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Neoliberalism

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### On Turning or Standing Still

*“With hearts fortified with these animating reflections, we most solemnly, before God and the world, declare...the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and perseverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties; being, with one mind, resolved to die freemen rather than live slaves” - John Dickinson/Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of the Cause and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, 1775.*

*“You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough” - William Blake, “Proverbs of Hell,” 1793.*

It does not yet have a name: these are the stakes of considering the present goings-on in north Africa and the Middle East. Events are occurring but they have not yet formed a clear place in our cultural symbolic. It has not been sketched out what we think is happening and what it means for the future. Constant volleys come in from all sides as the innumerable online news sources endeavor to fence these events in to fit one or another cleanly understandable notion. In one locus we see the emergence of themes of 'risk' and danger, economically 'paralyzed' nations, the rhetoric of a little ultimately insignificant patch of unrest which will slow the market of a given nation for a moment before it returns to normal (IMF, any 'business' paper) . Then there are those who, considering that the political dimension is not merely economic, see these protests as affecting some shifts in their nations policies towards greater equitably while essentially leaving those in power still in power and leaving

the basic structure of their economies/the world economy basically unchanged (Bremmer, Haetzni, Jonas). There are also those who see these movements as capable of precipitating dramatic changes in the structuring of the societies in question or in the global order in general. Included in this last category is the pessimistic side of the fear prone: the domino effect of global economic collapse which is seen by some as disastrous and by others as possibly fortuitous (Beck, Warner). As individuals collect information and form their own opinions independently they are inevitably effected by these slants of the sources which deliver that news.

We propose that these events imply a clear return to actual democracy more than anything else. A retreat from sovereign suspension of democratic functioning. It is in the nature of democracy to have such irruptions as these ones. The ability to respond to and accommodate for such law-breaking/law-reforming cycles is perhaps the most effective aspect of the democratic system. That any nation should need some kind of legitimacy to be 'ready for democracy' or that it should need to have the parliamentary structure of manufactured consent already in place (a clear catch-22) is merely the discourse of power attempting to subdue the public. If we can understand how such ritualized breaking of rituals is the fundamental aspect of functioning democracy we can come to understand how the Arab Spring does indeed have symbolic consequences. 'Revolutions', a term which we will be considering in some depth, are what democracy looks like. After fathoming the symbolic excesses component in the revolutionary Event we can plug such happenings into a framework of what democracy has meant and might mean today.

Utilizing the tool Google Insights will help us to make some sense of the otherwise overwhelming flood of internet media. Google Insights tracks the frequency of news search terms, broken down by as many demographic categories as you could please. In January-February the greatest news search growth on the internet overall was in *Libya* (+2,900%), *Egypt* (+1,600%), and *Tunisie* (+300%). Libya, being the only one of these countries which did not actually have any meaningful change of government, displays an interesting top three correlated search terms: *Gaddafi*, *Oil*, *Egypt*. In

as much as people were interested in what was going on in the Arab world they were primarily interested in a particular notorious figurehead, oil, and the fact that this was happening in multiple places. Worldwide the frequency of searches for *Oil* and *Libya* are about equal. In the U.S. *Oil* wins out about 4:3. If we look into March *Obama* and *War* become the top correlations. Looking at the term *Revolution* from January through April we see top correlations to *Egypt*, then *Jasmine*, then *China*, and then a slew issues which have nothing to do with any states or governments whatsoever. There was of course very little dissenting activity and certainly nothing like a revolution in ('Jasmine') China. Correlations of the term *Crisis* unsurprisingly turn up *Egypt* and *Libya*, right after *Japan/Nuclear*. In as much as Twitter trending gives us some alternative purchase on (non-media) public consciousness the only topic even remotely related to the Arab Spring was “Mubarak,” and that only in February. From this data we can begin to understand something about the broad trends of the public interest and, to some degree, public desire.

