

Answers to Today's Crisis: A Leninist View

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Nietzsche wrote apropos *Hamlet*: “what must a person have suffered if he needs to be a clown that badly! – Is *Hamlet* understood? It is not doubt but *certainty* that drives you mad.”¹ There are two distinct propositions combined in this passage: Nietzsche’s version of the old wisdom about despair that lurks behind the mask of a clown – Hamlet must suffer tremendously if he feels compelled to play a crazy clown; what makes him suffer, what drives him mad, is not his doubt but his certainty about who murdered his father, and his doubt, his search for the ultimate proof of Claudius’ guilt, is an escape from his certainty. Another mode of escape from unbearable certainty can also be to indulge in what may appear as tasteless jokes. A Bosnian cultural analyst was surprised to discover that, within the circle of people whose relatives died in Srebrenica, dozens of jokes about the Serb massacre circulate. Here is one example (which refers to the way one was buying beef in old Yugoslavia – usually, the butcher asked “With or without bones?”, where bones were used to add to the meet for the beef soup): “I want to buy some land for a house close to Srebrenica – do you know what he prices are?” “Prices vary, they depend on what kind of land you want – with or without bones.” Far from expressing tasteless disrespect, such jokes are the only way to deal with the unbearably traumatic reality: they render quite adequately our helpless perplexity, belying all pathetic compassion with the victims as a truly tasteless blasphemy.

Recall Paul Robeson’s later rewriting of his legendary “Ol’ Man River,” a model of simple and efficient critico-ideological intervention. In the original version from the Hollywood musical *Showboat* (1936), the river (Mississippi) is presented as the embodiment of the enigmatic and indifferent Fate, an old wise man who “must know somethin’, but don’t say nothin’,” and just keeps rolling, retaining his silent wisdom. In the new version,² the river is no longer the bearer of an anonymous, unfathomable collective wisdom, but, rather, the bearer of collective *stupidity*, of the stupid, passive tolerance for meaningless suffering, and the victim’s answer to it should be sovereign laughter - here are the final lines of the original song: “/.../ You gets a little drunk, / an’ you land in jail. / But I gets weary, / and sick of tryin’, / I’m tired of livin’, / and scared of dyin’. / But ol’ man river, / he just keeps rollin’ along.” And here is the

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¹ Nietzsche 2004: 40.

² Available in, among other recordings, the recording of his notorious Moscow concert in 1949 (*Russian Revelation*, RV 70004) with a brief spoken introduction by Robeson himself in perfect Russian.

changed version: “You show a little grit, / an’ you lands in jail. / But I keeps laughin’, / instead of cryin’, / I must keep fightin’, / until I’m dyin’. / And ol’ man river, / he’ll just keeps rollin’ along.”

A more radical strategy is that of de-realization. Apropos the big trench battles of the First World War (the Great War) like Ypres and Somme where hundreds of thousands died for a gain of a couple of hundreds of yards, Paul Fussell pointed out how the very incredibility of what went on made the participants experience their situation as theatrical: it was impossible for them to believe that they are taking part in such a murderous endeavor in person, as “themselves,” the whole affair was all too extremely farcical, perverse, cruel and absurd to perceive it as a form of their “real lives.” In other words, the experience of the war as a theatrical performance enabled the participants to escape from the reality of what went on, it allowed them to follow their orders and perform their military duties without involving into it their “true self,” and, in this way, without having to abandon their innermost conviction that the real world is still a rational place and not a madhouse of their daily lives.³

It is a commonplace that the Great War functioned as an immense shock, encounter of the Real, which signaled the end of an entire civilization: although everyone was expecting it, everyone was no less surprised when the war actually exploded, and (an even more enigmatic fact) this very surprise was fast re-normalized, war became a new way of life. How was this re-normalization achieved? As expected, with the massive use of ancient ideological myths and narratives which made the war appear as part of normal flow of things: the no-man’s-land between the trenches full of unexploded mines, holes and desolation, became a new version of the Waste Land from the Grail myth, etc.⁴ This mobilization of ancient myths and legends is the ultimate proof of the traumatic novelty of the Great War: precisely because something unheard-of took place, all ancient myths had to be put to work to account for this novelty. Of course, the character of these myths is more often the paranoid fantasy tale than a proper symbolic narrative – to paraphrase Lacan, what is too traumatic to be integrated into the Symbolic returns in the Real as a paranoid construct or hallucination. No wonder the Great War triggered an explosion of interpretive paranoia

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3 See Fussell: 2000.

4 I rely here on Fussell, op.cit.

- its problem was the same as that of Stalinism: how to account for the embarrassing fact of so many failures of our allegedly best system? The Stalinist answer was: counter-revolutionary plots and traitors everywhere, and similar is the answer of Reginald Grant’s *S.O.S.*, published in the course of the war, an unsurpassed collection of lies, legends and myths, all taken extremely seriously. Grant’s problem is a simple one: he cannot believe that Germans can be as astute as they are in locating the targets for their artillery across the enemy line by means of analyzing the sound and lightning of the enemy fire, so the only solution was for him that the Belgian countryside behind the British lines was full of treacherous farmers who were signaling the locations of the British guns to the Germans. They were doing this in a series of ways: (1) wind mills which all of a sudden start to turn in the direction opposite to the direction of the wind (incidentally, this idea was used in a famous scene from Hitchcock’s WWII thriller *Foreign Correspondent*: the good guys who are following a Nazi agent find themselves in an idyllic Dutch with wind mills; everything seems peaceful, there is no trace of the agent, when one of the good guys detects the stain which sticks out of the picture, denaturalizing it – he exclaims: “Look at that windmill! Why is it turning opposite the direction of the wind?”, and the idyllic countryside loses its innocence and becomes semiotically charged); (2) the hour hands on local church towers are set out of sync with the actual time; (3) when housewives hang their laundry to dry on the ropes in front of their houses, the disposition of the colors of the laundry (two white shirts, then one black...) also sends a coded signal.

The problem is how to distinguish this false (ideological) paranoia from the basic paranoid stance which is an irreducible ingredient of every critique of ideology. On a beach in a Mediterranean country, I was shown a lone fisherman repairing a network; while the idea of my hosts was to demonstrate traditional labor based on artisanal ancient experience and wisdom, my immediate reaction to its display was paranoia: what I saw in front of me, was a staged authenticity, a spectacle made to impress tourists, like preparing fresh food in department stores or other cases of the false transparency of the production process? What if, when one gets too close to the network, one sees a small sign “made in China” and one notices that the “authentic” fisherman is just mimicking productive gestures? Or, even better, what if we re-imagine the scene as a detail from some Hitchcock film: the fisherman is a foreign agent and he is weaving the network in a specially coded way so that another agent will decode in it a secret

(terrorist) message (again, like the windmill turning the wrong way in Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent*)?

