

Gregg Lambert, Syracuse U.S.A.

An Old Question Raised Again: “Is War merely the Continuation of Politics?”

Commented [GL1]: Slide One PPP Header

## Introduction

As I describe in the abstract I sent to Petr Kouba, this talk is part of a longer theoretical study associated with the practical initiatives of the third phase of “[The Perpetual Peace Project ~ 2022](#),” which I am co-curating with Adam Nocek (Director of the Center for Philosophical Technologies at ASU), which will include the first international conference [slide] that will take place next fall at Usti, which is being organized by my colleague Michaela Fisorova. The more theoretical study will appear as vol. 2 of my previous work, [slide] “Philosophy After Friendship: Deleuze’s Conceptual Personae,” and addresses what could be called the deconstruction of the Westphalian peace as one of the most important factors in understanding the return of the question of “the Balance of Europe” in response to the war in Ukraine today. The second part of my study from which today’s talk is drawn from this work and concerns what I am calling the conceptual persona of the “partisan philosopher.”

Commented [GL2]: Slide Two Asti

Commented [GL3]: Slide Three Cover

In his 1962 lecture “Theory of the Partisan,” Carl Schmitt invoked this history in describing the legal code of international law that was established to make possible a limited or “bracketed war” on the European continent, thereby protecting the boundaries between the temporal states of war and peace, and providing the juridical and diplomatic terms to distinguish between a “just or legal war” between existing nation-states and an indefinite or unlimited civil or partisan warfare, especially in the context of the various imperial, neo-colonial, and nationalist

revolutions in North Africa, Southeast Asia, India and Pakistan, and especially Cuba and Latin-America. It is around the appearance of the figure of the partisan that Schmitt turns to the analysis of the reform-minded Prussian military officer, [slide] Carl von Clausewitz, who, in *On War (Vom Krieg 1808)*, first addressed the problems to this “classical” theory of warfare that was caused by the new existence of partisan strategies and tactics of warfare, and it is precisely from this context that we find the original proposition that “war is a mere continuation of politics by another means.”

Commented [GL4]: Slide Four On War

Of course, as many in the audience may already recognize, this proposition has undergone many inversions and substitutions—first by Althusser in his 1969 essay, published immediately after May ’68, “Lenin and Philosophy,” who substitutes philosophy for war, “philosophy is a certain continuation of politics, in a certain domain, vis-à-vis, a certain reality” (XX). I repeat Althusser’s inversion simply because I enjoy his humorous habit of endless qualification, or “overdetermination,” in this case, of the three primary terms: philosophy-politics- (and I would say a certain reality of) “the war.” Perhaps the most well-known inversion was performed by Foucault in the beginning of the lectures of 1975, [slide] “Society Must be Defended,” seven years after Althusser’s own version. Foucault’s own formula that “politics is the continuation of war,” may, at first, appear like a more straightforward and conceptually simple inversion—minus “reality” as a third term—although, as I have discussed elsewhere, it is a bit more complicated than that. However, Foucault’s formulation is not my subject today.

Commented [GL5]: Slide Five Foucault

As I will return to discuss in the conclusion of my talk, in a recent op-ed [slide] by the Marxist theorist and former student of Althusser, Etienne Balibar who refers to this famous phrase somewhat dismissively as “a common slogan that We (i.e., the

Commented [GL6]: Slide Six —BALIBAR

Left) never tire of repeating,” even though he certainly must be aware that this slogan first entered the canon of Western Marxist philosophy precisely through Vladimir Lenin’s early and quite original appropriation of Clausewitz’s analysis of partisan warfare to the define the figure of the partisan philosopher as a new conceptual persona in the revolutionary global warfare carried out against Western imperialism. In fact, it is Lenin’s “theory of the partisan” that Schmitt identifies as a completely new determination of the “enemy-concept,” which, according to his argument, has resulted in nothing less than the complete destruction of the concept of a limited or bracketed war that the Congress of Vienna had hoped to restore to the European continent (and to the world!) after WWII. As a result of the deformation of the original meaning of Clausewitz’s statement that “war is [ideally!] the continuation of politics” that Lenin introduces in 1916 on the eve of the second Russian revolution, has become “lost in historical philosophical diversions and genealogies”—including, I will argue, the theoretical diversions and genealogies that “we” have primarily inherited from a certain tradition of post-’68 French Marxist Theory, since it is Althusser, after the events of May ’68, but from his academic position as a leading philosopher in the Sorbonne, who assumes Lenin’s prototypical role of the “partisan philosopher”—for example, I recall the famous line from “Lenin and Philosophy” that “all philosophy is partisan”!--who then is followed in this gesture by his students whose names are well-known by generations up to the present day (e.g., Badiou, Balibar, Macheray, Ranciere, etc.).

But it has now been over sixty years since Schmitt’s analysis of the geopolitical situation, mainly in response to the colonial, nationalist, and imperial wars in South-East Asia, Cuba, Latin-America (including Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua), and Africa (including the Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa, etc.), and lastly the Palestinian occupation and the war between Israel and Egypt. Since

then, indeed there have been many more imperialist and partisan wars (including in Afganistan, Iraq, and Syria), and lastly, there is the war in the Ukraine today. Therefore, I take Balibar's off-handed comment to confirm that "we" have lost the original problematic underlined by this proposition, and so in the first part of my talk I will return to analyze Lenin's earlier appropriation Clausewitz's original proposition, which he transforms into a revolutionary "slogan" that has become a commonplace axiom in both traditional Marxism and Leftist philosophy, more generally, and which today has become hopelessly contradictory in its ability to distinguish between politics and war, as Schmitt had originally feared, and this may indeed signal the end of an orthodox and polemical (i.e., Leninist-Bolshevik) tradition of partisan philosophy; especially, I will argue, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

#### I. The Birth of the Partisan Philosopher [slide]

Commented [GL7]: Slide seven LENIN

In 1915, while in exile in Switzerland during the war, Lenin closely studied Clausewitz's *On War* and took copious notes that will essentially become the argument of *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). What did Lenin learn in his study of Clausewitz? According to Schmitt, "What Lenin was able to learn from Clausewitz, and what he learned painstakingly, was not only the famous formula of war as the continuation of politics. It was the further recognition that the distinction of friend and enemy in revolutionary struggle is primary and that it practically serves to orient the public to the future goals of both war as well as post-revolutionary politics (51). In applying this lesson to the possibility of "absolute hostility" that determines the enemy-concept in all partisan struggles up to his day, Lenin specifically adopts this concept to his treatment of the "class enemy" from an earlier article on "the Partisan Struggle" that appeared

immediately after the first Russian revolution of 1905, to the “counter revolutionary enemy” in “Left-Wing Communism, or an Infantile Disorder” (19 and most of his later writings that determine the real nature of WWI as an imperial war between the European nation-states over colonial possessions, but; most importantly, as the inevitable consequence of the mode of production represented by European and American Monopolies.