While there is significant interest in the protests and government changes going on throughout the Arab world, this interest is largely outweighed (or equally weighed) by concerns over War, convenient figureheads, crisis, oil (economic interests, more broadly), and places where we would like for there to be a revolution (correlation for the term *Democracy* in 2011 is only marginally higher with *Middle East* than with *China*). It is impossible to say *why* any individual might actually be searching for Gaddafi or oil, however we can certainly say that these issues are relatively tangential to the reality of the situations in question. Yes, Gaddafi is an interesting individual with a complicated history of engagement with the West; and yes, Oil news could be relevant to certain people for economic reasons – but what of the democratic revolution itself? It is clear that individuals do not think that the political nature of the situation is directly applicable to them, or at least it is not very interesting. Blame does not rest on any individual for this, but rather the social structuring which promotes self-interest and easy entertainment. What generates interest instead are decidedly non-political (i.e. economic) concerns and convenient Western narratives. This is not surprising information. It is worth laying out merely for the

sake of demonstrating what direction the West had been leaning towards in labeling the Arab Spring (itself a relatively empty signifier) with so far. That is to say, why some clarification is already necessary.

Before addressing what *is* happening, the field must first be opened up again from the constraints of the definitions so far attributed to these events. For the Arab Spring is an Event in the sense of Events as Badiou proposes them. There is content to the happening of an Event which is never reducible to any of its parts nor their sum, the never fully symbolizable excess of the breaking of a symbolic/narrative chain/reality. Regarding the revolution of state, both as example and as it concerns the matter at hand, Zizek writes “In the revolutionary explosion as an Event, another utopian dimension shines through, the dimension of universal emancipation which, precisely, is the excess betrayed by the market reality which takes over 'the day after'--as such, this excess is not simply abolished....The excess of revolutionary enthusiasm over its own 'actual social base' or substance is thus literally that of the future of/in the past, a spectral Event waiting for the proper embodiment” (Zizek 394). Grasping enunciators on both sides of the event “attempt to reduce the Event to a factor in a political struggle of strategic interests” (Zizek 112) – what of the figure of the notorious tyrant, the economic interests, the resultant chaos, they chant. But none of these summarizations eradicate the opening, the gap, that is formed in all of these narratives by the sheer possibilities of the revolutionary moment. This notion is central to Zizek's philosophy in In Defense of Lost Causes where he endeavors to elucidate the unrealized potential of various revolutions of the modern era. The historical fact of what became of Mao or Robespierre does not reduce the opening up of possible futures that were possible during each Event.

Foucault's particular enthusiasm for the Iranian revolution of '78 was highlighted by his appreciation of its Evental status. The fact that the revolutionary fervor eventually coalesced into a repressive and conservative autocratic rule was likewise seen through by Foucault; he condemned the nature of this new government but refused to withdraw his claims as to the significance of the

revolutionary moment. He writes “Uprisings belong to history, but in a certain way, they escape it. The movement through which a lone man, a group, a minority, or an entire people say, 'I will no longer obey', and are willing to risk their lives in the face of a power that they believe to be unjust, seems to me to be irreducible...The man in revolt is ultimately inexplicable” (Afary 263). Foucault speaks of the revolutionary moment as an interruption in history which can never ultimately be fully reasoned out by what came before or what comes after that moment. Merely that they speak out against the predominant apparatuses of power of their time makes it worth listening to the revolutionaries. For Foucault the existence of such voices and their commitments is definitive proof that “human times does not take the form of evolution, but that of 'history’” (Afary 266)<sup>1</sup>. The impulse to reduce the revolution to its outcome is merely the result of the compulsion to fit human affairs into a convenient teleological narrative of progress/regress.

Even the very term 'revolution' has become largely inextricable from its narrativization. Foucault writes, “The age of revolution has constituted a gigantic effort to accumulate uprisings within a rational and controllable history. 'Revolution' gave these uprisings a legitimacy, sorted out their good and bad forms, and defined their law of development. For uprisings, it established preliminary conditions, objectives, and ways of bringing them to an end...the uprising thus found itself colonized by *realpolitik*” (Afary 264). Determining the legitimacy of an event whose primary purpose is to destroy a grounds of legitimacy is a profoundly misguided gesture. Endeavoring to mark the beginnings and ends of revolutions and deciding on such outrageous universalist finalizations as what grounds are a sound condition for a revolution to occur in are nothing less than directly contradictory to the nature of the revolutionary occurrence. Beginnings, ends, rationality, agreeable conditions – these are exactly all of the things things which are opposed and abandoned in the revolutionary gesture. If we hear from the '78, as opposed to the '79 sober perspective we have thus far been quoting, Foucault makes these things

