

of local opinions'. So the herd of citizens must be governed by 'a specialized class whose interests reach beyond the locality', and this elite class is to act as a machinery of knowledge that circumvents the primary defect of democracy, the impossible ideal of the 'omni-competent citizen'. This is how our democracies function – with our consent. There is no mystery in what Lippmann was saying: it is an obvious fact. The mystery is that, knowing it, we nevertheless play the game. We act *as if* we are free and freely deciding, silently not only accepting but even *demanding* that an invisible injunction (inscribed into the very form of our free speech) tells us what to do and think. As Marx realized long ago, the secret is in the form itself. In this sense, in a democracy, every ordinary citizen effectively is a king – but a king in a constitutional democracy, a king who only formally decides, whose function is to sign measures proposed by an executive administration. This is why the problem of democratic rituals is homologous to the big problem of constitutional democracy: how to protect the dignity of the king? How to maintain the appearance that the king effectively decides, when we all know this is not true? What we call a 'crisis of democracy' does not occur when people stop believing in their own power but, on the contrary, when they stop trusting the elites, those who are supposed to know for them and provide the guidelines, when they experience the anxiety signalling that 'the (true) throne is empty', that the decision is now *really* theirs. There is thus in 'free elections' always a minimal aspect of politeness: those in power politely pretend that they do not really hold power, and ask us to freely decide if we want to give them power – in a way which mirrors the logic of the offer-meant-to-be-refused, as mentioned above. So, back to Turkey, is it only this type of dignity that the protesters want, tired as they are of the primitive and openly direct way they are cheated and manipulated? Is their demand in fact, 'We want to be cheated in a proper way – at least make an honest effort to cheat us without insulting our intelligence!', or is it really more? If we aim at more, then we should be aware that the first step of liberation is to get rid of the appearance of false freedom and to openly proclaim our unfreedom. Say, the first step towards female liberation is to throw off the appearance of respect for women and to proclaim openly that women are oppressed – more than ever, today's master doesn't want to appear as a master.³⁶

TOWARDS A NEW MASTER

In the very last pages of his monumental *Second World War*, Winston Churchill ponders on the enigma of a military decision. After the specialists (economic and military analysts, psychologists, meteorologists ...) propose their multiple, elaborated and refined analysis, somebody must assume the simple and for that very reason most difficult act of transposing this complex multitude – where for every reason for there are two reasons against – into a simple 'Yes' or 'No': we shall attack; we continue to wait. This gesture, which can never be fully grounded in reason, is that of a Master. It is for the experts to present the situation in its complexity, and it is for the Master to simplify it into a point of decision.

Such a Master figure is needed especially in situations of deep crisis. The function of a Master is here to enact an authentic division – a division between those who want to drag on within the old parameters and those who are aware of the change that is necessary. President Obama is often accused of dividing the American people instead of bringing them all together to find broad bi-partisan solutions – but what if this, precisely, is what is good about him? Such a division, not the opportunistic compromises, is the only path to true unity. Let us take an example which surely is not problematic: France in 1940. Even Jacques Duclos, the second man of the French Communist Party, admitted in a private conversation that if, at that time, free elections were to be held in France, Marshal Pétain would have won with 90 per cent of the votes. When de Gaulle, in his historic act, refused to acknowledge Pétain's capitulation to Germany and continued to resist, he claimed that it was only he, not the Vichy regime, who spoke on behalf of true France (on behalf of true France as such, not only on behalf of the 'majority of the French'!) what he was saying was deeply true, even if it was 'democratically' not only without legitimization, but clearly opposed to the opinion of the majority of the French people. And Margaret Thatcher, the 'lady who is not for turning', was also such a Master, sticking to her plan of economic liberalism which was at first perceived as crazy, gradually elevating her singular madness into an accepted norm. When Thatcher was asked about her

greatest achievement, she promptly answered: 'New Labour.' And she was right: her triumph was that even her political enemies adopted her basic economic policies. The true triumph is not victory over the enemy; it occurs when the enemy itself starts to use your language, so that your ideas form the foundation of the entire field.

