

*"Finally, soon – bread and roses!"<sup>1</sup>*

## **A report on Althusser's *June Theses***

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The following text is a report on a manuscript which cannot be published. Written in the beginning of 1986 it is the last text Althusser himself has prepared for publication<sup>2</sup>. It has been produced in the concept of a delusive political project – Althusser had conceived to initiate an important founding conference for an international liberation initiative – originally to be known by the acronym MIL<sup>3</sup> then by the more modest CIL<sup>4</sup> – to be held in Paris in June 1986<sup>5</sup>, where the text of these theses should play a comparable role to Lenin's *April Theses*. It has been a difficult and in many ways embarrassing situation; and the text undoubtedly bears some marks of this. I therefore do accept the decision of Althusser's inheritors not to see this manuscript published as such. This will certainly be different in a distant future. As it does throw some light on the link between Althusser's notion of 'aleatory materialism' and his idea of radical politics, as well as on the backwards connection he established in his later days to his earlier philosophical interventions, I am convinced, however, that I owe this report on its contents to the present generation.

The text (13+1 pages of typoscript with ample spaces and with hand written corrections<sup>6</sup>) is articulated in 12 relatively short arguments. The presentation starts with Althusser's name as the author of the text, and ends with Althusser's signature (in typoscript). The argument starts by affirming that "the following observations will not be capable of constituting a 'Manifesto'" and finishes with the formula I have used for the title of this report.

The first, preliminary, thesis limits the scope of the text presented: In contradistinction to the situation, where "Marx has redacted the Communist Manifesto in order for calling the proletarians of all the world to unite", this "text could not have such an ambition" – for two reasons: First, "because it represents a modest individual enterprise, even if based on a long time of trials, experiences and reflections". Second, "because it is no more the time of comprehensive manifestoes. From now on, each people has to write its own manifesto, in function of the class-struggle it is being exposed to or it is carrying out." What Althusser promises his readers is no more than "some general observations which may be capable of aiding the coming to conscience ('prise de conscience') of those men who are engaged in the fight (who may need them)", as of those who are not, "but who are waiting for a *different politics* (who will certainly need it)".

The second thesis begins the argument: It characterizes the present "period of history" as "without precedent": Althusser pleads for the need to call it by its "real name" which "is

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<sup>1</sup> This is the last sentence of the manuscript of Althusser's *June theses*, on a line by itself and in the centre of that line, i.e. clearly lay-outed as a final call to conclude their presentation.

<sup>2</sup> „This text is published in order to be submitted to the criticism, the rectification and the improvement by all.” (p.1, end of the first thesis).

<sup>3</sup> =“Mouvement International de Libération“.

<sup>4</sup> =“Centre International de Libération ».

<sup>5</sup> I had to take a certain role in the ‚process of preparation‘ Althusser was then trying to launch – in effect, convincing him not to precipitate his initiative – , until another depressive phase made him incapable of pursuing it any further.

<sup>6</sup> The text is marked „Texte corrigé” in Althusser's hand, written just above his name as author of the text.

simple”: “We have entered, ... , by and large, the period of the human global revolution – that of the liberation of Humanity of the chains of many centuries: the slavery of economic exploitation, the tyranny of the state and the mystification of ideology”. And he adds: “this decisive period without precedent” has to be conceived as “irreversible, and certain of its success”. This is, according to Althusser, not a prophecy, nor is it a utopian statement, “but, as Marx has said, ‘communism as a real movement’, which can be objectively observed”. The “only ambition”, which Althusser pursues in this statement of fact<sup>7</sup>, “is to allow that the eyes which should still be closed to reality to open up to it and to recognize it for what it is.” This, according to this thesis, in nothing less, but “liberty almost in the reach of our hand,- and then fraternity and happiness on the entire Earth”.

Althusser concedes that we are still “only at the beginnings”. He adds, however, that these beginnings are bringing us irreversibly to move in this direction: “they commit ourselves with out any possibility of a way back”, even though, “things will not work just by themselves, without conflicts, some of which will be bloody, and without letting indelible traces for a long time”.

