

Slavoj Zizek in dialogue with Oxana Timopheeva: DON'T WORRY, THE CATASTROPHY WILL ARRIVE

The last week of August Slavoj Zizek and Mladen Dolar visited Russia with a series of lectures and seminars. They were invited by »Chto Delat?« (»What is to be done?«), the group of Russian intellectuals and artists, who combine in their practice theory, art and political activism. This visit was organized as a summer educational program, open for everyone, and produced a lot of interest and extremely heated debates. Oxana Timofeeva, a part of »Chto Delat?« and a main organizer of this educational program, asked Slavoj Zizek for questions, seemingly from within Russian current political context. This dialog is a kind of postscriptum to Zizek's Russian trip.

O.T. In one of your papers you refer to China, where, if you really hate someone, the curse to fling at them is: "May you live in interesting times!" We are now in Russia definitely living in «interesting times», when the entire society basically transforms into opposition toward the state power, and the variety of positions are sharing a certain «common ground», which consists of a kind of cultural confrontation. There is a huge demand for a dialog between, for example, our traditional liberal intelligencia and a younger generation of political left. What do you think about possible perspective of such a dialog? Does it make sense at all? It seems that we have an enemy in common, a personalised autocratic state power, but I think, for a real dialog, this is not enough, one needs something else.

S.Z. 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 heresy and non-belief, that is to say, when the only way to keep a religion alive is to perform a sectarian split from its main corpse. This is our position today with regard to liberal democracy: only a new "heresy" (represented by the radical Left) can save what is worth saving in liberal democracy: democracy, trust in people, egalitarian solidarity... The only alternative is "capitalism with Asian values" (which, of course, has nothing to do with Asia, but all with the clear and present tendency of contemporary capitalism to suspend democracy).

Progressive liberals today often complain that they would like to join a "revolution" (a more radical emancipatory political movement), but no matter how desperately they search for it, they just "don't see it" (they don't see anywhere in the social space a political agent with a will and strength to seriously engage in such activity). While there is a moment of truth in it, one should nonetheless also add that the very attitude of these liberals is in itself part of a problem: if one just waits to "see" a revolutionary movement,

it will, of course, never arise, and one will never see it. What Hegel says about the curtain that separates appearances from true reality (behind the veil of appearance there is nothing, only what the subject who looks there put it there), holds also for a revolutionary process: “seeing” and “desire” are here inextricably linked, i.e., the revolutionary potential is not there to discover as an objective social fact, one “sees it” only insofar as one “desires” it (engages oneself in the movement). No wonder Mensheviks and those who opposed Lenin’s call for a revolutionary takeover in the summer of 1917 “didn’t see” the conditions for it as “ripe” and opposed it as “premature” – they simply did not want the revolution. Another version of this skeptical argument about “seeing” is that liberals claim how capitalism is today so global and all-encompassing that they cannot “see” any serious alternative to it, that they cannot imagine a feasible “outside” to it. The reply to this is that, insofar as this is true, they do not see tout court: the task is not to see the outside, but to see in the first place (to grasp the nature of today’s capitalism) – the Marxist wager is that, when we “see” this, we see enough, inclusive of how to get out...). So our reply to the worried progressive liberals, eager to join the revolution, and just not seeing its chances anywhere around, should be like the answer to the proverbial ecologist worried about the prospect of catastrophe: don’t worry, the catastrophe will arrive...

Liberals like to point out similarities between Left and Right “extremisms”: Hitler’s terror and camps imitated Bolshevik terror, the Leninist party is today alive in al Qaida. Even if we accept this, what does all this mean? It can also be read as an indication of how fascism literally replaces (takes the place of) the leftist revolution: its rise is the Left’s failure, but simultaneously a proof that there was indeed a revolutionary potential, dissatisfaction, which the Left was not able to mobilize. How are we to understand this reversal of an emancipatory force into fundamentalist populism? It is here that the passage from the Two to the Three gains all its weight: the hegemonic ideological field imposes on us a field of (ideological) visibility with its own “principal contradiction” (today, it is the opposition of market-freedom-democracy and fundamentalist-terrorist-totalitarian-ism “Islamofascism” and so on), and the first thing we must do is to reject (to subtract ourselves from) this opposition, to perceive it as a false opposition destined to obfuscate the true line of division. Lacan’s formula for this redoubling is $1+1+a$: the “official” antagonism (the Two) is always supplemented by an “indivisible remainder” which indicates its foreclosed dimension. In other terms, the true antagonism is always reflexive, it is the antagonism between the “official” antagonism and that which is foreclosed by it (this is why, in Lacan’s mathematics, $1+1 = 3$). Today, for example, the true antagonism is not between liberal multiculturalism and fundamentalism, but between the very field of their opposition and the excluded Third (radical emancipatory politics).

