

The Political Forms of Modern Society

Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism

CLAUDE LEFORT

Edited and Introduced by John B. Thompson

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The Image of the Body and Totalitarianism

The problem of totalitarianism has long occupied a central position in my thinking and requires, I believe, a new approach to politics. This term has enjoyed a rise in its fortunes recently, at least as applied to regimes described as 'socialist'. It is true that Hannah Arendt, Raymond Aron and a few, very few others, including myself, made use of it twenty or twenty-five years ago, taking it in its widest sense, to describe its socialist as well as fascist variants. Each of us was following his or her own course; for my part, I did not know the work of Hannah Arendt when, after devoting a number of studies to the critique of bureaucracy (the first being published in 1948), I began to work out a more clearly political conceptualization in an essay entitled 'Totalitarianism without Stalin', which dates from 1956. To speak of totalitarianism in relation to the Soviet Union was regarded as scandalous at the time and continued to be so until fairly recently. Today the term surprises no one. I would even say that it has become worn out before becoming meaningful. What does it signify? It signifies a regime in which state violence is practised on society as a whole, a system of generalized, detailed coercion — scarcely more than that. It is now becoming the foundation of a new kind of political thinking, a new interpretation of the history of modern societies or of history in general. So I am a little afraid of adding my voice to the concert of those known as 'new philosophers'. But I have regarded totalitarianism for too long as the major fact of our time, posing an enigma that calls for a re-examination of the genesis of political societies, to give into the fear that I might be following fashion.

Having referred to my earliest work on bureaucracy, I should also indicate or remind the reader that my thinking was carried out at

first within the horizons of Marxism. In close collaboration with Castoriadis, who had at an early stage identified the features of a new social formation in the USSR, I set out to demonstrate the class division that had grown up after the Russian Revolution and the specific character of a state with which the dominant class, the bureaucracy, had become interlocked. The bureaucracy did not find the basis of its power in private property, but collectively, interdependently, in its dependence on state power, the party-state, which possessed all the means of production. This bureaucratic stratum displayed a strength and stability that Trotskyist thought was incapable of grasping; for the Trotskyists continued to imagine that a mere caste, parasitical and transitory, had superimposed itself on a socialist infrastructure and they failed to realize that a new form of domination and exploitation had been established at the expense of the peasantry, the proletariat and the overwhelming majority of the population.

Comparing the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, I observed that the latter offered a remarkable contrast between the strength of its constitution as a class and the fragility of the position of its members, who were constantly threatened with annihilation, whatever their rank and authority, on account of their subjection to political power. The great Stalinist purges showed that the bureaucracy was ideally everything and the bureaucrats nothing; the periodic eviction of thousands or tens of thousands of bureaucrats, far from being contrary to the interests of the bureaucracy, seemed to me to be proof of its power, beyond the fate of individuals. I developed these analyses under the aegis of what seemed to me to be authentic Marxism, the Marxism of Marx, which I regarded as having been completely distorted in all the versions of so-called orthodox Marxism. This being the case, I firmly believed, at the time, in the role of the proletariat. It was, in my view, the privileged agent of history. I thought, in short, that the bureaucracy, although it had taken advantage of the modern conditions of industrial society, had been able to constitute itself and develop as a historical force only because the working class had been divided, opposed to itself, during its century-long struggles to organize and emancipate itself; because it had given rise to a dominant stratum, it had become alienated from itself in the figure of a Leader, a power that turned out to be an alien force working for its own gain. By virtue of a dialectic, whose resources we know only too well, I concluded that this alienation

of the proletariat from itself, this ultimate form of alienation, was necessary, that the proletariat had to go through this experience at the end of which a bureaucracy separated itself off from it and turned against it, so that the need for an abolition of all social division, and not only of private property, would be fully affirmed. Thus the representation of a society delivered from division governed my thinking.

