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Friedrich Nietzsche and Georges Palante

A Failed Existential Identity?

Introduction

Georges Palante (1862-1925), French professor of philosophy at various lycées at the end of the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth centuries, has never been a thinker on whom the French intelligentsia have exerted much of their intellectual energy. Michel Onfray's study *Physiologie de Georges Palante: Pour un nietzschéisme de gauche*<sup>1</sup> has rendered justice to Palante, a justice that he certainly deserves, especially apropos his political penchant in interpreting Nietzsche's philosophy. There is no doubt that Onfray's book has helped stimulate interest in Georges Palante, interest, too, in Palante's especial relationship to Friedrich Nietzsche.

In our essay, we would like to explore several of Palante's concepts<sup>2</sup> of morality within the framework, however wide or narrow, of the individual and his society. For these concepts were gleaned, interpreted and fashioned upon those of Nietzsche's with the firm intention of applying them to the French society in which Palante lived; concepts that would transform a society of obedient subordinates chained to a monolithic, mechanistic collective, into a society of a myriad individuals sharing their egotistical freedom that would shape their social destiny. Now the question to be asked is just how much, by commenting and applying borrowed philosophical figures for a precise social framework, must the thinker identify himself to these concepts or figures; that is, must he uproot them from their original soil and replant them in his own soil so that there they may blossom and flourish? Would these replanted figures grow as they did in their primary soil if the planter were to identify himself to these uprooted concepts? Was Georges Palante's concept of an individualistic society compatible with Nietzsche's philosophical figures? Or phrased differently, was Georges Palante's ontological make-up capable of experiencing Nietzsche's figures, then graft them into a French, bourgeois-orientated society to which he belonged? This we believe to be the tragedy of Palante's life: He was unable either to

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<sup>1</sup> Editions Grasset, Paris 2002.

<sup>2</sup> We use the word **concept** in Palante's writings, whereas, if they were Nietzsche's we would employ the word **figure**. As is known, the conceptualisation of ideas in the quest for truth all but crushed imagination, which, however, must be exercised in the quest for meaning. In fact, we have oftentimes wondered whether Friedrich Nietzsche sought rather the **meaning** of life than the **truth** of life! Be that as it may, perhaps it was Palante's total absence of imagination, and Nietzsche's subtle and perspicacious use of it, that raised one of the major barriers between Palante's adopting Nietzsche's philosophy, and adapting it to his mode of thinking. Thinking philosophically or thinking as a daily activity cannot be separated from a *modus vivendi*!

experience ontologically or to apply existentially his intellectual relationship with Nietzsche's Figures, and yet, he obdurately endeavoured to mould them into the form of a social system. We hope to demonstrate that Georges Palante's sociological interrogations of Friedrich Nietzsche's reflections of the individual and his society, and his practical application of them to French society, resound more of a man projecting his own pessimistic subjectivity, his own private and public despondency into a philosopher with whom he had absolutely no ontological nor existential relationship, and, paradoxically, upon whom he set the highest hopes for a new, healthy society of individuals. Palante, unlike Nietzsche, lacked the aloofness necessary to place himself above the turmoil of life and there meditate upon it: Nietzsche's strength and combativeness in the face of incomprehension and indifference opposed Georges Palante's weakness and docility in the face of private and public acrimony and humiliation!

Georges Palante drew inspiration and affirmation of his own ideas from his reading of Nietzsche. But his phantasy of the hermit's life, the life of the 'loner', was not only in complete discord with the petty, bourgeois life that he really led, but more important still, with a philosopher from whose works he drew inspiration that carried and supported his unfolding ideas. It was as if Palante sought in Nietzsche<sup>3</sup> affects that would stir and stimulate his phantasy, and at the same time, sought images and formulae that would guide him in the accomplishment of his social task. However, with the passing of time, this double identity, psychological and sociological, aroused in Palante the acute consciousness that his life as a 'loner' would remain a pure phantasy, and that his mission of a society of free individuals would never be achieved!

In sum, Palante sought a model in Nietzsche; a model, alas, quite unattainable! Palante had neither the discipline nor the will to achieve this epitome of social resistance by his own Self. And yet, he wanted to follow Nietzsche in his rough, individualistic tracks, and undoubtedly, carry on the German philosopher's inchoate quest of a society founded on individuals, by individuals and for individuals. There is no mimicry here...only a timid, frank following.

Contrary to what Michel Onfray has written, we do not believe Georges Palante to be a Nietzschean, much less a Leftist Nietzschean! Neither in his writings nor in his private life. Onfray writes: « Palante était nietzschéan comme Nietzsche aurait vraisemblablement aimé qu'on le fût : en insoumis »<sup>4</sup> "Palante was a Nietzschean like Nietzsche probably would have liked to be: a rebel."<sup>5</sup> Yet, the rebel Palante was far from possessing a rebellious spirit: Both in his private and public lives. Alcohol, gambling, whoring, duels, concubines, unbalanced marriages could never be guides that would lead the accomplisher of the Self along the long and rough road of Self-Accomplishment. Nietzsche armed himself with iron discipline: Hiking in the mountains, inhaling and exhaling mountain air; intense, critical reading and close relationships with friends that allowed him to maintain a steady, powerful pace between his chosen erratic solitary life and the society to which he belonged. Georges Palante worked as a State servant for the National School System of France. His position was secure until his age of retirement, and his income a source of financial and psychological security. Nietzsche after ten years

<sup>3</sup> Georges Palante also evoked Schopenhauer, Stendhal, Gobineau and Stirner, etc. in his articles. These men were also 'loners' who kept aloof from the world in order to accomplish their works. The fascination that these men held for Palante mirrors his own exasperation to follow their stride.

<sup>4</sup> Loc. cit. page 29.

<sup>5</sup> All translations have been done by the author.

of professorship left the university and set out on his own in foreign countries like Switzerland, Italy and France.<sup>6</sup>

There is, however, one important existential, even ontological bond between our two thinkers: The philosophical inspiration they drew from their chronic illnesses. This is Onfray's major argument in collating both writers. And yet, if we look closely at this bond, at this collation, we discover more diverging points than converging ones. Georges Palante indeed suffered from terrible corporal deformities called acromegaly, an illness that bloats the extremities of the body, and which apparently began after he had had a bad case of measles at the age of fourteen. This hormonal dis-functioning literally transformed him into an ape-like, hunchbacked monster. When in class, conducting his courses, his disfigured appearance would provoke malicious teasing and sarcastic ragging from his pupils. When on promenade in the streets of the small towns in which he taught, it would rouse unembarrassed staring and muffled chuckles. It is this physiological deformity that drew Palante closer to Nietzsche, and spawned a complicity of malady. Michel Onfray says: « Pour Nietzsche et Palante, la maladie est la santé » (page 10) " For Nietzsche and Palante illness is health." Perhaps. But in Palante's case, not only did he aggravate his deformity by disproportioned individual and social behaviour, but it would appear even that he revelled in this rôle, the pathetic victim (*écorché*) of society, exposed to jeer and offense. It is certainly true that Nietzsche's assorted ailments did give rise to a physiological approach to the creating of his Figures; however, he never indulged in his maladies nor revelled in being a victim of society. Nonetheless, if there is indeed a 'faculty to suffer' in Nietzsche's philosophy, it consists of one's ability to overcome illness and suffering, and by whose joyous suffering, 'makes itself suffer out of joy in making itself suffer: *welche sich leiden macht, aus Lust am Leidenmachen,...*'.<sup>7</sup>

Joy in making one's Self suffer! But to suffer joyously does not mean a morbid or morose attitude towards Life; for illness is a sign of a full, rich and bountiful Life. Nietzsche read his illness (or illness in general) as 'overflowing health' 'überströmender Gesundheit'<sup>8</sup>, or as 'die grosse Gesundheit', for 'Lust its tifer noch als Herzeleid'<sup>9</sup>; a joy, alas, that never penetrated Palante's tortured heart, never uplifted his agonized spirit from the dregs of a social gregarity against which he battled all his life. We may even say, although with all due reserve, that Palante constructed a casuistical theory in order to absolve his own existential failures!

Before we analyse the reasons for this tragic cleft in Palante's existence, this failed existential rendez-vous (un rendez-vous raté), let us succinctly outline his life.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche did have his university pension as a source of revenue.

<sup>7</sup> *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, II:18. All quotations from Friedrich Nietzsche's writings have been taken from the Digital Kritische Gesamtausgabe (DKG), or the Digital Critical Edition of Nietzsche's Works and Letters, (ekGWB) by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montanari.

<sup>8</sup> Also sprach Zarathustra, Das trunkne Lied.

<sup>9</sup> Idem

### Georges Palante

Georges Palante was born in 1862 and was brought up as an only child after the death of his brother in 1867, by a mother and a father who never stopped bickering and fighting until the day they died. As we said above, after a bout of measles, he began to suffer from acromegaly, illness which although had a terrible effect on his corporal state, never damaged his brain: Palante was a brilliant student. In 1877 he won first prize in Rhetorics, and proved to be an excellent Latinist. In 1880, he again won the prize for excellence in Philosophy. He was admitted to Louis le Grand Lycée in 1881, distinction reserved for very few students, and in 1883 he won high honours.

His professional career began as professor of philosophy in a lycée at Aurillac, and Palante, henceforth, would remain a professor of philosophy in the French Lycée system, working in Valenciennes, la Rochelle and finally at Saint-Brieuc. He enrolled at the Sorbonne in 1907, and wrote his State thesis on `Les Antinomies entre l'Individu et la Société` which was refused by the jury in 1911 for reasons we shall outline later. Notwithstanding, Palante contributed many articles from his refused thesis for philosophical and sociological revues such as `Revue Philosophique`, `Mercure de France`, `Revue des Idées`. Georges Palante never wrote a book, albeit many of his articles, including his thesis, were published in book form. He also translated from the German, Ziegler's `La Question sociale est une question morale` in 1903 for Alcan Publishers,<sup>10</sup> and wrote an introduction to his translation.

Thus, Georges Palante was no stranger to the philosophical circles of his time, and was indeed appreciated for his erudite contributions; his were the first to position Friedrich Nietzsche in the Socialist camp of the turbulent and often violent French political landscape at the beginning of the XXth century. Why then, with all this abundant talent and support from colleagues, his premeditated suicide in 1925? It is Palante's inner state that should be briefly exposed in order to explain, partially, this voluntary death.

