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Many of my friends abroad still have an image of France drawn from the most glorious episodes of our political and intellectual history: the great thinkers of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, the Revolution of 1792–94, the nineteenth-century insurrections of the workers and common people, the July days of 1830 and the Commune of 1871; I could also mention June 1848, the formation of the Popular Front in 1936 and the great contribution made to the International Brigades in Spain, the Resistance, the social legislation of the Liberation, the great philosophical and progressive movement from the 1950s to the '70s, May 1968 and its consequences ... The result of all this is that when a fact of similar kind (political, intellectual, or both) but with an unquestionably reactionary character happens in France, these friends are amazed and wonder what is going on. Each time I have to remind them that France is also a deeply conservative country, which responds to the revolutionary episodes in its history with long sequences of black reaction, and that those who have come to power in these painful sequences have never lacked the support of numerous and well-established
intellectual cliques. There is a second history of France, longer and more bound up with the structures of state than the insurrectionary history written by the broad masses. We can think of the Thermidoreans after 1794, shielding if not actually practising a white terror that claimed a far greater number of victims than the Terror of the great Jacobins; or the Restoration after 1815, with the ‘milliard’ in compensation paid to the émigrés and the revenge of the privileged of all kinds; the swindle that brought the Orleanist monarchy to power in 1830 with the slogan ‘enrich yourselves’ that became the national hymn; the interminable reign of Napoleon III and his bankers, which followed from the revolution of February 1848 and the massacre of the Paris workers in June the same year; the consensus around horrendous colonial expeditions, in particular the conquest of Algeria; the repression of the Commune by the Versaillais and their frenetic massacre; the nationalist butchery of 1914–18; right after the Popular Front we had Pétain, after the red years of 1966–76 we had Giscard d’Estaing. And each time, a whole court of service intellectuals praising the re-establishment of order and grizzling over the ‘horrors’ of the revolutionaries. Eulogists of the restored monarchy under Louis XVII I, lickspittles of the Second Empire, Versaillais pen-pushers drunk on the corpses of workers, high-spirited youngsters of the anti-Bolshevik legions, Pétainists and collaborators . . .

It should be no surprise, then, that in the wake of May 1968 and its consequences a band of impostors took the stage under the bizarre signboard of ‘new philosophy’, charged with presenting, yet again, the abominations of the revolutionaries, extolling capitalism, parliamentary ‘democracy’, the US Army and the West. This was just a continuation of the great invariants of our history: outbreaks of impressive popular hysteria, to be sure, but also rancid reactionary obsessions.

I try to show here how the election of Sarkozy is a concentrate of this second history of France, the history of dark and ruthless conservatism. This is why I have called its principle one of ‘transcendental Pétainism’, giving it a name with a bit of a historical echo. I also try to show how, against this ‘restoration in the restoration’, it is necessary to go back to the most general and essential principles, what I call the ‘communist hypothesis’, of which I offer an interpretation divided into periods. These are long-term perspectives, triggered by an episode that one might believe is relatively unimportant.

Do I then have to despair of my fellow citizens? As we know, carried away by the fearful vertigo of their total political disorientation, the electorate chose a character from whom they soon saw nothing good could be expected. It might well be, then, that at the end of the day ‘Sarkozy’ will denote the end of this gloomy and increasingly sinister reaction that began in the 1980s and has not stopped laying waste to our country, its substance as well as its intelligence. Let’s hope so.

My enemies – and there are a good number of these – afraid as they are that the hope will return that a different world is possible than the one that they serve, have insinuated that I am anti-Semitic: a trick they invented two or three years ago and use against anyone who displeases them. I am proud to be attacked by true professionals of this insinuation. ¹ Clearly, when I criticize the policy of the state

¹ Accusations of anti-Semitism on Badiou’s part were made after the publication of the texts in Circumstance 3 (Paris: Lignes Manifeste, 2005) (in English they are collected together in Polemico (London: Verso, 2006). One of the most egregious examples of this claim was made by Eric Marty in his book Une querelle avec Alain Badiou.
of Israel, which is the least of things, or when I show how some of them, ignominiously perched on the piles of dead of the Extermination, attempt to stick the name ‘Jew’ on the fate of the West and its master, the United States, thus stripping this word of its great revolutionary tradition and prostituting it in a way that is not only detestable but actually dangerous for those who claim it, I give these professionals grist for their mill. I repeat here, however, for those of these professionals whose language is English, that if I cross the path of one of them, being as I am a champion of direct action rather than legal process, they will receive the slap due to a stupid slanderer.

