

# A precarious dialogue

## Maria Kakogianni and Jacques Rancière

**Maria Kakogianni** It seems to me that we are in an intermediary situation today. The period of the great renunciation of the revolutionary past, and of the ‘end of History’, seems to be giving way to a new sequence of popular struggles (the Arab Spring, *Los Indignados*, Occupy Wall Street, etc.). But, within this new sequence, it also seems that we are just about to run out of breath for the first time.

In this situation, there are now many attempts to take stock and to learn from what hasn’t worked. On the one hand, the lackeys of the dominant order never miss an opportunity to emphasize the fact that there exists no other viable project for society, no other programme, and so they tell us, with a mixture of arrogance and contempt, ‘leave us to get on with it, at least we know what we’re doing’. On the other hand, for those who desire a break with the status quo, the question remains: what can we do, and what do we want to do? Should we restore something like a revolutionary wisdom (*sophia*) that might prescribe to the movements the paths they should follow? And yet... When I invited you to come and participate in a dialogue with me about the present situation, I had in mind the subversive moment of 1968, less in the hope that we might succeed in understanding the present than that we might try to destabilize it.

Since the beginning of this crisis and this new sequence of struggles, a number of people, on the basis of various approaches, have articulated the problem in more or less these terms: there has been a transition from the Party, as the totalizing locus of political struggles, to the fragmentation of different, specific and local struggles. There has been a displacement from the essentialist class struggle towards a plurality of struggles – anti-racist, feminist, queer, regarding prisons, and so on. The question that remains concerns new processes of universalization – the question of the local in terms of its capacity for universalization.

And so my first question is to ask you to say a few words about a function or operation that you have often evoked, that of ‘the one who comes after’ [*celui qui vient après*].

**Jacques Rancière** ‘The one who comes after’ could obviously be someone who comes as a simple addition, as a parasite – and I have admitted in advance that I have nothing in particular to say about Greece, or about the revolutionary strategy that should be adopted so that Greece triumphs and Europe goes on to become communist. And so there you are, I have formally joined this discussion as a parasite, in order to try to say not how one should analyse the global crisis and what must be done, but rather to consider some of the small ways we might try today to change the very way that we think about thinking, and to ask what it means to act on a thought [*agir après une pensée*].

‘To come after’, fundamentally, we could say, defines something like a form of rationality that breaks with what could broadly be called strategic reason.

‘To come after’ means that we cannot coincide with a point of origin. In a certain fashion, what we are dealing with does not commence, is not the effect of a sort of initial decision; it is not something like a chain or string of intelligible events through which we might somehow refer to the point of departure, in order to say what should have been done, what should still be done, and so on. Instead we find ourselves faced all at once with different inter-lacing chains of events, where the question is that of knowing what we can about what exactly there is in the situation, what is taking shape there, and what sorts of chains or strings are forming.

And so it doesn’t stop, and, moreover, it doesn’t stop. To say that you ‘come after’ means that you live in a certain ‘after’ and not somewhere beyond the end. In other words, that which comes after is not what comes after the end. It is what comes after in an ongoing process. Just as there is no point of departure from which one can lay out the full set of causes and effects, there is no final destination where one can position oneself in order to say *voilà*, this is what happened. As is well known, the first position, the position of the revolutionary strategists who place themselves at the point of origin

in order to say what must be done, regularly evolves – we have seen plenty of examples of this over the last forty years – into the point of view of those who place themselves beyond the end, in order to say why this or that went wrong, why that regime got off to a bad start, why everything is either too early or too late, why what might have been possible isn't possible any more, and so on.

And so, 'to come after' is to place yourself in a logic where there is neither beginning nor end, but where there is something that continues. It's not the assessments or appraisals that are interesting. The appraisals always refer back to codes: someone explains that at a given moment, a strong alliance wasn't established between the proletariat and this or that intermediary fraction of society, and therefore an effort was doomed to fail. By contrast, 'to come after', as far as I can understand it, is to commit yourself to the continuation of a wager, in a sort of temporal line, a specific dynamic: there has been a present moment, several presents that have created temporalities, that have suddenly created something like a specific configuration shaping the way we see and judge events, and, on that basis, what we can imagine as possible. To start with, on a relatively formal level, 'to come after' is to try to situate yourself in the prolongation of the power of a present moment, in keeping with the idea that there are presents that actually do create futures. And, after a fashion, you try to think, to orient yourself towards this relation between the dynamics of a present and what it can authorize.