Besides his physical deformity, Palante's amiss assessment of human psychology, especially his own, led him to misinterpret people and events: His first marriage to Louis Gentry in 1890, a woman of bourgeois descent, rigid and demanding, ended in scandal and shame for him. Divorce was pronounced in 1897 after seven years of torment and self-torment. His relationship to his students was deplorable, disgraceful, even pathetic. One example will suffice. Palante writes in his unpublished journal:

*« Que de fois au lycée j'ai trouvé inscrit sur le tableau noir de ma classe, par les soins d'élèves malicieux, le schéma de mes extrémités inférieures qui m'ont rendu plus célèbre à Saint Brieuc que tous mes ouvrages de philosophie sociale. »<sup>11</sup>*

*`Many times at the lycée I found written on the blackboard of my class the outline of my inferior extremities by mischievous pupils, which made me more famous in Saint Brieuc than all my works in social philosophy.`*

<sup>10</sup> Theobald Ziegler (1846-1918) *Die soziale Frage eine sittliche Frage*, 1891, Strasbourg.

<sup>11</sup> Cited from Michel Onfray, loc. cit. page 191.

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This acknowledgement suffices enough to imagine Palante's daily commerce amongst his rumbustious and sharp-witted students.

In 1907, Palante's thesis was refused by Professors Célestin Bouglé and Gabriel Séailles of the Sorbonne. The reason for their disapproval and decision lay in the imprecision of the candidate's demonstrations, the lack of development of his postulates, an erratic method, specious arguments. Their decision brooked no contestation. Palante was furious, and accused the professors of partiality and of partisan opinions. It is true that Bouglé and Séailles had no great love either for Socialists or for Socialism. They both taught Emile Durkheim's sociological methods, those that Palante refuted 'en bloc' in his thesis, and in no ceremonious language. In overtly parading his Socialist methods of analysis, and harshly criticizing Durkheim's, Palante subsequently ruffled the susceptibilities of his two directors! As could be expected, the candidate was not spared the humiliation and opprobrium of such a refusal.

Several writers did defend Palante, and in doing so, spread ugly rumours about Bouglé and Séailles, notably their Jewish origins. Palante did nothing to intervene against the calamity, and found himself enmeshed in an ugly ideological and racist imbroglio. And although Georges Palante was in no manner an anti-Semite, he let the scandal run its course as if it were merely another head-line event with which France had been plagued.

Palante, more and more isolated from the academic world, chose to live with Louise Pierre, a woman so inferior in intelligence (but not in ethics!) from him that one can only deduce that he purposely plunged into a world of sordidness and squalor. Dirty, drunkard, a gossip-monger, she shared absolutely nothing with Palante besides their drinking bouts and slovenly attire.<sup>12</sup>

The final blow to any self-esteem or dignity he might have had for himself was the aborted duel with his friend Jules de Gaultier who had taken over the editorial responsibilities of 'Mercure de France'. An abrasive critique of de Gaultier's philosophy published in the 'Mercure de France' by Palante in 1922 transformed into a violent polemic, and quickly degenerated into a volley of low abuses and base insults. Palante esteemed de Gaultier's philosophy 'scolarisable' 'academic' and 'une philosophie d'Etat' 'a philosophy of the State'<sup>13</sup> The ironic tone of Palante's pen piqued de Gaultier's bellicose temperament, who responded that Palante had completely missed his point. Palante apologized, but de Gaultier regarded this apology as an act of cowardice and of incompetence, and abused Palante's person by accusing him of having 'une pauvre cervelle d'oiseau' 'a poor bird's brain', and of suffering from 'une débilité mentale' 'a mental deficiency'. Palante made the unfortunate gesture of alluding to de Gaultier's military prowess metaphorically, calling him « un duellist de pacotille " "a duellist of small value" (cheap, rubbish) which de Gaultier took quite literally, and which stung him to the quick. De Gaultier challenged the unsuspecting professor of philosophy to a duel which, fortunately ended in a non-lieu, albeit it heaped up yet another humiliation on Palante's shoulders and reputation, depriving him even of dying a hero's death!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> On these points see M. Onfray, loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Revue Mercure de France, 1922, in 'La Philosophie du bovarysme'.

<sup>14</sup> De Gaultier would have surely killed Palante given his experience both with the sword and the pistol, not to mention the professor's physical handicaps.

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Humiliated by de Gaultier, by his own second for the duel, by everyone in the town of Saint-Brieuc; pitied by his lycée director for the poor inspection report on his teaching, Georges Palante asked for an early retirement. It was granted in 1924. The following year he married Louise Pierre to assure her of his pension in case of death. In 1925 Palante shot himself in the mouth. One need not investigate deeply to understand the motives of this violent, and especially premeditated end. He wrote in his article 'Les Antinomies entre l'Individu et la Société':

*« Si l'on connaissait les mobiles secrets des suicides, on verrait sans doute que plus de suicides sont causés par un excès que par défaut d'intégration sociale. Par exemple, combien de suicides sont causées par la honte, par la crainte de l'opinion, par le respect des préjugés... »*<sup>15</sup>

*'If we knew the secret motives of suicide, we would undoubtedly see that more suicides are caused by a surplus more than a lack of social integration. For example, how many suicides are caused by shame, by fear of opinion, out of respect of prejudice.'*

Judging from such an analyse, Palante's suicide was certainly predeliberated. It put an end to the shame, the fear of opinion and the respect of prejudices which outwardly one would think he had scoffed, yet inwardly, he had assimilated and harboured, never capable (or willing?) to overcome them, and this in spite of his early and intense reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of the Individual and the Society since 1895, and his firm support of the individual's combat in society. For indeed, as early as 1903, Georges Palante had written an article in which Nietzsche is called on to bear witness. It was a name up till then which had very little resonance in France, besides Marie Baumgarther's and Daniel Halévy's translations of Nietzsche's and Wagner's polemics in 1877,<sup>16</sup> Henri Albert's translations of *Also sprach Zarathustra* in 1898 for 'Mercure de France' and Jules de Gaultier's *Frédéric Nietzsche*, published in the 'Revue Blanche' in 1898. However, Georges Palante was the first Frenchman to brandish the Nietzschean heraldry of Self-Accomplishment, of ontological and existential commitment or engagement to a mission which he deemed essential for the betterment of man in his society. Nietzsche's influence on Georges Palante was tremendous; an influence that slowly transformed into an affinity which tragically resulted in an estrangement.

It is this existential affinity and estrangement that we shall explore in the following rubrics. They follow the chronological order of Georges Palante's publications.

<sup>15</sup> M. Onfray, loc. cit. page 224.

<sup>16</sup> Translations that were hardly read.

### On Bovaryism<sup>17</sup>: A Modern Philosophy of Illusion<sup>18</sup>

Georges Palante centres his article on the oppositional thinking between the real world and the world of illusion. He defines Bovaryism as «...le père de l'illusion sur soi qui précède et accompagne l'illusion sur autrui et sur le monde.» "...the father of the illusion of oneself which precedes and accompanies the illusion of others and of the world." Bovaryism then induces man into error, into the error of illusion which seeps into his soul. It could also seep into the souls of nations, creating an immense mirage of life. Man, thus, consciously deceives himself, and believes he is living a real reality, which in fact is pure illusion. In sum, Bovaryism is the creator of `simulacres` an `enactment` or a `mockery` of the world. But Palante is not convinced of this simple definition, nor of the concept that has been drawn from it. Where is the frontier between reality and illusion? And he posits that one must assimilate this universal illusion in order to possess knowledge of one`s Self, in order to be conscious of one`s own deception as an object of this illusion. This consciousness entails a `dédoublement`, a `clefing` or a `doubling` of one`s Self: One is both subject and object of knowledge of the Self in the world.

This universal illusion, indispensable for the individual in his first step towards autonomy, is a moral illusion; that is, a bourgeois, herd conformity based on Christian resignation or Buddhist asceticism, which impedes an individual from attaining an aristocratic conception of his own destiny, and in the same token of the world`s. The conscious individual who deceives himself only to overcome this universal illusion does so by his `volonté de pouvoir`, his `will to power`, which he embodies as that very individual striving to overcome moral illusion in his attainment of the aristocratic elite. Palante`s use of the formula `volonté de pouvoir` not only adduces his keen understanding of Friedrich Nietzsche`s Figure, but more importantly, purveys to us, if not a full, an inchoate identification to the German philosopher`s existential path of the individual in society. He says: «Pour concevoir autre, il faut d`abord exister au sens fort et complet du mot. Il faut avoir une réalité foncière; un mode d`existence à soi.» "To conceive otherwise one must, first of all, exist in the fullest and strongest meaning of this word. One must have a fundamental reality, a mode of existence of the self." The `fundamental reality` `réalité foncière` for Palante is the natural personality of the individual, his true nature as Nietzsche might put it. A nature that knows not the frontier between reality and illusion, and in fact imposes the limits of that frontier. Palante reveals to us his knowledge of psychology; that the Ego is not a monolithic substance, and that a multitude of secondary subconscious states, `les sous-ego` `the under-egos` vie, converge and diverge in and round the Ego, each bearing its own social mask, comic or tragic rôle to play out in the world of reality. Palante shows us that the real and illusionist states, because they are nourished by these `sous-ego` are part and parcel of our natural personalities, our deepest instincts, and although not fully developed in our daily lives, at least give us the impression or the fantasy of a Self-

<sup>17</sup> Coined by Jules de Gaultier in 1892. The literary use of the family name was drawn from Gustave Flaubert`s depiction of Madame Bovary, whose attitude towards life represented a state of affective and social dissatisfaction, and by which someone suffering from this dilemma may identify him or herself to a personage, be it literary or invented.

<sup>18</sup> Published in `Revue Philosophique`, 1903. All citations from Georges Palante`s articles have been gleaned from: <http://www.georgespalange.net> by Stéphane Beau, and [kropot.free.fr/Palante-individu.htm](http://kropot.free.fr/Palante-individu.htm) These two sites constitute the bulk of Palante`s works, including letters and revue critiques.

Accomplishment. Palante evokes Nietzsche's formula of 'une colonie d'instinctes' 'a colony of instincts' which reflects his conception of 'sous-ego', indispensable to the individual as he expulses his latent instincts outwards into the world, where they may blossom into social realities, or simply offer the image of social accomplishment! These 'colony of instincts' are thus very real, for it is we who produce them!

Palante's thesis becomes thus clear: The frontier between reality and illusion is as illusionary as the realists who believe this illusionary world to be! They are not antithetical states. Dualism is an illusion, and this illusion has produced the two categories of man's thinking methods: Abstract reasoning and sensitivity.<sup>19</sup> For Palante, this methodological dichotomy is as illusionary as it is indispensable to the individual in order to overcome it. Again, Palante evokes Nietzsche's 'logical fictions', by which the two opposing methods perpetually falsify the world in which we live, yet are required to interpret the phenomenal world. But in interpreting the world the individual must surpass this comfortable and convenient oppositional thinking, and here Palante returns to Nietzsche's will to power as the representation of the myriad 'under-egos', through whose sensitivity the individual will be socially orientated. The will chooses its own social rôle as an individual choice. The will chooses it freely, from within and not without. A choice from the multiform Self bursting outwards of its own subjective reality, and not the imposition of a duty or a commitment from an objective, monolithic collective.

