destruction can of course take the form of letting-die?)

3. NECESSITY AND PURPOSE

I have proceeded here so far as if historical necessity were the same thing as historical teleology, but this is not the case. In itself, necessity refers only to a constraining sequence, to the idea of a determinate order in the succession of historical facts. Can't we think a necessity without teleology? Or, on the contrary, a pure teleology without necessity? It seems to me that we can search for the answer to these questions by a rapid overview of a series of positions going from Kant to Marx. Let's look at just four moments, in which possible conjunctions of necessity and teleology are related each time back to the subject-object couple. Above all, let's remain superficial — because if we dig too deep, we'll end up buried in the “molelike perspective of the scholar” (Foucault).¹¹

I have just declared in a slightly brutal manner a *methodological stance*, and I am going to explain it a bit further. This stance has two sides: on one hand, it is definitely a question of focusing on what might be provided for us by means of conceptual abstraction. It's a question of both thinking political subjectivation and of taking part in putting it into practice. What we can work on here is a supplement of symbolization, of symbolic articulation, precisely because we can identify a lack of symbolization within contemporary forms of subjectivation. Something is lacking at the level of conceptual articulation, and if political subjectivity today undeniably lacks consistency, it is also (and not only due to the strength of the enemy, etc.) because there is this lack. To do this work it seems to me that philosophical constructions provide the best landmarks. But on the other hand, it is of course not a question of mimicking the discourse of the university, delighting in the complexity of its constructions, and indefinitely delaying the moment to conclude – to speak in one's own name. The method adopted here is that of a quick comparison allowing us to determine the best articulation of the terms at stake – best not from the perspective of pure reasoning, but from the

perspective of providing a landmark, a structuring symbolization for the existent that is each one of us.

3.1

The first position to mention is the one we have inherited from Kant. Perhaps there is a purpose at work in history, and perhaps even nature works towards the realization of that purpose, but the latter is distinct from purely mechanical causality — the causality revealed by the sciences of nature. The problem is that this purpose cannot really be the object of knowledge. Perhaps we could speak here of a teleology without necessity, or at the very least without an objective verification of its necessity. However, we can speak of a subjective necessity of teleological *judgement* (“necessity” understood the sense of allowing the well-foundedness of a *rational* construction), even if this judgement is not guaranteed by a demonstrable objectivity. The content of teleological judgement is the idea that the world we live in is ordered according to certain ends. These ends cannot be known, they can only be the object of a reflection that remains inside a subjective framework: one cannot demonstrate that a purpose is objectively at work in nature or in history. On the other hand, it is necessary for us that we postulate this purpose — because if we don’t do so, we risk abandoning our destiny as moral beings.

Purpose is thus a pure requirement of reason here. The ends are no doubt in the object (in nature, and even in history — this is the hope that underlies “Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”) but reason cannot prove this. Reason can only show that humans should orientate their actions according to this requirement, and that it would definitely be in their interest to do so. Undemonstrable teleology has the function of subjective orientation, on the individual scale just as on the scale of entire societies.

3.2

The second position is Hegel’s. We can objectively know history as a necessary

movement endowed with an end. This knowledge, which is speculative, is absolutely guaranteed, and the suspicion that a purpose to history is no more than a subjective projection is completely alleviated. There is, therefore, a historical necessity which can be unveiled; indeed, there is no way it can go unrevealed because its revelation is one of its moments. To be precise, this revelation is its endpoint, its internal purpose. There is an identity between necessity and purpose, and this necessity is posited as the result of the objective process of history. If history has taken place as it took place, then it did so in order to be grasped again as concept. This comprehension in the form of the concept is its purpose. Philosophical discourse grasps the truth of history after it takes place, and unveils its meaning; in other words, the meaning of having been unveiled in this manner. The purpose of history is the unveiling of its necessity. But this objective necessity which is the motor of history is only such — in the final analysis, that is to say, at the end of the historical process — in that it is able to be grasped as subjectivity. In any case, in Hegel we cannot get stuck in the opposition between subject and object. Objective necessity is revealed retrospectively as identical to subjective necessity. But the subject, which then appears solely to have been present from the very beginning, is nothing other than the concept itself. It is the Concept, taking place as historical necessity, which is guided since the dawn of time by the necessity of its self-revelation.