This initial second thesis that the moment of liberation has come, historically, for humanity, is then developed by Althusser “in an orderly fashion”<sup>8</sup> (T 2)<sup>9</sup>. Instead of embarking on a “concrete analysis of the concrete situation of a given country or of the entire world” (T 3) which sees as the “easier but less assured way”, he chooses the “more difficult but surer way” of an “examination and rectification of the theoretical tools we have at our disposal to carry out such an analysis”. This way is followed, however, in a peculiar way: *First*, in search for such “theoretical instruments” (T4), Althusser draws our attention to the “many interesting concepts to be borrowed from the bourgeois theory of society”. In a *second* move he relegates their examination to “another occasion”, concentrating on one common “weakness of these theoretical elements” which he finds in “their being rooted in a bad philosophy (fr. “philosophie mauvaise”), be it positivist, be it structuralist or systemic”. He then dismisses this problematic, too: “we do not have the time to lose time on this”, and then goes on to Marx, to whom “we owe some irreplaceable scientific concepts, like the concepts of mode of production, of commodity, of exchange, of consumption, of fixed and variable capital, of economic exploitation, of class and state dictatorship” (T5), as well as a panoramic perspective (“vue”) “on the revolutionary action of the masses, on the unavoidable future of communism etc. etc.”. These “scientific concepts” have their proper context in “what the Marxist tradition has designated by the name of historical materialism, as a corpus of concepts allowing for a concrete analysis of the concrete situation”.

Althusser then goes on to philosophy: “There is the idea in Marx, and above all in Engels, Lenin and Mao, that scientific concepts are only valid on the background of a right philosophy” (fr. “philosophie juste”), and that, ... , they may only be used on the basis of the correct orientation provided by such a right philosophy” (T6). In this long sixth thesis, Althusser first underlines that such a ‘right philosophy’ cannot be found in the “theoretical humanism of the young Marx, i.e. in the philosophical theory of feuerbachian alienation”, and underlines that “the theoretical antihumanism of Marx is the condition: 1/ of his scientific theory of the formations of society (fr. “formations sociales”). 2/ of the practical, fraternal humanism of communism.”<sup>10</sup> Marx, however, Althusser insists, never has even “tried to write

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<sup>7</sup> “I say the things as they are (evidently within the narrow limits of this analysis).“

<sup>8</sup> The French original contains a typing error which may be the effect of an *acte manqué*: “Mais procédons pas ordre”, instead of “par ordre”.

<sup>9</sup> Wherever the place of a quotation in the text is not clearly visible from its immediate context, I have indicated the thesis from which is taken, by T and a number.

<sup>10</sup> Althusser promises here that he will „one day“ explain why he has „scarcely be understood“ in this plea. That he has rarely formulated his thesis so clearly as he does here (cf. e.g. the “Amiens defence” of 1975, ###) may be

down this philosophy”: in the *German Ideology*<sup>11</sup> (which Althusser reads on the basis of Georges Labica’s – 19## – analysis) “Marx considers that philosophy is ideology only, and therefore illusory”. Later on “he has openly re-approached Hegel, in ‘reversing’ him (a rather vague concept, as I have said, and of a conservative nature)”. Basically, “Marx has never totally abandoned the idea that philosophy were a form of ideology” or the project of being a “positive scientist” (fr. “savant positif”), “in the great line of scientific physicists and darwinians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Althusser describes Marx’s usage of Hegel<sup>12</sup> with concepts which he borrows from Gaston Bachelard: Marx uses Hegel „at once, to support himself by certain concepts of Hegel and their movement (as a philosophical support) and to fight against them in their perverted forms (fr. „dans leur perversion“) (as an epistemological obstacle)”, only to add that in this respect for Marx “the obstacle has always been definitely stronger than the support” – and Marx has never been able to really “come to grips with Hegel”, especially with his own relation to his philosophy.

At this point Althusser turns to Joseph Dietzgen, whom he sees as “the man who has first grasped that Marxism needs a philosophy, its philosophy”. Dietzgen had already – “well before Heidegger and better than he did” – defined “philosophy as the ‘Holzweg der Holzwege’, the path of the paths which do not lead anywhere”, which Althusser recommends as a “summary, but right definition of materialism”. Engels has taken this up, “with and after Dietzgen”, and has – in his “struggle, as we have to recognise, with Dühring and ‘the circumstances’ – “baptised marxist materialism as dialectical materialism, the famous ‘diamat’ of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International tradition”.