Palante concludes his article by redefining Bovaryism as that psychological complex of 'under-egos' which when extracted and played out, provide the individual his social representation. This complex and its social manifestations follows its own Laws of Life, quite unknown to the Categorical Imperatives of Kant, or any Universal or Absolute being. Palante says: «Au fond, il n'y a pas d'en soi, d'être universel» "Deep down, there is no being in itself, no universal being." And he quotes Nietzsche: «une nouvelle fierté m'a appris à ne pas cacher ma tête dans le sable des choses célestes. « Ein neuen Stolz lehrte mich mein Ich, den lehre ich die menschen: nicht mehr den Kopf in den Sand der himmlischen Dinge zu stecken, sondern frei ihn zu tragen, einen Erden-Kopf, der Erde Sinn schafft!<sup>20</sup>

Life is an extract of my Ego, my Self: The rest is illusion. Man's destiny is his will to power, neither predestined nor determined. Man's head is neither lost in celestial speculation nor, like an ostrich, interred under the layers of social conformity. The head, solid upon its shoulders, remains in the middle space where its destiny will be accomplished or played out. The so-called 'real world' (Wahre Welt) becomes a myth, for the real world can only be real when experienced by the will to power of the individual. It must be felt then reasoned. And Palante ends his article by quoting from Nietzsche's *Die Götzen-Dämmerung*:

*«Le monde-vérité, nous l'avons aboli: quel monde nous est resté? Le monde des apparences peut-être?...mais non! avec le monde-vérité nous avons aussi aboli le monde des apparences.»*

<sup>19</sup> In French 'sensibilité'.

<sup>20</sup> Also *sprach Zarathustra*, Von den Hinterweltlern. One may notice the difference between Palante's 'quotation' and the original German!

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«Die Wahre Welt haben wir abgeschafft: welche Welt blieb übrig? Die scheinbare vielleicht?...Aber nein? mit der Wahren Welt haben wir auch die scheinbare abgeschafft!»

In this first article, Palante engages Nietzsche as his mentor and road companion, whilst tentatively outlining the psychological concepts of the individual for his future triumph in a new society. From the complex of `under-egos` to the social rôle as one of the representations of these `under-egos`, Georges Palante traces Nietzsche's will to power to its very psychological and social root: The individual's creation of reality as the source of his real Self, the affective, sensitive Self that creates Reality. Palante writes: « Il n'y a de vrai que ma sensibilité individuelle et l'état présent de cette sensibilité. L'univers n'est qu'un état de ma sensibilité. » "There is only truth in my individual sensitivity and the present state of this sensitivity. The universe is but a state of my sensitivity."

### On Friendship and Sociality<sup>21</sup>

In this article, Palante evokes Nietzsche only once, but his position about friendship, and especially about the difference between friendship and sociability, are akin to Nietzsche's, perhaps even drawn from his readings of Friedrich Nietzsche.

For Palante, friendship is not an arbitrary encounter between people; it is based on mutual consent. On a spontaneous sentiment which must blossom over a long period of time. Spontaneous should be understood in its Latin meaning: *suoe sponte esse* `to be one's own master` or `of one's own accord`. Friendship is elective; it is not imposed, nor proposed as un `esprit de corps` in associations, clubs, political circles or work groups, where comradely, collegial sentiment and team spirit constitute a necessary gregarious coalition, diametrically opposed to the elective and aristocratic sentiment; to the `sentiment de luxe`! George Palante despised the artificial bond that binds members of a group...of society. He despised the memorized code which must be respected in order to be socially admitted. Friendship entails no code: It is the sympathetic bond between two individuals of the same affective and intellectual affinities. Sociality or association, on the other hand, is anonymous, a coming together of groups of people quite exterior to the individual. And to prop his argument, Palante quotes from Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*:

«Il faut honorer l'ennemi dans l'ami...Peux-tu t'approcher de ton ami sans passer à son bord? –En son ami, on doit voir son meilleur ennemi.- C'est quand tu luttas contre lui que tu dois être le plus près de son cœur.»

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<sup>21</sup> In `Revue des Idées`, 1905 `Amitié et Sociabilité`.

«Mann soll in seinem Freunde noch den Feind ehren. Kannst du an deinen Freund dicht herantreten, ohne zu ihm überzutreten?»

*In seinem Freunde soll man seinen besten Feind haben. Du sollst ihm am nächsten mit dem Herzen sein, wenn du ihm widerstrebst.»<sup>22</sup>*

Friendship in Palante's and in Nietzsche's eyes is not founded on code but on confidence; not expounded in laws but bursting from the heart! For this reason Palante declares: «L'humanisme est le culte de l'homme en général.» "Humanism is the cult of man in general." Friendship is not 'brotherly or neighbourly love', a love by commandment or code, but by a shared sentiment of a deep, exclusive freedom, one that is in fact anti-social. As to Nietzsche, he exalted friendship. And his friends were many: Richard Wagner, (in spite of the later animosity), Franz Overbeck, Peter Gast, Paul Rée, Malvida von Meysonbug, Lou von Salomé, Jacob Burchardt, etc. These were true friends for Nietzsche, and many, such as Overbeck, Rhodes and Gast remained as such until Nietzsche's final hours. In *Morgenröte* we read: «Alle grossen Tüchtigkeiten der antiken Menschen hatten darin ihren Halt, dass Mann neben Mann stand ...»<sup>23</sup> Or in *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*: "Es gibt wohl hier und da auf Erden eine Art Fortsetzung der Liebe, bei der jenes habsüchtige Verlangen zweier Personen nach einander einer neuen Begierde und Habsucht, einem gemeinsamen höheren Durst nach einem über ihnen stehenden Ideale gewichen ist: aber wer kennt diese Liebe? Wer hat sie erlebt? Ihr rechter Name ist Freundschaft."<sup>24</sup> The 'höheren Durste nach einem über ihnen stehenden Ideale gewichen ist: evinces Palante's own aristocratic sentiment, the intimacy of two spirits who soar into the heights of their intimacy so as to explore the very nether regions of man's 'Begierde und Habsucht einem gemeinsamen'. But for what? To 'possess' that friend as the chosen one, with whom no secret can be withheld, no hidden emotion veiled...

"...few philosophers have written more eloquently in praise of friendship than Nietzsche..."<sup>25</sup>

Paradoxically, Georges Palante hardly had any friends, and those who did speak to him were far from intimate. Two of his former students, Louis Guilloux<sup>26</sup> and Jean Grenier<sup>27</sup> did enjoy Palante's company

<sup>22</sup> In Vom Freunde.

<sup>23</sup> 503: Freundschaft-.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Kaufmann, Walter: *Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton 1974 page 36.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Guilloux's wonderful novel *Le Sang Noir* (1935) portrays Palante's deplorable life in romanesque fashion. Be that as it may, Louis Guilloux also wrote a book of memoirs about his teacher: *Souvenirs de Georges Palante*, 1926. *Le Sang Noir* is one of the finest novels we have ever read in the French language.

for a while because they were his students. But their discussions were by no means founded upon a 'sentiment de luxe', of which Palante spoke so boldly.

Palante's 'experience' of friendship appears to be rather a theoretical treatise to develop his sociological dichotomy of the individual (*amitié*), and the society (*sociabilité*), abandoning for the moment the individual's psychological complex in order to work on individuals' relationship to one another, not outside the society but exclusive of it, immured within their own select and superior 'sentiments de luxe'!

Friedrich Nietzsche's writings on friendship were truly shared, intimate experiences; Palante's, intimately desired...heartfully expected...But this expectation, this desire translates a sentiment of compassion, of mutual suffering: But for whom? For myself, for others? Nietzsche is quite clear on this point: « Freunde- Mitfreude, nicht, Mitleiden, macht den Freund. »<sup>28</sup>

Friendship is founded upon joy not suffering, be it for one's Self or for others.

### On Irony<sup>29</sup>

For Palante, irony is «une attitude essentiellement esthétique» "an essentially aesthetic attitude", and therefore is a sentiment that only an individual can possess. It is a sentiment that gushes forth from the depths of the individual's personality, and for this very reason, it is not «un sentiment proprement social?» "it is not a social sentiment proper."

Crowds or assemblies cannot understand irony because in fact, according to Palante, it is an attitude with which the individual confronts his society. Society is false, deceitful; the individual is ironic about this falseness, deceitfulness. He is ironic concerning his tragi-comic rôle within the society, now happy, now sad, ensnared within the social constraints of antimonies, of the reality and illusion of « contrariétés de notre nature humaine » "the contrarities of our human nature" upon which he must constantly

<sup>27</sup> Jean Grenier also wrote a novel where Palante's rôle, albeit fictitious, is quite vivid edition: *Les Grèves*, 1957. There remains very little of Palante's correspondance with his two favourite students: A letter to Guilloux in which he complains that: « Je ne vois personne. C'est dur parfois. Je songe avec mélancholie à nos causeries. » 'I don't see anyone. It's hard sometimes, I think back with melancholy of our chats.' There are also some twenty letters to Camille Pitollot, written between 1910 and 1925. Many only contain one line, and the majority complain of his misadventures with society, and his firm determination, in spite of everything, to remain 'un isolé' 'a loner', and « Ceux qui ont laissé une trace ont été des isolés : Schopenhauer, Nietzsche ; etc... Voilà mon idée quand je parle du crépuscule des philosophes dogmatiques » (January, 1911) 'Those who have left a trace have been loners [...] That is my idea when I speak of the twilight of the dogmatic philosophers.' As to Nietzsche's epistolary correspondance, it suffices to peruse the hundreds of letters in *Die Dokumente ihrer Begengung herausgegeben von Ernest Pfeiffer mit ausführlichen Erläuterungen*, Insel Verlag, 1970. This being said, it is certainly possible that after Palante's suicide, his ignorant wife might have destroyed much of his correspondance, not to mention notes and drafts for future articles.

<sup>28</sup> *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 499.

<sup>29</sup> *L'Ironie*, *Revue Philosophique*, 1906.

meditate in order for him to unite, as harmoniously as possible, the antitheses of his soul! Without this continued questioning the individual would cease to be an individual, absorbed into the mire of collective illusion. The ironist is one "who laughs at himself ensnared, at his own uncertainty and his own nothingness": « Il rit de lui-même, de sa propre incertitude et de son propre néant » If not, he would surely succumb to convictions that brook no contrary opinion.

