

This humanism: today's challenge

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I guess our century has been so hyper-turbulent that has brought about the most radical results: the declaration of human rights, which is seen not to be punctual and transitory, but rather universal and permanent, as if such rights have always been there and we have been blind such a long time not to see them! Briefly then, you have rights and I have rights: good for us! But other than a legal and political advantage I do not see where does this take us: what about my self and my identity? What about my own struggles that I carry out silently, in fury or in calmness when one of the axes looms over my neck now and then, when that feeling of frustration reminds me of my frail existence? Ah ... do I have the right to talk about my self? Here is the rub: it is not only a question of having a self but also the right to have one: to have a self does not mean to imply to have the right to a self: even if I can describe and signify that which I am, I may not have the right to be that which I signify! And here is the struggle: we say that we need to change those who look down on us; nay: to change the criteria in use by those who look down on us. So tell me who sets these criteria? Is it institutions as Michel claims? Well in part but who is the institution? I do not think I am part of any. But of course, I am part of a democracy, and this is the institution. But is there a difference between the self that is part of the institution and the institution itself? So long as the institution can survive unchanged without my self it is different; but if it has a life of its own, a momentum and an imperative that is its own, then the self cannot do anything if it thinks of changing the course of events. But without the self that is part of the institution there is no institution: so there is a self and an institution different from one another. In Aristotelian terms A is different from B: this however tells us something about A and B but not about the difference between them. This is the point that both Jacques and Gilles mention: that difference is interior and different from representation, while, after Sigmund, it is a presentation of the unconscious. At the same time, both Gilles and Jacques claim a difference that is anterior to representation and the logos. But here is the rub: if I am conscious of something that I was unconscious of, I cannot tell whether I was unconscious of it; to use Jacques, or rather Martin, the unconscious is a metaphysical concept as it presents itself as an externality to thinking. So here is maybe a mechanism that solves this paradox – equally highlighted by Gilles: we are focused on a number of events independently of our senses which are permanently ‘on’. This enables us to switch focality. It is not a question of the unconscious: we are always conscious of something and this something does change according to the conditions and events we undergo. We think of this of that and again of this or that or something else – nomadic Ideas. What is important here is that changes in focality signify small differences: these are small differences, infinitesimal differences that Gilles considers to be internal. These are the constitutive elements of Ideas. So here is the whole Idea: humanism is about the difference between ‘you’ and ‘I’, not in terms of the rights that humanism offers us as an externality, but in terms of the difference that incarnates us. This was actually the message that difference sent through in an interview recently conducted: ‘you’ and ‘I’ are

indeed endowed with something: not with rights but with difference and it is the acknowledgement of such an embodiment, such a flesh to use Maurice, is what allows the recognition of rights. Without flesh no rights! This difference, this internal difference, this difference that inhabits us and which we are concerned with ... nay obsessed by it, is a silent difference that no language can describe. For Gilles it is the differentiator whereas for Jacques it is différence. Simply put, humanism should rest on difference and not identity; if not, humanism is prone to ethics, and should-be discourses that undermine difference in the name of equity, which is currently the case. So here lies the challenge of our society: addressing the globalization of human rights and humanist manifestoes coupled with market economics in through international regimes and organizations that tends to undermine difference and erode diversity.