But the most brilliant hallucinatory legend of the Great War was the persistent rumor that, somewhere in the no-man's-land between the trenches of the frontlines, in this desolate waste land of barren scorched earth full of rotting corpses, holes full of water made by artillery grenades exploding, abandoned trenches, caves and tunnels, gangs of half-crazy deserters live. They are composed of members of all participating armies and nations: Germans, French, British, Australians, Poles, Croats, Belgians, Italians – they lived their hidden lives in friendship and peace, avoiding detection and helping each other. Living in rags, with long beards, they never allowed themselves to be seen – from time to time, one just heard their crazy shouts and songs. They came out of their subterranean netherworld only during the night after a battle in order to scavenge the corpses and collect water and food. The beauty of this legend is that it clearly describes a kind of alternate community, a great NO to the madness going on the battlefield: a group in which members of the warring nations live in peace with each other, their only enemy being war itself. While they may appear as an image of war at its most crazy – outcasts living a wild life -, they are simultaneously its self-negation, literally an island of peace between the front lines, the emergence of universal fraternity that ignores these lines. Precisely by ignoring the official lines of division between Us and Them, they stand for the real division, the only one that matters, i.e., the negation of the entire space of imperialist warfare. They are the Third element which belies the false duality of the War – in short, they are the true Leninists in the situation, repeating Lenin's gesture of the refusal to be drawn into patriotic fervor.

And this is our task, today more than ever: to discern the true division in the *melee* of secondary struggles. Here are two extreme cases of the false division. The ideological struggle in Peru at the time of the *Shining Path* rebellion (1980-1992) perfectly rendered the political deadlock in which the country was caught. On the one side, "the collective identity of the Shining Path was educational,"⁵ even their most brutal violence "had the purpose of educating the people about the revolution and the state about its impending doom"⁶; this education was

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5 Shadle 2013: 293.

6 Op.cit., *ibid.*

utterly authoritarian, exerted by those who believed they possessed the truth and usurped the right to have absolute power over their students. On the opposite side, the government's counter-strategy was even more ominous: a strategy of pure political demobilization and demoralization. The press controlled and/or manipulated by the state power actively promoted what analysts called "mean world syndrome": the government solicited an explosion of *prensa chicha*, tabloid newspapers specializing in celebrity gossip and crime stories, plus TV talk shows that focused on "real cases" of drug addiction, family violence and adultery, etc. The goal of this strategy was to "socially immobilize people through fear and /to/ atomize the public sphere"⁷ – the message rendered was that the world is a dangerous place in which all one can do is look out for oneself since there is no hope for solidarity, just envy of the rich and famous and pleasure at their troubles. Rarely in modern history was the ideological space of a country so neatly divided into "totalitarian" educationalism, which submerges individuals into a political collective demanding total self-sacrifice and atomized egotism, which impedes any formation of engaged collective solidarity, with traditional liberalism reduced to a dwindling side-show. Although this division is pure and radical, there is no place in it for authentic emancipatory politics.

Another false struggle concerns the status of anti-Semitism and Zionism today. For some pro-Muslim Leftists, Zionism is the exemplary case of today's neocolonial racism, which is why the Palestinian struggle against Israel is the paradigm for all other anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles. In a strictly inverted way, for some Zionists, anti-Semitism (which, for them, lurks in every critique of Zionism) is the exemplary case of today's racism, so that, in both cases, Zionism (or anti-Semitism) is the particular form of racism which colors all others, which determines the specific weight of the entire field of racism today – the true test of anti-racism today is to fight anti-Semitism (or Zionism), i.e., without fully endorsing this particular struggle, one is accused of secretly playing the racist game (and, in a step further in the same direction, any critical remark about Islam is equated with "Islamophobia"). While enough was written about the deeply problematic nature of equating any critique of the Zionist politics of the State of Israel with anti-Semitism, one should also render problematic the elevation of Zionism into neo-imperialist racism *par excellence*. When I recently asked a radically-Leftist friend of mine why elevate Zionism

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7 Op.cit., p. 295.

into racism par excellence, and Zionist oppression of the Palestinians into the paradigmatic case of today's imperialist oppression, while there are doubtless around the world many cases of a much more brutal oppression, my friend replied that this elevation is the result of the ongoing struggle for hegemony which no one can control – as he literally put it, Jews were “chosen” to be this exemplary case, and we have to follow this logic... this is what I find deeply problematic. When one specific ethnic group is “chosen” as a symbol (or the personification) of a universal negative attitude, this is never a neutral operation but a choice within a well-defined space of ideological tradition. Jews were already chosen twice in their history, first as the “chosen people” by God himself (in their religious view), then as the target of anti-Semitism, as the personification of moral corruption, so that any further “choice” has to be read against the background of the echoes of these previous choices.⁸ If the Jewish state, doing things which are without doubt ethico-politically deeply problematic, but which are nonetheless less gruesome than what many other states are doing, is “chosen” as the emblem of what is wrong in our world, then the surplus of libidinal energy that enables us to elevate its criminal status to the universal symbol can only come from the (anti-Semitic) past. And what is wrong in this “choice” is, again, is the disavowal of the class struggle.

Alessandro Russo has shown⁹ how the Radical Left of the 1960s was defined by the vacillation between “meta-classism” (adopting a position above class division: multitude, people and not just class, the unity of all progressive or patriotic forces excluding only traitors...¹⁰) and “hyper-classism” (focusing on a part of the working class as the privileged revolutionary agent (“cognitariat,” “precarariat,” illegal immigrants...)). It seems that, today, one can discern the same vacillation

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8 Far from being simply located on the margins of Europe, did the Jews not emerge in the XXth century as a kind of all-European *Ur-Vater*, the chief of the pre-Oedipal gang? Exactly as in Freud's myth about the murder of the primordial father, they were collectively killed by Europeans (holocaust as the ultimate crime) in order to reemerge as the superego agency making all Europeans guilty.

9 In his intervention at the fourth “The Idea of Communism” meeting in Seoul, September 27-29 2013.

10 Contrary to what one would expect, the accent on class politics does not necessarily entail “totalitarianism.” The apparently more “open” Popular Front Communist policy (Stalin in the 1930s, Mao in the 1940s) advocated a united front of all progressive forces inclusive of the “patriotic bourgeoisie,” with (only) the exclusion of traitors to the country. The paradox is that such “open” policy of the national unity of all patriotic forces was effectively much more “totalitarian”: in a proto-Fascist way, it established the all-national unity, the overcoming of “sectarian” class distinctions, but at the price of demonizing and excluding the Enemy from the national body – this Enemy is not just a class enemy but a traitor to the nation as such, like Jews in Fascism whose elimination can only guarantee national harmony.

in Toni Negri's work: multitude versus Empire AND workers against capital. The problem with the first couple is: where in it is the place for capital? Sometimes Negri implicitly identifies the two couples, talking about (capitalist) governance versus (proletarian) multitude; sometimes he discerns in the “deterritorializing” functioning of today's most dynamic capitalism (up to financial speculations) the dimension of multitude, concluding that in the most advanced forms of capitalism we are “almost there,” in Communism, we just have to drop off the capitalist form.

