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Introduzione al tema

Introduction. Beyond Globalization, and the Drift of the Political

Introduzione. Oltre la Globalizzazione e la deriva del politico

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Abstract. This thematic issue interrogates the crisis of globalization as both a material and conceptual framework, arguing that the present conjuncture can be grasped neither through the narrative of a borderless integrated world nor through that of deglobalization. The article proposes the *drift* as a critical practice of orientation in a world marked by multipolar tensions, ecological breakdown, and the collapse of inherited political categories. Thinking beyond globalization emerges not as a settled condition but as an open-ended critical and political task.

Keywords: globalization, drift, global, planetary, political categories.

Riassunto. Questo numero monografico interroga la crisi della globalizzazione come spazio materiale e concettuale, mostrando come la congiuntura attuale non possa essere colta né attraverso la narrativa di un mondo integrato e senza confini né attraverso quella della deglobalizzazione. L'articolo propone la *deriva* come pratica critica di orientamento in un mondo segnato da tensioni multipolari, dalla crisi ecologica e dal collasso delle categorie politiche correnti. Pensare oltre la globalizzazione ne emerge non come una condizione acquisita, ma come un'azione critica e politica sempre aperta.

Parole chiave: globalizzazione, deriva, globale, planetario, categorie politiche.

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1. Drifting maps

Globalization, long regarded as the defining horizon of late twentieth-century modernity, no longer provides an adequate framework for interpreting the present. While the material infrastructures of global interconnection – financial circuits, logistical networks, extractive regimes, and digital platforms – remain deeply entrenched, the conceptual vocabulary that once rendered them intelligible has entered into a crisis. The image of a progressively integrated, borderless, and homogenizing world – often associated with the expansion of neoliberal capitalism under U.S. hegemony – has lost much of its explanatory force. Yet the current conjuncture cannot be adequately captured by the equally reductive narrative of *deglobalization*. What we are witnessing is not a retreat from global interdependence, but its reconfiguration along fractured, conflictual, and uneven lines.

This monographic issue might be described – borrowing Mitchell's formulation in the essay we present here[1] – as an attempt to "see through madness," to grasp the planetary condition of disorientation that seems to pervade the present: the resurgence of "reactionary nationalism, authoritarianism, and racism" (infra, p. 16), alongside the proliferation of reckless and often irrational forms of political leadership, beginning with the president of the hegemonic power that once claimed to govern the fate of the globalized world.

From the classical metaphor of the *navem rei publicae gubernare*, evoked by Aristotle (*Politics*, III) – according to which, although navigation is perilous, it remains possible to govern the ship "within the concrete situation that the noetic act and virtue indicate as the direction to be followed"[2] – we seem to have moved toward that of the "Ship of Fools," described by Plato in his critique of democracy (*Republic*, VI). The latter now appears as a more fitting image of our condition: a planetary vessel repeatedly driven against the rocks by wars and by the effects of extractive capitalism, running the real risk of finding no safe harbor, except for a select few.

If the myth of globalization has rendered us blind to the dangers inherent in a project of endless exploitation, today – again in Mitchell's words – its political, economic, and ecological program has become obsolete: "The Ship of fools is no longer a metaphor for the rogue state. It now applies to

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[1] This essay first appeared as W.J.T. Mitchell, "Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools," in *"Disassembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art*, edited by Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder, Leuven: Leuven University Press 2019, 21–37. I sincerely thank Prof. Mitchell, and the Leuven University Press, for allowing us to publish his article in this thematic section of the Journal, confident that his contribution will broaden our gaze on these issues.

[2] Duso, *La logica del potere*, 89.

the planet, inhabited by a species that fits the legal criterion for insanity, namely, that it is a danger to itself and others" (infra, p. 17).

Mitchell's reflection on the space we inhabit today has deeper roots, tracing back to a lecture he delivered in 2018 entitled *Iconology 3.0*. As he noted on that occasion, we attempt "to inhabit our historical moment with a sense of critical clarity,"[3] only to find ourselves "caught up in a maelstrom of contradictions." The emerging image of the world no longer presents a totalizing unity, but rather exposes the limits of what remains a liveable world. Mitchell already linked this image to the ancient metaphor of the Ship of Fools, "reminding us that our planet is a wandering island in an inhospitable void [...] On our small and fragile island, our ship of fools, the seas are rising, and the deserts are expanding. If we do not find our way beyond our folly as a species, we will wind up like dinosaurs, just another fossilized relic of a life-form that could not adapt."[4]

This metaphor returns as a way of asking what space might be adequate to our present condition of drift – if not the sea itself? The maritime dimension can be approached not only metaphorically, but also through an attention to material realities, which increasingly reveal the oceans as a crucial site of struggle over the control of global flows. As such, the sea becomes a figure through which to reimagine the space we inhabit and traverse, and within which it is possible to rethink the "psychological and political framework within which a critical account of our planetary insanity has to be re-framed" (infra, p. 19).

Yet if, as Mitchell suggests, the sea is also the metaphor of madness *par excellence* – "to be all at sea is to be confused, disoriented, overwhelmed" (infra, p. 21) – it is equally true that the attempt to trace *drifting maps* may constitute a form of political and epistemological practice adequate to our present historical moment of chaotic transition. This metaphor, too, has a longer genealogy[5].

In the eighteenth century, English sailors used precise *drift charts* of winds and currents, improving navigational safety by consolidating previously fragmented maritime knowledge into a coherent system of orientation. Reconsidered from our contemporary perspective, however, these charts can also be understood as *drifting maps*: not merely technical devices of representation, but dynamic frameworks through which space

[3] Mitchell, *Iconology 3.0*, 26 (lecture delivered at the conference "Cultura visuale in Italia: Prospettive della ricerca," University of Palermo, March 19, 2018).
[4] Mitchell, *Iconology 3.0*, 27.
[5] It has recently been reactivated, for instance, in the editorial project Portolan Journal, where "the reference to nautical maps [...] is a gesture towards the need to forge new conceptual tools for navigating the turbulence of the global present." (Hardt, Mezzadra, *Capital and the Global War Regime*).

is interpreted, experienced, and continuously reconfigured. *To drift* thus emerges as a critical practice – in the sense developed by Guy Debord's *dérive*[6] – functioning as a device of intelligibility through which it becomes possible to follow the traces of transformations in forms of experience, political action, and aesthetic perception.

Drifting is not a simple loss of direction; rather, it emerges as a form of inquiry, a way of traversing environments, and constitutes a situated mode of engaging with complexity, in which objective cartographic knowledge intersects with subjective perception and affect, and foregrounds the political and experiential dimensions of practices.

This monographic issue proceeds from the hypothesis that to think *beyond globalization* requires neither abandoning the global as an analytical category nor replacing it with a new totalizing paradigm. Rather, it calls for a critical de-placement: a reworking of inherited concepts and the elaboration of new interpretive tools capable of grasping a world marked by multipolar tensions, ecological breakdown, technological acceleration, and shifting regimes of mobility and control. In this sense, the project resonates with the broader critical-theoretical efforts to interrogate the historical conditions of the present.

The contributions gathered here take up this task by interrogating the spatial, temporal, and epistemic coordinates of the present, foregrounding the instability of the categories through which it has been understood.

2. Global Processes Beyond Deglobalization

A crucial starting point for this inquiry is the critique of the globalization paradigm itself. As Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson argue, the contemporary invocation of "deglobalization" risks obscuring the persistence and transformation of global processes. The dominant understanding of globalization that emerged in the 1990s – centered on market integration, deterritorialization, and geopolitical unipolarity, and echoed in many respects in Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" – was always partial. Today, its limitations have become increasingly evident.

Rather than a smooth and homogenizing space, the global appears as a terrain of frictions, asymmetries, and infrastructural struggles. Finance, logistics, extraction, and digital platforms continue to organize economic and social life, but they do so through heterogeneous and often conflicting spatial arrangements.

[6] Debord, "Théorie de la dérive."

The current conjuncture is marked by the emergence of a multipolar order, the intensification of geopolitical conflict, and a rearticulation of the relationship between capitalism and territorial power.

Wars – understood in a broadened sense to include both "military activities other than war, including security operations like border control" and "wars conducted by non-military means, such as tech wars, trade wars, sanctions" (infra, p. 45) – along with competing infrastructural dynamics, are not external to globalization but constitutive features of its ongoing transition. From a global process perspective, war emerges from the tension between capitalism and territorialism, while also revealing the instability of global power formations and their connection to capital operations, which operate through infrastructures and are tied to labor and life.

From this perspective, transition must be understood as an "open and contested spatio-temporal process" (infra, p. 39) rather than a linear shift from one regime to another. The global is neither dissolving nor stabilizing; it is being reconfigured through struggle. This diagnosis calls for a "renewed internationalism capable of confronting the global operations of capital" (infra, p. 39) while acknowledging the fractured and uneven terrain on which such struggles unfold.

3. From Resilience to Chaos: Epistemologies of Crisis

As Laura Bazzicalupo writes (infra, p. 58), it is difficult to think that we are going through a phase of infra-systemic transition. Although certain constants are confirmed, this approach – one that epistemologically presupposes a succession of systemic states of equilibrium – fails to grasp the discontinuity that disrupts coordinates, the emergence of something truly unforeseen, and today's variables make it impossible to discern the passage that the idea of transition evokes.

If globalization as a paradigm is in crisis, so too are the epistemological frameworks that sustained it. During the neoliberal decades, systemic and complexity-based approaches provided a language for managing uncertainty. Concepts such as resilience, adaptation, and nonlinearity were mobilized to render crises governable, transforming instability into a calculable and administrable phenomenon.

As Bazzicalupo highlights, this epistemic regime is now undergoing a significant mutation. The metaphor of resilience, once central to neoliberal governance, is increasingly displaced by a more radical invocation of chaos. This shift signals a loss of confidence in the capacity of systems to absorb shocks and maintain equilibrium. Chaos, in its absolutized form, names a condition of pervasive instability that exceeds the horizon of control.

Politically, this transformation has ambivalent effects. On the one hand, it legitimizes new forms of centralized and often opaque decision-making, frequently mediated by algorithmic systems and justified in the name of necessity. On the other hand, the recognition of chaos opens up the possibility of bifurcations of critical thresholds, at which established trajectories can be disrupted, and alternative futures can emerge. Catastrophe, in this sense, is not only an endpoint but also a site of potential "bifurcation that is as catastrophic/destructive as it is potentially morphogenetic." (Infra, p. 65)

To think beyond globalization thus requires engaging with these altered epistemologies of crisis. It entails examining how narratives of chaos and catastrophe are mobilized, while also exploring their capacity to generate openings for political rearticulation.

4. Environmental Governance and the Depoliticization of Crisis

The environmental question constitutes one of the most salient sites in which the limits of globalization become visible. While ecological degradation is deeply entangled with global capitalist dynamics, the frameworks through which it is addressed often reproduce the very logics that have contributed to the crisis. As Giulia Sajeva argues (infra, p. 77), environmental discourse remains deeply embedded in neoliberal order, even as it itself shows signs of decline.

This persistence manifests in processes of depoliticization that reframe environmental issues in ways that obscure their structural and conflictual dimensions. Responsibility is frequently individualized, reducing systemic problems to matters of personal behavior. At the same time, environmental governance is increasingly technicized, presenting decisions as neutral and evidence-based while concealing the ethical and political choices they entail. Finally, the reliance on market mechanisms – privatization, commodification, and financialization – reconfigures nature as an object of economic calculation, often at the expense of ecological effectiveness.

These dynamics unfold within a broader "hyperpolitical" condition, characterized by an intensification of discourses and interventions that paradoxically leads to a dilution of political agency. The result is a form of governance that is both pervasive and depoliticized, active yet unable to address the root causes of ecological crisis. Moving beyond globalization in this domain requires a re-politicization of environmental issues, foregrounding questions of power, responsibility, and collective decision-making.

5. Migration, Punitive Environments, and the Fragmentation of Space

The reconfiguration of global processes is perhaps most starkly visible in the domain of migration. As Martina Tazzioli demonstrates, the last decade has witnessed a profound transformation in the politics of migration containment in Europe. The "hostile environment" approach, initially developed in the United Kingdom, has evolved into a broader regime of "punitive environments," marking a shift in the governance of mobility that operates through the production of precarious and harmful conditions of life.

These environments operate not only through legal restrictions, but through the systematic dismantling of infrastructures of life-support. Migrants and asylum seekers are governed by being exposed to conditions that undermine their health and well-being – kept in insalubrious spaces, deprived of adequate services, and subjected to forms of violence that render life precarious. Punishment, in this context, extends beyond the sphere of criminal justice, targeting what Tazzioli, referring to Foucault, terms "infra-legal illegalism" and blurring the boundary between legality and illegality.

Importantly, these punitive environments do not affect migrants alone. They reveal broader processes of interlocking precarization and criminalization that also impact citizens, particularly along racialized lines. Migration thus becomes a privileged lens through which to observe the fragmentation of global space: a world in which mobility is both enabled and violently constrained, and in which the promise of global circulation is unevenly distributed.

At the same time, the dynamics identified here cannot be reduced to a purely European phenomenon. They point to a more general trend in the governance of mobility, one that reflects the tensions between global interconnectedness and the reassertion of borders. To think beyond globalization requires attending to these tensions and to the forms of violence and resistance they engender.

6. Toward a Critical Orientation of the Political

Across these domains – global processes, epistemologies of crisis, environmental governance, and migration – a common thread emerges: the inadequacy of existing categories to capture the complexity of the present. In response, alternative vocabularies have begun to take shape, among which the notion of the planetary occupies a central position.

The planetary perspective – as developed by thinkers such as Dipesh Chakrabarty[7] – shifts attention from the integration of markets to the conditions of life on Earth, foregrounding species interdependence, ecological limits, and vulnerability. It challenges the anthropocentric assumptions that have long structured political thought, opening the field to multispecies perspectives – in Donna Haraway's words[8] – and to new forms of ethical and political consideration. At the same time, it raises difficult questions about scale, responsibility, and action in a world marked by profound inequalities.

The task, therefore, is not to replace the global with the planetary, but to think their tensions: to develop a conceptual framework that can account for both the systemic interconnections of global capitalism and the material limits and vulnerabilities of planetary existence.

The contributions collected in this issue do not converge on a single theoretical model. Instead, they offer a series of situated interventions that, taken together, map a space of the beyond – in the sense evoked by Homi K. Bhabha: "to dwell 'in the beyond'" is to inhabit a "space of intervention in here and now"[9]; the *time of the now* in Benjamin's terms. If I may venture to say, what unites the essays is a shared commitment to moving beyond the limitations of globalization as an interpretive paradigm, while retaining a critical focus on the political dimensions of practices.

This orientation is necessarily experimental and open-ended. It involves not only the critique of existing categories, but their transformation and recombination. It requires attention to multiple scales and temporalities, as well as to the interplay between material processes and epistemic frameworks. Above all, it demands a renewed engagement with the political – not as a stable domain, but as a field of ongoing conflict, contestation, negotiation, and resistance. It also echoes ongoing attempts to rethink internationalism under conditions of fragmentation and crisis.

To think beyond globalization is to confront a world in which the coordinates of political, spatial, and epistemic experience are being fundamentally reconfigured. It is to recognize that the narratives of integration and coherence that once structured our understanding of the global no longer suffice, yet they continue to shape the terrain on which we think and act. It is, finally, to engage in a process of conceptual and political experimentation aimed at making sense of a present marked by instability, deplacement, and potential transformation.

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[7] Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses"; Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.
[8] Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
[9] Bhabha, *Location of culture*, 7.

In bringing together analyses of global processes, chaos and catastrophe, environmental governance, and migration regimes, this issue seeks to contribute to this endeavor. It does not offer a unified theory of the present, but a set of critical perspectives that illuminate its tensions and open pathways for further inquiry. "Beyond globalization" thus names not a settled condition, but an ongoing task: that of rethinking the world in a moment when its contours are more uncertain – and more contested – than ever.

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Il tema

Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools

Follia planetaria: globalizzare la nave dei folli

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Abstract. Starting from the analysis of the anonymous nineteenth-century lithograph of an anarchic dockworker astride the globe (fig. 1) as a key for rethinking Allan Sekula's *Ship of Fools / The Docker's Museum*, the essay proposes an unfinished visual theory of planetary madness. Read not as a marginal illustration but as the latent 'archon' of Sekula's archive, the image condenses the essay's central claim: the classical allegory of the *Ship of Fools*, once tied to the crisis of the state and the irrationality of sovereignty, must now be globalized and relocated within maritime space, where the material infrastructures of trade, labor, risk, and circulation make visible the contemporary world-system.

Keywords: madness, sovereignty, sea, planet, atlas.

Riassunto. A partire dall'analisi della litografia anonima del XIX secolo raffigurante un lavoratore portuale a cavallo del globo (fig. 1), l'articolo propone di ripensare la *Ship of Fools / The Docker's Museum* di Allan Sekula, come una teoria visuale incompiuta della follia planetaria. Letta non come un'illustrazione marginale ma come l''archè' latente dell'archivio di Sekula, l'immagine condensa la tesi centrale del saggio: l'allegoria classica della *Nave dei folli*, un tempo legata alla crisi dello Stato e all'irrazionalità della sovranità, deve ora essere globalizzata e ricollocata nello spazio marittimo, dove le infrastrutture materiali del commercio, del lavoro, del rischio e della circolazione rendono visibile il sistema-mondo contemporaneo.

Parole chiave: follia, sovranità, mare, pianeta, atlante.

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Where bodies are buried in secret there must also be a buried archive…waiting for resurrection. An archive, but not an atlas; the point here is not to take the world upon one's shoulder, but to crouch down to the earth and dig.
Allan Sekula

In the destructive element immerse.
Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

We are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it in dry-dock and reconstruct it from its best components.
Otto Neurath

The theme of the end of the world, and of the great final violence, was also a part of the critical experience of madness…
Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 25

My attempt to 'see through madness' has evolved as a series of ever-larger concentric circles, from the 'up close and personal' accounts of a singular cases of schizophrenia, to the crazy historical period in which this book was written, to the larger world of the arts and media, to an atlas of the world's images.[1] But today it looks as if a 'planetary madness' is afflicting the world. Reactionary nationalism, authoritarianism, and racism are on the march, and the world's most powerful democracy has elected a lunatic and con man to be its president. It is not the first time that a mad sovereign has assumed tyrannical powers. From the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar to King George III to Hitler, the emergence of terrifying authoritarian regimes has punctuated epochs in human history. And democracies, as Palto foresaw, are especially vulnerable to the rise of maniacal despots. Plato's famous metaphor of the Ship of fools captures perfectly the way populist irrationality can lead the ship of State, steered by an incompetent, corrupt, and deranged captain, into a catastrophic shipwreck.

But our time is different. We are no longer in a world where disastrous wars, destruction of the environment, and the immiseration of vast populations can be confined within national borders. In an age of global

[1] This essay first appeared as, W.J.T. Mitchell, "Planetary Madness: Globalizing the Ship of Fools," in *"Disassembled" Images: Allan Sekula and Contemporary Art*, edited by Alexander Streitberger and Hilde Van Gelder, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019, (21–37).

climate change and a deeply dysfunctional global economy of deregulated capitalism, the risks have taken on a planetary scale. The Ship of fools is no longer a metaphor for the rogue state. It now applies to the *planet*, inhabited by a species that fits the legal criterion for insanity, namely, that it is a danger to itself and others.

If the Ship of fools is now a planetary vessel, then the earth can no longer be seen as an island in space. As the etymology of the word 'planet' (an errant wanderer – OED)[2] indicates, we now have to catch up with the intuition of Walt Disney's Epcot Center, and imagine ourselves realistically as 'spaceship earth,' a Noah's Ark that may not have any harbor waiting for it.

But exactly what kind of spaceship do we inhabit? Bruno Latour[3] has provided an image of the most urgent way of thinking about this question. He compares the contemporary world to an enormous passenger plane that is running low on fuel. The pilots announce that the long-standing destination of human progress – modernity, modernization, and 'the global' – has just been closed off by the simple fact that the planet cannot possibly sustain modern development as presently envisaged. We would need anywhere from '2 to 5 virtual planets' to accommodate the 8 billion people who will inhabit this orb in the predictable future. Globalization, as an economic and ecological program, has become obsolete.

The passengers on Latour's airplane are understandably concerned. Some of them even stop sipping their whiskeys and begin looking at alternative destinations. The most popular at this point is nationalism, the populist, reactionary answer. Let's go back to 'where we came from,' to our 'own country,' our nation and our kind of people. Let's return to the Homeland, or just 'the Land,' whether it is called Fortress America or Little England. Certainly, it is not Europe, or any of the global destinations. And most certainly it involves a closing of borders to immigrants, foreigners, aliens, refugees, and outsiders. The passengers tell the pilot, well let's go back, then. Let's go home. Let's make America, or Russia, or France 'great again'.

The pilots, however, have bad news. The Homeland is no longer reachable either; the borders have already been long since breached, and the spaces promised by neo-nationalists "offer a space much too small for us." The only answer is to 'triangulate', to imagine a third destination – Latour[4] calls it "Gaia" or "the Earth" – the actual physical ecosystem in which the species has to come to ground, or risk crashing and burning.

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[2] The word 'planet' comes from the ancient Greek for 'wanderer,' applied to wandering stars (cf. classical Latin *stellae errant* – to lead astray [in passive] to wander, of uncertain origin). See Mitchell, "World Pictures: Globalization and Visual Culture," 97.

[3] Latour, "On a Possible Triangulation of Some Present Political Positions."

[4] Latour, "On a Possible Triangulation of Some Present Political Positions," 217.

Latour's choice of Earth is, I think, to be taken both literally and metaphorically: literally as the limited amount of solid ground for feeding and housing an out of control population; metaphorically as a figure for ecological balance and harmony, the kind of thing envisioned back in the 1960s by the *Whole Earth Catalog*. But there is a fourth possibility that he does not consider, and that is the sea, which covers two thirds of the planet. This is an element that must surely be considered in both its literal and metaphoric terms as well. We need to remember that every plane flight begins with safety instructions that include a short lesson on what to do 'in case of a water landing'. For one thing, climate change is already producing a rise in sea levels, so the proportion of the planet comprised of dry land is going to shrink.[5] The sea is also where all of the planet's life-forms originated, and a major source of its nutrition. It is, despite the dominance of hyper-modern modes of communication and transportation, air travel and the internet, the medium in which most of the world's material commerce is carried on. Speculative finance capital may operate at the blinding speed of computers, but physical commodities still circulate around the world at about the same speed that they did in the late 19th century era of the steamship. I am invoking here the striking conclusion of the late Allan Sekula's photo essay, *Fish Story*, in which he makes the following point:

> My argument here runs against the commonly held view that the computer and telecommunications are the sole engines of the third industrial revolution. In effect, I am arguing for the continued importance of maritime space in order to counter the exaggerated importance attached to that largely metaphysical construct, 'cyberspace,' and the corollary myth of 'instantaneous' contact between distant spaces. I am often struck by the ignorance of intellectuals in this respect: the self-congratulating conceptual aggrandizement of 'information' frequently is accompanied by peculiar erroneous beliefs: among these is the widely held quasi-anthropomorphic notion that most of the world's cargo travels as people do, by air.[6]

I want to take Sekula's irrefutable argument as a launching point for a reconsideration of the *ship at sea* rather than the airship or airplane as the appropriate metaphor for re-imagining our earthly habitat, and the *sea* as the inevitable image of the element in which that ship lives and moves and has its being.[7] Sekula's last unfinished project, *The Docker's Museum*,

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[5] Van Gelder, *Ground Sea*.
[6] Sekula, *Fish Story*, 50.
[7] See Liu, *The Three-Body Problem*. Here he treats space travel and warfare on the model of maritime strategies.

already points toward that heading. And it does so with particular emphasis on the question of collective and individual madness as the psychological and political framework within which a critical account of our planetary insanity has to be re-framed. I should say, however, that I don't think this was exactly the direction that Allan himself was heading. He was a hard-headed Marxist materialist, and as an artist-photographer committed to documenting the material conditions of labor. His treatment of madness, or more precisely, folly, was basically pitched toward ideologies such as the metaphysics of cyberspace that he skewers in the passage just quoted, and in the neoliberal processes of globalization that have turned our attention away from maritime space while planting the seeds of destruction for human life on this planet.

My aim here is to emphasize the question of folly and madness, both in the global system that Sekula criticized, and in the heroic, even Herculean effort he waged to bring it all into focus. Like Aby Warburg, Sekula was obsessed with Hercules as the hero of labor, especially of physical and material labor and the defeat of monsters who threaten humanity.

His installation at Documenta 12 in 2007 explicitly referenced the twelve labors of Hercules, especially the cleansing of the Augean stables. Among these is the task of taking the world on his shoulders to relieve Atlas of his burden while the Titan fetches the Apples of the Hesperides. *The Docker's Museum* complements Sekula's photographic documentation of maritime laborers (*Ship of Fools*) with a vast array of material objects collected from around the globe.

The Docker's Museum includes postcards, figurines, toys, posters, tools, a ship's siren, a fan, a soccer ball autographed by Pelé, a Herculean club, a model of the human spine, an antique child's crutch, various medals, tiny carvings, miscellaneous souvenirs, and the packing boxes in which they were shipped back to Los Angeles. Sekula stressed that these items are not to be seen as 'found objects' like Duchamp's *Fountain*, nor could they be assimilated to a single coherent program like Marcel Broodthaers' *Department of Eagles* (1968), or the artistic collections of Gerhard Richter. None are valuable works of art. They are more like mementos of a life at sea, shipped from ports all over the planet. Sekula described them as "a kind of cargo, or [. . .] a cargo cult, my own private cargo cult."[8] I want to take seriously the remarks of Sekula's widow, photo historian Sally Stein, who saw the wild miscellany of objects in Allan's *Docker's Museum* "as a private archive [...] in all the madness of that collecting enterprise" that Walter Benjamin described: "Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collec-

[8] Van Gelder, "Allan Sekula's Panecasticism," 76.

tor's passion borders on the chaos of memories."[9] Stein goes one step further to suggest that Allan was risking 'immersion' in 'a sinkhole of money spent on a folly'. He was in the grip of a 'mad materialism' that pre-dated the onset of his fatal illness in 2011. Benjamin's hope that a legible 'constellation' would emerge from the collector's chaotic passion has yet to happen with Sekula's last project. There is no guarantee that it ever will, and certainly I will not be able to provide one.[10] We are like Walter Benjamin's "revolutionary spy or detective"[11] contemplating a wall of evidence, a forensic atlas that is either reducible to something like the material conditions of narrative as such, the 'ball of string', the *yarn* that connects all the images and objects, or a subjective complex that may turn any perceived order in the array into a case of apophenia, the psychiatric syndrome in which one projects patterns into an array of clues that are not visible to anyone else.

Certainly, Allan Sekula would not be the first to succumb to the collector's passion, especially when it seems that the fate of the world somehow hangs in the balance. As we have seen, the founder of modern art history, Aby Warburg, attempted a similar thing with images rather than objects, by creating a *Bilderatlas* that would place in a totalizing perspective all the graphic representations of the human species' expressions of passion, the *pathosformel* that were to complete Darwin's program of cataloging the expressions of emotions in animals and man. Warburg's project occupied a border zone between madness and rationality, folly and encyclopedic knowledge. His earlier project of attempting to compile an atlas of all the images and texts associated with the nightmare of history known as the Great War finally came to nothing. The residue of that project now resides in unsorted archives of the Warburg Institute in London, still waiting after almost a century the archivist who might be able to see the patterns that Warburg was seeking. Within weeks of the end of World War One, Warburg experienced a psychotic break in which he attempted to murder his own family. Like Hercules, the mythological hero who attempts to civilize the known world, killing monsters and even taking the world on his shoulders while Atlas runs an errand for him, Warburg was broken by the enormity of the task he had undertaken. When Warburg emerged from the asylum where he was confined for four years, he took up the project of the *Bilderatlas* with a passion. Fortunately for us, he sur-

[9] Van Gelder, "Allan Sekula's Panecasticism," 103.

[10] Nevertheless, the contributors to Hilde Van Gelder's marvelous catalog *Ship of Fools/ The Docker's Museum* make a heroic effort to reconstruct the lost stories and meanings that accompany the objects.

[11] See Stein, "Benjamin on Montage," 50 on Benjamin as a "revolutionary spy or detective" or as "critical journalist"; see also Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," for Benjamin's "mania of collecting."

vived long enough to serve as the 'archon' or authoritative master of the archive fever he was experiencing.[12]

Not that he regarded the Bilderatlas as the cure for anything. Warburg declared himself 'incurable', a revenant or phantom. And he regarded himself in that sense as a representative man, since in his view "all mankind is everywhere and eternally schizophrenic." Warburg glimpsed the "planetary madness" that was being unveiled in his research, and in himself. Allow me to quote R. D. Laing's portrait of rare and gifted "schizophrenic seafarers:"

> Perhaps we will learn to accord to so-called schizophrenics who have come back to us, perhaps after years, no less respect than the often no less lost explorers of the Renaissance. If the human race survives, future men will, I suspect, look back on our enlightened epoch as a veritable Age of Darkness.[13]

Laing is not romanticizing schizophrenia here. He knows very well that it is a malady that produces extreme suffering in its victims. He is speaking of the lucky ones "who have come back to us," the rare souls that are able to work and create some reflection on their condition.[14] Like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, some seafarers return as 'loons' from the sea with a terrifying story of madness calculated to hypnotize the listener, and to make her reflect on her own condition. The sea is, of course, the image of madness par excellence. Chaotic, ever-changing, in contrast to terra firma, the 'down to earth' grounds and stable foundations of thought. The boring, vast emptiness of the sea is an invitation to madness; since the 18th century it has been well established that seafaring is one of the professions most conducive to mental illness.[15] To be all at sea is to be confused, disoriented, overwhelmed, as Sally Stein found herself, confronted with Allan's enormous, unreadable archive. If the *Bilderatlas* was Warburg's 'art history without a text', Sekula's *Docker's Museum* is an archive without an archon. It is up to us to make sense of it. I want to come at it via a maritime image that Allan did not collect, namely an interesting 19th century French print of the mariner/dockworker astride the globe, that was collected by Sally Stein and hung in a tableau on the stairs at their home (fig. 1). I am particularly interested in this one because of Allan's curious behavior around it. He was, Sally tells us, completely indifferent to it. And yet in her eyes, it was precisely a portrait of Allan himself:

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[12] I am echoing here Derrida, *Archive Fever*.
[13] Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, 129.
[14] Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*.
[15] Compton, *Off the Deep End*.

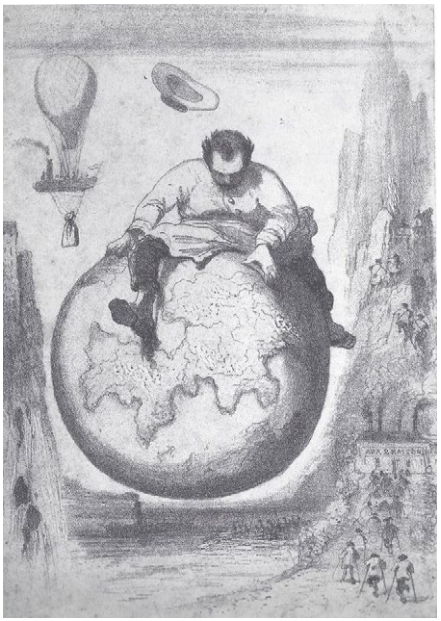


Figure 1. Anon. (probably French artist), Untitled chine-collé lithograph, ca 1870s, 16,2x11,5 cm. (C) Photo: Mary Reinisch Sackett. Collection and Permission of Sally Stein.

> To my surprise, this nineteenth century French lithograph did not produce much reaction, let alone self-recognition – despite the centrality of a stocky smocked worker (with a markedly receding hairline similar to Allan's) who studies the globe while perched atop it. He simply ignored this one image I considered so emblematic of his insatiable quest to encompass the world and fathom its linked systems of politics, production, and communication.[16]

I don't think this is a case of 'Dorian Sekula', the shameful repression of one's own revelatory portrait. In fact, it seems to me just the opposite, revealing instead an image of a certain political ego ideal, a fantasy of the global working class as the vanguard of world revolution. Instead of holding up the world as a Herculean burden, the anarchist dockworker is riding on top of the world. Could it have been just a bit embarrassing in its explicit reminder of Allan's own attachment to the lost world of maritime space during the industrial revolution, the age of the IWW and international workers solidarity? In today's maritime space, the disastrous underbelly of Leviathan is hidden from view, as national flags are rented out by

[16] Stein, "Collection and Recollection," 99.

multi-national corporations to evade regulations, with disastrous consequences. Allan was constructing his 'archive from below', in the otherwise invisible spaces of the everyday in contemporary maritime space.

The Atlas-like dockworker astride the world might have been a bit too grandiose for Allan's temperament. I do think he should have looked longer at this picture, where he could have seen in it a compelling portrait of his own paradoxical task. For it is undeniable that he was trying to 'take it all in', to mount the planet and recollect 'everything'.[17] He had seen the planetary madness, and now he had caught it, and was riding it like a runaway horse. The French worker is not securely positioned above the globe in the position of an unmoved mover or detached surveyor. He seems to be rolling atop it, and could be tossed off any moment, as indicated by the way his hat is flying off. His left hand is spread out in a measuring gesture, as if he is estimating distances, while his right-hand grips the edge of the world to keep him from falling off (fig. 2).

Sekula's globe is advancing into a perilous fjord, a chasm between two steep cliffs, perhaps an echo of the 'pillars of Hercules', erected by the hero to hold up the sky. The left side is surmounted by a castle, the other with a procession of crippled workers marching uphill to a smoking factory called "Aux 2 Maison." Above on the right, mountain climbers are clambering up the rock face, perhaps to join their globe-riding comrade, while on the left, three ghostly figures ascend the rock face toward the medieval castle at the top, perhaps echoing the theme of ascent to the heavenly city. Out in the harbor the vague outline of a steamship is on the horizon, and a body of men seems to be advancing down the beach brandishing pikes (fig. 3), perhaps an echo of Constantin Meunier's monumental sculptures of 19th century workers which were a crucial inspiration for Sekula's project; a portrait of the great Belgian realist is included in *The Docker's Museum* (fig. 4).

And in the sky in the background, the new mode of planetary transport hovers a hot air balloon, anchored by a sandbag, Carrying, not the expected gondola, but a steamship (fig. 5).

The airship is the ironic punctum complicating Allan's project of an "Atlas from below." Cyberspace and air freight are the communication and transportation media that made his *Docker's Museum* collection possible. In the long, boring stretches of seafaring, Allan spent a lot of time ordering 'objects of interest' on eBay. Cyberspace was taking over his work

[17] The craving for totality, for the entire world that a collection represents, is shared across many disciplines, and even the State. Consider the NSA's mad project of monitoring and archiving all network communication, CIA Director John Brennan's 'we want it all'. Ironically Brennan is now a slender line of defense against Trump's treasonous behavior.

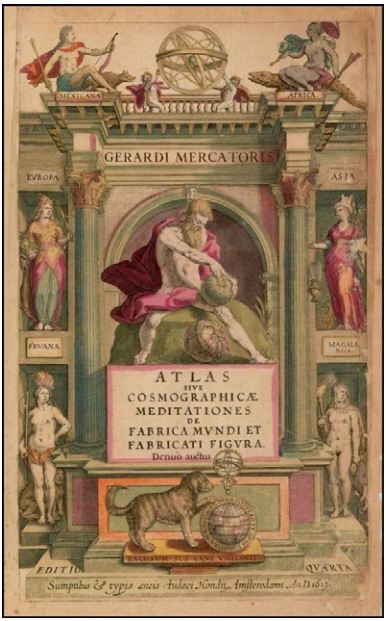


Figure 2. An etching showing Atlas sitting on a rock, measuring a globe with extended fingers with another globe at his feet. An etching showing Atlas sitting on a rock, measuring a globe with extended fingers with another globe at his feet.

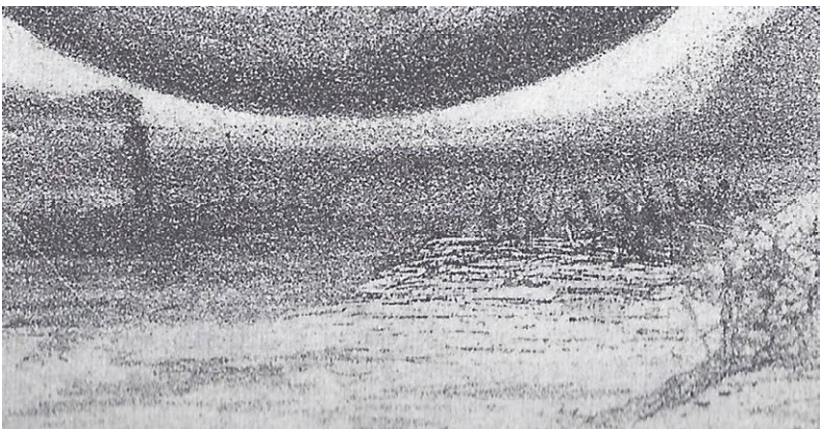


Figure 3. Anon. (probably French artist), Untitled chine-collé lithograph, ca 1870s (detail of fig. 1). Steamship approaching coast where crowd awaits brandishing pikes.



Figure 4. Constantin Meunier, The Peasants' War – The Gathering (1875). Oil on canvas, 114.5 cm x 176 cm. Meunier Museum, Brussels. A painting of a crowd of men with pikes, muskets, and a crucifix assembled on a beach.

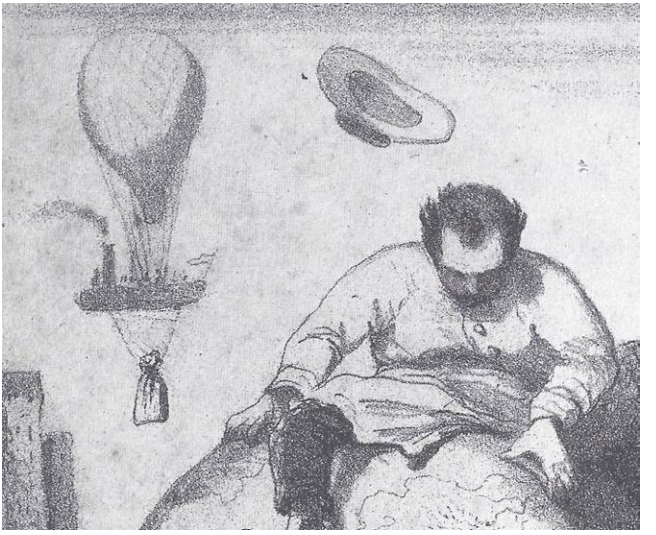


Figure 5. Anon. (probably French artist), Untitled chine-collé lithograph, ca 1870s (detail of fig. 1). A detail of a lithograph showing a worker sitting on a globe, a hot air balloon carrying a steamship behind him.

as a hunter-gatherer of images and objects, leaving behind an amazing variety of objects, from crutches to a soccer ball signed by Pelé, the closest thing I can find in the *The Docker's Museum* to a globe. I hope that future curators will not be parsimonious about displaying these objects; they should definitely not be treated as auratic singularities. I would try instead to show their abundance and fecundity; and overwhelm the beholder the way Sally was overwhelmed. Keep some of them in packing crates, unopened. There is no need for an exhibition of these objects to look orderly. My sense is that he was trying to bring these things together with the images to produce a kind of exhibitionary archive from below, perhaps a submarine space 'below decks', an ark of the history of maritime space. In a sense, then, the anonymous 19th century French print plays the role of archon for this archive, showing the worker as a young global knight errant astride his planetary steed. This image builds upon a whole genealogy of planetary, global iconography. And here I have to confess that I have come down with a serious case of the planetary madness that afflicted Allan Sekula, and found myself compiling a boundless archive of 'world pictures' that link images of the globe to seafaring, fortune, risk, and work, from the onset of early modern maritime space until the present day. My condition is not nearly as serious as that of Peter Sloterdijk, whose meditation on the philosophical status of the sphere (from bubbles to globes to foams) now occupies three capacious volumes.[18] The following, then, should be taken as a provisional *Bilderatlas* of planetary madness that is purely speculative and improvisatory. Somehow this seems like the right place to take this risk.

We could begin with Warburg himself, and with "Panel B," (fig. 6) his 'panel of panels', a cosmological tableau linking the early modern seafaring discovery that 'the world is round', with the ancient belief that 'man is the measure' of that circumference, his body a microcosm of the macrocosm, ruled by the same elementary humours, earth, air, water, and fire.[19] Leonardo's Vitruvian man might be exhibit A, along with Hildegaard von Bingen's and Blake's Albion Rising. Portrayals of the planet as a kind of "hand-held device" in the firm grasp of Christ as *salvator mundi*, the savior of a planet bound together by Christian imperialism might serve as exhibit B (fig. 7).[20]

But, aside from Atlas, it is arguably the figure of the Roman goddess Fortuna that is the most apt predecessor for the thoroughly secular world

[18] Peter Sloterdijk is the author of *Spheres*, a three-volume work that includes *Globes* as volume two, a world history and philosophy of globalization. Volume 1 is *Bubbles*; volume 3 is *Foam*.
[19] See Papapetros, "Panel B Introduction 1-3."
[20] For further discussion of these images, see Mitchell, *Image Science*, 93.

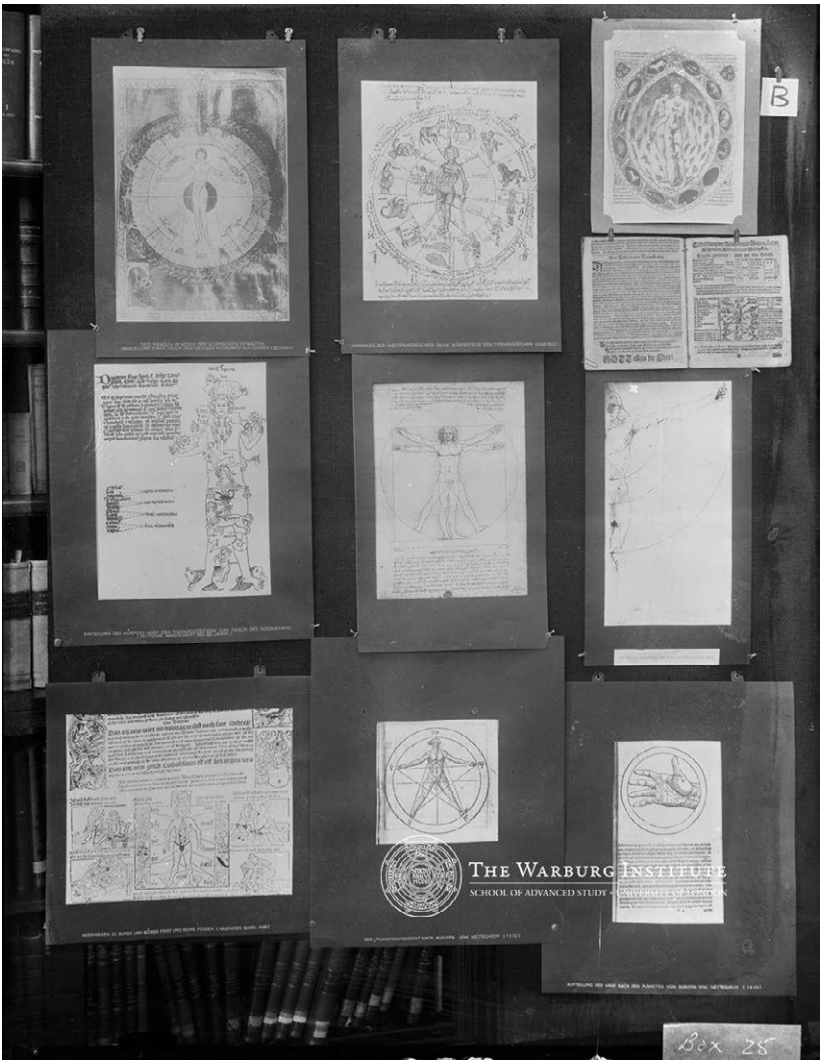


Figure 6. Aby Warburg, Bilderatlas, Panel B. From Cosmic Diagrams (1929). Warburg Institute, London. A photograph of a panel from Warburg's Bilderatlas with cosmic diagrams showing images of global order and the Vitruvian Man.

in the French print. Fortuna is frequently portrayed as the goddess of the lucrative but risky world of maritime commerce. She is often shown standing precariously on the globe, buffeted by winds which she catches in her shawl, as if she were herself a sailing ship.



Figure 7. Titian, Salvator Mundi (Christ with an Orb) (ca. 1520-30). Kunsthistoric-sche Museum, Wien. A portrait of Christ holding the globe in his hands, one hand raised with a halo softly illuminating his head.



Figure 8. Jean Francois Bernard, Fortuna, Goddess of Fortune (late 1800s). Oil on canvas. Private collection. A painting of a winged woman in a gauzy dress standing on globe and showering endless gold coins upon the earth from a shell.

In her positive appearance as "Felicitas" and riches she pours forth an abundance of gold coins, as in Jean Francois Bernard's (1829-1894). Goddess of Luck and Risk, she is the keeper of our destiny and the guiding power behind all fortunate and unfortunate turns of events (fig. 8).

In Fortuna's negative role as Tyche or Nemesis (fig. 9), she is a blind goddess who personifies chance, risk, and the ever-present possibility of disaster so central to the world of global commerce conducted in maritime space. Here she is seen standing on the globe, oblivious to the catastrophe unfolding at her feet, and the useless appeals of petitioners atop the heap of human bodies. In the background, the citadel seems to be going



Figure 9. Kuntz Tadeusz Konicz, Fortuna (1754). Oil on canvas, 114 cm x 163 cm. National Museum, Warsaw. A painting of the Goddess Fortuna blindfolded and standing upon a globe as war rages around her and figures desperately reach toward her.

up in flames, the figure of Victory is mourning defeat at the left, and in the distance, we see a ship buffeted by storms. That is why Fortuna is so often associated with the sea or stands on a globe between the images of a sailing ship and a church, rather like the Ancient Mariner returning to his 'home countree'.

One of the most interesting troves of 'globalizing' or 'planetary' images is to be found in a relatively little known *Bilderbuch* by the German artist, Andreas Friedrich, the *Emblemata Nova* of 1617.[21] Published in the period of the first great voyages, Friedrich's engravings depict the globe in ways that I think Allan Sekula would have found deeply resonant with his *Ship of Fools* understood as a planetary project. Perhaps most congenial to Sekula's vision would have been this emblem of the globe as itself the cargo on a ship that is being rowed by the devil (fig. 10).

Instead of Fortuna, we find a literal 'fortune' atop the globe, in which the symbols of Faith and Justice have been planted. Atop the central pedestal is the Cock who crows the impending dawn of a Divine Providence

[21] Martin, "Eschatological Perspective."



Figure 10. Andreas Friedrich, Alles vergänglich nimt ein End (Everything transient has an end) (1617). Engraving (attrib Jacques de Zettre). From the series Emblemata Nova. An engraving of a ship rowed by a devil bearing a globe with riches, the cross of Faith, the sword of Justice, and a rooster signifying End Times.



Figure 11. Andreas Friedrich, Globe as human masses (1617). Engraving (attrib. Jacques de Zettre). From the series Emblemata Nova. An engraving of a globe consisting of human faces. An hourglass hangs from an inverted triangle of light above the globe.

that will replace the reign of money. The hour-glass on the bowsprit tells the devil that although he is in control at the moment, his time is running out. It is as if the Ship of fools has been globalized, as if all the world's inhabitants are 'in the same boat', an idea that is made explicit in a subsequent emblem of the world as itself a kind of Leviathan comprised of the human multitudes[22] (fig. 11).

Friedrich's sardonic vision of a world driven by money is made most explicit in this image of the Christian imperial *globus cruciger* resting atop a bag of money, as the prize in a tug of war between the Devil and the Fool.

A blank heraldic shield is topped by a death's head that supports the familiar hour-glass, and beneath the money bag are strewn various objects of interest: a casket with crucifix, a pair of staves, a sword and what might be the notorious torture instrument known as a cat of nine tails. At the

[22] On the figure of the globe as etymologically a multitude, see Mitchell, "World Pictures."



Figure 12. Andreas Friedrich, Globus Cruciger (1617). Engraving (attrib. Jacques de Zettre). From the series Emblemata Nova. An engraving of a Christian globe sitting on a bag of coins with the Devil and the Fool holding it by a pair of horns.

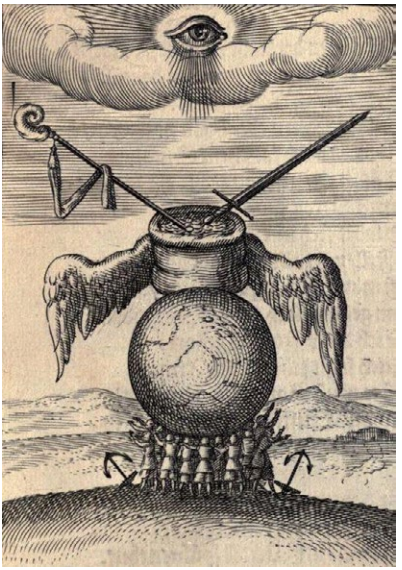


Figure 13. Andreas Friedrich, Der Welt und nachtlicht (The world and night light) (1617). Engraving (attrib. Jacques de Zettre). From the series Emblemata Nova. An engraving of a globe with a winged money bag, a sword and shepherd's crook sticking out of the money bag, held up by a crowd of mariners. The eye of God watches from above.

bottom center are a pair of dismembered hands, locked in a handshake which I cannot resist reading as an emblem of the 'art of the deal'. This bleak vision is reinforced by the next emblem, which portrays the world under the sovereignty of the devil, on an altar attended by a pair of burghers, one of whom is drinking to excess, flanked by figures of the Seven Deadly Sins.

What about the great masses of workers who hold up the world? They are shown in this emblem (fig. 13) like a crowd of Sekula's dockworkers, anchoring the planet, staggering under its weight, and gesturing for relief.

But the world they support with their labor is itself weighed down once again by the winged curse of money, which serves as the potting soil for a shepherd's crook and a sword, the emblems of Religion and War. This is about as close as Friedrich comes to hinting at an impious message, relieved only by the all-seeing eye of God above, who presumably



Figure 14. Andreas Friedrich, The Globe surmounted by dominant professions: Soldier, Priest, and Farmer, (1617). Engraving (attrib. Jacques de Zettre). From the series Emblemata Nova. An engraving of a soldier, priest, and farmer standing on top of a globe, each receiving a symbol of their profession from the heavens.

will set things right. If the masses of proletarian and peasant labor hold up the world in Friedrich's planetary emblem, the figures of the dominant classes are shown in the following image where the soldier, the priest, and (probably) the farmer are shown receiving the instruments of their professions from on high (fig. 14).

One year after *Emblemata Novus*, Michael Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens* appeared, featuring the following image (fig. 15).

Instead of the earth as a globe dominated or upheld by men, or ridden by the fickle goddess of Fortune, she appears as what Bruno Latour calls Gaia, the Mother Earth who is the source of all the life-forms that we know. Peter Sloterdijk reads this as an emblem of Catholic Mariolatry, which places the mother at the center, only to render her subordinate to the divine child that she is nursing.[23] I read this quite differently, as Destination Earth, the goal of human flourishing that has overcome both the false destinations of the national homeland and the abstract figure of a globalizing process driven by folly and vice, the madness and greed of neoliberalism. Probably I am being anachronistic in a reading that tries

[23] Sloterdijk, *Globes*, 102.

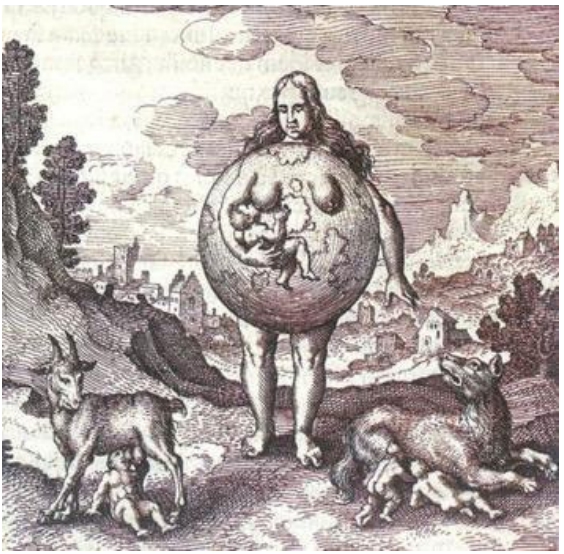


Figure 15. Michael Maier, Emblema II: Nutrix ejus terra est (The Earth is his nurse). Engraving (attrib. Matthaeus Merian). From Atalanta Fugiens (1618). Earth as Mother Goddess. An engraving of Mother Earth suckling a baby while standing in a landscape with human babies nursing from a goat and a wolf.

to bring us 'down to earth'; but so is the image. It launches me forward to the period of the French Revolution when William Blake provided his own images of the global imaginary in the form of three figures. Instead of the trio of Warrior, Priest, and Farmer, Blake gives us three planetary deities: the rational Newtonian mathematician who measures the world as a geometric abstraction (fig. 16); the artisan blacksmith, who creates the world out of material labor (fig. 17); and his own version of the *Terra nutrix*, a maternal goddess who is giving birth to a world that is still in its embryonic form, the placenta still attached to the mother (fig. 18).

Conclusion: Back to Allan Sekula.

I have tried to envelope Allan Sekula's 'atlas from below', within a complementary archive launched by reflections on Sally Stein's portrait of the artist as a worker of the world. Sometimes these workers appear as Herculean figures or burdened masses lifting the world on their shoulders; more often, they seem to be ordinary folks – a drunken pilot, a cleaning woman, a coal miner – or ordinary objects: a soccer ball, a crutch,



Figure 16. William Blake, The Ancient of Days (1794). Frontispiece to Europe: A Prophecy. Relief and white-line etching with extensive hand coloring, 30.8 x 24.8 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. An etching showing a god figure leaning down from the heavens to measure the universe with his compasses.



Figure 17. William Blake, The Song of Los (1795). Relief etching with color printing and hand coloring, 35.9 x 24.8 cm. The Morgan Library and Museum, New York. An etching showing Blake's character Los forging a fiery globe on his anvil.

a wrench. At all times, I think, they are parts of what Gustave Courbet called 'real allegories', objects and images seized from the world to constitute that world 'from below'. The presence of allegory seems to me especially undeniable in the explicit moral contrast between the 'good' and 'bad' ships, the Salamis Glory, like the traditional 'Ship of fools' dedicated to nothing but idleness, consumption, and oblivious distraction, and the good ship of Global Mariners, the 'wise fools' who carry no commodities around the world, just a body of critical thinking.[24] Sekula did not shrink from vulgar Marxist moralizing, making sure that the modern devils and fools of capital would make their appearance (fig. 19).

Andreas Friedrich would, I think, recognize the presence of emblematics in every image and object of *Ship of Fools/Dockers Museum*. But he would also understand that this artist has no need to literalize the image of

[24] On Sekula's egalitarian pedagogy and the imagery of Plato and the globe, see Van Gelder, "Allan Sekula's Panecasticism," 103.

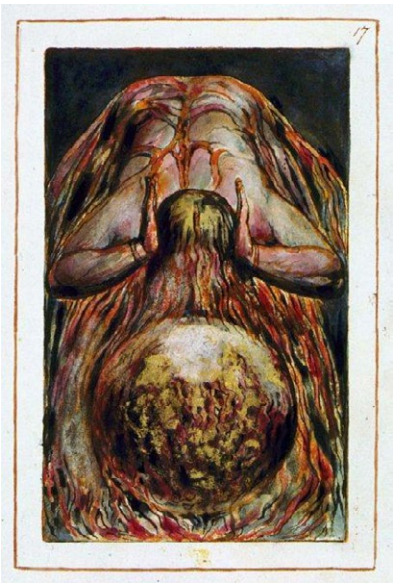


Figure 18. William Blake, The First Book of Urizen (1794), "Enitharmon gestating globe." Relief etching with hand colouring, 26 x 18 cm. copy G, in the collection of the Library of Congress. An etching showing Blake's character Enitharmon as a maternal goddess giving birth to a world still in embryonic form, the globe still attached to her body like a placenta.



Figure 19. Mutiny [as identified by Allan Sekula]. Cartoon, graphic digitally rendered as vinyl cut-outs, published in The Labor Defender (December 1937), variable dimensions. Element of Allan Sekula's The Dockers' Museum (2010-2013). Photograph: Reproduced with permission of Sally Stein. A cartoon of capitalists in suits and top hats screaming "Mutiny" at a steamship tied to the dock.

the globe as he did, or as I have done, but can let the smallest detail stand for the totality. Even the simplest part-object – a wrench displaced on a welder's bench – has the effect of putting this tool back to work in service of a photographic revelation of the fossilized detritus of capital (fig. 20).

In place of the eye of God surveying the global Ship of fools, Sekula offers his own keen eye, seeing everything through the lens of a critical historical materialism and radically egalitarian politics. One wonders, at what point in his voyage of discovery, did this artist mariner-detective begin to notice that some of the ship's equipment was starting to look back at him (fig. 21)?

Was it before or after he spent a bit too long contemplating the 'churn' or wake left by the Ship of fools, and abandoned himself to the oceanic madness of his final work?

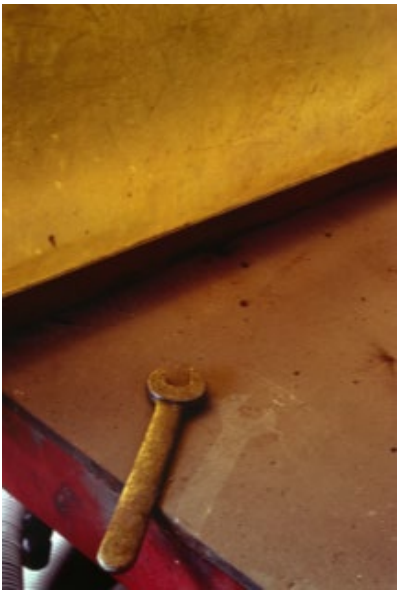


Figure 20. Allan Sekula, Welder's booth in bankrupt Todd Shipyard. Two years after closing. Los Angeles harbor. San Pedro, California. July 1991. Cibachrome print. From the series Fish Story (1988-1995). Photograph: Courtesy of the Allan Sekula Studio. A photograph of a wrench on a welder's bench that has been moved a few inches, revealing the trace of its shape surrounded by the rust on the bench.

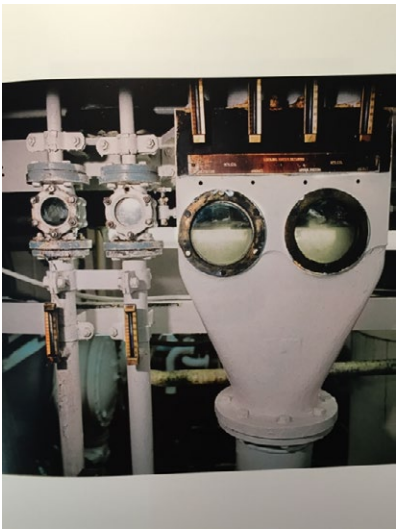


Figure 21. Allan Sekula, Engine Room Eyes 3. Chromogenic print. From the series Ship of Fools (2010). Photograph: Courtesy of the Allan Sekula Studio. A photograph showing pipe joints with round glass windows that look like eyes staring back at the viewer.

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Figure 22. Allan Sekula, Churn. Chromogenic print. From the series Ship of Fools (2010). Photograph: Courtesy of the Allan Sekula Studio. A photograph of a seascape from the rear of a ship showing the wake trailing off to the horizon.

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Il tema

Beyond Deglobalization. The World, the Globe, and the Planet

Oltre la deglobalizzazione. Il mondo, il globo e il pianeta

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Abstract. The article challenges contemporary claims of 'deglobalization' by critiquing the 1990s understanding of globalization as a homogenizing, market-driven project under U.S. hegemony. Drawing on and extending the authors' work on 'global processes', it proposes an alternative analytical framework that foregrounds the heterogeneous, frictional, and infrastructural dynamics of finance, logistics, extraction, and digital platforms. Situating the current conjuncture within a conflictual multipolar order marked by war, pole formation, and disrupted relations between capitalism and territorialism, the authors reconceptualize transition as an open and contested spatiotemporal process. They call for a renewed internationalism capable of confronting the global operations of capital and articulating a politics of liberation.

Keywords: war, globalization, territorialization, blocs, temporality of transition.

Riassunto. L'articolo mette in discussione le contemporanee tesi sulla "deglobalizzazione" criticando la lettura degli anni Novanta che intendeva la globalizzazione come un progetto omogeneizzante e guidato dalle logiche di mercato, esercitato sotto l'egemonia statunitense. A partire dal lavoro degli autori sui "processi globali," e sviluppandolo ulteriormente, viene proposto un quadro analitico alternativo che porta alla luce le dinamiche eterogenee, di frizione e infrastrutturali della finanza, della logistica, dell'estrazione e delle piattaforme digitali. Collocando l'attuale congiuntura all'interno di un ordine multipolare conflittuale segnato dalla guerra, dalla

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formazione di poli e dalla rottura delle relazioni tra capitalismo e territorialismo, gli autori riconcettualizzano la transizione come un processo spazio-temporale aperto e contestato. Essi invocano un rinnovato internazionalismo, capace di contrastare le operazioni globali del capitale e di articolare una politica di liberazione.

Parole chiave: guerra, globalizzazione, territorializzazione, blocchi, temporalità di transizione.

1. Globalization: what's in a name?

One may say that globalization is another name for capitalist modernity. World system theorists explain that in history there were many 'world systems', but that the capitalist one is the first in which the world coincides with the globe. Using a different conceptual language, Karl Marx famously argues in the *Grundrisse* that "the tendency to create the world market is directly given in the concept of capital itself."[1] Carl Schmitt, writing from a legal and political viewpoint in *The Nomos of the Earth*, observes that once the earth emerged as a measurable globe rather than a mythic imaginary, an entirely new problem arose: how to order the earth's space in terms of international law.[2] The world as a globe thus provides the spatial coordinates for economic, political, and legal history since the 15th century, framing it as a world history. The organization of global space is a key stake in that history, and while Europe and the broader West have long and violently struggled to occupy and maintain the center of the system through colonial and imperial expansion, the 'rest' of the world has never been a passive and peripheral actor. It has asserted multifarious forms of resistance, contestation, and negotiation that have shaped the very core of the system.[3]

It is important to keep in mind this general meaning of globalization (a word that did not exist in the 16th century, of course). It is not, however, what is meant by those who – facing 9/11, the 'global war on terror', the 2007/8 financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, and the current global turmoil – repeat from different and even opposite viewpoints that 'globalization is over. At stake here is the meaning of globalization acquired in the 1990s, when it was popularized as a word and became a widespread signifier framing debates on the state of the world in the wake of the end of the Cold War. The spirit of that moment can

[1] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 408.
[2] Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 86.
[3] Hall, "The West and the Rest."

be conjured through a handful of catchphrases: the space of flows placing the space of places under duress; the image of a borderless world; the cultural effects of McDonaldization; the US as 'lonely superpower' disciplining 'rogue states' through international police interventions. Together they indicate how globalization was cast, by apologists and critics alike, as a set of powerfully homogenizing processes, reshaping the world within the framework of a universal expansion of liberal democracy and market economy. At the core, it was the market that defined globalization, and globalization was deemed measurable through trade flows and the degree of openness of national economies.

