Life to come
Challenges, enigmas, change and repetition after crisis

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Chantal Mouffe
Joan Busquets
Ernesto Laclau
Paula Sibilia
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Foreword

A new humanism and multicultural identity
The city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is progressively becoming an internationally-recognised space of knowledge in terms of the state of the era; be it the era of music, art or, in this case, philosophy. And in fact it has become an increasingly important meeting point for European, Latin American and African intellectuals.

This fact is not, actually, a novelty. It constitutes a real manifestation of the cosmopolitan, multicultural, hybrid, cross-border and trans-oceanic dimension of this city at the start of the modern period. At that time, Norman, Breton, Dutch, Genovese, Spanish, Irish, Berber aborigines and Moorish and Jewish minorities built a loosely integrated society that was totally focused on the Atlantic exterior that is the DNI of the Canary Islands’ main city. It was a dimension, however, that, for well-known reasons, faded somewhat after the Spanish Civil War and did not really take off again until the current democracy was instigated, in the last third of the 20th century.

Casa África, la Casa de Colón, The Canary Islands’ Music Festival the Atlantic Centre of Modern Art (CAAM) or the new Atlantic Seminar, an event which, in its most recent and up-coming editions has been closely linked to the city’s Candidature for the 2016 European City of Culture, clearly demonstrate the so-called three-continental nature of the Canary Islands. This is a singular territory that is fully European in social, political, economic and cultural terms, located right next to Africa and enjoys a secular, intense and reviving projection in Latin America. The three-continental dimension, an indisputable historical fact for centuries but one which has also become, over time, a discourse that has, on occasions, lacked solid content, that has lain fallow, is once again thriving. And we should bear in mind that it is doing so in a very different historical context: at the end of what the experts consider to be the first stage of globalization, which has ended with the systematic crisis in which we are currently immersed.

And the social profiles of this post-Berlin, globalised world in crisis in which the Islands, Europe, find themselves, are those of an Old Continent in the midst of a reformulation of its very identity. An Old Continent that is beginning to offer some essential aspects that formed part of the Canary Island society back in the 16th century, as a minute but expressive sample of the stron-
gest kind: a hybrid, multi-cultural Europe, in which the border, as a meeting place between different worlds, is no longer limited to the external geographical boundary that shapes it, but rather has become a category and a factor of internal order. So this new multicultural European identity has already undergone its own historical distillation in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, a city that has always professed what some people call an overseas Europism and whose geostrategic logic has led it to pave the way, in some aspects, in the breaking down of classic relations between the centre and the periphery in a number of perspectives, another sign of our times.

It is no coincidence, then, that some months ago world-famous philosophers such as the Italian Gianni Vattimo, the London-based Argentinian Ernesto Laclau or the French-Belgian Chantal Mouffe met up in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria with major names in a number of disciplines, such as the Catalan architect and urbanist Joan Busquets, a lecturer at Harvard and protagonist of the 1992 Olympic Barcelona; the Argentinian writer and psychoanalyst (originally from the Canary Islands) Jorge Alemán, a leading figure in his subject in the Spanish-speaking world; the Brazilian anthropologist Paula Sibilia or the Spanish film critic Javier Tolentino to talk about Life to come. Challenges, enigmas, change and repetition after the crisis, in what was the third edition of the Atlantic Seminar. Neither is it any coincidence that the original and even eccentric – not in the sense of strange but rather of outside the centre – nature of frontier-city and the neoperipheral European quality of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria lie at the heart of its candidature for the European City of Culture in 2016.

And at this point I would like to stress the importance of two questions: the first is the imperious need for younger generations to get involved and express what their enigmas and challenges are in the context of this globalisation, in the face of which, as Chantal Mouffe so rightly points out, we have to elaborate an effective alternative to rampant neoliberalism.

The second is to address the fact that, in the building of alternatives, beyond the crisis, as Gianni Vattimo underlined, and given the relevance today of thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, we should propose that the world and life itself be contemplated with an awareness of the values
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Foreword

In the photo on the left, and from left to right, Paula Sibilia, Jorge Alemán, Ernesto Laclau, Antonio G. González, Gianni Vattimo, Chantal Mouffe, Joan Busquets and Javier Tolentino, during the closure of the III Atlantic Seminar in March 2010 in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Above, top, Vattimo (l) and Mouffe; in the centre, Busquets (l) and Tolentino; and below, Sibilia (l), Alemán (c) and Laclau during the same act. Photos: Nayra Bello O’Shanahan y Victor M. Cruz.
that in the history of Humanity have progressively shaped and constitute what we still call humanism. This concept would appear to be classic and has recently been questioned, particularly since Auschwitz, where faith in the idea of human progress and perfectibility was severely shaken from which we have not yet fully recovered. But we are talking here about an awareness of values that need to be perfected.

In our post-war society, in this life accompanied by an international order in crisis that will require us to build a replacement, these situations will, above all, continue to exist; this economic crisis, this enormous farce of an international financial order, require constant values that will silently help to forge the future to come. That is my standpoint. And, at this point, I think it is pertinent to underline, equally, that there is still an excess of Euro-centrism in Europe. I don’t know whether in Latin America the south also has more influence than the centre, leading us to forget what the periphery can contribute. I’m not talking here about the Canary Islands, but, for example, the case of Scandinavia. I think it is very important to spend some time considering and reflecting on the reason why the crisis in the Scandinavian countries has not been as dramatic as it is in the rest of the continent. And that we ask ourselves why Finland has an education system that appears to be perfect and why we haven’t copied it. Meanwhile, they continue to believe in it, they haven’t got bored of it, they have a sense of happiness, although those who from a Christian perspective aim to discredit that Scandinavian world always commit the sin of brandishing the statistics of suicide. I think that that culture, that civilization, which we tend to forget about, has some interesting aspects for us to bear in mind.

Lastly, I should point out that this book is, of course, an up-dated, extended version written by the speakers who gave the conferences and participated in the debates on the post-crisis situation and its main challenges held during the third Atlantic Seminar that the City Council of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is now pleased to publish in digital and printed formats and that, for the first time, is available in Spanish and English.

I would finally like to thank the participants for their contributions. They represent a timely, effective and revealing combination of figures of international
standing with incisive intellectual starting points, approaches and challenges that they addressed here in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, which, in turn, offers an outstanding example of a city that has brought itself up-to-date and is currently immersed in a leap in scale. In its role as the promoter of this edition, together with the seminar of the same name, Life to Come, the City Council of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria aims to do justice to an island society that, as I have explained, has always been sensitive to what happens elsewhere and, consequently, has paid particular attention to worldwide phenomena. This book is, then, a contribution made by my Atlantic city to the general course of the era.

Jerónimo Saavedra Acevedo
Mayor of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
Introduction

Live, given the real
The first decade of the 21st century has concluded with the world immersed in the worst crisis in the last one hundred years. We could say that it is the balance of the first stage of globalisation, a period that started when the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War ended just some twenty years ago. However, the economic-financial dimension of this first global Crisis is but a symptom of something deeper, of a real crisis of an era. The phenomenon with which the current situation is so often compared, particularly in terms of its scope, is the crack of 1929, a tectonic movement that shook the period between the two World Wars to the core. They were dizzy zero-grade times, with long tentacles and a brutal dénouement: the rise of Nazism, fascism and Stalinism in Europe, with their extermination camps, and finally the Second World War, a blood-bath that divided the world into two blocks.

There are currently five different types of crises interwoven. In the foreground: the economic-financial crisis and the food, energy, climate-environmental and demographic crises. And this interweaving takes place in the information era, a time that refracts stabilities, does not take routines in account and in which the meaning of significations changes the whole time.

A second level of upheaval, however, is inscribed in the material substrate of these crises, what they actually entail, in an unprecedented social and cultural context. And it is leading to a breakdown of what sociologists call the institutional programme. Basic social institutions – family, school, politics, justice, work, museum, nation-states and, consequently, power and knowledge - appear to be inevitably blurred and fragile, liquid, even in their new forms. The very idea of the community is falling apart and in the end it is the subject him/herself who is in a state of crisis. This is an unexpected outcome given that the triumph of liberal democracy in the world after the Cold War heralded a new Sunday in life, a time of consensus capable of dissolving antagonisms. On the contrary, these two decades of globalisation have accelerated what is turning out to be the culmination of the crisis of representations that emerged at the end of the 1960s.

However, globalisation has not ceased to intervene in the world after the era of disenchantment. It continues to hold sway in politics, material exchanges between the economy and trade have not ceased, indeed their pace
has increased with the production of science, technology, architecture, philosophy, psychoanalysis, art, films, literature, music, and so on. But, at the same time, we are constantly waiting for something to happen. It is as if, in some way, these disciplines and practices have lost their relevance and capacity, a kind of threshold of what has been termed Unease in Culture.

Anyway, this zero grade, this lack of “the real” that each serious crisis sends us back to, is also the condition of the possibility offered by crises as a mechanism for the production of life. The object of the III Seminar is to consider the subjects of the 21st Century, tackle its inevitable cocktail of change and repetition and, in short, examine in depth the horizon of knowledge, creation and power. It also aims to produce a useful and applicable reflection on the urgent and profound updating of public policies for the upcoming decades. The intention here is clear: to build a global innovative strategy of changes in the world based on the idea that the interests of the social majority should be paramount.

Antonio G. González
Director of the Atlantic Seminar
Gianni Vattimo

Becoming what one was

(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)
Gianni Vattimo

He has been one of the major figures in the world of philosophy since the 1980s. Outstanding author of post-modern schools of thought, he is known as the philosopher of pensiero debole (weak thought), a theoretical supposition that Vattimo himself links closely to the emergence of the mediatic, multimedia, apparently transparent society. His prolific work, among which we can find real philosophical best-sellers, is a benchmark for the analysis of the general course of events over these years. Vattimo studied philosophy at the universities of Turin and Heidelberg. He is a disciple of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and has been one of the renovators of the hermeneutic school of thought in philosophy. In 1964 he started teaching at the Philosophy Faculty in Turin. Clearly influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche, on whom he is the leading European expert as well as translator into Italian, he has also been a university lecturer in Los Angeles and New York, and is also doctor honoris causa from numerous universities all over the world. He retired last year as Professor in Theoretical Philosophy in his home city and he continues to lecture and give talks all over the world. As a politician, he was an Italian member of the European Parliament for the Democrats of the Left, a group he left in 2004. Over recent years, Vattimo, a practising Catholic and gay militant, has concentrated on reflecting, in terms of political philosophy, on the renovation of the Left. His innumerable works include The existence, the history, and the language of Heidegger (1963), The subject and the mask. Nietzsche and the Problem of Liberation (1974), The adventure of difference: Philosophy after Nietzsche and Heidegger (1993), Weak Thought (1983), The end of modernity. Nihilism and hermeneutics in Post-modern culture (1985), The transparent society (1989), Ethics of interpretation (1989), Beyond the subject. Nietzsche, Heidegger and hermeneutics (1992), Believe (1999), Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy (1997), Dialogue with Nietzsche. Essays 1961-2000 (2008), After Christianity (2002), Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics and Law (2004) o Ecce comu. Come si ri-diventa ciò che si era (2007). He is currently working with Santiago Zabala on Comunismo Hermenêutico [Hermeneutic Communism].
A.G.: A few days ago [18th March, 2010] an intervention of yours in the European Parliament was posted on YouTube. The political Vattimo, a member of Parliament for Italy of Values, to some extent putting into action your ontology of current affairs, your ontology of the present, which is what you have been devoting your philosophical work to lately. You were warning specifically about the European inobservance of a European Union presided over by Spain, in terms of the respect for human rights in Latin-American countries with which agreements have been signed. For instance, Colombia, where the paramilitary forces are killing trade unionists on a daily basis, and others, Guatemala I believe ... it was a very political intervention

Gianni Vattimo: Yes, well. Guatemala is on the list because there are indeed problems regarding previous agreements with Guatemala. It is not an issue directly related to human rights. Honduras and Colombia are two states in which Europe should intervene somewhat more strongly before signing privileged association agreements. In Colombia, in fact,
a trade unionist is killed more or less once a day and in Honduras there is still a coup d'état government because these elections have not been as democratic as we thought. These are ways of legitimising governments that we say do not deserve any such legitimisation in terms of human rights. The danger is that precisely Spain, with its socialist government, holding as it does the rotating Presidency of the European Council, wants to sign these agreements because they will then count as a result of the Presidency; but more care should be taken in this regard. Some suggest that very deep Spanish economic interests still exist in Colombia and some say that Spain takes advantage of this situation. We should leave these particular economic interests to one side. The problem is that in fact what we know in the European Parliament is that not everyone shares this attitude. Paradoxically, the right (wing) of the European Parliament agrees with the Spanish Socialist government on this point. Whenever the Right agrees with the Left, we should be suspicious because it may be that we are getting something wrong, I'm not sure. The issue of Latin-America is of considerable interest to me, and not only because I am the Vice-President of Eurolat, which is an interparliamentary assembly with 75 Members (of Parliament) from Latin-America and 75 from the European parliament. This assembly does not have much power but it is a sounding box for problems that can then be proposed and addressed at levels where decisions are taken.

A.G.: Despite this call to order to the Spanish Government, the last time you were in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, two years ago, you spoke in favour of Zapatero. You thought that, although no-one could do much in the economic-financial sphere, at least he was capable of taking decisions in the area of civil liberties, that he upheld the spirit of the Left, something that you didn’t see as feasible in your country.

G.V.: That was my hope. I also had hopes for Prodi’s government in Italy, although the last one has only lasted a very short time. He wasn’t able to change many of the economic structures because we are dependent on numerous international factors that oblige us to be a capitalist state, at the end of the day. But at least he could have maintained the spirit of the Left in the sense of some symbolic measures, such as homo-
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Gianni Vattimo

sexual weddings, civil rights in general, etc., that would have enabled him not to lose the majority. At some point, Prodi lost it, I don’t know if only for that reason. To a degree, the Left in Italy is somewhat worse off than before the two Prodi legislatures. In the worst-case scenario, it may still get worse.

A.G.: Within the approach of this seminar, we sustain that this first global crisis is, in fact, a crisis of an era. Because of its material substrate as such, the facts, but also because it is inscribed in a specific framework. On the one hand, the era of communication; on the other, a complete breakdown of the institutional programme: the basic social institutions have fallen to pieces completely and, as a result, the operational and symbolic armour of “the social”. Do you think that this is a crisis of an era? How deep do you think it goes? What are we actually living through?

G.V.: Yes, we are indeed in the midst of a crisis of an era because social life is undergoing tremendous transformations. Today, for example, in Laclau and De Mouffe’s presentations, mention has been made of the capitalist society, after Fordism, after the Fordist factories, after class consciousness, etc. This is important. I think that perhaps capitalism is able to develop in this somewhat suicidal manner as the recent crisis has shown because there is a transformation in social life in the sense of neutralisation. This is the term that I learnt to use thanks to Carl Smith and which cannot be used without referring to him. For example, in one of the recent election processes in Italy, the two antagonists reproached each other, saying that they had copied the other’s programme. Can you imagine anything more absurd in an election battle? No, you have copied our electoral programme and nobody thought it a scandal. It seemed that the norm was that everyone always tries to do the same things, but we on the Left are a little less dishonest, less corrupt and the others are more so. But this is an argument that is also used
by those who claim to be more religious, and that others are less so. It’s terrible. There is a neutralising effect in the mass media, which are clearly not shared property. In Italy, we have state television channels that depend on the government that depends on Berlusconi. He is the owner of other private TV channels, a huge advertising agency that controls many of daily newspapers, because if they lose the agency’s advertising they lose a lot of money. It’s all this type of problem. I think that there’s an atmosphere of neutralisation, which to a certain extent I have taken to be somewhat physiological because if someone asks you if you prefer to live in a society of conflict or harmony, you say I prefer harmony. This is the idea that the international waves of violence can be overcome by waves of purely economic struggle. As an Italian citizen, I’m not bothered about whether some Italian banks are bought out by Spanish banks. It’s like fights between groups of leaders, of share-holders, it’s nothing to do with me. That’s why I thought it was somewhat physiological, but I no longer think so. I thought there was something physiological in this neutralisation of conflicts before I listened to Ernesto Laclau. Now I am more in favour of a society with more conflict. A society without conflict is a society that is prepared to accept a softer, less violent type of fascism, but that is fascism nonetheless. It is always totalitarianism. During times of fascism, public places always bore written warnings: no blaspheming, no spitting and no talking politics. That is what is happening quite a lot now in the West; people are always talking and arguing about the administration. This is not so healthy because the administration is never neutral. The world is divided into administrators and administrated.

A.G.: Over the last twenty years the impression caused by the falling of the Berlin Wall is that a liberal democracy was finally going to be capable of organising life by consensus and dissolve all antagonisms. As we’ve seen, this has not happened.

G.V.: Yes, the dissolution of antagonisms has been a constituent part of things social, and has even been considered a prerequisite for the drawing up of constitutions, and will always form part, for example, of all those very legitimate discourses about non-violence. Not long ago an extreme left-wing Italian politician, Bertinotti, declared that he was not
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(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)
Gianni Vattimo
A full house for Vattimo’s first intervention, held in dialogue format. | Photo: V.M.C.
in favour of violence, because the Russian Revolution had been very violent, and I wonder when he is going to declare that even the French Revolution was too violent, i.e. what the history books designate as the beginning of modernity was actually a violent act that we declare that we do not share. I think this is going too far. I think that Habermas’ real problem lies in instituting society with free dialogue between the interlocutors. It’s not that easy. For example, you could persuade the King of France to hand over the constitution without killing anyone, but what about the Queen? In recent years, I have tried to explain this from a Heideggerian perspective. I discovered that you can’t use free dialogue in order to articulate more philosophically the emergence of a situation of free dialogue. When they killed the King, the French revolutionaries didn’t hold a referendum, simply because there were no referendum laws, there was no constitution. This worries me considerably, because according to the rationalist view of a society that is developed just as economic, capitalist freedom is developed, democracy is absolutely Utopian. Not even Utopian, it is unrealistic. It cannot come to pass because it represents a possibility for social development where there is an order that is actually not disputed. The poor shouldn’t make revolutions because if they do, they’ll end up worse off; let them accept the existing order and not try to change it. This is a problem, although it’s always represented as something obvious.

A.G.: This crisis could be portrayed as the culmination of the sunset of those representations that started at the end of the 1960s. This sunset is closely related to your philosophical work, which has gone straight to the heart of the matter, of the dismantling of the major narratives of the Modern period. However, you have now decided to take up again two, not just one, militancies. Christianism and communism, but in a novel, post-modern, post-metaphysical, weak way (in the sense that this latter term has been given by so-called debolismo, its offspring). This return to action and to beliefs that you are taking on now with this first global crisis appears to be a way of ensuring that your dismantling of metaphysics doesn’t degenerate into nihilism, hard-line conservatism and market relativism.

G.V.: Since 1968 in Italy, given the lack of success of the revolution, some
retired to build and live in communes which were subsequently dissolved because no-one ever knew who had to do the washing-up. The women didn’t accept the traditional division of work. You cook and we’ll do politics. Those that didn’t retire to private communes took the direction of the armed struggle during this period. I wasn’t admitted because my mother was a widow and I don’t know how to handle a weapon. I didn’t have the slightest vocation for violent revolution, I wasn’t remotely prepared. Finally, I learnt about this experience through people I know who have taken the route of the armed struggle, of clandestinity, and in the end I realised that it entailed a whole rhetoric of sacrifice, of martyrdom, that as a student of Nietzsche, I couldn’t share. At that time, I started to develop the idea of a Nietzschean ultra-man, who instead of directly participating in political games, built an “autonomy”. “Autonomies” are more or less anarchistic groups, who avoid social observation whether it be of production or consolation, who represent a core, the beginnings of the transformation of the revolution. I was on that side. This gave me the chance to develop weak thought as the destruction of the major metanarratives. However, I have my doubts about the destruction of dominant ideologies, because the dissolution of the existing order does not solve all problems. I am not against seizing power by violent means, it is just that all the violence in our world gives rise to an increase in violence by those in power. If we look, for example, at what happened in Genoa in 2001, the result was one of stronger repression rather than a contribution to social transformation. I am a pragmatic believer in non-violence because I think that today immediate armed violence, at least in western societies with NATO, the European Union, etc. is impossible. The French Revolution, today, would be unthinkable. The revolutionaries kill the king, and immediately, England, NATO, the EU and everyone else takes action. It’s a case of inventing a means that takes this entire general framework into consideration.

I am not sure at the moment about the destruction of the major metanarratives, not everything can be solved by dissolving the existing order; but this democracy is unreal, free dialogue will not, by itself, ensure the emergence of a situation of free dialogue.
Toda a frescura Yoggi, agora em Zero.
A.G.: Well, as you have decided to go back to being what you were, although in a slightly different way, let’s run through a brief overview to discover exactly what you were and then what you are in the process of becoming. First, for Vattimo, there were two big names: Nietzsche and Heidegger. Let’s look at the first of the two, in his most deconstructive dimension. In *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche says that “truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents”. The lack of basic underlying principles and the destruction of the myth of origin. In *Aurora* he adds: “there is something altogether different behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms”. So what we have are not truths vs. lies, but conflicts between interpretations. What does that Nietzsche mean today?

G.V.: It’s a question I always ask myself. I have invented different interpretations of Nietzsche. As proof that philosophy is not a science of eternal truths, but an ideological critical analysis of daily life in many senses. I give philosophy a wide range of names, some of which are insults. One is the “ontology of current affairs”, which is a term used by Foucault in his later writings, although I’m not sure to what extent he would view it in the same way I do. Foucault thought that the ontology of current affairs was like a kind of historical autobiography, a way of knowing where one had come from. I think of it as a study of the sense of the being in the current situation. I think, on the one hand, that Nietzsche’s current affairs consists of that unwrapping of any visions of the being as something that is structurally given, something substantial, because if you see what Heidegger, calls metaphysics, and possibly what Nietzsche calls metaphysics, although he doesn’t have a definition that is as clear-cut Heidegger’s, it’s the same thing. Metaphysics is the idea that there is a being on whom we depend, from whom we are created, that we form part of, but who is not here. Who exists

*One interpretation of the Nietzsche’s eternal return is an ideal of existence and essence of what happens; he rejected the postponing of plenitude for the future. A further idea is that knowledge is only objective in the framework of a specific period*
yet cannot take any particular form. What we do in history can't be understood along these lines. All discussions of freedom as opposed to predestination are linked to this interpretation. The Christian God, up to a point, has been the god of the Greeks, i.e. the pure act of Aristotle etc., in which it is very difficult to perceive anything new. Now Nietzsche prepares Heidegger in this sense and rejects any idea of a given being once and for all, even through the idea of the eternal return, but is a self-contradictory idea, like many of Nietzsche’s.

A.G.: At the same time, there is an action programme in Nietzsche. He rejects history, proffering objections in the name of life. He longs for man freed from the morals of the herd. For him, the unity of being and evolution is the highest possible form of what he calls the will to power, the decision that institutes the eternal return and the ultraman. The interesting part of Vattimo’s interpretation is the idea of the Nietzschian eternal return as a state to be instituted, something to be built. Of course, you warn, in The subject and the mask that it is precisely for this reason that Heidegger sees Nietzsche as an event in the history of the being characterised by subjectivism and by voluntarism.

G.V.: Yes. In Nietzsche this idea of eternal return is an idea that tries to present itself as physical and scientific, because he says that just as material is finite, time is infinite; and just as it is impossible to imagine that material configurations have not yet taken place once, everything can return. All this seems to me to be somewhat akin to contemporary science. If you think of the results of astronomy, of cosmology (after Einstein), we reach the idea of an eternal sphere where nothing gets lost. If we invented a very powerful telescope some 2000 light years from here and we could see the Earth we would probably see Jesus in Palestine. But the fact is that even the speed of light is limited. This does not offend me it’s just that I can’t think it through clearly. The other interpretation of the eternal return, which is how Nietzsche himself explains his idea, is the question of how happy you have to be to accept that this moment could be repeated eternally, which is like saying the eternal return is like an ideal of coincidence, of the existence and essence of what is happening. This idea of plenitude, to be taken as a
regulating idea in the world, will always be present in the world; this is why Nietzsche seemed to me to be reconcilable with an attitude of martyrdom, of the revolutionary. Nietzsche was a bit Marcusian, i.e. he no longer accepted the idea of displacement to the future of plenitude, we want it now, immediately, and if this is not possible, everything has just been a deception on the part of the powerful, of ecclesiastic, social and other powers. This was one of the senses of the eternal return. The other sense is the idea that knowledge is never objective. It is only objective within the framework of an era and this also implies criteria of verification or falsification, criteria that were never built on the bases of a different paradigmatic framework, but rather we find them in our existence. I always give this example to lighten up this discourse. Is there a vampire amongst us? Let’s have a look. It is a pointless question because we don’t have the criteria needed to define a vampire, but at the end of the 17th century there were police teams, obviously from the region of Transylvania, the homeland of the vampires, who officially decided to open up tombs to see if fresh blood emerged or not: if there was no fresh blood, it was not a vampire. How was the belief in vampires lost? As the result of some crucial experiment? I don’t think so. It was lost just as the belief in witches was lost, like the belief in many other things that were socially formalised at the time. We no longer hold these beliefs, just as we have lost many others. But the paradigm of the truth is one that we can modify and perhaps it is transformed, as stated by Thomas Kuhn, the inventor of this theory of paradigms. We move from one paradigm to the other for example from the Ptolemaic system to that of Copernicus without it having been clearly proved that one was right and the other wrong. There is a beautiful sentence in Nietzsche that says: we don’t have to try to give reasons for giving up a certain theory because we didn’t give any when we took it up. It is all pretty well linked to our existence; they are fractional structures that allow us to change.

A.G.: To close the chapter on Nietzsche, you have pointed out that his work is basically a reaction, in fact, compared to the two major subjects of philosophy of the 19th Century: the reciprocal principle between truth and freedom, in Fichte, and the possibility of absolute knowledge, in Hegel. And in Beyond good and evil he says categorically that to perish for absolute knowledge
Vattimo during his intervention, in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. | Photo: V.M.C.
III Atlantic Seminar

Becoming what one was
(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)

Gianni Vattimo
Becoming what one was
(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)

Gianni Vattimo

could well constitute part of the fundamental principles of the being. How could we relate this warning to the state of scientific knowledge, to neuroscience, for example, in its arrogance? Could we perish as a result of scientific-technical progress?

G.V.: The point is that the very notion of the absolute is one of power rather than of knowledge. This is indeed interesting for me. Absolutism is always about someone who considers himself in abstract terms, not linked to any rules. Absolute knowledge also had that connotation of sovereignty in Heidegger; eventually, I will realise everything. To realise means to take possession of something. I think that today the problem of science and scientific technology is also a problem of conception of the effective power in society. I am against genetically modified organisms. We clearly have no respect for nature as it was before because everything is already pretty modified; agriculture is all modified. These are objects that cannot reproduce. In India, lots of peasants committed suicide because they couldn’t buy the new seeds. That worried me. Habermas is against genetic manipulation because he respects nature. This is what the Pope believes in when he recommends Habermas’ book, and for this reason Habermas should be suspicious and stop publishing it. On the other hand, Habermas is right in a kind of democratic liberal way because genetic manipulation is not carried out in an ideal laboratory. It is done in labs that are subsidised by powers, by economic societies or companies. We are running the risk that patents will be taken out on life, on parts of our body, etc. This is a problem. It is always a problem belonging to the social domain, not just to knowledge. I don’t believe in objective truth because I don’t think that it can be presented without a power having recommended it, without a consensus from Washington or something similar. I obviously think this is something that needs to be discussed.

A.G.: Il pensiero debole was published by Feltrinelli in 1983. A couple of years ago you said that although the idea of weak thought was, initially, more or less that of the multiplicity of descriptive languages of reality, akin to Wittgenstein’s plays on language, it then developed in the sense of an awareness of the progressive weakness of the notion of the being. Before, reality was immobile, as it was interpreted by a unified power; today, this is no longer the
case. It is manipulated and the being can only be given in its interpretations. Based on a specific interpretation of Heidegger and of Nietzsche, as well as of René Girard, you thought that weakening should also represent an emancipating thread in this history of the being, as it could weaken our power structures. What would fit of these new approaches to emancipation today?

G.V.: Emancipation means everything that philosophers have promised. They promised improved knowledge of reality because afterwards they would be freer and therefore able to work on reality. Aristotle himself, in one of the first books on metaphysics, talks of the fact that we cannot know everything. This is obvious, but we can know about everything and take possession of it through basic principles. If I know these principles I can, in some way, dominate reality. Emancipation is the traditional dream of philosophy: I promise you more happiness if you follow or share what I teach you. Plato did this, as well as Aristotle. What might emancipation be? Philosophy thought of emancipation as the realization of a given model. It is a model that is given from origin.

