

The two names of communism

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Toujours avec l'espoir de rencontrer la mer,
Ils voyageaient sans pain, sans batons et sans urnes,
Mordant au citron d'or de l'idéal amer.

Stéphane Mallarmé, 1862¹

The recent explosion of writing on the communist idea, ideal and 'communization' recovers or expands a moment in the early to mid-1980s when French political theory and philosophy (in particular Félix Guattari and later Jean-Luc Nancy) and post-operaism in Italy were thinking through the content of communist practice against the defamation of the name and legacy of communism under Stalinism and Maoism. This writing emerged as much from the increasing debacle of the PCF's pro-Moscow statism (and wait-and-see tactics) as from the anti-Stalinist ruins of French Maoist militancy. But what is particularly striking about it is how productive and unapologetic it is in its support for the 'communist ideal' (as a yet unnamed or to-be-named ideal) at the height of the new Thermidorian reaction in the West, before the general slide of the French Left into mordancy and shame.

Guattari and Negri's *Communists Like Us* (1985)² and Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1986)³ are emblematic here. Nancy in particular makes it his job to think 'community' not as a reach-me-down category of bourgeois democratic politics, but as a living (non-identitarian) communist concept and practice. Thus we tend to forget today, as Alain Badiou's intellectual advocacy of the 'communist idea' takes on a quasi-leadership function in current debates, that he is contributing to this shared and creative hold-out from the early 1980s. Indeed, Badiou has continued to honour Nancy, if not Negri. As he said of Nancy in 2004: 'Let us greet the friend, the loyal man, the last communist, the thinker, the intellectual artist of sensible disparity.'⁴

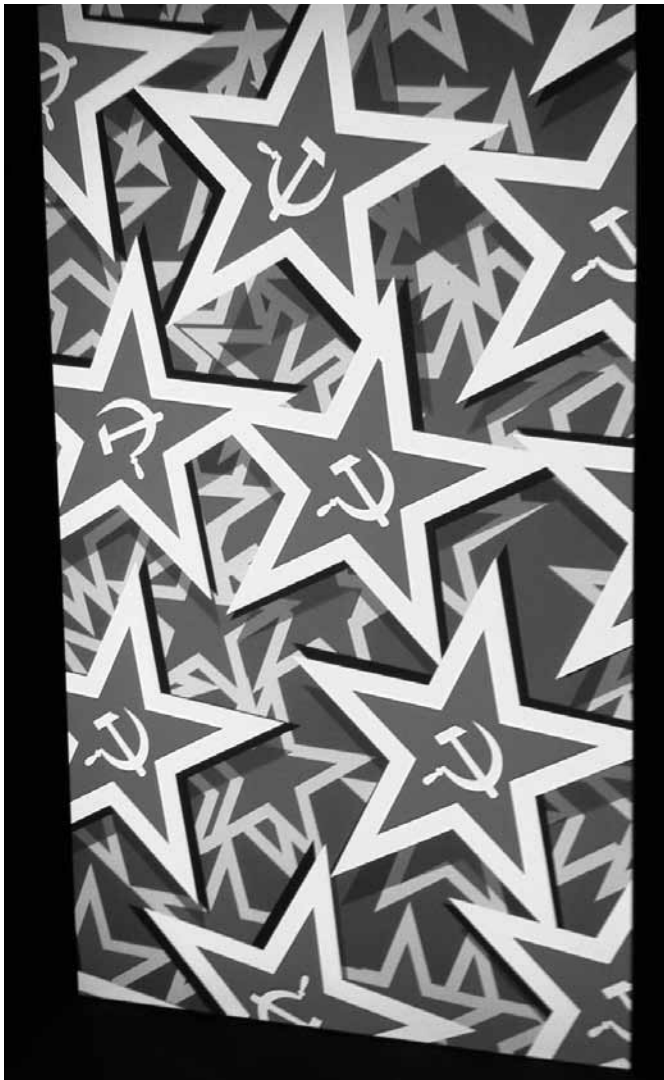
This leads us to link the current writing on the communist idea and communization to the key problem

of this longer political sequence: the fundamental radical impasse between working-class politics and the state-party form. The electoral and political demise of workers' and Communist parties is not the consequence of an enduring crisis of the Left (or even the demise of the industrial working class), but of this political form, which the very real political crisis of the Left (after the collapse of European and Soviet Communism) has simply covered up or deflected. In this sense, the new writing on the communist idea comes out of a profound and long-standing crisis of proletarian agency and representation, which even Henri Lefebvre was noting in the 1950s in his reflection on the increasing dissociation between the French working class and its assumed class identity. Workers were then beginning to develop various strategies of resistance to their identity *as* workers.⁵ Today, in a sense, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of social-democratic reformism, this disconnection is all the more stark and generalized.

One of the consequences of this is a split, as Alessandro Russo has cogently put it, between communism as a name in *politics* and communism as a name in *philosophy*; communism as a (failed) political tradition and set of strategies, and communism as an (emergent) emancipatory theory.⁶ The current re-engagement with and re-theorization of the communist idea and legacy are hyperconscious of this split as a condition of political renewal. Thus, if the limited communization of the early Soviet Union remains a source of invaluable political knowledge in the making of a revolution, the legacy of 'actually existing Communism' as a depoliticized state form cannot be deflected or suppressed in the renaming of communism as an emancipatory politics in the present. The failure of this state form and its reification of the name 'communism' have to be brought to bear on the political uses of the name 'communism' now. For it is easy to pass from the crisis of the political name of communism to the

philosophical name of communism, indifferent to the fate of communism as a political name, as if the renewal of the philosophical name can instantiate a communism untouched by the realities associated with the political name of communism. But history is not that easily amended or ignored.