The problem that lurks beneath this vacillation is a crucial one: the problem of defining what division really divides today if it is no longer the traditional class divide (multitude and governance is not strong enough to play this role). What if it is still class struggle, but with the expansion of the scope of proletariat which should no longer be focused on the traditional working class but include all those who are exploited today: workers, unemployed and –able, “precarariat,” “cognitariat,” illegal immigrants, slum dwellers, “rogue states” excluded from “civilized” space...¹¹ (We should bear in mind here that there is already a subtle subterranean difference between working class and proletariat discernible in Marx: “working class” is ultimately an empirical category designating a part of society (wage workers), while proletariat is a more formal category designating the “part of no-part” of the social body, the point of its symptomatic torsion or, as Marx put it, the un-reason within reason – rational structure of a society – itself.) This is why, as Alain Badiou recently proposed¹² in an ironic but simultaneously serious way, one should search today for the “principal contradiction” *within* the people (classes) themselves, not between the people and the Enemies of the people, or between people and the State: the primordial fact is a split/antagonism in the very heart of the “people.”

Rage and depression in the global village

How are we to proceed in such conditions? A century ago, G.K. Chesterton made some useful comments about movements for radical

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11 Those who claim that working class is disappearing are in a way right – it is disappearing from our sight. There is a new working class emerging all around us from the Emirates to South Korea, a nomadic class of invisible immigrant workers separated from their homes and families, living in isolated dormitories in the suburbs of prosperous cities, with almost no political or legal rights, no healthcare or retirement arrangements. To mobilize them and to enable them to organize themselves for an emancipatory cause would have been a true political event.

12 In a debate at the fourth “The Idea of Communism” meeting in Seoul, September 27-29 2013.

social change:

“Let us ask ourselves first what we really do want, not what recent legal decisions have told us to want, or recent logical philosophies proved that we must want, or recent social prophecies predicted that we shall someday want. If there is to be Socialism, let it be social; that is, as different as possible from all the big commercial departments of today. The really good journeyman tailor does not cut his coat according to his cloth; he asks for more cloth. The really practical statesman does not fit himself to existing conditions, he denounces the conditions as unfit.”¹³

Such (perhaps too idealized and therefore false) consequentiality is what is conspicuously absent from the rage exploding all around Europe today – this rage

“is impotent and inconsequential, as consciousness and coordinated action seem beyond the reach of present society. Look at the European crisis. Never in our life have we faced a situation so charged with revolutionary opportunities. Never in our life have we been so impotent. Never have intellectuals and militants been so silent, so unable to find a way to show a new possible direction.”¹⁴

Berardi locates the origin of this impotence in the exploding speed of the functioning of the big Other (the symbolic substance of our lives) and the slowness of human reactivity (due to culture, corporeality, diseases, etc.): “the long-lasting neoliberal rule has eroded the cultural bases of social civilization, which was the progressive core of modernity. And this is irreversible. We have to face it.”¹⁵ Outbursts of impotent rage bear witness to the devastating effects of global capitalist ideology which combines individualist hedonism with frantic competitive work rhythm, thereby closing the space for coordinated collective actions. Recall the great wave of protests that spilled all over Europe in 2011, from Greece and Spain, to London and Paris. Even if there was

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13 Chesterton, “The Man Who Thinks Backwards,” <http://www.catholic-forum.com/Saints/gkc13004.htm>, the last paragraph.

14 Berardi 2011: 175. But is this inconsequentiality really a new phenomenon? Are “bland revolutions” not for centuries part of our tradition, from medieval peasant revolts to Chartists etc.? In November 1914, Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa entered Mexico City with their troops... and, after a couple of weeks of debates, left for home, basically not knowing what to do with their power.

15 Op.cit., p. 177.

mostly no consistent political program mobilizing the protesters, the protests did function as parts of a large-scale educational process: the protesters’ misery and discontent were transformed into a great collective act of mobilization – hundreds of thousands gathered in public squares, proclaiming that they had enough, that things cannot go on like that. However, such protests, although they constitute individuals participating in them as universal political subjects, remain at the level of purely formal universality: what these protests stage is a purely negative gesture of angry rejection and an equally abstract demand for justice, lacking the ability to translate this demand into a concrete political program. In short, these protests were not yet proper political acts, but abstract demands addressed at an Other from which it is expected to act... What can be done in such a situation where demonstrations and protests are of no use, where democratic elections are of no use? Only withdrawal, passivity, abandonment of illusions can open a new way: “Only self-reliant communities leaving the field of social competition can open a way to a new hope.”¹⁶

One cannot but note the cruel irony of this contrast between Berardi and Hardt and Negri. Hardt and Negri celebrate “cognitive capitalism” as opening up a path towards “absolute democracy,” since the object, the “stuff,” of immaterial work are more and more social relations themselves: “What the multitude produces is not just goods or services; the multitude also and most importantly produces cooperation, communication, forms of life, and social relationships.”¹⁷ In short, immaterial production is directly biopolitical; the production of social life. It was already Marx who emphasized how material production is always also the (re)production of the social relations within which it occurs; with today’s capitalism, however, the production of social relations is the immediate end/goal of production: “Such new forms of labor /.../ present new possibilities for economic self-management, since the mechanisms of cooperation necessary for production are contained in the labor itself.”¹⁸ The wager of Hardt and Negri is that this directly socialized, immaterial production, not only renders owners progressively superfluous (who needs them when production is directly

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16 Op.cit.,:176.

17 Hardt & Negri 2004: 339.

18 Op.cit., :336.

social, formally and as to its content?); the producers also master the regulation of social space, since social relations (politics) IS the stuff of their work: economic production directly becomes political production, the production of society itself. The way is thus open for “absolute democracy,” for the producers directly regulating their social relations without even the detour of democratic representation. The illusion at work here was succinctly formulated by Althusser, when he noted how Marx never managed to relinquish the “mythical idea of Communism as a *mode of production without relations of production*; in Communism, the free development of individuals takes the place of social relations in the mode of production.”¹⁹ Is this idea of Communism as a “as a mode of production without relations of production,” also not what motivates Negri and Hardt? When social relations (inclusive of relations of production) are directly produced by social production, they are no longer social relations proper (i.e., a structural frame, given in advance, within which social production takes place), but become directly planned and produced and as such totally transparent.

Berardi’s conclusion is exactly the opposite one: far from bringing out potential transparency of social life, today’s “cognitive capitalism” makes it more impenetrable than ever, undermining the very subjective conditions of any form of collective solidarity of the “cognitariat.”²⁰ What is symptomatic here is the way the same conceptual apparatus leads to two radically opposed conclusions. Berardi warns us against what he calls the Deleuzian “gospel of hyper-dynamic deterritorialization” – for him, if we are not able to step outside the compulsion of the system, the gap between the frantic dynamics imposed by the system and our corporeal and cognitive limitations sooner or later brings about the fall in depression. Berardi makes this point apropos Felix Guattari, his personal friend, who, in theory, preached the gospel of hyper-dynamic deterritorialization, while personally suffering long bouts of depression:

“Actually the problem of depression and of exhaustion is never elaborated in an explicit way by Guattari. I see here a crucial problem

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¹⁹ Althusser 2006: 37.