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault assumes here that evolution connotes a teleological progress narrative, which it does not and never has – but it is a very common misconception.

are clear: “The absence of long-term objective is not an indication of weakness. On the contrary, because there is no plan for a government and because the slogans are simple, there can be a clear, obstinate, almost unanimous popular will...a refusal to sustain in any manner the current system...a refusal to step aside in favor of a political battle over a future constitution...The Iranian people's political will is to prevent politics from gaining a foothold” (Afary 212). The excess of the revolutionary moment, the Event, is exactly that movement which opposes all grounds of legitimacy, all 'political' rationality. It is very simply the demand for a dramatic change, a turn, a shift, of *any* sort. It amounts to an unreasonable and totalizing rejection of everything that is the present order of power no matter what else that rejection entails.

Regardless of what ends up happening in any of the countries of the Arab Spring the opening up of the possibility for a post-neoliberal-world-economy state has entered into social consciousness. Žižek speaks of the event of the Iranian revolution, “What makes the Iranian explosion an Event was the momentary emergence of something new that pertained to the struggle to formulate an alternative beyond the existing options of Western liberal democracy or a return to pre-modern tradition” (Žižek 114). This immaterial concept of 'something new' is equally present today in relation to the first states to revolt *out* of the Western neoliberal co-option of the colonial revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The refusal to reduce their revolutionary impulse into a clearly formatted political plan has caused a great deal of concern amongst commentators. But as we have seen this merely marks these events as being actual revolutionary (E)vents. In several of these instances, such as the situation in Yemen as I write this, the falling autocrats have proposed reasonable compromises. Surely from the perspective of reducing the violence of a situation and sustaining the nation's economy such compromises are rational. The conservative narrativizing forces that be will say “Ok now, that is revolution enough, you can stop now”, but this is exactly what a revolution does not do. A revolution is never enough. It does not reach a compromise. It effects a certain turning of the course of a nation, of the currents of power. Anything beyond this turning, the conventionally 'political', is simply not a part of the revolutionary Event. That

the people of Yemen, as the people of Egypt and Libya before them, should refuse any such compromise means that revolutionary moment is sustained until something that convincingly appears to be a real change, a real turn, has occurred.

Appearances are however often deceiving. As the neoliberalizing revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century show, the absence of a clear political agenda in the direct aftermath of the revolutionary moment has often allowed for international interests to swoop in and privatize the revolutionary nation while setting up elaborate systems of economic exploitation. Naomi Klein's The Shock Doctrine documents many such instances in detail. Indeed as a Wall Street Journal article from May 4<sup>th</sup> indicates: “The World Bank last month said it would provide Tunisia with a \$500 million loan—part of more than \$1.2 billion in international aid—to support new policies to allow greater freedom of association, improve delivery of basic services and train unemployed workers.” Tunisia is already well on the way to neoliberal re-ruination. The situation is brighter in Egypt where inflammatory policies towards the West have already been set into motion. As activist Hossam el-Hamalawy recently recounted at a May Day protest, “The main demand is definitely the re-nationalization of all the privatized factories, a complete halt to the neoliberal program. The complete freedom must be given to the Egyptian working class to establish its independent unions” (as recounted by Democracy Now on May 2<sup>nd</sup>). The situations in Yemen and Libya are far from resolving any kind of future policies and it remains unclear as to whether the democratic activities in Syria and Bahrain will lead to any meaningful changes at all. As the contrasting examples of Tunisia and Egypt so far demonstrate however, the revolutionary moment is just as likely to unfold into continued neoliberal exploitation or the possibility of a less privatized future.

The appropriate stance to adopt towards these events, regardless of what direction they may or not may be heading and in appreciation of the Evental status of their revolutionary moments, is that the Arab Spring is profoundly democratic. What 'democracy' means is amongst the most hotly debated topics in all areas of thought which consider themselves even remotely political – from Plato through to

this week's op-ed column. This by no means entails that 'all has been said' on the matter. How we define this term is as exigent as ever today, when most of the world's nations consider themselves in some sense democratic and all manner of violence can be legitimated by the claim of future democracy. Appropriately then there has been an irruption of texts published on the concept of democracy in the past decade. Two particularly evocative ones will be dealt with here: Derrida's Rogues (2005) and the compilation Democracy In What State? (2011) [by Agamben, et. al.].