But there are two reasons, it now seems to me, which contradicted that Marxist perspective and prevented me from fully accepting a conception that reduced the creativity of history to that of the proletariat. These two reasons apparently belong to quite different orders. In the first place, at the very moment when I imagined an abolition of social division and found in the proletariat the true agent of history, I was reading Marx in a way which encouraged and facilitated questioning. In terms of my background, I am neither a sociologist nor a political scientist. My training is philosophical, and I acquired it, while still on the lycée benches, from Merleau-Ponty, a thinker who had a gift for breaking certainties, introducing complications where one sought simplification, who refused the distinction between the subject and the object, taught that the true questions were not to be exhausted in the answers, that they come not only from us, but are the sign of our interaction with the world, with others, with being itself. So drawn to, indeed enchanted by Marx, I nevertheless could not read him without satisfying the high standards laid down by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. I developed a relation to Marx's work in and through my questioning of it. No doubt what I found there responded to a desire within me whose origin I could not identify, but that is of little significance. The fact is that what attracted me in Marx was the ambiguity of his thinking and, more than that, his opposition to himself, the way in which his thought escapes from itself in the best of his works and from one work to another, the indetermination that undermined what was presented as a system, that undermined the commentary which he himself sometimes gave on his work in order to bring it together in the form of theses.

For instance, I very soon became aware of an opposition in Marx between the notions of continuity and discontinuity in history: the idea of an ineluctable movement governed by the growth of productive forces, moving from one mode of production to another, on the one hand, and the idea of a radical break between all precapitalist

modes of production and modern capitalism, on the other; or in other words, an opposition between the idea of a dissolution of all restricted social relations and the idea of a force of conservation, of mechanisms of repetition which, even in capitalism, seemed to ensure the permanence of a structure. Similarly, I was very aware of the vacillation of an interpretation that sometimes was concerned solely to discover the material foundations of social life and its evolution, while at others revealed the full weight of the social imaginary, the function of the phantoms that haunt the present or the function of fetishism — an interpretation that was sometimes Darwinian, sometimes Shakespearean in inspiration. In short, while being drawn to the theory of the proletariat or of a classless society, I was no less attracted by the elusive elements in Marx's work. Thus, unknown to myself, the ideal of a complete determination of social reality, of the essence of history, was in contradiction with the discovery of an indetermination proper to thought, of a movement that removed statements from any univocal determination. If I have taken the liberty of referring to this relation to Marx's work, it is in order to make it clear that there could be no full adherence to his thought, no question of resting firmly on his theory, as soon it became apparent that, at one and the same time and somewhat paradoxically, the proletariat provided me with the guarantee of social practice and history while the guarantee of this guarantee — namely, Marx's thought — was the object of my questioning. It was inevitable that the moment would come when my earlier certainties would crumble.

The second reason I referred to concerns my experience, while still very young, as a militant in a small political group. I think a brief mention of this will throw light on what I have to say. I joined the Trotskyist party before the end of the war and remained in it for about four years. This group originated, as is well known, in the condemnation of Stalinism. It presented itself as the legitimate heir of Marxism-Leninism, claimed to be taking up the task initiated by the Russian Revolution and prefigured in the Paris Commune; it denounced the counter-revolutionary role of the communist parties, seeing them as carrying out, *mutatis mutandis*, the same role once played by the social democrats. Whereas the Third International had condemned the betrayal of the interests of the proletariat by the Second International, the Fourth now condemned the Third International and, in short, demanded a return to primal sources. The

Trotskyist party claimed allegiance to a founding hero, Trotsky, a hero who was both dead and immortal, and claimed allegiance more generally to a dynasty; immortality was embodied in the crown that had been worn successively by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. And that crown guaranteed the immortality of the 'body' of the revolutionaries. Stalin, on the other hand, was represented as the usurper that the body of the revolutionaries would expel. Now it gradually occurred to me that the Trotskyist party functioned like a micro-bureaucracy, despite the rules of so-called democratic centralism which allowed a conflict of tendencies — a conflict that was intense at times. The power of the apparatus, the division between leaders and followers, the manipulation of meetings, the withholding of information, the separation of activities, the stereotyped character of the dominant discourse in its various forms, the imperviousness to events that might challenge the correctness of practice and theory: innumerable such signs convinced me that, despite the enormous gulf between our group and the Communist Party, one could find in the former a tiny replica of the latter. What concerned me was that this micro-bureaucracy had no basis of a material kind. The positions of power occupied by a small number of militants was ultimately based on the possession of a certain knowledge, a skill in speaking and, to be more precise, the ability to inscribe every internal or external fact in a mytho-history. Russia provided the privileged context for this. It would be impossible here to enumerate all the sacred episodes that, from the formation of Bolshevism to the Stalinist betrayals, made up the register on which the present acquired its meaning. The function of this mytho-history, of the discourse that found its referent there, profoundly disturbed me. After all, this was precisely how I exercised whatever power I had in the party.

