



# IGLP

**INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL LAW & POLICY  
HARVARD LAW SCHOOL**

Working Paper Title:

Series #:

INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL LAW AND POLICY AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL

[www.iglp.law.harvard.edu](http://www.iglp.law.harvard.edu)

NEXT LEFT. FRAMING A NEW NARRATIVE.

BARCELONA, 10<sup>TH</sup>-11<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2013

## Portraits of the “*progressiste*” as depictions of the progressive paradigm

Yiannis Z. Drossos\*

*videmus nunc per speculum et in aenigmate*

The emblematic personalities, praiseworthy or notoriously emblematic, of the Left have become part of the stuff the Left is made on. Words like “Lenin” or “Alliende”, “Mao”, “Willy Brandt”, “Ho Chi Minch”, “Ché Guevara” or probably “Malcolm X” are not just bearers of the historical memory regarding the individuals they correspond to; they come along with a political-ideological aura, they trigger meanings far beyond the particular histories of the politically active subjects they once had been.

The Left is composed also by the multitude of her so-called “anonymous heroes.” Not really anonymous -everybody has a name- but practically unknown outside the circumstance, the circle and the moment of their political activity, they may be individually unidentified. Still, the unknown militants of the Left, by their personalities, the ways of their life or their death, incarnate the Left no less than her other fundamental components, such as dogmas, sets of ideas, political projects, the epochs of rise and decline of the leftist ideas, the ascent and descent of the Communist régimes, the conduct and the perspectives of the Social Democracy, the dynamics and limits of the progressive grass root movements, the strategic embarrassment of the Left in view of the rapidly progressing globalization.

One can never be sure about the profile of the paradigmatic leftist militant in and after the actual years of change and perplexity. Looking *through a mirror and in enigma*, I will attempt to describe such profiles. I will be based on my personal experience out of the cultural, political and social surroundings I grew up and I live in, on my hopefully indicative experiences from the USA and on some speculations about things to come. The actual crisis affects my description substantially. Not just as an element of the environment where I will put my pictures, but for serious theoretical reasons. If a missing alternative, a missing idea world, a missing agent and a missing crisis are indeed the four grounds for the disorientation

---

\* Professor of Constitutional Law, Athens Law School. An earlier form of this text has been presented in May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in the colloquy *Next Left. Framing a New Narrative*, organized by Fundacio Rafael Campalans, FEPS, Renner Institute and IGLP at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona

of the Left (as eloquently put in a Roberto Unger's elaborate approach<sup>1</sup>) then the forth ground for our disorientation –the lack of a crisis- has disappeared, or, at least, is fading away. A crisis, thanks God! Let's reorient ourselves. But who are we?

*I am the Spirit that always denies<sup>2</sup>...*

The archetypical model of the Greek leftist activist is shaped by and deducted from the legacy of the World War II and our Civil War (1946-1949). The master figure is the Resistance fighter: a patriotic and a socialistic comrade in arms. The key persona is the partisan of the National People's Liberation Army, a preponderantly Communist guerrilla army, much like (although not identical to) the Chinese People's Liberation Army of the wartime. Their fight was for national liberation from the Nazi and Fascist occupants and, in parallel, to establish the People's Republic. The bitter Civil War followed our Liberation has brought an important evolution of the figure: it became now the Communist detainee in the concentration camps during of the Civil War and its aftermath. The word "*Gulag*" is generally and notoriously known, and rightly so. Shamefully the word "*Makronissos*", a place of systematic torture for dozens of thousands of Communist "*inmates*" with the purpose to break down their moral and personality remains generally unknown outside of Greece. Then comes the figure of the courageous defender of the honor of Party in front of the military courts of the victorious "*Free World*" condemning him or her to death. A famous in my country sketch by Pablo Picasso, reproducing the photograph of a prisoner in the military courtroom draws the lines of such a personality: an unshaved (but not bearded) man around in his late thirties is holding a carnation in front of his smiling eyes. The Man with the Carnation was executed in March 1952. His name was Nikos Beloyiannis. It is also the name of a Hungarian village, created by and for the Communist political refugees of the Civil War and still existing, under the same name.