²⁰ With all the growing importance of intellectual work, we should never lose from sight the massive displacement of physical work to China, Indonesia, etc. – but does this global outsourcing of material work really allow us to maintain the so-called “labor theory of value”? Is knowledge as a factor of value not a fact today, a fact foretold long ago by Marx?

of the theory of desire: the denial of the problem of limits in the organic sphere. /.../ The notion of the ‘body without organs’ hints at the idea that the organism isn’t something that you can define, that the organism is a process of exceeding, of going beyond a threshold, of ‘becoming other.’ This is a crucial point, but it’s also a dangerous point. /.../ What body, what mind is going through transformation and becoming? Which invariant lies under the process of becoming other? If you want to answer this question you have to acknowledge death, finitude, and depression.”²¹

Depression, finitude, exhaustion, etc., are here not empirico-psychological categories, but indications of a basic ontological limitation - when Berardi talks of depression, it is with regard to interpellation proper, i.e., a reaction of the human animal to the Cause which addresses us, specifically with regard to late capitalist interpellation, but *also* with regard to the emancipatory mobilization. Does this imply a resigned surrender to the hegemonic power structure? No – there is nothing inherently “conservative” in being tired of the usual radical Leftist demands for permanent mobilization and active participation, demands which follow the superego logic – the more we obey them, the more we are guilty... The battle has to be won **HERE**, in the domain of citizen’s passivity, when things return back to normal the morning after ecstatic revolts: it is (relatively) easy to have a big ecstatic spectacle of sublime unity, but how will ordinary people feel the difference in their ordinary daily lives? No wonder conservatives like to see, from time to time, sublime explosions – they remind people that nothing can really change, that the day after things return to normal.

But things go even further here: nature itself is today in disorder, not because it overwhelms our cognitive capacities but primarily because we are not able to master the effects of our own interventions into its course – who knows what the ultimate consequences of our biogenetic engineering or of global warming will be? The surprise comes from ourselves, it concerns the opacity of how we ourselves fit into the picture: the impenetrable stain in the picture is not some cosmic mystery like a mysterious explosion of a supernova, the stain are we ourselves, our collective activity. It is against this background that one should understand Jacques-Alain Miller’s thesis: “*Il y’a un grand*

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²¹ Berardi, op.cit., p. 177-8.

desordre dans le reel."²² "There is a great disorder in the real." That's how Miller characterizes the way reality appears to us in our time in which we experience the full impact of two fundamental agents, modern science and capitalism. Nature, as the real in which everything, from stars to the sun, always returns to its proper place, as the realm of large reliable cycles and of stable laws regulating them, is being replaced by a thoroughly contingent real, real outside the Law, real that is permanently revolutionizing its own rules, real that resists any inclusion into a totalized World (universe of meaning), which is why Badiou characterized capitalism as the first world-less civilization.

How should we react to this constellation? Should we assume a defensive approach, and search for a new limit, a return to (or, rather, the invention of) some new balance? This is what bioethics endeavors to do with regard to biotechnology, this is why the two form a couple: biotechnology pursues new possibilities of scientific interventions (genetic manipulations, cloning...), and bioethics endeavors to impose moral limitations on what biotechnology enables us to do. As such, bioethics is not imminent to scientific practice: it intervenes into this practice from outside, imposing external morality onto it. But is bioethics not precisely the betrayal of the ethics immanent to scientific endeavor, the ethics of "do not compromise your scientific desire, follow inexorably its path"? A new limit is also what the slogan of the Porto Allegro protesters "a new world is possible" basically amounts to, and even ecology offers itself at this point as the provider of a new limit ("we cannot go further in our exploitation of nature, nature will not tolerate it, it will collapse..."). Or, should we follow the above-mentioned opposite path (of Deleuze and Negri, among others) and posit that capitalist disorder still too much order, obeying the capitalist law of the surplus-value appropriation, so that the task is not to limit it but to push it beyond its limitation? In other words, should we risk here also a paraphrase of Mao's well-known motto: there is disorder in the real, so situation is excellent? Perhaps, the path to follow is this one, although not in exactly the sense advocated by Deleuze and Negri in their celebration of de-territorialization? Miller claims that the pure lawless Real resists symbolic grasp, so that we should always be aware that our attempts to conceptualize it are mere semblances, defensive elubrifications - but what if there is still an underlying *order* that generates this disorder, a matrix that provides its coordinates? This is what also

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²² Miller 2013: 18.

accounts for the repetitive sameness of the capitalist dynamics: the more that things change, the more everything remains the same. And this is also why the obverse of the breath-taking capitalist dynamics is a clearly recognizable order of hierarchic domination.

Mamihlapinatapei

We should follow T.J. Clark²³ in his rejection of the eschatological notion of Future, which Marxism inherited from the Christian tradition, and whose most concise version is rendered by Hölderlin's well-known lines: "Where there is danger, that which saves is also rising." Perhaps, therein resides the lesson of the terrifying experiences of the XXth century Left, the experience which compels us to return from Marx back to Hegel, i.e., from the Marxist revolutionary eschatology back to Hegel's tragic vision of a history which forever remains radically open since the historical process always redirects our activity into an unexpected direction. Perhaps, the Left should learn to assume fully the basic "alienation" of the historical process: we cannot control the consequences of our acts – not because we are just puppets in the hands of some secret Master or Fate which pulls the strings, but for precisely the opposite reason: there is no big Other, no agent of total accountancy who or which can take into account the consequences of our own acts. This acceptance of "alienation" in no way entails a cynical distance; it implies a fully engaged position aware of the risks involved – there is no higher historical Necessity whose instruments we are and which guarantees the final outcome of our interventions. From this standpoint, our despair at the present deadlock appears in a new light: we have to renounce the very eschatological scheme which underlies our despair: there will never be a Left magically transforming confused revolts and protests into one big consistent Project of Salvation, all we have is our activity open to all the risks of an open contingent history.

Does this mean that we should simply abandon the topic (and experience) of "living in the end time," of approaching the apocalyptic point of no return when "things cannot go on like this any longer"? That we should replace it with the happy liberal-progressive "post-metaphysical" view of modest risky but cautious pragmatic interventions? No, the thing to do is to separate apocalyptic experience from eschatology: we are now approaching a certain zero-point – ecologically, economically, socially... -, things will change, the change

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²³ See Clark no.74 (March/April 2012).

will be most radical if we do nothing, but there is no eschatological turn ahead pointing towards the act of global Salvation. In politics, an authentic Event is not the Event traditional Marxists are waiting for (the big Awakening of the revolutionary Subject), but something that occurs as an unexpected side-event. Remember how, just months before the 1917 revolutionary upheaval in Russia, Lenin gave a speech to the Swiss socialist youth, where he told them that their generation may be the first one to witness a socialist revolution in a couple of decades.