It seems to me that not only are we confronted by the problem of bureaucracy, but that certain elements of totalitarianism are to be found here. I don't mean, of course, that I regard the small party to which I belonged as a totalitarian embryo. That is certainly not the case. Indeed it did not have the means of being so. But what strikes me, and already struck me then, was the closed nature of the party, supported by a discourse that was supposedly scientific, declaring the rationality of the real and governed throughout by the representation of what had taken place, of the already-done, the already-thought, the already-seen. This discourse is fundamentally invulnerable; it is subject to error and rectification in fact, but not in

principle. It imprints the signs of the real in a text — that of the great authors, but more usually that of a founding past — and it constantly nourishes the reading of the great text with these signs. And what strikes me no less is that the closed nature of this discourse derives from the fact that it is the discourse of no one person: it is the discourse of the party, the ideal body of the revolutionary, which traverses each of its members. Each individual sees himself caught up in an *us*, a *nous*, which imposes a break with the outside; the things of the world, which everybody talks about so much, can be grasped only by being carried back to the imaginary enclosure of history, of which the party is the trustee. And while the militant is incorporated, the supposed real is destined to be assimilated.

The two experiences that I have described are not unrelated. The first cannot be confined to the sphere of theory, the second to the sphere of practice. Being a militant presupposes a certain relationship to knowledge. Every communist is a person of knowledge, his identity is bound up with a body of knowledge that enables him to apprehend texts and things. The adventure of interpretation, on the other hand, implies a relation to power. To read a work, and I have experienced this even more in connection with Machiavelli than with Marx, is to allow yourself to lose the bearings which assured you of your sovereign distance from the other, which assured you of the distinction between subject and object, active and passive, speaking and hearing (to interpret is to convert reading into writing), the difference between one time and another, between past and present (the latter can neither be suppressed nor ignored), lastly it is to lose your sense of the division between the space of the work and the world on to which it opens. Thus by different paths, which cross and recross, I was gradually led to carry my questioning to the very centre of Marxist certainty.

I have now come to the question that I wanted to pose, after giving a brief indication of how I arrived at it. Why is totalitarianism a major event in our time, why does it require us to probe the nature of modern society? At the foundation of totalitarianism lies the representation of the People-as-One. It is denied that division is constitutive of society. In the so-called socialist world, there can be no other division than that between the people and its enemies: a division between inside and outside, no internal division. After the revolution, socialism is not only supposed to prepare the way for the emergence of a classless society, it must already manifest that society

which bears within itself the principle of homogeneity and self-transparency. The paradox is the following: division is denied — I say denied, since a new dominant stratum is actively distinguishing itself from the rest of society, since a state apparatus is separating itself off from society — and, at the same time as this denial, a division is being affirmed, on the level of phantasy, between the People-as-One and the Other. This Other is the other of the outside. It is a term to be taken literally: the Other is the representative of the forces deriving from the old society (kulaks, bourgeoisie) and the emissary of the foreigner, the imperialist world. Indeed these two representations converge, for it is always imagined that the representatives of the old society are linked up with foreign centres. So it is understandable that the constitution of the People-as-One requires the incessant production of enemies. It is not only necessary to convert, at the level of phantasy, real adversaries of the regime or real opponents into the figures of the evil Other: it is also necessary to invent them. However, this interpretation can be carried further. The campaigns of exclusion, persecution and, for quite awhile, terror reveal a new image of the social body. The enemy of the people is regarded as a parasite or a waste product to be eliminated. The documents assembled by Solzhenitsyn, some of which have been known for a very long time, are highly instructive in this regard. The pursuit of the enemies of the people is carried out in the name of an ideal of social prophylaxis, and this has been the case since Lenin's time. What is at stake is always the integrity of the body. It is as if the body had to assure itself of its own identity by expelling its waste matter, or as if it had to close in upon itself by withdrawing from the outside, by averting the threat of an intrusion by alien elements. So there must be no failures in the functioning of institutions, failures that might suggest a relaxation in the monitoring of the mechanism of elimination or an attack from disruptive agents. The campaign against the enemy is feverish; fever is good, it is a signal, within society, that there is some evil to combat.

