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Italian Philosophy from Abroad

Edited by Silvia Benso, Antonio Calcagno

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Essays

Introduction. Italian Philosophy from Abroad

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The past few years have attested to the emergence of a new area of interest among scholars of continental thought, namely, the increased presence and popularity of Italian philosophy. The reasons for this rise are varied, and we will not address or speculate on them here. Also, the very questions of what constitutes Italian philosophy, whether there even is a unified phenomenon such as Italian philosophy and if so, when did it begin, what characterizes and differentiates it, etc. are topics of debate and, at times, contention. Regardless of these issues, it is undeniable that the philosophical positions of contemporary Italian thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, and Antonio Negri, to name but a few, have gained prominence in recent philosophical discussions.

Although its origins, nature, figures, and defining features (if any) may remain up for debate, the tradition of Italian philosophical thought has a history, breadth, and width that go well beyond the recent popularity enjoyed by positions associated with what has become widely known as Italian Theory. One could think of important historical figures such as (just to name a few) Dante Alighieri, Marsilio Ficino, Niccoló Machiavelli, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei, Giambattista Vico, Benedetto Croce, and Antonio Gramsci. But also, and more recently, one could name the positions of Gianni Vattimo and his *pensiero debole*, Vincenzo Vitiello and his reflection on topology, Carlo Sini and his thought of practices, Massimo Cacciari and his negative politics and theology, Adriana Cavarero and Luisa Muraro and the thinking of difference, and the list could go on.

Yet, due in part to linguistic barriers, much of this philosophical work (especially the more recent material) has remained largely unknown outside of Italy, accessible to and accessed by only a small number of specialized scholars. To remedy in part this situation of a lack of knowledge and appreciation abroad and to provide a forum for wide conversations of a critical nature on the various aspects, themes, and figures that may be loosely gath-

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ered under the category of Italian philosophy, the Society for Italian Philosophy (SIP: https://www.societyforitalianphilosophy.org) was founded approximately four years ago outside of Italy, on the North–American continent. The primary goal of the Society is to promote Italian philosophy, broadly understood as consisting of both its historical content as well as its more recent expressions, inside as well as outside of Italy. The creative and impressive body of recent philosophical work in Italy over the last 40 years has and is continuing to have an impact around the world. This fruitful period of thinking is marked not only by the production of texts and ideas but also by intense debate, critique, and polemics. SIP's hope is that it can contribute to the further development of Italian philosophy by bringing it into contact with its others, not only the varied schools of Italian thought but also schools and ideas that lie outside the Italian framework, broadly understood.

The essays gathered in this volume of *Trópos* comprise a sample of the work carried out by SIP at its third international conference held at Stony Brook University, New York, March 28–30, 2019. After meeting on the North–American territory for the first three years (London, ON, Canada; Rochester, NY, USA; and Stony Brook, NY, USA), in 2020 SIP will meet at the University of Turin. This international gathering will be the first time the Society will meet in Italy. We are grateful to Professor Gaetano Chiurazzi, who will serve as the local host for the Turin gathering, for the kind invitation to showcase some of SIP's work here in *Trópos*. The essays we have collected represent, for the most part, work done outside of Italy, which now comes back into the Italian scholarly context, thereby facilitating a dialogue across oceans and testifying to the international movement that is Italian philosophy today. The essays gathered here do not follow any thematic order or sequence. They ought to be read as individual contributions to the conversation on Italian philosophy and its engagement with various interlocutors.

Embodied life and subjectivities are at the center of Silvia Benso's "Affirmative Biopolitics: Life, Love, and Politics in Lea Melandri." In this contribution, Benso offers an account of Lea Melandri's philosophical position, especially as it emerges from her fundamental book, *Love and Violence*, her only complete work accessible in English. Melandri's thought, centered on exposing the patriarchal traits that still characterize current dimensions of social and political life, aims at affirming a politics of life where individual, real subjects retain their embodied singularity and are not subsumed into the abstraction of concepts, universalities, and predetermined identities.

Alessandro Carrera's contribution, "The Restless Mind of Italian Humanism: On Massimo Cacciari's *La mente inquieta*," follows Cacciari's intention to emancipate fifteenth–century Italian humanism from the assumption that it was not real philosophy but rather philology and scholarship. By arguing that philology is philosophy and through an analysis of the role

that Fortune plays in the thought of various Italian humanists, Cacciari also brings to light the tragic component present in humanism, more specifically, in its unfulfilled longing for peace.

In "Organized Loneliness," Diane Enns brings Italian thinking into conversation with other important figures like Hannah Arendt on important social problems. Mass urbanization, the changing nature of work, and a globalized economy have dramatically altered sociality, resulting in what Enns, borrowing from Arendt, calls "organized loneliness." Franco "Bifo" Berardi's discussion of work, abstraction, and semiocapitalism are mined and analyzed in order to augment Arendt's deep insight. But Enns also notes that if we are to take Berardi's claims seriously, more is at stake than just the decline of community. Organized loneliness challenges the very possibility of worlding that Arendt sees as vital for the human condition.

Mark Epstein's contribution, "Preve's Uses of Lukàcs: Rethinking a Marxian Tradition," examines Costanzo Preve's use of György Lukács as both a provocation and foundation for Preve's own project of an ontology of the social being. The essay shows not only how Preve and Lukács are on opposite trajectories concerning the understanding and evaluation of the idealism–materialism continuum, but also how both thinkers share the need for a rethinking of the Marxian tradition that addresses aspects of social reproduction beyond economics.

Travis Holloway's essay, "A Strategy for a Democratic Future: Constituent or Destituent Power?," confronts the political question of the best strategy to employ for a democratic future. In conversation with recent work by Giorgio Agamben and, especially, The Invisible Committee, Holloway addresses aspects of the positions of those who invoke a constituent form of power that seeks to reform through constituent activities and demonstrations, and the positions of those who uphold destituent forms of power as a way to withdraw and dissolve the state through a lack of people's legitimation. Rather than simply considering the two forms as opposites, Holloway highlights the strengths and weaknesses of destituent political activities in terms of their possibilities of imagining a world where one lives otherwise, that is, not according to neoliberal, capitalistic, self–entrepreneurial lifestyles.

In "Should We Renounce Hegel? From Existentialism to Hermeneutics," Alberto Martinengo explores the relation between some of the most important representatives of Italian hermeneutics, namely Luigi Pareyson, Valerio Verra, and Gianni Vattimo, and Hegel's philosophical position with the aim of showing that the discussion of Hegel by the aforementioned thinkers is fully part of the origin and history of Italian philosophical hermeneutics, which lie far beyond the narrow limits of early twentieth–century Hegelianism.

Angelica Nuzzo's "Leopardi Beyond Spinoza: Hegel's Logic of Essence" makes the case that Giacomo Leopardi's *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese* (1824) and the late poem *La Ginestra* (1836) offer readers a deeper understanding of the freedom of Nature that moves beyond the controversial reading of Hegel's understanding of the Absolute as being similar to Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*. Nuzzo not only corrects the misreading of Hegel along Spinozist lines but also introduces a broader, more dynamic understanding of absolute freedom through the philosophical writings of Leopardi, a figure that in Italy as a philosopher, but which is seen more as a poet by Anglo–American readers. Nuzzo's essay captures a rich hallmark of Italian thought, namely, its engagement with literature and poetry, which are received as articulating profound philosophical insights.