Althusser reminds the reader that it is beyond any doubt that Marx has “a thousand times repeated that he was a materialist” – this “meant for him before everything else ‘not to tell stories to each other’ about the real, but to conceive of it without any foreign addition” (Engels). And he adds: “But *Marx has never pronounced the concept of dialectical materialism*<sup>13</sup>, that ‘yellow logarithm’, as he would have liked to say, this theoretical absurdity.” Althusser insists on the fact of Marx’s incapability “to write ‘twenty leaves on dialectics’” (which he qualifies as a “lucky incapacity” (fr. “bienheureuse impuissance”) the reasons of “one should like to understand”), has the final effect that “all we shall know from his side on dialectics (putting aside the ‘dialectical’ play of the concepts of the labour value theory) is contained in the beautiful statement that ‘the dialectics which have mostly served the established powers is also critical and revolutionary’”. In this statement Althusser finds “everything”: “Used in a positive way, when its ‘laws’ are enunciated (Engels, Stalin), dialectics are conservative, reactionary or apologetic (...). But used in a negative way, when it is not only critical but also revolutionary, dialectics should be appreciated (fr. “appreciable”). This implies, for Althusser, that any talk about “laws of dialectics”, quite like talking about “laws of history” is an absurdity.

What then could be such a purely negative dialectics? Althusser takes a turn here, “coming to the essence” (fr. “J’en viens à l’essentiel.”) and he states his central thesis: “The ‘true’ materialism is the aleatory materialism, inscribed in the line of Democritus, as Lenin had said it so well.” And he adds some specifications: “This materialism is not a philosophy that *has to be elaborated as a system* in order to merit the name of philosophy. This would not be an impossible luxury, but is not indispensable.” Rather it is defining itself by the position it

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seen as having some importance in this, alongside with structural ideological resistances against giving up the state centred idea of a ‘subject of history’.

<sup>11</sup> Which, in its known shape is largely a product of the editorial work of the First MEGA, as we now know, on the basis of a more extended and still less cohesive bundle of manuscripts, in which, alongside with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, also Moses Hess seems to have participated.

<sup>12</sup> The way in which Marx has been using Hegel is described by Althusser on the basis of the analysis of Jacques Bidet (19##).

<sup>13</sup> Underlined by hand in the typescript. Further passages underlined by hand will also be in Italics. The underlined words so far have been underlined using the typewriter.

occupies in the field of philosophy: “What is decisive in Marxism is that it represents a position in philosophy.” Because a philosophy is not constituted by its more or less systematic elaboration: “What makes a philosophy is not its discourse of proof (there is no real proof in philosophy, as the logicians do know since a long time), nor its discourse of legitimation.” Instead, “what is defining a philosophy is its position (thèse, thesis) in the philosophical field of struggle (the “Kampfplatz” of Kant) – for or against this or that existing philosophical position (a new position: Satz, Setzen, Thèse, thesis.)”.

Althusser’s following, seventh thesis spells out the “immense advantage” proper to “aleatory materialism” (T7) as a philosophical position: “First, it posits the primacy of materialism over everything else, the aleatory included, even though materialism and the aleatory are only one.” This is referred back to a distinction between “matter” and “materiality”: “materialism can be just matter, but not necessarily mere matter, “stark naked” matter. Instead of restricting itself to “the matter of the physicist or the chemist” or that of the “worker who works out of metal or earth”, aleatory materialism, by affirming the “primacy of materiality over everything else”, can extend to the “materiality of the experimental contraption” (fr. “dispositif”) or even to the “simple *trace* (Derrida), the materiality of the gesture which leaves a trace, not to be distinguished from the trace it left on cavern walls or on a sheet of paper”<sup>14</sup>, or with Derrida again, even to the materiality of a “speaking voice”<sup>15</sup>. In this extended sense, Althusser is then capable of affirming: “The primacy of materiality is universal” – and to distinguish this thesis from that of the “primacy of the infrastructure (falsely conceived as the sum total of material productive powers and of primary materials)”, which claim to universality is “absurd, when it is referring only to the productive forces, while these are subjected (fr. *soumisés*) to the relations of production”. In a passage in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx has written, “that depends” with regard to this relation, “when the question is whether the forms of logical priority are also logically prior”. “That depends”. An aleatory word, not a dialectical one.”

