

Too Close, Still Missing

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Almost half a century. That's a very long time. When does one ever have the opportunity to revisit, rethink, and re-discuss things said and done almost fifty years ago? It's a privilege. Releasing this distant interview is an emotional experience. For two reasons, I say, precisely to imitate Badiou's style, who often punctuates his words with numerals. The first is that, despite all the time that has passed, this interview still doesn't seem distant to me at all. On the contrary, it's almost too close. The second is that it still seems lacking, affected by that same sense of loss that made this interview so long, driven by the desire to never stop asking, as if the true object of our discussion remained elusive. Let me explain. Why too close? Because, in my opinion, the fundamental questions still remain more or less the same. That is to say, in the most general terms possible: how can we be there, how can we count; how can we assert ourselves alongside all those who usually aren't there, don't count, are worthless? How then can we be there, count, assert ourselves, not by blending in with our peers without recognized qualities and following them in revolts or transgressive behaviour, but by trying to reduce the differences in power over others? It is precisely around such questions that all the endless controversies on Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism revolved in the interview. Nor was anything else at stake in all the discussions surrounding the then, and to some extent still to this day, highly renowned French intellectuals, of whom the interview always reports. Not being by vocation a philosopher or an intellectual, particularly well-versed in any field of knowledge, my aspiration at the time was in fact none other than to be a militant communist, so to speak, up-to-date. That is, inspired above all by the little or much I knew about the Cultural Revolution in China, in particular, the attempts pursued there to revive what had been one of the clearest, greatest, and most difficult objectives to emerge from Marx's work: attempting, above all, to reduce the differences between intellectual and manual labour. My experience in this regard in Italy had been both exhilarating and disappointing. I had conducted it within one of the many fragments of the PCI (m-l), a small party founded in 1966 and nevertheless recognized by China, where our leader had even met Mao himself. An exhilarating experience, because I had experienced the passions and stimuli of militant activity in a collective that was certainly political but disinterested. A disappointing experience, because the intellectual poverty of its leaders forced it into sterile dogmatic exercises aimed solely at pleasing what was supposedly pleasing to the Chinese parent company. As this experience was winding down, Maoist France had begun to seem like an El Dorado to me. A country then at the centre of global high culture, a country then heir to that position of excellence in knowledge and thought that Germany had held before the Nazi devastation, a country whose most famous universities had given rise to such a fascinating phenomenon as structuralism, a country whose intellectual peaks were largely seduced by Maoism: what more could

one ask for? Thus, my encounter with Badiou in the mid-1970s was a kind of love at first sight, crowning my enthusiasm for what I believed was truly revolutionary in France at the time. Meanwhile, I met Alessandro Russo during a meeting commemorating Mao's death, organized by the extra-parliamentary Italian Workers' Movement for Socialism. We were offered to edit a series for a publishing house that went bankrupt shortly afterward. Before that, our primary intention was to translate and publish a text by Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction*, which was to be preceded by the interview proposed here. From a political perspective, there were no disagreements among the three participants. By then, we knew what we no longer lacked: the party. What we lacked, above all, was a precise indication of what could replace it and how. The search, therefore focused primarily on which political organization to adopt. "Political organization" was the name given to itself by a group of comrades that Badiou later led and that I personally followed for years. Like every other collective body not subservient to capital, however, it ended up dissolving. And for some time now.

The interest of the interview published here lies in its occurrence at the end of the 1970s, when the irreversible dissolution of all the revolutionary experiments attempted during the decade surrounding 1968 began to emerge. This dissolution also led to the decline of France itself as a country of global cultural excellence. With the rise of neoliberal ideology, the intellectual devitalization emanating from the United States left no escape route. Technique and technology seemed to have become the only topics worth discussing in depth. This was also in keeping with the impending world war, the most likely outcome of which is anticipated by the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Long before this abysmal scenario began to unfold, Badiou dedicated himself to building an immense philosophical system aimed at understanding and revitalizing political research within a set of experiences he called "procedures of truth", including art, science, and love. And it gives me great satisfaction to have remained faithful to this path, even while reinterpreting it in my own way. The question still remains: what was missing from this journey, and what is still missing from it? The answer for me would be the same: political activism. The conditional tense is obviously necessary, however, given that there is no way, either in Italy or elsewhere, to satisfy this desire. Even less, it can be satisfied through philosophy, as one might ultimately deduce from Badiou's intellectual journey.

Why not consider instead that a necessary condition for political engagement, never truly reworked since the explosion of '68, is ideology? Why not reconsider, for the umpteenth time, what Lenin said as early as 1902: that to combat the ideology of capitalism, a new ideology is needed? Why not acquire the entire vast anti-ideological literature, to which Badiou himself contributed in his youth, and try to think positively

about a new ideology instead? Why couldn't its goal be to promote the need for experiences that finally reduce the differences between manual and intellectual labor? Examples of this kind abound. The extraordinary, incredibly tenacious struggle of the GKN factory workers in Campi Bizenio, on the outskirts of Florence, demonstrates this. However, it lacks a supporting ideology. It is to theorize something of this kind that I am working. Always striving to continue the path whose beginnings this interview chronicled back in 1978.