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Mahmut Mutman

In the immediate aftermath of so-called September 11, there was a particular phrase we frequently heard on television. Every expert, every commentator, every interviewee said the same thing: "from now on, everything will change; nothing is going to be the same again." What was meant by this was surely a re-organization of political, administrative and security apparatuses against the new terrorist danger. Despite the whole seriousness of the matter, this statement made me smile whenever I heard it. If September 11 proved one thing, it must be that it is simply impossible to prevent international terrorism by taking safer and more advanced organizational, technical and legal measures against it. If terrorism disappears one day, this will not happen because we will have fought against it by our advanced security, administrative and technological organization. If hijacking a plane and destroying two skyscrapers is really as simple as acquiring a pilot diploma and carrying a knife, naturally tomorrow someone else may have another surprise. The point is precisely that no system can be so well organized not to have any weak points, failures or malfunctions. But if this is often put forward as a justification for increasing security measures, it is because those who do so are extremely reluctant to discuss, let alone do something about, the fact that while North Americans and Europeans pick an "ethnic" restaurant to go every evening, millions in Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America simply starve. To remain silent in the face of this unforgivable crime is to support it. But not hearing the grievances of people all over the world is also to support such a crime of humanity in a most insidious way. The first issue on the global agenda is therefore not more effective security measures but a global redistribution system, that is, the issue of social justice and freedom for the large working masses of the planet. I am not referring to good will, charity or benevolence, but a global social reform. This is already the end of my argument, and the rest is only a supplement.

My supplement is about a major constituent of our "modernity", the way we produce, understand and institutionalize what we call "technology". I think our strong belief in technology is, in the final instance, a belief in the power of arms, but I am going to say something more general than this. Technology here is a complicated concept, and by it, I do not mean simply instruments or machines. I would like to define technology as a system of sovereign subjectivity, which is to say not merely an instrument or means to an end. The system of sovereign subjectivity depends on the assumption of full control over nature and people by Man as sovereign subject. This desire to control and master nature in its largest sense is also an imperial system, if we remember that the Latin word "*imperium*" means "sovereign". A primary feature of the system of sovereign subjectivity is its "strategic" mode

of working, using this expression in Michel de Certeau's sense: a calculation of relations of force in and by which a sovereign subject isolates itself from an environment which it then calls "other".[1] Since the system depends on a supposedly rational and scientific calculation of forces, its failures can only be described as accidents. If we take the rationale of the system in itself, indeed it would not be wrong to describe September 11 as an accident. Obviously no such system can be immune to failures or accidents, as every system is subjected to finitude, that is, being worn out, aging, metal tiredness, death, failures of all kinds—just a simple knife, just a missing Arab, etc. Our modern technological system of perfect organization and control of everything cannot recognize finitude. The technological system, i.e. the imperial system of sovereign subjectivity, which is generally presented in terms of the "free market economy", is a desire for immortality. Is the terrorist response not mirroring and mimicking this modern desire for immortality? Let us note that such an immensely lethal action, which caused the deaths of thousands, was also made possible by the advanced technology of airplanes. The fundamentalist terrorist's metaphysical act of sacrificing himself and others for "the great cause" is a desire to become immortal too. This is why one has to be very careful not to confuse fundamentalism with cultural, ethnic or religious identity or difference. If Islam suggested at times that one could reach immortality by killing the infidel, certainly it is not the only religion which made that suggestion, as it also made many suggestions which are in exactly the opposite direction. Indeed one of the other Abrahamic religions, Christianity, too, defended martyrdom as powerfully as Islam, and Christian fundamentalism is pretty strong with millions of followers in the U.S., whose current president, it is said, came to power through electoral alliances with Christian fundamentalists. Given the global social and economic circumstances as well as the historically changing and fluctuating nature of religious discourse in all societies, it is highly debatable whether it is a meaningful response to talk of the "crisis of Islam" as the *sole* reason for what happened.[2]

"Increasing security measures" which is the only present response, is no response to terrorism, but in turn, mirroring and mimicking the terrorist gesture in a dangerous way. It is feeding into fundamentalism and terrorism. Might this administrative-organizational mania be a desire *for* terrorism, a desire for negativity, a desire for "weapons of mass destruction"—a nihilism gone mad?[3] The real and difficult response is to change the dire social, economic and cultural conditions under which millions of people live in the Middle East and elsewhere, and to create a *global* system of social redistribution, justice and freedom. One could describe "increasing security measures and establishing a security state" as a panic response. However, when making that description, we should keep in mind that this panic response is a constitutive element of a panic subjectivity whose fundamental aspect is a perverted rationality based on fear of "nature" in its most general sense. This is a view which sees nature in terms of scarcity rather than as infinite plurality of forms of life and thought. If "9/11" is going to teach us something beyond a merely defensive response, it must be a lesson about the way we see the planet and the people who populate it.

Works Cited

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[1] Michel de Certeau: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. 35-36.

[2] This seems to be what Bernard Lewis does in his recent book, in which Islam's failures turn out to be the sole attention of learned and scholarly discourse. See Bernard Lewis: *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Modern Library, 2003.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Will to Power*, tr. Walter Kaufmann & Richard Hollingdale, New York: Vintage Books, 1968. 12-13.