

The Red Hussar: Daniel Bensaïd, 1946-2010

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“It is said that one should live with one’s times. These times are dying. Are we then to rot and disappear along with them?” [1]

“But because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth”. [2]

Time is currently extracting a heavy blood tribute from the thinkers of the radical left. It is enough to list the names of those we have lost recently to get a measure of the hecatomb—Georges Labica, Giovanni Arrighi, Peter Gowan, GA Cohen, Howard Zinn. The juggernaut is likely to roll on relentlessly, picking up speed as it advances. Each death provokes a sense of shock and remorse—another fallen ally departing at the wrong moment, another pile of texts inadequately digested, another line of research and enquiry broken off in mid-stream. But for those of us on the revolutionary left, those of us still engaged in projects of building and maintaining organisational realities, the recent, sudden disappearance of two comrades in particular, despite their fundamental differences on every level—aesthetic, stylistic, temperamental, intellectual—leaves us with a real sense of solitude, especially in this peculiarly murky and uncertain conjuncture.

For Chris Harman and Daniel Bensaïd, two men who have died at almost the same age and within months of each other—one after a monumental 20-year struggle against illness, the other plucked without warning from the night—scarcely addressed probably more than a few sentences directly to each other in over 40 years. And yet their lifelong, daily, uncomplaining commitment to combine the patient, often wearisome, work of building a small revolutionary group with that of trying to theoretically regenerate the grandeur of the classical Marxist tradition by fertilising it constantly with elements of the new was nonetheless a common endeavour.

Both represented different political trajectories—the International Socialist Tendency and the Fourth International (FI)—and divergent styles of being activist-intellectuals. Chris to some extent saw himself as working with a pre-existing theoretical framework that needed developing, whereas Daniel was more comfortable rethinking the very nature of that framework. But the parallels exist and resonate, and their nearly simultaneous exits render this a sombre moment.

What follows is a first attempt, necessarily inadequate and provisional, to sketch some elements of Daniel Bensaïd’s life and work for a readership that, due to his largely—and scandalously—hitherto untranslated work, may only have the faintest outlines of his tumultuous story and rich legacy. [3] It is to be hoped that more rigorous and systematic work will begin to see light over the coming years and thus overcome the lacunae of this initial approach. [4]

Life

Daniel Bensaïd was born on 25 March 1946 in Toulouse, south western France. His parents owned a working class bar—Le Bar des Amis—in the outskirts of the city. His mother, Marthe, the feisty daughter of a Communard wood-turner and an embroideress who lost an arm in a work accident, trained as an apprentice milliner and left her home town of Blois to travel round the world. She landed first in Oran in still French-controlled Algeria, where she met Daniel's father. Haïm was from a poor Jewish family in Mascara and left school at the age of seven. He became a waiter in Oran and then started a boxing career, becoming amateur welterweight champion of North Africa, which he had to give up for his day job. Daniel recounts that his mother squashed his own pugilistic aspirations early on, deciding that his hands were too fragile for such brutalities.

Prisoner of war during the Phoney War, Haïm escaped and bought a bar near Toulouse with a fake identity, only to be reimprisoned by the Gestapo in 1943. Unlike two of his brothers, who were sent to the death camps, Daniel's father managed to stay in the detention camp of Drancy until the end of the war thanks to the resourcefulness of his wife, who rustled up forged papers "proving" non-Jewish origins. Although never religious or Zionist, the Bensaïds drew from these experiences an absolute intolerance of the slightest whisper of anti-Semitism. Haïm would fish out his yellow star from a drawer and slap it onto the bar counter, should any of his clients let themselves go in this direction.

The bar was a social centre for manual workers, postmen, mechanics, small shopkeepers, Spanish Republican refugees, anti-Fascist Italians, former fighters in the Resistance and the International Brigades. Here Daniel was impregnated with a spirit of popular Latin communism that was to stay with him all his life, drawing him always towards the balmy climes of Spain, Portugal and Latin America, rather than the colder, danker social democratic ambience of northern Europe, for which he never manifested much enthusiasm or interest. From here too he picked up much of his ease of contact and *joie de vivre*, his attraction for large, convivial, unpretentious gatherings that he was to rediscover in the Basque country and Brazil in later years. [5]

The local branch of the French Communist Party (PCF) held its meetings in the bar and vacations consisted of stays in holiday camps run by the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). New Year celebrations were marked by attempts at Soviet army dancing and renditions of the Internationale. Bathed in such a plebeian and radical environment, it is no surprise that Daniel was politicised by the polarisation around the Algerian War of Independence and, especially, the massacre at the metro station Charonne in Paris of nine Communist Party and Young Communist demonstrators by the police on 8 February 1962.

The next day, Daniel and others created a Young Communists' branch in their school. They immediately entered into dissidence when they insisted on it being a mixed-sex cell at a time when the party tried to impose a separation of the youth between the Young Communists and the very prim Union of Young Girls of France. Other dissident influences were soon to be felt: first the waves of the Cuban Revolution, as carried back in the suitcases of the legendary theatre and film director Armand Gatti—with whom Daniel was to remain linked until his last days—and then texts of the Left Opposition. These were conveyed in clandestine fashion, like pornographic literature, by the entryist Trotskyist Gérard de Verbizier. He recounted to the provincial neophytes all the internal wrangling in the Union of Communist Students (UEC) between the orthodox majority, the centrists, the proto-Maoist faction including Louis Althusser's followers, and the left oppositionists led by Alain Krivine and Henri Weber.

In this context, against the background of the last days of the Algerian War, the Sino-Soviet split and

the Cuban developments, other unorthodox texts were being circulated and consumed avidly, from those of Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon (these were the years in which the admirable publisher François Maspero was expanding his output of Third Worldist and Marxist books in cheap format) to the works of Althusser, André Gorz and Henri Lefebvre—not to speak of Pierre Broué's history of the Bolshevik Party and Ernest Mandel's Marxist Economic Theory. By the autumn of 1965 Daniel and his group had been won over to the left opposition.

The key turning point came the following year when the leftists were expelled at the Congress of the UEC. The 50-odd expellees—all very young (Daniel was only 20, Krivine the oldest at only 27) and not a little swaggeringly arrogant and grandiloquent—founded the Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires (JCR) in a small room above a cafe in the Latin Quarter of Paris. The return to Toulouse, and the attendant suspicion, hostility and ostracism from erstwhile comrades and party-loyalist family members, were hard going for Bensaïd but brief enough. Having been accepted as a philosophy student at the École Normale Supérieure at Saint-Cloud, he moved rather reluctantly to Paris in the autumn of 1966. [6] As he was later to regret, Daniel neglected his philosophy classes and threw himself into political activism, joining the leadership of the tiny JCR in the following year.

