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POSTMODERN ETHICS, MULTIPLE SELVES,
AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: This article starts with a brief overview of well-known criticisms of modern democracy in order to suggest a different approach: reflecting on the principles of Western democracy in the basic horizon of the problematic of the self and wondering if the 'multiple' self should not be conceived as the single subjective correlate that is adequate to democratic pluralism and also as the only chance of curing ourselves of 'fundamentalism'. I try to highlight the Derridian radical view of democracy as "always still to come", placing it in the generic framework of 'postmodern ethics'. I distinguish between two trends in postmodern ethics and also between three kinds or models of relationship to the self, in order to argue that the 'multiple' self, that is the self conceived as an irreducible multiplicity of voices, positions, tendencies, vocabularies, and characters, might claim the status of an ideal that needs to be fully embraced and understood in all its consequences – some of them profoundly disturbing for the old 'images of the self' consecrated by our tradition, on the one side Greek and Latin, on the other, Judeo-Christian –, if we want that democracy actually become a social and political reality. I conclude this paper with a plea for resistance to biopolitical normalization.

Key Words: postmodern ethics, fundamentalism, democracy, pluralism, relationship to the self, multiple self, care, biopolitics.

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, all type of reflection upon religious fundamentalism, the inescapable tension between faith and the values of a democratic Occident and also the degree of constitutive violence that is implicit in the great monotheistic religions amounted to a new dimension, along with a worrisome type of stringency. All thoughts that follow have as their aim the attempt to stress another sense of ‘fundamentalism’ – without necessarily labeling it as such –, a more discrete, diffuse and all the more present kind, one that is intrinsic to the very core of our common social reality. My argumentation will entail several steps, and a considerable detour as well.

Approaches that highlight the lack of democracy in the actual political practice of Western states are commonsensical in the area of leftist social critique, as well as the ones that stress the distance between the ethical core of democracy and our political reality. According to these perspectives, arguments are abstracted only from the social, political and economic reality of contemporary world. One alternative involves stressing the social and opportunity inequalities of capitalist states, the lack of social justice, the widening gap between the rich and the poor on a global scale, the exploitation and oppression of extensive social categories belonging to the alleged democratic states or of the poor from the third world countries, and also the merciless exploitation of all natural resources, without concern for the world that will be inherited by future generations. Another alternative involves uncovering hidden aspects from the backstage of the fights for power in parliamentary or presidential democracies, and also criticizing the type of representation that is peculiar to modern political parties, or the hidden economic interest of those chosen by the people, as a consequence of campaign funding and aggressive lobby undertaken by multinationals.

Democracy seems to carry on not as a political reality but rather as a projective experience and a *messianic* form without a determined content. In agreement with Derrida’s famous statement, *la démocratie est toujours à venir*: it does not have a present nor does it allow itself to be understood on the ground of stable presence or persistence (*Anwesenheit*, *parousia*) of a structure (let it be called ‘rule of law’), but it is always *still to come*, perpetually articulating itself at the *future tense*. In my perspective, Derrida¹ offers a *radically positive view of democracy*: he stresses that it isn’t a regulative idea understood in a Kantian sense, but a structure of promise, a pure future that is yet to come. But, in the same time, using a Heideggerian-Derridian jargon, *it happens* – it offers itself in the urgency of *here and now*, inspiring the present social and political order, assuming its perfectibility and the constitutive character (hence, not only

regulative) of “the right to autoimmune self-critique” in this sphere². To put it shortly, democracy *à venir* is an “*experience of the impossible*”, as another famous Derridian statement rightly assumes.

The hypothesis I will endorse in this study follows another argumentative thread. I will inquire if it is possible to place all the critiques of Western democracy in the basic horizon of the problematic of *the self*. In other words, the significant gap between the ethical core of democracy and the political practice could be understood and analyzed, in a basic manner, starting from the perspective of the ‘simple’ *relationship to the self* of the (majority of) the citizens. This critique assumes, at a philosophical level, the attempt to understand the self not as a substantial entity, a given nature, or a “prereflective familiarity” (M. Frank)³, but as a *relation that relates itself to itself* (in the words of Kierkegaard, from *The Sickness unto Death*⁴): a reflexive “folding” (Deleuze)⁵ of a certain kind, a manner of subjectivation that is nothing but “the historical correlate” of a specific “technology”, as Foucault states⁶.

‘Care for the other’ and ‘care of the self’: the two trends in postmodern ethics

Firstly, it should be stated that the Derridian reflections on democracy mentioned above could be inserted in the scope of an ensemble of moral problematizations belonging to the French philosopher that follow the same double aporetic structure, problematizations that have as their subject matter hospitality, gift, promise, forgiveness, and justice. Subsequently, I think that a more ample circle or overview of the Western philosophical and cultural scenery of the last centuries would allow us to include the ethical ‘turn’ of deconstruction, easily observed in the seminars and texts published during the last period of Derrida’s activity, in the generic framework of what Z. Bauman identified, taking as his primary benchmark the thoughts of E. Lévinas, as “postmodern ethics”.⁷

The general dissatisfaction towards moral philosophical theories and ethical decision-making procedures provided here has determined, in the years following the war, an increasingly stronger current of rejection of philosophical ethics based on codes, and generally, of any *normative* theory that allegedly regulates behavior and human interactions, from a moral standpoint. This dissatisfaction was motivated, on the one hand, by the incapacity of these conceptual instruments to orient us through unequivocal solutions settled in the context of major moral dilemmas and, on the other hand, by the ease with which such conceptual schemas of moral reasoning were distorted and ideologically instrumentalized (if we were to evoke a single nefarious example, that of Eichmann, who, during his trial, pretended to have acted in accordance with the Kantian imperative when he implemented the “final solution” for the extermination of Jewish populations). If we add the alleged absence of a firm *motivational* support

for respecting moral rules prescribed in conformity with a doctrine (think of 'Gyges's ring'⁸ as a test for morality that most normative theories belonging to the area of moral philosophy seem not to pass), we are in a position to grasp the reasons behind this complete repudiation.