Life went on and so did the leftist profile. It now took the form of the demonstrator on the streets of Athens in the early sixties, fighting for democratic liberties. It took also the form of the less rigid but not less tough peace and disarmament activist (in line with Bertrand Russell's peace movement of the early sixties): Grigoris Lambrakis, an MP, assassinated in Thessaloniki on May 1963 by parastatals operating under the guidance and the auspices of the police. In the film "*Z*" by Kostas Gavras many people have caught a glimpse of the story.

---

<sup>1</sup> Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *What should the Left propose?* Verso, London-New York, 2005, 12, 18-19

<sup>2</sup> "*Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint [...]*", J. W. Goethe, *Faust*, I, Chapter 6

In 1967 a military junta was imposed. Thirty three years later, in 1999, President Clinton, during his one day visit in Greece, in his official allocution in presence of our President of the Republic, pronounced words of apology for the US involvement and support of the junta. A political disaster for the Left, the junta was also a source of a weird kind of psychological uplift for many leftists. Yes, for the sake of the Cause “[...] *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions [...]: or when I am weak, then I am strong.*”<sup>3</sup> The leftist militants were given the chance, once again, to prove that the Left might have been strategically unsuccessful, but them, *le peuple de la Gauche*, could handle the defeat with adamant strength, the power of their will and a high sense of dignity. Once again we defended the honor of the Party (and of the Left in general) by resisting the junta, by not yielding to the intimidating demands of the junta either in their notorious concentration camps, in their chambers of torture or before their military courts. In the last two years of the junta a new appearance of the master figure emerged: it was the activist student, well organized by the best standards of the Communist tradition. These leftist student activists were prepared to risk (and loose) their freedom, as well as his or her life, as it happened for several dozens of them in the night between November 16<sup>th</sup> and November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1973, when the tanks of the régime put a bloody end to the occupation of the Polytechnic School of Athens organized by leftist students.

A noisy happiness reigned or 35 years long after the collapse of the junta in 1974 and until the outbreak of recent crisis in 2009. We kept our fighting spirit, adapted to the normalcy of the new era, of course. This time the typical leftist appeared as a rather loud frontrunner, mimicking modes, voices and tunes of the Great Ones of the glorious pasts. Much more prosaic in form and content, this activism has been consumed in a process of constant demands (usually with some moderate success, but not much heroism) for even more social benefits such as salary raises, job positions in the public sector, early pensions and many other forms. To undertake a serious responsibility for establishing political and economic structures and functions corresponding to wide masses’ social aspirations and struggle for more “consuming power” and better distribution of the incomes, however loud in our rhetoric, was ultimately out of our scope.

\*\*\*

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul, *Corinthians II*, 12, 10

The crisis took the Left by an unworthy for a Left worthy of her name surprise.

Notwithstanding that the austerity measures were not imposed by military means or by abolition of the democratic institutions, and independently on whether and how far they were useful or just unavoidable, the austerity measures were brutal. Their brutality proved a very convenient situation for the rejuvenation of the profile of the leftist militant and for its adaptation, after about 35 years of militancy stagnation, to meet the fascination of the new challenges. An enemy, a real enemy, at last!

Oddly, the situation proved more complicated for the leftist militants. On the one hand new capital priorities emerged from the crisis: restoring a tolerable fiscal stability; restarting the economy by the productive activation of the human and material potential of the country; restructuring the state; eliminating the corruption and the partisan trade-off as constitutive element of the political system; redeeming the public interest as contrasted to whimsical egoisms and over-liberalistic sub-interests, and all these while preserving the democratic form of government. Such were now the generally admitted as bitterly and urgently needed fundamental political tasks. Yet, on the other hand, due to the lack of any real existing leftist programmatic alternative, these tasks were (and still are) undertaken on the basis of an articulated, down to the smallest detail, political project, analytically epitomized in the policies provided by a series of “Memoranda of Understanding” with the key-holders to our bankruptcy. The Memoranda are implemented under the strict control of the creditors’ representatives, the “troika”. The Memoranda impose a predatory ultra neo-liberal policy, a rude austerity, partially also malicious and harshly punitive, but also a long list of structural reforms, mainly with regard to the organization and functioning of the administrative state apparatuses<sup>4</sup>. This, unfortunately, was the only real existing practically implementable political project –not the only *possible*, but the only available.