### The concept of crisis

**MK** There is a widely shared opinion today, even in the ranks of those committed to contesting this order, that the system manages to profit from crises and collective traumas, and uses them to submit entire populations to shock therapy. Rather than being a threat to the system, it becomes a matter of explaining how the various crises (be they hurricanes, *coups d'état* or crises of public debt) provide opportunities to force the acceptance of structural reforms that, during 'normal' times, couldn't be passed. This has led to an entire medico-clinical lexicon (shock therapy, Greece as a laboratory, etc.). It makes me think of a text by Lenin, written in 1917, 'The Crisis Has Matured', which tries to identify all the signs that indicate a revolutionary turn. I don't want to return to a critique of Leninism; what interests me is the register of oppositional discourse. We have passed from 'the crisis has matured' to 'the crisis

profits the system'. We have passed from a reading of symptoms that signal the right revolutionary moment to be seized to a reading that, essentially, deciphers everything that is currently happening in terms of defeat, as a neoliberal machinery for undoing the welfare state. But this elucidation makes the capitalist International seem as if it has fully 'mastered' the current crisis. With this 'crisis that profits the system', can we speak of a reversal [*inversion*]?

**JR** I think I should begin with a remark on the very notion of crisis, on the equivocity of this concept. We should remember that, to start with, it was a medical concept, before being an economic concept, but also that traditionally, in medicine, what they used to call a crisis is the moment of resolution [*dénouement*]. In any case, we have since transformed the normal concept of crisis by making it designate not the resolution but the pathological state itself. But this pathological state has also been doubled, mainly to distinguish what one might call the normal pathological from the abnormal pathological, the excessively pathological. In what we're calling the crisis, today, there is something that we could call the excessively pathological, with its Ponzi schemes, its high-risk speculation, and the bubbles or snowballs that grow and grow until they collapse. And then there is what I would call the normal operation of the system, which is indeed pathological because it causes suffering for such a great number of people: think of how what we used to call the class struggle in France is nowadays regularly referred to as *souffrance au travail*, as suffering at work. In a sense, the pathological lexicon has become normal.

Concretely, we must indeed see that what we call 'crisis' is the extreme form of a normal operation. For example, it has always been normal, at the heart of the capitalist system, to try to do something like transfer industrial activity into hands that are less well paid, and less inclined to resistance. In the nineteenth century, the people from surrounding rural areas were brought in and recruited into what Marx called the reserve army of the proletariat; nowadays, things work differently, and the factories are sent to places where the workforce comes cheap and well disciplined. But, concretely, there is no reason to call this a crisis – it's no more a crisis than it was in the nineteenth century.

And so I would say that we should look to see if something has come together that is in excess of the normal operation of the system. It is on this basis that 'crisis' actually becomes a concept. Why does

it have such a role? Because it's a concept that is useful for everyone, starting with our governments. On the one hand, a crisis is an excess in the logic of the system, the situation of exception which allows drastic measures to be taken to destroy everything that obstructs the competitiveness of labour. But on the other hand, this is the normal pathology. They take it as given that our society is sick, and explain to us that we all have a part to play in the sickness, including the poor who want to eat, to own property, to have credit, and so on. This validates the idea that the normal functioning of society is a functioning inhabited by illness. Which means, of course, that we need doctors. And we know that doctors are always on hand. But it also suits what I call the imaginary radicalisms very well, because in reality it helps to feed the bravado of those who argue that 'the crisis has arrived', 'we must aggravate the crisis to bring it to its tipping point', and so on, or, indeed, those who take the opposite point of view: 'we are in the crisis', 'we are caught in the apparatus of the enemy', 'the enemy is all-powerful, everything we can do ends up profiting them'. Think of all the variations on this theme: May '68 and the revolt of the young have allowed capitalism to manage its crisis, to resolve it, and to create a 'new spirit of capitalism'.

And so there you are, it's not for me to say that 'capitalism profits from crises', but rather to try to

think what we ourselves mean when we use the very word 'crisis'.