Althusser proposes to translate this: “Everything may be determining in the last instance, i.e. dominate.” He refers back to Marx as affirming changing dominances that “of politics in Athens, and of religion in Rome” and to himself and Balibar in *Reading Capital*, where they had “attempted to theorize” an “unspoken theory of the displacement of dominancy”. And he extends this very idea by interpreting also his ‘next step’ in theory: “But within the superstructure itself what is determining is also its materiality. This is why I have tried to show the *de facto* materiality of all superstructures and all ideologies (of ideas...) resinding in the ISA (Ideological State Apparatuses).” And Althusser adds a further methodological specification: “This is where we have to find ‘in the last instance’ (which is so very labile) the displacement of the materiality which is always determining ‘in the last instance’ in each and every concrete situation, and it is always true that ‘it depends’ – of the concrete configuration of forces, and, therefore, of their repartition under one dominancy.”

In Althusser’s argument, however, the “most important” (T 8) is still to come. He goes for it by giving an interpretation of Engels’s thesis that “Marxist materialism (we should say: the position ...) is not mechanicist, but dialectical”: “Engels wanted to say: Our materialism is not the materialism of a history that has been made (fr. “*histoire faite*”); not about the accomplished fact of history.” Such a history that has been made<sup>16</sup> is treated by “historians, ethnologists, sociologists etc.” who “apply such a materialism of the accomplished fact”, “in the face of customs and interdictions repeating themselves, and repeating themselves like

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<sup>14</sup> Probably, this is a mistake of redaction by Althusser himself: I think it should not be ‘from’ but rather ‘between’. This is not the wording of the text, however.

<sup>15</sup> This has been exemplified by Balibar (199#, ###) in talking about the grain of Althusser’s voice.

<sup>16</sup> Althusser refers here to the German words: „Historie ([...] =accomplished history, not history about to be made: Geschichte“.

[mere, FOW] things”, where it is therefore possible to formulate “laws, quite as those of physics, structural and statistical laws, determining and determinist laws”, so that it functions as “the matrix of the spontaneous ideology of the vulgar historians or sociologists, not to mention the economists... of the historical determinists.” Referring to the meaning of “dialectical in the sense of Engels and Stalin”, Althusser begins by stating that “dialectical materialism is able to foresee (fr. “peut prévoir”), if not predict (fr. “sinon prédire”) the laws of the history still to come, or simply their effects”, and goes on to focus on what he sees as the key problem: “– and why not enunciate the coming of<sup>17</sup> the monstrosity of scientific socialism”.

In a rhetorical preterition (“but this another affair”), in brackets, Althusser hints at Marx’s own implication in this development: it “reposes, [...], on the ideology of the possibility of a science of ‘political economy’ which Marx has believed in, in spite of his ‘critique’”.

Althusser’s main criticism against this tradition of historical determinism is then formulated on the basis of the idea of “bifurcation”<sup>18</sup>: “But this materialism of the masters always foresees everything wrongly (fr. “de travers”), because living history does only obey to one constant (which is not a law), the constant of class struggle [fr. “lutte de classes”, italics FOW].” Althusser goes on to refer his thesis back to Marx himself: “Marx has not used the term of constant (which I borrow from Lévi-Strauss), but a rather ingenious expression. He talked about a ‘*tendential law*’ and even about [another, FOW] tendential law which could *counter* [fr. “contrecarrer”] (not ‘contradict’ N.B.) the first tendential law.” And he goes on to explain: “In talking about a tendential law, Marx wanted to say that a tendency does not possess the figure of a linear law: but it may bifurcate [fr. “bifurquer”] under the effect of an encounter [fr. “rencontre”] (with another tendency) and so on, to the possible infinite [fr. “à l’infini possible].” This gives Althusser the cue for his own reinterpretation of dialectics: “The bifurcation is, therefore, the invariant (subjected to variations as all invariants) figure of what has been called dialectics [fr. “la dialectique”]. This allows him then, to bring in the aleatory at this central point: “At each and every crossroads, the tendency may take this or that unforeseeable path, because it is aleatory [fr. “telle voie imprévisible, car aléatoire”]. Therefore, according to Althusser, “the famous dialectics are nothing but the aleatory [fr. “la fameuse dialectique c’est l’aléatoire”] and the aleatory does not obey to any laws (except statistical ones, but with them we are in the night of the famous successful throwing of the dice on the background of the ‘law of the big numbers’).” What we have instead, is some invariant figures: “As a counterpart [fr. “en revanche”] the aleatory exhibits [fr. “comporte”] some invariant figures of tendencies<sup>19</sup> susceptible of variations in which they exist.”