Under such condition two new facets of leftist model-figures appeared. The one is based on a mixture of the traditional post-communist type of leftist and the ‘*indignado*’, the angry one. Denying everything and denouncing everyone this figure longs for yesterday and calls it future. Eager to protest on the streets at first instance, always ready for any strike or other form of civil disobedience, he or she denounces the government as Quislings, prompt and willing collaborators and servants of the occupants (i.e. the troika), and in this, this type of

---

<sup>4</sup> More about these measures in, Yiannis Z. Drossos, *Yesterday*, (Presentation at the *European Legal Project: New Approaches*, organized by IGLP at Harvard Law School, April 13, 2011), in [www.constitutionalism.gr](http://www.constitutionalism.gr) and (in an earlier version of the same subject), *The sovereignty of the Debt, the Sovereigns over the Debts and some Reflections on Law*, IGLP Working paper series, 2011/#7

leftist militant often advances a form of neo-patriotism, hardly discernible from the traditional nationalism of the populist Right, denies or undermines any structural reform effort whatsoever, discards Merkel as a modern Nazi, cherishes Chavez and the Chavistas (cunningly forgetting their petrol based blunt populism), questions Europe, capitalizes on every real political shortcoming of the government or personal insufficiency of the political personnel and on the real anger, anxiousness and despair spread by the crisis all over the society, propagandizes something that usually looks more like a metaphysical promise and less like a political project. Oscillating between an *infantile disorder*<sup>5</sup> (the adolescent stance, fed by the anger, the anxiety and the despair) and the effort to acquire statecraft and practical political wisdom (the grown up stance, fed by the elevated, but not yet at clear governmental scale electoral results) these angry and serious figures lose gradually their once remarkably high sense of humor, when out eat in taverns and choose a rather casual dressing.

Next comes the portrait of the “responsible Left”. In its extreme appearance, this neo-socialist figure discovers, in happy flabbergast, an intellectual revolution in the form of the enthusiastic endorse of values that once upon a time used to belong to the ideological opponents. This figure discovers the values of private initiative and fair competition (underestimating or even forgetting the heavy involvement –almost inseparability- of the Greek private sector with the state and the political élites and their interdependence), distrusts as source of corruption and stagnation anything called “social”; moves easily from political liberalism to the economic liberalism; undervalues or even belittles the brutality of the austerity measures; cherishes the Germans as industrious; discards Chavez and the Chavistas as picturesque; likes the smell of the people’s votes; despises the scent of their sweat; is devoted to the implementation of the Memoranda policy, which, when in public or official audience, represents as necessary evils, while when in private circles or even in intimate moments, welcomes them as God’s good blessings and just punishments. “Realism” is for this figure a value by itself, but, apart from tangible results with regard to macro-economic figures, without much sensibility for the directions that the realism of the day may lead to. This figure has a rather high level of cynicism, when out eats in restaurants and chooses dark grey or blue suits, usually with a bright colored tie over a mauve-cyclamen stripped shirt.

---

<sup>5</sup> W.I. Lenin, *Left-wing Communism. An Infantile Disorder (1920)*, in *Lenin, Collected Works*, Volume 31, p. 17–118, Moscow 1964, transl. by Julius Katzer

A less fanatically “innovative” facet in the same brand still adopts several elements of the traditional leftist rhetoric, such as more sensibility for preserving social benefits and *aquis*, a rather polemic language than a technocratic one (the tough measures voted by this Left in Parliament are being defended as a matter of superior necessity, not of choice) shows more sensibility towards democratic process and clear liberalism towards the flood of foreign immigrants, underlines the seriousness and responsibility of the Left for the whole of the society. Dressed less formally, with rather scarce moments of humor, these people use to eat sandwiches or delivery in their offices, or a hasty meal in eateries nearby.

