

Thoughts on Progress

The world of today, in a very short time, seems to be going backwards. However, this is only thinkable as an event if we concede that the linear model of advance, the progress religion of the 19th century, which was never challenged either by Marxism or Liberalism, is basically flawed.

Things are going backwards today not merely as reaction, but also because of the implicit victory of the principles themselves, out of completion. I think Negri, for the very reason of his confusion, captured this quite well when he claimed that we were living inside the communism of capitalism. After all, almost every demand of *The Communist Manifesto* has been completed. The State controls very much and rations production and distribution in a general way. The poverty of the Victorian era has been done away with, along with the factories and the top-hat capitalists. Everyone has access to culture and education. We are slowly freeing ourselves from traditional Christian habits and morality, etc. Think to yourself, as you reflect on the various jobs you have held or do hold, their immaterial labor, the welfare you perhaps touch, and the generalized abundance of products (or for the Greeks, to think back a few years)—you in fact *have lived inside the dream of the 19th century*. The well-preserved, now altered facades of that era adorn the empty silence of the cities of the West, expressing in their fashion both the inner emptiness now filled by multinational corporations for consumption and how the outer dreams are fulfilled in this way. Walk down Ermou in central Athens and see if the feverish era of production has not given way to a boundless consumption of commodities. Consider if that ultimate spiritual commodity, leisure, has not now been bequeathed to all. The gentle streetlit nights, abandoned churches



and deserted plazas, the velvet decadence and ease of the welfare-state, most of all, the spiritual state, the ideal of the *End of History*, has now been generalized and lived. This means that the world of the workers' movement has completed itself as a *World-Spirit*, but also spent its energy. You feel this today, as no one can get excited about debates over the management of the economy and no one believes in a resurrected social-democracy. As you stroll through the well-stocked stores, perhaps on an evening passing another abandoned church, the realization dawns as the twilight arrives: the world we live in today, that is passing away, *is the completion of the workers' movement*. Of course, ideas can never realize themselves as fully as they might like and they realize themselves most fully as Ideas. Just as Christianity's heaven can never really arrive, but this negation of life finds itself approximated in a monastery. Theoretically we find in the *City of God* of Augustine that despite all the imperfections, the schema of world-history still did correspond with the eschatological version of things, Babylon as Rome had been overthrown and the true city of saints, the Church, firmly established. But then this millennium of Christianity itself ends historically, when Christianity no longer rules world-history, at the great eruption of 1789.

The passing era claimed itself as Marxist, so what is important is the spiritual claim and also a certain inherent rationality inside the world itself. After all, the Christian era was most Christian in its ideas and this is how we designate that era. As an historic stage we actually are inside the dream of the past society since this workers' movement, despite claims to the contrary, is actually a spiritual stage of humanity, not a material one. It is simply spiritualized materialism. But where are we today? We are living out the end of the workers' movement and arriving at Anarchy. This is concomitant with the "end of history" as a specific universal stage of human understanding, which generally has been reached in post-modernity. The teleological goal has been reached and now we are entering into retrograde or, potentially, a different motion. We are not finished with the world but there is incontestably a world that is finished. The State is literally withering away all over the globe. Just look at the decay on the edges—in Ukraine, Somalia, or Syria—and this will indicate to you the real rot at the core. Since the state is synchronous with history and history has ended, then the state too, has to end. And the final act in history is appropriately the destruction of the State.

So why does it seem we go backwards? We have now an alliance of Neo-Nazism and Neo-Liberalism in Greece and in Ukraine. People are threatened by fascists for example even in 'progressive' Sweden. Women are having their rights curtailed as in Spain. The trade unions are being destroyed and the middle class reduced to poverty once again... without a spiritual conception of understanding that the prior stage has been reached, we seem to be going only backwards. Actually, however, we are only going backwards as related to the old exhausted mode. All the old things are now getting ready to emerge in a new shape, much as the notes repeat in a higher octave. They remain, but as transfigured. So the possessions of the workers' movement, such as it was, the anti-fascism, the welfare state, the identity politics of the New Left, can no longer fit inside the world that they formed because they formed it on the basis of the State. This also accounts for the general vapidness and tiredness of all the old demands of today besides that of rioting and violent destruction. They no longer have the same force—their energy is spent. But the energy is spent because they have reached their goal. If it seems a defective world we live in today, what was defective was not the world,



as such, but the ideas that inspired the changing of the world, e.g. abstract negation, a Victorian economist ideology, the unelaborated idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.

It would be a one-sided and abstract negation to claim that things we have been dealing with since 1789 are simply 'ended' in this way, which is a popular method and one that has a certain appeal to it. However the real point would be that these issues, in their unfolding, have ended as such in their historical relation to the state, but now, protecting their essence—what was truly inside them—falls to those who work outside the State. Today it is only Anarchy that possesses any of the old energy that used to belong to these various movements and is also the only one that can articulate them anew. And we find that the real essence of the past era of the workers' movement was actually the destruction of Christian morality and the attempt to articulate a different way of life, as well as a philosophically comprehended relation to history. The real critique of Marxism is that the prior era was simply a defective form of what is now being revealed as Anarchy. Then we have not simply a one-sided acceptance or refusal but the comprehension of a thing in its changing aspects manifested over a period of history. This too, unobserved, has happened in our times.

In another image, the tapestry of the prior period of history has now been woven, with all its threads bound together, colored differently, forming great battle scenes, and now lies on the loom. There is no more of the old work, classically considered, left to be done. However, to take the work itself off of its prop, to bring it out into a life free from its now useless support, and most of all, *to admit the work itself has been finished...*

Penelope, after enough delays and false starts, has been compelled to finish her work, just as the *Odyssey of Universal Geist* completes itself after its long wanderings and peregrinations. On the one side is the isolated culture that tells the record of the tales already past or passing, and on the other, the history and practice of

the deeds in their own right. When once again re-united under the aegis of the Goddess of Philosophy, Athena, then the corrupt and debauched suitors, sophists, unfaithful servants, in a word, the world of today, are chased off and destroyed through their own folly and presumption...

Life returns to its self-altered self and resumes its simple course of Love, what it always-already was, before the weaving and the wandering. . .

