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Reviews

Crisis and Strategy: On Daniel Bensaïd's "The Notion of the Revolutionary Crisis in Lenin"

- Reviews section -

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The English translation of Daniel Bensaïd's autobiography, *Une lente impatience*, is a welcome event in the Anglophone Marxist world. Not only does it contain a rich history of some of the most decisive moments for the French Left from the '60s to the present, it also deepens our understanding of the heterodox sources that coexisted within Bensaïd's unique form of Marxism.

Two key chapters contribute to this theoretical approfondissement: "A Thousand (and One) Marxisms" and "Thinking the Crisis." The former is a winding, wide-ranging intellectual mini-history of the various currents of Marxism that have been an influence on his own work, from the critical, historicist Marxisms of Lukács and Gramsci in the face of Second International orthodoxy, to the analytical Marxist and post-workerist schools. [1] Bensaïd stresses that each generation must face its own "crisis" of Marxism, thus sweeping away any "myth of a homogeneous doctrine"; it is a critical theory inseparable from social struggles and practices, and "inseparable from the history of its receptions."

From this perspective there is always a capacity for Marxism to begin anew, something that needed to be urgently reiterated and emphasized in the post-'89 conjuncture. This way of approaching the history of Marxism as an "open dogmatism" is familiar to anyone who has read *Marx for Our Times*, his most substantial and extensive theoretical statement. [2]

The latter chapter, however, reveals a side of Bensaïd that is less well-known to readers outside of France. This is a retrospective look at his *memoire de maîtrise* (master's thesis) written under the supervision of Henri Lefebvre, entitled "The Notion of the Revolutionary Crisis in Lenin." Parts of the thesis were recycled for a famous article in *Partisans* from 1968, co-written with Samy Nâïr. [3] With the recent launch of [Le site de Daniel Bensaïd](#), the majority of Bensaïd's writings are now available, including the complete version of this fascinating thesis. With an impressive range of sources and an auspicious analytic and intellectual prowess on display (coupled with a deep knowledge of Lenin's *Collected Works*), Bensaïd seeks in this text to theoretically clarify the concept of crisis in Lenin and the broader Marxist tradition. While the marks of the then-current Parisian scholarly field are evident in the more Althusserian aspects of the text, it is also true that the themes he encounters here would, as Sebastian Budgen notes, "continue to goad him for the next 40 years." [4] These included the recurrent dialectical oppositions between subjectivity and objectivity, structure and event, and crisis and strategy; Bensaïd constantly, and from many different angles, tried to set these philosophical dualisms in motion through a politically charged optic. It becomes readily apparent, from even a cursory perusal of his later texts (not only on Lenin, but also his writings in *La discordance des temps* and *Marx for Our Times*) that these are concerns that stayed with him, as direct sections of the thesis will appear in his rightly praised article from the *Lenin Reloaded* collection. [5]

This an opportune moment, then – un moment propice, in Bensaïd's evocative vocabulary – to reconsider the impact of this thesis on his career, with his critical recollections serving as our guide. This is not meant to serve as an exhaustive overview, as his corpus demands a more patient and thorough reading, but is instead intended as a brief inquiry into the reading of Lenin that this particular work opens up for us, and the ways in which the problems evident in this very early text have a continuing actuality for contemporary Marxism. [6]

The first question we may pose is a common problematic that can be found in previous pages of *Viewpoint*: what kind of Lenin does Bensaïd give us? [7] How does Lenin's understanding of the relation between theory and practice, organizational form and class struggle, state power and ultimately, the revolutionary crisis, bear on present struggles? As we will see, Henri Lefebvre's "unfortunately neglected" book on Lenin was a major influence on Bensaïd's own reading, primarily in its comprehensive and careful reconstruction of the connection between Lenin's contributions to historical materialism and his advancement of a distinctly Marxist political theory, comprising both a

theory of the state and revolutionary political action. Bensaïd's text here and his later work will bear the traces of Lefebvre's interpretation, but we will also encounter an even more intriguing and innovative fusion of these two facets of Leninism which, in an untimely fashion, endeavors to think politics both as an art of scanning historical possibilities and as a surveying of situated conflicts for moments of strategic intervention.