\*\*\*

These are, in very rough lines, the profiles of the Greek leftist militants appeared in the last about seventy years. With the exception of the all too recent “neo-socialist” type, which is a personage gradually departing from the traditional leftist ideologies anyway, “*the tradition of all dead generations [weighed] like a nightmare on [their] brains.*” In particular in changing times and epochs of crisis Greek leftist militants “*anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes*”, as well as “*emotions and illusions*” and present their activity “*in time-honored disguise and borrowed language. [...] In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into his mother tongue.*”<sup>6</sup>

The *schwankende Gestalten*, the wavering forms<sup>7</sup> of the National Resistance and the remembrance of their epos is always the most prestigious jewel of the Greek Left. It is heavy, it is still shining, not just over the Left and it is not deprived of some political usefulness as well. To call up the dead of these epochs meets the activist’s psychological need to surpass the triviality of the moment. However, no matter how the “*the awakening of the dead*” served the purpose “*of glorifying the new struggles*”, and “*magnifying the given task in the imagination*” and not a purpose “*of parodying the old*”<sup>8</sup>, the unheroic triviality of many aspects of the present social condition only too often extracts the archetypical leftist prototype from the tragedy that shaped it and brings it to feature at a farce.

---

<sup>6</sup> References from Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). Transl. by Saul K. Padover (Chapters 1 &7) and Progress Publishers (Chapters 2-6), Moscow, 1937. Transcription/Markup: Zodiac and Brian Baggins for Marx/Engels Internet Archive 1995, 1999. Proofed and corrected by Alek Blain, 2006, Mark Harris, 2010, 5.

<sup>7</sup> “*schwankende Gestalten*”, Goethe, *Faust*, I, Dedication [Prologue]

<sup>8</sup> References from: Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 5, 6.

There is, nevertheless, a type of archetypical leftist activist, who was *never* admitted as a paradigmatic hero of the Greek Left. An epitome of this personage is found in the fictional character of a novel of the Soviet thirties, famous at that time: *How the Steel was Tempered*, by Nikolai Ostrovsky<sup>9</sup>. The main figure, Pavel Korchagin, a quintessence positive hero, gave everything in the war battles for the Revolution, and, afterwards, he gave also everything in the peace battles for the reconstruction of the fatherland, for his country's and people's economy, wealth and prosperity. His undeniable heroism was not limited in the deconstruction of the enemy, but extended to the construction of the society after the military defeat of the enemy. The novel leaves no space for doubt that it was about his *socialist* country that Korchagin fought his struggles in the fields of reconstruction. But it should not be underestimated either that his labors of peacetime were aiming to *actual*, present lives of real people in a real country, in great and immediate need of economic restructuring and development<sup>10</sup>.

I wonder: is the bankruptcy and devastation of an industrial facility somewhere in Greece *only* the end of the capitalist exploitation in that facility? Does this loss of jobs and misery *always* lead to the great progressive social change? Is it not *also* the elimination of an important component of the material basis for progress? Is it not also the end of the jobs of hundreds, or thousands of working people and the beginning of misery for their families? Usually, at least in my country, the family members of the owners and top managers of the bankrupt capitalist businesses do not suffer, because, timely enough, the assets of the business have been turned into their private wealth. The collapse of the facility may affect the extent of the savings of the entrepreneur's family, but it's not their lives that will collapse. Therefore not only the fair distribution of the wealth produced in there, but also the persistence of the facility *is* an issue the Left cannot overlook without yielding to illusions and ceding strategic social, political and ideological space to the most ferocious neo-liberalism.

In the legacy of another Southern European Left, a different figure of an indisputably red star rose, Palmiro Togliatti. For all what he did or omitted, Togliatti, one in the inner circle of Stalin himself, did seriously and constructively participate in the formation of the post-

---

<sup>9</sup>Nikolai Ostrovsky, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, transl. R. Prokofieva, Central Books Ltd. London, 1973

<sup>10</sup> I thankfully note that my friend *Yiannis Meimaroglou*, a former leading member of the pro-soviet Communist Youth and Party in the seventies and eighties indicate has indicated to me that Korchagin has always been presented as a the master model of devotion and self-sacrifice, but, as he finally admitted, in the circumstance of capitalist domination, for the construction of the Party, not of the country.



Fascist Italy. He did this knowing that Italy would remain politically a bourgeois democracy, socially a capitalist economy and geo-strategically a part of the anti-communist West. With the possible exception of Ilias Iliou, a leading, but not decisively influential politician of the post war era, the Togliatti type was never among the emblematic profiles of my country's Left.