We have two points to make regarding this. The first is that in current debates on deglobalization – as well as decoupling, reshoring, and the like – globalization continues to be understood as it was in the 1990s. The second is that in those years globalization basically named the contours of a specific project of capitalist and imperial reorganization of the world under US leadership. It was the time of uncontested neoliberal hegemony in the form of the Washington consensus, a time when China was preparing to join the WTO, and when, in July 2001, we stood in Genoa against a meeting of the G8 with the participation of Vladimir Putin – a moment that felt like the beginning of an ending. The project of global reorganization of capitalism associated with 1990s globalization was vast in ambition and consequential in effect. What matters most, however, is that this project collapsed in the years that followed and we are living today in the rubble generated by its defeat and failure. Abandoning the picture of globalization forged in that conjuncture is necessary. But we are equally wary of the notion of deglobalization – not only because it is built as a reverse image of globalization, but because it obscures the persistent relevance of vectors of unification in a world torn by fractures, tensions, and wars. A different conceptual language is needed.

In our previous work, we address this question by returning to methods and concepts tested in the critical discussion of globalization since the 1990s. Beyond the quick profile offered above, there were many notable attempts to come to grips with the world emerging after actually existing socialism. Étienne Balibar's work on the global relevance of borders and on the violence associated with their operations provided a powerful counterpoint to the prevailing rhetoric.[4] Stuart Hall's idea of a 'subaltern proliferation of difference' that exists alongside and in tension with 'globalization's homogenizing tendencies' pointed to a tension between homogenization and heterogenization that remains important today.[5] Hall

[4] Balibar, *Les Frontières de la Démocratie*.
[5] See Hall, "Conclusion."

also challenged the idea that globalization was a unilateral process driven by capital alone – a challenge that set the stage for Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's *Empire* (2000), which placed workers', anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist struggles at the center of globalization's genealogy rather than its margins.

Working with these and other sources, we propose in *Border as Method* and subsequent works to distinguish from the rhetoric of globalization what we call actually existing global processes.[6] This distinction is a foundational point of method for the investigation of capital and power in global space. Focusing attention on processes in the plural, we do not presume that they compose a system in the manner implied by the singular globalization. Rather, we emphasize the frictions and tensions generated among global processes, including those driving the development of finance, extraction, and logistics. In this way, we demonstrate how global processes, despite their relatively homogenous character, have heterogeneous effects when they 'hit the ground' in specific material contexts that deserve empirical observation.[7] Our subsequent writings on digital platforms and related processes of 'platformization' have further tested this framework, tracing the rapid spread of these processes across regions and continents and the different assemblages of power and resistance within which they operate.[8] A focus on global processes opens new viewpoints on the constitution of global space and the tensions that crack it, allowing us to hold together, rather than dissolve, both the unifying and fragmenting forces in an emerging multipolar world.

2. Global processes and infrastructures

One pitfall of the rhetoric of globalization was its impulse to identify a unit that was transformed by the singular process at hand. Most often this unit was the nation-state. If the world was being globalized, the argument went, changes would be evident at the national level. Consider the globalization index compiled by the KOF Swiss Economic Institute. Based on a series of data indicators, primarily economic but also social and political, this organization produces annual country rankings for globalization, ranging from the most to least globalized (in 2022, the Netherlands and Somalia respectively). Countervailing arguments have long contested this emphasis on the nation-state. Saskia Sassen's work on the global city posi-

[6] Mezzadra, Neilson, *Border as Method*.
[7] Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Politics of Operations*.
[8] Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*.

tioned urban space as more sensitive to globalization's pressures,[9] while analysts of global governance such as argued that globalization extends beyond state-centric systems to encompass international institutions, businesses, and civil society.[10] Yet the claim that the nation-state is the primary unit of globalization has remained prevalent. The notion of deglobalization does nothing to dislodge this notion. On the contrary, it entrenches and amplifies the primacy of the nation-state by suggesting that a reversal of globalization is evident in national level policy changes such as the raising of tariffs, the making of sovereign wealth funds, the support of state-owned enterprises, the introduction of industrial policies, or the imposition of export controls. We do not deny the importance of such measures, nor of the broader shift in relations between state and capital they reflect.[11] It seems clear today not only that capital is a direct political actor but also that the state has returned as a prominent economic actor, taking forms such as owner, promoter, supervisor and investor, especially since the 2008 economic crisis. But this is less an effect of nationalism or ideology than one of broad geopolitical, economic, and financial changes in the global development of capitalism. Placing an analytical emphasis on global processes means paying attention to the shifting spaces and scales of capital operations rather than just seeking to track or register their effects upon nation-state policies or the international system.

While global processes can loosely be classified as operating across the domains of finance, logistics, and extraction, we are less interested in proposing a taxonomy of these processes than in their material manifestations.[12] Observed through the lens of infrastructures, global processes at once materialize in physical configurations of hubs, routes, and connecting devices, and expand the powers of abstraction that enable the production and circulation of capital. Beyond the nexus of state and infrastructure long ago identified by Michael Mann,[13] contemporary large scale infrastructure projects like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which was interrupted by the Gaza war, have both geopolitical and geoeconomic relevance. These initiatives produce vast operational spaces that reorient geopolitics more toward connectivity than territoriality. They also seek to establish paths of capital circulation that buttress the integration of states with the global economy and offset the increasing inability of even the most powerful states to guarantee social reproduction – i.e., the reproduc-

[9] Sassen, *The Global City*.
[10] Ruggie, "Global Governance and 'New Governance Theory'."
[11] Alami, Dixon, *The Spectre of State Capitalism*.
[12] Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Politics of Operations*.
[13] Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State."

tion of both labor and capital. This competition over connectivity has a commodity dimension too. Items such as silicon chips, critical minerals, electric vehicle batteries, and photovoltaic panels have become critical to interstate tensions, with the mounting China-US conflict occupying center stage. Yet the expectation that US hegemonic decline will produce a Sino-centric replacement underestimates the complexity of the current moment. Multipolarity is not a stable destination but an unstable process: pole formation simultaneously registers a return to direct imperial domination – visible in the blackmailing and bullying of US foreign policy under Trump – while offering little sign that any emerging power can assume the role of global hegemon, whether through military coercion or the subtler work of cultural leadership.

Joyce C.H. Liu characterizes China's BRI as a new *Tianxia*, invoking a classical Confucian concept 'all under heaven' to understand this infrastructural and economic initiative as "a mode of ordering space and sovereignty [...] beyond national borders, shaping transnational zones of control through economic corridors, special economic zones (SEZs), and logistic networks."[14] Key to Liu's critical vision of China's infrastructural expansion is the reemergence of a certain political theology, which while not rooted in the monotheistic Catholicism favored by Carl Schmitt, rests in a similar link between law, land appropriation, and spatial ordering. It is certainly possible to associate other instances of pole formation with analogous claims for spiritual or civilizational destiny – think, for instance, of the centrality of *Hindutva* to the emergence of contemporary India, or the concept of the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) that animates the neo-Eurasianism espoused by Aleksandr Dugin and influential in the Putin regime. Some thinkers have gone so far as to argue that critical intellectual work on postcolonialism and decolonization, such as the writings of Partha Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty on resistance to European colonialism in India, have, however unintentionally, paved the way for this kind of civilizational thought.[15] This is a serious charge, deserving a fuller rebuttal than we can offer here; we note it as a symptom of the contested intellectual terrain on which any critique of pole formation must operate. Seen from the perspective of global processes, the theological and civilizational registers of pole formation are less its animating logic than its ideological expression. What drives pole formation is a more mundane set of pressures: propping up state power within circuits of capital circulation, securing logistical and infrastructural advantage, and controlling the extraction and flow of critical resources. Its geographies are consequently

[14] Liu, *Tianxia and its Discontents*, 39-40.
[15] Nanda, *Postcolonial Theory and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*.

nested and overlapping rather than homogeneous or neatly bounded – less a world dividing into blocs than a world of tangled and competing operational spaces, in which territorial ambitions like the Ukraine war or US designs on Greenland and the Panama Canal represent one register of a much wider and more dispersed struggle.

3. A conjuncture of war

It is important to keep global processes in view when accounting for the brewing geopolitical mess in today's world. The current proliferation of wars and processes of militarization beyond war certainly has multiple and complex causes, rooted in histories both national and imperial, as well as in intersecting patterns of racial, gender and nationalist domination. But the nexus of capital and war remains a crucial analytical conduit that complicates visions in which war is fought out against a background of international law, either upheld or violated, or impelled by its own logic of power and might, often defined in exclusively military or geostrategic terms. An attention to global processes puts war in a frame where the tensions between capitalism and territorialism, to use the terms of Giovanni Arrighi,[16] have come to a head. This approach highlights both the relevance of military activities other than war, including security operations like border control, and the role of wars conducted by non-military means, such as tech wars, trade wars, sanctions, and the like. Moreover, it highlights the unstable and shifting processes of pole formation and their relation to capital operations at once materialized in infrastructures and abstracted from labor and life.

A multipolar world need not be a more belligerent world than one patrolled by a lone superpower, yet it is a world in which the fiction of a retreat back into the national threatens to exacerbate the linkage of capital and violence. Realizing this is crucial to any politics that seeks to oppose current regimes of war. The current conjuncture is peculiar because the articulation between the international and the world systems has been disrupted, fracturing the alignment between territorialism and capitalism at the level of the world market. This is the most blatant manifestation of the collapse of the project of 'globalization' that we discuss in the first section of this essay. While we do not think that we are living through a linear 'hegemonic transition,' as we explained above, it is hard to deny that the present situation exhibits many characteristics typical of past periods in

[16] Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*.

which the world system was reorganized.[17] In such periods increasingly devastating wars – from the Napoleonic wars to the 20th century's World Wars – played important roles in facilitating transition. Recognizing this provides us with a point of entry for analyzing the current conjuncture, in which the weakening of US global hegemony runs parallel to a persistent interdependence that remains particularly apparent despite the rhetoric of 'decoupling' between China and the US, and the unifying vectors associated with global processes. What is distinctive about the present moment is that deepening fractures, tensions, and conflicts must be analyzed against the backdrop of the globality of economic and political developments. The same is valid for current wars and for the proliferation of war regimes across regions and continents.

The emergence of a multipolar world reflects the gaps between operations of capital – and the operative spaces they concur to create – and the territorial logic encapsulated in existing political spaces.[18] Our focus on processes of pole formation is an attempt to grasp those gaps and their workings. Today the world faces a centrifugal and conflictual multipolarism, in which the complex constitution of poles – understood in terms of relations between territorial and capitalist actors, as well as among capitalist actors themselves – can be organized and simplified in different ways. In particular, poles can be turned into *blocs* through processes of militarization that do not merely anticipate future wars but constitute the conditions for them. An analysis of imperialism today should focus precisely on such processes, identifying the fractions of capital and state apparatuses that push in the direction of bloc creation. At stake is the reorganization of global spaces as spaces both of political influence and of the valorization and accumulation of capital. Here the analysis of imperialism proposed by Rosa Luxemburg (1913) remains indispensable.[19] Where Lenin understood imperialism as capitalism's highest phase, Luxemburg grasped it as a structural feature of the capitalist mode of production itself, one whose violence and genocidal effects are not aberrations but conditions of capitalism's dynamism.

Today, imperialism operates against the background of a tendency to stagnation that has fundamentally altered the temporal horizon of capitalist development and crisis. This framework highlights something important in the international turmoil brought about by the initiatives of the second Trump administration in 2025. In a way, these initiatives register the weakening US global hegemony and aim – from what might be called

[17] Arrighi, Silver, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*.
[18] Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*.
[19] Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*.

a post-hegemonic perspective – to redraw the spaces for the projection of US political and economic power. Russia, and above all China figure in different ways as limits to the scope of this project, making the negotiation of 'deals' unavoidable, although particularly complicated in the Chinese case due to persisting interdependence.

This repositioning has multiple fronts. In the Middle East, the ongoing genocide in Gaza has been incorporated into a risky wager to foster a convergence of capitals from the region to turn the strip into a logistical and real estate "special economic zone."[20] Across the Atlantic, the renewed aggressive focus of the US on Latin America, with Trump backing Bolsonaro in Brazil and Milei in Argentina and with growing tensions and warmongering in the Caribbean against Venezuela at the time of writing, forms another dimension of the same reorientation. The emphasis on the national denomination of US capital, which appears as the guiding principle in current tariff and trade war policies, is crucial in this context: it can be read as an attempt to fill the gap between capitalism and territorialism, foreshadowing a new alliance between capital and the federal executive.[21] There is no shortage of similar tendencies in other parts of the world. That liberal commentators point to a kind of mirror effect in the relation between the US and China – both regarding a presumed 'state capitalism' and negotiating tactics – may be considered as symptomatic in this regard. Nonetheless we take the new alliance between capital and the state (whose transformations over the last decades deserve closer investigation) as a political project more than as an established fact, as was the case in classical theories of imperialism.

An important condition for this project is provided by the momentous processes of capital concentration witnessed in recent years. The global Covid-19 pandemic both revealed and intensified such processes, particularly in the digital domain, driving an unprecedented acceleration of the monopolistic tendencies long identified by scholars of digital platforms.[22] The huge infrastructural platforms of 'Big Tech' instantiate such a concentration of capital that now bears directly on the very infrastructures and codes of social cooperation. This scale of concentration has led several thinkers to speak of an emerging new feudalism[23] – an analogy that recalls the Gilded Age in the US. We do not think that we are living on the brink of 'capital's grave' and we remain unconvinced that the notion of feudalism is analytically or politically adequate to the stakes of the cur-

[20] See Bhandar, Toscano, "Property as Warfare."
[21] Hardt, Mezzadra, "Capital and the Global War Regime."
[22] Peck, Phillips, "The Platform Conjuncture."
[23] Morozov, "Critique of Techno-Feudal Reason"; Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism*; Dean, *Capital's Grave*.

rent conjuncture. But its widespread resonance is itself significant – symptomatic of the stagnation and exhausted dynamism that haunt contemporary capitalism. It is precisely in such situations that wars and war regimes can proliferate.

4. The globe and the planet

It has become commonplace to claim that the pandemic and the conjuncture of war has displaced climate change as the central global problem – pushing to the margins not only global warming but associated challenges such as resource depletion, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and urbanization. This displacement is visible in the terrain of social movements. The years prior to the pandemic saw prominent protests and campaigns by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Last Generation. In the wake of Covid, energies have shifted to opposing the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, not to mention the necessary mobilizations against internal war regimes such as the US 'civil war' against migrants[24] or the 'war against social reproduction' in Argentina.[25] This shift seems paradoxical given that the pandemic was a biopolitical event on a massive scale, a kind of dress rehearsal for the privations, divisions, and mobility restrictions that climate change might bring. Ida Dominijanni[26] offers one way to make sense of it: the impotence of states before the microbial threat of Covid, she argued in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, precipitated a backlash in which the old specters of sovereign violence and territorial control assumed new and frightening dimensions. Whatever the adequacy of this argument, the post-Covid period has drawn renewed attention to matters of human history, empire building, colonization, and capitalism – precisely the issues that a thinker like Dipesh Chakrabarty associates with the category of the globe as opposed to the planet.[27] For Chakrabarty, the planet refers to Earth as a vast, dynamic natural system that exists independently of human perspectives. It encompasses geological, atmospheric, oceanic, and biological processes unfolding over immense timescales, many of which have occurred long before humans appeared. The globe, by contrast, is a human construct, emerging about five hundred years ago and linked to politics, development, narratives of economic expansion, social processes, and cultural meanings.

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[24] De Genova, "From Border War to Civil War."
[25] Gago, "The Fascistisation of Social Reproduction."
[26] Dominijanni, "L'escalation delle parole."
[27] Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*.

Chakrabarty's insistence on thinking the planet and the globe in relation to each other is a productive starting point, though not all commentators follow him there. Some argue that the planet presents "a radical new way of understanding the world" at odds with globalization, which offers rather "a totalizing and capitalist centric concept that homogenizes the entire planet into a territory to conquer."[28] This contention that the planet replaces the globe as a historical-philosophical category for understanding the world does not accord the social movement dynamics discussed above. Moreover, it rests on the same homogenizing narrative of globalization that our conception of global processes seeks to contest, both conceptually and empirically. Missing here is an analysis of how capital operations take heterogeneous forms across different scales and spaces, despite the unifying tendencies that compose global capitalism. Chakrabarty is right that "the history of capitalism alone is not enough for us to make sense of the human situation today."[29] But this doesn't mean that climate change and its associated problems can be addressed in the current conjuncture without a critique of capitalism. 'Class struggle', as we have written before, "is not suspended in the Anthropocene."[30] There are several impressive attempts to come to terms with climate change in a frame that accounts for contemporary capitalism, from Jason W. Moore's work on the Capitalocene[31] to Andreas Malm's account of 'fossil capital'.[32] There are also disagreements about how anticapitalist politics should respond to ecological collapse. Kohei Saito[33] advocates a 'degrowth communism' that would heal the metabolic rift between humans and nature by a planned reduction of economic activity focused on democratic reforms in labor and production. Ecomodernists like Matthew T. Huber[34] argue that only a working class seizure of the means of energy production can establish the conditions for decarbonizing the economy. Although a dialogue between Saito and Huber suggests points of convergence, we are not interested here in reconciling these positions.[35] Rather we note that both degrowth and ecomodernism face a situation in which the prospects for any transformative ecological politics are conditioned by the conflicts between capitalism and territorialism, and the related tendency for poles to harden into blocs.

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[28] Mould, "From Globalisation to the Planetary," 1.
[29] Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, 4-5.
[30] Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*, 37.
[31] Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?*
[32] Malm, *Fossil Capital.*
[33] Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene.*
[34] Huber, *Climate Change as Class War.*
[35] See Future Histories, "Matt Huber & Kohei Saito on Growth, Progress and Left Imaginaries."

This hardening is nowhere more visible than in the domain of energy. Jean-Baptiste Fressoz[36] argues that the energy transition to renewables is not a simple replacement of fossil fuels but an addition to the overall energy mix, likely to result in increased total energy consumption. But clearly this mix takes different forms across the emerging poles of today's world. Energy production and distribution is hardwired into contemporary regimes of war, and, alongside militarization, contributes to the imperial vectors that push toward bloc formation. Although US investment in renewables has continued to grow under the second Trump administration, federal support for the energy transition has been severely restricted and there has been an effort to maximize fossil fuel production and export as a geopolitical strategy. At stake is not only the assertion of US dominance through energy control but also an effort to counter China's rise and bind allies through energy dependence. In the case of Russia, fossil fuel revenues, including from sales to geopolitical agonists in Europe and the renminbi denominated trade with China, have been crucial to funding the military aggression in Ukraine. And while China remains the world's largest consumer of fossil fuels, its preeminence in the production and export of renewable energy technologies is not only shifting its domestic energy mix but also contributing to its growing geopolitical influence. These developments shift the spatial dimensions of global politics in ways that modify the articulation of the international and world systems. To analyze their implications adequately, we need to approach the energy transition not only as a temporal process of technological and economic change but as a spatial dynamic that reconfigures the geographies of power, extraction, and circulation. This is an observation that extends beyond energy: it applies to the political analysis of transition as such.

5. Living in transition

Space and time have been strictly interwoven in debates on globalization. It is worth reading again from this viewpoint the original essay on the 'end of history' published by Francis Fukuyama in 1989, months before the fall of the Berlin wall. Building on Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, Fukuyama frames his argument from the beginning in geographical terms. "The triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*," he writes, was foreshadowed in the battle of Jena in 1806 and accomplished in "the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism" toward

[36] Fressoz, *More and More and More.*

the end of the Cold War.[37] The issue of the geographical conditions of 'world history', of the specific understanding of the 'world' upon which it is based,[38] was already clear in Kojève, who speaks of the 'vanguard of humanity' with respect to the French revolution and Napoleon. For Kojève, what had happened since 1806 "was but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon."[39] This 'extension of space' is not difficult to read as a figure for European colonial expansion. While Fukuyama takes critical distance from 'imperialism', the 'end of history' also appears as the accomplishment of that colonial expansion.[40] Its philosophical foundation is Kojève's notion of the 'universal and homogeneous State', homogeneous in the sense of "free from internal contradiction: from class strife, and so on."[41] Not only time, but also space becomes therefore homogeneous and void, to recall Walter Benjamin's quip on historicism. There is no alternative. The hallmark of temporality becomes repetition – a repetition that has haunted debates on globalization and neoliberalism since the 1990s, and whose affective register is perhaps better captured not by any theorist but by Shakespeare's Macbeth: "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow/creeps in this petty pace from day to day/to the last syllable of recorded time."[42]

Against this backdrop, something has radically changed in recent years, not necessarily for the better. Let us focus on two key points in Fukuyama's diagnosis of the end of history. First, the triumph of the West – as we wrote above – can no longer be taken for granted. It is challenged from without by the rise of other poles and world regions, and destabilized from within by mounting tensions between the US and Europe – tensions that have caused the very meaning of the West, always a metageographical notion[43] with a far from linear history, to begin to totter. Second, Fukuyama rehearses the vexed liberal opposition between trade and war, which found many instantiations between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Herbert Spencer's distinction between 'militant' and 'industrial' societies. The death of Marxism-Leninism, Fukuyama writes, "means the growing 'Common Marketization' of international relations, and the diminution of the likelihood of large-scale conflict between states."[44] That optimism is difficult to sustain today, when trade

[37] Fukuyama, "The End of History," 3.
[38] See Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*.
[39] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 160.
[40] Fukuyama, "The End of History," 16.
[41] Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 90.
[42] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 287.
[43] Lewis, Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*.
[44] Fukuyama, "The End of History," 18.

wars and increasing geopolitical tensions arise not despite commercial interdependence but from within its own dynamics.

The end of history takes different shapes today, for instance in the apocalyptical tones that abound in discussions of climate change and in the specters of decline that haunt Western societies, more often than not nurturing reactionary and even fascist political discourses. We do not follow these tendencies. We are more interested in analyses that identify contradictions and tensions as constitutive features of current temporality – analyses that can account for what Murray and Nir[45] describe as "intolerable stasis in the face of sharpening antagonisms and 'frantic overactivity'." While we have always contested the idea of an overcoming of all contradictions and 'class strife' in the global age (or since the battle of Jena in 1806, for that matter), our work has been inspired by an awareness of the density, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of historical time, which was nurtured in part by postcolonial critiques of 'historicism'.[46] This also informs our interest in the proliferating transitions (ecological, digital, energy, hegemonic, and the like) that characterize the present conjuncture. What makes up the temporality of transition? How are its spatial dynamics projected onto time in uneven and fractured ways? These questions require moving beyond the 'historicist' and teleological 'narrative of transition' that has prevailed in theories of modernization and capitalist development.[47] Transition today shares crucial characteristics with crisis: the accomplishment of transition, like the overcoming of crisis, matters less than the spaces of government and accumulation that its deployment brings into being. We understand transitions, more generally, as open processes in which different temporal vectors and spatial conditions are contradictorily articulated against the background of shifting compositions of social forces and persisting clashes. The temporality of transition is therefore far from linear – it is open to a panoply of interruptions. Transition is, at the end of the day, a field of struggle in which heterogeneous assemblages of space and time provide the ground not only for domination and the valorization of capital but also for struggles that may foreshadow a new politics of liberation.

We have lived through the exhaustion of philosophies of progress, and when we think of Benjamin's image of the "pile of debris"[48] too many concrete instances come to our mind, including pictures of Gaza today. Yet it is at the level of the world and at the intersection between the globe

[45] Murray, Nir, "Introduction," 1.
[46] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
[47] Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development*.
[48] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 258.

and the planet that a new politics of liberation needs to be invented. The world, however, is not a simple object. Grasping its totality raises philosophical problems and confronts thought with its limits. Writing in 1994, Paolo Virno drew on Kant's notion of the sublime to contend that the idea of "world is both the totality of the sensible context and the supersensible realm to which we are introduced by the 'unattainability' of totality'."[49] The 'suprasensible' here names the epistemic conditions under which the world becomes an object of knowledge. From our viewpoint, this is an important reference: it points to the cracks and fractures that make the unity of the world, its totality, both apparent and materially impossible. What we call global processes cut through the world, deploying unifying and even homogenizing effects but at the same time inciting heterogeneity and concurring to produce fractures with both temporal and spatial qualities. Today the rule of capital negotiates its relations with territorial actors through this interplay of unity and fractures in ways that drive the proliferation of wars and war regimes. We are confronted with a logic whose operative code is global, and which must therefore be confronted at the global level if we are to hijack the temporality of transition and bend it towards a politics of liberation. This bending becomes possible only if we approach the global not from above, taking it as an abstract totality, but from below, attending to the materiality of its constitution and the myriad of struggles crisscrossing it. Drawing out what is common in these struggles, articulating a new political language, and working through translation to foster its effectiveness in radically heterogeneous contexts is a very general, but for us necessary task. At stake is the invention of a new internationalism, capable of addressing the heterogeneous conditions of domination and exploitation and of articulating a common desire for liberation.[50]

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[49] Virno, *The Idea of World*, 16.

[50] Mezzadra, Neilson, "Reframing Internationalism."

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Il tema

On the Edge of Chaos: From Resilient System to Catastrophic Break Point

Sull'orlo del caos: dal sistema resiliente al punto di frattura catastrofico

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Abstract. Chaos's widespread diagnosis of global instability calls into question the systemic approach (indeterminism and complexity) that was the cornerstone not only of analysis but also of technocratic management, during the golden years of neoliberalism, above all through the metaphor of resilience. Today, an absolutized version of chaos prevails, enabling a centralized and un-mediated political/economic command, supported by the evidence-based algorithmic decision-making. Yet, from an epistemic (and social) point of view, chaos also opens bifurcations at the point of catastrophe.

Keywords: chaos theory, complex systems, neoliberal governance, resilience, unpredictability.

Riassunto. La diffusa diagnosi dell'instabilità globale in termini di caos problematizza l'approccio sistemico fondato sulla coppia concettuale indeterminismo/complessità, che costituiva la chiave di volta non solo delle analisi ma anche della gestione tecnocratica, durante gli anni d'oro del neoliberismo, soprattutto attraverso la metafora della resilienza. Oggi prevale una versione assolutizzata del caos che consente un comando politico-economico centralizzato e non mediato, supportato da un processo decisionale algoritmico basato sull'evidenza. Eppure, da un punto di vista epistemico (e sociale), il caos apre anche delle biforcazioni sul punto di catastrofe.

Parole chiave: teoria del caos, sistemi complessi, governance neoliberale, resilienza, imprevedibilità.

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1. Introduction. The Crisis of the Systemic Approach: Inside or Beyond?

This essay delves into the mutual influence between the current governance of global instability and the epistemic paradigms that support and are supported by it.

Calling this situation *Chaos*, as many do, questions the systemic approach based on the conceptual indeterminism/complexity pair, the keystone of understanding and global governance in the golden years of neoliberalism. Today, a chaotic version of that systemic paradigm is prevailing, which strains it to the point, perhaps, of overturning it. This onto-epistemic slippage is reflected in the flanking and over-ordination of political/economic command and control bent on security, over neoliberal management. A power structure based on control and automation is attached to an absolutized and unpredictable chaotic indeterminism.

It may then be useful to question the onto-epistemology of chaos. It is scientific, and its preferential socio-political interface is managerial-technocratic, effective because it is widespread in common sense. Therefore, its ambivalence and contestability must be explored. What hybrid metaphors, between common language and science, have been (or can be) derived from an onto-epistemology that speaks of bifurcations, points of catastrophe, strange attractors...?

It's more and more difficult to think that what we are going through is an infra-systemic transition, as in the paradigm, that is in many ways enlightening, of the historical-theorist of the world-system. And it's difficult because, however confirmed the systemic constants are (the centrality of the capitalist Weltmarkt and its *structural* connection with the political), perhaps the very self-referential character of the systemic approach (an indispensable acquisition of contemporary epistemology) implies a succession of systemic equilibria that emerge from each other; it therefore has difficulty grasping the discontinuity that messes up the interrelations, the emergence of a truly unforeseen *new*.

Moreover, the *transition* is apparent: the system is besieged by such a disorderly, critical reality that the great effort of systemic-cybernetic control and adaptation, effective in the neoliberal heyday, gives way hastily. The centrifugal forces of the many regions, unsatisfied with their peripheral status, which Arrighi[1] had already pointed out, the financialization of capitalism as a sign of the never-ending and yet-to-be-ending decline of US hegemony, and the endless and always-unresolved wars, are clear signs of the transition. But they do not exhaust the variables that today make it impossible to glimpse the *passing* that the idea of transition brings to mind.

[1] Arrighi, Silver, *Chaos and governance in the modern world system*.

What is missing above all – and in my view, this is crucial – is the accelerated and all-encompassing irruption of algorithmic technology, with the power it exerts both over decision-making and in the renewed and peremptory revitalization of military force: indeed, in the last decade, it has caused a fracture deeper than previous capitalist transitions/revolutions.

In the time of emphasis on globalization, new technology has provided decisive support to complex systems cybernetic thinking in managing an *open*, dynamic, systemic indeterminism.

Today, it provides the shaky system *on the edge of chaos*, with powerful tools of governing/intervening that deeply alter the exercise of military force, labor management and population control. Yet it is not without potential alternative uses.

The typical idea of the *global liberal order* years, under US hegemony, of being inside a complex system of interdependencies open to the plasticity of life where emergency was a positive chance; this idea, which the cybernetics theoretical and ideological revolution supported, setting itself as a *universal method* of communication and control across all fields of post-determinist knowledge and action; that idea, in the pressing of very serious endogenous crises, twists uncertainty/positive chance towards a pessimistic, anxiety-filled insecurity.

We speak of chaos: the world is thrown into a chaotic transition, without being able to imagine new equilibria. The dynamic balance of the system of global interdependencies (of geopolitics, finance, energy and logistics, labor and culture, health and climate: all subsystems, complex and dynamic in their own right, that cybernetics modeled and stochastically managed) proves incapable of the most typical systemic performance: adapting and absorbing emergencies through adequate feedback, metabolizing crises by growing on them, self-organizing at a higher level.

The system, instead, dies without dying, just as liberal democracy and the technocratic yet regulated governance that supported it, die without dying. Everything remains and is distorted. Everything coexists without synthesis; centrifugal forces reach the point of systemic non-tolerability. And so, in the onto-epistemology of complex and nonlinear systems, the focus shifts to a long-marginal field, due to its limited, always very short-term oriented, predictive capacity: chaos theory. It provides the heuristic tool of the *point of catastrophe,* the edge of chaos, where, due to exogenous and endogenous perturbations, the system moves away from the safety zone of homeostatic mechanisms.

This lexicon (rare in analyses, such as mine, that refer to the genealogical and historical paradigm) just belongs to the scientific-practical paradigm of the cybernetics of complex systems. Keeping it in mind is required by a genealogical analysis of the knowledges/powers that underlie

governmental technologies: it fuels (and in turn is fueled by) the neoliberal conceptual and metaphorical devices and follows its eclipse. Terms such as catallactic order, plasticity, autopoiesis, order by noise, retroaction and feedback, without fail, are rethought or give way to those of chaos theory: catastrophe, bifurcation, unpredictability, strange attractor, non-proportionality of effects... The belated and fluctuating fortune of chaos theory – which, mostly ignored when it emerged in the late nineteenth century and up until the sixties, after a rapid success in the eighties, falls into disinterest and today comes back, driven both by the urgency of the climate crisis and meteorology (the science of chaos par excellence), and even more so by the current Zeitgeist filled with insecurity – attests to its (preter-intentional!) socio-political use.[2]

From the *catastrophic* event of 2001, which revealed the unseen anger of peripheral peoples, to the implosion of the financial system in 2007/08 (the black swan event we will return to), the chaos metaphors multiply. Not only does the term *chaos* appear in the lucid analysis of the latest Arrighi, but it also recurs in mainstream political scientists' analysis, in economic and social theories, in management textbooks, and even in psychoanalysis.[3] As well as, of course, in everyday language.

Chaos theory, which, as we will see, in science refers to complex, nonlinear systems in which an infinitesimal and seemingly irrelevant variation gives rise to abnormal, in fact unpredictable, effects, shows a paradoxical intertwining of the determinism of highly irregular (mathematical deterministic chaos detects, in chaotic behaviors, not predictable regularities, following fuzzy logics) and the recognition, *scientific and therefore indisputable* of a very limited or irrelevant predictability. This *incoherent coexistence* – developing on the systemic generative emergentism well-managed by cybernetics – becomes the hallmark of our contemporary world.[4] Even more incoherent, as information technology, crucial to cybernetic governance but also key to diagnosing chaos, retains its own aim of control, while shifting the increasingly difficult stochastic prediction toward non-causal forms of induction based on pure correlation and contiguity. Chaos cannot be represented by causal processes, but only by top-

[2] The steps in the formalization of complex nonlinear systems range from Poincaré to the meteorologist Lorenz, "Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow," and, in the 1980s, to Prigogine, *Les Lois des Chaos*; Thom, *Paraboles et catastrophes*, outlined the morphogenetic nature of catastrophes.

[3] Arrighi, Silver, *Chaos and governance*. See also the pointed introduction of Mezzadra, "Introduzione alla nuova edizione"; Bull, *The anarchical society*; Kavalski, *World Politics at the Edge of Chaos*; Saperstein, "Chaos in models of arms races and the initiation of war"; Goodwin, *Chaotic Economic Dynamics*; Navarro, Arteta, "Chaos in human behaviour."

[4] Bazzicalupo, "Coesistenza."

ological patterns, drawn only by computer, as emerging from a limitless collection of micro-data. Computation does not produce prediction, but rather a figurative simulation of the possible. This is a powerful injection of contingency into a global systemic interdependence that, until a few decades ago, seemed indeterminate but governable, optimizable, thanks to the vital power of creative adaptation.

In chaotic systems, control, the primary aim of technoscience, coexists with its own failure. We only have historical series that can always be disproved. What if complexity were so indeterminate as to be ungovernable?

Contingency, recognized and metabolized by systemic theories, is absolutized in a dark feeling of ultimate risk of life itself; it creates fear and opens up a margin (which can be an abyss) of ungovernability. Then only a command external to the system, external to the dissolving cybernetic homeostatic, can attempt a new order or stress the disorder by making its command and predominant techno-political force weigh on it.

As cybernetic devices of managing emergencies and possible disasters are hastily updated, autonomy and self-governance (collective/democratic or individual/technocratic?), the pivots of the neoliberal immanentist narrative, are increasingly being replaced by the extrasystemic position of command. Whether political, military, or of the CEO/corporate owner, the decision-making *modus* does not change. The biographical overlap between economic-financial and political management makes the differences, although present, between the different kinds of leadership, irrelevant.

After a brief foreword to the interplay between everyday and scientific lexicon, we will explore the kind of power and control that the veridical regime of the indeterminate conveys in neoliberal globalization. We will then compare it with the role of the epistemology of chaos: how it, in a version that absolutizes its unpredictability, supports the authoritarian/decisionist turn, that paradoxically synergizes with *intelligent* automatism.

Concepts, words, and metaphors of complex and chaotic systems will drive us through the ambivalence that a serious taking charge of contingency (and its limits) brings to the political discourse.

2. Migrating Words: The Systemic Approach and Resilience

Why call into question such difficult scientific paradigms? Surely not because of a physicalist reductionism that enables techno-engineering or behaviorist responses to political challenges,[5] but because they are truthful

[5] In defense of mathematical and algorithmic models widely used in the social sciences, see Boccia Artieri, "Fare sociologia attraverso l'algoritmo"; and in a critical perspective, Airoldi,

regimes explicitly called upon to provide scientific, and therefore unquestionable, support for the management programs of economic, political, social, and even cultural systems (rarely critical). It shouldn't be surprising that some scientific words/concepts have become key words for the knowledge and technologies that manage society and, through them, have entered into everyone's lives: this transfer is just the core business of modern techno-science. Which is, in turn, affected by the reverse process: from social to scientific language.

The words used in public and daily discourse to describe the confusion overwhelming us are as dark as they are vague: crisis, catastrophe, disaster, apocalypse, chaos. Being emotionally full of anxiety and impotence, they are crucial for those who manage power. But they are also the words of science. Or, rather, they belong to the intermediate land between science and common sense, increasingly less distinguishable; despite the clear Platonic detachment between episteme and doxa, that modernity reinforced, basing the indisputability of science on it.

That detachment has long been in crisis, not only due to the irruption of the uncertain and indeterminate within nature and science, with the onto-epistemic scientific revolution of the early twentieth century, but perhaps more because of science's own growing and unproblematic admission of its own technical nature, contiguous to power. Today, we call science an apparatus that produces truthful statements, using techniques and producing techniques: a field of expertise that acquires and spreads material and symbolic credit. Its credibility arises by assembling 'formal' statements with trans-epistemic themes that make its media credibility fluid (and contestable). The truth test of theories is their problem-solving effectiveness: an explicit and conscious dependence on scientists themselves, embedded in investment and financing networks, political-military commissions, public and private projects, which they often, as chief investigators/entrepreneurs, personally manage. The impurity of technoscience is not denied at all today.[6] This is highly relevant for the translation of its conceptual knots to the study fields that directly govern lives and, through these, to common sense. Scientific language is increasingly taking on media-accessible terms, making explicit its relationship with social issues.

While the risks of this transposing/mixing languages must be quite clear, as techno-scientific solutions to political issues are quite the threat we wish to avoid, it cannot be denied that this intermingling, whether conscious or unconscious, is a fact and attests to broadly political working of the scientific apparatus.

"Teorie e dimensioni del potere algoritmico."

[6] Bazzicalupo, "Natura e politica."

Mixing occurs precisely through the metaphors of everyday language. In neoliberal governance, terms such as sustainability, adaptation, self-regulation, organization, resilience, and emergency, far from neutral/objective in common language, become theoretical-normative terms in the market, in the slang of financial traders, and in the 'principles' of the eco-biosystem in green policies. We talk about *constitutive metaphors*, which begin their journey from daily language, full of social demands, towards epistemology and then return, strengthened by the scientific paradigm, to a politically decisive common sense.

If the words of modern epistemology (order, balance, certainty) are getting less and less common, it's a sign that indeterminacy (epistemological in Heisenberg, ontological in quantum theories) has affected not only science but also management knowledge and common sense. It's hard today to deny that living beings and nature are ontologically historical, indeterminate, and complex: and therefore modifiable. The space for doing increases. Complexity is an asset: you just need to update techniques, metabolizing new coordinates and, by modeling the data, manage predictions.

In a time of neoliberal revolution, complexity and emergentism enter a catallactic framework, a multilevel interdependence that finds its own order, on the model of the market, which in turn models all organizations. Reduction (which is power) is exerted on *extrasystemic* interferences. The key words are self-organization, creativity, competitiveness, optimization, flexibility, adaptability, and self-responsibility: resilience. All 'borders of uncertainty'.

Digital technology provides the image of the indeterminate (the unlimited and interdependent worldwideweb) and at the same time pursues it with its powerful tools for computing and processing micrological data. It is it that gives form and communicability to a living and social world, made up of codes, messages, information, programs. Cybernetics therefore plays a key role: more than a science, it aims to be a method for *all* sciences, an attractor (we will return to this term) for all the others: from natural sciences to psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science and learning sciences. Its initially centripetal and homeostatic reasoning style, functional to self-referential systems, was rapidly updated in the eighties to meet the challenge of emerging behaviors. Which are, after all, practically all of them: crowds, consumers, market operators, users, voters, collectives...

From its first (and recurring) strategic-military matrix, it extends to business, financial, and political management, to which it lends its conceptual range: organization, reflection, program, control, retroactive feedback. The governance's work is twofold: internally, it is managed by conservative autonomous/automatic processes that integrate the emerg-

ing heterogeneous levels through homeostatic mechanisms; the external, indeterminate exchange, is instead stochastically governed with rules that produce new equilibria, enhancing the system. The ingenious Gould's *exaptation* enters the manager's behavioral code. And in neoliberal governance, also the leaders of political and public (corporatized) agencies are managers!

A relative uncertainty[7] is inherent to the process, but the systemic flexibility of responses can modify the program just in time. And no human agent does this better than deep-learning machines that automatically learn from mistakes. It is the dawn of a new millennium: uncertainty can be directed by integrating the emergency, quantifying as much as possible, and obsessively modeling virtual scenarios of variation. Emergency is governed by managing risk. Economics and finance are among the first social sciences to take over the terms of complex and reflexive systemics.[8]

But geopolitics also takes them on, mixing them with game theory and cognitive logic. The liberal order system, by its management models, *metabolizes* emergencies within higher levels of functionality. Even early financial crises and speculative bubbles are managed in such a way as to confirm the system's dynamic homeostasis. Thanks to them –– it is said –– the market is driven to give rise and set up to new systemic correlations which make it more efficient. Resilience, Horace, resilience! That's the mantra. System resilience works as long as it holds up in the face of turbulence, thanks to negative feedback;[9] individual resilience, indeed, is getting harder and harder in times of austerity. When the system, under the blows of endogenous and exogenous crises – health, climate, and, once again, financial crises – begins to crumble, it's on individuals that the duty to be resilient falls: the failed, the fired, the earthquake victim or the hungry must resist and adapt. Perhaps, they might even seize the opportunity to re-build[10] their lives![11] Besieged by incessant crises, disasters, wars, and epidemics, the recommendation/need to be *resilient* sounds mocking.

When there are signs of financial turbulence before the 2007 subprime crisis (a minor event in itself), the market does not respond with corrective feedback, which would bring it to stability, but by highlighting disorder: positive feedback that further distances it from equilibrium. It is on the edge of chaos. We know that political and financial resilience will

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[7] De Finetti, *La logica dell'incerto*.

[8] On embedded rationality, see the Nobel Simon, *Models of Bounded Rationality*; on the theory of decision-making under uncertainty (and behavioral finance), see another Nobel, Kahneman, Tversky, *Choices, Values and Frames*; on reflexivity, see Soros, *The Alchemy of Finance*.

[9] Walker, Cooper, "Genealogies of resilience."

[10] Joseph, "Governing through failure and denial."

[11] For a critical analysis see Schmidt, "Intuitively neoliberal?."

somehow react with ex post adjustments and controls, but chaos has barely been touched.

3. On the Edge of Chaos: Attractors and Bifurcations

A few months before the crash, mathematician and financial trader Nassim Taleb's book, *The Black Swan*, was published. Taleb, confusing chaos and chance, develops the idea that we are blind to the randomness of black swans, unpredictable catastrophes, but... If you became *anti-fragile*, that is, resilient in a constructive and useful way, it would be possible to whiten Juvenal's *rara avis*, that is, *to profit from catastrophe*.[12] The essay is remarkable not so much for the quality of its analysis, as it is for signaling a major epistemic shift that impacts governance; its worldwide success (followed by similar works: management manuals, policymaking and psycho-existential know-how) attests to the translation into common sense. The epistemic horizon does not change, but it veers toward chaos theory, whose indeterminism and unpredictability, however, are unduly absolutized: the line between chaos and pure chance becomes blurred. Furthermore, the centrality of the unexpected, surprising event, presaging the chaos, is recognized: the black swan enters the common mentality and language. The system is unable to metabolize it.

The event presents itself as a *point of catastrophe*, signaling a bifurcation that is as catastrophic/destructive as it is potentially morphogenetic: it therefore calls for a *decisive* choice for life. Hayek's catallactic and autopoietic system is disproved, and the oscillation both inside (homeostatic) and outside (integrative and exaptive) of the system, which long absorbed noise/disorder, doesn't work because the latter, the disorder, is, in practice, absolutely unpredictable: pure randomness.

Just because of this total lack of pattern, however, if you are *anti-fragile* (rather than merely resistant/resilient) and ready to change the rules, the catastrophic event can be a chance to exploit to your advantage.

Bringing indeterminism to its fullest extent impacts forms of power and can be functional to them. Indeed, socio-political powers paradoxically foster this mood of unpredictability and extreme randomness, therefore of ungovernability, which allows them not to investigate the historical sequences that conditioned the systemic collapse (supported in this by

[12] Anti-fragile people tolerate (and love) randomness, uncertainty, volatility, and errors: they benefit from chaos, do things well without understanding them, make non-predictive decisions: more than risk calculation, it is a reasoned gamble on an unpredictable future, typical of the stock speculator (trader). Assessable only ex post, by success or failure.

algorithmic logic). They settle on uncertainty and fear, in a paradoxical form of non-government.

It's now necessary to better focus on chaos and its metaphors by linking them to the techniques of government/non-government they influence.

Chaos, in its mythological root, is the void, the abyss from which the cosmos, the new order, will rise. For Plato, this leap requires an architect, the Demiurge, an ordering deity who counteracts the abyss: needless to say, this model has great weight in the history of Western politics. In fact, chaos in our language (which follows that philosophical myth and whose center is the logos/order) names pure, absolute disorder, the greatest risk, the reverse of the system.

The scientific paradigm, however, seemed to reverse that idea. Complex dynamic systems hold disorder and order together: *order by noise* enhances the generative potential of *noise*, managing it as we have seen, through vital plasticity and resilient adaptation; and so, even the subgroup of nonlinear chaotic systems, by the deterministic chaos oxymoron, detects, in disorder, self-replicating regularities, albeit in a fractal way: that is, it distances chaos from pure chance.[13] Save that we're not dealing here with simple *noise*, but with a disorder that (however generative it may be, but may not) marks an unusual discontinuity. The non-proportionality between a disordered event and its effects (beyond, therefore, linear causality) now signals a possible reversal of the system. A discontinuity, indeed. A clarification that would give a negative answer to our first question of whether or not chaos is an infrasystemic transition.

Epistemic metaphors shift from the adaptive resilience that ensures governability to the unpredictable event/turn, within an absolute and ungovernable indeterminism, which facts seem to confirm: risk shows its dark side threatening life itself; techniques for organizing uncertainty appear impotent, incompetent, or irrelevant: law (a classic stabilization tool) but also free trade, pragmatic mediation, the solidity of money, the productivity of global mixing, the human rights institution... These stabilizers, which in dynamic systems are called attractors, lose their effectiveness. To clarify: attractors are grooves, spectra of motion *within a space of competitive coexistence*, between the stabilization of communication and the instability of fluctuations: equilibria the process tends to gravitate towards, attracting data in an invisible order. Although called *values* in organizational theories, they have nothing ideal or transcendent; they are rather, *ethoi* that act as an immanent and effective center of gravity: normative, immanent, quite stable conventions, often not modeled, but ever-present. It is a sign of highest systemic fragility when the social stabilizer

[13] Casati, *Il caos*; Schuster, Wolfram, *Deterministic Chaos*.

par excellence, the law, which in its neoliberal metamorphosis worked as an attractor, ruling unstable social relations with adaptive flexibility, today, mainly at the international level, loses its grip. Once the stabilizers are loosened, the interdependent elements achieve partial autonomy by self-organizing in an uncontrollable and antagonistic way, despite the system's efforts to reprogram itself by integrating them. Thus a sequence of risky, catastrophic bifurcations emerges.

The chaotic behaviour of financial trading and geopolitical dynamics – aperiodic, predictable only in the very short term, unstable and reactive to small perturbations, seemingly random, producing disproportionate, nonlinear effects – signals the emergence of *chaotic attractors* sensitive indeed to minimal variations, toward which chaotic dynamics evolves.[14] In an Aristotelian space, non-isotropic as the chaotic one, where divergences in competition, specializations of parts, mutations of functions, system gradients coexist, attractors are virtual *patterns*, fractal, unexpected structures (for Poincaré even unimaginable, therefore *strange*), detectable only by very powerful computers.

But, strange as they are, they are the system's *horizon of predictability*: identifying them is the only way to read the chaotic movement. In their (perhaps incautious) translation to the social sciences, they show what a collective movement means: a crowd, a consumer group, or a political protest one... empirical group-behaviors (*ethoi*), that seem connected by contagion rather than by causal-final reasons: the algorithmic output presents them as automatons.

On the edge of chaos - a point of oscillation and bifurcation, neither order nor disorder - attractors can determine competition, cooperation, coevolution, but also discontinuity, bifurcations from which it's not at all sure that a self-correcting structure emerges, but rather *positive* feedback loops (in the market, in the war challenges, in the pursuit of tariffs) which increase entropic dissipation.[15]

At each critical bifurcation point, a size transition can arise from each anomalous behavior of the system. The neoliberal resilience itself can give rise to conditions that call into question the market-functional order. There may be strategic reversibilities: unexpected active resistance (Foucault-style) that changes the process's presuppositions. But unpredictability, bifurcation, catastrophe, and minimal but potentially decisive events become, above all, the keywords of the new way of governing. Each power agent holds them in the meaning that's most useful not to bend to the impotence that unpredictability could show.

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[14] Ruelle, "Small random perturbations"; Ruelle, "What is a strange Attractor?"
[15] Cohen, *The Edge of Chaos*.

From political or managerial think-tank meetings to popular newspapers and philosophy festivals, the term chaos is chosen to take a stance on it. The response of powers, as we will see, is to ride it, enhancing the entropic and dissipative drive, and at the same time blocking the bifurcation paths that could push it toward unwelcome solutions. Even critical and antagonistic analyses see chaos as a potential suddenly at hand.

4. Chaos Management and Master's Command

Let's start again from the suggestions of Taleb and the group of theorists who, like him, are faced with the crisis of the systemic approach, on the edge of chaos. Metaphors taken from the theory of chaos (read as unpredictable disorder) trivialize the complexity of the scientific paradigm: they rather respond to the need of economic and political powers to preserve a now paradoxical control, chasing chaos, identifying attractors/trends to bend them for their own profit. It's interesting to observe the twist of organizational science (the mother of all management disciplines, from business economics to public policies and geopolitics) in manuals and workshops: chaos management (so explicitly defined) is their most updated paradigm, updated to the narrative of absolute indeterminacy.[16]

Management focuses on the active/subjective, *anti-fragile*, rather than systemic response, and therefore on the leadership's protagonism. Managers/leaders are advised to implement even drastic organizational changes, in a spirit, needless to say, of creative, assertive, and *visionary* optimism (beyond the traditional efficiency-driven approach). The organization is one with the competitive individualism of the leader, whose mindset is proprietary, private, and, obviously, decision-making-oriented, in a struggle for survival in a politically unstable globality that does not guarantee predictions: a struggle that focuses above all on technological competition. The leader *knows* that the old stabilizing attractors (shared corporate objectives, shared decision-making, self-correcting feedback, rewards) are losing their weight and should be mentioned as subordinate to the potential need to cancel them. The challenge is to identify, anticipate or predict the unexpected, strange attractor that is the trend, not visible but present, in all chaotic movements (from meteorology to social systems, from financial markets to collective protests): an unexpected, decisive *value* capable of attracting behaviors and positive feedback that could amplify entropy up to a different power structure.[17]

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[16] Kotler, Caslione, *Chaotics*; Azzariti, *Il Caos*, 97.

[17] On manager leadership: Keene, "Complexity theory"; post-crisis, Griffin, Stacey, *Complexity and the experience of leading organizations*; Erçetin, Açikalin, *Chaos, Complexity and Leadership 2023*.

Today, we are dealing more than with organized theories, with workshops and podcasts that follow current winning practices: the emphasis on crossroads and bifurcations works for a revolutionary, *visionary,* and fearless leadership, setting on them to direct them, blocking other possible trends. A lot of metaphors invite the leader (and us) to surf, to ride the waves of chaos, exploiting risk and contradictions without avoiding them, without solving them.[18] It means welcoming disorder, drawing maximum energy from the crest of the wave (there is stasis upstream and downstream), occupying that apex of the bifurcation where it's possible to prevent trends that threaten one's own system of power, which morphs while remaining the same. A conservative revolution that paradoxically increases chaos. The needed merit, in an ever-changing world, is the speed of decision-making, which, rather than being carefully considered, must be timely, surprising, and unsettling for competitors: revolutionary, indeed. Schumpeter's *creative destruction* of the capitalist entrepreneur is often cited: the differences would be great, but the image, often compared to Weber's political leader, is strongly evocative.[19] It's light-years away from any idea of a self-managed, bottom-up order. Speed of decision-making is everything, when one is riding the crest of the chaotic wave, in the space-time that *decides* the organization's fate. Managerial leadership (in BigTech, the Ceo/owner) is highly hierarchical and exerts a surplus of control that adds to the loosening of interconnections between subsystems and exploits its own possible mistakes.[20] Deep learning technologies help in a major way to this well-running and self-enhancement, by replacing workers who might choose dissipative and entropic options: they automate them as much as possible to ensure obedience and predictability of the executive ranks. The *vision* of the decision maker rests, in fact, on the control of productive and social work, which in an unpredictable world, must increasingly be automated: robotic or passivized.

In chaos-management, the final attractor always remains the same: the capitalist valorization of social knowledge, but the *political* vector that supports it, is the avoidance or blocking of potential *strange and dissipative attractors* that compete with that: management is visionary as well as it is conservative. Flows of competitive or antagonistic behaviors that would derail the goal, and which, in the neoliberal cybernetic system, would have been hailed as creative, are blocked and overdetermined

[18] See the re-edition of another worldwide hit: Peters, Thriving on chaos; Sirkin, Hemerling, *Globality*.

[19] See also Ciappei, *Il realismo strategico nel governo dell'impresa*, where classical authors such as Carl von Clausewitz, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Sun Tzu are applied to business strategy.

[20] Miles, "The Billionaire King of Techtopia"; Chafkin, *The Contrarian*; Aresu, *Geopolitica dell'intelligenza artificiale.*

by decisions that are as timely as they are unforeseen, difficult to elude, unsettling.

Powers exploit chaotic unpredictability, indulging in it. Or rather, they themselves promote it to destabilize processes based on linear and proportional causality. After all, if a reality is totally unpredictable, it makes no sense to reconstruct the causes of events, nor to investigate the vectors that brought the system to the brink of chaos. The response can only be immediate, lightning-fast, crushing on the ongoing emergency, on presentism, which is, in fact, the temporal hallmark of the time, whether it is war, a financial crisis, global trade, emerging centers of power, or the magma of popular protest. And it's no coincidence that just-in-time presentism, the immediate, fast output (without analysis of causes and contexts), is the pride of algorithmic logic: correlations, connections, figures (or better, designs), simulations rather than interpretations, projects, and long-term plans that would require stories. It's the synergy of indeterminism, demiurgic solution, and cybernetic automatism. An immediate decision is called to untie the Gordian knot of complexity and instability. In chaos, everything can change; in chaos management, however, it is decided (the manager/demiurge commands) so that essentially nothing changes. Bifurcations end in a one-way exit.

5. Conclusions. The Battlefield of the Epistemic Horizon

Is this also the only possible reading? The bifurcation turns out to be a simple yet literally *decisive* metaphor. It shows the critical point of catastrophe as a crossroads: if, in the absolutely random (and therefore mythical) version of chaos theory, chaotic trajectories are multiple and unpredictable, competing between weakened but persistent conventions and still not explicit, *strange* trends, then the choice, the decision – a voluntaristic and political factor silenced by the neoliberal cybernetic narrative – becomes essential. And there is no doubt that this point of catastrophe, decisive and dependent on minimal variations, also holds appeal for those who, seeking radical systemic change, lack the strength to produce it. Indeterminism opens up possibilities not only for conservative, decisionist voluntarism that locks it into itself, but also for *minor* forces given up as losers in mainstream geopolitical models, and sometimes even in the critical and painful ones of world history. Huge and unforeseen effects caused by seemingly insignificant events: how should we read this trigger, this spark: random, determined, decision-made? Saying that the event is absolutely discontinuous and contingent still means oscillat-

ing between the current protagonism of decision makers and resting our hopes on chance.[21]

From this viewpoint, the onto-epistemic background matters and proves to be a battlefield.

Once the situation has been defined as the edge of chaos, projecting the decision onto a horizon of generalized, absolute, or partially knowable indeterminism, is relevant. Both management techniques and the logic of command, which we have seen as symbiotic, drag chaos towards pure randomness: both ride the chaos in the dystopian illusion of superimposing voluntaristic command by leveraging a hypothetical, total governability of automated infra-systemic behaviors.

By blocking possible alternatives, they foster fear of the abyss in a permanent *war regime*, a firm chaos and a mood of impending catastrophe, functional to this purpose. Nothing is solved because nothing must be solved: multiple and pressing endogenous crises showed that the system cannot hold up, that centrifugal vectors were sought and are seeking alternatives. The answer was: stay in the chaos, blocking it in.

Even recent social theories, that are seemingly critical but fully intra-systemic, insist on absolute indeterminism: new materialism, network analysis, reflexive approach. These ontologies shift from political issues towards a subjectivity that is structurally plastic and ever-evolving, unstable, vulnerable, but able to incessantly reinvent itself. Anti-fragile management! Even the term management is avoided. There is no room for conflictual collectives, material differences that weigh differently depending on the places, work, and on economic, cultural, and political contexts in their material linking. It's once again an individualistic idea of reflexivity, risk, talent and resilience that we know is exposed to techno-authoritarian management. The point is that, here too, the causes and constraints within the real exercise of freedom and power are removed.

The epistemic battle, therefore, shifts to those *constraints*, which the chaos manager's operational style ignores, removes, and erases with the help of algorithmic connectionism, which de-contextualizes and de-concretizes the power of human/social work, depriving it of its antagonistic potential.

Catastrophic bifurcations seem undecidable. Are they? The more unpredictably contingent the system is, the more the decision at the catastrophic point is eradicated by constraints, the more inactive is the hope for chance.

The epistemic horizon *matters*, and so does its contestability. The onto-epistemology that supports the current synergy of decisionism and

[21] In a critical key, see Kahneman, *Thinking fast and slow*.

automatism is more mythical than scientific. In science, however, mechanical deterministic paradigms and hybrid/dialectical paradigms coexist in conflict, which, however, consider (both in the mathematical and physical-meteorological matrix, and, even more, in the biological-evolutionary one) the coincidence of chaos and absolute contingency to be unacceptable, as it would prevent any theoretical reconstruction.

Evolutionary epigenetics highlights leaps, bifurcations, and generativity without erasing the conditioning and reciprocal relationship with the environment and with history. The bifurcations are many, and many and mostly accidental are the minimal variations that have weighed on an evolution that is *a cascade*, irreducibly dependent on the history of choices (random, exaptive, not always voluntaristic, indeed) at the bifurcations.[22]

Even more so, Foucault's genealogy of the social (but he is not the only one) is a history of discontinuity within processes of disciplining and norming immanent to lives: fractures in regimes of truth, surplus power arising (however conditioned) in power relations. It is a genealogy of *Entstehungen*, of insurgencies, gaps that break processes, divert them. And these points of contingency and instability, where the system can take different paths, are held together with the network of conditioning that structures the subjects.[23]

An indeterministic epistemic horizon certainly enhances the potential of the new. But it must be freed from the narrative that absolutizes it.

Our starting question – whether we are, today, in an infra-systemic transition of adjustments, retroactions and feedback, or whether a systemic rupture is occurring – refers us to the impure matrix of all ontologies whose truthful discourse has its origin and its end in the historical and political conjuncture. They are a battlefield where we must take a stand.

Perhaps those who endure this government/non-government grafted onto chaos/chance and aim to change the situation mood, must challenge the presumed unlimitedness of ontological indeterminism.

It's possible to affirm the coexistence (dialectical? not necessarily) of the onset (unforeseen events, eventualities, opportunities/kairos, to be seized perhaps in a Machiavellian key) with concrete, material systemic conditioning (immanent determinisms, causal series, constants). These constraints must be linked, as in epigenetics, to the valorization of chaos, which opens up to potential insurgence, to the strength of the minimal event, to be defended against any alleged cybernetic or structuralist annihilation. The fecundity of disorder is thus preserved and grafted onto a work of organizing the vectors of real and concrete struggles, ready to

[22] Gagliasso, "Lontani dal determinismo."
[23] Foucault, "Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire."

engage, in chaos, the potential glimmer of a *new* that is not, as Benjamin says, a masked and conservative repetition of the *always the same*.

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Il tema

Selling Nature, Buying Green. Two Neoliberal Roads to Environmental De-Politicisation

Vendere la natura, comprare "verde". Due vie neoliberali alla de-politicizzazione ambientale

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Abstract. While acknowledging the declining trajectory of the neoliberal order, this article explores de-politicising tendencies that keep environmental debates and practices deeply embedded in its logic. It focuses on how some central neoliberal patterns and practices remain alive and well, including their ability to cast a shadow over class struggles. In particular, the article examines two lines: the delegation of environmental protection to processes of privatisation, commodification, and marketisation (neoliberal conservation), which reduce conservation to technical decisions that appear politically neutral yet inherently involve ethical and political choices; and the reduction of environmental concern to individual positions and behaviours (neoliberal activism), entrenched in market dynamics and exemplifying a *hyperpolitical* era. These two heterogeneous tendencies withdraw environmental decisions from collective political contestation – the former by handing them over to markets and institutions, the latter by dissolving them into individual conduct. The article concludes that this twofold de-politicisation – together with the emerging forms of hyperpoliticised yet individualised engagement – exposes the limits of our modern and post-modern political categories and calls for new terms and frameworks through which to think the environmental question.

Keywords: environmental depoliticisation, environmental neoliberalism, neoliberal activism.