**MK** Yes, the conflict today bears on, among other things, what we understand by 'crisis'. There's no such thing as *The Crisis*. Our crisis is not theirs. The carpenter and joiner Gabriel Gauny reduced his consumption to escape the empire of necessity, and ponders each item in his budget in terms of how he might become more free. Can we think the economic crisis as a scene of struggle between the economy of wealth and this economy of freedom? The figure of the consumer is itself split in two: on the one hand it's someone who demands more purchasing power, and on the other it's someone who can turn their purchasing power into a genuine power. But at the same time doesn't this risk privatizing the struggle? Reducing it to a matter of lifestyle [*art de vie*]? Is an economy of freedom a condition of possibility of politics, or it is already a political subjectivization?

**JR** There's no need to start with *The Crisis* in order to distinguish its good effects from its depressing effects. Because what one actually does in that case is to remain in the discourse that accepts this general description of the situation. The attempts to live differently are still to be understood in terms of the logic of the crisis's beneficial effects. Since it's happening, people say, we'll start to live differently,



consume differently, pay attention to this or that, and develop new reflexes. But this kind of deduction validates the dominant description of the fact of the crisis and the radical changes that it obliges.

As for attempts to live differently, this isn't a novelty born of the crisis; it has a history as long as the history of industrial and post-industrial capitalism. You're right to refer to Gaunty's economy of freedom as a way of escaping ways of living and thinking that are determined by exploitation, and the form of subjective attachment to the kinds of life the system requires. If we rethink these in their historical context, we always find something like a double effect, namely that in this logic of an economy of freedom, a logic of emancipation, there is at the same time something like an overall rift that separates it from the economy of wealth. What you refer to as an economy of freedom is a way of fleshing out the struggle between worlds, to make it into something that's at stake in our daily behaviour, but at the same time it is perfectly clear that the economy of profit will not be vanquished by lifestyle choices. There is a logic of lifestyles today, perhaps an entire thinking of the micropolitics according to which one might gnaw away at the economy of wealth through such lifestyles.

Depending on the situation, I think that there may or may not be a way of articulating the emancipation of ways of living with a collective problematic of emancipation. Emancipation is a way of preparing another world, but also a way of living in this one. There is in any case a proper and unavoidable dimension of the struggle between two worlds, which is the dimension of politics as collective action, the universalization proper to political collectives. And so, there are already such things as forms of political pre-subjectivization, which go beyond the moment of political conflict, as it were, but a logic of lifestyles will never by itself constitute the economy of those operations of universalization produced by political collectives.

**MK** You've said that what was scandalous about 1968 was the way it went against the sensible principles of revolutionary science, to the point that it seemed thoroughly sullied by ideology. Today, the movements are more often accused of lacking any ideology. Even those who recognize this as one of the virtues of these movements agree about this absence.

Since there is no longer any such thing as a revolutionary science, doesn't this modify the relations between science and ideology, as well as the distribution of possible positions on one side or

the other? In 1968 the notion of ideology evoked an apparent incapacity to see (since vision was reserved for revolutionary science): do you think the same applies today?

**JR** I'm not sure that a parallel between the two situations can be maintained very rigorously. The accusation of ideology made against the turbulent students was after all very specific. It was an interpretation of revolutionary science, Althusserian science in particular, saying that those who are rebelling don't understand the true law of exploitation and that they consequently, of course, will only make fools of themselves when they rebel.

But today, as a matter of fact, the idea that the people can't see for themselves, and that one must explain things to them, is scarcely tenable. The rhetoric of ideological illusion has become obsolete, but in my opinion this by itself doesn't much affect, ultimately, what we could call the position of those in the know [*celui qui sait*]. Those in the know are not necessarily those who see the real process that is unseen by others, but we nevertheless come across the same kind of accusations, in the movement of the 15M, and so on. By and large, it's always the same thing: to wit, that those who are taking action, those who occupy the terrain – be it the Sorbonne in 1968, or the Puerta del Sol today – lack any real understanding of what they're doing, and don't know why they're doing what they're doing. And so we have all the variations on the great theme, 'they don't have a programme', and so on – which clearly means 'they know not what they do'. To do something has a meaning if you know why you do it. If we don't know what we're doing, or how to organize the revolution, and so on, then there's no point in mobilizing for change.

And so, as I see it, there may have been a displacement. Indeed, this position of the scholar or scientist [*savant*] with respect to the ignorant or short-sighted rebels is no longer filtered through the radical difference between science and ideology, so much as through a sort of displacement. In place of a mastery founded on science, there is a mastery founded on prudence, which is to say something like an art, an art that is not necessarily founded on science but on a sense of timing, a feel for which moments are the right ones, a sense of what must be done in those moments, and so on.