The second issue concerns the qualification of a revolutionary crisis being restricted to the status of a notion, not a concept. This separation is connected to the distinct difference drawn between a revolutionary situation and a revolutionary crisis. With the latter problem, there is a clear reference to the French historical epistemological tradition in Bensaïd's analysis of how Lenin tried, and ultimately failed, to truly "establish [fonder] a concept," understood as a definition that can hold up to the modalities of history, theory, and politics. [8] There could not be, in other words, a truly scientific concept of the "revolutionary crisis" in the Althusserian sense, since its predicative characteristics necessarily had to pass through the test of practice: therefore, it could not escape the trappings of ideology and remained at the level of the notion. This line of questioning, then, involves a strict delineation between the subjective and objective aspects of a crisis (between what can be described and what has to be accomplished through practice) through a methodological lens that is tainted by an "ultra-Bolshevism" inspired by Lukács circa *History and Class Consciousness*, with the subjective factor – or revolutionary party – as the nodal point of differentiation and decisive element. Ultimately, I will look to Bensaïd's later writings to answer this question of the demarcation between a revolutionary situation and crisis, or notion and concept: there, he notes that possible resolution of this problem can come from seeing "crisis" as a "strategic concept," a concept that has political implications relative to its historical and theoretical efficacy.

Lenin and Political Strategy

If we want to gain an understanding of the basic ideas underlying Bensaïd's dense text, it is useful to start with the "unjustly forgotten" book his thesis supervisor devoted to Lenin's thought, *La pensée de Lenine*, from 1957. [9] There Lefebvre embarks on an ambitious attempt to synthesize all the periods of Lenin's thought, an approach that finds definite echoes in Bensaïd's own panoramic view that connects "What the 'Friends of the People' Are" to the "April Theses," within a coherent theoretical and practical narrative. There are three features of Lefebvre's account in particular that I want to highlight for their importance to Bensaïd: first, the consideration of Lenin's rigorous investigation into the expansion of capitalism in the Russian countryside and the drawing out of its strategic and political implications; second, the role of the party as the principal "subjective factor" in the class struggle; third, and most significantly, the attention given to the notion of revolutionary crisis as the moment where the political, economic, and social contradictions engendered by capitalism fuse and condense to produce a conjuncture where true change is possible, when it becomes possible "to sketch the outline of another mode of production." [10] We can take these features in turn.

Lefebvre links Lenin's body of thought as a whole to his initial investigation into the conditions of the development of the Russian proletariat: "What has Lenin contributed? A theoretical analysis of the totality [ensemble] of Russian society and its historical development – a new analysis that led him to a new analysis of the global situation itself." [11] Lenin's Marxist stance in theory and politics – what Gramsci would call his methodological criterion – allowed him to grasp historical and societal development in all its contradictory reality. Lefebvre continues: "it was necessary to find a revolutionary formula specifically adapted ... to Russian conditions, adapted to the backward countries that are predominantly agricultural." But this agricultural basis does not diminish the role of the proletariat: "the revolution forming in Russia – and in Asia and other continents – will have Marxism as a guide, the proletariat as the leading force." [12] From his detailed study of the ongoing introduction of capitalist social relations into Russian agriculture, Lenin ensures that this thesis – "the capitalist mode of production becoming increasingly dominant in Russia" – is the focal point for his political strategy, stressing the leading hegemonic role of the proletariat in the coming revolution. [13]

While there is clearly (as will be shown below) a complex interplay between rupture and continuity in Lenin's thought—chiefly based around the outbreak of the First World War and the collapse of the Second International, as well as his close reading of Hegel's Logic [14]—Bensaïd will maintain even in his later work that this "foundational work of his youth... will put in place the problematic that subsequently allows him to make theoretical corrections and strategic adjustments." [15] This provides an initial yet cohesive framework that can be bent and shaped in light of the shifting terrain of conflict, as will become evident in the particular shifts that took place in Lenin's political vocabulary and focus from 1905 to 1917.