As Hans Hahlweg, the editor of the German edition of Lenin’s notebooks (*Tetradka*), observes:

Now the whole core question of revolution is in its struggle [is] the recognition of the essence (class analysis) of world war, together with the attendant problems of opportunism, defense of the fatherland, the fight for national liberation, the distinction between unjust and just war, the relation between war and peace, revolution and war, and the end of imperialist wars through the internal revolt of the working class, becomes the revision of the Bolshevik Party program [in 1920]. (51)

In his polemical writings against Kautsky and Plekanov, both during and immediately after WWI, Lenin decried the sophistry of the bourgeoisie nationalism and chauvinistic patriotism to justify the French working classes shooting at the German working classes, and employed the tactical adoption of the enemy-concept to break up and prevent any international consciousness of the working classes (see V. Lenin, “The Collapse of the Second International” and “Leftist Communism, or an Infantile Disorder”). In one sense, this means that the limited or bracketed concept of bourgeoisie warfare that was first established in the 1907 Hague convention is itself only a diversion, if not a sham, designed to pull the wool over the eyes of the international proletariat. These wars are not intended as the end of war, but only the continuation of bourgeoisie politics on a global scale never seen

before in history. Thus, Lenin's strategic response is the adoption of total partisan warfare on the same scale of global imperialism, the same military and economic theatre of the imperialist war so to speak, in to bring about the absolute and final war, after which is the final peace of revolution. Thus, war is simply grasped politically and strategically as an "expedient," a means to bring about, not the end of war, which is a relative peace, a temporal suspension belonging to a "treaty of peace" (as Kant had already argued in his later writings, including *Perpetual Peace*), but total revolution (i.e., international civil war), and supposedly after this, a perpetual peace defined as the end of politics and a classless society; either without a state-form, according to the earlier utopian myth of Marx, or leading to the long transitional state of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," according to Leninism.

Of course, these positions are already well known, especially by "we" on the Left. However, to examine the definition of war as "another means" than politics in the original proposition, we should briefly pause to ask: "by what means?" First: "What is the means of war?" Second: "What is the means of politics that is different from the means of war?" Third: "What is the means of philosophy that is different from the means of politics?" Finally, fourth: "What is a means?" "What do means mean?" In reply, I will simply say a means is an expedient. What is an expedient? An expedient (derived from the Latin *expedire*, and the Middle English verb "to expedite") is simply the definition of a certain kind of means; basically, a means of attaining an end, especially one that is convenient, but is often considered improper or immoral. When it comes to the historical rationalization of war, particularly the defense of the necessary uses of war as an expedient to obtain the end of politics, unfortunately we always begin thinking in propositions that go back to our first lessons on power and violence in nursery school when the teacher

first taught us why it is not good to shout or hit, and how to shape our anger into polite discourse, that is, how to avoid war and employ a technique of polity instead, even as a means of control or repression. In fact, one can find the same basic lesson concerning war, and thus the same formula, as the basis of the most sophisticated political and diplomatic communications between nations today. For example, Biden recently visited Asia in May, 2022, and in a news briefing in Japan declared that if China invades Taiwan, “the United States will intervene militarily.” In response, Beijing issued an official communication that the U.S. was “playing with fire.” These statements employ a belligerent and bellicose rhetoric that are essentially no different than the one we can witness between two bullies on the kindergarten playground. One belligerent shouts from the sandbox: “You better watch it!” “I’m going to punch you in the face!” The other responds: “Oh Yea, you and what army?” Since the understanding of war as a means to an end (i.e., destruction of the enemy, in the name of security or peace) applies equally to the playground as it does to the most sophisticated discourse of statecraft today, perhaps it is appropriate to begin an analysis from the simplest interpretation of the proposition that “war is simply another means to the same end,” such as the following definition: “The phrase means to an end is used to describe things that a person considers to be necessary to suffer through in order to accomplish their real goals. When a person is described as a means to an end, it means that another person is using them as an expedient tool to get what they want.” It is clear that Kant had this definition of a means as an expedient in mind when he distinguished the hypothetical imperative from the categorical imperative, defining man as an end in himself that should never be utilized as a means, or an expedient, as for example, in the philosophy of utilitarianism.

Like all wars, revolutions or civil wars are not peaceful, but rather a continuation of politics that includes bloodshed, death, famine, ecological devastation and economic hardship for the populations, especially in modern warfare when a newly armed proletariat class emerges on the battlefield who can always one day turn their weapons against the national and colonial bourgeoisie. Thus, as Lenin concluded on the eve of WWI, war (even world war) is the absolutely necessary phase that belongs to revolutionary struggle in the last stage of Capitalist history, and so the terrors of war must be allowed, if not encouraged, in order to create the necessary socio-economic conditions for revolutions to happen. In other words, once again, war and the general horrors associated with modern wars that are increasingly waged within or among the populations, must be accepted as the necessary *expedient* that leads directly or indirectly to revolution. “In any case,” as the German “council communist” Paul Mattick [slide] has observed, “what revolutions that have taken place—the Paris Commune and the revolutions of the twentieth century in Russia and Central Europe—grew not out of economic crises [or, only secondarily] but out of war and defeat and the general miseries associated with them” (Marxism 197). Foucault later confirmed this by saying that any temporary state of peace is determined by the “last battle in the last war,” which always maintains the new imbalances and injustices that will become the cause of the “first battle in the next war.” The war in Ukraine is certainly evidence of this thesis.

Commented [GL8]: Slide Eight Mattock

However, it is this temporal order of, first, “the war,” then “the revolution” which belongs to classical Marxist-Leninist theory that I want to highlight, and I will return to this order in the conclusion of my talk. In other words, first, the war (or multiple wars waged over a long duration as prophesied by Marx in the *Grundriss* as a series of “cataclysms, explosions, and catastrophes” that precede the end of

capitalism); afterwards, the revolution (or multiple national and neo-colonial revolutions globally) that gradually assume an international character over time and particularly in the creation of a new international proletariat class consciousness. As Mattick explains:

While two different social revolutions cannot occur together in a particular nation [again, this would be civil war, which dissolves the legal personality of the nation itself], they may occur simultaneously in an international setting, which may change the international class structure in such a way as to lead to the dominance of the proletariat over the whole of the revolutionary process, just as the diversity of the developmental stages of various national entities does not prevent capitalism's overall rule over the global economy. (Mattick 203)

For example, as Kautsky said of WWI, "after the war, after the debacle of government, we may get strength enough to conquer the political power." Likewise, in a letter to Gorky written in 1913, Lenin exclaimed that "a war between Austria and Russia would be a very useful thing [i.e., expedient] for revolutions throughout Eastern Europe, but it is not very probable that Franz-Josef and Nicky will give us the pleasure" (quoted in Marxism, 197). Three years later, on the eve of the first "proletariat revolution in Europe," Lenin vehemently rejected and polemicized any socialist call, including those by Kautsky and Plekhanov, for ending the imperialist war on the basis of the war's destructiveness of both human lives and capitalist property, but rather pursued every means for actually turning the imperialist war into a civil war (198). In his notes on Book II of *On War*, Lenin actually compares the difference between the concept of a limited territorial war put in place after the French Revolution, which becomes the basis for the European International Order, and the concept of "Absolute War" that becomes the principle of Bolshevism, to the difference between a real war and a

mere game (*Igrá*). **Moreover, “absolute war” knows no limitation and bracketing by any International Law**, which was conceived in the first place by the bourgeoisie nations and the modern European Monopolies precisely as the legal means of extorting labor and “booty” from the colonies—or later, in the post-WWII period, the “developing world,” the “third world,” or “the Global South.”

