

Abensour, M. (2011 [1997]) *Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*. Trans. M. Blechman and M. Breaugh. Malden, MA: Polity.

Blechman Introduction: "To think emancipation otherwise"

How should Marxism criticize itself vii

emancipation should not be a coercively unified knowledge and power viii

Abensour focuses on Marx's "political" writings, esp. *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* viii

for Ab this text signals a "Machiavellian moment" in Marx viii

Marx's "true democracy"; Lefort's "savage democracy"

the idea of an excess of politics, overflowing the containers in which it is put viii

politics as permanent critique viii

for M and for Ab emancipation is still a viable category viii

against the consensus of liberal democracy viii

for Ab we are in a Machiavellian moment ix

for Ab Marx thought the State's disappearance is the fulfillment of democracy

ix

democracy is permanent struggle against order that settles, that denies the originary division of society ix

the Machiavellian moment is: a return to A and the idea of the political

animal but a radicalizing of it, a going beyond the State ix-x

Ab thinks politics without an end-of-history idea, it is for him an ongoing struggle to establish political equality and liberty x

key for Ab is Marx's insistence that political *representation* is alienating and mystifying x

we can work with emancipation as an idea, but the idea can never be finally settled, it is always open to contestation x

there is a whole theme: Ab tries to rescue Marx's political thinking from an economistic reading which says that the political is merely epiphenomenon, and the young Marx's concern with the political is merely immaturity xi

Ab wants to reestablish this political period as real, as really Marx, as legitimate, as not having been "superseded" in Marx's thought xi

[and as not a period: Ab says the political analysis goes throughout M's work]

M: we must go beyond the idea that political community *requires* commanders and obeyers xi

antimony between State and society for Ab, but this is thought not as absolute negation, but as an ongoing struggle of people against the State xii

[the State does not so much disappear in Ab as we struggle every day to make it disappear]

for M democracy is human existence, while citizens currently have only a legal existence xii

M: we must maximize political participation and *augment* the political

realm [rather than eliminate it as Ab later (and prob. misguidedly) says anarchists want to do], without centralizing power, without strengthening the bureaucracy, without using representative techniques xii

the goal is to help the political animal flourish, to create a space of active engagement and equality xiii

reduction is a key term: the State must be reduced, that is, it must be understood for what it is, an objectification of people's activity [essentially: constituted power is seen as really just a form of constituent power] xiii

the State is reduced to merely one [contingent] form of relation among people [rather than the sovereign relation among people] xiii

it is one of millions of relations, and it is absorbed into that sea xiii

true democracy requires the reduction of the State, so that we see the State as partial, and instituting/constituting power as universal xiii
for Ab, M felt that true democracy would bring out the baseline conflict between plebs and nobles, between governing classes and the governed xiv
for Ab the idea of democracy is to break with the idea of the political organizing form, i.e. to not want or expect the establishment of a new, "democratic" organizing form xiv

true democracy keeps the ruling classes' rule from being settled [very JR] xv

it rejects the entire device of sovereignty and the idea of rulers/ruled as a natural, necessary relation xv

it rejects a completed whole xv

the communal constitution is a big deal for M [and Ab?], *perhaps* a way forward to establishing a political realm in a non-sovereign, non-State way xv

a constitution whose mission is to struggle against the State; a political form that struggles against political form xvi

a la Clastres [and Graeber]: mechanisms whose purpose is to ward off Cephalus, to ward off the separated power of the State-form, to block a division between State and society [by reducing the State, forcing it to swim in the sea as one water molecule among millions] xvi

not a millenarian disappearance of the State; but a perpetual struggle against the State, to reduce the State xvi

M 1871: the State machine is not to be seized and used, but smashed xvii

the State is not a neutral mechanism, bad only because the bourgeoisie controls it; it is *itself* a form of domination, itself to be struggled against xvii

social domination is the State's embryonic structure; it separates power from society xvii

for M the Commune was a revolution against the State itself; and for the people's desire to govern themselves xviii

"by taking the direction of public affairs into their own hands" xix
democracy does not resolve social division into a singular demos [although

this is at times what it seems in M, per Ab], rather democratic society continuously self-institutes, and the division is a necessary element in this process xviii

the Communal form/constitution was a form whose purpose was to forestall the State's return, to nurture the desire for liberty xix

a form designed to ward off both the return of the old State, and the emergence of the State that is being born xix

democracy is not one possible form of the good regime, it is the rejection of the idea that a good regime is possible xix

the Commune is not a final/perfect/determinant form of democracy, it is an *example* xx