So what about the core values of liberalism: freedom, equality so forth? The paradox is that liberalism itself is not strong enough to save them – namely, its own core – against the fundamentalist onslaught. The problem with liberalism is that it cannot stand on its own: there is something missing in the liberal edifice, and liberalism is in its very notion “parasitic,” relying on a presupposed network of communal values that it itself undermines with its own development. Fundamentalism is a reaction – a false, mystifying, reaction, of course – against a real flaw of liberalism, and this is why it is again and again generated by liberalism. Left to its own devices, liberalism will slowly undermine itself – the only thing that can save its core is a renewed Left. Or, to put it in the well-known terms from 1968, in order for its key legacy to survive, liberalism needs the comradely help of the radical Left.

Perhaps, the disappointment at capitalism in the post-Communist countries should not be dismissed as a simple sign of the the “immature” expectations of the people who didn’t possess a realistic image of capitalism. When people protested against Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the large majority of them did not ask for capitalism. They wanted solidarity and a rough kind of justice; they wanted the freedom to live their own life outside the state control, to come together and talk as they please; they wanted a life of simple honesty and sincerity, liberated from the primitive ideological indoctrination and the prevailing cynical hypocrisy. As many perspicuous analysts observed, the ideals that led the protesters were to a large extent taken from the ruling Socialist ideology itself – people aspired to something which can most appropriately be designated as “Socialism with a human face.” Perhaps, this attitude deserves a second chance.

O.T. The one of topics you presented in Moscow was on psychoanalysis. I totally share with you the idea that psychoanalysis is now needed more than ever – some more reflection, some more retrospection, some more thought. This is not only a question of diagnosis, but also a question of freedom, of liberation. But some people seriously think that psychoanalysis does not work in Russia – we are too crazy for such a rational therapy. Do you think we still should insist in this urgency of an intellectual interruption against a social delirium? How far our individual troubles are related to the paranoiac structure of our state power?

S.Z. Maybe some cultures are less open to psychoanalytic treatment than others – but it is only psychoanalytic theory that can explain this differences. As Freud once remarked, psychoanalytic theory is not only the theory of analytic practice, but, paradoxically, also the theory of why this practice often fails. So especially in the cases of what you call the Russian “social delirium,” psychoanalytic theory is needed more than ever.

In the last years, there is a new wave of the triumphalist acclamations of how psychoanalysis is dead: with the new advances in brain sciences, it is finally put where it

belonged all the time, to the lumber-room of pre-scientific obscurantist search for hidden meanings, alongside religious confessors and dream-readers. As Todd Dufresne put it, no figure in the history of human thought was more wrong about all its fundamentals – with the exception of Marx, some would add. And, effectively and predictably, in 2005, the infamous *The Black Book of Communism*, listing all the Communist crimes, was followed by *The Black Book of Psychoanalysis*, listing all the theoretical mistakes and clinical frauds of psychoanalysis. In this negative way, at least, the profound solidarity of Marxism and psychoanalysis is now displayed for all to see.