The negotiation between these two names of communism, political and philosophical, is therefore the rhetorical ground of the current debate, the space through which all the contributors grouped around the Badiou-led repositioning of the ‘communist idea’ are trying to make their way, and establish a newly named communism. This is why all the contributors to the



collection *The Idea of Communism* (2010) are visibly constrained by the aporetic condition of the debate – from whatever political or philosophical tradition they may have emerged. The philosophical renewal of the name of communism, then, is both the site of communism’s re-emergence as idea/ideal and also the place where it is foreclosed, or even suffers collapse, as a politics. Indeed, to give up the political name of communism for communism as a name in philosophy

is to give up the name of communism as such. The reliance on the philosophical name of communism for the renewal of politics is a symptom of a wider political crisis. Philosophy is what allows communism to be renamed as a politics, but politics has to assert its autonomy *as* politics. This is why philosophy precisely can never be philosophy *for* politics, for to do so ‘accords philosophy the task of thinking’ politics.⁷

Consequently, this is why Badiou’s own theoretical leadership on this question is such a source of tension within the debate in *The Idea of Communism* and elsewhere. For if Badiou opposes political philosophy as the dead letter of renewal, it is the work of phil-

osophy as a rupture with democratic doxa that supplies the necessary space and working distance for a revolutionary politics. (Although the production of a ‘pure’ politics entailed by this certainly does not possess a fixed identity for Badiou across the dyad philosophy/politics – as is reflected in his recent writing on the recent riots and resistance in Egypt.⁸) The notion of Badiou as a post-Marxist speculative leftist has been thoroughly deconstructed by Bruno Bosteels.⁹ Yet, even so, the construction of a ‘pure’ space out of philosophy for politics operating in conditions of defeat is imperative for Badiou if the name of communism as a politics is to have any connection with what is to come, and as such is unnamed politically. For what is to come will determine the content and direction of this ‘pure space’, without the baggage of the past. In these terms, Badiou makes no bones about the political name of communism, on this basis, uncoupling itself from all the machinery of the older political name of communism: the mass Communist Party, Marxism as theory of unified proletarian agency, trade unions and working-class leadership working hand in glove. The new name of communism is post-party and anti-statist to its very core. ‘The party-form, like that of the socialist State, is no longer suitable for providing real support for the Idea.’¹⁰ So, in this sense, political philosophy is the language

of the old state–party–class machinery, in so far as its reliance on the past preforms the political (such as parliamentary realism and ‘public opinion’), whereas philosophy, as a universalizing truth procedure, opens the space for the renewal of communism as a (new) name in politics. Philosophy, in these terms, makes politics the site of the *unnamed*.

This deflation of political philosophy and inflation of philosophy obviously is a source of contention,

leading to a range of counter-positions within the debate that contest this elision, as we will discuss below. But it does have the virtue of pointing to a new theoretical terrain in the epoch of the communist idea's current aporetic condition: the need to think *across, through, inside* communism as a name in philosophy and communism as a name in politics. To give up on either is to produce deadlock. (Russo, for instance, having named the problem, strangely thinks the best option is to give up on the name 'communism' altogether!) But if giving up on the name is opportunist, echoing all the revanchist moves of some European Communist Parties after 1989, trying to resolve the split dialectically plunges the naming process straight back into the abstract realms of political philosophy. Badiou, therefore, is at least right: the re-meeting of communism as a name in philosophy and as a name in politics will be conducted on politics terms.

But what politics? And to what ends? In what follows, I look at how the relationship between politics and philosophy is being played out under the headings of 'the idea of communism' and 'communization', and what Badiou has recently called 'movement communism' (a post-party concept that Badiou has used before, but that now operates as a formalized response both to current political events and to the earlier work on communism as Idea).

Minoritarianism or majoritarianism?

One of the repeated criticisms of Badiou in *The Idea of Communism* and elsewhere is that the mediation of philosophy and politics in these terms produces a politics and a political subjectivity that are only 'rare', exceptional, residual. For, if the class-party-state nexus can no longer provide a space of support for the idea of communism, it is the job of the 'pure space' of philosophy to rename/unname communism as an emergent name in politics; that is, to subtract politics from the daily constraints of everyday capitalist practice. The relinking of communism as a name in philosophy and as a name in politics can only begin to happen in a space free of (democratic) political philosophy and the legacy of Communism. In this sense, the unnamings are derived from a politics unmediated by the machinery of the state. To do otherwise is to disconnect philosophy from politics. But for Badiou this is more than an expression of political 'autonomy' in the face of co-opted party politics. Rather, these new conditions of extra-state subjectivity support the (collective) political subject's incorporation into the new name of communism in politics as a task rather than a prescribed goal. Indeed, it is only through