M: the Commune was not the establishing of democracy, but the embodiment of the movement toward democracy xx

it made self-determination actual, currently practiced, active xxi

a political form whose purpose is to always search actively for its own political expression; a political form of emancipation xxi

against Jacobinism, against appropriating the State as a strategy xxi

also "the anarchist rejection of the political realm" is rejected; Ab and M want not just "spontaneous sociality," but to regenerate an active political life of self-governance [this way of understanding anarchism is unhelpful, I think] xxi

Ab: 'democratic State' is an oxymoron xxi

goal is to act politically such that we annihilate the division between rulers and ruled xxi

Ab: Lefort's "savage" democracy, in the sense of wildcat strikes that can endure without a bureaucracy, without a division between power and people (Budapest 1956, Paris 1968, Gdansk 1980-2, Paris 1995) xxii

Abensour's Preface to the Italian Edition (2008): "Insurgent Democracy and Institution"

Must rescue democracy from its debased conceptualizations: rule of law, representative government xxiii

instead: radical or savage or insurgent democracy xxiii

democracy is not a political regime; it is an action, an irruption of the *demos* against the *grandezes* [i.e. rulers, Machiavelli's term] and for non-domination xxiii

democracy perpetuates itself by permanently (re-)irrupting xxiii

in the French Revolution there *was* insurgent democracy, even if in the end it became a new State xxiv

the right to insurrection [or rebellion] is a way to reclaim constituent power xxiv

and then use that power to search for a new political relationship, non-hierarchical, un-ordered, egalitarian...nurturing the people's ability to act, preventing the re-emergence of separated power xxv

and to create instead a "fraternal disorder" xxv

Ab: some say I ignore institutions, but insurgent democracy is not *merely* the

negation of **institutions** xxv

you could have insurgent institutions [cf H&N's *Commonwealth*]: they would have to have a constitution that enshrined the people's right to insurrection xxv

and prevented domination by grandees while stoking the people's desire for liberty, kept the ferment going [sourdough starter metaphor] xxvi

they would be institutions meant to foster the people's capacity to act xxvi

a *continual interaction between* insurgence and institution xxvi
insurgent democracy seeks institutions so that it can endure, but only institutions that: promote the people's action and ward off *grandee* rule xxvi

institutions that ferment new desire—Deleuze's "anticipatory institutions"—rather than capture desire that already exists xxvii

these institutions could take on "a stability resistant to change" [here change would have to mean a decline in people's action] xxvii

the institution can "articulate the principle of non-domination" xxviii

an institution as launchpad/base for the people's action/desire/invention xxviii

we do not want democracy to be just a flash in the pan xxviii

but that should not tempt us into institutions that are sovereign, or fixed in Law xxviii

but we *can* have a kind of non-State "social law" xxviii

Abensour's Foreward to the Second French Edition (2004): "Of Insurgent Democracy"

Marx's 1843 *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and the question of "real democracy," which, for M would mean "the disappearance of the political state" xxx

in the 1871 addresses on the Commune, this is less a withering of the State than a struggle against it xxxi

democracy works against domination, for free action xxxi

for M democracy is the "resolved enigma of all constitutions" xxxi

all constitutions are alienations from the power that produced them, which is the *demos* and its free action xxxi

we might settle on Lefort's savage democracy, resolved by the principle of anarchy [see appendix] xxxi

emancipation from foundational principles, a politics exposed to flux, and to the possible xxxii

for Lefort there is a role for the struggle for rights, for new law, but not as they are typically understood xxxii

it is essential to ward off State control xxxii

democracy is a struggle that rises against the State xxxiii

it **reduces** the State to one moment among many of the people's power,

and **blocks** the elevation of the state to a State, i.e. a sovereign/separate/organized/unified power xxxiii
the “democratic State” is a contradiction xxxiii
after reduction and blocking that prevents the sovereign State, democracy, as the action of the people to manage themselves, can **extend** itself to (irrigate) other (non-political) spheres xxxiii
Ranciere’s police/democracy ideas useful [or, almost identical to Ab’s] xxxiv
M: hopes for the people to reappropriate the power that the State claims for itself xxxiv
democracy struggles against both the existing State, and the State that will begin to grow when a revolution topples the existing State xxxv
it operates best in the caesura between those States, trying to keep the way clear for the free action of the people xxxv
and what it does, essentially, is struggle to **preserve that caesura**; that would have to be the characteristic activity of the democratic institutions he discusses in the previous chapter xxxv
insurgent democracy is the community of citizens against the State, the “all ones” against the “all One” xxxvi
the argument is not that civil society is the seat of liberty, especially bourgeois civil society; but a repoliticized civil society has that potential xxxvii
for L, H, R: civil society is the State/political community; for Hegel: civil society is the private and economic sphere outside (and against) the State xxxvii
for Hegel, the solution was for the State to swallow civil society and make everything whole and public/universal xxxvii
Ab: we are against L, H, R’s civil society *as* the State; and against Hegel’s civil society as private and economic xxxviii
rather we want to draw the political fault line of: political community against the State xxxviii
there are many kinds of political community other than the State, and we must explore them xxxviii
[and here is perhaps his beef with the anarchists, who might assume that the political sphere and the State are the same thing, or at least that domination is necessary in politics, and so emphasize a social revolution rather than a political one]
these political communities must always ward off the formation of the State (Clastres again) xxxviii
struggle against the State for a political community of the people, “the all ones,” in action; a political community that is not the State xxxviii
for Ab: discovering a non-statist political community is what it means to re-politicize civil society xxxix
rejects a vulgar anarchism that wants the disappearance of the political sphere because it (crudely) equates political community with the State xxxix