So let us conclude with going back to the protests in two neighboring countries, Greece and Turkey. In a first approach, they may seem to be entirely different: Greece is caught in the ruinous politics of austerity, while Turkey enjoys economic boom and is emerging as a new regional superpower. What if, however, each Turkey generates, and contains, its own Greece, its own islands of misery? In one of his “Hollywood Elegies,” Brecht wrote about this village, as he calls it:

“The village of Hollywood was planned according to the notion
People in these parts have of heaven. In these parts
They have come to the conclusion that God
Requiring a heaven and a hell, didn't need to
Plan two establishments but
Just the one: heaven. It
Serves the unprosperous, unsuccessful
As hell.”

Does the same not hold for today's global village, exemplarily for villages like Qatar or Dubai with glamour for the rich, and near-slavery for the immigrant workers? No wonder, then, that a closer look reveals the underlying similarity between Turkey and Greece: privatization, enclosure of public spaces, dismantling of social services, the rise of authoritarian politics (compare the threat of closing down the public TV in Greece to signs of censorship in Turkey). At this elementary level, Greek and Turkish protesters are engaged in the same struggle. The true event would, thus, have been to coordinate the two struggles, to reject “patriotic” temptations, to refuse to worry other's worries (about Greece and Turkey as historical enemies), and to organize common manifestations of solidarity.

Perhaps, the very future of the ongoing protests depends on the ability to organize such global solidarity. The Fuengian language spoken in parts of Chile has a wonderful expression, *mamihlapinatapei*: a shared

look between two persons – say, in our case, a protesting Greek and a protesting Turk - who are both interested in contact, yet neither is willing to make the first move. But, someone will have to take a risk and do it. And the ongoing events in Ukraine should also be interpreted in this light.

Lenin in Ukraine

In TV reports on the mass protests in Kiev against the government of Yanukovich, we saw again and again the scene of enraged protesters tearing down statues of Lenin. These furious attacks were understandable insofar as Lenin's statues functioned as a symbol of the Soviet oppression, and Putin's Russia is perceived as a continuation of the Soviet policy of subjecting non-Russian nations to Russian domination. One should also bear in mind the precise historical moment when Lenin's statues start to proliferate in thousands all around Soviet Union: until 1956, Stalin's statues were much more numerous, and only in 1956, after Stalin's denunciation at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party, Stalin's statues were *en masse* replaced by Lenins – Lenin was literally a stand-in for Stalin, as it was made clear also by a weird thing that happened in 1962 to the front page of *Pravda*, the official Soviet daily newspaper. Before the *public* rejection of Stalin at the XXIIth Congress of the Communist Party in 1962, the title “PRAVDA” was accompanied by a drawing of two profiles, Lenin's and Stalin's, side by side; what happened after was not what one would have expected, i.e., just the one profile of Lenin — instead, there were two identical profiles of Lenin printed side by side. In this weird repetition, Stalin was in a way more present than ever in his absence, since his shadowy presence was the answer to the obvious question: “why Lenin twice, why not just one Lenin?”

There was nonetheless a deep irony in watching Ukrainians tearing down Lenin's statues as a sign of their will to break with Soviet domination and assert their national sovereignty: the golden era of Ukraine's national identity was not the Tsarist Russia (where Ukrainian self-assertion as a nation was thwarted), but the first decade of the Soviet Union when they established their full national identity - here is the Wikipedia passage on Ukraine in the 1920s:

“The civil war that eventually brought the Soviet government to power devastated Ukraine. It left over 1.5 million people dead and hundreds of thousands homeless. In addition, Soviet Ukraine had

to face the famine of 1921. Seeing an exhausted Ukraine, the Soviet government remained very flexible during the 1920s. Thus, under the aegis of the Ukrainization policy pursued by the national Communist leadership of Mykola Skrypnyk, Soviet leadership encouraged a national renaissance in literature and the arts. The Ukrainian culture and language enjoyed a revival, as Ukrainization became a local implementation of the Soviet-wide policy of *'korenization'* (literally *indigenisation*) policy. The Bolsheviks were also committed to introducing universal health care, education and social-security benefits, as well as the right to work and housing. Women's rights were greatly increased through new laws designed to wipe away centuries-old inequalities. Most of these policies were sharply reversed by the early 1930s after Joseph Stalin gradually consolidated power to become the *de facto* communist party leader."

This "indigenization" followed the principles formulated by Lenin in quite unambiguous terms:

"The proletariat cannot but fight against the forcible retention of the oppressed nations within the boundaries of a given state, and this is exactly what the struggle for the right of self-determination means. The proletariat must demand the right of political secession for the colonies and for the nations that 'its own' nation oppresses. Unless it does this, proletarian internationalism will remain a meaningless phrase; mutual confidence and class solidarity between the workers of the oppressing and oppressed nations will be impossible."²⁴

Lenin remained faithful to this position to the end: immediately after the October Revolution, he engaged in a polemic with Rosa Luxemburg who advocated allowing small nations to be given full sovereignty only if progressive forces will predominate in the new state, while Lenin was for unconditional right to secede, even if the "bad guys" will be in power in the new state. In his last struggle against Stalin's project for the centralized Soviet Union, Lenin again advocated the unconditional right of small nations to secede (in this case, Georgia was at stake), insisting on the full sovereignty of the national entities that composed the Soviet State - no wonder that, on September 27

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²⁴ Lenin, "The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination« (January-February 1916)

1922, in a letter to the members of the Politburo, Stalin openly accused Lenin of "national liberalism." The direction in which Stalin's wind was already blowing is clear from how Stalin proposed to enact the decision to simply proclaim the government of the RSFSR also the government of the other five republics (Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia):

"If the present decision is confirmed by the Central Committee of the RCP, it will not be made public, but communicated to the Central Committees of the Republics for circulation among the Soviet organs, the Central Executive Committees or the Congresses of the Soviets of the said Republics before the convocation of the All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, where it will be declared to be the wish of these Republics."²⁵

The interaction of the higher authority (the CC) with its base is, thus, not only abolished, so that the higher authority imply imposes its will; to add insult to injury, it is re-staged as its opposite: the Central Committee decides what the base will ask the higher authority to enact as if it were its own wish. Recall the most conspicuous case of such re-staging from 1939, when the three Baltic States freely asked to join the Soviet Union, which granted their wish. What Stalin did in the early 1930s was thus simply a return to the pre-revolutionary tsarist foreign and national policy (for example, as part of this turn, the Russian colonization of Siberia and Muslim Asia was no longer condemned as imperialist expansion, but was celebrated as the introduction of progressive modernization that set in motion the inertia of these traditional societies). And Putin's foreign policy is a clear continuation of this tsarist-Stalinist line: after the Russian Revolution of 1917, according to Putin, it was the turn of the Bolsheviks to aggrieve Russia:

"The Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons - may God judge them - added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic makeup of the population, and today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine."