The JCR was far from a homogeneous grouping at this point. A majority were linked to the Fourth International (FI) around Krivine, Weber (now a flatulent senator for the Socialist Party and spokesperson for Laurent Fabius) and Verbizier. Another tendency was close to the Communist dissident group which published *Voix Communiste* and then *Bulletin de l'Opposition de Gauche*, in which the psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari participated. Daniel identified with a "Guevarist" tendency represented by Jeanette Habel. Even in later years, although Daniel would gladly identify himself as a Leninist, and while he had the greatest respect for Trotsky and the Left Opposition, the label "Trotskyist"—whether orthodox or heterodox—was always something that made him uncomfortable, with its echoes of sectarianism, dogmatism and the narcissism of small, sometimes infinitesimal, differences. [7]

The death of Guevara in 1967 was to have a major impact—first traumatic and then fertile—on the young JCR. An interesting light is shone on this question by Bensaïd's reflection that "this tragedy was ours. Che was our best antidote to the Maoist mystique" then hegemonic among leftist students. [8] It was the young Habel who brought back and translated *Socialism and Man* from Cuba, while the Fourth International leader Mandel had known him only a few years earlier, having participated in the famous economic debate in Cuba in 1964. [9] The position of resolute anti-imperialism and internationalism, as well as the apparently anti-bureaucratic ethos represented by the martyred Guevara, was to stand the JCR in good stead in the following years, and exerted a longstanding influence into the late 1970s, despite growing criticisms of the bureaucratic and repressive trajectory of the Cuban regime itself. [10]

Political activity for Bensaïd in 1968 focused mainly around the campus of the University of Nanterre. Alliances were forged between the JCR, which had established a significant base there, and the anarchist group around Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Jean-Pierre Duteuil, especially in the fights with fascists or police who tried to make incursions into "Nanterre la Folie" (the Nanterre madhouse), as it was known. Again skipping classes for the sake of permanent activism, Bensaïd nonetheless found the time to work on a master's dissertation on "The Notion of the Revolutionary Crisis in Lenin", under the supervision of the independent Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Here he outlined, in a form very much influenced by an ultra-Bolshevik and voluntarist reading of the young Georg Lukács, a series of concerns regarding subjectivity and objectivity, structure and event, crisis and strategy, that were to continue to goad him for the next 40 years. [11]

The delegation sent by the JCR to the giant and militant anti Vietnam War demonstration in Berlin in February 1968, followed by the attempted assassination of the student leader Rudi Dutschke in April

(which provoked a riotous protest outside the German Embassy in Paris), was to have radicalising effects on the young revolutionary communists. But little did they expect the events of the following month. Daniel was caught on the hop, on holiday with his girlfriend, studiously reading his way through Lenin's Collected Works, when they learnt from the newspapers of upheaval at the Sorbonne and running battles in the Latin Quarter. They had to pack up and scamper back to the capital in double-quick time in order to be able to participate in the night of the barricades.

Despite its incapacity to break out substantially from its student base or to counter the weight of the dead hand placed on the shoulders of the general strike by the PCF and the CGT, the scarcely 200-strong JCR played a significant role in the events of May. The Gaullist regime did it the honour of dissolving the organisation, along with a number of others, in June. Krivine and a number of other leading members were arrested and imprisoned, and Bensaïd and Weber went into hiding while a clandestine network was set up for the organisation. The novelist Marguerite Duras agreed to act as postbox for the newly formed Communist League (LC) and to shelter the two young revolutionaries on the run from the state, as they scribbled away on their hastily composed analysis of the events—published under the title *May 68: A Dress Rehearsal*. [12]

The LC was officially founded at Easter 1969, after an internal debate in which Bensaïd and other “a-Trotskyists” were won to the perspective of merging with the small Internationalist Communist Party of Pierre Frank and becoming the section of the FI. Strategically, the LC drew the conclusion that May had indeed been a Gallic equivalent of the February 1917 Revolution and that something like an October-shaped event was looming on the near horizon. [13] The newspaper *Rouge* was launched, opening the phase later characterised by Daniel as one of a “hurried Leninism”, spurred on by Mandel's predictions of the imminent outbreak of revolution in a five-year time frame. The mood was best captured by Bensaïd's notorious summons at the time: “History is gnawing at the napes of our necks.” As he later qualified it, it turned out that in fact history had only been nibbling.

The LC's first foray into electoral activity in the presidential elections of 1969 was, to put it mildly, disappointing. Alain Krivine, now free from jail but serving out his military service, achieved a measly 1 percent. This no doubt rendered other beckoning shores more attractive. The Ninth World Congress of the FI in April 1969 marked a decidedly Latin American emphasis, supporting an armed-struggle orientation there. The longstanding passion of the FI and the LC for the continent—one in which Daniel participated the most ardently—was inflamed. Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Brazil were to become the privileged foci of attention and activity over the next two decades for Bensaïd and many of his comrades.

In the meantime, Daniel was also made responsible for relations with the clandestine nuclei of FI groups in Catalonia and Madrid, as well as with ETA VI in the Basque Country, where the FI-supporting faction briefly held the majority in the nationalist left. These activities around the slowly decomposing corpse of Francoism often had a cloak and dagger aspect, and also involved various risky stunts in solidarity with political prisoners or those threatened with execution (or, indeed, actually garrotted) by the clerico-fascists. [14] At one point the idea of creating a secret arms factory near to the Spanish border was mooted, in order to feed the opposition forces with weapons, along the lines of the initiatives taken by the Trotskyists in support of the FLN in Algeria. Sadly, most of the FI's hard-won influence was to be lost in the Spanish state in the late 1970s and 1980s, after the non-appearance of the expected revolutionary situation following the end of the regime and the phoenix-like resurgence of social democracy.

The rising curve of struggle in France, Italy and Britain, the looming crisis situations in Chile and Spain, not to speak of the Portuguese Revolution, encouraged an increasingly ultra-left perspective. Daniel helped to formulate and theorise this perspective. The internal bulletin for the LC's 1972 Congress, which he co-wrote, was entitled “The Question of Power is Posed? Let Us then Pose It!”