rather than wanting, with M and Ab, the disappearance of the State's *dominance* of the political community]
anti-statist political community is better than non-statist for Ab
[this move is bad: it orients us *toward* the State, rather than away from it]

M is searching for the original subject, the whole *demos* [as a way to emphasize that the sovereign is not the original subject, that *the people* are –but of course that unifies all people into “the people,” the modern error that M makes] xl

Ab: but we should think in terms not of the whole *demos* but in terms of the “all ones” (*hoi polloi*) xli

the body of the people is always already divided/split, but it is on a permanent quest for its identity [cf H&N's multitude] xli

insurgency of the people is the live source of democracy xli

the permanent struggle between the plebs and the nobles xli

the permanent struggle by citizens against the State xli

insurgent democracy gives rise to a political community, one that is not the State and is in fact against the State xli

[my quibble (perhaps it is more like a disagreement) here is that we should be building a non-State political community, not an anti-State one. I know, it is necessary to be against the State because we have to ward it off when it re-emerges, but that is a readguard action (ala D&G), not a primary one. The primary action is a positive one: to build political relations that are loving/egalitarian/free, all of which are necessarily non-State relations]

Abensour's Preface [to this edition]

Marx can be used as an inspiration for statist-marxist politics xlii

we need to save Marx from Marxism xliii

esp. the philosophical early Marx xliii

he was always a theorist of workers' self-emancipation xliii

focus on *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* 1843, which was published only in 1927 xliv

Ab's questions:

What status does Marx give to the political realm? xliv

What kind of society does Marx envision by the terms true democracy? xliv

the idea of the Machiavellian moment is to focus on and discover the political realm xliv

res publica, emancipation xliv

M always had this focus xliv

common argument: M went on to subordinate the political to the economic xlv

Ab: we must decry the equation democracy = State xlv

democracy is the political institution of human sociality xlv

Clastres: *Society Against the State* [inspired Ab's title] xlvi

some on the left equate democracy with liberal democracy and then oppose it (they are muddling things badly) xlvi

Ab invites us to envision democracy arising over the dead body of the State xlvi

unlike in the 19th century, today we know we cannot find the solution; we must continue our lives unresolved, and politics must be a continuous struggle xlvi

Introduction

I:

Tocqueville: tame democracy's savage instincts, submit it to civilization (the State) 1

M: democracy as the enigma of all constitutions solved (Ab: more the enigma is redoubled) 2

in democracy the State is not universal but particular, and so the State *as sovereign* disappears 2

democracy is a political community whose truth is the disappearance of the political State 2

democracy overflows beyond the State to non-political realms 2

political dimension of M has been ignored; we must avoid the common economic reading M's analysis of the political [even M's own doing this in the *Contribution to Critique of Political Economy* 1859] 3

we should read the political writings as a work of thought 3

an occulted dimension of M: a philosophical questioning of the political realm, which runs through his whole work [Ab is essentially positing a "minor political Marx" to discover] 3

this dimension is best revealed through Machiavelli 3

read M (and Machiavelli) as though they were living today and see what they have to offer 4

Machiavelli offers a proper thinking of the political, not as reduced to an epiphenomenon 5

Pocock, using Machiavelli, upends the juridico-political model of political philosophy and offers instead a (Machiavellian) republican and humanist model that affirms the active-political nature of humans 6

so the Machiavellian moment:

take up the goal of an active political life using *logos* to make common decisions in the *polis* 6-7

here truth is generated by citizens in common through *logos* 7

homo politicus/homo rhetor/zoon politikon 7

republic is the best form of *polis* 7

the *polis* is not subject to eternal fact, it makes its own way, values, norms, laws, justice 7

in 1842 Marx welcomed this Machiavellian centering of the political/human/earthly against the theological-political of his Germany 8