To balance out the commentary by our contemporaries let us introduce the topic through an originative text of the modern conception of democracy: Rousseau's On The Social Contract. Rousseau suggests that the Evental opening up of the revolutionary moment may be the only proper dimension of democracy. He writes, “A true democracy has never existed and never will...No government is so subject to civil wars and internal agitations as a democratic popular one, since there is none that tends so forcefully and continuously to change its form...Better to have liberty fraught with danger than servitude in peace” (Rousseau 56). The Arab civil unrest, by this definition, is properly democratic. They are willing to accommodate danger and civil war for the sake of the possibility of a certain turning towards the always out of reach principles of the democratic project: equality, liberty, etc. In countries where neoliberalism is already at ideological play, albeit far less firmly planted, huge swaths of the citizenry have decided to sacrifice economic interests and personal gain – the only dogma of the neoliberal hypothesis – in favor of the dream of the democratic project. To quote from another 18<sup>th</sup> century document outlining the nature of democracy, the United States Declaration of Independence:

“whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the people to alter and abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness....when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such



Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security”

As we can see, from in as far as the modern Enlightenment world is concerned, democracy entails the right to revolutions as a constitutive and fundamental to its definition. Is there a single other aspect which can be agreed upon as constitutive to the democratic project?

Arriving at any opinion of democracy requires first extricating it from the various apparatuses today masquerading under the banner of its name. Wendy Brown explores how democracy has become an empty signifier, “Democracy is exalted not only across the globe today but across the political spectrum...we are all democrats now. But what is left of democracy?...No compelling argument can be made that democracy inherently entails representation, constitution, deliberation, participation, free markets, rights, universality, or even equality. The term carries a simple and purely political claim that the people rule themselves...democracy is an unfinished principle” (Agamben 45). Brown suggests that the essentially empty signifier of 'democracy' can freely float around and be deployed by just about anyone to mean whatever they want – with the added bonus of the surplus value that the inarticulable 'good' brand nature the word bestows. This term occupies such force that one could look at just about any conflict or political event since the end of World War II (or at least since the fall of the Soviet Union) and see that the term is used as operative justification for this or that use of force or exceptional state without the term ever suffering from being weighed down with a definite identity.

On May 6<sup>th</sup> for example we can look at Larbi Sadiki's Opinion piece on Aljazeera “Syria's 'spring' toward democracy.” In it Sadiki calls for a careful approach to a 'democratic tipping point': “right now Arab masses, especially youths, have produced the momentum and the currents that are now creating critical mass. The tipping point does not come easy...This is just one more reason why Assad must recruit Syria's vibrant civil society into a collective search for democratic learning, outcomes and agendas.” It is difficult to imagine just what Sadiki might be suggesting in these terms, but we can say for sure that he is suggesting that no shift in the essential governmental structure needs to take place,

that Assad can and perhaps even should remain in power. All he needs is to begin learning “democratic language.” This term is ironically deeply accurate. What leader today would not benefit from throwing around the brand identity of democracy? If Assad were to claim he was implementing democratic policies, which could mean just about anything, he would likely undermine some of the symbolic efficacy of the protester's demands. If not within Syria itself at least in the international media. If he paid more attention the ways the West has utilized this term to legitimate the bringing to power of its various (actually autocratic) neoliberal leaders in the nations of the global South perhaps he would not be incurring the step-ladder of Western sanctions which so often leads to military intervention right now. For as is clear an autocrat (such as the ones in Iran or Saudi Arabia for instance) is allowed to kill as many of his people as he wants and still receive Western favor. Unlike the non-governmental entities which are of course practicing evil terrorism if they should take a single life.