Analyses of the far left, LC included, stressed tendencies within the European parliamentary democracies towards authoritarianism, some going as far as claiming to perceive processes of “fascisation”. Old manuals and debates about military strategy and urban insurrections were dusted off and studied carefully. The LC pursued agitation within the armed forces (composed in France at this time, it must be remembered, in large part of civilians doing their military service) in the hope of creating fissures within the repressive state apparatus. The LC’s service d’ordre, or stewards’ organisation—which Bensaïd was delegated by the leadership to oversee—became increasingly professional in all sorts of derring-do, from audacious stunts in order to attract publicity, to more serious activities such as the mass helmeted and Molotov cocktail wielding attack on the meeting of the far-right Ordre Nouveau movement in 21 June 1973. This led to a thrashing of the police and a second dissolution of the organisation by the state (it resurfaced as the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire—LCR). [15]

It was in Argentina, where the FI’s section, the PRT, was pursuing a programme of armed struggle, that Daniel witnessed at first hand the limits of such substitutionism. It was one of his most painful political experiences, as he recounts it. The pressures of clandestine organisation and the competition between groups to outdo each other in feats of political daring led to an increasingly autonomous and fatal spiral of militarisation: bank robberies, prison breaks, kidnappings and shoot-outs that resulted in the decimation of the International’s affiliates. Half of the comrades Daniel knew during this period had suffered imprisonment, torture or assassination by the end of the decade. [16] It was a hard and bitter passage which vaccinated him “against an abstract and mythical vision of the armed struggle”, and it initiated a long process of reflection about the transformations in the forms of political violence and warfare that Bensaïd would pursue through till the end, without ever ceding to abstract moralism or light-headed pacifism. [17]

The rollback set in globally from the middle of the 1970s onwards, as the revolutionary left entered a crisis impelled in part by the failure of the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-5 (or rather, the success of the social democratic neutering of the political and social upheaval). This combined with the anaesthetising effects and marginalising impact (for the far left) of the Pact of Moncloa in Spain, the Historic Compromise in Italy and the Union of the Left in France. The FI maintained its unrealistically optimistic perspectives, although now moving from a “guerrillaist” to a workerist orientation. These were exacerbated by an ill-timed push towards “industrialisation” (sending members to work in factories to strengthen the proletarian composition of the organisations) and a farcically badly judged, but mercifully aborted, “reunification” with the cynical and manipulative Lambertist current. But rhetorical hyperventilation—temporarily comforted by events such as the Nicaraguan Revolution or the rise of Solidarno’s’c in Poland—could only hide the depths of the crisis for so long. Daniel was delegated with mopping up the debts accrued and winding down the operation mounted during the three-year experiment that had turned Rouge into a daily paper. The FI slipped into a series of increasingly fractious and venomous internecine conflicts, sometimes pivoting round relations with the American Socialist Workers Party, concerning questions such as Cambodia/Kampuchea, the character of the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. [18]

However, the strengthening of the FI sections in Mexico and Brazil during the 1980s—a period when Daniel was absorbed by the FI’s centre of operations in Brussels—seemed to provide a counterpoint to the general feeling of dispiriting gloom. Both episodes proved to be something of an Indian summer (or a symptom of the uneven rhythms of class struggle at global level) and ended badly. The Mexican affair was the more sordid and briefer of the two: the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) grew rapidly in the mid-1980s, thanks to its association with the charismatic Rosario Ibarra, [19] and due to its involvement with land seizures by poor peasants—with the result that whole families, indeed villages, joined the party en bloc. In 1986 the PRT had six deputies elected to the national

parliament, organised mass meetings and social struggles and even won control of the small rural town of Morelos.

Sadly, the regime's powers of venal corruption proved overwhelming. The deputies were bought off and the peasant leader Margarito Montes—once dubbed the “Zapata of the North”—flipped from Robin Hood figure to warlord. The PRT, buffeted by crises stimulated by the emergence of the social democratic Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and later the Zapatista uprising, entered a period of decline and disintegration from which it has still not emerged.

Brazil, which Daniel visited two or three times a year throughout the 1980s, proved to be his great passion, although the aftertaste was all the more bitter. Starting from a very low base, but aided by the absence of a suffocating Stalinist tradition and the presence of a powerful and militant working class movement, the FI section Socialist Democracy (DS) expanded rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s and participated energetically in the consolidation and flowering of the trade union confederation (CUT) and of the Workers' Party (PT). The latter was a mass popular organisation, democratic and ideologically heterogeneous in constitution and headed by Lula, a colourful trade unionist from a very humble background (in a country where hitherto politics had been monopolised by military bureaucrats or the *crème de la crème* of high society).

DS attracted a number of highly gifted militants, including João Machado, Raul Pont and, crucially, Heloisa Helena, a kind of Catholic-Trotskyist Pasionaria and still today one of the most popular and principled political personalities of the country. These developments were inspiring and hopeful experiences for Daniel, and contrasted all the more brightly with the leaden skies of the Mitterrand era in France, with its ever heavier load of renegacy, liberal anti-totalitarianism, kitsch and xenophobic moral degeneracy. Moreover, the correctness of DS's strategic choices seemed to be borne out by its ever greater affirmation as a current in the PT, as testified to by Pont's gain of the mayoralty of Porto Alegre—birthplace of the World Social Forum—in 1996-2000 and Miguel Rossetto's rise to the position of vice-governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

But, as developments from Lula's election as president in 2002 were to prove so very painfully, an extravagant price was paid for these breakthroughs. The PT government was adept in incorporating a series of former revolutionaries into the leadership, where they became faithful rottweilers defending the neoliberal “realistic” line (the French Socialist Party had already patented this method, from Lionel Jospin to Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, in the 1980s).

For Rossetto, the poisoned chalice took the form of the Ministry for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform—in a country where landlessness is a life and death issue for millions. As rows started breaking out within the section as to what position to take on the government's “reforms”—a process that led to the expulsion from the party of Helena and other activists due to their opposition—it became clear that a majority of the group, behind the rhetoric regarding the “dual power” that they claimed to be upholding from within the corridors of power, had become completely integrated into the party and state mechanisms. The section split, with the majority breaking *de facto* with the FI and the dissident faction left with the complex and difficult task of building a new pluralist radical left from scratch (in the form of the Party of Socialism and Liberty, PSOL). Throughout this traumatic break, Daniel, firmly but without arrogance, tried to reason with the Brazilian comrades and then, when the rupture became inevitable, backed the dissidents unreservedly.