There is a persistent emphasis, then, on the fact that political theory and practice follows from and is bound up with inquiry into actual historical developments: Lenin's early work could be seen as a "theoretical summing up," to use Lenin's terms in *State and Revolution*, that can be referred back to for direction in future struggles. [16] For Bensaïd, these early theoretical and scientific works provide a "confrontational clarity" and coherence to all of Lenin's political interventions, from his polemical texts against the Populists, his debates within the RSDLP, and (most importantly) his conjunctural analyses of 1917. Lenin transposed, in other words, Marxist theory to a certain set of unique conditions, conditions which in turn delimited or made clear certain tactical and strategic choices. Lefebvre sees this as Lenin's fundamental deepening or elaboration upon Marx and Engels's own revolutionary thought; the most effective consequences of this transposition are reflected in the novelty of Lenin's political theory, and the conceptual apparatus that is thereby established. The crucial fifth chapter of Lefebvre's book – "Lenin's Political Thought" – has two passages from Lenin that will serve a critical function both in Bensaïd's *mémoire de maîtrise* and his later work: first, from 1917, that "the key question of every revolution is undoubtedly the question of state power;" and second, from 1920: "politics is more like algebra than like elementary arithmetic, and still more like higher rather than elementary mathematics." [17] The question of state power will always be in play when politics is involved, this is a matter of course; yet the second quotation is connected to the first, and helps to explain its deeper meaning. Politics has its own logic that is irreducible to the social order, i.e. the social relations of capitalism; Marxist politics cannot be imagined as a form of sociology. [18]

For Lenin, the confusion between the political subject and the social subject – party and class – can only lead to a "disorganizing" confusion that can considerably hamper the impact of short- or long-term political strategies. There is an undoubtedly a connection between the two orders; but, as Lefebvre notes, "the perpetual relations between these two elements is also perpetually changing." Politics reveals certain "becomings, possibilities." [19] Bensaïd will describe it in terms of "a permanent game of displacements and condensations," whereby "social reality is manifested in political language." [20] This refraction causes the central antagonism of capitalist social reality, between capital and labor, to appear in more complex, convoluted form, thus requiring an expanded conception of political practice to navigate through these historically specific articulations. This point was also made quite forcefully by Trotsky in "Class, Party, and the Leadership," where he polemicalizes against determinist explanations of revolutionary politics. He notes that "History is a process of the class struggle," but it also remains the case that "classes do not bring their full weight to bear automatically and simultaneously," as "in the process of struggle the classes create various organs which play an important and independent role and are subject to deformations." [21] Politics, and a form of politics based on revolutionary Marxist principles in particular, is to be conceived as a "strategic art," traversing the interacting and shifting variables of a volatile situation. In turn, it also requires a theoretical understanding of the revolutionary political subject and the objective conditions in which it finds itself that goes beyond any and all simplifying or reductive (sociological) gestures:

The force of Lenin's thought lies in the fact that he knew to establish, through the theory of the party, the specificity of politics as seen from the viewpoint of the working-class. His theory of organization (the party) is at the center of a conceptual network which structures this new understanding of the political field: class consciousness, relation of forces, alliances, moment (revolutionary crisis). It is with Lenin that time, duration, irrupts into politics, giving it a strategic formulation. The proletarian struggle is no longer a pilgrimage [pèlerinage] to the horizon of history, or an abstract dialectic of means and ends; rather, it is a rhythmic battle where, for the first time, there is a tactic (initiative, decision) that is not an empirical fragment of the battle, but the permanent actualization of a plan, the translation of a project and a will. It is thus with Lenin that Marxism makes a real step forward in terms of political theory. [22]

