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Massimo Cacciari

Our Homes are Hell: Interview with Massimo Cacciari

The philosopher Cacciari has told *Huffington Post*: “Only an irresponsible person can be at peace at a time like this. In these conditions. [Italian] government has not yet been able to put forward something other than a stay-at-home order. I understand doctors: it’s their job. The work of politicians, however, is different. Why have they not delivered a plan for recovery yet?”

It is a condition of instability: “I can’t read, I have difficulty writing, I can’t concentrate. The situation is distressing. Forget about the crap spread by the fat cats on television. How can anyone be happy at home? What kind of idiotic fantasies are these? Only an irresponsible person can be at peace at a time like this. In these conditions, our homes are hell.” The very popular philosopher [Massimo Cacciari](#) has not been very philosophical about it. On the contrary, he hates the idea that thought has been sweetened and made into candy, small pieces of wisdom, to be handed out especially to the elderly to calm their sleepless nights. Also, at the slightest mention of the reflections on the pandemic that have been shared by some of his colleagues, who think the market will never be the same, the state will never be the same, so imagine what it will be like for men, women, relationships, nature, he immediately clarifies: “Listen, the last thing I want to do is philosophize. Do you understand? It’s a horrible habit that trendy intellectuals have: it consists in taking whatever is going on in the world and interpreting it as a turning point in history; imagining piles of rubble everywhere and climbing to the top, and from there announcing that “this is over”, “that is over”, pleased to be the first to speak of an epochal turning point. For God’s sake.”

To speak of the future, during our conversation Cacciari charts the present: “History has no purpose. There is no promised land awaiting us, nor its opposite, that is catastrophe. This crisis is creating havoc in the context of a process that has been underway for some time, greatly accelerating it. It is increasing the speed with which the technical-scientific system is moving towards the centre of the global scene, causing the pre-eminent function of politics to disappear and reducing the space of autonomy of politics. Technique and politics are becoming one. You cannot have one without the other. Just look at how all the countries in the world are managing this crisis. Heads of state and scientists: side by side.”

Has everything come to a standstill except history?

There are those who think that this interruption caused by infection is actually a turning point, able to re-establish everything, lead us to rethink the course we have taken, imagine another possible world, rebuild everything from the beginning. This is an optical illusion. We are the ones who have stopped, not the processes we have been immersed in for years.

Would you say this is traumatic?

Trauma is an unforeseeable event that torments us by repeating itself in our unconscious. A global contagion is, on the other hand, always possible. Above all, it isn't a nightmare. It is reality. To understand capitalism, it is more useful to read Schumpeter than Freud. Capitalism is crisis. It consists in destruction and creation. Contradiction: discontinuity within continuity. Conflict. Sudden leaps, frantic periods, imbalance. It has nothing to do with the calm straight line that is how many conceive of the movement of history.

Can we draw a comparison with 9/11?

We cannot read this event in the short-term: just as then it was not about the fear of flying, now it's not about the fear of coming into contact with people, as some say. There will be an extraordinary acceleration towards political capitalism while the spaces of representation of traditional democracy will shrink. If our liberal systems are not able to meet the challenges of this era, with a completely new organization of our political life, they will pay a very high price. A permanent state of exception calls for decisionism. The Chinese model might become the dominant one at a global level.

Could the nature of globalization change?

It's a realistic hypothesis. Globalization originated because of the driving force of the United States. Today China might become the new protagonist. It's the only country able to implement a colossal reconstruction plan. It owns part of the US debt, and part of ours. Vice versa, no western country controls the Chinese debt. This is why we could witness a huge geopolitical shift.

Why the conditional?

Because we don't know how things will play out. There are various political capitalisms. There is the Chinese one, the Russian one, the North American one. They have different characteristics. Competition among them is fierce. This crisis will also accelerate this competition. In time it will become clear which of these imperial powers has the weapons necessary to prevail.

Is Europe out of the picture?

Europe is microscopic in this global scenario. The fact that it didn't have the strength to react united, not even in such a situation – following the warning of the sovereign debt crisis and the risk of a migration crisis – shows there is no rational plan. A Europe clinging onto the defence of the German trade surplus, or onto the autonomy of a semi-rogue state such as Nederland, will emerge from the crisis in an even more subordinate position, at the mercy of this or that empire.

Are you also doubting your own Europeanism?

If things continue to evolve in this direction, I too will be forced to weep over my youthful utopias and forget about them.

So why did you set your hopes on Conte, who is among the weakest in a very weak Europe?

Because if Conte fails, everything is lost anyway. The country would fall apart. We'd have new elections. The spread would go up to 600 percentage points. Fierce social conflicts would arise. This is what Matteo Renzi and Matteo Salvini think [*Renzi is the leader of one of the parties which support the present government; Salvini is the leader of the rightist opposition. Note of the editor*]: that it's time to bring out Mario Draghi [*the former president of the European Central Bank. Note of the editor*]. It's too late for that. The various Draghi are the result of this government's catastrophic course and of Mattarella's [*President of the Italian Republic. Note of the editor*] desperate plea. Now, it is time to prepare for a tremendous budget manoeuvre, similar to the one introduced by [prime Minister] Giuliano Amato in the nineties. If we are not able to get this done, without making a mess of it, everything will collapse.

Would restarting everything help?

The government has not yet been able to put forward something other than a stay-at-home order. I understand doctors. It's their job. The work of politicians, however, is different. They should have a plan. They should be saying: "This is what the situation is at present. But we have a plan for recovery. Or, at least, we're working on it. Things will be as follows. This will restart first. Then this. Of course with all the necessary security measures in place." A country cannot survive for long if everything remains shut down. That's a fact. Coronavirus is lethal. But also unemployment is. What are we waiting for? For there to be no more infected? No dead? For intensive care units to be empty? What's the scenario? It's not clear.

There are those who claim that the dividing line between the people and the elites has grown thinner.

That's a joke. It's only natural to rely on the commander-in-chief in the midst of a storm. But how can anyone believe that Italians have suddenly regained faith in politics. They obey because doctors tell them to. As soon as the situation changes, also just slightly, and the problem will once again be about political and economic choices, clashes will resume.

Where are you now?

In Milan.

So you haven't seen the sea in Venice, your city, which is blue again.

I have spoken to people who tell me about it, sighing, because they wish the city were always like that.

And what do you think?

That, as you see, there's no interruption in history. Assholes are always the same, the same as before the Coronavirus.

*Translated from the Italian by **Emma Gainsforth***