This underlines Schmitt’s first major concern over Lenin’s theory of the partisan, which is that in a civil war there is no law but a “state of nature” as in the philosophies of Hobbes and especially Kant, who defined the 18<sup>th</sup> century nation states as still existing in a “state of nature or barbarism,” given the asymmetrical relationship between civil law governing the conduct of individual citizens and international law regulating the conduct of the nation states themselves. It is in *Toward Perpetual Peace* that Kant first presents a division between preemptory and conclusive (*peremptorisch*) right and provisional (*provisorisch*) right, which violates the strictest moral principle of right, but is permissible only because it is impossible to enforce by positive laws and current political institutions, or because, although morally objectionable, its provisional acceptance holds open the possibility of progress and prevents something worse (which, for Kant, would be a return to barbarism and the abdication of any rule of law as in the case of civil wars). This distinction is further developed two years later in the *Rechtslehre*, and as the Kantian scholar Elizabeth Ellis has argued, has been a major source of controversy and misunderstanding concerning Kant’s politics.<sup>1</sup> For example, as he says throughout *Perpetual Peace*, the “right of war” (*jus belli*) is certainly morally objectionable, and yet, because it remains the founding principle of national right at this historical moment, it will legally be permitted to continue as long as the principles of international law are not strong enough to prohibit it as a political practice between nations. As Kant writes in the second definitive article, moreover,

“the notion of a Right to go to war cannot be properly conceived as an element in the Right of Nations. [...] If such a Right be conceivable at all it would amount, in fact, to this: that in the case of men who are so disposed it is quite right for them to destroy and devour each other, and thus to find Perpetual Peace only in the wide grave” (61). Certainly, this understanding of a provisional acceptance war as a current element of the principle of national right is very different from the Westphalian order that has often been ascribed to Kant’s political theory.

In the case of civil war, however, there can be no legal right claimed by either side, and thus no concepts of either just war or even illegal acts of war, no rules to prohibit certain acts of war such as the murder of wounded enemy combatants or the genocide of civilian populations; one can see this principle applied to the war in the Ukraine today by some of its more Machiavellian proponents. Since all juridical determinations are purely provisional (*provisorisch*), given there there is strictly no “rule of law” that binds the state actors as in the case of individual citizens in civil society, the **concepts of “war” and “peace” become strictly moral and thus fundamentally polemical in their meaning, which is to say “purely politicized.”** Thus, according to Schmitt, “Lenin had shifted the conceptual center of gravity from war to politics ... a logical continuation of the idea that war is a continuation of politics” (93). Therefore, here we see that it was actually Lenin—*not Foucault!*—who first inverted Clausewitz’s original proposition into the slogan “politics is the continuation of the war by another means!” This politicization becomes the basic principle for the violent rejection of any expression of pacificism in the tradition of Marxist-Leninist philosophy historically, after the collapse of the second International, which was the cause of the failure of the second international on the eve of WWI, and which today has become the automatic rejection of any proposal of peace as nothing more than the

attempt to ameliorate the real contradictions caused by Western imperialism, particularly in the former colonial possessions. At the same time, the other side of this is the willingness to tolerate, and even encourage, the catastrophe and the destruction caused by the imperial wars, which under the pseudo-bracketed concept of International Law, can also be compared to numbers of dead tallied in a game. Therefore, according to Lenin's dictum, in order to be for the revolution, one must first be "for the war" (moreover, one must be "all in" as one might say in a game of poker in a desperate move that could either signal a winning or losing hand—i.e., a desperate gamble); moreover, one must also be willing to risk everything and everyone in "the wars." Of course, this position was codified in the April Theses of 1917 that opening supported the principle of "Russian defeatism" as a condition of ceding Western Ukraine to the Germans as a delaying tactic to allow for the establishment of the Bolshevik's political power over the other counter-revolutionary factions in Russian society, since it was only through the increase of social misery, human death, the destruction of infrastructure, leading to the complete collapse of both economy and government that the Communist party would have any hope of success.

The second major concern expressed by Schmitt returns us to the **fundamental change in the "enemy-concept" as the result of Lenin's identification of the real enemy as the absolute class enemy in most, if not all, inter-national wars;** however, in the case of intra-national civil wars or revolutions, in his writings around the period of the Russian Revolution and the struggle of the Bolsheviks to take control of the communist party apparatus, the external or foreign enemy is often replaced by the internal class enemy represented by a number of other parties and factions (Mensheviks, anarchists, bourgeoisie socialists, Leftists, etc.), including Lenin's own former mentor, Kautsky. In other words, according to

Schmitt, “war became absolute war and the partisan became the bearer of absolute enmity against an absolute enemy” (89). But this immediately introduces the problem of the irregularity of the partisan, which is dependent on the nature of the regularity of a standing army, whose violence or warpower (*Wehrmacht*) is limited or bracketed by the “sovereignty of law,” in including the Geneva Conventions. In the case of absolute war against an absolute (and thus abstract and non-tullurian) enemy, on the other hand, there can be no limit to the violence and class hatred that is unleashed by the popular partisan struggle, which can also be strategically amplified by other forms of enmity such as racism, nationalism, and religious enmity as we have witnessed in many of the revolutionary civil wars in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as today in the war in Ukraine. **On one side, we have “animals” (even though animals do not actually rape other animals when invading their territory); on the other side, “Neo-Nazi’s and Satanists.”**

The unleashing of a spirit of nationalist chauvinism and patriotism of the partisan was the problem that originally occupied Clausewitz with the success of the Spanish Guerillas after 1808, when he saw the superior strength of the irregular partisan force against any 18<sup>th</sup> century regular Napoleonic army, particularly when the peasant and uneducated citizen was armed not only with weapons, but with the strength of absolute enmity and hatred for the foreign enemy, which the regular soldier did not necessarily express according to the strategies and conventions of the “bracketed or legal warfare.” Later on, this is the same idea that later inspired Mao, particularly in view of the political dependency on basically an uneducated peasant population in waging the colonial wars against the foreign occupier. However, it was Lenin who was the first to embrace this risky gamble any creating a necessary guardrail, which was the investment of all control of the irregular partisan army in a centralized party apparatus that will also command the regular

army and, if necessary, who at the end of the war will repress and even exterminate the partisan army as “the last battle of the last war” (Foucault). This became Mao’s solution as well, who calculated the necessary ratio between the composition of the partisan and regular red army as 9/10, that is to say, with the 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the regular army held in reserve until the end of the war when “the situation is mature enough for a communist regime” (60). In the case of Lenin and Bolshevism, however, “the peasantry would have to be ‘neutralized’ [for example, as Stalin did in the between 1933-1935 in the Ukraine] one way or another no matter which class, bourgeoisie, or proletariat, should come into possession of the Russian state (Mattick 202).