M loved A's idea of the political animal 8

is true democracy = civic-republican humanism? 8

II:

there are two constellations in the young Marx: 1842 and then 1843-4, the second a critique of the first 9

first: emancipate the political from the theological 9

second: question the political realm as it is identified with the modern State 9-10

later there was the turn to political economy and a denying the autonomy of the political (and a severing from Machiavelli) 10

but Ab thinks M's questioning of the political never went away 11

[his method of sussing out something he already wants to be there seems a bit shaky]

was there a break after which he abandoned the political to epiphenomenon? Or was he just finding in the proletariat a new political subject, alternative to Hegel's State? 11

the question of democracy, the political realm, emancipation, life in common in the *polis*: these are the themes Ab finds in Marx, and says

they are enduring (not just in the young M) 12

upshot: 1843 is not just a superseded youthful indiscretion...it is part of a serious search for democracy and the political realm that never ceased 12-13

1-The Utopia of the Rational State

[Chapters 1-3 chronicle the development of M's thinking]

In the first period, pre-1843, M is exploring the possibility of a rational democratic State, the best/right/just form of the State 14

he is concerned to emancipate the State from religion, from the *ancien regime* and build a modern democratic republic in Germany 16

Feuerbach argues for the importance for humans of the political need, and wants to situate this need on earth (not heaven), and invest it in the State 17

but the State replaces God in F's schema 18

this is the political/intellectual climate in which Marx begins his work 19

tempted to equate the modern State with democracy with communism 19

Spinoza offers M the separation of theology and philosophy 19

M sees emancipation as freedom from religious diktat and the creation of the rational State 20

bringing the State back down into the human (rather than divine) realm, but leaving it in place 20

very A in his conception of rational human exploration of the political good 21

M wants to use speculative philosophy to discover the best form of State 21-2

this State would be a unified organic totality 22

statist though M is here, he is trying to radically reinvent the political realm 23

2—Political Intelligence

[Chapters 1-3 chronicle the development of M's thinking]

The State is the self-becoming of human reason 24

M seeks the spirit of State as regulator and resolver of civil-society conflict, defender of public right, of universality [he is almost pure Hegel here] 25

State mediates between humans and their liberty 26

transforms their private selves into something greater [much JJR here as well] 26

this higher public-spiritedness is what we gain when we grow up, trading the particular for the general 27

political/public unity is achieved in the State 28

Ab: what matters here is that M is critiquing the *ancien regime* and the Christian State in order to free the political realm from domination and return it to people 29

[even if he still sees the State as a vehicle for this freedom]

3—From the 1843 Crisis to the Criticism of Politics

[Chapters 1-3 chronicle the development of M's thinking]

After 1843, M decides that the State merely offers a new divine form through which control the political realm is established 31

instead of the unitary, universal subject of the State, M explores a plural subject, radiating power horizontally, what he calls “true democracy” 31

M critiques political emancipation as a bourgeois trick: it offers freedom and equality as citizens in the public/State realm, but strict avoidance of inequality and domination in the private civil-society realm 32

but still, M wants to save the political realm, not abandon it 32

moreover, the State *itself* alienates power, it withdraws from its producers (everyone) and establishes itself as a foreign power over them 32

then sets itself up as the new God 32

what is required is to **deconsecrate** the State, to understand it as one possible political form among millions, rather than as the *necessarily most high* political form 33

see it not as abstract, but concrete [not transcendent, but immanent] 33

M is relentlessly seeking emancipation *in the political realm*, by radically rethinking it 33

the Greek idea of politics is explicit in M here 33

he still thinks the democratic State is the fulfillment of man's highest needs 33

M distinguishes, with A, between life and the good life, which for him is living in accordance with liberty 34

M: everything has within it its *telos*, and the goal is to push it to grow towards this *telos*; so the current political realm must grow toward

its *telos*, its truth, which is democracy 34

carry trends in the political realm, i.e. the invention of the modern State by the bourgeoisie, farther down the road of their natural development 33-4

so the modern State is this complex enemy/ally, this resource for political innovation and power that we must engage with in order to force it toward its truth [*telos*], force ourselves to go beyond the State 35

the State carries within itself the seeds of a life beyond the State 35

so, do not turn away from the State or the political realm, rather plumb the State's tensions in order to supersede it 36

the State's *telos* is the full blossoming of the political principle: the State's nature is to supersede itself 36

for Ab, all M's investing of energy in the political realm is evidence of his Machiavellian desire 36

it is equally A: this faith that our full humanity is to be achieved in the political realm, and so we must seek emancipation there as well 36

[i.e. if modern/bourgeois political emancipation is inadequate (or a sham), we should respond by improving *political* emancipation, not abandoning the project and seeking social emancipation instead]

[this argument is quite at odds with M's other claim (e.g. in the *EPM*): that our true humanity is seated in the productive/economic realm (and so our emancipation must be found *there*), and that counter-evidence is probably the reason that Ab works so hard to argue M's link to Aristotle/Machiavelli]

[this whole narrative doesn't smell right...in the course of about one year M seems to have gone from a straight Hegelian statist to a staunch critic of the State...which makes him seem, in this period, to be like a puppy who has no idea what is going on, which plays right into the whole young-Marx-was-left-behind-by-the-adult-scientific-economistic-Marx narrative...]