A century ago, Freud located psychoanalysis into the series of three successive humiliations of man, the three “narcissistic illnesses,” as he called them. First, Copernicus demonstrated that Earth turns around the Sun and thus deprived us, humans, of the central place in the universe. Then, Darwin demonstrated our origin from blind evolution, thereby depriving us of the privileged place among living beings. Finally, when Freud himself rendered visible the predominant role of the unconscious in psychic processes, it became clear that our ego is not even a master in his own house. Today, hundred years later, a different picture is emerging: the latest scientific breakthroughs seem to add to it a whole series of further humiliations to the narcissistic image of man: our mind itself is merely a computing machine for data-processing, our sense of freedom and autonomy is merely the “user’s illusion” of this machine... Consequently, with regard to today’s brain sciences, psychoanalysis itself, far from being subversive, rather seems to belong to the traditional humanist field threatened by the latest humiliations.

Is, then, psychoanalysis today really outdated? It seems that it is, on three interconnected levels: (1) that of scientific knowledge, where the cognitivist-neurobiologist model of the human mind appears to supersede the Freudian model; (2) that of psychiatric clinic, where psychoanalytic treatment is rapidly losing ground against chemotherapy and behavioral therapy; (3) that of the social context, where the image of society, of social norms, which repress the individual’s sexual drives, no longer appears valid with regard to today’s predominant hedonistic permissiveness. Nonetheless, in the case of psychoanalysis, the memorial service is perhaps a little bit too hasty, commemorating a patient who still has a long life ahead. In contrast to the “evident” truths of the critics of Freud, one should insist that it is only today that the time of psychoanalysis has arrived and that Freud’s key insights gain their full value.

One of the standard topics of today’s conservative cultural critique is that, in our permissive era, children lack firm limits or prohibitions. This lack frustrates them, driving them from one to another excess. It is only a firm limit set up by some symbolic authority that can guarantee not only stability, but even satisfaction itself – satisfaction brought about by way of violating the prohibition, of transgressing the limit. In order to render

clear the way denegation functions in the unconscious, Freud evoked a reaction of one of his patients to a dream of his centered around an unknown woman: “Whoever this woman in my dream is, I know it is not my mother.” A clear negative proof, for Freud, that the woman was his mother. What better way to characterize today’s typical patient than to imagine his opposite reaction to the same dream: »Whoever this woman in my dream was, I am sure it has something to do with my mother!«

Traditionally, psychoanalysis was expected to allow the patient to overcome the obstacles which prevented him/her the access to normal sexual satisfaction: if you are not able to “get it,” go to the analyst, he will enable you to get rid of your inhibitions... Today, however, when we are bombarded from all sides by the different versions of the injunction “Enjoy!”, from direct enjoyment in sexual performance to enjoyment in professional achievement or in spiritual awakening, one should move to a more radical level: psychoanalysis is today the only discourse in which you are allowed not to enjoy – not “not allowed to enjoy,” i.e., prohibited to enjoy, but just relieved of the pressure to enjoy.

We discover a Freud who is far from the proverbial Victorian caught in his repressive vision of sexuality, a Freud whose moment is, perhaps, arriving only today, in our “society of spectacle,” when what we experience as everyday reality is more and more the incarnated lie. Although the statement »If there is no God, everything is permitted.« is usually attributed to Dostoyevski’s Karamazov Brothers, he effectively never made it (the first to attribute it to Dostoyevski was Sartre in his Being and Nothingness). However, the very fact that this misattribution persists for decades demonstrates that, even if factually false, it does hit a certain nerve in our ideological edifice – no wonder conservatives like to evoke it apropos scandals among the atheist-hedonist elite: from millions killed in gulags up to animal sex and gay marriages, here is where we end if we deny all transcendent authority which poses some unsurpassable limits to human endeavours.

Without such limits – so the story goes – there is no ultimate to exploit one’s neighbors ruthlessly, to use them as tools for profit and pleasure, to enslave and humiliate them, to kill them in millions. All that separates us from this ultimate moral vacuum are, in the absence of a transcendent limit, temporary and non-obligatory »pacts among wolves,« self-imposed limitations in the interest of one’s survival and well-being which can be violated at any moment... But are things really like that?