As in Marx himself, the thought of an originary society, that was harmonious, not divided, not in conflict, etc. There is always an approach based on the history of salvation. Joaquin de Flores’ idea interests me a great deal when he talks about the age of the Holy Spirit, that is the age of spiritual reading, of a sacred, free, transformative reading of the Christian message, and so on. Apart from all this, the idea of emancipation was always founded on the aim of looking for an originary model that had to be rebuilt. For me, the only possibility of emancipation is the idea of a reduction in violence and not that of the realisation of an originary model. This is, for me, a very important shift because it involves a political ideal that is not simply a liberal idea because reducing violence also means reducing hunger, for example. If we are to reduce hunger or the social domination of the poor,
Becoming what one was
(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)
Gianni Vattimo
Reading that persists. Nayra Bello O’Shanahan, Lisbon 2010.
etc. something positive has to be done. Weakening is a form of emancipation, i.e. relations between people are not initially harmonious and subsequently violent. They are always violent to begin with because they are like the survival instinct. When corrupt politicians are unmasked, what do they say? In Italy they say: I have a family. Why does a Christian reject that idea? Because they have the idea that the world was created by god, who was perfect and then went rotten as a consequence of original sin. Agnostics in Antiquity thought that the world was created by the devil and god just limited the damage. It’s not so strange. I’m not an agnostic but I don’t think that god has produced this whole machine that is the Universe. That is why I can be an evolutionist, I can believe in the Big Bang, which is the consequence of a variation. This variation as it was produced. In this sense, I remain religious.

In the USA my friends tell me that their kids take medicine in order to be able to cope with the pressure of social pressure. There are reasons for imagining communism on Lenin’s terms: economic development and a great deal of social participation

A.G.: Let us return to your religious slant and parallel interest in the ontology of the present, that gives rise to the political act. In principle, this would give the impression that you felt *horror vacui* at some point in the face of this absence of founding principles and tried to set a limit to the interpretation, an obligatory outer limit. For you the limit lies in love, which you call charity, which is the community. This is the real meaning of the being in Vattimo. A godless religion is thus merged with a postmodern or liberal communism, freed from all the metaphysics of objective truths. “We need a weakened Marx to discover the truth about communism without liberal reservations”, you have said. What is that truth? Where does the truth of charity lie? And, on the other hand, is charity the link? Is it the synthesis of this political-religious fusion?

G.V.: The synthesis lies in my placing of charity in the place of truth. In Heidegger’s sense, the truth is only given within a cultural historical opening that I share. In order to share this, I have to feel and show solidarity with others. When Wittgenstein talks of plays on language, why should I have to participate in the plays on language of my society instead of talking a
completely different language? There is no imperative. There is a problem in that if I call milk stones, I will be given stones when I ask for a milky coffee. The reason is pragmatic. Sharing a language is a human participation, which is not demonstrated by any tangible proof. I have to love my neighbour, but why? I love someone I like, but there are others I don’t love because they are ugly, bad, aggressive or Berlusconian. There is no demonstrative reason for respecting others. I think that this is a derivation of the Christian message that has been generally misinterpreted even by the church: when the church undertook the crusades, it did not respect charity because it aimed to kill the infidels. Are we not heirs to all of this? As we are heirs to it all, let us discover the meaning of charity. Today, as we live in the post-modern world that Nietzsche described as the world of the will to power, etc., we have discovered that we cannot live in society without being charitable or showing solidarity because the world is increasingly integrated. The realisation of this individual capacity for connection with others is what Nietzsche called the ultra-man.

A.G.: Well, that is a proposal. That attitude towards others alludes inevitably to becoming aware and the act of will. However, all the experience of the modern period shows that these are not very reliable, in operational terms, and above all that they don’t last long.

G.V.: Above all today we cannot preach solidarity on the basis of a purely rational argumentation because nobody likes living in a world of domination, although if I were among the dominators, it might very well be to my liking. There is even a contradiction in this because if I live in a world of dominators and dominated, if I fall in love with someone on the other side I can’t go out at night with him or her. Even the dominated have some reasons to prefer a more open world. I think basically that it is a problem of what I share naturally. Benedetto Croce said that we can’t not call ourselves Christians, i.e. we cannot think without all this tradition. This means that I don’t have to convert Muslims, Buddhists or people who think differently from me, because I have no intention towards universality. I, as part of this western Judo-Christian tradition can only think in these more or less transformed, secularised biblical terms. This seems to me to be the only reason to continue to be religious
From here to the sky. Bello O’Shanahan, Brasilia 2010.
and Christian, not papist. The problem with the Pope is that he has authority. If the gospel were preached with no aim to create a Vatican state, a concordat with Italy with economic privileges for ecclesiastic institutes, etc, it would have a much greater following.

A.G.: Another of your convictions is that “normal” democracy, in order to survive, needs “deep injections of subversivism”. You allude to a pressure outside Parliament that prevents the political system from closing down and grinding to a halt with its internal games. What is needed, and here you coincide with other speakers at the seminar, such as Laclau and Mouffe, is a certain degree of non-institutional politics, but without violence. Your non-violence has an ethical component but it is also a product of a simple calculation of forces, as, in your opinion, it would only lead to the system being reinforced. Of course, you don’t give any clues, you merely appeal to having “subversive” creativity and fantasy …

G.V.: The formal democracy that we know in the West is on a suicidal course. Who wins the US elections? The candidate with the most money, who has collected the most money. Obama says that he has raised his funds from small contributions. That may or may not be the case. I never believe these things much. Formal democracy as it is in the west is a major deception. This democracy allows a tolerable slavery in many senses. We are highly conditioned by economic powers, those of the big families, but in the end it is always better than fascism, which kills us directly. How long will it be better for? Possibly until once the planet’s resources have disappeared, when there will be wars over commodities such as clean air and water. This is the direction in which dominant capitalism is pushing us; it is an idea of indefinite development that always wants to produce more objects, more sales, etc. This is the gross national product. It could grow enormously if the French sold all their museums’ paintings. That would constitute major economic progress. The same could be said of Italy and other countries. If we take this index as decisive, the outcome is terrible because it condemns us all to a wild reproduction of productive life, of production and more production. The recently-developed financial economy is but the maximum expression of the paradox. Not the production of goods from goods but the pro-
duction of money through money. It is the height of an unrealism that kills people because the crisis gives rise to unemployment. It is quite complicated. I think of weak thought through a reduction of the peremptoriness of principles, the reduction of the power of the powerful, a more friendly society. Someone said that the USA has exported unhappiness to the whole world. I don’t know if that’s true or not, but I suspect it probably is because when I go to the States and I meet up with friends who emigrated there who tell me that their children have started to take medicine because that’s what they’ve learnt at school. Medicine for your nerves, to withstand the pressure of social competition. Goodness me! So there are indeed reasons to imagine a society that I call communist because I return to Lenin’s original definition of communism, which was electrification plus soviet power. Technological economic development plus popular power in all possible forms.

A.G.: You have established that the limit of formal democracy as a bearable system could be the definitive exploitation of the last-remaining natural resources and that, from then on, we would have a major problem. Two years ago, as the crisis was starting, I interviewed you. I suggested that in the seventies, a lesser crisis produced phenomena such as the Red Brigades, for example. We called it “I thought that this crisis would lead to social protest, but the degree of resignation is huge”. Do you think that resignation has remained constant?

G.V.: I think that when we talked about this point, it was just as the crisis was beginning. Now, for example, in Italy, Berlusconi and the forces of the Right want to make us believe that the crisis is over. But living in the north west of Italy (Piedmont), what I see is that industries continue to shut down, unemployment continues to grow. I don’t like the fact that this crisis is more serious. We are today discovering the effects of the crisis. People’s resignation and patience are coming to an end, it is unusual for people to put up with so much misery, so many negative transformations in their existence, without getting angry. The fight is between neutralising normalisation and a growth in social conflict. The idea of social conflict is something that is rejected a great deal because I like living in a society where you don’t have to go about armed.
Two other shots of Gianni Vattimo. | Photos: N.B.O.
I don’t know if in the end, this ideal of society is a deadly ideal. In Europe, people talk about guaranteeing social stability. Here, social stability is of no interest. If I was born poor, stability doesn’t interest me, I want transformation. This is an idea that I’ve taken from Walter Benjamin. Those with power think that history is rational because it has led to them, but the poor and those without power cannot think of history as rational or reasonable. They just want to change it. The middle class is the worst, as they determine the electoral affirmation of conservative powers. Laclau’s floating signifier. As the middle class, I instinctively feel the need to live in a stable society. As a Christian, I have to be communist and as a member of the middle-class I can worry about what will happen in ten, fifteen or twenty years when western government will be preparing plans not for non-interstate wars but to overcome guerrillas at home. The weapons that sell the most today are not atomic bombs: they are in Korea, Iran, Israel, USA, etc. The light arms that are used to destroy local public movements are of interest. This is what I think I should bear in mind: a future that, if it continues down the limitless path of capitalist development, is going to be an unbearable path for everyone, including this wretched middle class of which I am a part. All of this will come into my next book, co-authored by Santiago Zabala, entitled *Comunismo Hermenéutico* [Hermeneutic Communism].
Chantal Mouffe

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A Belgian political theorist, she is one of the most prestigious contemporary post-structural philosophers. She holds a degree from the Catholic University of Louvain, the University of Paris and the University of Essex, and she currently lectures in Political Theory at the University of Westminster (London). She is also the main figure in her Centre for the Study of Democracy. She was the programme director at the very influential Collège International de Philosophie in Paris between 1989 and 1995. This school was founded in 1983 by Jacques Derrida and François Châtelet, among others. She has led research at the universities of Harvard, Cornell, California, the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton University and at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Among Mouffe’s theoretical concerns, those subjects that deal with “the political”, such as the nature of politics, the destiny of sovereignty, post-essentialist tendencies in contemporary philosophy, political liberalism, the criticism of rationalism and of political passions, feminism and the future of democracy and of citizenship and citizens, are perhaps the most outstanding. She also reflects on antagonisms, insofar as they are political, as a key to the very existence of society and social concerns as a whole. Mouffe is also currently concentrating on the role the surge of right-wing populism in Europe plays or could play in a multi-polar world. As editor she has been responsible for Gramsci and Marxist Theory (1979), Dimensions of Radical Democracy, Pluralism, Citizenship, Community (1992), Deconstruction and Pragmatism (1996) and The Challenge of Carl Schmitt (1999). Also, apart from the book that now has a cult following: Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (1985), written with Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe has written The Return of the Political (1993), The Democratic Paradox (2003) and On the Political (2005).
he question I’d like to address in this presentation concerns the most appropriate type of criticism for addressing the situation we are in now. In approaching this question, the first thing we have to do is to decide what kind of criticism we are going to take into consideration. There are, of course, many different ways of understanding the nature of criticism, and the grammars corresponding to each one are also very wide-ranging. Should we address the activity of criticism in terms of judgment or in terms of practice? Is it, as is often stated, a self-conscious act linked to the Enlightenment, a characteristic of modernity? These are questions that lead us to deal with the subject in very different ways. Even more so, as Michel Foucault correctly pointed out, given that criticism cannot be defined in isolation from its objects, and consequently it is condemned to dispersion. If we had to restrict the object of our research to social criticism, this would limit the field of possible meanings; but it would not prevent us from coming across crucial controversies. If we consider, on the one hand, Jürgen Habermas, who argues that social criticism depends in some way on the theory of social criticism – the theory of
communicative action – that provides the basis on which it is possible to draw strong normative judgments; and, on the other, Foucault, who thinks of criticism in terms of a practice of resistance.

My objective in this text will be very concrete. I will only address the field of social criticism, and specifically the relationship between social criticism and radical politics. My intention is to scrutinize one of the points of view on social criticism that is currently most in fashion, which thinks of radical politics in terms of desertion and exodus, to contrast it with the approach based on the notion of hegemony that I have defended in my work. My intention is to foreground the main differences existing between these two approaches that could be represented schematically in the following way: criticism as withdrawal vs. criticism as commitment, in order to show how they emanate from theoretical frameworks and ways of understanding politics that conflict with each other. I am going to argue that in the last instance the problem of the type of radical politics postulated by postoperaist thinkers such as Antonio Negri and Paolo Virno lies in their erroneous conception of “the political” that does not recognize the ineradicable dimension of antagonism.

**Criticism as withdrawal**

The model of social criticism and radical politics proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire, Multitude* and *Commonwealth* calls for a total break with modernity and the elaboration of a post-modern approach. From their point of view, such a break is necessary as a result of the radical transformations that have taken place in our societies since the last decades of the 20th Century. These changes, which are consequences of the process of globalization and of the transformations in work processes brought about by workers’ struggles, can be summarized, in a general way, as follows:

1-. Sovereignty has adopted a new form, made up of a series of national and supranational organisms united by one sole command logic. This new global type of sovereignty called Empire has replaced the previous state of Imperialism that continued to be based on an attempt by the Nation-states
to extend their sovereignty beyond their frontiers. By contrast with what happened during times of Imperialism, the current Empire does not have a territorial power centre or fixed frontiers: it is a decentralized, deterritorialized command apparatus that is gradually incorporating the whole world within its open, expanding frontiers.

2-. This transformation corresponds, according to them, to the transformation of the capitalist production model, in which the role of the industrial factory has been reduced and priority is currently given to communicative, co-operative, affective work. In the post-modernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends to be produced by means of bio-political production. The Empire currently seeks to apply its command to all aspects of life, thus representing the paradigmatic form of biopower.

3-. We are witnessing a transition that leads us from the “disciplinary society” to the “control society”. The latter is characterized by a new power paradigm. In the disciplinary society, corresponding to the first stage of capitalist accumulation, dominion or command was built by means of a diffuse network of mechanisms or apparatuses that produced and regulated productive customs, habits and practices with the help of disciplinarian institutions such as prisons, factories, psychiatric hospitals or schools. Control society, by contrast, is a society in which the mechanisms of command are immanent to the social field, and are distributed by citizens’ brains and bodies. Social means of integration and exclusion are increasingly interiorized though mechanisms that organize brains and bodies directly. The new power paradigm is of a biopolitical nature. What is directly at stake in this type of power is the production and reproduction of life.

4-. Hardt and Negri state that the notions of "mass intellectuality", "immaterial work" and "general intellect" help us to capture the relationship between social production and biopower. The central role previously played in production by the work force/mass factory labour is increasingly occupied by the intellectual, immaterial and communicative work. The figure of immaterial work involved in communication, cooperation and reproduction of affection occupies an increasingly central position in the capitalist production scheme.
5-. Given that, in the transition towards post-modernity and biopolitical production, the workforce has become increasingly collective and social, a new term is needed to refer to this collective worker: this term is Multitude. Hardt and Negri believe that the transition towards the Empire opens up new possibilities for the liberation of the Multitude. They see the building of the Empire as a response to the various machines of power and struggle of the Multitude. They believe that the Multitude gave rise to the Empire; and globalization, insofar as it brings about a real deterritorialization of the previous structures of exploitation and control, is a condition for the liberation of the Multitude. The creative forces of the Multitude that sustain the Empire have the capacity to build a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization to the global flows of exchange and globalization, with a view to reorganizing them and directing them to new ends.

At this point, it is worth introducing the work of Paolo Virno to complete the picture. His analyses contained in *A grammar of the multitude* coincide to a considerable extent with those of Hardt and Negri, but also show significant differences. He is, for example, much less optimistic in terms of the future. While Hardt and Negri have a messianic vision of the role of the Multitude, which will necessarily tumble the Empire and establish an Absolute Democracy, Virno sees the current changes as ambivalent phenomena, recognizing new forms of subjectivisation and increasing precariousness that are typical of the post-Ford era. It is true that people are not as passive as before, but it is also true that this is so because they have become actors in their own increasingly precarious situation. Thus, instead of seeing the generalization of immaterial work as a type of “spontaneous communism”, as Hardt and Negri do, Virno tends to view post-Fordism as a manifestation of “communism of capital”. He points out that the capitalist initiative today orchestrates to its own ends precisely those material and cultural conditions that could, in a different
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situation, have opened up the way for a potentially communist future.

When imagining how the Multitude could become free, Virno declares that the post-Ford era needs a Republic of the Multitude to be created, taking as such a sphere of common affairs that is no longer directed by the State. He proposes two key terms for the grasping of the type of political action that is characteristic of the Multitude: exodus and civil disobedience. Exodus is, according to him, a complete model of political action, capable of facing the challenges of modern politics. It consists of a massive defection that rejects the State and looks to develop the public condition of the intellect outside the sphere of work and in opposition to it. This would require the development of a non-state public sphere and a radically new kind of democracy to be given in terms of construction and experimentation of non-representative types of democracy outside the realms of Parliament, organized in leagues, committees and soviets. The democracy of the Multitude is expressed through a set of active minorities that never aspire to become a majority, but rather develop a power that rejects the idea of becoming government. Its way of being consists of “acting in agreement” and, while it tends to dismantle supreme power, it rejects the idea of becoming a State. For this reason, civil disobedience needs to be emancipated from liberal traditions, which constitute the framework in which it is normally placed. In the case of the Multitude, civil disobedience no longer means ignoring a specific law because it does not correspond to constitutional principles, as in that case it would still constitute a way of expressing loyalty to the State. What needs to be questioned by means of radical disobedience is the very faculty of state command.

In terms of how we should envisage the most suitable kind of political action for the liberation of the Multitude, I personally think that there are no fundamental differences between Vimo, on the one hand, and Negri and Hardt, on the other, as the latter also advocate desertion and exodus.

The two key concepts in addressing the question of the political are antagonism and hegemony. This entails accepting both the inexistence of any kind of final principle and the contingent in social order, which will always be an expression of power relations.
They argue that, given that in the Empire there is no longer any beyond, struggles against something have to take place everywhere. This “being against” is for them the key to all political positions the world over, and the Multitude has to recognize the sovereignty of the Empire as the enemy, in order to discover the most appropriate ways of subverting its power. While in the disciplinary age, sabotage was the basic form of resistance, they state that in the imperial control era, desertion could constitute the new form. It is, indeed, by means of desertion, through evacuating the places of power, that Hardt and Negri think that battles against power can be won. Desertion and exodus are, for them, a powerful form of class struggle against the imperial post-modernity.

Another point of agreement between Vimo and Hardt/Negri lies in their conception of the democracy of the Multitude. It is true that Virno never uses the term “absolute democracy”, but in both cases what we find is a rejection of the model of representative democracy and the outline of a stark opposition between the Multitude and the People. The problem with the notion of the People is, according to them, that it is represented as a unity with one sole will and that it is linked to the existence of a State. The Multitude, by contrast, flees from political unity. It is not representable because it is a singular multiplicity. It is an agent of active self-organisation that will never attain legal status or converge into a general will. It is anti-state and anti-popular. Virno, like Hardt and Negri, states that the democracy of the Multitude can no longer be conceived of in terms of a sovereign authority that is representative of the people, and that new non-representative forms of democracy are needed.

In summary, we could say that, according to this model, the activity of criticism corresponds to a form of negation that consists of withdrawing from the existing institutions.

**Criticism as a hegemonic commitment**

By contrast with the above, I am going to present the way in which I conceive how social criticism can today be better suited to radical politics.
agree with the above-mentioned authors in that it is necessary to bear in mind the crucial transformations that the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism has produced in the way capitalism is regulated. But I consider that the dynamics of this transition can be better captured and addressed in the framework of the theory of hegemony that we have put forward in Hegemony and socialist strategy, a book that I wrote together with Ernesto Laclau. I agree that it is important not to interpret these transformations as a mere consequence of technological progress, and that we have to foreground their political dimension. What I want to underline, therefore, is that there are many factors that have contributed to this transition, and that it is necessary to recognize their complex nature. My problem with the ope-
raist and postoperaist points of view is that, by putting so much emphasis on the workers’ struggles, they tend to view this transition as if it obeyed one sole logic: the workers’ resistance to the process of exploitation, that forces capitalists to reorganize the production process, moving towards post-Fordism, where immaterial work is core. From their point of view, capitalism can only be reactive, and they reject the creative role played by both capital and labour. What they reject is, in fact, the role played in this transition by the fight for hegemony, and what I propose to argue straight away is that this is due to their immanent ontology and their refusal to recognize the political in its antagonist dimension.

In accordance with the approach that I advocate, the two key concepts for addressing the question of the political, are “antagonism” and “hegemony”. On the one hand, it is necessary to recognize the dimension of the political as the ever-present possibility of antagonism; and this requires, on the other, the acceptance of the inexistence of any type of final principle, as well as the undecidability that might impregnate it. This means recognizing the hegemonic nature of all types of social order, and conceiving of society as the product of a series of practices the purpose of which is to establish an order in a contingent context. The articulation practices by means of which a specific order is created, as well as the meaning of the social institutions set up, constitute what we call “hegemonic practices”: all orders are time-related, precarious articulations of contingent practices. Things could always have turned out differently, and all types of order are based on the exclusion of other possibilities. They are always the expression of a particular structure of power relations. What is accepted at a given moment as “natural order”, together with the common sense by which it is accompanied, is the result of the sedimentation of hegemonic practices; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that is external to the practices that have brought it into being. All hegemonic orders are susceptible to being questioned by contra-hegemonic practices that attempt to disarticulate them, in order to install a different form of hegemony.

I sustain that it is necessary to introduce this hegemonic dimension when we think of the transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism. This means leaving behind the point of view that it is one sole logic - the workers’ strug-
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Reflections. Nayra Bello O’Shanahan, Cacheu (Guinea Bissau) 2010.
gles— that operates in the evolution of work processes, and recognize the pro-
active role played by capital. To this end, we can find some interesting consi-
derations in the work of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, who, in their book *Le
nouvel espirt du capitalisme* bring to light the way in which capitalism manag-
ed to use the demands for autonomy of new movements in the 1960s, con-
trolling them through the economy in a post-Ford network and transforming
them into new forms of control. It is what they call “artist criticism”, referring
to the aesthetic strategies of the counterculture: the search for authenticity,
the ideal of self-government, anti-hierarchy demands, were all used to pro-
mote the conditions needed by the new form of capitalist regulation, replacing
the disciplinary framework that was characteristic of the Fordist period.

From my point of view, the interesting thing about this approach is
that it shows how an important dimension of the transition from Fordism
to Post-Fordism consists of a process of discursive rearticulation of existing
discourses and practices, allowing us to visualize this transition in terms of
hegemonic intervention. It is true that Boltanski and Chiapello never use
this vocabulary, but their analysis is a clear example of what Gramsci called
“hegemony through neutralization” or “passive revolution”, referring to a
situation in which the demands that challenge the hegemonic order are
retrieved by the existing system, satisfying them in a way that neutralizes
their subversive potential. When we view the transition from Fordism to
post-Fordism in this analytical framework, we can understand it as a
hegemonic movement on the part of capital that reestablishes its leading
role, restoring its questioned legitimacy.

It is quite clear that, once we conceive of social reality in terms of he-
gemonic practices, the process of social criticism that is characteristic of ra-
dical politics cannot consist of withdrawing from existing institutions, but of
committing oneself to them, in order to disarticulate the existing discourses
and practices by means of which the current hegemony is established and
reproduced, and in order to construct an alternative hegemony. I want to em-
phasize the fact that such a process cannot merely consist of separating the
different elements whose discursive articulation lies at the origin of those
practices and institutions. The second momentum, that of re-articulation is
absolutely crucial. Otherwise, we would be confronted by a chaotic situation
of pure dissemination, leaving the way open for other re-articulation attempts by non-progressive forces to penetrate. There are, in fact, many historical situations in which the crisis of the dominant order has led to right-wing solutions. Therefore, it is important that the moment of dis-identification is accompanied by a moment of re-identification, and that the criticism and disarticulation of the existing hegemony go hand-in-hand with a process of re-articulation. This is something that is not understood by some approaches viewed in terms of reification or false consciousness, that believe that by merely ridding themselves of the burden of ideology, a new order, free of oppression and power will emerge. Neither is it understood by the Multitude theorists, although in their case the lack of comprehension takes a different shape, as they believe that their consciousness of opposition does not require political articulation. According to the hegemony-based approach, social reality is built discursively and identities are always the result of identification processes. It is through involvement in multiple practices and plays on language that specific forms of individuality are built. The political plays a primordial structuring role, because social relations are, in the last instance, contingent and any prevalent articulation is the result of an agonistic confrontation the outcome of which is not decided on previously. What is therefore needed is a strategy aimed at disarticulating the existing hegemony by means of a series of contra-hegemonic interventions, in order to establish a more progressive hegemony thanks to a process of re-articulation of old and new elements in a different configuration of power.

Conclusions

I think it is important for us to realize that the differences between the two approaches that I have presented arise from the different ontologies that underpin their respective theoretical frameworks. The strategy of exodus, based...
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on an ontology of immanence, assumes the possibility of a redeeming jump towards a society that is beyond politics and sovereignty, in which the Multitude will immediately be capable of governing itself and act in a concerted manner with no need for law or State, and where antagonism will have disappeared. The hegemonic strategy, by contrast, recognizes that antagonism is irreducible, and consequently that social objectivity can be constituted completely, as a result of which a totally inclusive consensus and absolute democracy can never be achieved. According to the immanentist point of view, the priority ontological terrain is one of multiplicity. In many cases, it is based on a vitalist ontology according to which the physical and social worlds are viewed entirely as the expression of some underlying vital force. The problem presented by all the versions of this immanentist point of view is its incapacity to explain the role played by radical negativity, i.e. antagonism. It is true that negation is present in the work of all those theorists, who even use the term “antagonism”; but their negation is not conceived of as a radical negativity. It is conceived of either as a means of dialectic contradiction or simply as a real opposition. As we have shown in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, in order to be able to conceive negation as a means of antagonism, a different ontological approach is required, in which the main ontological territory is one of division, of failed unity. Antagonism cannot be understood when addressing a problem area that conceives of society as a homogeneous space, because this is incompatible with the recognition of radical negativity. As Ernesto Laclau has underlined, the two poles of antagonism are linked by a non-related relationship, they do not belong to the same representation space, and are therefore themselves heterogeneous. It is from this very irreducible heterogeneousness that they emerge. In order to open up space for radical negativity, what we need to do is abandon the immanentist idea of a saturated, homogeneous social space, in order to recognize the role of heterogeneousness. This requires abandoning the idea of a society that is beyond division and power, that does not need laws or the State, in which politics, in short, would disappear.
Democratic politics in the post-political era

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It could be argued that the strategy of exodus is the reformulation, with different terminology, of the idea of communism, as found in Marx. There are, indeed, many common points in the ideas of the postoperasist and the traditional Marxist conception. It is true that for them the proletariat no longer exists; it is now the Multitude, which is a privileged political subject; but in both cases, the State is viewed as a monolithic apparatus of dominion that cannot be transformed. It has to disappear in order to open up space for a society that is reconciled beyond the law, power and sovereignty.

If our focus has been called “post-Marxist”, it is precisely because we have questioned the type of ontology underlying that conception. By foregrounding the dimension of negativity that prevents society from becoming completely totalized, what we have questioned is the very possibility of a reconciled society. To recognize that antagonism is ineradicable involves recognizing that any form of order is necessarily a form of hegemony, and that antagonism cannot be eliminated: antagonistic heterogeneousness signals the limit of the constitution of social objectivity. As far as politics are concerned, this constitutes the need to conceive of them in terms of hegemonic struggle between conflicting projects that seek to embody the universal and define the symbolic parameters of social life. Hegemony is obtained through the construction of nodal points that discursively fix the meaning of institutions and social practices, and articulate the “common sense” by means of which a specific conception of reality is established. This is a result that will always be contingent, precarious and likely to be questioned through contra-hegemonic interventions. Politics will always take place in a field run through with antagonisms, and to conceive of politics as a way of “acting disagreement” leads us to erase the ontological dimension of antagonism, which I have suggested calling “the political”. A suitable political intervention is always one which is committed to a certain aspect of the existing hegemony, in order to disarticulate/re-articulate its constitutive elements. It can never be merely in opposition or be conceived of as a desertion, because it is directed more to re-articulating the situation in a new configuration.