Finally, the third major concern is the figure of Lenin himself as the new conceptual persona of “professional revolutionary,” which according to Schmitt’s use of the term, should be heard in the same sense as the “professional soldier” on the side of bourgeois order of standing armies under international law (basically, the neo-Westphalian order). However, it is in Mattick’s earlier critique of Bolshevism as the official ideology of the Russian revolution after 1916, and of the new kind of professional revolutionary basically invented by Lenin (although, as we will see, there were already historical precedents in Clausewitz’s time) that gets to the core of the problematic relationship between philosophy and insurrectionist politics, or between “partisan theory” and partisan politics that became a model for doing philosophy (or “theory” rather) in the Marxist-Leninism mode. Already after 1903 Lenin’s strategic program for organizing the Russian revolution between three major parties (the bourgeoisie capitalists and young intelligentsia, the Russian peasantry, the industrial working classes) implied different political techniques for “disciplining” each class. These three classes would have to participate equally in the overthrow of the tsarist regime, but since this would only lead to the reassertion of the self-interests that defined each class in a post-

revolutionary system; however, only one class could serve as the dominant political class of the state that is constructed afterwards. “Logically,” as Mattick writes, “the bourgeoisie would have to be the ruling class” if only because it would be the class from which the educated intelligentsia of the new communist society originates (Mattick 202). However, it is on this final point that Lenin adds his rejoinder, which is taken from Marx’s 3rd thesis on Feuerbach: “the educators themselves must be educated.” In other words, the members of the bourgeoisie intelligentsia who would become the “vanguard” of the revolution and the leaders of the state must first be disciplined and subordinated to the control of the leaders of the Bolshevik party in the same way that a professional army is trained for a military campaign. (This same organization was later taken up by Mao and only expanded to include other segments of Chinese society.) This amounts to the ideological recruitment and training of the “professional revolutionary class,” which must take place at the same time as the organization of the working classes and rural peasantry by different means and would need to be periodically supported by regular purges and repression of any resistant and politically inconsistent individual elements. Of course, it was only natural for the political class of bourgeoisie intelligentsia to “backslide” to their own pre-revolutionary class interests that would lead to a “reformist” and essentially bourgeois revolution that has already happened after the revolutions across Europe after 1848 and was the major cause of the failure of the second communist international in 1916, which many of the leading socialists allied with the nationalist and chauvinist interests during the war. Therefore, to avoid any future “betrayals”—a constant charge in Lenin’s many polemical writings against other bourgeois socialists and leftist communists during this period, including, as we have seen, Plekhanov and Kautsky, who would only be the first in a long list of traitors to the revolution—it was necessary to forge “a type of revolutionary organization that allowed only the

most steadfast revolutionaries into its ranks” (Mattick 205). This marks the birth of the style of partisan philosophy that is also, at the same time, mirrors the form of political organization of the intelligentsia into a new political corps that is incarnated with the soul of the partisan! The only model of this new professional and revolutionary subject whose individual existence was completed dependent on the collective existence of the party was none other than the figure of Lenin himself; someone “who knows of no distinction between his individual personal and his organizational life” (Mattick 205) and whose sole purpose was to promote and guide the progress of the revolution both in words and in deeds—i.e., theory and practice—but in the case of Lenin, “the theoretical and practical were combined in his own person” (Mattick 210), which becomes the basis of the infamous “cult of personality” that becomes the hallmark of both Soviet and Chinese post-revolutionary states.

At this point, let us now return to Schmitt’s 1962 analysis of the “theory of the partisan,” where he makes a similar, if not the same, critique of Lenin’s role as the philosopher-poet-dictator of the Bolshevik revolution. “The new reality conceived with philosophical consciousness by the Russian revolutionary Lenin, and the alliance of philosophy and the partisan that he forged unleashed unexpected new and explosive forces” (Schmitt 53). Therefore, in asking what is at stake when bourgeoisie philosophy generally becomes partisan philosophy, Schmitt returns to a figure who emerges after the French revolutions of 1789 and 1793:

A great and courageous thinker of the ancient régime, Joseph de Maistre, had foreseen brilliantly what was at stake. ... What he feared most was an academic Pugachov. [slide] Thus, he took pains to make clear what he considered to be the real danger, namely, an alliance of philosophy and the elemental forces of an insurrection. (53)

Commented [GL9]: SLIDE Pugachov

Schmitt constantly italicizes or underscores the adjective “*academic*” throughout his discussion of this episode: “an *academic* Pugachov would be a Russian who “started a European-style revolution” (54). Why is the identification of Pugachov, the illiterate Cossack who in 1772 decreed the abolition of [serfdom](#) and gathered a substantial partisan army, including Yaik Cossacks, peasant workers in the mines and factories of the Urals, and agricultural peasants from Eastern Ukraine. Why is the deadly combination of the partisan leader with an academic philosopher so important for Schmitt? Is it to underscore the absurdity of this figure of the statesman in keeping with Kant’s earlier portrayal of the academic philosopher vis-à-vis the statesman in the beginning of *Toward Perpetual Peace*, who is likened to “a child playing a game of skittles on the floor underneath the feet of the practical politician”? Or is it the horror that the game of philosophy could easily turn into a children’s crusade, threatening to become more deadly than the limited or bracketed wars of the statesmen themselves. It is the historical realization that through this new conceptual persona of the partisan-philosopher, philosophy has now more deadly and violent than politics because it can imagine waging absolute war precisely as another means of politics, at least in theory? “Ultimately, the danger of combining philosophy with “a European-style revolution would inspire both the German and Russian bourgeoisie intelligentsia who would incarnate this personage less than a hundred years later. “That would produce a series of horrible wars, and if they went too far, Schmitt quotes Maistre on this fear, “I would not have the words to tell you what one would then have to fear”” (54). Nevertheless, for Schmitt, it is really the exceptional figure of Lenin himself that the forecasts. As he writes, “if one still thinks in terms of the alliance between Hegel’s philosophy of history and unchained mass forces, such as the Marxist professional revolutionary Lenin forged, then the formulation of the brilliant Maistre would

shrink to a small verbal effect in rooms or anterooms of the ancien régime” (Schmitt 54).

Even though Lenin was not an academic philosopher—in fact, the academic philosopher is the enemy of the professional revolutionary, beginning with Engels *Anti-Duhring*—it is specifically his theory of combining philosophy and global insurrection, according to Schmitt, that was responsible for expanding a “European style revolution” that marks the beginning of the end of the “Eurocentric world.” In other words, Lenin’s use of the partisan as a key persona globalizes the very *nomos* of revolution and produces a series of horrible wars that always bear the risk of “going too far,” thereby extinguishing any hope of regularity or bracketing of the destructive violence of war. This is what I have already referred to as the deconstruction of the Westphalian order that intensified in the 1970’s during the last phase of the cold war, “causing the power of an interested third party to grow” (76), especially in all decolonizing partisan wars that followed. For Schmitt, however, this embrace of “irregularity” that is also supported by a “technical-industrial aspect” (i.e., Capitalism) effectively ends the possibility of a limited or bracketed war that is defined by the 18<sup>th</sup> century formation of territory as a legal “boundary-line” (e.g., a “red line” as we often here in the news reports today concerning Taiwan or Crimea) that guards against an absolute war (which means today nuclear war). Moreover, because in the period that Schmitt was analyzing the evolution of partisan warfare in the early 1960’s, during the Vietnam war, but we now find a “European style revolution” emerging globally in several locations, including Africa and Central America: a revolution defined by absolute enmity for an enemy-colonizer (or his global surrogates), and a form of destructiveness and violence that has now surpassed any juridical form of regularity such as the uniform code of military conduct or “rule of law.” Of course, I am compelled to

also note Schmitt's "theory of the partisan" have been severely criticized by the contemporary left for their collusion with the European and American world orders that have been installed after WWII by the United Nations and the IMF. Although, it is also important to point out that Schmitt's 1962 analysis of the theory of the partisan predates 9/11 by forty years, even though he is credited with the identification of the "terrorist" as the final incarnation of the non-tellurian partisan, as well as a concept of a partisan war that no longer corresponds to the legalized boundaries of national territory or the regularized constraints of the rules of international law.