It should also be observed that in totalitarian ideology, the representation of the People-as-One is in no way contradictory with that of the party. The party does not appear as distinct from the people or from the proletariat, which is the quintessence of it. It does not have a specific reality *within* society. The party *is* the proletariat in the sense that it is identical with it. At the same time, it is the guide or, as Lenin put it, the consciousness of the proletariat; or, as I would

say, using an old political metaphor, to which I shall come back, it is its head. And, similarly, the representation of the People-as-One is not in contradiction with that of an omnipotent, omniscient power, with, in the last analysis, that of the *Egocrat* (to use Solzhenitsyn's term), the ultimate figure of that power. Such a power, detached from the social whole, towering over everything, merges with the party, with the people, with the proletariat. It merges with the body as a whole, while at the same time it is its head. A whole sequence of representations is to be found here, the logic of which should not escape us. Identification of the people with the proletariat, of the proletariat with the party, of the party with the leadership, of the leadership with the *Egocrat*. On each occasion, an organ is both the whole and the detached part that makes the whole, that institutes it. This logic of identification, secretly governed by the image of the body, accounts in turn for the condensation that takes place between the principle of power, the principle of law and the principle of knowledge. The denial of social division goes hand in hand with the denial of a symbolic distinction which is constitutive of society. The attempt to incorporate power in society, society in the state, implies that there is nothing, in a sense, that can indicate an externality to the social and to the organ that represents it by detaching itself from it. The dimension of law and the dimension of knowledge tend to be effaced, in so far as they do not, as we know very well, belong to the order of things which are socially (or indeed psychologically) conceivable, in so far as they cannot be located in empirical social life, in so far as they establish the very condition of human sociability. A kind of positivisation of the manifest law takes place through intense legislative, legal activity, at the service of the totalitarian state; and a sort of positivisation of manifest knowledge takes place through intense ideological activity — ideology becoming that enterprise of phantasy which tends to produce and to fix the ultimate foundations of knowledge in every sphere. In fact, what one sees is the attempt by power to appropriate the law and the knowledge of the principles and ultimate goals of social life. But this language is still inadequate, for it would be wrong to attribute power with unbridled freedom; to do so would be to confuse, once again, arbitrary power with totalitarian power. Of course, it is true that in innumerable ways power manipulates and subjugates legal rules and 'ideas'. But one must also see that it is caught up in ideology: the power of discourse is fully affirmed, while the true discourse becomes a discourse of power.

And we must also see that the law, positivized and reduced to the law of socialism, regulates power and renders it opaque to itself, more opaque than it ever was before.

This very sketchy interpretation is concerned only, I should like to stress, with the aim of totalitarianism. It is not my purpose here to inquire into the facts of social development and change. Were this the case, I would have to try to analyse all the forms of resistance to the totalitarian project — and I am not speaking here of conscious, political resistance, but of the social relations that elude the grip of power. I would also have to try to analyse all the pathological processes of the bureaucratic world, for the perversion of the function of power, of law and of knowledge has effects on the whole of social life — let us be in no doubt — even when there is not, or no longer, any support for the regime. Among others, Alexander Zinoviev is one of the most severe analysts of this pathology.