It could be said that the so-called 'postmodern' ethics implies two divergent directions, united only by the rebuttal of major ethical *theories*, codes and formulas dictated from 'above', having as their claim the pretention of being universally applicable. These directions are related, first and foremost, by the general critical attitude towards modern moral philosophy, towards the guiding principle of right over good, or, to put it shortly, by the *antinormativist* and *circumstantial* character assumed in the matter of moral deliberation.

These are the following two directions I am suggesting:

a) The first one, following the lineage of E. Lévinas, for which the exposition of Z. Bauman serves as a reference point, is focused on *the care for the Other*, considering moral *responsibility* as a primary condition of the human subject, condition that makes possible the *work* of socialization of individuals, instead of deriving it through the extension of a 'contract'. This direction pleads for a repersonalization of ethics and assumes an ethical radicalism characterized by the asymmetric relationship to our fellow men or, in Lévinas's words, a way of being *for* the Other before being able to be *with* the Other. The late writings of Derrida could be placed in the same category⁹.

b) The other one, following the lineage of Nietzsche, is concentrated on the care of the self and tries to articulate, in Foucault's words, an "aesthetic of existence" adequate to our times, an attempt to rediscover the antique sense of ethics as an "art of living". At this level we can point out two alternatives:

(b1) A rather *individualistic* one, or a graft between liberal individualism and romantic aesthetics, supported by R. Rorty in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* and many other studies, that assumes the "privatization" of ethics through the plain separation between public and private, an ethical creed equivalent with that of an "aesthetic life" striving for "private perfection" and "self-creation", a life motivated by "the desire to enlarge oneself", "the desire to embrace more and more possibilities", that implies relating to ourselves as "incarnated vocabularies" and the attempt to redescribe and reappraise ourselves "by revising our own final vocabulary".¹⁰

(b2) The other one, sketched by M. Foucault during his last years of life, represents a rather *communitarian* alternative, by reason of the partial revival of the antique Socratic and Stoic sense of *the care of the self* (*epimeleia heautou*).¹¹

It is significant that both thinkers, Rorty and Foucault, inherit from Nietzsche an almost unsolvable tension or oscillation (at least in the theoretical sphere), concerning what the stylization of existence or "the

grand style” should mean: an oscillation between the goal of a permanent detachment from the self, the innovation and experimentation of new narratives and styles of existence¹² – or what the German philosopher called, in a famous paragraph from *The Gay Science* (§ 295), “brief habits” – and the plea for assuming a stylistic unity as a work to be accomplished¹³, the work of life, in the double sense of the genitive, thus locally reinstituting *teleology* in the field of the unity or narrative order of a *single* life, using MacIntyre’s¹⁴ expression. Additionally, both preserve Nietzsche’s adversity towards the culture of interiority and the Rousseauist ideal of authenticity, rejecting the chimera of a ‘true’ inner self that awaits to be discovered and publicly expressed.

Persisting for the moment at the level of general considerations, it could be even asserted, against those commentators that simply identify postmodernism with the adversity towards any ethical theory¹⁵, that the contemporary authors mentioned above are not *necessarily* hostile towards ethical theories per se, but towards the idea of conceiving moral life and relating to ourselves as ethical agents or subjects in a *quasi-judicial* mode – as subjects of various laws or ethical codes pretending to be universally applicable – and in a *mechanistic* fashion – by way of uncovering some *algorithms* of moral thinking that could guide us in problematic situations or that could simply resolve our ethical dilemmas.

It can be stated that postmodern ethics should not be comprehended, in any of its directions, as a post-moralist attempt of circumventing or bedimming some universal moral exigencies, regulated by the principle of impartiality. Even when what is at stake is the recollection of the fact that ethics was, at its origins, oriented towards the relationship with the self and interested in how we act towards those with whom we have personal relationships – without directly setting one’s heart on a universal point of view, or offering some norms of general applicability –, what prevails in importance is the assimilation of the ‘postmodern’ lesson which states that any moral action violates *de facto* the principle of impartiality. And this is happening because any moral action inevitably implies a choice, a dose of arbitrariness, a selection and, in an implicit manner at least, the exclusion of those that are not the subject of our care *hic et nunc*. But to the same extent it should be said that the principle of impartiality persists as the elementary form and, simultaneously, the main preoccupation of any moral theory plugged to modern times. Hence the unavoidable aporia or paradoxical consequence according to which *to act morally means to act conscientiously of this uninterrupted violation of morality*, to act morally knowing that no matter what you do, you won’t suppress the guilt, you won’t suppress the original remorse around which, some would hold, the entire Judeo-Christian tradition has established itself. Ethics remains incurably *aporetic*, and the aporetics on which Derrida insisted so much, in his last texts and public interventions, was aiming precisely to the acknowledgment of this situation. On the one hand, trying not to privilege

anybody, to maintain without exception 'the impersonal point of view', to treat each and everyone *exactly the same*, almost equates with non-action, or with the fact of not transposing into action *any* moral impulse directed towards others. On the other hand, *forgetting* this original guilt, doing with a peaceful conscience the 'calculus' of cumulated happiness of individuals in various sceneries of action, the balance between costs and benefits, is equivalent with transgressing outside the area of ethics, with the temporary narcotization or numbness of our moral faculties, with the circumventing or hazing of the condition of subject or moral agent *in the name* of the moral principle of impartiality.¹⁶

Let us now focus our attention on the second direction of postmodern ethics that I was suggesting above. It should be stressed that the revival of the ancient theme of self-care in our days happened in an individualistic (or rather hyper-individualistic) climate in which it risks to be misinterpreted as an irresponsible narcissistic turning point or a "form of Dandyism, late twentieth-century style"¹⁷, losing from view that what distinguishes care of the self in a Socratic or Stoic sense is exactly its inextricability from the care for the others: in the context of ancient ethics, care of the self didn't suppose "a solitary activity", but it "was exercised in a largely communal and institutional framework", constituting "an intensified mode of social relation" and having an aim that was *both* ethical and political.¹⁸