Nowhere is the emptiness of the democratic signifier more clear than in the West's selective use of it with regard to the various revolutions. We support democratic revolution in Libya, and *maybe* Syria, but we condemn protests with the same demands and format elsewhere. As Prabir Purkayastha puts it in another piece from May 6<sup>th</sup>, for Monthly Review Magazine, “France also shipped on an emergency basis police equipment and crowd-control devices to Tunisia at the height of the demonstrations. In Egypt, Mubarak's fall is widely seen in the Arab world as a defeat of a US puppet. Not surprisingly, the West is now trying to rewrite this recent history of supporting completely authoritarian forces by climbing on to the democratic bandwagon, first in Libya and now in Syria. Meanwhile, the democratic upsurge in Yemen, Bahrain, and even in eastern parts of Saudi Arabia have drawn no response from the West.” All of the Arab protesters and all of the Westerners can agree they want democracy and that democracy is a good thing. Unfortunately that means almost nothing.

Brown suggests that much of this loss/destruction of the term democracy can be blamed on the ascent of the hegemony of neoliberalism across the world's ideologies:

“It is not simply a matter of corporate wealth buying (or being) politicians and overtly contouring domestic or foreign policy, nor of corporatized media that makes a mockery of informed publics or accountable power. More than intersecting, major democracies today feature a merging of corporate and state power...unapologetically harnessed to the project of capital accumulation via tax, environmental, energy, labor, social, fiscal, and monetary policy as well as an endless stream of direct support and bailouts for all sectors of capital. The populace, the demos, cannot fathom or follow most of these developments let alone contest them or counter them with other aims. Powerless to say no to capital's needs, they mostly watch passively as their own are abandoned” (Agamben 47).

Anything which we might endeavor to tie up with democracy (constitutions, equality, civil liberties, universal inclusion) is trampled over and forgotten about in the face of the unashamed pursuit of capital for capital's sake. The neoliberal dogma of “cost/benefit ratios, efficiency, profitability, and efficacy” (Ibid.) become the logic of the state and by extension the average citizen. Anything that would be democracy can only play a subservient second fiddle to dominant neoliberal thought. It is no wonder that inadequate attention is paid to democratic principles since they are ultimately only of secondary significance.

Echoing Rousseau, Brown eventually turns to mulling that “democracy could never be achieved but is only an (unreachable) aim, a continuous political project” (Agamben 53). This being the case, as we have already suggested, she suggests attempting to bring the term democracy back towards its only common content: “Democracy, like liberation, could only ever materialize as protest and, especially today, ought to be formally demoted from a form of governance to a politics of resistance” (Agamben 56). Continuing in the line of what democracy as a project could mean, Ranciere sees the democratic project as fundamental to what we know as politics itself: “Democracy, in the sense of the power of the people, the power of those who have no special entitlement to exercise power, is the very basis of what makes politics thinkable...it is the wrench of equality jammed (objectively and subjectively) into the

gears of domination, it's what keeps politics from simply turning into law enforcement" (Agamben 79). In as much as politics has something to do with the people and is not just experts and 'elected' officials, it is in the sense of the democratic move of resistances. For the political realm to not just be a system of power and domination the illegitimate must make themselves heard.

In the example of the uniting of the Palestinian state, a perhaps less well publicized element of the Arab Spring, the truly political element can be seen. Khaled Entabwe, a Palestinian-Israeli youth leader in Haifa and a coordinator with Baladna, the Association for Arab Youth describes: "Our new modes of organising include a direct challenge to entrenched institutional power. We do not want to just memorialise the past, but also to demand a new future" (Erakat). This is very clearly the democratic project: the bursting forth of egalitarian principle. Challenging present power structures and demanding a not fully articulated new future fits perfectly into the locus of what the thinkers we have been looking at describe as democratic. Mohammed Majdalawi, an aspiring filmmaker and youth activist from Gaza City notes that "In Gaza, nearly all political demands have been associated with one party or the other. If you demand elections you are accused of supporting Fatah and if you support ending Oslo you appear to be supporting Hamas. So, in order to maintain neutrality and establish a popular position, we have demanded an end to the division" (Erakat). Power structures naturally illegitimate any group which opposes them. Therefore adherence along a well-demarcated party line, at least in the early stages of resistance, can very easily destroy the credibility of the movement and therefore its popular appeal. By uniting and eradicating these party lines the Palestinian people force the discourse of power to declare the will of the majority of the people itself as illegitimate. Having the people in their totality, the demos, framed as illegitimate is generally the first step in any revolution.