\*\*\*

The successive profiles of the Greek Left in the last about seventy years seem to advocate for Roberto Unger's assessment that the lack of crisis is a reason for the disorientation of the Left. This assessment and poses a further and much more important question: is the Left at ideological and political ease, is she "oriented" only in times of crises? Is she only the salt to salt the world and not a promise of the world? Is she doomed to be the medicine –useful only in times of illness- or is she the form (or: a form) of health?

So much for the native.

*The ecstatic moment of finding other risk takers, making plans, arguing all night long about what to do, doing something<sup>11</sup>...*

I have first encountered the figure of the American global *progressiste* in the hospitable gardens of Harvard, Cambridge, U.S.A., in the early nineties. This was through the school of the Critical Legal Studies, and, significantly, also through the personalities substantiating that movement.

I came across only to the profile of the American activist only indirectly: apart from Clinton's first election nothing more revolutionary occurred in the United States of America during my six months at Cambridge, the autumn fall of 1992. I met activists but –with the exception of some really subversive moments of teaching in the classroom- not much activism; not of the type I knew. Nevertheless, it was a novel and thrilling experience for the more or less typical product of the 'classic' leftist tradition of my marginal Southern Europe origin that I am.

The American experience offers an idea about the profile of a leftist activist in the absence of a relatively stable leftist political current, mass movement or other structure within the society. As observed by Duncan Kennedy, "*When the war in Vietnam was over, the cultural*

---

<sup>11</sup> Phrase taken from Duncan Kennedy, *Legal Education and the Reproduction of Hierarchy. A Polemic against the System*, New York – London, 2004, [A critical edition (with an Introduction and Afterword by the Author) of a pamphlet, initially published in Cambridge, 1983], [=Duncan Kennedy, *Legal Education*]

*dimension was all that remained, and it quickly turned into 'me decade' narcissism. The civil rights movement followed by uprising of the urban black masses won temporary concessions. When the threat of black violence had been crushed by state force or receded in exhaustion, white society went back to its business, and the black community split into a deteriorating underclass and co-opted bourgeoisie."*<sup>12</sup> In such condition, "if you are an activist, you choose your ideas of activity based on your identity."<sup>13</sup>

Activism, any activism, is *also* a matter of identity. In the American case I'm discussing here, it seems that –with the exception of exceptional moments- it becomes more a matter of personal ethical stance of the activist and less the outcome of his or her political or, more generally, social condition. The leftist intellectual becomes a leftist activist because his or her need to resist against the type of evils of the world the Left is programmatically fighting to eliminate. This attitude "turns into activity, that becomes a habit, and pretty soon it's like the habit of exercise and you feel bored and unused when you aren't for someone somehow. The spiritual dimension of resistance is nonetheless positive. It is about the ecstatic moment of finding other risk takers, making plans, arguing all night long about what to do, doing something."<sup>14</sup>

*What is to be done?* Lenin's famous aporia about the *burning questions of our movement*<sup>15</sup> is still there. One American answer, very genuine one, is offered by the profiles emerging from the critical theorists' paradigms. The first is about the global activist.

I was acquainted with the stereotype of a *global*—in the sense of taking care and action for the good of the whole humanity – activist before. The profile I knew was the soviet styled – *styled*, not necessarily affiliated- militant of the international movement, solid in doctrine, with deep certainties and, as a rule, personally involved in political action and usually either persecuted by the reactionary government on his or her country or sort of apparatchik in the socialist government of his or her country.

The profile of the American global activist was quite different. More intellectual, with a personal and professional life less affected by the miseries of this vain world than other

---

<sup>12</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Radical Intellectuals in American Culture and Politics, or My Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 1 Rethinking Marxism (1988), [=Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*], 104

<sup>13</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Legal Education*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Legal Education*, 7

<sup>15</sup> V.I. Lenin, *What is to be done? Burning Questions of Our Movement*, Collected Works, Moscow 1961, Vol. 5., 347-530, also in <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/>

comrades' lives, but not less genuine in his or her devotion for a progressive, even subversive and definitively emancipatory cause.