The invention of the modern individual, a social atom with rights and duties, but incapable of a genuine communitarian life and confronted, as stated by Weber, with "a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual"¹⁹, was equivalent with the invention of a moral self conceived, according to McIntyre, as something *other* than its social roles: "prior to and apart from all roles"²⁰. But, in this context, it must be said that Foucault, unjustly accused of "narcissistic individualism" (A. Renaut), was in reality a critic of modern individualism, seeing the individual merely as an effect of disciplinary power, "the effect of techniques of separation, isolation, individuation, and differentiation" that shape the modern world²¹, and at the same time stressing that the struggle for a modern subjectivity really implies two levels of resistance: resistance to *normalization* and resistance to solitude or (rather) *estrangement*.²²

The modern individualist self is situated at the antipode of the ancient fashion of understanding and practicing 'self-care', involving a completely different framework of reference. But distancing ourselves from McIntyre in at least one respect, we could advance the hypotheses that between the *functional* concept of man belonging to the Greek and Latin Antiquity²³ and modern individualism, the Christian relational *personalism* functioned as a kind of middle point. One of the most influential orthodox theologians of our times, J. Zizioulas, stated the fact that through the identification, operated by the first Fathers of the Church, of the 'mask', *prosopon*, with the subjacent nature, *hypostasis*,

Christianity generated a true 'revolution' with relation to the Greek ontology.²⁴ Starting from here, we can identify two decisive mutations produced by Christian religion, both in the social sphere and at the level of the relationship to the self of the human beings:

(1) Firstly, it is about the unprecedented importance attached to a single life, to a single soul, on a cosmic scale. Christian theology always insisted, according to Scripture (*Gen.* 1: 26-7), that man is made in the image and likeness of God, the mystery of personhood consisting in the fact that each and every one of us is a unique 'icon' of God and presupposes a singular 'measure' of this divine likeness. It could be stressed that no other philosophical or religious tradition prior to Christianity attached so much importance to a single human life, to the personal calling towards 'eternal life', or to the *personal* relationship of every human being with the Creator of the world, a God identified with eternal Love. In the words of an important Christian writer of the XX century, there is "a Christian consciousness of the unique character and eternal worth of every human being".²⁵

(2) A second essential feature is determined by the shift of the essential mission of a person or of her finality to the horizon of *eternal life*, the ultimate stake of the salvation of the eternal soul inducing a certain negligence of worldly realizations or life plans that don't directly aim at Salvation, as well as a dose of detachment from any social role, all these being in relationship with a famous excerpt from Saint Paul.²⁶

It could be argued that the modern *expressivist* self, in the sense of the analysis that Ch. Taylor underwent²⁷, is constituted by a truncated, secular inheritance of the Christian hermeneutic self (I shall clarify the meaning of this last expression in the following section). For modern men, the relationship to the self involves the practice of introspection, the search – to all intents and purposes, a never-ending task – of the 'true' reasons for action, of the 'secrets' of the Self and of the origins of our impulses. But without further assuming the mystery of the personhood, running deeper than the passionate and selfish character of the individual (the condition of the individual being, from a Christian stance, only the reflection of the state of fall), self-exegesis, that is the expression of the combination of features, drives, and sentiments that would singularize an individual, is transformed into a *purpose in itself*: the expression of the *ultimate truth* about a human being. In opposition, the Christian confession represents a way of purification of the soul, even a renunciation to oneself, as Foucault has suggested²⁸, through which the soul of the believer offers itself to the love of God.²⁹ It could be stated that, no longer being capable of embracing the perspective of a personal communion with God, the modern man is constrained to remain on the level of his individuality, to hold on to his most intimate emotions, drives, and dreams, which he will interpret as the expression of the *ultimate truth* about himself.

The self as *rapport à soi*. Three ways of (ethical) subjectivation

Thus far I assumed, following Foucault, a *relational* conception about the self, trying to avoid the ‘grammatical trap’ that results from using the definite article – *the* self –, inducing the impression that we would be speaking about a substantial entity. My guiding hypothesis is that ‘the self’ is nothing else but “what relates itself to itself”, as Kierkegaard said, in other words, a ‘being-relation’. To put it otherwise, all that I am assuming is the self as a ‘fold’, as a possibility of “folding”, according to Deleuze’s formula: ‘the being’ of the self is nothing but the *relationship* to the self, what happens, becomes, is being made or ‘crystallizes’ itself in this relationship and as this relationship.

How could we better understand the meaning of this *relational* definition of the self?³⁰ One of the most provocative thesis of the ‘last’ Foucault is that the ‘original’ self, the self that supposes the relationship to itself as a ‘secret’ core and an *inner* truth about our being, doesn’t reflect a natural or spontaneous condition of human beings, but it is only a Christian discovery, the correlate of a specific technology of the self and, in that sense, a cultural effect. The ‘hermeneutic’ Christian self, as Foucault would have named it³¹, supposes a moral subject inwardly divided (*coupé*), not simply ‘ahead of itself’ (*décalé*), of its work of life, as the subject of virtue ethics or, more generally, the one of ancient philosophy seemed to be. Demanding the continuous labor of inquiring into all one’s thoughts in order to reveal their origin and to uncover, with the help of a director of conscience or a confessor, the ‘traces’ of desires and passions in the stream of mind, Christianity inaugurates the culture of *interiority* and the practice of introspection. Originated in the practice of penance and of unconditioned obedience (*exagoreusis*) towards a spiritual Father, elaborated in the first Christian monasteries, ‘contaminating’ myself with the doubt that I *am* not what I spontaneously think about myself, this ‘hermeneutic’ relationship to the self is extended today, in secularized and simplified versions, in the contemporary *expressivism* that Taylor talks about or, otherwise put, in the *pop* culture of authenticity; even psychoanalysis would be, from this point of view, a therapy with Christian roots.