One could say that Hegel remade the Cartesian gesture, which consists in welding together certitude and truth, but by making a long detour. The detour is history. But it's worth it for Hegel. Taking a detour via history is what allows him to guarantee the identity of certitude and truth without passing via God.

3.3

The third position is what we could call vulgar materialism, or “scientistic” “materialism”, even when it wishes to be political. It attempts to overturn Hegelian idealism by stipulating the purely objective character of historical necessity, believing that in this manner it is remaining true to Marx (I'm thinking of the

Marxism Lenin called “economist”). But this objectivity is thought according to the model of positivist science. This is the flattest version of Marxism, that of the materialist science of history. Subjectivity is the pure effect of chains of causality revealed by positive knowledge. In this sense one could say the subject does not exist as such, since a subject possesses the kind of being that cannot be inscribed as a pure variable of causal chains. One could also say, conversely, that the Hegelian position entails the disappearance of the object, or more precisely, its complete absorption, its integration within subjectivity in so far as the latter fully encapsulates its essential truth.

The scientistic materialist position could be summed up as saying there is a purely objective historical necessity that can only be accessed by means of scientific knowledge; the latter has no need of the category of purpose, which is only ever a subjective, that is, illusory, projection of such necessity. So here we can speak of a necessity without a genuine *telos*, without, strictly speaking, any teleology. And this position is inseparable from the positivist myth according to which the real is pure objectivity without a subject.

3.4

The fourth position is that of materialism thought in a clearer manner in the wake of Marxism. Whatever temptations Marx may have been subject to at the level of making his discourse “scientific”, he never erased the difference that exists between the object of scientific knowledge and the object of dialectical thinking.

Marx is the inventor of the speculative materialist dialectic, and the meaning of these three interwoven terms should be specified (though without staying strictly within Marx’s vocabulary). Remember the 1857 *Introduction*: the historical situation is the “concrete reality” presupposed by thought which it is to be reconstructed in thought — it’s a question of producing “concrete thought”. The speculative object does not leave the subject in its supposed position of comfortable exteriority in the process of knowledge: this object cannot be described without adding the very

act of describing it to the description. When the speculative object is a situation of existence, this addition comprises the effects of thinking that situation in so far as they are inseparable from the effects of those acts which extend or anticipate them. The speculative object, then, is that which, existing before the subject's existence, forms the condition for the inscription of the latter's act. But this object is then dialectical because it obliges thinking to indicate its limit; that is to say, the way in which it cannot complete its description, its grasp of the object, on its own.

What does it mean to say speculative dialectics is materialist? It's not that matter determines ideas rather than the other way round, but that historical processes are marked by an essential contingency. Hegelian historical necessity evacuates all contingency from the essence of the historical process. To be more precise, there is contingency in history for Hegel, but it doesn't belong to the latter's essence. This is why historical action — and we would say political action — doesn't play a central role. I'm not saying it has no place in Hegel's thinking, but it certainly has a different place to that in Marx's thinking. Materialist dialectics sets up an empty space in its analysis of history, in the way in which thinking grasps its necessity; and it is in this empty space that political action can find its place. The task of thinking is to state historical necessity so as to be able to indicate in what way thinking cannot bring about such necessity on its own. Historical necessity is conceptualized as a set of contradictions which produce new situations — but not automatically. Contradictions only give rise to a new situation in so far as they are acted on. Materialist dialectics is the thinking of objective contradictions which are subjectively acted on.

This is how it makes room for what we can correctly call purpose, a historical teleology, which constitutes the messianic side of Marx's thought. Positive materialism is immediately recognizable by the fact that it does not promise much, apart from more equitable, less destructive, etc., management; in short, a goal so reasonable that nobody feels like fighting for it. Marx's materialist dialectics promises emancipation from all chains; the purpose is prescribed by the potential for flourishing that is contained in the life of living human beings,

and it is already clear that for him that human life is not separate from other lives. The purpose [*finalité*] has no end [*fin*] because the horizon for flourishing is unlimited. Purpose is inscribed within the objective necessity of history insofar as a subjective intervention takes on the task of fully revealing it as such.

We cannot take up any of these four perspectives, even the last one. As far as Kant goes, he is quite endearing as an author because he cannot stop destroying what he wished to protect: God, reason, immortality, morality. He did not destroy the latter himself, but he showed how to do so: what philosophers wanted to demonstrate can only be postulated; what should have been given a foundation turns out to have no foundation and is reconstructed in a position of endless precarity. He places all of these idols on the edge of the abyss — all we have to do is push them over (philosophizing with a hammer).