Irony is anti-social, and the hearty laugh at oneself that accompanies it is directed at society's confidence in its rational, progressive and irreversible advancement ever onwards, without hesitation, without baulking, without error. The individual bursts its sides asunder when contingencies and accidents disrupt the machine, and the emergency wheel grinds the dull, tedious, mechanical rhythm to a writhing halt. Palante's irony is the individual's weapon to shield him from the dangers of docility and anthill efficiency: « L'ironiste s'est retiré de la scène du monde, qu'il contemple depuis les hauteurs » "the ironist has abandoned the world stage, and contemplates it from the heights." And: « il se place à un point de vue supérieur » "he positions himself at a superior point of view." Palante then engages Nietzsche directly: « Elle (irony) est le suprême désintéressement, le dépouillement absolu du moi, dans le sens d'un dilettantisme esthétique, d'un ironisme détaché de tous les devoirs, qui annonce l'immoralisme de Nietzsche. » "Irony is the supreme disinterest, the absolute deprivation of the ego, in the sense of an aesthetic amateurishness, of an irony detached from all duty, which announces Nietzsche's immorality."

Palante's ethical theory draws much of its inspiration from Nietzsche's battle "against borrowed or imposed values" « contre les valeurs empruntées ou imposées, ... »; against despotic convictions that can only harm the individual, and hinder him from Self-Accomplishment. Palante combats the herd-animal values that create gregarious adhesion by dipping into Nietzsche's philosophy and drawing on strong images such as the `exorcising` of moral values, "like a priest" « comme un prêtre », and he urges us to practice "infidelity with a light heart" « l'infidélité d'un cœur léger ». The ironist is that immoralist who glides high above the crowd. His vision is panoramic, uncongested by petty bourgeois interests, and especially those that promise social advantages and career opportunities. Palante insists that irony is a way or method of existence; having no end in itself, no objective besides itself, no truth-seeking goal or ambition. For irony is the antithesis of the rationalist's optimistic and progressive attitude for all and sundry. Thus irony is essentially aesthetic, aristocratic, and Palante here evokes Nietzsche in this respect, albeit without quotations: irony is « la pure immaculée connaissance » "the pure and immaculate knowledge."

However, Palante is careful to distinguish between the ironist and the cynic, and upholds his argument by summoning Nietzsche: The cynic is he who takes nothing seriously besides his egoism and his own reality, whereas the ironist is he who takes his Ego as seriously as everything else!<sup>30</sup> When decrying the vulgarity of the cynic's laughter Palante cites Nietzsche, albeit without quotation marks: « aucun geste animal n'égalé la vulgarité du rire humain » "no animal gesture equals the vulgarity of human laughter." And Palante to conclude: « Le rire est l'arme des lâches coalitions grégaires » "Laughter is the weapon of cowardly, gregarious coalitions." That laughter be a distinguishable trait between the

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the cynic is he who knows so much of the world (or thinks he knows so much of it!) that this knowing so much is an impediment to his freedom to know the world.

ironist and the cynic may be true; however, Nietzsche's comments on laughter seem to be more nuanced than what Palante implies. We read this enlightening entry in *Janseits von Gut und Böse*, where Nietzsche repudiates Hobbes' remarks on laughter amongst philosophers: « Das Olympische Laster- [...] das Lachen ist ein arges Gebreite der Menschlichen Natur, welches jeder denkende Kopf zu überwinden bestrebt sein wird" (Hobbes)-, würde ich mir sogar eine Rangordnung der Philosophen erlauben, je nach dem Range ihres Lachens- bis hinauf zu denen, die des goldnen Gelächters fähig sind»<sup>31</sup> Hobbes' 'arges Gebreite' when qualifying laughter, in Nietzsche's mouth transforms into a 'goldnen Gelächters'.

The philosopher who laughs at the world is he, too, who laughs at himself. This is the essence of irony; it is also the value of the noble (vornehm) man who in Nietzsche's eyes are individual men who create their happiness, will their ambitions and lives. Under certain circumstances these nobles may become the elite (Aristokratie), but not necessarily since it is their own will that has conditioned their individuality, and thus an eventual participation in society if these engendered values are maintained and respected. For Nietzsche, laughter is an essential attribute to the individual's Self-Accomplishment; a gesture that accompanies irony.

Now it may be asked whether or not Palante laughed at himself? It hardly seemed so. What is sure, however, is that he was laughed at by others! A multitude of others from whose circles Palante was unfortunately excluded. Again, Palante theorized on irony but rarely practiced it, even in his writings; they lack the *éclat* of irony, whether bitter or sweet! And this in itself may, alas, be the irony of Georges Palante's tragic existence! As to Nietzsche, his reflections on irony display existential *éclat*! In *Ecce Homo* he relates to us the ironic fact that his philosophy was first recognized and taught by a Dane, Georg Brandes in Denmark, rather than in Germany: « Dies schliesst aber nicht aus, dass ich die Ironie liebe, sogar die welthistorische Ironie.»<sup>32</sup>

Nietzsche here clearly links his ontological 'love of irony' with that which has befallen him quite by accident, by the contingency of the incessant stream of events round him.

To conclude, if Georges Palante declares irony to be an individualist sentiment, and to a certain extent anti-social, Friedrich Nietzsche's irony lies in the strength to laugh at oneself. For after all, the ironist participates in the world whether he likes it or not. Palante's irony appears to exclude him from the scene of irony; an exclusion that can cause alienation and a sense of utter uselessness because he took his mission and himself, much too seriously. Nietzsche also took his mission seriously, but certainly not himself. And in this attitude towards the Self lies the vast difference, existentially, between Palante and Nietzsche, albeit both have strong analogical thoughts on the subject. This is no paradox: It is the essential distinction between existence and un-lived, professional philosophy! Friedrich Nietzsche might have been a lonely man, but his sense of irony reminded him of his 'use' in the world. Palante's lack of irony shut him more and more up into himself, out of the world, and finally out of both...

<sup>31</sup> Section 294.

<sup>32</sup> In the section, *Der Fall Wagner*, 4.

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### On Anarchism and Individualism<sup>33</sup>

How does Georges Palante articulate anarchism and individualism: Are they synonymous, gradational, antithetical? It appears that Palante seeks to demarcate clearly the notions of anarchism and individualism: Anarchism is a social doctrine, a system; individualism is a state of the soul: «un état d'âme [...] une sensation de vie, une certaine attitude intellectuelle et sentimentale de l'individu devant la société.» "a state of the soul [...] a sensation of life, a certain intellectual and sentimental attitude before society." The twain shall thus never meet! Since the individualist, fundamentally anti-social, can never accept and integrate into a social doctrine or system of any kind. He believes neither in progress nor in Becoming. His will to power (*vouloir-vivre*) lies in the eternal present, an intemporal or anhistorique sentiment that makes him wary, suspicious of any hierarchy or assembly of men. Some men have been called 'individual anarchists'; for example, R.W. Emerson, Ibsen, Kirkegaard, Nietzsche, Stirner, etc., but Palante sees these men only as summits of geniuses, none adhere to any social doctrine or dogma. They are social rebels! On the contrary, political anarchists such as Kropotkin or Bakounin were bent on destroying the present political order only to rebuild another. As to the Marxists, they seek only to transform the Capitalist society into another type of society, be it Socialist or Communist, a mere remaking of the same society but of different distributive means. Palante does compromise, or so it seems. He readily acknowledges Nietzsche's social projection of, and we quote Palante: «une organisation hiérarchique et de sériation harmonieuse des valeurs.» "a hierarchic organisation and a serialisation of values." And yet, this ideally would serve only the reigning elite. In this sense, he says: «Nietzsche reste un idéaliste impénitent, impérieux, violent. Il idéalise l'humanité supérieure.» "Nietzsche remains un unrepentant idealist, imperious, violent. He idealises superior humanity." For Palante then, anarchists are not of a higher order. Their struggle against the present social order, if successful, only dissolves into another by which the means may indeed be different but the results would be the same: A new social order as corrupt as the former! Anarchists believe only in **revolution**, the individual is the eternal **rebel**! Palante does concede, however, that the anarchist spirit may be the very first step towards individualism, and that anarchism represents the 'first moment' of individualism: «le moment de la foi et de l'espérance, de l'action courageuse et confiante dans le succès.» "the moment of faith and of hope, of courageous action and confidence in success." But he concludes: «L'individualisme à son second moment se convertit, comme nous l'avons vu, en pessimisme social.» "Individualism afterwards transforms, as we have seen, into social pessimism." For the anarchist is an optimist who believes that social disharmony and the antinomies between the society and the individual are only transitory, accidental, due to the political regime in power. Once man has attained self-mastery, a new political regime would lead men to true freedom of action and of thought.

Georges Palante smiles condescendingly at these naïve sentiments of good will. There is neither now nor will be any ontological or existential relationship between anarchists and individualists. As to his account of an idealistic Nietzsche, here it seems that he has overlooked the German philosopher's doubts about any political State, be it Anarchist, Socialist or Democratic. We shall speak of Nietzsche's thoughts

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<sup>33</sup>In *Revue Philosophique*, 'Anarchisme et Individualisme' 1907.

on the State in another rubric. For now, let us take a glance at Friedrich Nietzsche's rather sarcastic and scathing remarks about anarchists. He is far from being an idealist...

In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Nietzsche compares anarchists to anti-Semites, and metaphorically place both as blossoming flowers that grow in secluded corners: «Den Psychologen voran in's Ohr gesagt, gesetzt dass sie Lust haben sollten, das Ressentiment selbst einmal aus der Nähe zu studieren: diese Pflanze blüht jetzt am schönsten unter Anarchisten und Antisemiten, übrigens so wie sie immer geblüht hat, im Verborgnen, dem Veilchen glich, wenn schon mit andrem Duft.»<sup>34</sup>

'Ressentiment': the psychological trigger that motivates anarchists. The sentiment of frustration, abandonment...exclusion...pettiness. These sentiments are opposed to the individualists' joy, freedom and plenitude of life. The anti-social attitude of the anarchists for Nietzsche resides in their 'ressentiment' towards others, towards themselves. Nietzsche's 'ressentiment' is not Palante's 'pessimisme'. For Nietzsche it is negative. For Palante, positive. As far as we know, Palante makes no mention of Nietzsche's use of 'ressentiment'. Did he suffer from it himself?

