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The Two Faces of the Present

Massimo Passamani

“One cannot enter twice into the same river” —
Heracleitus

“What’s new? There’s Clio” — A Renault advertisement

The totalitarian dream of power is to make us bathe not twice, but thousands of times in the same river. The governors of time want to force us to survive within the walls of an eternal present — the social measurement of a continuous and collective deferment of life to the future.

What happened today? The images of products on advertisements changed. Some different faces appeared on television and an identical commentary gathered facts in a different order. A statesman disappeared into the void that is absence in the news after forty years in government. For forty years, it was a difficult enterprise not to come across his name at least once a day — now he has become a perfect Carneade. What happened today?

Capital has managed to make almost all the activity of individuals nearly identical day after day. The way in which they dream of doing something different (the career, the unexpected

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prize, fame, love) is also identical. But bodies, though malnourished and atrophied, are different from each other and from themselves from one moment to the next. Everything that has happened can even be reconstructed and rewritten (“one never knows what the past reserves for us” as a worker under the Stalinist regime commented), but bodies are not recuperated, not yet.

Power has made recycling, in all senses, its proper practice and ideology. The science of transplants — which an effective euphemism calls “the frontiers of medicine” — has been working for some time so that the exchange of parts insures an ever-longer survival to the social machine that is the human body. Like all the other property of the state domain, individual existence obeys only one imperative: to endure. For anyone who produces (automobiles or rights, resignation or false critiques, it matters little), domination is quick to replace an arm, a liver, a heart. In the name of progress any organ of anyone who is no longer of service can be easily sacrificed. On the other hand, as a doctor favorable to transplants said, “If someone is clinically dead, why waste all that good stuff?”

Human beings whose opinions are interchangeable, just like the performances carried out during work and “free time”, must have the bodies they deserve. This serial world wants everything to be in its image and likeness.

Only religion is left to talk of tomorrow (ideologies, as is well known, are all dead). Capital, however, speaks of today, speaks of that which must be bought and sold now. But at bottom they say the same thing. The first distances happiness, the second brings misery close. For both, the future is the thing that is always the same, for which one sacrifices the previous day that becomes the present. The next day, one starts again.

What happened today?

“Living beyond laws that enslave, beyond narrow rules, even beyond theories formulated for the

generations to come. Living without believing in earthly paradise. Living for the present hour beyond the mirage of future societies. Living and feeling existence in the fierce pleasure of social battle. It is more than a state of mind: it is a way of being, and immediately.” — Zo d’AxA

“Quick” — graffiti from May ’68 in France

The struggle against oppression is merely the indispensable minimum of an insurrection that wants to lay hold of life. It is now that one plays the game, not tomorrow or the day after. Our lives are much too short and there have never been so many kings’ heads to chop off.

The unsuccessful realization of militance has produced its wretched counter-image everywhere. There is no longer anyone speaking of the duties to the Cause and promising the future society. All are for the “here and now”, quick to accuse every discussion and every practice that does not guarantee the security of the known and approved here and now of martyrdom and messianism. On sale today is militance in its most laicized version: realism.

To those who talk of wanting to enjoy life without concerning themselves over the oppressors, one can only respond in one way: by watching how they live. One will discover how much they accept the way the oppressors concern themselves over them.

The one who does not hide the limits and impositions by which she is constrained knows that, beyond empty proclamations, one can be outside of that which exists only to the extent to which she is against it. Really because he wants much more, he launches herself into the struggle.

When she lacks the strength, he has no need of an ideology of pleasure to disguise his weakness and fear. They exist and are part of the game as well, like love and hatred, relationships

torn away from exchange value and actions that spit in the face of the order of passivity.

My ideas, my activity and my body are not those of yesterday, nor of everyone — so she desires to think and feel. Today something happened. Each day he must release her own unique perfume from the impersonality — now secretly, now with the roar of the tempest. Then one can speak of tomorrow as well. As it is currently written for us, there is only slavery behind the imperative: Attend to the future.

In a time that is always the same, the rulers of survival want to impose their measure on each and all. The immeasurability of our demands is the only true necessity of a change much more than necessary, and that is to say, possible.

Today something happened.