As far as the present book goes, you’d be hard-pressed to find anything on which to pin the infamous charge of anti-Semitism. Not a mention of ‘Jews’, not so much as a passing allusion? No problem! It takes more than a little difficulty like this to deter those sycophantic professional informers who’ll always find something to pounce on (even if they have to lie through their teeth). A certain character of admittedly limited intelligence, Monsieur Assouline, remarked on his blog - you’re either modern or you’re not - that I called those Socialists who joined the Sarkozy government ‘rats’ and christened Sarkozy himself the ‘Rat Man’. Anyone with even a modicum of education would immediately have grasped that I am referring here (not without a rhetorical subtlety they should surely commend) to the metaphor of rats leaving a sinking ship, to the legend of the Pied Piper who led the rats out of the city, and to Freud’s celebrated case of the Rat Man.2 Does Monsieur Assouline have any education? He knows well enough, at least, where he wants to end up. Since the last war and the Nazis, he proclaims (follow closely), no one has ever treated anyone at all as a rat. On the other hand, Sarkozy has certain Jewish ancestors. And so . . . You see? OK? You really do see?

The oddest thing is that the leader of these media intellectuals committed to Restoration, Bernard-Henri Lévy, should jump on the bandwagon without even citing his inglorious source. Thus we read in Le Monde:

In a recent book, The Meaning of Sarkozy [De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?], Alain Badiou used his just struggle against what he finds ‘disgusting’ to reintroduce into the political lexicon those zoological metaphors (‘rats’, ‘the Rat Man’) that Sartre unequivocally showed, in his preface to [Fanon’s] The Wretched of the Earth, always bear the mark of fascism.3

There we are! Pierre Vidal-Naquet, a man greatly missed, already showed, with his immense knowledge, how Bernard-Henri Lévy was also a professional of howlers and ignorance. And Sartre, throughout his essential essay The Communists and Peace, written in 1953–54, referred to anti-Communists as ‘rats’. He certainly did so with far more good humour than the way he himself was treated as a ‘typing hyena’, not by the fascists but by his Communist allies. The same Sartre uttered the famous sentence that ‘every anti-Communist is a swine’. So we see that, well after the war, animals were still used on all sides . . . I particularly like the Chinese usage to denote two apparent enemies who are really complicit with one another – as for Mao were

2 [Pierre Assouline is a writer and journalist who runs a popular blog called La République des Livres.]

the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and the United States under Kennedy, and I could say the same for my part of the Socialist Party and Sarkozy in matters of xenophobic and 'security' legislation. The Chinese then spoke of 'two badgers from the same hill'. I love this image, and used it in the present book with reference to a fact that my English readers will appreciate: during the election campaign, both Sarkozy and Ségolène Royal praised Tony Blair – Blair, *blaireau* [badger] ... translate it how you can! So I've added to 'zoological metaphors' the ignominy of a play on words.

I can only plead guilty and expose myself to Sarkozy's legislation on recidivism (legislation, let us say in passing, that is openly directed against ordinary people, and therefore abominable). I claim the right to use 'zoological metaphors' – I don't have a hang-up about them. It is characteristic of politics that there are enemies, even if capitalo-parliamentarism presses its domination to the point of trying to make us forget this. And why the hell, if there are real enemies, shouldn't I be allowed to insult them? To compare them with vultures, jackals, reptiles, even rats – not to mention hyenas, whether typing or otherwise? Not everyone can be compared with an eagle, like Bossuet, or a bull, like the Fourth Republic Prime Minister Joseph Laniel, even a fox, as Mitterrand regularly was. And now, ladies and gentlemen, a touch of humour. If Sélogène Royal makes me think of a painted goat, and Prime Minister Fillon a sleeping weasel, there's no need to hit the roof.