The collection of essays concludes with Ariana Ragusa's "Tasting *Vino* with Vico: Full–Bodied Discourse," which creatively joins Giambattista Vico's account, in *The New Science*, of the origin and use of metaphors with a descriptive analysis of the experience of winetasting. Whereas Vico's narrative traces the birth and development of language to sight and hearing, the activity of winetasting, centered on the senses of taste and smell, supplements and expands Vico's linguistic considerations to the hedonic senses of taste, smell, and touch. Thus, Ragusa argues, winetasting offers a welcome enrichment of the human sensorial experience of embodiment, the earth, one another, and our own self.

As one can glimpse from these overviews of the essays contained in the current issue of *Trópos*, interest in Italian philosophy covers a broad range of content—from feminist themes to existential and political issues, from historic figures to more contemporary ones, from single authors to challenging conversations set up between Italian and non–Italian thinkers, from literature to philosophy. We, the editors, wish to thank the authors of the contributions for their willingness to let us reproduce their essays in this volume and give the readers of *Trópos* an additional sense of important thinking occurring within the context of Italian philosophy.

Italian Philosopy from Abroad

Affirmative Biopolitics:
Life, Love, and Politics in Lea Melandri

Silvia Benso*

Abstract

In this essay, I explore some crucial themes such as life, embodied experiences, the narrative self, the thinking body, all of which characterize the position of the Italian feminist writer, thinker, and activist Lea Melandri, as they emerge in her recently translated volume, *Love and Violence*. I also address her conviction of the hidden connection between love and violence, according to which men turn aggressive against the one who has first given them life, love, care, and sexual inspiration. The current "feminization" of the public space, which seems to soften the "war between the two sexes," is, for Melandri, an updated version of the centuries–long domination that has understood women in terms of biological life, domestic virtues, and sexual servitude. How does this "feminization" reflect on how life unfolds, and what possibilities does this entail for the creation of a different politics, named by Melandri "affirmative biopolitics" and centered on the thinking body?

Keywords: Melandri, Italian feminism, maternity, biopolitics, patriarchy, the body.

Lea Melandri (1941) is a prolific Italian writer, public intellectual, educator, and activist, who has been supporting feminist causes since the 1970s — a self–identified *storica del femminismo*, *storica* here indicates her role as both a historian of and a historical figure within the women's movement. Melandri's work is at once personal, lucid, provocative, suggestive, poetic, reflective, assertive, critical, unapologetic, timely, direct, denunciatory, and uncompromising. It includes short pamphlets, journal articles in daily newspapers and magazines, essays, and a dozen books.[1] Her presence

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1. See Lea Melandri, *L'infamia originaria* (Milan: L'erba voglio, 1977); *Lo strabismo della memoria* (Milan: La Tartaruga, 1991) *La mappa del cuore* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1992); *Migliaia di foglietti. Mineralogia del mondo interno* (Moby Dick, 1996); *L'erba voglio. Il desiderio dissidente*, ed. Lea Melandri (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1998); *Una visceralità indicibile. La pratica dell'inconscio nel movimento delle donne degli anni Settanta*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000); *Le passioni del corpo. La vicenda dei sessi tra origine e storia* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2001); *Come nasce il sogno d'amore* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002); *Preistorie. Di cronaca e d'altro* (Naples: Filema, 2004); *Il legame insospettabile tra amore e violenza*, with Stefano Ciccone, Arcidosso: Effigi, 2008; *Amore e violenza. Il fattore molesto della civiltà* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011); *L'attualità inattuale di Elvio Fachinelli,* ed. Lea Melandri (Milan: IPOC, 2014); *Alfabeto d'origine* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2017).

in the social, cultural, and public landscape is extensive. Nevertheless and regrettably, her name is infrequently acknowledged within the academic world (especially within philosophy, which she studied at the University of Bologna).

The volume *Love and Violence: The Vexatious Factors of Civilization* is the only complete work of Melandri's available in English.[2] The book is an effective presentation of her approach — a line of thinking that, in its frequent invocation of analyses and positions from 1970 feminism, may sound outdated, some may say. Yet and unfortunately so, this line of thinking has lost none of its currency within the context of the #Metoo movement, the continuous, unacknowledged violence, assaults, and micro–aggressions against women, and the recent threats to what seemed to be irrevocable victories of the women's movements of the earlier century. Briefly stated, Melandri's approach identifies in the power relation between the sexes and the patriarchal system it generates the root of all forms of violence — against women but also in general. This position is accompanied by the belief, which Melandri upholds, in the impossibility of working against an inherently patriarchal system from within the system: the organization in fact self–immunizes by inevitably contaminating, assimilating, and neutralizing dissidence — even differences become normalized by subjecting them to rules, policies, and best practices. Embodied differences become abstract identities under the rule of law. It is the return of patriarchy under the pretension of democratic thought, which then reveals its systematizing nature in the spreading of various forms of populism, intolerance, and xenophobia. Its "dispositifs" change, but the law of the Father does not seem to pass.

Always external to the (especially traditionally academic) system, for over forty years Melandri has maintained her vivacious, exhilarating, and uncompromised voice. Through it, in public debates, encounters, and on the social media, she persuasively reminds us that when it comes to women's issues, nothing can ever be taken for granted as long as we move within the system of patriarchy. Capitalism, neoliberalism, and (I want to add) globalization and the related racisms, nationalisms, nativisms, identitarianisms, and sovereignisms are but the most recent configurations of such ages–old patriarchal structures. The cost Melandri has not heedlessly paid for her position of exteriority is that the system she denounces has marginalized, ignored, and even obliterated her because of her non–assimilability. The advantage is that her voice is still free to express itself with the intact ingenuity of her beginnings in the 1970s, to which she has remained loyal. In that ingenuity lies her timeliness, I argue; and this is what I wish to survey

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2. Lea Melandri, *Love and Violence: The Vexatious Factors of Civilization*, trans. Antonio Calcagno (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019). I will refer to this text as LV.

— without a thesis of my own but with a desire to bring up to focus and discussion the relevance of Melandri's approach.

1. Embodied Life

Love and Violence confronts the reader with a peculiar form of writing that, in the sequence of chapters apparently unrelated but in fact tied together by the activity of the reflecting self, intertwines personally lived experiences (*il vissuto*) and cultural analyses from a variety of angles. Curiously enough, despite her philosophical training, philosophers rarely make an extended appearance in Melandri's narrative; when they do (Nietzsche, Marx, Agamben, Esposito), their thinking is deployed more in a suggestive sense rather than in sustained confrontations. This deliberate practice of writing uses a technique similar to the stream of consciousness as a way to explore the most intimate, secret, unconfessed and, therefore, intricate aspects of life (both one's own and society's) as they leave their mark on the embodied experience, and to which the writing self is called to listen. In the language of 1970 feminism, this was called *pratica dell'autocoscienza* (consciousness–raising practices). It is a writing of and by embodied life, possibly a bio–writing in which life writes itself on the embodied experiences of the reflecting self (this is different from the autobiographical style though, which takes a distanced, detached attitude toward life, even one's own). Melandri calls this narrative style "the salvific bilinguism of the political culture of women" (LV 129): the ability to "reason [. . .] with our deep memory, the intimate language of infancy, and, simultaneously with words, the language of social life, work, and institution" (LV 135). It is a way to tie together the personal and the political, the individual and the universal in a modality that does not preempt embodied individuality; rather her narrative style sees life as the nourishment, the thread, the life of thought — a genuinely living thought (to cite the title of a recent work by Roberto Esposito).[3] Melandri does not write *about* or *of* life, in the theoretical distance (which is also a luxury) provided by traditional philosophy; she writes life as life writes itself in her embodied existence: with passion, humility, and honesty.