My purpose is rather to bring out, and to submit to the reader's questioning, the image of the political body in totalitarianism. It is an image which, on the one hand, requires the exclusion of the malevolent Other and which, simultaneously, breaks down into the image of a whole and a part that stands for the whole, of a part that paradoxically reintroduces the figure of the other, the omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent other, the militant, the leader, the Egocrat. This other offers his own body — individual, mortal, endowed with all the virtues — whether he is called Stalin or Mao or Fidel. A mortal body which is perceived as invulnerable, which condenses in itself all strengths, all talents, and defies the laws of nature by his super-male energy.

Of course, I am aware that I am drawing on only one thread of the interpretation. I cannot develop this remark here, but I should like to suggest that we ought to examine another pole of the totalitarian representation — that of the organization. Or, to use another term which is more likely to convey the discordance within the totalitarian representation, I would say that the image of the body is combined with that of the machine. The scientifico-technical model and the model of the production enterprise, governed by the rational division of labour, have not only been imported from Western capitalism, but have in a sense taken hold of the whole society. Socialism seems to be linked, at least in an ideal way, with the formula of a harmonious society, in touch with itself through all its parts, delivered from the dysfunctions of a system in which the various sectors of activity

each obeyed specific norms and in which their interdependence remained at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the market. The new society is presented as a single organization comprising a network of micro-organizations; furthermore, it is presented paradoxically as that 'great automaton' which Marx claimed to uncover in the capitalist mode of production. It is worth pointing out that such a representation is split in two: the social, in its essence, is defined as organization and as the organizable. From the first point of view, socialist man is the man of the organization, imprinted in it; from the second point of view, he is the constantly working organizer, the social engineer. But it is important above all to note the articulation of the two key-images, that of the body and that of the machine. In a sense, they are convergent: they involve an ambiguity of the same kind. In the first case, the political agent is dissolved in an *us* that speaks, hears, reads reality through him, thus identifying himself with the party, the body of the people and, at the same time, representing himself, through the same identification, as the head of that body, attributing consciousness to himself. In the second case, the same agent proves to be a part of the machine, or one of its organs, or a driving belt — a frequently used metaphor — and at the same time an activist-machinist who makes decisions concerning the functioning and production of society. However, the two images do not fully merge; the image of the body is altered when it comes into contact with that of the machine. The latter contradicts the logic of identification; the communist 'us' is itself dissolved. The notion of the organization, even though it gives rise to that of the organizer, poses a threat to the substance of the body politic, making the social appear at the boundaries of the inorganic.

I shall now dare to ask the question, From where does the totalitarian adventure arise? It is not born out of nothing. It is the sign of a political mutation. But what is that mutation? It seems to me that it would be futile to try to analyse it at the level of the mode of production, as the consequence of a final concentration of capital; but it would be equally futile to treat it, as some have been content to do, as the product of the phantasies of revolutionary intellectuals, seeking to complete the work of the Jacobins of 1793 in order to reconstruct the world on a *tabula rasa*. In my view, totalitarianism can be clarified only by grasping its relationship with democracy. It is from democracy that it arises, even though it has taken root initially, at least in its socialist version, in countries where the democratic

transformation was only just beginning. It overturns that transformation, while at the same time taking over some of its features and extending them at the level of phantasy.

In what characteristics can we discern this process? I believe that my brief comments on the image of the body politic indicate the lines of a response. For modern democracy is that regime in which such an image tends to vanish. I say *regime* advisedly. Taken in its conventional sense, this term is inadequate. Beyond a historically determined system of political institutions, I wish to call attention to a long-term process, what de Tocqueville called the democratic revolution, which he saw coming to birth in France under the *ancien régime* and which, since his time, has continued to develop. As we know, this revolution found its motive force in the equalization of *conditions*. However important this phenomenon may be, it does not shed enough light for my purpose and it leaves an essential mutation in the shadows: the society of the *ancien régime* represented its unity and its identity to itself as that of a body — a body which found its figuration in the body of the king, or rather which identified itself with the king's body, while at the same time it attached itself to it as its head. As Ernst Kantorowicz has shown in a masterly fashion, such a symbolism was elaborated in the Middle Ages and is of theologico-political origin. The image of the king's body as a double body, both mortal and immortal, individual and collective, was initially underpinned by the body of Christ. The important point for my purpose — it would be quite outside the scope of this essay to analyse the many displacements of this representation in the course of history — is that, long after the features of liturgical royalty had died away, the king still possessed the power to incarnate in his body the community of the kingdom, now invested with the sacred, a political community, a national community, a mystical body. I am not unaware of the fact that in the eighteenth century this representation was largely undermined, that new models of sociability emerged as a result of the growth of individualism, progress in the equalization of conditions of which de Tocqueville spoke and the development of the state administration, which tended to make the latter appear as an independent, impersonal entity. But the changes that occurred did not entirely eliminate the notion of the kingdom as a unity which was both organic and mystical, of which the monarch was at the same time the body and the head. It can also be seen that, paradoxically, the growth of social mobility and the increasing uni-