4-A Reading Hypothesis

[more on M's thought post-1843, and Ab making the argument about M as political]

Again, we are trying to see M as genuinely and enduringly interested in the political realm 38

M: the real human being is the subject, and the State is the predicate; whereas Hegel makes the State-Idea the subject 39

for M the State is dependent on the active force of real people 39
[here we can read "active force" as constituent power or desiring-production—that which is active, the agent, produces everything]

of course M agreed with H in 1842 40
M wants a democratic rather than bureaucratic way to think the political realm
41

bureaucratic thinking accepts the State as separate, independent, the
only active agent in society, and real people are passive 41

M: we must invert this way of thinking, understand that real people are
the source of power, that they are the only active agents and that it is
the *State* that is derivative 41-2

M seeks an originary subject, a root or font of social/political life,
and he finds it in the *demos*, the whole *demos*, human beings as a mass,
out of which the State is formed 43

the whole *demos* is the “real ground” of the constitution and the
State 43

M is not trying to explain the political by reference to the
social; he is saying that the real power of the State is external
to the State, in the active life of the *demos* 43

the whole *demos*, as source of the State's existence, haunts the
State 43

M: we must radically re-understand the political realm to be
grounded not on the State-Idea, but on this active life of
the *demos* 44

H's mistake, for M, was to botch the understanding of *the*
political realm 45

in the political realm, understood correctly, involves the
struggle between the activity of the *demos* and the efforts of the
State to control that activity 45

so, M asks, what is the nature of this political subject? Is it a
body? an organic whole? A system? 46

M denounces Idealism in favor of an analysis of real human beings, the
terrestrial 46

5—The Four Characteristics of True Democracy

[according to M]

Paradox: when the political community reaches its truth (democracy), the State
will disappear 47

democracy != the political State 47

the disappearance of the State is not a simple negation, it is a
transformation, a conversion of the State to an organ subordinated to
society [a deconsecration] 47

democracy lies at the heart of the question of the political realm 48

[Marx's] *Four Characteristics of True Democracy*:

I:

the people are the real State, the true sovereign; democracy is the *telos* of

all political forms 48-9

i.e. democracy is the truth of monarchy, and of every constitution 49
we must discover how we might live together in a way that enables
liberty 50

Moses Hess: all politics involves the opposition between domination and
submission 50

so monarchy is the truth of politics 50

anarchy, for Hess, is the negation of domination, of the State, of
politics 50

he also rejects democracy [meaning liberal democracy, I think] 50-1

M: for Spinoza democracy is the crown of political forms, the most natural
form, most rational, most free 51

the true political form 51

politics and the political realm, for M (contra Hess), is not limited to
the master/slave relation, it involves also the working out the union of
humans oriented toward liberty 51

Hess has only a negative relation to politics, M has a critical relation,
trying to distinguish true from false politics 52

II:

the activity of the whole *demos* is objectified in the constitution 53

but in democracy, the constitution and its objectification are *reduced*,
they are seen as a subordinated tool, a convenience meant to serve
humans, not as a power lifted over them to rule them 53

democracy is human existence, whereas other forms are merely political
existence 53

but the constitution is still *there* in democracy, law is still
there [the State too?], it is just deconsecrated, subordinated to
the activity of the *demos* 53

socialized man is the essence of every constitution 53

M is not against the political realm, society against the State, but for a
revolution in the political realm: democracy against the State 54

it is in democracy that man is his species-being [rather than in free economic
production], and attains his objectification in and through the State [?] 54

he must realize a different *political realm* in order to attain his
telos, his social being 54

you have to have *civitas* to have *societas* 50

giving himself the constitution enables the existence of socialized man
[rather than man becoming socialized man in the social/economic realm
and rendering the political realm unnecessary] 54

enables him to be freed from civil society 54

it is through the transubstantiation from the private/civil society into
the public/State that the movement toward man's species-being is
contained, toward socialized man 55-6

but it is necessary to remain vigilant, to prevent constitutional
objectification from degenerating into alienation 56

democracy does this by *reducing* the constitution to its source, which is the activity of the *demos*, and thus the constitution does not become crystallized, removed, and alienated from that activity 56

democracy thinks of the constitution not as a sacred text, as pre-political given, but as one among many, many moments/manifestations of the people's life and activity 56

this reduction, this going back to [*se rabat sur*, as Deleuze and Guattari would say in A0] the originary activity of the people, is the difference between democracy and other forms of constitution 56

and this reduction (for Ab) allows democracy to remain within itself, but so then, because of this reduction, it can spread into (irrigate) other non-political realms [this reduction-so-it-can-spread riff is the weakest link in his argument] 56

without the reduction, the political (State) takes on an exorbitant, sovereign status 57

in monarchy the constitution is not reduced, and the people, the creator of the constitution, becomes understood instead as *created by* the constitution 57

in democracy the people are a subject that is its own end and that constitutes itself continually 58

the people are not constituted in the social realm, they are constituted in the *political* realm, by their *political* will to be a people 58

and they are perpetually *conscious* of themselves as the author of their own actions, as the creator/source of the constitution 58