Finally, concerning the problem of absolute enmity released by the new conceptual persona of the professional partisan philosopher, this must even be distinguished from Mao Tse-tung's contribution to the theory of the partisan during the Chinese revolution, but also later in his strategic enlisting of students into formation of the red guard Red Guard during the cultural revolution to wage a partisan war against the "bourgeoisie roaders" and "the four olds." [slide], beginning with the command to "bomb the state party headquarters." Nevertheless, Mao's concept of the partisan was tellurian, and the enmity was always directed against a concrete foreign and colonial presence, even when not directly at the occupier, a nationalist enmity that was enshrined during the World Peace Conference in 1949 in the first lines of the new national anthem, [slide] "March of the Volunteers" originally titled the "March of the Anti-Manchukuo Counter-Japan Volunteers" (i.e., partisans):

Arise! Ye who refuse to be slaves!  
With our flesh and bones, let us build our new Great Wall!  
The Chinese people face their greatest danger,  
From each one of you comes the urgent call for action.

Commented [GL10]: insert slide

Commented [GL11]: Slide Volunteers

Arise! Arise! Arise!

**(As an aside, this national anthem was officially banned last summer when it was used on-line by Chinese in Shang-Hi to protest the lock-down brought about by the Zero-Covid policy of the CCP.)**

As Schmitt first observes: “Here lies the deepest origin of the ‘ideological’ differences between Soviet Russian Communism and Chinese Communism (Schmitt 58), which in the final analysis is an ideological difference based on the origin of the enemy-concept. “But it can also be traced to an inner contradiction in the situation of Mao, who linked a universal, absolute, global enemy—the Marxist class enemy—with a territorially limited, concrete enemy of the Chinese-Asiatic offensive against capitalist colonialism” (Schmitt 58). On the other hand, the difference between the Chinese revolutionary hatred of the concrete foreign enemy and Lenin’s conceptual persona of the class enemy risked being too abstract philosophically, or ideologically determined to apply to both citizen and foreigner, and thus could be arbitrarily deployed in political conflicts that neither presuppose a foreign enemy, or a colonial occupier, since the class enemy was also fundamentally a local personage, but also because it could be deployed for purely ideological reasons, as in the case of the philosophical polemics that I will turn to next. Consequently, this contributes to the mobility of the “enemy concept” to other local conflicts and class struggles, as well as to the racialization of the “friend-enemy concept” today in the United States. At the same time, this is the origin of Schmitt’s concern, and later, his view that the fundamental change in the enemy-concept can know no limited or controlled warfare and thus is “too risky” from the viewpoint of international law (i.e., the Eurocentric order). Nevertheless, one might simply conclude that Schmitt favors the Eurocentric world order dreamed of by the expansion of the European Westphalian system into the

Capitalist “world system,” as was theorized throughout the 1970’s by the great Marxist theorist Immanuel Wallerstein, through the institutions of the United Nations, the IMF, and the World Bank after WWII. It was a system that sought to regulate the competition of a limited number of stronger nations, which would allow for temporary and localized wars in the periphery as a means of resolving contradictions produced by the system itself. Let us recall, however, that Lenin himself already regarded the this entire world system as an elaborate game created only to continue the imperial wars under the plan of unlimited development of Capitalism; therefore, the only way to end the war was through the cauldron of concrete and absolute violence that belongs to civil and revolutionary war, that is, until both the intra-national and the inter-national class enemy is finally vanquished. Here, I would only highlight that the above sentence could just as easily appear in a political or ideological sense of an affirmation (i.e., “there will only be peace when the absolute war is over and the universal class enemy is dead), but this only underlines what we have already discovered earlier: **the concepts of war and peace have become fundamentally polemical in their meaning and have no objective epistemological or scientific meaning from this point onward**—in either politics, diplomacy, and especially today, in philosophy itself.

## II. The Ghosts of the Dialectic

Today, as a result of the above “historical philosophical diversions and genealogies”, the problem now becomes how the synthesis of the ideological authority of this philosopher with the concrete and practical activities of a political organizer fundamentally distorts the unified perspective of both philosophical (academic) and political activities, which previously belonged to separate spheres

of civil society? Moreover, given the history of partisan polemics are mostly directed against socialists, and later “Marxist philosophers” in the national universities, beginning with Engel’s polemical and vituperate attack of the other Young Hegelians and of Herr Dühring in particular. It is at this the university professor occupying an official position in a social institution necessary for the reproduction of the dominant political class fundamentally poses a contradiction that will become the basis for all Marxist polemics since then. How can this development in political philosophy be seen as anything else than yet another “betrayal” of the proletariat and working classes by bourgeoisie national intelligentsia that contradicts the whole logic of the professional revolutionary subject”? In what way does academic authority over the younger generations of bourgeoisie intellectual and political life lead to a fundamental contradiction in the theory of partisan philosophy, a contradiction that has been present ever since Marxism first found a location in the Western university and the authority of the “public professor” is employed to wage the revolutionary struggle. This has been mainly responsible for producing a philosopher like Badiou today, who has become a one-man party apparatus, a professional revolutionary who no longer even needs an organic proletarian class, because he has formed his partisan army mostly from a new international class of “disaffected youth” located across elite universities in the “Global North”—Paris, New York, Los Angeles, San Paulo, Seoul. Of course, the simplest explanation is that this is a fundamental contradiction of the class interest of the bourgeoisie academic that has resurfaced many times in the history of Marxist philosophy; at the very least, it has represented a “structurally overdetermined contradiction and overdeterminations between theory and practice” (Althusser) that has plagued the Marxist tradition of Western bourgeoisie philosophy for the past one hundred years. Of course, here I am employing the classical Marxist conception of the contradiction of historical

“European style revolutions” that obstructed a clear theoretical path from bourgeoisie society to socialism via the intermediate stage of state-capitalism (or “the dictatorship of the proletariat”), and from socialism to something resembling a stateless society “in the final instance”—even though the last social formation has never existed on earth, even in the mythical and prehistoric communities of the period of the so-called Asiatic mode of production. Therefore, in concluding my commentary on Lenin’s transformation of Clausewitz’s proposition in the creation of the conceptual persona of the modern partisan philosopher, I will turn to recent articles by Balibar and Badiou that both address the current war in Ukraine in the context of this broken teleology in order to illustrate the contradictions and the overdeterminations—or, in the Freudian origin of these terms, “condensations and symptomatic displacements”—of the orthodox and dogmatic *topos* of “the war” in Marxist dogmatic philosophy, recalling Althusser definition of philosophy as only providing theses concerning the “correct position” with regard to “the Whole.” Preliminary to my observations, however, I want to alert the audience that these articles (or rather, “non-academic editorial opinion pieces”) are very recent, both appearing in blogs or online sources in 2022, and so my own impressions are very fresh and still not yet been digested through a more careful method of close reading (or “deconstruction,” what Althusserians themselves have called “symptomatic interpretation”) which I will evolve in the later published version of this talk. So, for now, I will give my remarks in a brief series of associations, reflections, and hypotheses—some of which might even appear polemical—concerning what I have intuited as the symptoms of the final exhaustion of what I am calling the “philosophy of the partisan”—i.e., a specific tradition of “Marxist Theory” (Leninism) which is not the same thing as the much larger and much more diverse historical tradition of Marxist philosophy.