In conformity with this bio–style, several passages of the volume, scattered here and there where the overarching narrative calls for them, offer a theoretical as well as a historical analysis of the trajectory of the life of Italian feminism since the 1970s. These are the years when, after "fleeing uncomfortable country roots," an unwelcome marriage, and a profession

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3. Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

as a school teacher, Melandri arrives in Milan, the "place of [her] rebirth," a city that appears to her as a maternal body — not shielding and familiar, as some analyses would have it, but rather "dilated and anonymous" (LV III). Melandri's attitude toward the notion of maternity or the maternal, extolled by other women writers such as Luisa Muraro and Luce Irigaray, will always remain problematic, and could be the theme of a (perhaps comparative) account of its own.[4]

When the Italian feminist movements of the 1970s attempt to expand in the mid– to late 1980s — from small consciousness–raising groups and collectives to an infiltration into the broader cultural and political institutions of the time — Melandri notes that a three–fold fragmentation occurs. The fragmentation corresponds to three different strategies of dealing with women's issues.

The first approach aimed to introduce into the academic world new and equalizing epistemic contents and forms that could renovate strictly regimented disciplines and advance alternative models and paradigms for studying, learning, and producing knowledge. In the rest of the world, such transformational strategies of epistemic decanonization (or decolonization) produced so–called gender studies programs, which, however, remained almost entirely absent within the male–dominated world of Italian universities, which continued and largely continues to prevail in form and content. Melandri deliberately avoided these academic endeavors because, she argues, institutionalization means inevitably the violence of normalization.[5]

A second approach, Melandri's analysis continues, preferred focusing on the creation of a woman identity through the development of a distinct symbolic order, a separate tradition of women's authority and language upon which to found a uniquely feminine subjectivity. This is the so–called *pensiero della differenza* (thought of difference), which has been very popular in Italy even before and independently of Luce Irigaray's own version of it, and sees some of its most renowned representatives in Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero, the latter of whom also succeeded in entering the academic world prominently. Melandri is, however, critical of this position because of what she reads as its essentializing drift, which is perhaps comforting because of the traditionally reassuring roles it assigns to women as mothers, nurturers, and care–takers, yet it is problematic, from Melandri's

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4. See especially, within Italian feminist thinkers, Luisa Muraro, *The Symbolic Order of the Mother*, trans. Francesca Novello (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018).

5. Yet, she actively participated and still participates in mainly extra–institutional, self–regulating, anti–authoritarian educational settings — from public debates to daycare facilities to alternative journals to the Libera Università delle Donne in Milan (the Women's Free University), to her "networking" on the social media — all initiatives that are situated outside, external to (and therefore non–supportive of) dominating structures.

perspective, because of the overall justification it allegedly provides for existing power relations, which remain basically unchallenged and unchanged.

Equality or difference are the conceptual categories under which Melandri captures the distinct overall approaches of the two feminist groups that are focused, in the mid–eighties, on effecting change and transformation. Yet the very alternative between equality, which "gender studies" wish to attain within the epistemic and then largely cultural realm, and difference, which the "thought of difference" aims at establishing as a legitimate standpoint from which to unfold an alternative model of subjectivity and feminine identity, is, for Melandri, a false option. The contrast emerges only within an already binary, dualistic way of approaching life. More poignantly, "this binary presents a false dichotomy imposed upon women by male power" (LV 67), Melandri argues. As such, the dichotomy has to be examined, unveiled, and ultimately opposed as part of the way of thinking that creates the problem of women's subordination in the first place.

The goal, from Melandri's standpoint, is not to emancipate women while remaining within a system of power that maintains male structures, modes, and models of thinking and behaving. As she says with respect to the thinking of sexual difference, the idea of "a specifically female 'nature' or gender" is "an idea deployed by men in order to confine women to a minority social, legal, and political status" (LV 67). Emancipation, based on concepts of rights and equality that are in fact male constructs, confirms the system, which allows emancipation to exist as a form of self–inoculation. As such, it is opposed by Melandri with the idea of "liberation." The task is that of liberating oneself, whether man or woman, from complicity with the male, patriarchal way of thinking that operates through dualisms, that denies the other in order to assert itself, that asserts itself in order to deny the other, ultimately, that proceeds through a dialectic that denies the third because it considers it already implied in the one and the two, understood in an opposition for which the notions of complementarity, harmony, and fusion of the sexes are simply the more peaceful (and yet devastating) aspect. As Melandri captures in the title of the concluding chapter of her book, the goal is an "unavoidable revolution"[6] — not a reformation — of the male structures of power. Everything has to go for things truly to change

Thus, in the 1980s, Melandri chooses the approach of a third group of women beyond both the vindication of difference and the establishment of gender equality. This group of women remained interested in a less academic, more activist approach that intertwines thinking and doing, reflection and action and remains loyal, in Melandri's words, to:

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6. "Inevitabile" is what Calcagno translates as "unstoppable" (LV 111).

> The practices out of which feminism had grown: examination of the connections between politics and life, between self–knowledge and the other forms of discourse that we had imbibed. They sought a self–awareness capable of interrogating traditional forms of knowledge and the established powers of public life, and they called for a "geography rather than a genealogy," a kind of knowing able and willing to enter "disturbing landscapes" and unafraid to plumb male–female relations in all of their complexities and contradictions (LV 133–134).

This path privileges what Melandri names "the thinking body." The thinking body expresses a self–aware and embodied subject, individual, and person that, on the one hand, rebels against abstract concepts of identity as subjectivity, individuality, and personhood and, on the other, is antecedent to, rejecting, resisting, and immune to all dualisms that are in fact imposed by the patriarchal order. As such, the thinking body is therefore capable of joining politics and life in what Melandri qualifies as an "affirmative biopolitics" (LV 129): a politics of life that is life affirming.[7]

2. The Body, Geography, and Biopolitics

The theme of the body is, of course, one of the centerpieces of the 1970s feminist movements, which elevated the body, sexuality, and the bodily conditions of life that constitute the lived experience of the individuals to be one of the main points of their programs. This form of feminism made the private (the home, the family, procreative issues, the education of children, the care of the elderly) not "a women's question" but a public, political issue. A geography of the body (that is, a cartography of embodied presence) and not a genealogy is what Melandri claims to be interested in. The body that feminists make the topic of their geography is certainly not the Cartesian body reduced to sheer, measurable, quantitative extension; but it is not even the body reduced to mere organism, naturalized, and inserted into a biochemical view of life.

With respect to the theme of the body, Melandri's position seems particularly interesting, first, with respect to somewhat related, current analyses carried out by thinkers such as Foucault and Agamben about the reduction of the human being to a biological organism or bare life on which to exercise policing functions; and second, with respect to the emphasis on the maternal body as a positive metaphorical or symbolic model for

7. The polemical reference is, of course, to the recent popularity of biopolitical analyses inspired by Foucault and carried on, among others, by thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito.

ontological, socio–political, and ethical relations proposed by thinkers as varied as Muraro and Irigaray but also Levinas among others.[8]

With respect to a thinker such as Agamben, Melandri describes his thinking as a "lucid analysis of the birth of the *polis* (that is, how the abstract figure of the biological body is produced and deployed)» out of a schism that opposes thought to body and transforms the singularity of all human beings into a relation between sovereign power and life bereft of humanity. Yet, despite his lucidity, Melandri exposes also the inadequacy of Agamben's position. His limitation lies in the fact that he:

> Did not see the vehement conviction with which the son–man [*uomo–figlio*] believes himself to be different from the body that delivered him into the world — a body identified with a "lower" nature, with animality, and, consequently, a body understood as the very repository of its own heritage is imbricated with and mistaken for the process of socialization (LV 4).