Two concepts are crucial to this reading: on the one hand, the formation of the revolutionary party and its implementation of tactics and strategy based on the historical development and activity of the proletariat and its class allies; on the other, the objective conditions, or situational elements, of a revolutionary crisis. Once again, these concepts are of great significance for Lefebvre's earlier study. The revolutionary party, as described in *What is to be Done?*, "realizes concretely, practically, the fusion of thought and action, socialism and the workers' movement, knowledge and the mass movement." [23] The revolutionary crisis is the necessary condition for this practical realization. The crisis is the moment where the subjective and objective conditions fuse together and reciprocally condition each other, where a potentially revolutionary situation is altered and transformed by the subject which traverses it. In Lefebvre's words, it is a "total crisis, shaking the existing society from the base to the superstructures, from the social relations of production to ideologies and juridical institutions ... it is as much a crisis of daily life as it is of politics." In brief: "no revolution without a revolutionary crisis." [24]

As parenthetically noted above, the traumatic shock of the almost unanimous support given by the European Social-Democratic parties for war credits in 1914 allowed Lenin to modify as well as systematize his conceptual and practical understandings of revolutionary situations and revolutionary crises in "The Collapse of the Second International." The revolutionary crisis became essential to his overall strategic approach, highlighting the break between Lenin's outlook and the majority opportunist orientation of the Second International. Above all, the consideration of the "factors" that are at work within a revolutionary situation implies a reworking of the role of the party, from a pedagogical role to "a conscious project, a force capable of initiative – of decision." [25] Instead of an educative party that mainly has a clarifying task, the party becomes a "strategic operator" that is ready not only to reflect upon but also make tactical choices depending on the current relation of forces within the political struggle. And without a notion of crisis, the "taking of power by the proletariat... becomes strictly unthinkable... all avoidance of the revolutionary crisis leads sooner or later to the replacement of the perspective of revolution by a gradual and electoral process of partial conquests, substituting the movement for the goal." [26].

The crisis, understood as the theoretical and practical lens through which to view political struggle, breaks up the continuity of revolutionary strategies based on economistic themes of development and growth, and keeps the question of working-class emancipation as the end goal. Revolutionary strategy now articulated a plurality of times and spaces through the analysis of concrete, conflictual situations and precise evaluations of the national and international class struggles that did not accord to any form of historical rationality, thus "combining history and event, act and process, the taking of power and the "revolution in permanence." Bensaïd will come back to this question of the crisis as a "discontinuity within continuity" in his thesis.

This emphasis on the theoretical centrality of revolutionary crisis is perhaps the most noteworthy upshot of Bensaïd's continual engagements with Lenin's thought, as he takes Lefebvre's short mention of the notion's importance to a much more rigorous level. This is clear in his balance-sheet of the events of May, Mai 1968: *Une répétition générale* [May 1968: A Dress Rehearsal], co-written with Alain Krivine right before the completion of the master's thesis. [27]

This work contains the essentials of Bensaïd's outline of the elements of a revolutionary crisis, as the authors analyze Mai 1968 as an "objectively" revolutionary situation that fatally lacked a political subject to work towards its resolution—thus remaining at a "pre-revolutionary" level. The inexistence of "the subjective conditions of revolution in May," the lack of a "sufficiently organized and politically educated political force" that could take up the project of overthrowing bourgeois power and radical social transformation, meant that there could not even be discussion of a "situation that was ¾th revolutionary." [28] Revolution, on this view, is not a matter of percentages. Bensaïd's reading of Lenin will stress the "interdependence" of the elements of revolutionary crises: but it is precisely this interdependence or reciprocity of conditions (i.e., subjective and objective) that make the formation of a concept of revolutionary crisis so difficult.

Lenin in the Crisis

In his thesis, Bensaÿd takes the schema from "The Collapse of the Second International" as his starting point. First, he delineates the criteria that Lenin describes as essential for a revolutionary situation to take place: when there is a crisis in the policies of the ruling class; when class exploitation has grown more and more; when class struggle has become more antagonistic. But there is always a deciding factor, the subjective factor of the party and the actions of the masses in their ability to take power. As he argues, "the nodal point of the crisis is no longer located in one particular objective element, but is transferred within the organization-subject which combines and incorporates them." [29].