this subtracted space that philosophy and politics can secure the unnamings of communism as a name in politics. That is, to take the class-party-state route is to meet full-on the historical blockages of Communism and its rusting ideological machinery. The unnamings/renaming of communism, then, for Badiou, is classically ill-disposed to the idea of communism as a residual emancipatory tradition immanent to the transformation of capitalism. Faced with the rusting ideological machinery of state Communism and the repressive inertia of 'democracy', there is no unfolding progressive tradition to sustain inside the channels of a dying capitalist polity. The new name of communism in politics must subtract itself from history, from any notion that the remnants of a revolutionary tradition represents a faint red line of 'progress towards' (as if we were now 'back on track'). The re-engagement of philosophy and politics emerges as a constitutive break with both a failed Communism and a failed capitalist state. Without this break, there is no process of renaming/unnamings. This is why Badiou talks about the renaming of communism – or a universalizing emancipatory politics – as being strategically, culturally, politically somewhere close to where the communist movement was in 1848: as mere rumour and advocacy. But it is precisely through rumour and advocacy that new political work can be done.

Badiou's minoritarian renaming of communism here certainly borrows from the post-party anti-statism of Guattari, Negri and Nancy. Badiou's 'pure space' is similar to Guattari and Negri's 'third space', a space without state-party mediation. But in Negri particularly, and post-operaism generally, this minoritarian separation of the work of communist renaming is utterly antithetical to the movement of communist thinking immanent to capitalist relations and the labour process. The work of renaming communism for Negri is not something that needs a 'pure space' of advocacy at all. On the contrary, workers' practice, their struggle for autonomy, creates the movement for communist practice and thinking, and as such the conditions for communism's renaming. As Negri argues in a classical vein, in his postscript to *Communists Like Us*: 'As Marx teaches us, communism is born directly from class antagonism, from the refusal of both work and the organization of work.'¹¹ Thus if Badiou's minoritarianism returns us to the beginning, so to speak, in an act of 'productive contrition', Negri's immanent movement of the renaming/unnamings of communism is already with us as a consequence of workers' struggle. Indeed these forces and energies build up their organized surplus 'throughout the entire

aleatory process of struggles.’¹² So, in this sense, communism is possible, and therefore renameable, precisely because it already exists as a set of processes immanent to praxis, to the labour process. Communism as a name in politics is already here as the result of the collectivity and creativity of workers. More broadly, then, this commits Negri to an immanentist reading of Marxism in which workers’ subjectivity is always challenging or putting capital on the defensive, and, therefore, workers’ continuous struggle for collective control over their own labour functions as a communist majoritarianism in the making. This position has become highly influential in the extended life of post-operaism through the debate on cognitive capitalism and labour (Maurizio Lazzarato, Christian Marazzi, Carlo Vercellone),¹³ in which the new forms of immaterial and affective labour at the point of production are seen as placing increasing pressure from living labour on the constraints of capitalism’s unmanageable measurement of value, thereby setting in place, within the technical division of labour itself, the coordinates for a communist democracy ‘beyond measure’.

Negri’s optimistic majoritarianism here, then, is a long way from Badiou’s withdrawal to a place where ‘we can think (again) clearly’. Indeed, it rejects the very notion that the horrors of the party–class–state nexus should mediate communism as a name in politics, for this history is wholly alien to the continuous resistance and creativity of workers themselves. One might say, therefore, that this position makes little or no concession to the place of philosophy in the realignment of philosophy and politics, reconnecting Marx’s own subordination of philosophy to politics to the very renewal of communism as the ‘real movement of things’. Marx advocates this as a condition of communist practice in the 1840s because communism as a name in philosophy during this period was overwhelmingly dominated by the febrile abstractions of would-be communist ‘thinkers’, in short by the projections and airy fancies of political philosophy. In these terms *The Communist Manifesto* is an attempt to *break out* of the abstractions of political philosophy, not *break with* philosophy.

The Idea of Communism of necessity, then, returns us to this terrain, in which the resistance to communism as an inheritable name in politics is accompanied by a resistance to the inflation of philosophical abstraction, as a way of making the communist idea more amenable, more friendly. In these terms, outside of the covers of *The Idea of Communism*, we can see how a Negrian majoritarianism offers resistance to both

options, and a way of avoiding Badiou’s trip back to 1848: the renaming of communism as a name in politics is a condition of where workers stand now. There is no need for the reinvention of a ‘new relationship between politics and philosophy’¹⁴ in any systematic sense for the conditions under which workers’ labour will prepare the ground for this kind of work. Indeed, for Negri et al. the rise of the new immaterial and cultural worker makes this all the more a priority. But, paradoxically, this new post-Fordist workerist ‘resistance’ to philosophy produces its own abstractions, in so far as the notion of rebuilding a movement outside of the state generates a strategic impatience, and a return to the old problems of ultra-leftism, if not as an infantile disorder, then certainly in various forms of annoying and time-consuming distraction. Thus, underlying the debates in *The Idea of Communism*, but never addressed – which is a revealing omission in itself – is the growth of what we might call a post-post-operaist ‘exit-communism’.