formity of behaviour, customs, opinions and rules had the effect of strengthening rather than weakening the traditional symbolism. The *ancien régime* was made up of an infinite number of small bodies which gave individuals their distinctive marks. And these small bodies fitted together within a great imaginary body for which the body of the king provided the model and the guarantee of its integrity. The democratic revolution, for so long subterranean, burst out when the body of the king was destroyed, when the body politic was decapitated and when, at the same time, the corporeality of the social was dissolved. There then occurred what I would call a 'disincorporation' of individuals. This was an extraordinary phenomenon, the consequences of which seemed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, absurd, even monstrous, not only to conservatives, but to many liberals. For these individuals might become entities that would have to be counted in a universal suffrage that would take the place of the universal invested in the body politic. The relentless struggle to combat the idea of universal suffrage is not only the indication of a class struggle. The inability to conceive of this suffrage as anything other than a dissolution of the social is extremely instructive. The danger of numbers is greater than the danger of an intervention by the masses on the political scene; the idea of number as such is opposed to the idea of the substance of society. Number breaks down unity, destroys identity.

But if we must speak of a disincorporation of the individual, we must also analyse the disengagement of civil society from a state, itself hitherto consubstantial with the body of the king. Or, to put it another way, we must examine the emergence of social relations, not only economic ones, but legal, educational and scientific relations which have their own dynamic; and, more specifically, we must examine the disentangling of the spheres of power, law and knowledge that takes place when the identity of the body politic disappears. The modern democratic revolution is best recognized in this mutation: there is no power linked to a body. Power appears as an empty place and those who exercise it as mere mortals who occupy it only temporarily or who could install themselves in it only by force or cunning. There is no law that can be fixed, whose articles cannot be contested, whose foundations are not susceptible of being called into question. Lastly, there is no representation of a centre and of the contours of society: unity cannot now efface social division. Democracy inaugurates the experience of an ungraspable, uncontrollable society in

which the people will be said to be sovereign, of course, but whose identity will constantly be open to question, whose identity will remain latent.

I referred to the experience of an ungraspable society. It is true that this society gives rise to a multi-layered discourse which tries to grasp it; and in this sense it emerges as an object, by the very fact that it is no longer imprinted in the order of nature or in some supernatural order. But it seems remarkable to me that the discourse that may be imputed to bourgeois ideology was maintained in the early days of democracy under the threat of a breakup of society as such. The institutions and values proclaimed — Property, the Family, the State, Authority, the Nation, Culture — were presented as bastions against barbarism, against the unknown forces from without that could destroy society and civilization. The attempt to sacralize institutions through discourse is directly related to the loss of the substance of society, to the disintegration of the body. The bourgeois cult of order which is sustained by the affirmation of authority, in its many forms, by the declaration of the rules and the proper distances between those who occupy the position of master, owner, cultivated man, civilized man, normal man, adult and those who are placed in the position of the *other*, this whole cult testifies to a certain vertigo in face of the void created by an indeterminate society.