During the long arid years of the 1980s Daniel split his time in Paris between his day job at the University of Paris VIII (Saint Denis), and the newly relocated offices of the International and its publication *Inprecor*. He describes the team flanking Ernest Mandel in this “bonsai Comintern” (which included John Ross, later a handsomely rewarded adviser to Ken Livingstone at the Greater London Authority) as a cosmopolitan Mexican army of oddballs, akin at times to a group of earnest

slapstick comedians. [20]

Daniel learnt much from Mandel and felt great respect but no real affection for him. Daniel sometimes mocked Mandel's buttoned-up, philatelic, petty bourgeois habitus and his tendency to lapse into monologues and irrefutable and optimistic claims. One might suggest that such barbs were unfair, as Mandel had other more attractive personal characteristics, such as his willingness to discuss, warmly, passionately but attentively, any question with all and sundry. More substantively, Mandel's attraction for positivist and objectivist explanations, his inability to take clear positions in unexpected and new circumstances, [21] allied with his unwavering faith in the course of history and his mania for rummaging in the history books for precedents and examples, combined to create a certain distance between the two. [22]

Daniel also played an active role in the FI's International Institute for Research and Education, opened in 1983 in Amsterdam and directed by Pierre Rousset and his wife, where he gave innumerable, and by all accounts highly memorable, lectures for the three-month international cadre schools.

The collapse of the Stalinist states, starting with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, caught Daniel in a sober and perturbed state of mind. He was quite at odds with Mandel's confident predictions of the imminent uprising of the East German proletariat to sweep away the remnants of the bureaucracy and protect the conquests of the deformed workers' state, thereby reactivating the dormant militant traditions of the German Revolution of 1918-23. [23] After two decades of hopeful examination of the oriental horizon for the sparks of proletarian revolution, the reality of the collapse was deflationary, not to say shabby. This sombre mood was exacerbated by the first Gulf War, accompanied by its sordid phalanx of leftist apologists and, shortly afterwards, by the onset of Daniel's illness. It did have one inestimable silver lining—namely, a period of enforced leisure that permitted Daniel to start writing more substantial works than purely political or interventionist texts (leaving aside his response to the intellectual counter-revolution of the 1970s in *La Révolution et le Pouvoir*). The period was inaugurated by his ventriloquy of the spirit of the French Revolution, *Moi, la Révolution*, directed against revisionist historians led by François Furet, published in 1989. This was followed a year later by his study of Walter Benjamin (*Walter Benjamin, Sentinelle Messianique*) and then by his attempt to reclaim the heritage of Joan of Arc from the nationalist right in *Jeanne, de Guerre Lasse*. The floodgates to two decades of veritable graphomania, in which he would publish no fewer than 28 books, had opened.

The caprices of his health permitting—which at least once dragged him to death's door—Daniel continued from the mid-1990s onwards to engage in an incredible and exhausting number of activities. Some were convinced that he was locked in face to face combat with mortality itself, constantly pushing his body to the limit, defying the malady to do its worst. Although no longer in the leadership, Daniel maintained intense involvement until the end with the internal affairs of the LCR and then the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA). Having traded his bad-boy leather jacket and medallion for a demure tweed with elbow pads and flat cap, he reinvented himself as the sage to whom all, including Olivier Besancenot, came for advice and discussion about matters large or small. He was always on call to address meetings of all sizes all over the country (he particularly enjoyed the warm reception and contact of provincial sections of the LCR), to engage in interviews with journalists from around the world, to speak at educationals, or to attend his local branch.

Never afraid of taking a clear position, Daniel supported the LCR's decision to liquidate itself and launch the NPA with enthusiasm but not triumphalism, aware of the dangers that loomed in the background. All the while Daniel continued to travel widely (Japan, Brazil, Chile, Italy, Spain, Quebec, New York, even London), to supervise his PhD students and give his classes, and he faithfully attended many of the European and World Social Forums during the rise of the movement

for another globalisation.

Perhaps most importantly for him, Daniel also doggedly pursued a project of developing Marxist theory by cross-fertilising it with other radical currents (such as those influenced by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Badiou), and by seeking to transmit in a critical, open but unapologetic manner the wealth of Marxism's past to a younger generation he hoped would forge a future for it. This project was manifested in the creation of the journal *Contretemps* in 2001, [24] the books he edited with the publishers Textuel and Syllepse, [25] and the formation of the Société Louise Michel (a discussion club for intellectuals sympathetic to the NPA).

Unusually for a contemporary Marxist intellectual, Daniel had the ability to plough his own furrow while constantly encouraging and participating in forms of collective work at all levels. In his very last hours of consciousness, he was following the organisation of the conference on communism in Paris he had launched in the wake of the London event organised by Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, as well as the negotiations between the NPA and the Communist Party over the forthcoming regional elections.

"I'm hanging in there," he said a few days before he died; and indeed he did, like a boxer determined to remain standing until the final bell.

Character

Some words need to be added about the character of Daniel Bensaïd, for without some understanding of this, the deep impact he had on all he met can scarcely be grasped. Any such reflections have to be prefaced by the fact that this author only knew him in the last period of his life, a more reflective phase marked by shadow of disease. Bensaïd the organisation man and thundering tribune, ruthless faction fighter and valiant street combatant, was without doubt a somewhat different person. [26]

But, in any case, Daniel was most definitely a member of a very rare breed in the often grey, glowering and pinched milieu of the revolutionary left. Long stretches of time spent in small and marginalised organisations held together with string and sticky tape, all the while scourged by one defeat after another, are not the most conducive circumstances for the cultivation of rich and effulgent personalities. The pathologies of a downturn can take a terrible toll on the spirits of activists, leading some (even whole organisations) to spiral off into sheer delirium and a fantasy world of their own. For of all of his faults, Daniel incarnated to the end a counterexample to all these tendencies.