No wonder we can see Stalin's portraits again during military parades and public celebrations, while Lenin is obliterated; in a large

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²⁵ Quoted from Lewin 2005: 61.

opinion poll from a couple of years ago, Stalin was voted the third greatest Russian of all times, while Lenin was nowhere to be seen. Stalin is not celebrated as a Communist, but as a restorer of Russia's greatness after Lenin's anti-patriotic "deviation." No wonder Putin recently used the term "*Novorussiya* (New Russia)" for the six south-eastern counties of Ukraine, resuscitating a term out of use from 1917... The Leninist undercurrent, although repressed, nonetheless continued to live in the Communist underground opposition to Stalin. Although Communist critics of Stalinism were for sure full of illusions, long before Solzhenytsin "the crucial questions about the Gulag were being asked by left oppositionists, from Boris Souvarine to Victor Serge to C.L.R. James, in real time and at great peril. Those courageous and prescient heretics have been somewhat written out of history (they expected far worse than that, and often received it)."²⁶ This large-scale, critical movement was inherent to the Communist movement, in clear contrast to Fascism: "nobody can be bothered to argue much about whether fascism might have turned out better, given more propitious circumstances. And there were no dissidents in the Nazi Party, risking their lives on the proposition that the Fuehrer had betrayed the true essence of National Socialism."²⁷ Precisely because of this immanent tension at the very heart of the Communist movement, the most dangerous place to be in the time of the terrible 1930s purges in the Soviet Union was the top of the *nomenklatura* (in a couple of years, 80% of the Central Committee and Red Army Headquarters members were shot).²⁸ Furthermore, one should also not underestimate the "totalitarian" potential, as well as direct outright brutality, of the White counter-revolutionary forces during the Civil War: had the White victory been the case,

"the common word for fascism would have been a Russian one, not an Italian one. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was brought to the

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26 Hitchens 2011: 634.

27 Op.cit.,: 635.

28 Another sign of this immanent tension is the fact that, in the last days of the Really Existing Socialism, the protesting crowds often sang the official songs, including national anthems, reminding the powers of their unfulfilled promises. What better thing for an East German crowd to do in 1989 than to simply sing the GDR national anthem? Because its words ("Deutschland einig Vaterland" / Germany, the united Fatherland") no longer fitted the emphasis on East Germans as a new Socialist nation, it was prohibited to sing it in public from late 50s to 1989: at the official ceremonies, only the orchestral version was performed. (The GDR was thus a unique country in which singing the national anthem was a criminal act!). Can one imagine the same thing under Nazism?

West by the White emigration [...]. Major General William Graves, who commanded the American Expeditionary Force during the 1918 invasion of Siberia (an event thoroughly airbrushed from all American textbooks), wrote in his memoirs about the pervasive, lethal anti-Semitism that dominated the Russian right wing and added, 'I doubt if history will show any country in the world during the last fifty years where murder could be committed so safely, and with less danger of punishment, than in Siberia during the reign of Kolchak.'²⁹

No wonder that Kolchak was recently celebrated as an honorable Russian patriot and soldier in a big biopic *Admiral* (Andrei Kravchuk, 2008). And, as if echoing this dark past, the entire European neo-Fascist Right (in Hungary, France, Italy, Serbia...) is firmly supporting Russia in the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, belying the official Russian presentation of the Crimean referendum as a choice between Russian democracy and Ukrainian Fascism. The ongoing events in Ukraine - the massive protests which toppled Yanukovich and his gang - are thus to be understood as a defense against this dark legacy resuscitated by Putin: they were triggered by the Ukrainian government's decision to give priority to good relations with Russia over the integration of Ukraine into the European Union. Predictably, many anti-imperialist Leftists reacted to the news with their usual patronizing of the poor Ukrainians: how deluded they are, still idealizing Europe, not being able to see that Europe is in decline, and that joining European Union will just made Ukraine an economic colony of Western Europe, sooner or later pushed into the position of Greece... What these Leftists ignore is that Ukrainians were far from blind about the reality of the European Union, they were fully aware of its troubles and disparities - their message was simply that their own situation is much worse. Europe's problem are still rich man's problems - remember that, in spite of the terrible predicament of Greece, African refugees are still arriving there *en masse*, causing the ire of Rightist patriots.

Should we, then, simply support the Ukrainian side of the ongoing conflict? There is even a "Leninist" reason to do it. Recall how, in Lenin's very last writings, long after he renounced his utopia of *State and Revolution*, one can discern the contours of a modest "realistic" project of what the Bolshevik power should do. Because of the economic underdevelopment and cultural backwardness of the Russian masses,

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29 Hitchens, op.cit., ibid.

there is no way for Russia to “pass directly to Socialism”; all the Soviet power can do is to combine the moderate politics of “state capitalism” with the intense cultural education of the inert peasant masses - NOT the “Communist propaganda” brain-washing, but simply a patient, gradual imposition of developed civilized standards. Facts and figures reveal “what a vast amount of urgent spadework we still have to do to reach the standard of an ordinary West European civilized country. /.../ We must bear in mind the semi-Asiatic ignorance from which we have not yet extricated ourselves.”³⁰ And could we not conceive of the Ukrainian protesters’ reference to “Europe” as the sign that their goal is also “to reach the standard of an ordinary West European civilized country”?

Here, however, things get quickly complicated: what, exactly, does “Europe” the Ukrainian protesters are referring to, stand for? It cannot be reduced to a single idea: it spans from nationalist, and even Fascist elements, up to the idea of what Etienne Balibar calls *égaliberté*, freedom-in-equality, the unique contribution of Europe to the global political imaginary, even if it is today more and more betrayed by European institutions and people themselves; plus, between these two poles, the naïve trust into European liberal-democratic capitalism. What Europe should see in Ukrainian protests is its best and its worst, and, to see this clearly, Europe has to look outside itself, onto a Ukrainian scene.

The Ukrainian nationalist Right is part of what is going on today from the Balkans to Scandinavia, from the US to Israel, from central Africa to India: a new Dark Age is looming, with ethnic and religious passions exploding, and the Enlightenment values receding. These passions were lurking in the dark all the time, but what is new now is the outright shamelessness of their display. In the middle of 2013, two public protests were announced in Croatia, a country in deep economic crisis, with high unemployment rate and a deep sense of despair among the population: trade unions tried to organize a rally in support of workers’ rights, while right wing nationalists started a protest movement against the use of Cyrillic letters on public buildings in cities with a Serb minority. The first initiative brought to a big square in Zagreb a couple of hundred people, the second one succeeded in mobilizing hundreds of thousands, the same as with a fundamentalist movement against gay marriages. And it is crucial to see this ethical regression as the obverse of the explosive development of global capitalism – they are the two

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30 Lenin 1966: 463.

sides of the same coin.