In the introduction to this lecture I have already referred to Balibar's op-ed [slide] published on-line in November 2022 where I was first struck by the contradictions to the "correct position" of traditional dogmatic Marxist interpretation of "the war." The article is titled "Ukraine's Sovereignty Depends on NATO: we are all in the war," and I remember immediately thinking to myself: "Well, this is a very strange thing for a Marxist to say." Of course, here Balibar is responding, as he says, "both with and against his own camp," in refuting many the earliest interpretations of "the war" by his fellow campers. I do not need to rehearse these arguments in detail, since we have all heard the same arguments for the last hundred years. As the editorial heading reads:

The response of the intellectual left to Russia's war against Ukraine has largely involved blaming NATO, an aversion to any kind of military involvement, and generic calls to pacifism. But understanding this war involves recognizing some realities that the intellectual left finds uncomfortable: NATO is not the aggressor, Russia is; Ukrainians are driven by a form of nationalism; and there is no meaningful sense of national sovereignty independent of powerful guarantors. Even if this will mean a new form of dependence for Ukraine, and even though these institutions come with their own imperial past, only the EU and NATO can guarantee its sovereignty against Russia's imperialistic advances."

But I was more surprised by Balibar's conditional approval of the call made by the Italian Marxist Sandro Mezzadra that "we must desert the war": "We have no choice, alas, as my friend the philosopher Sandro Mezzadra proposes in a beautiful lesson in revolutionary pacifism, to 'desert the war'" [2]. Yet, this immediately begs the question: which war, exactly? The current nationalist war, which Balibar defines as the Ukrainian war for independence that was suspended and left in abeyance since 1991, and whose bill has finally come due? "The European Civil

War,” which began in 1914 and not in the 1848 revolutionary wars that spread across the continent eastward in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a Balibar explains, “because the history of European Communism is an integral part of a larger and more complex cycle, that of the “European Civil War” that began in 1914, linking imperialist war and revolution.” Or, finally, the war against Western imperialism and global Capitalism itself, and since WWII primarily against the global hegemony of the United States, an enemy that has evolved both theoretically and politically in “the Global South” in the latter half of the twentieth century? In responding to this question, and attempting to define the complex and overdetermined structure of “the war” I find it symptomatic that Balibar’s own arguments in this short op-ed that is intended to clarify this question for “the Left” becomes horribly convoluted, as if the Russian invasion of the Ukraine has resulted in a disorientation concerning the “correct position” in interpreting the war, and it is because of this disorientation that Balibar now seems to question the major slogan that “war is simply [that is “ideally”]the continuation of politics.” However, Balibar is less “classically Marxist” in his rhetoric, more Althusserian, and thus describes the current war as an “overdetermination” of the fundamental contradiction of Capitalism; more over, in defining WWI as a “European Civil War,” he also appeals to this classical *topos* of the difference between so-called legal wars and an absolute and final war that would end this long period between war and revolution. Moreover, in the historical condensation, repetition, and displacement of this overdetermination of “the war,” not only concerning “our judgement of its historical character,” as he says, “but also our idea of the politics it calls for or, conversely, prohibits,” but here I will simply ask what is nature of the moral judgment that claims the power to “prohibit” an idea of politics?

In response to this question, at this point I will hazard a “symptomatic interpretation” and suggest that, unconsciously or not, after a long historical detour in theory, we have returned exactly to September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1915, that is, to the middle of the war, and to that fatal decision that resulted in the collapse of the second International, and which split the “correct position” with regard to the idea of revolutionary politics into two extremely opposed but equally orthodox camps. Nevertheless, my hypothesis can easily be confirmed by referring to the conclusion of Mezaddra’s March 2022 op-ed for *Transversal Texts* that Balibar quotes from: “In recent days there were calls from Russia and Ukraine for a ‘new Zimmerwald,’ that is, a conference in the vein of the one in Switzerland that convened socialists who opposed the war in September 1915. We don’t know if this is an actual concrete call, and surely the situation today is completely different than a century ago. But it is a powerful suggestion, and it deserves to be taken up.” Although, as Balibar qualifies any enthusiasm for such a proposal, “we should let ourselves be ‘mobilized’ and carried away by it in an unreflective way. The margin of choice is very frail, but perhaps we should not decide in advance that it is non-existent.” In other words, if my hypothesis of historical repetition is correct—and the contemporary tradition of Marxist theory is grounded on nothing more than a series of historical condensations and displacements of this moment—it even appears that there is a desire to return to this fateful decision and choose a “different camp.” Therefore, according to the same symptomatic interpretation, it would even seem that Balibar reappears today as our contemporary Kautsky, that is, “the sacharro-conciliatory chauvinist” (as Lenin called him in “Left Wing Communism, or an Infantile Disorder”) who has the moral timidity to propose the principle of self-determination and independence gives the Ukrainian proletariat the right to defend itself, including inflicting the greatest violence against the Russian proletarians.

Of course, if Balibar can be viewed as our contemporary Kautsky, then certainly it is Badiou [slide] who appears today as a hybrid persona of Lenin and Mao, which introduces a last dialectical evolution in the conceptual personage of the partisan philosopher, one that even resembles what Schmitt feared most: an academic Pugachov. Because of lack of time, however, I can only briefly refer to a recent propaganda published in the journal *Crisis and Critique*, [slide] edited by Frank Ruda and Agon Hamza, published online in 2022, “Politics Today: Thirteen Theses and Commentaries,” which “proposes a conceptual framework – having learnt the lessons from previous historical failure – that will allow the conception and practical articulation of what a yet to be invented politics must be.” Here, we should again underline the function of philosophical theses in Althusser as not emulating scientific propositions that can be verified as “true or false,” but as dogmatic statements that dictate the “correct position” concerning Totality (or History), dogmatic in form because these theses are never empirically verifiable. Thus, recalling my question concerning what form of politics claims the authority to “prohibit certain ideas,” the answer would be what Althusser first outlined in “Lenin and philosophy” as a “non-philosophical practice of philosophy—i.e., a didactic practice whose object is the “class struggle in theory.” Of course, secondly, the number of theses should also performatively enact the axiomatic function attached to Marx’s “Eleven Theses on Feuerbach” that Engels suddenly happened to “discover” in one of Marx’s old notebooks and published as an appendix of his 1888 book on Feuerbach. (But it always strikes me as humorous that duplications of this genre by contemporary Marxists always seems to add more than eleven, perhaps signaling that the intervening history requires a few more axioms.) For example, Badiou’s interpretation of the current contradiction represented by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine more clearly appears in the thirteenth

Commented [GL13]: Slide Crisis and Critique

thesis (echoing the original thirteenth thesis of Feuerbach concerning the overall goal of changing history):

Under such conditions only one uncontrolled military incident suffices to bring everything to the brink of war. The sides are already drawn: the United States and their “Western-Japanese” clique on the one side, and on the other, China and Russia; nuclear weapons proliferate.