Another important aspect of hegemonic politics lies in how to establish “chains of equivalence” between different demands, in order to transform them into demands that question the existing structure of power re-
La política democrática en la época de la post-política
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lations. It is clear that the existing set of democratic demands in our societies are not necessary convergent, and some could even enter into conflict with others. For this reason, they need to be articulated politically. What is at stake is the creation of a collective will, a “we”; which requires that a “they” be determined. This is something that the various defenders of the Multitude do not understand either; they appear to believe that the Multitude has a natural unity that does not need political articulation. According to Virno, for example, the Multitude always has something in common: the general intellect. His criticism of the notion of People, that Hardt and Negri share, as they consider it homogeneous and an expression of a unitary general will that leaves no space for multiplicity, is completely out of place if we think of the construction of the People by means of a chain of equivalences. In this case, it is a form of unity that respects diversity and that does not eliminate differences. As we have repeatedly emphasized, a relationship of equivalence does not eliminate the difference, as that would simply give us an identity. These differences may substitute one another only insofar as, as democratic differences, they oppose the forces or discourses that deny them. For this reason, the construction of a collective will requires the definition of an adversary. This adversary cannot be defined in such general terms as “Empire” or “Capitalism”, but in terms of nodal points of power that need to be challenged and transformed in order to create the conditions of a new hegemony. It is a case of a “war of positions” that needs to be launched in a multiplicity of places. This can only be done by establishing connections between social movements, political parties and trade unions. To create, by means of the construction of a chain of equivalences, a collective that is committed to a wide range of institutions in order to transform them. This is, from my point of view, the type of criticism that should inspire radical politics.
Joan Busquets

City design and management in the new economic dynamic
Joan Busquets

PhD in Architecture from the University of Barcelona and Professor in Urbanism in the Superior Technical School of Architecture in Barcelona, Joan Busquets has held the position of first Martin Bucksbaum Professor in Practice of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University (Graduate School of Design) since 2002. He is an internationally renowned urbanist, and thirty years ago he co-founded the historic Barcelona Laboratory of Urbanism at the Polytechnic University of Barcelona, a space which, to a great extent sowed the seeds for the major urbanistic transformation of Barcelona in the 1980s. In fact, shortly after Busquets was named Coordinator of Urbanism of Barcelona’s City Council, he became one of the key figures within the team led by the mayor, Pascual Maragall, of the major urban remodelling operation for the 1992 Olympics. The significant projection acquired by the experience of the capital of Catalonia, which immediately became a worldwide urbanistic benchmark, led to Busquets being called upon to develop urbanism and architectural plans all over the world. In fact, he has collaborated in the definition of urban strategies for Rotterdam, Marseille, Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Sao Paulo and Singapore. He has also built emblematic buildings in Trento and Nesselande and has converted old towns, such as Toledo, for which he was awarded the European Gubbio Prize in 2000. He currently directs, among many other projects, the Guiniguada Project in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. He was awarded the Spanish National Urbanism Prize in 1981 and 1983, and has published about Barcelona –el Eixample, Ciutat Vella y la urbanización marginal- and on contemporary urbanistic theory and practice. His latest books include *Barcelona: The Urban Evolution of a Compact City; New Orleans: Strategies for a City in Soft Land; A Coruña: A Maritime City in the Port*; or *Cities X Lines: A New Lens for the Urbanistic Project*. 
I took part in this seminar two years ago and at that time I presented some research that I had just undertaken, referring to the fact that city design and management are concepts that are closely related to the term “multiplicity”. That paper is now published in the book of the II Atlantic Seminar *Excess and shortage in the global age* and I do not intend to continue on that subject. Today I would like to talk about the city of the future, in these times of multiple crises. I think that this leads us to a somewhat difficult situation because in a state of multiple crises it is very difficult to imagine or think that we are capable of defining the future. We think that in such a critical situation, it is difficult to look forwards; just thinking about tomorrow is complicated enough. This is a very difficult idea to handle. I am going to try to defend the idea that it is in moments of these multiple crises that the major realignments of our societies have taken place. I don’t know when this crisis as a global phenomenon or which of its dimensions will subside soonest, but in any case it seems to me that people are talking about a lost decade, and saying that the first ten years of the 21st century have actually been wasted. This is what we have read in the press, the lost decade.
I don’t see it as a lost decade, although it has been an awful decade because of many of the things that have happened. Many cultural, political and cultural changes and a possible loss of some models that were taken as such. Perhaps it is a decade that reflects something that has been occurring in recent decades, perhaps the last thirty years. Western society has moved according to very clearly defined patterns since the Second World War. It has continued to function without realising that there were environmental, resource-related problems, difficulties about the way we produce cities and how we live in them, how we use the land. This is what Antonio González today defines as the different crises, be they environmental, demographic, economic, financial, etc. These are subjects that have been latent for some time. We have realised this in this last decade, which has not been a waste of time, but has been a bit strange. We have discovered that cities have tried out, or are trying out, new models and organisations, and that at the moment we all agree that we are in the presence of a major globalisation condition. Some theorists have associated globalisation with vulgarisation, stating that in the end, all cities will be the same, all territories tend to be the same, and that this will be boring. I am going to defend the idea that territories are not the same, and are not going to continue being the same, but that globalisation is taking us to what may be other opportunities, communication and information systems that are much more powerful and that these may not be negative elements.

I am going to advocate the specific city as opposed to the generic city. This idea that has been defended and that some people have backed too easily. It is very easy to point to parts of the city as generic and focus on the architecture of these major gestures, on the big museums, the big airports, what does the rest matter? But I think that any fragment of a city, any piece of territory, should be understood in its new state and each one demands a lot of affection and care. I am going to come out in defence of this new global condition and, at the same time, of the specificity of the treatment and design of the city.

I’m going to use three blocks to make my argument clearer. In these three blocks I’m going to use experiences from some of the research or subjects that we have dealt with in recent years. To help you to see that nowadays in this context of globalization, different things and very different
processes continue to occur. The first will refer to very high-paced social and urbanistic processes. Sometimes we say that in Europe, old Europe, things no longer happen, there are no major transformations. This is not true. In Europe, lots of things are happening. The thing is that sometimes the glasses we use have got old-fashioned lenses and perhaps we don’t realize what is going on. I am going to propose that we readjust our glasses to see things more clearly. To see this, there are also some processes with unprecedented singular rhythms which are the ones I shall talk to at the beginning. I shall break things down into three blocks and some conclusions.

The first argument is related to this phenomenon, which is the major transformation underway in East Asia and about which some authors have said: this is fantastic, this is the future; these cities, that grow and develop so easily [Photo 1]. This is a beautiful photograph of a city called Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. We look at it like these school children do, amazed by such
a strange phenomenon. This city has eleven million inhabitants, about twice the size of Madrid. It has been built in twenty years. It is a phenomenon that had never existed, a tremendous process. Observe a city that is almost shapeless. There are precedents in the way in which these cities have been made, for example Brasilia, which is a city built over the same period of time with the clear objective of making a capital. In this case there is no making of a capital, just a city with productive activity, services, all those elements needed to produce a city with considerable industrial dynamics.

This is the model on which Brasilia was built [Photos 2 and 3]. There was an idea, after the World Wars, during which designers imagined that, with certain key ideas, a city of several million could be shaped and built. Brasilia was designed by Lucio Costa together with the famous architect Oscar Niemeyer. The curious thing about this case is that the city emerges in an area where previously there had been absolutely nothing. A cross was stuck in the ground and the city grew in the shape of a plane, according to Brasilia’s founders.

This has got nothing to do with the current phenomenon of city transformations. These Asiatic cities that, for example between Hong Kong, Guangzhou and Macau number some 50 million inhabitants. A larger urbanistic reality than Spain, in a more concentrated, smaller
With a completely strong functional system that forces us today to think what the new reading of geography is like [Photo 4]. It is a very important question in the way we think about cities. Geography should continue dominate and be present in the way in which cities can be designed, treated and transformed [Photos 5 and 6].
In these diagrams the rivers and mountains shape this millenary city. We can see that the way in which these vibrant-pace cities are created produces cities that include residential forms, service forms, forms of industrial activity that are produced like a machine but with a degree of control between one other. The formalism through which Brasilia was conceived is no longer present. There is an axis across which everything is conceived. Brasilia is a pretty boring city because you cannot produce a real city from such an abstract, independent act. In these cities you can see in one block very nice middle-class housing, and also working-class housing and it all works within a logic. I would say that these transformations have rarely produced cities like these ones where even working-class people live in pretty reasonable conditions [Photo 7]. I think these are important questions. The idea of social justice. To manufacture a city means that urbanity can be used by the majority. Urbanity is not something that only belongs to those that have a lot of money, as occurred in European cities at the end of the 19th century. The city has this dimension.

*Photo (image)* 7. Urban Project for a new centrality in Ningbo (Prof. Joan Busquets + BLAU): a very open solution proposed, after studying the geographic accidents. The coordination process between the different parts of the design plays a vital part in ensuring the urban quality of the project, in order to put together the proposed diversity.
III Atlantic Seminar

City design and management in the new economic dynamic

Joan Busquets

Joan Busquets, during his conference. | Photo: V.M.C.
The first conclusion of this phenomenon is that cities are taking on different shapes. Designers intervene in these cities with strategies that are somewhat different from those used in the case of Brasilia. Very open systems in terms of land organisation that understand geography and produce more residential results, with areas for services, industry and mixed activity based on the underlying geography. How should we intervene in these cities, given the strong rhythm of their development? These cities may take on elements of urban shape at relatively different paces. The general shape of this city is also conditioned by buildings that respond to different functions, parks and garden elements, elements related to activities that are very different from each other, such as cinemas, theatre galleries and civic areas, including restaurants or squares. Elements that play. They are architectonic shapes that are more open and perhaps enable changes and adjustments between the different pieces to create a different harmony. Perhaps in Europe, in old Europe, similar things are happening but our glasses prevent us from seeing them.

This is the heart of Milan [Photo 8]. Recent research has shown that the most substantial economy of Milan does not lie in this old town, but in the open surrounding areas to which almost nobody pays attention. This is an important
point for reflection. Perhaps we pay too much attention to just the heart of the city, in this case in Milan, while the real economy, that is dynamic, grows and transforms, emerges in other places.

The first observation, from my point of view, is that cities evolve openly today. The idea that some architects or urbanists have defended that cities have some enclosed areas and peripheral roads, that we call city ring roads and that hem the cities in, has become really obsolete by now. In Madrid they are called the M30, M40, M50 and M60, and they now no longer know where to put any more of these ring roads, as the cities continue to grow and flow over them, they are no longer contained by them. These are structural elements of the city but the city itself now has other logics, other shapes. The current urban economy is governed by other patterns. Perhaps we should adjust the strength of our glasses’ lenses to recognise these processes and offer appropriate design responses. Someone could say that what is happening in Milan is fine, but subsequently realise that this growing economy does not produce such a good city because the installations of productive activity outside the city without services and public transport do not, ultimately, give rise to a good city, and the people who have to work there have to use private transport, walk a lot or use transport means that are not appropriate to the current situation. In this context, even in Europe, when we see the scale of these transformations the processes we discover with this part of Milan, we understand that we have to tackle other questions as well. [Photos 9 to 20]

Another experience took place in Holland, a country with a small amount of land, much of which has been recuperated from the sea in order to ensure agricultural land and areas of landscape interest for the country. The logic of this land is to produce dense settlements, although there are some nodes in which residential areas stand cheek-by-jowl with the water. We can see this, for example, in Rotterdam. The city’s land is manufactured from the earth extracted from the bottom of the lake, which is a very difficult process. The
Photos (and images) 9-20. Project for a new city in Nesselande, Rotterdam. The project consists of the creation of a new node for residential and innovative activities. The sustainability requisites set by the client have been raised due to the nature of the future complex users.
ways in which they work in these places oblige us to understand that city building processes are closely related to how different uses can be mixed. This marks how the city is built. But as we also saw in Asia, the city has forms that clearly achieve their aims based on the existing geography. Here, in the project of Nesselande, the creation of a new beach and an esplanade organise the whole territory. A landscape element of the first order of connection with the water that immediately makes places more attractive or ensures that services are enjoyed by users. In winter, the freshwater will freeze and the lake will become a huge square to skate on. We are talking about forms of city with relatively few architectonic form criteria. Architecture is important, but there are elements that come into play in this logic that I consider to be scenographic, even in the alteration of the geography as I indicated above.

The first reflection takes me to this question: cities are open, be they those of Asia or of Europe. On this point I insist that Europe is not as sleepy as we imagine. Residential needs are strong, perhaps in Spain we have given more priority to building houses than to building cities and this would explain much about the famous property bubble. This has been a very Spain-specific phenomenon, as compared to the rest of Europe. If, instead of underlining how many thousands of houses we were building in each sector we had said which bits of the city we built and where we did so, perhaps the result, or the pressure we are suffering with this crisis, would have been less.
The second reflection for me is related to operations in cities, above all projects within the city. These have two tracks, as I see it, that are related to their scale. In Europe in general there is a different way of understanding that we can improve cities through certain major projects. This is the case of Lisbon [Photo 21], where a huge project was carried out on the waterfront for the Expo98. This is what I call a big bang in that it appears suddenly. It is a big public operation that produces an enormous amount of land that turns what had previously been an abandoned or under-used industrial area into a new city centre for Lisbon. Cities need certain projects to give them a twist, a new image. This has occurred with recent projects in Valencia and Zaragoza; attempts to agglutinate in projects this type of action. I think that they may sometimes be necessary but I also wanted to draw attention to their limits and appropriateness. I am sure there are few projects that have been as successful as Lisbon, which has managed to set up an operation on that bit of land that has produced the post-Expo city. Lisboans like to be in the old town and in the Expo area, which is the new town. The idea is that these projects allow cities to revamp themselves. It is an important element and here in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria it may be that there is a need for this discussion.

In this image of a model of New York, a group of people discover the future with affection and care [Photo 22]. This is one of the advantages of these pro-

Foto 22. Expectation at the presentation of the future image of New York in the 1950s.
jects when we can frame them in the city, because they allow us to shape, or imagine the shape, of the future. We know that we know the city well and we can see it, but nobody knows what the cities of the future will be like. The future does not, as yet, have a shape; we have to give it one.

This is the exhibition in Shanghai: Expo 2010 [Photo 23]. The biggest undertaken to date. This is the next one, 2015 in Milan [Photo 24]. This city that we used to say was disperse in this sector, is looking, by means of a smaller-scale operation of this type, for something like Lisbon. The idea in Shanghai is to explain, as in New York, the shape or form, as did New York in its day. And Milan, with the Expo in 2015, aims to talk about how food can become more rational: these are clues to ways to deal with our crises. The city of the future has not yet taken shape.

Shanghai will try to explain the shape or form, as did New York in its day. And Milan, with the Expo in 2015, aims to talk about how food can become more rational: these are clues to ways to deal with our crises.
these elements up for debate. One of the hypotheses in Milan is to imagine that a large territorial space can be rewoven from this space. The shape of the drawing is one of almost a reinterpretation of the natural geography in which water functions in existing open green systems that can link one place to another. These are questions that design on this scale might pose for us.

Cities are often remade on a different scale. I am going to present Dunkerque, in the north of France [Photos 25 and 26]. You will have heard of it, as I had, more because of its destructions than because of its projects. During the last century, it was destroyed twice by war. It is a strategic town between France and England. Consequently, it was in the pathway of both German and Allied planes and was bombed many times. It is a town with a very profound history. If we look at images of the town, we would probably
think: let’s rebuild it all, new. But underneath the buildings there are foundations, sewers and walls [Photos 27 and 28].

Just see how that image changes if we start to understand the previous elements. The different city walls, the important buildings, some of which have been rebuilt, others not. I think that this idea that cities can have ambitious projects, that perhaps do not take shape under one sole logo, as was the case in Milan, but rather projects that can form global strategies while bearing in mind what the city was originally like, those things that lie beneath the city and that are systems that can easily help to recompose a general strategy for the centre. In a city like this one, these types of projects can be addressed ambitiously. It has suffered two major disasters, almost like two earthquakes, two World Wars, but perhaps the shape of the city can re-emerge. We call this element that writes one culture over the other and creates the superposition of these cultures, palimpsest. In fact, construction, demolition and new construction can happen in one sole city. This is to some extent the ambition of an operation that is an urbanistic, archaeological project with elements of economic and residential activity that reclassifies existing activity. These are questions that this city raises, making better use of current resources, that at heart is the city itself.
The third discussion that I wanted to open up refers to the fact that our cities have important roots that must be taken into consideration. We have recently collaborated in an exhibition carried out for Barcelona on the 150th anniversary of the Cerdá Project (1855). This project made the city, which was merely an old town and a void, a city projected as can be seen in the image [Photo 29]. We discovered that this rule or this way of making the city, the city of the 19th century, has deep-seated origins and a very interesting future. This was the conclusion of this exhibition. These cities have a regular grid shape. The order in the streets is what constitutes the urban shape. Seeing these examples, we discovered in this research that the idea of a regular city, that many people had always imagined was born in Greece, copied by the Romans who then distributed it across Europe and which, as of Mediaeval times was repeated and taken up once more by the Renaissance city and then that of the 19th century, is not actually the

Today’s cities have roots and are now searching for their DNA. The orderly city is not a Greek invention adopted and extended by the Romans and so on until the 19th century; even Arab cities are well-ordered. And the order of the 21st century’s cities will depend on their needs
case. On the contrary, we can say that this format is something innate in man [Photo 30]; it is almost an anthropological fact.

In the design of today’s city we should be less worried about objects and more about systems. These regular systems can be square or rectangular in shape, be larger, smaller, oriented in terms of wind direction or light. There are other dimensions. The idea that the regular city is the same the world over is not true. The idea that the regular city is an invention of the ancient Greeks is not true. Even Arabian cities, which we have always associated with the Kasbah, are regular.

The city of the 21st century must be built based on regularity, but it will not be the same city as that of the 19th or 20th centuries. In Barcelona, when the seafront was enhanced, regular systems were used. Here we can see two images from 1985 and 1992 [Photos 31 and 32]. In terms of scale, the city is similar, in terms of infrastructure and spatial quality, the difference is considerable. The final result is a reinterpretation of regularity based on Cerdà’s outlines. This allowed Barcelona to draw closer to the sea, with an open, powerful system that allows citizens to approach the water and infrastructure systems to be placed at a lower level. Each phase of the reinterpretation of the regular city takes on different scales that also correspond to the programmatic solutions of each moment. What is impossible to imagine is that we are going to build the 21st century city like that of the 19th century because we like the 19th century city. Because today we have to address programmes, needs, times and investments that are totally different.
We have been involved in the project for the seafront of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, studying the relationship between the old historic town and the sea [Photos 33 and 34]. We feel that if the connection between the old gully and the sea could become freed, a new public space could be created, allowing the city to become reunited with its sea front. When you look at the evolution of how Las Palmas has maintained its relationship with water, be it the gully or the sea, you realise that it is a city that used these two natural elements. The relationship between Vegueta and Triana, today improved thanks to the reduction of traffic in the city centre, but still too dependent on the organisation of tarmac, could become free and act as more of an urban spine in the connection of the historical centre, enabling a park to exist next to the sea that would give this city a
space in line with what the city deserves. The possibility that the tide would even reach the level of where we are now, and that therefore the tidal movement would be reflected in the lower water square, with its fountains, allowing citizens to become aware of the movements of the water has been studied.

London was a city that had abandoned its river, but a project has made it possible to get the river going and has turned London into a really beautiful city, with very interesting public spaces next to the river [Photos 35 and 36]. We are at a stage with projects in search of the identity, the DNA of the city. If the DNA of Barcelona was that regularity that reaches back to the 19th century and its way of being, it is not surprising that one of the most important elements in Las Palmas is that contact with the water that, some years ago, was resolved with Las Can-

The Fresh Kills project in New York has turned recycling into a park on the outskirts of the city. The functional, industrial, residential city no longer works. People want a city in which things happen as they walk along. Here, a reencounter with geography plays a fundamental role.
teras Beach. The relationship with the open Atlantic and the Port will be one of the most exciting elements of this city in the future.

We have seen different scales and rhythms, so the idea of globality is not leading us to equal or similar processes everywhere. I would just like to refer to those questions that are most pressing in today’s world and allow us to give the city a different orientation. The questions of recycling the city. Up until now, the way in which we have recycled the city has been to send the waste outside the city and let someone take care of it. The Fresh Kills project in New York turns recycling into a park on the outskirts of the city [Photo 37]. It is an enormous project that enables us to see that these new questions thrown up by the crisis oblige us to rethink the ways we act in the city. This means producing spaces that people find interesting and innovative. The future of the city lies in seeing if we are
Programme optimization study in an urbanistic project. Establishment of hierarchies between direct and derived functions. Analysis of self-contained, non-specialist activities and those capable of generating “branding”.

Interrelation in time of the direct functions on a 24-hour time scale. Derived activities contributed consistency to the distribution proposed.

Flow-chart of users and degree of attraction of activities proposed.
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capable of locating innovation within the city, or alternatively recognising if innovation lies in the most economically or technologically active spaces, in what is called knowledge-related industry, which is normally located outside the city, and therefore the city loses that economic capacity. Consequently, there is a huge, titanic research effort to understand how these activities function. The functional, industrial, residential city does not work. We like places where, when I walk past, there are things happening in the street, near people, but how do you make that? Working on uses and which uses are compatible, what level of compatibility, at what time of day? Therefore the city is used differently in the morning from at night. These are questions that, in our view, all these diagrams we are now going to show [Photos 38, 39 and 40] and that lack architectonic form, address with huge potential, enabling us to discuss certain economic proposals.

Cities do not make mistakes in finding these directions. The project of drawing closer to water may be greener, or more mineral, but getting close to water is something that most people want. Opening up the city to the sea in Barcelona has provided the point where most of its citizens coincide. People will say that the palm trees are too small and the lights are too high or bright, but basically speaking, this option has found acceptance among the majority. I think that these are the basic questions, those of the city’s geography, of how cities have been placed on land. Perhaps then some infrastructure has disturbed that geographical relationship. We could today remake these geographies to turn them into elements that belong to the city, understanding that today cities battle or they find themselves in a completely different position as I said above. Cities are much more open. Therefore we have to try to understand the empty spaces of a city; there are some in Las Palmas and they could house new activity that would create above all interesting cultural, economic value for the city. Otherwise we are to some extent on the road to imagining that we are going to build a new city outside, in which case land suffers and is misused. If cities have occupied surroundings, reoccupying those territories seems to be to be a fundamental question and it is one in which we should invest considerable amounts of research and creativity. Finally, in the light of the subject that Antonio González has raised and the reality of this decade I think that it has not been a lost decade, but one of change, of breaking with the past. From my point of view, understanding that perhaps now is a good moment to have a somewhat Utopian, ambitious attitude for the city. Utopian not in the sen-
of a poetic figure, but a Utopian vision in the sense of a Utopian logic that is open, that thinks on a large scale and thinks about how to execute it.

We are at a point of not exactly major enthusiasm due to the crisis, but also at a point of great truth, of drawing quite close to these questions that I feel are going to be questions with no return. I don’t think that once the crisis is over we are going to return to the cities of the past. I think that energy-related issues are going to be of extreme importance. There is a whole change in attitude; I think that there is an emerging culture, which will not return to the previous situation. This is where I see the need to combine these efforts that are born and appear from many different fronts from our modest contribution, from the point of view of the city, of how it is formed, of how it is transformed. Our reflection includes this idea of saying that today’s city is subjected to strong global tensions, to fierce competition. This is true, but cities should not be generic, they should play with their own DNA, with their own capacities and they need to be strong. This means working together, setting things out clearly and, above all, understanding that geographic dimensions are basic dimensions, that they are the dimensions that most affect or most interest citizens and the economic activity linked to these cities.
COLLOQUIUM

Audience: A question about two possible tendencies. Are the big cities going to get bigger to the detriment of smaller cities or will these smaller ones gain protagonism? The second question is, in terms of the commercial possibilities and services offered, is there a tendency towards a greater concentration within the city or more dispersion in smaller centres?

Joan Busquets: It is difficult to answer these questions because as I was saying earlier there are realities that follow different patterns, but in any case it is clear that there is still going to be a major movement of people towards the cities. In China they expect some 500 million people to move to the cities over the next 10 years. The reality is colossal. In Europe there is still movement towards the cities. The future lies above all in middle-size towns and cities, which are those that have services like those of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. These cities enjoy all the services of a large city, where the comfort level is higher. Paris and London will continue to exist, but we are seeing that, with the new communications systems, there are many companies that are looking to decentralise outside these major cities because they are anti-economical, and very difficult to live in. The cities of the future are those of 400, 500, 600 thousand inhabitants that have universities and hospitals. These cities exist within a very strong competition framework. Each of them has to look to and stress its strong points. Cities of this size in the United States are competing with big cities because they have good hospitals and they are more comfortable, more human. Universities are starting to show preferences for specific fields and this is important. It will be difficult for a university to be good in all fields. You need to reinforce your points of excellence. It is good to play with various economic sectors because it allows you to be stronger.

In terms of the commercial side of things, it is even more difficult to tell. I think that in Europe there is a strong change towards a more diversified commercial system, we prefer to be able to choose. I think that the 21st century is one of options and that this is also true here. What people want is to be able to choose. In the 21st century, man is largely free from physical work,
The 21st century is the century of options. Man is freeing himself of mechanical elements, the great invention of the 20th century, such as the car, which is going to change considerably. Individual independence is now afforded by mobile phones and other such devices.

where mechanical elements that were the major invention of the 20th century like the car and other things are going to change significantly. This is what we are seeing. The individual independence that cars, and now mobile phones, have given us, and many other things. This is a crisis that is opening up a very interesting future.

Audience: I analyse the context of the major cities and I think of pollution, the noise created by an amazing amount of automobiles, few green spaces, the massification of architectonic buildings in small spaces. In my experience these cities are very uncomfortable if we bear in mind that health is the most important thing for the citizens that are going to inhabit those spaces. In the future are these cities going to be designed in this sense or, on the contrary, will they be more inhabitable cities where people feel at ease?

J.B.: You have touched on a very pertinent question, that of comfort. The citizen of the 21st century is the comfort citizen. Thirty years ago we didn’t complain about noise. We used to live next to the railway tracks and it was awful, yet nobody complained. Today we complain about the noise. In middle-sized cities, the solution is easier than in larger ones. The way of orienting the design of big cities, and I was referring to London, is to consider that London is made up of smaller entities, which are entities in which comfort levels can be increased and pollution reduced. Thus, there will be two or three like the City where everyone rushes around. This appears to be the modern boom. I think that the facility to achieve urban comfort, and therefore be able to walk, depends on the scale of the city. It is also related to the subject of density, the city of the future is relatively dense. If we want to tackle energy and resource questions, we have to put up with a degree of density. It has sometimes been said that Los Angeles is the city of the future, but that is not true. Los Angeles was the city of the 20th century, based on the automobile. It has been used as a model for many cities, particularly in Latin-
City design and management in the new economic dynamic
Joan Busquets

Two shots of Busquets during the colloquium with the audience. | Photos: V.M.C.
America. Many have copied its freeways and roads, albeit without tarmac, due to their lack of money. Los Angeles, despite being affected by a brutal financial crisis, is where there are the most millionaires per hectare, so it is not realistic to dream of a city like Los Angeles. When we look seriously at the energy and pollution issues, a low-density city cannot function with public transport, with well-distributed services because it just is not possible to pay for them. With intermediate and high-density forms they are viable. There are emerging projects in some northern European cities that had previously opted for low density and are now changing to mid-level or mid-to-high levels of density for energy-related reasons. These are very serious factors that are even being treated seriously on governmental agendas.

Audience: As far as density is concerned, major changes have taken place. Some years ago, England was depicted as the ideal place to live and now all architects talk about density as though it were a panacea. I don’t know if we are taking the pendulum too far in the opposite direction with a high-rise city where we don’t actually like living. Isn’t there a kind of contradiction between high concentration and a low quality of life? The other question is that the energy-related revolution that is currently underway with electric vehicles and new ways of producing electricity is also going to make the whole current paradigm change in a short period of time.

J.B.: You have touched on something that I think is sometimes important. Cities have to produce transitory solutions, which then become definitive. I am not really in favour of transitory solutions like the building of tiny houses, emergency remedies, as happened in Spain at one point. I prefer to think that the city can be improved over time, that fairly simple districts can be created because improvement is a possibility, it forms part of the process. People agree to live in certain conditions because we will be able to improve them, and that’s not a problem. I am heavily in favour of thinking in terms of the process of a city. A city that is made, grows and develops.

In terms of density, I agree with you in that there was a point at which the ideal city followed the English norm, with its garden; this happened at the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays, we have seen that this doesn’t lead us anywhere. To think that density means inferior quality of life is just
not true. There are certain limits and it depends on the form. Efforts must be made to come up with prototypes that people can understand. We want a home with services, but we want our home to ensure a certain position in the city, certain services and that it also guarantees a degree of privacy. Because people go to low-density areas or to cities with gardens because they want privacy, they want something that is independent from other people. At other times they want to interact with their neighbours. Urbanists and architects should create pilot districts so that people can see the two points that you brought up. Cities can improve, and of course I will be able to improve. A finished city costs a lot of money but the city that I create progressively according to what I can afford gets made depending on my budget at any given time. What I called intermediate densities, where one can obtain a degree of privacy or a high level of privacy, which is what people want. We like living in the city but at times we like to bring down the blinds and say I am only available for those that I want to see. This right to privacy also occurs within the family. A home has different entities.

Only with intermediate densities can we obtain reasonable energy factors, urban services, reasonable public transport without incurring tremendous costs. Cities in the south of Europe are based more on these principles and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria shares these patterns. I think that it is easier to follow this process and that cities will be like this in the future. When new energy components come into play in houses, they are important factors. Here I advocate a degree of common sense. There are two tendencies in Europe right now. The Germans are carrying out lots of research on small, expensive techniques to achieve insulation. Each room costs about the same as a car. Who can maintain that? How do you do it? Sustainability has to be viewed from an economic perspective as well. We know that the tradition of a given wall thickness allows for a reasonable degree of cheap insulation. We need to think about these very basic questions. In northern
Europe, each home has big ventilation systems with long pipes. This incurs titanic costs and very high levels of maintenance. This is absurd and it is coming to Spain. We must reactivate common sense and have homes with reasonable energy conditions.