One facile way of describing this would be to say that Daniel radiated charm to all around him. And he was indeed something of a seductive charmer, courteous and patient, both raconteur and listener. But this is too short and does not convey the contradictory complexities of the man. Perhaps key to locating the specificity of the gravitational pull he exerted on others—rank and file members, trade unionists, actors and directors, journalists, intellectuals, friends, adversaries and even some enemies—was that politics, although the centre of his life, did not exhaust it. Indeed, at a certain point in his memoirs Bensaïd writes that he always felt that he was never particularly gifted for politics, but that he engaged in it rather out of a sense of class solidarity and honour. His lifetime of political struggle, he claimed, was not rooted in the certainty of victory, as defeat was all too possible, but in the need to avoid the dishonour associated with never having fought back. [27]

He was not intrinsically enamoured of the abstractions of philosophy, for his first and abiding love was for literature of all types, ranging from the great 19th century and turn of the century classics

(he could wax eloquent, for example about Charles Péguy or George Bernanos) to the novels of Jonathan Coe and contemporary crime fiction. [28] The first aspect imbued Daniel's approach with a certain calm and ironic distance, a gently mocking smile always hovering on his lips, which was combined with the passion and sincerity with which he adopted certain views. This latter dimension protected him from slipping into dogmatic ritualism and made him into one of the greatest stylists of the Marxist left. [29]

Above all, Daniel was an affective personality, intensely curious and affectionate about people, especially their faults, kinks and strange angles, always keen to make new encounters, especially with the young. Always solicitous and remarkably generous with his time, he was often at the same time mischievous, mordant, teasing and irreverent. Perhaps most impressive—although also somewhat frustrating—was Daniel's deep and solid fidelity to his friends, even those who had long since left behind their revolutionary past for the grimy climb to the higher echelons of establishment politics or journalism. Daniel was not one to cover up or minimise profound political differences with those to whom he felt close, but these came in second place to fond attachments forged over time. Sometimes this could lead him into error, but mostly it was the source of an inner humane strength.

Daniel was also an example of successful fusion of "national characters": strongly attached to aspects of revolutionary French popular culture—he loved to honour the tradition of eating a calf's head on the anniversary of the execution of Louis XVI—he was also deeply imbued with Brazilian, Spanish and Latin American tropes. Fascinated by the dissident Jews of the ilk of Spinoza, and inspired by a certain messianic tradition filtered through Walter Benjamin, Franz Rozenzweig and Gershom Scholem, Daniel was a "non-Jewish" Sephardic Jew who never ceded a millimetre to Zionism or narrow communitarianism. Appropriately, he was attacked in the 1970s by the far-right press due to his surname as both a Jew and an Arab. [30]

With regard to his own work, Bensaïd was always humble—he would insist, when introduced as a "philosopher", that he was merely a "teacher of philosophy"—and he had a powerful belief in the values of pedagogy and exchange which he carried over into his party activity. [31] Open to all currents of thought from all linguistic zones and able to take the best elements within them, while elegantly marking his criticisms and divergences, Bensaïd turned theoretical discussion into a warm, fraternal, genuinely dialogical and pleasurable activity, full of asides, anecdotes and parentheses. [32] Active engagement in politics, in building an organisation of the revolutionary left, was for him neither a dilettantish luxury to be discarded when times got tough, nor a fetish that was to be brandished about feverishly while blinding oneself to a changing external world. Rather, more pragmatically, it was an indispensable principle of reality and accountability that prevented one from drifting into the stratosphere or becoming totally disorientated. Political activity for Daniel was not one of the "sad passions"—echoing Heine, he said that he was of the party of "flowers and nightingales"—and being a member of an organisation was not an exercise in "self-denial, but rather a process of discovery of others". [33]

Bensaïd loved oxymoronic formulations, such as when he characterised his Marxism as an "open dogmatism", or when he characterised the revolutionary's perspective as one of "ardent prudence" or a "slow impatience". They do indeed sit well with his personality, expressing openly the inner tensions (boyish enthusiasm and grey-haired inquietude, for example, or unshakeable partisan loyalty and intellectual vagabondage) that could be the source of creative developments rather than the sites of sterile deadlock. Thus he would speak in his last years of a "reasonable" or "melancholic" optimism as the core of his political outlook, a "disenchanted" optimism of the rational profane wager on the human capacity for self-transformation but which never sought to sweep under the carpet the weight of a century of barbarism, defeat and disillusionment or the perils of the future. The revolutionary, he insisted, should be a person of doubt rather than one of faith.

Daniel almost never turned down an opportunity to discuss—"Il faut toujours discuter" was his motto—with anybody, from goggle-eyed Argentinian ortho-Trots to the urbane and purring Jacques Derrida, from lickspittle journalists to veteran trade unionists and young postmodern feminists. [34] He would impress each with his intransigent passion and his good humour, even during the darkest periods of hand to hand combat with his illness about which he maintained a noble, if somewhat excessive, discretion.

Work

To disinter a well-used phrase, it is no doubt "too early to tell" what will be the precise impact of Daniel's thought, or even to take a proper measure of it. Moreover, the English-speaking world is gravely handicapped by the absence of translations of his major works, aside from *Marx for Our Times*. This is, no doubt, a negative result of Daniel's relative lack of narcissism (or at least the particularly virulent, explicit forms)—unlike so many Marxist intellectuals, resentment at the lack of recognition of their work gnawing at their souls, he scarcely engaged in any serious self-promotion or pushed for translation of his works, at least in English. Projects for the latter would be greeted with an amused, slightly surprised, pleasure, but no delusions of grandeur. Had it not been for the enthusiasm of Mike Davis, even *Marx for Our Times* would probably never have seen the light of day.]] Even for those who read French, there is the problem that there is so much material to choose from. Between 1968 and 1989 Daniel published only five books, and two of these were co-authored while a third was a booklet of his lectures on strategy and the party given at the Amsterdam cadre school (*Stratégie et Parti*, 1987). [35] Of course, alongside this was a mass of articles and internal documents, but the bulk consisted of texts overdetermined by the specific political conjuncture (a large number of pieces on Brazil in the 1980s, for example) or reactions to the texts and positions of others. From 1989, but particularly from the mid-1990s, the rate and intensity augmented algebraically, and he put his name to at least 28 books and a host of chapters in collective volumes, prefaces and introductions to works (such as his very useful introductions to four collections of Marx's writings) and innumerable articles and interviews in all the major languages. Despite hospitalisation, in the last full year of his life Daniel published at a rough count at least a dozen significant texts. [36]

In order to gauge the contribution properly, one would have to sift carefully through all this material, classifying and categorising as much as possible in order to separate out the ephemeral from the texts of longer-lasting value, filter out the repetitions and so forth. Clearly, limitations of space and competence do not permit such an exercise here. However, it is possible to say some general things if one leaves aside the more time-limited interventionist works.

From one angle, Daniel was a continuator, an inheritor of the classical Marxist tradition that was largely snuffed out in the pre-war period, but also of the "warm current" of Western Marxism, largely identified with a dialectical if not Hegelian spirit, that tried to reconnect with the work of the early Lukács and Korsch, embodied by figures such as Roman Rosdolsky, Pierre Naville, Lucien Goldmann or Henri Lefebvre. [37] From the 1990s onwards, however, there is a clear shift away from the centrality of the figure of Lukács towards an abiding engagement with Walter Benjamin and Ernst Bloch along with the contemporary figures of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and, later, Alain Badiou. [38] Certainly, nothing but hostility was felt for the glacial waters of, for example, doctrinaire Althusserianism or analytical Marxism and, broadly speaking, war was declared on all species of evolutionism, positivism, sociologism and teleology. [39] *Marx in Our Times* is a magnificent three-pronged attack on the conception of Marxism as a manifestation of historical, sociological or scientific reason and, in this sense, is a "post-postmodern" text that includes within itself all that is of value in the critiques of grand narratives, but without ever conceding to

irrationalism, relativism or irrealism.

