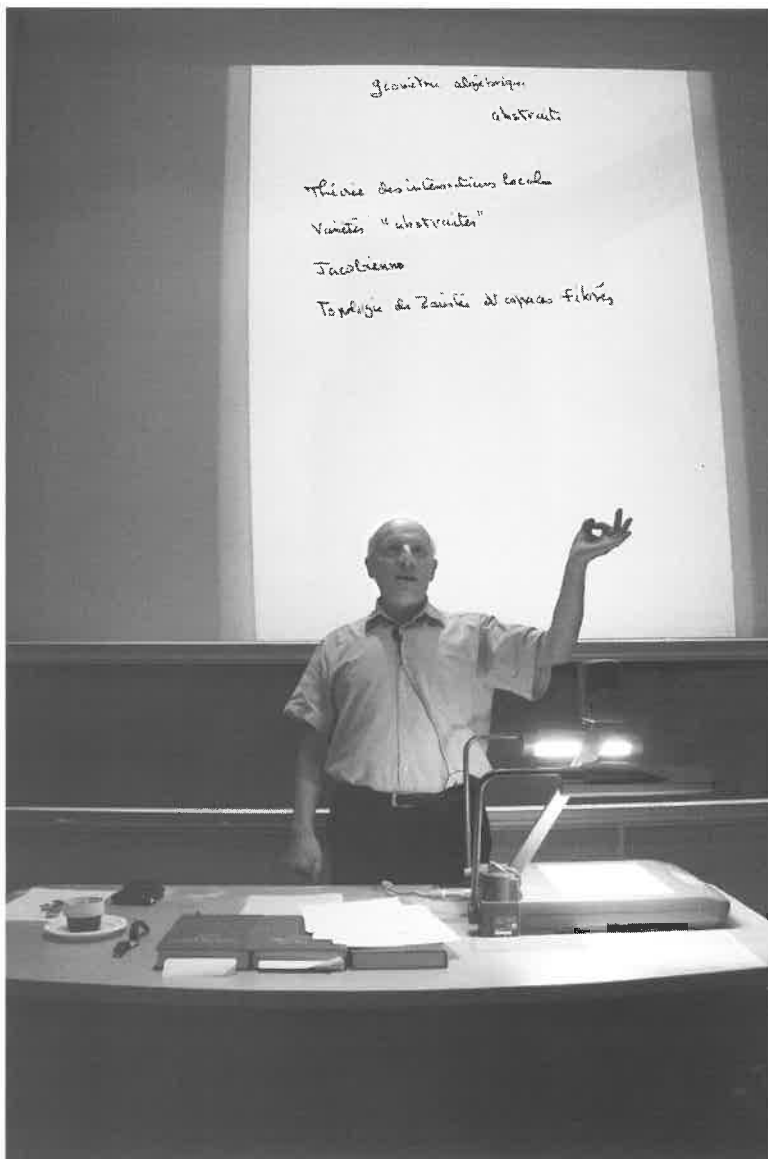


## Solidarity

A mathematician who travels abroad is never a tourist. In a normal situation, given the professional aspect, he finds himself in a convivial environment where certain values are tacitly shared, humanist values which characterise more or less the mathematical community: mathematicians are liberals, despite a few blunders as during the international congress in 1920 in Strasbourg, where the Germans were excluded! They were only reintegrated in 1928.... However, Soviet mathematicians under Stalin did not come up against the same ideological errors as the biologists, for example. We must say they were in an ambiguous situation. The regime needed good scientists for its nuclear and military industry and tended to look after them, and mathematicians were sufficiently removed from the direct applications of their work to be deemed inoffensive, a bit like musicians or chess players. It's true that this position, somewhat in retreat, can be a haven in extreme situations and conduces to the development of a moral and physical aptitude to abstract oneself from reality which borders on autism. One takes refuge in mathematics a bit like





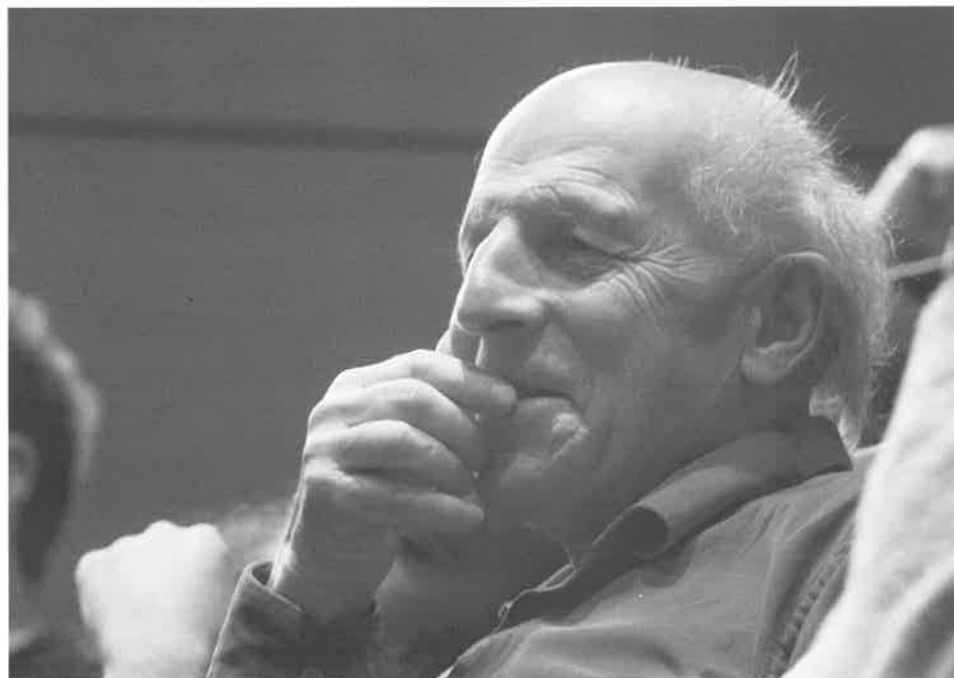
Miguel Angel Estrella in prison playing sonatas in his mind. I remember, at the worst moments during the Algerian war, always having a maths book in my pack which I would read whenever I had a quiet quarter of an hour to myself.