Althusser adds here an aside on “Lord Popper” who has understood nothing” – “about history, about Marxism and about psychoanalysis”: “Because<sup>20</sup> these ‘objects’ are not forms of the *Historie* (of accomplished history) but of *Geschichte*<sup>21</sup>, of the living history which is being made in the night of aleatory tendencies and of the unconscious, history the forms of which are alien to the determinism of physical laws.”<sup>22</sup> Or, to resume Althusser’s position positively: “Certainly everything is determined, but what is done is aleatory [fr. ce qui se fait est aléatoire”], i.e. only to be determined after the act (in Freud’s admirable words), and also to be determined in the act itself [fr. “en acte”] (in life, in action) as an aleatory variant of an existing tendential invariant.”

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<sup>17</sup> Handwritten addition: fr. „l’avènement de“.

<sup>18</sup> Which Althusser has taken from the mathematics of the non-linear dynamics of complex systems developed in the 1950s and 1960s without indicating his specific sources.

<sup>19</sup> Handwritten addition: fr. „des tendances“.

<sup>20</sup> Typing error: „Cer“ instead of „Car“.

<sup>21</sup> Typing error: “Gechichte” instead of “Geschichte”.

<sup>22</sup> Althusser distinction between living history and accomplished history should not be mistaken for a relapse into a Bergsonian philosophy of life. On the contrary, it can help to sort out such confusions.

In historical retrospect Althusser sees his aleatory materialism as the “sharp point of materialisme since the beginning of the world [fr. “la pointe augüe du matérialisme vieux comme le monde”]”, and he adds that it is needed “to think the opening of the world to the event” [fr. “évènement”]<sup>23</sup>, quoting Wittgenstein as saying “the world is what happens [fr. “le monde c’est ce qui arrive”]”, linking this category of the event to “its unheard of imagination, and also to all living practice [fr. “toute pratique vivante”], in the first place to the practice of politics”.

After referring the reader to “a more technical exposition of philosophy as<sup>24</sup> the primitive matrix from which the different variants of one and the same invariant have originated [fr. “sont issues”] Althusser announces that “after we have now somewhat better secured our theoretical instruments [fr. “assuré nos instruments théoriques”] we can pass on to the concrete analysis of concrete situations”, for which he has “no pretention to be a specialist” calling on “the competent to criticize and to redress my errors without regard [fr. “sans égard”<sup>25</sup>].”

Althusser’s ninth thesis, then, “to go as quickly as possible, in the reduced space given to me” (T 9), is about the world market: “what is the situation of the world market today?” Althusser reminds us that Marx has never produced the theory of the world market he had announced “in his plans for Capital”, and that “Lenin and Mao have approached it in their theory of imperialism” and declares: “I inscribe myself in their material trace.”

He then goes on to resume the situation as it has existed in Marx’s time: “the world market has presented itself approximately as the following complex:

1. System of archaic production and not only in the colonies, but even in the industrialised countries (cf. p.ex. the Italian South)
2. System of capitalist/imperialist production
3. System of capitalist-colonial and interimperialist exchanges
4. System of communication between the different spheres of the world market.”

After stating that already in Marx’s time “the world system was on the path of imperialism and the primacy of financial operations” and after describing that “the world market has been dominated by Great Britain, closely followed by Germany, and, with some distance, by Russia, France and Japan, practising a “politics of the ‘corvette’” for appropriating the “remains of the colonial world”, Althusser comes to his central point: “What is important for us here is [the fact, FOW] that the world market had several centres, but only one dominant centre, to which the others were subordinated.” And that, since then, this old centre has been substituted by a new one: “during the years 25 to 75 the USA came to replace London and became the new dominant centre. There has therefore always been a centre and a dominant one.” The existence of “local economico-political units” and “subalternate economical centres” which were “under the old authority of political States in the service of ruling classes [fr. “classes dominantes”]” lead to “the proliferation of national and then inter-imperialist wars, until their highest point: the war of total destruction, as well of constant capital (of factories, of towns), as well as of variable capital (of the active populations, even far behind the front lines), of 39-45<sup>26</sup>”. Or to sum up: “Such is, then, the world, when we observe it from 25 to 75. A world market unified by the colonization, and equipped with a dominant economical, financial, stock exchange and political centre: Wall Street.”

This description of basic continuity of the world system serves as a background to Althusser’s sketch of a historical explanation of Stalinism which I shall quote in full: “During all of this period the USA have been the dominant centre of the world in all respects [fr. “sous

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<sup>23</sup> I cannot help but to think of Badiou here, whom Althusser has also approached in these days, cf. Badiou #####)

<sup>24</sup> deleted variant: „and“.