Riassunto. Pur riconoscendo la traiettoria di declino dell'ordine neoliberale, questo articolo esplora le tendenze alla depoliticizzazione che mantengono i dibattiti e le

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pratiche ambientali profondamente radicati nella sua logica. L'analisi si concentra sul modo in cui alcuni modelli e pratiche centrali del neoliberismo continuano a persistere, compresa la loro capacità di oscurare i conflitti di classe. In particolare, l'articolo esamina due direttrici: da un lato, la delega della tutela dell'ambiente ai processi di privatizzazione, mercificazione e marketizzazione (*neoliberal conservation*), che riducono la conservazione a decisioni tecniche apparentemente neutrali sul piano politico, ma che implicano inevitabilmente scelte etiche e politiche; dall'altro, la riduzione della questione ambientale a posizioni e comportamenti individuali (*neoliberal activism*), radicati nelle dinamiche di mercato e rappresentativi di un'epoca *iperpolitica*. Queste due tendenze eterogenee sottraggono le decisioni ambientali al confronto politico collettivo: la prima affidandole ai mercati e alle istituzioni, la seconda dissolvendole nella condotta individuale. L'articolo conclude che questa duplice depoliticizzazione – insieme alle forme emergenti di impegno iperpoliticizzato ma individualizzato – mette in luce i limiti delle categorie politiche moderne e postmoderne e richiama la necessità di nuovi concetti e quadri interpretativi attraverso cui ripensare la questione ambientale

Parole chiave: depoliticizzazione ambientale, neoliberismo ambientale, attivismo neoliberale.

1. Introduction[1]

Today's profound environmental degradation is such that the renaming of the present geological epoch is being discussed.[2] The current human has turned into a "geological agent," the consequences of whose actions are impersonal, collective and visible from the stratigraphy[3] and impose new priorities on philosophical reflection and political action.

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[1] I am profoundly indebted to Serena Marcenò for her support and for our discussions on the content, structure, and flaws of this paper. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers, who so attentively addressed the limitations of my first draft and helped me improve the present version. Any remaining errors and shortcomings, however, are my sole responsibility.

[2] From a scientific point of view, discussion on the entrance in a new epoch – the Anthropocene – has somewhat halted. On the 21st of March 2024, the International Union of Geological Sciences and the International Commission on Stratigraphy rejected the proposal to use the Anthropocene Epoch as a formal unit of the geologic time scale (see the official website: https://stratigraphy.org/news/152). Nevertheless, the Commission and the Union recognize the value of the term as a descriptor of human impact on the Earth system. The term, still widely discussed in the humanities, remains problematic even from other points of view, as the very term implies a certain vision of the relationship between nature and culture, nature and humanity. A vision that accepts the "naming of an epoch after ourselves" (Crist, "On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature," 14) and that reflects a certain understanding of "class, race, gender, sexuality, nation" (Moore, "The Rise of Cheap Nature," 78).

[3] Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History," 2021.

And yet, paradoxically, at the very moment when the political stakes of the environmental question are highest, a powerful constellation of tendencies is pushing the ecological question away from the classic domain of politics – away from the open and collective contestation of values, principles, and priorities – and towards forms of decision-making that present themselves as neutral, technical, or simply natural.

This scenario opens the door to a constellation of old and new responses to the ecological challenges that, though profoundly different from one another in their idioms and prescriptions, share a common structure: they each dissolve political questions – about class, race, gender, colonial and neocolonial structures, regimes of war – into something that appears to lie beyond political matters, into markets or into individual responsibilities, into science and technology[4] or into natural laws,[5] into the hands of active (or activist) judges,[6] or into the green and blue economy[7]. Decisions that are eminently political (how to distribute resources, what to produce, what to conserve and how, which futures to imagine) are shifted under the claim of becoming more rapid, efficient, correct, just.

The change in the relationship with politics that tends towards a sort of de-politicisation of environmental matters is not a new development *per se*. It well fits within a wider picture and ideological framework: the one that characterises neoliberal societies and economic orders. In the neoliberal ideology, what appears to be a rush toward de-politicisation is more than present: the market rules itself naturally as the best instrument to promote the allocation of resources; people are to concentrate on their individual interests, needs, and capitals to take care of themselves; the state is relegated to the role of a neutral manager, discouraged from setting or pursuing collective goals (what an act of destructive hubris!). The consequences of these ideological stances are entrenched with the changes in the relationship between people and politics that have occurred in the so-called West, where, after the abandoning of mass politics of the

[4] See Saito, *Slow Down*, 2 on climate techno-solutionism.

[5] The re-emergence of natural law theories under the guise of new environmental theories – such as Earth Jurisprudence, Ecology of Law, and Ecological Integrity – will not be addressed here. It is the object of a parallel reflection published by the author as Sajeva, "De la descripción de la ecología a la prescripción del derecho y la política."

[6] I here refer to climate litigation and rights of nature cases, where judges all over the world have taken on the fight for the conservation of nature calling States to their responsibilities towards the climate or binding them to recognize rights to nature or to elements of nature. For as important and groundbreaking these decisions often are, they escape democratic decision-making procedures, sometimes also disregarding the realities of local communities and indigenous peoples. The analysis of these cases is not addressed in the limited space of this paper and is therefore delegated to future research and publications.

[7] See Crist, "On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature."

last century[8] we have entered a post-political[9] era whose developments are characterized by the imposition of technocratic ruling and the search for the softening of political conflicts[10], the anesthetisation of class struggles[11], the government of bodies and populations through expanding techniques and technologies of control[12].

This article explores a limited part of these de-politicisation tendencies that keep environmental debates and practices deeply embedded in a neoliberal logic. It focuses on how some of the central neoliberal patterns and practices remain alive and well, including the ability to cast a shadow over class struggles which, confined to individual matters and responsibilities, lose the centrality they should retain *vis à vis* the differentiated impact of environmental degradation among classes. In particular, the article will focus on two lines: the delegation of environmental protection to processes of privatisation, commodification, and marketisation that reduce environmental governance to technical decisions (*technofixes*) which appear politically neutral yet inherently involve ethical and political choices regarding principles, priorities, and processes of subjectivation; and the confining of the environment to matters of individual positions and behaviours entrenched in market dynamics and varying across social classes.

These two tendencies are, admittedly, heterogeneous and seemingly difficult to bring together. The first concerns the institutional discourse and practice of conservation (*neoliberal conservation*). It addresses both national and international conservation actions, tailored at the global scale by international institutions and markets: they, however locally diverse, retain common features that can be readily identified across contexts. The second, a set of practices and individual behaviours (*neoliberal activism*) is by definition partial, since it bears on practices and therefore captures only a portion of reality – no mapping of every practice of environmental activism worldwide could ever be seriously attempted within a single article. Yet both belong to the same de-politicising logic of the neoliberal order: each withdraws environmental decisions from collective political contestation – the one by handing them to markets and institutions, the other by dissolving them into individual conduct.

What connects all these tendencies is the fact that the so-called global environmental crisis is also – and perhaps above all – a crisis of modern and post-modern political categories. To anchor it to this monographic issue: they are inadequate tools to comprehend the world *beyond globalisa-*

[8] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*.
[9] Crouch, *Post-Democracy*; Crouch, "Post-democracy and Populism."
[10] Mouffe, *On the Political*.
[11] Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*.
[12] Taşkale, *Post-Politics in Context*; Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control."

tion. This article will not attempt a re-categorisation but will simply trace some connecting lines of processes that appear distinguished yet retain common features that might prove relevant to find new interpretative paths beyond globalisation.

2. Still talking about neoliberalism?

Among the categories in crisis, neoliberalism surely occupies a prominent position. Using it as an interpretative framework is not obvious at a moment when the collapse of the USA-centred hegemonic order, the increased interdependency of economic and political interests, the withdrawal of the US Dollar as the global currency, Trump's tariff policy, the data monopoly held by large platforms, and the concentration of capitals justify yet another inquiry into whether "capitalism is changing its skin"[13]. Contemporary conditions of "systemic chaos and war" compel recognition of an emerging multipolar international order in which the West can no longer be regarded as "the universal actor orchestrating some kind of liberal rules-based international order"[14] and neoliberalism is witnessing a proper political crisis made of authoritarian leaders, returns to façade nationalism[15], state interventionism, and tariff protectionism[16]. Nevertheless, it is not the first time that "neoliberalism is declared dead" (and then turns out to be still alive)[17] and readings centred on neoliberal structures cannot yet be dismissed. Whether or not neoliberalism is reaching its concluding turn, its characteristics remain essential to grasp its still considerable influence[18] – both at the micro-economic level, where strategies of discrimination and exclusion to create value-less groups to be exploited and practices based on the concept of human capital remain alive and well[19]; and at the macro-level where the financialisation of the economic system and decentralisation of state control, the erosion of welfare, and the globality of the markets do not seem to be declining, yet.

Neoliberal heterogeneous processes have, in fact, demonstrated the ability to survive the 2008 and Covid-19 crises. Even if lights were lit on the responsibility of the neoliberal economic model as the cause of the financial crisis and on the privatisation of the management of health as

[13] Chignola, Mezzadra, "Neoliberalismo: che cosa c'è in un nome?."
[14] Mezzadra, Neilson, *The Rest and the West*, 1.
[15] Saad-Filho, "Endgame."
[16] Laruffa, Plehwe, "After Neoliberalism?," 2.
[17] Laruffa, Plehwe, "After Neoliberalism?," 1.
[18] Laruffa, Plehwe, "After Neoliberalism?," 2.
[19] Chignola, Mezzadra, "Neoliberalismo: che cosa c'è in un nome?."

the cause of the lack of effective responses to the pandemic, the subsequent States' responses maintained the repulsion for state expenditure (austerity) and inflation. In other words, neoliberal processes adapted to the very crises they helped generate, giving rise to state policies that, in one way or another, reinforced market mechanisms, maintained reliance on individual behaviours, and perpetuated the existence of subaltern classes and groups[20].

3. Neoliberal conservation

The ability of the neoliberal order to adapt and incorporate its own crises is well shown by its relationship with the so-called environmental crisis. Within the neoliberal framework, the conservation of nature, while apparently countering the detachment of people from nature, fosters their complete separation, suggesting instruments to "solve the crisis" that actually tend to amplify it[21]. *Vis à vis* the obvious and predicted impossibility of an enduring indefinite growth and unlimited use of natural resources, neoliberalism has "rolled sideways," giving birth to a neoliberal response to environmental issues: neoliberal instruments and *fixes* meant to limit the crisis while allowing for the continued increase of wealth[22]. The market has so responded to environmental degradation by offering solutions that are presented as superior and that substitute other – more State-based – options, such as legal restrictions on the use of natural resources, and public expenditures for protection, restoration, and research[23]. The neoliberal order has acted incorporating nature, making it part of its system; by giving it a value in the only way it gives values to beings and non-beings: by turning them into commodities and ensuring their circulation, i.e. by "finding new ways to guarantee 'nature on the move'"[24]. This move allows the extraction of value from nature not only when it is actually used (from the extraction of natural resources, for example) but also from its non-use, or from the *promise* of its non-use (even though conservation of the environment is not just a matter of not touching nature but implies many actions)[25]. Such a shift in the valuation of nature allowed a wider

[20] Esposito, Moini, "Fare un passo di lato per farne due avanti."
[21] Büscher, "Nature on the Move I," 183.
[22] Esposito, Moini, "Fare un passo di lato per farne due avanti."
[23] McAfee, "The Contradictory Logic of Global Ecosystem Services Markets"; Srinivasan, "Economic Valuation and Option-Based Payments for Ecosystem Services."
[24] Büscher, "Nature on the Move I," 184. Alike migrants who, once turned into *people on the move*, are guaranteed a value that can be extracted in the labour market.
[25] Büscher, "Nature on the Move I," 185.

attachment of capital to nature, allowing neoliberal conservation[26] practices to span across a variety of "strategies and mechanisms that seek to reconcile conservation with economic development"[27] through the funding of conservation practices with market mechanisms, their re-regulation from state to non-state actors (such as privately owned natural resources, NGOs, international organisations and firms), the commodification of nature and the creation of a financial market for environmental protection assets[28]. What all these practices have in common is their increased separation from a collective and political arena of discussion: they are managed and implemented by non-state actors and through a (ideologically) self-regulating market whose conditions for existence are enabled by the actions and regulations of States, but whose development is handed to an invisible hand.

The search for technofixes to environmental issues began when the idea of *development*[29] (already fully entrenched in the neoliberal discourse and practice) was confronted with the recognition of the limitation of the natural resources of the planet (for example through the famous 1972 Report on *The Limits to Growth*) leading to its conjunction with the word *sustainable*, giving birth to paradigms that combine economic and well-being interests with the recognition of the need to take the environment into consideration[30]. As shown by the 1980 World Conservation Strategy,[31] the discourse about and the practice of sustainable development inevitably encountered the discourse and practice of biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, drawing much-needed attention to the importance of harmonizing the second with the existence, rights, and abilities of local communities and indigenous peoples – so far easily disregarded or, worse, treated as existential threats to the conservation of the environment.[32] However, the result of such a get-together was not solely the promotion of so-called community-based conservation[33] – whose aims were meeting social devel-

[26] Also known as neoliberal nature, green neoliberalism, market environmentalism, green capitalism, for-profit conservation, Nature™ Inc (Fletcher, "Neoliberal Conservation," 2).
[27] Fletcher, "Neoliberal Conservation," 1.
[28] Fletcher, "Neoliberal Conservation," 1-2.
[29] For a reconstruction of the idea of development with a vintage flavour, see Sachs, *The Development Dictionary*.
[30] Cardesa-Salzmann, Cocciolo, "Global Governance, Sustainability and the Earth System," 439; see also Sands et al., *Principles of International Environmental Law*, 206.
[31] See International Union for Conservation of Nature, *World Conservation Strategy*.
[32] As so clearly shown by the habit of evicting indigenous people and local communities from newly created conserved areas and national parks in line with *fortress conservation approaches* (see Maffi, "Biocultural Approaches to Conservation and Development," 4; Campese, "Rights-based Approaches to Conservation," 7).
[33] Agrawal, Gibson, "Enchantment and Disenchantment"; Alcorn, "Indigenous Peoples and Conservation," 3; Gavin et al., "Defining Biocultural Approaches to Conservation"; Reed,

opment and poverty alleviation goals in combination with environmental conservation goals[34] – but also the elaboration of a conservation lexicon and rhetoric that could echo the *utility* of natural resources for humans. A clear example is given by the decision of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment to give its endorsement to the term *ecosystem services* (ES)[35] as the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. This *simplified language* was precisely meant for politicians and the private investment world to better understand each other[36] and was aimed at taking into account the benefits ecosystems and natural processes provide to human wellbeing and production, and the environmental costs of production. Accordingly, Costanza et al. famously estimated the annual economic value of the world's ecosystems – between USD 16 and 54 trillion – as an effort intended to highlight the centrality of ecosystems to human well-being and economy.[37] This intellectual and policy shift – endorsed in the Rio+20 report *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication* – squeezed ecosystems and natural processes, as well as local communities and indigenous peoples, into the global market system[38]. It also importantly attempted to overcome the eternal obliviousness of environmental externalities, which are typically ignored and relegated to society, subaltern subjects and the natural environment[39]. However, it acted and proceeded along with the reasoning of Garrett Hardin's *Tragedy of the commons,*[40] who, to account for the limits of the environment, accused the common use of goods and natural resources of being a threat to conservation, and promoted a (profoundly racist and classist)[41] rhetoric against overpopulation. He consequently saw protected areas and private property rights to be the only (logical and economically efficient) instruments to conserve the environment and prevent the overexploitation and exhaustion of natural resources. Protected areas are indeed often managed by States, but they belong to what – in a retrospective analysis – was left part of first wave conservation (*fortress conservation*[42]) as they require a vision of the State

"Stakeholder Participation for Environmental Management," 2420.

[34] Hughes, Flintan, *Integrating Conservation and Development Experience*.

[35] On the origins of the concept see Ehrlich, Ehrlich, *Extinction*; Lele, "Environmental Justice and the Limits of Ecosystem Services Frameworks," 122. For a recent assessment see Costanza et al., "Twenty Years of Ecosystem Services."

[36] Martin-Ortega et al., "Nature Commodification."

[37] Costanza et al., "Twenty Years of Ecosystem Services."

[38] See Fletcher et al., "A New Future for Conservation," 2.

[39] See De Lucia, *The Ecosystem Approach in International Environmental Law*, 197.

[40] Hardin, *Tragedy*.

[41] A rhetoric that is not hard to spot, especially if read in tandem with his article "Lifeboat Ethics."

[42] See Fletcher, "Neoliberal Conservation," 2.

that goes beyond the classic neoliberal minimal state and are seen as cumbersome and inefficient as welfare policies are. The current so-called third wave,[43] *neoliberal conservation*, builds instead on Hardin's recommendation for the creation of private protected areas that build on private interests in conservation and the commodification of nature as the most efficient and large-scale instrument to promote a sustainable use of nature. Predicated on development optimism and on faith in the capacity of the market to self-regulate, the resulting paradigm champions technocratic, top-down solutions, asserting that these can dissolve the poverty-environment nexus by creating win-win scenarios and "opportunities for local benefits in poor countries through exchanges with private and public parties from industrialised countries"[44]. Among others, the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiative (established during the G8+5 in 2007) explicitly acknowledged this approach, stating that "the failure to account for the full economic values of ecosystems and biodiversity has been a significant factor in their continuing loss and degradation." As a response to this type of challenge, TEEB suggested "the introduction of mechanisms that incorporate the values of ecosystems into decision making, through incentives and price signals. This can include payments for ecosystem services, reforming environmentally harmful subsidies, introducing tax breaks for conservation, or creating new markets for sustainably produced goods and ecosystem services"[45], as well as eco-tourism, bioprospecting, and green offsetting. The market, hence, takes care of nature in the most efficient way *if* left free to operate through the enlargement of private property. In the words of McAfee: "selling nature to save it"[46].

Through this rhetoric, the evaluation of the practices used to promote conservation is moved from deliberation on ethical considerations on the balancing of different interests, needs, and values, to a technical and apparently a-political evaluation of gains and costs delegated to companies, firms, and international NGOs. Money becomes "a cultural veil obscuring material asymmetries by representing unequal exchange as reciprocal"[47], so allowing them to be fit (or, better, pressed) into contract-based relationships where all parties interact as if they were equal because such "commodity fetishism" allows the "masking of the social relationships underlying the process of production"[48]. Furthermore, this process not only eclipses the cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and biological values of

[43] The second wave should account for *community-based conservation*.
[44] Adger et al., "Advancing a Political Ecology of Global Environmental Discourses," 702.
[45] TEEB, *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity*, 9 and 12.
[46] McAfee, "Selling Nature to Save It?," 146.
[47] Hornborg, "Colonialism in the Anthropocene," 14.
[48] Kosoy, Corbera, "Payments for Ecosystem Services as Commodity Fetishism," 1229.

nature[49] but, by transforming its value into commodified capital, enables monetary compensation to mediate trade-offs – both between poverty and conservation[50] and between nature and assets previously deemed beyond comparison[51].

While these mechanisms are perfectly consistent with a neoliberal logic, they are importantly grounded in, and thus constrained by, a "material space" and in the material resources which are commodified, evaluated, and exchanged[52]. Such a necessary link acts as a limitation to the potential capital growth and has been overcome by transforming nature into a "fictitious capital," i.e. "capital without any material basis in commodities or productive activity"[53]. In this further process of neo-liberalisation of conservation, nature was turned into a "liquid nature" fit to circulate in capitalist commodity markets, even when it is not directly linked to a natural resource or its conservation. Such financial assets may be attached to conservation projects or to environmental risks (extreme weather events, volcanic explosions, earthquakes, and the like), or even to the promise of the future implementation of conservation actions. What matters is not, anymore, the production of conservation goods, but rather their *circulation*: they need to be kept *on the move* to produce value through transactions in the financial market. They function through NGO's conservation messages, brands that sell *eco-friendly* products, companies providing carbon offsetting options, but also through the reports, policy briefs, and campaigns about environmental issues that create the ideology – and the anxiety – necessary for people and companies to be interested in buying financial products that are associated – at least theoretically – with conservation. The value of biodiversity that is bought and sold is not linked to biodiversity's *utility* (which was and remains the limited vision of ecosystem services) but relies on "ephemeral values" detached from "any direct basis in material, sociobiophysical nature"[54]. The resulting "fictitious conservation" just needs "a memorable logo, some catchy slogans, smooth marketing campaigns, visually captivating websites, celebrity spokespeo-

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[49] Kosoy, Corbera, "Payments for Ecosystem Services as Commodity Fetishism." As Pascual et al., "Diverse Values of Nature for Sustainability" observe, social-scientific insights, local perceptions and knowledge, Indigenous worldviews, and non-instrumental benefits derived from nature are routinely marginalized, leaving the framework analytically incomplete and in some cases ineffective.

[50] Wunder, *Payments for Environmental Services*, 2.

[51] See Read, Cato, "'A Price for Everything?'" 158 ff; Sikor, *The Justices and Injustices of Ecosystem Services*, 4.

[52] Fletcher, "Neoliberal Conservation," 4.

[53] Büscher, "Nature on the Move I," 185.

[54] Büscher, "Nature on the Move I," 195, 198-199.

ple, and a take-home message that 'everybody wins'. It can make people 'feel good'"[55].

4. Neoliberal activism

"It can make people feel good" without engaging in a political collective discussion. The institutional level of conservation is so entrenched in complex market mechanisms that aim at efficiency that it loses its connection with the reality of conservation and with the collective political debate around it.

This sideling of the collective political debate links to the second key component of the still existing neoliberal nature of environmental rhetoric and action, the one centred on individual practices, embracing actions and perceptions of responsibility. To fully engage in this second part, we need to draw some of the lines that connect neoliberalism as an economic system to neoliberalism as an ideology able to shape people's relationship with the political realm.

Once the end of history became a conceivable idea and the "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism"[56] was proclaimed, the Berlin Wall fell, employment in industries shrank, and globalisation and global capitalism came to be regarded as natural as the seasons[57]. The wars of the twentieth century were coming to an end, and military operations became undertakings carried out only by those who voluntarily enlisted and by the technocratic élites who directed them, racism was increasingly addressed through legal processes, as in South Africa[58], and the political and economic climate seemed to promise peace and prosperity even in the absence of sustained political engagement. The perpetual modulation (up or down) of salaries[59] and the life in a competitive market pushed individuals to concentrate on the overcoming of their personal crises of the moment (economic, financial, urban, environmental) through hard work, attention to detail[60], the acquisition of new skills and the improvement of their human capital ("remunerative university studies, creation of individual savings for retirement, purchase of one's home, long-term investment in stock-market equities"[61]). This individu-

[55] Büscher, "Nature on the Move I," 203.
[56] Fukuyama, "The End of History?," 3.
[57] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 26, 10.
[58] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 11-15,
[59] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 5.
[60] Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, 176.
[61] Dardot, Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 177.

alized over-responsibilisation of people came with identities that were no longer rooted in affiliation with parties and trade unions but rather in consumer choices – "whether sexual, culinary or economic"[62] and privatised public life revolved around healthy diets, petitions against animal abuse and support for drug addicts.[63] In this "ownership society,"[64] responsibility towards oneself and one's family and the very identity of each person rested on the value of the products that one can buy. There is no collective solidarity left, no political action possible: only individuals engaged in the market with a competitive logic[65]. *Vis à vis* this private vision of life, there is no time for a collective action or for the interactions with other individuals, there is time only to start a new apprenticeship or training course[66]. Mass consumption, parties, recreational drugs, offer more compelling answers than "boring" politicians in whom people do not recognize themselves[67] and democracy comes to be treated as something unchangeable and taken for granted – something that could be politely ignored, along with the collective responsibilities it entailed[68]. Western countries "quietly enter[ed] a private utopia" of a post-political era, one that drew a clear boundary between the public and political spheres on the one hand and the private sphere on the other[69]. With the exception of feminist scholars and activists – who continued to argue that the private was political and vice versa – Western populations largely refused to view the two realms as intrinsically interconnected and withdrew from the public sphere to devote themselves to their private lives. People "retreat[ed] from politics"[70] to devote themselves to shopping, yoga, health and wellbeing and beauty products.

The arrival of the 2008 world financial crisis exacerbated the political crisis which had seen the crunch of political parties, the pulverisation of society, and the dominance of global financial markets[71]. Parties – all somehow responsible for the rise of unregulated global finance that led

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[62] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 37.
[63] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 39; see also Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*: "The human being becomes [...] a choice among possibilities, *homo optionis*. Life, death, gender, corporeality, identity, religion, marriage, parenthood, social ties – all are becoming decidable down to the small print."
[64] Esposito, Moini, "Fare un passo di lato per farne due avanti," 65-66 retrieve the expression "ownership society" from the inaugural address of George W. Bush's second term.
[65] Dardot, Laval, *The New Way of the World*, 209.
[66] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 7.
[67] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 27.
[68] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 34-36.
[69] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 11.
[70] Bauman, "Identity in the Globalising World," 127.
[71] Revelli, *The New Populism*, 11.

to the crisis[72] – tried to rebuild support and a political platform broadening the electoral base by fishing for voters who were disenchanted with politics, uninterested, and immersed in the digital world. The resulting "mood" was that of populism, both "as context" and "as project"[73].

As is widely acknowledged, this post-political period still persists; however, it has developed a distinct and additional set of features. Reshuffling the cards of the separation between public and private, while not responding to the demands of feminist scholars and activists, nor rediscovering politics as an integral part of identity (as old mass parties demanded), the slogan "the political is personal" twisted into "the political is nothing but personal"[74]. *Vis à vis* a market that encourages atomisation with products increasingly tailored to individual consumers that can be enjoyed alone – podcasts, gyms, porn – and *vis à vis* the dismantling of the welfare state, civic engagement is now a private affair: participating in the local church activities, volunteering, and doing civil service (strategies that also uplift human capitals and CVs[75]). Politics has hence invaded everything, but not in the ways of the politics of the early 20th century, which required passion, concentration and perseverance. This *hyperpolitics*, as Jäger calls it, is a "politisation without politics"[76], a low-cost politics, like consumeristic identity is:[77] superficial, erratic, short-lived[78]. This pattern echoes the speed of today's society, which demands constant change and progress: marriages, jobs, and friendships exist in a precarious and fast-paced world, while development plans become short-term and politicians are required to deliver results within very tight deadlines. Long gone are the days of five-year plans or long-term planning in national politics. Politics that feed on tweets needs to provide answers here and now and produce immediate results[79]. Social media is nowadays full of simplified political content ranging from veganism and the fight against climate change to re-emigration and anti-vaccination, from me-too movements to the pillorying of accused but not yet convicted individuals. Just as we consume increasingly short videos on social media, political participation is more pluralistic but also more superficial. Political actions take the form of flash

[72] Crouch, "Post-democracy and Populism," 129.
[73] Revelli, *The New Populism*, 11.
[74] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 116.
[75] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 56-61.
[76] As the Italian version of his book's subtitle goes.
[77] As Lasch underlines, the open-ended, experimental conception of the good life upheld by the propaganda of commodities that surrounds the consumer with images of unlimited possibilities, makes also the choices of friends, lovers, and careers all potentially subject to abrupt cancellation (*The Minimal Self*, 38).
[78] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 20.
[79] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 24.

mobs, NGOs, Facebook profile pictures, short-term boycotts, influencers, movements, and even companies and polling firms that provide more agile and less demanding alternatives to political parties[80] – now seen as stale and slow dinosaurs. While this shallow politicisation of social media reigns supreme, a great part of Western political activism concretises in participating in demonstrations, changing profile pictures, and posting videos, but is not accompanied by membership in political parties or trade unions[81]. The resurgence of what looks like re-politicised practices mostly did not go through resocialisation and institutionalisation, so creating a shallow hyperpolitics dictated by personal values, guided by a very strong moralisation of political issues (as if they were, in fact, personal and not collective) and rooted in a profound "inability to think through collective dimensions of struggle"[82]. The neoliberal order, in fact, still reigns, and any movement within it is made consistent with capitalism itself: nothing escapes its clutches, as exemplified by T-shirts of popular brands with the word "Rebel" written on them.

This transformation of political participation and subjectivity remains entrenched in the post-political frame but acquires some specific features[83] which are most evident in part of the practice of Western environmental activism. Here, market-tailored individual action has become the default, common-sense response to systemic crises. And so, a segment of environmental activism manifests in statements such as: *I'm very concerned about climate change. I'm going to buy a new electric car or to download an app to track my personal carbon footprint on my smartphone*.

I only buy organic cotton clothing and zero-kilometre products, and I always use a reusable water bottle. I'm a vegetarian, so I eat tofu and drink soy milk (though I own a dog in town, smoke, and drink alcohol).[84]

As Saito writes, stoned by the sustainable development rhetoric – new "opium of the masses" – people buy their indulgences by acting and thinking green: "buying eco bags and bottles without changing anything about the economic system [so masking] the systemic problem and reduce[ing] everything to the responsibility of the individual, while obscuring the responsibility of corporations and politicians"[85]. This rhetoric encourages

[80] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 30-42.
[81] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 45.
[82] Jäger, *Iperpolitica*, 65, 144.
[83] Taşkale, "Still Post-Political," 3.
[84] See Goldwert et al., "Climate Action Literacy Interventions Increase Commitments to More Effective Mitigation Behaviors." See also: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/apr/10/pet-dogs-have-extensive-and-multifarious-impact-on-environment-new-research-finds.
[85] Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene*; see also Saito, *Slow Down*, xiii; Saito, "Interview in A New Way of Life."

the over-responsibilisation of citizens and directs them towards individualist forms of action[86]. While they are accused of not being radically green enough (*turn vegan, do not use honey, do not fly*, etc.), they are welcomed into an economic system that creates the products that appear to feed their souls, providing them with the *ethical* and *personal* solution to their sense of guilt. If they make the *right* purchase, they are *green* citizens. If they do not choose the *green* product to consume, they demonstrate that their ethical positions are not the *correct* ones, and they are called responsible for the state of the planet.

The lack of long-term and deeply entrenched relationships with political parties, the volatile voting decisions that can be changed with the same speed as a Facebook profile picture, lead citizens to the conclusion that no political party is *green enough* for their vote, and hence they are justified not to join any party nor vote for one. Political parties that reach enough consensus to become part of Parliaments are unlikely to take positions that are as pure as environmental ethics theories demand. Hence, the over-responsible green citizens will rather refrain from engaging in more classic political action, believing their consumption already speaks enough for their greenness. So, the *green* citizens will not be willing to vote and will retreat to their private lives of *green* products that satisfy their hungry souls much more than voting for a party or another.

These practices fit within the highly personal nature of contemporary political engagement – this hyperpolitics scenario – and with the internalized normalisation of market logic. More fundamentally, these examples reveal how these hyperpolitical practices appear critically blind to how class position structures the very possibility of behavioural change. The Berlin vegetarian student who bemoans the difficulty of shopping at organic markets while receiving unemployment subsidies (subsidies which, crucially, enable her family's life in the city, her kid's schooling, and her university attendance) – reveals a profound misapprehension of material constraints that were once foundational to progressive political consciousness. This failure to recognise class as a structuring condition, and the consequent inability to forge a durable, cross-class collective movement for environmental justice, demonstrates how the individualistic focus dominant in Western societies remains perfectly congruent with the neoliberal order, however much that order may now be in crisis.

While the middle class focuses on selecting products that signal or cultivate a green identity, the poorer classes of society possess neither the time nor the resources for such considerations. If confronted with the

[86] Not to mention that they may even cause more harm than good at times (Saito, *Slow Down*, xiii).

issue, they are likely to deny the very existence of a problem they cannot afford to confront – a problem eclipsed by their immediate and intensifying struggle to secure a decent life or concealed under an ad hoc "alternative reality" manufactured by post-truth politicians[87]. The rich, instead – as in the dystopian future imagined in *Elysium* – abandon the very recognition of a community of reference, understanding that "if they wanted to survive in comfort, they had to stop pretending, even in their dreams, to share the earth with the rest of the world"[88]. The discussion on the upcoming environmental collapse reinforces the individualist myth among those who have the luxury of thinking of themselves as not Earthlings. Whether inspired by "400-odd pages of near-hysterical orotundity" of *The Sovereign Individual: How to Survive and Thrive During the Collapse of the Welfare State*[89] or by the IPCC most extreme predictions, the small class of super-rich subtracts itself from the imminent apocalypse, imagining futures on Mars (or more realistically in New Zealand).[90] "Narrow elites project into space (to Mars, to be clear) their desire to secede from a world rendered increasingly uninhabitable by war, poverty, and the climate crisis"[91]. This subtraction allows them to claim that they do not need to worry about sustainability or ecological transitions (unless they are economically beneficial): they can continue to "maintain their heedlessly luxurious lifestyle"[92] and to fuel the exploitation of Earth's resources, and accept the consequences of such actions because "there will be lifeboats for the rich and privileged"[93].

5. Sinking ships

We have so far explored just a few examples of the discourses and practices that are taking place – neoliberal conservation strategies and (a section of) neoliberal activism. Both demonstrate how Western societies are still entrenched in the neoliberal order and use its own instruments – those same ones that have led to talk about the change of the name of the current geological epoch – as a palliative to deal with the challenges our relationship with the environment faces.

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[87] Latour, *Down to Earth*, chp. 5
[88] Latour, *Down to Earth*, chp. 5
[89] Written by James Dale Davidson and William Rees-Mogg in 1997.
[90] See https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/15/why-silicon-valley-billionaires-are-prepping-for-the-apocalypse-in-new-zealand.
[91] Chignola, Mezzadra, "Neoliberalismo: che cosa c'è in un nome?."
[92] Saito, *Slow Down*, xv.
[93] Malm, Hornborg, "The Geology of Mankind?," 67.

Environmental challenges are reduced to a sphere of action characterised by market-tailored conservation projects and the crafting of green consumer identities – a focus that perfectly fits the neoliberal framework while subtracting environmental issues from the political arena of collective debates, obscuring the material constraints of class. The result is a profound misunderstanding where these actions reveal a blindness to the structural inequalities that once animated progressive thought – now far too concerned with shaping individual and institutional actions within the logic of markets.[94] This individualistic focus leaves society fragmented: while some curate a green conscience through consumption, poorer strata are denied even the luxury of such concern, forced to disregard or negate a crisis eclipsed by the immediate struggle for a decent life. Against this, the much-discussed Anthropocene thesis of a universally shared vulnerability rings hollow,[95] but the truth rests in a grimmer middle ground: there will be lifeboats for the rich and privileged, but they are doomed to sink anyway – just a little later.

This only partially segregated fate underscores the need to move beyond both the neoliberal marketisation and the personalisation of politics – and, with them, beyond the very categories through which we still think the environmental question. Looking from a greater distance, this new form of hyperpoliticisation shows the very limits of our modern and post-modern categories. While it cannot be considered a return to a classic political engagement of citizens of the so-called West, it cannot be ignored as a form of participation in collective matters – though as individuals rather than collective beings. On the other side, the financial and market-based governance of nature today occurs with the approval of a good section of the conservation scientists' picture, so making it harder to distinguish between those engaged in conservation and those engaged in the exploitation of nature. As drawing binary lines becomes more and more challenging – not only within the environmental discourse but across the whole spectrum of political matters – the search for new categories and frameworks may only proceed, with the hope of providing some useful instruments for reaction to the challenges of the present and the future.

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[94] Saito's example of the "Netherlands Fallacy" clearly shows the class struggles in its global form: the North-South divide. While this North European country looks and feels much greener than many countries of the Global South thanks to the implementation of many environmental policies and laws, it still does place a much heavier burden on the Earth (Saito, *Slow Down*, 15).

[95] See Malm, Hornborg, "The Geology of Mankind?," 67, according to whom the Anthropocene makes the whole of humanity equally vulnerable, such that "unlike in the crises of capitalism, there are no lifeboats here for the rich and the privileged."

What we can now say is that while Fukuyama's prediction of the end of history proved wrong, it was less of a long shot to imagine a today dominated by "economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands"[96].

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[96] Fukuyama, "The End of History?," 18.

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Il tema

Governing Migrants through Punitive Environments Ten Years from the 'Refugee Crisis'

Governare i migranti attraverso gli ambienti punitivi a dieci anni dalla 'crisi dei rifugiati'

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Abstract. This article examines the reconfiguration of the "hostile environment" approach to migration governance in Europe into "punitive environments." Drawing on Foucault's notion of "infra-legal illegalism," it argues that punitive environments operate beyond criminal justice, criminalising not only legal infractions but also "unruly conducts." Through an analysis of three national contexts (Greece, Italy, and the UK) and the 2024 EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the article shows how punitiveness functions as a latent condition that enhances migrants' precarity and exploitability, while also eroding the socio-economic rights of racialised citizens. It concludes by reflecting on the possibility of building a constituent counter-discourse grounded in "infrastructures of dissent" that cuts across the migrant/citizen divide.

Keywords: migration, punitive environments, hostile environments, EU Pact, life-support infrastructures.

Riassunto. Questo articolo esamina la riconfigurazione dell'approccio del "hostile environment" alla governance della migrazione in Europa in "ambienti punitivi." Attingendo alla nozione foucaultiana di "illegalismo infra-legale," sostiene che gli ambienti punitivi operano al di là della giustizia penale, criminalizzando non solo le infrazioni legali ma anche le "condotte indisciplinate." Attraverso l'analisi di tre

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contesti nazionali (Grecia, Italia e Regno Unito) e del Patto UE su Migrazione e Asilo del 2024, l'articolo mostra come la punitività funzioni come condizione latente che accresce la precarietà dei migranti, erodendo al contempo i diritti socioeconomici dei cittadini razzializzati. Conclude riflettendo sulla possibilità di costruire un contro-discorso costituente fondato su "infrastrutture del dissenso" che attraversi trasversalmente la divisione migrante/cittadino.

Parole chiave: migrazioni, ambienti punitivi, ambienti ostili, Patto UE, infrastrutture di sussistenza.

1. Introduction

Ten years have passed since the image of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy found dead on the beach in Bodrum, Turkey, after the boat he was travelling on with his family capsized, went around the world, becoming an icon of the so-called 'refugee crisis'. That image was also an important catalyst for the 'humanitarian surge' of many people who, in 2015 and 2016, mobilised in solidarity with women, men and children arriving on the Greek shores and continuing their journey along the Balkan route to seek asylum in Germany, Sweden, Austria and other European countries. Today, although Alan Kurdi's image is still remembered, that humanitarian momentum, which took the form of very diverse practices of solidarity, has suffered a setback: without ever completely dying out, mobilisations in support of migrants in transit, or to ask governments to allow shipwrecked people rescued in the Mediterranean to disembark in a safe port, have been superseded in the media by the racist anti-refugee riots that have broken out in the last two years in the United Kingdom, but also in Greece, Germany and France. In a way, an anti-immigration commonsense is firmly grounded in the European context, and extends far beyond it.[1] Migration policies have been reconfigured as anti-immigration measures, and criticisms raised against the EU's politics of migration containment fail to grasp the global dimension of this transversal authoritarian commonsense. In the last decade, the EU's agenda on migration has been twisted towards preventive containment: through a proliferation of bilateral agreements, memorandums of understanding and experimentations in asylum externalisation, migrants are systematically hampered from becoming asylum seekers, through a series of bureaucratic obstacles and spatial restrictions. Yet, a critical knowledge of the border regime can-

[1] Stierl, Tazzioli, "Punitive Environments and the Anti-Immigration Authoritarian Commonsense."

not be circumscribed to registering the generalised escalation of border violence or the hardening of frontiers. Rather, it should draw attention to the partial shifts and often invisible dislocations occurred in the politics of migration containment, investigating how the "power's hold"[2] over migrants' life has changed in the last few years.

Building on such consideration, this article claims that the politics of 'hostile environment' against migrants has been progressively reconfigured in terms of 'punitive environments'. While the notion of hostile environment refers to policies, spatial tactics and administrative measures aimed at making migrants' lives unliveable, deterring them from settling down, governing through punitive environments entails criminalising their unruly conducts and existence as such; punitiveness ranges across the whole spectrum of migration, targeting asylum seekers, illegalised migrants and refugees. To be punishable is their 'abuse' of mobility, of socioeconomic rights and of the right to asylum as such. This European trend is best encapsulated in the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, approved in 2024 and enforced in June 2026, and in national laws and administrative measures introduced in a few EU member states. Drawing on Michel Foucault's notion of "infra-legal illegalism" as "an illegalism that is not a breach of the law,"[3] the article contends that punitive environments operate beyond the sphere of criminal justice as they do not necessarily constitute an infringement of the law. To be criminalised and eventually punished are 'unruly' conducts, that in the case of migration essentially consist in spatial disobediences with respect to the geographical restrictions imposed by EU and national laws, or in the 'abuse' of the right to asylum and to welfare. Punitiveness, as a potential and latent condition strengthens migrants' socio-economic vulnerability and, jointly, practices of criminalisation that are not narrowed to law's infringements. Relatedly, the article contends that far from being exclusively a matter about migration, an insight on the making of punitive environments reveals modes of interlocking precarisation and criminalisation between citizens and racialised non-citizens. That is, the punitive environments enforced in several countries against people governed as 'migrants' do have a backlash on citizens as well and accelerate a downward spiral of rights' erosion. This partial shift from hostile to punitive environments should be situated within a sociopolitical context characterised by the systematic dismantling of migrants' life-support infrastructures and by ways of governing by making them sick. Although the article is essentially theoretical in character, it zooms into the UK, Greece and Italy for briefly retracing a genealogy of

[2] Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended,"* 234.
[3] Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 173.

hostile environment (UK), the making of punitive environments in relation to broader erosion of life-support infrastructures (Greece), and the interlocking subjugations between migrants and citizens enforced through this widespread punitiveness.

2. Governing migrants by eroding life-support infrastructures

The emergence of punitive environments must be situated within a broader transformation in the power's hold over migrants' lives that has unfolded across Europe over the last decade. People who are labelled as 'migrants' in Europe, are increasingly governed by making them sick, both psychologically and physically: confining migrant persons to insalubrious spaces and dismantling their life-support infrastructures have been turned into political technologies for disrupting their incorrigible presence. By life-support infrastructures I refer to the spaces, resources and social relations that enable collective forms of liveability and the cultivation of aspirations. These include housing, access to food and healthcare, humanitarian support, informal networks, and the conditions necessary for sustaining social reproduction on an intergenerational level.[4]

While a growing body of scholarship has observed, the 'politics of injury' has long shaped practices of migration containment,[5] today this has been consolidated into an enduring political technology for disrupting migrants' lives and undermining their spaces of collective liveability.

Indeed, despite the proliferation of bilateral agreements since 2015 for hampering migrants from reaching the European shores, migrants keep coming into Europe: while the EU's political agenda, and the new EU Pact in particular, pivot around fastening deportations and multiplying agreements with third-countries, in practice state authorities cope with migrants' incorrigible presence by debilitating and injuring them.[6] More concretely, this is enacted by withdrawing humanitarian and medical support in sites of confinement – like refugee camps and reception centres – , while at the same time dismantling any autonomous space of liveability and forcing migrants into a psycho-physical debilitation. This mode of governing migrants' lives through the curtailment of humanitarianism recalls what Neferti X.M. Tadiar has defined as "modes of life lived and

[4] Rigo, *Migration, Asylum and Exploitation*.
[5] Davies et al., "The Politics of Injury"; Minca et al., "Rethinking the Biopolitical."
[6] Puar, *The Right to Maim*.

practices of living that are remaindered in the process of production of biopolitical life."[7]

In fact, this European trend is visible both in countries of first arrival – such as Greece and Italy – and in Northern European countries, despite the more flourishing economies.[8] The dismantling of life-support infrastructures is enacted through a series of administrative measures and spatial tactics oriented at hampering migrants from becoming asylum seekers and, disregarding their legal status, from accessing socio-economic rights and coping with their livelihood.

Linking the making of punitive environments to modes of governing by suffocating migrant lives and making them sick is crucial, I suggest, since the systematic attack to life-support infrastructures does something more – and different – than producing misery and exercising cruelty over migrants:[9] it obstructs migrants from re-building life and from envisioning a liveable future on an intergenerational level: by violently dismantling life-support infrastructures, to be undermined are the possibilities of cultivating aspirations and desires.[10] Although we need to caution against analyses that read the present moment in terms of unprecedented shifts, it is worth noticing that Covid-19 constituted an important watershed in the transformations that occurred in the European border regime.[11] Indeed, during the protracted lockdowns that asylum seekers in Europe have been subjected to techniques of control that responded to a 'confine to protect' rationale: migrants have been kept in camps and in enclosed spaces repurposed for that goal – such as ships – , in the name of an insidious and ambivalent logic of protection, according to which migrants constituted a health threat for citizens, as potential virus spreaders, and at the same time they should be protected from the risk of exposure to Covid-19.

The obligation for a quarantine period for the newcomers was paradoxically enforced in many sites by keeping migrants in overcrowded and insalubrious spaces. In the years 2020-2022 some key re-rearrangements

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[7] Tadiar, *Remaindered Life*, 24

[8] For instance, in Belgium, in 2024 the government has restricted asylum seekers' access to both the asylum procedure and to the hosting system: migrants who already claimed asylum in another EU's country are blocked from lodging an asylum application and excluded from refugee accommodations. The following year, the right to social integration income had been restricted to refugees and asylum seekers who demonstrate their efforts to integrate in the social system.

[9] Aradau, Canzutti, "Asylum, Borders, and the Politics of Violence."

[10] Khosravi, "Afterword."

[11] Throughout the article I use 'European border regime' to designate migration policies enforced on the European continent – thus, including for instance also Great Britain and the Balkan countries. Instead, when I specifically refer to policies enforced by the European Commission I use 'EU's border regime' or 'EU's agenda on migration'.

of the politics of asylum and the border regime occurred. More precisely, the outbreak of the pandemic paved the ground for introducing bordering mechanisms and changes in the relationships between states, humanitarian actors and 'the governed' that have then remained in place after the end of the Covid-19 emergency. Even if some of these measures had been implemented specifically for managing migrants' presence, and with the goal of dividing them from the rest of the population, it has progressively emerged that they concerned 'the governed' at large, encompassing both migrants and citizens. Indeed, at a close glance, Covid-19 has been seized as an opportunity to shrink and differentiate citizens' access to welfare and socio-economic rights. Struggles over social reproduction played a key role in the transformations that occurred in the politics of migration confinement: as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson have noticed, "the pandemic has exacerbated tensions between mobility and control in ways that shape the circulation of capital and the social reproduction of labour."[12]

3. Conceptualise punitive environments

Drawing attention to modes of governing migration by making them sick allows grasping the fields of conflicts opened by the multiple adjustments in the relationships between humanitarianism, state's institutions and labour economy. Such resorting to technologies of suffocation for tackling migrants' presence is symptomatic of the reconfiguration of the hostile environment approach to migration, which was introduced by the British government in 2012 and became popular in Europe at large, in terms of *punitive environment*. However, the moulding of the *hostile environment* in punitive terms should not be understood as a radical shift, and as the former being fully superseded by the latter. Rather, while if some key features of what the UK Home Office defined for the first time as 'hostile environments' for migrants are still in place, today such hostility acquires new articulations and functions, and it is better qualified as 'punitive'.

While hostile environments are characterised by making migrants' life unliveable in a certain place in order to deter them from settling down, punitive environments encapsulate an array of administrative measures, laws and spatial tactics to criminalise and punish those migrants who remain. As is well known, the notion of hostile environment emerged in the United Kingdom under the Conservative government led by David Cameron: introduced by then Home Secretary Theresa May in 2012, it sought to create 'a really hostile environment for illegal migration', whose

[12] Mezzadra, Neilson, "The Capitalist Virus," 199.

ultimate goal was to prevent a "situation where people think that they can come here and overstay because they're able to access everything they need"[13]. In practice, the hostile environment logic is characterised by the fact that immigration controls are not confined to the borders and, rather, bordering mechanisms spread across society. This multiplication of borders within the social texture implies a second and interrelated shift: migration controls are no longer enforced exclusively by the police: hospitals, schools, banks, and other public and private actors had been coopted in enforcing such hostility, with immigration controls being deputised to them.[14]

In fact, through hostile environment policies illegalised migrants are excluded or expelled from the national health system and from education, and they are hindered from opening a bank account or renting a flat. Hostility is enacted by keeping migrants out from a range of life-support infrastructures, relying on citizens' participatory policing, as well as on enhanced data exchange activities between institutions and private actors, which leads to a 'digital hostile environment'.[15]

Therefore, the hostile environment approach was predicated more on a politics of deterrence, enforced also by exhausting migrants, more than through punishment: by restricting access to the infrastructures of life-support and by making their life unliveable, migrants would be inclined to leave and would not consider the UK a desirable place to stay. According to this governmental logic, migrants were deterred as excluded from the possibility to develop their own spaces and conditions of liveability: "hostile bordering practices in the UK," Coddington stresses, "are embracing discomfort as a political strategy to deter migrants."[16] While originally conceived as an approach to be deployed in urban settings, the logic of hostile environments has been replicated on natural environments: "the process of making (mainly urban) space unliveable for some bears an eerie resemblance to the ways in which other, more 'natural' environments have been turned into hostile spaces."[17] It follows that to make migrants' life difficult, restrictions to social security and rights went in parallel with the implementation of physical impediments and of harming technologies devised for weaponising the environment itself.

It is worth noticing an interesting terminological slippage that occurred in 2018, when the term was rebranded in the UK as 'compliant environment', to highlight that for making migrants life unliveable,

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[13] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/theresa-may-interview-going-give-illegal-migrants-really-hostile/

[14] Goodfellow, *Hostile Environment*.

[15] Narita, "The Digital Hostile Environment"; Ozkul, Godin, *Exclusion by Design*.

[16] Coddington, "Incompatible with Life," 1712

[17] Pezzani, *Hostile Environments*.

citizens' active participation in policing migrants was needed. In order to check that only migrants who comply with the law stay in the country, the discourse goes, institutional at different scales and citizens alike must be compliant and report undocumented migrants. In the last decade, the governmental logic underlying the hostile environment approach travelled across Europe, although under diverse labels and enforcing it through slightly different tactics.[18] The partial reconfiguration of hostile environments as punitive environments is less a matter of degrees – a progressive hardening of bordering mechanisms and an increasing of border violence – , than a question of the different tactics by which migrants' life is made unliveable, and the goals associated to that.

The target of punitive environment is less the undesirable migrant, conceived as a social threat or as a 'risky subject'[19] than the welfare abuser, the predatory asylum seeker and the unruly migrant who cultivates her aspirations by enacting her freedom of movement.

Arguing that migrants' lives are disrupted through punitive environments is partially different from 'bordered penality',[20] conceived as penality directed at non-citizens. Indeed, the bordered penality approach conceives that the "absence of formal membership is the essential factor contributing towards shifting the nature of penal intervention from reintegration into the society towards territorial exclusion."[21] The making of punitive environments is also distinctive from 'crimmigration',[22] which captures the "increasing overlap between criminal and immigration law."[23] More specifically, crimmigration captures a twofold trend: "the expansion of criminal grounds for deportation" and the "regulation of migration through immigration-related criminal grounds, such as unlawful re-entry, newer crimes [...] or crimes that by their nature involve non-citizens."[24]

These trends are still firmly grounded in modes of managing migrants' presence and, actually, have been enhanced: deportations are one of the key pillars of the EU Pact and the legal leeway for incarcerating not only migrants but also people who hold international protection has been widened in Europe. Therefore, it might appear counter-intuitive to

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[18] For instance, in France after the last eviction of the 'jungle' of Calais in October 2016, French authorities have introduced the 'zero-point fixation' politics, that consists in harassing and chasing away migrants in border-zones, like Calais: thus, the goal of making migrants' lives unliveable is pursued by exhausting them and by hindering them from resting and temporarily settling down.

[19] Aradau, "The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words."

[20] Fabini, Ferraris, "No Deportation but No Leniency Here"; Franko, "Bordered Penality."

[21] Franko, "Bordered Penality," 521

[22] Menjívar et al., "The Expansion of 'Crimmigration,' Mass Detention, and Deportation."

[23] Stumpf, "The Crimmigration Crisis," 381.

[24] Stumpf, "The Process Is the Punishment in Crimmigration Law," 61.

suggest a distinction between punitive environments and crimmigration. However, the point I want to make is that for understanding the underlying logic of punitiveness as a key tactic embedded both in migration policies and in the asylum system, it is necessary to scrutinise how it exceeds the juridical sphere and shape subjectivities.

As mentioned in the Introduction, punitiveness extends beyond formal legal infractions: it refers to modes of disrupting migrants' presence by criminalising what Michel Foucault in *The Punitive Society* has defined as "infra-legal illegalism."[25] Focusing on individual and collective conducts of refusal to work in the nineteenth century, ranging from laziness to unruly mobility, Foucault has noticed how those irregularities were not infractions: to be criminalised were more modes of existence and, more precisely, unruly conducts that were stealing capital's condition for profit. Infra-legal illegalisms, Foucault explains, are enforced by the worker on his own body, through laziness: as long as he refuses to work, he "steals what he owes to the employer," which consists in putting his labour-power to work to the service of capital's accumulation.[26] In a similar way, the criminalisation of people governed as 'migrants' or as 'asylum seekers' exceeds the violation of the law and concerns their non-compliance with territorial fixation or geographical restrictions and with the moral economy of asylum.[27] Hence, punitiveness is not about unlawful conducts but unruly conducts, and criminalisation is not reduced to the sphere of criminal justice and, rather, encompasses the political and moral dimensions: migrants' autonomous geographies, defined by European Commission as 'secondary movements', as well as the enjoyment of socioeconomic rights are framed as abuses. Crucially, the effectiveness of punitive environments does not depend upon the actual implementation of punitive measures. Punitive environments are characterised by the criminalisation of migrants and refugees' presence as such: migrants are considered subjects to be punished insofar as they 'exploit' social security and, the discourse goes, abuse socio-economic rights, alongside the right to claim asylum. Although to be at stake is in part a punitive twist in immigration laws, what is remarkable is punitiveness as a latent condition that strengthens migrants' socioeconomic precarity and practices of criminalisation that are not narrowed to law's infringements. To put it differently, the punitive dimension does not necessarily translate into actual punishment or detention: rather, punitivity exceeds the implementation of punitive measures and, in a similar way to 'deportability',[28] it con-

[25] Foucault, *The Punitive Society*.
[26] Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 173
[27] Beneduce, "The Moral Economy of Lying."
[28] De Genova, "The Legal Production of Mexican/Migrant 'Illegality'."

sists in the possibility, reiterated on a daily basis, of being punished. Hence, punitiveness concerns the persistent anxiety of being object of punishment, through detention or expulsion, but also by being criminalised on a social level, for one's own existence: disregarding whether punitive laws are enforced, they enhance migrants' precarity and exploitability. Indeed, recalling Nicholas De Genova's definition of deportability:

> The disciplinary operation of an apparatus for the everyday production of migrant 'illegality' is never simply intended to achieve the putative goal of deportation. It is deportability, and not deportation per se, that has historically rendered undocumented migrant labour a distinctly disposable commodity.[29]

Hence, the production of punitive environments relies on punitivity beyond the sphere of criminal justice and works by "feeding a sense of fragile entitlement."[30] Punitiveness concerns the persistent anxiety of being object of punishment, through detention or expulsion, but also by being criminalised on a social level, for one's own existence.

The redefinition of hostile environments as punitive environments in Europe stems from a combination of laws and administrative measures enforced both on an EU level – the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum – and on a national one, as well as from the re-articulation of public discourses on migration. A distinctive feature of current migration policies and discourses consists in targeting not only illegalised migrants but also refugees who, as clearly stated in the EU Pact, are depicted as rights' abusers. That is, regardless of the refugee status, migrant persons are depicted as unbearable socio-economic burdens and, consequently, as social threats. Therefore, while legal status used to function as a discriminatory threshold for migrants' social acceptability, today it is partially superseded by the grounded commonsense that racialised foreigners abuse welfare and put under pressure a labour market already in crisis. Hence, 'refugees as refugees' are deemed to be part of the 'migration problem'. In fact, as Bridget Anderson has contended, migration is about 'problematic mobility'.[31]

What emerges through the making of punitive environments is that the 'migration problem' encapsulates both problematic, racialised mobility and migrants' unbearable access to socio-economic rights. In fact, migrants and refugees' temporary or protracted presence is seen as predatory: the scarcity of socio-economic resources fuels what I have called elsewhere as "zero-sum rights' game,"[32] according to which migrants'

[29] De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," 438.
[30] Carvalho et al., "Punitiveness Beyond Criminal Justice," 15
[31] Anderson, "New Directions in Migration Studies."
[32] Tazzioli, *Border Abolitionism*,

access to socio-economic rights and to the job market goes to the detriment of citizens. Migrants and refugees' alleged exploitation of the social security system and of the labour market is seen not only as parasitic but, rather, as actively predatory.[33]

4. The making of punitive environment in Europe

The governing of migrants and refugees through punitive environments has become quite visible across Europe, although it has been inflected in slightly different ways across national contexts. The approval of the EU Pact in 2024 foregrounds a generalised punitiveness in the restructuring of the EU's migration agenda: migrants' life will be made unliveable through the production of punitive environments. To give an example from the Pact, the new Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (AMMR), punishes 'unruly' asylum seekers who have dodged the mobility restrictions of the Dublin Regulation, by excluding them from the reception system as a whole – including the pocket money – from the moment when they are notified of the transfer to the responsible Member State. Indeed, the punitive environment is not equivalent to more discretionary detention and confinement for asylum seekers and, rather, concerns the potential punishment of their unruly conducts: indeed, as clearly stated in the Pact (AMMR section), "in order to limit the possibility that the behaviour of applicants could lead to the cessation or shift of responsibility to another Member State" the time limits leading to cessation of responsibility are extended when the person escapes the national territory or "absconds to evade a transfer."[34] Punitiveness, as a latent and pervasive potentiality, turns out to be embedded in the very functioning of the asylum system.

This emerges quite glaringly in two key European countries of migrants' arrival, Greece and Italy, where state authorities have enforced a series of laws and administrative measures whose deliberate punitive character mirrors a widespread attack to the infrastructures of life support. More than the new laws per se and the implementation of punitive measures, what matters is the way in which they have boosted a latent punitiveness for migrants' conducts that are not in the breach of the law. The making of punitive environment in Greece culminated in the immigration legislation adopted by the Greek government in 2025. The new law con-

[33] See also Anderson, "Immigration and the Worker Citizen"; Bendixsen, Näre, "Welfare State Bordering as a Form of Mobility and Migration Control."
[34] AMMR, "2024/1351."

tributes to blur the distinction between migrants and asylum seekers and reveals that the risk of latent punitiveness prevails over actual punishment. Asylum seekers whose asylum claim has been rejected will be subjected to electronic surveillance and told to leave the country within 14 days; if they do not leave, they will be subjected to administrative detention of up to 5 years; people who look for jobs in Greece without authorisation to stay in the country might be imprisoned for up to 24 months. Migrants who have been in Greece with no permit to stay for more than seven years, won't be able to be regularised.

Although for migrants matters the extent to which these criminalising measures will be enforced, for the purpose of a critical knowledge of punitive immigration laws it is not sufficient to ground on an evaluation about the difficulties and possibilities of fully applying those legislations. The punitive character of this new law is not narrowed to its actual implementation and, indeed, we take into account statistics, the result is ambivalent at a first glance: since the implementation of the new law in September 2025, incarceration rate has increased but deportations have decreased in comparison to the previous year.[35] Moreover, even if this new law targets illegalised migrants (failed asylum seekers and unauthorised migrant workers), it should be analysed as part of the production of a broader punitive environment, that affects refugees as well. Women and men who hold the refugee status in Greece have been progressively excluded from financial-humanitarian support and housing – as soon as they obtain the refugee status, they need to leave the camps, and they stop receiving the cash assistance. Hence, despite the permit to stay in the country, many refugees are turned into homeless and struggle to cope with their livelihood.[36] Although the legal status is a *condicio sine qua* non for not being detained and deported, refugees are forced into a condition of protracted socio-economic precarity.

Hence, the making of punitive environments is not merely an exacerbation of hostile environments. Rather, first, punitive environments mould and redefine hostility towards migrants and refugees in terms of criminalisation of their existence and unruly conducts: the dismantling of life-support infrastructures is enforced by state actors, in cooperation with private and non-state actors, by actively harassing migrants. Second, while the hostile environment approach is deliberately directed at those labelled as 'migrants', punitive environments target individuals with different legal

[35] https://rsaegean.org/en/deportation-and-immigration-detention-statistics-in-greece-in-2025/
[36] Lafazani, "Residing (at) the Border: Ethnographies of Precarious Homes and Internal Borders."

status: the latent punitiveness runs across the legal-political spectrum and affect asylum seekers, refugees and illegalised migrants.

5. Punitive environments and interlocking subjugations

An insight into the Italian Security Bills helps us seeing that such punitiveness does not concern migrants only and it will reverberate on citizens as well. Although this is not directly contained in it, a lateral reading of the EU Pact, enables us situating this latter in undergoing wider sociopolitical transformations. Indeed, reading the Pact as a stand-alone piece of legislation would lead us to think that such downward motion in the access to rights and welfare concerns migrants only: as the Italian case demonstrates, the spiral of criminalisation and socioeconomic precarity affect citizens as well; the intertwining of immigration laws, security bills and urban banning orders foregrounds that the production of 'social dangerousness' is entrenched in the representation of asylum seekers and some citizens as rights abusers. Among the measures introduced, the Security Bill that passed in the Italian Parliament in 2025 exacerbates a purely punitive approach to migrants who, disregarding their legal status, organise or participate in uprisings, or engage in passive resistance in detention centers as well as in the hotspots.[37] In all the above mentioned cases, migrants will be punished with a prison sentence. Yet, the criminalisation of the uprisings is not narrowed to spaces of migration confinement; it also includes prisons and Italian detainees. Moreover, the security bill turns the occupation of buildings into a crime – even when the occupations are made for housing families in need. The enforcement of 'red zones' in Italy followed a similar logic: in autumn 2024, the Ministry of Interior ordered local governments (Prefectures) to establish 'red zones' in some Italian cities – Bologna, Milan, Rome, Florence, Naples, Palermo – , which consist in identifying "through specific ordinances, urban areas where dangerous individuals with criminal records are prohibited from entering, and then order their removal"[38].

[37] Any person who, while detained in detention centers or confined in a hotspot "participates in a riot through acts of violence or threats or resistance to the execution of orders issued for the maintenance of order [...] committed by three or more persons acting in concert, shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of one to four years [...]acts of resistance also include conduct involving passive resistance"; moreover, "those who instigate, organize, or lead the riot shall be punished by imprisonment for a term of one year and six months to five years (Art. 27, Security Bill, 2025).