Hegel's idea was to reabsorb this contingency of the foundations of reason by turning them into the very foundation of historical *existence*. Only in this manner can reason ground itself; that is as something which is not solely a procedure of knowledge, but a movement that accomplishes its own existence. Reason accounts for itself because it accounts for its place amidst life as the goal of life itself. It seems to me that we can no longer have such confidence in reason, in its capacity to sublate [*relever*] the very essence of life.¹² For Hegel, real life is not literature (Proust), it's the life of the Concept.

The scientific approach wishes to reestablish the exteriority of reason; in Hegel's terms it is thus knowledge in the form of the pure understanding. It describes objectively what is, which it confuses with facts. When it wishes to be political, this approach forgets that it started out by making the very condition of politics disappear. If there is nothing but objectivity, then there is no politics. Besides, if there is an approach that is useful for our enemy, then it is clearly one which supports the disappearance of the subject, insofar as the latter is real and irreducible to the "subjective" understood as the set of necessary illusions out of which lived experience is woven.

Finally Marx takes up again the speculative approach from Hegel, according to which the subject must think her/his own intervention as added to what s/he describes; in this case not only as a thinking subject, not only inside a purely speculative space — s/he must think her/his possible intervention inside a historical space. But even in Marx's dialectic, subjective intervention is still thought as an expression of objective contradictions. Historical necessity is not causal (as in the scientistic approach), but expressive. It does not automatically produce the subject, but hollows out the exact place of its act. This also entails the specification of the subject (proletarian, worker). S/he is only a subject inasmuch as s/he comes to accomplish, in the place prescribed for her/him, the historical necessity that s/he was able to decipher. It is not by chance that this place is one of negation — let's say that in this perspective, the subject can only carry out his/her act as the negation of whatever *prevents* historical necessity from occurring.

In this seminar we have especially followed the indications of Badiou and Rancière, for whom the logic of expression or negation should give way to a logic of supplementation. Political action detached from historical necessity can solely be added to the existing situation; rather than it being mandatory to deny or refuse the latter. Political supplementation is affirmation; it is only accidentally negative. It is not defined by what it negates or by what it refuses, but rather by what it affirms. This displacement towards affirmation entails, and is entailed by, the unfastening of politics from history; in other words, by the idea that political action is not prescribed by the situation, which implies that there is no place that is prescribed in advance for the political subject.

What happens if history returns, not just for the essayists and journalists, who have been calling for it ever since Fukuyama had the bad idea of writing his book, and thus not in the sense of “something is happening” (wars, assassinations, etc.), but in the sense in which history returns as the content of political actions? What would happen if we went back to the idea that the historical situation prescribes something for us? Would we be condemned to return to Marx, and thus in a certain manner to Hegel, that is to say, to a totalizing thinking centered on the powers of

the negative, and which would restore history as the figure of the Other?

It seems to me that it is rather a matter of holding onto this schema of supplementation as a starting point, and of accepting the latter's complications, including the fact of this insistent question of ends in relation to the historical situation. There is most definitely an effect of prescription that results from objective (speculative) analysis, but there is no direct subjective qualification that follows specifically from this prescription. If there is a subject of history, it is therefore defined, paradoxically, by its indetermination.

4. NECESSITY AND FREEDOM

But this question of ends is inseparable from another theme which I have not spoken of up till now and yet which forms a couple with necessity, and that is freedom. We have already spoken in this seminar about the way in which Hegel conceives — or one can conceive on the basis of Hegel — freedom as the overturning of necessity. The teleology inscribed in Hegel's *Logic* is the basis upon which Marx was able to construct his concept of the "proletariat". It was also on this basis that Lenin was able to think revolutionary irruption as what occurs outside objective conditions and, in a sense, against them (second year, third session). But what matters to us today is that if freedom can be defined as the overturning of necessity it is precisely because it has the capacity to identify a purpose.