This is what we hear today, with all the talk of the 'absence of organization', and so forth. We know very well that the popular movements, like that of the 15M, have invented forms of organization that are,

materially, extremely precise, complex and efficacious, but at the same time it's said that there is no organization, because this is not organization in the classically defined sense: a hierarchical organization guided by a strategic knowledge of the ends to be attained. We're told that discipline is needed. One hears arguments for the need for communism today as a need for discipline – which avoids asking what kind of discipline, for what purpose, and so on. This sort of talk isn't very interesting. What is in any case certain is that those who denounced ideological illusion yesterday are the same people who today complain that there is no ideology, meaning that there is no programme. These people always land on their feet. The same thing is at work in this double condemnation: on the one hand, they say that there is no radicalism in these movements, that no irreversible acts are being carried out. And then, on the other hand, they say: there is no sense of realism – being assembled together in the same city square doesn't turn you into the people, and isn't real politics the art of making alliances, a matter of strategy, of knowing how to inscribe yourself within the logics of the state, and so on. I'm really struck to see how radical revolutionaries can at the same time become something like 'fans' of Hugo Chávez, saying that there, at least, there are proper state politics, social measures are taken, and so on.

And so I believe that, in a certain way, whether it's through accusations of ideology or its absence, there is always, at bottom, the same magisterial position that reproduces itself. To be sure, the question nevertheless remains, if people are moving today we don't quite know what we are moving towards, which perhaps obliges us to shift the question into the logic of what we said earlier about the fact of 'coming after' – namely that, perhaps now more than ever, the meaning or direction [*sens*] of the action is given by the potentialities of the action itself.

## Occupied spaces

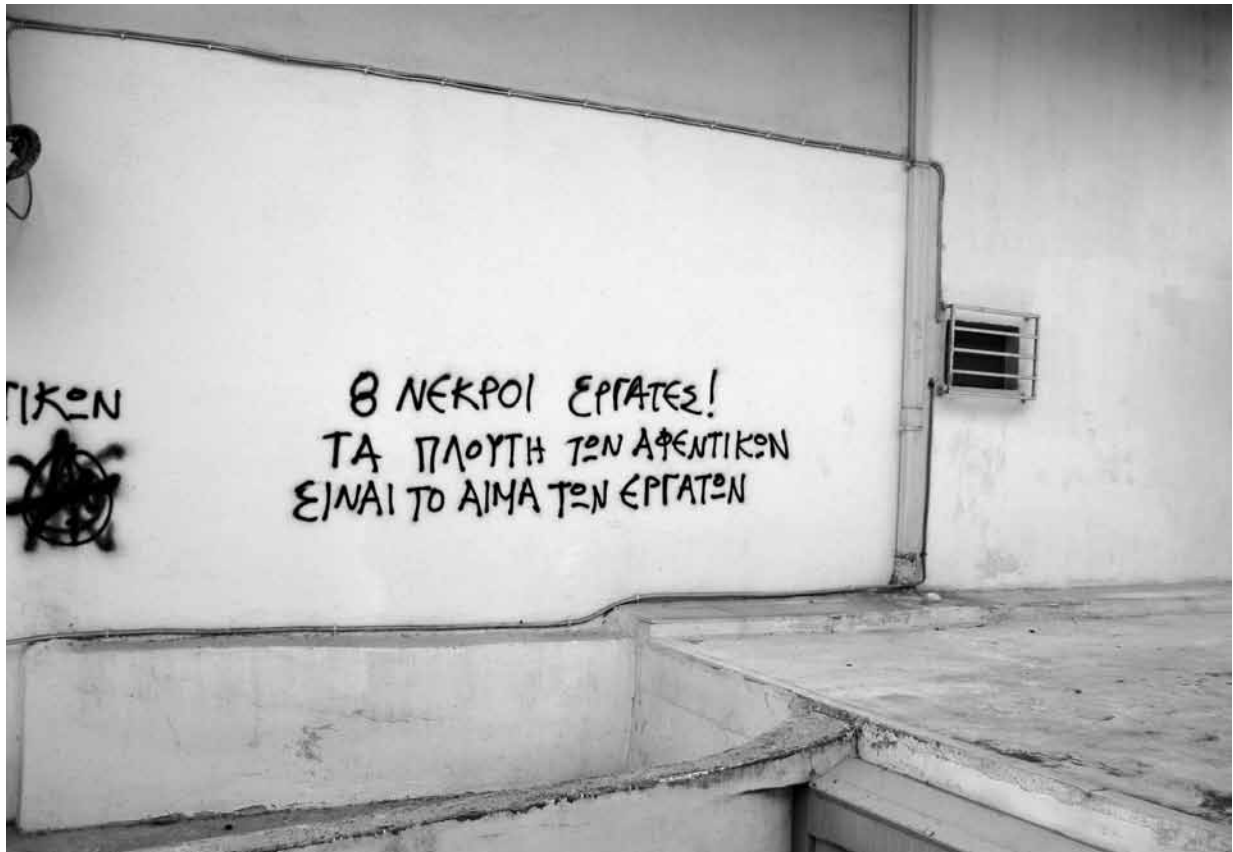
**MK** I'd like to linger for a while over the occupation of Syntagma. Emancipation has always been undertaken by anonymous people, who take to speaking when they are not supposed to speak, who appropriate old words to tell their stories. To the extent that it is a procedure of symbolization, there is emancipation there where names arise. It is important to see that in the actual sequence of struggles, in very different configurations, what is constant is the absence of proper names – and, within them, the absence of leaders; there is this image of movements