Badiou corroborates the perception of the empty signifier of democracy, which, as he puts it, "is just a word for a conservative oligarchy whose main (and often bellicose) business is to guard its own territory, as animals do, under the usurped name *world*" (Agamben 8). However his thought also helps us to understand better how the present hegemony retains its grip: "Parliamentary politics as practiced

today does not in any way consist of setting objectives inspired by principles and of inventing the means to attain them. It consists of turning the spectacle of the economy into the object of an apathetic (though obviously unstable) public consensus...the possibilities whose development it pretends to organize are in reality circumscribed and annulled, in advance, by the external neutrality of the economic referent” (Badiou 31). As touched on before, this is the logic of neoliberalism which can be said to be the only truth of the present order of power. Badiou sees a number of ways in which this power structure prevents its subjects from resisting. One is the claim of power on the ethical domain: “By blocking, in the name of Evil and of human rights, the way towards the positive prescription of possibilities, the way towards the Good as the superhumanity of humanity, towards the Immortal as the master of time, it accepts the play of necessity as the objective basis for all judgments of value” (Badiou 32). Badiou is suggesting that the consensus of an ethical standard based exclusively on the maxim that man is the creature who is able to suffer pain and that pain is the absolute Evil is no more than a hegemonic device the present power structure has assembled to rob the subject of the ability to make individual decisions. Man as the animal that suffers allows for no positive dimension, no life affirming action. It allows only for the sterile and sensation-less preservation of life for life's sake – man should not do *anything*, for doing anything might cause pain to himself or others which is the only standard by which what is good and bad can be measured. This is of course ad-absurdum extension of the principle of Human Rights, but it is nonetheless clear how this knowledge structure prevents its subjects from taking any violent action against those in power. Consider the Syrian rebels. They have committed themselves to dying by the hundreds and the government does not bat an eye. Why should they not return the use of force so freely applied to them? The only thing they stand to gain is the reputation of their movement in the international human rights community.

To see a play of the comedy of contemporary human rights discourse one need look no further than Anthony Shadid's May 12<sup>th</sup> article for the New York Times “Signs of Chaos in Syria's Intense Crackdown.” Shadid indicates that up to 9,000 possible dissidents have been detained without even the

auspices of a fair trial. This being in addition to the stunning overkill of force the Syrian government has utilized – including but not limited to the deployment of a several tanks to combat unarmed (and likely non-violent) protesters. Rassem al-Atassi, the president of the Arab Association for Human Rights in Syria, declared “The reaction of the authorities has excluded any possibility of having a rational solution.” The only reaction from the West has been limited sanctions, though none directly targeting Assad himself. The 'hardest' line Hiliary Clinton has stated has been “Tanks and bullets and clubs will not solve Syria’s political and economic challenges.” This statement is very clear. Mrs. Clinton includes 'clubs' alongside tanks thereby suggesting that the violence should remain off the table for the people while offering no support for the supposed ideals of democracy and human rights that these people are fighting for. Ending protests with tanks would evidently be acceptable if it adhered to the true and only logic of world politics: the economy. What 'economic' challenges is Mrs. Clinton referring to, exactly? The blatant exploitation of the people by the autocratic elite, or the damage wrought on the GDP by the people demanding economic equality? One is acceptable to neoliberal dogma and the other is not.

In practice, human rights, like democracy, is an empty signifier used to legitimize the exceptional exercises of power. That Assad's regime is blatantly violating human rights is somehow not legitimate cause to end the reign of that regime by any means necessary. All that the discourse of human rights is authorized to do in this case, as in any other, is provide medical help to the non-violent protester's mercilessly attacked by Assad's excessive force. This is at best symptomatic; it is like treating chronic illness with tylenol. At worst it freely offers the exclusive use of violence to those in power. Badiou suggests that the ethics of human rights is what people have come to “busy themselves with” in lieu of confronting the harsh political reality and what sort options that reality might call for. Much like the inconsequential gestures of the eco-hip of green capitalism, human rights discourse allows subjects to feel that they have made the right gesture (surely making the *right* gesture is the best giveaway that you are merely conforming to power) and not dwell on the bigger picture. Badiou further

asserts that the ethics of human rights are “Nihilist because its underlying conviction is that the only thing that can really happen to someone is death...Between Man as the possible basis for the uncertainty of truths, or Man as being-for-death (or being-for-happiness, it is the same thing), you have to choose. It is the same choice that divides philosophy from 'ethics', or the courage of truths from nihilism” (Badiou 35). The only thing which men are guaranteed is the right to not die or be tortured. In exchange for this right man gives up his ability to engage in any political or personal project which gesture towards the future, towards infinity, towards man's capability to be man.