We are not going to dive into Hegel's *Logic*; I'm going to keep just two images from it. First of all, the chapter focused on teleology is found in the "Doctrine of the Concept", at the point at which it's a matter of going beyond mechanical or chemical causality. It has been remarked — Hegel tells us — that the "opposition of teleology and mechanism in the first instance the more general opposition of *freedom* and *necessity*"; and the principle of freedom has to be thought as what is torn away from mechanism.¹³ Freedom makes its appearance solely when it extracts itself from an effectivity that is not informed by it. This is also the

outcome of Kantian practical reason, but in Hegel there is a genuinely conflictual element which does not appear as such in Kant — it can be read as a way in which Hegel tried to get the measure of that event which marked him so deeply, the French revolution:

Never since the sun had stood in the firmament and the planets revolved around it had it been perceived that man stands on his head, that is, on thought, and reality is constructed in terms of it... This, accordingly, was a glorious dawn. All thinking beings shared in the jubilation of this epoch. Emotions of a lofty character then stirred men's minds; a spiritual enthusiasm thrilled through the world, as if for the first time it had come to a true reconciliation between the divine and the world.¹⁴

(Jacques Rancière used this passage in a recent interview when attempting to define philosophy as “thinking of conflict”). One must learn how to walk upside down, how to begin with thinking that is orientated by a purpose and then go towards reality, and this implies engaging in a combat with reality. So this is the first image: freedom appears when it extracts itself from reality — reality that is confused with the chains of necessity — and freedom can only extract itself by setting a goal, a purpose. From the outset, purpose is posited against necessity, freedom is conflict with necessity.

Gwendoline Jarczyk has shown that the passage from necessity to freedom, which is carried out in the “Subjective Logic” during the moment of teleology, is prepared during the “Objective Logic” — that is to say, in that part of the *Logic* in which the concept is not yet posited as subject, notably in the passage in which it is a matter of surpassing or sublating the “ground”.¹⁵ Previously, Hegel exposes the movement of “determinations of reflection”, that is, the passage from difference to opposition, and from the latter to contradiction. Grounding is the key to the “Doctrine of Essence” because it is what is attained at the end of a process of digging deeper into negativity. But this process of digging cannot be limited by the

opposition between the ground and what is grounded. The ground itself has to be tipped into the abyss (here there is a play on *Zugrundegehen* which means both go down to the ground and go into the abyss, in a double sense which has agitated many pens). What ends up emerging as the sublation of the opposition between ground and what is grounded, and thus as the unity of essence and appearance, is existence. Existence only appears when there is nothing “behind it” to support it, when it supports itself and is not supported by some ground that would be distinct from it. This then is the second image: one must fall into the abyss [*l’abyme*] so as to start out again towards existence that has liberated itself from what it believed it had to rely on, but into which it could only ever fall [*s’abîmer*].

Some authors have found ethical echoes in this passage: it is only when we hit rock bottom that we can start over and head towards existence. We could say it’s only when we are completely destitute, when we experience distress without succour, that we can come back to life and be utterly renewed. Hegel’s old classmate from Tübingen, Hölderlin, does not say anything different in his magnificent poem “Destiny” in which distress figures as a rough but reliable teacher: “From distress all desire is sprung /and under pain only thrives/the best my heart enjoyed...”.¹⁶

What we can retain from Hegel, even if it is not quite what he says (in the sense that he doesn’t *stop* there), but which does appear in what he says, is that to be free is to grasp necessity at its roots, to grasp it as distress, and turn it around. But we cannot follow Hegel in his desire to find a perfect coincidence of freedom and rational conduct through which he posits the unity of teleology and necessity — inasmuch as the unity of the two is precisely the movement of the concept. The concept of purpose that we find in German idealism always presupposes that it is ultimately reason which forms its own purpose for itself — in the form of the moral being who must apply the principles of reason in the world (Kant), or in the form of self-knowledge (Hegel). We cannot possess such a perfect loop.

Against Hegel, we would say that what is required to bring about the overturning of necessity into freedom — to disjoin what produces distress and is imposed as

necessity from what can be set as a goal — is an irrational subjective intervention, in the sense that it cannot be grounded in reason. This is the sense of the “absurd” decision, the decision that cannot be pieced together element by element, that Kierkegaard speaks of. It is not that what precedes it and what follows it cannot be rational; it’s rather that there is a break that occurs which interrupts the unity of a process, and that’s a question of inhabiting that breaking point. The goal that is set can be completely rational (we have plenty of arguments for claiming that capitalist (patriarchal, racist, etc.) power should be dismantled before the catastrophes it generates are irreparable), but the gesture itself of setting the goal is neither reasonable nor rational.