So what remains of Thatcher's legacy today? Neoliberal hegemony is clearly falling apart. The only solution is to repeat Thatcher's gesture in the opposite direction. Thatcher was perhaps the only Thatcherite – she clearly believed in her ideas. Today's neoliberalism, on the contrary, 'only imagines that it believes in itself and demands that the world should imagine the same thing' (to quote Marx). In short, today, cynicism is openly on display. Recall again the already-mentioned cruel joke from Lubitch's *To Be Or Not to Be*: when asked about the German concentration camps in occupied Poland, the responsible Nazi officer, 'concentration camp Erhardt', snaps back: 'We do the concentrating, and the Poles do the camping.' Does the same not hold for the Enron bankruptcy in January 2002 (as well as for all the financial meltdowns that followed), which can be interpreted as a kind of ironic commentary on the notion of the risk society? The thousands of employees who lost their jobs and savings were certainly exposed to risk, but without any true choice: the risk appeared to them as blind fate. Those, on the contrary, who effectively did have an insight into the risks as well as a possibility to intervene in the situation (the top managers), minimized their risks by cashing in their stocks and options before the bankruptcy – so it is true that we live in a society of risky choices, but some (the Wall Street managers) do the choosing, while others (the common people paying mortgages) do the risking.

As we have already pointed out, one of the weird consequences of the financial meltdown and the measures taken to counteract it (enormous sums of money to help banks) was a revival in the works of Ayn Rand, the closest that one can come to an ideologist of radical 'greed is good' capitalism – the sales of her magnum opus *Atlas Shrugged* exploded again. According to some reports, there are already signs that the scenario described in *Atlas Shrugged* – the creative capitalists themselves going on strike – has been enacted. John Campbell, a Republican congressman, said in support of the Tea Party movement:

'The achievers are going on strike. I'm seeing, at a small level, a kind of protest from the people who create jobs . . . who are pulling back from their ambitions because they see how they'll be punished for them.' The absurdity of this reaction is that it totally misreads the situation: most of the gigantic sums of bailout money went precisely to the deregulated Randian 'titans' who failed in their 'creative' schemes and thereby brought about the meltdown. It is not the great creative geniuses who are now helping lazy ordinary people but the ordinary taxpayers who are helping the failed 'creative geniuses'.

The other aspect of Thatcher's legacy targeted by her Leftist critics was her 'authoritarian' form of leadership, her lack of a sense for democratic coordination. Here, however, things are more complex than they may appear. The ongoing popular protests around Europe converge in a series of demands which, in their very spontaneity and directness, form a kind of 'epistemological obstacle' to any proper confrontation with the ongoing crisis of our political system. These demands effectively read as a popularized version of Deleuzian politics: people know what they want, they are able to discover and formulate this but only through their own continuous engagement and activity, so we need active participatory democracy, not just representative democracy with its electoral ritual which every four years interrupts the voters' passivity; we need the self-organization of the multitude, not a centralized Leninist Party with its Leader.

But is this myth of non-representative direct self-organization not the last trap, the deepest illusion that is most difficult to renounce? Yes, there are, in every revolutionary process, ecstatic moments of group solidarity, when thousands, hundreds of thousands, together occupy a public place, like on Cairo's Tahrir Square in 2011; yes, there are moments of intense collective participation in which local communities debate and decide, when people live in a kind of permanent emergency state, taking things into their own hands, with no Leader guiding them. But such states don't last – and 'tiredness' is here not a simple psychological fact, it is a category of social ontology. The large majority – me included – *wants* to be passive and to rely on an efficient state apparatus to guarantee the smooth running of the entire social edifice, so that I can pursue my work in peace.

Following the spirit of today's ideology, which demands the shift

from traditional hierarchy, a pyramid-like subordination to a Master, to pluralizing rhizomatic networks, political analysts like to point out that the new anti-globalist protests all around Europe and the US, from Occupy Wall Street (OWS) to Greece and Spain, have no central agency, no Central Committee, coordinating their activity. Rather, there are just multiple groups interacting, mostly through new media like Facebook or Twitter, and coordinating their activity spontaneously. This is why, when the apparatuses of police power look for the secret organizing committees, they miss the point – in the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, 10,000 protesters gathered in front of the Parliament in February 2014 and proudly proclaimed: ‘The protest is attended by 10,000 organizers.’ But is this ‘molecular’ spontaneous self-organization really the most efficient new form of ‘resistance’? Is it not that the opposite side, especially capital, already acts more and more as what Deleuzian theory calls the post-Oedipal multitude?³⁷ Power itself has to enter a dialogue at this level, answering tweet with tweet – indeed, now Pope and prime ministers are on Twitter. We should not be afraid to pursue this line of reasoning to its conclusion: the opposition between centralized-hierarchic vertical power and horizontal multitudes is inherent in the existing social and political order; none of the two is *a priori* ‘better’ or more ‘progressive’.³⁸