In other words, what Agamben neglects to account for is, in Melandri's reading, the fact that the exclusion of the body on which civilization founds itself is in actuality the exclusion not of the biological body or of "anyone's" body but of the "motherly" body, an already acultured body. The "bare life" that biopolitics denigrates and controls is not simply dehumanized life but rather the domestic life, marked by the invisibility, exploitation, and alienation with which the woman's body has traditionally been associated. The human community, for Melandri, originates in a previous power struggle between the sexes that results in the male's alienation and escape from the female body with which the male subject was, "between the coitus and birth" (or between origin and history), in an indiscernible / seamless unity. Such unity is what he now needs to reject in order to find his autonomy but for which he nevertheless longs as the originary, primordial unity that he therefore idealizes. Briefly stated, Agamben's analysis of biopolitical power forgets the more fundamentally sexed and gendered character of the body over which biopolitics primarily exercises itself in order to assert sovereignty, which remains male sovereignty. Agamben ignores that biopolitics is rooted in the already historical relation between sexes that plays itself out through the woman's body as the giver of life.[9]

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8. On some of the Italian women thinkers giving a central role to maternity, see *Another Mother: Diotima and the Symbolic Order of Italian Feminism*, ed. C. Casarino and A. Righi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018). With respect to Levinas, see for example the role played by the figure of maternity in Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981).

9. As Melandri explains in a section of *Love and Violence* titled "The Armed Defenselessness of the Son–Man [*uomo–figlio*]", in order to fully celebrate his autonomy, his freedom in the public sphere, man has had to "annihilate the biological chains of his birth from a female body and from all

There is an original violence that men perpetrate on women and that is intertwined with the very concept of love. Such violence between the sexes, which also explains subsequent forms of social violence against women, stems from men's perceived sense of weakness and marginality in the generative process, which men do not control. This sense of powerlessness is then covered up by men through the creation of gender roles of the kind we have known throughout history and which condemn women's bodies to their gendered role as nourishing mothers (wives, and daughters). Such reductions go hand in hand with men's attempt at distinguishing themselves from nature and animality while attributing to themselves the realms of morality and history. The reductions that successfully create the dualisms between nature and culture, biology and history, animal and human are therefore preceded by another dualism — that between the sexes — which associates nature, biology, and animality with women and culture, history, and humanity with men. The naturalization of the body is the colonization of the woman's body, which is itself a cultural operation.

For Melandri, then, gender dualism is not itself originay but rather the result of one (the male) sex's own attempt at dominating the body from which one receives life. At the origin is the body, not as difference but as possibility, ground for differentiation, of which the sexual difference understood as male–female is simply one form. In this sense, the body of the origin is the generative body antecedent to all dualisms: the dualism of the genders, because the generative body contains both unity and multiplicity, selfsameness and otherness, but also the dualism that separates the body from the activity of thinking, consciousness, and self–consciousness. Thus, the body of the origin is the thinking body, an embodied self in which one's own self–consciousness is rooted in one's own life or lived experiences. It is, one could say, the body as *aporia*, as that which contains within itself as its innermost possibilities both birth and death, love and hate, caring and aggressiveness. It is the body as "power of life," as generative, creative ability but not thereby necessarily as a maternal body according to the role of the mother, which is gendered, that is, the socio–historical result of male predominance and subjugation of the female body for the reasons indicated above. It is the body as *chora*, as "the bottomless well" that dissolves clear representations, fixed concepts, unities, and universalities.

what that body represents for him: fragility, mortality, his early dependence on his mother. Although men exalt women in their imagination, they have projected their own weakness, guilt, and all that belongs to the heritage of our animal nature, including our limits as living beings, onto women. In order to degrade maternal and erotic power, man has forced woman to live a mirrored life, to embody and become his fears and desires, to be simultaneously glorified and subjugated" (LV 88; trans. modified).

To speak of the body in terms of maternal body, as various feminists have done and still do, is, for Melandri, still to remain captive of the rhetoric that understands the body in terms of dualisms between a male and a female sex with already specified roles. More specifically, the rhetoric of the maternal is functional to the desire of the son to both be nurtured by the mother in the unity of the womb and yet to assert his own independence by necessarily eliminating or subordinating the mother.

The privileged connection mother–son, which Melandri explores with the help of psychoanalysis, simultaneously invokes the complementarity of the sexes, from which the son derives, and asserts the necessary exclusion of the maternal principle so that the son can assert itself. Together with this exclusion is the vilification of the body, assimilated with the biological and excluded from the political realm except for its masculinized form. But the masculinized, virile body, Melandri claims, is a body that in fact is no longer a body because it has erased its connection with life, sensuality, passions, and emotions.

Melandri's criticism of the maternal model is especially timely when it is read side by side with her parallel critique of the current feminization of work and politics, *il fattore D[onna]* or the W(oman)–factor, as Melandri names it. Current appeals to the introduction of models of "feminine virtues" into the work environment as ways to render such an environment more humane are heard frequently. Yet, for Melandri, all such appeals fall into the old trap of supporting that which in fact causes subordination in the first place. The feminization of the workplace and the political realm through the invocation of notions of service, caring, mentoring, work–family balance, etc., in truth perpetuates the ancient association between woman and nature / nurture; even more gravely, it prevents actual women from developing their own, independent mode of identity and subjectivity. By duplicating and projecting onto the traditionally male world of politics and the public sphere old images of care and nourishment, the system, which persists as male–dominated, legitimizes, by giving it a political place, the traditional function of the mother, daughter, and wife, now extended to the public sphere. Thus, far from altering the current male dominated system, its feminization confirms and reinstitutes women in the traditional, stereotypical roles assigned to them by that same system of domination and subordination. Moreover, such a feminization risks duplicating the aspects of invisibility and gratuitousness of women's domestic work; care and love cannot be monetized, and the productivity of the mother in generating and raising children is left unpaid. Hence, "motherly virtues" come as cheap, highly desirable items for the capitalist, neoliberalist economy geared toward high profit at low cost or, in other words, exploitation of traditional feminine virtues presented as natural, in truth, imposed.

Analogously, the body that is present in its glamorized form everywhere in the media, in politics, in society, is not the celebration of the embodied self and the body, their return on the scene of exclusion; rather, it is the generalized exhibition of their vilification. What is displayed is, in fact, a pornographic body, a body that, under the pretense of its emancipation, has been objectified, conformed, and enslaved to match the needs, expectations, and configurations of male desire. Once again, it is a body subjugated by the patriarchal system, which has disguised its contempt for the female body under the deception of its glorification and public admiration. To emancipate the body from the puritanism of previous eras is not yet to liberate its possibilities outside of the forced roles and images that have been imposed on it. As Melandri says with respect to maternity, it is only when motherhood is liberated from the patriarchal roles that have been assigned to it, when it is not expected as natural that it can be freely chosen — both as a possibility and in the modes of its manifestation and practices.