that come from below, while doing away with proper names. The majority of engaged intellectuals have welcomed this absence as something marvellous. It is perhaps more interesting to try to see if there isn't, at the heart of those movements, a new elaboration of the tension between the name, the proper name, and the group, or even between anonymization and symbolization. This means resisting the idea of an escape from the illusions of the past, or of progress – such as: there has been progress, since movements are now run from below, and so on.

I read the proceedings of an assembly at Syntagma one day, where the issue being discussed concerned a press conference that was to address the media. One of the major problems animating the debate was whether or not the delegates should be masked. It's not the answer that counts, but the fact that the question was posed in these terms. This visible community absolutely wanted to maintain the invisibility of its participants.

**JR** This goes back to a sort of fundamental paradox: the anonymous are also those who emerge out of anonymity. The anonymous are those who ordinarily have no name, and who decide to make themselves seen. It reminds me, in passing, of an extraordinary text of Mallarmé's, titled *Conflit*, where he speaks of the railroad workers who don't truly have a name, since he calls them Poitou or Le Normand, names which indicate only the province that they come from. Mallarmé asks how we may 'fix points of light' on these births shadowed by anonymity. This is not just a poetic dream. In a certain fashion, the power of the anonymous is always the power of an inscription which makes it so that they who were anonymous take a name, just as what was invisible becomes visible.

I think that proper names nevertheless play a major role in popular movements, but at the same time we should notice that those proper names are completely forgotten. If you take this or that insurrectionary period, you will, all of a sudden, find proper names that have an extraordinary power to bring people together, during the moment, and then they disappear. This is either because they've been struck down, or for various other reasons, which goes back to the fact that the name has a punctual function. You alluded to the idea that the people who come to speak in the name of the collective should be masked in order to represent the collective. But, after all, people wearing masks has more to do with clandestine action, with a secret army, than with democratic anonymity.



It's true that our situation is dominated by a sort of horror of representatives, which is hard to criticize. It's not just a horror of representatives in the sense of elected officials, but also a horror of all these people who, at various general assemblies, are ready to sell the wares of their own little group – ready to offer their own leadership, their capacity to represent the movement. And we see this very clearly in the recent popular assemblies: they seek out every available means of obstructing those who specialize in the leadership or direction of spontaneous masses. I think that this reflex is thoroughly justified, but, at the same time, we mustn't reduce all this to stories of the society of the spectacle. We must free ourselves from this discourse: 'don't make a spectacle' [*on ne fait pas de spectacle*], or 'every public utterance is a spectacle', or even 'public speech should hide itself so as to not become a spectacle'. All of this is part of a logic that inverts supposedly critical discourse, which wants us to believe that just because one does something that's seen, that's bad, that's part of the spectacle, and so on.

I believe that what's fundamentally at issue in the emancipation of the anonymous is the question of confidence. This is a crucial question for forming new political subjects. It passes through names; it passes through the action of people who have names.

