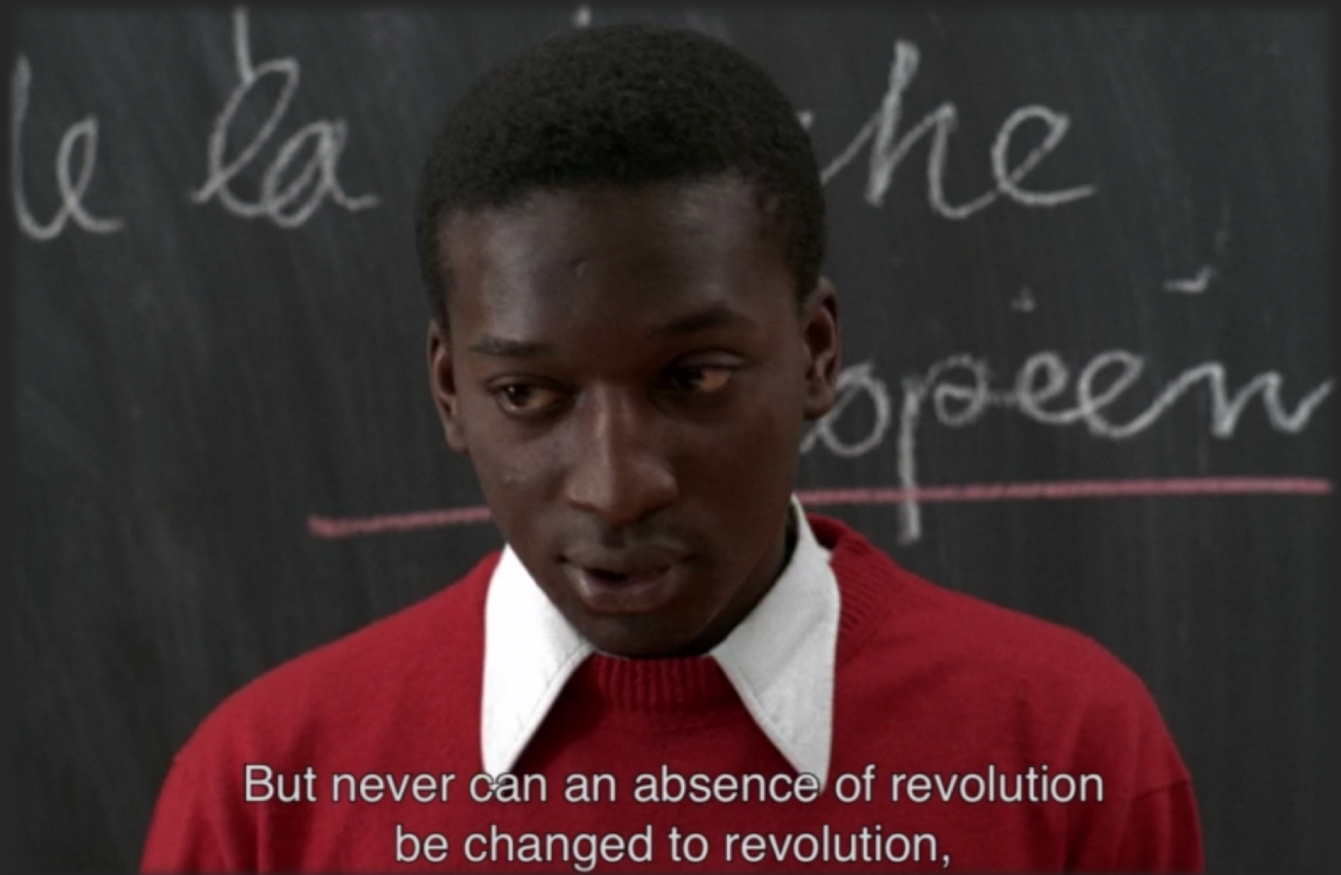

PANDEMIC, IGNORANCE, AND NEW COLLECTIVE PLACES



But never can an absence of revolution
be changed to revolution,

ALAIN BADIOU

The current pandemic is related

both to a natural cause: the existence of a virus, and its modes of transmission and subsistence from bats to humans; and to a “social” cause: the considerable volume and speed of human travel, explaining how the virus has circulated in a few weeks from China to Europe and the Americas without anything to stop it, except the cessation of almost all human tumult, the so-called “quarantine.” (*confinement*).

