

IT IS NOW-ALWAYS 1984

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Paul-André Dagon, *Contribution à la critique de l'idéologie américaine*, La Nature de la Chose, Montréal, 1981, pp. 130.

The implacable criticism of everything that exists would, Marx vowed, produce for the world a consciousness that was missing from its ownership of the dream of a thing that has already long been.¹ In this light, Marxism is less the science of history, the method of historical materialism, the technique of revolution or any other of its signifiers than it is a science of bitching.

Like all sciences, bitching opens onto a continent of knowledge. Like all continents, this one possesses not only a topography but also its explorers and discoverers. Like all continents, it is multiple and temporal, with its old worlds and its new. And as Hegel predicted, the new world would see the reign of the extreme unleashing of fabulations of all kinds.² Has critical criticism, never implacable enough, thus succumbed to delirium in the face of everything that exists?

As a delirium whose supposed object is historical, Marxism has been accordingly tongue-tied by its inability to properly address the history of itself (assuming that there is such a *thing* as Marxism unless *it* be the Marxian dream that never gets realized). This handicap has been a considerable limitation in discounting suspicions that Marxism may itself be an ideology, and one should distinguish between suspicions inherent to Marxism (ontic phenomena that produce a universe best characterized as "concentrationnaire")³ and those extrinsic to it (mainly the suspicion of being what I have elsewhere called a power system)⁴.

For the purposes of this review, one can focus on some of these suspicions *inherent* to Marxism. Outside the charmed circle of militancy, it was M. Merleau-Ponty who first touched upon the dialectic of Marxism and terror, though the times were still terroristic enough to force him to entitle this relationship, with all the innocent irony of the ideological, "humanism" and terror.⁵ Not for nothing, then, does terror (as the critique of terrorism)⁶ deeply inform Paul-André Dagon's *Contribution à la critique de l'idéologie américaine*.

Terror is of the world; as part of "everything that exists" terror is the world and speaks the language (and logic) of that world. Terrorism (or the science of bitching, critical criticism raised to the power of criticism by the weapon) thus becomes a discourse that is interchangeable with the world as it articulates itself. Terrorism is a discourse that is eminently recuperable by the world since it speaks the same language. Terrorism, finally, speaks the worldly language of

recuperation (through interlocutors like the police etc. on the one hand, "revolutionaries" on the other) since its object is the reproduction of the terror of this world; ie, power over others in the dialectic of "L'Etat c'est les autres."

In opposition to this, Dagon (as the interpreter of the text of the revolution as the end of pre-history) articulates the *new* world: "la tendance la plus radicale du 'mouvement réel', celle qui ne veut pas 'le pouvoir' mais 'le monde' " (p. 36). The movement of the real that destroys the existing order, no longer on the basis of the old marxo-lenino-stalino- etc. order, but on the basis of the new world. The new is thus new in being both i) as old as the world (p. 40) and ii) the dream of a thing that has already long been. The new world is the New World; *it* is and its name is *echt* America.

And so it becomes directly pertinent that Dagon is Québécois, writing from within the context that is the continuity of Quebec (New France) in the new-old/old-new world and interrogating a so-called revolutionary ideology that has been part of the Quebec spectacle since 1970, or more exactly that arose in the wake of the 1968 moment of the new world revolution.

And just as May '68 "happened" in France, and was later hailed by Marxist theoreticians as an event of epochal revolutionary significance,⁷ so too Quebec—weak link in the imperialist chain of "fortress America" (p. 31)—"experienced" its *Oktyabr* in the FLQ crisis of autumn 1970. Something akin to a "revolutionary" seizure of power — at least a "provisional" government—flashed across the TV screens, and was happening/happened/might have happened/never happened in time and place here within the pasteurized hinterlands of capitalist domination. History, offering a fragmentary glimpse of its Significance, flashed the diamond ring on its little finger, and the skies were torn asunder by the dawn of revelation.⁸

(The importance of this, especially in a society of the spectacle, that is, one from which History has been eliminated electronically, and therefore upon the consciousness of Quebecers [or Canadians who are even more ideologically dominated] saturated with the image of the American contemplation of its own self-consciousness, is immense. In a psychological framework as mythologically-over-determined as Marxism which believes itself to be a reading of history, such an impact *could* have staggering consequences. The American left could keep "its" Watts or Weathermen, terrorist operations easily contained by the traffic police: in Quebec, whiteniggerdom but with a memory of its own imperialism, History is on the march!)