As is well-known, Jacques Lacan claimed that the psychoanalytic practice teaches us to turn around Dostoyevski’s dictum: »If there is no god, then everything is prohibited.« This reversal is hard to swallow for our moral common sense: in an otherwise

sympathetic review of a book on Lacan, a Slovene Leftist daily newspaper rendered Lacan's version as: "Even if there is no God, not everything is permitted!" – a benevolent vulgarity, changing Lacan's provocative reversal into a modest assurance that even we, godless atheists, respect some ethical limits... However, even if this Lacan's version may appear an empty paradox, a quick look at our moral landscape confirms that it is much more appropriate to describe the universe of atheist liberal hedonists: they dedicate their life to the pursuit of pleasures, but since there is no external authority which would guarantee them a space for this pursuit, they get entangled into a thick network of self-imposed Politically Correct regulations, as if a superego much more severe than that of the traditional morality is controlling them: they get obsessed by the idea that, in pursuing their pleasures, they may humiliate or violate others' space, so they regulate their behavior with detailed prescriptions of how to avoid »harrassing« others, not to mention the no less complex regulation of their own care of the self (bodily fitness, health food, spiritual relaxation...). Indeed, nothing is more oppressive and regulated than being a simple hedonist.

The second thing, strictly correlative to the first observation, is that today, it is rather to those who refer to god in a brutally direct way, perceiving themselves as instruments of god's will, that everything is permitted. It is so-called fundamentalists who practice a perverted version of what Kierkegaard called religious suspension of the ethical: on a god's mission, one is allowed to kill thousands of innocents... So why do we witness today the rise of religiously (or ethnically) justified violence today? Because we live in an era which perceives itself as post-ideological. Since great public causes can no longer be mobilized as grounds of mass violence (or war), i.e., since our hegemonic ideology calls on us to enjoy life and to realize our Selves, it is difficult for the majority to overcome their revulsion at torturing and killing another human being. The large majority of people are spontaneously moral: torturing or killing another human being is deeply traumatic for them. So, in order to make them do it, a larger »sacred« Cause is needed, which makes petty individual concerns about killing seem trivial. Religion or ethnic belonging fit this role perfectly. Of course there are cases of pathological atheists who are able to commit mass murder just for pleasure, just for the sake of it, but they are rare exceptions. The majority needs to be anaesthetized against their elementary sensitivity to the other's suffering. For this, a sacred Cause is needed: without this Cause, we would have to feel all the burden of what we did, with no Absolute on whom to put the ultimate responsibility. Religious ideologists usually claim that, true or not, religion makes some otherwise bad people to do some good things; from today's experience, one should rather stick to Steve Weinberg's claim that, while, without religion, good people would have been doing good things and bad people bad things, only religion can make good people do bad things.

O.T. As you know, in today's Russia, we face directly the violence justified and legitimized by religious ideology. One would say, if Church exists, then everything is permitted to those in power. Thus, you pay attention to the judge Syrova who said that Pussy Riot girls violated all written and unwritten rules. I wanted to develop this interesting line and to ask you about the obscenity and violation and their relation to rules and to the law itself. What would be our marxist, Freudian, Lacanian or Hegelian answer to someone Syrova? Where are real criminals? Definitely not in prison?

S.Z. My basic thesis is a simple one and, I think, universal: every legal order (or every order of explicit normativity) has to rely on a complex "reflexive" network of informal rules which tells us how are we to relate to the explicit norms, how are we to apply them: to what extent are we to take them literally, how and when are we allowed, solicited even, to disregard them, etc. – and this is the domain of habit. To know the habits of a society is to know the meta-rules of how to apply its explicit norms: when to use them or not use them; when to violate them; when not to use a choice which is offered; when we are effectively obliged to do something, but have to pretend that we are doing it as a free choice (like in the case of potlatch). Recall the polite offer-meant-to-be-refused: it is a "habit" to refuse such an offer, and anyone who accepts such an offer commits a vulgar blunder. The same goes for many political situations in which a choice is given on condition that we make the right choice: we are solemnly reminded that we can say no – but we are expected to we reject this offer and enthusiastically say yes. With many sexual prohibitions, the situation is the opposite one: the explicit "no" effectively functions as the implicit injunction "do it, but in a discreet way!".