Exit-communism and proletarian self-abolition

Exit-communism is politically to the left of Badiou and Negri and the current debate on the Communist Idea. Although it draws on the same anti-statist and post-party connections as Badiou and Negri, its critique of political mediation is defined by an uncompromising non-identitary revolutionary politics. This takes two current significant forms: a *weak negationism* and a *strong negationism*. Weak negationism is perhaps best identifiable with John Holloway’s post-Negrian programme of interstitial ‘misfitting’ and guerrilla or localized resistance;¹⁵ and strong negationism with the politics of communization as process (the present rejection of proletarian identity as the determinate agency of proletarian emancipation), which currently really only exists as a theoretical programme and prefigurative claim on the future – although some writers within this framework currently believe they can see increasing evidence of this process at play in the generalized working-class flight from (official) labour politics itself.¹⁶ In these terms, such forms of exit-communism are the product of the same sense of historical crisis driving Badiou and Negri, and thus inhabit the same post-Stalinist, post-Trotskyist continuum. As such, all are indebted to the legacy of an anti-teleological Marxism,¹⁷ and to the same assessment of the current conjunctural deadlock: capitalism is unable to reproduce itself in its own bourgeois image, but the proletariat presently is unable to break through this state of non-reproduction in order to effect real

change. But, in contradistinction to the Badiou/Negri axis, this very deadlock becomes the explicit agential content of the renaming of communism as a name in politics for exit-communism. For this blockage carries with it the immanent content of this current stage of workers' struggles: the recognition of the limits of wage struggle and progressive 'class identity' as the potential or actual means to exit from labour-capital relations. That is, communization is identifiable first and foremost with this process of refusal.

In these terms weak and strong negationisms are essentially *actionist anti-work* responses to the crisis of the class-party-state nexus, and the crisis of worker identity, exchanging Negri's almost classical Marxist affirmative immanentism for an immanentism of non-relation and withdrawal – with clear echoes of Mikhail Bakunin. As Holloway argues, regarding 'the understanding of class struggle as the struggle of labour against capital': 'It is this form of Marxism that is now in crisis, simply because this form of struggle is in crisis.'¹⁸ As *Théorie Communiste* – the leading theoretical grouping within communization theory, whose origins lie in 1970s' left council communism – declare: 'The unity of the class can no longer constitute itself on the basis of the wage and demands-based struggle, as a prelude to its revolutionary activity. The unity of the proletariat can only be the activity in which it abolishes itself in abolishing everything that divides it.'¹⁹ As a result *Théorie Communiste* asserts that the proletariat has entered a qualitatively new period of struggle: the days of 'programmatism' and the realization of class identity, grounded in the vicissitudes of waged labour, is over.

These are enormous and controversial claims, even within communization theory. That is, what is taken as a tendency in Western capitalist countries – the weakening of the efficacy of wage struggles as redistributive mechanisms; the dissolution of working-class identity (low levels of trade-union membership, etc.) – are extrapolated to cover all countries and all industrial contexts. The idea that wage struggles in China, India, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, South Africa cannot produce successful distributive and socially transformative outcomes is clearly parochial. (See, for example, the monumental struggle of South African miners today.) As is the notion that the wage form has irrevocably broken down for most workers in the light of mass proletarian indebtedness. On the contrary, on a global scale credit is not the main basis of proletarian consumption. This only applies to some workers, in some countries, mainly the USA, the UK, Canada, Germany and Japan. Indeed, major

indebtedness largely exists within the middle class in Western Europe and North America. Thus, despite the drop in working-class purchasing power, wages still have a hold on how workers think strategically.²⁰ Moreover, the transformation of the undoubtedly real crisis of workers' identity into a principle of revolutionary politics – without recognition of the unevenness of workers' struggles globally, and the necessity of asserting workers' identity in any transitional struggle against capital – becomes equally parochial, as if the exit from workers' identity itself constitutes a process of (workable) communization.

The communization theory of *Théorie Communiste*, then, is constructed wholly at the level of supposition, placing the (admittedly key) axiom of proletarian self-abolition over and above real-world proletarian struggles. Bruno Astarian, author of *Le Travail et son Dépassement* (2002)²¹ and a communization theorist critical of the abstractions of *Théorie Communiste*, has put the problem of proletarian self-negation very well:

I don't understand how a struggle, even limited and moderate, would not include a self-relationship of the proletariat. On the contrary, in any struggle against capital, the first content of the struggle is for the proletariat to assert itself and its presence in capitalist society. At the start, any struggle is an affirmation of the class against capital and hence a self-relationship (be it as a union action or a riot). It is only then that the question arises of what this affirmation develops. The forms of struggles that I grouped together under the term anti-work show that the affirmation has to convert itself into a negation.²²

In other words, proletarian self-negation as a fixed principle of revolutionary negation divorces communization from any viable strategic bearings. In producing a radical immanentism solely through the crisis of the wage form and the crisis of working-class self-identity, it locks self-negation out from self-relation, in another, and familiar, version of 'pure' proletarian politics. The recent collection of communization literature *Communization and Its Discontents* (2012), edited by Ben Noys, is very much attuned to this question. As Noys says: 'it's hard to see how [*Théorie Communiste's* theory of communization] can coordinate or develop ... "moments" of communization globally across the social field.'²³ Or, as Alberto Toscano puts it in a similar register, in his contribution to the collection, the 'paucity of strategic and political reflection within communization' produces a peculiar depoliticization'.²⁴