Enjoy your reading, whatever your favourite animal.

*París,*

*22 July 2008*

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1 Before the Election

We are now in the midst of an election campaign to appoint the president. How can I avoid speaking of it? A tricky one that ... Philosophy may resist the content of opinions, but that does not mean it can ignore their existence, especially when this becomes literally frenetic, as it has done in recent weeks.

I discussed voting in *Circonstances 1*, with regard to the presidential election of 2002. I emphasized on that occasion that little credence should be placed in such an irrational procedure, and analysed in terms of this concrete example the disastrous consequences of that parliamentary fetishism which in our society fills the place of 'democracy'. The role of collective affects could not, I said, be underestimated in this kind of circumstance, organized from one end to the other by the state, and relayed by its series of apparatuses - precisely those that Louis Althusser aptly named the

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1 This section more or less repeats the session of my monthly seminar at the École Normale Supérieure, in the context of the activities of the Centre International d'Etude de la Philosophie Française Contemporaine (CIEPFC), held on 4 April 2007.

'ideological state apparatuses': parties, of course, but also the civil service, trade unions, media of all kinds. These latter institutions, notably of course television, but more subtly the written press, are quite spectacular powers of unreason and ignorance. Their particular function is to spread the dominant affects. They played a good part in the 'Le Pen psychosis' of 2002, which, after the old Pétainist – a knackered old horse from a ruined stable – had passed the first round, threw masses of terrified young lycéens and right-minded intellectuals into the arms of Chirac, who, no longer himself in his heyday as far as political vigour was concerned, did not expect so much. With the cavalcade headed by Sarkozy, and the Socialist Party choosing as candidate a hazy bourgeois whose thinking, if it exists, is somewhat concealed, we reap the fatal consequence of this madness five years down the road.

This time round, the collective emotion that propels a kind of twitchy accountant into the limelight, mayor of a town where hereditary wealth is concentrated, and moreover visibly uncultured, could be called, as it was at the time of the French Revolution, la grande peur.

The elections to which the state summons us are in fact dominated by the contradictory entanglement of two kinds of fear.

There is first of all the fear I shall call essential, which marks the subjective situation of dominant and privileged people who sense that their privileges are conditional and under threat and that their domination is perhaps only provisional and already shaky. In France, a middle-sized power for which one cannot foresee any glorious future – unless it invents a politics that would reverse the country's insignificance and make it an emancipatory reference point for the planet – the negative affect is particularly violent and wretched. It translates into fear of foreigners, of workers, of the people, of youngsters from the bantiques, Muslims, black Africans . . . This fear, conservative and gloomy, creates the desire for a master who will protect you, even if only while oppressing and impoverishing you all the more. We are familiar today with the features of this master: Sarko, a jittery cop who sets the whole place on fire, and for whom media coups, friendly financiers and backstage graft make up the whole secret of politics. With this very miniature Napoleon, and faced with the internal perils made real by fear, the state ends up taking the one-sided form that Genet previously gave it in his play The Balcony, that of the police chief whose dream costume is a gigantic rubber penis. It is no paradox, then, if Sarkozy, a minuscule character in direct communication with the lowest form of opinion polls, hoisted himself up to the profound thought that paedophilia is a genetic defect, and he himself a born heterosexual. What better symbol of the unconscious fears whose mustiness is conveyed by the political spectacle than this paedophilia, which as we have seen for years, culminating with the Outreau trial, symbolizes, in our genuinely pornographic society, the buried desires that are not allowed to exist? And what worthier master to put an end to this accursed and abstract paedophilia, and at the same stroke to deal with all these foreigners and foreign ways, than a reinforced-concrete heterosexual? Celebrity politics is not my cup of tea, but I would place some hope here in the candidate's strange wife, this Cécilia who may

Opposed to this primitive fear, in electoral terms, is not, as it should be, a clear assertion that is different in principle from the variations on the policing theme. It is on the contrary another fear: the fear that the first fear provokes, by conjuring up a type of master, the jumpy cop, with whom the Socialist petty bourgeois is unfamiliar and doesn’t like. This is a second fear, a derivative fear, the content of which, we have to say, is indiscernible beyond the affect involved. At the level of their broad mass support, neither side, not the UMP rank-and-file nor the Socialist activists, have the least positive vision to counter the massive effect of unleashed capitalism. Neither asserts, against the external and internal division globalized capitalism provokes, that there is only one world. In particular, no alliance with the persecuted, with the inhabitants of the ‘other’ world, is proposed by the Socialist Party. It simply envisages harvesting the dubious benefits of the fear of fear.