One of the strategies of "totalitarian" regimes is to have legal regulations (criminal laws) so severe that, if taken literally, EVERYONE is guilty of something, and then to withdraw from their full enforcement. In this way, the regime can appear merciful ("You see, if we wanted, we could have all of you arrested and condemned, but do not be afraid, we are lenient..."), and at the same time wield a permanent threat to discipline its subjects ("Do not play too much with us, remember that at any moment we can..."). In ex-Yugoslavia, there was the infamous Article 133 of the penal code which could always be invoked to prosecute writers and journalists – it made into a crime any text that presents falsely the achievements of the socialist revolution or that may arouse the tension and discontent among the public for the way it deals with political, social, or other topics... this last category is obviously not only infinitely plastic, but also conveniently self-relating: does the very fact that you are accused by those in power not in itself equal the fact that you "aroused the tension and discontent among the public"? In those years, I remember asking a Slovene politician how does he justify this article; he just smiled and, with a wink, told me: "Well, we have to have some tool to discipline at our will those who annoy us..." This overlapping of potential total culpabilization

(whatever you are doing MAY be a crime) and mercy (the fact that you are allowed to lead your life in peace is not a proof or consequence of your innocence, but a proof of the mercy and benevolence, of the “understanding of the realities of life,” of those in power) – “totalitarian” regimes are by definition regimes of mercy, of tolerating violations of the law, since, the way they frame social life, violating the law (bribing, cheating...) is a condition of survival.

The problem during the chaotic post-Soviet years of the Yeltsin rule in Russia could be located at this level: although the legal rules were known (and largely the same as under the Soviet Union), what disintegrated was the complex network of implicit unwritten rules which sustained the entire social edifice. Say, if, in the Soviet Union, you wanted to get a better hospital treatment, a new apartment, if you had a complain against authorities, if you were summoned to a court, if you wanted your child to be accepted in a top school, if a factory manager needed raw materials not delivered on time by the state-contractors, etc.etc., everyone knew what you really had to do, whom to address, whom to bribe, what you can do and what you cannot do. After the collapse of the Soviet power, one of the most frustrating aspects of the daily existence of ordinary people was that these unwritten rules largely got blurred: people simply did not know what to do, how to react, how are you to relate to explicit legal regulations, what can you ignore, where does bribery work, etc. (One of the functions of the organized crime was to provide a kind of ersatz-legality: if you owned a small business and a customer owed you money, you turned to your mafia-protector who dealt with the problem, since the state legal system was inefficient.) The stabilization under the Putin reign mostly amounts to the newly-established transparency of these unwritten rules: now, again, people mostly know how to act in react in the complex cobweb of social interactions.

This is also how one should answer the popular and seemingly convincing reply to all those who worry about torturing prisoners suspected of terror acts: “What’s all the fuss about? The US are now only (half)openly admitting what not only they were doing all the time, but all other states are and were doing all the time – if anything, we have less hypocrisy now...” To this, one should retort with a simple counter-question: “If the high representatives of the US mean only this, why, then, are they telling us this? Why don’t they just silently go on doing it, as they did it till now?”

What is proper to human speech is the irreducible gap between the enunciated content and its act of enunciation: “You say this, but why are you telling me it openly now?” Let us imagine a wife and husband who co-exist with a tacit agreement that they can lead discreet extra-marital affairs; if, all of a sudden, the husband openly tells his wife about an ongoing affair, she will have good reasons to be in panic: “If it is just an affair, why are you telling me this? It must be something more!” The act of publicly reporting on

something is never neutral, it affects the reported content itself. Or, a more standard case: we all know that a polite way to say that we found our colleague's intervention or talk stupid and boring is to say "It was interesting."; so, if, instead, we tell our colleague openly "It was boring and stupid", he would be fully justified to be surprised and to ask: "But if you found it boring and stupid, why did you not simply say that it was interesting?" The unfortunate colleague was right to take the more direct statement as involving something more, not only a comment about the quality of his paper but an attack on his very person.