In *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche equates anarchists with those who derive joy from destroying not only society but existence itself. Indeed, Nietzsche, unlike Palante, makes no compromises, offers no pale link to an individual:

«Das Verlangen nach Zerstörung, Wechsel, werden kann der Ausdruck der übervollen, zukunftschwangeren Kraft sein (mein terminus ist dafür wie man weiss, das Wort 'dionysisch'), aber es kann auch der Hass des Missrathenen, Entbehrenden, Schlechtweggekommenen sein, der zerstört, zerstören muss, weil ihn das Bestehende, ja alles Bestehen, alles Sein selbst empört und aufreizt – man sehe sich, um diesen Affekt zu verstehn, unsre Anarchisten aus der Nähe an.»<sup>35</sup>

This desire for destruction, change and Becoming is not based on the love of life or the pleasure of existence, but on the sentiment of 'ressentiment': The jealous, the envious, the low and mean. In sum, these are not self-accomplished individuals who could pretend to constitute a new social order; they rather constitute the frustrated who seek to destroy because too cowardly to undertake the efforts entailed in Self-Accomplishment!

We see that Nietzsche is far from any idealism when speaking about anarchy. His keen insight offered no political scheme or project to his readers, only a hope for a brighter dawn to come, embodied in Zarathustra. And for this very reason, there can be neither a Leftist Nietzsche nor a Rightist Nietzsche, nor any Nietzscheanism for that matter. If Palante was a Leftist Nietzschean, as Onfray has proclaimed, it would seem that it was Palante (or Onfray?) who was (were) the idealist(s)! Nietzsche was much too 'practical, phenomlogic' for Romantic ideals. Perhaps Palante's projects for a Socialist society compensated for his own unchanging, mediocre existence...

<sup>34</sup> In Zweite Abhandlung, 11.

<sup>35</sup> In section 370.

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### On Individualist Sensitivity<sup>36</sup>

Georges Palante defines the individualist on the grounds of his sensitivity, an attribute that demarcates the individual from the mechanistic collective. In this article he creates an anthropology of this new man; the individualist who bears the honour or burden of living a free life. He is what Nietzsche called the 'free spirit' 'Freigeist'. Who then is this overman? He is not a Christian who practices the love of all humanity. He is not a humanitarian who loves everyone as much as he loves himself. He is not a democrat who effaces the differences in the individual in order to attain the equality of the rights for everyone. And he is surely not a philanthropist who would like everyone to live in mediocre harmony like one big happy family! In fact, Palante's individualist practices isolation, and can even be called a misanthropist! He is not, however, a vulgar egoist. Palante's individualist wants and requires nothing but his need for independence, his sincerity towards himself and towards his friends, his need for discretion and delicacy, his enthusiasm for honour and heroism, his higher sentiments. This individual-overman loves Difference; a Difference that he cultivates, and that other individualists cultivate like him, yet differently: «La sensibilité individualiste plaira à cultiver l'exception, la 'différence' humaine.» "The sensitive individualist takes pleasure in cultivating the exception, the human 'difference'."

Sensitivity opposes reason, pragmatism. Sensitivity is the stamp of the individualist, his defensive shield against social band-waggoning, taxonomy, ant-hill effervescence. For the individualist is always on the defensive: 'reacting' against impinging gregariness. Here Palante seizes upon Nietzsche's sentiments apropos the individual who «est en partie réactive, au sens nietzschéen.» "is partly reactive, in its Nietzschean sense." Reactive because of his spirit of contradiction which situates him at antipodes with the society; he who loves sincerity and clarity because hostile or antipathetic towards hypocrisy and ambiguity.

At the end of his article Palante sketches the two types of individualists whose sensitivities are in fact Nietzsche's Figures: The Dionysian sensitivity: impulsive, passionate and unstable, and the Apollonian sensitivity: level-headed (pondéré), harmonious, thoughtful (réfléchi). Both sensitivities define the individualist because they constitute a psychological duality which, if distended in the collective, transform into a social dualism, and thus become antagonistic, vulnerable to the mechanism of social dichotomy which judges the attributes of both those individual figures as abnormal, simply because «ils ne sont pas comme nous!» "they are not like us!"

The individualist defined as such, his fate seems, thus, destined to eternal solitude, living an existence of haughty disdain, renounced scorn and willful isolation. We shall see in our next rubric that Palante's views were not as trenchant as they appear in this article. Be that as it may, when he writes: «la sensibilité individualiste se détermine en réaction contre une réalité sociale à laquelle elle ne peut ou ne veut point se plier» "the individualist's sensitivity is determined in reaction against a social reality to which it neither can nor wants to yield.", he is drawing deep from Nietzsche's well of thoughts: The

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<sup>36</sup> In Revue Mercure de France, 'La Sensibilité individualiste', 1908. A new edition was printed in 2003 by Alive Publishers, and contains 'Amitié et Socialité', 'L'Ironie', 'Deux types d'immoralisme' and 'Anarchie et Individualisme'.

individualist is not a sacrificial animal to a society's glorious past, nor to its dazzling dreams of racing forwards towards greater progress. The individualist, on the contrary, embodies new forms of life, of values, and thus raises himself out of this manufactured historical process. Palante appropriated this truism when he distinguished the individualist living in the eternal present outside of the social body, unconcerned or indifferent towards an imposed past, and consequently a designed future. For this reason the Figures of Dionysus and Apollo, albeit they appear diametrically opposed, unite as a puissant duality in the Figure of the Individualist, be it Nietzsche's or Palante's...

### The Antimonies between the Individual and the Society<sup>37</sup>

In this long essay, Palante opposes the individual's **desire** and the society's **demands**. The opposition is indeed a brutal one, and shows Palante's fine and subtle notions of psychology, long before Freud's investigations on the subconscious. Palante's desire is the individual's will to conserve his autonomy in view of the slow by steady methods of gleaning social adhesion, belonging, conformism, gregariness which root out the Difference of the individual in order to replant it in the gardens of normalcy. « En politique ; surtout dans un régime démocratique, c'est la médiocrité qui l'emporte et qui gouverne. » "In politics, especially in a Democratic regime, it is mediocrity that wins out and that governs." Be it Democratic or Anarchist, the State makes the individual dependant on it, effacing the Self of man, levelling the innate Difference. Therefore, and we quote M. Onfray: « L'économie devient l'instrument de l'amélioration de conditions de vie de l'individu, sans que l'essence de ce dernier soit en danger. » "The economy becomes the instrument of the betterment of the conditions of life of the individual, without the essence of the individual put into danger."<sup>38</sup>

These propositions for a new society, which one may call Socialist, may or may not have their inspiring roots in Palante's reading of Nietzsche. As is known, Nietzsche mistrusted the State. He posed the problem immediately in dialectic terms of Existence (*Existenz*) and State. *Existenz* is man's true nature, one that he must consciously, lucidly and experimentally cultivate throughout his life. This true nature is one's Self, and if not cultivated, either by laziness and indolence or apathy and ignorance, remains a latent larva, prey to the facilities of the State, its gilded promises and seductive charms. The State thus becomes a proprietor of the individual's Self, his true nature, who sells or rents it at a price, if price there be at all! The State, thus, enmeshes the individual by inveigling itself into the docility, ignorance and passivity of the individual. Indeed, social institutions separate the individual from himself and submit him to an exterior model to which he will eventually identify himself.

<sup>37</sup>Alcan Editions, 1912 'Les Antinomies entre l'Individu et la Société'. This was Palante's complementary thesis. It is divided into XIII sections. A new edition was printed in 1999 at Folle Avoine Publishers.

<sup>38</sup> Loc. cit. page 115.

Nietzsche's and Palante's preoccupation was the question of the 'single-one', the individual 'die Frage an den Einzelnen', because if this 'uniqueness' were to die out, the State would transform itself into a new idol for the masses: «Staat nenne ich's, wo Alle Gifttrinker sind, Gute und Schlimme : Staat, wo Alle sich selber verlieren, Gute und Schlimme : Staat, wo der langsame Selbstmord Aller- 'das Leben' heisst.»<sup>39</sup> And in the same rubric: "Staat heisst das kälteste aller kalten Ungeheuer. [...] Aber der Staat lügt in allen Zungen des buten und Bösen; und was er auch redet, er lügt- und was er auch hat, gestohlen hat er's. Falsch ist alles an ihm, mit gestohlenen Zähnen beisst er, der Bissige. Falsch sind selbst seine Eingeweide."

These comments speak for themselves. The images that they evoke strike the reader as ones that brook no compromise. A compromise that Palante does negotiate at the end of his study, and to which we shall shortly turn. As to Nietzsche, his adamant position does soften when he invokes the three 'true natures' that could rehabilitate society by sincerity, austerity and toils in the Art of Self-Accomplishment: The artist, the saint and the philosopher. For Nietzsche, the artist is he who has accomplished his true self, and thus represents the highest value of a culture. The artist takes pleasure in his passions, harnesses them to produce works of art; these are his spiritual pursuits, his creative life, his will to power. The will to power that creates one's own Self, be he the artist, the saint or the philosopher. The three roads may differ, but the means to wend them is identical: The will to power. The creation of one's true nature requires good health, requires that the artist overcome illness:

*«-Die grosse Gesundheit.- ...einem künstler, einem Heiligen, einem Gesetzgeber, einem Weisen, einem Gelehrten, einem Frommen, einem Wahrsager, einem Göttlich- Abseitigen altens stils: der hat dazu zuallererst Eins nothing, die grosse Gesundheit-“<sup>40</sup>*

It is the artist's will to suffer for himself, to form his Self through ascetic hardship that will raise him above societal levelling and make way for the accomplishment of the higher men. He must be hard on his Self, yield to no concessions, succumb to no facile advantage; he labours joyously, toils pleasurably:

*« Diese heimliche selbst- vergewaltigung, diese künstler- Grausamkeit, diese Lust, sich selbst als einem schweren widerstrebenden leidenden Stoffe eine Form zu geben, einen Willen, eine Kritik, einen Widerspruch, eine Verachtung, ein Nein einzubrennen, diese unheimliche und entsetzlich- lustvolle Arbeit einer mit sich selbst willig-zwiespältiger, Seele, welche sich leiden macht, aus Lust am Leidenmachen.“<sup>41</sup>*

To overcome one's Self is that instinct for freedom: 'Instinkt der Freiheit', which Nietzsche calls the will to power. The true artist is he who fashions his own life in the image of Life itself: «...wir aber wollen

<sup>39</sup> In *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Vom neuen Götzen.

<sup>40</sup> Fröhliche Wissenschaft, 382.

<sup>41</sup> In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, II, 18.