We have seen that we can extend Hegelian-Marxist teleology on the condition that it be overturned twice. First it must be deciphered as such from the standpoint of its not-having-taken-place. Second, its declaration of exigency must be sustained also from the standpoint, and alongside, those beings that have no voice — nature, natural beings, environments and their history. The subject, by way of consequence, does not see in the objective movement something that supports and verifies, or will necessarily verify, her/his action; nor is s/he dedicated to acting as if such a support existed, like some kind of wager that s/he knows is risky. On the contrary, the subject must bear this goal as what painfully tears him/her away from the objectivity of the historical movement that is underway. Henceforth subjective intervention will solely be confused with freedom thought as the overturning of necessity. Necessity is not to be understood solely as a mirage maintained by the enemy: chains of necessity do exist, quite literally; they are imposed as the run of things which unfolds according to its immanent logic if nothing interrupt it.

Tronti tells us “anyone who believes they can think politically without considering the sense of the end is weak-minded”.¹⁷ This is exactly what we must leave behind, this weakness. And to do so, we must take on the task of setting goals against historical necessity, such as it is presented to us, *and yet goals that are extracted from its effectivity*. This is what must be emphasized today — this is

how we can understand the return of the historical situation as the content of politics.

To summarize then what happens to teleology I propose the following: the teleology of the past revolutionary movement, for a long time centered on the figure of the worker, was defined by a coincidence between the necessary development of history and the position of the ends attributed to that development. This is how the Hegelian speculative program was repeated: necessity itself led, not to its surpassing, but to the point that called for its surpassing. Today we need to start out from a situation in which necessity, understood as an irreversible — or at the very least constraining — sequence of facts, has split in two, and has separated itself from the *telos* that gave meaning to its sequence. Hence it is now a matter of assuming this separation: we need to think how goals can be set against what, from now on, is imposed as necessity — given that necessity is understood today as a sequence of facts which no longer possesses any meaning. Necessity as the bearer of meaning has been overturned; not into freedom, but into a compact series of facts from which we must extract ourselves — so as to find again the ancient goal, and to give it a new accord.

6. COMRADESHIP

What should we retain from Marx's gesture? Not so much his expectations for the scientific demonstration of exploitation, but rather his confidence in what can come about through sharing a truth about the logic of a global situation, and about the destiny it imposes. This logic is that of the destructive appropriation of lives and activities, mobilized in order to make a strange abstract machine function. This machine simultaneously imposes two quite contradictory things: on the one hand those it mobilizes are welded to an immanence comprehended as the absence of any transcendence; on the other hand, it sacrifices this immanence by imposing an objective to which the immense majority of living beings cannot adhere, but in which they are all more or less forced to participate. This double imperative brings about the ever more expanded, ever more irremediable ruin of

the conditions of life. Were this ruin to be overturned... what might appear? Marx and Engels give us a clue in their formulation: the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all, or the inverse. This reversibility between the fulfilment of each and of everyone is one way of taking up the anti-liberal side of Spinoza. The freedom of the other is not what limits my freedom, but what increases it. The free flourishing of each and everyone is the co-amplification of freedom.

Yet this political horizon cannot just be something to invoke and nothing more: it must be joined to a diagnosis of the historical situation in which we find ourselves — our present. If there is a political duty that is irreducible to moral or religious judgements, it is tied to the exposition of a truth situated at the crossroads of political confidence and a historical diagnosis. This duty can be grasped as setting a goal that is antagonistic with regard to what is imposed by the run of things. My proposition is that comradeship is the action of carrying out this duty, of articulating and bearing its charges together.

But to speak of comradeship, I'm going to make a little detour: to raise the question of camaraderie we have to raise the question of being. These days, usage of the term 'ontology' is quite varied, including in this seminar. For my part I propose to stick to the very beginning of Heidegger's meditation — the grasp of "that it is" cannot be superimposed on the knowledge of "what it is". It is from this standpoint that the question of being-which-is-not-a-being first appears in Heidegger, and in a certain manner, this is sufficient. By raising the question in this way, it clearly appears to be a supplementary question; in other words, a question that can be easily forgotten, precisely because it cannot lead to the production of knowledge. The forgetting of being is first of all the forgetting of a way of questioning which is not that of knowledge.