We reach thereby the "heart of darkness" of habits. Recall numerous cases of pedophilia that shatter the Catholic Church: when its representatives insists that these cases, deplorable as they are, are Church's internal problem, and display great reluctance to collaborate with police in their investigation, they are, in a way, right – the pedophilia of Catholic priests is not something that concerns merely the persons who, because of accidental reasons of private history with no relation to the Church as an institution, happened to chose the profession of a priest; it is a phenomenon that concerns the Catholic Church as such, that is inscribed into its very functioning as a socio-symbolic institution. It does not concern the "private" unconscious of individuals, but the "unconscious" of the institution itself: it is not something that happens because the Institution has to accommodate itself to the pathological realities of libidinal life in order to survive, but something that the institution itself needs in order to reproduce itself. One can well imagine a "straight" (not pedophiliac) priest who, after years of service, gets involved in pedophilia because the very logic of the institution seduces him into it. Such an institutional Unconscious designates the obscene disavowed underside that, precisely as disavowed, sustains the public institution. (In the army, this underside consists of the obscene sexualized rituals of fragging etc. which sustain the group solidarity.) In other words, it is not simply that, for conformist reasons, the Church tries to hush up the embarrassing pedophilic scandals; in defending itself, the Church defends its innermost obscene secret. What this means is that identifying oneself with this secret side is a key constituent of the very identity of a Christian priest: if a priest seriously (not just rhetorically) denounces these scandals, he thereby excludes himself from the ecclesiastic community, he is no longer "one of us" (in exactly the same way a citizen of a town in the South of the US in the 1920s, if he denounced Ku Klux Klan to the police, excluded himself from his community, i.e., betrayed its fundamental solidarity). Consequently, the answer to the Church's reluctance should be not only that we are dealing with criminal cases and that, if Church does not fully participate in their investigation, it is an accomplice after the fact; moreover, Church AS SUCH, as an institution, should be investigated with regard to the way it systematically creates conditions for such crimes.

O.T. As Kafka said, it is painful to respect the laws, which we do not know, or the laws, which have been established by someone else. It is especially annoying if the very legal system of the established order with its written and unwritten rules is itself a condition of a crime. Do you think we need a revolution? Do you think we will have it? Then the most difficult question – what should we do after?

S.Z. The totality of global capitalism is approaching a zero-point at which things will no longer be able to go on the way they go now – in ecology, in biogenetics, with regard to intellectual property, etc. The true utopia is not a revolution, but that things will go on like they are now. What this means is that the question is not if we need a revolution or not, but HOW will things change. If we do nothing, we will find ourselves in a new authoritarian-capitalist world whose signs are more and more visible all around, not only in China. How this change will look, we cannot say.

2011 was the year of dreaming dangerously, of the revival of radical emancipatory politics all around the world. Now, a year later, every day brings new proofs of how fragile and inconsistent the awakening was, with all of its many facets displaying the same signs of exhaustion: the enthusiasm of the Arab Spring is mired in compromises and religious fundamentalism; the OWS is losing momentum to such an extent that, in a nice case of the »cunning of reason,« the police cleansing of Zuchotti Park and other sites of the OWS protests cannot but appear as a blessing in disguise, covering up the immanent loss of momentum. And the same story goes on all around the world: the Maoists in Nepal seem outmaneuvered by the reactionary royalist forces; Venezuela's "Bolivarian" experiment more and more regressing into a caudillo-run populism... What are we to do in such depressive times when dreams seem to fade away? Is the only choice we have the one between nostalgic-narcissistic remembrance of the sublime enthusiastic moments, and the cynically-realist explanation of why the attempts to really change the situation had to fail?

The first thing to state is that the subterranean work of dissatisfaction is going on: rage is accumulating and a new wave of revolts will follow. The weird and unnatural relative calm of the Spring of 2012 is more and more perforated by the growing subterranean tensions announcing new explosions; what makes the situation so ominous is the all-pervasive sense of blockage: there no clear way out, the ruling elite is clearly losing its ability to rule. What makes the situation even more disturbing is the obvious fact that democracy doesn't work: after elections in Greece and in Spain, the same frustrations remain. How should we read the signs of this rage? In his Arcades Project, Walter Benjamin quotes the French historian André Monglond: "The past has left images of itself in literary texts, images comparable to those which are imprinted by light on a photosensitive plate. The future alone possesses developers active enough to scan such