III:

democracy must be an *ongoing* self-determination, self-foundation 58

the constitution must be *perpetually* returned to the real ground of the *demos*, which prevents the slip from objectification into alienation 59

[never allowing State/law/constitution to ascend from earth into heaven] the *demos* always retains its right to give itself a new constitution; always recognizes itself as the foundational subject of politics, as the source of political power 59

the subject-people objectifies itself, and never ceases objectifying itself; never ceases reducing the constitution/State/law to merely one moment (among many) of the people's existence: the constitution is never confused with the people themselves or with the whole *polis* 60

the constitution is always material, empirical, historical, becoming; it is never an Idea, eternal, being 61

IV:

in democracy, the whole is never represented by a part; the political State is never seen as identical to the *demos* 63

when a part *claims* to be the whole, it will be reduced, perceived as *in fact* a part [no one can say *l'etat, c'est moi* and get away with it] 63

[the concept of “reduction” is also, for Ab, a way to avoid arguing for the disappearance of the political State: since he allows it to exist, he has to have a way to ensure that it remains partial, ordinary, subordinated. It is unclear if such a thing should be called a “state” any more...it is certainly no longer a “State”]

democracy itself remains reduced as well, never an organizing form for all realms of life, always merely a *political* moment, never the whole of the human realm 64

and yet [weak move] its very reduction allows it to “irrigate” other realms 64

again, for any institution [and these exist in democracy, for Ab], the key is to preserve the *instituting activity*, rather than allow it to dissipate and be substituted for by a dead, *instituted* structure 65

when this activity remains alive and fluid, it can irrigate other realms 65

[institutions must be perpetually vivified and deconsecrated]

so in Ab's democracy the political State does not disappear entirely, it disappears *as a totalizing organizing form and separate realm* 65, 69

but, Ab keeps stressing, this does not mean the disappearance of the political realm more broadly [since the State is now properly seen as just one small part of the possible activity in the political realm] 66-7

it opens up the political realm to far more politics 67

democracy is thus, Ab claims, not anarchism, not the crude idea of the disappearance of the State, not the idea that the self-organization of the social realm makes the State and the political realm unnecessary 69 [Ab never tires of repeating the Aristotelian/Machiavellian insistence on the political as necessary for human flourishing]

the political realm is the realm where people come to realize their species-being 70

make a free life in common 71

the political is not dissolved into the social, nor vice-versa: each realm remains its own moment 71

M preserves the political, but at the same time he restrains it, makes sure it does not grow into an organizing form [that would dominate/overshadow, say, economic production in the social realm] 71

in M democracy produces unity, but not by imposing a unifying form on the divisions

of society 66

it can “produce an effectively actual universality” through constant action rather than a formal universality devoid of action 68

it can infuse all realms with the newly active life of the people 69 unity [or maybe better togetherness, commonality] can be generalized into non-political realms 71

but unity/institution must be continually vivified through the people's action [if it is not lived, if it is not effectively actual right now

because it is currently being lived by the people, then it does not exist] 71

6—True Democracy and Modernity

[Abensour's criticism of M's idea of democracy]

Moses Hess is cast as the figure of anarchy beyond the political realm, for M to reject 73

M: in true democracy the State is no longer an organizing form, but it still exists and there is still a political realm 73

democracy is limited, though, to its proper political realm 73

but also it initiates the coming of our species-existence 73

the political realm is different from other realms, M does not collapse everything into an organic whole 74

at the same time, unity plays a big role for M, he does not handle well the question of social division in the *demos* 74

Machiavelli is of use here: originary division between *grandees'* desire to command and the ruled's desire for liberty 74

and this division is the wellspring of liberty, for Machiavelli 75

both Machiavelli and Montesquieu question the figure of the One 75

M does not: he sees unity as only positive 75

M: the truth of democracy means the disappearance of conflict (even if that does not mean an organic unity, for M) 75

the *demos'* unity can only exist if they are perpetually willing to be unified 75

when the whole *demos* becomes self-conscious, actually becomes the effective unitary subject, that is the center of true democracy for M 76

for M in true democracy the people objectify themselves as the whole *demos* but block the transformation of this objectification into alienation 76

Ab favors seeing the people as having a problematic and never completed identity, so as to prevent authoritarian ideas of the One, and allow for division and politics 77