3. Affirmative Biopolitics

Recurrent violence against women and both overt and unconscious misogyny is what Melandri observes as still operational at all levels of social, political, economic, and cultural life. Women are often unsuspecting accomplices of the situation because of a long–history of internalization of gendered roles that makes them appear as natural when they are instead imposed. Against this, Melandri advocates (and actively works) for a radical politics that goes to the roots of the human. At such roots, we find the complex story of the power relation between the sexes, which is what needs to be unveiled, that is, exposed and recognized, before moving forward. Such a politics is, with a term shared with Foucault and Agamben but with a radicalized content, "an affirmative biopolitics." The beginnings of it are retraced by Melandri in the non–authoritarian and feminist movements of the 1970s, to which it is thus important to return (LV 129) and which Melandri herself has never left. In Melandri's interpretation, an affirmative biopolitics means "a politics that accord[s] a greater role to the body, a politics that question[s] experience and underst[ands] subjectivity as located in the thinking, sexed, and plural body" (LV 129). This form of subjectivity is for Melandri based on "the freedom to be," which is also the freedom to be different, free from imposed laws, roles, and models of behavior, feeling, desiring, thinking, and acting. Ultimately, it is the ability not to neglect any one part of oneself, to be complete as an individual "whose thought is embodied and sexed" (LV 131). It means not to have to choose between dualisms — of sex, gender, and otherwise — as if they were the only alternative, as if

they were part of an alternative, whether the alternative between the body and the mind, one's reason and one's passions, one's domestic life and the political sphere, feminine and masculine roles and virtues. Ultimately, an affirmative biopolitics is, for Melandri, one that is "capable of producing an underdetermined subjectivity and a politics not only 'based on' life but "of" life" (LV 15).

The Restless Mind of Italian Humanism:
On Massimo Cacciari's *La mente inquieta*

Alessandro Carrera[*]

Abstract

Massimo Cacciari's *La mente inquieta* [*The Restless Mind*], first published in 2016 as an introduction to *Umanisti italiani. Pensiero e destino* [*Italian Humanists: Thought and Fate*], is now being reprinted as a separate book with some additions. Cacciari's intention is to emancipate fifteenth–century humanism from the Heideggerian and post–Heideggerian assumption that it was not real philosophy and nothing more than philology and erudition, marred by an anthropocentric, essentialistic ideology about what "man" is or is supposed to be. Cacciari's argument is that philology "is" philosophy; it was so from Valla to Vico, and from Leopardi to Nietzsche. By re–reading Valla, Alberti, Ficino, and Pico in this light, Cacciari deemphasizes the anthropocentric reading of humanism and brings to light its internal tension, its fundamental "insecurity." There is a tragic component in humanism. It struggles, on the one hand, to harmonize the classical tradition and the Christian heritage and, on the other, to come to terms with the impossibility of harmonizing the city at both the philosophical and the political level. A "tragic" and unfulfilled longing for "peace" runs through the humanistic debate of the fifteenth–century up to Savonarola's failed attempt to a radical reform of faith and politics.

Keywords: Alberti, Fortuna, humanism, Pico, possibility, virtuality.

For a long time, and certainly after the political unification of Italy, fifteenth–century Italian writers, philosophers, and intellectuals did not enjoy a good reputation in their own country. At the height of the Risorgimento and immediately afterwards, when the imperative was to portray Italian culture as "one" and always striving toward the geographical and political unity to come (to show, in other words, that Italy had always existed and its cultural continuity had never faltered), the cultural figures of the *Quattrocento* seemed to fail the task of representing Italy, and their reputation in the newborn kingdom was not very high. Regardless of the high opinion that Hegel expressed toward Italian humanism in his lessons on the history of philosophy (an endorsement that, alone, should have had the Italian Hegelians think twice about the matter), the humanists were

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hastily grouped under the rubrics of grammarians, rhetoricians, philologists at best, or just minor *literati* (it was a century without poetry, it was said). Being categorized in every field except philosophy definitely did not help their reputation in an environment where philosophy was endowed with an idealist supremacy.

As Rocco Rubini has noted in his highly documented *The Other Renaissance*, hardly anyone wanted to be related to historical figures who had not shown national feelings and who, seemingly sheltered in their disciplines, even seemed content of the intellectual segregation in which they lived.[1] Moreover, what lineage had they left? There were Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, but where were their followers, where was their school to be found? Likewise, one could ask where the followers of Tommaso Campanella or Giordano Bruno were. In the history of Italian philosophy, one had to wait until Giambattista Vico came along for a Vichian genealogy to be acknowledged. And even in that case, it took time.

If the first "Vichian" of European repute was Jules Michelet (thanks, however, to Vincenzo Cuoco and Francesco Salfi), the first "Brunian" was Schelling with his dialogue *Bruno* (1802). For a revival of Bruno on the Italian soil, we must wait for Bertrando Spaventa.[2] Bruno, however, has only a distant relationship with humanism, and he is removed from the Renaissance too.

A recent re–assessment of the difficult legacy of *Quattrocento* humanism comes from Massimo Cacciari's *La mente inquieta* [*The Restless Mind*].[3] Originally written for the seminal anthology *Umanisti italiani*, published in 2016,[4] Cacciari's introductory essay has now been revised, augmented, and published as an independent book.

Cacciari is not afraid to look back at the now worn–out *Quattrocento* diatribe that started after World War II. Against Oskar Kristeller's negative judgement (according to which the Italian fifteenth century did not produce a philosophy, not even according to the most generous standards), Eugenio Garin and Cesare Vasoli attempted a serious re–evaluation. This was certainly done in the name of historicist continuity, but also with a deep appreciation for the original contributions of thought in an age that, to many, seemed to have spent all its strength (but what strength it was!) in painting and architecture, leaving nothing to speculation.

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1. Rocco Rubini, *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism Between Hegel and Heidegger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 1–20.

2. Luca Oliva has recently traced Bruno's reception in Italy in *L'ontologia della materia. Giordano Bruno tra Otto e Novecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018).

3. Massimo Cacciari, *La mente inquieta. Saggio sull'umanesimo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2019).

4. Raphael Ebgi, ed., *Umanisti italiani. Pensiero e destino* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016).

Is this dispute not buried now under the weight of mere historiography? Cacciari wants to show that this is not the case. And if he takes the side of Garin and Vasoli, it is certainly not in the name of rediscovered historicism, but rather to clear away any doubts. The humanism of the fifteenth century is not "waiting" to be re–evaluated, because its importance cannot even be doubted. The goal is neither to return to a generic Germanic *Humanismus* nor to reactivate the old controversy between Sartre's *humanisme* and Heidegger's seemingly definitive criticism (a controversy that in fact precedes the Kristeller–Garin–Vasoli disagreement). Rather, the point is to show that all that grammar and rhetoric that kept the *literati* of that distant century busy was meant to give the foundation to a new ontology of language. At the same time, the matter is to highlight the necessity that such ontology be grounded in the actual practice of philology and, if we can use a modern term, of general linguistics.

The basis of this new ontology (it does not matter that it was never systematized) consists in the awareness that language is irreducible to any easy theory that reduces to a mere instrument at the service of the human will. Cacciari proposes therefore to read the *Quattrocento* humanists against the rhetoric of humanism, as philosophers of language, not in spite of their philological concerns but precisely because of them, and as thinkers who have faced the unfathomable essence of language with the same "restless mind" of Seneca (*mobilis et inquieta homini mens data est*) and perhaps, we add, with the same *inquietum cor nostrum* of Augustine. Pushing Cacciari's suggestion even further, we could say that philological humanism was the deconstructionism of the fifteenth century and, at the same time, it was much more. On the one hand, Lorenzo Valla's linguistic analysis showed how the medieval ontology was marred by an insufficient understanding of grammar (in the Middle Ages, they were inclined to forget that "being," "ens," is first and foremost a participle). On the other hand, Valla's work, together with others', highlighted how language strives towards the Truth that is nonetheless independent from the empirical language in which Truth itself is embodied. Like Spirit, Truth acts where it wants, in the language and in the historical epochs it wants. This freeing of Truth from a privileged language (from the language of Revelation, that is) made possible the grafting of classicism onto Christianity, which was the heart of the humanistic enterprise.