But, thanks no doubt to his literary temper, Daniel was more than just a follower—he was an alchemist, able to combine the most unlikely and apparently incompatible influences, such as Lenin and Joan of Arc, Pascal and Trotsky, Blanqui and Mandel, Arendt and Chateaubriand, Proust and the Kabbala, the tradition of the Marranos and that of the Left Opposition. This hybridisation of the political with the aesthetic, the haut bourgeois with the revolutionary proletarian, the 19th with the 20th century, the medieval with the modernist, not only allowed Daniel to let his words breathe more freely, but also aided him in his exploration of the nature of historicity—on the one hand the need to uphold and reignite the memory of the defeated through the ages, to hear and echo the voices from the ditches and the mass graves; on the other, the struggle against the tendencies towards the effacement or homogenisation of the past and the introduction of a “judicial” and moralising reading of the tragedies of the 20th century. [40]

And if the past was to be considered as open—never quite past, always ready to be reactivated and redeemed—so too the horizon of the future was radically indeterminate. Fusing Lenin’s conception of the compressed, accelerated temporality of crisis and revolution with a Benjaminian critique of positivist progressivism’s notion of empty and linear time and a certain reading of Derrida’s “messianism without the messiah”, Daniel sought to develop a strategic understanding of time. This passed through a complex articulation of multiple temporalities—those of capital (production, circulation, realisation, cycles, crises) and those of politics (long periods of apparent stasis—the time of resistance against the grain—followed by leaps, peaks, troughs, advances and regressions both rapid and slow—the epochs of revolution and counter-revolution)—with their discordances, divergences and clashes and their occasional explosive conjunctions. [41]

A strategic conception implied learning the art of riding or surfing these tumultuous and incompatible movements of the non-synchronous, the non-contemporaneous and the uneven and yet combined, and conceiving of the future both as a field of bifurcations, moments of decision and turning points, but also as overshadowed by the looming presence of catastrophe. “Civilisational crisis” Daniel dubbed it when referring to the spectrum of disasters already in play, stretching from the microscopic (such as the patenting of genomes) to the planetary (ecological ravages that demand an eco-communist response)—a catastrophe that is not beyond the horizon but rather already active and harbouring within it the threat of unimaginably greater degrees of barbarism. Such barbarism, he repeatedly emphasised, was prefigured by the transformations in contemporary warfare, with its “bestialisation” and “dehumanisation” of the figure of the enemy, its abolition of the frontiers between civilians and combatants and between frontline and domestic “security”, such that every infamous act of brutality could be pre-emptively justified by a permanent state of exception. [42]

With such high stakes at play, Daniel sought to analyse the changing terrain of strategic thought in the new century, a landscape rendered always more complex and treacherous by the spatial, temporal and subjective reconfigurations that neoliberal globalisation both initiated and accelerated. For Daniel, these changes could be gauged by the tendencies towards, on the one hand, the disappearance of the political as such in favour of a mass of atomised and increasingly electorally abstentionist consumers (a de facto restoration of the limited suffrage of the 18th and 19th centuries), tracked by opinion polls and focus groups and governed in reality by an insidious complex of lobbies, clientelism and mafias, and, on the other, the blurring, crumbling even, of the lines that hitherto separated the public and private spheres. Whether manifested by the increasing personalisation and mediatisation of political life (a phenomenon not unfamiliar to the LCR/NPA in the past few years) or the replacement of universalisable forms of identity with those of the nation, niche or “community”, these trends seem to militate against any broad-based and credible revolutionary project. [43] To

this Daniel counterposed not a nostalgia for a bygone age of apparent certainties but rather a humble admission that serious strategic thinking on the far left, the tradition of the LCR included, had reached a “ground zero”—the “eclipse of strategic reason”.

But this unsparing lucidity did not cause Daniel to throw up his hands in despair, or even less to attach his wagon to the new fashionable trend in town, but rather he rolled up his sleeves and delved straight into the problematic. In his last major work, *In Praise of Profane Politics* (2008), Daniel provided an acute survey of the major historical shifts in the forms of contemporary politics. Via a critical engagement with thinkers as diverse as Benjamin, Arendt, Schmitt, Miéville, Deleuze, Foucault, Harvey, Hardt and Negri, Holloway, Badiou and many others, he refuted those one-sided theorists who sought to elevate one particular tendency into an absolute (the transformed role of the nation-state, the delegitimisation of the party form, the rejection of a statist orientation and so on), and thereby promote a new utopianism—whether radical or petty in form. For Daniel, the “social illusion”, which could take many forms, from autonomism to soft movementism, that assumed that social struggles would in and of themselves produce political alternatives, was just as deleterious as a caricatural and braggadocio form of vanguardist politicism. Daniel rejected the sterile binary choice of either rejecting, ostrich-like, that anything had fundamentally changed or proclaiming the need to sweep the board clean of all previous conceptions of emancipatory politics. The classical heritage of Marxism in its various forms and its attendant strategic “hypotheses” (as Daniel rebaptised them, to take a distance from the notion of “models” that could be applied in all circumstances) remained a fertile resource on condition of being constantly held up against the demands of the new. By his own admission, Daniel did not provide us with solutions to our new strategic dilemmas, but his detailed reconnaissance of their features is indispensable if revolutionaries are to make any further progress. [44]

Daniel’s theoretical methods were, of course, not flawless. His impatience with pedantry and academicism occasionally led him to be rather hasty or slipshod in his readings. His choice of texts and authors to subject to critique was often somewhat arbitrary and unsystematic, and his beautiful pen, that could produce shimmering moments of illumination, appeared also to trap him now and again in the belief that a lyrical formulation was sufficiently powerful to resolve a real theoretical difficulty. In reality, it was sometimes merely a way of skating—with great élan—across the surface. But his Marxism was in almost all cases exemplary in its combination of intransigency on a foundational level with an open, sceptical, questioning spirit. This reflexive self-critical conception is well brought out by an interview given to the Russian socialists of the group *Vpered* in 2006. Asked what he considered to be the main theoretical challenges facing contemporary Marxism, Daniel responded with a sketch of an extraordinarily ambitious research agenda that included, among the issues that required serious investigation: the ecological question; the new uneven and combined production of social space and scales; the transformations of the nature of work and the prospects for its possible transcendence; the phenomenon of bureaucratisation, not only of parties and unions but also of NGOs, universities and the media, and the consequences of this for the democratisation and deprofessionalisation of politics; and, finally, the question that had obsessed him since his days in Nanterre University, namely that of strategy, citing the need to,

without renouncing the centrality of the class struggle in the contradictions of the system, think the plurality of these contradictions, of these movements, of these actors, think their alliances, think through the complementarity of the political and the social without confusing them, pick up again the problematic of hegemony and the united front...deepen our understanding of the relationships between political citizenship and social citizenship.