From this basic point, common to both Lenin and Trotsky, he then complicates his analysis. There is an acknowledgement very early on in the text that there is no satisfactory construction of the "concept" of revolutionary crisis in Lenin's work; and yet, it still serves as a singular term, one in which all of the key terms of Lenin's political theory – many of which probably reach a higher degree of scientificity and thus conceptuality – seem to merge and interact. He sets up these basic groupings, or parallel syllogisms, modeled after the Hegelian syllogisms of existence, whereby the "singular serves as the mediation between the particular and the universal": [30]

The first vertical column (social formation, spontaneity, ideology) corresponds to the particular, the middle column (revolutionary crisis, party, theory) corresponds to the singular, and the last column (truth, class, mode of production) represents the universal, or the basic concepts of historical materialism. It is the dialectical interaction of the first and third columns with the middle (singular) terms that specifically provides the historical conjuncture of a revolutionary event, with the last column reduced to, or condensed into, their most acute and antagonistic forms. So, while the revolutionary crisis can only be the crisis of a determinant social formation with all its contradictory and overlapping realities, it still lays bare the antagonistic relation between the working-class and the bourgeoisie, marking the "determinate unity of the extremes." [31]

The party is what allows, in the best Lukácsian fashion, for the passage from the proletariat as the theoretical subject of the revolution to its role as the political revolutionary subject. More ambiguously, the crisis is what allows for the intersection of truth and ideology to be measured through revolutionary theory, that is, Marxism. It is through the crisis that theory can take on a practical role. As he writes later, the crisis is the moment where theory can be transformed into strategy, touching upon practice. It is, in an interesting turn of phrase, the "truth-operator of an event," mediating and suturing the hole between continuity and discontinuity, diachrony and synchrony. A revolutionary crisis, then, constitutes a "test of truth" for these different groupings: for the social formation, by heightening the contradictions between the antagonistic classes of the capitalist mode of production; for the party-organization in that it must "take on the state" through its leadership of the proletariat, while also fighting opportunistic and reformist deviations with its own ranks; and finally for theory in that it allows for, in a historically determinant and differential manner, a "reconnection" of truth (historical materialism) and ideology (class struggle or political practice).

However, Bensaÿd performs some audacious theoretical leaps to keep this intricate structure intact, not all of them effective: drawing on Freud and Lacan, linguistics (Greimas and Guillaume), as well as Lukács, Poulantzas, Bachelard, and Sartre, he tries to hold the dialectical articulation of the three groupings together. It is clear that they do not always work, and he would later disavow this theoretical structure as inevitably leading to a form of "ultra-Bolshevism" and blind voluntarism. No matter how differential or non-linear he tries to make the gap between the theoretical subject of revolution (the proletariat) as compared to its historically concrete political subject in the party, there is always an inevitable conflation of party and class within this framework. This tendency to absorb the class into the party was driven in a certain sense by the very concept of revolutionary crisis, through which one could "reconcile, in a kind of historical epiphany, the practical subject and its theoretical phantom." [32] Bensaÿd was deeply critical of this "Hegelian metaphysics," but also saw it as a product of a particular practical-theoretical milieu:

the very choice of such a theme was clearly a critique of the structuralist ideology that was tendentially dominant (at the university at least), whose ultimate consequence could be to render the very idea of revolution unthinkable. In

other words: against the ventriloquist structures, everything for the subject! [33]

In later works, most evidently *Marx for Our Times*, Bensaïd would try and rethink this linked problematic of party and class, subject and object, and ultimately, the in-itself/for-itself division in more materialist and anti-historicist terms. Put otherwise, it will be his reconception of time, and its relation to politics, that will allow Bensaïd to overcome the Lukácsian problematic. The concept of the discordance of different times within the present opens up a radical critique of historical progress and the "homogeneous, empty time" that is seen as inhabiting much of the previous Marxist political tradition. [34] The consequences of such a critique of historical reason for political action are evident in *Marx for Our Times*:

Object and subject, being and essence are bound up with one another in the development of classes. In the dynamic of class relations, the subjectivity of consciousness cannot arbitrarily emancipate itself from the structure, any more than the objectivity of being can be passively detached from consciousness. This problematic is opposed to any mechanical conception of a necessary transition from the in-itself to the for-itself, from the unconscious to the conscious, from the pre-conscious social to the conscious political, with time acting as a neutral go-between. Class consciousness and unconsciousness are intertwined in a perverse embrace, and both are consistently mistaken. [35]

This leads Bensaïd to posit a conception of politics based upon the uncertainties and uneven development of struggle, and most importantly, the unpredictable bifurcations of historical possibility. This is a domain that can only be charted through a form of strategic reason, "based on the interaction between theory and practical experimentation"; this idea of strategy, and the revolutionary crisis as fundamentally a strategic concept – the qualifier is absolutely essential, as it signals a political importance – is the key breakthrough Bensaïd retains from this early text. [36]

This returns us to one of our guiding questions – why the insistence in this text that the revolutionary crisis was not a concept, but a notion? It is because it necessarily breaks down at the threshold of practice. [37]

This is a point that is reminiscent of Lenin's explanation in the Postface of *State and Revolution* for the incompleteness of the text: "I was 'interrupted' by a political crisis – the eve of the October Revolution of 1917." [38] Revolutionary crises find their resolution and completion through a subjective intervention: it is a concept with a necessarily practical referent, a concept that is necessarily encountered on the concrete terrain of history and politics. For the Althusserianism dominant during the immediate period, Marxism was based on an epistemology of the concept, and reliant on the autonomous production of theoretical practice. There could be no subject of a science. As is well known, high-Althusserianism encountered real and unresolvable difficulties after May 1968; it is clear that Bensaïd had already observed these and taken them into account (he maintained a critical, if appreciative, distance from Althusser throughout his career). [39]

The fact that a revolutionary crisis can only rise to the level of a notion – and not the "purity of the concept" – is surely attributable to the impure imprint left by one of its conditions, the revolutionary organization or subject. [40] This means that instead of a concept fashioned from the concrete-in-thought, the development and efficacy of the notion of revolutionary crisis indicated a shift from theory to strategy: "the crisis then appears as the moment of rupture at which theory be transformed into the art of conflict." [41]

Strategic Questions

In some of his later articles, and in the context of his own work as a militant within the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire*, Bensaïd deepens this shift from theory to politics – the latter informed by strategy, with an

emphasis on the importance of strategic hypotheses. These mediate the exigencies of struggle and a critical understanding of previous revolutionary experiences:

We have insisted on the role of the "subjective factor" as against both the spontaneist view of the revolutionary process and the structuralist immobilism of the 1960s. Our insistence is not on a "model" but on what we have called "strategic hypotheses." Models are something to be copied; they are instructions for use. A hypothesis is a guide to action that starts from past experience but is open and can be modified in the light of new experience or unexpected circumstances. Our concern therefore is not to speculate but to see what we can take from past experience, the only material at our disposal. But we always have to recognise that it is necessarily poorer than the present and the future if revolutionaries are to avoid the risk of doing what the generals are said to do – always fight the last war. [42]

From this passage we can see how the question of strategy is implicated both in the Leninist notion of revolutionary crisis and its theoretical-practical implications (the crisis transforms the place or role of theory and the party), as well as Bensaïd's own understanding of historical time that stresses the "primacy of politics over history." [43] In a way, this is an example of Bensaïd's heterodox historical materialism, what could be described as "the concrete analysis of historical possibility" that combines historical reflection with strategic foresight and tactical creativity. [44] Revolutionary politics must have a conception of how ruptural events are historically determined. Today, when it seems that we can't get away from the word "crisis," this combination or merger of perspectives is more relevant than ever. Bensaïd's Lenin invites us to ask ourselves: what is a crisis, how do we think its emergence, and what do we do about it? For what are we to do when the real crisis happens?