surfaces perfectly.” Events like the OWS protests, the Arab Spring, demonstrations in Greece and Spain, etc., have to be read as such signs from the future. In other words, we should turn around the usual historicist perspective of understanding an event out of its context and genesis. Radical emancipatory outburst cannot be understood in this way: instead of analyzing them as a part of the continuum of past/present, we should bring in the perspective of the future, i.e., we should analyze them as limited, distorted (sometimes even perverted) fragments of a utopian future which lies dormant in the present as its hidden potential. According to Deleuze, in Proust, “people and things occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one that they have in space”: the notorious madeleine is here in place, but this is not its true time. In a similar way, one should learn the art to recognize, from an engaged subjective position, elements which are here, in our space, but whose time is the emancipated future, the future of the Communist Idea.

However, while one should learn to watch for such signs from the future, we should also be aware that what we are doing now will only become readable once the future will be here, so we should not put too much hopes into the desperate search for the »germs of Communism« in today’s society. Signs from the future are not constitutive but regulative in the Kantian sense; their status is subjectively mediated, i.e., they are not discernible from any neutral “objective” study of history, but only from an engaged position – following them remains an existential wager in Pascal’s sense. The Communist signs from the future are signs from a possible future which will become actual only if we follow these signs – in other words, they are signs which paradoxically precede that of which they are signs.

The times of “revealed Communism” are over: we cannot any longer pretend (or act as if) the Communist truth is simply here for everyone to see, accessible to neutral rational historical analysis; there is no Communist “big Other,” no higher historical necessity or teleology to guide and legitimize our acts. In such a situation, today’s libertins (postmodern historicist skeptics) thrive, and the only way to counter them, i.e., to assert the dimension of Event (of eternal Truth) in our epoch of contingency, is to practice a kind of Communism absconditus: what defines today’s Communist is the “doctrine” (theory) which enables him to discern in (the contemporary version of) a “miracle” – say, an unexpected social explosion like the crowd persisting on Tahrir Square – its Communist nature, to read it is a sign from the (Communist) future. (For a libertin, of course, such an event remains a confused outcome of social frustrations and illusions, an outburst which will probably lead to an even worst situation than the one to which it reacted.) And, again, this future is not “objective,” it will come to be only through the subjective engagement which sustains it.

Perhaps, we should turn the usual reproach about what we want and what we don't want around: it is basically clear what we want (in the long term, at least); but do we really know what we don't want, i.e., what we are ready to renounce of our present "freedoms"?) It is here that we should remain resolutely Hegelian – Hegel's opening towards the future is a negative one: it is articulated in his negative/limiting statements like the famous »one cannot jump ahead of one's time« from his Philosophy of Right. The impossibility to directly borrow from the future is grounded in the very fact of retroactivity which makes future a priori unpredictable: we cannot jump onto our shoulders and see ourselves »objectively,« the way we fit into the texture of history, because this texture is again and again retroactively rearranged.

The Left entered a period of profound crisis – the shadow of the XXth century still hangs over it, and the full scope of the defeat is not yet admitted. In the years of prospering capitalism, it was easy for the Left to play a Cassandra, warning that the prosperity is based on illusions and prophesizing catastrophes to come. Now the economic downturn and social disintegration the Left was waiting for is here, protests and revolts are popping up all around the globe – but what is conspicuously absent is any consistent Leftist reply to these events, any project of how to transpose islands of chaotic resistance into a positive program of social change: "When and if a national economy enters into crisis in the present interlocking global order, what has anyone to say – in any non-laughable detail – about 'socialism in one country' or even 'partly detached pseudo-nation-state non-finance-capital-driven capitalism'?" T.J. Clark sees the reason for this inability to act in the Left's "futuralism," in its orientation towards a future of radical emancipation; due to this fixation, the Left is immobilized "by the idea that it should spend its time turning over the entrails of the present for the signs of catastrophe and salvation," i.e., it continues to be premised "on some terracotta multitude waiting to march out of the emperor's tomb."