M does oppose democracy and the political State 78

M brings democracy back to the self-organizing activity of the people 79

in the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," the 1844-periodical published article, M installs the proletariat as the new actor, as universal class 79

this does not mean he leaves the *demos* and the Machiavellian moment, but it does portend a long period of attention to the social (rather than political) realm as the key to all things 79

in this new period, for M, instead of *logos* and the political as our nature, it is *faber* and the economic 82

his attention shifts: whole *demos* → proletariat; democracy → communism 82

but, Ab strains to say, the idea that after 1844 M abandons the Machiavellian

moment is wrong 83

[for me this straining is not needed. Why rescue Marx as someone who always thought the political. Maybe he mostly stopped caring about it. But there is still the Critique of Hegel, there is still the Commune addresses; the political analysis is there, why quibble over whether a later (major) Marx thought the political was epiphenomenon. Minor Marx didn't think that, so engage with minor Marx and leave major Marx alone...]

Ab's evidence is: an 1845 outline for a work on politics, and his subsequent writings on France and the commune 83

though Ab does admit that M became oriented primarily toward the economic rather than political intelligence 83

but did true democracy become sublimated to communism? 84

no, it persisted as latent in M's thinking, and the commune brought it out; the "political form at last discovered of the working class' social emancipation" 84

the commune did not seize the State, it smashed it, and M applauds this loudly [which for Ab shows the persistence of 1843] 84

the people re-appropriated control of their social life, control the State (of the French Revolution) had appropriated 85

the commune was the absolute contradiction of the State; it did not take over existing modern State power (which is *as such* a relation of domination), it transformed it, subordinated it 86

the State apparatus is not: neutral and dependent on who controls it, rather it is, all by itself, a relation of domination that batters down on society as a whole 86

the commune tried to destroy that relation of domination itself 86
Jacobinism, as a revolution via the State, misses this wisdom, and is rejected by M and Ab 86

the workers' revolution is not initially or immediately social: it begins in the political realm, and social emancipation must proceed through the political realm, through "the communal constitution" which deploys itself *against* State power in a permanent insurrection 87

this constitution is a self-institution of the *demos* that prevents the impudence of the State form from reclaiming its sovereignty 87
through such techniques as extended suffrage, recallability, and the like 87

a political form against formalism 88

Conclusion

Totalitarianism destroys politics, so we must remain political to ward it off 89

retain the emphasis on the originary social division 90

Machiavelli, Lefort 90

action in the public realm (Arendt) 90

M points to a living power that reminds us that emancipation involves flights, but it also involves struggle *against* the State 91

the catastrophe of actually existing socialism has made it clear for us now that *liberty* must be the primary question, the question of emancipation; also justice, the free city 91

M is valuable because he:

- 1) links the advent of democracy with the disappearance of the State 92
- 2) points us to the reduction: allow objectification, but keep it from growing into alienation, keep the State from becoming the overweening State-form 92, 94

M helps us preserve the understanding that the State arises from vital forces 93

the current State tries to do what commodity fetishism does: mystify the true source of value (labor) 93

in the end, M does not see democracy as a process that ends the State, but as the institution of conflict, a space against the State-form energized by the people's active life 94

against the liberal State, which puts us to sleep, letting us pretend that the State-form can carry, and be the same thing as, the life of the people 94

this understanding of the political as a position *against* is central to Ab's thinking 94

he is less concerned with "the creative power of liberty," with what forms of life the people can produce instead 94

the Jacobin tradition: reinforce the State to achieve good ends 96

the Communalist/Councilist tradition: smash the State and create a new form of political link 96

but, of course, we do not want a democratic sunrise to give way to a new form of State, and so democracy needs to figure out how to endure 96
the institutions and constitution of democracy are therefore necessary 96

but what they institute is: a perpetual rising up against institution and constitution and State 96

pass from power over humans to power with and between humans [form *pouvoir* to *puissance*] 97

with Ranciere, we denounce the idea that the State and democracy can be the same thing, but then we must step beyond that critique, to permanently present the gap between the State and the people [between the *partage du sensible* and real life] 97

we must remain opposed to the "form that takes itself for the whole of right" 98

we must always pursue a political life in common as citizens [never only an economic life in common as producers] 98

and in that political life we must invent new political links 99

we want conflict and struggle, not consensus; we must remember the category of plebs, and of *grandees* 100

we need a renewal of libertarian thought 100

but in tandem with law, with a new idea of law, and in tandem with

power, with a new idea of power 100
and we should take seriously the idea of anarchy, the idea of democracy
severed from all *arche*, all principle, all beginning/foundation assumptions
101

democracy refuses all order, all synthesis, all unity 101

Appendix: “Savage Democracy and the “Principle of Anarchy”