David Kennedy's *Spring Break* and *Autumn Weekend* illustrate my first encounter with this activist as an individual person and as part of an activist community.<sup>16</sup>

In the *Spring Break*, the activist is identified as an American "human rights worker", member of a small group conducting a fact finding visit, some time in (the Orwellian) year 1984 in the, remote, "dangerous, exotic, exiting"<sup>17</sup> Uruguay, a military dictatorship at that time. Their mission was to investigate about the conditions of detention and the physical and legal treatment of a small number of political prisoners. They actually met three of four detainees, witnessed the deprivation of their freedom, heard their stories of their torture and the régime's reasons for their detention, met the press and the American authorities in Uruguay and reported back to the institutions that had sent them. Undoubtedly a noble mission, and the text accounts it honestly. The enquiry is described in full detail, but more useful to outline the figure of the activist is the exhaustive following up and revealing of the activists' emotions and psychological process through the successive moments of the mission. A unique insight of the activist's inner world is generously given: a "nagging doubt" on whether he had anything to offer, on "what 'right; did he [he] have to do this to 'them'", on whether the distant Uruguay was so different that he might become "an agent of 'cultural imperialism'", or not so different, after all (otherwise he wouldn't be invited)<sup>18</sup>; a loss of interest in the prisoner's case because "her personal story [was] too intimate and shocking to relate to"; a fascination "by the strings around [the prisoner's] wrists."<sup>19</sup> As candidly admitted, it was somebody else's condition that substantiated the activist's task: "Ana" the prisoner they first met "gave our mission significance and meaning."<sup>20</sup> Prepared to leave, the activist "felt corrupt, as if we had deceived the Uruguayans for our own professional and personal reasons. The true price of constituting Uruguay as foreign and exotic was [...] to be paid upon my return, as I became once more foreign to them,

---

<sup>16</sup> David Kennedy, *Spring Break: The Activist Individual*, in *The Dark Sides of Virtue*, 2004, 37 [initially in *Texas Law Review* 63 (1985)] *Autumn Weekend: The Activist Community*, in *The Dark Sides of Virtue*, 85 [initially published in an extended version as: *Autumn Weekends: An Essay on Law and Everyday Life*, ed. by Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (1993) 191]. A profile of the humanitarian activist, a person indulged in a *humanitarian effort to rebuilt society* [*The Dark Sides of Virtue*, xviii] is clearly discernible in other David Kennedy's texts as well, such as *The International Human Rights Movement: Part of the Problem?* in *The Dark Sides of Virtue*, 3. However I find *Spring Break* and *Autumn Weekends* much more characteristic.

<sup>17</sup> Kennedy, *Spring Break*, 41

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, *Spring Break*, 41

<sup>19</sup> Kennedy, *Spring Break* 54

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, *Spring Break*, 52

*disconnected and out of touch.*"<sup>21</sup> What if Ana was not imprisoned and Uruguay not a brutal dictatorship?

Twenty years later, it is *Autumn* and it is *Weekend*, yet the general picture is not really altered. The activist is member of a stable and activist community. The *Autumn Weekends* tell how an activist community constitutes in Lisbon a Platform for solidarity to the massacred people of East Timor. In place of a small number of individual activists for protest and solidarity *on the spot* there is now a whole conclave activated for the establishment of a structured institution *for the spot*. As long as somebody is suffering in some spot, the 'spot' seems irrelevant. The techniques for a platform for East Timor are apt to serve West Sahara as well, are they not? In the *Autumn Weekends* elements of lassitude are visible in the activist's figure, a kind of fatigue that, if driven to the limits, might end up with a kind of bitterness and cynicism: "*At lunch, smoking by the tennis court, drinking with age cohorts, national cohorts, private-in groups, we recognized with a wink or a chortle that our public idealism could not be supported by the realism of our common projects. We entered the zone of flirtation[...]. If we could bring law to bear on Timor together, wouldn't we also sleep with one another? [...] Indeed, who would sleep with whom, who would befriend whom, who would promote, hire, help, whom? Who would reveal their loneliness, exasperation, sexual orientation? How can laughter in Lisbon be defended when people are being slaughtered in Timor?*"<sup>22</sup>

