

# From the People to the Many and Maybe Back? Magic.

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## PART ONE MANY COME FIRST, THE REST LATER

It is May 2011, and a description of the then so-called ›phenomenon of squares‹ in a mainstream Greek newspaper reads: »It was a mosaic of ages, wages and demands. A multitude that was belonging everywhere and nowhere.« (Papadopoulos 2011) The journalist went further, he tried a categorization. First: *the newlyweds*. Practically, this category included just a couple that »celebrated their wedding with a kiss in the square among the indignados«. The category was judged as essential, because the enthusiastic clapping of the multitude at the view of the kiss had been broadcast globally that day. Then: *the activists*, defined as »these individuals« that came to the square holding their bicycles, instead of holding the Greek flag like others. »Not because of the trend but moved from ideology«, explained the journalist. Then arrived: *the gadget geeks*, accepting invitations from »friends« in social media. Their goal being »to upload everything that happens«. Then: *the unemployed*, described »as those that hold one or two degrees but no job.« Finally come: *the veterans*, experienced syndicalists and members of parties, some »standing embarrassed« in front of the motley multitude, while some others feeling »pleasant surprise seeing colleagues that never participated in the past in protests, now standing in front of the parliament.«

## THE MANY AND THE OTHERS

Such a description was an immature differentiation between ›the many‹ and ›the people‹ addressed to both at the same time. It was simultaneously signaling a rupture and a division. It was an attempt to create a form of representation of the ›many‹ gathered in the square, for those who were not there, yet. It is true that most of those gathered in the square had no prior political experience. They were not organized, at least in the way that people used to be organized in the past. There were no references to the workers' struggles in Greek history or to anti-Nazi resistance, to the civil war and the struggles against dictatorship of 1967-74. Most of the people in the square were sharing a common belief, a common feeling against parliamentarism (some against the parliament building itself).

The refusal of the many in the square to select representatives embarrassed the state politicians, as it was inverting the usual practices of power, practices that are based on aspersion toward the leaders. It is characteristic that mainstream media used a psychiatric term to describe the non-representative will of the many by calling it ›depersonalization‹. The People reproduced it. The result of this critique became visible in the 8 o'clock news as well as to the hipsters' crowd on the Facebook timeline. The new thing for the many was: the people criticizing the many.

## THE INTERPSYCHICAL DIMENSION OF THE MANY

In an interview given to Alexei Penzin, Paolo Virno talks about the relations between the *I and the many*, referring to the theory of Lev S. Vygotskij. He states that

initially there is an ›us‹ [...] yet this ›us‹ is not equivalent to the sum of many well defined ›I's‹. [...] the mind of the individual [...] is the result of a process of differentiation that happens in a primeval society: ›the real movement of the development process of the child's thought is accomplished *not* from the individual to the socialized, *but* from the social to the individual.‹ Gradually, the child acquires the collective ›us‹, which we can define as an *interpsychical* dimension, turning it into an *intrapsychical* reality: something intimate, personal, unique. However, this introversion of the

interpsychical dimension, this singularization of the ›primordial us‹, does not happen definitively during childhood: it always repeats itself during adulthood. (Virno 2010)

Was this manifested on the square? Did some signs of an upcoming desire to form new institutions of communication appear? Was this the beginning of a new form of life style? Certainly, some early signs of institutionalization attracted many critics. But after all, as Virno says about the term ›institution‹: »Is it a term that belongs exclusively to the vocabulary of the adversary?« (ibid) Maybe the answer is in Virno's claim: »For the people, the One is a promise; for the ›many‹, it is a premise.« (ibid) In any case, on the square, consciously or not, the many set rituals for a future institution. But the peaceful rituals did not last long.

## VIOLENCE AS RITUAL

Violent clashes during protests are nothing new. Going back in time, protests of workers' syndicates, students etc. were often turning violent for various reasons. However, these protests were protests of the people.

The new thing at the square concerned subjectivity. During the days when the riot police decided to fully raid the square, using thousands of canisters of tear gas, the many faced the emersion of the ›no-subject‹. What since then was loosely called ›riots‹ encircled the movement of the square, punctured it, penetrated it and produced deviations in the practices of the movement.