*die Dichter unseres hebens sein, und im kleinsten und Alltüglichen zverst.*"<sup>42</sup> And although Nietzsche admitted that the artist is ambiguous, who may wield dangerous concepts and falsehoods, he does so with a good conscious: « ...dem gefährlichen Begriff 'künstler'- 'Die Falscheit mit gutem Gewissen,..."<sup>43</sup>

Could deceit, falsehood or the artist's manipulating enchantment (illusion) be the sole manner for him to belong to a society? To penetrate the collective but at the same time remain an individual? Palante, too, created his concept of the artist, forged from the individual's subjectivism; a pure monad, a solitary who practices « une forme raffinée de l'insociabilité intellectuelle; attitude du penseur qui s'est retiré de la vie sociale et qui ne regarde plus la société que comme un objet de curiosité intellectuelle et de contemplation esthétique.» (page 66) "The refined form of intellectual insociability; that attitude of a thinker who has withdrawn from social life and who looks at society only as an object of intellectual curiosity." Georges Palante's artist-Figure remains aloof of the crowd, turns down the shoals of honour, is neither ambiguous nor a deceiver or illusionist. His sensitivity protects him from mediocrity, his curiosity serves to maintain a distance necessary to create, and not to produce commodities, clichés...platitudes!

Save some artists and philosophers, it would seem that man is condemned to effacement within his society, to mediocrity; his desire snuffed out early through herd routine and institutional injunctions: working, sleeping, eating, producing. Is it this 'social reality' that pushed Palante to pepper his book with reconciliatory notes and concessionary tones? Indeed, we observe that the individual: « n'est pas une révolte absolue à l'égard de toute société [...] il s'attaque à la société actuelle au nom d'un idéal supérieur de sociabilité.» (page 102) "...is not an absolute rebel towards the whole society [...] he takes on the present day society in the name of a superior ideal of sociability." Compromise, hope or resignation? Palante even goes so far as to concede that this superior ideal, forged by the individual, abets him in comprehending: "la nécessité de se subordonner à l'oeuvre commune." (page 190) "the necessity to accept subordination for the common task." And even more striking is when he states that freedom is not isolation but « l'entraide, la collaboration de tous qui ne nie pas la société, mais désire l'amélioration et l'élever moralement." (page 252) "the mutual aid, collaboration of all who do not repudiate society, but wish to better it and elevate it morally." And Palante concludes bombastically that the individual is « compatible avec l'idée d'une culture humaine et d'un lien social." (page 286) "compatible with the idea of a human culture and a social link."

The difficulty and narrowness of marginal existence for the individual might have provoked in Palante recourse to a 'political compromise' whose form has been called 'nietzschéisme de gauche',<sup>44</sup> 'Left-wing Nietzscheanism'. If this were the case, and we are not pretending that it is, Palante could never have drawn such a 'political theory' from Nietzsche's philosophy, he who loathed the cunningness of the State that drains all energy from the individual in order to divert it into self-indulgence, frivolity, servility:

<sup>42</sup> Fröhliche Wissenschaft, 299.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, 361.

<sup>44</sup> Michel Onfray.

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«Der Staat, in den Händen dieser letzteren, macht wohl, ebenso wie der Egoismus der Erwerbenden, den Versuch, alles aus sich heraus neu zu organisieren und Band und Druck für alle jene feindseligen Kfäfte zu sein: das heist, er wünscht dass die Menschen mit ihm denselben Götzendienst treiben möchten, den sie mit der Kirche getrieben haben“<sup>45</sup>

Can there be any concession on the part of the State towards the individual? Does there exist a notion as egotistical freedom within a collective mass? Should the individual compromise his painstaking gains for the sake of State security? Friedrich Nietzsche warns us of this unbalanced compromise and its pitfalls: One need only to peruse the section `Ein Blick auf den Staat` in *Menschliches Allzumenschliches*, 438 to 482 to seize the urgency of his meditated mistrust of Statehood. For example:

«Gerechtigkeit als Parteien-Lockruf. [...] Dagegen Gleichheit der Rechte fordern, wie es die Socialisten der unterworfenen Kaste thun, ist nimmermehr der Ausfluss der Gerechtigkeit, sondern der Begehrlichkeit.“<sup>46</sup>

Nietzsche does believe that social justice is possible in a Socialist State, but only within the ruling oligarchy, because justice there means sacrifice and renouncement; that is, self-sacrifice and self-renouncement! The `outflow of justice` is not innocent: It is a stratagem devised by the covetous collective, the State depleting the individual's creative energy, his so called `egotistical freedom`, and distending it into a uniformed mass. In this sense, Nietzsche offers no compromise towards the idea of a Socialist State:

«Der Socialismus in Hinsicht auf seine Mittel.-Der Socialismus ist der Phantästische jüngere Bruder des fast abgelebten. Despottismus, den er beerben will; [...] Der Socialimus kann dazu dienen, die Gefahr aller Anhäufungen von Staatsgewalt recht brutal und eindringlich zu lehren und insofern vor dem Staate selbst Misstrauen ein zuflößen.“<sup>47</sup>

For Nietzsche, the State, be it Socialist, Democratic, Anarchist or despotic share one common denominator: the absorption and the effacement of the individual. If there glimmers certain concessions in Palante's writings, especially the one that this rubric is concerned with, Nietzsche's tirades proffer no such concession. It is not a question of pessimism but of his acute perception of the apparent, phenomenal world; the world of `Realpolitik`! A world where there is no place for the sensitivity of individuals. Self-Accomplishment is achieved in solitary and remote places far from the great fair of

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<sup>45</sup> *Unweitgemässe Betrachtungen*, (Schopenhauer als Erzieher, 4.)

<sup>46</sup> Section 451.

<sup>47</sup> Idem

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human activity. Palante writes: « L'individualisme neitzschéen est profondément antisocial; il est une révolte contre toute société future ou possible »<sup>48</sup> "Nietzschean individualism is profoundly anti-social; it is a revolt against all society, future or possible."

This statement is both correct and incorrect. Nietzsche might have built his individuality upon the sentiment of anti-socialness, however, this is a transient phase in the social evolution of Mankind. For Nietzsche, man must overcome his `ressentiment`, and in doing so, may pass on to a better possible future, which is the more possible because the individual has divested himself of this arrogant and self-destroying sentiment. Palante continues to fail to comprehend Nietzsche's evolution of Being, and thus of thinking. For example, when speaking about man: «Cette antinomie est dans sa nature. Contre l'esprit grégaire, la sociabilité veule et lâche, fléau de l'époque moderne.» "This antinomy is in his nature. Against the spirit of gregariness, spineless and cowardly sociability, the malady of the modern epoch." And yet, Nietzsche overcame dualism, for it was not in his nature!<sup>49</sup> And although he did resent social cowards and pusillanimous clowns, this did not become an obsession with him. They were all stepping stones for him as he wended his way towards Self-Accomplishment, his Overman. As to Palante, as we said earlier, these were the very obstacles that obstructed his way...And curious enough, was it not Palante who wrote this perspicacious comment on Nietzsche, one that seems to contradict himself? : »Nietzsche admet que la décadence actuelle est une période de transition d'où sortira une société contenant encore des possibilités de noblesse et de beauté. Il ne nie la société actuelle pour appeler de ses vœux une société habitable encore pour les grands âmes [...] Nietzsche à ces heures-là n'est pas un pessimiste désespéré... »<sup>50</sup> "Nietzsche admits that today's decadence is a period of transition out of which will rise a society containing still the possibilities of nobleness and beauty. [...] Nietzsche at his best hours is not a hopeless pessimist."

Strange that Palante should display such acumen in understanding Nietzsche's position, whilst he himself still clung to the idea that Nietzsche's nature was fundamentally `oppositional`! Perhaps for Palante, there were two Nietzsches: « un créateur de valeurs, un fondateur de société ; un prophète, un prêtre. »<sup>51</sup> "a creator of values, a founder of society; a prophet, a priest."

And Palante is certainly correct in assuming this. It is not that Nietzsche writes ambiguously; he thinks and writes ambivalently: A process of thinking that Palante glimpsed when reading and commenting on Friedrich Nietzsche, but unfortunately was never capable of emulating...

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<sup>48</sup> In *Précis de Sociologie*, page 7.

<sup>49</sup> In other words, Nietzsche did not reduce natural dualities to artificial dualisms in order to accommodate methods of reasoning!

<sup>50</sup> In `Pessimisme et Individualité`.

<sup>51</sup> *Idem*.

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### Historic Pessimism<sup>52</sup>

The pessimism of Georges Palante was not a mere theoretical method of analysing the individual within his society, it lay deep within his ontic layers. A physiological pessimism whose corporal torments led him to regard the world through the prism of his own inability to cope with daily, irksome requirements of administration and a career-orientated existence, a poignant desire to assert self-expression because of a crushed personality.

Palante's deformity may provide certain answers to his unswerving pessimistic approach towards society. At the same time, however, he seems to attach the pessimism of an individual to his historical reality: «Le pessimisme de Nietzsche n'est pas sans présenter une parenté secrète avec le pessimisme romantique.» "Nietzsche's pessimism evinces a secret relation with the pessimism of Romanticism." But what is the 'secret relation'? Can an individual not escape his historical allotment? Is he, in spite of his individuality, a simple product of his society? Perhaps the 'secret relation' was Nietzsche's literary relationship to Schopenhauer, and his friendship with Wagner, which may have tainted his early writings with tinges of Romantic pessimism. Perhaps. The fact that Nietzsche severed his ties with Wagner and 'grew out of' Schopenhauer certainly taught him to overcome this sentiment, which, however, is not necessarily linked to a literary movement of a particular time period. This would be a rather shoddy interpretation of the Marxist theory of literature. Could Palante have projected his deformity into Nietzsche's own illnesses, and thus devise a physiological bond between him and the epoch in which he lived? If this were the case, Palante certainly misread Nietzsche, or read himself into him! Illness exists as it is: It makes us, we do not make it. Illness may even create us! And because illness is a part of life, it is an activity, an individual activity that, however, cannot be mastered or controlled. Illness controls us. It could drive us to manic depression, to pessimism...to suicide. Or it can liberate us from ourselves by creating an individual whose malady is inseparable from his life's work. Palante and Nietzsche share analogical proprieties of what illness or deformity or malady can drive a man to do; both wrote with bodies that suffered painfully. Nevertheless, Palante's suffering bestirred emotions that would plunge him deeper and deeper into pessimism; Nietzsche's sundry illnesses transported him beyond the pains and into an uncleaved thinking and existence where joy and pain merged into one tremendous energetic drive, one tremendous will to power. It suffices to read the tale of Zarathustra, he who is the happiest of individuals because he had overcome oppositional thinking, thus oppositional existence! Zarathustra is no pessimist; nor was Nietzsche!