In the *Spring Break* the activist is profiled as an emotional person, feeling 'foreign' before and after the mission, aware the distance separating him from the suffering. In the *Autumn Weekend* the activist comes out as a component of a more or less bureaucratic structure – a humanitarian apparatchik?- always alert and in readiness between the outbreak of one reason for solidarity (to East Timor) and the emergence of another (to West Sahara). The activists in these cases are not and will never become Uruguayans in prison, nor Timorese or Saharans under massacre. They may not even endorse the political views of them; they cannot substitute neither them nor any other individual or group worthy of solidarity such as the oppressed, the hungry or the unemployed. However, all along the moments between 'before' and 'after' the moments the activists' humanitarian deeds, they are there for the Cause, their engagement is there, at the disposal of those who need and can use it. From the

---

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, *Spring Break*, 79

<sup>22</sup> Kennedy, *Spring Break*, 101

point of view of the needy, this matters more than the essentially irrelevant activists' feelings, emotions, personal motives, projects or individual features.

\*\*\*

The *global* humanitarian activist is not the only figure of progressive radical activist the superpower can offer; there is also the *mainly domestically* active radical militant. A portrait of such activist is the one of the radical intellectual. As reliably observed, "*the tale of the left intelligentsia in America is a sad one quickly told.*" Since the American leftist intellectuals have "*little or no access to cultural consciousness of the masses*" and "*little or no hope of participating in the exercise of state power*", what remains can only be "*collections of left niches*" and "*radical social critics (mainly in the universities)*"<sup>23</sup>. The tale might be sad and quickly told, but it is worth telling; after all, an opinion or a stance in a world center becomes easily a world opinion or stance, apart and on top of its merits, already because of its origin. With the possible exception of Las Vegas, nothing that happens in America stays in America.

Conceiving herself as the "*'theory' part of a mass movement of the left*", American radical Left offers "*'thought'*" in the aspiration that it "*will find agents to put [it] into practice if it is theoretically sound*"<sup>24</sup>. This is best done by "*organization around ideas*", not in the sense of propagation of an ideology, but in "*developing a practice of left study, left literature and left debate about philosophy, social theory, and public policy that would give professional, technical and managerial workers the sense of participating in a left community*".<sup>25</sup>

Organization around ideas takes place mostly in the universities and their academia. It is not limited just in advancing radical ideas; it calls also for "*taking humanism seriously within a formally liberal but actually repressive workplace*" in the aspiration that "*The next step is the formation of left minorities and the exercise of some real power in office politics as opposed to current situation of radical grumbling at the fringe.*"<sup>26</sup>

It calls for great courage and for a deep sense of belief, mission and duty to dedicate a mind and a life in creating subversive niches and kernels of critical consciousness while the social surroundings are worse than hostile: they are indifferent. The courage turns into an exemplary heroism once it is realized that such subversive niches and kernels in places like

---

<sup>23</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 104, 105

<sup>24</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 124

<sup>25</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Legal Education*, 117, 118

<sup>26</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 126

Harvard, which, in an environment of isolation from broader masses “*sometimes seem like decolonized Polo and Tennis clubs in Kuala Lumpur.*”<sup>27</sup>

Sisyphean or utopian, this type of activist shows no element of emptiness or vanity. I can imagine his or her profile in the form of a rather austere, but not unworldly figure. It is not the figure of the philosopher King (since there is no hope for an American leftist intellectual militant/worker to come to power), neither the figure of the “*wielder of the lightning of philosophy to the virgin soil of the proletariat*” (since the American working “*class seems obviously ill-adapted to the role of ‘virgin soil’*” for such wielders).<sup>28</sup> I can imagine such an activist strategically armed with intellectual power and tactically equipped with sensitivity, deeply learned, wise and witty, cruel in thoughts, warm in deeds, critical -a courageous intellectual ally of all well-intended people in the homeland and abroad.