We must therefore re–read the classics with new eyes, from Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (for everything begins with Dante' "linguistic turn") to Petrarch and then up to Savonarola, which is to say the point of catastrophe of the entire humanistic project. Cacciari's thesis is in fact that humanism is in its essence a tragic philosophy. Covering the distance that separates Athens from Jerusalem in view of a cosmic renewal (*renovatio*) was an infinite task

(literally: a task that could not end), desperate in many ways and with full awareness of the tragedy it faced. Humanism wished to be a philosophy of Peace and Concord. Yet, already in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government*, painted less than twenty years after Dante's death, Peace is an isolated figure, languidly laying down on a couch with an olive branch in her hand and nobody paying any attention to her. Humanistic peace was, to be sure, a "philosophy" of peace, a "theory" of peace rather than a political project; yet a philosophical peace between the classical heritage and Christianity as well as a theological peace between Roman Catholicism and the East–West Schism (not to mention the Western Schism of 1378—1417) was the necessary prelude to any politics of peace. Or, at least, that was the hope.

Such hope was put to the test during Savonarola's years in Florence, and it failed. Ficino's change of heart — first a supporter of the terrible Dominican and then his fiercest denier — gives us the measure of the bitter disappointment experienced by intellectuals and common folk alike. The legacy of the humanistic project was then collected by Machiavelli, certainly no longer as a philosophy of Peace, and its tragic side was now in full view.

But the tragedy of humanism did not emerge from the political–religious failure in Florence; it predated it. Cacciari's main argument is how inherently tragic the philosophical anthropology of humanism already was — and if it was not, it became so after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Leon Battista Alberti's trajectory from the solid optimism of *Intercoenales* and *De Familia* to the desperate but lucid account of human affairs in *Momus* and *Theogenius* is the case in point. From Alberti's *Theogenius* to Machiavelli's *Asino*, human beings are *incurabiles*, and their restlessness, which is also the source of their glory, cannot be "healed." The worst that human beings can do will have to take its place alongside the good that comes from them. The contradiction is tragic yet essential for it cannot be overcome, and here is where anthropology rises up to philosophy. The charge of anthropocentrism always leveled against Italian humanism, having Pico as its favorite target, must be not just lessened but dismissed altogether. If human beings stand at the center of creation, halfway between beast and angel, then humans are constantly torn apart, in a true Dantesque fashion, between the two opposite natures, without the possibility to release the internal and external tension. Human beings are "miraculous," yet every miracle is terrifying in its own way; and human beings are miraculous in their misery as well as in their triumph.

Where, however, the *Quattrocento* humanists reached their philosophical peak was in their treatment of *fortuna* [fortune, luck, chance]. Cacciari points out how in his *Disputationes*, Pico includes *fortuna* within his non–systematic "system" by highlighting both sides of the issue: on the one

hand, the world is not ruled by *tyche, fatum, casus, fortuna*. There is a Mind at work, after all. On the other hand, sheltering human beings from *fortuna* is just impossible. Pico's aporia, roughly the same that Alberti had subjected to an allegorical treatment in *Momus*, stretches back to the past and moves forward to the future, from Dante to Machiavelli.

It is not out of place, therefore, to expand on Cacciari's acute analysis of Pico's and make an attempt to turn *Fortuna* (fortune, luck, chance) into a category of "active nihilism" (Nietzsche's terminology) that did not bog down the Human Being — whatever the Human Being was and was not — but, on the contrary, spurred the Italian Renaissance as much as predestination spurred Protestant capitalism (and if Italian Renaissance ultimately failed in the political arena, it was not for lack of *Fortuna*; planetary forces were at play that overwhelmed any game of chances).

Again, we must begin with Dante. In *Inferno* VII, 70–90, Dante attempted (in Boethius' and Brunetto Latini's wake) to recruit the ancient blind force (*fortuna imperatrix mundi*, fortune, the empress of the world) as an assistant to Divine Providence. Yet Virgil, who pronounces the speech honoring *Fortuna*, does not sound entirely convinced, nor does Dante. The very notion of *Fortuna* is uncomfortable within the boundaries of a divine plan. But later on, as soon as fortune was de–theologized, it generated an astonishing amount of active or productive nihilism by means of assessing the sum of chance, risk, multiplicity, and unpredictability that a society needs in order to thrive, fail, try again, succeed, or fail again.

Fortune's underlying assumption is that the essence and the agency of the human being are undecided, oscillating, everything and nothing at the same time, and that the world has not been judged yet. Dante broke the ground by having a figure from classical antiquity openly praise fortune as an angelic intelligence in an admittedly problematic Christian context. Others followed in their own terms: Petrarch in *De Remediis Utrusque Fortunae*; Boccaccio in *Decameron*, Day Two, where fortune is the thread that provides an appearance of destiny,[5] and mostly Alberti, whose treatment of fortune paves the way to Pico's *Disputationes* and Machiavelli's *Asino* and *The Prince*. In Alberti's *Theogenius*, the question is, How can we defend ourselves from unfair, mean fortune after we realize that "we" indeed are the first culprits of our misfortunes — because of our ingrained restlessness, never satisfied

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5.   See Charles M. Radding, "Fortune and Her Wheel: The Meaning of a Medieval Symbol," *Mediaevistik*, 5, 1992: 127–138; F. Petrarch, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 5 vols., trans. C.H. Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Ciabattoni, "Decameron 2: Filomena's Rule between Fortune and Human Agency," *Annali d'Italianistica* 31, 2013: 173–196; Marchesi, *Boccaccio on Fortune (De casibus virorum illustrium)*, in Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr eds., *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 245–54.

with the present things and always "hanging on varied expectations" (an anticipation of Cassius', "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars?").[6]

The link that connects fortune and active–productive nihilism is less theoretical than practical. It is nonetheless philosophical, as it belongs to practical reason and it is a matter of ethics. To be precise, it is an ethics of the void that opens ahead of our steps every time we try to put the perfect world of theory into practice. "In theory," everything works fine. In practice, fortune spins the wheel, reducing theory to nothing. Yet fortune is not nothing; it is present, alive, and active everywhere. It shows, however, the *quantum* of nothingness that is inherent to all human enterprises, the bridge that human endeavors will never cross, lest they fall into the abyss of absolute *nihil*.

By making nothingness visible, fortune makes it a companion and a corrective to human action, which is successful, when it so happens, precisely by incorporating fortune's unpredictability together with the nothingness that comes with it. Otherwise (Cacciari's observation), why would the Romans, tempered by their harsh discipline, build so many temples to the goddess *Fortuna*? The expectation that we, humans, can change the entire fabric of reality may be already nihilistic at its core. The destructiveness inherent in human action cannot be reversed into an all–encompassing productivity, which would be another nihilistic myth. This is where fortune intervenes. Rather than just causing human agency to fail, fortune protects the same agency from its own nihilism. For fortune is not chaos; on the contrary, it gives chaos a shape and perhaps a destiny. It is the transcendental limit of human action, the quintessential unpolitical force, and, most of all, a *katéchon* that keeps human *hybris* at bay.