[38] 'Zone rosse' nelle grandi città, direttiva del ministro Piantedosi per innalzare la sicurezza urbana | Ministero dell'Interno

Individuals who are labelled as socially dangerous receive an urban banning order (Daspo) and, if they do not comply with that, they are subject to a 3-month prison sentence. To date, more than 70% of the people who received an urban banning order in Italy are not Italian citizens. The high percentage, which is the outcome of racialised identity checks, has been flagged up by the government to show that Red Zones help protecting citizens from socially dangerous subjects, and conflating these with the image of non-white foreigners. Therefore, the implementation of Red Zones, confirmed under the Security Bill passed in 2026,[39] enhances racialising bordering mechanisms and, jointly, makes generalised police checks acceptable (Security Bill 2026). Punitive environments target migrants and refugees, turning hostility into a systematic police harassment towards them and trigger a pervasive anxiety of punitiveness, drawing on the widespread perception of migrants as predators and abusers of the welfare system.

Nevertheless, even if migrants and racialised citizens will be more harmed than others, many of the measures introduced for crafting punitive environments, criminalise citizens' conducts and violate the right to protest. Thus, the production of punitive environments for criminalising migrants' lives unfolds a widespread – although differential – erosion of socio-economic rights of citizens as well. Even when the production of punitive environments is intended to punish and criminalise migrants, their effects ripple across other marginalised populations, at times producing cross-cutting impacts on both citizens and non-citizens. The criminalisation of the uprisings is not narrowed to spaces of migration confinement; it also includes prisons and, thus, Italian detainees. Moreover, the Security Bills turn the occupation of buildings into a crime – even when the occupations are made for housing families in need.

In this respect it is worth noticing that it is precisely around housing that migrants and citizens' struggles have coalesced in the last few years; the criminalisation of squatting and occupation of buildings aims also at hampering the consolidation of transversal alliances. Under the Security Bills, roadblocks are also subjected to punishment and police's powers will be strengthened during public demonstrations. The making of punitive environments in Italy is emblematic of the ways in which the weaponisation of citizens' discontent and rage for migrants, that constitute the ground of many anti-immigration measures, is ultimately twisted against

[39] According to the 2026 Security Bill, "the prefect may identify specific urban areas characterized by serious or repeated incidents of crime or illegal activity, from which individuals who have been reported to the authorities in the past five years are to be removed."

citizens too or, more precisely, against some groups and by criminalising also citizens' conducts.[40]

The policy discourses that sustain the making of punitive environments, strengthen a clear-cut divide between migrants and citizens, coopting the latter in policing racialised foreigners – by punishing migrants' non-compliance with the law with citizens' compliance. Yet, in practice, such punitiveness multiplies degrees of denizenship widening the spectrum of actions and conducts that can be potentially criminalised.[41] Denizenship reveals the uncomfortable "otherness that operates within citizenship itself, and renders ostensible citizens as so many more denizens."[42] This "intensive policing of the urban poor" is characterised less by "petty states of exception" than by a proliferation of administrative measures, ad hoc decrees and legal measures enforced on the edge of the law.[43] In other words, more than suspending temporarily the rule of law, nation states, alongside passing bombastic anti-immigration laws[44] have multiplied what appear to citizens as *petty regulations*, that often pass unnoticed, or do not cause any flamboyant stir or uproar.

Hence, the production of punitive environment for disrupting migrants' lives unfolds a widespread – although differential – erosion of socio-economic rights of citizens as well. However, the interlocking mechanisms of precarisation are far from being a guarantee of transversal alliances between migrants and citizens. To the contrary, "migrants and low waged/unemployed citizens are competitors for privileges of membership" and, in fact, "marginalisation within citizenship, and of exclusion from citizenship are rarely considered together even as they clearly overlap."[45] In this respect, René Kreichauf has cogently demonstrated how sub-standards housing for refugees has paved the ground in Berlin to "house other racialized and low-income populations that fall out of Berlin's regular housing market, thereby developing refugee accommodation."[46] Therefore, while the EU Pact and recent national laws have been aptly criticized for fast-tracking deportations and widening the legal leeway for detaining asylum seekers, it is likewise fundamental to shed light also on less conspicuous crackdowns on migrants' life-projects, enforced through puni-

[40] Scalia, "Zone rosse."
[41] Shutes, "Work-Related Conditionality"; Turner, "We Are All Denizens Now."
[42] De Genova, "Denizens All," 2015.
[43] Fassin, "Petty States of Exception," 105.
[44] As it is the case for instance of the Greek new legislation on migration and asylum enforced in September 2025 that I mentioned in the previous pages, and that introduces harsh penalties for failed asylum seekers.
[45] Anderson, "Blurred Boundaries," 2778.
[46] Kreichauf, "Accommodation for Profit, Not for Refugees," 473.

tive environments and by depicting women, men and children who seek asylum as rights' abusers. The punitive twist that the Pact has boosted exceeds the enforcement of laws devised for detaining and deporting people who seek asylum in Europe, as criminalisation is a political and not merely a juridical act. Indeed, even if we cannot predict the numbers of asylum applicants who will be punished by the new European and national immigration laws, governing migrants through punitive environments entails enhancing migrants' vulnerability and exploitability.

6. Infrastructures of life and dissent

The pro-refugee mobilisations as well as the spontaneous humanitarian support given to women, men and children seeking asylum in Europe in 2015 has been weakened, and migration itself struggles to work as a political catalyst for broader mobilisations. This is partly the result of a global authoritarian conjuncture,[47] and in part it is the effect of a progressive criminalisation of migrant solidarity and of refugees as rights' abusers. The transformations occurred in the border regime since the onset of what European states have defined as 'refugee crisis' in 2015 do not constitute a clearcut watershed. Indeed, it would be misleading to fall in the dehistoricising trap of presentism, reproducing involuntarily the scripts of the emergency or of the crisis. As part of the systematic attempt to dismantle refugees' life support infrastructures, the hostile environment approach to migration has been reconfigured in terms of latent but pervasive punitiveness, what I have called *the making of punitive environments*. To be potentially punishable are migrants and refugees' unruly conducts and, more broadly, their existence as a whole.

However, what is going on across Europe mirrors a global trend, from Argentina and Chile, where punitive anti-immigration measures have been the backbones of the recent electoral campaign, to India, Tunisia, Algeria, the United States, Turkey, Japan and Pakistan, just to name a few. For this reason, a challenge to 'the punitive environments of migration' requires complicating analyses that posit the desirability of borders as an essentially European or Western-centered priority. Punitive laws are flaunted by states as a way for strengthening the boundaries of the nation and, relatedly, the exclusionary criteria of belonging, considering that immigration controls are "crucial technologies for nation-making (and nation-maintaining) strategies."[48] Such widespread anti-immigration consensus

[47] Hardt, Mezzadra, "A Global War Regime."
[48] Sharma, *Home Rule*, 3.

appears even more pernicious if we consider that it cuts across political coalitions. Yet, such transversal anti-immigration consensus, which reinforces a robust opposition between 'us and them', overshadows that punitive mechanisms boost a downward spiral that affect migrants and citizens, multiplying hierarchies of citizenship.

As Nicholas De Genova notices referring to the US context and the ripple effects anti-immigration policies, "we are all illegal now": that is, the harsh measures against migrants have actually "rendered indistinguishable and undecidable the putative nation's ostensible 'inside' and 'outside'.[49] The global anti-immigration commonsense pushes us to envision a constituent counter-discourse on migration, which is not simply counter-punctual to the making of punitive environments and that, rather, foreground interlocking practices of freedom, beyond the migrant/citizen divide. In such a context, the dismantling of life-support infrastructures that target migrants more violently through punitive environments but increasingly concern citizens as well, appears as a political catalyser for constituent practices that aim at building up and re-building starting from the erosion of collective spaces of liveability.

Indeed, life-support infrastructures reveal not only the socio-material conditions for carrying on a liveable life but also the fact that individuals are inextricably connected to each other and that, in order to survive, they need to be sustained by a social environment.[50] Such mutual interdependency foregrounds a leeway for turning the violent erosion of life-support infrastructures on its head, paving the ground for what Alan Sears has defined as 'infrastructures of dissent': organising collective acts of desertion to oppose the coaptation of citizens in anti-immigration policing, and rebuilding spaces of liveability are part of the same struggle against transversal punitive environments.

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[49] De Genova, "We Are All Illegal Now."
[50] Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance."

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L'intervista

Un'affermativa gioia politica. Intervista con Rosi Braidotti

Affirming Political Joy. An Interview with Rosi Braidotti

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Abstract. A key figure in contemporary thought, Rosi Braidotti is one of the leading voices in European feminist theory and posthumanism. Her work, developed across European philosophical traditions, feminist scholarship, and reflections on technological change, has produced influential concepts such as nomadic subjectivity and critical posthumanism, rethinking identity, embodiment, and politics within a materialist and relational framework. The interview revisits central themes of her work: the nomadic subject as multiple belonging in tension with resurgent identity closures; the need for a situated European engagement with postcolonial perspectives; and critical posthumanism as a way to address technological and capitalist transformations beyond both nostalgic rejection and uncritical enthusiasm. Feminism emerges as a key site for rethinking sex, gender, and reproduction beyond current polarizations. At its core lies the proposal of an affirmative politics grounded in relationality, affects, and generative practices, aimed at transforming critique into the creation of alternatives in a time of overlapping crises.

Keywords: nomadic subjectivity, posthumanism, feminism, technology, affirmative politics.

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Riassunto. Figura centrale del pensiero contemporaneo, Rosi Braidotti è tra le principali esponenti del femminismo teorico e del postumanesimo in Europa: il suo lavoro, sviluppato tra tradizione filosofica europea, studi femministi e riflessione sulle trasformazioni tecnologiche, ha elaborato categorie decisive come la soggettività nomade e il postumano, ridefinendo in chiave materialista e relazionale i concetti di identità, corpo e politica. L'intervista ripercorre alcuni nuclei fondamentali della sua riflessione: la soggettività nomade come appartenenza multipla, capace di leggere le tensioni tra mobilità globale e ritorno delle identità chiuse; la necessità di una rilettura situata del postcoloniale europeo; il postumanesimo critico come strumento per interpretare le trasformazioni tecnologiche e capitalistiche senza ricadere né nel rifiuto nostalgico né nell'entusiasmo acritico. Il femminismo emerge come spazio privilegiato di rielaborazione dei rapporti tra sesso, genere e riproduzione, oltre le polarizzazioni contemporanee. Al centro si colloca infine la proposta di una politica affermativa, fondata su relazioni, affetti e capacità generativa, che invita a trasformare la critica in costruzione di alternative in un presente segnato da crisi multiple.

Parole chiave: soggettività nomade, postumanesimo, femminismo, tecnologia, politica affermativa.

Carlotta Cossutta [CC], Giorgia Serughetti [GS], Elisa Virgili [EV]: *Rosi, il tuo lavoro sta conoscendo una rinnovata centralità nel dibattito pubblico, anche italiano. A gennaio di quest'anno si è tenuto un grande convegno internazionale a Parigi, col titolo evocativo di "Rhizome Rosi", in cui studiosi e studiose provenienti da tutto il mondo si sono confrontate con i tuoi testi e il tuo pensiero. E in Italia Castelvecchi sta ristampando molte delle tue opere, da* Soggetti nomadi[1] *a* Madri mostri macchine,[2] *che erano introvabili e per Rizzoli è uscito recentemente* Il ricordo di un sogno,[3] *in cui racconti la storia della tua famiglia e il suo intreccio col mondo.*

Crediamo che tutto questo non sia un caso, non soltanto poiché hai anticipato gli studi femministi in Europa, aprendo spazi, come la Summer School NOISE a Utrecht o la rete Athena, che hanno permesso a giovani ricercatrici di scoprire un altro modo di fare teoria, ma anche perché il tuo pensiero affronta moltissimi temi – dai confini alle identità, dalle tecnologie al desiderio – che sono centrali per comprendere il panorama e le trasformazioni sociali contemporanee. Inoltre, la tua formazione, a cavallo tra mondo anglosassone e tradizione europea, permette di scardinare molti dei binarismi in cui siamo intrappolate. Per questo ci piacerebbe ripercorrere alcune tappe del tuo lavoro che illuminano alcuni problemi del presente.

CC: *In* Soggetti nomadi *definivi la coscienza nomade come «il possedere un senso di identità che non si basa sulla stabilità bensì sulla contin-*

[1] Braidotti, *Soggetti nomadi*.
[2] Braidotti, *Madri, mostri*.
[3] Braidotti, *Il ricordo*.

genza», proponendo una prospettiva che partiva anche dalla migrazione, dal muoversi con e in diverse lingue, dallo straniamento. Oggi vediamo, invece, un risorgere delle identità fisse, siano esse quelle nazionali, razziali o sessuali e parallelamente assistiamo a una forte dicotomia tra chi è nomade per privilegio (lavorando da remoto e trasformando i luoghi al proprio passaggio) e chi è migrante per necessità. In che modo la coscienza nomade può ancora aiutarci a leggere queste contraddizioni e queste chiusure? Come essere nomadi coscienti oggi?

Rosi Braidotti [RB]: In effetti la soggettività nomade, in quanto alternativa alle identità fisse e granitiche, è anche una critica di ogni forma di nazionalismo. Io diffido di tutti i movimenti che si aggrappano alla presunta autenticità di un'identità che è sempre data come naturale e sacra, e che risulta inevitabilmente divisiva e discriminante verso i soggetti non conformi. Il razzismo è un elemento costitutivo di tutti i nazionalismi – che si dotano di un vero arsenale di prerogative, qualità e doti ritenute superiori a quelle di altre nazionalità, etnie e culture. L'identità è sempre difensiva e può diventare un'arma molto offensiva.

Certo, i miei itinerari di vita – da giovane emigrante in Australia, esule intellettuale a Parigi e poi professionista cosmopolita nei Paesi Bassi – richiamano il concetto di nomadismo, ma non credo ci sia un'equivalenza diretta tra il vissuto e il pensato. Molti sono i soggetti spiazzati o migranti che si irrigidiscono su posizioni identitarie spesso nostalgiche, cioè all'opposto del soggetto nomade. Quindi nulla è giocato in anticipo. Si tratta piuttosto di effetti di risonanza, come ho cercato di dire anche in *Il ricordo di un sogno*.[4] Ma io sono comunque molto affezionata al soggetto nomade, perché indica un perenne processo di distacco dalle identità unitarie. Nella mia esperienza di vita, la soggettività nomade significa anche lasciare che le cose ti sfuggano di mano. Mi spiego: io ho scritto la mia tesi di dottorato in francese, la tesi che poi è diventata il mio primo libro, *Dissonanze,* mai pubblicato in francese, ma solo in inglese.[5] Però da quel lavoro è uscito *Soggetto nomade*,[6] che mi ha occupato per tutti gli anni '90. Ed è un libro scritto in inglese che si può definire un long seller, tradotto in una dozzina di lingue – quest'anno sono uscite nuove edizioni in italiano e in cinese. Molti dei miei libri sono stati pensati in varie lingue in contemporanea ed alcuni sono traduzioni senza un originale nel senso di una sola lingua d'origine. La scrittura dei soggetti nomadi è fluida per necessità.

[4] Braidotti, *Il ricordo.*
[5] Braidotti, *Dissonanze.*
[6] Braidotti, *Soggetto nomade.*

Soggetti nomadi è un libro che io riscriverei tale quale. E retrospettivamente è chiaro che la soggettività nomade è diventata la base per la cartografia postumana, ed è ormai l'impalcatura di tutto il mio impianto di pensiero. Però, se vogliamo seguire questo itinerario all'incontrario, io l'ho scritto nel mezzo della furia postmoderna degli anni '90, quando tutto era relativo, tutto era contingenza e quindi la mia prima reazione fu di grande cautela. Volevo dire ai miei coetanei filosofi di non affrettarsi a dissolvere delle identità che noi soggetti minoritari ancora non avevamo definito – ci serviva un po' di tempo. L'inizio del mio intervento è andato così, e si vede chiaramente in *Dissonanze*:[7] va bene il divenire donna proclamato appassionatamente dai filosofi, ma possiamo diventare donne anche noi? Amici e compagni, ci date il tempo o ci rubate il tempo? Questa è stata la mia prima critica dell'accelerazionismo, queste accelerazioni che sono poi diventate centrali nella fase postumana. Qui ho imparato molto da Deleuze, specialmente dalla sua anatomia politica rigorosa e francamente geniale del capitalismo avanzato come accelerazione costante, tra flussi e velocità di fuga, deterritorializzazioni crudeli e profitti maligni. Si tratta di un sistema senza meta precisa: probabilmente non va da nessuna parte, va a sbattere. L'ordine teleologico della modernità si è interrotto.

Insomma, all'inizio il pensiero nomade era una critica delle contingenze e delle decostruzioni eccessive. Dicevo: se voi postmoderni scardinate tutto, bloccate anche i processi di emancipazione, perché anche la modernità sta finendo, ma non è ancora finita per tutti, alcuni di noi sono ancora in processo di divenire. L'inizio è stato questo, per cui ci sono sì le critiche delle identità granitiche fisse, il microfascismo che ritorna sempre (difatti, eccolo di nuovo), ma c'è anche un grande timore che questi relativismi postmoderni ci impediscano di stabilire le velocità, i modi e i tempi del nostro divenire – per noi soggetti marginali. Perché ha ragione Kristeva quando scrive che la temporalità dei movimenti delle donne è complessa.[8] Un passo avanti, tre passi indietro, la circolarità, le ripetizioni, le regressioni. Però il processo politico non si ferma, segue un'altra modalità storica perché non siamo soggetto dominante, quindi dobbiamo ritagliarci gli spazi, cercando di stabilire dei ritmi. Questo lo vediamo nella nostra vita quotidianamente: non siamo noi a imporre i ritmi, siamo sempre lì a cercare di negoziare con un tempo che non definiamo noi. A questo proposito, la differenza che fa Deleuze, la distinzione tra *kronos* e *aion*, il tempo dell'essere e il tempo del divenire, è molto utile perché il tempo del divenire è veramente molto caotico, poverino, ed eccoci qua a cercare

[7] Braidotti, *Dissonanze*.
[8] Kristeva, "Le temps des femmes".

di controllarlo.[9] Quindi no al relativismo, no alle unità granitiche, dateci il tempo, dateci lo spazio, quindi dateci una soggettività. Da una vita io ribadisco una richiesta semplicissima: "ma ci date il tempo di definire le nostre soggettività o ce le portate via?" Andiamo su Marte, andiamo su un'altra galassia, tutto pur di non permettere ai soggetti minoritari di autodefinirsi. Su questo, Peter Thiel è di un candore assoluto:[10] dispostissimo a sacrificare il divenire delle altre, per affermare il suo diritto a essere il padrone dell'avvenire. Un delirio di onnipotenza che si accompagna ad un potere tecnologico immenso e a un vero fastidio per le regole, i controlli e contrappesi dei sistemi democratici. È un momento di grande pericolo.

Da questa prima fase del pensiero nomade immediatamente si arriva alla seconda – ma le fasi si sovrappongono le une con le altre –, cioè alle appartenenze molteplici. Il soggetto nomade vive nella complessità, è veramente a molti piani. Non nel senso della non appartenenza alienante, quanto dell'appartenere a tante collocazioni, lingue e culture diverse e in maniera generativa. Per prendere l'esempio della mia biografia, ho vissuto situazioni che si contraddicono fra di loro: nascere sul confine nord-orientale dell'Italia, crescere australiana, studiare da filosofa, vivere nella classe operaia, diventare professoressa ordinaria – tutti questi tasselli compongono un affresco eterogeneo, che pure regge su un equilibrio molto singolare. E così, a mio avviso, siamo tutti in un modo o nell'altro – collocati in una meta-stabilità, seppure con grandi differenze.

Su questo tema delle appartenenze molteplici c'era negli anni ' 90 un filone di pensiero critico che poi è stato abbandonato, e a me dispiace molto, che sono i *critical whiteness studies*, gli studi critici della bianchezza, volto a studiare i posizionamenti dei soggetti che passano per bianchi. Ma siccome la bianchezza è un valore dominante, è stato difficile difendere la necessità di analisi speciali dedicate a questa categoria. Eppure mi sembra una pista di riflessione molto importante. Abbandonare lo studio delle categorie dominanti è, a mio avviso, una strategia contro-producente, perché la bianchezza, per quanto dominante, non è una categoria unitaria. E negli anni australiani, in cui ragionavo molto sulla mia esperienza di diventare europea proprio quando ero fuori dall'Europa, cioè sull'identità come spaesamento e ricostruzione a posteriori, mi inquietava la tragedia silenziosa dei bianchi marginalizzati migranti. Ricordo che sono 60 milioni soltanto gli italiani nel mondo, e se poi aggiungiamo tutti gli altri emigranti europei, stiamo parlando di una massa di gente che non sa da che parte appendere il proprio senso di identità. Mi sentivo interpellata dalla consapevolezza che non stavamo prendendo sul serio le sofferenze, i dolo-

[9] Deleuze, *Logica del senso*.
[10] Thiel, "Education of a Libertarian".

ri di una massa di persone che non avevano il diritto di dirsi marginali perché erano bianche, ma che pur restavano povere e marginalizzate. Mi sembrava una lacuna flagrante nel pensiero critico.

Richard Rorty ha scritto una cosa molto bella nel '98, in *Achieving Our Country.*[11] Diceva che, se noi non stiamo attenti, questi votano a destra e ci danno una virata verso il fascismo che ci provocherà dei danni enormi. Io condividevo questo timore, ovvero il non aver saputo inventare un discorso sulla bianchezza altro da quello dominante, e quindi il rinchiuderla in una gabbia di privilegi e di non detti. Ora, qui c'è un altro problema di fondo che ho vissuto quando dirigevo con le colleghe le reti europee degli studi femministi, e cioè il fatto che non solo non si studia abbastanza l'emigrazione dei bianchi europei, ma non si espande neppure il pensiero coloniale a tutti i paesi europei che sono stati potenze coloniali. Cioè il pensiero postcoloniale è dettato dagli anglosassoni e si svolge essenzialmente in lingua inglese, come se noi europei non avessimo una densa e violenta storia di colonialismo e di tanti variegati imperi. Così, i nostri non-detti sul passato coloniale e l'impero fascista italiano si mescolano ai non detti sulla storia della nostra emigrazione. Sarebbe importante studiare più a fondo questo nesso storico e sociologico e quindi nomadizzare il discorso critico sull'essere bianchi, pur continuando a denunciare i privilegi razziali e le violenze nazionaliste implicite in questa categoria. Un vero gioco di equilibri instabili, che di nuovo richiede un minimo rispetto per la complessità. Inutile dire che la popolarità della destra estrema oggi riposa proprio sull'alienazione e lo sgomento delle classi meno agiate e più escluse dalla transizione tecnologica, proprio come aveva profetizzato Rorty.

Quindi, attraverso il soggetto nomade, io lancio anche un appello alle scienze umane, perché superino il loro nazionalismo metodologico – come lo definisce Ulrich Beck.[12] Dovremmo intraprendere il pensiero postcoloniale a casa nostra, non appoggiarci completamente sugli angloamericani, perché questa dipendenza intellettuale diventa anche un pretesto per far passare sotto silenzio verità molto scomode, mentre l'illusione collettiva di "italiani brava gente" circola ancora. Invece, la soggettività nomade implica la creolizzazione di tutte le identità ed etnie, per citare Édouard Glissant – anche lui grande pensatore delle relazioni e della poetica nomade.[13] In questo quadro, io volevo assolutamente mettere a fuoco le contraddizioni interne alla categoria di *critical whiteness*, prima che fosse troppo tardi, e capire come questa mancanza di conoscenze influisca sul dibattito attuale sugli immigranti che arrivano in Italia.

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[11] Rorty, *Achieving.*
[12] Beck, *Sguardo cosmopolita.*
[13] Glissant, *Poetica della relazione.*

Poi, è evidente che il grande nomade oggi è il capitale e che la sua mobilità è aumentata soprattutto con l'inizio del neoliberalismo, in quelle accelerazioni di cui parlavamo. Adesso, ovviamente, si tratta di una circolazione anche virtuale, tecnologica, che però resta profondamente materiale, anche con i giri perenni di dati e di informazione su scala pianetaria. Insieme alla sinistra giovanile della mia generazione, mi chiedevo come intervenire su queste velocità a multi-scala, regolate da una economia politica dove ha interesse solo il profitto immediato, quindi un presente senza futuro. La volontà di opposi alle contraddizioni e le accelerazioni scellerate del capitalismo avanzato, è presente fin dall'inizio nel progetto del soggetto nomade, perché io leggo il capitale con Deleuze, non con Marx. Sul piano meta-metodologico, è un sistema schizofrenico, non dialettico. A livello concettuale, il soggetto nomade è postumanista e aperto al non-umano, sulla scia di Foucault. Il problema del marxismo è il suo umanesimo residuale, che lo spinge a pensare l'avvenire in un quadro profondamente antropocentrico. È una posizione che offre molti vantaggi sul piano delle solidarietà diffuse, ma rinchiude l'umano in una cornice concettuale limitata e troppo eurocentrica. Qui si apre un grande dibattito, lo so.

CC: *Sì. Se posso aggiungere un pezzetto, perché mi sembra molto legato a quello che dicevi sull'identità bianca e su una certa critica postcoloniale che viene dal mondo anglosassone: la riflessione sull'identità nasce per te anche dal tuo pensarti europea, immaginando l'Europa come un superamento delle identità nazionali. Ritorni su questo tema anche recentemente in* Post–Nationalism[14] *sottolineando l'urgenza di riprendere questo percorso. Di fronte all'Europa come scenario di guerra da un lato e fortezza con confini invalicabili dall'altro, che forma può prendere un processo di trasformazione post–nazionalista?*

RB: Penso che tutte le identità siano un po' retroattive: le scopri quando le perdi e sempre in un quadro relazionale, come è successo a me col sentirmi europea, come dicevo sopra. L'europeizzazione come momento in un percorso nomade ha avuto un effetto immediato anche sul mio rapporto con la filosofia. Ricordo che io la filosofia l'ho studiata nel mondo anglosassone, dove la differenza fra filosofia continentale e filosofia analitica è fondamentale. Ognuna di queste tradizioni però prosegue per la sua strada con grande energia e spirito innovativo. Per esempio in Australia, grazie anche al mio lavoro ma non solo, Deleuze è un nome che conoscono tutti gli studiosi, perché l'abbiamo inserito fin dall'inizio al cuore della tradizione continentale universitaria. Questa visione della filosofia europea

[14] Braidotti, *Post-Nationalism*.

vista dal mondo, da fuori e non da dentro la coscienza egemonica dell'Europa, è davvero cruciale per il mio lavoro. La si ritrova anche nel mio femminismo postumano, con le sue radici neo-materialiste francesi, a cui si aggiungono ovviamente l'impatto della fenomenologia, la psicoanalisi, il marxismo, il post–strutturalismo. La filosofia continentale non coincide affatto con la versione dominante della Storia della Filosofia che si insegna tuttora. Come dicevo prima: ci sono maniere profondamente diverse di studiare la storia della filosofia.

Questo è il passaggio fondamentale. Dopo il '68 la generazione filosofica di Deleuze si è dedicata a elaborare una controgenealogia del pensiero filosofico, per cercare di aprirlo alle sfide epocali che loro avevano già individuato. Foucault e Deleuze praticano una critica rigorosa del marxismo dall'ala politica di sinistra, mentre Alain de Benoist la faceva da destra. Questa critica, che ci aiuta a oltrepassare il dualismo fascista–antifascista per comprendere i nuovi microfascismi striscianti, Deleuze ce la offre negli anni '70. E noi studenti a Parigi, provenienti da mezzo mondo, lo abbiamo vissuto come una vera rinascita. Anche dall'Australia e dall'Inghilterra, dove in quegli anni c'era una sinistra marxista davvero molto attiva e vivace – questo pensiero ha prodotto un nuovo lume di speranza di ripensare il marxismo da sinistra.

Questa trasposizione della filosofia francese nella tradizione continentale del mondo filosofico anglosassone è stata facilitata dalla presenza di tanti anglosassoni a Parigi nel seminario dei "maître-penseurs" di quella generazione. C'erano soprattutto gli inglesi, i canadesi, gli australiani, ma tanti anche gli africani: insomma, tanti che cercavano un'alternativa al marxismo ufficiale. Specialmente dopo la disfatta del movimento dei minatori inglesi da parte di Thatcher, e la presidenza di Ronald Reagan negli USA, il mondo anglosassone comprese ciò che Deleuze e i suoi coetanei avevano capito all'indomani del fallimento politico del maggio '68: che servivano urgentemente delle alternative concrete, sostenute da un fronte unito. I vari gruppi e gruppuscoli della sinistra dell'epoca non erano affatto uniti. Da quel lato, l'autolesionismo della sinistra è davvero leggendario.

Quindi nel mondo universitario filosofico anglofone, il pensiero francese – di Deleuze, ma anche di Derrida – fa da sponda a un momento di transizione intergenerazionale e transculturale. La gioventù di sinistra trova nei loro testi energia e speranza per continuare a lottare. Per ragioni assai diverse, e a volte perfino opposte, come spiego nell'introduzione al libro di Deleuze,[15] questo passaggio non è avvenuto né in Francia né in Italia. La Francia l'ha rifiutato perché, dopo la vittoria elettorale di Mitterrand, rientra in campo l'universalismo socialista, il sistema umanista

[15] Braidotti, *Deleuze*.

repubblicano, con quel profondo rapporto al razionalismo cartesiano, che si schiera contro ogni forma di cosiddetto "relativismo". E difatti i miei professori poststrutturalisti, accusati ingiustamente di questo peccato mortale, non hanno fatto una grande carriera in Francia, tranne Foucault che però è venuto a mancare molto presto. In Italia è mancata allo stesso modo una critica concettuale e pacata del marxismo da parte della sinistra nelle istituzioni, anche perché quelli purtroppo sono stati per noi gli anni di piombo. Alain de Benoist, però, continuava a insegnare e a tessere la sua tela teorica di estrema destra.

Il femminismo è stato per me il vero laboratorio critico. Io però ho incontrato sempre una certa difficoltà a inserirmi nei dibattiti filosofici italiani perché quando pensavo alla "filosofia della differenza" avevo in mente tutta un'altra cosa rispetto a quella di cui parlava Luisa Muraro, che io avevo conosciuto a Parigi come traduttrice di Luce Irigaray. Adriana Cavarero l'ho conosciuta anni dopo. Io avevo in mente una filosofia della differenza che era già staccata dall'impianto hegeliano e marxista, e molto critica dell'universalismo umanista.

Così sono entrata nella discussione filosofica da un'angolatura molto specifica: soggetto nomade antinazionalista, ma incarnata e situata nel presente, e dunque non relativista. Soggetto in divenire ma di appartenenza europea, dove l'essere europea è comunque definito dal fenomeno dell'emigrazione e dalla consapevolezza del colonialismo. Il risultato è spiazzante, perché la filosofia continentale che pratico io non esiste nelle strutture istituzionali e nelle tradizioni filosofiche in Italia. L'umanesimo – nelle variazioni universaliste, socialiste, post-coloniali e anche femministe – continua infatti a giocarvi un ruolo decisivo.

Ma la filosofia continentale ha fatto un lavoro critico eccellente. Deleuze ha scritto la storia del concetto del fascismo come elemento costitutivo del pensiero filosofico. Lui è il primo filosofo a prendere sul serio il fascismo come concetto e non solo come avvenimento storico. È un concetto molto preciso di identità sovrane, unitarie, dominanti, razziste, antisemitiche e islamofobiche, misogine e sessiste, essenzialmente assassine, e violente. Si tratta di un fascismo diffuso e banalizzato che ci portiamo addosso e fa parte di una certa idea di noi stessi. L'antidoto è la presa di coscienza europea come passaggio nomade verso il post-nazionalismo, o la creolizzazione di Glissant, di cui parlavo prima. Ricordo che Deleuze e Guattari erano entrambi federalisti europei: non erano affatto anarchici, né cinici: vedevano nell'Europa di Ventotene una vera possibilità storica di divenire altrimenti europei. Questi filosofi ci aiutano a capire che cos'è l'antifascismo come pratica etica, politica, ma specialmente come concetto guida in filosofia.

Ecco, tutte queste precisazioni forse aiutano a chiarire il mio rapporto con l'Italia sul piano filosofico, dove mi sento collocata in uno stato di produttiva estraneità. Io sono davvero molto grata a tutte quelle che mi hanno accompagnata in Italia, prima di tutto Anna Maria Crispino, poi il Centro Orlando di Bologna, con Raffaella Lamberti e Annamaria Taglia-vini. Nel movimento femminista i dialoghi sono stati intensissimi, però non vertevano su Deleuze, che non era tanto conosciuto, e quindi mi mancavano degli elementi. Ma io ho giocato la carta dell'estraneità produttiva per introdurre altri temi e dimensioni, per esempio, sulla tecnologia e su come la tecnologia ha ridefinito i parametri dell'umano. E su come i residui dell'umanesimo costitutivo della cultura italiana nel suo insieme si ritrovano tuttora nella filosofia marxista. E sulla necessità di seguire la battaglia delle idee filosofiche lanciata dalla destra, cresciuta sui testi di De Benoist.

GS: *Molto interessante questa idea di una certa estraneità nel tuo rapporto con la tradizione, anche femminista, italiana…*

RB: Ma l'estraneità è anche il prologo dell'amore, come spesso accade nella vita. Sentirsi non completamente a proprio agio, in uno stato di relativa non-appartenenza, è molto generativo. Per esempio, io penso che la storia delle idee sia alimentata anche da incomprensioni e perfino da equivoci legati alla non-appartenenza. La mia formazione filosofica è interculturale e quindi creolizzata – studio storia della filosofia nella tradizione continentale in Australia, e poi alla Sorbona in un corso intitolato "Storia dei sistemi di formazione del sapere", che era la specialità di Foucault, ed era anche il titolo della sua cattedra. Già in questa impostazione si capisce che non si tratta della storia lineare della filosofia come rullo compressore, ma di un altro modo di studiare la storia della filosofia.

L'orizzonte condiviso, e quindi il filo conduttore tra quei due momenti chiave della mia formazione, resta la critica di come la filosofia nel dopoguerra ha evitato il confronto con il fascismo e con il colonialismo, ovvero movimenti storici di cui è stata un motore assolutamente attivo e portante. Senza un pensiero filosofico che predica la superiorità intellettuale e morale dell'Occidente non c'è colonialismo. Hobbes, Locke, Hegel - che affermano che l'avvenire del mondo è l'Europa - e l'America – con culture incaricate di una missione civilizzatrice - preparano la strada al fascismo. Esiste una solida e nobile tradizione filosofica che predica la superiorità razziale della cultura europea, trasformata in significante universale di razionalità e di ordine morale. Idee che, nella realtà, esprimono il dominio del soggetto bianco, maschile e cristiano, nei confronti del quale mi sento effettivamente estranea.

GS: *Un altro aspetto che avvertiamo molto attuale nel tuo pensiero è naturalmente la riflessione sull'umano e il postumano. Nell'introduzione al primo volume della trilogia sul postumano, uscito in edizione originale nel 2013*,[16] *parli dell'"esplosione" del concetto di "umano", sotto la doppia pressione dei progressi scientifici e degli interessi dell'economia, a cui le forze conservatrici e religiose rispondono con il tentativo di reiscrivere l'umano all'interno dei paradigmi della "legge naturale". Non sono trascorsi molti anni da quella pubblicazione, eppure i processi che descrivevi allora sembrano imporsi all'attenzione su una scala nuova, si potrebbe dire ingigantita, con la tensione (e talvolta l'insospettabile alleanza) tra umanesimo tradizionalista e progetti transumanisti di fuga dal corpo, dalla materia vivente, dalla Terra. Oggi il postumanesimo critico può aiutarci a leggere e interpretare questo salto, se di salto si tratta?*

RB: Grazie di questa grande domanda. Esiste un parallelismo assai significativo tra la critica del marxismo da parte di Deleuze e dell'ala filosofica di sinistra – quindi la critica del dominio di una certa filosofia della storia, della linearità, della teleologia hegeliana – e la questione dell'umano. Nel '67 in *Le parole e le cose*,[17] Foucault scrive che l'uomo è morto, risuonando con il Nietzsche che scrive che Dio è morto. Ma che cosa intendeva dire? Che una certa idea dell'umanesimo è finita e questo avvertimento lui lo rivolge non solo ai liberali, ai conservatori, che insistono sull'Europa come culla di civiltà – e ai neofascisti che trasformano quest'idea in uno strumento di repressione e violenza contro i non-Europei. Foucault lo indirizza anche molto alla sinistra, criticando le lacune di un pensiero che si era irrigidito. Mette a fuoco quello che sul piano filosofico è il nodo concettuale, specialmente in Italia, che è l'umanesimo socialista, l'universalismo marxista. Cioè la nozione che l'Uomo sia la misura di ogni cosa e che l'avvenire vada pensato a sua immagine e somiglianza, liberato dal giogo del capitale che opprime e falsifica la sua autentica natura fondata sulla libertà. Ideale eccellente che condivido in parte, ma che vorrei liberare dai presupposti maschilisti, eurocentrici e anche antropocentrici che lo sorreggono. La forza dell'umanesimo risiede proprio nella sua diversità: c'è l'umanesimo in salsa rinascimentale, poi coloniale, poi marxista, poi liberale con valori incontestabili quali i diritti dell'uomo – e delle donne? - e l'universalità della giustizia. Sono tutti valori fondamentali, che non rifiuto, ma che vorrei ampliare per renderli più inclusivi.

A compromettere quell'idea di umano è, dagli anni '60, il capitalismo stesso, attraverso nuovi dispositivi tecnologici che vanno oltre l'ide-

[16] Braidotti, *Il postumano*.
[17] Foucault, *Le parole*.

ale modernista della tecnologia come supplemento del lavoro umano. Le nuove tecnologie erodono l'umano, lo espandono, ne aumentano le capacità e lo ridefiniscono radicalmente. Lo sbalzo è qualitativo, non quantitativo. Le macchine hanno sempre lavorato per noi e al posto degli umani, ma rispettando le dovute distanze. Per esempio, nel boom economico del dopoguerra arriva certo l'automobile, ma entrano anche in casa le lavatrici, le aspirapolveri, che parlano della liberazione della donna. La pillola anticontraccettiva e gli elettrodomestici, a mio avviso, vanno messi in cima alla classifica degli strumenti tecnologici emancipatori del genere femminile. C'è nella serie tv *Mad Men* una scenetta che dimostra questo nesso sovversivo tra tecnologia e liberazione: quando arriva la prima lavatrice a casa di Betty, la protagonista, meravigliosamente annoiata, che sembra uscita dalle pagine del classico femminista di Betty Friedan,[18] la trasforma in giocattolo sessuale. Ci si appoggia contro, durante la centrifuga e lascia che l'industriosa macchina faccia vibrare le sue membra. La tecnologia è proprio così, è completamente multifunzionale, e questa vignetta della lavatrice–vibratore per me è rivelatrice su molti fronti.

Pensare la tecnologia come elemento positivo e generatore dell'evoluzione umana non fa parte dell'apparato concettuale della sinistra, tranne come un'utopia da realizzare dopo il crollo del capitalismo. La nuova sinistra, quella della generazione dei Baby-Boomers, tutto il fronte antifascista, per quanto radicale e appassionato di giustizia sociale, si riunifica intorno a questa volontà – non esplicitata, ma attivata di continuo - di *non* rimettere in causa l'unità di definizione dell'umano che è il maschio bianco. Chiunque si azzardi a non rispettare questa regola non scritta – per esempio noi femministe – lo fa a suo rischio.

Le tecnologie sono davvero un'antinomia? Sono il nemico o sarà forse il caso di pensare che viviamo in un nuovo momento? I francesi lo capiscono molto presto perché ci sono stati Roland Barthes, i situazionisti, Guy Debord... Tra la fine degli anni '60 e l'inizio degli anni '70, loro capiscono che sta arrivando la società dello spettacolo, in cui le immagini sono molto più importanti della realtà.

La sinistra politica invece si rivela assai scettica nei confronti di un pensiero critico che non parte dai presupposti di capitale e lavoro – e approccia le tecnologie della comunicazione in un quadro nettamente restrittivo. Allora l'estrema destra, penso di nuovo ad Alain de Benoist, capisce invece, legge attentamente la situazione, e conclude che "il capitale ci sta rubando l'umano, difendiamolo". E rinasce una nuova destra, androcentrica, oscurantista, reazionaria, 'spiritualoide' e duramente opposta alla modernità.

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[18] Friedan, *Mistica della femminilità.*

Noi femministe invece no. E allora io ho continuato il pensiero critico concentrandomi proprio sull'umano dicendo: se l'umano coincide con l'Uomo bianco occidentale, in quanto femminista, donna, gay, antirazzista e antifascista, cosa me ne importa della crisi dell'umano? Le mie colleghe e amiche aborigene in Australia, tutto il fronte postcoloniale pianetario pensa: 'ma ci va bene che questo umano se ne vada, anzi meno male che non c'è più!' Pensiero inimmaginabile in Europa, a meno che uno non legga attentamente Fanon, ma anche Spinelli, e ci mediti sopra seriamente. Penso che un momento fondamentale per me sia stato il movimento punk. Il cyberpunk e specialmente il cyberfemminismo sono atti fondatori. Io li ho vissuti, in Inghilterra, e molto in Australia, dove il collettivo "VNS Matrix" di Sydney ha lanciato il primo manifesto, *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto*.[19] Una paginetta di puro genio – siamo all'inizio degli anni '90 – su come le donne devono prendersi il controllo del cyberspazio. Ma qui in Europa pensiamo anche al punk della prima Nina Hagen, fino alle Pussy Riot. Un passaggio meraviglioso. Poi anche quel momento cyberpunk si chiude. Però quella storia io la racconto in *Femminismo postumano*:[20] è una genealogia che continua nel femminismo contemporaneo.

L'idea è semplice: cerchiamo di impossessarci di queste nuove tecnologie della comunicazione, per inventarci una nuova democrazia digitale, solidale e femminista. Che cosa ci vuole? Perché non dovrebbe essere possibile? Però servono dei contenuti all'altezza di questa sfida. Immaginiamo che abbiamo finalmente a nostra disposizione un satellite femminista: che cosa diciamo al mondo? Abbiamo la possibilità di parlare alla terra intera, che cosa vogliamo dire? In genere queste domande provocano prima una risata imbarazzata e poi un leggero panico, perché le controproposte non abbondano, visto che la cultura critica è dedita al culto della negatività. E qui si apre un altro orizzonte al quale tengo molto: quello dell'affermazione, che è una *praxis*, che ci impone di preparare delle controproposte, lavorare su contenuti seri, documentati e aggiornati. Facciamo un ragionamento politico con Spinoza sulla nostra collocazione nel sistema: sei dentro, sei parte del problema e se sei parte del problema devi diventare parte della soluzione.

Io vedo il femminismo come una delle filosofie che non hanno mai smesso di lottare per sviluppare e lanciare un messaggio globale, che cambia la percezione dell'umano nel suo insieme. Quello che facciamo non è solo per le donne e le persone LGBT, è un messaggio profondo di trasformazione della vita, del modo di essere, di relazionarsi. Il mio femminismo postumano accetta le tecnologie in chiave critica e trasformativa

[19] VNS Matrix, *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto.*
[20] Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism.*

come uno degli elementi che alimentano l'evoluzione della nostra specie. Queste nuove tecnologie cambiano anche il nostro sistema di percezione, la memoria e l'immaginario e quindi la nostra coscienza. Serve una via femminista verso una nuova alleanza con le tecnologie, che vanno regolate e governate per il bene di tutti. Su questo ha ragione Papa Leone nella sua Enciclica,[21] anche se sbaglia sul postumano. Ma noi femministe non possiamo bloccarci come predica il Vaticano, ritornando al mito fondatore dell'umanesimo universalista: il disegno intelligente del creato, capace di realizzare la piena umanità di tutti. Non ci caschiamo più, grazie, e indietro non possiamo andare. Il mio itinerario da filosofa femminista è più a zigzag, è più civico, più spinoziano, è la democrazia radicale che viene dal popolo, che viene dal basso. Rispetto alle tecnologie, siamo noi cittadini a doverci organizzare in comunità cognitive capaci di mettere ordine nelle accelerazioni tecnologiche, a provvedere regole e norme adeguate ai tempi e alle nostre esigenze. La cittadinanza informata, in alleanza con le tecnologie, messa in relazione con realtà sociali, e a confronto con istituzioni antiquate, sa autoorganizzarsi. Questa fiducia nell'intelligenza collettiva di una cittadinanza competente e comunicativa è molto praticata nel mondo odierno. Piace molto alla generazione Z, ma anche a tanti altri che cercano di ricostruire comunità digitali socialiste dalla base. Mi interessa molto l'ipotesi di prendere le città 'smart' come punto di riferimento, un arcipelago di città indipendenti autonome con la tecnologia integrata – un nuovo Rinascimento postumano!

GS: *Ma più difficile mi sembra l'altro versante della tensione, perché credo che possiamo comprenderci come soggetti che hanno a cuore la trasformazione piuttosto che respingere l'evoluzione tecnologica per una sorta di nostalgia nei confronti di una certa idea dell'umano, però poi entra in gioco il capitale…*

EV: *Ti chiederei di aggiungere qualche riflessione che ci aiuti a comprendere meglio quanto hai detto finora sulla tecnologia, e a valutare in che misura queste considerazioni possano essere valide anche alla luce delle attuali trasformazioni tecnologiche, in particolare quelle legate all'intelligenza artificiale e alla governance algoritmica. Considerando, da un lato, l'importanza di una dimensione corporea incarnata nel pensiero e, dall'altro, le trasformazioni in corso nel capitalismo tecnologico.*

RB: Inizia un decennio fa (come minimo) il momento in cui i tecnoboys – come li chiamavamo nel cyberfemminismo - cominciano a parlare

[21] Leone XIV, *Magnifica humanitas.*

di intelligenza artificiale come di qualcosa che non ha né corpo né materia, né fondamenti, né fondazioni. E che non risponde ad alcuna regola, politica, costituzionale o morale, o ad alcun obbligo etico verso l'ambiente. Questa dematerializzazione avviene però anche in maniera un po' sciocca, e superficiale, senza considerare, ad esempio, la questione delle fonti energetiche che servono per i datacenter. Cito una delle mie colleghe aborigene a Melbourne: "Guarda, quel ciò che metterà fine a tutto questo è Gaia perché il loro sistema non è sostenibile". Una parte integrale della superficialità del capitalismo tecnologico deriva proprio dalla sua volontà di potenza, cioè dal fatto che i padroni delle grandi imprese tecnologiche credono di controllare l'avvenire del mondo. Però io non sono pessimista e penso che le forze democratiche – specialmente in campo progressista, femminista, decoloniale, ambientalista e postumano – stiano contenendo questa forza distruttiva. Le alternative ci sono. Qui le università hanno un ruolo cruciale da svolgere sia sul piano della didattica, che per selezionare i punti chiave della ricerca e della gestione della mutazione tecnologica, nel pieno rispetto di quella ecologica. Si sta lavorando molto sui sistemi alternativi, algoritmi e reti energetiche comprese. Si parla di etica integrale, che copra tutti gli assi di ciò che io chiamo la convergenza postumana. Si sognano i socialismi digitali. Le idee non mancano di certo!

E poi bisogna aggiungere un fattore sociale, che deriva da, ma non è attribuibile solo alle, tecnologie: la crescita delle disuguaglianze, l'attrazione fatale dei neofascismi, dei razzismi, la violenza contro tutte le minoranze, i femminicidi, la mancanza di empatia verso l'ambiente e l'indifferenza agli altri, che sono il cuore del capitalismo contemporaneo e delle sue derive illiberali. Contro le nuove oligarchie *high tech* ci serve una cultura della giustizia sociale, la solidarietà e la pace come mentalità e pratica sociale, non solo come assenza di guerre. Dobbiamo rassicurare a fatti e non solo a parole le nuove generazioni che questo è davvero il loro momento: non è vero che i giochi sono fatti, possiamo ancora disegnare qualcosa di alternativo, con uno spirito affermativo, non di negazione. È il momento di lavorare, di studiare, di creare alternative. È possibile che non ci sia un impegno civico collettivo e generalizzato a disegnare il futuro? Non siamo abituati a reagire in maniera affermativa, noi della sinistra. È come se fossimo innamorati del concetto di crisi perpetua: finché c'è crisi, c'è sinistra? Ma allora aveva ragione Berselli a dire che siamo proprio "sinistrati"?[22] E se praticassimo un po' più di etica affermativa?

L'etica che ci serve è un'etica della collaborazione, un'etica della gioia, nel senso di generare insieme l'energia che non c'è. Nel sistema hegeliano-marxista l'energia è sprigionata dallo scontro dialettico: viene sempre da

[22] Berselli, *Sinistrati.*

fuori e quando fuori non c'è niente tutto si estingue. In un sistema spinoziano l'energia è creata dall'affettività condivisa di gente che dice "no", ma nel senso di: "io preferirei quell'altra cosa". Quando dico "no, io preferirei di no", dico "io preferirei". C'è il desiderio, c'è già lo scatto affettivo. Io scelgo, affermo la mia preferenza per un no. È un'altra cosa, non è il taglio del negativo hegeliano, è un'altra struttura concettuale, profondamente antidialettica, è un'affettività condivisa che può essere il dolore, può essere l'alienazione, può essere una visione condivisa. Qualsiasi punto di incrocio è valido, purché generi la formazione di una comunità, di un gruppo che si attiva e si mette al lavoro: facciamo un altro algoritmo, e inseriamolo nell'ambiente in maniera generativa!

GS: *Torneremo sulla politica affermativa. Ma restando ancora un momento sulla categoria del "postumano", e passando al femminismo: uno degli aspetti forse più fecondi della tua teoria neo–materialista postumana è la possibilità che offre di disfare e superare la tradizionale distinzione tra sesso–natura e genere–cultura, come parte della più ampia opera di messa in discussione dei dualismi. Particolarmente prezioso ci sembra oggi il tuo invito a tracciare una via di fuga fra il determinismo biologico e il costruttivismo sociale…*

RB: In effetti tutto il mio pensiero – dal nomadismo al postumano – ha cercato di definire le diagonali e le linee di fuga trasversali, per disfare i dualismi che ci bloccano la mente. Mi sembra urgente staccare le complessità che ci troviamo ad affrontare dalla stretta dei dualismi che le paralizzano. I termini che definiscono i sistemi complessi non si possono ridurre a elementi contrari o contradditori, che si escludono a vicenda. È importante imparare a pensarli invece come assemblaggi eterogenei e dinamici.

Per quanto riguarda la questione specifica sul rapporto natura-cultura, chiaramente io sono cresciuta con Beauvoir e la fenomenologia femminista francese, e quindi sono d'accordo che non si nasce donna, ma lo si diventa. Nel secolo scorso, il costruttivismo sociale fonda il femminismo del dopoguerra. Ma le cose sono cambiate molto da allora, e il legame natura-cultura è stato ripensato, in filosofia da Foucault e poi con il ritorno al neomaterialismo di Deleuze, di stampo spinoziano. Quindi io sono partita da questa filosofia e l'ho incrociata con l'intuizione femminista – penso alla prima fase dell'opera di Irigaray - che parte dal presupposto della struttura sessuata della materia vivente. La nostra corporalità appartiene al continuum della materia vivente – dobbiamo ricordarci che la vita non è solo una prerogativa umana. Poi la materia viene plasmata anche dall'ordine culturale e dalle norme sociali, ma in maniera molto nomade e dinamica. Questo approccio mi consente di fare altre distinzioni, per

esempio fra gradazioni possibili di sessuazione dei corpi viventi. Perché si tratta pur sempre di corpi materiali e situati in un ordine sociale che li ricodifica, ma non li contiene mai pienamente. La sessualità precede ed eccede il genere, sempre. Qui ci serve la teoria psicoanalitica del desiderio, che è stata ingiustamente messa da parte in questi ultimi decenni.

Chiaramente anche la scienza ci illumina: c'è un sistema di cromosomi, di ormoni, che costruisce i nostri corpi, ma anche queste entità non sono neutre e vanno liberate dalle gabbie binarie dentro le quali spesso vengono rinchiuse. Ridurre la pluriformità complessa della sessuazione a due soli generi è una vera violenza epistemica oltre che politica. Se la materia è sessuata, è ovvio che si manifesta in gradazioni e composizioni diverse. Mi ricordo di cosa diceva Virginia Woolf della sua amica-amante Vita: è più femmina che femminile, *more female than feminine*. Si nasce come composizione corporea a gradazione sessuata non solo al femminile o maschile, ma come minimo secondo cinque gradazioni possibili, per Fausto–Sterling, secondo il ventaglio cromosomico. Ma i numeri non contano: la sequenza resta aperta e la sessuazione del vivente nasce all'insegna della complessità, che resta fluida anche se poi culturalmente si diventa qualcosa che è riconoscibile come donna/uomo. Questo processo di socializzazione attraverso il genere si appoggia sulla materia, ma non la inventa, non la porta alla significazione. Io sono una neo-materialista realista: non è il linguaggio a creare la realtà, anche se la trascrive e la codifica. Il mondo vive al di fuori dello sguardo e della parlata umana.

Però è altrettanto vero che la biopolitica che ci ha insegnato Foucault ha fatto della manipolazione del vivente la base del suo potere. In un regime biopolitico di stampo patriarcale come il nostro, il binarismo di genere serve agli interessi di una classe dominante che impone l'eterosessualità obbligatoria in famiglie nucleari come strumento di governo.

GS: *Vista la profondità della frattura che attraversa il femminismo proprio in rapporto alla distinzione tra sesso e genere, tu in realtà secondo me offri una delle pochissime via d'uscita da questa polarizzazione tra gender theory e femminismo gender critical…*

RB: Sarei onorata di svolgere questo ruolo, perché credo che il femminismo sia abbastanza ampio, come movimento di pensiero, da potersi permettere grandi variazioni al suo interno – penso all'importanza del transfemminismo, per esempio.

Permettetemi un primo commento su come il capitalismo avanzato innesca e poi trae profitto dalle divisioni che scatena nelle culture di sinistra. Tante di queste guerre culturali tra femministe sono fomentate da una destra molto abile che, anche attraverso le sue manipolazioni dei

social e della rete, sa sobillare odio ovunque. Un secondo fattore dolente riguarda invece la nostra stessa cultura dell'aggressività come disposizione mentale, anche in campo femminista e progressista. Forse il problema di fondo è quel culto della negatività al quale ho già accennato, cioè a come il pensiero critico si voglia aggressivo e arrogante verso i propri oppositori, anche a sinistra. Questa negatività ha contaminato anche il femminismo. Io non so a che punto sia iniziata, perché negli anni della grande mobilitazione eravamo così in tante, c'era così tanto da fare che le differenze portavano a grandi discussioni e disaccordi sicuramente, ma venivano assorbite da un'ondata di energia collettiva. Una volta passata questa ondata, come tutte le ondate di riflusso, restano differenze che mutano in germi di bellicosità e in rivendicazioni assurde. La destra sa sfruttare queste guerre culturali ed instaurare un clima sociale divisivo. È anche entrata in gioco una tendenza – molto americana – ad imporre un'unica agenda, un paradigma egemonico, che impone la questione del giorno, l'unica che conta, come se non ci fosse nient'altro, come se il mondo non esistesse più. Errori da ambo le parti.

Con il pensiero nomade, io immaginavo non una terza via, ma una via di mezzo, una diagonale di fuga da questi campi ormai minati, che stanno distruggendo il movimento femminista. Rifiuto il pensiero unico ed i sistemi mono paradigmatici; credo nella complessità, la molteplicità, il nomadismo eterogeneo e dinamico. Ma è possibile ci sia una sola unica 'domanda del giorno'? Mi sembra assurdo. Possiamo ascoltare le donne iraniane; ci sono le rivendicazioni LBGTQ+ che ci interpellano; generazione Z ha abbracciato la complessità e la solidarietà; possiamo parlare con le donne ingegnere del CERN che stanno cercando di fare dei sistemi di calcolo che ci permetterebbero di spostare l'accento delle tecnologie dalla distruzione alla rigenerazione. Noi possiamo rigenerare il pianeta con queste tecnologie. Basta aprire i nostri portali della percezione e dell'intelletto e ascoltare il mondo intorno a noi.

Ci serve in questa fase la forza radicale dell'immaginazione, oltre che il potere del pensiero filosofico. È un momento straordinario, se riusciamo ad abbracciare questa scienza e tecnologia, e fare delle controproposte. Di proposte alternative ne aveva già fatte Shulamith Firestone negli anni '60, Donna Haraway negli anni '80; le cyberfemministe negli anni '90, le Xenofemministe nel millennio e poi noi postumaniste. Ma prima ancora ci aveva provato Rosa Luxemburg, anche se Lenin non l'ha voluta ascoltare. Utopie afrofuturiste su un avvenire alternativo appaiono negli scritti di Octavia Butler, e slanci affettivi cosmici in quelli di bell hooks. È possibile che questa vena visionaria utopica protecnologica e planetaria si sia esaurita, o rimanga inascoltata? Questo è il compito dell'affermazione, cioè il duro lavoro di ribaltare la forza del negativo per passare all'azione creatri-

ce. Dobbiamo trasformare la paura del nuovo in volontà di sapere. E come apprendere conoscenze dal dolore, dalla consapevolezza delle difficoltà ed estrarle in modo da renderle agibili nel mondo. L'immaginazione come forza creativa è importante quanto il pensiero analitico e concettuale.

Vorrei però tornare alla questione del rapporto sesso/natura/genere/cultura. Ovviamente è un rapporto che il femminismo postumano ha ridefinito, ma questo intervento non si è svolto nel vuoto. La colonizzazione dell'umano da parte delle nuove tecnologie - che non sono solo quelle dell'informazione, ma in maniera ancora più preponderante quelle neuronali e genetiche - è il motore del capitalismo cognitivo. La nostra economia è in grado di clonare e riprodurre vaste porzioni della materia vivente, come dicevo sopra. La vitalità della materia fa parte del nostro sistema di produzione, e la ricerca scientifica oggi comporta tutto il vivente, appiattendo le partizioni che separano vite umane da vite animali o oltre. Si tratta di un cambiamento epocale, parallelo allo sviluppo dell'intelligenza artificiale, che richiede sforzi di comprensione e di adattazione da parte di tutti noi cittadini presi nella convergenza postumana. Ma ciò che non funziona per nulla è il sistema di governance di queste trasformazioni sociali. Allo sgomento ed incompetenza di alcuni politici, si aggiungono la negazione, l'ignoranza, le menzogne e manipolazioni dei governi di destra più o meno estrema. Non contenti di non voler studiare e capire la dimensione dei cambiamenti, strumentalizzano lo sgomento provato dai cittadini verso le nuove tecnologie, puntando il dito verso i loro nemici principali: le femministe, le persone LBGTQ+ e i movimenti per i diritti civili. Basta vedere come il governo Meloni ha spostato il dibattito sulla rivoluzione tecnologica, concentrandolo quasi esclusivamente sulla questione della riproduzione, tradotta in quello del genere e della sessualità. E in questo campo, seguendo i manuali della destra MAGA americana, vincono e riscuotono consensi, perché chiaramente agitano i peggiori fantasmi: "fanno i bambini in provetta, orrore assoluto! Scienza Frankenstein!". Senza pensare poi che la produzione detta in provetta – oggi brevettata dalla biologia sintetica – dovrebbe riguardare soprattutto il settore alimentare per sopperire alla crisi della produzione agricola e allo sfinimento del nostro pianeta. Ma questi pensieri non sfiorano le menti distratte dei governi della destra sovranista. La spinta rigeneratrice deve arrivare dalla cittadinanza e dalla società civile, oltre che dalle università, le imprese, il mondo dell'attivismo e dell'arte, che sono molto più informati della classe politica. Altri modi di impostare il rapporto natura-cultura sono già in atto.

Io sono convinta che la gente, le e i cittadini sapranno trovare le vie giuste per gestire la transizione tecnologica, ecologica ed energetica. Io sono abbastanza tranquilla, forte di quel senso di estraneità nel confronto dell'immagine dominante dell'umano di cui parlavamo all'inizio. Non

sono – o non voglio essere – completamente "umana", se l'umano è quello del dominio di un soggetto maestro, padre padrone, colonizzatore accanito e fascista impenitente. E piantiamola con queste celebrazioni retoriche di un umanesimo che nessuno sa più neanche definire, oltre che praticare. Avevano ragione Adorno e Sartre a dire, ciascuno a modo suo, che qualcosa dell'umanesimo è morto ad Auschwitz; o Fanon a segnalare le sue lacune nel colonialismo. Capisco però che per altri questa presa di coscienza sia un momento di tristezza, di perdita. Va bene, allora simbolizziamo questo momento: facciamo dei riti di passaggio, costruiamo un santuario: "qui riposa la versione precedente dell'umano, ora comincia la seconda fase", come propone la filosofa Sylvia Wynter.[23] Mettiamoci una pietra sopra e andiamo alla ricerca dei parametri per questa ridefinizione collettiva di ciò che siamo capaci di divenire. Per me la categoria di "postumano" ci aiuta di più, in fondo, perché riposa su una genealogia filosofica di primo piano – da Nietzsche in poi, anche se scomoda per le istituzioni. Ripeto che Foucault aveva analizzato questo passaggio oltre cinquant'anni fa. L'umano è morto? Viva il più-che-umano, in chiave etica affermativa postumana!

CC: *In effetti, mettere in discussione le identità ha voluto dire per te scompaginare la stessa identità di donna, proponendo un femminismo che rifiuta le definizioni identitarie, comprese quelle oppositive, e che pensa la differenza sessuale come progetto. Oggi assistiamo, sia in campo conservatore che femminista, a un ritorno della categoria di donna come soggetto stabile e definito. Cosa pensi di questi processi?*

EV: *Aggiungo un'altra cosa: nel dibattito contemporaneo la maternità è sempre più attraversata da questioni legate alle tecnologie riproduttive e, in particolare, dalla discussione sulla gestazione per altri, come interpretare queste trasformazioni?*

RB: La questione è molto vasta e va affrontata a partire dalla genealogia della domanda stessa. Dicevo prima che un momento decisivo sul piano tecnologico è stato quello dell'introduzione della pillola anticoncezionale: lì si è posta concretamente la possibilità di separare la sessualità dalla riproduzione – cioè le categorie di donna da quella di madre. Ricordo che Sigmund Freud riprende da Platone e il pensiero greco antico la distinzione tra *eros* e *agape*, che il sistema patriarcale ha applicato nella sua architettura sociale. Alle donne assegna un unico amore, quello riproduttivo – *agape*. Agli uomini invece consente entrambe le forme, anche se

[23] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality".

l'*eros* "vero" è tra uomini – a patto di restare sessualmente attivi – e l'*agape* è la forma d'amore legata alla riproduzione.