Audience: You have mentioned that the future of cities lies in concentrations for economic reasons, etc., that distribution is homogeneous, by which I understand the grid and that each city has its own DNA, that may change that system, but I haven’t heard anything about the self-ventilation of cities, which is urban hygiene, about the runoff water and its possible effects depending on the slant of the city; we have had major disasters in the Canary Islands for this reason. If we are moving towards homogenous concentrations, I think it will be difficult to ventilate the city. I know that this is the way things are moving because the capital is in command, but we would have to study these points I have mentioned.

J.B.: I think that conditions such as runoff water, ventilation and urban hygiene are basic. If cities use their geography well then these conditions become easier. I spoke of a degree of concentration but I also talked about the fact that cities are no longer closed, so when I talk about a level of density, it’s not a case of future cities spreading like oil slicks. The current city is already open, perhaps it would be better if it were not open in the sense of an urban continuum but that there should be parts of the land that leave room for nature. These could be parks, higher areas. This is where a new concept of land organisation, infrastructures, water and runoff water should lie. My idea is that when we make a discontinuous city, the nodes of this discontinuity are also dense. Up until now, cities always grew, and there were garden cities outside the cities. Today, cities are more discontinuous and we therefore have to work with this model, which is not always bad; and when these territorial nodes are dense, we will obtain efficient nodes with the services required by hygiene and the capacity to function.

Audience: On the island of Gran Canaria we have the major tourist area in the south, the Arinana industrial estate and an international airport handling a huge number of passengers to the east, and lastly the capital, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria with its port (el Puerto de la Luz), which is one of the hubs for container
J.B.: The question is always that what comes from history, that has been a model in place over time, reveals the strength of some of these elements. Airports have a very strong economic force, not just as airports as such but also as an attraction factor. Sometimes we haven’t really taken this into account. They constitute elements with a great deal of pull in territories. They must be a very powerful element given their placement. The most important thing is to understand that this logic be understood within other logics within city and territory. There is often a discontinuity between what is imagined and planned at the planning stage and what is driven through by reality. This is something that occurs commonly. Airports tend to seek very specific activities that are particularly linked to them. They are logistic activities, which is good. It is more interesting to create an airport city rather that just some airport-related functions because their economies are very fragile. They are fragile cities. In Barcelona, this is an area with huge potential but still somewhat uncertain. The sector between the port and the airport will eventually take shape, but it is still somewhat uncontrolled. These are highly changeable economic sectors, in ten years their strategies change, they no longer want larger spaces, but prefer a smaller type of logistic set-up. Today logistic sectors and the more innovative sectors of economic activity are a field we need to learn about and whose logics we need to investigate to see what spatial forms they require.

AG: In the previous seminar, which we called *Excess and shortage in the global age*, one of the elements that Joan Busquets stressed was his concern over the insane growth of cities in the third world, particularly those that are subjected to uncontrolled logics from the political point of view, for example. He is now telling us that the last 10 years have not been a lost decade, that elements have been identified that have organised a horizon of senses for the city of the future, one of which is to return to the geography of those cities with a clear DNA. Another is that cities will grow very quickly, as we can see in China, but they will do so in an orderly fashion. They will
Another shot of the colloquium. | Photo: V.M.C.
not have a DNA of their own but rather will construct it as the city grows. Then there will be a third group of cities from the so-called Third World that will grow very fast but with no type of control. This will bring about a larger gap in the urban sphere between cities in the opulent world that renew themselves based on their own DNA, those of emerging countries that will be built quickly based on capital and order and then a load of cityless cities.

JB: I think I have seen that even some Latin-American and African cities are improving along the lines that I mentioned for European cities. There are improvement processes in place. We must continue to push them forwards. Citizens are more aware of the situation. If you look at cases such as Rio, Sao Paolo or Bogotá, these are cities where substantial improvement is being made in terms of public spaces, certain infrastructure and I think that here the new culture of these energy-related and environmental demands is going to come into play generally speaking because they will come in at the top. At the moment, there is an emerging process in which people start to think about what they should do with recycling, this is at the bottom level. At the top, there is this question of energy discipline by governments. This is where I think that there will be a major impact on the urbanistic dimensions of cities.
Ernesto Laclau

The return of antagonism

(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)
Ernesto Laclau

Laclau is one of the most important political theorists of our time and is the main figure of what is known as post-Marxism. He is a lecturer at the University of Essex (United Kingdom), holds an influential chair in Political Theory and directs the Programme of Ideology and Discourse Analysis. His books immediately become the subject of debate and controversy in the main forums of left-wing intellectuals across the world. Laclau deconstructs Marx, rejecting his economic determinism and the central nature of the role of the class struggle in its most classic form, in work that is influenced by psychoanalytical theory and by post-structural philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida. He advocates a “radical democracy” in which a number of antagonisms are channelled, revealing the impossibility of a full society with no conflicts. Not in vain does the signature of Laclau often appear linked to radical thinkers, in the strictest sense, such as the North American Judith Butler and the Slovene Slavoj Zizek. His dialogue with them, among others, represents acute criticism of contemporary culture. A good example of this can be found in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (2000), a three-handed work that has had enormous repercussions. After studying history in Buenos Aires, his home city, Laclau moved to London more than thirty years ago to study his doctorate with the support of the historian Eric Hobsbawm, one of the leading figures in this discipline in the 20th century. His intellectual career since then has been rooted in the United Kingdom. His books, some of which have been written with the Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe, such as the above-mentioned *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), include *Emancipation(s)* (1996), *Misticismo, retórica y política* (2002), *On Populist Reason* (2005), in which he reviews this much-criticised political concept in the light of the current state of affairs in Latin-America, or *Debates y combates. Por un nuevo horizonte de la política* (2008). He is currently working on *La universalidad elusiva [Elusive universality]*, a kind of re-captilation of all his work and that Laclau himself considers to be his most important book, one that will mark the end of his essay-writing.
A.G.: Well, we are going to carry out this interview in an attempt to articulate Professor Laclau’s thought on the state of the age and the complex, difficult circumstances in which we live. We have called this conversation “The Return of Antagonism”. The word antagonism is key as the concept that signifies the work of Ernesto Laclau. And it is also closely linked to his perspective of the contingent nature of “the political”, of society and even of the subject. Other aspects also derive from this, such as hegemony, political construction, populism, etc. So, a few hours ago [18th March, 2010] President Obama cancelled a trip to Indonesia and Australia so that he could vote on Sunday on his famous health system reform, given the fact that the vote is a close call. Some Democrats are not in favour. The pressure of big business is massive. In fact, this health system reform could be what you call a significant void. In other words, in this case, a specific social demand, addressed by a new Government – which, as it takes place in a given context, in such a socially oppressive crisis, eventually takes on new meaning and, in fact, represents political change as a whole in the United States. Thus, the individual and the collective are
bound together in the health system reform. It is a way of asking you about antagonisms and political construction.

ERNESTO LACLAU: Fine. Let’s firstly address the question of Obama. Obama has not been a particularly populist politician. Populism is given whenever society is divided into two sides and there is a call of the underdogs as opposed to those in power. This can happen within a very wide range of ideologies. I think that Maoism was populist, but so was Italian fascism. That is to say that populism, from an ideological standpoint, is a neutral category but what is permanent in the political form that is called Populism and which stands in opposition to radical institutionalism is the fact that society is divided into two sides. And this is where what we have called in our terminology significant voids, i.e. a specific term becomes loaded with a special cathetic density because it evokes something beyond its own singularity, which is a universality built in our terminology by means of equivalence. To give you an example, the demands of the Solidarity trade union in Poland were, to begin with, just the demands of a particular group of workers in the Lenin shipyards in Gdansk. But the fact that these demands and symbols arose in a society in which many other demands were also frustrated turns them into symbols of something much bigger that divides society into two sides.

Now, if you think about Obama’s campaign, that election campaign was not particularly populist because there was no call to the underdogs against power, but, on the contrary, a discourse of national unity. If you want to think of a right-wing populism at the heart of that election campaign you would have to think about Sarah Palin’s discourse. But subsequently, reality is pushing Obama towards what appears to be towards the beginnings of a populist direction. The whole bi-party approach with which he started his government is clearly falling apart. The Republicans have not given the slightest support to his measures, they oppose them. At the same time, many conservative factions of the Democratic Party don’t support him either. So, in recent weeks, specifically during the campaign relating to the reform of the health system, he has started to appeal to the political grass roots over and above the institutional apparatus
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and now, at this point, his campaign on this issue is starting to have an increasingly visible populist slant. Quite how far it is going to go, we cannot tell, but is it interesting to see how the problem is taking shape.

A.G.: We could clarify, before going any further, that in your work you very clearly deconstruct the economicist determination of classic Marxism. You reject that production relationships determine everything else and that the ultimate underlying principle of the social be the economy. You do not say that the economy is not central, but that its centrality is not derived solely from an internal logic that cannot be exceeded, even in the tardo-capitalist rhizome.

E.L.: I think that, in terms of the economy, it is necessary to make a distinction. That economic progress is central to all societies is something that no sane person can question. And that it profoundly affects people’s lives, as we can clearly see in the current situation, is equally obvious. When economicism is criticised, that central nature is not questioned. What is criticised is the idea that the economy is a closed, auto-regulated space, capable of reproducing the material life of society based on its endogenous mechanisms, as neoliberalism sustains. What is necessary is to reintroduce the idea of a political economy. What is necessary is to abandon definitively all ideology linked to deregulation.

A.G.: Perhaps it would be relevant at this point to underline that the term populism used by Ernesto Laclau has a completely different meaning from what we commonly understand as populism. He has carried out a review, an evaluation, of a maligned term called populism. He has imbued the term with new value, above all, within the current political situation in Latin America. Is that so?

E.L.: That’s right. I think that the term populism has to be treated in the same way as Christians have done with the cross: to transform a symbol of ignominy into a highly positive symbol. Populism in a negative sense,
which is the only sense used by the Spanish press, is a bit like the term democracy in Europe at the beginning of the 19th Century. Yesterday, Jorge Alemán, [see “The new unease in culture. Politics for a divided subject”, pages 225 to 263] talked about the relationship between liberalism and democracy that is, to put it mildly, a relation of conflict. At the beginning of the 19th Century, liberalism was a perfectly respectable political form in Europe, whereas democracy was a pejorative term, because it was identified with the government of the much-hated mob. It required the whole long process of revolutions and reactions of the 19th century to reach in Europe a stable relationship between the terms. It is clear that this is a case of an only relatively stable relationship, one of tension, a hiatus has never completely been fully satisfied. I would say that that hiatus in Latin America has never been satisfied and that, therefore, when one thinks of democratic formulae for the Latin American continent, we have to think of forms that are very different from those that are valid for Europe and that are difficult for Europeans to understand.

To round off this point, and to present it within a polarity that is, of course, somewhat excessive, I would say that there is a continuum in which institutionalism is at one extreme, which is the reduction of politics to the administration, i.e. the government of a technocracy. In the 19th century, Saint-Simon said that it was necessary to move from a government of men to the administration of things. And it is no coincidence that this formula had already been accepted by Marx when he wanted to talk about a communist society in which the political sphere was completely extinguished. At the other extreme, we have populism, i.e. division, the centrality of the political moment and the division of social space into two sides. Similarly, all political systems have to combine these two polar positions. Of course, talking of total polarity involves a reduction to the absurd, as, in different proportions, there will always be a combination between these two principles.

A.G.: In line with the aforementioned deconstruction of economism, you also refute the concept of social class and the role of the class struggle, denying them any immanent dimension in the wake of Antonio Gramsci. Moreover, you underline the determinations of the political over the economy, for exam-
E.L.: I’m afraid the answer to this question is not going to be that short... because as Sherlock Holmes used to say, it’s not the questions that are indiscrete but the answers. I would start from a different angle, because the problem of economic determinism is a subject that has been filed away now for a long time. Nobody today defends an economist determinism as given in classic Marxism. However, within Marxism there are two types of interpretations, both of which are present in Marx’s works. On the one hand, we have the notion of history as a process that he calls almost natural, which can be determined with the precision of a natu-
ral process, and which is given by a substrate of history that consists of developing the productive forces and their adaptation or lack thereof to different systems of production relationships. This means that it is a process within which social antagonisms play no role. Marx says in the Prologue to Critique of Political Economy, that the way in which social forces live their conflicts is purely superstructural, because he says that just as we cannot judge a man by the idea he has of himself, we cannot judge a whole historical period by the way in which people live their real conflicts, i.e. real conflicts are reduced to the sphere of ideological and deformed representation. On the other hand, Marx states that this history of humanity is the history of the class struggle. So, class struggles, which had been eliminated from the first formulation, reappear forcefully. These two dimensions were never really integrated; and here I would like to insert a comment, to point out that what has been central to our approach to this question is the determination of the nature of social antagonisms.

What is social antagonism? What relation between agents is assumed to hold in social antagonism? The starting point, in *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, but which I have developed subsequently in other works, has been a discussion that was held during the fifties and sixties in Italian Marxism, and which was initiated by the school of Galvano Della Volpe. Della Volpe and his disciple at that time Lucio Colletti started out with a distinction found in Kant’s work, in some of his precritical writings but also in Critique of Pure Reason, in all the criticism of Leibniz in the amphiboly of the concepts of reflection. Kant’s distinction was between what he called real opposition (*Realrepugnanz*), which is a relation between things, for example, two stones that bang into one another, and, on the other hand, the logical contradiction, which is a relation between concepts. The logical contradiction lies in the A-not A relationship; the relation of real opposition is the A-B relation. The claim of the Dellavolpeian school of thought was that real opposition is the only one that includes the opposition between historical forces. The side linked to antagonism was developed by Colletti more than by Della Volpe. So they claimed that, while Hegel as an idealist philosopher who reduced reality to the concept could talk about contradictions in reality, in a materialist philosophy like Marxism, that affirms the nature of reality beyond logic, it cannot be claimed that there
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My intimate wealth. Nayra Bello O’Shanahan, Cacheu (Guinea Bissau) 2010.
are contradictions in reality. And the project of the Dellavolpeians transferred all the theory of social antagonisms in Marxism from the field of logical or dialectical contradiction to the field of real opposition.

I agree with them in that it is not possible to have contradictions in reality, i.e. contradictions are logical contradictions that occur between concepts. In the 19th century, Trendelenburg had already laid out from his point of view all those weaknesses inherent in Hegelian logic. But, on the other hand, neither do I think that social antagonisms can be conceptualised in terms of real oppositions, simply because in a real opposition there is nothing antagonic. If two stones bump into one another and one of them breaks, that breaking expresses the identity of the stone that breaks just as much as of the other stone, i.e. that the two poles of the relationship of real opposition belong to one sole conceptual space of representation. In other words, a relationship between enemies, which is what we have in an antagonistic relationship, is not captured by the idea of real opposition. Colletti indignantly stated that the Marxists had not even understood that the concept of real opposition was present in Kant. I think this highly improbable; a professional philosopher like Lukács would have had not to have read *Critique of Pure Reason* not to know what real opposition in Kant was.

However, I think that the problem is different, that the dimension of negativity, which is inherent in antagonism, is something that the category of real opposition does not capture. And, therefore, as the only notion of negativity that Marxist philosophers had was dialectical negativity, they associated dialectical contradiction with antagonism. But dialectical contradiction also presents the same difficulties as real opposition, because if we go dialectically from one category to another, as all negation is determined, we remain, however, in the same field of representation. The identitary character of the whole process is never questioned. There is no interruption of the identity of an agent. The Real, in the Lacanian sense that Jorge Alemán was talking about, does not appear in any guise in this philosophy.

This led me to think that what is difficult to understand about anta-
Social antagonisms are not objective relations, but those in which the impossibility of building the social as an objective order can be seen. [...] The subject is the cut-off point as of which identity is not achieved.

A.G.: You base your formulation of antagonism on two questions. One is a new concept of the subject. As opposed to the idea of the self-centred, transparent subject of Modernity, the subject divided between reason and drive, Freud, in short. Insofar as one lives one’s life, there are two, the subject is no longer One. From this internal distance of constitutive void, substance – objectivity – perceives itself as alien. This breaks down the structure-subject dualism. The subject would be that distance between the undecidable social, symbolic structure in which it (the subject) is inscribed and the act of deciding as such, which is inevitable. The other question, correlative, is a new concept of society. The social lacks essence, and, therefore, society cannot close in on itself, it is not an objective fact, it cannot be given as a totality. You provocatively say, “society is impossible”, in the sense that all social models are a vain attempt to hem in the field of differences. Society will always be a necessary but impossible project, always unfinished, but this lack of completeness constitutes the margin for politics, as the subject feels desire ...

E.L.: I think that the subject is exactly the cut-off point as of which identity is not achieved. And once we reach that point, we can link the discussion of political subjects with something that we were talking about earlier. Let us assume that we have a certain social antagonism, using the
example of a peasant community and landowners that try to throw them off the land. There, we have the perspective of the peasant, from which the presence of the landowner embodies the negation or interruption of his own identity. Exactly the same thing happens in terms of the landowner. And this means two things: firstly, that the moment of the clash between the two forces as such cannot be represented in the same space, because I cannot go from one force to the other by means of any conceptual, dialectical or other type of mediation; on the other hand, if this is so, in this case there is no unitary subject of history, what there is are two finitudes that confront one another and constitute through that unrepresentable moment, which is antagonism, the clash that is inherent to antagonism, something that actually exceeds any representation space. And here there are two possibilities. We either say that this moment of clash is purely appariential and there is a third man, an absolute spirit or whoever it might be, that can reduce the whole process to an objectivity that transcends the consciousness of the agents, or that finite consciousness of the agents is all that there is. And in that sense, antagonism is constitutive in the transcendental sense of the word, but it is a constitutivity that excludes any possibility of representations.

If we adopt the first point of view, here we move to the different teleologies of history. The clearest case that springs to mind is that of Hegel, but it is important to realise that Hegelian theory has a whole prehistory. If we look at the Carolingian Renaissance, there we see that in De divinisation naturae, John Scotus Eriugena formulated a general salvation plan, by means of which, on the one hand, he had to affirm the immanence of God vis-à-vis the world and, on the other, deny that God had been perfect throughout all eternity, as God only becomes perfect during the process. And these two claims were obviously incompatible with even the most lax forms of orthodoxy, although Scotus did not really realise this. This is a view of history that has a long tradition in western thought. It started with the Carolingian Renaissance, but we can also find it subsequently in all the Scandinavian mysticism, through to Nicholas of Cusa, Spinoza and finally Hegel and Marx. The secularised version of what originally was a theological vision can be found in Hegel’s Astuteness of Re-
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Laclau, in another shot during his intervention. | Photo: V.M.C.
ason, and also in Marx, when he claims that the primitive community was not antagonic in nature but that in order to develop the productive forces of humanity it was necessary to go through the whole hell of class-divided societies and that only with ultimate communism would the rationality of this process be revealed, i.e. within the general lines of interpretation.

Nevertheless, when we move onto the second perspective, i.e. that of claiming the constitutive character of antagonism as such, and therefore the limits of that which can be represented conceptually, then we have a different idea of negativity, another idea of the subject and, finally, another idea of the internal composition of a process that we have called hegemonic. From the political point of view, this is the moment at which Gramsci’s vision acquires all its centrality. He has been poorly read. In Italy, the first reception of his school of thought came through Crocian historicism, and this permeated all the Communist reading of Gramscian thought. Even Althusser managed to equate the absolute historicism of Gramsci with Lukács’ notion of class-consciousness, which are exact opposites, because the Lukacsian notion is completely inherent to Hegel’s philosophy, whereas for me Gramsci represents a radical break with Hegelian tradition. I see the notion of absolute historicism as the affirmation of a radical contingency. And, in this sense, all the hegemony theory starts to move outside the historical horizons of Marxism, in the direction that we have called post-Marxism.

A.G.: If in the operations that take place in the social sphere, everything is marked by the contingent nature of the social and by subjectivity, and if the social is the product of dancing structural antagonisms, all identities are of a precarious nature. The openness of the social rips open traditional limitations and opens up the possibility for new forms of emancipation: you have talked of Emancipations(s) in the plural.
E.L.: Well, classic Marxism has been a theory of society's growing homogenisation. What it stated was that the inherent laws of capitalism would lead to the disappearance of the middle classes and peasants. That is to say that capitalism would produce a growing simplification of the social structure. In my work I have tried to show the stages through which this vision of historical development progressively breaks down. Firstly, the whole process of the Russian Revolution, the idea that democratic tasks have to be adopted by social subjects who are not natural agents leads to a complexity in the relationship subject-task. Leninism tried to cover it to an extent, but based on the maximum maintenance possible of traditional Marxist thought. However, subsequently, in the 1930s, we see that with the theory of unequal, combined development it becomes clearer and clearer that this abnormal relationship between task and agent permeates all historical social processes. In the mid 1930s, Trotsky will say that unequal, combined development is the condition of all the social struggles of our times. And then people start to wonder if all historical developments are going to be heterodox, then what does normal development mean. And it is at that point that the Gramscian intervention occurs, extracting the ultimate consequences of this analysis. Gramsci says that the articulation between tasks and agents and the constitution of the identity of the agents through the articulation of tasks is something that exceeds any a priori determination, be it based on class or of any other type. For Gramsci, social subjects are not social classes, but are what he calls collective wills and all the categories he introduces (historical block, hegemony, war of positions, etc.) move us in this direction.

In this sense, the notion of contingency present in these debates entails an ambiguity that I think we need to overcome. There is a tendency, for example in the work of Richard Rorty, to identify contingency with accidental, in the Aristotelian sense of the term. But the two notions are completely different. The notion of contingency appears in *De interpretation*, in the logical writings of Aristotle. But by accident we mean something that does not belong to the essence of a body, so accidental is the opposite of essential. By contrast, contingent is that being whose essence does not presuppose its existence, i.e. it presumes a radical finitude, and this refers to both the essence and the accident. This means that we
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have to understand the notion of contingency in a radically different way. This is a notion that has been negotiated in contemporary thought in different ways. I think that 20th century thought started with three illusions of immediacy, immediate access to things. These three illusions were the referent, the phenomenon and the sign. And this gave rise to three traditions, namely: analytical philosophy, phenomenology and structuralism. Now, the history of these three intellectual currents is remarkably parallel; at a certain moment the illusion of immediacy dissolves and we have to move on to affirm the constitutive character of one or other type of discursive mediation. In analytical philosophy this is what happens in the work of the second Wittgenstein, he of the Philosophical Investigations. In phenomenology with the transition from Husserl to the existential analysis of Heidegger. And in existentialism, with the set of poststructuralist criticisms of the sign.

A.G.: Discourse plays a special role in your work. Both the discursive nature of the social and the discursive nature of the human. You introduce this linguistic angle of 20th century philosophy into the field of social and political analysis. Here is the performative nature of political language, the discursive formations, that does not mean that only words exist, a farewell to things.

E.L.: For me, discursive does not just refer to spoken or written language but to a whole structure of meaning, and there is no social practice or structure that is not a structure of meaning. Similarly, Wittgenstein's plays on language include both the use of words and actions that are associated with them. All human practices combine words and actions intimately and essentially. If this articulatory whole includes linguistic and non-linguistic elements it cannot be that it is in itself either linguistic or non-linguistic. This more primordial whole that includes both dimensions is what we call discourse.

A.G.: Well, if we move on from this quick review of the central elements of your political thought, let us have a look at some current issues like, for example, the crisis, the first global crisis. What meaning would you give it as such? Do you think that we are facing the crisis of an era? You have said that “we don't know how we are going to emerge from the crisis, but we do
know how we got into it, with deregulation”, in short, with the loss of control of the economy by politics.

E.L.: How we got into the crisis is quite clear and was, indeed through all the ideological predominance of the idea of deregulation and through neo-liberalism, which has led to the economic and financial disaster that we are in now. It is clear today that any future recomposition of the international financial system and international relations, the ultimate form of which we are unsure about, because we cannot forget that new agents are emerging who are going increasingly to question the centrality of the American hegemony, this whole recomposition will have to take place by means of increasingly pragmatic practices, i.e. it is today very clear, in Latin-America but also in the US and global contexts that one cannot oppose the principle of market self-regulation with the principle of a bureaucratic total state control. In the future, we will see the combination of market forms and state forms, and the advance of any democratic struggle will have to take place within the context of these situations. Now, in the post-modern globalised world, the above-mentioned processes of contingentiation of social and political articulations have clearly evolved far beyond what Gramsci was able to perceive. The Gramscian ontology is now viewed simply as a stage, but not just as a terminus ad quem of a process. Today we need a much more radical ontology to explain these processes. We are at the epicentre of a new thought: this is where we will see pensiero debole and other comparable currents creating tools to give it a new vision, and this is where I can see the notion of contingency occupying a central place.

Radical contingency does not mean that everything is possible, but that it is the context that renders some things possible and others, not. For an Austrian sergeant like Hitler to rise to Chancellor in William II’s Germany would have been impossible.

A.G.: That notion of contingency means that nothing is determined, that situations are not given due to historical predetermination but as a result of politically built phenomena. In your work there is a very ambitious reformulation of the concept of the political, to which it returns the primacy in the cons-
La vida que viene

Desafíos, enigmas, cambio y repetición después de la crisis

18 y 19 de marzo de 2010
CICCA

Ernesto Laclau

Laclau, in another shot of the live interview. | Photo: V.M.C.
titution of the social, of the profiles of a society that is intrinsically preven-
ted from constituting itself as an “objective reality”. Based on the deconstruction
of the ontological bases of the classic left, its fixed ideas, its impotent pre-
dictions, you place something you call hegemony. In your terminology it would
basically be the existence of a dynamic, unpredictable play of forces that would
progressively organise the social. But this concept changes things considerably.
Hegemony creates a new non-dichotomic individual/universal relationship.

E.L.: First of all, let’s clarify one point. Radical contingency doesn’t mean
that in any historical context, anything is possible. An absolute contin-
gency would only pertain for an inhabitant of Syria, sub species aeternitatis.
But we live in a world that is more limited than eternity, in contexts that
make some things possible and others impossible. The fact that an Aus-
trian sergeant like Hitler became the Chancellor of the Reich in William
II’s Germany would have been impossible, but in the new context crea-
ted by the crisis of the Weimar Republic, many things that previously would
have been unthinkable, became feasible. Radical contingency means that
there are no contextual determinations guaranteed a priori, once and for
all, but that all contextual determination is the result of a degree of ba-
lance of forces that can be altered. But this balance can become very fi-
xed over long periods of time. Gramsci said that when a hegemonic vic-
tory is achieved, it is achieved for the whole of a historical period.

A.G.: In what framework has this crisis arisen? You underline the fact that
there is a growing social heterogeneousness, which would be a breeding
ground for new antagonisms and new processes of shaping contingent
hegements in advanced societies. It appears that this social context of
heterogeneousness in which the crisis has arrived is a good moment for a
return of politics in some way.

E.L.: Yes, that’s exactly what I think. We are in the process of inverting prio-
rities relating to the social and the political. Using Husserl’s old distinc-
tion, I would say that the moment of the social is the moment of sedi-
mentation and the political moment is that of reactivation; a reactiva-
tion that however does not lead to the transcendental constitution of the
subject in a radical sense, but that leads, on the contrary, to a moment
of radical contingency. And because there is radical contingency in that sense, politics start to be a priority. The 19th century was a whole period during which attempts were made to reduce the political to the social, to the underlying immanent laws. Today, with this step towards the centrality of contingency, the situation is that the political moment acquires an increasing centrality.

When we talk about the death of politics, this type of claim can be made for two very different types of motives: either because the political is reduced to an underlying social process, or by means of an affirmation of the political moment as a moment that is so total that the dimension of contingency disappears completely. This is the vision that, for example, Hobbes had, i.e. that the moment of sovereignty represents the only possibility of order in the community, But this also means the death of politics for reasons that are opposite but similar in their effects to those that Marx postulated.

Of course if we move on to the theory of hegemony, we see that sovereignty becomes reconverted into hegemony once sovereignty ceases to be total and enters into this game of opposition between heterogeneous agents. Here, of course there are other dangers, for example a danger that I have tried to point to in the work of [Michael] Hardt and [Toni] Negri, [authors of Empire], which is to state that the moment of heterogeneity and that of autonomy lead to the need to abandon the dimension of political articulation.

Indeed, in the Italian tradition in the post-war years there was an exaggerated emphasis on the notion of articulation, for example, in the thought of [Palmiro] Togliatti; and that led to the notion of the party as a necessary form of articulation of all social conflicts. This led to a crisis at the end of the sixties and seventies, as a result of which new social antagonisms started to emerge that could not
be subjected to the logic of party-based articulation in the traditional sense. And this gave rise to the extreme opposite, that is to the total affirmation of autonomy. But this is where we cannot be polarized between the mental asylum and the cemetery. Somehow, the construction of politics goes through some intermediate forms and the categories of those intermediate forms are what we have tried to present in our work (in my work, that of Chantal Mouffe and of other people linked to our projects, or who are our cousins, like Jorge Alemán).

And in this whole process, what I have considered increasingly important is to indicate the centrality of the notion of disassociation in the theory of antagonisms. For example, in Hegemony, Socialist strategy we still claimed that the ultimate form of abgrund [abyss] is antagonism, but antagonism, to build or portray someone as an enemy is already a first form of discursive inscription. There is something more radical than antagonism, and that something is what we would call dislocation, that would be the moment of the abgrund, i.e. something whose transition to the field of the discursive is going to presuppose a decision and the cathexis of a certain object.