The expression *rückgängig machen*, suits perfectly this process. Imagine a society which fully integrated into its ethical substance the great modern axioms of freedom, equality, democratic rights, the duty of a society to provide for education and basic healthcare of all its members, and which rendered racism or sexism simply unacceptable and ridiculous – there is no need even to argue against, say, racism, since anyone who openly advocates racism is immediately perceived as a weird eccentric who cannot be taken seriously, etc. But then, step by step, although a society continues to pay lip service to these axioms, they are *de facto* deprived of their substance. Here is an example from the ongoing European history: in the summer of 2012, Viktor Orban, the Hungarian Rightist PM, said that in Central Europe a new economic system must be built

“and let us hope that God will help us and we will not have to invent a new type of political system instead of democracy that would need to be introduced for the sake of economic survival. /.../ Cooperation is a question of force, not of intention. Perhaps there are countries where things don’t work that way, for example in the Scandinavian countries, but such a half-Asiatic rag-tag people as we are can unite only if there is force.”³¹

The irony of these lines was not lost on some old Hungarian dissidents: when the Soviet army moved into Budapest to crush the 1956 anti-Communist uprising, the message repeatedly sent by the beleaguered Hungarian leaders to the West was: “We are defending Europe here.” (Against the Asiatic Communists, of course.) Now, after Communism collapsed, the Christian-conservative government paints, as its main enemy, Western multi-cultural consumerist liberal democracy for which today’s Western Europe stands, and calls for a new more organic communitarian order to replace the “turbulent” liberal democracy of the last two decades. Orban already expressed his sympathies with the “capitalism with Asian values,” so if the European pressure on Orban will continue, we can easily imagine him sending the message to the East: “We are defending Asia here!”

Today’s anti-immigrant populism stands for a clear passage

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31 Quoted from <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/news-brief/2437991-orban-considers-alternative-democracy>.

from direct barbarism, to barbarism with a human face. It practices the regression from the Christian love of the Neighbor back to the pagan privileging of our tribe (Greeks, Romans...) versus the barbarian Other. Even if it is cloaked in a defense of Christian values, it is itself the greatest threat to Christian legacy. A century ago Gilbert Keith Chesterton clearly deployed the fundamental deadlock of the critics of religion: "Men who begin to fight the Church for the sake of freedom and humanity end by flinging away freedom and humanity if only they may fight the Church. /.../ The secularists have not wrecked divine things; but the secularists have wrecked secular things, if that is any comfort to them." Does the same not hold for the advocates of religion themselves? How many fanatical defenders of religion started with ferociously attacking the contemporary secular culture and ended up forsaking any meaningful religious experience? In a similar way, many liberal warriors are so eager to fight the anti-democratic fundamentalism that they will end by flinging away freedom and democracy themselves if only they may fight terror. If the "terrorists" are ready to wreck this world for love of another world, our warriors on terror are ready to wreck their own democratic world out of hatred for the Muslim other. Some of them love human dignity so much that they are ready to legalize torture – the ultimate degradation of human dignity - to defend it... And does the same not hold also for the recent rise of the defenders of Europe against the immigrant threat? In their zeal to protect Judeo-Christian legacy, the new zealots are ready to forsake the true heart of the Christian legacy. They, the anti-immigrant defenders of Europe, not the crowds of immigrants waiting to invade it, are the true threat to Europe.

One of the signs of this regression is the request of the new European Right for a more "balanced" view of the two "extremisms," the Rightist one and the Leftist one: we are repeatedly told that one should treat the extreme Left (Communism) the same way Europe after WWII was treating the extreme Right (the defeated Fascism and Nazism). Upon a closer look, this new "balance" is heavily unbalanced: the equation of Fascism and Communism secretly privileges Fascism, as can be seen from a series of arguments, the main among which is, that Fascism copied Communism which came first (before becoming a Fascist, Mussolini was a Socialist, and even Hitler was a National Socialist; concentration camps and genocidal violence were practiced in Soviet Union a decade before Nazis resorted to it; the annihilation of the Jews has a clear precedent in the annihilation of the class enemy; etc.). The point of this argumentation is that a moderate Fascism was

a justified response to the Communist threat (the point made long ago by Ernst Nolte in his defense of Heidegger's 1933 Nazi engagement). In Slovenia, the Right is arguing for the rehabilitation of the anti-Communist "Home Guard" which fought the partisans during the WWII: they made the difficult choice to collaborate with the Nazis in order to prevent the much greater absolute Evil of Communism. The same could be said for the Nazis (or Fascists, at least) themselves: they did what they did to prevent the absolute Evil of Communism...³²

So what are we to do in such a situation? Mainstream liberals are telling us that, when the basic democratic values are under threat by ethnic or religious fundamentalists, we should all unite behind the liberal-democratic agenda of cultural tolerance, save what can be saved, and put aside dreams of a more radical social transformation. There is, however, a fatal flaw in this call for solidarity: it ignores how liberal permissiveness and fundamentalism are caught in a vicious cycle of the two poles generating and presupposing each other. When we hear today a politician offering us a choice between liberal freedom and fundamentalist oppression, and triumphantly asking a (purely rhetorical) question "Do you want women to be excluded from public life and deprived of their elementary rights? Do you want every critic or mocking of religion to be punished by death?", what should make us suspicious is the very self-evidence of the answer – who would have wanted *that*? The problem is that liberal universalism long ago lost its innocence. What Max Horkheimer had said in 1930s should also be applied to today's fundamentalism: those who do not want to talk (critically) about liberal democracy and its noble principles should also keep quiet about religious fundamentalism.

So what about the fate of the liberal-democratic capitalist European dream in Ukraine? One cannot be sure what awaits Ukraine within the EU, beginning with austerity measures. In my books I repeatedly used the well-known joke from the last decade of the Soviet Union about Rabinovitch, a Jew who wants to emigrate? The bureaucrat at the emigration office asks him why, and Rabinovitch answers: "There are two reasons why. The first is that I'm afraid that in the Soviet Union the Communists will lose power, and the new power will put all the blame

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32 Along the same lines, some liberal critics of anti-Semitism claim that not only today anti-Semitism is predominantly Leftist, but that anti-Semitism was from the very beginning part of the Communist project. (Suffice it to note that the majority of the members of Lenin's Politburo in the first years of the Soviet power were of Jewish origins – a unique case in the Western world. Whatever Lenin was, he wasn't anti-Semitic.)

for the Communist crimes on us, Jews – there will again be anti-Jewish pogroms ...” “But”, interrupts him the bureaucrat, “this is pure nonsense, nothing can change in the Soviet Union, the power of the Communists will last forever!” “Well,” responds Rabinovitch calmly, “that’s my second reason.” We can easily imagine a similar exchange between a critical Ukrainian and a European Union financial administrator – the Ukrainian complains: “There are two reasons we are in a panic here in Ukraine. First, we are afraid that the EU will simply abandon us to the Russian pressure and let our economy collapse...” The EU administrator interrupts him: “But you can trust us, we will not abandon you, we will tightly control you and advise you what to do!” “Well,” responds the Ukrainian calmly, “that’s my second reason.”