On this basis, philosophers, including Heidegger, made the mistake of believing that the privileged experience of being was that of nothingness, of the void — and Sartre and Badiou took this road a little further. Nothingness is certainly an

interesting object to think about, but — put it like this — you pretty quickly get the hang of it. In hindsight it seems to me that the sense of the work I carried out on Simondon and his conception of the transindividual is that it provides an alternative route. The idea is that the privileged experience of being-which-is-not-a-being is not that of nothingness, but of being-together (the *Mitsammen* [Together] that Celan evokes so poignantly in “Anabasis”).¹⁸ This does not contradict what I said earlier about the relation to the other: being-together is what deposes the relation to the other as problem; it is only when one loses being-together that this relation appears as a problem.

The question of being is the supplementary question, and since we cannot separate the question from its object here, it is also the question of the supplement itself — Derrida was right to underline this point, even if it is not a question here of following his line of thinking (one could say that the supplement takes the place of the ground *as much as its absence*, and that it is only in this manner that the entirety of metaphysics can be completely overturned). The question of being is always the question of what is added, as being, to what is. This is precisely where we must not confuse nothingness with the supplement (to come back to the displacement mentioned earlier, but from a different perspective — from the logic of negation to the logic of the supplement). What is, without being given in the form of a being, is not nothingness, but being which remains something different to entities amidst entities, and whose privileged form is being-together. This is the-object-which-is-not-an-object, the object which cannot be thought without that thinking transforming it, and without that transformation thus modifying the very configuration of entities.

Thinking camaraderie is an example of the thinking of being that is irreducible to entities, and by this means is potentially capable of modifying the configuration of entities. To think the specific being-together of comradeship, is to add some being to what is. So perhaps tonight we'll add a little being — if we construct some being-together such that each of us leaves slightly augmented, that is, with more being than when we came in.

Like all being-together, elaborating comradeship can be understood as weaving patiently a space of resonance. This weave has become quite difficult. Twenty years ago, we said we were like painters who not only had to create an artwork, but also create the materials for supporting the work, and even the space in which it would be shown. For some time, we thought we had taken some steps forwards, and then things got worse. Such that nowadays not only do we need to create all that, but we also need to build the town in which the exhibition will be held.

(But of course things can change, and even very quickly. The French Revolution just like the Russian revolution turned out to be a moment of unpredictable acceleration. Without any transition they brought about a passage from the reasonable (constitutional monarchy in the English style, management of the post-Tsarist period) to the profoundly unreasonable (Republic, Bolshevik revolution). Such that we ought to speak about subjective haste, like a crystallization that happens all of a sudden. Perhaps this could happen again, in times to come: a similar subjective haste — in this case it would not take place inside a revolutionary process but would inaugurate it.)

In any case, it seems to me that this patient weaving supposes some clarification of the space of comradeship as a dialectical space. To envisage this space we need to go back to the problematic of Plato's *Statesman* and the art of weaving: what can be tied together, and what must be separated? To be comrades should we define a common line; in other words, a proposed analysis which is inseparably also a proposed organization? Or rather solely a kind of minimal basis for a common articulation, without being able to prescribe the mode of organization entailed by it? Or just a strategy?

It seems to me that this session along with all the work we have done in the seminar favour the second hypothesis. This session extends our research with a unary trait, a mark of supplementary identification, potentially a support for a common political identification, a mark of identification that could potentially add to the existing forms of political subjectivation, characterized by heterogeneous

problematics (which were at stake in a good number of this seminar's sessions, no need to go into details here). Let's say that tonight it's a matter of making this minimal basis of elaboration a little more constraining.

I'm just going to say a few words about comradeship to open up the discussion. To be comrades is, first of all, of course, to not push off into the future the experience of reciprocal fulfilment. Perhaps this phrase seems a bit exaggerated in this time of realism, of falling back on the few things that remain for us. But we have to know whether we still expect something from life, or more precisely whether we are still capable of expecting everything from life (more than ever we have to read the "Treatise of Despair"¹⁹). In this sense the space of comradeship is a gentle space, a space that promises benevolence in a world that itself promises to become more and more hurtful. But it is a dialectical space and we also need to take into consideration relationships of rivalry between comrades — rival positions, rival strategies. The best way of not contradicting the benevolence I was speaking of is to not conceal rivalry. The dialectical synthesis between these two terms in apparent tension (benevolence/rivalry) could be formulated as: *know how to love your rivals*.