This depoliticization is expressed acutely in communization's lack of any discussion of intra- and inter-class relations, as if the very notion of proletarian

self-abolition will itself dissolve both the internal divisions within the proletariat and the divisions between itself and its key adversary and ally: the petty bourgeoisie. Three sets of related problems in *Théorie Communiste*'s 'communization' arise as a consequence. (1) The chronic failure on their part to recognize – as a result of their abandonment of transitional theory – that self-abolition prior to and during revolutionary transition leaves the social field open to capital and to the recrudescence of petty-bourgeois ideology as a solution to the social question of production: petty-socialized production for the market. (2) The need, as a consequence, for proletarian self-relation to *override* self-abolition in any transitional period in order to prevent the breakdown of production, social anomie, counter-revolutionary desertion, and so on. (The situation today is vastly different from the situation in 1917–18 in Russia, but workers similarly will have to maintain the factories and keep them open as a condition of the revolution's very survival. That is, it will be as *workers* that workers will secure social reproduction during this stage).²⁵ (3) The failure to recognize how proletarian self-abolition, in the current period, is ideologically double-edged: it is both the outcome of the political crisis of the wage form, as *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes* rightly argue, and also the result of the rise of petty-bourgeois ideology (entrepreneurialism; individualist solutions to collective problems; 'creativity' above political relations) to a position of cultural hegemony. It therefore reflects how petty-bourgeois ideology in its current neoliberal form is not just class-specific – the operational ideology of the new middle class, so to speak – but operates in a Lukácsian sense, deep within and across class relations.²⁶ That *Théorie Communiste* fails to address this leaves self-abolition at the mercy of petty-bourgeois notions of 'classlessness'. The overall picture, then, is a '[wanton indifference] to the gargantuan obstacles in the way of negating capital'.²⁷

Even after this brief survey and limited analysis, one can see how much of the work on the communist idea and communization in its reconceptualization of communism in philosophy and in politics is fighting an uphill struggle against the encroachment of abstraction, given the absence of communist practice as the 'real movement of things'. Thus, we might say that the tendency to weak abstraction – or the primary reconstruction of communism as a *speculative* name in philosophy – is a consequence of the aporetic condition

of communization as theory of politics in the present period. This is why sectarian denunciations of this abstraction are, in a way, beside the point, as if 'better' philosophy will issue in better politics. In conditions of the renewal of communism as a name in philosophy and in politics within a period of general retreat, political indeterminacy will of necessity condition the nature of the debate, inflating various real-world tendencies and symptoms into empty prefigurations. Similarly, *Théorie Communiste* and *Endnotes* are quick to argue that communization theory is not as yet an organizational politics, but a set of theoretical propositions and presuppositions that prepare the ground for future (major) struggles. Yet to accept this



is not to turn away from the obvious problems here. Communization, as it moves into the formalization of proletarian self-abolition, moves easily into chialism and gnosticism, recalling the very thing that communism's enemies have continually set out to demonstrate: communism's essential apocalypticism. The groups Tiquun and The Invisible Committee (author of *The Coming Insurrection*²⁸) – both discussed at length in *Communism and Its Discontents* – and the writers associated with Krisis in Germany, do little to dissuade us from this reading. All abdicate the need to rebuild

proletarian self-relation as a condition of revolutionary transformation.

It is worth, then, putting on the brakes at this point and indulging in a kind of severe counter-rationalization. Why should we take this writing seriously? Is this theory not a kind of political sideshow? Is de-temporalizing proletarian self-abolition not simply an overcompensatory reaction to the legacy of statist triumphalism and workerism? For it is hard not to imagine communist workers and activists, looking on aghast or even pityingly at this growth in (European) communization theory.

Antitheses

Recently T.J. Clark, in 'For a Left with No Future' (2012), and before him John Gray in *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (2007), have produced grindingly rebarbative and bitter critiques of this kind of thinking, from the left and the liberal centre respectively, although neither refer specifically to communization theory. (Clark does, though, have a dig in passing at the Invisible Committee.) These critiques of Clark and Gray are arresting not simply because they are the work of renegades or apostates, but because of their utter fatigue with and contempt for the disorganizational immaturity and impracticality of the radical Left on the world historical stage. For Clark, an ex-member of the Situationist International, and a high-Debordian critic of capitalist cultural barbarities, this is clearly something of a turnaround. His essay has little sympathy for the extraordinary growth in left theory recently (of which Franco-Anglo-German communization theory is only one part) and new forms of activism, reserving his plaudits for A.C. Bradley and Nietzsche's tragedian contempt for mere ideas and gestures. 'The modern infantilization of politics goes along with, and perhaps depends on, a constant orientation of politics towards the future.'²⁹ Similarly, Gray – albeit from a position that is deeply antipathetic to the revolutionary tradition – argues that 'The pursuit of Utopia must be replaced by an attempt to cope with reality.'³⁰ Politics, therefore, should free itself from narrative: 'Spending one's life looking to the future means inhabiting a world fashioned from memory.'³¹ The fact that the pursuit of utopia might in fact be the greater realism is of course in keeping with Gray's crude historicizations and illicit fusions, in which Nazism, Marxism, Islam and US neoliberal 'humans rights imperialism' are all teleological millenarianisms. But such illicit fusions are grist to the mill, because what is on trial is the very relationship between politics and history

itself: universalizing thought is disfiguring precisely because it sets itself goals it cannot fulfil given the limited materials it has to work with. The majority of humans are not 'truth-seeking', but pragmatists, whose self-interests will invariably coincide with power.