In the brief introduction to *La mente inquieta*, Cacciari observes that humanism is definitely less "modern" and therefore much deeper than contemporary "Italian Theory." It is a brief observation, almost a punchline — a jab, indeed — that deserves to be taken seriously and dealt with elsewhere. A new reflection on humanism, however, can make us aware of the many ways in which the cluster of philosophical production known as Italian Theory can meet its internal deadlocks, which can be summarized — if I may venture to say it — as an insufficient distinction between potentiality and virtuality. The tragic nature of human beings does not put them in a deadlock when it comes to action. It is not tragedy that leads to impotence; what leads to impotence is the complacent contemplation of the endless possibilities of possibility itself. In *Purgatory* XXX, 115–117, when Beatrice

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6. *Sempre suspesi a varie espettazioni*; see Leon Battista Alberti, *Theogenius*, in *Opere Volgari*, ed. Cecil Grayson (Bari: Laterza, 1966), vol. II; Progetto Manuzio electronic edition, 17; author's translation.

says that Dante was such, "virtually," that any propensity in him would have succeeded (*questi fu tal ne la sua vita nova / virtüalmente, ch'ogne abito destro / fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova*), she is not saying that Dante as a young man "had potential," as if he were a student who could do better if he just put more effort in it. She is saying that his virtues were all present, already at work, when he decided to change his path.

A reappraisal of virtuality (not "everything is possible," but "everything is already here," in full display, and it is up to us to activate it, always knowing that fortune — "she" is already here as well — may thwart our plans at any moment) is the end of theory and the beginning of action — be it artistic, ethical, or political.

Organized Loneliness

DIANE ENNS*

Abstract

The point of departure in this essay is Hannah Arendt's intriguing reference to "organized loneliness" at the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. If loneliness is a unique experience of psychological suffering fundamental to human life, *organized* loneliness threatens our very existence for it systematizes the isolation produced by totalitarianism to suppress solidarity and action. I will argue that the concept of organized loneliness has never been more relevant, though its conditions have changed, and no one elaborates these conditions as effectively and urgently as Franco Berardi. Loneliness under "high–tech capitalism" is one of many psychosocial symptoms resulting from the erosion of empathy and sensitivity, social media–fed mass conformity, and the severe isolation caused by our competitive, precarious and flexible work environments. Bringing together the insights of these two remarkable thinkers will help us understand the danger — at once psychological, social and political — of our contemporary loneliness.

Keywords: Loneliness, totalitarianism, technology, capitalism, social media, Arendt, Berardi.

Philosophers do not often address the theme of loneliness. We may discover it between the lines of a philosophical work or speculate on the loneliness of its author, but as an experience worthy of philosophical reflection, loneliness rarely makes an appearance. Solitude is another matter; since thinking demands it, and since the thinker takes some pleasure in it, we should not be surprised that philosophers write moving tributes to solitude. Thinking about loneliness, however — that painful experience of feeling isolated from others whether one is alone or not — is generally left to the psychologists or the poets.

Two exceptions to this philosophical neglect are Hannah Arendt and Franco "Bifo" Berardi. In her remarkable conclusion to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt makes a provocative reference to "organized loneliness." She is alluding to the systematization of an experience she believes is normally suffered in marginal circumstances like old age. Organized loneliness is systemic, produced by the isolation that twentieth–century totalitarian regimes cultivated so efficiently and effectively. Arendt warns that loneliness

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poses an ominous threat to our existence, a danger "considerably" worse than the powerlessness of those living under tyranny. As the "tool of terror," loneliness threatens to "ravage the world as we know it."[1]

More than half a century later Berardi picks up where Arendt left off, justifying her concerns over a ravaged world with his impassioned descriptions of the conditions and effects of contemporary loneliness. Ours is a loneliness arising not from totalitarian–induced isolation, but rather from the operation of our current digitalized version of advanced capitalism or "high–tech capitalism," to use Berardi's expression.[2] Loneliness is organized for us today through seamlessly interrelated phenomena: a competitive and precarious world of work, financial abstraction, new modes of communication, and the breakdown of social forms we rely on for care and conviviality. Berardi does not provide a sustained analysis of contemporary loneliness itself; it appears, rather, as one symptom in a long list of psychosocial symptoms that indicate our social body is ill. Loneliness, alienation, anxiety, depression, and panic, as well as the loss of empathy, meaningfulness, and a sense of belonging, indicate that high–tech capitalism is destroying the social landscape, bringing about an "anthropological mutation"[3] that appears irrevocable despite Berardi's occasional expressions of hope for new modes of resistance.

My objective in reading Arendt and Berardi together is to complicate the overly simplistic accounts of loneliness that have been making the headlines in recent years. The pundits proclaim that loneliness is our newest health crisis, responsible for an increase in illness, disease, and even early death, and prescribe facile remedies that tend to place the burden of loneliness on the lonely.[4] As one of the few contemporary philosophers to analyze loneliness bluntly asserts: "In many cases, it will be correct to say: you are not lonely because you are alone — you are alone because you are lonely."[5] When causes are sought, the loneliness experts fault social media, but there is little recognition of the complexity of the conditions and effects of loneliness, and of the structures that produce them.

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 478.

2. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *And: Phenomenology of the End* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015), 110.

3. Berardi, *And*, 25.

4. Loneliness has been making the headlines since George Monbiot declared in a 2014 *Guardian* article that ours is "the age of loneliness," and it is killing us. See "The Age of Loneliness is Killing Us," *The Guardian*, October, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com. See also S. Pinker, *The Village Effect: How Face–to–Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier and Happier* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2015), and Judith Shulevitz, "The Lethality of Loneliness", *The New Republic*, May 13, 2013, https://newrepublic.com.

5. Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Loneliness* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2017).

While loneliness may be fundamental to the human condition, as Arendt acknowledges — an ordinary experience common to all of us — it has structural causes that bring the social, political and psychological dimensions of life to bear on one another. To understand loneliness is to understand our very great need for one another, a need that Arendt and Berardi never fail to respect in their preoccupation with the question of how we are to live with one another in the continual process of recreating a shared world. It is a need that demands a wide spectrum of human togetherness, from political solidarity to neighborliness to intimate love. If we once did, we can no longer take for granted that if political solidarity fails us, we will be supported by social forms, or that if the psyche is injured, those same social forms will bring us back to life. If Berardi is right, we are facing a breakdown on all fronts, initiating the very ravaging of the world that Arendt worried would be the outcome of mass loneliness.

1. The Totalitarian Organization of Loneliness

We find Arendt's description of organized loneliness in the final chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a chapter in which she analyzes the distinction between twentieth–century totalitarianism and other forms of tyranny. The distinction lies in the deadly combination of terror and the logic of ideology that we find in totalitarianism as opposed to tyranny. Having established that the essence of totalitarianism is terror, Arendt's objective at the end of this extraordinary political text is to locate the basic human experience that underlies totalitarianism.

Two distinct yet related human experiences play a crucial role in the operation of totalitarian domination and repression: isolation and loneliness. Isolation occurs in the political realm where it prevents solidarity and thus impedes political life since, for Arendt, politics is constituted by speaking and acting with one another. We cannot act when we are isolated from others because there is no one to act with us. Isolation thus leads to political impasse and impotence and may constitute, Arendt suggests, "the beginning of terror." At the very least, isolation is the most "fertile ground" for terror, and always its result.[6] Tyrants know that isolation is a crucial instrument for domination, turning one person against another by cultivating and rewarding fear and suspicion; family member turns against family member, neighbor against neighbor. An entire population may be isolated — "prepared for elimination," to borrow a phrase from Étienne Balibar.[7]

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6. Arendt, *Origins*, 474.
7. Étienne Balibar, "Difference, Otherness, Exclusion," *Parallax* 11, 1 (2005): 19–34, 32. Emphasis in the original.