A certain number of us have taken advantage of this ambiguous status of mathematics when participating in international congresses held in countries ruled by dictators. It was the case in Ceausescu's Romania, it was the case in Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring, where I went on behalf of the Jean Hus, an association presided by Jean-Pierre Vernant, Jacques Derrida and Nathalie Roussarie, a relative of Adrien Douady. I took with me banned books (Plato's *Republic*, for example) and a considerable amount of money, the equivalent of ten thousand euros today. Piotr Uhl, one of the leaders of the resistance at the time, was a native of Prague and a man of the old school: after having asked me not to stand too close to the window because of police surveillance, as soon as I had given him the packet, he sat down at his typewriter and typed me a receipt! I swallowed it as soon as I had gone out of the door.

Laurent Schwarz, Jean-Louis Verdier, Marcel Berger, Alain Guichardet and I also went to Poland. The situation was different, just after Jaruzelski's putsch, the 13th of December 1981. Speaking of this, nowadays there isn't a right-minded Pole who doesn't do justice to Jaruzelski. Thanks to his military putsch, he could say to the Russians, "No need to invade Poland, I have the situation under control." We should remember that his parents were killed in Katyn and that, if he wore dark glasses, it's because his

eyes were burned by the snow in Siberia where he spent ten years in deportation. Anyway, it was December '81 and the International Congress of Mathematics was to be held in Warsaw in '82! The classical dilemma: to go or not to go? To caution or to boycott? Hence our exploratory mission in February '82. We found a society under close surveillance, with the appropriate number of police indicators and glamorous fortune seekers at the bar of the one hotel reserved for foreigners. The day after we arrived, at an official meeting at the Science Academy in Copernicus Square, the president comes onto the stage. "I have invited you in the name of the Polish Mathematical Society, unfortunately it has been banned as well as all the other associations..." However there was still a buffet, so we started to talk. A student comes up: "Are you the French people? I have a mission for you..." And he takes a letter out of his pocket and holds it out to Laurent Schwartz, who puts on his glasses to read it... I kick him. "What's the matter?" I kick him again and this time he understands and puts his glasses away. The letter contained a list of a hundred and fifty imprisoned mathematicians. "They" hoped we could take advantage of the international congress to get them out of gaol. The young man who had given us the letter bends towards me: "Don't you want to come to Wroclaw?" I exchanged glances with Jean-Louis Verdier, always so solid and magnificent, and we said yes. The French Embassy, for whom we were the only presentable French delegation at that time, did the necessary work, and that very evening we had plane tickets and our passports duly stamped with visas.

Usually, at eight o'clock in the morning, Wroclaw is full of people, lorries, smoking factory chimneys. This time, nothing. General strike, town lifeless, apart from the patrols. As for us, we had no instructions. But a signpost indicates



"Ratuz"—Rathaus, that is to say Town Hall in Polish German—and there, on the main square, we find several student cafés open. We go in and feel immediately that we are on the right track: instead of finding us a table, the bar tender lets us stand around waiting like everybody else. So we are among equals, therefore in a democracy-friendly environment... Indeed, once we have sat down, a young man comes up to us: "Are you the

French people?" His friends join him, so it isn't a police provocation, and he takes us to a meeting with a leader of the resistance, a Jewish mathematician who had been imprisoned, then released, and who wanted to discuss whether the mathematics congress should take place or not. The official regime wanted it to take place at all costs:



an international mathematical congress is a sign of normality with a lot of "added value." Finally it took place after a short delay, in 1983. Out of the hundred and fifty mathematicians on our list, a hundred and forty nine had been released. There remained the hundred and fiftieth, whose release Christophe Soulé and I obtained at the end of the

congress. When the whole thing was over and we got on the plane home, I felt an envelope on my seat as I sat down. I put it in my bag and didn't open it until we got to Paris. On it was written: "Thank you for everything," followed by all the big names of Solidarnosc.

At that time, Jean Dieudonné also intervened a lot. As he was rather right-wing and didn't make a secret of it, it was natural for him to protest against communist leaders, but he also went to Montevideo and succeeded in persuading the Uruguay Defence Minister, a hulking great brute, to release José-Luis Massera by telling him: "In a civilised country, you can't do that kind of thing."

It was the right argument: the notion of civilisation is indeed a decisive one. I am firmly convinced that mathematics is an integral part of civilization and moreover that without mathematics civilization wouldn't exist. Obviously in some ways maths is that almost autistic activity I have already mentioned which can be done with just a paper and pencil but that only corresponds to one particular phase; Roger Godement once said jokingly that we should be attached to the arts faculty. Fortunately it was only a joke.... Mathematicians don't have tools, but they are constantly creating tools which just as constantly escape them and pervade all fields, from geometry to astronomy. And when my granddaughters start to count, they take in this activity like a gift of civilization which is their natural heritage. Mathematics reaches apotheosis each time one does maths without realizing it, and the true ambition of a mathematician is that mathematics should belong to everyone.

Pierre Cartier