In any case, we're lucky to be living in the most important period of human history. What luck to be born today. Even Lenin must envy us. (This is not an ironic remark; comic no doubt, but not ironic).

And don't forget, however old we might be, the time has come to be seventeen years old:

It really was in vain that the lamp burned in the youth of Alexander Dvanov, lighting up the soul-irritating pages of books whose guidance he would in any case never follow. However much he read and thought, inside him there always remained some kind of empty place — and through this emptiness passed the unwritten and untold world, like an anxious wind. At the age of seventeen Sasha still had no armor over his heart — neither

faith in God, nor any other peace of mind; he would not give a name not its own to the nameless life opening before him. But he didn't want the world to stay unnamed; he was merely waiting to hear its proper name from its own lips — rather than other people's contrived labels.²⁰

NOTES

1. This text was given on the 13th February 2024 as the first session of the Spring semester of a research seminar “La Division Politique” held at La Parole Errante in Montreuil just to the East of Paris. The seminar – organized collectively, featuring different speakers – ran for six years under the aegis of the College Internationale de Philosophie, and then continued under its own name.
2. E. Husserl, “Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature,” trans. Fred Kersten, in Husserl, *Shorter Works*. Ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 222-33.
3. Andrey Platonov, *Chevengur*. Trans. R. Chandler, & E. Chandler. New York: New York Review of Books, 2023, Ch.39.
4. The French translation Aspe uses for the Manifesto has *le libre épanouissement de chacun*. ‘Epanouissement’ also means flourishing, blossoming, fulfilment and happiness. K. Marx & F. Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party” in *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 6*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976.
5. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Trans. J. Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Alain Badiou, “ ‘We Need a Popular Discipline’: Contemporary Politics and the Crisis of the Negative: Interview with Filippo Del Lucchese & Jason Smith”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Summer 2008), 645-659.
6. Sylvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland: PM Press, 2019, 110.
7. Gregoire Chamayou, *The Ungovernable Society: a Genealogy of Authoritarian Liberalism*. London: Polity, 2021.
8. Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
9. Mario Tronti, “Politics at Sunset: Theses on Benjamin”, *e-flux Journal*, Issue #139, October 2023. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/139/559025/politics-at-sunset-theses-on-benjamin/> Frédéric Neyrat, *Le cosmos de Walter Benjamin*. Paris: Editions Kimé, 2022, 203ff. Also see, Neyrat, “Walter Benjamin’s Cosmos: Correspondence, Aura, and the Cosmo-geological Subject”, *Mosaic, an interdisciplinary critical journal*, Volume 54, Number 3, September 2021, 59-84.
10. Aline Leclerc, « Manque de sécurité sur les chantiers : ‘notre fils est morte pour 6000€’ » [Lack of security on building sites: ‘our son died for 6000€’], *Le Monde journal* du 7 Février 2024. President of the COP28, General Director of WHO, Special Envoy for Health and Climate Change « Si nous n’agissons pas, les changements climatiques conduiront bientôt à la submersion des systèmes de santé du monde entier » [If we do not act, climate change will soon lead to the submersion of health systems across the entire world] Opinion column, *Le Monde journal* du 12 novembre 2023.
11. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, in Paul Rabinow. Ed. *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, 77.
12. Aspe uses the verb that Derrida first identified as the best translation of Hegel’s term *aufhebung*. *Relever* means to lift up (again), to relay, and to replace.
13. G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*. Trans. A.V. Miller. New York: Humanity Books, 1969, 737.
14. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Trans. R. Alverado. Wordbridge Pub, 2011, 399.

15. Gwendoline Jarczyk, *Système et Liberté dans la Logique d'Hegel*. Paris : Editions Kimé, 2001, 204-5.
16. Friedrich Hölderlin, « Das Schicksal »
Der Not ist jede Lust entsprossen,
Und unter Schmerzen nur gedeiht
Das Liebste, was mein Herz genossen (4th stanza, Lines 1-3)
17. Mario Tronti, "Politics and Destiny" on Endnotes. <https://endnotes.org.uk/posts/mario-tronti-politics-and-destiny>
18. Paul Celan, "Anabasis" in *Selected Poems*. Trans. M.Hamburger. London: Penguin Books, 1990, 199.
19. 'Treatise of Despair' is the title of the older French translation of Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death*.
20. Platonov, *Chevengur*, ch.9.