In contrast, Greek and Latin Antiquity implied the relationship to the self as a *final* stage or a work yet to be accomplished.³² An important argument supporting this thesis is offered by the famous historian J.-P. Vernant: “not only that there aren’t, in the Classical and Hellenistic Greece, any confessions or intimate journals – the thing is inconceivable –, but... the characterization of the individual in Greek autobiographies ignores «the intimacy of the self»”.³³ Foucault seems to go even further than historians of Antiquity as Vernant or Brown. „For Foucault, the

question ‘Who am I?’ is not a Greek question but a Christian question.”³⁴ Socrates never asks: „Who are you?“, but: „What are you making of your life?“, and the meaning of the notorious Delphic prescription ‘Know thyself’, even when it enters the philosophical stage, thanks to the legendary figure of Socrates, seems to be no other than that of recognizing the divine nature of your rational soul, as well as the inherent limitations of the condition of a mortal, without implying any kind of ‘introspection’.

Between myself ‘as I am’ and the one I could *become* by ‘stylizing’ my existence, giving it coherence and unity, there is a ‘gap’ that takes the shape of a *task*. This type of attitude could be found even in Baudelaire’s considerations about *dandyism* as a form of modern ‘asceticism’ – involving the transfiguration of daily existence into a ‘work of art and the *invention of the self*, instead of trying to uncover an alleged ‘inner truth’ of our being³⁵ – as well as in Nietzsche’s reflections about the “grand style”. But the roots of this model could be found, at least if we follow Foucault’s suggestions, in the “culture of the self” from the Roman and Hellenistic period, a culture focused not on the inquiry of inner depths, but on the effort of ‘incorporating’ certain philosophical precepts through appropriate “spiritual exercises”, thus radically transforming our existence according to a fully embraced philosophical ideal.

But the 20th century certifies the affirmation of a third kind of (relationship to the) self. I am referring to the relationship with the self conceived not as an *original* secret or as a *final* work, but as an irreducible *multiplicity* of voices, positions, tendencies, vocabularies, and characters. I am speaking about the so-called multiple ‘postmodern’ self, involving the ‘Buddhist’ dissolution of a sound concept of personal identity. For the European culture, Nietzsche’s writings are particularly regarded as the starting point for conceiving this ambivalent manner of relating to the self, where subjectivation is somehow indistinguishable from ‘desubjectivation’.

“For this rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and to unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless souls dispute its possession; numerous systems intersect and dominate one another. The study of history makes one ‘happy, unlike the metaphysicians, to possess in oneself not an immortal soul but many mortal ones’.”³⁶

Starting from the assumption that there isn’t such a thing as a ‘true’ self (whether we talk about the immortal soul of Christians or the unique combination of features that would singularize an individual, as various self-help gurus still reassure us), and that our identity is, in large part, the result of various preconceptions and reflexes that we were inculcated with since we were children, of conditioning and disciplinary techniques that

are pervasive in our societies, one could end up holding the *reductionist* view according to which “the self is no more than a ‘peg’ on which the clothes of the role are hung”, as the famous sociologist E. Goffman once stated.³⁷ We are left then, from a subjective point of view, with two choices: either conformism, resignation and passivity in the moral, political and civic domains, or an activism that renounced the mirage of utopias and final solutions, assuming “the undefined work of freedom” and concentrating on “a permanent critique of our own historical being”.³⁸ In the latter case, this critique finds itself supported, on a personal level, by what Nietzsche called “brief habits”: the invitation to play the free game of ‘cheerful’ proliferation of characters, of continuous self-distancing and reinvention of the self. The self possesses, in this case, just the feature of a *weak* unity or equilibrium, or that of a work in progress with a multitude of abandoned tracks, requiring the continuous effort of ‘holding together’ one’s ‘own’ character, an effort that doesn’t try to suppress or deny the existence of tensions and multiple fractures: the self as the result of a temporary settled and periodically renegotiable hierarchy between our divergent ‘voices’, tendencies, and drives.

This is the model embraced today, more or less explicitly, not just by the ‘champions’ of postmodernism, but also by the adepts of social and linguistic constructivism, of *reductionist* approaches dealing with the matter of ‘personal identity’, or by those passionate about “autofiction” or “heteronimity” in literary art. It is the model of (de)subjectivation supposed by the “art of living” encapsulated, according to Foucault, in *Anti-Oedipus*, a model situated at the antipode of the current conception about authenticity as free expression of a ‘real Me’:

“[I]t is certain that neither men nor women are clearly defined personalities, but rather vibrations, flows, schizzes, and ‘knots’... The task of schizoanalysis is that of tirelessly taking apart egos and their presuppositions; liberating the prepersonal singularities they enclose and repress; mobilizing the flows they would be capable of transmitting, receiving, or intercepting... For everyone is a little group (*un groupuscule*) and must live as such – or rather, like the Zen tea box broken in a hundred places...”³⁹

It should be added that the idea of *subjectivation* acquires here a radical meaning, taking into consideration that Deleuze/Guattari consider, following Nietzsche, the *process* (in this case, the “subjectivation”) as that which is real, the resulting “subject” being nothing more than “an appendix” or “a spare part adjacent to the [desiring] machine”: “there is no fixed subject unless there is repression”.⁴⁰

The Multiple Self as a Condition for Democratic Pluralism

We are accustomed to interpret the birth of democracy starting from Greek and Latin sources (Ancient Athens, and also some aspects and institutions of the Roman Republic) and to plead for the universalism of democratic aspirations on the basis of some Judeo-Christian sources.⁴¹ But if we accept that *pluralism*, in a very general sense, is the mark of (liberal) modern democracies, a serious revision of the 'grounding' of democracy could be required. The hypothesis that I am now advancing is the following: *the 'multiple' relationship to the self is somehow implied by the 'ethical core' of modern democracy itself*. And if this is the case, I wonder if the *multiple* self, instead of the 'original' or the 'final' one, should not be conceived as the veritable basis of interpersonal openness and communication, and for that reason establishing itself as the single subjective correlate that is adequate to democratic *pluralism*, more precisely to the effective realization of the goals of democracy. It follows that the 'multiple' way of relating to the self might claim the status of an ideal that needs to be fully embraced and understood in all its consequences – some of them profoundly disturbing for the old 'images of the self' consecrated by our tradition, on the one side Greek and Latin, on the other, Judeo-Christian –, if we want that democracy actually become a social and political reality.

