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May eternity embrace us

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Sometimes I seem to be completely alienated from the world around me. It is a curious sensation for someone who has filled three volumes with a story of intense immersion in what exists.[1] Probably, I tell myself, it happens because I'm old; no matter how hard I try to keep communication open with younger, more awake friends, my perception is dull. But then I wonder: Could it be that my consideration of the world and this sense of alienation are not true? True? I mean, that this perception of alienness does not depend on me, on my insufficient or reduced attention, but on the fact that the world around me is really ugly and inconsistent. Could it be that my trust in being, my admiration for what is alive, no longer corresponds to something that can be loved?

Ugly, beautiful, alive, loved... are adjectives that are difficult to define and highly relative. Perhaps then, to confirm my doubt, I should not place my trust in these terms. Perhaps the only adjective that counts, among the many that I have used from the beginning, is "alien." An alienation-effect is what languages and moods, no matter whether individual or collective, that resonate in society, outside of me, provoke in me. I have the feeling of being deaf and hearing confusing sounds. In reality, I am a little deaf, but I do not hear confusing sounds with my ear, but with my soul, with my brain. The world around me escapes me. I have had a long life, I have known enormous contradictions and deadly conflicts,

but I always knew what things were about; the elements of the contradiction and conflict were within a known or, in any way, significant framework. Why then is the meaning of the events that take place around me today obscure and escapes me? What is their insignificance? There is a whole new world that represents this alienness. It is a new, but tired world, prostrate before the physical, political and spiritual difficulties of its own reproduction; economic difficulties and the fall of political and collective references, of valuable references. Communication has become frenetic, but the signifiers fade in this speed. The spirits are confused. The languages are corrupted. The old references of struggle have disappeared: right and left, unions and parties, sense and meaning of history... this is the world that surrounds me. It doesn't depend on my old age, on my tiredness: that's how it is.

When I reflect on this phenomenology of the present, the more I refine my gaze, the more it seems to me that the only evaluative and descriptive figure that permeates the world of the signified and allows it to be described is that of nihilism. The signs lack meaning, the faces lack smiles, the speeches are empty. We don't know what to talk about. I see a grimace on the haughty face of the interlocutor; it is always the same one that I find in most of my interlocutors. Therefore, it is a great celebration when someone is found free of this pathology. People are desperate. When I think of those who in my time, already ancient, developed nihilistic conceptions for their philosophy, and who often ended in crisis, in pessimism and in the expectation of catastrophe (and my readers know with what constancy and with what harshness I have fought them), when I think about them again, I am almost moved now by their illness, from which they suffered and of which they were conscious. While today I have people before me whose ethics are nihilistic and catastrophic not as a result of critical work, but

because their existence is inconsistent, even when, when frequenting them, it seems that they live an ordinary life. In reality, they have no passions, they have no signifiers, they have no faith; at most, they think that language should be purified, washed and rewashed, and brought to a meaningful purity: the purity of the sink within which they have been doing the cleaning. Seriously, they throw the signifier out with the dirty bath water. They are left with that ideal of purity – the "*purity* of reason, of sense, of the concept – which has become an adjective of emptiness, of the mere remainder after the emptying of being. When I look around, I feel that I am surrounded by these *zombies*, millions of *zombies*.

Is this world truly new? It is true, it has recently been consolidated, it is growing, soon this "new" thing will take over everything. But it is not new. I am eighty-five years old. Until my twenties, thirties, this "new" world was, in solid and effective ways, the world between the wars and post second-world war. It was that world that oppressed me and against which I fought. We had partially destroyed it and put it in the attic. Now, this very old world reappears hegemonic. It was that fascist world of my childhood and youth. It was the world in which "patriarchy-capitalist exploitation-sovereignty of the nation" of the bosses permeated the lives and heads of the people. And they betrayed the generosity and intelligence of young people to induce them into illusory adventures: patriotism, the nation, race, identity, masculinity were assumed as superior values. This world is called fascist, not only conservative but reactionary, not only religious but fanatical about the destruction of all freedom. A world where the fatique of life dominated any other passion and a harsh discipline forced souls to be insensitive to pain. Oppression pushed towards insignificance. Has today's world become like this again?