Some years have passed, from the "spectacular" act of 1970, to René Lévesque's arrival to power, to the present "general crisis". It is now-always 1984⁹, says Dagon, the writer of text, arriving *post-* or *ante-festum* on the scene, and surveying the nature of things with the biliousness that comes from a surfeit of History. So a decade of practice (in its local, groupuscular, syndicalist and secret police forms¹⁰) is there to be copiously crapped upon. Critical criticism is loosed: there is an unleashing of fabulations of all kinds. But, as Marx said with cheerful resignation when he abandoned *The German Ideology* to the mice, at least the main objective of some clarification has been achieved. Writes Dagon:

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Au lieu de courir après toutes les modes révolutionnantes... Marx et Engels se sont attachés à lutter de toutes leurs forces contre le "communisme vulgaire"; de même, il faut aujourd'hui se battre contre le marxisme et l'égalitarisme vulgaires. Tout comme le marxisme vulgaire (qui n'est rien d'autre qu'une survivance du communisme vulgaire via l'école kautskyste-léninienne) a été la planche du salut du capitalisme, l'égalitarisme vulgaire s'apprête à prendre la relève du "friendly fascism" pour assurer la continuité du règne de la séparation où le désespoir de chacun est la clé de l'oppression de tous.¹¹

Why—one must ask since Dagon only dances in the shadow of the question—is there such a preoccupation in Marxism with vulgarity? What is this suspicion of lowly origin that predominates in so much Marxist theory? Could it not be the *terror* of a theory that is afraid to reflect (think) itself for fear of seeing there something frightening? Or has the time still not yet come for Marxism to bear the burden of its own failures, beginning with its inability to read History (or Lenin or *Capital*)? At least Dagon (p. 34) comes close to being able to admit that 'objectively' and historically old-world Marxism *is* terrorism.

And once that terrible step 'beyond good and evil' is taken, Dagon has the courage to make the attempt to carry on:

"La force motrice de l'histoire moderne, c'est la révolte du prolétariat", c'est ainsi que Raya Dunayevskaya entendait "résumer" Marx....on voit facilement le clin d'oeil de la vérité, à savoir que le force motrice de l'histoire *bourgeoise*, c'est le prolétariat et sa révolte. La bourgeoisie n'est pas seulement "la classe révolutionnaire par excellence" qui "ne peut exister sans révolutionner constamment les instruments de production", mais bien plutôt la seule classe révolutionnaire, c'est-à-dire la seule classe qui peut prendre le pouvoir à l'occasion d'une révolution ET LE GARDER, l'exercer *en tant que classe* (l'ambition de la bourgeoisie est d'ailleurs d'être "la seule classe"...la survie de son pouvoir est toujours plus essentiellement liée à sa capacité de se *représenter* comme classe unique, "planétaire", solidaire...).¹²

Faced with the "planetary" domination of this one *self-conscious* class

Le lot des travailleurs révolutionnaires n'est pas tant de n'avoir

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"ni dieu ni maître", que de n'avoir aucun recours, aucun abri, aucun refuge; ni "leur classe" (qui, vouée au rôle de "force motrice", ne saurait se "constituer en classe") ni—encore moins—l'éventuel exercice d'un éventuel" pouvoir de classe du prolétariat"...ni rien d'autre, sauf "la critique impitoyable de tout ce qui existe". En même temps qu' "avec le capitalisme s'achève la préhistoire de la société humaine", notre époque, à défaut d'autre chose, aura au moins vu s'achever le temps de la préhistoire de la révolution...faite par des révolutionnaires....¹³

Yet in the utter darkness of the old world, the illumination cast by the new is incandescent, not only in shining light into the shadows but more so because of the nature of its *own* reflection. Thus

le prolétariat d'Amérique du Nord, du fait même qu'il est employé, c'est-à-dire exploité, aux points les plus cruciaux de l'accumulation du capital, de la marchandise et du spectacle, est *la clé de voute de la libération mondiale*...parce que...son programme révolutionnaire ne peut que porter sur la *totalité* de la vie.¹⁴

Located in the new world, the North-American proletariat (or as Dagon says more directly "the salaried slaves") *is* the New World and the *new* world-revolution, poised on the edge of the dream that has already long been and is about to become Historical Truth. In other words, a *logos* of recuperation (anti-terror, anti-world) whereby the new world articulates the annihilation of the old:

...une nouvelle Internationale de la révolte se dresse qui, achevant de balbutier dans le langage qui lui avait été confisqué par le vieux monde, écrit maintenant sa propre théorie et sa propre histoire...qui sera..."le coup du monde".¹⁵

Thus, from 1970-'1984', the ellipse from Revelation to Affirmation. For Dagon's contribution is affirmative; the myth is reaffirmed and it is Year Zero. The historio-theology of critical criticism triumphs over the delirium of everything that exists. History *is*, and all is well.