In the famous dialog *The Republic*, Plato, one of the most illustrious critics of democracy of all times, emphasized the fact that promoting what he was considering to be the ideal form of government, the true *aristocracy* (i.e. 'the ruling of the best'), demands, first and foremost, that right 'government of the soul'. This means that the rational 'part' exercises control over our multiple desires that pull us simultaneously in different directions by allying itself with the passionate or spirited 'part' (*thymoeides*) of our soul, that is by educating the passions and transforming them in the 'guardians' of our natural inclinations. The justice in the city is nothing but the reflection of the harmony of the soul, of the self-discipline imposed on society's members. In that case, what kind of relationship to the self should the promoter of democracy entertain? Keeping the setting of the analogy between 'soul' and *polis*, we will have to acknowledge that democratic *pluralism* cannot truly become a reality in the day-to-day political praxis, unless supported by a true acceptance of the *multiplicity* of every self.

This argument could also be formulated in the following way. The desiderata of modern democracy – the free affirmation of one's own individuality counterbalanced by the respect for Alterity – call for the transformation of 'tolerance' towards others into real *hospitality*, in order not to remain just some catchphrases behind which dwells a total moral indifference in the relationship to the self⁴², doubled by an indifference

towards the close ones and all the more towards strangers. I am referring to another Derridian theme, identifying hospitality with the risky openness towards the other, the Stranger, with the attempt to truly see the world through his or her eyes, to experiment, as much as it's possible, other cultural traditions and ways of life, by taking advantage of his or her 'coming'. This premise is linked to the affirmation that only a relationship to the self as an irreducible multiplicity of 'voices' could encourage us to open up in front of the other, of this Stranger so radically different from us, being guided by the conviction that solely the recognized *strangeness* of the other can free 'the stranger(s)' within ourselves, can dislocate, mobilize and spiritually reconfigure ourselves, thus becoming 'another' than before, revealing other 'habits', other ways of seeing the world. But still, there are ways and traits somehow *already* existing there, inside ourselves, waiting to be 'freed': "externally on the inside" (Pessoa).⁴³ How else could *understanding* between two individuals who seem 'externally' connected by nothing still be possible? Why would we otherwise accept this risk, inherent to every dialogue, to every 'clash of words', that the other changes us even a bit by way of altering our beliefs and attitudes?

The politics of Western states towards immigrants ('be like us or leave!'), as well as the escalation of international terrorism, demonstrate the deficiencies of modern individualism and of Western social life, as well as the repeated failure in establishing bridges of communication towards cultures with very different traditions from our own. "The dividing practices", the various systems of exclusion and strategies of "biopolitical normalization" that Foucault highlighted continue to define the Western world and they are even intensifying with the help of the Internet and new media, despite the assurances delivered through all channels, that we live in the world with the highest degree of individual liberty and civilization ever attained in the history of mankind.

Modifying the relationship to the self becomes an aim of vital importance once we truly assume the democratic values, observe the fallibility of any isolated individual, and militate for the rights of others to disagree with us. It is the only way that modern democratic systems could be kept from becoming the mask of oligarchic regimes that accentuate unlimited domination and exploitation of populations and resources, without any real concern for the good of the many or for the world in which the future generations will be born. And I think this is the right context to comprehend a declaration repeated many times by Foucault, during his last years, according to which "taking distance on oneself" (*se déprendre de soi-même*), the Socratic-Nietzschean demand for some sort of 'unsettlement' and continuous experimentation, the attempt of "thinking otherwise than before", of thinking against our own preconceptions and habits, should be considered "the ethic of an intellectual in our day".⁴⁴

But we should not deceive ourselves: it is possible that we, the Europeans or Americans of the 21th century, are not prepared to fully

assume this genuine and *unconditioned* openness towards the Other that we hear so much about; maybe we won't be ready for many generations to come, or maybe never. Moreover it is possible to be attracted, at a theoretical level, by the postmodern model of the *multiple* self and by the assumption of a 'weak' personal identity, without being truly capable of understanding all the existential and political implications of such a relationship to the self. It could be argued that a formidable complex of normalizing biopolitical instruments and spiritual and religious traditions that oppose this model (proffering either an original self, or a final one, when they are not proposing a radical *transsubjectivation* or a mystical 'self-renunciation' and an 'integration in the Absolute') make such a 'practical' understanding almost impossible.

What I am suggesting is that assuming the idea of a 'multiple' self would imply, on an ethical and political level, an enlarged and also reinforced ground for human *solidarity* by way of loosening the 'straps' of our own Egos and thus rejecting *de facto* modern individualism (in other words, believing that each and every one of us is not really a well-defined *individuality*, but a *multiplicity*, a "little group", as Deleuze/Guattari said). Perhaps it is only such a 'weak' basis for personal identity that wouldn't allow any more slipping into 'fundamentalism'. So what would be the practical consequences of adopting such a model?