Having done something to disarm the hegemonic controls that democracy and human rights exercise over discourse today, why one might want to embrace the turning of the democratic event with fewer reservations has become clearer. Take for example the Western commentators who stress the non or inadequately democratic nature of this or that element of a state in rebellion. What can be mistaken as the specifically non-democratic element of a revolution is in the present context perhaps exactly that which attests to the truly democratic nature of that event. Derrida writes, “The great question of modern parliamentary and representative democracy, perhaps of all democracy, in this logic of the turn or round, of the other turn or round, of the other time and thus of the other, of the *alter* in general, is that the *alternative* to democracy can always be *represented* as a democratic *alternation*” (Derrida 30). The alternation Derrida is referring to is the turn (revolution) from the stable electoral system in which equally democratic parties take turns (revolutions) replacing each other to the democratically elected possibly non-democratic party. In pursuit of the unreachable objectives of democracy, those ideas which make it never attainable and always to come, it is sometimes necessary to either 'suspend democracy for its own good' (as many Western interventions into third world elections have decidedly done) or allow for the turn (revolution) towards the non-democratic. This is not merely logic which leaves open the possibility of democracy's destruction of itself. It is logic that assures democracy is suicidal. Derrida poses the thought: “If one values freedom in general, before any interpretation, then one should no longer be afraid to speak without or against democracy. Is the right to speak without

taking sides *for* democracy, that is, without committing oneself to it, more or less democratic? Is democracy that which assures the right to think and thus to act without it or against it?" (Derrida 41). If one, in properly democratic fashion, is fully open to the turn (revolution) towards the other, the alternative, the possibility, one must be willing to embrace the destruction of democracy.

Derrida's suicidal democracy falls in line with all of the other thinkers of democracy we have so far considered. He writes, "When democracy is subject to constitutional laws, it is the worst regime, the last in which one would wish to live; but it is the best when the laws are broken. When the written constitution is not respected, one is better off in a democracy than anywhere else" (Derrida 76). Not only is the logic of democracy inherently suicidal but its destruction, for Derrida, of itself is the only positive provision that the democratic system entails. The complicated nature of the multiplicity of the demos makes it very difficult for the stable democratic society to agree upon and commit itself towards positive goals. Instead advances are made towards goals in the moment of the turn itself, in the dissolution of outdated laws in their entirety (which parliamentary bureaucracy might not ever be able to undo) and the institution of a new set of societal values which will themselves be one day thrown away wholesale.

To offer even meager support to the bloated and rotting world oligarchy which has the most ability to define democracy and human rights today is to stand still in the current of a system which is meant to turn. To admit that democracy is logic of turning and change is to embrace what Derrida calls 'democracy to come':

"The expression 'democracy to come' does indeed translate or call for a *militant* and interminable political critique. *A weapon aimed at the enemies of democracy*, it protests against all naïvete and every political abuse, every rhetoric that would present as a present or existing democracy, as a de facto democracy, what remains inadequate to the democratic demand, *whether nearby or far away*, at home or somewhere else in the world, anywhere that a discourse on human rights and on democracy remains



little more than an obscene alibi so long as it tolerates the terrible plight of so many millions of human beings suffering from malnutrition, disease, and humiliation, grossly deprived not only of bread and water but equality or freedom, dispossessed of the rights of all, of everyone, of anyone” (Derrida 86).

[Italics my own]

Even if one is to ascribe to the principles of democracy and human rights, one must in doing so admit that what these concepts most call for is destruction of any present order which allows for no possibility of their continuation or extension. The Western powers clearly do not support either of these principles. What is the often cited consensus on any foreign power which fails to support these projects? On what grounds could one condemn the Arab Spring as anything other than the turning towards principles which everyone approves of?

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