<sup>25</sup> Handwritten addition .

<sup>26</sup> Handwritten addition: „de 39-45.“

tous les rapports”]. But the war of Spain a strange phenomenon has occurred which has been very significant. Not only the constitution of the Axis (Berlin, Rome, Tokyo). But something we may, until Pearl-Harburg [sic, FOW], with some prudence call the ‘conflictual’ alliance between the USA and the Germany of Hitler. It is not, again, the USA who have fabricated a Stalin made-to-measure on their politics, but they have seized upon his existence and integrated it into their strategy.” Althusser the goes on to make explicit what is his thesis, which deems “essential for understanding why stalinism is so perennial, still today lively, in a good number of communist consciences”: “Stalinism has been the form which has been ‘found’ (and not premeditated), the proper *form of exploitation and bloody oppression to be imposed (and encouraged) by imperialism on the populations of the ‘socialist’ countries.*” Althusser compares this to “the same politics of bloody dictatorship which the USA have imposed for decades on the countries of Latin America, - which dictatorships have so well opened themselves to European Nazi criminals”.

Whereas his ninth thesis has underlined the continuities of the imperialist world system over the change from British to US rule, Althusser’s tenth thesis is highlighting a discontinuity: “Only since two years US imperialism has renounced its classical solution of bloody dictatorship, supported by murder and torture, in favour of the social-democratic solution on a world-wide scale.” Here Althusser refers us to “bourgeois historians and political scientists” who “have already well studied this matter and goes on to explain the new “figuration of the world market” since “2-3 years”. The “principal features” of which are the following “in my eyes”):

1. Each and every event is now global [fr. “mondial”]), irrespectively of being economical (the black work of South-East Asia, the clandestine immigrants in Europe, the stupefying development of steel exports etc. etc.), political or cultural<sup>27</sup>. The world has become one. Each<sup>28</sup> element has its repercussions at the other end of the world. Therefore information gains a new and revolutionary importance.
2. This world has no more any one dominant centre, but a plurality of centres between which the dominancy is displacing itself without any break. This can be seen in the fluctuations of the stock exchange, in the enormous American debt, in the unforeseeable sliding of the Dollar, now in free fall after a spectacular ascent. [... (Here, again, Althusser refers the reader to unnamed “excellent bourgeois monographies on these crucial questions.)]
3. In a large, majoritarian part of the world the industrialised countries, capitalist and socialist ones, including China etc., are *in a dominant position* – if not effectively [fr. “en acte”], at least virtually. And on the day, when the Chinese and French policy of a union of China, Europe, the USSR, and the Third World will have become no more a simple project but an effective force, the situation will change over [fr. “basculera”] definitively. I take note that in this ‘tacit alliance’, which is directed against the USA imperialists, there is no centre any more, no ruling country [fr. “pays dirigeant”]..
4. From now on, the world is an unforeseeable flux. If we want to forge an image for it, we have to go back to Heraclitus (we cannot bathe twice in the same river) or to Epicurus (primacy of the void over the atomic corpuscles). If we want to use an image which is closer to us, following Deleuze (a French philosopher of genius), we should no more represent the world in the manner of Descartes, as a hierarchised<sup>29</sup> tree, but as a horizontal<sup>30</sup> rhizome.”

<sup>27</sup> Handwritten addition: „politique ou culturel“.

<sup>28</sup> Typing error: fr. „Caque“ instead of „Chaque“.

<sup>29</sup> Typing error: fr. „hierrarchisé“.