All of this, he added, in a typical Bensaïdian gesture that rejected purist pusillanimity in the face of intellectual cross-pollination, had to be conducted with the:

important tools that come from other currents of critical thought: from economics, from sociology, from ecology, from gender studies, from postcolonial studies, from psychoanalysis. We will only make progress by engaging in a dialogue with Freud, with Foucault, with Bourdieu, and with many others. [45]

For Daniel, this spirit combining the uninhibited acceptance of the singular identity of Marxism with openness to genuine dialogue with other currents could be applied both on the intellectual and political fronts:

It is perfectly compatible and complementary to contribute to broad regroupments and to maintain a memory and a project which are carried by a political current that has its own history and its own organisational structures. This is even a condition of clarity and of respect with regard to unitary movements. Currents which do not publicly embrace their own political identity are the most manipulative. If it is true, as Deleuze liked to repeat, that in politics there is no clean slate, and that we always have to “start again from the middle”, then we should be able to open ourselves to the new without losing the thread of past experiences. [46]

In an elegiac text Alain Badiou has written, “With [Daniel’s] disappearance, the intellectual, activist, political, and what we might call, even though the adjective is today obscure in meaning, ‘revolutionary’ world has changed”. [47] If this is true for such a “distant companion” (as Badiou describes his relationship with Daniel), how much truer must it be for us. But, in this changed world, we will need the work, example and spirit of Daniel Bensaïd more than ever.

Daniel’s death is like a wound, not a sadness. A loss which leaves us heavier. However, this weight is the opposite of a burden; it is a message composed, not with words, but with decisions and acts and injuries. [48]

Sebastian Budgen

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] Bensaïd, 2004, pp460-1.

[2] *The Book of the Revelation of John*, 3:16, cited in Bensaïd, 2001a, p111.

[3] Only two books have been translated, Marx for Our Times and a collection entitled Strategies for Resistance. It is to be hoped that his memoirs will be published by Verso and that the Historical Materialism Book Series and Haymarket Books, among others, will bring out other works in English. A number of translated articles and interviews are available at the following websites: www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article9410;

www.marxists.org/archive/bensaïd/index; www.internationalviewpoint.org

See on ESSF [Daniel Bensaïd: A bibliography \(English and other languages\)](#)

[4] See, for example, the issue of the journal *Lignes*, number 32, May 2010, entirely devoted to Daniel, including articles by Gilbert Achcar, Alain Badiou, Etienne Balibar, Stathis Kouvelakis, Michael Löwy, Stavros Tombazos, Enzo Traverso and others. See also Arruzza, 2010.

[5] Not to speak of his otherwise incomprehensible enthusiasm for mindless activities such as football, rugby and cycling.

[6] However, Daniel never lost his affection for his toulousain-and more generally, southern-roots and popular culture, nor indeed his accent, and this no doubt preserved him from all types of Parisian affectation and snobbery. In later years he was contemptuously dubbed a "rustic philosopher" by Philippe Raynaud in his survey of the thinkers of the radical left for the Fondation Saint-Simon. Truth be told, it was a label Daniel quite appreciated.

[7] For a reading that insists insightfully on the continuity of Leninism in Bensaïd's thought, see Arruzza, 2010.

[8] Bensaïd, 2004, p75.

[9] See Stutje, 2009, pp148-154.

[10] See, most recently, the book on Guevara by Michael Löwy and Olivier Besancenot-Löwy and Besancenot, 2009. Bensaïd himself, it has to be said, despite never denying or reneging on his original Guevarism (although he could never have been described as an uncritical Castroite), in later years was to be more sparing and prudent in his citations of Che.

[11] An extract of this thesis was presented in an article co-written with Sami Naïr and published in Maspero's journal *Partisans*, [A propos de la question de l'organisation : Lénine et Rosa Luxemburg](#) and now available at www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article10230.

[12] Perhaps this episode is the origin of one of Daniel's favourite aphorisms, when he compared building a revolutionary party to absolute love in Duras's novels-impossible but nonetheless necessary. It has to be said that this had a rather disorienting effect on the British audience when repeated at the SWP's Marxism event in London a few years ago.

[13] Two minorities were to continue to oppose this orientation: one led by Henri Maler and Isaac Johsua, who went on to found the group *Révolution!*, which had affiliations with the Italian quasi-Maoist organisation *Avanguardia Operaia*, and with which the International Socialists maintained relations in the 1970s; the other influenced by André Glucksmann and Guy Hocquenghem, the latter of whom was later to found the revolutionary gay rights movement, the FHAR.

[14] In one case, the Bank of Spain's building in Paris was raided in December 1970 by 40-odd masked activists in protest at the imminent execution of Basque nationalist prisoners. The bank was wrecked, but no one was hurt and no money was taken. It was a case of what Bensaïd calls the LC's "parodic" form of violence that, miraculously, did not skid off course.

[15] Daniel never conceded to the criticisms of this action-Bensaïd, 2004, pp170-171.

[16] See the very moving Bensaïd, 2004, chapter 10.

[17] Bensaïd, 2004, p194. For some broader reflections, see Bensaïd, 2009b. Daniel developed a late flowering friendship with Jann-Marc Rouillan, a leading member of the leftist terrorist group *Action Directe*, still serving out a prison sentence.

[18] A minority of the FI, around Tariq Ali, Gilbert Achcar and Michel Lequenne, argued for a position calling for immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops.

[19] Ibarra was the mother of a young man who had been "disappeared" by the regime, and leader of the movement of parents and partners of other victims of the Institutional Revolutionary Party's corrupt and violent government.

[20] Bensaïd, 2004, p361.