I have insisted in my latest work that the notion of “object” in Lacan and the logic of hegemony, as we have presented it, are not only homologous but that they are practically the same idea, in one case contemplated from the sphere of political thought and, in the other, from the psychoanalytical sphere. In our opinion, hegemony takes place when a certain singularity takes on the representation of a universality with which it is incommensurable: i.e. totality ceases to be a founding principle and becomes a horizon. And this type of horizon is what determines that the only form of universality compatible with the radical contingency of the social is hegemonic universality. This notion implies that, when we talk about totality, we are talking about an object that is necessary, but at the same time impossible. As necessary, it has to have access to the field of representation; as impossible, it is an object the representation of which is necessarily going to be distorted. It is a bit like the case of the Kantian noumenon, an object that reveals itself to itself through the impossibility of its suitable representation. Now, I think the notion of “object A” in Lacan pre-
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sents both characteristics. A certain singularity that is invested with the representation of something that exceeds it, “the thing” in the Freudian sense. Lacan said that sublimation is raising an object to the dignity of thing; I believe that all hegemonic formations proceed in exactly this way.

A.G.: You see a good example of antagonisms in relatively recent times in Fordism and mass consumption, which as of the 1940s opened up new antagonisms that gave rise to the social State. However, on the current horizon of the developed world we do not see dynamics or technical advances that lead to a redistribution of wealth. Redistribution, you insist, is not only important from an economic point of view but it also has a basic political role: it acts as an extension of the social base within the liberal-democratic system, creating new antagonisms that, in short, are those that pave the way for those logics that trigger social changes.

E.L.: On the one hand, the redistributive policies came across structural limits in the neo-liberal adjustment policies of the last two decades; on the other, however, there has been a growing extension of new forms of social conflictivity. The current crisis is generating two parallel processes: the emergence of new subjects, breaking points and antagonism, on the one hand; on the other, the discrediting of neo-liberal recipes, which is paving the way for more pragmatic and redistributive politics. This can be seen with particular clarity in the Latin-American context.

A.G.: However, redistribution processes are underway, or at least an acceleration in production, in the so-called emerging powers, although they are of a very different stamp. China and India, in radically capitalist forms, although China has taken tough measures to incorporate the peasant masses from inland areas into the accumulation process. And in Latin-America, firstly Brazil, the third way of peripheral turbo-capitalism. And then other countries, from former regional powers such as Argentina, Venezuela or Mexico, to silent countries such as Peru or Bolivia, who are recuperating the sovereignty over their enormous resources in order to be able to redistribute.

E.L.: I would refer to my previous answer. As far as Latin America is concerned, it is clear that regional integration and the decreasing influen-
ce of the United States will be defining characteristics of this decade that is starting now. To quote just one case: five years ago, in the meeting of American presidents at Mar del Plata, Bush saw how his project to create the FTAA was rejected, a project which would have subordinated Latin-American economies to North American power, and since then the projects of consolidation and expansion of Mercosur have continued apace. Without mentioning the growing independence in international affairs that Latin American countries are showing.

**In the Italy of 1922 fascism was said to have been successful insofar as it had made the revolution whereas communism had failed to do so. In periods of deep social disintegration, people want order regardless its specific content**

A.G.: You indicate that one of the tasks of the political Left is to expand the open field of the social because this is the way of organizing new contingent hegemonic processes. But at the same time you point out that you don’t know what form this new priority of the political will take. This is where we get into what you call floating signifiers, i.e. ideas that may fall on either side of the field, of political tendencies, according to how they are inscribed in the social. For example, the right-wing populism of Berlusconi can perfectly take on board a series of heterogeneous demands of a social nature because it may symbolise them by some procedure. This open field of the social is totally open, with all the opportunities and risks that this entails.

E.L.: Yes, I don’t think there is any specific demand that a priori includes a pre-inscription of the necessary forms of inscription. Any one-off demand can move in a number of different directions. There is no doubt that the crisis of the Weimar republic assumed that a number of democratic demands could not be routed by the traditional institutional channels. In those circumstances, signifiers started to become not so much empty, but floating, because they admit different ways of inscription. There is no doubt that in the Nazi access to power a wide variety of democratic demands were incorporated into the Nazi discourse. Finally in the years immediately preceding the arrival of Nazism to power, the two forces that grow enormously in electoral terms are Nazism and the Communist Party, while the
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intermediate forms of institutional articulation, like social democracy, suffered an ongoing process of retraction. And if we think about the origin of Italian fascism, we can see a similar phenomenon. In Italy it is often said of the years immediately following the “March to Rome” that the fascists had succeeded in carrying out the revolution where the communists had failed. That apparently makes no sense because the two revolutions would have been completely different. But what happens is that in a period of deep social disintegration, of disorder, people are more interested in having an order of some type than in the specific contents of that order. The more their identity feels threatened and interrupted, the more indifferent they are to the order that is going to reassemble it. Then, at that moment, revolution in Italy meant many things, but it was a kind of magic signifier that posed the need to refound the state that had emerged from the Risorgimento [the national unification in the 19th century and which was in a profound crisis], i.e. the resolution of a crisis can advance in completely different directions.

The crisis of neo-liberalism in Latin America is leading to the rebuilding of the left-wing and centre-left populist regimes. But neither of them is predetermined by the nature of the specific conflicts that they articulate. The moment, for example, of political recomposition, is something that for me, unlike Tony Negri’s point of view, continues to be important, i.e. I think that there is a whole movement of autonomising bases of each one of the social struggles, but at the same time, the summit of the political system has to be changed in order for a political solution to the crisis to take place. In Venezuela, for example, without the mobilization of bases that the new communities started to create, the coup d’état of 2002 would have been successful; but at the same time, if Hugo Chávez had not been in power, those autonomous mobilisations would also have disintegrated rapidly. So, the process has to advance from different angles. If we think of May 1968 in

The generalized disenchantment with the political system in Europe has favoured the appearance of a radical populist Right. It seems unlikely that this will now follow the same course as in the 1920s and 30s, but it is worrying nevertheless.
France, today we can see where the main fault lay: nobody thought, in the midst of the mobilisations, of how to give a political solution to that crisis at the level of the state apparatus. The only person who thought of it at the time was Pierre Mendès-France [former prime minister and main leader since then of the left wing in France, who enjoyed considerable social respect]. At the time of the crisis of ’68 he was on a trip to Chile and he immediately returned to France, spoke on the radio and said that he was prepared to take power if the whole of the left supported him. What he was suggesting was the founding of a sixth republic. The problem was that no-one was interested in that. The communists had a very cautious policy of corporate negotiation with other forces and the last thing they wanted was to have a left-wing populism in France. And, on the other hand, the gauchistes were thinking about something completely different: their slogan was “power to the imagination”, that the facts signified an entirely imaginary power. In short, the whole thing led to a cul-de-sac and in the following elections, the French supported De Gaulle en masse. So I think that this is also essential: this is happening in the Latin-American processes, movements are starting to be seen at the top end of the political system and, at the same time, autonomous mobilisations of a new kind are also taking place.

A.G.: And do you not think that, apart from possibly originating in this multiplication of dislocating effects and heterogeneous antagonisms, the danger of a new totalitarian logic or even one of a social implosion may also emerge from the technical-scientific logic, insofar as it represents the muzzling of the subjectivity and objectification of the social?

E.L.: That danger is always present, but we have to understand that its main source is neo-liberalism and the technocratic tendencies associated with it. All we have to do is remember Mr Samuel Huntington. But I think that at the moment the process is moving more in the opposite direction.

A.G.: Bearing all of this in mind, and if we return, finally, to the current state of affairs, you have indicated that you do not foresee the international crisis triggering new radicalisms. You understand that there is always a point, once again a floating dimension of signifiers, as of which order is reconsti-
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tuted. A provisional balance. A historic balance. There is always, then, a contingent reconstruction of the social given the unrepresentable nature of the social and of subjects.

E.L.: I think we have to distinguish between regions. As I have already said, I am quite optimistic in terms of Latin America. I am much less so for Europe. In Europe, the capitulation of the social democratic parties in the face of the neo-conservative ideologies has constituted a generalised, dominant line. I remember that Eric Hobsbawm wrote once that Tony Blair was Thatcher in trousers. The result of this tendency is that the distance between the conservative and social-democratic elites has decreased, and that people are not in a position of clear political opposition. The result has been a generalised disenchantment with the political system and this has propitiated the emergence, in many countries of the [Old] Continent, of a radical populist right-wing. I do not think it is likely that this will give rise to a political swing like those seen in the 1920s and ‘30s, but the signs, in any case, are worrying.
Paula Sibilia

The eclipse of the modern inner world and the search for spectacular happiness
Paula Sibilia

Sibilia is a lecturer in Cultural Studies and New Media at the Federal Fluminense University of Rio de Janeiro, where she has lived since 1994. She is one of the emerging cultural anthropologists in the international field of this discipline. She studied Communication and Anthropology at the University of Buenos Aires, holds a master in Communication from the same Brazilian University, and a PhD. in Collective Health and also in Communication and Culture from the State University of Rio de Janeiro. Her main intellectual interests revolve around the status of the body and its images, new corporal practices and transformations in contemporary subjectivity in times of crisis, which is related to the tendency of the “spectacularisation of the self”. Sibilia has written two books of considerable impact. In *Postorganic Humankind: Body, Subjectivity and Digital Technologies* (2002), she analyses the underlying philosophical principles of contemporary techno-science, decoding its political, social and ethical articulations. In line with authors such as Deleuze and Foucault, she develops the concept of biopolitics coined by the latter, in which Sibilia inscribes the omnipresence of computer discourse and the aura enjoyed by medical discourse. In *Intimacy as spectacle* (2008), she analyzes the keys with which the current exhibition of privacy is presented through the Internet and, specifically, the 2.0 network, i.e. the new interactive audiovisual communication channels, as spaces such as Facebook, My Space, blogs, photologs, YouTube are known, in which users exhibit images, exchange material and relate to one another. This anthropologist analyses to this end the meanings of this cultural phenomenon of the first order to which today’s unstoppable drive to make oneself visible leads.
This Seminar proposes to think of the present under the sign of the crisis and what is to come: to consider the current crisis as something more rooted in contemporary culture and not just a mere circumstance of a financial order. Because this episode has been triggered in an unprecedented social and cultural context, in which a generalised crisis reigns, that affects not only the economy but also a number of basic institutions of the modern period. From the family and the school to political parties, as well as ideals and values that were considered universal under the sign of democracy, such as progress and equality, for example, that today we can see on the horizon of globalisation.

This is a complex plot, without doubt, in which techno-science, the marked and mass media play key roles. In this scenario, we discover that even the subject himself is in crisis today: the very definition of what we are is in question. For this reason, what I propose here is to ponder on those displacements, those mutations and their consequent unease or the perplexity they provoke, because perhaps all this represents a transition...
between different ways of life associated with specific ways of being, that are going out of date and other ways of life that are gaining strength because they are compatible with the new ways of being in the world. These reconfigurations are still very novel, hence why it is so difficult to understand what they are about: we are in the midst of a metamorphosis and we need maps to map out the new territory.

I therefore propose to reflect on these challenges and enigmas based on a concrete object that can be considered a symptom of this major crisis and of the changes that it brings with it. I refer to certain “confessional” uses of Internet, particularly, but not exclusively, by children and young people. These practices are manifested in blogs and photologs, in the social networks such as Facebook, Twitter y MySpace, and in the exchange of videos through sites such as YouTube. My proposal is to think in what way these attitudes imply certain transformation in terms of ways people relate to one another and, above all, in the production of typically contemporary subjectivities.

On the one hand, as we know, an enormous expansion in the possibilities of producing, circulating and consuming a very wide range of textual and audiovisual types of creation is underway, with a scope that until very recently would have been unthinkable, thanks to the popularisation of the Internet, mobile ‘phones and other mobile devices. On the other hand, however, there are some more controversial facets to this phenomenon, such as the increasing “exhibition of intimacy”, i.e. this desire to be famous or to become a celebrity, the desperate longing to conquer visibility, the will to make a show of oneself, a desire to transform one’s own life and the I – what one is – into a spectacle. I would like to reflect on the extent to which these tendencies have political relevance. Because it may seem to be something banal, trivial, that does not warrant much attention, but I think that that impression would change with an examination of its implications from this standpoint.

Over recent years, accompanied by remarkable technical progress, the ways available for achieving an increasingly sought after state, that of fame, have multiplied. Together with being famous, people want to be able to access the much sought-after “spectacular happiness”. This is why the new channels of personal interactive media exposure that flourish on the Internet have be-
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come so popular. Not just blogs, photologs and social networks, but also webcams, those small recording cameras that transmit on the web all kinds of “private” images uninterruptedly in real time. These mechanisms are now incorporated into the computer so that you don’t even have to make the decision to buy them separately. Apart from the Internet, other new genres of expression and communication have emerged, such as TV “reality shows”, for example, as well as a whole set of parallel phenomena such as first person documentaries, the boom of autobiographies in the publishing market and the various modalities of “self-portrait” in contemporary arts.

This is a broad set of new options that share a certain era brand, because they all allow and stimulate personal exhibition. Thus, more and more spaces are opened in which what counts is showing yourself: showing what one is, exhibiting an attractive and supposedly real or authentic I. Or at least something that looks like it: a verosimile and spectacular I. By making use of this type of resource, millions of people the world over write about themselves, narrate their lives with the help of photos and videos and build themselves like characters in that daily “confession”. Because all that tends to be exhibited, at least potentially, before millions of eyes: people from all over the world spend their time and energy consuming this type of material. The slogan of YouTube, for example, is “Broadcast Yourself”. And that is what it is all about: exhibiting oneself, transforming oneself into a visible character, as if one’s own life were a film and as if we were all entitled to recruit millions of spectators and “fans”. Or, as they say in the brand new, successful Twitter: now we can all have “followers”.

Very often, then, in these new media interactive spaces what is said or shown is not so important: the most important thing is the mere fact of making oneself visible, of exhibiting oneself and being on screen. In these cases...
– which are obviously not all of them, although they are numerous and for that reason, merit our attention – it appears that the final “work” that each person can produce will always be accessory, because it does not matter very much what one actually does when one shows oneself. All of this will only be of value if it contributes to the celebrity of the subject on show: the work serves and counts insofar as it adorns, makes a spectacle of or increases the value of the personal image of the exhibitionist. In short, what is of interest is not what but who.

What does this mean? Why does it only matter what each person is or that which each subject is capable of showing and pretending to be? It means that the spot-light shines on the character that each subject embodies in his/her real life. And, in this sense, the ability to exhibit on screen that character that one is is fundamental. Now, what does that being someone in the sense of being a character consist of? What kind of character are we talking about? If we think of the protagonists of reality shows like Big Brother, for example, or of the users of the Internet who exhibit themselves on the new interactive channels, are they fictional characters or real people? That question would appear to re-address a apparently worn-out and sterile differentiation: that which delimits reality and fiction. It is worth, then, reformulating the question: are these artists that create works of art, rehearsing new modalities of invention and updating the production of fiction? Or are they “normal” people, mere Internet users who show and tell the truth about their lives as truthful documents about who they are?

Converting what one is into image

To try and understand a little better what all this means, what the vital and political sense of these new habits is, what they involve and for what motives they prosper today, I am going to resort to some reflections by Walter Benjamin, taken from his essays dedicated to the study of the impacts of the emergence of movies in our culture. In a text from the nineteen thirties, the German philosopher observed that film actors, those glamorous stars whose radiance shone out from the big screen, did not tend to represent a character before their audience. By contrast with what occurred traditionally in the theatre, for example, an activity with which early films were often compared,
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the actors of the new medium did something different. “The film actor only portrays himself”, sustains Benjamin.

The best results would even be achieved when actors represent as little as possible; i.e. when they act for the camera without embodying the role of any character; when instead of interpreting other fictional beings, invented by a writer, those successful film stars expose their own personalities on the screen. That would explain, according to Walter Benjamin, at least partially, the strong attraction of film stars, particularly of that type of movies that the television has subsequently inherited. Because those actors who portrayed themselves so well seem to open up the opportunity to everyone to be in films. Thus it must have been thanks to that medium, and more specifically to the narrative model catapulted by Hollywood, that the dream not just of filming but of being filmed was born. That dream, that anybody could stand in front of a glass lens to be filmed, is absolutely modern.

Almost a century ago, Benjamin wrote that the idea of being reproduced by the camera was enormously attractive to modern man. It is clear that there is nothing new in this for us, above all given the most recent phenomenon we are focussing on here, but in the 1930s it must have been a very bold statement. The same author admitted that the idea of mass diffusion of the figure and voice of an actor left the glory of the serious theatrical artist in the shade. From this perspective, then, the movie actor was very different from that of the theatre. Not just quantitatively in terms of how many people he could reach – just one film can reach many more people than the performance of a play – but also at a qualitative level: both types of actors do different things, at least if we consider stars as prototypes of film actors.

In this affirmation lies the initial seed of the curious desire to be seen that runs through the veins of the “society of the spectacle”, i.e. of this society of ours that started to take shape in the middle of the 20th century under the seductive light of the audiovisual media: firstly the film projector and then the hypnotic shining of cathode rays. This desire to be seen appears to be fully consummated among us, with the triumph of interactive media, given that those new media channels are also, and increasingly, audiovisual. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century that great satisfaction of knowing
that everyone is looking at you is realized everywhere: the glory of being seen and noted, the pleasure of gaining access to the highly sought-after media visibility and, in this way, be someone.

This dream of appearing on screen, so intensely shared in contemporary society, appears to reach its zenith in services such as those offered by Justin TV, Ustream or Stickam. These systems are known as full time life casting. They are channels that are already available on the Internet, “where anyone can create their own continuous life cast for free”, according to the advertising of one of them. What does that mean? The users of these services remain permanently online, without any kind of interruption, even when they are far away from their pcs installed in their homes or offices because they carry a wireless device permanently stuck to their bodies. A portable mechanism with a camera allows them to transmit their life on the Internet: everything they do and what they don’t do, given that most of the time they don’t tend to do anything. Or, rather, nothing of particular interest that might arouse the interest of other people. However, it is a kind of personal reality show, in which anybody can be the protagonist.

Benjamin has already pointed out that the film actor, rather than the theatre actor, plays himself. The 20th century’s “society of the spectacle” triggered the desire to produce a “me show”... But the vast majority of the confessional videos on Youtube are not actually watched by anyone.

There are several projects of this type that take advantage of the miniaturisation of cameras and incorporate them in different portable devices with a view to offering similar services: that those who so wish can record their whole life. This personal, total archive is presented as something of great value, although it is probably also quite dangerous. It is even worth pointing out a paradox that emanates from this type of projects, revealed with a degree of irony in Jorge Borges’ story “Funes, the Memorious”. In an extemporary fashion, because that piece of fiction was written several decades before the appearance of these phenomena, he denounces the paradox implicit in those dreams that remember every detail of one’s life. Because in order to see that film of oneself with which several contemporary companies want to tempt their poten-
tial consumers, it will be necessary to live at least one other full life... that will be passive; an existence as a mere spectator, ready to watch what has been lived during the first living experience that was filmed entirely. Without reaching the extremes of these extravagances, we are already living with something similar by using digital cameras that allow us to capture an unlimited number of daily images, to which we normally react avidly, but it is then very difficult to find the time and the will needed to look at all those photos.

Another indication of this era brand is what happens on YouTube, for example. Amongst the immense and ever-growing collection of home videos posted by people from all over the world available on this Internet portal, one can make contact with millions of people who talk about their lives in front of the camera. These are “confessional” videos or films, a whole new growing genre. People singing, dancing and doing various fripperies into the camera that records them as saying in unison: “look, this is me”. With different degrees of success, of course. Some of these episodes become famous, in a short period of time millions of people see them, they are transformed into worldwide successes and can even go onto television or get some space in other mass media. But the vast majority are hardly seen by anyone. However, they are there and continue to reproduce. With or without success, what is normally sought by means of these undertakings is to make a spectacle of oneself. The idea is to put together a “me show”, a mise-en-scène of oneself, a shout of “here I am” to reach the world.

This tendency would seem to recall the film *The Truman show*, a major cinematographic hit in 1998. The plot of this typically Hollywood fiction caused considerable surprise at the time: it showed the life of a man who had been adopted at birth by a TV channel, and subsequently brought up by a couple of actors who interpreted the role of his parents. This character’s whole life took place within a film city strewn with cameras that broadcast everything to homes the world over. The only person who didn’t know anything about the set up and its TV transmission in real time was the protagonist: poor old Truman, that “real man” who though he was living an ordinary, normal, real life, i.e. what is considered to be a “true life”, one that is not pretence or acted, nor converted into a show for the enjoyment of innumerable eyes belonging to others.
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The TV programme was very successful, the spectators were fascinated by this very point: because the protagonist was not an actor who interpreted the “false emotions” of a fictitious character, as in traditional theatre, for example. Truman was a real-life character who just lived his life and showed it without realising that he was doing so, exhibiting to the hidden cameras the “real emotions” of his true character. Even when both he and his life were banal and apparently of little or no interest, as he wasn’t a big hero taking part in fabulous adventures, or a singular individual endowed with a bountiful interior life. There was nothing more than the trivialities of an “ordinary” life. However, the character had something that was apparently much more valuable than all that: he was real.

“We’re bored of watching actors interpreting false emotions”, explained the sinister producer of the kind of reality show depicted in the film. Have we lost interest in that which, for centuries, has constituted the basis for theatre performance? From this perspective, both films and television, and now also the Internet, will allow us to explore other much more “realistic” possibilities. It is worth asking, however, in more detail what really makes up this fascination exercised by real characters in a context such as our own, in which the influence of the audiovisual media is incalculable. Benjamin had already felt it several decades ago; when dealing with these kinds of media, it is not fictional characters that most seduce the audience. It is real characters who manage to bewitch screen spectators. The question, then, should change to, why?

In principle, it doesn’t seem to matter if these characters are trivial or far from extraordinary. The mere fact that they are real and spontaneous, or that they appear to be so, with no script or editing, appears to justify their attraction. For this reason, to illustrate this vigorous tendency in contemporary culture, perhaps it is not necessary to resort to the tragedy of The Truman Show which, after all, is fiction and now appears to be a bit out
of date. Not just because it is over a decade old, but because its protagonist despairs when he discovers that his whole life has been a “mere” show for the eyes of others. By contrast, from this side of reality, four or five years ago a new item was published in daily newspapers and new sections the world over, according to which nearly thirty thousand candidates had applied to participate in a reality show with no set finishing date, responding to the announcement of a German TV station. Something like an eternal, consented and much less fictional *Truman Show*. It was even announced that the life of sixteen chosen people would be lived out forever in a scenographic city, all their movements would be constantly registered by dozens of cameras that would transmit them live on TV.

We didn’t know if this actually happened or not, if it was a rumour or a project that was subsequently abandoned, but the noteworthy thing is that it sounds likely. It might seem a bit unusual, but given what has happened over the last ten years, it is not exactly improbable. And this should surprise us, because it means that something has changed a great deal over the last decade. Let us recall that *The Truman Show* is one year older than the first *Big Brother* type reality show, inaugurated on Dutch TV a few months before the end of the last century. And that is has been recreated up until today, with the same tremendous success, by broadcasters all over the planet. Something has changed considerably over the last decade, then, because there are now huge numbers of people who want to be a “mere” real person in order to become a real show. Instead of despairing at being just a show and wanting to become a real person, as happened to the unhappy Truman.

**Being an audiovisual character**

The relationship woven between these recent transformations and the current success of “confessional” practices on the web is very close. With the dissemination of mobile devices that permit access to the Internet from just about anywhere, many users tend to be permanently connected to these mechanisms. This real vital fusion denotes a certain climate of the era, that has a strongly political crucible, because interactive media channel this insistent current demand: they enable anyone to become the author and
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narrator of an attractive character. Someone who turns their intimacy into a constant, daily spectacle, potentially destined for the curious eyes of the whole planet. That character, of which many are now authors and narrators, is always called I, and wants to make a spectacle of him/herself: the every present and increasingly strident “me show”.

The journey up to this point aimed to reformulate, once again, the initial question. What characterises a character? Where would the difference with a real person lie? At this point, I think it is clear that it is not a case of the classic – and increasingly problematic – distinction between reality and fiction, or truth and lie, or between unmasked authenticity and pretence inherent in the use of disguises. What would be the difference, then, that operates here between person and character? Perhaps that difference resides in solitude. And, above all, in the capacity to be alone. Or, more accurately, in the increasing incapacity to be alone; because this is an ability that is increasingly rare in our culture, something that has less and less sense for us.

But, what does this have to do with characters? By contrast with what continues to happen to what we call “ordinary people” or “real people”, characters are never alone. There is always someone watching everything they do, avidly following all their acts and gestures, all their feelings and thoughts, and who knows even their tiniest emotions. There is always a spectator, a reader, a camera, a gaze on the character that takes away his/her human character, that merely human character of the “real person”, and turns it into a real character, in the life of real people, by contrast, our acts are not always witnessed by someone: be they heroic or miserable, and much less those day-to-day trivialities. Perhaps too often, no-one watches us; we have no witnesses to what we are. The problem is if no-one watches us, in this society that is so oriented towards visibility, that sets so much store by the image and media success, what does it matter if at some point we were marvellously unique or even if we were ridiculously ordinary? If there is no gaze capable of celebrating our existence, consuming it as valuable images, how can we guarantee that we really exist or that we are someone?

I wanted to get to this contemporary experience of solitude because I consider that this is where the nub of the problem lies. Because that intima-
te, private isolation, without witnesses of any kind, represented a fundamental element to cement a kind of typically modern “way of being”, that perhaps we are leaving behind. Some authors call this model of human being who reached his zenith in the 19th and a significant part of the 20th centuries sentimental man, homo psychologicus or homo privates. A type of subject that built what he was, his I, with the help of the word: reading and writing were basic tools for the building of this historical “way of being”, an interiorised subjectivity build around an axis located “within” oneself. Both stories and novels as well as letters and private diaries were very useful tools for embarking on introspective travels to think about oneself, to reflect on what each one actually was. In these interior explorations a singular I was created: the protagonist of a story called “my life”. All these introspective practices based on the word needed solitude and silence to be able to carry them out; consequently, they required a private refuge, clearly separate and protected from the reigning bustle of the public space of the urban, industrial era.

This is why solitude is so important to understand the metamorphosis that we are undergoing. It is no coincidence that today we are aware of a growing inability to be alone, a certain panic at the thought of solitude and silence, which have suddenly become problems; they are not only undesirable but even unbearable. Neither is it coincidental that it is precisely solitude where the major abyss that still insists on separating us from characters lies.

Because if the truth about who we are is only supported by interiorness, i.e. by something located “within” each one and that constitutes its very essence, and that truth then irradiates from the image and from what we are capable of showing, then the conclusion appears very clear: if nobody can see us, nothing can prove that we exist. This would explain the intense current desire to become an audiovisual character capable of conquering the gaze of the other: from a reality-show to a profile on a social network or a blog offer this promise.

The ways of being that are projected on the surface of the visible exteriorise us and unravel the ties that used to link us to the hard core of what one was, and what constituted interior life, with its abyss. Today, the right to connection prevails.
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It is true that characters often appear to be alone: both the protagonists of classic stories and novels and those of more recent films. However, they are never really alone: they are always in view. If they were alone, they would not exist: the only are when someone looks at them or reads them, under that gaze they take on their fantastic vitality. Absolutely everything in the lives of characters happens under the bewitched eyes of their spectators or readers, or their followers – as Twitter prefers – or their friends and fans, according to the vocabulary of social networks like Facebook and MySpace. In the life of those special beings, the characters, everything happens under the gaze of the other. The most sought-after option would be if that observing eye were a Hollywood camera or one of a powerful TV station. But if such a prowess cannot be attained, a household webcam will do, one of those that constantly show what is happening inside interconnected homes. The important thing is to be focussed on by a lens that can stamp one’s image on a screen, thereby to become an audiovisual character. A lesser one, perhaps, or possible even catapulted to fame, albeit an ephemeral fame; even so, the strategy would appear to be valid and desirable.

From internal abysses to the mediatic veneer

So the sudden desire for visibility that today is expanding everywhere, this ambition to transform the I into an audiovisual show can also be interpreted as a more or less desperate attempt to satisfy a human desire, that may be too human: to frighten away the ghosts of solitude. The problem is that that goal has become particularly complicated in this day and age, when these newly-minted subjectivities that we could call “externalized” flourish, as they are ever less anchored in interiorness. This “interior” instance was considered an intimate, dense space, the fruit of the confluence between the main aspects that make up the modern subject: universalist rationalism of illuminist roots and the singularising irrationalism of the romantics. This magma constituted a pretty solid, stable basis, despite its abysses and turbulences, the heaviness of which could not only asphyxiate but also protect subjectivity: it anchors the I around its axis and offered it a whole basis of references that are now in crisis or becoming fragile.
In mid-metamorphosis, the new ways of being that are projected on the surface of the visible, these types of subjectivity that are so contemporary and are also invented via the Internet, untie the mooring ropes that used to be provided by something that now sounds so old-fashioned: inner life. It is exactly in that liberation, however, that they also lose their shelter. Of course, that interiorised essence was also an invention, with its own premises, advantages and historical utilities; and for all these reasons, it is considerably different from this novelty that we can now see developing. There appears to be less and less space “within” ourselves to keep whatever it might be, or that internal gallery has become less valuable because it has ceased to be so necessary. Now, by contrast, various pressures drive us to exhibit everything that we are; or at least to show what we would like others to think we are; in fact, there is less and less difference between the two. If we are something, then it has to be seen, that trait cannot remain hidden “inside” but must be projected on the skin or screen. Because if something is not shown and nobody sees it, then it probably doesn’t exist.