<sup>30</sup> Handwritten addition: fr. „horizontal“

Althusser inserts drawings visualising the contrast between a ‘tree’ and a ‘rhizome’, and then goes on to go back to Marx, using his application of the Epicurean notion of the gods’ existence in the “interstices of the world” to the “world of slavery” – “in the same way commodity relations do exist in the interstices of the world of slavery” – for forging a new image for the relation between imperialism and communism: “I should say even that communist relations [fr. “rapports”] (communism being the end of relations of economical exploitation, the end of statist<sup>31</sup> domination and the end of ideological mystification) do exist effectively (fr. “en acte”) in the interstices of the imperialist world.” Althusser, then, takes another step: “I effectively do think that it is necessary now to reverse this figure. There do not exist nowadays, in a world which is in its majority communist or liberated, but interstices, numerous and very dangerous – I am speaking about imperialist interstices: the USA and their client states, South Africa, the incredible wars of the Middle-East, the Iran-Irak war, the uprisings in India, the very real menace of a war<sup>32</sup> of religion in Islam [sic, FOW] et Israel. I stop my enumeration here: not without having mentioned that US positions in South America are still very strong and full of dangers.” Althusser refers from these “simple observations” from his part to the necessity of their being “rectified and specified for each social formation by those comrades who struggle [fr. “militent”] for the liberation of their peoples”, but concludes already: “we cannot but state the impressive character of the relation of forces between the forces of communism and liberation on one side over<sup>33</sup> imperialism on the other side.” In order to “take conscience of this relation of forces and to act accordingly”.

Althusser’s eleventh thesis refers to the present state of “this world” (T11): After pointing to “the technological revolution we are living” which he characterizes as being “without precedent in history” - “if the peoples seize the occasion of this innovation without precedent, everything will be permitted and possible” – he paints a world which has lost its compass (fr. “débousolé”), i.e. “which has lost its traditional ‘values’ and with them any kind of a theoretical, political and economical centre”.

As a philosopher, Althusser takes his argument from the non-existence of “great thinkers of our time<sup>34</sup>”: “excepting the English philosophers of language (disciples of Wittgenstein and Austin), excepting Deleuze and above all Derrida in France, nobody has succeeded to make himself known (fr. “percer”).

What Althusser “simply wants to say”, as he tells us, is just “that this world, void of any assured and stable structure, extremely<sup>35</sup> depoliticized (an excellent sign: the politics ‘of the politicians’ is being rejected, but in the silent hope of a true politics), [...] offers itself by itself and is to be taken [fr. “il est à prendre”]”. Referring back to his own studies on the concept of “‘fortune’ (the good occasion)” in Machiavel, he offers his conclusion: “that fortune in its higher form is the void: the absence of obstacles”. He takes his distances from “the idea that there are no more obstacles today”. As he had reminded us in the beginning of this thesis – “the resistances to change are always bigger than we imagine” – there are those obstacles now “which we know and which are gigantic, and there also those we do not know and which will pop into our faces one day”. But Althusser insists on his diagnosis of a new historical situation: “But the relation of these obstacles to the rest of the world have changed from now on: they continue to subsist only in the (sometimes immense) interstices, but in a world that is encircling them.” Therefore he introduces a list of 8 bullet points by a rhetorical question: “Is it saying too much to say that the occasion is unique in history?”.

These bullet points are introduced to characterize this occasion. As they are very dense, I quote them in full (with some omissions only in the longer explanations added to some):

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<sup>31</sup> typing error: „ététique“.

<sup>32</sup> typing error: „geuerre“.

<sup>33</sup> Handwritten correction: „sur l’“ instead of „et“.

<sup>34</sup> Handwritten correction: „temps“ instead of „??“.

<sup>35</sup> typing error: „à l’extrême“.