#### A shibboleth of all good things and aspirations

Today, probably more than ever, “*We are all basically in the same boat, at this moment of history, and no one has a good idea where we’re going.*”<sup>29</sup> So what is Left for tomorrow? Paraphrasing Marx, in the century ahead, the social revolution –or, modestly: the prevalence in praxis of the driving ideas of the Left- “*cannot take its poetry form past but only form the future*” and “*cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past*” therefore, the coming years “*must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content.*”<sup>30</sup>

I cannot speculate on the forthcoming poetry that will shape the future Left activist’s profiles because I cannot speculate on the content of our shibboleth for all good things and intentions. I curiously observe the facebook as organizer of mass movements under authoritarian régimes (as reported, for example, with regard to Tahrir square), or the Anonymous and the “*politics and aesthetics of hacking, enabled by the global information infrastructure*”<sup>31</sup> and I see this technology bringing the figure of the e-activist to the profiles of the past. Piotr Czerski’s vision<sup>32</sup> is indicative: the Web Kids “*grew up with the Internet and*

---

<sup>27</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 118

<sup>28</sup> Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 107, 121

<sup>29</sup> Duncan Kenney, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 109

<sup>30</sup> Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 6

<sup>31</sup> Michael D. Kennedy, *From Affirmative to Critical Solidarity in Politics*, in the materials distributed for the *Next Left: Framing a New Narrative* meeting in Barcelona, May 10-11, 2013, 131

<sup>32</sup> Piotr Czerski, *My, dzieci sieci* (“We, the Web Kids”), transl. by Marta Szreder, February 12, 2012, <http://pastebin.com/0xXV8k7k>. In thankful appreciation to Michel Kennedy *From Affirmative to Critical Solidarity in Politics*, 128, footnote 63 for bringing this most remarkable text to a wider attention..

on the Internet”, they “do not use the Internet, [they] live in the Internet and along it.” Participation in cultural life is most valuable to them: “global culture is the fundamental building block of our identity, more important for defining ourselves than traditions, historical narratives, social status, ancestry, or even language that we use. [...] [C]ulture is becoming simultaneously global and individual.” They hold that “money [has] stopped being paper notes and became a string of numbers on the screen, paying has become a somewhat symbolic act of exchange that is supposed to benefit both parties” and that “the sales goals of corporations are of no interest to [them] whatsoever.” They are “increasingly annoyed” by the state’s “archaic interface.” They dismiss the “humble acceptance” and the “utmost importance” displayed by their parents with regard to “administrative issues.” They “do not feel that respect, rooted in the distance between the lonely citizen and the majestic heights where the ruling class reside [...].” In their view “society is a network, not a hierarchy.” They “do not feel a religious respect for ‘institutions of democracy’ in their current form, [they] do not believe in their axiomatic role, as do those who see ‘institutions of democracy’ as a monument for and by themselves.” They solemnly proclaim: “We do not need monuments. We need a system that will live up to our expectations, a system that is transparent and proficient. And we have learned that change is possible [...]. What we value the most is freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of access to information and to culture. Perhaps we have not yet given it a name, perhaps we are not yet fully aware of it, but I guess what we want is real, genuine democracy.”

All ingredients are there, in Czerski’s e-manifesto: a weltanschauung, a statement of values, an element of utopia, a demand, an appeal, a nucleus for further political and economic assumptions, the chastity of innocence, a network of mutually sympathetic people from different contexts<sup>33</sup> sharing all these. Is there any, remote or close, analogy with the wild entrance of coal, steel, railroad and spinning mill in the pre-capitalist world? Will the e-community constitute a new *bearer of universal interests of society*<sup>34</sup>, substantial enough to influence with ideas, politics and activism the centers of world political and economic power?

I can imagine among the features of a next leftist militant the ability to use *the global information infrastructure*<sup>35</sup> in order to organize around individual issues of global relevance, to participate directly and with no time or space limits in a realm of shared

---

<sup>33</sup> Paraphrasing Duncan Kennedy, *Talk at the Gramsci Institute*, 122

<sup>34</sup> Utilizing an Unger’s expression, Unger, 17

<sup>35</sup> Michel Kennedy *From Affirmative to Critical Solidarity in Politics*, 131

(hopefully progressive) values and ideas, to create new political realities. Their faces will be young, their intelligence high, their feeling of speed probably much more sensitive than their feeling of depth, their clairvoyance will be high, and so will be their ability to sort out the important and discard the useless.