Thanks to Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi for their helpful comments and suggestions on both this short introduction and the translation itself.

[Viewpoint](#)

[1] The chapter is in fact a condensed version of his mémoire d'habilitation, an oral examination that contains a summary of past and future academic research (an "intellectual autobiography") to be presented before a committee of one's peers. Bensaïd's committee included Jacques Derrida, Georges Labica, Michael Löwy, and André Tosel.

[2] Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2002). For another influential reading of the history Marxism as a series of "crises," see Louis Althusser, "The Crisis of Marxism," trans. Grahame Locke, in *Power and Opposition in Post-Revolutionary Societies*, trans. Patrick Camiller and Jon Rothschild (London: Ink Links Ltd., 1979), 225-235.

[3] Daniel Bensaïd and Samy Naïr, <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>, "Partisans no. 45 (May-June 1968)

[4] Sebastian Budgen, <http://isj.org.uk/the-red-hussar-da...> International Socialism 127 (June 2010).

[5] Daniel Bensaïd, "Leaps, Leaps, Leaps: Lenin and Politics," in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, ed. Stathis Kouvelakis, Sebastian Budgen, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[6] Two collections have been published in French that provide good introduction to some of the major themes of Bensaïd's thought: one is the various articles that appeared in the journal *Lignes*, no. 32, May 2010; the other is entitled *Daniel Bensaïd, L'Intempestif*, ed. François Sabado (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2012).

[7] See Salar Mohandesi, <https://viewpointmag.com/2012/04/09...>, Viewpoint Magazine, 2012.

[8] Daniel Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/La-notion-...> 1968

[9] For Bensaïd's remark, see Bensaïd, 2014, 81.

[10] Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/La-notion-...>

[11] Henri Lefebvre, *Pour connaître la pensée de Lénine* (Paris: Bordas, 1957), 53. All translations from this text are my own.

[12] *Ibid.*, 51.

[13] One could argue that this is an underestimation of Lenin's insistence on the need to struggle for bourgeois-democratic political freedoms and the importance of this struggle for the tactics of the Bolshevik party, as Lars Lih has recently pointed out in an influential and thoroughly researched interpretation. It is also nevertheless true that Bensaïd actually backs up some of Lih's claims for the pervasive Kautskist overtones present in Lenin's early works, and his fervor for the proletariat's revolutionary mission or calling. See Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to be Done? in Context* (London: Brill, 2006). We may also note the interesting parallels and convergences between Bensaïd's reading of Lenin with that of Antonio Negri's, specifically on the importance of Lenin's studies into the class composition of the Russian working class and peasantry for his political-organizational work, and for his definition of revolutionary crisis more generally. Cf. Antonio Negri, "Workers' Party Against Work," trans. Francesca Novello and Timothy S. Murphy in *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy* (New York: Verso, 2005), 53-54, 82; *The Factory of Strategy: Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin*, trans. Arianna Bove (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[14] See Michael Löwy, "From the 'Logic' of Hegel to the Finland Station in Petrograd," in *On Changing the World: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1993), 77-90.

[15] Daniel Bensaïd, *Un monde à changer: mouvements et stratégies* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), 154. All further translations of Bensaïd's works are my own, unless otherwise noted.

[16] V.I. Lenin, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/le...> Collected Works, Volume 25, 405. See Mohandesi, 2012.

[17] V.I. Lenin, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/le...> 1917; <https://www.marxists.org/archive/le...>, 1920.