Yet in a science of bitching, there is no affirmation, only critique,¹⁶ the sacrifice, as Nietzsche noted, of everything to and/or including "future blessedness and justice."¹⁷ But in the presence of the nothing is preserved a relic of Marxism's philosophical genealogy: the eternal dawn of speculation

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shimmering with questions.

Despite its taint of affirmation, Dagon's pamphlet is one of a growing breed.¹⁸ It is no more than it claims to be: a *contribution* to the critique of American ideology; that is, both the dominant ideology in its death pangs, and the ideology of a North-American Marxism in its birth pangs. But the latter, odd-looking bastard though it may be, is at least alive, or *says* it is.

What if this were so then, and the imperial bastions were at last on the verge of crumbling even if only in the realm of theory? What if the dream of a thing that has already long been is nigh, here in the New World, in the uncertainty between sleep and wakefulness of what Nietzsche called dreamy times? Would it be the *echt* American Dream or the extreme unleashing of fabrications of all kinds?

Would one then be able to say "Hic Rhodus, hic salta", or would one prefer the more vulgar Ramones' (new) version of that (old) tune: "Do you do you do you wanna dance?"

Montréal

Notes

1. Marx, letter to Ruge, September 1843, quoted in Dagon, p. 1.
2. *Reason in History*, quoted in Dagon, frontispiece. See also Tom Darby, "Nihilism, Politics and Technology," *CJPST*, V. 3, Fall, 1981, p. 57.
3. See George Lichtheim, "Sartre, Marxism and History," in *Collected Essays*, New York, 1973, pp. 382 ff.
4. In *Discourse of the Old Mole*, unpublished MSS., Ch. X.
5. *Humanisme et terreur*, Paris, 1947.
6. Dagon, p. 15: "La dénonciation et la critique du terrorisme, ainsi que la lutte contre sa "logique" constituent une élément essentiel de l'offensive que les travailleurs révolutionnaires de notre époque doivent mener...."
7. Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London, 1979, p. 95: "For the first time in nearly 50 years, a massive revolutionary upsurge occurred within advanced capitalism...."
8. Cf. two remarks made by Hegel that seem to the point here: his celebrated "Never since the sun had stood in the firmament..." contrasted to his own, far drier "By the little which can thus satisfy the needs of the human spirit we can measure the extent of its loss", in Preface to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, New York, 1967, p. 73.
9. Dagon, p. 99.
10. Dagon who appears to have studied, not terribly well, at the Raoul Vaneigem school of name-calling, expends tremendous energy in the main body of his text (pp. 1-92) hurling insults at individuals and organizations. The insults are generally of an *ad hominem* or scatological kind.

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Fortunately, in the notes (pp. 95-120), this lets up enough for Dagon to demonstrate that he has indeed thought a bit about some of the points he is attempting to make; to such a degree, in fact, that something resembling beauty even emerges, as in his aesthetic of suicide, pp. 95-96. One of the reasons for this dichotomy can be laid at the feet of the intensely *provincial* character of Quebec society as a whole.

11. Dagon, pp. 91-92.
 12. *ibid.*, pp. 90-91, Dagon's emphasis.
 13. *ibid.*, p. 91.
 14. *ibid.*, p. 69, emphasis added.
 15. *ibid.*, pp. 78-79.
 16. On some of the origins of the terror of affirmation, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, Boston, 1973, p. 56. Almost everything remains to be said on the rich topic of being and time in Marxism, and Walter Benjamin said most of it in his description of Messianic time as "the straight gate through which the Messiah might enter." In "Theses on the Philosophy of History", XVIII B, *Illuminations*, New York, 1969, p. 264.
 17. *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chicago, 1955, p. 61, emphasis added.
 18. See, for purposes of invidious comparison, the manifesto, "Pour un Québec socialiste", Montreal, in this issue of *CJPST*.
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