But, if so, how will the young people of today be able to read me, how will they understand me? My book will seem to sink into distant depths, difficult to access. It will be an archaeological document for them. And my editors, why should they publish this text that is at most archival-worthy? Are there still enough elderly who will appreciate this story and thank the editors for publishing it?

When – not long ago – a horrendous fascist became President of a great country, Brazil, some young friends asked "What can we do? How should we resist?", I responded, "Don't be afraid." That is the condition for building a great and effective resistance. Fascism is governed by fear, it produces fear, it constitutes and keeps the people in fear. Do not be afraid: this is all we need to be able to say to the people, among the people, in the multitude that today suffers the return of fascist barbarism, also here, under our sun; to not be afraid to break the prison of empty language that is imposed on us and laugh at authority, wherever it appears with the grotesque fascist mask. Not being afraid means releasing passions and thus filling those linguistic forms that the process of fascist subjugation left empty. It seems as if the century has darkened: to reject fear, to produce resistance is, above all, to dissipate the shadows, to reconquer the meaning of words. Fill them with things, with reality, with freedom. Subjectify them. But the main operation consists of recognising that fascism is always the same, it is always the repetition of violence to block hope; it is the old – the absolute non-values of patriarchy, violence, exploitation and sovereignty – that returns as the illusory proposition to impose it as a necessity of the spirit and an obligation of morality, while it is the foundation of a culture of death. "Long live death" is the slogan of fascism.

“Long live life” is the response of those who are not afraid. Spring will return; it always comes back! Fascism seems eternal and, in fact, (even if it is brief) it seems like an overly long prison sentence, but fascism is fragile. Faced with the passion to live freely, how little it can endure. Freedom necessarily prevails against fascism, because with freedom there will be other strong political passions, such as the passion for equality and the passion for fraternity. Spring will return and it will be a true season of the new. But then if fascism is always the same, the spring of freedom is always new, always different, always full of gifts.

Look at the past, look again at the great seasons of struggle. We could go back so far..., but two examples are enough. 1848 and 1968 are fundamental dates for my generation. The first, the inauguration of socialism in Europe, within and against the development of the contradictions carried over from the French Revolution and the maturation of capitalist accumulation. From this encounter there arose the antagonism of freedom against equality and that of equality as fraternity of peoples versus freedom as nationalism and sovereignty. The reactionaries are always on one side, fixed, blocked in the defense of their privileges. The revolutionaries raised, for the first time, the red flag of brotherhood among peoples. 1848 was followed by a century of fierce struggle. Socialism was affirmed, then defeated, but in either case, it left an enormous legacy of public goods, or rather, of “the common” for new generations. 1968 opened upon this terrain of innovation and potentiality. “Communism” was its horizon. It was a matter of making what was *public*, *common* again, about obtaining *more* common from what was public, conquered in the democratic game. The fruit of socialism had to be multiplied.

We have been and will be in this struggle, which is our struggle and our children’s. That breath of democratic will that once again

turned the world upside down was new. And it repeats itself: every ten years, more or less, we have large, widespread and extended episodes of revolt. The Kondratiev cycles are over. The cycles of subjectivation of the common have taken the lead. Each time, resistance is adapted to overcome the obstacles created by a repression now converted into a "science of government." Every *governmentality* is a capitalist and sovereign operation to block and corset the productive movements of living labour. The answer is a renewed attack by citizen-worker movements and an ability to build on the gains made.