Nevertheless, despite its complex equilibrium, that internal space had its solidity and maintained a degree of stability during the personal history of each person. That interior space was considered a hidden, true essence with a degree of continuity, where everything was related: according to the accounts of psychoanalysis, for example, each element has some sense in relation to the whole, nothing was gratuitous and therefore nothing could or should be erased or thrown out, or be changed for something new or considered better. Interiorness was the hard core of what one was: consistent and harsh, it needed those two valuable ingredients – solitude and silence – to build itself, to grow and to be. It needed privacy and intimacy, and it had to strengthen itself in the shade from the eyes of others.

As an illustration, I like to allude to the burning defence of the room of her own that Virginia Woolf made in the 1920s, i.e. in the midst of the boom of the interiorised “way of being” that we are now abandoning. The British writer advocated that private intimate space as a basic tool to be able to develop subjectivity, as the right of all women as human beings. In order to be someone – and the problem was that, at that time, women did not have that right – it was necessary to be able to enjoy that private room, to practise the active right of a
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Paula Sibilia during the conference. As her backdrop, the III Atlantic Seminar poster. | Photo: N.B.O.
room of one’s own, i.e. privacy, solitude and silence; not just to create novels but also to write private diaries and letters, above all to be someone.

Now, with that image as a background, I plan to think about the difference with respect to what happens today, because I think it is clear that something has changed in this sense, and to this end I am going to quote some declarations of young Internet users. For example, a teenager who publishes her erotic photos on a blog says “I don’t do it for money, appearing makes me happy, I still can’t believe that the boys talk about me”. She is referring to the comments she receives from her visitors and spectators on the Internet, and she concludes proudly “it’s like having fans”. Here they appear again, the admirers or followers that have become so fundamental. “it’s like having someone looking at me”, we could paraphrase, “a gaze that confirms that I exist”. Another thirteen-year-old girl says “I spend the whole day on my computer in my room”. Here we see a singular updating of the room of her own that Virginia Woolf called for almost a century ago, because the declaration continues as follows: “I have 650 contacts on Messenger and hundreds of friends on Facebook that I talk to all day, and then I’ve got three personal blogs where I post my photos and write about my life; I meet lots of boys this way”. I would like to say that “lots” really does mean many, given the hundreds of contacts that shine on her screen.

Evoking that Victorian vindication of intimacy and privacy to be able to be someone at the beginning of the past century, why had women up until then not managed to be someone? Because they had no right to silence and solitude. I think it is interesting to compare this with the current discourses about “digital inclusion”, i.e. the right of all the citizens in the globalised world to have access to the Internet, handle computers, to know what YouTube and Facebook are, in short, all of this as something necessary to be someone in today’s world. If we are all to be citizens of the 21st century it is said with the best of inten-
tions that access to this type of electronic, digital tools must be democratised. This is why we can underline this comparison: what does it mean to be someone today and what did it mean to be someone a century ago?

It is clear that that old-fashioned room of her own with nineteenth century tinges is today completely out of place. Solitude is immunised between its walls, deactivated by hundreds or millions of tranquilising presences that contaminate the silence, inhibit it and avoid it at all costs. The others – hundreds, thousands, millions of more or less unknown people have access to that supposedly private room, despite the security and alarms, despite homes that are increasingly armour plated and protected in the face of the growing fear of the “insecurity” of contemporary public space. More than a right to a room of one’s own to be someone in solitude and silence, it is now the right to connection that is imposed. A prerogative that does not cease to be, also, a gentle, pleasant obligation. So there is a certain “intimacy” or privacy that is protected more and more zealously, although the rigidity of the walls may be infiltrated by those technically mediated or mediatised gazes, that travel along the leads, the antennae, the cameras and screens. Webcams constitute a perfect example of this infiltration, but so do social networks and many other resources available today.

Spectacle and solitude

It could therefore be concluded that this fascination aroused by exhibitionism and the desire to be famous, to become a visible celebrity, has put down roots in a society that is increasingly atomised by a type of individualism with narcissistic flourishes, that needs to see its image reflected in the eyes of other people in order to be. It is no longer a case of closing oneself in and much less so of hiding in the solitude of one’s own room to develop interiority in an intimate dialogue with one’s own depths, as happened when the ideal of the “Cultivated Culture” was still applicable. In the current audiovisual, spectacular culture, in order to be entitled to be someone one has to be visible, to have access to visibility and build a good image in that field. No more hiding away and locking oneself in, but showing oneself and projecting oneself. You have to be able to handle the new multimedia interactive resources in order to sur-
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vive in an increasingly competitive market of appearances.

All of this comprises a picture that is very close to what Guy Debord called “the society of the spectacle”. More than forty years ago, this author perceived the birth of this new sociocultural configuration, one of whose definitions sustains that “the spectacle is a relation between people mediated by images”. Although this is now an anachronism, because none of this would be remotely imaginable way back in 1967, we could think that what is happening today with the Internet is the consummation of the spectacle: exactly that which Debord felt by intuition. The channels of the so-called “Web 2.0” are some of the tools available for the consumption of this overriding ambition today: to model one’s own subjectivity like an image and to turn I into a spectacle. Or a well-positioned brand, able to survive in the dizzy market of personal images and physical appearances. In short, in order to be a good audiovisual person you have to know how to respond successfully to all these demands, to the pressures that the contemporary world practices on bodies and the current subjectivities: the pertinent obligation to make oneself visible in order to exist.

To conclude, I would like to underline the impression that all this implies both a panic at solitude and a growing incapacity to be alone. This makes a lot of sense: it is not a case of a disorder or fault, but it is perfectly compatible with the project of the world in which we are immersed. This is the point I wanted to reach when I stated that these questions are highly relevant to politics. Because this incapacity for solitude converts us into “docile and useful” bodies, as Michel Foucault would say, although in a picture that is increasingly distant from the “disciplinary societies” that the French philosopher described several decades ago. Because together with the capacity to integrate efficiently the labour chain, that modern, industrial society included a certain will to be alone and in silence. If we now stimulate just the opposite it is because now that is what is useful.

We live in a world that, despite its bad habits and continuities, is no longer that of the industrial capitalism of the 19th and 20th centuries, that needed to produce certain types of bodies and subjectivities not only disciplined but also “interiorised”, for whom private diaries, letters and novels were also tools for self-construction. Those bodies and subjectivities were trained daily in schools to be able to work in factories, for example, and to reproduce the va-
lues needed to ensure that the machinery worked properly. To a great extent, we have freed ourselves of those cogs, and in the same process we have emancipated ourselves from the burden involved in having to be faithful to that “oneself” that was considered to be lodged in each subject. That entelechy that was sometimes despotic, tyrannical, monstrous, the modern I, that subjectivity shot through with bourgeois morality, that had to obey under the pain of guilt, traumas and other suffering. We conquered that freedom as the fruit of a complex, painful historical process, in which various factors from the widest range of artistic, philosophical, political, economic and sociocultural spheres played a part.

We could think, however, if we are in fact freeing ourselves of all that, of what other cogs – or integrated circuits – we are now assembling, what are the new power networks that are being shaped now and in which these tools, practices and bodies are useful. This is why we have to consider the political side of certain tendencies that arise in contemporary subjectivities, and not just in how intimacy is being turned into spectacle and in the imperative of the connection, that curious need to be always available and the pleasure of always reporting oneself, but also in other phenomena that we could include in the same line. Like multi-tasking hyperactivity, for example: the need to be constantly updated and demonstrating a high level of performance in all areas; the capacity to recycle ourselves constantly; the lack of concentration and apathy; the body cult, immediate pleasure and that is what we call “happiness”: anxiety, panic, depression … and so the list could go on. But the point is that all these very contemporary “disorders” are functional and useful for this way of life, they serve this project of the world in which we have embarked. Despite all its contradictions, of course, but it is in no way accidental that they are developing now in the present.

In order to understand these transformations, the brief essay of Gilles Deleuze on “control societies”, written in 1990 is basic reading, together with the theses on the “society of the spectacle” that Debord perceived four decades ago. Because the relationship between all this that is happening and the
boom of the audiovisual in our culture, with the concomitant decline in reading and writing, in that horizon of cultivated culture that sounds increasingly obsolete and “boring” is very close. Debord himself would have been incapable of imagining how far our relationship with images would go in the 21st century audiovisual media, or the consummation of the loss of the word or the capacity for dialogue that he posited.

Lastly, I would like to underline once again that it is a case of hugely complex historical processes, so that capturing them in their entirety is very risky. Moreover, I would clarify that I am emphasising historical differences without ignoring obvious continuities, although everything is changing very fast, because I’m interested in understanding what we are becoming and what we are ceasing to be. When I started to think and write on this, YouTube did not exist, for example, social webs like Facebook or Twitter were unheard of, but all these novelties that appeared on the way continued to consolidate my hypotheses and contribute new ideas. I have absolutely no doubt that in the next few years many other new instruments will continue to appear for self-construction and sociability, and a lot of those that we have named here will be long-forgotten.

Many surprises will emerge that we cannot even imagine today but that I am sure will arrive. However, despite the uncertainty of this context and the fact that we are in full, rapid mutation, I think it is very important to try and think, despite the inhospitable terrain and the fact that many characteristics also appear to be conspiring against thought, the time and silence that reading and writing demand. Despite the difficulties, I think that this effort is worth it, because the important thing is to be able to act: to decide what we can and want to do with all this. I think that philosophy, thought, like art, has a primordial role to play in this task. To think and create, nothing more, nothing less.
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Paula Sibilia, standing in front of the Atlantic Seminar poster. | Photo: V.M.C.
Question: From the point of view more of psychoanalysis, which is my profession, what would the gaze of the other be that this demonstration of the whole of life is offered to? What is the condition of that other, not the subject who exhibits him/herself, but that gaze that is created as a result of exhibition? There is an outstanding question there, given the quantitatively significant and sufficiently anonymous nature of the audience. We used to be able to say that the gaze that was always present was that of the self, or in psychoanalytical terms, that of the Superego. Something along these lines seems to be embodied in this type of practice. As far as solitude is concerned, I think what you say is interesting: yes, it is a way of creating a partner for oneself, a companion towards a social tie in this practice of exhibition, of showing oneself and being watched. But this throws up a pretty serious question, which is the return of that gaze. If, as you say, the being in modernity is regulated in silences of space, of privacy, etc., by contrast, in these practices there is a being constantly being watched, which makes one think that that can only be taken as a form of forced anguish, or at least that is what we could think from the perspective of psychoanalysis. At the same time, what you have said regarding Michel Foucault is also true, that there is no longer a system of disciplinary control but it is also a panopticon.....

Paula Sibilia: My perspective is more anthropological, we could say that it is a confluence of the historical and socio-cultural vectors, but I think that psychoanalysts have a great deal to say on all these issues. I have a considerable amount of dialogue with that field of knowledge; in fact, my book *The intimacy as spectacle* was created in intense contact with that field, as it was the fruit of a doctorate I took in Brazil, coordinated by a group of researchers from three main areas: philosophy, anthropology and psychoanalysis. In that group there was much discussion on this question of the crisis of interiority, given the new cases that appeared in the clinic and that appeared not to obey the subjectivity outline that the psychoanalytical arsenal has created. For this reason it is necessary to think how to adapt it, or even whether or not it is adaptable. There is the idea that the Superego would no longer be the instance that regu-
lates the new subjective configurations, but the ideal Ego. What is clearly
the case is that there appears to be a terrible weight deposited in the gaze
of the other, a capacity to judge that can drag under all that subjectivity
that is today presented as very fragile and vulnerable, built on
less solid bases than interiority. A configuration that, of course,
just like the “interiorized” one, is an
intersubjective creation that is generated in contact with others, as
one would expect for something that is understood as human from
an anthropological point of view: if it is not social, it cannot be taken as human. But beyond that more or
less obvious basis, what is happening now is a historical mutation in terms
of the cultural configuration of “ways of being”. The modern subject enjoyed that interior thickness, in which he could take refuge even if there
was not anybody close by watching him, or if everyone was against him,
in any case he had a “himself” with which to dialogue and on whom to
lean. But when this thickness of interiority loses strength, value and gravity, the gaze of the other becomes something vital for the confirmation
of the very existence of the subject, and this explains his vulnerability:
his subjectivity is very fragile, it is endangered because it could fall apart
before any obstacle. Nothing can be hidden, the possibility of retiring to
that refuge to hide everything considered too intimate to be shared, much
less shown, is no longer available.

At this point the new disordered that are under discussion today
appear, such as anxiety disorders, social phobias, panic syndromes, food
disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, depression, abulia and addictions.
So, despite the liberation that I mentioned briefly, because somehow we
would be getting rid of a degree of the tyranny of the 19th century
Superego –at least, of a considerable amount of that disciplinary, moral,
interiorised force-, on the other hand, however, there is that external
pressure, that exposure to and excessive dependence on the gaze of the
other, that makes these new types of subjectivity very vulnerable.

The market plays a basic role in this
externalized subject; today, “ready-made
characters” are sold a kind of moral
permission prevails and even
neuroscience seeks to eliminate trauma.
In the end, this just increases fragility.
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Obviously the market plays a fundamental role in this state of affairs, because today “ready-to-use personalities” are sold, as they are termed by a Brazilian psychologist called Suely Rolnik. Today, kits of standard profiles are manufactured and sold to be used, discarded and renewed following the pace of fashions. So if we no longer believe in the value of the personal history of each person, which constitutes us from birth and is housed “within” each one (a kind of internal file in which everything means something and that cannot be erased in any way because it would remain, despite the attempt at erasure, constituting what one is), there would now appear go be a kind of moral permission or even socio-cultural or economic pressure to “erase” certain things, to forget what one has been and reinvent ourselves at whim. There is even research in neuroscience that points to “erasing traumatic memories”, for example. This would be inconceivable if we were completely immersed in the paradigm of the interior, because in that case just the opposite would occur: the more we insist on wanting to negate something, the more strongly it will appear, and the more significant and dangerous it will be.

But at the point where we have this moral permission to erase certain things that were formerly considered “inherent”, to exteriorise certain internal weights, the market offers us ready-made solutions. It is as though we were being told, from advertising showcases: “well, you don’t want that so chuck it out and buy this!” So you can dye your hair a different colour, have plastic surgery, change your style and you are considered to have undergone a transformation. But, of course, all of this is also subject to the fashions and trends of each season, so fragility increases with each transformation.

I also use the Internet, but in order to better think what to do in the face of the unprecedented freedom of choice that it entails, I prefer to adopt a critical perspective and underline the different pressures that exist to shape certain new “ways of being”.

Question: I would like to comment on this question of having something at hand on the computer or via the Internet that leads us to another being, to
being a character. I am carrying out research on a game called Second Life, and it is very interesting to see how the person, through that avatar that is fabricated, has new hair, a new sex. You go into a life that is another life, a virtual life. The curious thing is that there are an ever-increasing number of people subscribed to the game—some 75,000 in Spain, a significant number—and how this question of the subject no longer has this real life but moves into virtual life. My reflection is if it is not the case that the subject is afraid of real encounters with the other and therefore prefers to move to this marvellous virtual life, where everything is possible and happiness is guaranteed.

P.S.: Second Life would be one more tool in the sense of those that I mentioned in my presentation. Of course, it has its own specific characteristics, but it is moving in a similar direction. I wouldn’t draw such a clear distinction between virtual and real life, because I think that what happens in Second Life and in all those Internet spaces is also “real”. My research subject that I summarised here today wasn’t the Internet, I am not particularly interested in what happens on the Internet, but to study those spaces as privileged places in which these processes can be seen in a more exalted fashion, where perhaps all this becomes more of a spectacle and more obvious. But the new ways of building oneself as a subject—which doesn’t happen only on the Internet, but everywhere: that construction as a visible character increasingly impregnates our daily life.

That’s why I’m not sure if what happens in Second Life is more virtual or less real that what happens in day-to-day face-to-face relations. Certain bodies and subjectivities on this side of the screen, i.e. the side we call real, sometimes seem too like the avatars of Second Life. In fact, the media models of celebrities, that we all apparently want to imitate, are a bit like Second Life avatars. It is clear that what happens on the Internet has its singularities, it is not the same as what we do in our daily lives, but neither is it so different and, above all, it is real. If we think of the contemporary obsession with one’s body (plastic surgery, gyms, diets), this type of body that is so highly coded that we have to copy and be it, that so many people die trying to imitate, is also somehow plastificated and “unreal”, in the sense that it is pure image. As and when that body shows its thickness, its carnal consistency and organic viscosities, it is no longer
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ideal, it ceases to be the body that is worshipped and to which we are all supposed to aspire. When a model gets older, for example, wrinkles or any other “defect” that spoils her smooth inorganic skins are erased using software for editing images, like Photoshop. In this sense, I would say, it is not so different either: be it on the Internet or outside, we are talking about practices and tools that we invent because in some way we feel that we need them in order to live in this world.

Question: Although I am not going to contradict your thesis, I intend to give others that I also think are correlative. What I am left with in the end is a somewhat catastrophic vision of visual spectacles, i.e. of new technologies. I agree with what you have been saying, but I also think that there is another possible reading that co-exists with your vision, at least in my experience. Firstly, human beings, with their solitudes, fears, guilt, have always existed and will always exist; the Internet is not going to transform or change that. Secondly, the subject of technology as you have addressed it. It is all there, but other versions are also true. For example, my first contact with Twitter was through my daughters and they see that I read at home and that I like reading. They have continued to read but they also use new technology because it exists. I am also getting into it. Writing letters has become writing e-mails, which entails some major dangers. But I am going to talk about its virtues. I think that the main problems in this question are the limits. We need limits, because technology obviously does entail dangers, such as addiction. What I cannot agree with is what you have said about inner life, that personal room that we each have, and that it will in all cases become faded, I do not believe that these technologies are always at odds with this inner room. For example, on Facebook I have a lot of contact with book editors, with people who are constantly writing, who transmit their paragraphs, their fragments, their life ... It is a way of contacting them and with many others who post their videos, music and comments that interest me. They are new channels that are opening up and offer tremendous advantages, in the sense that communication flows in different ways. They are there, that is undeniable.

P. S.: I also use the Internet, and in no way do I want to demonize those tools, or deny either their existence or relevance. Neither am I calling for a return to the caves, or even to the 19th century. If I sounded catastro-
phic, perhaps it was a result of a rhetorical effect that aimed to give an alternative vision to the triumphant one we are so used to. Individual and collective experiences are very rich and varied, and perhaps more so now than ever, because this moral permission that I have just mentioned does really exist together with an unprecedented set of freedom of choice, despite the hegemonic pressures that encourage us to be and to act in a specific way. But, at least in theory, today many of us could do what we wanted; we are even told that we should do so. We have to be different, happy, unique, etc. But what I want to set out is that there are certain socio-cultural, political and economic pressures that stimulate the configuration of certain specific, historical “ways of being” that are becoming hegemonic at this point of major transition.

I want to avoid being too schematic: it is clear that it is not the case that we no longer have an inner life, that’s over and done with and let’s move onto something else, because if that were the case, I would have had to explain in a much more detailed way what was that thing that our ancestors called “interiorness”. If we address this from an anthropological standpoint, I think you will agree that we are talking about something somewhat crazy that was invented some time ago, as if on opening up a modern subject, we are going to find innards and viscera, nothing like the mysterious entity we are talking about here. However, you understood very clearly what I was talking about: we all know what this inner life is and we feel it. Nevertheless, it is not difficult for us to think why some contemporary authors detect a transition towards other ways of building subjectivity as if this inner instance were being deflated and its value were falling, giving rise to other ways of building oneself that rely more on visibility.

This is what takes us to the race for plastic surgery, for example: it is not that people now resort to aesthetic operations simply because they exist. It’s the same as in the case of the social networks: technology is there because we invented it and if we invented it we use it because we are interested in the function it fulfils. In fact, you don’t have to force anyone: people do not undergo liposuctions (that horrible operation that consists of hovering up fat from human bodies) because it is compulsory. Ho-
However, and although it is far from a pleasant experience, lots of people do it. Lots of people don’t do it for the simple reason that they can’t afford to, but if they could, they would. There are others who are a bit afraid, but may pluck up courage and do it. It is not a duty, and yet there is something in our culture that pressures us to want to do it and to do it. Why today is it so important not to see people’s bellies? Why is it so important not to be old, or not to look it? Why do people invest so much energy in disguising old age as if it were something to be ashamed off, when in other cultures maturity is associated with other values, like experience, for example?

I don’t want to give the impression that everything is a catastrophe: I have no particular interest in vindicating a past that was supposedly better. But as the idea here is to think about life to come, I wanted to look at a critical perspective to stimulate debate. I think it is worth thinking along these lines, because to defend the opposite posture, we have all that advertising that shines on the city walls or TVs and tells us that everything is wonderful. In order to be able to think better and choose what we want to do with what we have got, I prefer to underline the darker side that tends not to be questioned so much, thereby also avoiding antonyms of the “positive” and “negative” type that to me appear sterile.

Question: I completely agree with what you say, they are historical variations.

P.S.: They are historical variations and they have a meaning: it is no coincidence that this should be happening right now. Just as, at the time, that historical “interiorized” way of life was useful, because it served the hegemonic powers of the 19th and 20th centuries and was compatible with the lifestyle proposed by that project. Bodies and subjectivities were needed, and by this I am not just referring to the disciplined body of the machine-man represented by Chaplin in *Modern Times* and that would take
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Running... the past. Nayra Bello O'Shanahan, Sarajevo 2010.
on the gestures and rhythms of the factory, and the working day capacity of the industrial era, obedient and respectful of hierarchies, etc. I also refer to the subject who wrote letters and kept diaries, who fell in love and suffered in accordance with the values of the 19th century, etc. Similarly, we could say that the bodies and subjectivities that are useful to our contemporary society are different. They are subjects that are more compatible with current demands, more spontaneously creative, anxious, connected, willing to change, etc.

Question: An image that I saw today on the TV news comes to mind. A man who lived in a cave in appalling conditions and someone who offered him a dwelling. The image of these people was diametrically opposed to that of the man, a fairly well-off family. That was when I realised what image is all about. I wonder what people would think of that person who is looking for a degree of dignity and that family who interpret him as a kind of servitude. That interpretation of the image can be harmful for any human being who wishes to have a degree of dignity in this stupid society. I am sure that man’s principles, deep internal values are completely different from those of our wild society that does not work, that just speculates, and the people who carry the weight of society as a whole are those who finally pay the price.

P. S.: If I have understood you properly, I think that in this case the question of image would be the least important, because, according to your description, that person did not form part of the “luminous” circuit of new technology and marketing that we are discussing here, and he is certainly not the only one. You do not have to go to such extremes in order to be outside that circuit. If we check the number of people with access to the Internet, for example, the statistics for Europe are not so catastrophic, but in Latin America, we are talking about an insignificant part of the population. However, the curious thing is that it doesn’t show. If you visit certain Latin American countries and you don’t take a detour, as it were, towards those caves that you mentioned you could easily think that everyone there is also connected and happily shopping online. Because that is the discourse that circulates the most and that makes the most noise: now we are all connected, and it doesn’t get any better than that. Although we know that it is not exactly like that. But it does-
n’t matter, because those of us that are connected set the pace of contemporariness, conquer visibility, and that is what matters.

Question: **According to what you are saying, I could interpret that the virtual is real but not up-to-date.**

**P. S.:** Well, that is the dictionary definition of “virtual”, let’s say. But, as we tend to say colloquially, apart from the Internet, “virtual” tends to refer to what happens on the Internet. Which does not coincide with the classic definition, because what happens on the Internet is up-to-date and real.

Question: **The phenomenon would appear to be getting stronger, but would you dare to guess how this story will end?**

**P. S.:** As I said a little while ago, new things turn up all the time. When I started to think about these things, for example, some six or seven years ago, social networks didn’t exist, only blogs, not even photologs. I found it interesting that, depending on the novelty factor, blogs were defined as “intimate diaries published on the Internet”. That rankled with me. How can a personal diary be published on the Internet? Then I started to study what intimacy is and how it could have been transformed to the extent of becoming something that allows a personal diary to be published on the Internet. And while I was researching this, I was overrun by photologs, videologs, YouTube, social networks...

Looking into the future a bit, then, I think that more systems like these will emerge, because it is not just a case of the Internet. Once again I would insist: if we have invented all of this it is because we needed these tools to build a type of spectacularised subjectivity. Beyond that, luckily, I don’t know what will happen in the future. The idea is to think in the present, because I think that if we think based on this present we are already building what will come. Perhaps this implies making an effort to think of ourselves as subjects of history, something that is also becoming increasingly difficult. It is as if the future were only open to technological progress and other spheres of the horizon had closed, hence the
impression that there is nothing more we can do. In the contact that I have with young people, in class, I am particularly surprised by this: they see the future as closed. For them, it is only a case of technology advancing and natural, or other types of “external” catastrophes. But to think of themselves as subjects of history is something they view as being very old-fashioned. I am in my forties and I lived through the Argentinean dictatorship, for example, or what happened in the Latin American dictatorships in general, I can tell that I have a much greater sense of history because of what I have lived through, that to many members of the younger generations appear surprisingly alien. Perhaps this is also due to the decline in interiorised subjectivity, which implies a relationship with the past, and therefore also with the present and the future.

So, despite the fact that we are all immersed in this new magma, because nobody is outside this contemporariness, those of us who are a little older have a certain notion that the future is more or less open. Younger people, by contrast, find it more difficult to think in these terms. For them, the future is already closed, and that is awful because it means they have no capacity to do anything: the present drags them along in its crazy dizziness towards something that will be more or less the same but with new technology, if there is no ecological catastrophe or terrorist attack along the lines of 9/11, i.e. a catastrophe that lies outside our scope of action as subjects of history. Then, perhaps as the question is how to think about the future, I would propose this exercise of rethinking ourselves as subjects of history, given that all these things we’ve been debating are clearly historical, and we invented them ourselves.
Javier Tolentino

Exhibition of the void
or listening to people
who know they are
being watched is
always a waste of time
Javier Tolentino

Director of the Seventh Vice (El Séptimo Vicio) programme on Spanish National Radio 3 (Radio Nacional de España - RNE) since it was first broadcast. This radio programme dedicated to films with the highest audience figures in Spain, is led by one of the most reputable Spanish film critics. He also coordinated the Word Tree (El árbol de las palabras), a space that facilitates contact and communication between African, Asian and European Cinematography broadcast by the Spanish World Service (Radio Exterior de España) through its associate channels around the world. Tolentino started out as a journalist in Radio 3, on the Diálogos programme directed by Ramón Trecet. He has always specialised in cultural information, and has held different posts in outstanding radio programmes on culture in general and films in particular, such as El Ojo Crítico, El otro cine posible or De Cine. He is also often sent as a special film reporter for RNE to cover leading festivals, such as Cannes, Venice, Berlin and San Sebastian, among others. At the same time, he lectures on the RNE’s Master programme and at different university institutions. He often collaborates with magazines and journals that specialise in cinematographic information, with the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and the Spanish Psychoanalytical Society and he participates and collaborates in the programming of Dialogue Cinema, a prestigious and popular forum in Madrid that organises meetings for film-makers. He has published two books, Julieta en el país de las maravillas. Una conversación con Norma Leandro (1999) and Ni tiburón ni mojarrita. Diálogos con Leonardo Sbaraglia (2004). He is preparing an in-depth study on the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman.
There is a kind of sensation in today’s society that is very well expressed in this Third Edition of the Atlantic Seminar: the sensation of void, a kind of free fall into disenchantment. A sort of lethargy into which the human being would appear to have let himself fall, a mental state filled with impotence and the scant belief in the other, in an other that relates to us like a salesman. From the other we always get the message that he wants something from us, but isn’t actually interested in us.

Some people are pointing towards, indicating, drawing up the theory of what could be a discourse of man emptied of his being.

But, aside from market analysis, petrol values, admissible quotas of corruption and obscenity, aside from the showcase where we place the capacity for intervention and we put the starting line for the change of the subject, of the protagonist of life to come, we will have to work out what can be done with
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all this, despite the fact that nothing can be done, or not?

Poets, film directors, thinkers and artists think out loud, put their work forward and dare to do so, and perhaps this is still important, the important thing, despite the inevitable repetition it gives rise to. We are concerned about creation, the capacity to make proposals, the option of intervening, of not leaving our lives in the hands of others. Perhaps this is precisely what defines creation.