Who is this emerging no-subject who practices violence as a ritual? In 2011 we were already in the middle of the crisis and the number of the unemployed especially among the youth was already increasingly high. Precarity produces exclusion and in a new and paradoxical way – one more derivative of the state of exception – the exclusion becomes the command through which the state produces integration and which the no-subject has to obey.

For thousands of young people, mostly belonging to the lower social classes, this new absurd form of ›integration‹ to society means only one thing: to lose the ground they stand on. Losing the ground means losing subjectivity. When the objective conditions of living, the objectivity of a social section,

and the vital space of desire production is cancelled, there is no subject anymore. The subject disappears. Was the no-subject-group part of the many? The answer is yet to come. The many kept a rather contradictory stance towards violence. This stance was visible during the two days of June 2011 when police was raiding the square. The first day many voices among the many were against violent involvement with the riot police, while they changed stance the second day, after experiencing the ›hate for society‹ executed by police forces.

Sunday, February 12, 2012 was the day when the movement of the many and also the violence skyrocketed. This day was more or less expected. It was almost announced on mainstream media. Nobody did something to block its arrival and nobody could do something about it. That day the many faced the rage and at the same time experienced the tactics of the state. It was a crucial day, an explosion, necessary for the reproduction of power structures. An integration into the state through discipline and oppression that could only be achieved by the state making an exception to the law. It was a risky situation for the state, and a brand new lesson for the movement of the many. It was the day that many among the many realized the end of the workers' movement. The rupture between power structures and the people was total. That day the many won the battle because they stayed in the streets in spite of the oppression, but they lost themselves. They lost themselves not in fear but in hope. They went home expecting the promise of the One, like normal people.

## **THE MANY ON DEMAND (AS PEOPLE)**

There haven't been significant protests of the many since Sunday, February 12, 2012. Attempts to reconstruct a massive social movement have failed. The majority expects a ›solution‹ from parliamentary parties now. However, hundreds of assemblies, collectives and social initiatives have spread all over the country. Some practices and ideas of direct democracy remain alive, regardless of the wildness of the landscape. Will the magic of the many work in the future and how? It remains to be seen.

## PART TWO

### THE MANY ON DEMAND (AS HOPE)

- *I gave the mortals a way to stop foreseeing their death as fatality.*
- *And what kind of remedy have you found for this? (Asks the Chorus)*
- *I provided them with blind hopes. (He answers)*
- *Oh! You found a great solution. (Replies the Chorus)*
- *I gave them fire too! (Says Prometheus)*

*Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound*<sup>1</sup>

Why was hope included into Pandora's box (*pyxis*) of woes?

The legend, as written by Hesiod in *Theogony*, describes an era when only gods existed, and then (during this era), they decided that it was about time to create humans and animals and everything that exists on earth. They took from earth all the elements that melt in the fire, put them together and thus created all living beings. According to the myth, Epimetheus, brother of Prometheus, undertook the work to distribute the qualities and faculties among the beings. But as he was not very wise, he wasted them thoughtlessly, leaving man naked and defenseless. As the day was coming when the gods would breathe life into the beings, Prometheus decided to save man by giving him the gift of the skillful use of fire, which he stole from the gods. Because, as Herodotus says, »it takes wisdom for fire to be useful«<sup>2</sup>, he also wanted to offer politics to mankind. However, this was impossible as politics were the privilege of Zeus and strictly kept by him. So, before the day that gods would breathe life into beings, Zeus decided to have revenge on Prometheus, and thus begins the myth of Pandora and along with it the punishment of Prometheus.