We have to admit the grain of truth in this simplified bleak vision which seems to sap the very possibility of a proper political Event: perhaps, we should effectively renounce the myth of a Great Awakening – the moment when (if not the old working class then) a new alliance of the dispossessed, multitude or whatever, will gather its forces and master a decisive intervention. The entire history of the (radical) Left, up to Hardt and Negri, is colored by this stance of awaiting the Moment. After describing multiple forms of resistance to the Empire, Hardt and Negri's Multitude ends with a messianic note pointing towards the great Rupture, the moment of Decision when the movement of multitudes will be transubstantiated the sudden birth of a new world: "After this long season of violence and contradictions, global civil war, corruption of imperial biopower, and infinite toil of the biopolitical multitudes, the extraordinary accumulations of grievances and reform proposals must at some point be transformed by a strong event, a

radical insurrectional demand.” However, at this point when one expects a minimum theoretical determination of this rupture, what we get is again withdrawal into philosophy: “A philosophical book like this, however, is not the place for us to evaluate whether the time for revolutionary political decision is imminent.” Hardt and Negri perform here an all to quick jump: of course one cannot ask them to provide a detailed empirical description of the Decision, of the passage to the globalized “absolute democracy,” to the multitude that rules itself; however, what if this a justified refusal to engage in pseudo-concrete futuristic predictions masks an inherent notional deadlock/impossibility? That is to say, what one does and should expect is a description of the notional structure of this qualitative jump, of the passage from the multitudes resisting the One of sovereign Power to the multitudes directly ruling themselves.

So what happens if we radically renounce this stance of eschatological expectation? Clark concludes that one has to admit the tragic vision of (social) life: there is no (great bright) future, the “tiger” of suffering, evil, and violence is here to stay, and, in such circumstances, the only reasonable politics is the politics of moderation which tries to contain the monster: “a politics actually directed, step by step, failure by failure, to preventing the tiger from charging out would be the most moderate and revolutionary there has ever been.” Practicing such a politics would provoke a brutal reply of those in power and dissolve the “boundaries between political organizing and armed resistance.” Again, the grain of truth in this proposal is that, often, a strategically well-placed precise “moderate” demand can trigger a global transformation – recall Gorbachov’s “moderate” attempt to reform the Soviet Union which resulted in its disintegration. But is this all one should say (and do)?

There are in French two words for “future” which cannot be adequately rendered in English: futur and avenir. Futur stands for future as the continuation of the present, as the full actualization of the tendencies which are already here, while avenir points more towards a radical break, a discontinuity with the present – avenir is what is to come /a venir/, not just what will be. Say, in today’s apocalyptic global situation, the ultimate horizon of the “future” is what Jean-Pierre Dupuy calls the dystopian “fixed point,” the zero-point of the ecological breakdown, of global economic and social chaos – even if it is indefinitely postponed, this zero-point is the virtual “attractor” towards which our reality, left to itself, tends. The way to combat the catastrophe is through acts which interrupt this drifting towards the catastrophic “fixed point” and take upon themselves the risk of giving birth to some radical Otherness “to come.” We can see here how ambiguous the slogan “no future” is: at a deeper level, it does not designate the closure, the impossibility of change, but what we should be striving for – to break the hold of the catastrophic “future” over us and thereby open up the space for something New “to come.”

Based on this distinction, we can see what was the problem with Marx (as well as with the XXth century Left): it was not that Marx was too utopian in his Communist dreams, but that his Communism was too “futural.” What Marx wrote about Plato (Plato’s Republic was not a utopia, but an idealized image of the existing Ancient Greek society), holds for Marx himself: what Marx conceived as Communism remained an idealized image of capitalism, capitalism without capitalism, i.e., expanded self-reproduction without profit and exploitation. This is why we should return from Marx to Hegel, to Hegel’s “tragic” vision of the social process where no hidden teleology is guiding us, where every intervention is a jump into the unknown, where the result always thwarts our expectations. All we can be certain of is that the existing system cannot reproduce itself indefinitely: whatever will come after will not be “our future.” A new Middle East war or an economic chaos or an unheard-of environmental catastrophe can swiftly change the basic coordinates of our predicament. We should fully assume this openness, guiding ourselves on nothing more than ambiguous signs from the future.