For both electoral camps, indeed, the world does not exist. On such questions as Palestine, Iran, Afghanistan (where French troops are engaged), Lebanon (likewise), Africa (swarming with French military personnel), there is a total consensus, and no one envisages opening the least public discussion on these questions of war and peace. Nor is there any serious questioning of the villainous laws voted day after day against undocumented workers, youngsters from the poor districts and the incurably ill. Since fear is set against fear, the implication is that the only questions that really move people are of this kind: Should we be more afraid of the Tamil street-sweeper or of the cop harassing him? Or is global warming more or less of a peril than the arrival of Malian cooks? This is the way of the electoral circus.

The subjective index of this omnipresent affective negativity is the cleavage of the electoral subject. Everything in fact leads us to expect a massive vote, to the point that even their own friends seek to intimidate those who, like me, have the firm intention not to take part in this crooked summons from the state. The vote thus operates almost like a form of superego. The polls, however, indicate massive indecision right up to the last minute. In other words, this probably massive vote, which people even experience as compulsory, carries no conviction beyond the affects involved. One may well believe that to decide between fear, and fear of fear, is a delicate undertaking.

Let us assume that politics is what I think it is, which can be summed up in the following definition: organized collective action, following certain principles, and aiming to develop in reality the consequences of a new possibility repressed by the dominant state of affairs. Then we have to conclude that the vote to which we are summoned is an essentially apolitical practice. It is subject in fact to the non-principle of affect. Hence the cleavage between a formal imperative and an unconquerable hesitancy about any possible affirmative convictions. It is good to vote, to give form to my fears, but it is hard to believe that what I vote for is right. What is lacking in the vote is nothing less than the real.

Concerning the real, it will be said that the second fear, which we can call opposition, is still further removed from this than the original fear, which we can call reaction. For people react, if in a terrorized, incriminating or even criminal fashion, to some effective situation. Whereas the opposition
simply fears the amplitude of this reaction, and is thus one notch further from anything that effectively exists.

These elections are a confused crystallization of the fact that the negativity of the Left, or of opposition, has the notable weakness of being in a confused sharing of the real along with what it opposes. For the real by which this Left sustains itself, at a great distance, is simply that which creates the original fear, that fear whose dreaded effects are the whole content of the opposition.

Too devoid of the real, or sharing in the reality of its supposed adversary, the second or Socialist fear can only fix its sights on the vague, the uncertain, a haziness of language with no mooring in the world. This is Ségolène Royal. She is the imaginary propensity in which the lack of anything real is articulated, the second fear as empty exaltation. She is nothingness as the subjective pole of the fears organized by the election ritual.

I shall propose a theorem: every chain of fears leads to nothingness, and voting is the operation of this. If this is not a political operation, as I maintain, what is its nature? Well, voting is a state operation. And it is only by assuming that politics and the state are identical that voting can be conceived as a political procedure. 4

I spoke just now of the electoral cleavage: voting is on a mass scale and experienced as an imperative, whereas political or ideological conviction is floating or even nonexistent. This cleavage is interesting and positive to the extent that it unconsciously signifies the distance between politics and state. In the case that we are concerned with here, for want of any genuine politics, there is an incorporation of fear into the state, as the substratum of its own independence. Fear serves to validate the state. The electoral operation incorporates fear, and the fear of fear, into the state, with the result that a mass subjective element comes to validate the state. We can say that, after this election, the winner – very likely Sarkozy – will have become the legitimate head of state by feathering his nest with fear. He will then have his hands free, because once the state has been occupied by fear, it can freely create fear.