Let's look carefully at this game that was launched after '68; the resistance of workers to achieve the satisfaction of old and new needs, then repression. But can repression achieve the objective of blocking subversive action? We were often forced to give a positive answer to this question. But even when the subversive movement is blocked, we must see if the struggle truly had a negative (or relatively negative) result. And well, it's not like that. The reforms that the struggles – even those that are lost – accumulate are important; they are an increase of the "common" in the hands of the multitudes of the proletariat. Pay attention to old voices that come from the past: does the positivity of this process mean that we must be "reformist" in leading the movement? Absolutely not. The reformists do not accumulate anything of the common, they only accumulate defeats and demolitions of the common, they collaborate in *capitalist governance*, they pollute and pervert the struggles. On the contrary, only resistance struggles that become subversive accumulate common wealth and subdivide it among institutions of the common. Surrounded by institutions of the common, we have achieved a certain progress for our lives and those of our children. I gladly testify to this in my old age.

But to keep open this dispositif of the "common", of its conquest and its accumulation, the history of struggles teaches us that we must organise. I have spent my life trying to solve this task. I do not think I have achieved it; that is, to discover an organisational formula that would have the effectiveness of the "labour union" in the Second International or the "soviet" in the Third. We have identified the terrain of the multitude as a set of singularities, which operate as a swarm, as a network, probably susceptible to organisation in a true *direct democracy*. However, we have never managed to go beyond "*in vitro*" experiences. But that is the path, and following it already allows the dialectic of resistance and subversion to destabilise enemy power and de-structure its production system, therefore, prepare for the conquest of the common and for the construction of its institutions. The road ahead is still long and the lack of organisation and the empty times of the subversive endeavor are paid for dearly.

We are faced with a resurgent fascism. We know that the struggle is difficult. Let us not be afraid. Let us keep the front line. Let us think that our resistance is effective. But it is necessary to prepare for the extreme consequences that fascism can lead to: war. Whoever has lived through war, who has suffered it, knows that war is, has been and will be an irresistible machine of destruction. And this time, it will be the destruction of the whole of humanity, given the means of war that the great capitalist powers can use. War between powers = destruction of the roots of humanity. Fascism can produce this human disaster, this massacre of its history on the planet. Therefore, fighting fascism means fighting for humanity, without ever forgetting that fascism is capable of destroying it, when it claims that the patriarchal rules of society, the command structure for exploitation and the sovereignty of its own interest in the political form of the State are endangered. Let

us concentrate on this point and organise ourselves so as not to suffer the decision of war by an authority that has crossed paths with fascism. Our task is to avoid war, to fight and win over capital without going through war. How is this to be done? Pacifism will be our weapon, because peace is our desire.

I have lived through and suffered fascism. My heart is hurt and my brain is traumatized when I think back on that experience. I have lived since 1968 until today, without the fear of fascism. The crimes that were attributed to it, first among them, the *Shoah*, prevented it from being desired again; the great mass of the population seemed to have definitively repudiated it. Only the officials of sovereignty were able to follow in the memory (and be conniving in the practices) of those criminal behaviours, sometimes renewing them. The repression of 1968 in Europe was an example of this. Anyway, I was never afraid; I simply developed disgust for those criminals. Today things are different: a cloud of sulphurous smoke, a thick atmosphere, impossible to see through with one's eyes, surrounds us. Fascism is omnipresent. We must rebel. We must resist. My life is fading away, fighting after eighty becomes difficult. But what remains of my soul leads me to this decision.

In the resistance to fascism, in the attempt to break this rule, in the certainty that we will succeed, this book was written. All I have left, my friends, is to leave you. With a smile, with sweetness, I am dedicating these pages, these three volumes that I am concluding, to those virtuous people who preceded me in the art of subversion and liberation, and to those who will come after. We say that they are "eternal" – may eternity embrace us.

[1] This text is the English version of the last pages of the third and final volume of Toni Negri's autobiography, published by Girolamo de Michele at Ponte alle Grazie. Volume 1: Storia di un comunista, 2015, Volume 2: Galera ed esilio, 2018, Volume 3: Da Genova a domani, 2020.