Furthermore, as far as concerns the molecular self-organizing multitude against the hierarchic order sustained by reference to a charismatic Leader, it is worth noting the irony that Venezuela, a country praised by many for its attempts to develop modes of direct democracy (local councils, cooperatives, workers running factories), is also a country whose president was Hugo Chavez, a strong charismatic Leader if there ever was one. It is as if the Freudian rule of transference is at work here also: in order for the individuals to ‘reach beyond themselves’, to break out of the passivity of representative politics and become direct political agents themselves, reference to a Leader is necessary, a Leader who allows them to pull themselves out of the swamp like Baron Münchhausen, a Leader who is ‘supposed to know’ what they want. This is why, in their book of dialogues, Alain Badiou and Elisabeth Roudinesco were right to point out how, while horizontal networking does undermine the classic Master, it simultaneously breeds new forms of domination that are much

stronger than the classic Master. Badiou's thesis is that a subject needs a Master to elevate itself above the ‘human animal’ and to practise fidelity to a Truth-Event:

ROUDINESCO: In the last resort, what was lost in psychoanalytic societies is the position of the Master to the benefit of the position of small bosses.

AESCHIMANN: What do you mean by ‘master’?

ROUDINESCO: The position of the master allows transference: the psychoanalyst is ‘supposed to know’ what the analysand will discover. Without this knowledge attributed to the psychoanalyst, the search for the origin of suffering is quasi impossible.

AESCHIMANN: Do we really have to go through the restoration of the master?

BADIOU: The master is the one who helps the individual to become subject. That is to say, if one admits that the subject emerges in the tension between the individual and the universality, then it is obvious that the individual needs a mediation, and thereby an authority, in order to progress on this path. The crisis of the master is a logical consequence of the crisis of the subject, and psychoanalysis did not escape it. One has to renew the position of the master; it is not true that one can do without it, even and especially in the perspective of emancipation.

ROUDINESCO: When the master disappears, he is replaced by the boss, by his authoritarianism, and sooner or later this always ends in fascism – unfortunately, history has proven this to us.³⁹

And Badiou is not afraid to oppose the necessary role of the Master to our ‘democratic’ sensitivity:

I am convinced that one has to re-establish the capital function of leaders in the Communist process, whichever its stage. Two crucial episodes in which the leadership was insufficient were the Paris Commune (no worthy leader, with the exception of Dombrowski in the strictly military domain) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Mao too

old and tired, and the 'group of the GPCR' infected by ultra-Leftism). This was a severe lesson.

This capital function of leaders is not compatible with the predominant 'democratic' ambience, which is why I am engaged in a bitter struggle against this ambience (after all, one has to begin with ideology). When I am dealing with people whose jargon is Lacanian I say 'a figure of Master'. When they are militants I say 'dictatorship' (in the sense of Carl Schmitt). When they are workers I say 'leader of a crowd', and so on. It is so that I am quickly understood.⁴⁰

But is this effectively the case? Is the only alternative to the Master the (potentially 'totalitarian') 'boss'? In psychoanalysis, the Master is by definition an impostor, and the whole point of the analytic process is to dissolve the transference to the Master *qua* 'subject supposed to know' – the conclusion of analysis involves the fall of the subject-supposed-to-know. While Jacques-Alain Miller (as an analyst) endorses this fall, he nonetheless agrees with Badiou that the domain of politics is the domain of the discourse of the Master. Their difference resides in the fact that, while Badiou opts for full engagement, Miller advocates a cynical distance towards the Master: a psychoanalyst

occupies the position of ironist who takes care not to intervene into the political field. He acts so that semblances remain at their places while making it sure that subjects under his care do not take them for *real* . . . one should somehow bring oneself to remain *taken in by them* (fooled by them). Lacan could say that 'the non-duped err': if one doesn't act as if semblances are real, if one doesn't leave their efficiency undisturbed, things turn for the worse.⁴¹

One should reject this shared premise: an axiom of radical emancipatory politics is that the Master is *not* the ultimate horizon of our social life, that one can form a collective not held together by a Master figure. Without this axiom, there is no Communist politics proper, but just pragmatic ameliorations of the existing order. However, we should at the same time follow the lesson of psychoanalysis: the only path to liberation leads through transference, and this is why the figure of a Master is unavoidable. So we should fearlessly follow Badiou's

suggestion: in order to effectively awaken individuals from their dogmatic 'democratic slumber', from their blind reliance on institutionalized forms of representative democracy, appeals to direct self-organization are not enough: a new figure of the Master is needed. Recall the famous lines from Arthur Rimbaud's '*À une raison*' ('To a Reason'):

A tap of your finger on the drum releases all sounds and initiates the new harmony.

A step of yours is the conscription of the new men and their marching orders.

You look away: the new love!