I'm not sure how much Clark the Hegelian (ex-Hegelian?) would endorse this Spinozan version of a history without meaning – or for that matter the utterly counter-intuitive notion that the human mind is not 'attuned to truth'³² – but he certainly believes that there is little or nothing being built under capitalism that might capture the emancipatory wings of history. Indeed, in a grim echo of Gray, he argues for a newly honed finitude in thinking on the Left, in which the world opening up to us after the collapse of reformism and social-democratic gradualism is not one in which there is a heightening of the crisis of labour-capital relations in the wake of the crisis of the wage form and a revived revolutionary consciousness, but one in which there is an increased ineffectiveness to anti-capitalist thinking. In this gap between limited anti-capitalist possibilities and the increasing low-level authoritarianism of capitalist non-reproduction, a politics actually 'preventing the tiger [of violence and oppression] from charging out would be the most moderate and revolutionary there has ever been'.³³ Consequently, he concludes, it would be 'wrong to assume that moderation in politics, if we mean by this a politics of small steps, bleak wisdom, concrete proposals, disdain for grand promises, a sense of the hardness of even the least "improvements", is not revolutionary'.³⁴

This is the high-low road, the road not of Lenin's zigzags, but a mixture of recalcitrance, fear and dogmatic finitude that Badiou has been so skilful in unpacking. Yet it does capture a sense of the gargantuan problems and forces facing a Left beyond capital. The Clark-Gray theses mount a familiar argument against the possibility of fundamental change, that Left and Right, workers and ruling classes, can all find something 'realistic' to identify with and feel comfortable about. To be stuck, then, philosophically somewhere between the Clark-Gray theses and *Théorie Communiste's* communization theory is not an auspicious place to begin to do any transformative thinking, let alone the work of 'communization', existing as this position does between a kind of grey rectitude and hubris of the event. The problem of new uses of the name of communism in politics and philosophy, therefore, must crucially be one in which the 'real movement of things' in the absence of *communist practice* as the 'real movement of things' is both dialectically conceived and temporally extended. The impatience

and endism of *Théorie Communiste* and the chronic atemporalism of the Clark–Gray theses – in which the rhythms and ruptures of capitalism have no determinate presence on the present – abrogate this, divorcing the name of communism in politics *from* the name of communism in philosophy. Thus, if the Clark–Gray theses fail to recognize the ‘real moment of things’ at all as a condition of saying anything worthwhile politically (realistically) about the present conjuncture, communization theory hopes the real movement of things is already being prepared for us, distilled in the breakdown of the wage form. An axiom presents itself here. *The ‘real movement of things’ in the absence of communist practice as the real movement of things is the realist condition of the renaming of communism as a name in politics.* Consequently, if the communist idea and communization are essentially aporetic in the current period, it is on the basis of this axiom that an aporetic politics is worth defending. For this makes realism not a condition of predetermined limits, but a dialectical condition of *overcoming* impatience, endism and atemporality.

Something of this ‘thinking temporally’ as a condition of thinking aporetically and dialectically is evident in some of the contributions to *The Idea of Communism*, in particular Bruno Bosteels’s essay.³⁵ He rightly brings the debate on the communist idea and ‘communization’ into alignment, not with dreams of proletarian non-power (Holloway) or proletarian self-abolition, but with the tactical overcoming of present neoliberal conditions, focusing on the achievements of Evo Morales’s government in Bolivia and the South American ‘leftist’ populist turn more generally. These popular achievements are real, and have brought millions out of poverty and illiteracy; they have split open the historical division between city and countryside, mestizo and native identities, and blocked the neoliberal evisceration of natural resources in the area. Moreover these are achievements that have been conducted outside/inside of a weakened neoliberal state, through an association of rural indigenous and urban social movements. As such, this represents a mass development of an anti-statist politics, which has many novel features, the least of them being that Morales’s vice president, Álvaro García Linera, is a Marxist theorist of some note. As Linera has argued, Bolivia is currently engaged in a post-neoliberal transition.³⁶

Now, Bosteels does not confuse the populist national-democratic revolution in Bolivia with communization in the making, and as such is rightly sceptical of such claims – as if nationalization plus rural and urban communitarianism is able to disconnect national

capitals from the pressures of the global market, and confront the capitalist state. Linera has unfortunately made a number of exalted claims along these lines. Indeed, the rural and urban bloc has largely been stalled in electoralism and a rural romantic anti-capitalism. Communization must begin somewhere under such or similar conditions, but it cannot be by definition, historically, politically, philosophically national in shape and orientation. But nevertheless in Bolivia (under Linera and Morales, as in Venezuela under Chávez), the popular repossession of the political process has created a space for new organizational forms of resistance and class alliance that provide a ‘political laboratory’ in which the problems of intra- and inter-class struggle can again be framed by communism as the real movement of things – a Left very different from Clark’s image of its ‘dis-organizational immaturity’. This is not the beginning of exit communism in its pure form, then, but neither is it Stalinist statecraft in which the ‘beautiful soul of communism’³⁷ is doomed to betrayal and recrimination. The Morales/Linera national-democratic revolution has shifted the overall dynamic of class relations in Bolivia and South America, opening up a range of popular forces from below.