Il patriarcato è un sistema efficace proprio perché riesce continuamente a riaffermare il potere ed i privilegi maschili a partire da questa divisione simbolica e sociale tra sessualità e riproduzione. Il femminismo affronta direttamente questo nodo e dibatte la questione di come le donne, in quanto soggetti emancipati della modernità, possano vivere liberamente la loro sessualità, aprendo margini di negoziazione con il nuovo dispositivo della riproduzione. Vista la storia che abbiamo alle spalle, è difficile scindere la questione del corpo femminile da quello della maternità, perché biologicamente e storicamente quello è stato il luogo in cui la riproduzione si è strutturata. Ovviamente tutto cambia con la tecnologia. In un primo momento la psicoanalisi è stata molto utile, perché afferma che questa scissione tra sessualità e riproduzione era già presente in tutti: anche le donne hanno un *eros*. Le isteriche, in questo senso, soffrono proprio per questa tensione. Tuttavia, questa consapevolezza della specificità del desiderio – del fatto che l'*eros* non coincide con il desiderio di riproduzione – resta tuttora un terreno contestato e di grandi tensioni. L'appiattimento del desiderio sulla riproduzione e l'obbligo di rendere le donne unicamente responsabili per la riproduzione è l'arma principale del patriarcato. Diventa esacerbata nel fascismo, e non a caso il fascismo non ha mai accettato la psicoanalisi. Bisogna tenere sempre presente che il fascismo si fonda anche sulla glorificazione nazionalista delle madri della patria, o di "Dio, patria e famiglia": sono tutte variazioni di questo schema.

Dicevo che interviene la tecnologia e il primo momento in questo processo di annientamento dell'economia politica riproduttiva del sistema patriarcale è l'introduzione della pillola anticoncezionale. Sovvenzionata da una benefattrice donna - Katharine Dexter McCormick - la pillola rende operazionale il controllo della riproduzione e quindi la liberazione della sessualità. Da quel momento in poi però si apre una battaglia politica che continua ancora oggi: da una parte i femminismi che cavalcano la liberazione sessuale e vogliono istituzionalizzata la separazione tra sessualità, maternità e riproduzione, attraverso le campagne per i diritti riproduttivi delle donne. E dall'altra chi invece cerca di resistere e ritornare al regime precedente, considerato 'naturale'. Negli Stati Uniti questa battaglia – per esempio nel caso dell'aborto - è stata in gran parte persa, e sappiamo che ci sono investimenti ingenti da parte della destra per intervenire anche nel contesto legislativo e politico europeo. Vediamo dinamiche simili anche in Italia, con l'introduzione delle associazioni *pro vita* nei consultori.

Se guardiamo alle grandi ideologie del Novecento, manca ancora una mappatura biopolitica precisa di come si siano organizzate rispetto a sessualità e riproduzione. Anche il comunismo, per esempio, su questo pun-

to era assai conservatore: nell'Unione Sovietica si riconosceva una certa libertà sessuale, ma non la contraccezione, e quindi si ricorreva all'aborto come principale forma di controllo; nella Germania orientale era proibito anche quello. Anche qui, dunque, la gestione della riproduzione è stata problematica e spesso molto dura per le donne.

Nel femminismo, la questione della maternità è sempre stata divisiva. Già con Simone de Beauvoir, che afferma che emancipazione significa anche emanciparsi dalla maternità. E poi, fin da subito, le lesbiche si dividono in almeno due gruppi: da una parte, per esempio, Adrienne Rich, che dice "nasciamo tutti da donne" e rivendica la maternità lesbica. Quel testo[24] è fondamentale, ed è stato in parte dimenticato perché percepito – a torto – come contrario alle teorie trans e queer. Ma resta un testo fondamentale, così come lo è quello di Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*:[25] l'idea che la madre sia terra, territorio. Cioè dimensioni materiali, corporee, legate a soggetti femminili identificati come donne, che non è in sé una collocazione restrittiva. Se la liberiamo dal binarismo di genere e la ricollochiamo in un orizzonte di sessuazione fluida del vivente, questa prospettiva di terra/materia/materna offre molto spunti.

Un'altra genealogia teorica è quella che comincia da Monique Wittig, che propone una rottura radicale con il binarismo sessuale e afferma che la lesbica non è né uomo né donna, ma un "terzo sesso".[26] Questo tipo di elaborazione circola poi, anche attraverso figure come Teresa de Lauretis,[27] e viene ripreso e rielaborato nel contesto teorico statunitense, contribuendo alla formazione del quadro entro cui si afferma successivamente il pensiero di Judith Butler e, più in generale, delle teorie queer.

Con l'affermarsi di questo paradigma si produce uno spostamento che tende a mettere in crisi la centralità del soggetto "donna" come riferimento politico. Ricordo però che la decostruzione delle categorie – compresa quella di donna e del femminile – era già stata praticata nella fase filosofica postmoderna e quindi non era per nulla nuova. Se si costruisce una mappatura più ampia – nomade e "braidottiana", potremmo dire – diventa subito evidente che esistono molte più fonti critiche del significante "donna". Quindi non si può ragionare solo su un'unica linea dominante, spesso americana, che tende a capitalizzare tutto. Nel femminismo non abbiamo mai tentato di arrivare a un consenso su cosa definisca realmente il soggetto "donna": ci siamo concentrate sulla battaglia contro le ingiustizie e le discriminazioni di soggettì socialmente definite come tali. Nel movimen-

[24] Rich, *Nato di donna*.
[25] Walker, *In Search*.
[26] Wittig, *Il pensiero eterosessuale*.
[27] De Lauretis, *Soggetti eccentrici*.

to LGBTQ+ le differenze erano notevoli: già allora per alcune la lesbica è iper–donna, più che donna, perché è capace di essere donna, madre e di amare un'altra donna. Altre invece celebravano la donna mascolinizzata, dominante, butch – che detestava il materno in tutte le sue pieghe. E molte altre resistevano a tutte le classificazioni. Non si può ridurre la storia del femminismo e delle idee femministe a uno scontro binario tra due sole posizioni, di cui una è la bandiera dell'impero ideologico americano. Questa è una caricatura!

Le teorie transfemministe attuali, sviluppate anche in chiave postumana, accelerano la dimensione non binaria, lasciando ampi spazi a vari posizionamenti in rapporto al femminile. Il solo punto che mi sta davvero a cuore è sempre lo stesso: non imporre un modello unico. E qui ritorna il tema iniziale di *Dissonanze*: se si procede con accelerazioni univoche, si rischia di sottrarre gli spazi ed i tempi alle femministe in lotta, cioè la loro capacità di divenire. Le categorie di genere vanno nomadizzate in una pluralità di modi, tempi e piani. Non si tratta di imporre una nuova categoria dominante, qualunque essa sia, ma di lasciare libertà ai processi di divenire di ciascuna, in relazione ad una comunità politica attiva. I soggetti politici necessari devono restare eterogenei, complessi e contraddittori, altrimenti la battaglia del femminismo è già persa.

Ho sempre difeso una specie di essenzialismo strategico, che offre come punto di riferimento l'esperienza vissuta da soggetti femmine e LGBTQ+ nel regime patriarcale e a partire da questo punto – diversificato ma sintetizzabile – lancia una serie di campagne parallele e divergenti contro i dispositivi patriarcali. Il soggetto sessuato donna o LGBTQ+ è il punto di partenza per una politica nomade, ma non il suo punto di arrivo. Non si tratta di valorizzare un femminile unico, universale o metafisico, o al contrario di celebrare un'unica modalità trasgressiva trans o queer, ma di esplorare e di attivare tutte le modalità trasversali possibili del divenire-donna/post-donna/proto-donna/intra-donna/quasi-donna, ecc. Il processo nomade si nutre di gradazioni e composizioni di soggetti molteplici, in maniera trasversale, eterogenea e complessa. Donne non lo si diventa una volta per tutte, ma si continua a – o si smette di – divenirlo, smontando i monumenti e documenti del patriarcato, in mille piani possibili di divenire-donne-altrimenti e in altri modi. Questa è la via che propongo.

Su questo terreno già molteplice e differenziato intervengono poi le tecnologie riproduttive, che permettono innanzitutto interventi significativi a favore delle donne che desiderano figli, come la fecondazione assistita. La fretta con cui i militanti *pro vita* ed altri gruppi religiosi si sono precipitati a ridefinire i parametri di applicazione di queste tecnologie rivela anche il loro potenziale sovversivo. Tutte le forze politiche che contestano queste tecnologie – e dalla Chiesa cristiana nel suo insieme ai movimenti

nativisti e ipernazionalisti – rivelano la paura di perdere il controllo delle leve e dei meccanismi di riproduzione – l'economia biopolitica fondata su *agape*. Ma timori simili vengono espressi anche da una parte del femminismo, a partire dagli anni '90, quando si sviluppa una forte critica dell'"invasione" tecnologica del corpo femminile. In questo quadro, le tecnologie vengono assimilate al potere patriarcale e percepite come una forza ostile. E qui io sono in disaccordo. Questa opposizione radicale rivela una contraddizione acuta: si accettano tutte le altre tecnologie, ma si rifiuta proprio quella che interviene sulla riproduzione? Perché? Questo perché la maternità viene collocata su un piedistallo da gruppi femministi che l'hanno sacralizzata in un ordine simbolico e sociale che, ai miei occhi, riflette aspetti fondamentali della tradizione cristiana. Molte femministe radicali e anche lesbiche finiscono per attribuire alla maternità lo stesso statuto sacro attribuitole dal patriarcato.

Come si vede, nella mia posizione protecnologica e scettica sulla sacralità del materno entra anche in gioco la questione della laicità e, più in profondità, dell'impatto della metafisica cristiana nei movimenti femministi europei e italiani in particolare. È prevedibile che la Chiesa continui a intervenire su questi temi, insistendo sulla naturalità della maternità e il suo valore universale. Ma mi è sempre sembrato assai strano che esista una parte consistente del femminismo – anche molto radicale – che attribuisce alla maternità un valore così centrale. Si può anche riconoscere che la maternità sia un'esperienza profonda, affettivamente e inconsciamente significativa, anche molto privata. Proprio per questo, però, deve essere rispettata all'interno di un quadro pluralistico e le donne vanno lasciate libere di fare altre scelte.

Torna qui l'idea di un ventaglio di possibilità e, con essa, il riferimento a René Descartes: nei momenti di transizione serve una "moralità provvisoria", cioè un patto minimo che permetta la coesistenza delle differenze. Questo ci permetterebbe di diluire la violenza e elaborare una cultura femminista della pace delle menti.

In questa prospettiva, anche la gestazione per altrui – detta maternità surrogata - non può essere giudicata in modo univoco. Il problema emerge soprattutto quando viene praticata su larga scala da attori molto ricchi, come Elon Musk, Sam Altman o Peter Thiel, che la trattano come un sistema produttivo che serve essenzialmente alla riproduzione di maschi bianchi. È impossibile non sottolineare le sfumature eugenetiche di tali pratiche. Le esperienze delle donne coinvolte, in contesti come Canada, India o Ucraina, sono invece molto diverse: alcune la vivono come un'opportunità, altre la criticano. I dati sono difficili da ottenere, perché si tratta spesso di pratiche che avvengono in strutture private. Sophie Lewis descrive anche modelli alternativi, come le cooperative di maternità surro-

gata in Canada, analoghe a quelle delle sex worker.[28] Si tratta di esperienze che indicano modi diversi di organizzare la gestazione per altrui e le nuove modalità di riproduzione. In ogni caso, è ormai evidente che la riproduzione umana è destinata a essere sempre più tecnicamente mediata. In alcuni contesti – per esempio in Cina – si stanno sviluppando tecnologie avanzate che permettono di intervenire su elementi fondamentali del processo riproduttivo, come la placenta. Non si tratta di scenari fantascientifici: è il mondo in cui viviamo.

Di fronte a questo, si può anche dire che si sarebbe preferito un altro mondo. Ma, dato che questo è il solo mondo che abbiamo, bisogna trovare modi per regolarlo, accettando anche le differenze e le ambivalenze legate alle nuove pratiche della maternità. Anche perché il rapporto con la maternità come esperienza esistenziale – e quindi non solo come fattore statistico in un calcolo neoliberale del gender come indicatore di crescita demografica - è profondamente situato. Per alcune può essere viscerale, ma per altre può anche sembrare alieno, e può essere vissuto indirettamente attraverso relazioni affettive e familiari non tradizionali. Attribuire riproduzione, famiglia, amore ad un ordine "naturale" esprime una normatività che nega le trasformazioni già indotte dalle tecnologie nelle nostre vite.

Quando la maternità viene ridotta a modello unico – quello della famiglia tradizionale, bianca, eterosessuale e cristiana – essa smette di essere una questione legata all'esperienza e diventa uno strumento politico. In questo caso si ritorna a una logica eugenetica e neocoloniale, in cui la maternità viene strumentalizzata dall'ideologia fascistoide del suprematismo bianco in veste *high-tech*.

Ormai è un luogo comune che l'emancipazione femminile comporti un declino delle nascite, almeno in questa fase storica in cui il patriarcato sembra voler punire le donne rifiutando di adattarsi a ciò che noi siamo diventate attraverso il processo di emancipazione. Se vogliamo favorire la natalità servono riforme sociali concrete, del lavoro e dei salari, degli alloggi e della sanità – non servono invece a nulla la propaganda e la retorica neonatalista dei movimenti di estrema destra. O forse servono solo ad inasprire i conflitti sociali e a creare ulteriori divisioni all'interno di una società – quella italiana – già dilaniata da fratture profonde. Da soggetto nomade vorrei dire che forse siamo già diventate, per usare una metafora surrealista, delle "macchine celibi", cioè soggetti non obbligatoriamente riproduttivi. E anche questa può essere una forma di evoluzione sociale e umana. Grazie alle tecnologie, la riproduzione – umana, animale e vegetale – oggigiorno può avvenire in modi diversi. Scandalizzarsi non serve a nulla, e se vogliamo evitare che siano il capitale e la ricchezza a decidere

[28] Lewis, *Surrogata universale.*

da soli come e quando si fanno figli, sarebbe saggio affrontare un dibattito pubblico pacato su forme di riproduzione alternativa.

Da questo punto di vista, la mia posizione è vicina a quella di Shulamith Firestone e del transfemminismo: benvenute le nuove tecnologie, se possono contribuire a liberarci da un sistema patriarcale che ha sempre controllato la riproduzione femminile, istigando processi di spuria naturalizzazione di un regime culturale che sottometteva le donne al ruolo obbligatorio di madri. Come propongono le Xenofemministe: se la natura è ingiusta, cambiamola! E se le tecnologie ci assistono in questo processo, che siano le benvenute!

Il problema è capire come organizzare socialmente il ventaglio di pratiche riproduttive alternative. Il primo scoglio da evitare è quello del profitto e quindi dello sfruttamento da parte del capitale. Come dicevo, la gestazione per altrui si può praticare attraverso cooperative, modelli gratuiti ed altruistici di mutua assistenza riproduttiva. Qui entra in giuoco la necessità – a mio avviso capitale – di un'evoluzione culturale che accompagni la forza trasformativa delle nuove tecnologie – e non solo in campo riproduttivo. E si deve partire dalla grande conquista del secolo scorso, cioè il divario qualitativo tra sessualità e riproduzione, tra corpo femminile e corpo materno, tra piacere/desiderio e natalità/demografia. Non per creare nuove opposizioni dualistiche, ma per ricongiungere questi registri così diversi in combinazioni molteplici, nomadiche, multiformi e pluridirezionali. Per arrivare a tanto, però, dobbiamo partire da un punto fondamentale: che non esiste nulla di 'naturale' nel complesso dispositivo di sapere/potere/desiderare l'avvenire nella forma di procreare generazioni future. Qui non si tratta di semplici funzioni corporee dettate da un ordine 'naturale' sacralizzato dalle religioni, ma degli effetti contraddittori di contesti sociali fortemente segnati dall'immaginario patriarcale, che si è costruito una 'natura' speculare alla sua cultura, per proteggere i propri privilegi.

E tuttavia non basta dire di no: pensare che basti opporsi per fermare questi processi – tecnologici e sociali - è un'illusione. Le alternative vanno costruite, pezzo per pezzo. Al centro del dibattito per me si colloca la questione che ha motivato tutto il mio lavoro: che tipo di soggetti stiamo diventando? Il punto, quindi, è produrre contenuti e modelli di controsoggettività: è su questo che devono lavorare il femminismo, la sinistra, l'università. Non basta essere contro: bisogna essere in grado di proporre, costruire, articolare alternative.

CC: *Più in generale, gran parte del tuo lavoro è pervaso da una concezione della politica – appunto affermativa – come ricerca della felicità, come "un processo comune, non egocentrato e scevro da interessi di profitto, essendo volto alla costituzione spontanea e gratuita di orizzonti sociali di cam-*

biamento", che si oppone alle forme di rassegnazione e passività. In un mondo pervaso dalla guerra, dalla catastrofe climatica, dalla necropolitica e dal disincanto, come possiamo continuare ad agire pratiche di resistenza vitali e prospettive orientate al futuro?

Non si tratta di felicità, quanto di benessere condiviso. La felicità nel capitalismo avanzato è stata strumentalizzata e monetizzata – i nostri piaceri ci costano cari. E non si tratta di spontaneità – la malattia infantile della sinistra. Si tratta di prassi collettiva volta a trasformare le condizioni negative in possibilità generatrici di alternative. Si tratta in effetti dell'affermazione come pratica collettiva centrale, non solo nel rapporto alle tecnologie, ma anche rispetto ai temi ambientali e alla giustizia climatica.

È affermativo ciò che si attiva per creare orizzonti sostenibili di alternative economiche, sociali, intellettuali ed affettive. Non possono esistere movimenti sociali contemporanei senza una forte spinta di carattere affermativo, cioè propositiva, documentata, negoziata collettivamente e puntata all'avvenire. Anche se spesso questa visione, all'inizio del processo politico esiste solo in forma iniziale, non del tutto sviluppata. A me spiace molto che rimanga ancora così forte, nei movimenti progressisti e anche in alcuni femminismi, la tendenza a proporre soprattutto dei "no", senza riuscire a immaginare alternative. Ed è proprio questo il punto su cui insisto quando parlo di politica affermativa.

Per capirlo bisogna tornare alla genealogia di questa posizione, come dicevo prima. La consapevolezza di fondo è che solo una cultura attiva – un attivarsi nella creazione di alternative insieme ad altri che condividono lo stesso slancio, questo *yearning,* questo desiderio orientato – può generare l'energia creativa necessaria per cambiare il mondo. Questo orientamento etico-politico è ciò che produce realmente trasformazione. Per effettuarlo, servono soggetti che condividono questa passione etica. Il punto è decisivo perché implica un cambiamento di paradigma, come indicavo sopra: sostituire il modello negativistico della dialettica, in cui l'energia nasce dallo scontro, con la forza auto-generativa di pratiche collettive negoziate in funzione del contesto postumano del capitalismo avanzato in cui dobbiamo muoverci. Conta molto l'auto–organizzazione dei soggetti: una sorta di autopoiesi democratica, oggi chiaramente intrecciata anche con il digitale.

Come indicavo prima, Spinoza, è il pensatore dei commons: dei commons ambientali, digitali, affettivi. È una concezione della democrazia radicale che parte dal basso, dai cittadini, dalle pratiche collettive di autoorganizzazione. E non è affatto complicata. A mio avviso, la cultura giovanile contemporanea funziona già così: gruppi connessi tecnologicamente che si autoorganizzano. Il problema è che questa dinamica non viene tematizzata

politicamente. Se invece queste soggettività si aprissero davvero al mondo, se si "innamorassero" del mondo, si produrrebbe uno scarto decisivo.

Ed è qui che rientra in gioco il tema dell'affermazione. Affermazione significa aprirsi al mondo, aumentare la propria capacità di relazionarsi agli altri – umani e non umani. La gioia, in senso spinoziano, è precisamente questo: un aumento della capacità di essere affetti e di agire. È qualcosa di molto materiale, quasi fisiologico – una questione di energie e di relazioni, non di sola psicologia. Ovviamente, dire di sì al mondo significa anche afferrare e condividere le sue pene e le sue contraddizioni, perciò l'etica affermativa implica una relazione intima con la sofferenza, il dolore – e si apre a modalità molteplici di empatia. La vita attiva che teorizzava anche Hannah Arendt in un'ottica affermativa si nutre di questi processi di trasmutazione del negativo, cioè di attraversamento delle passioni negative, per cercare di immaginare orizzonti sociali di fiducia e di speranza.

A livello concettuale, la gioia è il "bonus" – il valore aggiunto – che emerge quando si riesce a uscire dall'individualismo possessivo – che è sempre cupo, depressivo, secondo la formula feroce del narcisismo e della paranoia, le due facce della stessa medaglia iperindividualistica – e a entrare in relazione con altri. Una politica affermativa, con l'alternanza di critica e creatività, personale e collettivo, discorsivo e materiale, con questa passione divorante per i movimenti e le emozioni che sono anche azioni, per me descrive abbastanza bene il femminismo delle origini. Si trattava di incontri, gruppi, che rivelano il momento in cui ci si accorge che non si è sole, e che il mondo cambia improvvisamente, diventa a portata di mano, anche se è alienante e oppressivo. L'etica affermativa genera una politica attiva che ci rende capaci di condividere le contraddizioni del mondo in cui viviamo: ci dà presa sul presente, pur sapendo che il presente ci sfugge, poiché è al contempo la traccia di ciò che stiamo cessando di essere e il germe di ciò che siamo in processo di divenire. Comunque sia, aprirsi al mondo e sentire questa appartenenza profonda è un'esperienza generativa perché ci mette a confronto con la sofferenza, la frustrazione, la rabbia che proviamo davanti alle ingiustizie del presente – che non è un blocco temporale fisso, ma una realtà scissa e sfuggente. Ma questo confronto genera anche la produzione di idee, di energia condivisa. E va compresa in termini etologici, come dinamica di forze.

Ripeto che è fondamentale distinguere questa etica della gioia dalla cultura dominante della felicità e del benessere, che è parte integrante del capitalismo. L'ottimismo consumistico – il "go shopping" – è un'industria. La gioia affermativa, invece, è quasi stoica, frugale, ma capace di sostenere il rischio dell'apertura e dell'azione. Non aspetta il crollo del capitalismo per agire. Perché il capitalismo non crolla: si adatta, si piega, e si piega anche dentro di noi. Come direbbe Deleuze, si "ripiega" all'interno dei soggetti.

Per questo bisogna attivarsi qui e ora, inserendo flussi diversi dentro il sistema, sapendo che non siamo soli. Questo tipo di democrazia di base produce anche una forma di felicità, se vogliamo usare questo termine, ma intesa come senso di legame e di appartenenza. È ciò che, come ha detto Judith Butler a proposito del mio lavoro, mette l'attivo nell'attivismo.[29] Nel frattempo, la destra – pur senza innovare – mantiene una continuità ideologica, attingendo sempre agli stessi riferimenti, da Otto Weininger a Julius Evola, passando per il maestro De Benoist. Questo la rende paradossalmente più stabile, mentre la sinistra resta bloccata. Per questo dico che l'antifascismo contemporaneo – nell'epoca dei micro fascismi diffusi nel sociale e nei social – non può limitarsi a una posizione negativa o di comoda ripetizione del passato. Deve saper trasformarsi in una politica affermativa, capace di costruire alternative collettive.

Il femminismo, per me, è stato e resta esattamente questo – la creazione collettiva di orizzonti di speranza. E continuo a vederlo anche oggi: quando gruppi di giovani si incontrano – mi è successo recentemente a Parigi, con persone provenienti da tutto il mondo, dalla Cina al Giappone – la prima cosa che emerge è la gioia di scoprirsi in tanti. "Pensavo di essere sola", mi hanno detto. E invece no: siamo molte. È questa la forza. Rendersene conto è l'inizio dell'itinerario verso l'etica affermativa.

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Uno sguardo sui classici

La libertà oltre il liberalismo: una pressoché ignota intervista di Benedetto Croce all'*Herald Tribune* di New York

Freedom beyond liberalism: a virtually unknown interview with Benedetto Croce in the New York Herald Tribune

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Abstract. The present article publishes and comments on an almost unknown interview with Benedetto Croce that was originally conducted in Italian in June 1930. The interview was significantly abridged when it was published four years later. The philosopher was in the midst of an unfinished reflection on the nature of freedom in relation to the various forms of modern liberalism. From his perspective, the notion of a federal Europe represents a contemporary manifestation of the liberal spirit.

Keywords: theory of freedom, liberalism, nationalism, Europeanism.

Riassunto. L'articolo pubblica e commenta un'intervista di Benedetto Croce, pressoché sconosciuta nell'originale italiano, concessa a un quotidiano americano nel giugno del 1930 che la pubblicò in forma molto abbreviata quattro anni dopo. Il filosofo è nel pieno di una riflessione, ancora non conclusa, sulla natura della libertà nel suo nesso con le varie forme del liberalismo moderno. Un'Europa federale gli appare la nuova possibile incarnazione di quello spirito liberale che aveva già trovato espressione nella genesi degli stati nazionali del XIX secolo.

Parole chiave: teoria della libertà, liberalismo, nazionalismo, europeismo.

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in ricordo di Piero Craveri

Per quanto brillantissimo conversatore in cerchie amicali, Benedetto Croce non amava l'improvvisazione orale in pubblico, e quando doveva prendere la parola per lo più leggeva un testo preparato. Non dissimilmente, nelle interviste che gli accadde di rilasciare chiedeva che gli si ponessero domande scritte, alle quali poi rispondeva per iscritto. E da sagace utilizzatore di tutti i mezzi di comunicazione disponibili, l'esercizio in genere gli riusciva piuttosto bene, ossia l'intervista aveva quella parvenza di dialogica oralità richiesta per il pubblico della stampa periodica. Le circostanze potevano però essere varie, e magari capitargli che, spazientito dall'inettitudine del giornalista, l'intervista finisse per condurla lui stesso, scrivendo domande e risposte; oppure che, per sentirsi porre le domande alle quali reputava opportuna una propria risposta, ne confezionasse una del tutto fittizia. Sono questi peraltro, rispettivamente, i casi di due delle sue interviste che più suscitarono polemiche nel dibattito politico dei primi anni del ventesimo secolo: quella sulla "mentalità massonica" e l'altra sulla "morte del socialismo".[1]

Non sempre Croce si preoccupò di raccogliere nelle serie delle proprie 'pagine sparse' le interviste che aveva rilasciato: ciò, forse, perché le giudicava poco rilevanti, o perché non le aveva viste pubblicate, perdendo magari le tracce del manoscritto di cui non aveva salvato copia. Così accadde, ad esempio, per un'importante intervista a un giornalista che volle interrogarlo appena sceso dal motoscafo americano che, nel settembre del 1943, lo condusse in salvo nella Capri sotto il controllo alleato, precedendo di poco il commando tedesco che avrebbe voluto rapirlo per portarlo nel Nord d'Italia: il giornalista rientrò negli Stati Uniti con l'autografo di Croce, ma poi non lo pubblicò.[2]

È in parte diversa la vicenda del testo che pubblico qui. Privo di qualsiasi elemento di contestualizzazione, fu pubblicato nell'originale italiano nel 1967 in un volume curato dalla Fondazione Croce che ebbe scarsissima circolazione, mentre una traduzione inglese, alquanto abbreviata e semplificata, dal titolo *Croce on liberty*, comparve con grande rilievo domenica 18 febbraio 1934 sull'*Herald Tribune* di New York, occupando una pagina e mezza pagina del giornale, con il corredo di un ritratto a matita.[3] Le cose andarono così. Tra fine maggio e i primissimi di giugno

[1] Si leggono ora in Croce, *Cultura e vita morale*, 141-56.

[2] Fu da me ritrovato alla New York Public Library e pubblicato: cf. Cutinelli-Rendina, "Un inedito di Benedetto Croce del settembre 1943".

[3] L'intervista, non segnalata nella classica bibliografia crociana (Borsari, *L'opera di Benedetto Croce*), è presente nelle miscellanee in cui il filosofo archiviava la stampa periodica che lo riguardava: Archivio Fondazione Benedetto Croce, Miscellanea di scritti concernenti Bene-

del 1930 Croce ricevette la scrittrice e giornalista americana Alice Rohe che voleva intervistarlo, ma dopo una conversazione che non dovette essere particolarmente lunga, chiese, al suo solito, che le domande gli fossero inviate per iscritto. Ciò che la giornalista, rientrata a Roma, fece in una lettera del 5 giugno. Qualche giorno dopo, l'8, Croce annotò nel suo diario di aver "abbozzato la risposta ad alcuni quesiti per una intervista, fattami da una giornalista americana". Una bella copia dovette quindi essere spedita alla giornalista, mentre nel suo archivio rimase la bozza dattiloscritta con numerose correzioni e integrazioni autografe.[4]

Non sono in grado di spiegare il ritardo di quasi quattro anni nella pubblicazione sull'*Herald Tribune*, anche se non dovettero esservi estranee ragioni di opportunità politica, stante il grande risalto che la Rohe dà all'antifascismo di Croce, ricordando fin dal sottotitolo la devastazione squadrista della sua casa, avvenuta alcuni anni prima. E a tal proposito, la giornalista si sofferma con larghezza sulle difficoltà per farsi condurre dal filosofo: l'impiegato dell'albergo la sconsiglia di andarvi perché pericoloso, il primo tassista si rifiuta e il secondo infine accetta seppur riluttante. In effetti l'articolo è in parte occupato dal racconto della visita fatta dalla Rohe a casa Croce, con una presentazione al pubblico americano dell'uomo e della sua eccezionale casa-biblioteca, e in parte (senza ovviamente dichiararlo) dalla traduzione del testo che Croce stesso le aveva inviato, operando diversi tagli e semplificazioni. Qui dunque si ripubblica il pressoché ignoto testo italiano che Croce approntò scrivendo non solo le risposte, ma anche le domande, le quali a loro volta non riprendevano che parzialmente quelle rivoltegli per lettera dalla giornalista: cade per esempio la domanda relativa alla questione femminile, argomento per il quale Croce non aveva interesse specifico, ma se ne aggiungono, come vedremo, altre assai significative.[5]

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detto Croce, vol. 50, n. 146. Il dattiloscritto originale (cf. la nota successiva) fu invece messo a stampa, come dico a testo, in un volume di limitata circolazione, e comunque da decenni esaurito, con cui l'Istituto italiano di studi storici, fondato da Croce stesso negli ultimi anni della sua vita, apriva la serie dei carteggi del filosofo: Croce, *Epistolario* I, 156-62.

[4] Archivio Fondazione Benedetto Croce, Napoli, serie Carteggi, sottoserie per anno e per corrispondente, 1930, n. 399 (la lettera della Rohe si trova nella medesima collocazione).

[5] Queste le domande della Rohe:

(1) Can you explain the reason for reactionary world tendencies today, notably with regard to the suppression of freedom of thought and expression in American (book and play censorship, the lynching of negroes, shooting of working men and women strikers (Carolina) and the enforcement of Fundamentalism in Tennessee?

(2) What country do you consider the freest today?

(3) What country, in the life of human history, has made most progress towards true liberty and culture?

All'altezza del febbraio 1934 ciò che si leggeva sull'*Herald Tribune* poteva essere considerato una ripresa o una sintesi (certo molto semplificata) di posizioni teoriche, storiografiche e politiche già svolte da Croce in scritti pubblicati, e in particolare nella *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*, uscita all'inizio del 1932 e disponibile in traduzione inglese già l'anno successivo per i tipi della newyorkese Harcourt and Brace. Se tuttavia si tiene conto che il suo testo è del giugno del 1930, allora esso offre una testimonianza assai interessante di quel che si stava battendo nel laboratorio crociano, e che del tutto acquisito ancora non era.

Da alcuni anni in effetti il filosofo napoletano aveva avviato una diretta riflessione teorica sulla libertà e sul liberalismo: sulla libertà nella sua dimensione spirituale, e sul liberalismo come specifica dottrina dell'epoca moderna. E quindi la sua meditazione si era estesa allo storicismo inteso come consapevolezza del nesso tra l'eterna dimensione spirituale della libertà e i sistemi politici che nel corso della recente storia europea si erano fregiati del nome di liberalismo, con la crisi che ora li investiva e si mostrava generalizzata. Avviata per lo meno nel corso del 1924, con gli *Elementi di politica*, proprio quando in Italia l'orizzonte della libertà politica si restringeva, e il suo avvenire si faceva sempre più incerto anche in Europa, tale meditazione pervenne al traguardo della massima trasparenza teorica nel saggio *Principio, ideale, teoria. A proposito della teoria filosofica della libertà*, scritto per l'editore americano nel gennaio del 1940[6]. In quelle pagine, che sono di particolare nitore e felicità letteraria, Croce giungeva al pieno possesso della teoria, come la definiva, metapolitica della libertà; una teoria in forza della quale libertà, umanità, moralità sono altrettanti sinonimi di quanto vi è di più umano nell'umano.

In un percorso al quale appartengono alcuni dei vertici della sua meditazione – dalla già ricordata *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono* a *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, del 1938 – si erano intrecciate e reciprocamente alimentate la riflessione teorica, l'indagine storiografica, nonché, e forse in primo luogo sebbene vi appaia implicita, la lotta poli-

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(4) In which of your works can I find a passage embodying your principle that no human being lacks the moral sense? If the passage is not too long for you to quote, may I ask you to do so?

(5) In what country has woman attained to the greatest freedom of expression as a useful and constructive member of society?

(6) Does her struggle for economic and cultural equality matter?

(7) Your many admirers in America are wondering why you did not carry your recent History of Italy beyond 1915. Is it possible for you to give them an answer?

[6] Con il saggio di Croce l'editore Harcourt and Brace apriva infatti il volume *The Roots of Liberty*, della serie *Freedom*. Ora, nell'originale italiano, lo si legge in Croce, *Il carattere della filosofia moderna*, 103-21. Per una discussione del liberalismo crociano, che mi è stata particolarmente presente, rinvio a Sasso, "Benedetto Croce e il liberalismo".

tica. Sempre meglio Croce era giunto a definire il proprio storicismo nel nesso che lo stringe alla concreta vita della libertà; e, in parte modificandone il senso, aveva fatto sua la celebre definizione hegeliana della storia come storia della libertà; della storia, quindi, come autentico orizzonte nel quale la libertà si rende concreta pluralizzandosi in istituti sempre nuovi e tali per cui alla libertà non si può assegnare un traguardo da raggiungere una volta per tutte, fosse pure quello al quale erano pervenuti gli stati nazionali a regime costituzionale retti con sistemi rappresentativi, per non dire dell'irenico e astorico eden comunistico. La libertà insomma come ideale di perpetua liberazione e l'unico che affronti sempre l'avvenire e che non pretenda di concluderlo.

Era una meditazione, infine, quella svolta da Croce lungo il quindicennio che separa l'instaurazione del regime fascista dalla nuova guerra mondiale, che nell'Europa coglieva l'orizzonte in cui si erano fin lì realizzate le forme più alte di libertà. Fin lì: cioè storicamente e senza quindi poter escludere, e anzi dovendo ammettere, che la libertà potesse trovare nuovi e diversi orizzonti nei quali esprimersi. Il che era evidente, appunto, dalla crisi dei contemporanei sistemi liberali, che almeno in un caso, quello italiano, aveva subito un vero e proprio collasso. Per Croce infatti appariva innegabile che l'Italia caduta nella dittatura fascista era pur stata una nazione provvista di istituzioni liberali, le quali tuttavia, nel momento cruciale, non avevano saputo difendersi dalle pulsioni autoritarie che la insidiavano. Di qui era sorta in lui l'urgenza di una rinnovata indagine sulla libertà e la sua essenza, e sul legame che essa stringe con le realtà in cui di volta in volta si rende concreta.

È proprio nella parabola di questa complessa e fin drammatica meditazione che si situano alcuni degli aspetti più interessanti del testo che qui si pubblica, soprattutto quando si faccia attenzione alle domande che la giornalista non aveva poste, e che Croce formula per poter dire ciò che gli stava a cuore. In effetti, il dubbio che si presentava al profondo conoscitore della storia italiana indagata nelle epoche di decadenza e di torpore politico e civile – Croce aveva appena pubblicato la *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* e si apprestava a riunire i suoi saggi sulla letteratura italiana del Seicento –, il dubbio, che dunque meritava di essere avanzato e discusso, era se nelle viscere della storia contemporanea non si stesse forse preparando una forma diversa e più alta di libertà; una forma che magari poteva pure avere il volto dell'autoritarismo e comportare la negazione delle classiche libertà del liberalismo europeo del XIX secolo, ma che tuttavia era portatrice di una libertà meglio adatta all'uomo moderno, e con ciò di una più giusta e piena umanità. Di qui la prima domanda non formulata dalla giornalista: "non parrebbe cosa impossibile – lasciando da parte le vuote affermazioni verbali, le cattive dottrine e gli spropositi – che le odierne reazioni contro

la libertà e le libertà, contro la libertà di stampa, di associazione, di propaganda, i parlamenti, la democrazia e via dicendo, rappresentassero appunto l'acquisto o la tendenza all'acquisto di una migliore libertà, di una libertà da raggiungere per nuove vie, ma nella quale l'umanità si esalterà e si nobiliterà: di una libertà, per così dire, contro il liberalismo".

Il dubbio che chiedeva di essere discusso era di carattere metodico, anzitutto; ed era imposto, per così dire, dai limiti intrinseci allo sguardo di chi, vivendo nel proprio presente, e a maggior ragione in un presente di crisi, inevitabilmente non coglie tutto quel che in esso si prepara; e quindi, nel caso specifico, in quel torbido avvio del quarto decennio del ventesimo secolo, temesse di non riuscire a vedere come, pur entro forme di vita politica e civile che rinnegano le libertà classiche del liberalismo, si stesse elaborando, magari oscuramente e con aspro travaglio, una nuova libertà, "una libertà, per così dire, contro il liberalismo". Detto altrimenti, per Croce bisognava sgomberare il campo dal dubbio, a priori ben legittimo, che, magari inconsapevolmente e al di là delle semplicistiche parole d'ordine, come l'assolutismo delle monarchie nazionali aveva rappresentato un progresso di civiltà e dunque di libertà contro l'ormai opprimente e sterile feudalesimo, così del pari dietro i sistemi illiberali odierni, dal comunismo bolscevico al fascismo (per non dire di altre meno robuste opposizioni alla libertà di origine letteraria o confessionale), si stessero preparando forme più elevate di libertà. A tal proposito egli rinviava a un suo saggio di un paio d'anni prima, *Contrasti d'ideali dopo il 1870*, dove quel dubbio era stato discusso a fondo, pervenendo infine alla risposta che no, nelle loro varie incarnazioni i regimi autoritari e illiberali del presente, con i sistemi di pensiero da cui erano ispirati, non celavano affatto le premesse di un'inedita, superiore e più giusta libertà e, per quanto in germe, di una forma nuova di umanità; e che pertanto a chi nel nome dell'"uomo nuovo' imponeva la soppressione delle classiche libertà liberali (di associazione, di espressione, di stampa, di religione, ecc.), bisognava opporsi e replicare che la via imboccata era quella della più tetra tirannide. Il che per altro verso non toglieva a giudizio di Croce, e anzi ovviamente implicava, che i sistemi liberali ereditati dalla storia ottocentesca non fossero passibili di critica, e non meritassero di essere riformati a fondo e in molti aspetti, dalle "superstizioni pseudoliberali", che "coprono talvolta interessi illegittimi o diventati illegittimi", alle "tirannie dei partiti e gli intrighi dei politicanti".[7]

[7] Ora in Croce, *Etica e politica*, 285-98, dove è presentata come l'autocritica che il liberalismo ottocentesco era venuto operando quella che è in realtà la critica crociana: "Così, in economia, doveva finire e finì il semplicismo liberistico, che si era convertito in una credenza di teologico ottimismo delle armonie; nei rapporti internazionali si scorsero i limiti nei quali urtava il moto delle nazionalità tendenti a raccogliersi in stati, e s'intese che la politica, del

E qui giungeva la seconda domanda non formulata dalla giornalista, e che non era meno pungente per lo storicismo militante che Croce intendeva dovesse essere il suo. Se il liberalismo aveva fallito in Italia e appariva in crisi altrove, insidiato da tanti nemici – dai feroci nazionalismi e imperialismi al cupo e duro statalismo comunistico, dai torbidi sogni dei nichilisti e dei confusi seguaci di Nietzsche al neocattolicesimo pronto a patteggiare con tutte le autorità pur di mantenere la sua presa sulla società – non poteva però aver fallito, pena il venir meno dell'umanità a sé stessa, la libertà come principio animatore della coscienza morale, come esigenza di perpetua emancipazione, come svolgimento e arricchimento e infinita costruzione di quanto è umano nell'umano. Così Croce era condotto a domandarsi dove oggi stesse per l'uomo europeo la battaglia da combattere, la concreta frontiera della libertà verso la quale dirigersi e il vessillo ideale capace di riunire gli uomini di buona volontà. E allora si chiedeva, o faceva finta di farsi chiedere dalla giornalista: "Ma credete voi che vi sia ora qualche idea più particolare e qualche motto d'ordine, intorno a cui possano stringersi gli sforzi degli uomini migliori d'Europa?". Con la risposta che segue e che qui si legge. Ed è questa, salvo errore, la prima volta che sotto la sua penna il tema di un'Europa unita risuona con tanta forza e franchezza, con altrettanta, si direbbe, fede di quella che di lì a due anni si udrà nelle pagine finali del suo ultimo grande cimento storiografico, la *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*.

Insomma, il compito che Croce assegnava a sé stesso in quegli anni non era solo di dare una teoria filosofica della libertà, che ne ravvivasse la consapevolezza negli animi di coloro presso i quali essa si era illanguidita e addirittura persa, ma anche di indicare o provare a indicare in quale battaglia, nel contesto presente, la libertà potesse farsi concreta. Così come nel corso del XIX secolo si era potuta incarnare nella lotta all'assolutismo, nell'affrancamento dei popoli dai domini stranieri, nella creazione degli stati nazionali e dei parlamenti rappresentativi, nell'allargamento degli scambi materiali e spirituali tra gli stati, ora la battaglia aveva il nome di un'Europa sovranazionale.

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pari romantica, della restaurazione e del mazzinianesimo doveva fare i conti con la realtà, e riimparare qualcosa della vecchia politica ribattezzata *Realpolitik*; delle formazioni statali si apprese che l'unità nazionale statale poteva talvolta presentarsi disgiunta dal conseguimento del regime liberale, e l'uno o l'altro fatto procedere ecc." (293). Può essere interessante notare che in tutte le edizioni di questo scritto che precedono l'ultima, del 1945, Croce aveva scritto di "superstizioni pseudoliberistiche", e non di "superstizioni pseudoliberali". La variante meriterebbe un commento a parte che non può essere fornito qui.

12 giugno 1930
con una giornalista americana
Fu pubblicata con ritardo nei giornali americani[8]

Appunti per un'intervista

– Volevo domandarvi di spiegarmi le cause delle tendenze reazionarie che si avvertono nel mondo di oggi, e di cui si vedono anche talune odiose manifestazioni in America; volevo domandarvi quale paese giudicate oggi il più libero, e quale, nel corso della storia umana, vi pare che abbia fatto maggiori progressi verso la libertà e civiltà.

– Quante varie domande, e quale imbarazzo sarebbero per me e per chiunque dovesse soddisfarle con poche e rapide sentenze! Ma mi permetterete che, senza rispondere a esse una per una e nei particolari, io vi faccia osservare che tutte si aggirano sul tema della libertà. Come dice il proverbio italiano, la lingua batte dove il dente duole. È infatti questo il punto di riferimento di tutte le preoccupazioni, di tutti gli sforzi, di tutti i conflitti odierni. E voi certamente sapete perché.

– Perché?

– Per una ragione molto semplice e molto elementare. Perché il cuore della storia umana è la libertà, e tutto ciò che nel mondo si è prodotto di vivo e sano è prodotto dalla libera inventiva, è creazione della libertà spirituale. Tutte le età più splendide della vita dei popoli confermano questa semplice verità. Tutte; anche quelle che si chiamano assolutistiche; almeno per chi non guarda alla storia in modo superficiale e fermandosi alle apparenze o adoperando modelli fissi, desunti da una sola epoca e perciò arbitrari. Per intendere la storia, per riconoscere da per ogni dove l'opera della libertà, bisogna osservare ciò a cui un nuovo ordinamento politico segue e si contrappone. Così l'assolutismo monarchico dei secoli decimosesto e decimosettimo, mettendo fine alla invecchiata, sterile e opprimente feudalità, segnò un progresso relativo di libertà: progresso che rifulse più chiaro quando quell'assolutismo chiamò intorno a sé la scienza e la cultura della nuova classe intellettuale e si fece assolutismo illuminato: dal quale, per un ulteriore progresso, uscirono poi le monarchie costituzionali. Nel primo medioevo, la feudalità stessa era stata una garanzia di maggiore libertà, proteggendo i deboli e la loro vita e il loro lavoro contro la violenza e il brigantaggio. Le forme storiche vitali nascono sempre a questo modo: come quelle che, nelle date condizioni dei tempi, rappre-

[8] Annotazioni autografe di Croce. Nel trascrivere il testo, non segnalo quanto è correzione o integrazione manoscritta.

sentano la maggiore libertà, la maggiore possibilità di salute e svolgimento e di dignità umana.

– Ma contro questo che voi dite stanno quelle teorie dei nostri tempi, che celebrano invece il contrario della libertà, la norma che venga dall'alto, la disciplina sul modello militare, la sudditanza verso lo Stato e simili. Che cosa voi ne pensate?

– Penso che ideali di questa sorta sono, in alcuni intellettuali, reminiscenze di concezioni chiesastiche, della Chiesa che sola possiede la verità e guida gli uomini nelle vie segnate per renderli degni della beatitudine celeste. In altri nascono da un letterario disprezzo verso gli uomini e verso i valori e la serietà della vita umana, da un cinismo o pessimismo che si compie nel non meno letterario sogno del superuomo. Ma, nei più, sono concetti di semplicisti, che immaginano che si possano regolare le società umane come si regola (quando si riesce, ché non riesce sempre) la marcia di un reggimento; e ignorano la virtù creatrice dei contrasti e delle gare. E in altri ancora, più pratici, quelle teorie coprono interessi particolari ed egoistici; e in altri, infine, sono effetti di smarrimenti e di paure innanzi ai pericoli, reali o immaginati, che correrebbe la società. È impossibile, in ogni caso, riportare l'origine intellettuale di coteste teorie a una severa meditazione della realtà e delle sue leggi e la loro origine mentale a un impeto generoso dell'animo. Nascono da piccolezza di cervello e da angustia di cuore.

– Credete che vi siano cause che concorrono a spiegare la diffusa depressione mentale e l'abbassamento intellettuale, che voi notate come predisposizione agli sconoscimenti e rinnegamenti della libertà?

– Non vi pare che c'entri per qualcosa la guerra che ha falciato il fiore della gioventù europea, la più ardita, la più generosa; e che, d'altra parte, ha per lunghi anni disabituati dal pensiero e abituati alla credulità, a dire e a udire parole senza senso, affermazioni false, spropositi di ogni sorta? Non ero io il solo che, durante la guerra, si domandasse che cosa sarebbe accaduto per effetto della distruzione, che improvvidamente si veniva facendo, di quelle attitudini alla riflessione e alla critica, di quella ripugnanza alla violenza, di quella gentilezza e finezza di discernimento e di sentimento, che erano state coltivate con infinite cure in lunghi anni di pace e che erano tesori non certo inferiori ai tesori economici che sono stati distrutti. Ora, in ogni parte del mondo, si avverte il vuoto, la rottura della tradizione, il disorientamento, e la mancanza di gioia: dico di quella gioia che è interiore serenità e fiducia, e non della chiassosa allegria, perché questa non manca. Non manca, ma non serve.

– Vi concedo che le teorie e gli ideali antiliberali siano assurdi e che ciò che ora si mormora o si grida, in ogni parte del mondo, contro la libertà sia, sotto l'aspetto della dignità umana, cosa empia e sacrilega. Ma,

fermandoci a quello che voi dicevate or ora, non parrebbe cosa impossibile – lasciando da parte le vuote affermazioni verbali, le cattive dottrine e gli spropositi – che le odierne reazioni contro la libertà e le libertà, contro la libertà di stampa, di associazione, di propaganda, i parlamenti, la democrazia e via dicendo, rappresentassero appunto l'acquisto o la tendenza all'acquisto di una migliore libertà, di una libertà da raggiungere per nuove vie, ma nella quale l'umanità si esalterà e si nobiliterà: di una libertà, per così dire, contro il liberalismo.

– Accetto tale formulazione del problema, che è anche la mia. Ma questa formulazione ci trasporta dal terreno ideale e teorico al terreno storico, e va risoluta con l'osservazione storica. Io, per mio conto, ho fatto questa indagine in vari miei lavori, e tra l'altro in un articolo che pubblicai due anni or sono nell'*Esprit international*, che è organo della fondazione Carnegie e vi ha gran parte il vostro illustre presidente della Columbia University, Nicolas Murray Butler. Mi sarebbe difficile riassumere quello scritto, che era esso stesso molto condensato. Permettete che vi rimandi ad esso. S'intitola: *Contrasti d'ideali politici in Europa dopo il 1870*.[9]

– Quale era la tesi generale di quello scritto?

– Questa: che tutti gl'ideali proposti contro quello della libertà, esaminati a fondo l'uno dopo l'altro, si dimostrano o fantastici o vuoti o artificiosi, e sono venuti al mondo coi segni della senilità, laddove quello liberale è sempre giovane o (che è il medesimo) capace di continui ringiovanimenti; e che l'opposizione contro di questo è da spiegare altrimenti, cioè non con la forza di altri ideali che siano sorti e che abbiano validità e superiorità, ma con le empiriche difficoltà che l'ideale liberale deve ora superare e che, più presto o più tardi, supererà. Esso parve che avesse ottenuto il definitivo trionfo nella prima metà o nei primi sessant'anni del secolo decimonono, col moto delle indipendenze e unità nazionali, con le costituzioni dappertutto diffuse; ed era animato da un entusiasmo e da una sicurezza, che aveva del giovanile, dell'ingenuo, quasi che il cammino gli fosse ormai aperto libero innanzi. Pareva non accorgersi dei due ostacoli nei quali presto si sarebbe incontrato, assai più complicati e più gravi di quelli offerti dai vecchi regimi assolutistici: gli ostacoli che venivano dalle due forze crescenti della plutocrazia e del moto proletario e dei loro conflitti. Certo non mancarono taluni che di ciò scorsero i segni annunziatori e s'impensierirono per l'avvenire, come il Tocqueville. Gli ostacoli si svilupparono sempre più, e seguì il contrasto dell'ideale liberale col bismarkismo, col marxismo, con l'imperialismo e nazionalismo e via

[9] Ora in Croce, *Etica e politica*, 285-97. Il saggio comparve dapprima in francese sul periodico della Fondazione Carnegie (non segnalato in Borsari), e in italiano l'anno successivo negli "Atti dell'Accademia di scienze morali e politiche".

dicendo; e questo contrasto si fece più acuto nei primi anni dopo la guerra. Ma, non perché une lotta sia aspra, chi sente di rappresentare la parte migliore, gl'interessi dell'umanità e della civiltà, deve cedere ed adorare il non adorabile Belial. Bisogna invece chiamare a raccolta tutte le forze per ristabilire la vita di libertà o per rafforzarla in modo conforme ai tempi.

– In quale modo e con quali mezzi bisognerà svolgere quest'opera?

– Ciascuno come può, con le forze che ha a sua disposizione: come, del resto, si fa, e si deve far sempre, in ogni opera di bene. Bisogna stillarsi il cervello e tendere la volontà. I malvagi sono così ricchi d'invenzioni: perché non dovrebbero essere altrettanto industriosi e feraci d'invenzioni i buoni? D'altra parte, non c'è programma al mondo che possa porre termine per sempre alla lotta, perché la vita stessa è lotta. *Vivere militare est*.

– Ma credete voi che vi sia ora qualche idea più particolare e qualche motto d'ordine, intorno a cui possano stringersi gli sforzi degli uomini migliori d'Europa?

– Ce ne sono di certo, e, per esempio, una di queste idee, che sta passando dalle lontane visioni dei profeti ai propositi e tentativi pratici, – una idea che, invece di perdere terreno, ne guadagna di anno in anno e si fa sempre più familiare alle menti e vicina agli animi, – è quella della unione degli Stati europei. A mio avviso, essa è di quelle che possono ora dar più ampio respiro alla libertà ed è atta a purificare, innalzare e infiammare i petti meglio dei vari nazionalismi e imperialismi, che forse sono ora così freneticamente eccitati sol perché sono moribondi. La grande guerra, che è sembrata sterile di grandi effetti, che è parsa deludere tutte le speranze e i sogni delle democrazie dell'Intesa, apparirà ai posteri assai feconda, se avrà maturato questa nuova coscienza e volontà europea.

– Ancora una domanda. I vostri molti ammiratori in America si sono meravigliati che voi, nella vostra recente *Storia d'Italia*, vi siate fermato al 1915. Potreste fornirmi qualche schiarimento in proposito?

– Lo schiarimento è già dato nella prefazione del libro, dove è detto che mi sono arretato a quell'anno, perché "il periodo che si apre con l'entrata dell'Italia nella guerra, per ciò stesso che è ancora aperto, non è di competenza dello storico, ma del politico", e che io "non vorrò mai confondere l'indagine storica con la polemica politica, la quale si fa, e si deve certamente fare, ma in altro luogo".

– Ma ciò è parso fosse detto per ragioni di prudenza, e qualche giornale inglese e americano lo ha interpretato a questo modo.

– Dovrei protestare contro questa interpretazione, che mi fa torto. Sento troppo i doveri dello scrittore per fare calcoli di prudenza, e, si mi mettessi a farne, temo che mi accadrebbe come al millepiedi della favoletta tedesca, il quale, invitato a considerare come si muove la sua gamba trecentocinquantacinque quando egli muove la trecentocinquantaquattro, si

arresta, riflette, non sa come rispondere, s'impaccia e rimane immobile: il suo giuoco ha perso la spontaneità. Dunque, si tratta di ben altro: si tratta di una mia ferma convinzione metodologica, che cioè la storia non si possa raccontare in modo intelligente se non dei periodi che hanno un principio, un mezzo e un fine; e l'occhio sagace dello storico riconosce questi periodi conchiusi (relativamente conchiusi). Ciò che è in corso non è materia di contemplazione e d'indagine storica, perché non è un tutto che possa guardarsi come tale. Ci viviamo dentro e dobbiamo fare in esso la nostra parte e battagliare con gli altri uomini per portarlo a compimento. È chiaro?

– Mi pare di comprendere, ma vi pregherei di chiarire meglio.

– Tanti anni fa, misi questa verità sotto la seguente forma popolare: – Se voi mi recitate sette od otto versi di un sonetto e chiedete il mio giudizio sul sonetto, io vi pregherò di andare innanzi fino al quattordicesimo ed ultimo verso, perché l'ultimo verso dà il tocco definitivo al primo, e può finanche cangiarne profondamente il senso. Del resto, anche coloro che ora reggono le pubbliche cose in Italia, – e che si sono compiaciuti di definirmi sarcasticamente un "imboscato della storia",[10] perché mi sono fermato col mio racconto al 1915, – non si stancano di ripetere che "la rivoluzione, cominciata con la guerra, è sempre in corso". Si lasci dunque che faccia il suo corso, e non si pretenda che io scriva la storia di un corso che è ancora in corso. È questione, mi pare, di buon senso; e io procuro, nei nostri assai agitati tempi, di conservare questo prezioso dono, che si congiunge assai bene col sentimento della libertà, che è anche essa, in fondo, cosa di buon senso.

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[10] Era stato lo stesso Mussolini in Parlamento, dopo la pubblicazione della *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915*, a definire così Croce.

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Uno sguardo sui classici

Ritornando su Croce e la democrazia

On Croce and Democracy

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Abstract. This work examines Croce's relationship with democracy, seeking to highlight its distinct moments, which can be identified as actual 'phases' of his reflection on the subject. The philosopher's attitude is characterized, on the one hand, by the continuity of his positions, but on the other, by a progressive and at times profound reworking of them. This evolution emerges particularly when confronting elements of a strictly political nature, such as the issue of popular suffrage and the relationship between democracy and liberalism. Therefore, Croce's critique of 'democratism' does not depict a monolithic rejection of the democratic phenomenon, but rather a critical engagement with the defining feature of contemporary politics.

Keywords: Croce, democracy, liberalism, democratism.

Riassunto. Il lavoro prende in considerazione il rapporto di Croce con la democrazia, cercando di metterne in luce i momenti distinti, che possono essere identificati come vere e proprie 'fasi' della sua riflessione sul tema. L'atteggiamento del filosofo si distingue da un lato per aver mantenuto la continuità delle sue posizioni, ma dall'altro per aver proceduto a una loro progressiva rielaborazione, talvolta anche profonda, che emerge soprattutto di fronte ad alcuni elementi di natura strettamente politica, quali il problema del suffragio popolare e il rapporto tra democrazia e liberalismo. La critica crociana al 'democratismo' non rappresenta perciò una chiusura monolitica nei confronti del fenomeno democratico, bensì un confronto critico con il tratto distintivo della politica dell'età contemporanea.

Parole chiave: Croce, democrazia, liberalismo, democratismo.

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1. Introduzione

Ritornando su un tema variamente discusso e approfonditamente studiato come quello tra Croce e la democrazia, credo che la prima cosa da fare sia quella di evitare di cadere in alcune trappole epistemiche che oggi, alla luce della distanza oramai abbastanza ragguardevole che ci separa dal nostro autore, possiamo facilmente aggirare. La prima, e forse la più importante di esse, è quella di evitare di trasformare la discussione dell'argomento in un giudizio politico sull'autore. È chiaro anzitutto un dato: il fatto che, soprattutto per gran parte degli appartenenti alla generazione formatasi nell'immediato dopoguerra, il pensiero crociano, e soprattutto il suo pensiero politico, ha finito inevitabilmente per essere identificato col passato; l'immediata conseguenza di ciò è stata la critica di 'passatismo' rivolta a quei discepoli fedeli – per la verità in quegli anni già divenuti assai pochi – che ne hanno coltivato l'eredità.[1]

Non è certo su queste pagine che il lettore potrà far conto per una riproposizione al dibattito filosofico-politico odierno dell'attualità o non attualità di Croce. Il mio scopo è invece molto più modesto: intendo ritornare su alcune posizioni del filosofo in tema di democrazia, e di fenomeno politico democratico in genere, che dopo aver attraversato l'intero novecento ci lasciano in eredità una riflessione ampia e complessa, della quale oggi, forse più di allora, siamo in grado di apprezzare tutti i risvolti grazie anche alla restituita distanza storica.

Dal punto di vista del merito, questo lavoro prenderà in considerazione l'atteggiamento di Croce verso la democrazia politica cercando di mettere in luce due o tre momenti distinti, che forse ci potremmo spingere a definire vere e proprie 'fasi' della sua riflessione sul tema. In primo luogo, deve essere registrato il fatto che il filosofo si è distinto da un lato per aver mantenuto la continuità delle sue posizioni, ma dall'altro per aver parimenti proceduto a una loro progressiva rielaborazione, in alcuni casi anche profonda, che emerge soprattutto dalla differente valutazione di alcuni elementi di natura strettamente politica. Continuità e fratture dunque; di questa duplicità danno testimonianza innumerevoli testi tratti dall'immensa produzione crociana, che si estende dalle grandi opere teo-

[1] Ciò peraltro non significa affatto che sia mancata l'eccellenza della ricerca sull'autore, come in Sasso, *Benedetto Croce. La ricerca della dialettica*; divenute oramai classiche le letture di Sartori, *Stato e politica nel pensiero di Benedetto Croce*; Chabod, *Lezioni di metodo storico*; Garin, *Cronache di filosofia italiana*; Piovani, *Il pensiero idealistico*, cf. più di recente Galasso, *Croce e lo spirito del suo tempo*; Tessitore, "Croce e lo storicismo in 'forma negativa'"; Musté, *Croce*; Musci e Russo, *Filosofia civile*; Musci, *La ricerca del sé*; cf. inoltre Cingari, *Benedetto Croce*. Lo stesso Galasso mette bene in luce alcuni elementi paradigmatici di quelle critiche: Galasso, *Croce*, 446-48.

riche alle più brevi incursioni polemiche, fino agli scritti e agli interventi istituzionali. Ciò che emerge, in primo luogo, è la figura di quell'autore a tutto tondo che egli era rimasto per tutta la vita, volto a garantire la continuità e la coerenza generale del proprio pensiero. Croce non fu mai un filosofo monolitico, come a torto a volte qualcuno lo ha rappresentato; piuttosto, è vero che ci furono continui aggiustamenti, approfondimenti e perfezionamenti delle sue teorie, anche se non vi furono mai radicali svolte e sensazionali abiure. Allo stesso tempo, e in modo particolare per la filosofia politica, è pur vero che in alcuni periodi specifici della sua vita e della sua riflessione troviamo un interesse più autentico per il confronto diretto col complesso dei problemi sollevati dall'affermazione storica della democrazia, in senso sociale e politico, che in qualche modo lo costringeva a rimodellare la propria visione dottrinaria, che restò quella liberale. Continuità e frattura, dunque, anche nel suo rapporto con la democrazia, che dopo gli inizi veniva sempre più ad apparire un riflesso della meditazione sul liberalismo. Pertanto, se in prima istanza abbiamo una continuità nella critica al 'democratismo', dietro questa apparente continuità si innestava una discontinuità, della quale oggi abbiamo maggiore contezza di un tempo, grazie anche alla testimonianza dei nuovi materiali editi e alle eccellenti ricostruzioni che ne sono state fatte. Queste fonti, risalenti ai testi successivi alla grande guerra, attestano un ripensamento della posizione di Croce in merito ad alcuni aspetti essenziali del concetto di democrazia e aprono la possibilità di nuove (o rinnovate) letture del suo rapporto con quest'ultima. Per sviluppare più diffusamente il tema procederemo per tappe cronologiche.