And why? Why paint, direct, write …? Why get up every day? Because we can’t not, because it is what our soul asks us to do. A writer writes to bear witness, and, above all, to perceive how and to what extent he/she belies herself. I write because I think; I build a language in order to know, perhaps, that I can love. One day, watching and listening to a news broadcast, I just couldn’t take it any more. I was waiting for a phone call that never came and I had butterflies in my stomach; I perceived that emotion almost without realising it, that sensation became a challenge, defying the newsreader, a tête-à-tête with the establishment that came into my house by cable. And it splashed all the walls of the room with mechanical, toxic, predictable, bureaucratic language. I reached out for a post-it and wrote: those that are guilty of or responsible for the crisis and swine 'flu don’t know how to love.

And why paint, direct, write? Because there is no alternative, our soul demands it of us. One writes to bear witness and perceive how and to what extent he/she belies him/herself. I write because I think, I build a language to know that perhaps I can love.

When I was staring at the images of the people who went about their daily businesses with masks on their faces to protect them from viruses, following the reporter’s words, the phone rang: the radio station director’s was surprised by the disagreement that I had appeared to have taken part in with a modern, transgressive cult author. When she had finished, I asked her if she had ever really been in love. She laughed in desperation:

“Don’t think that by using these types of tricks you’re going to get me to change the time El séptimo vicio is broadcast”.
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Shots from Isabel Coixet’s *Map of the sounds of Tokyo* (2009).
“No, I’m serious”, I said.

“Well, look, I don’t feel like going into these teenager-type, end-of-class-on-a-Friday questions”.

I convinced her that that wasn’t my intention, that I was writing a text for an Atlantic Seminar ....

“But, why don’t you concentrate on the principles and theories of social communication? Reread Ryszard Kapuscinski, the editor-in-chief of Le Monde Diplomatique, Ignacio Ramonet, Josep Ramoneda, Antonio Pascuale, remember the theories of Vázquez Montalbán but don’t start messing me around now, Javier”.

I apologised, it wasn’t the right time or the right subject to pursue right then, and then I recalled some of the students who didn’t think their recommended reading, María Zambrano as back-up texts for an exercise of journalistic writing, was suitable, perhaps they were of the same opinion...

But I had always had problems with faith and with the school hymn. Something similar happens with García Márquez’s theory and, of course, with that of Kapuscinski: his five senses of the journalist: to be present, see, hear, share, think, or going over the loyal Decalogue of Albert Camus: no subjecting oneself to power, flee from the desire to become an opinion leader and that danger of mutilating truth to suit the ends of propaganda....

And I understand and perfectly comprehend the advice of a British war correspondent and international analyst like Robert Fish: the importance of sources in the process of journalistic knowledge.

However, and far from wishing to sound frivolous although that may be the impression given, some time ago, in the Contemporary Journalism Centre, Information Theory workshop of the University of Malabo (Equatorial Guinea), in an encounter with young students, one of them asked me what made a good journalist and I answered as follows:

He/she should like good chocolate, with a purity of at least eighty percent.
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Shots from Marc Recha’s *Petit indi* (2009).
That his/her favourite drinks should include a good gin tonic, a caipirinha or a daiquiri.

That he/she should have been in a position, at least once, of having to respond to the responsibility of loving.

Returning to my radio station director’s phone call, it was, for me, just a test, a small test, a way of convincing myself that talking about love is always uncomfortable, particularly in relation to people who make you think that they are above you, in the company, in the editorial pecking order or in an institution (above you in terms of power). If you really put yourself on love’s side you can see that just opposite you, on the same level, you’ve got your own king, the president of your government, the church, parents’ associations and perhaps your own children.

Love is like the sea, an assembly of things lost, the call from the deepest, the certainty that human beings throw overboard the experience that could define them, that could give them meaning, that could save them, that distinguishes them from animals and calls them to the sleep and dreams reserved for the gods.

Loving does not have anything to do with making love.
Loving is the opposite of God is love
Loving is the opposite of those who speak in the name of love.
Loving is an experience with truth, pleasure is more conservative more puritan, it is contact with the cave, with the clan.
Pleasure puts you on the map, in reality.
Loving draws on the imagination, it relates you to symbols, dreams, fantasy, creation.
We love to bear witness to the fact that we are alive
We enjoy repeating the past
We write to notify this refutation

To write is to love

Someone who has loved just once makes different films,
Someone who has attained knowledge of defeating that ignorance makes tougher films, more painful films... someone who has borne witness to his/her void, abysm, loss.

Atom Egoyam, a film director, author of *Exotica* and other films such as *Felicia’s Journey* or *The Sweet Hereafter*, when asked if his love life had contributed nuances to his cinematographic narratives, answered: My films would be very different if I had not suffered the pain that is only associated with feelings of love.

Nobody makes films to entertain, or to raise society’s intellectual level.

People make films, FILMS, to express a state of mind, a feeling, an emotion. Films are a nervous, agitated, tense expression of an author, if they are not, we should call them something else.

You can make films in the same way you can have sex: urgent, marketed films that are a kind of prostitution, bureaucratic, administrative films related to the eroticism of the crisis, with man, with human beings as predators. A supermarket, off-the-shelf type of films like sausages, sauerkraut and popcorn. Rubbish films, in line with rubbish television, with an empty and emptied discourse, abject and under the effects of today’s delirium, in line with our times: security over liberty, the mobile over conversation, indifference over intervention, non-responsibility over commitment. A community emptied of living beings and inhabited by beings fit for death, apprentice gods with no discourse, as if fascist theories had in fact won. These are gods that aspire to mortgage loans, to the photo captions that the media have become. Dead people walking every day from bed to tomb keeping under the lock of seven keys, or the seven dungeons for which perhaps they were gestated: to create, to love, to live and not like that fighting bull that comes out into the ring once more in search of the hole, sex, the door through which he entered.
Exhibition of the void or listening to people who know they are being watched is always a waste of time

Javier Tolentino
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Javier Tolentino
The exhibition of the void

From the mass media of this global village we are at the mercy of the sick, the mad, the paranoid, those who, with their families, play at dominating the world exclusively in terms of profit or benefit. The planet is going to the dogs but they will continue to extract petrol, cars, aluminium, plastic and the thousands of cities will continue to be concentration camps, cemeteries that, by means of their virtual games and private channels, they can project to us as our virtual paradise. And as we have seen in films like The Truman Show, all we have is a void, and the culture of these modern times, the mass media under the control of the seven keys of the Empire (Obama, Berlusconi, Google and Peking, Islam and the old sick European lady, the African emperors and NGOs) serve only the big apple, the powerful market so that, as Luccino Visconti said in The Leopard, “if we want things to stay as they are, everything must change”.

And nothing has changed, essentially, since the cave art times of Altamira... the evolution of the message, which is more refined in our times, the propaganda techniques of the Nazis, Americans, Catholics and Jews... technique and refined style that leads us to the BBC of today. Those of us who used to read newspapers such as Le Monde, Washington Post, El País, The Independent and who look at them today see that they are unrecognisable. The same can be said for the RAI, the NOS, France Culture... A war between private and public channels. How can it be that the guarantee of an election process, in a free, educated and independent country be sponsored by Coca-cola, Prada or BMW?

Every day we see the mise-en-scène of the mass media whose objective is not the truth; we have reached a point which is a void, nothingness; the contents are of no importance, there are critics who talk about the advent of invisible films, films that don’t need films or the cinema... the guarantee of an election process, in a free, educated and independent country be sponsored by Coca-cola, Prada or BMW?

Every day we are treated to the representation, the mise-en-scène of mass media whose objective is not the truth, but the cynicism, hypocrisy and even the corruption of language makes us repeat until we are blue in the face that we are swimming in a sea of liberty. The fact is that
we have reached a point where it actually doesn’t matter any more, where people no longer talk, there is only silence, a void, even an exhibition of nothingness, of the void. The contents are not important; some film critics have talked about invisible films, films that don’t even need the cinema ...

Don’t you think that it’s as if the planet were complaining about all this?

There are currently such ridiculous absurdities as peak time TV viewing, where the two oldest forms of rubbish in the world are in charge: the circus and the back yard. They want it all and every day. If one evening a film programme or section runs a few minutes over time because a young director who has just won a prize after mortgaging his family, bugging all those he/she can, gets out a few words scribbled on a scrap of paper and looks live into the camera and organises the microphone, everyone (before he/she has even started to speak) feels the hairs on the nape of their necks rise because a minute in television is expensive .... But that doesn’t apply to the worst aspects of our own back yard, where the more rubbish you can gush, the better.

Other types of films are possible, just as there is a more powerful type of journalism, another television with forms that are radically different from those that we are shown, just as there is a very different style and project for addressing citizens’ health, human relationships, just as there should be a different way of understanding one another based on political science and not on political rubbish, education and, of course, the distribution of wealth and sharing out of profits should also be different. What is this situation in which there is a crisis and thousands of citizens live in poverty, in dire poverty and the banks present, in the same year, profits running into thousands and thousands of millions of euros? But, what is this democracy all about? What are they drip-feeding us every day? What kind of new version is this: the father, the owner, the state or the GESTAPO?

¿What kind of films are those of the future?

*Remembering the future, as Maria Zambrano would have said during her time in La Habana.*

The truth, well what can I tell you? I’m not much good as a prophet and I would
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also say that at film festivals, I don’t tend to agree with the decisions of the members of the jury. Well, sometimes when you listen from down there, I sometimes get the impression that in speeches and conferences, people reiterate lots of obvious truths. Perhaps everything is so obvious that it doesn’t appear to have been well thought through, researched …But it’s worth thinking about.

The films to come will have a lot to do with the human beings to come and with life to come. I don’t think that many people have the answers to those questions raised by this seminar; but it is important to posit the questions, perhaps even more important than identifying specific answers.

If we pay a bit of attention and look around us, there is no reason for optimism: monsters who are capable of keeping their own daughter in the basement, an international community that maintains a people like the Cubans in isolation, a Western system that has been stealing from, exploiting and looting a continent like Africa, the above-mentioned aggressions to the planet. No, there is no room for optimism, quite the contrary. And one of the facts, the circumstances that some of us consider to be most serious is the perversion and transformation of language. There is a Greek film that last year won *Un certain regardé* at Cannes that clearly expresses the maquieavelian nature of this technique that prevents knowledge. It is called *Kynodontas* and is by the Greek film director Yorgos Lanthimos. It was made in 2009, and it tells the story of parents who lock their children in their house, denying them access to the world. The novelty is that they have changed the language they use: they call morning, swimming pool; window, coffin, and the family, notebook. They changed their children’s language and by doing so, prevented them from gaining access to knowledge. If you don’t have knowledge or language, you can’t grow, evolve or be free. A real metaphor of the perversion of language and of a system that only exhibits profit, market. The being, the subject, the other, have all disappeared.

But in terms of life and human beings, there is always, always the possibility of the unpredictable. Nobody, absolutely nobody foretold the arrival of Perestroika, or the falling of the wall, and nobody really told us what was happening in Rumania, Albania, Russia, nor did anyone really give us a hint of what was happening in a dramatic, tragic summer in Kosovo, Belgrade or Bosnia Herzegovina. And in these cases, films have told the true story, are continuing to
tell it. Films, despite needing heavy industry in order to function, are acting as one of the fine arts that are most coherent with the society of their time.

From Good bye Lenin! by Wolgan Becker to Michael Haneke's White Ribbon, from Cronemberg's Crash to the Canadian Denys Arcand's Les Invasions barbares, from La petite vendeuse de Soleil by Mambety to the Italian's Gomorra, from Almodóvar's Hable con ella to Gus Van Sant's Elephant, from the Dogville of Lars Von Trier to There will be blood by Paul Thomas Anderson, from Wong Kar Way's In the mood for love to Quentin Tarantino's Inglorious bastards, from Los Muer- tos by Lisandro Alonso to La vendedora de rosas by Víctor Gaviria.

Because films (which is where I can play a role) do know, are aware of and do understand that whereas one thing are those films with maximum viewing figures, those that receive most support are something different, and those that aspire to truth, to become an experience of love, to be translated in terms of art, are something quite different. Manouel de Oliveira said that he “understands entertainment films but you should also understand that it is this other type of film that aspires to become a work of art that is that which I believe has the noblest and most honourable objective”.

¿Why can we leave a door open for optimism?

Because states don’t trust films, and this is a clue, if they don’t trust them it is because, to some extent they can’t control them.

Because, given the origins of the press in the fifteenth century, the bureaucracy of power, censorship by the state/market, builds up a spider’s web of norms, decrees and laws that make it almost impossible for love and films to be easy to make. And is this a reason for optimism? Yes it is. It is, because it doesn’t mean that you can’t make these types of films, just that they are, in some way, forbidden, vetoed.

Because despite censorship, despite industry, poverty, the thousand world leaders like Bush, Berlusconi, Merkel, Aznar, Nguema, Mohammed V; despite the poverty in Mozambique, Bolivia, the Philippines, Ethiopia, the Sudan;
despite the misery in Thailand, India, Austria, Spain, Italy; despite Hollywood, the White House .... Despite all of this, films are emerging that are periphery and in the minority (of course, but at least they do exist), a type of film related the truth, beauty, with the most wonderful stories of Persia or Mongolia:

This can be seen in the Philippine films of Aureas Solito or Brillante Mendoza
This can be seen in the Japanese films of Naomi Kawase
This can be seen in the Spanish films of Isaki Lacuesta, Marc Recha, Isabel Coixet or Santi Amadeo.
This can be seen in the Finnish films of Aki Kaurismaki
This can be seen in the Iranian films of Firoused Koshrovani
This can be seen in the Italian films of Paolo Sorrentino
This can be seen in the Senegalese films of Mambety
This can be seen in the Mauritanian films of Ousmane Sembene
This can be seen in the Portuguese films of Mireia do Cardoso
This can be seen in the American films of Cronemberg, Lynch, Sayles, Jarmush or Cassavettes.
This can be seen in the Mexican films of Guillermo del Toro, Cobrador, Carlos Reygadas, Arturop Ripstein,
This can be seen in the Rumanian films of Christian Munguiiu
This can be seen in the Russian films of Alexander Sokurov
This can be seen in the Chinese films of Hsiao-Hsien, Wong Kar Wai, or Jia Zhangke
This can be seen in the Argentinian films of Lucrecia Martel
This is El Quijote by Albert Serra (Honor de caballería)
This is Antichrist by Lars von Trier
This is Les herbes folles by Alain Resnais
This can be seen in the Arabic films of Laila Marrakchi or Raja Amari
This can be seen in the German films of The lives of Others
This can be seen in the Indian films of Mira Nair or Apitchapong Weerasethakul

The films of the future are closely linked to the human beings of the future. And here one of the most serious things is the perversion of language. But, despite the fact that they require an industry, films currently constitute one of the arts that is most coherent with their era.
This can be seen in the films by Michel Gondry, Agnés Vardá or Béla Tarr
Korean films by Kim Ki Duck, Rumanian films by Corneliu Porumboio or
Pedro Almodóvar’s world of desire.

These are films able to tell things from the standpoint of a commitment
to art, to language, to their time, to the depth of a human being who knows
that the enemy, his enemy, has imitated all the steps of the beast: that he is
capable of disguising himself, inviting us into the void, silence and death; the
enemy who makes prophecies and who offers you advice about how exquisi-
te rubbish is and how boring those thinkers, poets, film-makers were ... if you
think of how easy it is to live well and not to know. The enemy misleads you,
and, disorientated, we are easy prey.

I am pessimistic. I really think that it is late, as Bergman and Haneke have
foretold in their films and also because to recuperate what has been lost (ob-
 sessive tick-tock) are words that are lost before they start, and perhaps hope
and danger are similar to one another, like disturbing gods.

In any case, I would like to point to the stupidity of those who talk, kno-
 wing that they are the product, the winners in a sterile time, of a dead, bure-
 aucratic, worn-out administrative language. The human being is confused and
divided: to believe or not believe those who talk from I’m not sure where. The-
re is a good path to do down, should we be in any doubt: the path of knowledge.

Let us hope that nothing that we think
is true
Juan de Mairena.
COLLOQUIUM

Antonio G. González: Your conference has left us in no doubt that you have fully lived the experience of films and that you possess a cinematographic knowledge that goes way beyond the mere filing and classifying of so much data that some experts espouse. And, moreover, as befits a journalist, you inscribe the movie phenomenon perfectly in its era, which is the era of an over-saturation of images. You have stressed the relationship between films and the truth, and with love, as a form of truth, precisely because films have been closely related to many things. What’s more, you say that if they are not related to truth, if films are not more closely linked to truth, then they have no future. This is very interesting, the difference between the truth and objective knowledge, to put it that way. Truth is life, it is something that cannot always be formalized in a speech, wouldn’t you say?
Exhibition of the void or listening to people who know they are being watched is always a waste of time.

Javier Tolentino

Shots of Brillante Mendoza’s Lola (2009).
**Javier Tolentino:** I think so, that that is what makes them worth it, otherwise we are distorting ourselves, and we will end up getting sick. That is why I have established this triple relationship between films, journalism and love. If there is a common element or factor it is that they should all be lived with truth, that that doesn’t mean you have a licence to betray yourself; on the contrary, you know full well you are betraying yourself. This is where the world is changing. We can see it now in men, for example (well, I’m not sure it is such a good example), where is the ‘Latin lover’ now? That’s not so cool any more, is it? And it used to be important, a guy who picked up a lot of women … it is no longer something in your favour, or at least not so much as it used to be. Deceit now gets bad press whereas it used to be a basic element. From our very own Spanish picaresque literature to today’s society itself. We can see that here there is possibly a tenuous change. People want to know and I think that that links them to the truth.

**Audience:** I heard you express, much better than I could ever have done, what has been bubbling in my head in recent years. I no longer know which paper to read, I can’t find one that feels right; I don’t know which radio station to listen to, because they all sound the same, and so on. I would like you to give me an optimistic message or reason to continue, because really what I’ve done is to withdraw from society, I feel as though I’ve been beaten. It is very disheartening because I can’t find any reference figures. So I tell myself, OK, I’m going to do the best I can with people I know I can more or less talk to, with whom I can transmit something and feel something. There would appear to have to be something worth fighting for, but I don’t see us having the capacity to be able to change anything, if I’m honest.

**J. T.:** Well, I’m not going to be very optimistic. If we talk about the media, it’s as if you told me we were under Franco’s dictatorship and that I should be optimistic with the fascist regime. I just can’t. The media are categorically not the expression of democracy. So, refuge, just as we saw under Franco, continues to lie in knowledge, in wisdom, in curiosity and, of course, in not giving up. That is where resistance lies. Not giving up is not a call to the trenches, to revolution; I think that today, revolution and subversion really consist of creating your own business, in being very professional in your work and embracing films a lot; at least we’ve got films.
Audience:  *I would like to add a reflection. I think that this crisis has basically given rise to tremendous chaos. And I’m confident that this chaos will at least lead us to be more creative, to research more. I am an architect and I remember that when I was studying at the Faculty we all had lines marked out for us: to research, continue, create. That no longer exists, now you are freer in that sense, i.e. you have to work at it more. That’s why I believe that this crisis could, to a degree, be positive, because it will help us to be more ourselves.*

J.T.: *In any case, it is better than chaos. This well-being based on lots of material things is boring. You will see what I’m talking about when you see, for example, Lola, the film by the Philippine Brillante Mendoza. It is when people have got so many things in their head that you get chaos.*

A.G.: *You have recently sustained that African films and independent Asian films were amongst the freshest in the world and that they might be in a position to take the lead in world independent films in some ten or fifteen years, as long as they don’t do things too badly.*

J.T.: *African films are definitely the future. On the other hand, for some ten or twelve years now, Asian films no longer surprise us on an international level, the future doesn’t lie there. The fact that cutting-edge international films come from Japan, China, Thailand or India no longer surprises us. It is African films that are surprising us and will surprise us in the future, which is actually not saying much. You can’t really say anything about African films as such because they vary according to the countries in question: Egypt, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Mozambique or Guinea. In fact, Equatorial Guinea would be a different case altogether because it is the only country and culture in the whole of Africa that speaks Spanish, and we Spaniards consider it as something almost revolting. I use this word because it’s almost as if it smelt bad, as far as we’re concerned. However, it is one of the most beautiful parts of Africa and they speak Spanish there, the culture is Spanish and they defend the culture of our ways of thinking on a continent that speaks French, Portuguese, German, and yet we ignore it, as if it didn’t exist. Africa is hundreds of different languages, different sensitivities, different culture, different types of richness, all of which are exploring films. The only association we can*
Exhibition of the void or listening to people who know they are being watched is always a waste of time.

Javier Tolentino

Shots from Isaki Lacuesta’s *The condemned* (2009).
Exhibition of the void or listening to people who know they are being watched is always a waste of time

Javier Tolentino
make in Africa is with music. It wasn’t until independence movements
started in African countries that we discovered African music, because
until then all the African music that reached us was in English or in
French; they didn’t sing in their own languages. When they have done so,
they have commanded the Olympia in Paris or the Royal Albert Hall in
London, among others. We no longer need to say that African music is
that of the future because it is already something really important now
in the present. And we will see the same thing happen with African films,
from Mambety, Abderraman Sissako, Ousmane Sembene.
Jorge Alemán

The new unease in culture. Politics for a divided subject

(Interviewed by Antonio G. González)
Jorge Alemán

A philosopher and psychoanalyst of recognized prestige in Spain, Italy and Latin-America, he is currently Cultural Attaché in the Embassy of the Argentinean Republic. Grandson of emigrants from the Canary Islands, in 1974 he won Fondo Nacional de Las Artes Poetry Prize in Buenos Aires, which is the equivalent of the National Poetry Prize. He was then an active militant of left-wing politics in his country, and two years later came to Spain as an exile, after the military coup. Since then, he has lived in Madrid. Alemán is an outstanding member of the principal institutions of psychoanalysis, a role he plays in close collaboration with one of the main intellectual heirs of Jacques Lacan, Jacques-Alain Miller. Honorary lecturer the University of Buenos Aires, he has become a front-line interlocutor between the field of knowledge and new schools of philosophical and political reflection in Spain and Latin-America. His extensive examination, in collaboration with Sergio Larriera, of the relations between the work of Lacan and Martin Heidegger has paved the way for a specific field in contemporary thought. His books include: La experiencia del fin. Psicoanálisis y metafísica (1996), Lacan en la razón posmoderna (2000), Notas antifilosóficas (2003), Derivas del discurso capitalista. Notas sobre psicoanálisis y política (2003), El Porvenir del Inconsciente (2006), the book of poems No saber (2008), Por una izquierda lacaniana... Intervenciones y textos (2009) or Lacan, la política en cuestión... Conversaciones, notas y textos [Lacan, the politics in question ... Conversations, notes and texts] (2010) And, in collaboration with Larriera, Lacan: Heidegger, un decir menos tonto (1989), Lacan: Heidegger: el psicoanálisis en la tarea de pensar (1998), El inconsciente: existencia y diferencia sexual (2001), Filosofía del límite e inconsciente. Conversación con Eugenio Trias (2004), Existencia y sujeto (2006) or Desde Lacan: Heidegger (2009). He also publishes in specialist journals in the field of psychoanalysis, philosophy and art, and co-directs seminars and forums together with figures such as Eugenio Triás, Félix Duque or Ángel Gabilondo, the current Spanish Minister of Education.
Antonio G. González: We have called this interview “The new unease in culture: politics for a divided subject”. In a recent text of yours, “El legado de Freud” [“Freud’s Legacy”] you addressed a Freud as seen by Jacques Lacan. You underline a number of aspects: the sinking of symbolic fiction, the affirmation of the irreducibility of evil and of the end of Utopia, or rather the precariousness and contingency of law. But above all, you say something particularly interesting about Freud’s work, which this conversation will focus on. You say that in his work, Freud brings together “psychoanalytical invention and a new political thought”. What can we today say about the unease in culture foreseen by Freud? And, in what sense is there a new political thought?

J.A.: In the text you allude to, “El legado de Freud” [“Freud’s Legacy”], I tried to bring Unease in culture up to date, because I thought we could find in it a degree of political innovation. I allowed myself to classify it as one of Freud’s “non-political” works; I say non-political because there
we find that famous formula of Freud’s that to govern, education and psychoanalyse are three impossible tasks. Impossible insofar as that in the same sphere as these tasks, we always come across “something else”, with a heterogeneous remainder that none of the social ties at play can completely reabsorb. Or, in other words, to govern, educate and psychoanalyse constitute spheres that cannot be reduced to the evaluation mechanisms that aim to reduce the social tie to mere problem-solution. When Freud referred in “Unease in culture” to the death drive as that irreducible element that no “civilization” can eradicate by means of historic progress, he paved the way for a new thought of the “heterogeneous rest” and all the impasses that that entails.

When Freud referred to the death drive as that irreducible element that no “civilization” can eradicate by means of historic progress, he paved the way for a new thought of the “heterogeneous rest” and all the impasses that that entails.

It was a historical time linked to the beginning of the 20th century, where different discourses were being prepared in the hopes that a major transformation both of life and of collective order would be possible. Meanwhile, Freud tried to identify in his text a particular way of constituting the subject that does not lend itself, in principle, to a project of historical-dialectic transformation of progress, i.e., to that optimism that existed at the time as to the possibilities offered by different practices and different political procedures of transforming society. Freud replied by invoking the existence of an incurable, structural unease that was not susceptible to being transformed, in principle, by the fictions or narratives built into a logic of progress. This has given rise to a conservative school of thought, in which any expectation of collective transformation may entail an even more intense promotion of the death drive that leads to the worst. However, my preference is, by contrast, to make use of the obstacles that psychoanalysis managed to show to progressive ideologies in order to try to think through emancipatory logics in a different way. In other words, debunking the Utopian account of progress does not necessarily imply a strong rejection of the existence of a project of political transformation of society.
Freud was always very discreet with philosophy. He talks about categorical imperative, the law and he posits that in the very constitution of the subject there is a traumatic encounter with the law. He considered the law, as Kant did, to be the great gift of the starry sky, the big treasure of reason, the law that presents us as autonomous, unconditional, devoid of any particular inclination or “pathology”, i.e. we understand by law, as Kant formulated it in *Critique of Pure Reason* or in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*: when it applies to everyone and does not adhere to any individual bias, therefore law pertains when individual inclinations have been cancelled. The demand of the law is that it does in fact comply with the conditions of being separate from any kind of pathology, being absolutely condition-free and, consequently, that it maintains its unconditional, autonomous character.

The most canonical formula: act in such a way that the maxim of your action be valid for all cases, explains very clearly that a law cannot be conditioned by individual interest. However, when Freud examines moral masochism and questions what kind of erogenous zone nourishes moral masochism, he discovers that there is none. Unlike other kinds of masochism, that could compromise different erogenous zones, moral masochism does not affect any erogenous zones. So here, there is a very wise observation that is of considerable political value, in my opinion, on Freud’s part: it does not affect any erogenous zone because it is conscience itself, the very structure of the subject, that has been compromised by the law. And what does Freud discover in the law? That this law that Kant wanted to separate from any personal inclinations isolated from any kind of pathology, that is not susceptible to being dominated by any private or individual inclination is, however, allied, is a form of camouflage, is an appearance of the death drive.

Why does this happen? Because in opposition to this law, and Kafka’s literature appears to me to be paradigmatic on this subject, there is a law that in its insistence constitutes the subject as “debtor and guilty”. The subject never shapes up in terms of the law: he has done all his homework, but it is never enough; he has done the work he had to and yet there is a remainder left over that shows that he has not come up to
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scratch. In other words, it is a law that is always beyond our possibilities because, as it is an ally of the Id and the death drive, this law – and there is a later text by Lacan, “Kant with Sade”, referring to this – favours drives. After this, in Freud we can see a series of reflections that could indeed take on a political character. And it is not a case, as has been formulated in other fields of knowledge, of a power theory that oppresses us from above, which I would allow myself to call an “expressive” ideology of power; it is not a power that subjects us from above and does not allow us to access what is our own nature. It is not a power that prevents us from “expressing ourselves with freedom”; what happens is that in our own constitution, regarding the law, there is an obscene flip-side that demands of us in such a way that before we have contracted any debt or committed any punishable act we are already, in relation to that debt or act, in a position of debtor or guilty party. We have worked all week and on Sunday, which according to the biblical canon is a day of rest, there is a slight concern about some work not completed... dreams in which exams were not handed out, circumstances in which the subject feels he/she is an impostor, that everything he/she has done and written is worthless, that any recognition received is fraudulent because that implacable judge, who is never deceived, always demands more. In short, in the relationship between the law and the subject, there is always an ontological fracture, a gap that the Superego colonises with its feelings of unconscious debt and guilt.

The movement that Freud describes is circular and he calls it the death drive, constituted as a kind of hard non-dialectical bone. He is not discovering a particular fact that by means of mediation is going to be able to be integrated finally into the totality of reality. He discovers a kind of inertia that compromises the very project of the priest and also appeals to the idea of a teleological progress of history in which we will come across a society that is finally reconciled with itself. Freud’s thesis of the Superego, that we can trace very clearly in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” or in the above-mentioned “Kant with Sade” by Jacques Lacan, shows us that the idea of a society that is reconciled with itself is a structural impossibility i.e. if we could indicate exactly where Freud reveals a fracture that cannot be erased by any movement aspiring to a society that is
reconciled with itself, that indication would be located precisely where he described the figure of Unease. Unease, in a Freudian sense, is not an episodic or occasional unease that occurs at such and such a moment, neither does it respond to that sociological reading that some authors have made of this Freudian notion, in the sense of trying to refer to unease as a product of the repressive society of that time. What Freud says is that what the law really orders is “jouissance” [jouissance, in a Lacanian sense; not as pleasure, but as that subordination of the subject to unconscious drives, those that are beyond the principle of pleasure].