It's not only a question of knowing if we're sending representatives or spokespeople off to become media stars. It's a logic of the process of the constitution of the new. It has practically always historically included proper names with which, at some moment, anonymous collectives have been momentarily identified, which also means singular voices, people who are capable of sustaining a singular voice that allows the power of the anonymous to resonate. We must indeed rethink, reactualize this sort of permanent paradox of the visible and nameable presence of the anonymous.

**MK** You once said that, today, the enemy is absent – not in the sense that they don't exist, but in the sense that they're not localizable, and that there is less and less of a possibility for scenes of confrontation between inequality and equality.

I'd like to return for a moment from there to the carpenter Gauny. In your studies of the workers of the nineteenth century, you discover working-class figures for whom the question is not working-class identity and the defence of its interests, but the desire to no longer be a worker, to cross over to the other side, to change one's life. What Gauny the carpenter envies of the bourgeoisie is not the positivity of their riches but the negativity of their free or idle time [*temps mort*], their leisure time.

Today, amidst the unemployed, the intermittent and precarious workers, what is lacking is not idle time. And never have the wealthy and the successful worked harder than today. I ask myself how one can think with Gauny today. What negativity, if not idle time? A provisional hypothesis is space, and above all empty space, space that has no use, that is not occupied by a functionality or a final cause. Today's caricature is no longer that between the idle bourgeoisie and the worker alienated by endless work, but the one that separates the hyperactive man of success from those on full or partial assistance, with all their 'free' time. There are a great number of countries where nearly two-thirds of the youth are not working full time. And at the same time, there is an accelerated elimination of common space.

In some sense, is this sequence of struggles with the occupation of places not a shift towards struggles in which the parameter of space carries more weight than that of time and the promises of the future? This doesn't mean that in the 'new economy' there's no more exploitation of labour time. Emancipation is always a production of the commons, with a common time and a common place. But in concrete situations, whereas once two workers couldn't meet one another because they didn't have the time, nowadays for two telecommuters or two precarious workers, whose place of work is always changing, what poses more of a problem is physically meeting in a concrete place.

**JR** Personally I'm a little sceptical of this way of opposing the bygone desirability of free time with the current desirability of free space. I'm also a bit sceptical of this construction of the relation between the hyperactivity of the rich and the drifting [*l'errance*] of the poor. I do see what you're saying about social assistance. We have seen an entire electoral campaign in France run on the theme of 'no to assistance', a campaign whose hero, who went on to become the president of the Republic, has adopted the image of the hyperactive man, the incarnation of all that must be done to lead his people out of this state of generalized assistance. But still, I don't think that there is on the one hand this hyperactivity of the rich, and on the other the poor who are on assistance. Hyperactivity is something that is distributed all the way down the social ladder. Being hyperactive does not belong to the president alone, to the hyperactive managers who no longer distinguish between day and night; it also belongs to the factory workers who are subjected to harsher and harsher rhythms. There is a

dual connection between regular, accelerated labour, where one must adopt a certain rhythm or else get fired, and this order of drifting or vagrancy, of unemployment, the alternation between unemployment and labour, the endless multiplication of short-term contracts, periods of idleness, intermittency, and so on.

I don't think that we've really shifted from a situation where time isn't a problem anymore to a time where it's space that poses the problem. No, despite everything, the question facing everyone concerns the relation that can be established with respect to the temporal rhythm determined by exploitation – either the rhythm of hyperactivity, or, in classical terms, of the intensification of the labour process, or that of underemployment and assistance. This model reproduces the old opposition between active and passive men, with the former being considered as subjects participating in society, since they have regular work and spend money, and so on, and the latter figuring as merely passive citizens, people who fall through the cracks [*dans les trous*], who are *in* society without being *of* society, as they said in the nineteenth century. The question we all face is: what can one do with respect to this temporal rhythm, what can one do to loosen the constraints of intensification where they exist? And where they do not exist, what can one do to transform the experience of time spent in the cracks [*temps troué*], so to speak, into an experience of time that we might try to take up for its own sake? I don't think we need to oppose conflicts over time to conflicts over space.

Having said that, we can clearly see that it's on the basis of the constitution of common spaces that one can collectivize the conflict over temporal rhythms, and that in a certain way it's this kind of use of time, today, that separates, that stifles action, and that in some sense desubjectivizes. So, ultimately, the question is: can we conceive of a resubjectivization that might proceed through other uses of time? And here we fall back into the problematic of the economy of freedom that we were talking about a moment ago. We have these new beginnings of subjectivization which are undertaken through the effort to reappropriate either the time that could be won from hyper-exploitation or the time that is imposed and that one tries to reappropriate. To set out from the construction of common spaces may well be the way that this kind of tension, this form of subjectivization, of temporal distortion can become a conflict, and can become something collectivized.