*“Western-Japanese clique?!!* If you excuse my French here, but what the fuck is that? I don’t know, but sometimes I have the feeling that Badiou stopped looking at external reality sometime in the early 70’s. I can only assume this motley crew of imperial pirates and band of looters echoes the original list by Lenin that is clearly invoked by Badiou, including strange reference to the friend-enemy opposition as being “the United States and their [sic] “Western-Japanese clique” on the one side, and on the other, China and Russia” (21). I could only assume that Badiou is either consciously or unconsciously citing Lenin’s own original text where, to pass through the Russian censors, he admits in the preface that he had to substitute the example of Japan for Russia, and Korea for Finland, Poland, Ukraine, Estonia, and other Eastern European regions, even though this ciphered code would not make much sense in the current geopolitical context (8). Nevertheless, the citation problem is much more transparent in the following lines that describe the looting of the “Global South” in identical terms as the following original passage from the 1920 preface to the French and German editions:

Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of advanced countries. And this ‘booty’ is share between two or three powerful world pirates armed to the teeth (America, Great Britain, Japan), who involve the whole world in their war over the sharing of their booty. (11)

To illustrate another performative from Lenin's historical manifesto, here is the passage that basically plagiarizes the original:

Today, ... the great powers seek to collaborate to maintain the stability of affairs on a global scale (notably by fighting against protectionism), but on the other hand these same powers are blindly fighting for their individual hegemony. The result is the end of obviously colonial practices like those of 19th Century France or England, i.e. the military and administrative occupation of entire countries. I propose that the new practice is called 'zoning': in entire zones (Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Mali, Central Africa, the Congo...) States are undermined, annihilated, and the zone becomes a zone of looting, opened to mercenary forces as well as all other global capitalist predators. Or the State is made up of businessmen who are connected by a thousand cords to the big companies of the world market. (21)

Consequently, if we were to update Lenin's list of world pirates, we would need to substitute EU for Great Britain, and the United States, including the Asian-Pacific alliance with Australia, Korea, and Japan against North Korea, China, Russia, and Iran.

My second symptomatic interpretation of the contradiction in theory caused by the war in the Ukraine returns to the question of the temporal order between "war and revolution" from *Capitalism as the Last (or Highest) Stage of Imperialism* (written from Finland in 1916). Of course I am referring to the classical *topos* of Marx and Engel's original theory of the historical contradiction, referring of course to the contradiction that is internal to the Capitalist mode of production that through a dialectical history will become externalized in the final end of Capitalist society. But we should remember the temporality of this end consists of a long period of

“crises, cataclysms, and explosions,” of which wars between the imperialist bourgeoisie alliances are one realization of the end preceding the absolute or total revolutionary war. Turning to Badiou’s version of this temporal order:

We cannot but recall Lenin’s dictum: “Either the revolution will prevent the war or the war will provoke the revolution.” One could thus define the absolute ambition of the political work to come: that, for the first time in History, it is the first hypothesis – the revolution will prevent war – that will be realized rather than the second – that war will provoke revolution. As a matter of fact, it was this second hypothesis which materialized in Russia in the context of the First World War, and in China in the context of the Second. But at what price! And with what long term effects!

But what is the symbolic equivalence of this war, the current war, particularly from Badiou’s perspective. In other words, what is the symbolic equivalence of his own Leninist manifesto of thirteen theses and Lenin’s own manifesto of 1916 in view of WWI as a war of imperialism that precedes the final revolution, (Even though Badiou concludes by exclaiming that in this new repetition of history, the global revolution should come before the end of the ‘European Civil War’ (i.e., the war in the Ukraine), either that, or before absolute war of nuclear Armageddon that both he and Balibar prescribe as a component of any future communist politics, and which Balibar calls an “international pacifist movement of nuclear disarmament.”

But here lies the contradiction between these two moments and these two ideological theses that precisely concerns the difference between the situations of 1920 and 2022, exactly one hundred years later. Here, I will briefly expound some of these differences and why the appeal to Lenin’s understanding of the relationship between war and politics, that is, between bourgeoisie politics and revolutionary politics, reveals an glaring contradiction precisely in terms of an

unwillingness to translate Lenin's theory of the partisan, and particularly the character of absolute hostility toward the enemy, into the current context of the war in the Ukraine, or even in the larger context of the global war that "we are all in," but especially the war between the Western democracies, in Badiou's terms, "the United States and the Japanese-clique" and the "Global South" (e.g., Iraq, Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Mali, Central Africa, the Congo...") In other words, how do "We" (professional revolutionaries and philosophers) employ the absolute enmity of class hatred and even race hatred that Lenin found to be an essential instrument in the revolutionary struggle? Echoing the prescription from "What is to Be Done?" According to Badiou's revised and contemporary version: "Here we must quote Marx's definition of the singular militant's manner of presence [mode de presence] within movements: "the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things. In all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, not matter what its degree of development, at that time." Here, in other words, Badiou simply substitutes the original Marxist dyad: political activists and bourgeois intelligentsia and the mass of proletariat labor, with a newly minted troika composed by: 1. an orthodox and increasingly senile class of pseudo-political activists and bourgeoisie academics of the "global north; 2. "the youth movements" made up of privileged students mostly from the "global south," and finally; 3. "a mass of people who are completely destitute and thus politically dangerous." In his own words: What was done in the wake of May '68 by those organisations can and must be done once more. We must reconstitute the political diagonal I have spoken of, which remains today a diagonal between the youth movement, various intellectuals, and the nomadic proletariat. Here and there, this is already being done. It is currently the only true political task."

But I will stop here, since these arguments approach a form of scholastic philosophy in the slavish and unthinking citation of the philosophy of Aristotle and Aquinas, and today especially, I do not think we can any longer afford to interpret the material and historical reality of contemporary events (i.e., Totality, the Real) through these dogmatic lenses, especially when reality is simply excluded or ignored when it cannot fit into the metal grid of the Theory. Instead, I will conclude by referring to another set of theses concerning “Politics Today” published much earlier in 1950 by the German Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch, [slide] although these theses are not dogmatic in either form nor content, but rather outline a non-dogmatic form of interpretation—i.e., a philosophical practice of philosophy. Writing from exile in New Orleans, Korsch, the one time apologist of Lenin’s philosophical writings, particularly *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*, which had since become the required textbook on philosophy in Soviet universities, became the most severe and conscientious critic of the role of the Comintern as a vehicle of ideology for the Soviet Union, in scuttling any hopes for communist internationalism outside the narrow goals of Stalinism and state-capitalism. Again I refer to Paul Mattick, a “Council Communist” and syndicalist also in exile in Chicago after the rise of National Socialism, who observed in the early sixties, “this changed Marxian socialism from a revolutionary theory to pure ideology, which could be used for a variety of different goals, and was so used in the Russian Revolution and in the world at large. But the mere transformation of competitive private capitalism into a monopoly over the means of production and social control did not lead to the self-determination of the workers, and was not, whatever else it might be, any longer a revolutionary goal. (“Marxism of Karl Korsch,” 1964).

Commented [GL14]: Slide Korsch

The article I am referring to is aptly titled “Ten Theses on Marxism Today” [slide] (again, in the style of Marx’s original Theses on Feuerbach,” refreshingly Deleuzian in its subtraction of the principal N-1, but also revealing that Badiou’s own performative text implicitly responds, but only in order to negate, Korsch’s early theses on “Politics Today” published 70 years ago). Why? It should be obvious from the first two theses, which read:

- 1. It no longer makes sense to ask to what extent the teaching of Marx and Engels is, today, theoretically acceptable and practically applicable.**
2. Today, all attempts to re-establish the Marxist doctrine as a whole in its original function as a theory of the working classes social revolution are reactionary utopias.