In this sense, we could see a certainty foretold by Freud himself, that of the structure of capitalism as it is today. For this reason I have always thought that, in the most fertile moments of the history of psychoanalysis, there has always been an implicit interlocution with the field of the Left. On the other hand, unlike the positions of some sociologists who have talked about the sunset of duty or who have said that demands have now been relativised or that the current imperatives are weak, what Freud captures is that the demands of the law – to the extent that they are drives because they obey that moral masochism – readapt and can be susceptible to different reappropriations in different social structures. A permissive culture can house iron-like demands. Because, in short, if we had to attribute a formula to the unease of that law, it would be the order of jouissance, of going beyond the principle of pleasure.

This is what demonstrates that the societies that are currently supposedly more permissive are not necessarily happier societies. In these societies, the imperatives have not only not declined but have actually intensified in a specific way through their new faces. In this sense, I think that in Unease in culture, one of the major myths of the Left, that there could be a Utopian, revolutionary or progressive transformation of society, is deconstructed. If there is an implicit challenge in the Freu-
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Notion text it is how then to think of an emancipating logic that is not governed by the metaphysics of revolution, of progress or Utopia. Ideals that attempt to sew up the ontological gap in which the subject is constituted. In Freud’s case, it is not a case of emancipating ourselves from an oppressive power, but that the subject should emancipate himself from himself. His first emancipating act commits himself to himself, and we could translate this as follows: the way in which the subject can have a relationship with the instances of the demands – because we cannot conceive of a subject that is not run through with these demands – that, however, these demands are neither sacrificial nor work in favour of the death drives. It is a case, in fact, of rewriting a different pact with the Superego. We must transform the demand of drives into an ethic in which we are reached by an appeal that, although it overwhelms us and is impossible to satisfy, we confront unflinchingly. This involves separating the death drive from what we call desire. To paraphrase Freud in a somewhat dislocated way: wherever the mandates of capitalism order jouissance with the death drive, the desire of the people must arrive.

A.G.: What implications did the contribution of Freud, the third name of the so-called philosophy of the suspicion, together with Marx and Nietzsche, have for the theory of the subject in general and for social sciences? How has Freud sedimented?

J.A.: It can be said that, from Lacan on, there is real break with the so-called “philosophies of suspicion”. You evoke the famous conference that influenced us so much, where Foucault put the three of them in the same hermeneutics. Freud, Nietzsche and Marx were apparently characterised by their unravellings of the sense, or the hidden determinations, that organise and sustain reality in their scheme. But as of Lacan, with his notion of Real, it is no longer a case of suspecting any hidden sense, or of deciphering any structure that as an underlying

Marx, Heidegger and Freud are the names of a school of thought that foresaw that in the 21st Century human beings would weave structures that would transcend practices of transformation. Misery no longer lies beyond the orders of jouissance.
principle determines us in the last instance. The Real always implies a gap, a hiatus, an absence of sense, that prevents the existence of an ultimate nucleus of signification as a support for reality. From Lacan on, it is reality itself that is broken, that cannot be captured in its continuity, that is presented as dislocated and emerging from setbacks, fissures, symptoms, etc. In a sense, the so-called “philosophies of suspicion” remained trapped in a metaphysic that aimed to go beyond appearances in order to reach the hidden basic principle of things. The paranoid colouring of this principle stems from failure to admit the dislocation it implies, that the Real is always a hole in reality. From this Lacanian perspective, it is always very important to decipher the way in which the gap of the impossible real is treated by the civilization committed to it, but this is not just manifested in the field of meaning, rather it is through impasse, symptoms, the unforeseen happenings, the senseless repetition, half-truths boring holes in knowledge, that the characteristics of the Real can be conceived.

A.G.: Fine. Before addressing the transition from disciplinary societies to post-disciplinary ones, let’s stop at Heidegger, at the question of the Being and the Technique. For the moment, you attribute Heidegger with having shed light on some of the major anticipated certainties about this period.

J.A.: Indeed, I believe, among other things, that Heidegger had what may be called, and what you have called, an anticipated certainty. Particularly when he captures what he called the Technique, as a placement structure that introduces a leaderless will into the world. Technique, unlike science, which retains in its modalisation a relationship with the impossible, by contrast is deployed like a cross-cutting rhizome that expands to cancel out the impossible. For this reason, Technique promotes both the evaluation of the being in all its manifestations and the spectacular manifestation, as Paula Sibilia would say, of intimacy. Heidegger anticipates a world of calculations and security together with the most “personal” confessions elevated to the level of spectacle. This is the point at which Technique is a historical model that encourages talking, sexed, mortal beings to become available material. The major Marxist idea of the equivalential logic of Merchandise, the so-called
Capitalist Discourse of Jacques Lacan and Technique in the Heideggerian sense, constitute in my view the ideal reading instruments for thinking about the logic of current domination. Particularly if we take into account that that logic of domination, for the first time in history, does not in the first instance conceive any flip side, or possibilities of breaking or cut-off, to the extent that it has become much more conceivable, as we can see in contemporary catastrophist films, to imagine the end of the World before the end of capitalism.

Marx, Heidegger and Freud were the big names of a school of thought that foresaw for the 21st century that human beings in their “being with others” would weave structures that were going to escape beyond the scope of the very political transforming practices. This is the novelty of the 21st century: a contingent historical reality, such as capitalism, is presented with the false appearance of the eternal. For this reason, the return of the political, taking the political to be different resources from those that proceed from the history of western metaphysics, implies stopping and attending to the popular experiences that are still capable of being run through by political invention, even if that invention is presented to us as inconsistent in its definitions, without any guarantees of permanent success, largely imbued with the “not knowing”. The political should make a poetical effort.

A.G.: The second stop is something specific in the work of Jacques Lacan. In your view, other anticipated certainties in relation with the current era also stem from him. What does Lacan’s famous Capitalist Discourse anticipate and explain, in your opinion, about this period.

J.A.: Well, from the perspective I have just formulated, that relationship that Freud described with the law and called death drive, Lacan called “jouissance”. For example, in the sixties and seventies, poverty was considered as negative, something that fitted in with the classic Marx definition of “non-satisfaction of material needs”. Today, poverty is an excess, an excess of jouissance, i.e. poverty is not outside the typical drives of a Superego-ic instance that orders jouissance. In the current centres of misery there are drugs, weapons, the manufacture of imita-
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tion brand names, technical objects of all kinds ... so the very subject who lives in the most extreme conditions of misery is under the orders of jouissance. As Judith Butler would say, it is a case of subjects that one cannot even think of as “worth crying over”, that do not even get to be mourned when they die as they lack even an inscription in the symbolic Other and, however, are under the imperative of jouissance. If we had to define misery from a Lacanian point of view from this perspective, it would be to be alone with the death drive with no possibility of any type of symbolic articulation; or he would define misery as the individual jouissance of each person, an inert remainder in each person that is positive, not a lack, something that cannot establish any chain of equivalences, as Professor Ernesto Laclau proposes when he says that in the set of differences, a hegemonic articulation can be effected, through different equivalential operations.

What I mean is that today there has been a metamorphosis of poverty and that Lacan’s description of the so-called Capitalist Discourse is one that is completely conjectural and original at the same time, because if in all social ties there is a reference to the impossible, the Capitalist Discourse is characterised by trying to erase logical impossibility and sew up the ontological gap. The definition of social tie, as well as that of discourse in Jacques Lacan, always means that it is a case of a response to something impossible. The definition of all human ties is that they are ways of dealing with the impossible, there can be no human tie if that tie is not constituted somehow as a kind of negotiation over what is impossible. For the first time, Lacan postulates, by contrast, a discourse that is inspired by the matrix that Freud described in Unease in culture. Freud had described a circular movement between the Superego, renouncement and the drive, and had discovered a law that derived pleasure from the very renouncement itself. The subject facing this several tribunal over and over again and the tribunal tells him that his renouncement is insufficient. It is a greedy Superego, for whom no renouncement is enough. It is a circular movement that actually makes it an obstacle to all transformation dialectics. That same circular matrix is proposed by Lacan for The Capitalist Discourse, which is defined as a discourse that connects all
places, that rejects impossibility and in which it is not possible to locate the place where any cut-off can be made. This therefore opens up a huge problem about what would lie beyond capitalism. If we are really presented with a discourse that has rejected impossibility, that connects all places and where we cannot effect any cut-off, this is the same circuit that Freud described in *The Unease of Culture*. This is why I have allowed myself in my work to equate what Heidegger called Technique with this Capitalist Discourse. Because, in the end, if we take for example the text “The age of the world picture” or the seminar “What is called thinking?” Technique does not mean a technical instrument, but rather a “structure of placement”, i.e. we all become available, in the same way as we can state that a material is available, and particularly in a period in which there is no image of the world, but rather, as Heidegger says, the world itself has become an image.

Technique means that everything comes out to be present, that everything comes towards the image and that the image can be calculated, evaluated, distorted, manipulated, etc. This is where we could place this “jouissance” typical of the Capitalist Discourse, and a new political problem: if that discourse, that is built with a jouissance order, has no exterior, then where could we carry out what we call a process of political subjectivation?

A.G.: *In this sense, you have said that in order to understand the current state of affairs properly “a sufficient example lies in what the industry of fear and security have tried to impose on the so-called Welfare State”. So, in your view, politics has become fear management. In what sense?*

J.A.: Yes, for example the passage that Freud had foreseen to escape from these deadly circuits that I have mentioned was a passage through anguish. As you know, in the 20th century, anguish did not have a negative value, in fact, both in the Heideggerian experience of *Being and...*
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Time and then in Sartre's experience and in psychoanalysis, anguish was the possibility that the subject could open up or find a new place for his own constitution as a subject outside the demands of the Superego. Whereas today, these issues are dealt with by experts, by evaluators, they place these issues in specific classification orders... all under the modality of post-disciplinary societies, i.e. as a service to the community or as an extension of human rights. And this is why we have children with ADHD, defiant young people, personality disorders, bipolar people, i.e. there is a huge field in mental health that has become a field of filing and classification of abnormalities where any possibility that the subject might experience the real nature of anguish has collapsed. This means that anguish has been substituted by the panic attack, by generalised depression, by stress, by bipolarity ... which are ways of destroying the involvement of the subject in the experience of the real. In this sense, what were Freud’s political expectations? That this circuit, which I described earlier as the circuit of the unease of culture, could be transformed by the subject's unconscious resources thanks to the will that the subject had in terms of the unconscious, i.e. the possibility of organizing new social ties.

In other words, Lacan himself ended up thinking that ethics was always having a relationship vis-à-vis an instance that overwhelms/is above us, that we are never going to be able to reach. There are ethics involved to the extent that we confront a duty that we are not going to be able to fully comply with; but the whole of Lacan's effort was dedicated to explaining that that ethical relationship did not have to be captured by the mortiferous circuit of the Superego. I think that the fear politics that you referred to prevent this operation. Fear has substituted this for fear of what might happen, and that everything that might happen in the future will be worse, much more threatening, more
terrible. i.e. fear is the opposite of the assumption that was present in the major transforming projects of the 20th century, in psychoanalysis, in existentialism, in political practices. Fear is the whole time the will to close in on oneself to avoid what might happen.

And this can be seen quite clearly in this crisis. Society, as a homogeneous space where we are all citizens, does not exist, as Ernesto Laclau has pointed out on numerous occasions. There are a whole load of subjects that are not inscribed in reality as citizens, who are excluded. Lacan made a big difference between the rest and the dregs. The dregs are those that fall by the wayside, are out of shot; the rest have the fecund capacity to be an absent cause that reorders the whole symbolic structure. Fear means that nothing works as the rest and that everything will progressively start to function as dregs that are indefinitely inserted in the promise of their own circular recycling. So, the decisions that will have to be made so that that which is supposed to be a homogenous space of citizens could once again include all those subjects that have been left out of this play on language, are decisions that have nothing to do either with the “dialogic” reasoning, nor with this necessary implication between democracy and liberalism, or with the whole range of opinions that are currently the ultimate nucleus of signification of all the political facts that currently run through European reality. In the final instance, fear, and I return to my thesis of Freud’s Superego, is to go back to making a master who could at some point forgive us, happy. Fear means keeping a promise for an indefinite period of time; it assumes that right now we are badly off but that it is better not to provoke anything because the promise continues to hold. The promise of what? Who has made this promise? It is an inert figure that emanates from this Superego logic.

A.G.: You have insisted on many occasions that the worldwide defeat of the Left was not the result of the falling of the Berlin Wall, but rather occurred beforehand, in the 1970s. And, moreover, you say that what this meant has still to be thought through, that that defeat still contains an unpondered knowledge, “knowledge in reserve”. Here you take up once again the insistence on a datum of reality that remains veiled for most people who manage or analyse reality: that school dropouts, chronified patients, drug addicts, in short the
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non-inserted in general, tend to be nourished by the same social class. What knowledge in reserve does the worldwide defeat of the Left treasure? And why did this defeat come about in the 1970s?

J.A.: Well, if you will allow me to, in order to answer I should appeal to my Latin-American condition. For me, the USSR had long been defeated. For me, in Latin America, nobody expected that with the falling of the Berlin Wall the left would not be defeated. By contrast, I think the emancipating processes that took place in many parts of the world, and also in Latin America in the 1960s and ‘70s, still have a reserve of knowledge that has not yet been deciphered, to the extent to which one can read them ridding them of the metaphysics that dominated them, that is of the Hegelian and Marxist idea that we were going to gain access to a society that was reconciled with itself, a society where politics would no longer be necessary. That emancipation of reconciliation does not interest me, I am interested in the emancipation where the real differences emerge once and for all: madmen, neurotics, the anguished, suicidal cases, people who do not wish to live, people who desist, who do not desist … I have always been impressed by a saying of the young Trotsky: “I am interested in socialism because this is where tragedy begins”. i.e. I would like to see an emancipation where the difference breaks through, and that was not that sad, ill-intentioned difference imposed by the bourgeois hierarchical order, because that is an insult to the absolute difference of Lacan. And I would like, at this point, to stress something here, because I often have to discuss this with my philosopher friends: I’m not interested in the experience of the common as the experience of the homogenous; I am interested in the experience of the common to the extent to which it allows the real singularity of the subject to occur. I cannot imagine an emancipation in which there is not even any power.

In this sense, my difference with Ranciere and Badious is that I think they substantialise what they call the happening (Badiou) or “the part of those that have no part” and that is not included in the whole set of the population (Ranciere), and finally choose an elusive path, avoiding the moment of political construction by means of different rhetorical procedu-
res. I am interested in a political construction, and in that political construction, as I am a Freudian and Lacanian, I know that there will be all kinds of distortions and antagonisms. Why this interest in an egalitarian project? Why does being faithful not mean reproducing the same? It was in my own personal psychoanalysis that I felt that I had to be able to do something with my legacy and inheritance. Then I would say that the reason I am interested in emancipation is because I wanted to think of the possibility of a type of society, which would on the other hand be impossible, where social elements would be at work, where differences, those that really make up each subject, emerge with all their force. That is, for me, the common is the opposite of the homogenous, and equality itself is the opposite of the homogenous.

I say this because in many debates, even with progressive liberal intellectuals, whenever one talks about this, it is immediately assumed that one is dreaming of a homogenising project where all singularities are erased. But as my starting point was the subject, my way into the political problem is through the subject, I would be interested in conceiving of a emancipation project with indeed what Lacan calls the absolute, and therefore unrepresentable, difference, and not the different, as Heidegger would say—who has established in many cases the separation of the ontic and the ontological difference. In short, I long for an emancipation in which the ontological difference can finally come to pass. I can’t imagine a Communism in which everyone is happy, but one in which everybody practices the unhappiness they prefer, that of being a speaking, sexed mortal the best he/she can. Meanwhile, the real difference is interrupted by the hierarchies of private property. In my opinion, the hierarchies of the bourgeois society are an insult to the absolute difference that Lacan talked about.

A.G.: Apart from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, the most critical left-wing intellectuals effectively deny any relationship with power and movement of political construction and appear to remain, for the moment, as is the case of the antiessentialist tendencies (deconstruction, hermeneutics) waiting for some future, pure, unmediated happening: this is where the taking care of oneself, the call to another, the God who is a brother
are ... However, in one of your latest books *Para una izquierda lacaniana y otros textos*, you opt for political construction, like Laclau and Mouffe. And, moreover, you establish a concrete proposal. You talk about a trial between the state—with left-wing governments—, social movements and the operation of political construction itself, which would be a necessary but impossible construction, i.e. that is in favour of exercising power. So, decisions have to be made, management has to occur. Is this the case?

J.A.: Perhaps, as an example of that critical intellectuality that you mentioned, we could quote Badiou. Badiou is a French thinker in whom the Lacanian influence makes itself felt very strongly and that has very valid readings. But I observe that, in his theory, firstly, one always has to wait for a future event that is going to happen, but for which we have no logical form of recognition; Badiou gives this event a disruptive character where, as I said before, in a given situation, which is a knowledge situation, the event distorts all the conditions of the place where this event takes place. This is a transposition of Lacan's theory of the truth-knowledge opposition that Heidegger had also perceived as such. From then on, it is a case of being “faithful” to the event, i.e. once this event is postulated, the subject emerges, on this we are agreed: there is no previous reflexive subject who by becoming aware decides what the event will be, but the subject is the offspring of the event, the event constitutes the subject. I think this is very important and I can share it, but then once again in Badiou what I would call teological categories start to emerge. It is not just a case of being faithful to the event but also of being immortal. Those who are faithful to the event are immortal. I don’t think it is a coincidence that one of Badiou’s ways of unveiling the consequences of his theory was through his famous book on Saint Paul, the founder of universalism.

When I ask myself why I’m still left-wing, knowing that the Left entails more differences than equivalence, that there will never be a great collective meeting of minds, it is because I reject the idea that capitalism is eternal; it is contingent
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In front of the mirror, Nayra Bello O’Shanahan, Sarajevo 2010.
ads it to the point where everything that happens is a kind of substitute, that is not the awaited event and in which, moreover, a kind of major theoretical radicalism appears that is then scandalised by any other appearance of the political.

Then, there is always a platonic instance where the event per se emerges in such a way that it constructs faithful subjects but where we do not really see the political consequences take shape in a historical project of what that relation with the event could be. To a degree, the flip side of all this is Rancière, who in a great text in which he talks about the part that is not included, that Rancière calls People, because the People are not the censused population. And he refers to a People that is never included: we can share this idea and it is something to do with what Laclau calls “the plebs”. But to solve this question, Rancière, drawing on his Greek readings, proposes a raffle; he says that in order to be in correspondence with the egalitarian moment, one would have to accept that there are those who are entitled to govern because they were born into a good family, there are those who are entitled to govern because they are those that know, and there are those that are entitled to govern because they are strong. Rancière sees these three spheres, lineage, knowledge and strength, as forming part of what he calls the police, thereby distinguishing politics as that which is not the police because it does not have any representation. Rancière says that there can only be egalitarian politics including those that are not entitled to govern, and by letting them govern. How? By means of a raffle. And here there is irony in Rancière, when he says that things would not get worse if they were done by raffle. It is a possibility; we would probably have to think about raffled romantic encounters or about what life would be like for everyone if elections were also carried out by raffles.

Who would not at this point evoke Borges’ famous story “The lottery in Babylon”, that starts “Like all men in Babylon I have been a proconsul;
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Jorge Alemán, during the colloquium. | Photo: V.M.C.
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like all, a slave”. Similarly, Badiou has to declare equality axiomatically. All human beings are equal to others and Badiou postulates this through an axiom. However, it is true that we never see this achieved, because what is always presented are victims of non-egalitarian treatment. So in this, just as I believe that Lacan was never only interested in the real, but rather in constructing a clinic of the real, a knowing what to do with the real, I am interested in knowing what to do with the impossible, i.e. society is impossible, there will never be a for-all that reabsorbs us all in a great collective encounter, there will never be a society in which we are all articulated and in which each of us feels his/her difference is recognised. There is a structural impossibility as Freud has already determined from the beginning in his text, but what makes being left-wing challenging, then, is precisely that if one knows that societies are never going to be reconciled with themselves, that the oppressor may fall but the oppression will not, that, moreover, each subject has his/her own way of jouissance and that it is incompatible with that of the other, that, at the same time each subject has his/her own sexual choices, that do not have to be interchangeable with those of the other and that, moreover, each subject is inhabited by amorous logics that cannot be planned or shared with the other, then how can one, knowing all of this, continue to be left-wing?

That was my question with the Lacanian Left, because it is clearly very easy to be on the Left if you think that we will all reencounter one another, we will all be equivalent and that differences will be erased. But if, at origin, difference is more important than equivalence, how can we invent ties with our differences. This is, at least, what has worried me given that, since my youth, I have maintained a double relationship with psychoanalysis and politics: when I ask myself why I am still left-wing, it is because I continue obstinately to think that capitalism is a contingent historical reality. I reject the idea of eternity for capitalism; I confer other dimensions of human experience on the word eternity, but not capitalism.

A.G.: Well, then, from that perspective, let us lastly look at a certain view about politics for a divided subject. It is clearly not for thinkers to worry about organising how hospitals work, but they should not shirk the challenge in their
own utterances and, by contrast, offer certain pertinent observations to orient those policies in the direction indicated: that real misery be reduced and that the common should not engulf the singular. In the first instance, what could we say today about the Freudian dictate that education is an impossible task? What does education mean?

J.A.: When Freud claimed that teaching was impossible, that did not mean that there isn’t anything to teach. The impossible always works like an engine. I would like to make it clear that when something is declared impossible, that is the real reason for trying to do it, but at the same time, recognising impossibility as such. Freud, in all his texts, had insisted that the law was built in the logic of “for everyone”: educational laws, legal, social laws, etc. There is, in this aspect, a fault at the origin of the law, that is that it is as a structure built in the logic of “for everyone”. This means that the law is always prepared to reject the singular or admit it only as an exception. For this reason, in each child who is going to learn there is something singular that has to be adjusted to the “for everyone”. What is it that is singular in each one and that has to be adjusted for everyone? The encounter with language. If there is something in Common, if we tried to define the Common in its most crucial question, what is the Common? We would answer, something that is put into play before those that teach and learn, before those that command and obey. So, I understand by Common the always traumatic encounter with language. This encounter is not preceded by any type of hierarchy. When Freud says it is impossible to educate, he is referring to the encounter of each one with the mother tongue. The way in which the avalanche of language throws itself onto one, makes it appear something that is absolutely singular and solitary, that which we could paradoxically call the Common.

The Common as distinct from the logic that divides the world of representation between the universal and its exceptions. It is the Common because it cannot be tailor-made for anybody, for each speaking sexed mortal there is an encounter with language that, however, resists the “for everybody” logic. Allow me to say, here, that Lacan writes Lalangue all together in order not to talk about linguistics, coining a neologism that can be used to designate an “unlimited” space, the character of “not-all” of
“lalangue”. Then, any linguist who has perceived this moment of the Common may be struck by its emancipating dimension; because if we had to say where communism lies, where we can explain communism in a non-metaphysical way, what is the contingent principle of communism, the principle absent in communism lies in the encounter of each one with “lalangue”, before anyone has either taught or learnt. Everything that comes afterwards is an attempt administratively to organise the encounter with “lalangue”. And, of course, Freud saw that education was impossible because there is a singularity in each one with “lalangue” that resists, that remains as a heterogeneous non-absorbable remainder in the education process. What is it that happens now with this common encounter with “lalangue”? In many cases it is taken as a private abnormality and it is handed over to experts, to evaluators, to those who study the imperfections that may exist in learning, the so-called learning disorders, etc. Although these modalities must always be considered pathological, at the same time they maintain in reserve a discussion and knowledge about the way in which “lalangue” inhabits and is inhabited.

Then, at this point, I want to establish a difference between the Common and the Homogeneous. The Homogeneous is precisely what is built in the logic of “for everyone”, while the Common belongs more to the feminine, non-phallic logic, without a priori established limits and only shapeable by contingent surroundings. However, the Common belongs to the logic of the not everything, not to that of “for everyone”, because in the Common there is a traumatic encounter of each one with “lalangue” that cannot be subjected in either the universal or the for everyone, nor in the particular exceptions; it is a “Common Singular”. Perhaps we could evoke the implications for each one of us of capturing the idea that we were inhabiting a language; that does not depend on any pedagogical exercise or teacher, rather it is an instant
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that is presented to us as a temporal dislocation. This way of inhabiting lalangue in a singular fashion is, however, the only support we can come across to think of the Common outside the metaphysics that are carried out through a process where the Common tends towards a homogenizing totality. Then, in this sense, for me and I do not respond totally, self-help, that horrible word, self-esteem, the experts, etc., form part of all that politics of fear of the Common.

A.G.: Secondly, health. What is this patholization of bodies? What do those TV programmes of care, all those series on hospitals, doctors, etc., mean? What is at stake today in the order of health?

J.A.: Perhaps it is a new step in a world determined by what is known as “biopolitics”. Not just making control mechanisms enter into the most intimate parts of our body but also trying to isolate and present as a consumer object the “episodic substance” of jouissance. What do films about forensic experts, zombies and vampires seek if not to show life, anchored to what Lacan calls surplus jouissance, inspired in the Marxist surplus-value? Creatures dominated by drive without any social ties to invent, functioning as hoards or as secret societies, outside the experience of the “political” as an impossible account of an emancipation. The problem is that this surplus jouissance is not represented other than through its phallic representations. In this, “biopolitics” comes up against an obstacle that proceeds from the real. The drive is not digitizable nor can it be represented by a technical procedure. It demands absurdity, hyperbole, a monstrous appearance or its parody, the sinister or its rhetorical alterations. At the same time, the order of health that you have evoked will never be able to do anything with that surplus jouissance, except for promoting it even more.

A.G.: Security. Here is a Gordian knot for your perspective: the police, the army,
intelligence services. Public security today is unavoidably linked to the idea of politics as the management of fear, at least in the dimension that both this fact and the delinquent activity of the other, street violence have taken on. Could there in fact be a police force, security forces that do not cause segregation?

J.A.: We can always wish, try to articulate those repressive forces of the State with social movements and, at the same time, with an interpretation of the “being with others” that politicians should be drawing up. As long as it is understood that the real barrier to the death drive cannot be merely disciplinary or repressive, there will always be writings, symbolic acts, artistic work, political discourses that can also generate a social tie effect that allows irony to tendentially reduce invisible, deaf segregation.

A.G.: It is no coincidence that we are finishing this interview talking about employment. A huge number, over four million people now, are unemployed in Spain [in March 2010]. What condition of possibility do you reserve in the 21st century for the function of work? What meaning will, in your view, the function of work have in the next twenty or thirty years?

J.A.: In my view, the problem of work is treated erroneously in Europe, as if it were a technical problem, as if it were a problem that is strictly related to financial procedures, the banking sector, public spending and as if there were no political determination involved. There are indeed Latin-American processes that, as they are not governed by this circuit (I don’t want to be unfair to Habermas) of dialogical, deliberative reasons where the supposedly equal take decisions and everyone is a citizen, and I, on the contrary, I wonder if we are not at a point in history where we are not all citizens. The citizen will have to be invented. Then, this is where I evoke, with considerable caution because we are in the presence of Professor Vattimo, Heidegger’s idea of the “step backwards”, i.e. this unlimited growth of capitalism necessary brings with it as a structural effect the disappearance of work. This means that there is not going to be a rectification or a reintegration of labour in the framework of the development of capitalism with its unlimited growth. For this reason, a reformulation of the Common is necessary. Thus, these problems that
appear to be distanced from practical politics seem to me to be of paramount importance. If we were to discuss again what “being with others” is, and I think there are several discourses that should seriously renovate the debate about what “being with others” is, we would discover that the problem of unemployment is not a technical one, but that it is a decision; it is a decision that was taken ... and, well, Freud has a question in *Unease of culture* that I am going to evoke here: Why are there civilizations that, while provoking such a high level of dissatisfaction, not resolving any needs and infecting the whole world with unbearable demands, remain in place for centuries? And Freud's reply is neither “ideological apparatuses of the State”, nor “disciplinary societies”, à la Foucault, but so-called moral masochism. Freud best captures the key to domination in the famous “ghost” of “A child is being beaten” – it is a famous fantasy analysed by Freud of masochism – as that subjective time where the subject remains captivated in a field of promises and punishment in order to obtain value for the Other. The need of the subject to be legitimised by the Other ... is the great sadistic game of the Superego; the idea that there is an Other that has to legitimise us.

I know that this may appear to be a long way off but there are Latin-American societies that are starting to invent new ways of being with Others and that are not trapped in the Marxist teleology of a history that advanced inexorably towards socialism, but that are trying to invent a way of organising communities without the pressure of the corporations that inevitably lead, in their procedures of optimisation and profitability, to that which you have called a huge number of unemployed.
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