Una prima data significativa da tenere a mente è il 1912, anno in cui Giolitti varò il suffragio universale maschile e Croce stesso era membro (non eletto) del Regio Senato. La legge rappresentò una grande svolta per l'Italia, che finalmente si allineava ai paesi occidentali più importanti, i quali avevano già completato o stavano completando il compimento dei loro sistemi parlamentari in democrazie liberali. In questo senso, e nonostante i ritardi storici del paese, l'Italia compiva un passaggio epocale la cui importanza veniva giustamente ricordata a distanza di oltre un decennio, anche perché quella legge costituì la premessa per un significativo rinnovo del parlamentarismo italiano.[2] L'evento non dovette lasciare indifferente Croce, che in quel momento aveva compiuto una rielaborazione teorica dell'idea di democrazia,[3] ma che allo stesso tempo cominciava a confrontarsi con la realtà della stessa, in particolare col suo inserirsi all'in-

[2] Ricordo quanto ebbe a dire nel 1924 P. Gobetti a proposito dell'introduzione del sistema proporzionale: Gobetti, *La Rivoluzione liberale*, 141-43.
[3] Ricostruisce molto bene questa fase D'Angelo, *Benedetto Croce*, 360-68.

terno dello stato parlamentare, sperimentando il complesso dei problemi – ma anche le opportunità – di questo rapporto.[4]

La seconda data importante è quella dello scoppio del conflitto, con le conseguenze politiche e sociali che esso generò, tra le quali c'erano il definitivo scadimento dei patriottismi in nazionalismi aggressivi e bellicosi, e la successiva affermazione, anche in Italia, di una società di massa di tipo contemporaneo. Come si è detto, lungi dal rappresentare un fatto dalle conseguenze univocamente positive, per Croce – come del resto per molti altri intellettuali europei – la società di massa uscita dalla guerra costituì tuttavia un punto di non ritorno rispetto alla necessità di una evoluzione democratica dello stato, con la conseguente necessità di dare al problema della democrazia un posto effettivo non solo all'interno delle istituzioni, ma anche nell'ambito della riflessione politica.[5]

Infine, la terza data critica fu l'avvento del fascismo. A partire dal 1922 – dopo alcuni momenti di incertezza e forse di ambiguità – Croce inizia sempre più decisamente un'operazione di recupero della funzione politica della democrazia, in chiara antitesi alla dittatura proposta dal nuovo regime italiano, fino a divenire in questi anni la voce più significativa della cultura libera del paese; iniziò qui l'esercizio di quello stesso magistero non solo culturale, ma anche etico-politico, che in seguito gli è stato unanimemente riconosciuto, e che durò almeno fino alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale.[6] Alla luce di questa datazione, diviene molto interessante riuscire a comprendere fino in fondo quale sia il concetto di democrazia col quale si era confrontato il filosofo, e quali furono le sue sorti in quella fase di rinnovata evoluzione della sua filosofia. In altri termini, occorrerà chiedersi che cosa per lui abbia rappresentato l'idea della democrazia come valore.

2. Una critica alla democrazia (1910-1922)

Come si è detto, l'atteggiamento di Croce nei confronti della democrazia non fu assolutamente piano, ma si sviluppò in una progressiva articola-

[4] Un segno della piena consapevolezza della questione lo ritroviamo in una "postilla" del 1936: Croce, *Giorgio Sorel e il liberalismo*, poi in *Pagine sparse*, Vol. 3, 4.

[5] Anche in questo caso, un secondo breve ma importante documento (datato 1919/20, e dunque meno lontano dagli anni 'antidemocratici') testimonia la consapevolezza del filosofo non solo riguardo la necessità dell'accettazione del fatto della democrazia, ma anche della sua importanza per una comprensione storica del mondo contemporaneo: cf. Croce, *Le confessioni di un non politico*, poi in *Pagine sparse*, Vol. 2, 146-47.

[6] Tra tutti, si veda ancora una volta Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico del Novecento*, 166 ss.; ma anche Galasso, *Croce*, 445 ss.

zione e in una serie di aggiustamenti che di fatto attraversarono l'arco della sua intera vita. Nel periodo della maturità, tale flusso di rimeditazioni può essere ricondotto a tre specifiche 'fasi': una prima fase (dopo la parentesi 'labrioliana') sostanzialmente critica; una seconda fase più benevola, all'interno della quale è possibile trovare una duplice prospettiva, che riguarda da un lato la democrazia come fenomeno politico-sociale, e dall'altro il pensiero democratico in senso stretto. Infine, è forse possibile isolare anche una terza fase, cronologicamente coincidente con l'ultimo Croce, nel quale il pensiero sulla democrazia ritorna nuovamente a colorarsi di chiaroscuri, pur non venendo mai meno l'accettazione della procedura democratica. Queste tre fasi trovano i loro punti di svolta in alcune tappe fondamentali, che potremmo concentrare (con il beneficio di un certo margine di approssimazione) intorno ad alcune date strategiche: 1910/12, 1922/24 (e poi 1932/34), 1942; nel loro insieme, esse segnano intervalli temporali più ampi: 1900-1910; 1910-1922; 1922-1938; 1938-1952.

La prima fase della riflessione crociana sulla democrazia parte dunque dal calare del secolo decimonono e intercetta l'eredità degli anni in cui l'impegno culturale del filosofo era ancora principalmente monopolizzato da quella che egli stesso chiamò la sua "prima vita": quella dell'infaticabile studioso e del grande erudito. Come ci informano le varie interviste e la stessa autobiografia, quest'ultima si chiuse col suo avvicinamento ad Antonio Labriola e col suo "farsi filosofo". L'atteggiamento prevalente che segnò questo primissimo periodo fu una sostanziale indifferenza verso la politica e una distanza – in primo luogo sociale – rispetto al fenomeno democratico. Un tale atteggiamento iniziò a mutare con l'approfondimento della conoscenza del materialismo storico, grazie al quale il filosofo individua il germe di un suo ripensamento, o ancor meglio, del suo vero primo atteggiamento nei confronti della democrazia.[7] Da questo momento, e per alcuni anni, la posizione politica di Croce si apre ai temi democratici, con interventi pubblici (ad es. quelli sull' "Avanti!") volti decisamente a favore. Ancora nel 1902 rivendica un'adesione al "movimento liberale e radicale" e "simpatizzante" del socialismo; nel 1910 in un intervento su "L'Unità", non senza destare grande sorpresa, si interroga invece sulla necessità della democrazia, tanto che l'interpretazione di tutto ciò che accade da quel momento, per poi culminare nella celebre intervista su *La fine del socialismo* (1911), è il risultato di un dibattito piuttosto complesso.[8]

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[7] Croce, *Contributo alla critica di me stesso* (1915), ora in *Etica e politica*, 383. Cf. Galasso, *Croce*, 57.

[8] Su sollecitazione di Salvemini, i temi dell'intervento del 1910 divennero oggetto di un ulteriore articolo redatto nel marzo del 1912: *Il partito come giudizio e come pregiudizio*, ora in *Cultura e vita morale,* 191-98. Sulla questione cf. di nuovo D'Angelo, *Benedetto Croce*, 369. Da parte propria, Croce rivendicò sempre il carattere transitorio e tutto sommato occasionale

Ciò che si può dire con ragionevole certezza è che la posizione di Croce successiva al 1910/11 rimane sostanzialmente scettica nei confronti della democrazia come fenomeno politico, attribuendone la paternità spirituale a quella stessa cultura positivistica contro la quale era andato progressivamente polemizzando, dapprima interiormente, e poi pubblicamente sulle pagine della "Critica".[9] Per il Croce di quegli anni questo era il *punctum dolens*, e questo sostanzialmente resterà anche quando col passare del tempo quel giudizio lapidario sarà stemperato: in quando dottrina politica, la democrazia era un parto dell'astrattezza 'illuministica', affermatasi nel periodo della grande Rivoluzione e poi esportata attraverso la filosofia positivistica di Saint-Simon e di Proudhon, della quale in Italia si era fatto apostolo Mazzini. A questa definizione, che a prima vista aveva tutti i tratti di un'analisi storico-politica, Croce affiancava una categoria filosofica vera e propria, alla quale dava il nome di "egualitarismo". Nel periodo in questione, le ricorrenti critiche del filosofo a questo atteggiamento sono così diffuse (e così note) che risulta totalmente inutile darne conto in citazioni dettagliate. Per averne un saggio, basterà riportare un breve passaggio della già menzionata noterella del 1905, poi confluita in *Cultura e vita morale* (1913, 1925[2]):

> L'orrore contro il positivismo [...] divenne così violento da soffocare per parecchi anni persino le tendenze democratiche che sono state sempre naturali nel mio animo [...]. Ma la democrazia italiana era, non si sa perché [...], positivistica; e il mio stomaco si ricusò di digerirla, finché essa non prese qualche condimento dal socialismo marxistico, il quale, cosa ormai notissima, è imbevuto di filosofia classica tedesca. Anzi oggi la fraseologia positivistica di certi democratici italiani ma fa sorgere impeti di conservatore.[10]

Questo brano mette in chiaro un elemento importante, che troviamo formulato nelle prime righe: Croce confessa una sorta di propria 'tendenza' naturale verso la democrazia, che qui non può che essere intesa come un apprezzamento per i valori e i princìpi veicolati dall'idea di uguaglianza morale degli individui.[11] Questa naturale tendenza, tuttavia, è sconfessata dalla opposizione alla teoria sulla base della quale il pensiero politico nazionale aveva costruito le fortune democratiche. Trattandosi di anni in cui Croce, sostanzialmente, si identifica ancora in quella parte politica, il documento acquista un valore estremamente significativo. Si può dire che

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di quella prima adesione, che in quel fondamentale biennio andava esaurendosi: *Contributo*, 381-83.

[9] Croce, *A proposito del positivismo italiano* (1905), in *Cultura e vita morale*, 45.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Una conferma di ciò la troviamo nel *Contributo*, 375, 377.

già nel 1905, e parallelamente all'approfondimento della propria riflessione, la 'passione' democratica del filosofo si è oramai molto raffreddata. E a guastare quell'empatia entra in gioco un elemento intellettuale (che in Croce in realtà era sempre stato presente),[12] ovvero la critica all'astrattezza della ragione positivistica. Questo elemento lo condurrà a un completo rovesciamento delle proprie posizioni politiche, finendo – man mano che si esauriva quel "condimento" marxistico – per fargli vestire i panni del liberale *tout court*.

Di come il Croce d'inizio secolo avesse preso a sospetto la democrazia è stato detto a lungo, tanto da farlo sovente accostare – e non senza qualche plausibile ragione – ai cosiddetti elitisti.[13] In realtà, le posizioni di Croce rimandano a un substrato teorico sensibilmente differente da quello dei Mosca e dei Pareto, per non parlare di Weber (il rapporto col quale, peraltro, andrebbe trattato come un caso a sé); tuttavia, resta il fatto che – come nota nuovamente Bobbio – sul piano squisitamente politico gli orientamenti di questi autori finiscono con l'essere facilmente sovrapponibili.[14] Da questi orientamenti possono essere sviluppate le seguenti tesi: 1) il rifiuto della democrazia come sistema di governo; 2) il conseguente rifiuto del principio politico che ne è alla base, ovvero il suffragio universale; 3) un sostanziale sospetto nei confronti del fenomeno ad essi sottostante, la *democratizzazione sociale*: ovvero, quella stessa idea di una incipiente società di massa che conduce il popolo, inteso come moltitudine, a irrompere all'interno dell'organizzazione generale della società e a inserirsi nella sua gestione. Coi primi due elementi Croce fece ben presto i conti; col terzo restò in confitto tutta la vita, anche se tentò di venirci a patti. Alla base di queste osservazioni sta anzitutto una fondamentale differenziazione teorica interna al concetto di democrazia, una differenziazione che in senso stretto non troviamo mai formulata nelle pagine del filosofo, ma che tuttavia risulta fondamentale per comprendere appieno i termini della questione: si tratta della distinzione tra democrazia come fatto e democrazia come valore.

Di conseguenza, ciò che Croce critica della democrazia muove da due elementi distinti. Il primo elemento è lo scetticismo nei confronti della società di massa – un dato che gli proveniva massimamente dal suo essere uomo, come lui stesso dice, costruito in pieno secolo decimonono, e perciò certamente intriso di patriottismo risorgimentale, ma di quella specie legata alla tradizione della destra storica e della scuola moderata. In altri

[12] Va ricordata l'affermazione d'esordio dell'articolo: "Non sono mai stato positivista...", *A proposito del positivismo*, 41.
[13] In qualche modo aveva fatto così anche Bobbio nel suo celeberrimo profilo del Novecento politico: Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 96-7, 100.
[14] *Ibid*., 102-03.

termini, entrava in gioco una differenza generazionale, che segnava la distanza da quel modello di società destinato a divenire tipico del Novecento, e che anche in Italia, dopo la Grande guerra, rappresentava la realtà del secolo nuovo: dopo il 1918, tutto ciò fu perfettamente chiaro anche a lui. Ma se, già prima del conflitto, il realismo crociano non poté che confrontarsi col primo concetto di democrazia sulla base della forza dei fatti, per accettarla dopo senza più ripensamenti, l'altro concetto, quello della democrazia come valore, gli dette maggiori problemi. Infatti, veicolato dalla critica al positivismo, il secondo elemento solleva proprio il tema del valore della democrazia. Quest'ultimo problema aveva a sua volta due risvolti, che facevano riferimento al lato politico e a quello morale della questione. Del secondo il filosofo aveva già detto richiamando il suo atteggiamento generalmente 'umanitario'; tuttavia, l'immediata traduzione di quest'ultimo in principi politici in senso stretto continuava a presentare notevoli problemi. La maggior parte di essi, appunto, erano dati dall'astrattismo che le filosofie democratiche portavano con sé, con quel loro far riferimento a un ideale intellettuale di giustizia, di fatto mai realizzato perché irrealizzabile. Sottotraccia, però, restava aperta la questione di come dare espressione politica a quella stessa democrazia sociale che veniva affermandosi come dato di realtà, e pertanto qualcosa col quale fare i conti inevitabilmente; e lo diveniva in modo sempre più urgente, quanto più la sua alternativa storica, il socialismo, sembrava uscire di scena. Qualche tempo più tardi assistiamo alla conferma di questa posizione, che vede la democrazia come il fenomeno politicamente centrale del nuovo secolo, tanto da ricondurvi quello stesso socialismo che, nonostante tutto, aveva svolto un ruolo importante nella sua svolta verso la filosofia. A tal proposito, è istruttiva una riflessione del 1911, tratta dalla già ricordata intervista del 9 febbraio dello stesso anno a "La Voce", sul definitivo sciogliersi dello stesso nella democrazia.[15]

A queste affermazioni di non poca radicalità sul piano teorico, sul piano pratico faceva però seguito, e quasi stridendo con le prime, lo scarso impegno personale rispetto alla vita politica, nonostante la nomina a Senatore nel 1910 (seguita da quella a Senatore a vita nel 1948), nonché l'importante carica di ministro dell'istruzione nel quinto (e ultimo) governo Giolitti. Nel 1914 per la prima (e unica) volta il filosofo entrò direttamente in una vera competizione elettorale, come Presidente del Fascio dell'Ordine nelle elezioni amministrative di Napoli; in quell'occasione il suo 'programma' fu caratterizzato da un generale riferimento al patriot-

[15] Croce, *Due conversazioni: II La morte del socialismo* (1911), ora in *Cultura e vita morale*, 150 ss. Cf. il commento di Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 100; si veda inoltre Garin, *Benedetto Croce*, 662-80.

tismo nazionale (di chiara provenienza risorgimentale),[16] che tuttavia egli mai confuse con quelle tendenze puramente nazionalistiche e germanofile che al tempo caratterizzavano alcuni ambienti di quell'area politica. Ancora nel 1923 ci teneva a distinguere dal proprio un "patriottismo naturalistico", "etnico e brutale", che era stato ed era ancora quello di tutti i nazionalismi.[17] In altri termini, più che a uno spirito conservatore, l'obiezione crociana in questi primi decenni del secolo era istintivamente legata al fondamento normativo dell'idea democratica, al suo essere cioè la difesa di un'idea specifica: quella *egualitaria*. In questo senso, negli anni successivi al 1910 il filosofo insiste sulla critica a quella democrazia che finisce per identificare con la "mentalità massonica".[18] Si struttura intorno a queste riflessioni la celebre critica al "democratismo": qui però è essenziale sottolineare una distinzione tra il democratismo/democrazia nel senso della teoria e quello della pratica.

Le ragioni della critica crociana alla teoria democratica, che troviamo soprattutto negli interventi collocati prima e immediatamente a ridosso della grande guerra, sono molto note: riprendiamole brevemente. La democrazia viene criticata nel senso di dottrina egualitaria, e tali critiche sono fondate sulla corrispondente obiezione, di matrice filosofica e culturale, all'intellettualismo illuminista, del quale il positivismo non era stato che l'erede. Si tratta dunque di una critica all'individualismo di origine "atomistica", come sarà poi chiamato, che ha per base la prospettiva utilitaristica del volontarismo contrattualistico moderno, alla quale assieme a Croce farà ampiamente riferimento Giovanni Gentile, per quanto secondo una prospettiva che dal punto di vista filosofico-politico si svilupperà in modo significativamente differente rispetto a quella del filosofo napoletano.[19] In Croce, tuttavia, v'era un preciso punto di partenza che tendeva a separare un individualismo vero da un individualismo falso: laddove quest'ultimo, che aveva prodotto il giacobinismo rivoluzionario, tendeva a farsi promotore di una visione atomistica, costruttivistica e astratta, destinata a confluire nelle concezioni egualitarie di un democraticismo impossibile da realizzare, il primo creava invece la base del suo pensiero politico, che troverà ampio sviluppo negli anni successivi, allorché egli prenderà definitivamente le distanze da Gentile e svilupperà appieno la

[16] Croce, *Un intermezzo elettorale*, poi in *Pagine sparse*, Vol. 1, 406-11. Cf. *I socialisti e la patria*, ora in *Pagine sulla guerra*, 151; *Motivazione di voto (6 dicembre 1914)*, in *Pagine sulla guerra,* 19.
[17] Croce, "Recensione a G. Mosca, *Elementi di scienza politica*", 374-378.
[18] Croce, *Due conversazioni: I. La mentalità massonica* (1910), in *Cultura e vita morale*, 146. Cf. *Taccuini di lavoro*, Vol. 1, 451. Sul tema cf. Altini, *Croce*, 274-80.
[19] Gentile, *I fondamenti della filosofia del diritto*, 106; cf. *Genesi e struttura della società*, 13-14, 33 ss.

propria filosofia politica in direzione di un liberalismo inteso come religione della libertà.[20] Una tale opposizione tra quei due 'individualismi', vero e falso, si costruiva dunque sulla reciproca opposizione di concetti come: razionalità storica e intellettualismo; esigenze dell'uomo concreto e spirito illuministico astratto; coscienza morale e moralismo; amor di patria (cioè, vero patriottismo) e nazionalismo – dal quale, dal punto di vista strettamente politico, conseguiva l'ulteriore opposizione tra scuola moderata e mazzinianesimo. In sintesi, ci troviamo di fronte a variazioni della classica opposizione idealistica tra ragione e intelletto.[21]

Se si prendono in considerazione le pagine di questo primo periodo (come abbiamo detto, dal 1905 al 1922 all'incirca), fino alle sue incursioni più estreme negli anni Venti, è possibile notare che la radice del problema della democrazia è data sostanzialmente da una precisa posizione teorica, genuinamente filosofica, che come abbiamo visto affonda le sue radici nel pensiero idealista classico, per poi emergere propriamente in quello stesso realismo che, avendo attraversato il socialismo labrioliano, ritorna alla tradizione nazionale, dando forma al peculiare atteggiamento filosofico di Croce, col quale nei primi decenni del Novecento egli affronta i grandi temi generali della riflessione storico-politica. Le note de "La Critica" stanno lì a ricordarlo come una fonte centrale: quel lungo percorso, che proveniva dall'influenza non solo di Hegel, ma anche (e a suo stesso dire soprattutto) di Vico e di De Sanctis, aveva finalmente trovato un'autonoma espressione nel senso dello storicismo.[22] Tuttavia, persino al di là di quanto Croce stesso ha ripetutamente affermato in molteplici circostanze, è interessante osservare come il motivo originario di quel rifiuto teorico della democrazia, in quanto prodotto della mentalità astratta del secolo dei Lumi, si trova in un preciso passaggio del testo hegeliano, sul quale molto più di lui insisterà Gentile, ma che può a ragione essere inteso come una fonte comune dell'idealismo italiano, rispetto al quale – *mutatis mutandis* – non fu estraneo neppure il realismo desanctisiano, che pure appariva decisamente incentrato sull'estetica e molto meno sulla politica e sul diritto. Quel motivo realistico, che in modo differente da Croce aveva condotto De Sanctis a confrontarsi col positivismo, finisce per cogliere dall'interno le motivazioni più autentiche di un pensiero politico profondamente intriso di storicità, e per questo confluito in una dottrina della libertà costruita seguendo lo sviluppo di caratteri particolari, più che di principi generali.

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[20] Galasso, *Croce*, 360.

[21] Qui si fonda il senso del continuo richiamo di Croce allo spirito del Risorgimento, del quale – come si è detto – si sentiva culturalmente un erede: cf. Croce, *Fede e programmi* (1911), in *Cultura e vita morale*, 166; si veda anche *Contributo*, 393, 395-96. Cf. Sasso, *Per invigilare me stesso*, 223.

[22] Croce, *Contributo*, 392 ss.

Il luogo che ho in mente è naturalmente il celebre § 258 dei *Lineamenti*, nel quale Hegel accusa esplicitamente il pensiero contrattualistico di poggiare su una base astratta e illusoria, inadatta a proporsi come principio (*Grundsatz*) e fondamento (*Grund*) dell'eticità e dello Stato. Di contro, solamente la "razionalità concreta", che fa tutt'uno con la ragione speculativa, può essere in grado di edificare un'organizzazione *reale* della vita etica.[23] Ora, è chiaro che la rappresentazione di quella "organizzazione reale" non si allineava con le preferenze politiche di Croce, e ancor meno gli sarebbe piaciuta anni dopo, quando la versione rivisitata e corretta della *Sittlichkeit* hegeliana veniva innalzata a modello universale dal suo antico amico e collaboratore, divenendo oggetto della terza e più dura polemica tra i due.[24] Tuttavia, al di là delle ricadute politiche della dottrina, trovava il suo pieno apprezzamento il metodo di Hegel, la sua impostazione speculativa del problema della libertà, con i riflessi ontologici che produceva: vale a dire, l'allontanamento dal panorama della storia degli elementi puramente volontaristici, emozionali e velleitari e la ricomposizione del concetto della volontà con gli sforzi pazienti, progressivi e concreti degli esseri umani. Al grande filosofo svevo si doveva dunque l'identificazione dell'impulso soggettivo con lo strenuo sforzo dell'individuo che agisce, soffre e si muove in piena aderenza alla realtà storica, ovvero, per dirla con le sue stesse parole, esser certi che "la fede, ossia la volontà del bene, è dappertutto: è anche presso coloro che sembrano corrotti e cattivi".[25] Tutto ciò non poteva che fare dell'astratto e difficile pensiero hegeliano il distillato del proprio personale gusto filosofico. Vi sono probabilmente centinaia di pagine nelle quali, con le varie sfumature del caso, riemerge questo stesso giudizio; ma ancora una volta è rivolgendoci ai testi dotati di maggiore spessore teoretico che possiamo trovare un quadro esplicativo. È il caso, ad esempio, della *Filosofia della pratica* (1909), che nel XII capitolo della prima sezione affronta il problema dell'"astrattismo e il giudizio astratto" in sede morale, evocando esplicitamente per la definizione dell'elemento *concreto* il ruolo del giudizio "speculativo", contrapposto al giudizio "empirico".[26] Ed empirico è appunto il metodo del contrattualismo morale, dal quale discende ogni egualitarismo.[27]

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[23] Hegel, *Lineamenti di filosofia del diritto*, 196-97.

[24] Sulla questione ora Sasso, *Dalla* concordia discors *alla polemica*, 856-63. Cf. Visentin *et al.*, "La conclusione del carteggio Croce-Gentile".

[25] Croce, *Fede e programmi*, 162.

[26] Croce, *Filosofia della pratica*, 82, 87-9, 91.

[27] Questa difficoltà propria di ogni concezione egualitaria era contestualmente presente addirittura a Kelsen, il quale, infatti, nel celebre saggio del 1920 (1929[2]) preferì affrontare il tema della democrazia partendo non dall'uguaglianza, ma dalla libertà: Kelsen, *Essenza e valore della democrazia*, 45. Inoltre, si veda quanto ebbe a dire lo stesso Hegel a proposito di un simile

Si confronti ora queste riflessioni con un passaggio della nota del 1911 (lo stesso anno dell'intervista sul socialismo) dedicata a *Fede e programmi*:

> Non mai come da alcuni anni in qua sorgono in Italia, e si accalcano l'uno sull'altro, nel campo sociale e politico, programmi d'ogni sorta: riformistici e sindacalistici, democristiani e demomassonici, nazionalistici e liberistici (...). I programmi né sono la fede né possono suscitarla; perché la fede è qualcosa di saldo e assoluto, e i programmi sono contingenti e mutevoli. [...] Il rapporto tra programmi e fede è, dunque, che questa precede quelli e li genera [...].[28]

> L'atomismo sociale, che si rivela in questi fatti e in queste disposizioni d'animo [...] non può dunque generare se non programmi fallaci e a doppia faccia, ovvero programmi di bella apparenza ma inanimati. Inanimati, perché lo spirito che dovrebbe moverli è assente, e tutt'al più vi è presente quello stesso spirito individualistico e materialistico, che si vorrebbe correggere e superare.[29]

Nel testo riportato colpisce immediatamente come i concetti collegati di atomismo e materialismo siano ricondotti esplicitamente a un "individualismo borghese e socialistico", accomunando dunque democratismo e socialismo, entrambi poi ricondotti alla superiore categoria dell'individualismo astratto. È altresì interessante sottolineare come nell'endiadi proposta, è il concetto di *fede* ad avere un significato decisamente privilegiato, concetto che assume un preciso riferimento etico, fino ad identificarsi con lo sforzo morale, con l'intenzione e con la connessa coscienza soggettiva. Inoltre, l'autentico significato dei *programmi* sta nel loro essere elementi non universali, bensì particolari (nella misura in cui non intendono essere delle generalizzazioni astratte).[30] Assistiamo qui a un primo momento non solo di relativizzazione, ma anche di approfondimento del valore delle varie prospettive politiche, che ritroveremo più avanti, e che assumerà un segno per molti versi paradigmatico della posizione di Croce nella seconda fase della sua filosofia politica. Ciò che in questi anni si fa invece sentire in modo ancora prevalente è il riferimento critico, sottoposto al severo giudizio della visione idealista, duramente polemica contro quello stesso soggettivismo che per il filosofo coincideva col dannunzianesimo.

Un altro luogo sistematicamente collegato al primo, raccolto nella stessa silloge del 1913 (accresciuta in seconda edizione nel 1925), è del 1912, intitolato: *Contro l'astrattismo e il materialismo politici*. In questo

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tentativo di fare dell'uguaglianza il primo e più fondamentale principio: Hegel, *Enciclopedia*, 505.

[28] Croce, *Cultura e vita morale*, 160-61.

[29] *Ibid*., 166.

[30] *Ibid*., 168.

caso Croce traccia una sottile distinzione tra i due tipi pratici, che pure appaiono accomunati dallo stesso errore teorico. Polemizzando con i vari raggruppamenti politici che si vanno formando in Italia dopo la riforma Giolitti, il testo identifica in particolare l'"astrattismo" politico con il pensiero democratico, e il "materialismo" politico con il socialismo, ovvero con i partiti che si richiamano da un lato al principio della "giustizia assoluta", e dall'altro alla "lotta senza giustizia". Come sappiamo, sul piano politico la conclusione di questi anni è ancora una volta quella della storicizzazione e dell'inquadramento della lotta politica all'interno del più generale processo storico, che fa dei vari principi contrapposti anche i vari valori, quegli stessi valori della "cultura" che sono sempre incarnati in "valori storici", e come tali conciliati e 'relativizzati' all'interno del momento della *concretezza*.[31] Pertanto, accade che:

> il complesso dei valori della cultura, che si simboleggia col nome di Giustizia o di Umanità, non si attua praticamente se non attraverso queste gagliardiche difese e offese, perché i doveri generali non si attuano se non quando scendano da quell'astrattezza (...) e si facciano a noi prossimi.[32]

A ricordarci la peculiarità di questo atteggiamento sistematico di Croce stanno ancora una volta i riferimenti classici evocati nell'articolo: Machiavelli, Hegel (contro il 'moralismo' di Catone) e Tommaseo; e i riferimenti politici: Cavour contrapposto a Bismarck. È però importante notare come l'astrattismo democratico, pur nella limitatezza della sua posizione particolare, si faccia portatore delle esigenze dell'universalità, dell'eticità e della cultura; in questo senso, a ben guardare, essi sono 'migliori' dei fautori del puro materialismo, che "empiricizzano i valori assoluti", precludendosi in questo modo ogni possibile riferimento all'universale; infatti, conclude Croce, i valori empirici "hanno il loro limite nei valori della cultura".[33] Come dire, nell'ambito dello spirito pratico, l'elemento

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[31] *Ibid*., 184-86. Un altro testo del 1912 che va strettamente connesso a quest'ultimo è la già citata nota: *Il partito come giudizio e come pregiudizio* (*ibid*., 191-98), nella quale, partendo dai medesimi assunti, viene sottolineata la parzialità dei singoli momenti particolari, così come la necessità di farne astrazione nella misura in cui si voglia elevare la politica – qui Croce risolve in tal modo – ad autentico servizio agli "interessi generali" (genericamente identificati con la parola *patria*). Questa conclusione è apparsa a molti una vera e propria fuga dal confronto con il tema dell'impegno politico, evocando addirittura toni 'qualunquistici'. A ben vedere, anche al di là delle conclusioni proposte nella nota, mi pare che il ragionamento del filosofo possa essere assimilato a quello del testo precedente. Un'ampia discussione in Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 101-02, ma cf. pure 103-04. Sul tema del *qualunquismo* crociano cf. Galasso, *Croce*, 244.

[32] Croce, *Cultura e vita morale*, 186.

[33] *Ibid*., 188. Lo sviluppo di una siffatta conclusione sarà alla base del cambio di direzione impresso negli anni Venti, non senza peraltro destare dubbi sulla sua esatta collocazione all'in-

puramente economicistico e quello morale non stanno affatto sullo stesso piano. Non si tratta dunque di proporre un giudizio salomonico: quel che il filosofo tenta di evocare è un vero e proprio richiamo all'intelligenza politica, alla funzione sempre vigile e critica della capacità di giudizio, a quello stesso "equilibrio mentale" e "finezza intellettuale" che considera la più grande "conquista italiana", prodotta dalla sua millenaria eredità storico-culturale.

È infine importante notare come questo testo in particolare mostri come ci sia già l'accettazione della democrazia come sistema istituzionale di lotta politica, anche se viene accentuata la critica nei confronti della vacuità dei programmi dei politici democratici, se lasciati a loro stessi nella loro unilateralità. E vi appaiono, inoltre, le forze effettivamente in campo della nuova democrazia italiana: i fautori della giustizia universale, il democratismo, e quelli della lotta senza giustizia, il socialismo, e in particolare il socialismo rivoluzionario, verso il quale – nella versione di Sorel – pure Croce aveva avuto espressioni di apprezzamento (opponendolo al socialismo positivistico), e che nel 1925, al culmine della lotta politica in Italia, finiva invece per approssimare nella radicalità delle istanze al suo nemico più diretto, il "reazionarismo (nazionalismo o "fascismo")".[34] Inserito in tale schema teoretico, è facile comprendere lo spettro complesso del rapporto di Croce con la democrazia. Come si è detto, si tratta di una critica che in questi anni rappresenta soprattutto il frutto politico di una elaborazione in primo luogo concettuale. Molti autori hanno ben ricostruito le ragioni teoriche di una tale posizione:[35] tanto astratta è la teoria democratica, quanto concreta è per il filosofo quella liberale, che da ora in poi diverrà l'autentica protagonista delle sue riflessioni; un liberalismo figlio dello spirito storicistico dei grandi pensatori del XIX secolo, riformista nella prassi politica, di contro all'ingenuo rivoluzionarismo della scuola democratica. In un siffatto schema di riferimento sono da collocare tutte le posizioni crociane nella fase più apertamente 'antidemocratica', che successivamente non hanno mancato di destare aperte critiche.[36] E corollari di questa critica teorica sono inoltre gli interventi polemici nei confronti di quanti in Italia stavano riformulando la teoria della demo-

terno di una filosofia che voleva restare rigorosamente storicistica: cf. es. Faucci, *La filosofia politica*, 110 ss.

[34] *Ibid*., 284.

[35] Classico quello di Sasso, *La ricerca*, 23 ss. Anche Bobbio sottolinea, pur senza sottacerne l'aperta critica, la preminenza in Croce del profilo filosofico su quello politico, che lo porta ad accentuare la distinzione tra politica e cultura: cf. Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 103-04.

[36] Per un esempio eminente, si veda ancora Bobbio, *Profilo* ideologico, 97-99; per un'idea esatta delle origini di questa linea critica cf. Gramsci, *Passato e presente*, 25 ss. Sul tema ora Cingari, *Dietro l'autonarrazione*.

crazia, in alcuni casi alla luce di elementi affatto nuovi rispetto alla sua originaria provenienza. Un caso celebre, più volte imputato al filosofo, fu ad esempio quello di Guglielmo Ferrero;[37] ma, con Bobbio, si potrebbero aggiungere anche quelli, tra loro diversissimi, di Salvemini da un lato e di Luigi Einaudi dall'altro.[38] Ancora nel marzo 1916, quando per alcuni versi la sensibilità del filosofo su alcune questioni centrali stava già mutando, assistiamo a tali momenti di furore critico,[39] momenti inevitabilmente destinati a essere riprodotti anche nelle pagine dei saggi che andranno a formare gli *Elementi di politica*, raccolti nella silloge *Etica e politica* (1931), un'opera che del pensiero politico crociano testimonia in realtà un'epoca completamente diversa, nello spirito prima ancora che nella lettera.

3. Il 'secondo' Croce e il democratismo (1922-1932)

Parlare di un secondo periodo crociano non è una novità: a tale cesura ha fatto riferimento una amplissima e accreditatissima letteratura, che nella filosofia politica italiana è stata autorevolmente recepita ancora una volta da Bobbio.[40] È però interessante analizzare l'intera portata di quella che soltanto impropriamente potrebbe essere definita una 'svolta', e che in realtà fu qualcosa di diverso: infatti, da un lato si trattò della naturale prosecuzione delle istanze più profonde della filosofia crociana e dall'altro, effettivamente, di un momento di cesura e di approfondimento speculativo dello storicismo a cui quella filosofia era pervenuto. Come hanno ricostruito gli studiosi, certamente in questo periodo all'interno del pensiero di Croce maturavano questioni ampie e complesse, prima fra tutte il rapporto tra logica e storia e il relativo ruolo della storiografia. Non è su ciò che qui ci soffermeremo, quanto sull'impatto che il lavoro di questo decennio di grande trasformazione ha avuto sul suo modo di pensare la democrazia. Si tratta, in verità, di un motivo importante attraverso il quale – per riproporre l'espressione di Giuseppe Galasso – da un punto di vista più ampio Croce interpretò lo spirito del suo tempo.

Sintetizzando in una formula, si potrebbe affermare che, a partire dal primo dopoguerra, e avendo alle spalle lo snodo politico già rappresentato dagli effetti dell'allargamento della base elettorale del 1912, e dunque l'affermazione della democrazia come fatto, l'atteggiamento di Croce ten-

[37] Sulla questione fu categorico Settembrini, *Storia dell'idea antiborghese,* 56 ss., 248 ss., 254 ss.; per una equilibrata riproposizione della medesima tesi cf. ora Giannetti, *Guglielmo Ferrero*, 109-11.
[38] Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 105 ss., 171-172.
[39] Croce, *Pagine sulla guerra*, 108; 109-110. Cf. Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 98-99.
[40] Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 166 ss.

de a una progressiva evoluzione e a un sostanziale assestamento anche dal punto di vista dei valori. Se, come si è visto, negli anni della critica la prospettiva del filosofo partiva in primo luogo dall'analisi della situazione oggettiva della politica a lui contemporanea, in particolare di quella italiana, rigettando ogni ingenua fuga ideale, in tutti gli anni Venti e poi nei primi anni Trenta – nei quali assistiamo allo sviluppo della sua filosofia politica vera e propria[41] – il suo atteggiamento sarà di ben diverso tenore. Il punto di svolta decisivo è dato naturalmente dalla presa del potere da parte del fascismo, che assieme alla nascente democrazia mise fine a ogni autentica libertà. Questo fatto, com'è evidente, non poteva lasciare indifferente il filosofo del liberalismo, per quanto anche in questo caso egli tenne salda la distinzione tra i due concetti e le loro relative dottrine politiche. Quello che avvenne fu però da un lato una sostanziale relativizzazione dell'antagonismo teorico tra liberalismo e democrazia, dall'altro un approfondimento della loro rispettiva funzione all'interno della sua concezione generale della politica, nonché di quello stesso sviluppo della storia etico-politica moderna che proprio in quegli anni prendeva forma nelle 'quattro' storie.[42]

Infine, proprio in questo passaggio cruciale credo si possa identificare un'apertura a quella stessa dimensione valoriale che tradizionalmente il pensiero politico italiano associava all'idea democratica, finendone per dare una propria personale interpretazione, pur non giungendo mai alla sua accettazione come valore di riferimento, cioè come valore primario dell'orizzonte politico. Se facciamo riferimento ai più tardi *Scritti e discorsi politici* del periodo 1943-47, dal tono e dalle considerazioni di merito dell'autore appare chiarissimo il compimento di questa impostazione, un fatto che ci sorprende non poco quando le compariamo ad alcuni testi del primo periodo, ad es. le pagine della ricordata nota del 1905, le altre del 1915 sull'accettazione dell'elemento democratico grazie al materialismo storico,[43] oppure quelle del 1911-12, sulla sostanziale confluenza del socialismo nella democrazia (e viceversa, a seconda dei periodi e dei contesti). In un saggio apparso sulla "Critica" del gennaio 1943, Croce parla esplicitamente – nel "campo pratico e politico" – di una simbiosi tra liberalismo e democrazia, evocando la democrazia liberale. Così anche in tutti gli anni successivi, che congiungono l'armistizio alla liberazione, e poi nei primi anni della Repubblica.[44]

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[41] Significativa è la riflessione a chiusura di *Politica in nuce* sull'utilità della filosofia politica, dopo averne messo in discussione la legittimità teorica; riflessione che rappresenta una sorta di *clausula salvatoria*: *Etica e politica*, 249.

[42] Anche in questo caso, rimando a Galasso, *Croce*, 342 ss., 371 ss.

[43] *Contributo*, 375, 381-82.

[44] Croce, *Liberalismo e democrazia*, 114-18. Cf. *ibid.*, 191-94.

Un fondamentale momento di novità che segna questo passaggio compare nei saggi di *Politica in nuce* (1924), poi riproposti in *Etica e politica* (1931), allorché il "democratismo" appare con un profilo inedito rispetto ai precedenti, staccandosi dalla concezione della democrazia come "egualitarismo".

> Ma c'è una teoria politica che non possiede nemmeno simile merito e non si fonda su alcun momento della relazione politica (...): la teoria che, per evitare fraintendimenti, chiameremo non già democratica e neppure giacobina, ma, quale essa è, *egualitaria*. «Democratismo», infatti, indica la tendenza a far pesare più fortemente la massa, il popolo o la plebe nei consigli e nella deliberazione politica, ed è sempre questione empirica, di più o di meno; e «giacobinismo» designa l'atteggiamento pratico, che, movendo da un astratto ideale, ricorre all'imposizione e alla violenza per attuarlo (...). E il democratismo sarà, nelle circostanze date, plausibile o no, e il giacobinismo, sempre pochissimo plausibile; ma l'uno e l'altro non sono intrinsecamente impossibili e assurdi, com'è invece la teoria egualitaria.[45]

Cosa testimonia un luogo come questo? Testimonia chiaramente una revisione interna al concetto di democrazia, o almeno una duplicazione delle sue figure. Innanzi tutto, Croce fa chiaramente riferimento alla sua concezione politica, non sociale. Inoltre, ciò che la caratterizza non è certamente l'individualismo atomistico, e perciò appare priva di quegli stessi elementi teoricamente problematici che proprio in quegli anni venivano approfonditi e sviluppati nel pensiero politico di Gentile.[46] Inoltre, Croce insiste soprattutto sull'aspetto politico del democratismo, espungendone i rilievi critici sostanziali – cioè, l'impossibilità teorica, attribuita invece all'egualitarismo – e mettendo in luce quelli che finiscono per apparire elementi positivi, nella misura in cui colgono una parte della realtà; in tal modo, la democrazia si inserisce coerentemente all'interno della politica come dimensione pratica, cogliendo un "momento della relazione politica". Ora non si tratta più di questioni di critica politica, o di analisi storico-empirica, ma di una vera a propria rimeditazione teorica. Mettendo a confronto queste riflessioni con il dettato di altri testi, si può dire che Croce coglie già ora nel democratismo gli elementi di una 'religione' applicata alla vita politica: con il linguaggio filosofico-politico contemporaneo

[45] *Etica e politica*, 224-25 [nell'ed. critica 210].

[46] Non va dimenticato che si tratta dell'anno in cui infuriava la terza e più dura polemica con il pensatore siciliano, a conclusione del quale, con l'ultima lettera di Gentile a Croce del 23 ottobre 1924, e la risposta del filosofo napoletano il 24 ottobre, veniva a interrompersi definitivamente la loro corrispondenza. Cf. Croce, Gentile, *Carteggio. V*. Sulle profonde basi teoretiche della polemica si veda Sasso, *Gentile, Croce e la distinzione*, 211-68. Da ultimo si veda anche Peluso, *Anatomia di un dissidio*; Nitsch, "Filosofia, politica, guerra", 223 ss.

potremmo anche definirla una 'ideologia'. Che cosa è divenuta la democrazia alla luce di ciò? Si potrebbe affermare che in questa nuova fase il democratismo viene presentato come una forma positiva di ideologia politica, indirizzata soprattutto a servire due ordini di scopi: 1) la legittimazione del potere popolare; 2) una visione politica concreta, incentrata sugli interessi di quella stessa *minor pars* che è poi numericamente *pars maior*, il cui fine è quello di far prevalere "il popolo o la plebe nei consigli e nella deliberazione politica".

Ma a ben guardare, dietro questa definizione è possibile intravedere anche una visione latamente morale del concetto di democrazia, differente da quella moralistica, vuota e astratta, dell'egualitarismo. Qui il valore dell'uguaglianza democratica può essere ricondotto alla radice oggettiva dell'idea di popolo che la sorregge, individuabile nella concreta lotta storica per la prevalenza sugli schieramenti concorrenti e sulle loro rispettive ideologie.[47] Ciò presuppone, naturalmente, quella stessa competizione tra le varie idee politiche, quello stesso agonismo al quale il filosofo aveva sempre fatto riferimento, ma che nel contesto della ricostruzione del decennio 1922-1932 assume una veste alquanto diversa, perché l'esito di quell'agonismo pratico confluisce in una teoria affatto innovativa com'è quella che di lì a poco verrà esposta nella *Storia d'Europa* (1932) e resa celebre dall'appellativo di "religione della libertà". Pertanto, siamo già all'interno di quella prospettiva secondo la quale nella diade dello spirito pratico (bene e utile), presente nella politica, a prevalere è la sfera superiore (la morale, appunto, a cui corrisponde uno dei tre valori universali): il filosofo ha eclissato l'aspetto pragmatico-utilitario, ovvero quella stessa visione della politica e dello stato come "potenza" – che Bobbio gli rimprovera – per valorizzarne la componente etica. Come sappiamo, si tratta dell'elemento caratterizzante il pensiero crociano degli anni del fascismo, che ne farà anche il primo 'oppositore' al regime. Dal 1924 al 1932 abbiamo quindi la vera e propria costruzione della filosofia politica crociana in uno sviluppo che di fatto non trova soluzione di continuità.[48]

Coerente con questo ordine di pensieri, ad esempio, è la noterella del 1925 *La politica dei non politici*, nella quale si difende il valore morale dell'attività politica, che può essere svolta anche attraverso una politica "non praticata", di contro alla politica "governamentale", fondata sulla forza, sulla giustizia come utile del più forte, che rimanda al machiavellismo brutale. Si tratta di temi che rinviano a *Politica in nuce* (a ancor prima alle

[47] Diversamente, Bobbio sottolinea la continuità della polemica antidemocratica (che riguardò soprattutto il liberal-socialismo) anche in questo periodo: Bobbio, *Profilo ideologico*, 173 ss.
[48] Galasso retrodata di qualche anno l'apparizione dei moventi fondamentali di questo punto di svolta: Galasso, *Croce*, 255-59. Cf. anche 343 ss.

Pagine sulla guerra), applicati alla politica italiana del ventennio: la sostanziale identificazione tra stato e governo, tra quest'ultimo e la dimensione della forza, la loro connessione all'utile, con chiari riferimenti al fascismo e a Gentile. Di contro, la "politica dei non politici", che si fa praticando gli studi e la filosofia, rappresenta quella stessa politica 'morale' baluardo della civiltà contro la barbarie. Questo scritto è uno dei tanti esempi del passaggio alla seconda e più matura fase della riflessione politica crociana, che nel suo complesso coinvolge anche l'affinamento del giudizio sul valore sostantivo della democrazia, perché quando quest'ultima (intesa come libera partecipazione popolare al confronto tra opzioni politiche contrapposte) è perduta, Croce valorizza la sua importanza, integrandola all'interno della concezione liberale, che per lui è il "sistema della civiltà". E ancora una volta s'impone la necessità di cogliere il polimorfismo delle accezioni della democrazia, che ora è necessario tenere in accordo: 1) la democrazia come valore, appunto: il valore dell'uguaglianza politica, recepita come rielaborazione del democratismo in quanto fede storico-politica – o se si preferisce, ideologica; 2) la democrazia come esercizio della partecipazione pluralistica, che nella visione crociana tende a confinare e, in ultima analisi, a confluire nel liberalismo. La centralità della seconda definizione negli anni Trenta è oramai evidente; in modo meno palese, tuttavia, anche per la prima definizione pare esserci una precisa collocazione nella riorganizzazione crociana delle categorie politiche, pur non facendo di Croce un pensatore istituzionalmente democratico. Come si è detto, questo discorso che parte proprio negli anni della polemica sul fascismo si rafforzerà progressivamente fino al culmine rappresentato dalla *Storia d'Europa*, nella quale troviamo affermazioni come la seguente:

> così accadeva di un terzo sistema e di una *terza fede* [*corsivo mio*] [...]: l'ideale democratico. Qui le concordanze erano non soltanto negative, nella comune opposizione al clericalismo e all'assolutismo [...], ma anche positive, nella comune richiesta di libertà individuale, di eguaglianza civile e politica, e di sovranità popolare. Ma qui per l'appunto, in mezzo a queste somiglianze, si annidava la diversità [...]. Nei primi [*i democratici, n.d.r.*] gli individui erano centri di forze pari a cui bisognava assegnare [...] un'uguaglianza, come dicevano, di fatto: per i secondi [*i liberali, n.d.r.*] gl'individui erano persone, la loro eguaglianza quella sola della loro umanità, e perciò ideale o di diritto.[49]

In questa pagina appare meglio che altrove la mutata funzione della democrazia, il suo ruolo all'intero della storia moderna come storia etico-politica, e soprattutto la sua relazione con l'altra componente fondamentale della filosofia crociana di questi anni, ovvero la teoria del liberalismo

[49] Croce, *Storia d'Europa,* 31-32.

come religione della libertà. Un atteggiamento simile si può riscontrare anche nella *Storia d'Italia* (1928),[50] ma è la 'quarta' *Storia* a rappresentare la celebrazione di tale concetto, divenendo così non solo materia storiografica ma il cuore del nuovo storicismo crociano.[51] Nella misura in cui coincide con il sistema della civiltà, il liberalismo abdica dalla sua funzione direttamente politico-ideologica; giunto alla sua piena affermazione, esso non è più e non è tanto una delle opzioni politiche in gioco, ma è il principio intorno al quale si struttura l'intero sistema politico moderno. Contestualmente, il liberalismo stesso si sposta sempre più verso una dimensione differente da quella puramente storico-oggettiva per assumere un valore storico-universale, riferendosi cioè a quella stessa dimensione dello spirito assoluto che, chiaramente, non può più aver posto nello storicismo crociano, ma che tuttavia viene conservata come elemento di trasvalutazione etico-politica del suo principio fondamentale.[52] Questo elemento, lo vedremo tra breve, è fortemente influenzato da un'altra reminiscenza hegeliana, che in modo analogo a quanto era già accaduto nei primi anni del secolo torna a incidere fortemente nella costruzione di Croce.

Tale definizione costituisce quindi una soluzione funzionale allo schema teorico della politica caratteristico del periodo 1922-1934, anni fondamentali segnati dalla frattura storica del fascismo e dalla costruzione di una filosofia politica incentrata sull'opposizione alla cultura ufficiale del regime, nazionalistica e imperiale. Sul piano teoretico, poi, sono anche gli anni in cui il filosofo porta alle conclusioni ultime la propria versione dell'idealismo, e al suo interno l'interpretazione della filosofia hegeliana. L'esito filosofico-politico di questo approfondimento teoretico è restituito dall'idea di una comunità politica incentrata sul progresso infinito nella cultura in quanto sistema della civilizzazione, i cui pilastri sono rappresentati da un lato dal primato dell'idea liberale, e dall'altro dal conflitto tra le varie prospettive ideologico-ideali della civiltà moderna: la democrazia, il liberalismo stesso (inteso come movimento politico), il socialismo e il comunismo (a cui ora Croce inizia a dare un rilievo più generale). In questo schema delle fedi politiche, un dato appare molto chiaramente: la doppia funzione del liberalismo. Infatti, quest'ultimo è contemporaneamente un principio squisitamente filosofico – l'elemento speculativo presente nella storia (e di nuovo la *Storia d'Europa* ce ne dà un chiaro esempio) – e una fede pratica, e perciò una delle molteplici forze oggettive in competizione sul terreno della lotta politica. Dove risiede il vero spirito del tempo realizzato nella storia contemporanea? Come dicevamo, su questo punto, sotto-

[50] Croce, *Storia d'Italia,* 140, 153, 163-64, 174-75 [ora in edizione critica, a cura di G. Talamo].
[51] *Storia d'Europa*, 32 ss.
[52] *Ibid*., 8, 21-22, 37-38, 40-41.

traccia, ha nuovamente giocato un ruolo fondamentale la rimeditazione di un secondo motivo hegeliano. Così come era avvenuto per gli anni di inizio secolo con la critica al falso individualismo (cioè, al contrattualismo), negli anni Venti e Trenta è la dottrina della "presenzialità della ragione" a infirmare di sé il pensiero del filosofo, di cui l'idea della religione della libertà rappresenta la personale rielaborazione. Solo in base a una tale concezione il liberalismo poteva divenire un valore assoluto, e pertanto sovrapolitico; solamente in analogia con lo schema della "realizzazione" di un principio assoluto nella storia poteva maturare la concezione dell'età liberale come età dell'ingresso in, e della presenza di, un nuovo mondo spirituale.[53] Infine, soltanto in base a questo schema l'interpretazione stessa del fascismo poteva essere derubricata a "malattia passeggera", secondo la definizione che stupì molti critici del regime negli anni della dittatura. Da questa stessa riorganizzazione dell'impostazione teoretica del rapporto tra elemento particolare ed elemento universale dipende anche la nuova visione della storia etico-politica. In quella che, esplicitata in termini hegeliani, diveniva la sostituzione del primato dello spirito oggettivo con quello dello spirito assoluto, emergeva la nuova centralità della "coscienza morale" (come peraltro era già accaduto per lo stesso pensatore tedesco).

Nel decennio cruciale 1922-1932 abbiamo dunque una importante revisione dell'intera impostazione crociana del tema politico, che matura proprio negli anni della democrazia perduta e che accanto all'innalzamento del liberalismo a principio sostanzialmente speculativo, che acquista un rilievo universalmente morale, il filosofo opera anche una rivalutazione del valore della democrazia politica, elevata anch'essa al di sopra di quella sociale. Di riflesso, la critica alla democrazia/egualitarismo come falso individualismo e atomismo perde centralità, fin quasi a sparire totalmente dalla scena.

4. Una terza fase?

Sarebbe molto interessante integrare questa discussione facendo riferimento agli scritti dei due decenni successivi, e in modo particolare nell'ultimo decennio di vita del filosofo, ovvero in quell'arco temporale nel quale secondo gli studiosi insiste una 'terza fase' del pensiero crociano. Questo travagliatissimo periodo, che sul piano teoretico comportò la profonda rimeditazione della filosofia dello spirito alla luce del celeberrimo tema del "vitale", costò anche lunghi momenti di penoso confronto col tempo

[53] Anche in questo caso, indicherei come esemplari alcuni luoghi della *Rechtsphilosophie*: Hegel, *Lineamenti*, 133, 207, 269, 273. Cf. *Storia d'Europa*, 8.

presente.[54] E in questo ulteriore passaggio ancora una volta egli tornava a trovare in Hegel l'interlocutore principale del proprio dialogo interiore. Gli sconvolgenti eventi che fecero seguito alla seconda grande guerra europea lasciarono un tratto indelebile nella mente del vecchio filosofo, cui si aggiunse lo strascico di un certo numero di dispiaceri e amarezze personali.[55] Al contrario, se guardiamo il versante filosofico-politico, non assistiamo a grandi scossoni teorici. E qui torniamo al nostro argomento.

A voler tratteggiare il profilo di una succinta considerazione conclusiva, credo sia corretto affermare che, sostanzialmente, negli ultimi due decenni Croce continuò a conservare i tratti distintivi del proprio personale compromesso con la democrazia. Tuttavia, va sottolineato il fatto che quella stessa accoglienza del valore democratico all'interno dello schema generale delle varie fedi politiche in lotta, all'insegna del primato della religione della libertà, nel corso degli anni non tanto veniva posto in discussione, quanto veniva ad assumere – ancora una volta – una colorazione nuova; e ciò accadeva man mano che gli eventi storici iniziavano a delineare un nuovo periodo di eclissi del liberalismo, contrariamente a quelle che erano state le sue aspettative negli anni quaranta. In altri termini, se il Croce degli anni del fascismo di fatto pensa a un sistema politico incentrato sulle ideologie, ma conciliato grazie al primato spirituale dell'idea liberale (che alla fine ideologia non è più propriamente, o almeno non è primariamente), una volta che quest'ultima pare cadere in disgrazia, l'orizzonte politico resta limitato a una moltitudine di fedi in lotta (tra le quali, perché no, potrebbe essere inserito anche il liberismo), senza un vero e proprio principio ordinatore. Lascio al lettore filosoficamente accorto la riflessione ultima se tutto ciò possa somigliare, e in che misura, a una vera e propria incursione del vitale nel campo della politica. Ma non mi spingerei oltre nel seguire questa suggestione, ché andrebbe ben diversamente dimostrata, partendo anzitutto dai dati testuali.

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[54] Sasso, *Per invigilare*, 229; Galasso, *Croce*, 423 ss.

[55] Ricostruisce nei dettagli Sasso, *Per invigilare*, 238 ss.; cf. anche Galasso, *Croce*, 426 ss., 467 ss.

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African Political Philosophy of Decolonization: De-Alienation and Emancipation for Transmodernity

La filosofia politica africana della decolonizzazione: de-alienazione ed emancipazione per la transmodernità

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Abstract. The present article aims to propose the concept of emancipation and de-alienation in African political philosophy of decolonization in the actual context of neoliberalism for transmodernity. That is, every culture can dialogue with another and they can create a new culture where they can recognize one another. After the criticism of postcolonial philosophy, African political philosophy is at present struggling against neocolonialism in its form of neoliberalism, which is alienating various dimensions of life. This condition of the African continent led Olúfémí Táíwò to speak of the necessity to criticize the concept of decolonization. As a result, it is becoming clear that a new critique of de-alienation is urgent. In this article, we reflect through the contribution of Frantz Fanon's concept of de-alienation as humanism, Jean-Marc Ela's criticism of neocolonialism, and finally the Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's concept of decolonization of the mind as cultural decolonization, connected with Kwasi Wiredu's conceptual decolonization. First of all, the reflection will recognize the role of decolonization's philosophy as emancipation and de-alienation. In this case the African political Philosophy is conceived as the way for epistemological, cultural, political, economic, conceptual and linguistic decolonization. Finally, we will reflect on colonialism and neocolonialism as coloniality.

Keywords: emancipation, de-alienation, colonialism, neocolonialism, coloniality, decoloniality.

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Riassunto. L'articolo mira a proporre il concetto di emancipazione e de-alienazione nella filosofia politica africana della decolonizzazione nel contesto attuale del neoliberismo per la transmodernità. In altre parole, ogni cultura può dialogare con un'altra e insieme possono creare una nuova cultura in cui potersi riconoscere a vicenda. A seguito della critica alla filosofia postcoloniale, la filosofia politica africana sta attualmente lottando contro il neocolonialismo nella sua forma neoliberista, che sta alienando varie dimensioni della vita. Questa condizione del continente africano ha portato autori come Olúfémí Táíwò a parlare della necessità di criticare il concetto di decolonizzazione. Di conseguenza, sta diventando chiara l'urgenza di una nuova critica della de-alienazione. L'articolo riflette questa questione attraverso il contributo del concetto di de-alienazione come umanesimo di Frantz Fanon, la critica al neocolonialismo di Jean-Marc Ela e, infine, il concetto di decolonizzazione della mente come decolonizzazione culturale di Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, collegato alla decolonizzazione concettuale di Kwasi Wiredu. In primo luogo, l'analisi riconoscerà il ruolo della filosofia della decolonizzazione come emancipazione e de-alienazione. In questo senso, la filosofia politica africana è concepita come la via per la decolonizzazione epistemologica, culturale, politica, economica, concettuale e linguistica. Infine, si rifletterà sul colonialismo e sul neocolonialismo intesi come "colonialità".

Parole chiave: emancipazione, de-alienazione, colonialismo, neocolonialismo, colonialità, decolonialità.

1. Introduction

African political philosophy is currently undergoing epistemological revisionism because, with the independence of African countries, Africa became formally independent but not in practice. Indeed, the actual African condition calls for decolonization and emancipation. According to Michael Amoah in Africa it is necessary to decolonize the whole political system.[1]

Contemporary African philosophy begins its inquiry with Placide Tempels's book, in which the central idea was the possibility of the existence of African philosophy.[2] Tempels dissented from the dominant colonial discourse that denied the existence of African philosophy, as represented by the Hegelian vision of his philosophy of history.

This epistemological debate monopolized African philosophy, whereas the other dimensions – political, logical, linguistic, and so on – revolved around the question of existence or non-existence of African Philosophy. Thus, it is possible to say that African politics was viewed as the last

[1] See Amoah, *Decolonizing African Politics*.
[2] See Tempels, *A filosofia Bantu*.

topic to be addressed in the reflection of African philosophers. In the second part of the 20th century, after African countries gained their independence, African political philosophers began to reflect on the meaning of independence. Today, with the crises of African institutions, African political philosophy has become a central topic of the debate on African philosophy. It was expected that political independence would bring social and economic independence, but the old colonialism paradoxically became the new colonialism together with financial capitalism. This is what Kwame Nkrumah called *neocolonialism*. Accordingly, "the greatest danger at present facing Africa is neo-colonialism and its major instrument, balkanization."[3] For Nkrumah, balkanization is the condition in which the African state remains divided and without union, a situation that enables the colonizer to dominate. According to him, one state alone in Africa cannot resist the colonizer's domination.

So, for him, the solution to neocolonialism is that *Africa must unite4* and only with that unity, can the continent be decolonized. Nkrumah's conception of African union is rooted in the Pan-African movement, which emerged before his political thought and later became the basis for the present-day African Union.

On the other hand, the Third World movement that met in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 aimed to liberate all colonized countries based on the principle of non-alignment. When the leaders of African liberation movements returned from Bandung, however, they continued their political, social and linguistic divisions and negotiated only with their respective metropoles. This consequence is precisely what Nkrumah theorized as the "balkanization" of Africa.

According to Jean-Marc Ela, for Nkrumah, "balkanization" meant that the great powers transformed Africa into smaller territories by means of their "disagreement policy."[5] Nkrumah himself argued that the term "is particularly appropriate to describe the breaking up of Africa into small, weak states, since it arose from the action of the great powers."[6]

To this day, Africa's economic dependence has led to neocolonialism. African political decolonization – beginning in 1957 with Ghana as the first country to become decolonized, followed by the majority of African countries between 1960 and 1975 – did not mean economic decolonization. Even with political independence, African countries remain economically dependent on Western countries and today also on China. As

[3] Nkrumah, *Africa must unite*, 190.
[4] The first publication of Nkrumah's book, *Africa must unite*, was in 1963.
[5] Ela, *Afrique*, 8.
[6] Nkrumah, *Africa must unite*, 190.

previously stated, Nkrumah calls this economic dependence neocolonialism. For Nkrumah, neocolonialism is an instrument of the balkanization of Africa "this is one of the diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically, are formally independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence"[7]. Structural poverty – resulting from slavery, direct and indirect colonialism, and various forms of racism – has to this day prevented Africa from achieving any real decolonization. As Walter Rodney argues, the European project of domination through colonization actively underdeveloped Africa.[8] Europe dominated Africa in all dimensions of existence: political, economic, social, religious, epistemological, cultural, linguistic, and so on. This colonial domination has profound roots in Africa. The consequence of this condition is what Engelbert Mveng calls "anthropological pauperization."[9] Therefore, it is necessary to pursue the decolonization of all dimensions of the African worldview. Instead of creating strong institutions, colonialism created strong leaders who have misdirected African society.

This debate on decolonization was developed by Frantz Fanon, who reflected on the conditions of the oppressed in his concept of decolonization as humanism, understood as de-alienation and emancipation of the oppressed. From the same perspective, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o affirmed the importance of the cultural decolonization of language. For him, it is possible to decolonize Africa if Africans reappropriate their own local languages in order to decolonize the African worldview. On the other hand Kwasi Wiredu concentrated his reflection on epistemic decolonization in African philosophy, where conceptual decolonization became the basic framework of his thought.[10] Finally Valentin Mudimbe sees African thought as *gnosis* and proposes the decolonization of knowledge.[11]

This article presents the debate on African philosophy of decolonization from a critical theory and intercultural perspective. This framework identifies Frantz Fanon, Jean-Marc Ela, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Kwasi Wiredu, Valentin Mudimbe, F.E. Boulaga and Achille Mbembe as key figures who developed an African philosophy of decolonization and proposed a deconstructionist approach to it. Therefore, this reflection contextualizes the concept of decolonization in Africa in order to present the continent in dialogue with its own culture and other world cultures.