The final dialectic is that of fear and terror. A state legitimized by fear is virtually fit to become terroristic.

Is there a contemporary terrorism, a democratic terror? This is quite rampant at the present time. Democratic forms are being found for a state terror at the level of contemporary technology: radar, photos, Internet controls, systematic bugging of all telephones, mapping of people’s movements . . . The perspective of the state that we face is one of virtual terror, its key mechanism being surveillance, and increasingly also informing.

Should we speak, like our Deleuzian friends, of a ‘society of control’ essentially different from a ‘society of sovereignty’? I do not think so. Control will change into pure and simple state terrorism as soon as circumstances turn at all serious. Already, suspects are sent to be tortured by less considerate ‘friends’. We shall end up doing this at home. Fear never has any other future than terror, in the most ordinarily established sense.

I shall make a digression here. Philosophers know better than others, when they really do their work, that the world

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4 For three decades, Sylvain Lazarus has drawn the consequences of his most powerful axiom: that a politics of emancipation (which he calls, for technical reasons, ‘politics in interiority’) can only be conceived on the basis of a clearly made separation between politics and the state. This amounts, in the political process itself, to organizing, thinking and acting at a remove from the state. His major work, Anthropologie du nom (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996), has to be read.
of men and women, individuals and societies, is always less novel than the inhabitants of this world imagine. And technology, which is presented as the ultimate meaning and novelty of our future, whether glorious or catastrophic, almost always remains in the service of the most antique procedures. From this point of view, the convinced 'modern' who sees progress everywhere that capitalism deploys its machinery, and the semi-religious ecologist who clings, against productive artifice, to the fantasy of a benign nature, share an identical stupidity.

To return to our fears. What is the reason for this fearful tension that promises us an excruciating series of turns of the screw on the part of the state? It is that the truth of the situation is war. Bush, whose words it would be prudent to take literally rather than mock, envisioned 'very long war' against terrorism. And, indeed, the West is increasingly engaged on a number of fronts. The mere preservation of the existing order is warfare, as this order is pathological. The gigantic disparity, the duality of rich and poor worlds, is maintained by force. War is the global perspective of democracy. Our governments try to make people believe that war is elsewhere, and that war is waged for their protection. But this war has no fixed location, it cannot be readily contained in space. The West wants to prevent the appearance, anywhere, of what it really fears: a pole of power heterogeneous to its domination, a 'rogue state' as Bush puts it, which would have the means to measure up to the triumphant 'democracies' of today, without in any way sharing their vision of the world, and would not be prepared to sit down with them to share the delights of the world market and electoral numbers. The West will not prevail, it can only delay this event by increasingly savage external war and internal terrorism. For there are rogues at home, too, alas! Those whom a Socialist minister called 'little savages', and whom Sarkozy treats as 'scum' [racaille]. A future alliance between rogue states abroad and rogues at home – that's really something to fear! We have here the possible political profile for the creation of a grande peur.

The key point is that there is a dialectic of fear and war. We make war abroad, our governments say, to protect ourselves from war at home. We go and hunt out terrorists in Afghanistan or Chechnya who would otherwise arrive en masse in our own countries and organize here the 'scum' and the 'little savages'. And, in this way, they create fully formed, among the people of the privileged countries, the fear of war, internal and external, since war is at the same time there (far away) and not there (in our midst), in a problematic liaison of the local and the global.

What must be borne in mind is that this question has a particular history in France. The typical name of this alliance between war and fear, in our country, is 'Pétainism'. The mass idea of Pétainism, what made for its momentary but very widespread success between 1940 and 1944, was that, after the trials of the 'phony war', Pétain would protect the French people from the most disastrous effects of the world war – permit them to remain at a distance. The fear generated in 1914–18 created the fear necessary for Pétainism in 1940. It was Pétain who said that we should be more afraid of war than of defeat. It is better to live, or at least survive, than to make trouble. The French overwhelmingly accepted

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5 [Reference to Jean-Pierre Chevènement, then minister of the interior in the Jospin government, who referred in a notorious statement in January 1999 on television to young criminals as 'sauvageons'.]