You look back — the new love!⁴²

There is absolutely nothing inherently 'Fascist' in these lines. The supreme paradox of political dynamics is that a Master is needed to pull individuals out of the quagmire of their inertia and motivate them towards the self-transcending emancipatory struggle for freedom. What we need today, in this situation, is thus a Thatcher of the Left: a leader who would repeat Thatcher's gesture in the opposite direction, transforming the entire field of presuppositions shared by today's political elite of all main orientations. This is also why we should reject the ideology of what Saroj Giri called 'anarchic horizontalism', the distrust of all hierarchic structures – we should shamelessly reassert the idea of 'vanguard', when one part of a progressive movement assumes leadership and mobilizes other parts:

If consensus and horizontalism are not to remain stuck in nursing quasi-liberal egos, then we must be able to delineate how they can contribute towards a more substantive notion of politics – one which involves a verticalism. Perhaps this would be a better way to revive a communist politics instead of taking politically correct vows of horizontalism and consensus.⁴³

Giri takes the example of the Spokes Council in Oakland's OWS movement, a body separate from the General Assembly,

a separate body, which was not to be confused with the movement, taking key decisions and implementing them: was this (incipient)

verticalism violating democratic decision making or was it the natural working of horizontalism, giving us a verticalism which is the unfolding of horizontalism, horizontalism's truth? . . . *the minority providing the line of march to the movement does not amount to a reified subjectivity.*⁴⁴

The same goes for so-called 'extreme' tactics, which can be counter-productive, but can also radicalize a broad circle of supporters: 'such practices that are the actions of a radical minority do not lead to disunity but to a higher revolutionary unity.'⁴⁵

'THE RIGHT OF DISTRESS'

So what is the elementary gesture of this Master? Surprisingly, Hegel pointed out the way here. Let us begin with his account of the 'right of distress (*Notrecht*)':⁴⁶

§ 127 The particularity of the interests of the natural will, taken in their entirety as a single whole, is personal existence or life. In extreme danger and in conflict with the rightful property of someone else, this life may claim (as a right, not a mercy) a right of distress [*Notrecht*], because in such a situation there is on the one hand an infinite injury to a man's existence and the consequent loss of rights altogether, and on the other hand only an injury to a single restricted embodiment of freedom, and this implies a recognition both of right as such and also of the injured man's capacity for rights, because the injury affects only this property of his.

Remark: The right of distress is the basis of *beneficium competentiae* whereby a debtor is allowed to retain of his tools, farming implements, clothes, or, in short, of his resources, i.e. of his creditor's property, so much as is regarded as indispensable if he is to continue to support life – to support it, of course, on his own social level.

Addition: Life as the sum of ends has a right against abstract right. If for example it is only by stealing bread that the wolf can be kept from the door, the action is of course an encroachment on someone's property, but it would be wrong to treat this action as an ordinary theft. To

refuse to allow a man in jeopardy of his life to take such steps for self-preservation would be to stigmatize him as without rights, and since he would be deprived of his life, his freedom would be annulled altogether . . .

§ 128 This distress reveals the finitude and therefore the contingency of both right and welfare of right as the abstract embodiment of freedom without embodying the particular person, and of welfare as the sphere of the particular will without the universality of right.

Hegel is not talking here about the humanitarian considerations that should temper our legalistic zeal (if an impoverished father steals bread to feed his starving child, we should show mercy and understanding even if he breaks the law). The partisans of such an approach, which constrains its zeal to fighting suffering while leaving intact the economico-legal edifice within which this suffering takes place, 'only demonstrate that, for all their bloodthirsty, mock-humanist yelping, they regard the social conditions in which the bourgeoisie is dominant as the final product, the *non plus ultra* of history'⁴⁷ – Marx's characterization, which perfectly fits today's humanitarians like Bill Gates. What Hegel talks about is a basic legal right, a right which is *as a right* superior to other particular legal rights. In other words, we are not dealing simply with the conflict between the demands of life and the constraints of the legal system of rights, but with a right (to life) that overcomes all formal rights, i.e., with *a conflict inherent to the sphere of rights*, a conflict which is unavoidable and *necessary* insofar as it serves as an indication of the finitude, inconsistency and 'abstract' character of the system of legal rights as such. 'To refuse to allow a man in jeopardy of his life to take such steps for self-preservation [like stealing the food necessary for his survival] would be to *stigmatize him as without rights*.' So, again, the point is not that the punishment for justified stealing would deprive the subject of his life, but that it would exclude him from the domain of rights, i.e., that it would reduce him to a bare life outside the domain of law, of the legal order. In other words, this refusal deprives the subject of his very *right to have rights*. Furthermore, the quoted *Remark* applies this logic to the situation of a debtor, claiming that he should be allowed to retain of his resources so much as is regarded as indispensable if he is to