So the question is not if Ukraine is worthy of Europe, good enough to enter EU, but if today’s Europe is worthy of the deepest aspirations of the Ukrainians. If Ukraine will end up as a mixture of ethnic fundamentalism and liberal capitalism, with oligarchs pulling the strings, it will be as European as Russia (or Hungary) is today. (And, incidentally, it would be crucial to also tell the full story of the conflict between different groups of oligarchs – the “pro-Russian” ones and the “pro-Western” ones – that forms the background of the big public events in Ukraine.) Political commentators claimed that EU did not support Ukraine enough in its conflict with Russia, that the EU response to the Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea was half-hearted. But there is another kind of support which was even more missing: to offer Ukraine a feasible strategy of how to break out of its deadlock. To do this, Europe should first transform itself and renew its pledge to the emancipatory core of its legacy.

In his *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, the great conservative T.S. Eliot remarked that there are moments when the only choice is the one between sectarianism and non-belief, when the only way to keep a religion alive is to perform a sectarian split from its main corpse. This is our only chance today: only by means of a “sectarian split” from the decaying corpse of the old Europe can we keep the European legacy of *égalité* alive. To put it bluntly, if the emerging New World Order is the non-negotiable destiny for all of us, then Europe is lost, so the only solution for Europe is to take the risk and break this spell of our destiny. Only in such a new Europe could Ukraine find its place. It is not the Ukrainians who should learn from Europe, Europe itself has to learn to incorporate the dream that motivated the Maidan protesters. Today, more than ever, fidelity to the emancipatory core of the European legacy

is needed. The lesson that the frightened liberals should learn is: only a more radicalized Left can save what is worth saving in the liberal legacy today.

How, then, are we to proceed? We don’t have to look far from Croatia. In February 2014, cities were burning in Bosnian Federation. It all began in Tuzla, the city with Muslim majority; the protests then spread to the capital Sarajevo, Zenica, but also Mostar (with large segment of Croat population) and Banja Luka (capital of the Serb part of Bosnia). Thousands of enraged protesters occupied, devastated and set fire to government buildings, inclusive of the Presidency of the Bosnian Federation. Although the situation calmed down the next day, the high tension remains in the air. The events immediately gave rise to conspiracy theories (the Serb government organized the protests to topple the Bosnian leadership), but one should safely ignore them, since it is clear that, whatever lurks “behind,” the protesters’ despair is authentic. One is tempted to paraphrase Mao Ze Dong’s famous phrase here: there is chaos in Bosnia, the situation is excellent! Why? The protesters’ demands were as simple as they can be: we want jobs, a chance of decent life, the end of corruption. But they mobilized people *in Bosnia*, a country which, in the last decades, came to symbolize ferocious ethnic cleansing leading to hundreds of thousands of dead. In one of the photos from the protests, we see the demonstrators waving three flags side by side: Bosnian, Serb, Croat – expressing the will to ignore ethnic differences as irrelevant. In short, we are dealing with the rebellion against nationalist elites: the people of Bosnia finally got it; who their true enemy is, not other ethnic groups but their own nationalist elites pretending to protect them from the others. It is as if the old and much abused Titoist motto of the “brotherhood and unity” of Yugoslav nations acquired new actuality.

One of the protesters’ targets was the European Union administration which oversees the Bosnian state, enforcing peace between the three nations and provides large financial help which enables the state to function. This may appear a surprise, since the goals of the protesters are nominally the same as the goals of the EU administration: prosperity, end of ethnic tensions and of corruption. However, while the EU administration pretends to act for overcoming ethnic hatreds and to promote multicultural tolerance, the way it effectively governs Bosnia entrenches partitions: the EU deals with nationalist elites as their privileged partners, mediating within them.

What the Bosnian outburst confirms is, thus, that one cannot

really overcome ethnic passions by way of imposing the liberal agenda: what brought the protesters together is a radical program of justice. The next and most difficult step would have been to organize the protests into a new social movement that ignores ethnic divisions and organize further protests – can one imagine a scene of enraged Bosnians and Serbs manifesting together in Sarajevo? Even if the protests will gradually lose their power, they will remain a brief spark of hope, something like the enemy soldiers fraternizing across the trenches in World War I. Authentic emancipatory events always involve such ignoring of particular identities as irrelevant. And the same holds for the recent visit of the two Pussy Riot members to New York: in a big gala show, they were introduced by Madonna in the presence of Bob Geldof, Richard Gere, etc. – the usual human rights gang. What they should have done there is to add just one word: to express their solidarity with Edward Snowden, to assert that Pussy Riot and Snowden are part of the same global movement. Without such gestures which bring together what, in our ordinary ideological experience, appears incompatible (Muslims, Serbs and Croats in Bosnia, Turkish secularists and anti-capitalist Muslims in Turkey, etc.), the protest movements will be always manipulated by one superpower in its struggle against the other.

And the same goes for Ukraine. Yes, the Maidan protesters were heroes, but the true fight begins now, the fight for what the new Ukraine will be, and this fight will be much tougher than the fight against Putin's intervention. A new and much more risky heroism will be needed here.³³ The model of this heroism is found in those Russians who courageously oppose the nationalist passion of their own country and denounce it as a tool of those in power. What is needed today is the “crazy” gesture of *rejecting the very terms of the conflict* and proclaiming the basic *solidarity* of Ukrainians and Russians. One should begin by organizing events of fraternization across the imposed divisions, establishing shared organizational networks between the authentic emancipatory core of Ukrainian political agents and the Russian opposition to Putin's regime.

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³³ Ylia Ponomarev, the only member of the Russian Duma who voted against the move to incorporate Ukraine's autonomous republic of Crimea into his country, made a valid point in explaining his vote: he emphasized that Russia has good arguments for its claim to Crimea, but he disagreed with the procedures used to take it back from Ukraine. Therein resides the core of the problem: it is not about arguments and justification of claims (at this level, all sides also cheat: the West which supported Kosovo secession from Serbia opposed the secession of Crimea; Russia which advocates referendum in Crimea rejects referendum in Chechnia, etc.). What makes the annexation of Crimea problematic is the way it was organized (under Russian military pressure, etc.), plus the larger geopolitical struggle behind it.

This may sound utopian, but it is only such “crazy” acts that can confer on the protests a true emancipatory dimension. Otherwise, we will get just the conflict of nationalist passions manipulated by oligarchs who lurk in the background. Such geopolitical games for the spheres of influence are of no interest whatsoever to the authentic emancipatory politics.

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