[18] Franck Fischbach, in his *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale*, attempts to think this question from the inverse angle: how is politics inscribed in the social, when do social processes and relations become politicized? It is true that other Leninists of this late '60s-mid '70s period, such as Tronti, shifted to a conception of the autonomy of the political. We should heed Fischbach's warning and see the two levels at their point of articulation. This would "contest any autonomy of politics" understand the "reinscription of politics in the social and see the social as the conflictual terrain where confronting political representations form." Social reorganization, then, always involves distinct moments of political action. Frank Fischbach, *Manifeste pour la philosophie sociale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009, 59-61), 132.

[19] Lefebvre, 255.

[20] Bensaïd, 2003, 158. A similar passage is found, with a more specific reference to psychoanalysis, in *Marx in Our Times*, 112.

[21] Leon Trotsky, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/tr...> 1940.

[22] Daniel Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/Eurocommun...> 1977. All further translations of Bensaïd's works are my own, unless otherwise noted. On the subjective/objective dichotomy in Lenin, see Lefebvre, 65-66

[23] Lefebvre, 275.

[24] *Ibid.*, 301

[25] See Daniel Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/De-Marx-a-...> 2007.

[26] Daniel Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/Greve-gene...>

[27] Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Krivine, *Mai 1968: Une répétition générale* (Paris: Maspero, 1968).

[28] *Ibid.*, 171.

[29] Bensaïd, 2.

[30] Daniel Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/Retour-sur...>, 2001. Interestingly, Bensaïd wrongly transcribes the last of these groupings in this retrospective text, putting truth as the middle term instead of theory.

[31] G.W.F. Hegel, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/...>, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), Â§ 1478.

[32] Bensaïd, 2014, 84. Budgen has explored the consequences of such a substitutionist conception of the party in his retrospective, particularly in the circumstances of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire. It was also addressed in an interview concerning the LCR's Leninism, particularly in the formative years of organization from the late 60s to the early 70s, as Bensaïd urges that "a critical review of that period is necessary. In the context of the period, we had a tendency to fetishise the party as the direct and immediate adversary of the state (inspired by a questionable reading of Poulantzas), and gave our 'Leninism' a slightly 'militarist' twist ('ultra-left' if you prefer). In this you can see the influence of Guevara, his voluntarism and the role attributed to 'exemplary' actions." See "Leninism in the 21st Century," interview with Phil Hearse, *International Viewpoint Online* IV, no. 335 (November 2001).

[33] Daniel Bensaïd, <http://jeunes.npa2009.org/spip.php?...>, 2008.

[34] See, for example, Stathis Kouvelakis, "Daniel Bensaïd: La dialectique et la lutte des temps," in Lignes, and Philippe Pignarre, "Le concept d'intempestif," in Daniel Bensaïd, *L'intempestif*.

[35] Bensaïd, 2002, 114-115.

[36] *Ibid.*, 270.

[37] Alain Badiou, in his *De L'idéologie*, will make this same charge in regards to Althusser and May 1968: "In Althusser's formulations prior to May 1968, ideology was marked by the seal of infamy that opposed it to science. In the immediate aftermath of May 1968, the political limits of the mass movement had been transfigured by the enthusiasm for its ideological importance." In other words, a "theoretical question... was put to the test and divided by the real movement." Alain Badiou and François Balmés, *De L'idéologie* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), 7.

[38] V.I. Lenin, "State and Revolution," 492.

[39] See his contribution "Les intellectuels du PCF, dos au Stalinisme" to the collection *Contre Althusser* (Paris: 10/18, 1974), 295-308, but also his more tempered and appreciative statements in *Marx for Our Times*, especially for Althusser's considerations on historical time.

[40] Cf. François Matheron, "Louis Althusser, or the Impure Purity of the Concept," in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, eds. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 508. Althusser himself was not unaware of the "practical" nature of Lenin's own concepts, as has been detailed in his correspondence with Franca Madonia <http://www.penser-la-transformation...> and is apparent from even a cursory reading of "Contradiction and Overdetermination;" Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 2006).

[41] Bensaïd, 2014, 87.

[42] Bensaïd, <http://danielbensaid.org/De-Marx-a-...>

[43] Bensaïd, 2002, 87.

[44] See Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press), 59