Movement communism and the return to strategy

In a crucial way, therefore, this move in Bosteels towards the meeting of the name of communism in philosophy and politics on the ground of a non-Eurocentric politics, reflects a discernible shift recently in the (European) debate on the idea of communism under the pressure of current events. The fidelity to an idea, the consolations of the revolutionary past, the immanent counter-tendencies of the conjuncture, the proto-communism of ‘cognitive labour’, the renaming of communism as a post-party practice, have all passed into a reflection on the political event as reflection on political *strategy*.

Strategy has recently become a key concern for Badiou, and even Slavoj Žižek, providing a shift in political focus. This is clear in Badiou’s *The Rebirth of History* (2012), which in its polemical brevity, philosophical/political exchanges and response to current events (the European riots, the aborted democratic revolution in Egypt) returns Badiou’s philosophical encounter with communism and the communist idea to the interventionist spirit of his Maoist writing from the 1970s, as it is in Žižek’s equally brief and polemical *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (2012), which covers some of the same ground. Both writers

see the riots in Paris and London as the symptomatic precursors of new struggles in Europe, and the magnificent resistance in Tahrir Square, with its proto-communist irreducibility of the movement to one single group or identity, as a sign from the global future. As Badiou declares: ‘We have seen Muslims and Copts, men and women, veiled women and “bare-headed” women, intellectuals and workers, young and old, and so on, side by side. All identities were in a sense absorbed by the movement, but the movement was not reducible to any one of them.’³⁸ But if a new politics is at stake in these events for Europe and North America, there are larger implications at stake than the diffuse mass protest associated with the Occupy movement, which pushes the general air of anti-capitalist self-satisfaction further to the left. Indeed, both books are what we might call ‘post-Bolivian’ in their post-party emphasis on strategy, in so far as they are confrontations with the very spectre of the disorganizational immaturity of the new European Left (and communization) itself in this period of riots and resistance. Thus if, on the one hand, the Left has failed to capitalize politically on the riots in Europe and the Occupy movement generally,³⁹ on the other it has also failed to make a clear distinction between the proto-communist organization of disparate forces in Tahrir Square and its received (European) image as a Middle Eastern Occupy movement.

Such evasion and ambivalence, therefore, provide a snapshot of the prevailing problem for the Left (and of communization) now. How and under what forms can the post-party organization of revolutionary politics build discipline and continuity in this period? ‘Communism is not just or predominantly a carnival of mass protest in which the system is brought to a halt; it is also above all a new form of organization, discipline and hard work.’⁴⁰ ‘[O]ur guide is not the aleatory experience of rebellions ... but the constant and critical effort and work of organization.’⁴¹ Indeed, if, as Badiou suggests, we are living in 1848 – or maybe better in 1849 – how can political organization and discipline outside the party form realistically become the basis for the renaming of communism as a new name in politics? Well, it has to be said, with great difficulty. Thus the question of post-party organization as the new name of communism in politics is fraught with all the usual problems of prefiguration. A few riots and an aborted national (secular) democratic revolution in Egypt hardly amount to the rebirth of history. Yet Badiou’s compelling defence of the Tahrir occupation as the basis for an ‘organized politics, which will take responsibility for guarding genericity’,⁴² touches on

an important political distinction that is central to the fortunes of the communist idea and communization as process: namely, the necessary distinction between the industrial working class (in relative decline), the proletariat (growing globally) and the masses (the shifting, but productive and creative site of political alliances). For Badiou, it is always the ‘masses’ (as potentially the inclusive realm of communization) that is the crucial category here, for it is the masses as the generic site of the many-who-are-one-who-are-many that will provide the focus and leverage for a communization as process, what he calls ‘movement communism’.⁴³ ‘We must not be misled: it is “class” that is an analytical and descriptive concept, a “cold” concept and “masses” that is the concept with which the active principle of the riots [and Egyptian uprising], real change, is designated.’⁴⁴

In this sense there are echoes of Marx’s own thinking on communism here: communization is the name under which *all* might struggle, even though it is the global industrial working class (productive and non-productive) that will have a determinate say – in the final reckoning – on the outcome of this process. For it is workers who will decide where and when things start or stop. Indeed, communization theory would do well to remember the decisive importance of workers’ action in any realistic process of communization!⁴⁵ But workers, as the part with no part, have to be reassimilated as part of the masses, for it is the masses that are the source of political renewal and creativity as a set of public manifestations and struggles. This ‘movement communism’, then, certainly has a greater strategic reach and depth than exit-communism, or communism as idea. In this it points to the opening up of a new political sequence beyond the current disorganizational tinkering of the European and North American new Left.

Notes

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, ‘Le Guignon’/‘The Jinx’, in Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poésies/ The Poems in Verse*, trans. and notes by Peter Manson, Miami University Press, Oxford OH, 2012, p. 11:
Always in hope of arriving at the sea,
they voyaged without bread, or sticks, or urns,
biting the golden lemon of the bitter ideal.
2. Félix Guattari and Antonio Negri, *Communists Like Us*, with a ‘Postscript, 1990’, by Antonio Negri, trans. Michael Ryan, Semiotext(e), Foreign Agents Series, New York, 1990.
3. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, foreword by Christopher Fynsk, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simone Sawhney, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991.