But Palante insists on Nietzsche's social pessimism, which manifests itself in an acute form of an anti-social attitude. It is: « une antinomie naturelle, profonde, physiologique en quelque sort, entre l'individu et la société, l'individu étant pourvu d'instincts qui ne se plient pas à la vie sociale... » "a natural antinomy, deep, more or less physiological, between the individual and the society, the individual possessing instincts which do not succumb to society."

Here Palante equates Nietzsche's pessimism with an anti-social stance whose fusion creates the Individual: « L'individualisme de Nietzsche est très certainement un individualisme antisocial, mais cet

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<sup>52</sup> In 'Individualisme et Pessimisme', Alcan Editions 1914.

antisocialisme est-il absolu ou relatif, provisoire ou définitif ? » “Nietzsche’s individualism is very certainly an anti-social individualism; but is this anti-socialism absolute or relative, temporary or definitive?”

Palante’s question is important: It is one he probably never asked of himself! Whether Nietzsche’s so called pessimism be temporary or definitive, or whether it existed at all, did not engender Nietzsche’s individualism. It is founded on his refusal of the ‘present day’ values of his society, not on the society as a whole. In other words, in Humanity. Palante said it himself and conceded that Nietzsche believed in: « un idéal de grandeur humain encore possible et réalisable dans l’avenir » “an ideal of human greatness still possible and achievable in the future.” To this stage of thinking, to this stage of existence, Palante never really attained. His pessimism as a method of thinking, as a daily activity in the Act of Existence, remained imprisoned in antithetical categories: pessimism/optimism, pessimism/society, pessimism/intellectual. Binomial categories that Nietzsche had always despised and refuted. Friedrich Nietzsche would have surely found favour in statements such as: Le pessimisme c’est regarder les idées en face, jamais les subordonner à rien.»<sup>53</sup> “Pessimism is confronting ideas, never subordinating them to nothing.” Or «Le pessimisme est une sensation de vie vécue»<sup>54</sup> “Pessimism is the sensation of life lived.” Or «Le véritable pessimisme, comme le véritable individualisme, est un état de sensibilité plutôt qu’une théorie abstraite.»<sup>55</sup> “True pessimism, like true individualism, is a state of sensitivity rather than an abstract theory.” And finally: «Le pessimisme est donc une force.»<sup>56</sup> “Pessimism is thus a force.” Be that as it may, Nietzsche never adhered to pessimism as a conduct to rent his ire or build a system. What he did denounce in strong tones was optimism; that mawkish, nauseating sentimentality of the mediocre; that passivity of the resentful man:

*«Denken wir uns eine heranwachsende Generation mit dieser Unerschrockenheit des Blicks, mit diesem heroischen Zug in’s Ungeheure, denken wir uns den Kühnen Schriff dieser Drachentödter, die stolze Verwegenheit, mit der sie allen den Schwächlichkeitsdoktrinen des Optimismus den Rücken Kehren, um in Ganzen und Vollen ’resolut zu leben’...»<sup>57</sup>*

It is not the pessimist who is a ‘dragon-slayer’, but he who overcomes all dichotomic thinking whilst wending the way towards Self-Accomplishment. This is the Overman: The hero of the future who lives life resolutely.

What Nietzsche did equate to optimism was democracy, rationality and utilitarianism, all of which in his mouth was thoroughly negative:

<sup>53</sup> In ‘Pessimisme et Individualisme’, section ‘Pessimisme expérimental’, page 165.

<sup>54</sup> Idem, page 6.

<sup>55</sup> Idem, page 118.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, page 173.

<sup>57</sup> In Die Geburt de Tragödie, 7.

«Könnetet vielleicht, allen 'modern Ideen' und Vorurtheilen des demokratischen Geschmacks zum Trotz, der sieg des Optimismus, die vorherrschend gewordene Vernünftigkeit, des Praktischen und theoretischen Utilitarismus, gleich der Demokratie selbst, mit der er gleichzeitig ist, - ein Symptom der absinkenden Kraft, des nahenden Alters, der physiologischen Ermüdung sein?»<sup>58</sup>

Optimism as a sign of weakness, a devitaliser of strength. In other words, a depriver of reflection, constructive criticism, Self-Accomplishment. Palante would qualify the act of reflection, criticism and Self-Accomplishment as the results of pessimism! In *Pessimism and Individualism* he states: «Le pessimisme est signe de réalisme et de virilité, alors que l'optimisme peut être considéré comme une forme de timidité.»<sup>59</sup> "Pessimism is a sign of realism and virility, whereas optimism can be considered as a form of timidity." And: «L'optimisme est une philosophie de faibles, de tendres qui ont besoin de consolation.»<sup>60</sup> "Optimism is a philosophy for the weak, for the tender who need to be comforted."

It is true, elsewhere, that Nietzsche does pose the problem of oppositional thinking when he evokes pessimism:

«Ist Pessimismus nothwendig das Zeichen des Niedergangs, Verfalls, des Misserathenseins, der ermüdeten und geschwächten Instinkte ? [...] Gibt es einen Pessimismus der Stärke ? Eine intellektuelle Vorneigung für das Harte, Schaverliche, Böse, Problematische des Daseins aus Wohlsein, aus überströmender Gersundheit, aus Fülle des Daseins?»<sup>61</sup>

The theory that pessimism is strength is indeed collated to an ascetic existence which produces an existence of plenitude due to overflowing health. But this is a Friedrich Nietzsche writing in his early youth during his quest of meaning. Pessimism was undoubtedly an emotion which wells deep within him and which provided him with theoretical material, but **only because he harnessed and orientated it**, and in doing so, gradually tamed it until it melded in with the other creative emotions that composed the will to power, and its Figure, the Overman. Pessimism was a fleeting problem, or at most, a stepping stone for Nietzsche. For Georges Palante, it was an existential obsession which, when transformed theoretically, led to an impasse for him and for the society he projected for the future. For indeed, and perhaps quite to his unknowing, Palante had touched upon Nietzsche's most intimate hope for mankind when he stated: «l'idéal humain; ce n'est pas l'Hellénisme primitif dont nous sommes déçus; c'est le Surhomme de demain.» "Human ideal is not in the primitive Hellenism of which we are degenerates; it is in the Overman of tomorrow."

<sup>58</sup> Idem, (Versuch einer Selbstkritik, 4).

<sup>59</sup> Page 160

<sup>60</sup> Idem, page 162.

<sup>61</sup> Die Geburt der Tragödie, I.

It is as if Palante had seized Nietzsche's thoughts in their diachronic density and speed, the collective tragedy of the Ancient Greeks serving as a legacy only to be overcome by the individual's will to power, the Overman. It is the triumph of the individual over historic determinism, over the ineluctable designs of manipulating political authority or the Church's appropriation of the will of God! Pessimism might have triggered a reflection upon social determinism, might have helped cast away docile obedience and complying conformity, but it did not engender the Overman, who is the Individual *par excellence*...

Palante was well aware of Nietzsche's complex evolution of the individual for and against his society, but felt quite legitimate in linking this complexity to the productive sensitivity of pessimism: «L'attitude de Nietzsche dans le problème des rapports de l'individu et de la société n'est donc pas nette.» Mais elle confirme, dans son indécision même, la loi psychologique que nous essayons d'établir: la corrélation entre le pessimisme et l'individualisme.» "Nietzsche's attitude in the problem of the relationship of the individual and the society is not clear. But it confirms, even in its indecision, the psychological law that we are attempting to establish: the correlation between pessimism and individualism."

Palante established this correlation because he saw himself as a 'victim' of society. Indeed, a personal emotion may be theorized for one's own self, for one's own defense confronted by a brutal and changing society, but it should not be extrapolated and engrossed to embrace philosophers, thinkers and writers whose existential means might have, and this goes without saying, touched upon these emotions, but as we said, had never transformed them into obsessional methodological tools. This personal emotion or projection reveals the lack of confidence of the crushed personality, reveals, too, a partial absence of any path to wend, because it heavily relies on the observations and images of others' writings as an ersatz to this absence. An absence which is neither intellectual nor sensitive, but simply one which conveys an immeasurable gap between Desire and Act, or perhaps better put, the irretrievable bond between them! Palante acted against his desire, existentially. Nietzsche acted according to his desire,<sup>62</sup> existentially. Palante's acts led him to suicide, Nietzsche's to write this most wonderful hymn to life:

*«An diesem vollkommenen Tage, wo Alles reift und nicht nur die Traube braun wird, fiel mir eben ein Sonnenblick auf mein Leben: ich sah rüchwärts, ich sah hinaus, ich sah nie so viel und so gute Dirge auf einmal. Nicht umsonst bergrub ich heute mein vierundvierzigstes Jahr, ich durfte es begraben,- was in ihm Leben war, ist gerettet, ist unsterblich. Die Umwerthung aller Werthe, die Dionysos-Dithyramben und, zur Erholung, die Götzen-Dämmerung- Alles Geschenke dieses Jahrs, sogar seines letzten Vierteljahrs ! Wie sollte ich nicht meinem ganzen Leben dankbar sien? Und so erzähle ich mir mein Leben.»<sup>63</sup>*

<sup>62</sup> Desire as the sense of sensitivity or the will to power.

<sup>63</sup> In Ecce Homo.

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## Conclusion

### Nietzsche's Joy, Palante's Pessimism

An individual plunged in pessimism does not write such glowing lyrics as read above: Nietzsche is one happy to live, happy to confront his Destiny...his *Amor Fati*. He is the who has lived heartily and hopes to continue to live as heartily. Not as some maudlin optimist, but as a philosopher who has been the artisan of his life, who has melded a dualistic mode of thought into one mighty monistic force, which is the will to power...the will to live life as it is. For, and here is the crux of our argument, the life that Nietzsche led evolved without respite in an incessant Becoming; whereas Palante's life stagnated, wallowed in the mire of domestic sordidness, career trivialities and especially political aporia, due to an unproductive pessimism which he harboured and which became his alone. There can be no theory without practice, no matter how intellectually puissant. Palante's private mishaps and public failures conspired to fashion a theoretical pessimism whose political outlet offered him no relief, nor escape from his psychological dilemma. A stagnant or permanent pessimism that remains barren, infecund, no matter how motivating it may philosophically appear on paper, inevitably casts an enveloping shadow on all aspects of life; the eternal pessimist is he who has no faith or confidence either in his society, or more important still, in his own Self. Friedrich Nietzsche might not have had a glowing enthusiasm or ardent faith in his XIXth century European society, but the enthusiasm and faith that matures and fulminates in his existence and philosophy were drawn now from a generous and magnanimous personality, now from the society (or societies) that he traversed. Nietzsche's gift to all individuals is in the formula 'Trunkne Lust'! It is a cry to live life as joyously and dangerously as possible. It is a cry of hope...