(a) On the one side, there is the conviction that "That art thou!", *tat tvam asi*, and that *this* Stranger is somehow already *inside* yourself, that on the primary level of this irreducible multiplicity of voices, positions, and characters – or of "prepersonal singularities" (Deleuze-Guattari) defining the 'range of forces' of our selves –, *inside every human being there are all human beings!* The encounters that put a mark on us, the big events of our lives determine the display of some characters, rather than others: but it could have been *different*, we could have been different...⁴⁵

(b) On the other side, we may find a subjective ground for morality as a consequence of 'weakening' our naïve trust in the absolute truth of those values, beliefs and attitudes that we consider to be essential for our identity to an extent even greater than our looks or social status. To put it otherwise, we may realize, without falling into cultural relativism (because the position that I am defending here commits to a kind of *universalism*, a concrete and descriptive universalism, instead of a formal and regulative one) that living in different circumstances, we could have been very different people regarding many of our attitudes and values. And thus we become not only tolerant, but rather curios to *experiment*, due to the coming of the Stranger, other positions and points of view. I think that this would be, following Derrida, the difference between (conditioned) hospitality of *invitation* and (unconditioned) hospitality of *visitation*.⁴⁶

But, once again, it is doubtful that we are really ready to assume and *realize*, in both senses of the word, such a thing. It could be argued that

even those great minds that have theoretically and existentially adopted this model have backed off, frightened, or have ended up miserably, consumed by insanity (Nietzsche, Pessoa, Artaud, etc.). Still, it is extremely important to ask ourselves how much truth is in the following thesis: only a so-called 'Buddhist' sensibility⁴⁷, not a liberal or a Christian one, could constitute the real basis for democratic *pluralism*.

Someone could reply: still, why wouldn't *personalism* of Christian heritage be a true moral and social basis for democracy? First of all, it is hard to maintain that in the West the amount of true believers fully embracing the Christian ideal of *self-abnegation* is that large nowadays. Secondly, Christian personalism doesn't just reject 'monadological' individualism by assuming the fact that we are defining and recognizing ourselves only through our *relations*, but it goes to the opposite extreme, demanding *kenosis*, 'self-emptying', that is a renunciation of that 'self' conceived as the sum of our drives and passions in order to be worthy of a personal communion with God. It is possible that due to this reason, the Christian democratic ideology be, in the best case scenario, frail, if not completely inconsistent. The Christian doctrine would rather authorize a strict social and political hierarchy, as it did through the ages, one that doesn't legitimate itself through voting and that is reflecting in the public space the practice of unconditioned *obedience* to the spiritual father: the image of a community of believers that is *theologically* centered, not *dialogically* constituted. If we agree on this, we might also accept Foucault's hypothesis according to which the techniques of *power* pertaining to the modern world are the fruit of the transition of the Christian techniques of the *self* to the public sphere, where they are converted into disciplinary technology.

Instead of Conclusions: What Can We Do about It?

Around 1885, Nietzsche was writing: "Buddhism is silently gaining ground everywhere in Europe".⁴⁸ Even if postmodernism could be characterized, *inter alia*, by a kind of 'Buddhist' sensibility, resulting from the assumption that there is no (essential) self to be true to, the German thinker may have jumped to conclusions on this matter.

The question remaining is then: at this point, even honestly believing that the others are truly *indispensable* to my search for defining the coordinates of a 'good life', assuming the *fallibility* of any individual when left to make all decisions on his own, unchallenged and uncriticised, and also advocating for your right to disagree with me, am I also being able to renounce the belief in a 'true' self, genuine or 'authentic'? And if not, am I really capable of completely exorcising the phantasm of the unique social body, the 'fascist' inside me, craving for absolute power, perfect symmetry and unshakable unity?

Without confusing this ethical model with the pathology of a *split* personality, completely non-unitary, schizophrenic, we may conclude that the 'multiple self' still remains in our culture just a dizzying perspective. We could think of an ancient Greek that would denounce it as the symptom of *hubris*, a fatal 'lack of measure' (the ultimate lesson of ancient tragedies), while a contemporary Christian-orthodox would shudder at the thought of *possession*: considering yourself as having "many mortal souls", as Nietzsche once said, sounds suspiciously familiar to the 'legion' of demons that Jesus from the Gospels is called upon to exorcise... So what we actually do in daily life and through the practices of the self trusted in our culture resembles this continuous struggle: *if not to silence the voices of others – at least because, most of the time, we don't have enough power to do that – to silence our secondary voices*. This means to settle on a particular self-image, 'stiffening' in some tics and customs and transforming the 'soul' in a prison for our bodies, as Foucault said in the introduction to *Discipline and Punish*. We have to face the truth: it's really very difficult not to 'fold' and be tied to a particular identity in a constraining way, as long as the whole arsenal of biopolitical instruments works for our *normalization*, and both our spiritual traditions and other people's expectations (people who are afraid of surprises in the cooperation game and therefore want to know as clearly as they can whom they are dealing with, in order to be able to predict my behavior) seem to force ourselves into making an exclusive and definitive *self-choice*.

But if what is at stake in democracy is ultimately *pluralism*, only the establishment and maintenance of a 'multiple' relationship to the self would be capable of transforming a rhetoric often deceitful in a just political order. Until then, maybe "a phantom is haunting Europe", but it's not communism, as Marx wrote, but democracy itself! I would tend to agree with Derrida on this point: democracy has something *spectral* about it, it haunts our dreams and aspirations, constantly returning us to our 'origins', without being yet something real.

What should we do in this situation?

Firstly, we should recognize its social reality, we should admit and denounce the strategic complicity between a democratic rhetoric lacking full coverage in real life, but effective in the submission and 'folding' of modern individuals, on the one hand, and the interests of great powers or big transnational corporations for increasing political domination and/or social and economic exploitation, on the other hand. The rhetoric of authenticity, of the free affirmation of individuality, is just one paradoxical aspect and technique from this complex framework of instruments of disciplinary power aimed at defining individuals as a 'useful and docile' work force during labour hours, the same with the herd of neurotic consumers during leisure time. In fact, even our relationship to 'free time' attests the same effect of 'individualization' or estrangement mentioned by Foucault, becoming a breathing time (*scholê, otium*) with no

other fundamental use, in a biopolitical context (involving the leveling of the alternatives of good life and the loss of spiritual horizons), than that of consuming some more, in order to keep the production line going (an anguishing diagnosis of contemporary society, given in 1958 by H. Arendt, in her famous work *The Human Condition*, and seemingly becoming more and more accurate⁴⁹). The ideal of discipline, rather tacitly accepted, conjugates itself nowadays with the more and more openly stated one of *security*, of a 'society of security', determining the legitimation of a growing number of controls, surveillances, 'hackings' and domestic spyings or interventions in the alleged 'private' sphere of individuals, the same sphere of *intimacy* for whose 'unaltered' preservation, kept away from public interference, the neoliberal individualism⁵⁰ claimed to fight above all.