4. Alain Badiou, 'The Reserved Offering', in *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, ed. and trans. with an introduction by Bruno Bosteels, Verso, London and New York, 2012, p. 81.
5. Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1967), trans. Sacha Rabinovitch, Athlone Press, London, 2000.
6. Alessandro Russo, 'Did the Cultural Revolution End Communism? Eight Remarks on Philosophy and Politics Today', in Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, eds, *The Idea of Communism*, Verso, London and New York, 2010, p. 190.
7. Alain Badiou, 'Against 'Political Philosophy'', in *Metapolitics* (1998), trans. with an introduction by Jason Barker, Verso, London and New York, p. 10.
8. Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, Verso, London and New York, 2012.
9. Bruno Bosteels, 'The Speculative Left', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 104, no. 4, 2005, pp. 751–67.
10. Alain Badiou, 'The Idea of Communism', in Douzinas and Žižek, *The Idea of Communism*, p. 13.
11. Negri, 'Postscript, 1990', p. 166.
12. Antonio Negri, 'Communism: Some Thoughts on the Concept and Practice', in Douzinas and Žižek, *The Idea of Communism*, p. 161.
13. Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial Labor', trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emery, <http://www.generation-online.org/cf/cimmateriallabor3.htm>; Carlo Vercellone, 'From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism', *Historical Materialism* 15, 2007, pp. 13–36; Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. Kristina Lebedeva and Jason Francis McGimsey, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2011; Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*, trans. with an introduction by Giuseppina Mecchia, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2011.
14. Alessandro Rosso, 'Did the Cultural Revolution End Communism? Eight Remarks on Philosophy and Politics Today', in Douzinas and Žižek, eds, *The Idea of Communism*, p. 192.
15. See John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, Pluto Press, London and New York, 2010.
16. See their journal, *Théorie Communiste* (1977–), and *SIC, International Journal for Communization* 1, 2011. For a recent sympathetic account of Théorie Communiste, see Nathan Brown, 'Althusser's Lesson, Rancière's Error and the Real Movement of History', *Radical Philosophy* 170, November/December 2011. For the political links between Théorie Communiste's exit-communism and post-party thinking in Italy in the early 1970s, see Jacques Camatte, *This World We Must Leave, and Other Essays*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1996.
17. For one of the best defences of an anti-teleological Marx, see Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, trans. Gregory Elliot, Verso, London and New York, 2002.
18. Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, pp. 156–7.
19. Théorie Communiste, 'Communization in the Present Tense', in Ben Noys, ed., *Communization and Its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, Autonomedia, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson, 2012, p. 46. See also Leon de Mattis, 'What Is Communisation?', *SIC, International Journal for Communisation* 1, 2011, pp. 11–28.
20. For a more nuanced analysis of this question, see Andrew Kliman, *The Failure of Capitalist Production: Underlying Causes of the Great Recession*, Pluto Press, London and New York, 2012.
21. Bruno Astarian, *Le Travail son Dépassement*, Editions Senonevero, Marseille, 2002.
22. Bruno Astarian, 'Where is Théorie Communiste Heading?', <http://anarchistnews.org/content/where-theorie-communiste-heading>, 2012.
23. Noys, 'The Fabric of Struggles', in Noys, ed., *Communization and its Discontents*, p. 14.
24. Alberto Toscano, 'Now and Never', in Noys, ed., *Communization and its Discontents*, p. 91.
25. It was imperative, for instance, that workers in St Petersburg and Moscow in 1917 recovered a sense of class security at the point of production as part of the revolutionary process. See Daniel H. Kaiser, ed., *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.
26. For a discussion of the new cultural form of the petty bourgeoisie under neoliberalism, see Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant-Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics*, Zero Books, Winchester and Washington DC, 2012.
27. Toscano, 'Now and Never', p. 99.
28. The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, trans. anonymous, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, 2009.
29. T.J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', *New Left Review* 74, March/April 2012, p. 72.
30. John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, Penguin, London, 2008, p. 272.
31. Ibid., p. 291.
32. Ibid., p. 267.
33. Clark, 'For a Left With No Future', p. 67.
34. Ibid., p. 67.
35. Bruno Bosteels, 'The Leftist Hypothesis: Communism in the Age of Terror', in Douzinas and Žižek, eds, *The Idea of Communism*, p. 53.
36. Álvaro García Linera, 'State Crisis and Popular Power', *New Left Review* 37, January–February, 2006, pp. 73–85.
37. Bosteels, 'The Leftist Hypothesis Communism in the Age of Terror', p. 53.
38. Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p. 78.
39. One exception to this rule is the brilliant essay on the British riots by Evan Calder Williams (a contributor to *Communization and Its Discontents*), available at Socialism and/or Barbarism, <http://socialismandorbarbarism.blogspot.co.uk>.
40. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, Verso, London and New York, 2012, p. 82.
41. Negri, 'Communism: Some Thoughts on the Concept and Practice', p. 158.
42. Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*, p. 79.
43. Ibid., p. 113.
44. Ibid., p. 91.
45. As Ralph Miliband says, in his unflinching autopsy of the 1973 coup in Chile, it was the lorry owners who largely broke the lines of support and communication after the election. See 'The Coup in Chile' (1973), in *Class Power and State Power: Political Essays*, Verso, London, 1983.

Images, pp. 10 and 14: installation photos, Sylvie Blocher, *The Series: Speeches*, 2012. Liverpool Biennial 2012.