Palante's case appears hopeless, perhaps because he never 'outgrew' the philosophers he so passionately read and wrote of. He never lifted anchor and set sail on the high seas; instead he clung with precautionary prudence to *terra firma*, to the thoughts and ideals of philosophers and writers he knew well, but in whom he poured all this intellectual and affective energy, divesting him of independence and self-reliance. His quotations alone fill pages and pages of his articles, as if these voices spoke in his stead, suffused his personality devoid of Selfhood, steadied him on his route, buoyed him above water. They are far from dead voices, but his, because of their preponderant plethora, declines to a faint susurrus of timid reasoning and inchoate critiques.

It is true, none the less, that Georges Palante shared a passionate talent for fusing literature and philosophical debate as did Friedrich Nietzsche. Indeed, many of Palante's arguments drew inspiration from literary references, especially Stendhal, a writer from whom Nietzsche, too, drew inspiration. Also, when we examine Palante's words, we notice his propensity of capitalizing many common nouns which he deemed of great philosophical importance, albeit quite unconventional in the French language. This capitalization he purposely emulated from the German language which he knew well, and from, especially, Nietzsche's particular wise of enlarging the semantic field of certain words by capitalizing them. But emulation results in false identity; a stationary one without the risk required for venturing

forth on one's own. Nietzsche said: « Verbrennen musst du dich wollen in deiner eignen Flamme : wie wolltest du neu werden, wenn du nicht erst Asche geworden bist! »<sup>64</sup>

To die and be reborn again from one's ashes: This is the eternal recurrence of the joyous individual who relishes existence because existence is the means of Self-Accomplishment...again and again, accomplishing and accomplishing by Becoming. To commit suicide is the refusal of Becoming; a denial of one's Being, of one's Self as the very means of and to existence.

As we see it, to call Georges Palante a Nietzschean, as Michel Onfray does, would falsify Nietzsche's meditations on politics. That Palante be labelled a Leftist Nietzschean discredits Nietzsche's entire philosophy of Statehood and Authority, discredits, too, his philosophy of 'Freigeist' and *Amor Fati*. Stranger still, the formula 'Nietzsche socialiste' (page 94) seems to be accommodating Onfray's own political penchant: It is not because «Palante est l'un des premiers, en France, à associer Nietzsche et une pensée politique de gauche» (page 97) "Palante is one of the first in France to associate Nietzsche with the political thinking of the Left" that makes Nietzsche a Leftist, nor Palante a Nietzschean for that matter. The formula conveniently interweaves Onfray's main and subordinate theses in his book: The resurrection of Georges Palante and Onfray's appropriation of Nietzsche for his own political purposes.

What it further does is deepen the ignorance of the soft and tough Nietzscheans who attempt to categorize and thus petrify Nietzsche's philosophy into a handy politically labelled drawer or carton. The practice of political taxonomy has always been the shibboleth of the 'politically-minded' who ferret out formulae to be used as catch-phrases for their respective causes and cavils!

There is no political Nietzsche: Be it soft or tough, Leftist or Rightist, Marxist or Nazi! Only the alert and lucid individual who shuns political tendencies and snubs political theorizing. Nietzsche was the free spirit, keeping aloof from the uncleanness of the political agora. For his agonistic tension resided in his Self, striving beyond dualism, hieing far and high into Self-Accomplishment. Yet, Nietzsche was neither unsocial nor anti-social: His Self-Accomplishment wended the ways of the world as well as those ways of a more inner, remote nature. This choice is not a political one: It is ontological. Be that as it may, those who have appropriated and exploited Nietzsche in order to position their political pawns are not to be criticised for misunderstanding him, nor misinterpreting him, but of depreciating his philosophy; narrowing it to advance their political aims. Michel Onfray's book, meritorious in resuscitating Georges Palante after years of oblivion, meritorious in affirming him as one of the first French philosophers to have appreciated Nietzsche, and to have situated him squarely in the French intellectual landscape of that time, however, swerves gradually into the swamp of modern French politics where, cold, murky and turbulent Friedrich Nietzsche has found his Self floundering. Odd really, this sweep into French politics; indeed Michel Onfray says himself: «Le Nietzscheïsme de Palante réside en priorité dans son individualisme.» (page 79) "Palante's Nietzscheanism lies principally in his individualism." But Palante's individualism (and perhaps Onfray's, too) was a far cry from Nietzsche's! Nietzsche would have never dreamed of being a candidate to a political office as Palante was at Saint-Brieuce.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> In *Also sprach Zarathustra*, (Weg des Schaffenden).

<sup>65</sup> Palante presented his candidature and ran in the election for the town council board of advisors in 1919. He obtained only 438 votes out of 2.927, the last on the electoral list. His lose was extremely humiliating to him. See M. Onfray, loc. cit. pages 129-131.

There are far more stimulating French interpretations and commentaries of Friedrich Nietzsche which go beyond the mediocrity and superficiality of politics. Georges Bataille,<sup>66</sup> Maurice Blanchot<sup>67</sup>, Pierre Klossowski<sup>68</sup> and Gilles Deleuze<sup>69</sup>, for example, whose scope of explorations range from the ontological to the existential, and whose ontic identification with Nietzsche situates these philosophers and writers, and consequently situates the readers, too, on the firm soil of Being and Existence!

Is then Georges Palante a portrait of a Nietzschean as M. Onfray claims? Hardly, save their relationship to their illnesses: «Nietzsche et Palante partent de leur souffrance, de leur corps, de leur expérience pour échauffer une pensée qui les aide à vivre.» (page 10) “Nietzsche and Palante start from their suffering, their bodies, from their experience to construct a thinking process that helps them to live.” There is no doubt about this fact, except that the `results` of their construction are diametrically opposed. And if indeed: «Palante passe sa vie à transfigurer ses manques, ses impuissances et ses faiblesses en visions de monde à même d’adoucir sa peine:» (page 15) “Palante spends his life transfiguring his deficiencies, his impotencies and his weaknesses in visions of the world, in alleviating his trials.”, these visions of the world, whatever they be, held no place for him, nor for someone like him. His suicide not only confirmed his deficiencies, impotencies and weaknesses, but endorsed a failed existential identity with Friedrich Nietzsche that one could, indeed, depict as an anti-portrait of Nietzsche!

M. Onfray does, however, pose this crucial question: «Pourquoi si peu de Nietzscheisme dans la vie?»<sup>70</sup> “Why so little of Nietzscheanism in life?” This appears to be a rather naïve question after two hundred pages of development. Identification to a philosopher can only engender fruitful results if the identifier `breaks away` and sets out on his own. To remain a `Nietzschean` -if this notion exists at all!- implies to remain chained to a concept without substance, bound to a theory without practice. There can be no Act of Acknowledging the other, only sterile emulation. In this Act of Acknowledgment Palante failed, not because there was so `little Nietzscheanism in his life`, but because Nietzsche`s existence cannot be emulated. Nor can it act as a guide if the disciple does not follow the mentor`s ways of existence which for the majority are hardly tenable.

But perhaps Palante had absolutely no intention of walking in Nietzsche`s steps! Had read and integrated Nietzsche`s Figures in his writings not as existential models, but rather as simple arguments to construct his own! Perhaps he shrugged his shoulders to a Nietzschean `Weltanschauung`, to a Nietzschean `Dengesang`, or to a Nietzschean `Kunstwollen`. Perhaps Palante despised himself: The drinker, the gambler, the whore-seeker, the unwashed professor of philosophy,<sup>71</sup> he who sought and

<sup>66</sup> *Nietzsche et les Fascistes*, in Acéphale, 1937 and *Sur Nietzsche*, Gallimard, 1945.

<sup>67</sup> *L’Entretien Infinie*, Gallimard, 1969.

<sup>68</sup> *Un Funeste Désire*, Gallimard, 1963 and *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, Mercure de France, 1969.

<sup>69</sup> *Nietzsche et la Philosophie*, P.U.F, 1978.

<sup>70</sup> Loc. cit. page 201.

<sup>71</sup> The reports by the Inspectors of Education on Palante are devastating. They draw a portrait of a professor with a: “physionomie triste, timide, tenu un peu négligée [...] Le cours lui-même est exact, sans originalité de pensée, ni d’expression, sans accent personnel. » “A sad, timid physiomy, his dress somewhat neglected [...] The subject course itself is exact, without any original thought or expression, without any personal accent.” The inspector adds that Palante suffers from: «une santé fragile » and has « une certaine difficulté à exprimer ses idées.» “...fragile health” “a certain difficulty to express his ideas.” The

welcomed failure as a confirmation of the myth or cliché of the lonesome hero struggling for egotistical freedom amidst collective seduction and temptation; the dragon-slayer who waits for no one but himself to applaud his doughty deeds. Perhaps scandal is what he sought to break his ignominious isolation, for scandal thrusts the `loner` on to the stage where at least he can make a spectacle of himself, however grotesque. Or perhaps Georges Palante, rooted deeply in his native French soil, gravely shuffling to work every day with his gigantic shoes and weight, meditating on some weighty social problematic, never fully appreciated Nietzsche's frolicking Figures, who with light steps and hearts danced into the vaulted skies, upon the highest snow-capped summits. These images respond to Nietzsche's `Weltanschauung`, whilst Palante ponderously dragged his feet through the mire of discontent, never a laugh at tragedy, be it his or society's as a whole. His was the path of `Selbstverwüstung`, grinder of the general groove, a prisoner to his fey pessimism, and not `überwindungs-motiv`, that merging of strength and constraint, Instinct and Reason, and Sensitivity and Intelligence in the subliminal process of the Overman.

The following epitaph is written on Palante's tombstone at Hillion:

«L'individu reste la source vivante de l'énergie et la mesure de l'idéal»<sup>72</sup>

"The individual remains the living source of energy and the measure of the ideal"

Friedrich Nietzsche would have surely acquiesced. And perhaps in this epitaph lies the tragedy of Georges Palante's life: In adapting to society the individual dies. Individuals survive only by non-adaptation, by a constant struggle not to adapt or be adapted! To live, the Individual must impose his Difference, if not he perishes...Not to perish requires the strength or energy or will to live recklessly...dangerously. Friedrich Nietzsche possessed this strength, energy and will. Georges Palante did not...

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Dean of his Lycée writes that his professor is: «...jeune, rougeaud, l'air empêtré ... Il paraît avoir plus de verbiage que de méthode et parle beaucoup pour ne pas dire grand-chose. » "...young, red-faced with an air of confusion [...] He displays more verbiage than method and speaks a lot without saying much." (See M. Onfray, loc. cit. pp. 64-65.

<sup>72</sup> See M. Onfray, loc. cit. page 197.

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