Secondly, we must realize that *we do have a choice*:

(a) We can decide to *conform* ourselves, to display our 'normality', to accept the *status quo*, the condition of tinny replaceable parts of a global machine, and to manifest ourselves in an individualist manner, trying to be, as much as we're alive and not too old or sick, always 'popular' and 'trendy', duking out for the biggest slice of the cake, while being praised for our modesty and altruism.

(b) Or we could try to *resist*, without dreaming about universal Revolutions that will eventually end up in still more accentuated forms of oppression, about great utopias as levelling and totalizing in their effects, as the modern biopolitical nightmare. We try to resist by searching for our 'critical friends'. Maybe to this cultural, social and political moment cannot respond another viable form of resistance than the one in small, local communities, in interpersonal associations based on elective affinities and mutual respect, admiration, and trust. Within these communities we can open up to criticism, since we do not run the risk of being completely subverted by the coming of the Stranger. Maybe we should recognize, contrary to the various forms of contemporary Messianism (from Benjamin, to Derrida, and from Jehova's Witnesses, to the Aum cult), that we are still not ready for the coming of the *Other*, that we don't really consider ourselves 'multiplicities', but individualities that want to display themselves and impress others, and that under these conditions, democracy remains only a 'future' ideal (*à-venir*). But in small informal communities, as well as in any relationship based on friendship or love, we can accept criticism from others and even change, up to a certain degree, our core of beliefs and attitudes defining of 'who we are', because we feel protected in our identity, we know 'deep down' that the others from the group accept us or even admire us, and thus we don't risk everything, we never play *all in*. Though we shouldn't forget that this kind of play is exactly the thing that a certain Socratism, that is a radical manner of understanding and practicing philosophy, of converting philosophical discourse into life practice, would solicit us to have the

courage to carry out: risking your own 'self' with every dialogue and exchange of ideas!⁵¹

Notes:

¹ See for instance Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. P.A. Brault and M.B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 78, and especially *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. P.A. Brault and M.B. Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 81-92, where Derrida gathers and comments the references to the idea of democracy made in his previous texts.

² J. Derrida, *Rogues*, 91. "Democracy is the only system, the only constitutional paradigm, in which, in principle, one has or assumes the right to criticize everything publicly, including the idea of democracy, its concept, its history, and its name", holds Derrida (*Rogues*, 87).

³ See for instance Manfred Frank, "Subjectivity and Individuality: Survey of a Problem", in *Figuring the self: subject, absolute, and others in classical German philosophy*, eds. D. Klemm and G. Zoller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

⁴ "The self is a relation that relates itself to itself"; "A person cannot rid himself of the relation to himself any more than he can rid himself of his self, which, after all, is one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to oneself" (S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. H. Hong and E. Hong, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980, 13; 17).

⁵ G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. S. Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

⁶ Foucault's challenging thesis ("About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth", *Political Theory*, 21, 2 (1993): 222) is precisely that "the self is nothing else than the historical correlation" of a specific "technology": not a pre-given nature, merely the effect of a reflexive 'folding' of some kind.

⁷ See Z. Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993).

⁸ See Plato, *Republic*, II, 359d-360c.

⁹ For a characterization of postmodern ethic as "ethic of responsibility toward otherness", see also S. White, "Heidegger and the Difficulties of a Postmodern Ethics and Politics", *Political Theory*, 18, 1 (February 1990): 80-103, and M. Gibbons, "The Ethic of Postmodernism", *Political Theory*, 19, 1 (February 1991): 96-102.

¹⁰ Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection", in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 154; *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 80. For an excellent critical overview of Rorty, see Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford UK and Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1992).

¹¹ See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject. Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*, trans. G. Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); *The Care of the Self. The History of Sexuality 3*, trans. R. Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

¹² "The greater the impulse toward unity, the more firmly may one conclude that

weakness is present; the greater the impulse towards variety, differentiation, inner decay, the more force is present" (Fr. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, translated by W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, § 655).

¹³ "[T]he grand style... To become master of the chaos one is; to compel one's chaos to become form: to become logical, simple, unambiguous, mathematics, law - that is the grand ambition here" (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, § 842; see also *The Gay Science*, § 290).

¹⁴ See Al. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981/2007).

¹⁵ See for instance V. Mureșan, "Este etica aplicată o aplicare a eticii?", *Revista de filosofie analitică*, 1, 1 (2007): 83-84.

¹⁶ In order to be truly universal or at least 'more' universal, Derrida extends this unconditional moral exigency, from the Kantian sphere of persons, to the whole world of living. "How would you ever justify the fact that you sacrifice all the cats in the world to the cat that you feed at home every morning for years, whereas other cats die of hunger at every instant? Not to mention other people? (...) And yet we also do our duty by behaving thus. There is no language, no reason, no generality or mediation to justify this ultimate responsibility which leads me to absolute sacrifice; absolute sacrifice that is not the sacrifice of irresponsibility on the altar of responsibility, but the sacrifice of the most imperative duty (that which binds me to the other as a singularity in general) in favor of another absolutely imperative duty binding me to every other" (J. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 71).

¹⁷ P. Hadot, "Reflections on the Idea of the 'Cultivation of the Self'", in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. M. Chase (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1995): 211; see also A. Renaut, *L'ère de l'individu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

¹⁸ See Fr. Gros, "Le souci de soi chez Michel Foucault: A Review of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31, 5-6 (2005): 701.

¹⁹ M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 60.

²⁰ MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 59.

²¹ Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askêsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007): 301.

²² "[O]ne the one hand, they [these antiauthority struggles - note ours] assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way (...) The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries" (M. Foucault, "The Subject and Power", in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983: 211-212; 216).

²³ "For according to that tradition to be a man is to fill a set of roles each of which has its own point or purpose: member of a family, citizen, soldier, philosopher,

and servant of God.” (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*: 59)

²⁴ See J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997): 36-39.