Reading Pandora's myth carefully, the woes meant for mankind were not deriving only from the spectacular, attractive and deceptive appearance of Pandora. In the bottom of the box, below all woes, Zeus put hope. It is a kind

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- 1 [http://esperos-library.ucoz.com/\\_ld/0/3\\_---.pdf](http://esperos-library.ucoz.com/_ld/0/3_---.pdf), accessed January 26, 2016.  
Translated by the author.
  - 2 [http://www.greeklanguage.gr/greekLang/ancient\\_greek/tools/corpora/anthology/content.html?t=541&m=1&pane=trans](http://www.greeklanguage.gr/greekLang/ancient_greek/tools/corpora/anthology/content.html?t=541&m=1&pane=trans), accessed January 26, 2016.  
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of hope that was constructed and offered to mankind by the gods, the powerful, the leaders and the ruling class and not by man himself. In addition, when Pandora opened the box and the woes scattered in the world, the myth wants Zeus to ›regret‹, and thus he kept hope inside the box. Since then, hope is surrounded by mystery. We can never know if hope is a blessing or a curse, because we can perceive its face only through social and political struggle. Hope is destined to create expectations of liberation from fear and to establish aims, which in turn recreate the principle of delegation.

In the last seven years, the Greek society has been crushed, precarized, impoverished. As Bifo says, the Occupy movement of the many in the squares:

[...] was an attempt to reassert democracy, but Occupy has been unable to go beyond the social uprising of precarious cognitive workers. It has been unable to start a process of self-organizing the general intellect. [...] Occupy has been an exceptional process of reactivation of the social body, fragmented by financial abstraction and the deterritorialization of networked labor. However, Occupy has proved unable to turn this process into one of long-lasting social recomposition. [...] (Berardi 2014: n.p.)

In an anonymous pamphlet that circulated in Athens a while ago, it said that while the content and the time of a confrontation within power relations are set by those who take the initiative and define the rules, sometimes the content and the time are created by the confrontation itself, overcoming and reversing the original set. As mentioned before, there were moments during the years of protests when the confrontation of power relations could indeed reverse the original setting imposed in time and in space and produce unexpected and new perspectives – e.g. the persistence with which Syntagma square was chosen as the site for protest and struggle. But the social movements – not to mention the left wing political parties – could not or did not have the will to take advantage of these ruptures in time and space. The many of the protests became both producers of hope and products of political commodification.

However, the set of ›hopes‹ which was the promise – and the aftermath of the ›party‹ – for the radical left is nowadays practically an institutional proposal to exit the crisis era, which leaves no space for ideology anymore.

It became obvious that ideology is not problem-solving and at the same time it cannot be fed by the crisis itself.<sup>3</sup>

One of the reasons why this happened was the evacuation of the squares through the use of brutal police force. On the squares, the many, though they had put forward the issue of direct democracy during the period of the occupation, finally focused on (and hoped for) the imaginary of a helicopter, such as the one used by Fernando de la Rúa in December 2001 in order to elude the parliament building in Buenos Aires, rather than on the occupied, self-managed factories in Argentina; leaving space to the »easy« solution of the delegation and the elections. And this is how we arrive at the reestablishment of the state and the promise of the One.

Where there is hope, frustration lingers. It is a vicious circle, a composition of subliminal metaphysical exhortations, that only another imaginary could possibly break: the imaginary of the self-governed person who is aware of collectiveness. It is about this person and this collectiveness that presuppose one another and resist the »inherited temptation« of the political history of the past to see each other as a tool or as set of tools. The many who had imagined a »helicopter« ousting the corrupted government from the parliament building in the summer of 2011 could not anticipate that this would happen the other way around. The coming sleep, induced by hope, resulted in the awakening in a state of delegation and in the ritual of »representative democracy«.

However, social movements are still tracing the actual and contemporary perspectives of social transformations. As far as they do not fall into the trap of delegation, they work on new forms of the social, by creating alternative social relations in different aspects of our common life; they will remain here pointing towards the possible exit from the dipole of fear and hope and, as Bifo puts it, »be transferred into the real place of production: not just the

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- 3 Indeed, during the events that followed the compromise of the radical left government on the debt issue and the acceptance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> memorandum in July 2015, and more precisely at the current pre-electoral period in September 2015, it is clear that the issue of ideology becomes an internal instrumentalization into the political space of the radical left wing party (parties), a set of tools for the redefinition of their institutional roles and positions, while a major part of society remains indifferent, distanced and in a state of disenchantment in relation to ideology. Probably, these could be good news.

urban territory, but also the bio-financial global network» (Berardi 2014: n.p.)

Ps: The text was written in two different periods. Part one in May 2014 and part two between August and September 2015. There was – and still is – an overflow of events that we should consider in reading it.

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