However, as I have just suggested, we must be attentive to another aspect of the mutation. What emerges with democracy is the image of society as such, society as purely human but, at the same time, society *sui generis*, whose own nature requires objective knowledge. It is the image of a society which is homogeneous in principle, capable of being subsumed to the overview of knowledge and power, arising through the dissolution of the monarchical focus of legitimacy and the destruction of the architecture of bodies. It is the image of the omniscient, omnipotent state, of a state both anonymous and, as de Tocqueville puts it, tutelary. It is also, in so far as inequality exists within the boundaries of the equality of conditions, the image of a mass that passes the last judgement on good and evil, the true and the false, the normal and the abnormal, the image of sovereign opinion. Lastly, what emerges is the image of the people, which, as I observed, remains indeterminate, but which nevertheless is susceptible of being determined, of being actualized on the level of phantasy as an image of the People-as-One.

From this point of view, may not totalitarianism be conceived as a response to the questions raised by democracy, as an attempt to resolve its paradoxes? Modern democratic society seems to me, in fact, like a society in which power, law and knowledge are exposed to a radical indetermination, a society that has become the theatre of an uncontrollable adventure, so that what is instituted never becomes established, the known remains undermined by the unknown, the present proves to be undefinable, covering many different social times which are staggered in relation to one another within simultaneity — or — definable only in terms of some fictitious future; an adventure such that the quest for identity cannot be separated from the experience of division. This society is *historical* society *par excellence*. What seems to me to be condensed beneath the paradoxes of democracy is the status of power, for this power is not, as a certain contemporary discourse naively repeats, a mere organ of domination: it is the agency of legitimacy and identity. Now, as long as it appears detached from the prince, as long as it presents itself as the power of no one, as long as it seems to move towards a *latent* focus — namely, the people — it runs the risk of having its symbolic function cancelled out, of falling into collective representations at the level of the real, the contingent, when the conflicts are becoming sharper and leading society to the edge of collapse. Political power, as circumscribed and localized in society at the same time as being an instituting moment, is exposed to the threat of falling into particularity, of arousing what Machiavelli regarded as more dangerous than hatred, namely, contempt; and similarly those who exercise it or aspire to it are exposed to the threat of appearing as individuals or groups concerned solely to satisfy their desires. With totalitarianism an apparatus is set up which tends to stave off this threat, which tends to weld power and society back together again, to efface all signs of social division, to banish the indetermination that haunts the democratic experience. But this attempt, as I have suggested, itself draws on a democratic source, developing and fully affirming the idea of the People-as-One, the idea of society as such, bearing the knowledge of itself, transparent to itself and homogeneous, the idea of mass opinion, sovereign and normative, the idea of the tutelary state.

Since the advent of democracy, and in opposition to it, the body is thus revitalized. But it is important to point out that what is revitalized is quite different from what was once torn apart. The image of

the body that informed monarchical society was underpinned by that of Christ. It was invested with the idea of the division between the visible and the invisible, the idea of the splitting of the mortal and the immortal, the idea of mediation, the idea of a production which both effaced and re-established the difference between the producer and that produced, the idea of the unity of the body and the distinction between the head and the limbs. The prince condensed in his person the principle of power, the principle of law and the principle of knowledge, but he was *supposed* to obey a superior power; he declared himself to be both above the law and subjected to the law, to be both the father and the son of justice; he possessed wisdom but he was subjected to reason. According to the medieval formula, he was *major et minor se ipso*, above and below himself. That does not seem to be the position of the Egocrat or of his substitutes, the bureaucratic leaders. The Egocrat coincides with himself, as society is supposed to coincide with itself. An impossible swallowing up of the body in the head begins to take place, as does an impossible swallowing up of the head in the body. The attraction of the whole is no longer dissociated from the attraction of the parts. Once the old organic constitution disappears, the death instinct is unleashed into the closed, uniform, imaginary space of totalitarianism.

Such, then, are a few thoughts which indicate the direction for a questioning of the political. Some readers will no doubt suspect that my reflections are nourished by psychoanalysis. That is indeed the case. But this connection is meaningful only if one asks oneself at which hearth Freud's thought was lit. For is it not true that in order to sustain the ordeal of the division of the subject, in order to dislodge the reference points of the *self* and the *other*, to depose the position of the possessor of power and knowledge, one must assume responsibility for an experience instituted by democracy, the indetermination that was born from the loss of the substance of the body politic?