## The sages know nothing

**MK** One of the stories they tell about May '68 is that it was a generalized rebellion against figures of authority (the father, the schoolmaster, etc.). The hatred of the spirit of '68 is grafted onto this narrative of a May that instead prepared the way for the liberal adjustment, which prepared subjects for a stupefying consumerism. And now the doctors' cure will be something like 'we must restore authority to the School', etc. But I'm not looking for the truth about May. I'd rather make a detour and set up a scene with three characters. There is the sage or *sophos* who possesses a *sophia*, which is supposed to be transmitted to those who don't have it. Then there is the sophist and his labours of deconstruction; point by point he undertakes to dismantle the sage's pretensions to a true discourse. The *sophos* is something like the incarnation of the private universal, while the sophist has a kind of wisdom that forfeits the universal, be it private or common. The demystifying critique of the *sophos* culminates in absolute relativism.

In some ways, in 1968 Marxist science presented itself as a sort of *sophia*, and was supposed to lead us to final victory. It was the paradox of a 'science possessed by the dispossessed' that was to lead to the final rupture with the regime of property. And then there followed an entire series of labours of deconstruction. We find ourselves today, in this new sequence of popular struggles, in a moment when we need to catch our breath, a moment that lends itself to the first appraisals or 'balance sheets', and in this moment we run the risk of wanting to restore something like a revolutionary *sophia*. It may perhaps speak a new idiom, it may fabricate fashionable new concepts, but it will operate in the same fashion.

We appropriate old words in ways required by our own peculiar problems. I wonder if it's possible to appropriate another Plato, or, rather, to split him in two to propose a choice. There is the Plato who reacts against the sophist, and who wishes to restore the *sophos*; in our case, this would be the Plato who, today, would restore the revolutionary *sophia*. This is the anti-egalitarian Plato, with his philosopher king. And then there is perhaps another possible Plato who lets us see that the sophist's labours of deconstruction could themselves become a regime, a regime whose permanence is at stake in a different fashion. This is the literary Plato, who lets his letter be purloined, who never ceases to disidentify himself, ceaselessly circulating between characters,

endeavouring, at whatever cost, not to give way on truth. At the price, precisely, of no discourse being able to say the truth, or possess it.

In a sense Plato doesn't matter; there is no true face but only a multiplication of masks. The question is an attitude of thought, for which the struggle proceeds on two fronts. Neither progress nor return. Neither *sophia* nor sophistry. A thought in displacement that has no love for uniforms, and no love for wearing many hats. Isn't a way of staying faithful to the struggles of the past to betray their letter, their literal formulation? From anti-authoritarian to anti-liberal struggles, the question remains the construction of egalitarian presents.

I would like to finish not with a question, but by extending my warmest thanks to someone who, rather than giving us a pair of glasses with which we may learn to see, passes on an artisanal method for constructing our own glasses. The rest belongs to us.

**JR** I think that those are our concluding words; as you said, it's not a question. And I agree that the construction of the *sophos* and the sophists, of the philosopher and the anti-philosophers, is indeed one of the ways of interpreting the sequence of moments that separates us from 1968, and one of the ways of interpreting the present. It's the idea that, whatever happens, we must have a philosopher king, or at least a philosopher father who keeps the young democratic family from getting a little lost, from losing itself in the misleading labyrinth of what it believes is rebellion but which is nothing more than consumption. In different ways, with Marx or with Lacan, I think we always fall back into the same logic – that, despite everything, whatever we might do, we're first supposed to make sure that there are fathers present, to guide us.

I think that we can say two things about this. First of all, fundamentally, the sages know nothing. But second, one can very well say that the sages know nothing without thereby admitting that the sophists are right. However, sophistry today is not what it was in Plato's time. The sophists of our day and age are not people who argue on the basis of non-being, or about nothing, so to speak, but people who argue on the basis of apparently 'positive' knowledges and classifications, by mobilizing various kinds of social science, and so on. And so the relevant question here is indeed how to hollow out a sort of space or distance from such pseudo-knowledges, how to make the void. For there are several ways to make the void.

Translated by Olivia Lucca Fraser