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[7] Nkrumah, *Africa must unite,* 191-192.
[8] See Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.
[9] See Mveng, *Identità africana e cristianesimo*.
[10] Wiredu, "Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy;" Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization;" Wiredu, "Introduction: African Philosophy in Our Time."
[11] Mundimbe, *The Invention of Africa*.

This work is structured as follows: *1. Philosophy of decolonization as emancipation and de-alienation; 2. Cultural, linguistic, and economic decolonization; 3. African criticism of colonialism, neocolonialism and coloniality.*

2. Philosophy of decolonization as emancipation and de-alienation

To speak of decolonization is to engage with the concepts of liberation, emancipation, and de-alienation. Current movements claiming for the revision of African cartography – in which African maps are presented as smaller than the European continent – are one example that shows how important epistemological decolonization is. On the other hand, recent protests connected with Black Lives Matter in the United States demonstrate the demand for genuine liberation. These movements recall the necessity of epistemic decolonization. It is in this way that Olúfémi Táíwò tries to carry out an epistemological critique of the first decolonization, which was basically formal[12]. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos[13] puts it, this involves the decline of the Western cognitive empire and the emergence of a new epistemology of the Global South. Epistemological decolonization is emerging as the path toward cultural decolonization, because the first decolonization was merely political or formal, and remains so to this day. Decolonization was supposed to be the transition from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light. It is a birth, a passage to a new life that engages every dimension of the human being.

The African philosophy of decolonization saw figures such as Jean-Marc Ela[14], Frantz Fanon[15], Valentin Mudimbe,[16] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,[17] Michael Amoah,[18] Kwasi Wiredu,[19] F. Eboussi Boulaga,[20] and Achille Mbembe[21] as its key precursors. The philosophy of decolonization, before being political, economic, and social, is first and foremost epistemological.[22] It manifests itself as a counter-discourse aimed at deconstructing

[12] See Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation*.
[13] See De Sousa Santos, *La fine dell'impero cognitivo*.
[14] See Ela, *Le cri de l'homme africain*.
[15] See Fanon, *I dannati della terra*.
[16] See Mudimbe, *L'invenzione dell'Africa*.
[17] Thiong'o, *Decolonizzare la mente*.
[18] See Amoah, *Decolonizing African Politics*.
[19] See Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization."
[20] See Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu*.
[21] See Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit*; Mbembe, *Postcolonialismo*.
[22] See Eboussi Boulaga, *La crise du Muntu*; De Sousa Santos, *La fine dell'impero cognitivo*; De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologie del Sud*; De Sousa Santos, *Decolonizzare la storia*; Fanon, *Os condenados da Terra*; Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizzare la mente*.

narratives of oppression to achieve emancipation and overcome alienation. The urgency of a critical philosophy of decolonization for liberation stems from an analysis based on historical realism, which shows that the colonized or oppressed are not yet free. This was the basis for the creation of the Latin American philosophy of liberation, whose leading exponents include Leopoldo Zea, Augusto Salazar Bondy, Horacio Cerutti, and Enrique Dussel.[23] Therefore, there is today an urgent need for a philosophy of decolonization that can respond to this existential condition of the oppressed under neocolonialism[24] in its neoliberal capitalist form.

Indeed, the African philosophy of decolonization shares the same philosophical question as Latin American philosophy, where the critique of neocolonialism is the fundamental concept. The oppressed, despite their so-called independence, do not feel truly free because of neocolonialism. Therefore, a new systematic and critical theoretical approach to the African philosophy of decolonization is imperative. De-alienation and decolonization must be grounded in a concrete external metaphysics, as articulated by Enrique Dussel and Emmanuel Lévinas through their metaphysics of alterity.[25] When we say *person* we must refer to the *concrete person*, who lives in a *concrete context*. It is this person whose dignity and humanity we are called to respect. One cannot continue to philosophize in Africa's present condition of extreme poverty, nor can philosophers remain indifferent to the barbarities of contemporary society. The current African context shapes the very conditions of philosophizing; that is, it compels us to raise fundamental questions. Thus, today in Africa the great question is: How can we build a society with strong institutions and stability for integral development? It is in this context that the concept of decolonization becomes relevant once again.

Today, neoliberalism continues to alienate society, promoting war and destroying the natural biodiversity in Africa; therefore, deconstructing the concept of neoliberalism is necessary, and it will be important to recover Karl Marx's concept of alienation, which seems to have been forgotten in recent years.[26] De-alienation is only possible through a critical theory that places the concept of humanity at the center of its reflection, rather than through instrumental reason, which can no longer operate within a logic of domination. For Frantz Fanon, de-alienation is not possible without

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[23] Melchiorre, *Filosofie nel mondo,* 433.
[24] Nkrumah, *Africa must unite,* 190.
[25] Melchiorre, *Filosofie nel mondo,* 433; for the concept of concrete o external metafisica, see Cacciari, *Metafisica concreta*.
[26] Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione*; Hartmut Rosa proposes a revival of the concept of alienation that was developed by the Frankfurt School and subsequently abandoned by its followers Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth.

violence, as it is the only path to liberation.[27] This view aligns with Heraclitus, who claims that everything begins with *Polemos* (war), or with the defenders of just war. Unlike Heraclitus's determinism, Fanon's view does not present violence as inevitable. Rather, he places violence as *conditio sine qua non* – a necessary means of liberation – in the form of de-alienation understood as a new humanism.[28] According to Fanon, the process of alienation is the result of instrumental reason and violence. Thus, decolonization is necessary for liberation, that is, to de-alienate the whole human being. Violence creates violence; therefore, decolonization must take place through cultural and integral formation. It is necessary to de-symbolize African people in order to decolonize their imagination through critical consciousness, so as to question everything that has been indoctrinated that led to their alienation.

To date, the philosophy of decolonization is a critical ethical-political and theoretical reflection, grounded in an intercultural and transcultural vision for transmodernity.[29] According to Dussel, transmodernity is a dialogue between modernities aimed at creating a new modernity in which everyone can recognize themself. Decolonizing today means humanizing and protecting the whole human being. Yet this process requires rationality, a reason capable of illuminating the reality in which we live. According to Enrique Dussel,

> The affirmation of rationality is the indispensable condition for the process of liberation from oppression. Without reason, without practical, communicative, technological-instrumental, emancipatory rationality, it is not possible to intelligently carry out the struggle for justice.[30]

The struggle for justice is the result of an unconditional commitment to the total liberation of the human person. Today's oppression by neoliberal and digital domination in Africa is the continuation of erotic, religious, pedagogical, and cultural colonization. According to Do Nascimento and Ngameni, the concept of digital domination represents a new form of colonization in Africa, characterized as cybercolonialism.[31] According to others, cybercolonialism is a form of digital domination through contemporary information technology.

The new form of imperialism – which involves not only human rights violations but also ecological and military invasions – is justified in the

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[27] See Fanon, *I dannati della terra*, 3-70.
[28] Fanon, *I dannati della terra* 4; see Fanon, *Pelle nera, maschere bianche,* 25.
[29] Dussel, *Modernità e interculturalità per un superamento critico dell'eurocentrismo*.
[30] Dussel, *Filosofia della liberazione,* 58.
[31] Do Nascimento and Ngameni, *L'Afrique au risque d'une cybercolonisation*.

name of defending the human person, who paradoxically is being massacred everywhere. The "de-dollarization" (Jean-Marc Ela) of today's world requires the "de-economization of the imagination"[32]. Through a critical vision of reality, the oppressed can create the existential conditions needed to restore human dignity. In Nancy Fraser's words, many people are sacrificed on the altar of cannibalistic capitalism, left to their fate by the greed of multinationals and governments.[33] The sphere of life is being destroyed, and racism is growing with neoliberalism. Inequalities continue, and *The Wretched of the Earth* find themselves without prospects. We are living in an anarchy caused by neocolonialism, and the United Nations has lost credibility and is collapsing due to a lack of funding from major powers. We are in the Hobbesian condition of *Man as a wolf to Man*. Selfishness and greed for capital are destroying humanity and nature, as well as reducing everything to immanence.

It must be stated that after political independence in Africa, the process of recolonization or neocolonialism began, masked by domination through energy warfare and cybercolonialism.[34] Coloniality, as Anibal Quijano[35] called it, is a consequence of the attempt to maintain colonial hegemony with a continued logic of recolonization through financial imperialism.[36] The desire for power and the rush to brainwash people through the universalization of ideological narratives in order to repeat dehumanizing theories are the basis that perpetuate neocolonialism as a form of domination.[37] Modern philosophy is based on instrumental reason, which forces *The Wretched of the Earth* to repeat narratives that prevent them from developing counter-narratives. That is why Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o shows the urgency of decolonizing the mind[38] and the word. Neocolonialism as a culture is based on instrumental reason, which seeks to perpetuate the ideology of the denial of otherness; consequently, it is cannibalistic, as it requires oppression for its own existence. Only an emancipatory reason can seek to reverse this condition. The urgency of the critical theory imperative for the complete decolonization of humanity is grounded in a realistic analysis that leads to the conclusion that freedom has become an increasingly distant utopia today.

Political freedoms in Africa have not been transformed into economic and cultural freedoms due to a lack of cultural emancipation. Leaders

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[32] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres*.
[33] Fraser, *Capitalismo cannibale*.
[34] Fraser, *Capitalismo cannibale*.
[35] Quijano, "Colonialidade del poder".
[36] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres*.
[37] Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizzare la mente*.
[38] Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizzare la mente*.

such as Agostinho Neto (Angola), Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane (Mozambique), Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Gamal Abdel-Nasser (Egypt), and others thought about the concept of political freedom and did not develop a philosophy of decolonization. This was because, after political independence, an even worse form of cultural and economic-financial colonialism emerged. As Amilcar Cabral argued, decolonization should be a cultural project – it should be a project that has culture as its key element and could then have political consequences. When Cabral speaks of decolonization as a cultural act, he is precisely evoking the philosophy of decolonization as a cultural driving force, as does Kwame Nkrumah when he speaks of *conscientiousness*.

3. Cultural, linguistic, and economic decolonization

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that cultural decolonization in Africa requires the decolonization of the mind. Frantz Fanon, for his part, conceives decolonization as de-alienation and, through his concept of humanism, shows the necessity and urgency of decolonization for the total liberation of Africa. However, Frantz Fanon is widely regarded as the greatest precursor of the philosophy of decolonization[39] for having developed a philosophy of anti-colonial emancipation in a more systematic and rigorous way, starting from the category of humanity. According to Fanon:

> Decolonization never goes unnoticed because it rests on being, fundamentally modifies being, transforms spectators struck by inessentiality into privileged actors, captured in an almost grandiose way by the face of history. It introduces into being a rhythm of its own, brought by new men, a new language, a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men.[40]

Whether one considers Fanon's conception of decolonization or that of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, both share a common goal: to bring about the emergence of a new human being capable of criticism and self-criticism. Thus, the philosophy of decolonization is shaped by humanism. While Fanon does not develop a systematic theory of linguistic decolonization as Ngũgĩ does, both authors recognize that the colonized subject's desire to adopt the colonizer's identity is accompanied by a rejection of their own cultural and linguistic heritage.[41] Both agree that linguistic decolonization

[39] Dussel, *Filosofia della liberazione,* 64.
[40] Dussel, *Filosofia della liberazione,* 4.
[41] Fanon, *Pelle nera, maschere bianche.*

is key to the de-alienation of colonized peoples, and that their ultimate aim is to free humanity from its existential bonds.

In fact, cultural decolonization requires linguistic decolonization. For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, one cannot exist without the other. He criticizes an African literary culture that mimics European models and consequently dehumanizes Africans. This line of criticism continues that of Frantz Fanon, who denounced the attempt to render black people inferior.

African linguistics needs to be consolidated in order to reveal the African subject, and this is a cultural-epistemic process grounded in the valorization of African cultures and their philosophies. As Wa Thiong'o has insisted, the study of African anthropology, African linguistics, and African philosophy – along with other fields of knowledge in dialogue with modern science and consciousness – provides essential tools for an African cultural critique. Thus, performative African proverbs are the key to immersing oneself in *the* African *worldview*. Only through self-knowledge via the linguistic decolonization can the *munthu* (person) be revealed. The *munthu,* freed from all oppressions, can manifest itself as the key to *ubuntu* (the relational dimension of the human person). In this vein, knowledge of philosophical pluralism in Africa is key to understanding the richness that manifests itself in diverse cultures through knowledge of African languages, in line with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. This is the basis for the decolonization and the liberation of Africans from the shackles in which they find themselves. Similarly, Frantz Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), states that his goal is to "liberate black men from themselves."[42] This liberation cannot happen without economic and social decolonization – that is, without decolonizing the concept of progress upon which it depends.[43]

In fact, the basic concept in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is the decolonization of the African imagination through cultural and linguistic decolonization. African liberation, for him, depends on this process. African languages need to be consolidated as vehicles for perceiving the world in order to better decode reality. In advancing his ideas, Ngũgĩ insists on mastering local languages so that linguistic decolonization can lead to the decolonization of the African worldview and thus avoid what Frantz Fanon calls *double consciousness*. The new humanism resulting from the de-alienation proposed by Fanon involves a process of linguistic decolonization leading to the decolonization of consciousness – which, in Thiong'o's terms, we can call the decolonization of the mind. Black people must stop wanting to be white, and this involves a process of searching for authenticity

[42] Fanon, *Pelle nera, maschere bianche*, 26.
[43] See Allen, *The End of Progress*.

through recognizing their own existence. Mastery of languages is the key to effective decolonization in Africa and to cultural emancipation. For Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, thinking in one's own language helps to grasp complexity and to criticize the desire for power that can arise from interaction with others. Through his linguistic studies, he takes up Kwasi Wiredu's question: is it possible to philosophize in African national languages? This is crucial for conceptual decolonization.

In Wiredu's view, philosophizing in African languages is of paramount importance. Thus, his vision of decolonization leads him to valorize local languages as instruments of cultural decolonization. Consequently, Wiredu promotes the development of Akan philosophy in Ghana.[44] His reflection on conceptual decolonization is significant because it highlights the value of intercultural dialogue through critical reflection. Wiredu argues that philosophical reflection must recognize epistemic plurality and listen to other rationalities. Given that colonialism persists in Africa even after independence, Wiredu focuses on conceptual decolonization as a means to achieve intellectual autonomy on the continent.

The same interest in cultural decolonization through language is evident in Giuseppe Frizzi's work on Macua philosophy in Mozambique. Kwasi Wiredu (Ghana), Giuseppe Frizzi (Mozambico-Niassa-Macua), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Kenya) all see African languages as the way to decolonize the African continent. Whatever the case, Western reason needs to be disarmed, and the West must accept that others exist. Therefore, when we speak of the philosophy of decolonization from the perspective of critical theory as the integral emancipation of humanity, we refer to anti-Eurocentric discourse and, particularly today, to anti-neoliberal discourse as a critique of neocolonialism. It is a theory that, in the words of Enrique Dussel, aims at liberation from the last and most advanced stage of neocolonial capitalism.

4. African criticism of colonialism, neocolonialism and coloniality

The thinking of Cheikh Anta Diop, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Marc Ela, Engelbert Mveng, Pierre Meinrad Hegba, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Michael Amoah, Valentin Y. Mudimbe, Eboussi Boulaga, and Achille Mbembe, in addition to its undeniable impact on African philosophy, has the further global merit of having questioned Eurocentrism and the instrumental reason for domination. This Pleiad of African philosophers reflected on the urgent need to overcome colonialism and neocolonialism by seeking a

[44] Wiredu, "Conceptual Decolonization."

critical historical consciousness among Africans, thereby enabling them to become subjects of history rather than its objects. With scientific rigor and legitimacy, these authors can be regarded as African decolonial thinkers, as their work has left a significant mark on the philosophy of decolonization. According to Fabien Eboussi Boulaga,[45] African critical theory today cannot take the European worldview as its starting point; it must instead begin from the African worldview. This worldview must serve as the starting point for all reflection in the African context, grounded in the Bantu vision – in other words, the *ubuntocratic*[46] worldview. This is an African systematic concept that affirms Ubuntu across epistemological, political, economic, and social relations. *Ubuntocratic* logic is anti-Aristotelian as it rejects the Aristotelian principle of *tertium non datur* (the excluded middle) and affirms *tertium datur*[47] (the inclusion of a third possibility). The aim of these scholars is to deploy critical analysis so that African peoples may emerge from the abyss of colonialism and neocolonialism and become masters of their own existence. For this reason, a process of decolonization is urgently needed in Africa.

This lineage of philosophers and theologians contributed to criticizing the Western culture of domination through the concept of decolonization. Their work aims to develop an African emancipatory reason within the critique of imperialism, seeking to restore Africans' faith in their own abilities. Early after independence, these African scholars developed such a reason, one that regarded the historical trajectory of Africa with suspicion. They sought to show the urgency of Africa using its own capacities for a new way of being and existing within the historical process. For Engelbert Mveng, this takes the form of anthropological pauperization as a process of depersonalization.[48] Jean-Marc Ela's critique, meanwhile, locates this condition of external dependence in the fact that Africans rely entirely on the outside world, which raises the urgent problem of liberating Africa from human and economic dependence.[49]

M. P. Hegba argues that Africa's identity crisis and emotional dependence on the outside world allow others to prosper, particularly in the context of various forms of global imperialism. Consequently, there is a clamor for liberation on the continent and an urgent need to mobilize industrialization using African resources. There is a cry from African people to break free from the condition of being objects of history. According to

[45] See Eboussi Boulaga, *L'affaire de la philosophie africaine*.
[46] *Ubuntocracy* is an African systematic concept which affirms the power of Ubuntu in the epistemological, political, economic and social relations.
[47] Mussomar, Cecere, *Para um iluminismo Africano*.
[48] Mveng, *Identità africana e cristianesimo*, 70.
[49] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres*, 9–17.

F. Eboussi Boulaga, such liberation is possible only by believing in African forces through African *Ubuntu reason* – a form of reason that operates without a conflictual dialectic.[50] The demand for freedom and justice requires that Africans systematically and rigorously critique both the current context of the African continent and the condition of *The Wretched of the Earth*. According to Ela and Hegba, Christianity contributed to the domination of Africa. In this regard, for Ela, the objective is to develop a critical theoretical method of faith within the African context, one that resists the interference of domination through culture, economy, and politics.[51] Ela's thought offers a systematic critique of the impact of colonial domination in Africa and seeks the means for its decolonization. As Ela writes: "The urgency of radical change is to create better conditions for millions of Africans".[52] Through Ela's critique, these transformations produce an enlightenment – a critical awakening that can lead to the continent's renewal. Ela recognizes that it is a violent process, since the colonizers will not relinquish their spirit of domination and persist in creating conditions of dependence and injustice for African countries. What Ela's criticism shows is the issue of neocolonialism that has led Africa into an abyss from which it cannot easily escape. To emerge from this situation, what is required is a critical dialectical enlightenment. According to Ela, in a situation of widespread poverty,

> It is not certain that men who have all the initiative will eternally accept their status as objects of history. The lack of prospects for social and cultural advancement, such as real participation in political decision-making, if prolonged, will transform the Africa that was born out of independence into a huge powder keg.[53]

Further, Ela views political and economic corruption as the root causes of the collapse of African regimes. The prolongation of the African crisis is akin to a labyrinth with no way out. He is convinced that, to escape this situation of misery and injustice, violence must be avoided and human dignity respected and protected. The central point is humanity. In this, the Cameroonian thinker aligns with Fanon, for whom humanism is de-alienation. For Ela, Fanon is "one of the thinkers of the Third World who most broadly addressed the problem of violence within the revolutionary process."[54] Through his therapeutic work, Fanon sought to

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[50] Boulaga, *L'affaire de la philosophie africaine*.
[51] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres*, 17.
[52] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres*, 70.
[53] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres,* 70.
[54] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres,* 71.

de-symbolize Africans and *re-symbolize* them within an African symbol framework. African thought must therefore engage in a deep and honest dialogue with modern culture and scientific knowledge. This process demands sacrifice, honesty, and rigor, rejecting any inclination to continue receiving donations and depend on others for everything. Identity and freedom require work and seriousness; nothing comes for free. Freedom resides in truth, not in slander or trickery. However, according to Ela, economic and political aid to Africa is so pervasive that neocolonialism has turned independence into a process not of liberty but of recolonization. In other words, independence has led to dependence. This is why Ela asserts that, for Fanon, "the liberation of the colonized masses must be achieved and must not be achieved through force."[55] This process also entails a radical transformation of both colonizer and colonized, breaking free from the colonizer's superiority complex and the colonized's inferiority complex, so that both may become protagonists of their own existential destiny. Fanon's idea of liberation aims to find a new humanity and constitutes a therapeutic process for the creation of a new human being. It seeks to reverse the alienating situation to which the colonized have been subjected by the colonizer. The colonized must overcome their inferiority complex. Jean-Marc Ela concurs with Fanon, stressing that "the struggle for freedom involves a radical reordering of the universe where the colonized work to bring out the man in themselves."[56] That is why, for Fanon, liberation means leading the human being out of darkness into light, enabling him to begin trusting in his own abilities. It is a new creation in which the colonized man himself becomes the architect of his own destiny through his own critical capacity. It is therefore undeniable that Fanon's philosophy is a philosophy of decolonization, for it affirms the capacity of the colonized to redeem themselves from their condition and become subjects of their own history. Decolonization is the questioning of an established order that continues to blame the colonized; hence, according to Fanon, the mentality to be eliminated is that of the oppressor. In this sense, the philosophy of decolonization functions as a counter-narrative, a counter-discourse to Eurocentrism.

Ela clarifies that Fanon's position is not a legitimization of violence but rather an affirmation of the need to eliminate imperialism. In his reading of Fanon, Ela states: "Hence not only the legitimization of armed struggle, but the awareness of violence as 'absolute praxis.' Decolonization means the destruction of the colonial system."[57] The philosophy of

[55] Fanon, *I dannati della terra, 3*.
[56] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres,* 73.
[57] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres,* 73.

decolonization is therefore a critical-practical theoretical framework that seeks to call into question all claims of domination (*imperium*), whether colonial, political, social, religious, historical or epistemic-cultural. Therefore, in the wake of Fanon, "decolonization is humanism" because "it implies the possibility of reconstructing human relations and thus creating a new society."[58] In line with Ela's reading of Fanon, violence is understood as a means of decolonization, since armed organization compels the colonizer to change his mentality. Ela further observes that, "it is this aspect that Fanon draws on in his conception of violence as a means of purification."[59] Violence, according to this postulate, transforms "the psyche of the human being" and detoxifies him by removing the colonized's inferiority complex while simultaneously undermining the colonizer's superiority complex. Fanon rejects the revolutionary romanticism of elites who seek to benefit from the revolution after its outcome. Decolonization thus manifests itself as an immersion in history as a subject rather than an object – a pedagogy of decolonization of the oppressor and the oppressed.

5. Conclusion

Neoliberalism in Africa perpetuates the process of colonization to this date. The African philosophy of decolonization must therefore once again critique the mentality of domination through concrete and practical action. The African State is called upon to advance decolonization from neocolonialism and to initiate the process of emancipation and de-alienation through education. To that end, Frantz Fanon's work provides a powerful theoretical framework for a new vision of humanism rooted in cultural transformation. For Africa, it will be necessary – as Jean-Marc Ela argues – to undertake the deconstruction and critique of the concept of progress, which is intrinsically linked to capitalism and to modernity understood as rationality. Africa must therefore pursue cultural decolonization in dialogue with modern society. At the same time, it must embrace modern experimental science and technology as tools for its own development. Thus, Africa must promote a genuine dialogue between traditional and modern societies. Without such a reconciliation between modernity and African tradition, a new, decolonized Africa cannot emerge.

[58] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres,* 74.
[59] Ela, *Afrique l'irruption des pauvres,* 74.

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Saggi

Friedrich Engels's Contribution to Marxist Moral Theory

Il contributo di Friedrich Engels alla teoria morale marxista

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Abstract. Scholars have largely ignored Engels's views on morality, even though there is an extensive literature on Marx's statements, or implicit positions, on moral matters. Yet Engels's comments on moral questions also deserve our attention, for his writings help to elucidate the class character and ideological nature of moral views; explain why Marxists hold that the moral outlook of the proletariat represents the most advanced morality; and provide grounds for rejecting the overly reductionistic explanations of moral phenomena often associated with Marxism. Taken together, Engels's ideas lay the groundwork for a distinctively communist outlook on morality and moral questions.

Keywords: Friedrich Engels, morality, *Anti-Dühring*, Marxism, communism.

Riassunto. Gli studiosi hanno in gran parte ignorato le opinioni di Engels sulla moralità, anche se esiste un'ampia letteratura sulle affermazioni di Marx, o sulle sue posizioni implicite, in merito alle questioni morali. Eppure anche i commenti di Engels sulle questioni morali meritano la nostra attenzione, poiché i suoi scritti aiutano a chiarire il carattere di classe e la natura ideologica delle visioni morali; spiegano perché i marxisti ritengono che la visione morale del proletariato rappresenti la moralità più avanzata; e forniscono le basi per rifiutare le spiegazioni eccessivamente riduzionistiche dei fenomeni morali spesso associate al marxismo. Nel loro insieme, le idee di Engels gettano le basi per una visione tipicamente comunista della moralità e delle questioni morali.

Parole chiave: Friedrich Engels, moralità, Anti-*Dühring*, marxismo, comunismo.

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Introduction

More than four decades ago, the late Kai Nielsen observed, "Friedrich Engels wrote more fully and perhaps more adequately about morality than did Karl Marx."[1] A close reading of Engels's works bears out these observations and even enables us to dispense with Nielsen's qualification: Engels wrote both more fully (i.e., at greater length) *and* more adequately about morality than did Marx. Even so, scholars have devoted little attention to Engel's views on morality, at least in comparison with the extensive philosophical literature on Marx's comments, or implicit positions, on moral matters (the bulk of which literature – countless articles and quite a few books – appeared in the 1970s and 1980s).[2] In fact, in English-language commentaries that focus on Engels's works alone, there is, as far as I can tell, practically no discussion of Engels's views on the nature of morality – nothing in the pages of *Friedrich Engels for the 21st Century*;[3] or in *The Life, Work and Legacy of Friedrich Engels: Emerging from Marx's Shadow*;[4] or in *Friedrich Engels*: *A Centenary Appreciation*;[5] or in *Engels after Marx*;[6] or in the special issue of *International Socialism* published as *The Revolutionary Ideas of Friedrich Engels;*[7] or in *Science and Society*'s centenary issue on Engels.[8] Indeed, the essay from Kai Nielsen from which I have cited, originally published in 1983 in, of all places, *Studies in Soviet Thought*, seems to be one of the very few essays that examines Engels's views on morality, and Nielsen limits his work to a consideration of *Anti-Dühring.*

In what follows, I would like to consider a few of Engels's most distinctive contributions to a Marxist – and communist – approach to morality. For the purposes of this paper, I will be using "morality" in the broad, uncontentious sense of

> an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, and includes what are commonly known as the moral rules, ideals, and virtues and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal.[9]

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[1] Nielsen, "Engels on Morality and Moral Theorizing," 43.
[2] For an excellent review and analysis of one question prominent in these debates – namely, whether Marx condemns capitalism as unjust – see Geras, "The Controversy About Marx and Justice" and "Bringing Marx to Justice: An Addendum and Rejoinder."
[3] Carver and Rapic, *Friedrich Engels*.
[4] Illner, Frambach and Koubek, *Life, Work and Legacy.*
[5] Arthur, *Friedrich Engels*.
[6] Steger and Carver, *Engels after Marx*.
[7] Rees, *Revolutionary Ideas*.
[8] Kircz and Löwy, "Friedrich Engels."
[9] Gert, *Morality*, 13.

As Engels addresses moral questions in works spanning the course of his life as a political thinker, I will be referring to a variety of texts, from his early "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," written in 1843, to the very late work "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891," written by Engels only four years before his death. Careful consideration of the texts in which Engels addresses moral questions reveals, or so I will argue, that his works contain many fruitful theses in connection with moral questions. These include his elucidation of the class character of moral views; his defense of the claim that the moral outlook of the proletariat represents the most advanced morality; and his resistance to, and criticism of, excessively reductionistic explanations of moral phenomena.

Engels's Appeals to Morality

Before discussing these three ideas, it is worth noting one striking contrast, or pair of contrasts, between Engels and Marx with regard to the use of explicit moral categories in criticizing capitalism and defending an alternative, post-capitalist social arrangement (i.e., socialism/communism).[10] In the case of the young Engels, this contrast with Marx involves, in one important essay in particular, an explicit and multifaceted moral argument *against* capitalism; in the case of the mature Engels, we find a contrast with Marx in the form of explicit moral appeals *for* an alternative to capitalism. So it is that in "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy,"[11] the pioneering essay from the young Engels (1843) to which I just alluded, Engels denounces "the immorality of the economist" and the "hypocritical way of misusing morality for immoral purposes [which] is the pride of the free-trade system"; decries "the immorality of lending at interest"; and, in general, rails against "the despicable immorality of this system" (capitalism) and, indeed, "the immorality of mankind's condition hitherto," because of competition and the existence and operation of antithetical interests.[12] As for the later Engels's comments bearing on the post-capitalist future, the following line from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), a demand couched in unambiguously moral terms, is particularly noteworthy: "But this is not as it ought to be. What

[10] I prefer the broad term "post-capitalist social arrangement" here because Engels often neglects to use (as we see below) the words "socialist"/"socialism," or "communist"/"communism," in discussing the alternative that he envisions and defends.
[11] It is perhaps worth recalling here that until the 1870s, "political economy" was a term used "to describe the subject of economic theory" (Kurt W. Rothschild, as quoted in Arestis and Sawyer, "Introduction," XII).
[12] Engels, "Outlines of a Critique," 437; 423; 430; 443; 432.

is good for the ruling class should be good for the whole of the society with which the ruling class identifies itself."[13] Likewise noteworthy, and in a somewhat similar vein, is Engels' insistence, in his 1891 "Introduction to K. Marx's *Wage Labour and Capital*," that "a new social order is possible in which the present class differences will have disappeared," although this may "perhaps [be] after a short transitional period involving some privation,...[which is] at any rate of great value morally."[14] This passage is striking not only because it mentions the "moral value" of privation on the road to socialism, but also because of its relevance to contemporary debates regarding the costs and sacrifices that we may have to endure in a transition to an environmentally sustainable society, as societies adopt principles and practices which entail a lower standard of living (at least in terms of the values that define contemporary consumerist capitalism).

Engels's Contributions to the Marxist Interpretation of Morality

Let me now return to the three theses that I mentioned above. The first of these theses has to do with Engels's elucidation of the class character of moral views. Engels's basic claim in this regard is twofold. First, Engels contends that, as he puts it in *Anti-Dühring*, "morality has always been class morality."[15] One natural way to interpret this proposition is to assume that Engels is claiming that morality is *class-specific*, in the sense that every social class exhibits a distinctive moral outlook and that a person's class membership decisively shapes and determines her moral beliefs, values and principles. As he writes in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, "In reality every class, even every profession, has its own morality."[16] This view follows, of course, from a fundamental premise of historical materialism, which Engels also states in *Anti-Dühring*, namely, that human beings,

> consciously or unconsciously, derive their ethical ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based – from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange.[17]

Accordingly, fundamental changes in the latter will normally lead to significant modifications in people's "ethical ideas." Although I cannot pur-

[13] Engels, *Origin of the Family*, 276.
[14] Engels, "Introduction," 201.
[15] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 87.
[16] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 381.
[17] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 87.

sue this question in detail here, I would at least like to note one significant implication, or corollary, of this thesis, which is the following: in a communist society, we can reasonably expect there to be less moral pluralism, the major source of variations in moral views – social classes – having disappeared. This implication of Engels's (and Marx's) view on this question is important, as it represents a basic disagreement with standard liberal political theory, which assumes that a high degree of moral pluralism is an ineluctable feature of all modern, complex societies and that only repressive policy measures can substantially reduce this pluralism. If, however, Engels is correct in assuming that much of the content of an individual's moral orientation derives from his or her class membership (because of the experiences and interests bound up with one's specific class location) and class differentiation will not exist in a communist society, we can reasonably expect to find far more moral agreement under communism. Classlessness will not only foster moral agreement, incidentally, but also significantly affect the purview of morality, insofar as it will eliminate the need to apply moral principles and deliberation to the cluster of conflicts, antagonisms, and social tensions that arise from class divisions, which will have ceased to exist.

The second component of Engels's thesis regarding the class character of moral views – and one which may, at first glance, seem to contradict the thesis that I have just summarized – consists in Engels's assumption that there will be many moral values, principles, precepts, etc. common to all members of society, irrespective of a person's class status, even within class-based societies. In other words, some moral beliefs will command a supra-class allegiance; members of different social classes will subscribe to many of the same values and principles.[18] Engels seems to hold, then, both that morality is specific to a social class and that it – or at least some elements of it – are not. Does Engels contradict himself?

Engels explains the reasoning behind the second idea as follows: "the Christian-feudal morality," in its various manifestations, "the modern-bourgeois morality," and "the proletarian morality of the future" – the three moral systems operative, to one degree or another, in the capitalist societies of his time – "represent three different stages of the same historical development, have…a common historical background" and so "necessarily have *much* in common."[19] So, what we find in these societies is a blending of successive stages in the evolution of moral consciousness. This argument, which we might call, borrowing Trotsky's terminology, the "combined and uneven development" view of moral evolution, is, I believe,

[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid.*, 86-87; emphasis added.

the only reasoning that Engels offers to support his thesis that some moral beliefs are common to members of all classes in capitalist societies. But it would not be difficult to provide additional arguments for Engels's claim, both from a Marxist perspective and in terms of more general philosophico-ethical considerations, arguments that are perhaps even more helpful in removing the apparent contradiction between Engels's two claims.

As the *Communist Manifesto*, a work written jointly by Engels and Marx, tells us, "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class."[20] As moral beliefs plainly comprise "ideas" in the relevant sense, it follows that at least some of the ruling class's moral beliefs will be hegemonic in a class-divided society and thus, to this extent at least, *everyone*'s beliefs, whatever class one happens to belong to. Furthermore, if we bear in mind that Engels and Marx hold that a given class's rule is marked by an ascendent and descending phase – its rule in the first phase representing the interests of society generally, as this dominance serves to develop the forces of production and promote social progress, while in the second phase this rule represents a merely particular interest and involves, increasingly, an obstacle to socio-economic development – it is reasonable to suppose that all of society will embrace the ruling class's morality so long as it constitutes a "rising" class. Another way of effectively stating the same thing is to say that all members of a given socio-economic system will embrace those moral ideas that are essential to the structural viability and durability of this system.[21] (This is essentially the same point because the moral ideas in question will be, from a Marxist perspective, precisely those ideas that serve to develop the forces of production and promote social progress.) On the other hand, to the extent that the ruling class becomes a class in decline and ceases to represent the interests of society as a whole and, at the same time, "the oppressed class became [i.e., has become] powerful enough" (to use Engels's words), there will also exist a morality, alongside that of the bourgeoisie and the remnants of earlier moralities that continue to shape many individuals' moral views, which reflects the oppressed class's "indignation against" the ruling class's "domination" and expresses "the future interests of the oppressed."[22]

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[20] Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 503. For a nearly identical formulation of this idea, see Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 59.

[21] Cf. Nielsen, "Engels on Morality", 53: "But even the contending antagonistic classes of a class society will have, even with their clashing moralities, moralities with some common content with that of the morality of the dominant class. This common content will result from their common historical background and from the need of those moralities, in one way or another, to support to some degree at least the economic relations of that society."

[22] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 87.

Quite apart from these arguments suggested by classical Marxist assumptions, there is the simple fact that, as Nielsen has argued in some of his writings on Marxism and morality, a variety of moral truisms will likely inform the moral practices of all societies; these truisms – e.g., that suffering is bad, health, pleasure and autonomy good, etc.[23] – are, *as truisms*, going to be valid for all members of a given society. The existence of moral truisms thus furnishes additional grounds, along with Engels's own explanation cited above and the Marxist reasoning sketched in the previous paragraph, for assuming that certain moral principles and beliefs will be common to everyone in society, even if one also holds that there are moral outlooks or perspectives specific to each class. In light of these considerations, it seems safe to conclude that there is no contradiction between Engels's claim that "every class…has its own morality" and his contention that social classes' distinctive moral outlooks "necessarily have much in common."

The second aspect of Engels's views on morality that I would like to discuss is his defense of the claim that the moral outlook of the proletariat represents the most advanced morality. In a well-known passage from *Anti-Dühring*, Engels remarks that the "proletarian morality […] contains the maximum elements promising permanence" and that it "represents the overthrow of the present, [and] represents the future." It is in this sense, then, that one may say that the proletariat's morality is, among those moralities which coexist in modern capitalist societies, the closest to being "the true one,"[24] and the one which corresponds to a superior phase of moral (and socio-economic) development. The fact that the oppressed make up the immense majority of the population, as Engels assumes,[25] merely strengthens the claim that their moral outlook represents the "morality of the future" (as Engels puts it in a passage cited above), at least if we assume that this morality reflects the interests of the oppressed (the proletariat) and we grant the premise that society should, other things being equal, prioritize – by, for example, adopting certain moral principles – the interests of the majority.

It is worth stressing in this connection that elsewhere Engels articulates a bit more explicitly the presupposition contained in the passages just cited, namely, that successive moral outlooks represent and embody *improvements* in morals. "All successive historical states," writes Engels, "are only transitory stages in the endless course of development of human

[23] Nielsen, "Introduction," 13, 10; "Marxism, Morality," 32-33.
[24] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 87; cf. 104.
[25] Recall, for example, the well-known line from the *Communist Manifesto*, 495: "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

society from the lower to the higher."[26] In this passage, "to the higher" ("*zum Höhern*") plainly implies "better"; later historical stages and states are, therefore, superior to the earlier ones. To be sure, "stages" and "states" naturally refer to some general configuration of society, and therefore Engels's statement cannot be construed as meaning that later stages and states are superior to earlier ones in *every* respect, or with regard to *every* new development (which would include, for example, greater levels of pollution and traffic; the degradation of certain occupations; and unprecedented types and manifestations of violence). But morality, understood in suitably general terms, is one dimension of successive historical states and stages that improves over time; this is the case, in large part, because moral beliefs and practice are a form of knowledge (as Nielsen's discussion of Engels helpfully reminds us),[27] which grows and is enriched over time: we learn more about the world; more about other people; more about the ways in which our actions affect others; and so on. This also means, it should be noted, that it is an error to consider Engels a moral relativist, despite the fact that he also claims, in the passage from which I have taken the preceding quotation,

> Each stage is necessary, and therefore justified for the time and conditions to which it owes its origin. But in the face of new, higher conditions which gradually develop in its own womb, it loses its vitality and justification.[28]

While it is certainly not difficult to interpret this latter statement as an endorsement of moral relativism and to conclude that Engels is a relativist, I would contend that it is more accurate to regard both Marx and Engels as "contextualists," to use the term employed by Nielsen in his analyses of the Marxist approach to moral matters. "For the contextualist," Nielsen writes,

> a changed objective situation justifies…[a] change [in moral principles]; for the relativist, attitudes…the societal, class, or individual belief-system… The first is something plainly objective; the second is not.

That is to say,

> right or wrong, good or bad, is [for the contextualist] in considerable measure determined by the objective situation in which people find themselves. Thus, contextualism is not relativism in any form for what is right or wrong is not

[26] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 359.
[27] Nielsen, "Engels on Morality," 53.
[28] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 359.

> determined by what a person, culture, class, or whatnot believes to be right... or what canons of justification each will accept.[29]

I find this argument quite convincing, but a fuller discussion of Nielsen's view and the considerations adduced by those commentators who identify Marx and Engels's position with moral relativism, would take us beyond the scope of present essay.

In any event, in considering Engels's conception of proletarian morality in *Anti-Dühring*, we should also note an important ambiguity in the text: in the passage that I just cited, Engels seems to have in mind the everyday moral beliefs and practices that typify workers in capitalist societies; however, in another passage (cited above), in which he refers to "the proletarian morality of the future," Engels seems to have in mind the moral outlook of the politically enlightened section of the proletariat, or that of what Lenin often calls the "class-conscious worker" or "class-conscious proletariat."[30] Kai Nielsen seems to believe that Engels was mainly referring to the latter, for he writes that the proletarian morality points to "an emancipation that will lead to a general human emancipation and to the construction of a human and classless society without exploiter and exploited, master and slave, ruler and ruled."[31] To be sure, if, or to the extent that, we identify "proletarian morality" with the social and political aspirations of the class-conscious proletariat, which aims to establish a classless society, the proletarian morality surely does include the objective described by Nielsen in the passage cited. I believe, however, that Engels also has in mind the moral code of ordinary working people in advanced capitalist societies, elements of which do indeed anticipate the moral sensibility and ethos that will define a classless society, and which are, quite apart from the latter consideration, socially desirable in themselves. These elements include a highly egalitarian mindset; a prioritizing of cooperation; a commitment to solidarity; and a collectivist self-understanding. Such values and attitudes, integral to workers' experience in the workplace, are likewise constitutive of that "really human morality which stands above class antagonisms" evoked by Engels in *Anti-Dühring*,[32] one that would make possible and exemplify "purely human sentiments in our intercourse with other human beings," to use a formulation found in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*.[33] ("The proletarian morality of the future" really does correspond, in any event, *to the*

[29] Nielsen, "Introduction," 9; 8.
[30] Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 394; 495.
[31] Nielsen, "Engels on Morality," 51.
[32] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 88.
[33] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 377.

future: as Marx emphasizes in the "Critique of the Gotha Programme," the communist society that emerges from capitalism will at first be "morally… still stamped" by the old, capitalist system).[34]

There are three points that should be stressed in connection with the passages from Engels just cited. First, the "really human morality" of the future to which Engels refers is simply one aspect, or dimension, of that truly human *history* which, as Marx famously declares in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, can commence only after the disappearance of capitalism, the "social formation" with which "the prehistory of human society…closes."[35] This "prehistory" is, in other words, a *moral* prehistory, too, insofar as social arrangements, structures and practices that humans have created but do not control constrain their moral agency, diminishing their freedom of decision-making and encouraging choices that are, for example, more self-interested, less impartial, less other-regarding and less rational than they ought to be. Secondly, and somewhat relatedly, a system of morals that "stands above class antagonisms" is needed – and constitutes a *sine qua non* for a "really human morality" – for the simple reason that the inequalities arising from class antagonisms make compliance with the axiom of *universalizability*, implicit in most conceptions of morality, an impossible demand. This axiom requires, roughly, that we must apply the same principle of right action to – i.e., moral obligations are the same for – all people who are similar (in the relevant respects) and find themselves in similar situations (in the relevant respects). But the kinds of inequalities produced by class distinctions affect both individuals and their circumstances, or situations, in morally relevant ways: they condition individuals' abilities, needs, vital interests, life prospects, etc.[36] In this way, class distinctions significantly undermine the scope of application of the axiom of universalizability and, insofar as this is the case, represent an obstacle to the development of morality. They also represent an obstacle to morality owing to a corollary of this problem:

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[34] Marx, "Gotha Programme," 85; in the original German, the phrase "morally…still stamped" is "sittlich…noch behaftet" ("Kritik des Gothaer Programms," 20). I use "communist" here because it is the term employed by Marx in this well-known passage, but many Marxists writing after Lenin would surely regard "socialist" as a more suitable description of the social order to which Marx is referring.

[35] Marx, "Preface," 264. Trotsky states the same basic idea, but in a manner that is more directly relevant to our present concerns, in his *Literature and Revolution*, 14: "The historic significance and the moral grandeur of the proletarian revolution consist in the fact that it is laying the foundations of a culture which is above classes and which will be the first culture that is truly human." Notice Trotsky's use of the phrase "moral grandeur" in referring to the advent of the transition to a classless society.

[36] For passages from the early Engels bearing on this topic, see "Speeches in Elberfeld," 245-6, and "Outlines of a Critique," 432.

in circumstances in which substantial socio-economic differences make the application of the same moral principle to different individuals unfair, a commitment to fairness requires that we develop, and have the ability to apply, a plethora of moral principles, or the same principles in many, variously qualified forms; yet an excessive number of principles, or rules, diminishes the workability, and hence value, of a moral system. Finally, the social arrangement that makes a "really human morality which stands above class antagonisms" possible is also one which will, at the same time and somewhat paradoxically, reduce to a large extent the need for moral principles, or at least the scope of application of moral principles; this is so for the simple reason that, as noted earlier, the major source of social conflicts, antagonisms, and discord – class divisions – will have been eliminated.

Before leaving the topic of Engels's discussion of the proletarian morality and its relationship to a "really human morality," let me note one important corollary of Engels's treatment of this question, which is the following: moral beliefs are not always *ideological*. I should clarify here that in using the term "ideological," I have in mind Joe McCarney's definition of ideology, which holds that this concept, in the distinctively Marxist sense, refers to "thought which serves class interests" or, more precisely, thought which has this function in "the context of class struggle."[37] If, as Engels states, there can be, and will be, morality – at least in the sense of a coherent set of moral beliefs – even after classes cease to exist (i.e., in a *classless*, communist society), then not all moral beliefs serve class interests and therefore not all of morality can properly be deemed "ideological." The fact that some moral beliefs, practices and duties seem to have only the most tenuous, indirect connection with any phenomena bearing on the class struggle – obvious examples would include certain obligations to friends, children and the environment – together with the reality of "moral truisms," which certainly constitute moral beliefs and which are valid for everyone, likewise support the conclusion that it is an error to hold that morality is always, necessarily, ideological in nature, at least in the Marxist sense captured in McCarney's definition.[38]

The third element of Engels's view of morality that I wish to mention is Engels's resistance to, and criticism of, excessively reductionistic, mechanistic, and deterministic explanations of moral phenomena. It is important to stress this characteristic of Engels's thought, as it is, in general, easy

[37] McCarney, *Real World of Ideology*, 127; 5.

[38] Cf. Nielsen, "Engels on Morality," 54. In thinking about these questions, it is helpful to bear in mind that, as Nielsen rightly puts it in "Marxism, Morality", 34, "Being superstructural is only a *necessary* condition for being ideological. It is *not sufficient*" (emphasis in the original).

to interpret, and many of course do in fact tend to interpret, Marx and Engels's views on superstructural phenomena – religious notions, political and legal views, aesthetic tendencies, etc., as well as moral beliefs – in a very reductionist fashion. But it is also important because some of Engels's own comments on morality lend themselves to precisely this sort of interpretation. A case in point is this statement from *Anti-Dühring*:

> The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust…is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping.[39]

We encounter a similar, seemingly very reductionistic claim in Engels's 1885 preface to a German edition of Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*.[40]

As a matter of fact, and as people who are familiar with the letters often referred to as Engels's "letters on historical materialism" (written to Joseph Bloch, Franz Mehring, Conrad Schmidt and Walther Borgius in the 1890s) will recall, the later Engels does explicitly acknowledge the *relative autonomy of the superstructure*.[41] In other words, Engels grants, in keeping with these letters' insistence that historical materialism does not constitute a completely reductionistic and utterly mechanistic determinism, that developments in the forces and relations of production do not always dictate, shape and condition developments at the level of the superstructure, which, again, includes political and legal institutions, aesthetic, philosophical and religious ideas, and, of course, *morality*. But it is not merely the independent development of superstructural phenomena that Engels acknowledges in these letters from the final years of his life; he also acknowledges that elements of the superstructure can influence and shape ("react upon") the development of the forces and relations of production,[42] and this, in turn, implies that morality – moral values, aspirations and beliefs – can influence and shape the development of the forces and relations of production. So, for example, the establishment of new rights regarding safety, privacy or welfare may lead to changes in the way in which production is carried out (new procedures and methods) and in what society produces. Likewise, a society's embrace of an environmentalist or ecological outlook might lead to the adoption of new restrictions on the ownership and control of natural resources, or to production methods that cause less pollution, or to industrial policies that are more environ-

[39] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 254-5.
[40] Engels, "Marx and Rodbertus," 282.
[41] See, e.g., Engels, "Engels to Conrad Schmidt," 60-62, and "Engels to W. Borgius," 266.
[42] Engels, "Engels to W. Borgius," 265; "Engels to Franz Mehring," 165.

mentally-friendly. The larger point here is that historical materialism can, to the extent that it grants at least some measure of autonomy to the development of superstructural phenomena, offer a more nuanced understanding of morality, and a more positive assessment of its role in social struggle, than some critics of Marxist thought would have us believe.

Conclusion

Taken together, the three aspects of Engels's approach to morality that I have mentioned – his elucidation of the class character of moral views; his defense of the claim that the moral outlook of the proletariat represents the most advanced morality; and his resistance to, and criticism of, excessively reductionistic explanations of moral phenomenon – afford us the rudiments of a distinctively communist outlook on morality and moral questions. And these ideas by no means exhaust the resources for such an outlook found in Engels's writings. One could also mention, for example, Engels's comments on the Marxist conception of – and demand for – social equality. Engels memorably formulates this conception and demand in *Anti-Dühring* as follows: "the real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the *abolition of classes*. Any demand for equality which goes beyond that, of necessity passes into absurdity;"[43] and more than a decade later, in "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891," he would again underscore that "the abolition of classes is our basic demand."[44] In short, social equality so understood is also a fundamental moral objective for Engels and the Marxist conception of communism.[45] One could likewise mention in this connection Engels's scattered remarks on the baneful effects of competition in capitalist society and the imperative of eliminating it in the future, post-capitalist world. Engels's early article, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," offers a particularly forceful condemnation of the evil of competition, which is mentioned on numerous occasions in the essay;[46] and the implications of his observation, also found in this text, that "competition has penetrated

[43] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 99; emphasis in the original.
[44] Engels, "Critique of the Draft," 225.
[45] I am assuming here that equality is a moral and political good. It is surely relevant in this connection that, as Amartya Sen observed in *Inequality Reexamined*, 12, "every normative theory of social arrangement that has at all stood the test of time seems to demand equality of *something* – something that is regarded as particularly important in that theory" (emphasis in the original). For a useful overview of questions and topics that serve to illustrate the importance of equality to both morality and politics, see Baker, *Arguing for Equality*.
[46] Engels, "Outlines of a Critique," 429; 431-2; 435; 439-40.

all the relationships of our life and completed the reciprocal bondage in which men now hold themselves"[47] is, incidentally, as important to bear in mind today, when we urgently need an ethos of global cooperation if humanity is to avert ecological catastrophe and/or a thoroughgoing AI-induced dehumanization, as it was 180 years ago. There are, finally, numerous passages in which Engels more implicitly invokes moral considerations, as when he refers to capitalism as a social order in which "the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of others,"[48] or observes, also apropos of capitalist society, that "the great majority of its members is scarcely, or even not at all, protected from extreme want".[49]

In conclusion, Engels's contribution to the moral perspective that defines what Manuel Sacristán would call the "communist worldview,"[50] or Engels himself calls "the Marxian world outlook,"[51] is by no means negligible. Indeed, this contribution is, I would argue, greater than that of Marx, at least as far as explicit treatments of morality are concerned. Accordingly, morality is, in some sense, one of "the few special fields" – to quote a well-known footnote to *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*[52] – in which Engels's role in the development of historical materialism was decisive. The analysis of morality was *not*, in other words, a realm in which Engels played, to cite him once again, "second fiddle" to Marx.[53] To the extent, therefore, that moral commitments constitute an important component of Marxism as a social theory and political doctrine,[54] Engel's contribution to the articulation of these moral commitments plainly merits more attention than it has received up to now.

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[47] *Ibid*., 442.
[48] Engels, "Principles of Communism," 354.
[49] Engels, "Introduction," 201.
[50] Sacristán, "Engels's Task in *Anti-Dühring*," 122.
[51] Engels, "Preface to the Pamphlet," 519.
[52] Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, 382: "I cannot deny that both before and during my 40 years' collaboration with Marx I had a certain independent share in laying the foundation of the theory, and more particularly in its elaboration. But the greater part of its leading basic principles, especially in the realm of economics and history, and, above all, their final trenchant formulation, belong to Marx. What I contributed – at any rate with the exception of my work in a few special fields – Marx could very well have done without me. What Marx accomplished I would not have achieved."
[53] Engels, "Engels to Johann Philipp," 202.
[54] For a defense of the "moral" interpretation of Marxism and analysis of the affinities between Marxism and "ethical socialism," see Llorente, "Marxism and Ethical Socialism."

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Saggi

The Philosophy and Politics of Care: Between Vulnerability and Resilience

Filosofia e politica della cura: tra vulnerabilità e resilienza

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Abstract. Contemporary systemic crises and escalating global risks call for a renewed understanding of human existence beyond the assumptions of modern individualism. By foregrounding vulnerability as a shared condition, this paper argues that care constitutes a fundamental ethical and political response to collective precariousness. Situated at the intersection of vulnerability, global risk and political organization, care is conceptualized as a paradigm of political resilience capable of fostering responsibility, solidarity, and democratic coexistence.

Keywords: care, politics, vulnerability, resilience.

Riassunto. Le crisi sistemiche contemporanee e l'intensificarsi dei rischi globali impongono una riconsiderazione della condizione umana oltre i presupposti dell'individualismo moderno. Assumendo la vulnerabilità come condizione condivisa dell'esistenza, questo contributo interpreta la cura come risposta etica e politica alla precarietà collettiva. All'intersezione tra vulnerabilità, rischio globale e organizzazione politica, la cura emerge come paradigma di resilienza politica, in grado di promuovere responsabilità, solidarietà e convivenza democratica.

Parole chiave: cura, politica, vulnerabilità, resilienza.

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1. The Concept of Care in Ancient and Modern Philosophical Thought

Within the context of evolutionary theory, the experience of care and relational interdependence seems to contradict the laws of natural selection, which are based on the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. However, in *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Darwin argues that selection, together with complex emotions and mental faculties, has driven the emergence of the social instincts of higher animals, and especially of human beings. These instincts have led human beings to develop a moral sense, conscience, and sympathy. The latter, in particular, is understood as the ability to emotionally share the mental states of others, initially limited to members of one's own group and gradually extending to all human beings and even lower animals.[1] This brings into focus all those behavioural traits that may point towards an altruistic human nature, thereby corroborating the hypothesis that Darwinian anthropology is grounded in the reversive effect of evolution.[2] Accordingly, natural selection, through social instincts, has fostered civilization, thus institutionalizing altruism and other counter-selective behaviours. Darwin has described the constitutive features of human nature, showing how the moral sense is not a transcendent given, but rather the result of a slow evolution of social instincts and the historical outcome of adaptive dynamics enabled by sociality.

Darwin offers an empirical grounding for several insights already anticipated by ancient philosophy at a speculative level: Plato recognizes the interdependence arising from human needs; Aristotle formulates the concept of the *zoon politikon*; Cicero introduces the idea that the natural inclination towards community constitutes the foundation of justice. From a political-philosophical perspective, such anthropological assumptions cannot by themselves justify normative claims. However, they outline the conditions for a realistic and functional social order, supporting the idea that politics and institutions oriented towards cooperation are coherent with human nature. Therefore, such principles should be embedded in institutional practices in order to foster stability and effectiveness.

Starting from this premise, a critical debate has recently gained momentum on the role that "caring for others" may play in the social and

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[1] Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, Vol. 1, Chapter 3-4, 70-100.

[2] Tort, *Darwin e la filosofia*, 77-78. According to Tort, natural selection "*is subjected to its own* (eliminatory) *law*, resulting in the *tendential elimination of elimination*, through the advantage of social instincts and the associated faculties. Under its own law, natural selection gives rise – without any inconsistency in principle – to a different kind of evolution, whose selected advantage is no longer individual and biological, but rather essentially and fundamentally social" (our translation).

political sphere. The central question is whether care can function as a social mechanism of resilience capable of sustaining civilization and prioritizing it over selection,[3] while reorienting collective practices in the face of contemporary uncertainty and emergencies, in pursuit of social benefit. As Singer points out, any society is indeed characterized by both a tendency to competition and a tendency to cooperation, since both are constitutive elements of human nature: it is the balance between these tendencies that can change and prove decisive.[4]

This may explain why, despite rarely having been at the centre of public and political debate, the concepts of altruistic relationships and care for others are rooted in ancient thought.

In a passage from Plato's *Republic*, Socrates explains to Glaucon that philosophers, who devote themselves to the highest form of knowledge – the contemplation of the Good – are fit to rule, being compelled to "care for and protect the other citizens."[5]

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle clarifies that happiness is "a certain kind of living well and good action",[6] since "the activity in accord with virtue belongs to virtue."[7] He highlights the difference between virtue as a characteristic, which does not provide an opportunity to accomplish something good, and virtue as an activity, which necessarily leads to acting and acting well.[8] Therefore, according to Aristotle, caring for the self means not only seeking the good, but also acting virtuously towards others, in pursuit of their good.

The concept of care gains significance also in some modern philosophical approaches, including Heidegger's. Heidegger considers the human subject a "Being-in-the-world", whose being-there involves a relation to Being and to the clearing within which the entity exists, acts, and is open to possibilities. In this context, the term "*Dasein*" is used to describe the ontological constitution of human existence as a "potentiality-for-Being", an entity that "as long as it is" is "a not-yet." The concept of "Dasein" is closely intertwined with that of "*Sorge*" (or Care) conceptualized as solicitude for others and concernful engagement with the world in light of future possibilities. Care represents the structural totality of Being-in-the-world and coincides with temporality. In its circular structure, it appears as Being-ahead-of-itself, interpreted as projection into the future; as Being-already-in-the-world, insofar as *Dasein* finds itself thrown into a past that

[3] *Ibid*., 66.
[4] Singer, *A Darwinian Left*, 44.
[5] Plato, *The Republic*, 7, 520a.
[6] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1(A), 7, 1098b, 19-20.
[7] *Ibid*., 30-31.
[8] *Ibid*., I (A), 8, 1099a, 1-3.

it experiences affectively; and as Being-alongside, understood as fallenness and concernful engagement with entities within the world.[9] Since the human being exists in the mode of care, "each one of us is what he pursues and cares for."[10] *Sorge* opens up a horizon for understanding care for the shared conditions of existence as an authentic possibility of *Dasein*. Such authenticity encompasses responsibility for the shared world and an active engagement with it. Heidegger argues that the fundamental structures of human existence are intrinsically equiprimordial, with *Mitsein* being the modality by virtue of which *Dasein* is always Being-with other, a constitutively shared existence, and therefore the foundation of an authentic political dimension that is originary rather than optional.

Arendt explicitly draws on Aristotle's thought when she argues that human life can unfold only in a world shaped by the presence of others. She maintains that the human world itself would not exist without human activity, which brings it into being through the fabrication of things, tends to it through the cultivation of the land, and organizes it through the establishment of a political body. Within this world, different modalities of care may be identified. As Arendt observes, the first of these concerns the private realm of the household, which is the sphere where individual survival and the continuity of the species (the most pressing necessities of life) are taken care of. This occurs especially through labour, which explains why wealth, in ancient societies, was traditionally measured by the number of workers – slaves – one owned.[11] Ownership meant freedom from the necessities of life, and freedom to enter the common world, that public space in which human beings can interact with one another and preserve the memory of their actions through speech. An interpretive tension thus emerges. Care, in the material sense of nourishing, sustaining, and preserving life, belongs to the private sphere, thereby becoming politically invisible, since political action may be constrained by the demands of subsistence. However, while distinguishing necessity from freedom, Arendt acknowledges that the public sphere presupposes the private one. Care is excluded from politics, yet it also constitutes the very condition of

[9] Heidegger, *Being and Time*; Bertuzzi, *La verità in Martin Heidegger.*

[10] Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 49. According to Heidegger, existence is Being-in-the-world, or Being-there, which implies Being-with others. This co-existence means that, in relation to others, Being-there takes care of them, and this may occur in two ways: either depriving them of care or helping them to take care of themselves, thus distinguishing between inauthentic and authentic care. Inauthentic care deprives others of their care by directly providing them with what they need, and it is oriented more towards objects than human beings. By contrast, authentic care helps others to become capable of caring for themselves, enabling them to be free for their ownmost possibilities of Being.

[11] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50-51.

its possibility. As a result, it reveals an implicitly political dimension that challenges the rigid distinction between the public and private spheres.

Modern times are increasingly characterized by an atomistic outlook, shaped by a historical process through which the individual has come to assume a central role. This approach has produced a reversal of several perspectives, including the political dimension associated with Aristotle's thought, which focuses on the priority of the whole (the State) over its parts (individuals) and privileges the public sphere. The multiple contexts in which individualism has prompted a rethinking of social, moral, and political perspectives have also revealed that such "essence" of modernity conceals a number of degenerated aspects. These may be identified in both the erosion of "the relational and communicative fabric" and "the loss of the social bond, in short, the weakening of the community."[12]

Several modern political-philosophical theories propose a political condition resulting not from a natural process, but from an artificial configuration produced by a contract between individuals, isolated monads often marked by mutual tension. In particular, contractualist theories focus on the isolated individual, who is subject to intense passions and aggressive feelings that cause conflict and social instability.