[21] Daniel cites the invasion of Afghanistan and the Nicaraguan Revolution-although, as Gilbert Achcar has pointed out, in the former case at least, Mandel's circumspection was to be preferred to Daniel's later regretted haste to reach at all costs a definitive judgement.

[22] Bensaïd, 2004, p365.

[23] The story is recounted that at a congress of the FI, during the debate on the Eastern events, Daniel had rebutted Gérard Filoche's call for celebratory "Champagne!" with a call for "Alka Seltzer!"

[24] See www.contretemps.eu

[25] See www.editionstextuel.com/index.php?cat=020363;
www.syllepse.net/lng_FR_srub_60-Mille-marxismes.html

[26] Bensaïd was a central node of political and intellectual life on the left of the left in France- outside of the bunkers of sectarian self-isolation, “everybody” knew “Daniel”, “everyone” had chatted with him at least, and virtually all had fallen under his spell, some intensely so. The name “Daniel Bensaïd” for many was like a magic key that instantly stimulated smiles and opened doors.

[27] Bensaïd, 2004, p451.

[28] In his greatest moments of political lassitude, this was manifested, much to the bemusement of his comrades, when he would, following Trotsky, read Proust during leadership meetings... In his search for an aesthetic in his work, Daniel was both breaking from the humdrum writing by rote of much of the post-war Trotskyist tradition but also reconnecting with a certain pre-war tradition that included, aside from the Old Man himself, figures such as Isaac Deutscher, Maurice Nadeau and C L R James.

[29] For me at least, the title of one of his books on the communist legacy-*The Spectre’s Smile* (Bensaïd, 2000)-has a new resonance now.

[30] See Bensaïd, 2004, chapter 18.

[31] In his memoirs (Bensaïd, 2004, pp140-143), he recalls affectionately his brief period teaching in the secondary school of the provincial town of Condé-sur-l’Escaut in the department of the Nord-Pas de Calais, referring to the Third Republic’s “black-coated hussars”, the teachers who stood in the front line in the struggle against the church and the forces of superstition. It is at this point that Bensaïd refers to himself as a “red hussar”, from which we take the title of this article.

[32] A note regarding Bensaïd’s cool relationship to the English-speaking world: aside from rather unrewarding visits to the US during the period of the FI’s relationship with the American SWP (viewed by Bensaïd as rather grey and rigid in its tight organisation and emphasis on efficiency and promptitude-all the contrary of the Ligue’s own culture of dishevelled informality-Filoché, 2007), he had very little sustained engagement with Anglophone Marxism until the last decade of his life, and his cultural references were far removed. From the turn of the century on, however, he became one of the key transmitters in France of the largely untranslated work of Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Ellen Meiksins Wood, Alex Callinicos and others. Regarding the British SWP, Bensaïd had ambivalent feelings: he respected its ability to weather the downturn and try to relate to the new movements from 1999 onwards, and felt that it was a privileged partner for the LCR (and a model to follow in the professionalism of its publications), but he was uncomfortable about what he felt was its rigid and excessively homogeneous internal culture, its perceived fear of divisive debate and dissension and its discursive style consisting in what he called “proselytising self-persuasion” to maintain morale and keep things ticking over.

[33] Plenel, 2010, p130.

[34] In one particularly bizarre incident, Daniel amusedly accepted the invitation to address a meeting on his Joan of Arc book organised by Nouvelle Action Royaliste, a weird leftist-monarchist groupuscule that militates in favour of the general strike, self-management and the restoration of the monarchy...

[35] He also participated in collective volumes, against Althusser in 1974, on the Portuguese Revolution in 1976, and on Marx in 1986.

[36] As Enzo Traverso has pointed out, this outpouring of a fragmentary but scintillating œuvre is the precise opposite of the model of Marx, writing and rewriting until his death a book that he was never able to complete-Traverso, 2010, p180.

[37] The parallels between Bensaïd and Lefebvre, over and above similarities in personality and the affection the former felt for the latter, could be the subject of a whole chapter in itself.

[38] Again parallels could be drawn with another figure from the Trotskyist movement who also rediscovered the creative legacy of Benjamin-Terry Eagleton-and echoes of this can be found in Alex Callinicos's work of this period, such as *Making History*. The appeal of Benjamin for this generation of Marxist intellectuals confronted by an epoch of defeat appears-purists and grouches aside-to have been almost irresistible.

[39] Although Daniel did retrospectively revise his opinion of (especially the late) Althusser, as testified to by his contribution in Avenas, 1999, and by Bensaïd, 2001b. As Stathis Kouvelakis has put it (personal communication), "Daniel came to understand the profound convergence between the critique of teleology [the idea of history moving towards a goal] developed by Benjamin and that by Althusser. Thus his interest for the late Althusser, in which the 'aleatory [chance] encounter' is the exact equivalent, and is so relatively explicitly, of the miracle, the event and the messianic appearance or of impossible love in Duras (particularly the latter actually). Moreover: Daniel explicitly recognised the validity of the critique of theoretical humanism by Althusser. This was a fundamental rupture with, for example, the point of view of Mandel and with the young Lukácsian paradigm. But, in reality, things were more complex, as we read in his memoirs that Daniel was a member of an intellectual generation which was perfectly familiar with the debates of the 1960s. It was formed by this context and, even when Daniel tells us that he rejected Althusser during his student days, it was after weeks and weeks of intensive study (with among others his comrade Antoine Artous) of the texts. This is an entirely different intellectual universe from that inhabited by, for example, Michael Löwy, not to speak of an earlier generation of intellectuals close to Trotskyism (such as Naville or Nadeau)."

[40] See Bensaïd, 1999. Daniel's concern about this mode of thinking about the past, so popular with a certain type of moralistic centre left, led him to be very prudent about lending support even to measures that might appear "politically correct" such as the French Gayssot law which makes Holocaust revisionism a criminal offence or the prosecution of Pinochet.

[41] Daniel also cited other temporalities such as the juridical, the aesthetic and the ecological. See Bensaïd, 2010, p33. Importantly, he also insisted on the different temporalities of theoretical research and political action.

[42] See Bensaïd, 2008, chapter 3. For a reading of Bensaïd as theorist of time, see Kouvelakis, 2010.

[43] See Bensaïd, 2005, and the critique in Callinicos, 2008.

[44] For his contributions to the strategic debate in this journal, see Bensaïd, 2002b and 2007.

[45] Bensaïd, 2010, p34.

[46] Bensaïd, 2010, p38.

[47] Badiou, 2010, p21.

[48] Taken from a tribute to Daniel by John Berger.