- “1. The end of class struggle in the industrialised countries, capitalist as well as socialist).
2. The end of the social classes (I remind you of my thesis of the primacy of class struggle over the classes, expressed in my answer to John Lewis which the PCF considers to be a mere banality).
3. Capital: The displacement of class struggle from economics and politics towards the ideology. This is an event of capital importance, and it is necessary not to “miss” it. It is in the class struggle in ideology that the future of class struggle in general will be decided, and is already being decided. It is in this class-struggle that the slope will be decided upon which social democracy in the world will follow for the next ten years. [...] The general strategy will be the same: make social-democracy turn left : but there is no universal recipe for this. [...]
4. But all in all [fr. “dans l’ensemble”] in spite of enormous difficulties to be foreseen the movement is going in our sense: finally, through a number of trials, social democracy in the USA will take a left turn. [...] Everything makes us believe that they [sc. the USA] are already obliged to carry out a hard struggle in Europe in order to make their views triumph and that they will lose the game with the approaching defeat of Reagan, Thatcher [sic, FOW] etc. [handwritten addition]. This will be a chain phenomenon which which may seem irresistible. But it is always necessary to mistrust the ‘irresistible’. On the road, there are always unforeseen obstacles and turnarounds.
5. It is possible to advance that in a certain way a great number of the peoples of the Earth are already within communism or on an open road towards communism. I have already quoted some examples: Wherever neither economical exploitation, nor statist domination or the ideological mystification, there is communism. The only thing which is necessary is to unify all revolutionary movements and all alternative movements, as they are developing almost everywhere, looking for a strategy and for new practices.
6. To go any further, to dream of an international movement of liberation, would be falling into utopism [fr. “dans l’utopie”]. All that can really be conceived, is a *centre of ideological convergence for liberation and for liberty in the world*. A centre which would be an information centre, not a centre of leadership [fr. “de direction”]: a centre freely open to all active groups, where it would be possible to have exchanges of information. An international convergence for liberation (ICL) [fr. “convergence internationale pour la liberation (CIL)”]. [...]
7. For this purpose it will be necessary to follow Marx’s example. Marx said: the proletariat is camping in the margins of bourgeois society. And he has put it into the centre of the class struggles of the bourgeois society. What has Marx done? He has made the margin the centre. In its very form [fr. “formellement”] the problem is the same today. It is needed to make the margin the centre. But the margin is not unified, it is very divided , into multiple alternative groups, and the vast majority of young people, of the unemployed and of the poor are remaining outside of the consciousness about the need for union. [...] <sup>36</sup> Time is needed to act. Even more time is needed for understanding.
8. We need to know clearly [fr. “bien savoir”] that the essential task will now be decided upon *within ideological class struggle*, i.e. in relation to philosophy. Within philosophy before anything else. This may still be difficult to understand, but I’ll come back on it. And this is why (-and not for the trivial tactical reasons which have been leaping to the eyes at that time) I have always been saying since 1965: “Everything depends upon philosophy” [fr. “tout tient à la philosophie”], understand well=*all depends upon class struggle within philosophy*. A question of a situation of long-term extension? Evidently. <sup>37</sup>”

I have left out two arguments which go beyond these 8 bullet points, although they are part of point 7: An argument on the hope which may be carried by the youth, and an argument on the

<sup>36</sup> I’ll come back on the two developments omitted here later on.

<sup>37</sup> Hand-written addition: „Question de conjuncture de longue durée ? Évidemment.”

possible significance of “the renewal of religious sentiment in the world“. In the first argument Althusser describes a profound ambivalence of a young generation trying to live their liberty, expressing itself in immense gatherings at rock concerts, – an repudiating racism, fascism and all reactionary content, but living its liberty “everyone for himself only” (chacun pour soi). Althusser concludes “Therefore an immense hope that this youth = but prudence\_” [hand-written addition]. In the second argument, Althusser is also commenting on the ambivalence – between the “great promises” of “an ecumenicism put into march”, and the dangers of mystifying forms of religion, especially “the menace of a war of religion” between Islamic countries and Israel, and proposing “that more than ever encounters and dialogues must be opened, maybe before everything else in Israel and in Egypt”.

In his twelfth thesis, Althusser “is taking the example of France” in order to come to an end. Referring to the tendency of Mitterand to align himself with the foreign policy of China, of Chirac of implementing a politics of “less state”, a class struggle more and more put to rest in corporatist negotiations, and the strong resistance of media professionals as well as of French public opinion to submit to the ‘liberty’ of press tycoons, he sees the possibility that the “liberation” attempted by “our adversaries”, in the name of the “liberties” of the trusts and monopolies, “may lead us to the threshold of a liberty which the masses will know how to use, when the moment has come”. Althusser adds: “And this admirable youth movement, today taken by its fascination for sunlights [English in the original text, maybe ‘spotlights’, FOW] and the rhythms of rock, if it will overcome its ambivalence – and it all the reasons to do<sup>38</sup> this – what a hope should it not represent”. Althusser concludes his argument by posing a rhetorical question: “Seriously, have we ever know a comparable hope for liberation and liberty?”

In his final paragraph, before ending on the promise of bread and roses we have used for titling this report, Althusser announces that he returns to silence, confiding “in his comrades and in the men of good-will”, and asks vigilance and for trust – in “a last effort, before engaging ourselves in the final battle”.

Here I end my report on this manuscript which it is impossible to publish. I hope to have made clear that it is certainly dated, no doubt, but that its arguments are also illuminating – certainly on Althusser’s philosophy and politics, but maybe also on the times which have ended in the 1980s and on the new times which have begun in these very years. That the reader may judge for himself. I hope to have given him the elements he or she will need to judge for herself or for himself.

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<sup>38</sup> Typing error: fr. “pour le faure“ instead of „pour le faire“.