Lefort: savage democracy; Reiner Schurmann: principle of anarchy 102

Ab: maybe we can have savage democracy in the gap between anarchy and
principle 103

totalitarian bureaucracy of 'communism' 103

in the wake of actually existing socialism, Lefort turns away from
the idea of communism and toward democracy as a way to forestall
totalitarianism, to preserve the gaps, the conflict, the non-
closure of society 104

originary division of society (rulers/ruled) found in Machiavelli
104

totalitarianism denies this division, or claims to have sealed it
up 105

Lefort liberty must spring *from this division*, since it is what
leaves the field open for action 105

“savage” societies did not have democracy 105

savage does not mean Hobbes' SoN 105

savage means 'wildcat' (as in *greve sauvage*), untamed, undomesticated,
unled, spontaneous 106

savage democracy lacks doctrine, principle, foundation, ultimate
reference (as do all “foundations” of power/law/State) 106
and so its activity is to decide what *does* holds the *polis*
together (if not foundations), what the *polis* defines as good,
always knowing that such decisions are provisional and contingent
106-7

rights and laws are an example: understood as savage, they are
fine to fight for, since they are worked out politically through
struggle rather than given in advance by a principle/*arche* 107

once made, they are not sacred, but profane 108

there is and must always be a constant struggle between what has
been established and that which unsettles the established—the
most robust this struggle, the most robust the democracy [very R
here] 108

when society gets away from identification with the State and
experiences itself, it learns its own “social power” (as Lefort
says) [i.e. its *puissance*] 109

unifying subject [e.g. whole *demos*, the people] is rejected in
favor of many centers 109

institutions are always inadequate to contain democracy 109

democracy is raw being, savage [i.e. free] spirit 110

arche as foundation, as principle [as thing that must already be there when we begin] 111
and as commandment: prefigures and limits action 112
an-arche means the absence of this principle 112
where we can act...*however* 112
anarchy is the principle that we should have no principles [as democracy is the political form that prevents the rule of the political form] 113
actual anarchism, Ab says, still retains such principles, i.e. reason instead of authority [this is Bakunin, but do contemporary anarchists hold to reason as inviolate?] 113
and so we will have to work out together, politically, what we think we should do in common 113
if *an-arche* does away with necessary beginnings, similarly we should think politics without *telos*, or necessary ends 115
so that action can do whatever it wants [and it is in this whatever action that we must locate our democratic life], action is an end in itself 115
political cohesion, political principles are worked out together, politically by people 116
not a [metaphorical/imagined] political body, but a political topology, an actual coming together of bodies in space to decide in common 116
refusal of metaphysical ideals/norms 116
savage democracy is not *just* the political translation of the principle of anarchy 116
savage democracy: the foundations of power/law/knowledge are indeterminate [and so action does not have to fulfill a certain principle] 117
action can go toward wherever end, there is no predetermined end 117
the political is neither a making concrete of an *arche*, nor a tinkering toward a *telos*; rather it is whatever we make of it 117
and what we make of it is never final: we will always struggle and contest and reinvent 117
being is continually becoming; the given is continually questioned 118
Lefort works with human rights, but these are constantly being reinvented, which means so is the idea of what humanity is 118
“Lefort posits the originary division of the social that is always already there” [why is this not an *arche*?] 118
the people are never identical with themselves: they are either above themselves, heroically shaking off chains, or below themselves, in servitude [and therefore true democracy is never a settled (or final) state of being] 119
all claims of a popular subject identical to itself are mystifications 119

democracy recognizes the impossibility of the closure, of the One of the people, and it proliferates links, centers, combinations among people 119

democracy is savage in the sense that it is not tamed, that it acts beyond the bounds of containers/limits that try to capture it 120

it is an instituting form that avoids being tamed/domesticated 120
democracy involves a coming together with others, a common, but not one that is unitary, that lacks division [it must be a together-in-difference] 121

democracy dismisses the idea of solution, of regime, of instituted force; and favors the act of instituting, the leaving unresolved 121

what about law? 121

it is possible to imagine laws that favor liberty, laws that take off from the desire of the multitude to be free 122

law is then merely the political relation we have worked out most recently (and is never seen as given from an *arche*); it is just the current state of affairs, the current way we understand things, the thing we are here to decide whether or not to keep doing 122

paradox: democracy is the form of political experience against political form, it gives itself political institutions in order to struggle against institutions, it creates a state that rises against the State 123

democracy does not negate the political realm, but incessantly reinvigorates it 123

it never lets the Statist order integrate the plebs and their savage demands 123

but it also links up these demands, it connects savages in their liberty [we could say nomads here and be spot on] 123

democracy does away with beginnings and ends in order to free up the political, in order that we can become *more* political, *pace* those anarchists who argue we must avoid the political as arena of domination 124