On the side of the bourgeois States (there is no other today, alas), what is happening? They are forced to take measures that go beyond their strict class logic. The hospital system has to work, no matter what; hotel rooms have to be requisitioned in order to quarantine the sick; the movement of people carrying the virus with them has to be limited at the borders, etc. But through all this, States must imperatively protect the future of the structure of society as a whole, namely its class structure. Governing becomes a more difficult exercise than in less original circumstances. Fortunately for the States in place, the real enemy of our types of society, which is not the virus but communism, is so weak today that they will get away with it, at least in the short term, without too much trouble.

One vituperates Macron? The parliamentary regime, which is the natural political regime of developed capitalism, and which remains in France praised under the double fetish name of “democracy” and “our Republic,” has been through worse! If Macron must be unloaded, the masters of the game will do it by themselves, to the applause of malcontents of all kinds who, for the past two years, have thought that Macron is the cause of all their ills. While, to tell the truth, for two centuries our evils have come from the coupling, nowadays particularly tense, between private property (which can be praised and promised to everyone) and the “iron law” of the concentration of capital (which explains why, essentially, private property only benefits the very few).

What seems to me to be perilous, in these circumstances, and to favor all forms of reaction, is the ignorance of the evident things I mention above, and the little credit given to conclusive reasoning and scientifically established statements. True science is one of the few areas of human activity that deserves trust, one of the main common treasures of humanity, from mathematics to biology, to physics and chemistry, as well as Marxist studies of society and politics, not to mention psychoanalytic discoveries on the disorders of subjectivity. The real problem is that confidence in rationality is very often ignorant and blind, and as a result, as we see today, many people, perhaps the majority, also have confidence in false science, absurd miracles, old-fashioned things and impostors. This makes the situation completely obscure, and generates inconsistent prophecies regarding “the day after.” This is why revolutionary leaders of all eras knew that without ideological preparation of opinion, political action is very difficult.

The heart of the assessment of the pandemic crisis, and for that matter of all “crises,” should therefore be the constitution, by all voluntary activists, of a vast network of schools where all that needs to be known to live, act, and create in our societies would be taught to all those who desire it.

There should be an international investigation into everything that may already exist in that direction. Such an investigation would be all the more necessary and delicate because of an abundance of pretenses, whether associative or official, which are only charitable and falsely humanistic, because they are not at the service of real humanity, but of an integration into the existing order and its constituent inequalities.

Based on my own experience, I can say that the School of Acts (*l'École des Actes*), created in Aubervilliers (France) with the support of the Théâtre de la Commune, seems to me to offer a well-oriented place for the tasks of transmission and invention that are required today. This school brings together populations whose encounter is essential: intellectuals, workers from all over the world, artists, as well as women, men, and children of this multinational city. Their meeting is organized around “assemblies” (*assemblées*) - collective places for the elaboration of new ideas based on the hypothesis of “laws of people’s lives” that have to be formulated, recognized, and respected. Even before the epidemic, they were simultaneously thinking with and learning from - leaning on the experiences and questions of the popular public - the nomadic proletarians (the misnamed “migrants”) at their heart, many things which, in the various forms of rationality, are necessary to survive, to speak, to read, to think.

Schools of this type could also organize - the School of Acts tries to do so - material and administrative assistance to those who need it, such as a canteen with hot meals, a dispensary for first aid, concrete reflection on housing, counsellors for obtaining rights, those that exist and those that should exist according to the laws of people's lives. And many other things I haven't considered, and that they will invent.

As we can see, the "assembly" (*assemblée*) form is at the heart of the experience, and not the relationship with masters. On its more "political" side, in the broad and open sense that is required today, the School of Acts organizes every week - I have sometimes attended - a "general assembly," where anyone who has something to say or a question to ask, or a criticism, or a new proposal, can intervene. The interventions are translated into the languages spoken in the school - I saw that they were translated into English (for people from Bangladesh), Soninke, Fulani and Arabic. This is also a much-needed internationalist approach.

Perhaps we could ask this school, and any other school of the same kind, wherever it is, to hold open meetings (*assemblées ouvertes*) from time to time, where we would discuss the very principle, the necessity and the future, of this kind of institution. Of course, politics requires the control of time and a cold-bloodedness that protects against utopian outbursts such as end-of-the-world prophecies. However, combining a view of the general situation and the lessons learned from the concrete example I am talking about, I think it is reasonable to say that, in a future that is accessible to thought, a kind of international federation of schools would then be an important step towards the emergence, at least of a few essential elements, a few lines of force, of a new political program,

situated beyond our false “democracies” and the failure of state communisms.

If, fortunately, a new discussion opens up on the basis of this type of proposal, the pandemic will have a chance of not being at the same time biologically deadly, intellectually miserable, and politically sterile.