²⁵ Sophrony, Archimandrite, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, translated by R. Edmonds (Waldon: Stavropegic Monastery of St. John the Baptist, 1991): 227. I formulated a similar argument in C. Iftode, “What is wrong with ‘being authentic?’”, in *Applied Ethics: Perspectives from Romania*, eds. V. Mureșan and S. Majima (Sapporo: Center for Applied Ethics and Philosophy, Hokkaido University, 2013): 101-102.

²⁶ “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Corinthians 7: 29-31 KJV).

²⁷ Ch. Taylor, *The Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁸ See M. Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth”: 221.

²⁹ However, we should take into account the fact that ‘the self’ that the Christian believer should leave behind on his way towards God is his passionate and egotistical *individuality*, but not his spiritual being, his person (*prosopon* or *hypostasis*).): “the root principle of asceticism; a free renunciation of one’s free will, of the mere simulacrum of individual liberty, in order to recover the true liberty, that of the person which is the image of God in each one” (Vl. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976, 122).

³⁰ For further considerations, see C. Iftode, “Foucault’s Idea of Philosophy as ‘Care of the Self’: Critical Assessment and Conflicting Metaphilosophical Views”, *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Elsevier, 71 (2013).

³¹ See M. Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth”. See also Fr. Gros, “Le souci de soi chez Michel Foucault: A Review of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*”: 705.

³² “[I]n the Hellenistic or Roman philosophy, you see that the self is not something that has to be discovered or deciphered as a very obscure text... The self has, on the contrary, not to be discovered but to be constituted” (M. Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth”: 210).

³³ J.-P. Vernant, “L’individu dans la cité”, in *Oeuvres II* (Paris: Seuil, 2007): 1459. In Greek Antiquity, the experience of the self „est orientée vers le dehors, non vers le dedans... L’individu se projette aussi et s’objective dans ce qu’il accomplit effectivement, dans ce qu’il réalise: activités ou oeuvres qui lui permettent de se saisir, non en puissance, mais en acte, *energeia*, et qui ne sont jamais dans sa conscience. Il n’y a pas d’introspection. Le sujet ne constitue pas un monde intérieur clos, dans lequel il doit pénétrer pour se retrouver ou plutôt se découvrir. Le sujet est extraverti” (Vernant:1465). Peter Brown is also invoked for stressing this „ferocious emphasis on self-awareness” in relation with the stream of thoughts (*logismos*), without precedent until Christian ascetism (P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1978/1993: 90).

³⁴ Gros: 705.

³⁵ See M. Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*.

Essential Works of Foucault, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997).

³⁶ M. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology. Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 2, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998): 386. Foucault is quoting Nietzsche's *The Wanderer and His Shadow* [1880], in *Complete Works* (New York: Gordon, 1974), no. 9.

³⁷ MacIntyre, 32. MacIntyre is quoting E. Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 253.

³⁸ Expressions taken from Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" (I modified the translation of the second phrase in concordance with the French text).

³⁹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 362.

⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, 20; 26.

⁴¹ See for instance J. Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, trans. C. Cronin and M. Pensky (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2006), 150-151.

⁴² See R. Ogien, *L'éthique aujourd'hui. Maximalistes et minimalistes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), where the principle of moral indifference concerning the relationship to the self (*indifférence morale du rapport à soi-même*) is the crucial point in a project of a minimal ethics that aims at transposing in the moral sphere and that of private relationships the principle of *neutrality* from the liberal political philosophy.

⁴³ "I've created various personalities within... I've so externalized myself on the inside that I don't exist there except externally. I'm the empty stage where various actors act out various plays" (Fr. Pessoa (Bernardo Soares), *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. R. Zenith, London: Penguin, 2001: Text 299).

⁴⁴ M. Foucault, "Le Souci de la vérité", interview with François Ewald, *Magazine littéraire* 207 (mai, 1984): 22, quoted in Th. Flynn, "Philosophy as a Way of Life: Foucault and Hadot", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 31, 5-6 (2005): 617.

⁴⁵ The truly 'educative' function of art, in tight connection with the idea of 'aesthetic truth', could be found here, in a *community* experience of art, allowing the creation of a 'public' through the intersubjective mediation of our agreements relative to matters of taste, and also in the fact of making possible the imaginary experimentation of extremely different situations and 'worlds', thus allowing us to 'test' our reactions when being put in Hamlet, Romeo, or Desdemona 'situation'.

⁴⁶ "But pure or unconditional hospitality does not consist in such an *invitation* ('I invite you, I welcome you into *my home*, on the condition that you adapt to the laws and norms of my territory, according to my language, tradition, memory, and so on'). Pure and unconditional hospitality, *hospitality itself*, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new *arrival*, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of *visitation* rather than *invitation*" (J. Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides", in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003: 128-129).

⁴⁷ 'Buddhist' in the sense of not being attached to a particular image of the self or to the idea of an essential self, but without assuming the 'nihilist' goal of Nirvana.

⁴⁸ Fr. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §240: 139.

⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of

Chicago Press, 1958/1998).

⁵⁰ I use the term 'neoliberal' following a number of French thinkers and social theorists that have developed critical reflections about neoliberalism conceived not as an "ideology", but as a "rationality", in close connection with Foucault's notion of *biopolitics* (see P. Dardot and Ch. Laval, *La nouvelle raison du monde: Essai sur la société néolibérale*, Paris: La Découverte, 2009). Neoliberal rationality would signify "our very form of existence" in "a universe of generalized competition": a decisive factor not just for our way of relating to the market and for our understanding of economic interactions, but also providing the general framework on all levels of our public and private lives, the framework of our conducts.

⁵¹ A final warning: any of the self-proclaimed 'elites' or marginal groups through which *counter-conducts* are proposed and resistance to biopolitical normalization is enabled runs the risk of being sooner or later 'kitschized', caricaturized and neutralized in its transforming potential, as far as it becomes a successful fashion or *trend*, subject to 'mechanical reproduction': I think the most recent example is the *hipster* subculture.

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