Whether driven by desire for power, self-preservation, or competitiveness associated with the development of civil society and private interests, the outcome is the same: "in the individualist thought of early modernity, passions lead to various forms of relational conflict, in which 'the other' is portrayed as the enemy (Hobbes) or the rival (Smith), but also as the essential entity one must strategically engage with in order to pursue one's individual interests. This results in the emergence of the modern politician and the economic equilibrium of middle-class civil society, both of which imply the establishment of an exclusively pretextual social bond."[13]

Within classical liberal thought, the individual is conceived of as *homo oeconomicus*. Rather than being a fully rational agent capable of evaluating long-term self-interest, the *homo oeconomicus* is driven by a complex set of motivations, which can be summarized as the desire to accumulate wealth and material goods, and the desire to distinguish oneself from others and gain social recognition. This *homo oeconomicus* acts individually, without taking into account social and psychological interdependencies. As a result, the *homo oeconomicus* is oriented towards a "utility function or happiness that does not depend on wealth as such, nor on the quality of the relationships established with other human beings. This utility function rather depends directly on the quantity and quality

[12] Pulcini, *L'individuo senza passioni*, 9, our translation.
[13] *Ibid*., 12-13, our translation.

of goods and services consumed, and not on the social context in which consumption occurs."[14]

On the other hand, Smith highlights a moral value that is connected with the ability to transform human passions. He points out that human beings are interested not only in being praised, but in being praiseworthy; they do not wish to be merely appreciated and loved, but to be worthy of appreciation and love. This marks a significant shift from Hobbes's approach to self-esteem, according to which "[g]lory, or internal gloriation or triumph of the mind, is that passion which proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us."[15] So interpreted, self-esteem results from success in a competition whose only purpose or meaning is the establishment of a hierarchy based on merit.[16]

By contrast, Smith argues that glory is the practice of virtue, a moral inclination that, despite its competitive and rivalrous nature, contributes to strengthening the social bond. He identifies prudence as the virtue par excellence, although it is peculiar to the economic agent. Prudence can limit excessive self-love through sympathy, the feeling that arises from observing a certain emotion in another individual.[17] While prudence involves consideration for one's happiness (encompassing health, luck, social rank, and reputation) and attention to personal interest, it also requires that such interest be pursued virtuously. This may happen if individuals take the feelings of others into account whenever they act. In this sense, prudence may be considered "justified self-care, since each individual has the same self-respect as others and is the most suitable to take care of themselves and their needs." Yet, prudence can also be regarded as "appropriate care of one's own interests, since it includes thinking about the other through the impartial spectator", a figure created by imagination that judges one's behaviour honestly and fairly.[18]

Alongside the *homo oeconomicus*, the *homo democraticus* has emerged. Outlined by Tocqueville, the *homo democraticus* remains insufficiently characterized by strong interpersonal ties. Democratic society is indeed described as a crowd of like and equal human beings that "revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others: his children and his particular

[14] Becchetti, *Oltre l'homo oeconomicus*, 12, our translation.
[15] Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic,* Part 1, Ch. 9, § 1.
[16] D'Andrea, "Dal riconoscimento al mercato."
[17] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 12.
[18] Viganò, "La prudenza come superamento dell'individualismo", 43-52, our translation.

friends form the whole human species for him."[19] Therefore, the effect of massification produces a new type of individual who tends to replace conflict with apathy and indifference. This perspective is counterbalanced by an "immense tutelary" power that should ensure the enjoyment of goods and watch over the fate of human beings. However, Tocqueville suggests that the perverse effects of the democratic model and the disintegrating action of individualism may be limited by the awakening of other passions, expressed through democratic association. This is the way to satisfy the two passions that seize the modern human being: "the need to be led and the wish to remain free."[20]

The economic logic and the need for freedom have contributed to an individualistic perspective that has shaped the anthropology and social relationships of modernity, leading to a detachment from both classical thought and any practice that may be fully described as "care." Nevertheless, experience has shown that, even in a perfect world "in which the dread of war is erased, nobody starves to death, and everybody has the necessary resources to live a decent life, there would still always be the need for care."[21] "No one is merely a *homo oeconomicus*, an agent of the market, nor simply a *homo politicus*, an abstract citizen, but also, and always, a subject who needs care to live and live well. It is the relationships of care, affection, and solidarity that nourish one's sense of self-worth and belonging within a community."[22]

2. Care as Politics

Care is a practice governed by a logic of giving which, in its purest sense, does not belong to a culture shaped by exchange and utility. Giving presupposes freedom. Even though receiving a gift implicitly entails an obligation to reciprocate, the manner and timing of such reciprocation are not rigidly determined. Since this is a moral obligation, the value of a gift lies in the absence of guarantees for the donor, which requires profound trust in the other.[23]

Derrida pushes this contrast to its limit. He emphasizes that a gift may be both an object and an act, rather than something that should be reciprocated, since it does not involve exchange and is not characterized by the circular movement of economic logic. A gift can be described as such only

[19] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, Part 4, 663.
[20] *Ibid*., 664.
[21] Mortari, *Filosofia della cura*, 14, our translation.
[22] Serughetti, *Il vento conservatore*, 137-138, our translation.
[23] Godbout, *Lo spirito del dono*.

if it breaks the circularity of exchange, follows a non-economic logic, and challenges the principles of mutuality and symmetry. In its absolute form, the gift should not appear as a gift to either the donor or the recipient. It should be accompanied by a mode of forgetting that erases the memory of giving itself and, consequently, any possibility of recognition, consciousness, and intentionality.[24]

Such a pure gift does not structurally fit within a logic of care that is grounded in relationship, recognition, responsibility, and symbolic reciprocation. Operating within ever-evolving relational structures, care differs from the logic of the gift as it does not aim at transcendence or absolute gratuity, but rather constitutes a practice based on interdependence. However, this evident tension retains a trace of Derrida's conception of the gift insofar as a practice of care includes an aspect that exceeds exchange, a surplus that recalls Heidegger's authentic care, which does not impose itself, but allows the other to be.

More generally, a logic of care implies a recognized and intentional relationship, be it either symmetrical (when the responsibility of care is mutually distributed in the relational dyad) or asymmetrical (when responsibility is consciously taken on by only one participant).[25] In the latter case, a specific issue arises that is associated with an increase in responsibility, with the cared-for relying, or being made to rely, on the one-caring. Consequently, the one-caring is at one end of the relationship, while the cared-for occupies a subordinate position at the other.[26] Each relationship also entails a form of power. In asymmetrical relationships, this "is a crucial element, since it is connected with one of the ends of the relationship; it is not a dynamic element that is redistributed based on the quality of the experiences lived by both",[27] remaining linked to the one-caring.

Relationships of care need to be concrete, immediately experienced in daily life. While this mostly occurs through direct interaction, some relationships may unfold more formally and indirectly, such as those between rulers and citizens. Regardless of their form, all these relationships may be part of a practice of care in which the logic of the gift is enacted, provided it is conscious and intentional.

Therefore, the concept of care is broad and multifaceted. It cannot be limited solely to healthcare practices, nor to the care of children, the elderly, and vulnerable subjects. Rather, it should be situated within a more general context: "[c]are is a species activity that includes everything that

[24] Derrida, *Donare il tempo.*
[25] Mortari, *La pratica dell'aver cura*, 47.
[26] Mortari, *Filosofia della cura*, 82.
[27] Mortari, *La pratica dell'aver cura*, 48, our translation.

we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web."[28]

This general dimension of care shows that it is a mistake to regard the sphere of assistance and that of politics as unrelated. Assistance should not be reduced to a matter of compassion and kindness, just as politics should not be understood merely as a matter of prestige and competition.

The world of care and that of politics are deeply interconnected, especially in a democratic setting. Rethinking their relationship and interdependence is fundamental to democracy. Saying that care is politics means thinking of politics with both a small "p" and a capital "P." Small-p politics occurs in everyday life, which itself should be seen as political, since all care, every response to a need, involves power relationships. However, every caring act also is capital-p politics, since it is situated within a broader political context that reflects the values, laws, customs, and institutions of a given society.[29] This framework supports the argument developed in this paper that care should be understood not merely as an ethical disposition, but as a political paradigm capable of addressing vulnerability within contemporary society.

While Tronto's suggestion is crucial for highlighting the political importance of care beyond the private sphere, more recent developments have also emphasized its institutional and systemic implications. In particular, Engster argues that care constitutes a normative foundation of political theory grounded in the satisfaction of essential needs and the maintenance of social interdependence.[30]

Building on these approaches, care may be reconceptualized as a general principle for structuring collective responses to vulnerability, especially in contexts of global uncertainty and risk. In this sense, care transcends its ethical origins to become a paradigm of political organization capable of reconfiguring the relations between individuals, institutions, and shared conditions of vulnerability.

Regardless of how care is interpreted, all the values and human goods at play expose human beings to risk. "Caring about children, friends, loved ones", and "caring about political citizenship and political action; caring, in general, about being able to act rather than simply to be" define the interests and relationships that place those who cherish them at the

[28] Fisher and Tronto, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring", 40; Tronto, *Moral Boundaries*, 103.
[29] Tronto, *Who cares?*.
[30] Engster, "Care Ethics, Dependency, and Vulnerability."

mercy of luck.[31] These are vulnerable bonds, subject to the contingencies of reality, which may weaken or even destroy relational ties.

Risk may be considered the paradigm of the contemporary world, where facts and phenomena increasingly transform into emergencies, making it difficult to plan for the future.[32] Such a society tends towards catastrophe, as the systemic and interconnected nature of modern crises – which elude any spatial and temporal constraint – threatens to turn the state of exception into the norm.[33] Accordingly, emergency "is no longer merely an exceptional break that interrupts the flow of normalcy: it is a complex mechanism that redefines power relationships, redistributes vulnerability, transforms rules and languages, and above all gives rise to new forms of political legitimacy grounded in the management of uncertainty. Therefore, governing emergency means governing time itself, the rhythm of decision-making, and the narrative of crises."[34]

Consequently, the key to interpreting present times lies in realising that while all goods are inherently precarious, relational goods are uniquely so, as they simultaneously enrich life and increase its vulnerability. Although this vulnerability is intrinsic to having a body that is subject to wounds and deterioration, it is amplified by circumstances that do not depend on natural needs, but are rather influenced by exceptional conditions often created and fostered by human intervention: food shortages, natural disasters, wars, nuclear threats, pandemics, and, in general, lack of security, which culminates in the experience of fear.[35]

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[31] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, xxix.

[32] Preite, "Rischio. Futuro e paradossi della modernità", 45.

[33] Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.*

[34] Preite, *Filosofia politica e governo delle emergenze*, 21, our translation.

[35] The contemporary debate on the concept of vulnerability distinguishes between different interconnected analytical levels. Firstly, a form of ontological or essential vulnerability may be identified, understood as a constitutive feature of the human condition and grounded in corporeality, relational dependence, and exposure to violence and loss. See Butler, *Precarious Life*; *Frames of War*; Cavarero, *Inclinations*. Secondly, a form of structural or socio-institutional vulnerability, resulting from social, economic, and legal organization, is expressed through systemic inequalities and the asymmetric distribution of risk and protection. This perspective is prominent within theories of the "responsive state" and the "vulnerable subject." See Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject"; Fineman, Spitz, *Law, Vulnerability, and the Responsive State*. A third form of vulnerability, which is relational and based on dependency, emerges within the ethics of care and highlights the centrality of relations of interdependence in the definition of justice and socio-political responsibility. See Engster, *The Heart of Justice*; "Care Ethics, Dependency, and Vulnerability." Alongside these dimensions, a dynamic and contextual form of vulnerability is addressed in interdisciplinary literature. Manifesting itself in situations of risk and crisis, it results from the interaction between individual, social, and environmental factors. See Esposito, Turano, *Vulnerabilità, rischio e crisi.* All these perspectives converge in describing vulnerability not as an exception or a deviation from the norm, but as a universal

3. Care: Fear and Global Risk

The most ancient of the primordial passions, fear is experienced even by animals. However, it takes on a distinctive role in human beings, since they are the only beings capable of conceiving death. Biologically deficient, they can live in any natural environment only by creating a second nature, an artificial world that compensates for their biological limitations.[36]

The feeling of fear gains crucial political-philosophical significance in early modernity, serving as the main drive for self-preservation. In Hobbes's thought, fear arises from the natural equality among human beings who, driven by selfish passions, attack each other and become a mutual threat. This is a fundamental fear, as life itself is at risk. The relationship between fear and reason thus becomes evident, as fear transforms into a reasonable passion that leads human beings to enter civil society and pursue peace.[37]

The construction of the political artifice implies a double sacrifice. The first involves renouncing one's rights and passions (ultimately, renouncing one's freedom) in exchange for security. The second sacrifice consists in negating the social bond and embracing the immunitary logic, which constitutes the modern response to the danger of mutual destruction.[38]

However, the fear characterizing the global age no longer follows this linear dynamic, as it fails to transform into a mobilizing response. This new kind of fear is caused by a radical change in the sources and nature of danger, which is increasingly uncertain and indeterminate. Such a character leads to the perception that "[w]here everything turns into a hazard, somehow nothing is dangerous anymore." Therefore, in a risk society, contrasting effects may be observed that range from fear escalating into hysteria to complete indifference.[39]

Even taking into account the shift from the concept of danger to that of risk, contemporary global fear differs from (Hobbesian) modern

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condition that is variably shaped and legally salient, thereby requiring distinct and context-sensitive instruments of protection.

[36] Gehlen, *Prospettive antropologiche*, 68-69.

[37] Pulcini, "Paura, legame sociale, ordine politico in Thomas Hobbes."

[38] *Ibid*., 74. The immunitary paradigm is used to interpret the relationship between power and life. Rather than viewing power solely as subordinating and negating life, or as fostering and protecting it, the immunitary model encompasses both these negative and positive perspectives. Negation does not take the form of the violent subordination that power imposes on life, but rather is the "intrinsically antinomic mode by which life preserves itself through power" (Esposito, *Bíos*, 46).

[39] Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, 37.

fear, since it is incapable of a productive metamorphosis, due to its being marked by a destructive and non-generative character.[40]

Starting from the premise that communities and societies are constitutive dimensions of human experience, the need becomes evident (particularly in the global age) to reflect on possible barriers against the erosion of the social bond. It is crucial "to address the pathologies of individualism by recovering forms of alliance and solidarity" and "to resist dynamics of exclusion that emerge in the globalized society in multiple forms."[41]

Any reflection on the possibility of building a community and on the obstacles to relating with the other highlights a core dilemma. It remains profoundly difficult to reconcile individual freedom, understood as an essential good resulting from the primacy of the modern subject, with the constraints of reality. This tension is particularly evident when seeking security guarantees in the face of escalating risks. Freedom thus collides with another constitutive aspect of the human condition: the need to continually confront events, actions, and decisions that do not depend on the individual. This reveals the *conditioned* nature of human existence[42] and its ontological fragility and vulnerability. Only by containing human fragility and vulnerability is it possible to reclaim spaces of freedom that would otherwise be crushed by the weight of contingency.

In addressing vulnerability, Jonas proposes a kind of ethics of responsibility of human beings for human beings. This takes shape in a relationship that, "though unilateral in itself and in every single case, is yet, on principle, reversible and includes possible reciprocity. Generically, indeed, the reciprocity is always there, insofar as I, who am responsible for someone, am always, by living among men, also someone's responsibility."[43] This view follows from the fact that, by taking the human being as a point of reference, the precarious, vulnerable, and revocable character of the living being is emphasized. This makes it "a proper object of 'caring'", highlighting how "it shares with the agent subject the *humanum*, which has the first, if not the sole claim on him."[44] Building on the premise that everyone has first-hand experience of parental care, Jonas shows that

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[40] Fear is an immediate reaction to something that the subject perceives as a source of danger. While danger refers to uncontrollable events, risk concerns decision-making processes, choices whose consequences one attempts to assess. The distinction between the two concepts is not absolute, since a dangerous situation may be construed as a risk, and vice versa. For instance, seismic danger may become seismic risk if containment measures are adopted. By contrast, risks taken by decision-makers may be experienced as dangers by those who are not involved in the decision-making process (Longo, "Paura").

[41] Pulcini, *La cura del mondo*,14, our translation.

[42] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 25-26.

[43] Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 98.

[44] *Ibid*., 98.

responsibility extends to all living beings that, in their constitutive indigence and fragility, can become objects of responsibility. Accordingly, the child's education, which enables them to enter the human world, is accompanied by "the transmission of the entire code of societal convictions and norms, through whose appropriation the individual becomes a member of the wider community. The private opens itself essentially to the public and includes it."[45] As a result, the development of the citizen emerges as an immanent aim of education and as part of parental responsibility, not merely because it is imposed by the state. Reciprocity is highlighted insofar as the state, in turn, assumes responsibility for the education of the young. Responsibility, understood as an asymmetric relationship, results directly from the emotional and ontological response to the vulnerability of the other, that is, from feelings of concern that give rise to a form of authentic obligation, which is subsequently translated into concrete norms.

The limitation of such an approach lies in its envisioning a potential community where the possible forms of solidarity are based solely on ethically responsible action, regardless of the individual's motivations. This is because the vulnerability of the global age, often resulting from human technical interventions, shows unprecedented features: "the nature of human action has *de facto* changed", to the point that "an object of an entirely new order – no less than the whole biosphere of the planet – has been added to what we must be responsible for."[46]

A radical shift has occurred from traditional ethics, which presupposes an anthropocentric perspective and is concerned with individual behaviour, virtue needing to prove itself, and vice exposing itself. Within this framework, any relationship with "the nonhuman world, that is, the whole realm of *techne* (with the exception of medicine), was ethically neutral; in respect both of the object and the subject of such action."[47] By contrast, modern *techne* has introduced unprecedented actions, objects, and consequences that can no longer be subsumed under traditional ethics.

However, an anthropocentric ethical approach still persists, insofar as human fate, in its natural conditioning, continues to serve as the ultimate point of reference: the fundamental situation of interpersonal relationships remains unchanged, and all action originates from it. Yet, "the cumulative self-propagation of the technological change of the world constantly overtakes the conditions of its contributing acts and moves through none but unprecedented situations, for which the lessons of experience are

[45] *Ibid*., 102.
[46] *Ibid*., 7.
[47] *Ibid*., 4.

powerless."[48] The disappearance of "the containment of nearness and contemporaneity" opens onto a spatial and temporal extension that requires taking into account the global condition of human life and the distant future; ultimately, the survival of the species.[49]

Consequently, a new concept of rights and obligations emerges, one unaccounted for in traditional ethics. It requires respect and duty to extend beyond human interests, thus overcoming the anthropocentric limits of earlier ethical frameworks. If such a perspective is embraced, not only human good, but also extrahuman good should be pursued. This entails a global expansion of the concept of care.

The specific features of the global age prompt a rethinking of not only ethical, but also social and political perspectives. It becomes crucial to understand whether contemporary dynamics can still support an idea of community and whether relationships can be formed that embody some form of care. In this regard, Esposito reflects on the idea of community by returning to the Latin root of the term. The word comes from *cum munus*, where *munus* refers to a gift understood as an obligation; a giving that binds the members of the social body, an internal norm arising from communal need. However, despite being necessary, the community remains unattained and unattainable, as seen in several political and philosophical perspectives, including Hobbes's thought, which identifies shared fear as the force that unites naturally hostile individuals. This "defective" form of the community is intertwined with the concept of *immunis*, which designates exemption: it removes the *munus* from the community and preserves the identity of the subject. In modernity, a process of immunization has occurred, whereby, while *communitas* "binds individuals to something that pushes them beyond themselves", *immunitas* "reconstructs their identity by protecting them from a risky contiguity with the other."[50]

The fear of *the other* is one of the main sources of risk of modernity, even though *the other* is no longer the rival or the enemy in a relationship that is conflictual but concrete. *The other* increasingly becomes a disturbing and threatening presence to be kept at a distance. It is someone who instils fear not because of similarity, but because they embody the very idea of difference, be it cultural, religious, or ethnic. In the global age, the concept of *the other* undergoes a radical transformation, as it is no longer defined by the in-group/out-group duality that long underpinned the idea of keeping the foreigner-enemy beyond the border in order to strengthen internal bonds. The very notion of the border has lost its significance,

[48] *Ibid*., 7
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Esposito, *Communitas*, 47-50.

along with any guarantee of immunity. In the face of global contagion, the alternatives are either the negation of the community or the restoration of a logic of community that may encourage to interpret reality from a perspective beyond selfish individualism.

Esposito proposes reclaiming community through a reconfiguration of freedom that moves away from its modern, individualistic framing. During modernity, freedom undergoes a process of immunization that ties it to a subjectivist logic, in which the subject precedes the freedom they may attain, with freedom being seen as a good to be owned, conquered, and exercised. Yet, an analysis of the original meaning of the word shows that, in various languages, the roots of "freedom" appear in terms referring to community and communal growth.[51] This suggests that the word "freedom" did not originally denote immunity, but described the idea of openness towards the community and the other.[52]

If the original meaning of freedom were emphasized, the erosion of the social bond could be avoided, with the individual regaining awareness of the need to live with, for, and through the other.

In the face of increasingly global and unpredictable risks, a change of approach is crucial. This requires an inter-relational perspective that connects the individual with a community grounded in an unselfish, inclusive logic, as freedom regains its original ties to social and political responsibility. However, this kind of responsibility should not take the form of obligation, as Jonas suggests. Rather, it should be expressed as a concern for the other, ultimately embracing the concept of care, which,

> in its etymological essence, unites the ideas of concern and solicitude. As a result, a new aspect of the concept of responsibility should be considered, one that emphasizes the active, concrete, and engaging commitment to caring. This approach prevents the ethics of responsibility from being reduced to an abstract ideal or a purely theoretical principle.[53]

Caring thus means recognizing that individual existences are interconnected and that such interdependence calls for everyday practices that shape the concrete form that freedom takes.

The immunitary paradigm, as developed by Esposito, is grounded in a protective logic that seeks to preserve life through exclusion, neutraliza-

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[51] This is the case with *leuth* and *frya*. *Leuth* is the root from which the Greek word *eleutheria* and the Latin term *libertas* derive, while *frya* underlies the English *freedom* and the German *Freiheit*. These roots also appear in words such as *love* and *friend*, which evoke the ideas of community and communal growth.

[52] Esposito, *Terms of the Political*, 47-56.

[53] Pulcini, *La cura del mondo*, 22, our translation.

tion, and the regulation of exposure. In the face of contemporary emergencies, this immunitary logic of separation and differentiation comes into conflict with the recognition that no one saves themselves alone.

Care introduces a different orientation. Rather than eliminating vulnerability or erecting defences against it, care acknowledges the constitutive and irreducible dimension of human life. In this sense, care may be understood as a post-immunitary paradigm, as it redefines protection not as separation, but as a relational and dynamic process.

Care does not merely stand in opposition to immunity. It reconfigures its meaning, transforming protection into a practice of collective and continuous commitment to addressing vulnerability. This shift becomes particularly relevant in contexts where vulnerability cannot be eliminated, but needs to be politically mediated and shared.

These perspectives increase the awareness that understanding freedom as a relational concept is increasingly necessary, with concern for the other constituting the condition for collective survival. Care is a political practice; trust is the invisible infrastructure that makes cooperation possible. Trust is realized each time "a subject makes a trusting choice towards another, and the recipient responds reliably, even when this comes at a cost."[54]

Freedom, responsibility, and trust are interpretive keys to dealing with contemporary emergencies. The latter are indeed "opportunities to question the forms of coexistence, redefine the boundaries of citizenship, and rethink politics as a practice of care for shared vulnerabilities. Only if vulnerability is considered a common foundation can emergency be transformed from a time of fear into a space of possibility, capable of paving the way for new frameworks of justice and freedom."[55]

This requires a framework in which resilience is understood not merely as the ability to withstand shocks, but as the capacity to reorganise living conditions in creative and generative ways. This would redefine the relationship between vulnerability and power, crisis and possibility, with resilience becoming a transformative attitude of existence. Practices of resilience, especially grassroots ones, "question the vertical logics of governance, creating spaces of autonomy, solidarity, and experimentation."[56]

Within the context of global risk – characterized by ecological crisis, technological interdependence, and systemic uncertainty – vulnerability takes on a new, pervasive character. As Jonas argues, the scope and irreversibility of contemporary threats call for a future-oriented ethics of responsibility.

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[54] Mazzotta, "Fiducia. Opportunità e vincoli per il futuro", 199, our translation.
[55] Preite, *Filosofia politica e governo delle emergenze*, 74, our translation.
[56] *Ibid*., 57.

Introducing a relational and distributed model of responsibility, care emerges as a political response to global risk. Rather than addressing exposure through strategies of isolation, it relies on forms of collective organization and mutual support.

Within this framework, care is conceptualized as a paradigm of resilience, offering an alternative to both defensive models of political order and individualistic approaches.

A concrete shift from "freedom despite the other" to "freedom through the other" is fraught with difficulty, also due to the persistently unstable balance between defence and exposure, *immunitas* and *communitas*. Yet, amid contemporary crises, such a shift becomes necessary in order to navigate emergencies. Being free through the other is part of a relational process that needs to be supported and nurtured, with political care becoming an attempt to keep the relational space open without denying vulnerability. Where care fails, relationships break down. When relationships dissolve, freedom loses its meaning. This is too high a risk for a world that, exposed to continuous emergencies, is in constant need of care.

By situating care at the intersection of vulnerability, political organization, and global risk, this paper advances a framework that conceptualizes care as a paradigm of political resilience. Such a paradigm aims to reorganize vulnerability without neutralizing it, while rethinking freedom, responsibility, and coexistence beyond the logics of protection and exclusion.

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Saggi

What is Enlightenment Today?[1]

Che cos'è l'Illuminismo oggi?

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Abstract. This paper examines the meaning of Enlightenment in the contemporary "post-truth" era. Starting with examples of mass credulity and misinformation, it argues that contemporary obscurantism differs from that faced by eighteenth-century thinkers because it is generated not by a lack of information but by an overabundance of information combined with echo chambers and the rejection of scientific authority. The paper revisits Immanuel Kant's classic conception of Enlightenment as the individual's emergence from self-incurred immaturity through the courageous use of one's own understanding. It then considers Marina Garcés' proposal, strongly influenced by Kant, of a "new radical Enlightenment." While acknowledging the relevance of Kantian critical reason for a new Enlightenment, the paper argues that Kant's framework is insufficient to address the structural conditions that undermine public discourse today. In particular, growing economic inequality and the influence of wealth over public debate distort democratic deliberation and weaken the corrective power of rational argument. The paper concludes that a contemporary Enlightenment must move beyond Kantian reliance on free public reasoning by confronting the material inequalities that undermine democratic legitimacy and by reimagining political strategies to restore trust, equality, and democratic participation.

Keywords: Kant, Enlightenment, post-truth era, democracy, economic inequality.

[1] In accordance with the journal's editorial guidelines, Kant's quotations are cited using the title (as given in the English translation adopted) of the volume, followed by the page number. The latter corresponds to the page numbering of the *Akademieausgabe*.

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Riassunto. Questo saggio indaga il significato dell'Illuminismo nell'era della "post-verità." Partendo da esempi di credulità di massa e disinformazione, si sostiene che l'oscurantismo contemporaneo si differenzia da quello del XVIII secolo perché generato non da mancanza di informazione, bensì da un suo eccesso, combinato con il rifiuto dell'autorità scientifica. Il saggio riprende la concezione kantiana classica dell'Illuminismo come emancipazione dell'individuo da una condizione di auto-inflitta immaturità. Analizza poi la proposta, ispirata a Kant, di un "nuovo Illuminismo radicale" da parte di Marina Garcés. Pur riconoscendo la rilevanza della ragione critica kantiana, il saggio sostiene che il quadro concettuale di Kant sia insufficiente ad affrontare le condizioni strutturali che minano il discorso pubblico odierno. In particolare, la crescente disuguaglianza economica e l'influenza della ricchezza sul dibattito pubblico distorcono la deliberazione democratica e indeboliscono il potere correttivo dell'argomentazione razionale. Il saggio conclude che un Illuminismo contemporaneo deve andare oltre la fiducia kantiana nel ragionamento pubblico e libero, affrontando le disuguaglianze materiali che minano la legittimità democratica e ripensando le strategie politiche per ripristinare fiducia, uguaglianza e partecipazione democratica.

Parole chiave: Kant, Illuminismo, età della post-verità, democrazia, diseguaglianza economica.

1. A new obscurantism

On October 8th 2023, when all major media outlets worldwide had reported the news of Hamas' attack on Israel, the sales manager of a medium-sized Italian newspaper, "La Verità," noticed a trend that could have cost him his job. No fewer than 2,500 people (10% of the total) canceled their digital subscriptions in less than 24 hours. It was the largest and fastest decline in subscriptions in the newspaper's history. The sales manager wondered what could have happened and started a quick survey of the comments from readers identifiable through a regular account, and randomly sent emails to those who had canceled, begging for an explanation. After a while, it became clear that about 2500 people had left because they thought that Hamas' attack was nothing but fake news. Being 'La Verità' a far-right newspaper, it is hardly a surprise that some of its usual readers seized the opportunity to spread some anti-Semitic comments and denounced a new Jewish plot to fuel self-pity and attract sympathies.

Stories of people's credulity in the famous 'post-truth' era obviously abound, but let us pick a few cases as spectacular as representative:

1) the 2015 Jade Helm 15 conspiracy theory, with large groups of people in Texas (35% of the registered republicans and 50% of Tea Party supporters, including the then-governor Greg Abbot), convinced that

a military training by U.S forces, publicly announced beforehand, was in fact a secret attempt by the federal government to "take over Texas."[2]

2) the "Pizzagate" that went viral during the 2016 United States presidential election campaign, based on the false belief that the New York City Police Department (NYPD) had discovered but kept secret a pedophilia ring linked to members of the Democratic Party. The supposed pedophiles would meet at the Ping Pong Comet pizzeria in Washington, DC. People who bought the story gathered at the doors of the pizzeria, and one fired a rifle inside the restaurant to break the lock on a door to a storage room.[3]
3) The story spread by Bolsonaro supporters before the 2018 election that supporters of the opposition Workers' Party (PT) would use pacifiers with a phallic shape to induce homosexual inclinations in male children.[4]

More recently, we have the phenomenon of acts of hybrid war through hostile propaganda and here the award undoubtedly goes to Russia with news spread through socials of Ukrainian leadership Nazi sympathies, NATO plans to 'invade Moldavia' before the key elections of a few months ago, European citizens suffering cold during winter because their governments stopped buying Russian gas (this is literally what Uzbeks are told by official media at home, reports an Uzbek student of mine).

Finally, Trump's return to the US presidency added the most interesting dimension to the phenomenon. Republican members of the parliament, who were in the building during the January 6th insurrection, called for the prosecution of those responsible to the full extent of the law in the immediate aftermath. Most of them, however, now have a different posture. When Jack Smith, the prosecutor in charge of determining responsibilities related to the insurrection, was called before the House Judiciary public committee, Rep. Ben Cline lamented the lack of solid evidence that Trump intimidated actual and potential witnesses. Trump's invoking the 'death penalty' against one witness and addressing those involved in his criminal case with the warning: "If you go after me, I'm coming after you!" was evidently not enough for Cline. History has to be rewritten, no matter the costs in personal consistency. Some version of Cline's denialism is now the official position of the GOP. In a recent VA-07 Republican candidate forum, the moderator asked whether January 6th was an

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jade_Helm_15_conspiracy_theories.
[3] https://time.com/4590255/pizzagate-fake-news-what-to-know/
[4] https://g1.globo.com/fato-ou-fake/noticia/2021/10/28/e-fake-que-pt-distribuiu-mamadeiras-eroticas-para-criancas-em-creches-pelo-pais.ghtml

insurrection or an attempt at redress of grievances. Here are the answers: State Sen. Bryce Reeves: "So my personal belief was it wasn't an insurrection." Yesli Vega: "It was actually a group of Americans exercising their 1st Amendment rights, and as a result of doing that they've been persecuted, shamed, forced out of their jobs, forced to retire, and listen, the double standard is sickening." Derrick Anderson: "No, it was not an insurrection." Gina Ciarcia: "I resent it being called an insurrection because it was not, and I also think Ted Cruz saying that it was a 'violent act of terrorism' was also completely inaccurate, and he should never have said that at all." David Ross: "So, January 6th was not an insurrection; I think January 6th was an attempt for redress of grievances."[5]

The post-truth era, namely, the era in which objective facts are less influential than appeals to emotion and private beliefs in shaping public opinion – a disposition obviously enabled and amplified by social media – is undoubtedly the new face of obscurantism. If scarce information for common people, absence of opportunities to exchange ideas, and a-critical acceptance of established knowledge were the targets of the Enlightenment, anyone who would want to revive its spirit today is confronted with excessive information for people, discussion groups turned into echo-chambers, and a-critical refusal of science.

2. Kant's Enlightenment and the new obscurantism: opposition or complicity?

Indeed, one natural way to think of Enlightenment today, to decipher what kind of disposition is closest to the reformist and at times revolutionary spirit of *les philosophes*, is to say that while they were facing obscurantism and tradition, today we face a news bulimia, echo chambers and epistemic bubbles that challenge the results of science and target expert opinion as systematically infected by particular interests. Beyond the surface of obscurantism's new faces, however, on a closer analysis the enemy is always the same: self-inflicted credulity. Indeed, the remedy also appears to be similar: exercise of a critical capacity in questioning received knowledge. After all, this is how Kant famously defined 'Enlightenment':

> *Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority* is inability to make use of one's own understanding without direction from another. This minority is self-incurred when its cause lies not in

[5] All quotes are taken from this article: https://virginiapoliticalnewsletter.substack.com/p/was-it-an-insurrection-or-not

> a lack of understanding but in a lack of resolution and the courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude*! Have courage to make use of your own understanding! is thus the motto of enlightenment.[6]

Notice that Kant saw the Enlightenment more as a disposition than as the endorsement of a particularly enlightened view. It is the effort of each individual to think for him- or herself. It is the attitude of using one's own reason, mainly understood as a tool of scrutiny that does not stop before *any* form of authority. We know, incidentally, that Kant was quite extreme on this because, unlike contemporaries who were after a definition of Enlightenment, he thought that even religion was a legitimate target of doubts and criticism. But the point I want to emphasize here is that, for Kant, the movement he was living with and, to a good extent, championing was not about substituting one comprehensive view for another. Unlike past instances of self-proclaimed "overcoming of darkness," in which a metaphysical or moral doctrine replaced another, this time enlightened people were not supposed to embrace a particular creed. They were not required to reject what the past generation had thought was an enlightened way of thinking, but which, by the new standards, was just another instance of darkness. They were asked merely to adhere to a critical disposition. Also notice that the ultimate authority of this critique seems to be the individual. The overcoming of a self-inflicted condition of minority is supposed to happen through the use of *your own* understanding, not through passive reliance on what supposedly enlightened philosophers now say, not even on what science says, despite its spectacular epistemic successes already in Kant's time. For Kant, unlike many other contributors to the debate on the essence of Enlightenment, the point was not the acceptance of a scientific view of the world that would overcome religious dogma.

Another aspect of Kant's account, perhaps the most shocking and revolutionary, is that for him enlightenment does not seem to presuppose much knowledge and is far from restricted to learned people. Even common human beings can be enlightened, provided that they think for themselves. When Kant says that he feels that he is not living in an enlightened age but merely one of enlightenment, he does not mean that the masses are still ignorant but are progressing. [7] On Kant's story, as Samuel Fleischaker correctly notes, the opposite of a state of enlightenment is not a state of ignorance – a lack of information – but an emotional weakness, a

[6] Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," 35.

[7] Of course, at the end of the 18th century very few who could produce written works and thus be an active part in the "public use of reason" and yet a critical attitude at least in receiving information was arguably open to all.

disposition of passivity that will not be cured by an increase of the things one knows.[8]

Let us now return to the incredible stories of people's credulity from which we started. As I said, one way to address the question of what Enlightenment is *today* is to say that we have new forms of irrationality and credulity, but the tool we should adopt is still the one indicated by Kant. And yet this does not seem to work. These people were doing the opposite of accepting mainstream knowledge. They were clearly rejecting it by exercising their critical minds. The stories of mass misperception we recalled are, or appear to be, more stories of incredulity than of passive reception of traditional views. The whole point was to reject conventional knowledge and use common understanding, free from the yoke of the politically correct, mainstream media, and established moral and religious authority. The 'awakened believers' were all but 'lazy and cowardly' because they had the guts to reject the official story given by the 'guardians'. They also shared their thoughts with others through social media. Thus, they appeared to satisfy Kant's requirement that we must communicate our thoughts to others for reciprocal check and correction, because there is no such thing as isolated thinking. Finally, how difficult it is not to find in the no vax rhetoric an echo of what Kant says in the *Conflict of the Faculties* about immature people who attribute a sort of 'magic power" to experts in medicine?[9]

In sum, if not Kantian heroes, these gullible people all seem to have taken Kant's story about thinking for themselves very seriously. Does that mean that Kant's notion of Enlightenment is at best ineffective to face the new obscurantism and at worst its unexpected source of inspiration? In what follows, I am going to explain why this is not the case, at least not as profoundly as it seems, but I will also be signaling that if we stick to

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[8] Fleischaker, *What Is Enlightenment?*, Frederick Beiser makes a similar point when he notes that a fundamental principle of the *Aufklärung* was that "individuals should think for themselves, that they should accept a belief only when it agrees with their own critical reason" (4). While it is evident that Kant endorsed this radical principle in the 1780s, it is less clear that he still upheld and abided by it in the 1790s. According to Beiser, Kant appears to change his mind about the right of rebellion after the French Revolution. Indeed, he uses some *Reflexionen* from the 1780s to show that Kant was then in favor of it. Kant would argue against the same rights in the 1790s merely to convince the new Prussian government that they could leave freedom of the press because the *Aufklärer* posed no threat to the established political authority. In general, it is undeniable that in the 1790s conservatives in Germany looked at the main principle of the Enlightenment exposed in the 1784 essay as a great danger. Reason, let alone the reason of common people, should *not* be considered as the ultimate authority that judges the legitimacy of power.

[9] Kant, *Conflict of the Faculties*, 30-31.

Kant's notion of Enlightenment, we will not be able to counter the prejudices of our time.

3. Kantian tools for a new Enlightenment

At a closer look, what goes on with conspiracy theories, echo-chambers and epistemic bubbles is not what would come out of an application of Kant's *motto*, at least if properly understood. When Kant invites us to think for ourselves, he is not saying that we should reject any authority or expert opinion we encounter. He is simply saying that we should measure the credentials of any statement and of the authority that presents it to us. There are fields in which we can make the call entirely on our own. In moral and religious matters, this is certainly the case because a) morality is open to any common understanding and a layman knows what the moral law requires as well as a professor of moral philosophy does and b) revealed religion is ultimately under the scrutiny of morality because if there are practices and dogmas in a religion that clash with the moral law, they have to go. This is the whole point of including religious matters, despite the skepticism of some of his fellow *Aufklärer*, among the topics about which we have the possibility, in fact the duty, to exercise our critique. This was also the point in *What is Enlightenment?* of denying that the clergy could lock in the interpretation of a religion once and for all and impede future generations from having their own, possibly better (read: more in line with the universal moral law) understanding of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and so on. But, of course, this means that we have to think for ourselves *guided by universal principles* that are not 'up to us' to establish. Even if enlightenment is a disposition and not a doctrine, Kant's faith that the exercise of one's own understanding will lead to something good, to an enlightened position, rests on the fact that at least in areas like morality and religion our critique is supposed to arrive at a pre-established end: the moral law as it is already inscribed in our reason.

Of course, Kant's examples suggest that the duty to think for yourself does not stop at moral issues but also extends to epistemic ones, in fact, to empirical matters in which the motto seems ridiculous. Kant admonishes us not to trust doctors blindly, and we all know what it meant a few years ago to have people during a pandemic who thought they knew better than official medicine. How can I think for myself in matters that require a lot of knowledge, proper training, and experience? Similar things could be said about the other two examples Kant gives. One is the officer in the army who says, "do not argue but drill," and the other is that of the tax official who tells you to pay without, again, arguing. Military strategy but

also economics seem to be pristine examples in which one should not think for oneself, not because of fondness for passivity and lack of courage, but because, like medicine, these are fields in which you need to be knowledgeable in order to say anything meaningful. While this is quite evident in the case of military strategy, it applies also to taxation. Of course, there is a moral question about how much it is fair to tax people, but there is also a technical question of how much it is *efficient* to tax people that cannot be solved merely by appeal to the moral law or to the UPR.

What Kant seems to mean, or better must mean, in these cases is that even when a lot of knowledge is required and therefore you cannot help but rely on the opinion of experts, you have a duty to check the credibility of the sources. More importantly, you have the duty to do so by measuring this credibility against something more demanding than your private or partisan standards. These standards have to be acceptable in principle to all. Here Kant's emphasis on the necessity that the individual be the ultimate judge of any thesis he is asked to believe is mitigated or perhaps simply complemented by what he says in the third critique about the necessity to think "in the position of everyone else" and "in accord with yourself."[10] When you think for yourself, you need to be able to step outside your role, your position, your tradition, your cherished beliefs and evaluate whether these rest on values or norms of epistemic validity that others, at least in principle, would be able to accept. This entails that when you make a public use of your reason, you gain freedom because you can argue about everything, including religious dogma. You also shoulder constraints, however, because you are supposed to utter ideas that could be accepted even by those who are not part of your group. Notice that these constraints are far from being satisfied when you merely find some official external source (e.g., a scientific paper that supports your position). You must be able to accept the hard truth that science advances through a confrontation between discordant opinions among which it is often possible to find one that suits your prejudices. Hence, shouldering constraints for a proper public use of reason includes assessing whether there is a prevailing opinion among scientists (yes, numbers count not only in politics) and accepting that, no matter how fallible we are and remain, one should adopt precisely that stance.

In addition, you may not contradict yourself. Surprisingly, Kant says this is the maxim hardest to follow. One would think that only very sloppy people fall into contradiction. And yet, on second thought, this is precisely what passive minds are most inclined to. If you receive a doctrine without the vigilant attitude Kant preaches, then possible contradictions

[10] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 295.

within the doctrine will not be noticed or perhaps will be noticed and discarded as your problem of understanding, not a problem in the theory. This phenomenon is actually very common. People endorse human rights and then disregard the basic rights of immigrants, proclaim themselves as defenders of Christianity and suggest seeing empathy as a sin. Unfortunately, this is not an absurdity made up for illustrating the point. MAGA people and evangelical preachers such as Ben Garret or John McPherson have recently suggested dumping empathy: "Empathy should be struck from the Christian vocabulary,"[11] Elon Musk reiterated the point, stating in a podcast that "the fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy."[12] Similarly, you may praise freedom of expression and a) threaten to cut public funding to universities that do not align with views dear to the executive, b) ban books and textbooks because they cite unwelcome theories, c) use executive authority to exercise pressure on the media to remove critical voices. Also, you may remind all human beings of the genocide your people have been victims of and commit one against another. You may appeal to evidence-based cases in which being vaccinated led to serious harm for the individual and then disregard empirical evidence that a) explains why that happened and b) shows how statistically an innumerable number of people were saved from the vaccines.

The human ability to triumphantly ride over contradictions is spectacular, and Kant is absolutely right that the maxim of consistency is probably the one that, if practiced rigidly, would require a revision of our beliefs perhaps more profound than that deriving from the application of the first two maxims.

Be that as it may, it is now clear that the rules Kant spells out for a proper use of our understanding complement and clarify his famous *motto*. It should be something like the following: "Think for yourself on moral, religious and empirical matters and when you do it adopt standards of acceptability that are sharable by people even most distant from you, having faith that our common rationality will always provide a space in which we do not talk past each other. And while you are at it, try to avoid contradictions." This is not the motto for conspiracy people; it is, in fact, the most effective cure for their condition. This is not what creates echo chambers; it is rather what allows people to free themselves from them. It is not a justification for weirdos who want to replace experts even when they are evidently needed, but the best cure for those who believe their

[11] This statement is from a 2025 podcast episode of *Stronger Men Nation* featuring pastor Josh McPherson. See also https://x.com/tompawnbadil/status/1882115502061068777

[12] Elon Musk made this statement during an interview on *The Joe Rogan Experience*.

gurus over and above people who are serious about certain topics, despite their obvious fallibility.

4. A new radical Enlightenment?

Not accidentally, a return to Kant is also what the Catalan philosopher Marina Garcés, in her *New Radical Enlightenment*, seems to suggest. Garcés notes that we live in a world that is "radically anti-enlightenment," especially in the "authoritarian impulse" that – she thinks – is often misinterpreted as populism, in the "defensive and offensive identities," in the "fascination with the pre-modern" of which contemporary politics and society continually provide striking examples, from the waving of rosaries to the suspicion of vaccines.[13] These factors are all based on a "voluntary credulousness" of the masses, victims of "enlightened illiteracy" due to the vast amount of indistinguishable information readily available. Her pamphlet proposes a new radical Enlightenment that "resumes the fight against credulousness and affirms the freedom and dignity of human experience in its capacity to learn from itself," taking us "back to the roots of the Enlightenment, as an attitude and not as a project, as a refutation of dogmas and the powers that benefit from them."[14]

The echo of Kant is evident and explicitly acknowledged. Here and there, however, Garcés tries to distance herself from Kant and the Enlightenment he lived, which would be a "concrete historical project of the European ruling classes, tied to the development of industrial capitalism through colonization." She instead wants "a planetary Enlightenment, more geographical than historical and more global than universal." In other words, purge Kant of his sins of Eurocentrism, universalism, rationalism, and perhaps racism, and reconstruct a global reach for this enlightened radicalism by including voices around the world that have so far never been properly heard.

It should be recalled that the notion of "radical enlightenment" was coined in 1981 by Margaret C. Jacob, who, in her essay by that title, found the seeds of the movement in the underground of pantheists, Freemasons, and republicans whose voice went by and large unnoticed in the history of philosophy, defeated by the prevalence of compromise between philosophers and sovereigns. Under the same title, in 2001, Jonathan Israel defined the proliferation of anonymous clandestine manuscripts of a subversive and/or materialist nature. It thus seems that Garcés positions herself within

[13] Garcès, *New Radical Enlightenment*, 7.
[14] "Garcès, *New Radical Enlightenment*, 8.

a revisionist perspective. But while the scholars just cited backdated in time the beginning of the phenomenon, and reshaped its origins and fundamental assumptions, she seeks to transform it from a doctrine into an attitude for our days, which would coincide with what Kant defined as critique, boosted by the contribution of all those voices so far scarcely heard.

To return to our original question (what is Enlightenment today), we need to ask whether Kant or Garcés really provide effective tools for facing the post-truth era, the return of authoritarianism, and the degeneration of the public sphere in a state of nature in which rage and loudness are the rule of the game. Let's start with Garcés and apply Kant's rule for proper thinking, centered on avoiding contradiction, to her proposal. On the one hand, Garcés tells us that ordinary people today, perhaps more than in the past, are ignorant and anti-enlightened. Recall the "voluntary credulity" of the masses, victims of "enlightened illiteracy" due to the vast amount of indistinguishable information made available by the socials. On the other hand, she wants the masses to free themselves from this condition on their own. She does not want the work that Kant reserved for the elites to start the process of enlightenment of the public. The process, as Kant imagined it, was one of fortunate enlightenment of some rulers (e.g., Frederick the Great) that allowed freedom of expression *among scholars* ("few independent thinkers") in the public use of their reason. This would eventually "disseminate the spirit of a rational valuing of one's own worth and of the calling of each individual to think for himself" in the masses. Also, she does not seem to view favorably the idea that certain universal principles and standards of epistemic validity are to be recognized by the masses as they enlighten themselves. After all, these standards are not generated by the radically democratic, decentralized, and bottom-up procedure that Garcés defends. Thus, one cannot help but wonder: how can the gullible and illiterate masses, without any guidance and any pre-established cognitive or moral principle, become this radically critical and enlightened entity that will save us from barbarism?

5. Kant's cure: promises and limitations

What about Kant? Is it enough that he had at least a more consistent story to tell about how the masses can free themselves from the yoke of immaturity? Can we revamp his definition of Enlightenment once we learned that his *motto* is not 'anything goes as long as you think for yourself' and deal with it to address our contemporary issues? Hardly so. What Kant misses is that this elites-led process of enlightenment through rational discourse, freedom of the press and collective trial and error only works on

two main conditions: 1) the public is not under the impression that what the elites say is at best self-interested and at worst a sophisticated attempt to play them; 2) the public debate is not rigged by material forces that either impede that certain issues enter the political agenda or, if they do, shape and steer them to their advantage. The "unforced force of the better argument," to use a famous Habermasian expression, will prevail, as Habermas knows very well, only if participants in the public sphere maintain a minimal degree of trust and if we are not too distant from an ideal speech condition.[15] The tragedy of our times, however, is that the free public debate, on which everything rests, may be compromised by the manner in which some groups influence it. As we shall see in some detail later, money has many creative ways of influencing public opinion, and the current levels of inequality assign an incredibly unequal share of political influence to the wealthiest group. The consequence is that many ordinary citizens living in liberal democracies feel that public debate is structurally impotent or rigged to address their deepest concerns. They see governments shift from left to right and vice versa, while their condition of exclusion and the progressive erosion of their social and economic status steadily advance.

Let us try to illustrate this with an example. In France, where the centrist and Macronist Bayrou was recently ousted in a vote uniting both the extreme right and the extreme left, the proposal by Gabriel Zucman (a student of Thomas Piketty) to tax 2% of net assets exceeding 100 million euros was rejected. We should reflect on the fact that an advanced democracy, with a tradition of welfare and redistribution, is at pains to introduce what appears to be a minimal operation of social decency, given the difficult condition of French national debt and deficit and the way in which inequality (in France and elsewhere) has evolved in the last 20 years.[16] Let's recall some numbers, mostly drawn from the latest Oxfam report (2026).

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[15] The quoted phrase recurs in several works by Habermas, including *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* and *Faktizität und Geltung*. It can be seen as the motto of a normative conception of democracy, namely the deliberative model. This model is often adopted by theorists who appear less aware than Habermas himself of the possible distortions that may affect deliberation. In his reconsideration of the Enlightenment project in "The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of Its Voices" (1996), Habermas argues that the task today is not to abandon reason – as postmodernism invites us to do – but rather to reconstruct it in terms of communicative rationality. Within this framework, a democratic public sphere is essential, since it allows citizens to engage in rational discussion aimed at identifying the "better argument" and at freely accepting, for the right reasons, the laws that regulate their political community. At the same time, Habermas is well aware that communication among individuals can be distorted by power, money, and strategic action. One form of distortion that has become increasingly central – and whose scale Habermas could not fully anticipate – is the current level of economic inequality, both globally and within liberal democracies in particular.

[16] Zucman and the EU tax observatory that he directs tried at the European level, after his proposal was rejected by the French Parliament during the discussion preceding France's 2026

It is common knowledge that global economic inequality has grown enormously. In 1996, the wealth of the 500 richest people accounted for 6% of global GDP; today, it accounts for 40%. Perhaps less well known is that this trend is not sparing liberal democracies, even those in Europe, which have traditionally been more open to redistribution and welfare. In the very unequal United States, the wealthiest 1% of the population owned 35% of the national wealth in 2007; by 2018, the percentage was not much different. In Italy, however, the share of GDP held by the richest was about 17% in 2007, but over the next 10 years it increased to nearly 25%. Similar trends can be observed in France, the UK, and to a lesser extent Germany.[17]

Less known (at least among the general public) is that this peak of inequality is, among other things, the result of specific political decisions. Between 2007 and 2015, corporate taxation decreased by a considerable 0.5 percentage point of GDP, while taxes on income from dependent labor increased by roughly the same percentage. While taxes on high incomes and wealth have fallen, those on middle- and lower-income brackets have increased.[18]

What do these figures tell us? That the exponential increase in inequality is also due to 'democratic' choices. It seems the wealthiest have found a way to convince democratic public opinion that it was right to lower their taxes, perhaps with the worn-out argument that everyone would somehow benefit from their becoming richer: the infamous, and disastrous, trickle-down economy. The difficulty in accepting the Zucman tax, which would amount to nothing more than restitution for what the rich have not paid in taxes due to irrational fiscal policies, suggests that the wealthy are so politically influential that they manage to pass laws that benefit them and disadvantage the poorer population. American political scientists like Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page have shown that, in the last three decades, the U.S. Congress has never passed a measure that was against the interests of the wealthiest, while it has passed many that benefited them, such as measures that stopped taxing the very wealthy and high-income individuals. It is always good to remember that only a few decades ago, in the certainly not socialist United States, the very rich were taxed 80% on their income, and a severe inheritance law mitigated the

budget law. The tax would now be on the wealth of individuals over US$1 billion. Raising the threshold shields the proposal from the charge that it would harm innovation which hardly depends on the initiative of very few individuals objectively not interested in bettering their economic condition.

[17] All these data can be found in the 2025 Report of the G20 Extraordinary Committee of Independent Experts on Global Inequality. See: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202511/g20-global-inequality-report-full-and-summary.pdf

[18] See on this the 2025 and 2026 Oxfam Inequality Report.

passing of undeserved advantage from one generation to the next. Then, from the late seventies on, things began to turn very rosy for the wealthiest part of an already very unequal society. Think of the Estate law that is now half of what it had been for thirty years. Or think of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 that significantly reduced the corporate tax rate, further lowering the effective tax burden on the wealthiest households, who own a significant portion of business wealth. While public opinion favors higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations, policies such as the 2017 tax cut and existing tax code structures contribute to these trends. The lesson to learn is that even when public opinion manages to voice its preferences, they are far from becoming legislation. Our democracies are becoming oligarchic, in fact plutocratic systems, and as such, despotic.

But sometimes public opinion does not even have a chance to formulate the 'right' preference. Is it acceptable that a successful entrepreneur earns and possesses not significantly more than a teacher, a police officer, or an employee, but *monstrously* more? What justifies the idea that a citizen can become wealthy without limits, just by being talented and/or lucky enough? The undeniable difficulty in establishing when 'more' becomes 'too much' certainly does not. A rough estimate is possible, as demonstrated by some recent studies.[19] I suspect that behind the justification that many people (unfortunately not only the super wealthy) would give lies an idea of merit and freedom as widespread as indefensible: freedom of enterprise and hard work provide an absolute right to any measure of wealth one can accumulate. It doesn't matter if this harms crucial aspects of communal living, such as the promise of having roughly equal power to influence democratic decisions. The left of recent decades, not by chance in a constant crisis of identity, has told us that we should not be against wealth but against poverty. Meaning: we don't care about inequality, as long as no one is poor. What a spectacular act of self-sabotage.

Thus I submit that the current structural condition of injustice, generated by the return to levels of economic inequality reminiscent of the Jazz era, is generating a sense of distrust and disenchantment of the low-middle class in our democratic societies, from unemployed young people to underpaid state employees, from people who 'did not go to college' and ended up in the losing side of globalization to working class people living side by side with non-integrated immigrants whom they perceive (most of the time wrongly) as a threat. Politics today seems unable to shape a dream that could end this condition. We are in a vicious circle of increasing inequality and corresponding suffering of low-middle classes in our societies that targets not the real problems but things like woke culture or

[19] Alì, Caranti, "How Much Economic Inequality is Fair in Liberal Democracies?."

immigrants, something which in turn leads to more inequality and more rage and distrust. Nobody can articulate a new democratic dream of peace and *widespread* prosperity. In this stall, it is no surprise that autocratic or perhaps tyrannical figures advance. Their intrinsic appeal is that they are against the system, or so they say. Their contradictions, false promises, reliance on factual inaccuracies, and embarrassing theories that would have cost a political career in times less extreme than ours are perceived as reassuring proof that the guy is not part of the usual mainstream politics that has constantly failed common people.

Why do I claim that Kant cannot make sense of this, that he does not have the resources to pull us out of the impasse that is eroding Western civilization? It is not that I believe that structural measures of redistribution are alien to him, despite the famous line in *On the Common Saying* regarding the compatibility of the republic with the utmost levels of economic inequality:

> But this thoroughgoing equality of individuals within a state, as its subjects, is quite consistent with the greatest inequality in terms of the quantity and degree of their possessions, whether in physical or mental superiority over others or in external goods and in rights generally (of which there can be many) relatively to others. Thus the welfare of one is very much dependent upon the will of another (that of the poor on the rich); thus one must obey (as a child its elders or a wife her husband) and the other directs; thus one serves (a day laborer) and the other pays him, and so forth.[20]

Ironically, powerful resources against a reading that sees Kant as a forerunner of the minimal state can be found precisely within the above passage, if one reads it in the proper context.[21] If one has to take seriously Kant's idea that economic independence (to own means sufficient to avoid blackmailing power on my choices) is an essential component of active citizenship, then it is possible to mount an argument on Kantian grounds for a structural dispersion of private ownership *as required by political equality*.[22] Something reminiscent of Rawls' preference for a property-owning democracy over welfare capitalism. Kant's rooting the dignity of all human beings in our common humanity may be compatible with temporary restrictions of full political equality due to contingent circumstances of passivity (again de facto subjection to a blackmailing power of

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[20] Kant, *On the common saying*. 291-292.

[21] A similar argument is to be found in Ripstein. *Force and Freedom*. For a recent critical assessment of the ways in which one can find in Kant a justification of some form of the welfare state see Davies, *Kant on welfare*. See also Sánchez Madrid, *Kant on Social Suffering*.

[22] For the extended argument see Alì, Pinzani, "Taking Economic Inequality Seriously."

others), but is certainly more aligned with a condition in which we pull out passive citizens from that very condition, so that their equal moral worth finds its public recognition in the equality of their political rights. Certainly, Kant does not seem to look favorably on social and political conditions that distribute wealth and opportunities to future generations, shaped by what Rawls would later call a social lottery. Kant makes this point clear in a passage perhaps insufficiently mobilized by interpreters who resist the idea that he is a hardcore libertarian:

> Having the resources to practice such [for the poor] benevolence as depends on the goods of fortune is, for the most part, a result of certain human beings favored through the injustice of the government, which introduces an inequality of wealth that makes others need their beneficence. Under such circumstances, does a rich man's help to the needy, on which he so readily prides himself as something meritorious, really deserve to be called beneficence at all?[23]

What worries me about Kant's account of Enlightenment is rather the absence, to my knowledge, of any awareness of the phenomenon to which we referred above: huge economic inequalities easily translate into appalling unequal political influence. The free public debate, on which everything rests, may be compromised by the way in which some groups influence it. Marx said that the dominant ideas in any historical period are those of the dominant class, and Gramsci famously elaborated on this with his illuminating notion of hegemony. I do not know whether they are entirely right, but even people like Habermas who rely on a free and unobstructed discourse as key to the well-functioning of a democracy were aware that the force of the better argument can emerge only if there are at least roughly equal forces that impede one group from steering the discussion in the direction that suits its interests.

Notice that the problem is not merely that rich people can fund campaigns so that their preferred candidate or party wins. Indeed, we know that rich people and big companies often fund competing candidates to ensure that whoever wins will have to respond to them to some extent. And this is another phenomenon that would explain why radical measures to fight excessive inequality are rarely even discussed. More importantly, the way in which money influences public discourse certainly does not stop at campaign financing. Thomas Christiano famously distinguished three basic mechanisms, in addition to campaign financing. It is perhaps important to recall them: 1) money as gatekeeper, 2) money as means for

[23] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 454.

influencing public and legislative opinion, and 3) money as independent political power. The distinctive characteristic of the first mechanism – money as gatekeeper – is that money sets the agenda for collective decision-making: "the interests and points of view of the affluent segments of society will be better represented in political campaigns than those of the less well off."[24] Money can also be used to influence public opinion, as happens with the second mechanism. The addressees are now citizens, not politicians or candidates. Money is used to highlight and boost (through advertising, for example) specific messages and to support the activities of lobbyists, think tanks, and intellectual activity in general. Finally, through the fourth mechanism, money does not operate in the process of collective decision-making, but as an independent constraint. Imagine a government doing something to pursue a democratically chosen aim, e.g., fair fiscal policies (the Zucman tax, for example). Affected large corporations can, for example, decrease (or threaten to decrease) investments in that country, thereby increasing unemployment and popular discontent with the government.[25]

Perhaps a personal anecdote here may illustrate the point. I was asked to write a piece for an Italian newspaper *(Il Sole24ore*) on the Zucman tax, given my interests in economic inequality. I wrote it and said what I think: that the tax is only a first step, yet a significant one. I also said that it is perhaps time to overcome the widespread idea that private property is untouchable even when the size of economic inequality alters democratic procedures and violates political equality. The newspaper's answer was that these ideas were "too militant." Perhaps it is not an accident that the newspaper is owned by the Italian association of entrepreneurs, but it would be a mistake to believe this is nothing but a defensive move by those who are interested in keeping these ideas from being publicly discussed. This "no principled limit to inequality" ideology is clearly something even progressive minds often subscribe to. As Gramsci would put it, it is a piece of the current hegemony: those who dominate have managed to convince the dominated ones that the basic rules that govern us are by and large just. But if democracies are backsliding because their public opinion is no longer able to correct, in fact even to articulate, our problems, is a philosopher who had so much faith in freedom of the press and in the self-correcting capacity of rational debate still a credible guide?

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[24] Christiano, "Money in Politics," 246.

[25] This is precisely what large investment funds are currently doing in Faria Lima – the Brazilian Wall Street – against the Lula government. Thanks to Alessandro Pinzani for this example. For an empirically informed analysis of how the richest 10% of the population in the USA have managed to avoid legislation against their interests in the last three decades see Gilens, Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics"; Gilens, Page, *Democracy in America?*

An orthodox Kantian might still say: yes! If the distortion you denounced is real, but scholars like you remain free to diagnose and discuss it in the public arena, then public opinion will, sooner or later, receive it, and elites will be forced to make room for the necessary reforms. Unfortunately, this reply seems to beg the question. If material conditions influence how public opinion is shaped, then one cannot expect the better argument to emerge. In fact, it does not, and people are left with the alternative between obeying and further growing anger and distrust in traditional channels of political representation. I do not have the solution to break the vicious circle. I am only saying that freedom of the press and the public use of reason may be insufficient tools against democratic backsliding and that unbounded material inequalities rig the democratic procedure and violate political equality.[26]

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to shape the best answer Kant could give to the obscurantism of our times. I have suggested that while only a superficial understanding of Kant's notion of Enlightenment can make him an accomplice of the decadence of the public discourse that social and other forces have generated, Kant's resources remain insufficient to hit the material precondition that disables a 'normal' solution of our problems through free debate and consequent political reforms. Perhaps to be enlightened today is mainly to become aware of the evident shortcomings of rational discourse. Reason may not be limited only in its ambition to know but also in its ability to improve our political reality. Sometimes change comes from unexpected events that expose the system's intrinsic injustice, or from the collapse of the *modus vivendi* on which it rests. It is hard to predict, obviously. Kant shaped a view in which people can really exit their state of immaturity and think for themselves without falling into the folly and rage to which social media have reduced the public sphere. However, he is perhaps not the best guide to understanding how we can get out of the bottle, given that the voices of scholars and intellectuals are far less powerful than those of those with immense resources to shape public opinion. One thing is certain: Enlightenment did not come merely with the promise of emancipation from immaturity. It also came with a strong commitment to equality, popular sovereignty, and freedom from oppression. Enlightenment today is mainly about finding new means, beyond

[26] A more detailed version of this argument is available in Alì, Caranti, "How Much Economic Inequality is Fair in Liberal Democracies?."

what Kant suggested, to ensure that liberal democracies stop their backsliding and resume the march toward the realization of those ideals. Less faith in rational debate, more political imagination and courage to win the hearts of disenchanted people. This would be my *motto* for the enlightenment we need today.

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