For the purposes of this talk, however, I will restrict my brief commentary on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> theses:

4. The first step in re-establishing a revolutionary theory and practice consists in breaking with that Marxism which claims to monopolize revolutionary initiative as well as theoretical and practical direction.
5. Marx is today only one among the numerous precursors, founders and developers of the socialist movement of the working class. No less important are the so-called Utopian Socialists from Thomas More to the present. No less important are the great rivals of Marx, such as Blanqui, and his sworn enemies, such as Proudhon and Bakunin. No less important, in the final result, are the more recent developments such as German revisionism, French syndicalism, and Russian Bolshevism.

In other words, returning to the major thesis first put forward in Marxism and Philosophy (1923), revolutionary consciousness is bound up with its specific historical time and place—as Hegel said, a philosophy cannot be anything but ‘its time expressed in ideas, “ and this would also include Marxist theoretical doctrine

that materially loses its relation to the current social struggle, becomes ossified, dogmatic in form, ideological and terroristic in its practice, as I believe have demonstrated. In keeping with this materialist view, therefore, all of the earlier polemics, including those launched by Marx and Engels themselves (against Stirner, the Young Hegelian's, Proudhon and Bachtunin, against Duhring), or Lenin's polemical battles against the Empirico-Criticism of Mach, Bogdanov, Avenarius, or later against the "national chauvinism" of Plekhanov and Kausky himself, must today be submitted to a thorough deconstruction.

Unfortunately, a very conservative and reactionary theoretical apparatus was installed in Western Universities, which successfully maintained these polemics dogmatically long after they no longer existed in flesh and bone, but were just ghosts of previous moments of the dialectic. Earlier I asked what form of politics would actually prohibit the spontaneous production of social ideas? I will give you an example of the most recent form of dogmatic politics, mostly organized by young student readers of Badiou. A student of mine (who also happens also to be from Cairo), and therefore is personally struggling with the hopelessness of the current political class in his own country, became seduced into a Marxist reading group online. He participated actively in conversations over revolutionary politics with peers of his own generation from places far and wide, from San Paulo to New York; he express himself in the manner that seemed natural and organic to his own stage of intellectual exploration, that is, with a kind of DJ Spooky mix of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, Said (certainly), Badiou (of course, this goes without saying) and inevitably (and unfortunately in my view), the rhymes of the Mixmaster himself, Slavoj Zizek. His peers tolerated this at first (though I imagine they were intimidated by his knowledge and native intelligence); however, the minute he made some minor criticisms of Stalinism, his blog

interlocutors suddenly asked who “authorized” him to speak this way, and if “the committee” had first approved these statements. When he reported this to me, I found this incident both comical and grotesque, since it demonstrates the return of the most sinister and repressive form of a party apparatus, a Politboro, a new Comintern—a form of politics that has been spontaneously reinvented by a bunch of student Marxists who happened to have created a blog, but who resemble in many ways “the Red Guard” under the command of Mao. As Badiou says, “the intellectual youth has always played a key role in the birth of new politics, the continued journey towards other social strata – particularly to the most deprived where the impact of capitalism is the most devastating – is necessary.” But this anecdote also immediately reminded me of the question of Spinoza: “why do people desire their own repression?” On the other hand, Badiou continues, “If it is the power endowed by the agents of capitalism, the State must be broken, by means of confrontation or siege. And if this is what is at stake in the communist path, it must perish, if needed by revolutionary means, as seen in the fatal disorder of the Chinese Cultural Revolution.” In other words, this is the most recent version of *What must be Done* by the most recent incarnation of the professional revolutionary philosopher who didn’t even need to swim the span of the Yellow River to prove his remaining vitality as a leader of the revolution. [slide]

To conclude now, allow me to give you another example that is drawn from my own experiences for the past 15 years in engaging the Perpetual Peace Project. Ever since I initiated the Project in 2008, based mostly on the use of the preliminary and definitive articles of Kant’s 1795 *Toward Perpetual Peace* and especially the later political writings which in some ways I view as an alternative version of Universal History that can be constructively placed in a dialectical relation to the version of Universal History proposed by Marx and Engels, but

Commented [GL15]: Slide PP

primarily in the earlier writings Marx. From the very beginning, however, I have received nothing in response from my Marxist colleagues, even my closest and dearest friends, —at least, when they have chosen not to simply remain silent about the goals of the project—have expressed the most dogmatic and blanket rejection of Kant’s entire philosophy, once again, expressing a moral character of judgment that is both historical and prohibitive. Of course, ever since Engels first invented the dyad of “materialism vs. idealism,” Kant’s philosophy was summarily dismissed as idealist, a term that was especially polemicized by Lenin in his attack on Mach and the Empirico-Critics, but today the philosopher himself is simply condemned as racist. What I have noticed more recently, however, and mostly coming from the mouths of “the youth,” is an affective intensity that approaches an absolute enmity that I have assigned to the partisan philosopher. As a result, today, for many, Kant’s philosophy has become “unthinkable,” or as the French say “*strictement defendue*,” as in the sign in the Metro that reads: “*il est strictement defendue de fumer*.” Nevertheless, I also realized from the beginning that this judgment was actually not the result of any act of individual thinking, even when the negative is actualized through the mouth of a living speaker. Instead, these judgments are simply the ghosts who have poured their poison into the open ears of anyone who will continue to listen to them today, and all they say is “no” and “no” and “no.” I stopped listening to these ghosts long ago. However, I will provide you with one final example of these ghosts who I heard recently speaking through the mouth of Badiou: [slide] “The lexicon used should be controlled and coherent. For example: today, “communism” is incompatible with “democracy”, “equality” is incompatible with “liberty”, all positive use of an identarian vocabulary – “French” or “international community”, or “Islamic” or “Europe” – should be banned, as well as psychological terms – “desire”, “life”, “no-one” – as

well as all terms related to the established state systems – “citizen”, “electorate”, and so on.”

Returning to Hegel’s statement that philosophers are merely the expression of ideas that are materially conditioned by their time and place is different from saying that philosophers are simply the products of their time, that is, merely ideologists. In fact, this is only another dogmatic thesis promulgated by Marx and zengels themselves for the purpose of purely practical battles with their colleagues, most of whom occupied more prestigious positions in the German university and in the bourgeois technical sciences. In other words, in order to discover the revolutionary content of a particular class position, everything must be put back on the table today after a hundred years of censorship, including, but not restricted only to Kant’s philosophy. [slide] To return to the practical goals of the PPP, I would that the polemic of idealism vs. materialism (which has been made completely meaningless today by the material evolution of history and politics, although apparently not in the history of philosophy); therefore, the absolute enmity that is still being directed against Kant’s philosophy is, in my view, precisely is one of these dialectical ghosts we must now contend with in order to reimagine and thus to “re-member” a politics of the future, if only to avoid repeating an idea of politics that belongs only to the past, and thus “dis-membering” any hope of confronting the politics of the present. [slide]

Commented [GL16]: Slide PPP2022

---

<sup>1</sup> See Elizabeth Ellis, Provisional Politics: Kantian Arguments in Policy Context (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 9-19.