But isolation is not yet loneliness. As an anti–political experience, isolation prevents the action that solidarity initiates, but it does not prevent a private sphere of friendship and intimacy. We can be alone and isolated without being lonely and, conversely, we can be lonely without being isolated. In fact, Arendt claims that we need some isolation, a space between us that permits the individuality of thinking and experience, that gives rise to the separateness necessary for pluralism.[8] Isolation in this sense has productive capacities — the artist creates, the philosopher thinks, when isolated from others. This is the kinder version of aloneness that we might prefer to call solitude. Any suffering that accompanies solitude would be balanced by the meaningfulness of creative expression.

While isolation has to do with political existence, since it prevents pluralism and collective action, Arendt stipulates that loneliness has to do with our social existence; it concerns human life as a whole[9] and is, in fact, part of the human condition even if it is an "inhuman" experience. Loneliness means, for Arendt, that "I as a person feel myself deserted by all human companionship." I no longer belong to a world; abandoned to myself, I feel uprooted and superfluous.[10] I am even deserted by myself — the self to whom I speak when I am alone thinking, engaged in a silent dialogue. Arendt refers to this thinking self as the "two–in–one"; when I think, I am still *with* myself, and therefore also with others in some sense, for the dialogue I carry on with myself when I am alone does not lose contact with the world of others. These others are represented in the "other self" to whom I speak when I am thinking.[11]

The suffering of loneliness is thus caused by a combination of losses. Abandoned by others, we lose the affirmation of a self, for every self needs to be confirmed through others. Arendt believes that the "saving grace" of companionship is that it rescues us from the sameness of a singular voice; friendship saves us from being imprisoned within a self.[12] Loneliness is unbearable, therefore, not only because we lose others, but also because we lose the self that is in relation to others, and this in turn leads to the loss of a world. All at once, therefore, we lose a self, a world, and the capacity for thought and experience that the world offers to us.[13] Arendt concludes that loneliness is the experience of "not belonging to the world at all, which is

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8. Arendt, *Origins*, 474–75.

9. Arendt, *Origins*, 475.

10. Arendt, *Origins*, 474–75.

11. Arendt, *Origins*, 476. For her extended discussion of the "two–in–one"; see Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 179–193.

12. Arendt, *Origins*, 476.

13. Arendt, *Origins*, 477.

among the most radical and desperate experiences of man."[14] She reinforces the extreme nature of this suffering later in *The Human Condition* when she claims that "loneliness is so contradictory to the human condition of plurality that it is simply unbearable for any length of time."[15] The question for Arendt's contemporary readers is whether we are learning to adapt to this contradiction.

It is worth noting that, for Arendt, there is only one mental process that has no need of the self, the other, or the world, and that is logical reasoning, the kind that supports the ideology of totalitarianism. Ideology itself was not responsible for preparing the victims and executioners required by totalitarianism, but rather the "inherent logicality" of the ideology, an "irresistible force," as Stalin had called it, more powerful than the *idea* of ideology.[16] Submitting to an endless process of logical calculation means, for Arendt, that we surrender our freedom to begin something absolutely new, which is the condition for all action, as well as our freedom to think.[17] To this, Berardi will add that logicality admits no empathy.

The simplest demand of the lonely is thus: *I want to be a part of the world*. I want to be known, understood, visible, reflected back to myself, but I also want to exist *for* others *in* the world in order for my life to be meaningful. Already we see how the psychological, the social, and the political bleed into one another when we reflect on loneliness. Though it is experienced individually, loneliness is never merely an interior experience. The lonely person, for all her inner suffering, bears witness to the failure of the social, a failure that is politically expedient. But this expediency remains hidden; the organization of loneliness — its seamless production — masks both its political usefulness and the social failure that led to it.

Arendt explains the unique relationship between loneliness and terror under totalitarian regimes in her description of the "iron band of terror," necessary for turning isolation into loneliness. The iron band of terror presses individuals together so tightly that movement ceases, along with the possibility for action. The space between people — essential for the pluralistic give and take of public life — is eliminated. Paradoxically, the iron band also destroys human togetherness; in pressing individuals into an undifferentiated mass, it smothers human interaction.[18] As a result, the experience of the materially and sensually given world of those subjected to totalitarian rule is stunted. Arendt believes that we can trust our sensual

14. Arendt, *Origins*, 475.

15. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 76.

16. Joseph Stalin, *Speech of January 28, 1924*; quoted in V. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. I, 33, Moscow 1947; quoted in Arendt, *Origins*, 472.

17. Arendt, *Origins*, 472–73.

18. Arendt, *Origins*, 465–66.

experience only because we are pluralistic, we share a common sense without which we would be enclosed in our own particularity, in an unreliable and treacherous individual sense data.[19] The iron band of terror destroys this shared common sense.

Loneliness thus paves the road to totalitarian rule by preparing human beings for domination, replacing thinking with logical ideology, and preventing our common sensual experience of the world. Once relatively uncommon, under totalitarianism loneliness becomes "an everyday experience" of the masses.[20] Its destruction is twofold — eliminating the space between us, so vital for political life, and eliminating the human togetherness so vital for social and psychic life. In the totalitarian organization of loneliness, the borders that separate the political from the social and the social from the psychological begin to dissolve. We are left in a desert world, Arendt concludes, "a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon," where sand storms threaten to devastate all parts of the inhabited earth.[21] The real danger is not the desert itself, for Arendt maintains we are human precisely because we suffer in desert conditions, but when we begin to feel at home in one.[22]

2. The Iron Band of Technology

Berardi also makes use of a desert analogy in his diagnosis of the human condition in our own times. Perhaps no one else expounds as powerfully the "desertification"[23] of the human landscape, brought about by dramatic changes in the way we work, communicate, and live together under digitalized capitalism. The desertification of our social terrain is the ravaging of the world in process, characterized by a mutation — from an "alphabetical" to a digital infosphere — that is sweeping in its effects.[24]

The mutation is constituted by a transition from a "conjunctive" to a "connective" mode of relating to one another. Conjunction occurs through empathy. When we conjoin, we become other to ourselves, understanding another's emotions and experiences as though they were our own. Conjunction leads to a meaningful exchange that engenders something new;

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19. Arendt, *Origins*, 475–76.
20. Arendt, *Origins*, 478.
21. Arendt, *Origins*, 478.
22. Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 201.
23. Berardi, *And*, 110.
24. Berardi, *And,* 11.

we become something we were not before the exchange.[25] It is therefore "a creative act" as each conjunctive relation begins an "infinite number of constellations" that do not follow a pre–conceived pattern.[26] When we communicate in a conjunctive mode, we interpret another's meaning within the context of a particular interaction; we are attentive to our interlocutor's intention, to what is left unsaid, and to the implications of the interaction.[27] The body is fully present in conjunctive relations, attended by sensibility and sensitivity, emotion and empathic understanding.

Connection, on the other hand, is a purely functional mode of relating, "a product of the logical mind"[28] that does not involve empathic understanding. The understanding that occurs through connection is another sort altogether, based on "compliance and adaptation to a syntactic structure."[29] Nothing new is created out of connection, singularities remain separate, their interaction useful but not meaningful. We acknowledge a sequence and carry out what it asks of us; it is a "punctual" and "repeatable" exchange of "algorithmic functions" that relies on precise rules of behavior.[30] In connection, there are no nuances or intentions that we can actually detect, thus no ambiguity in the exchange.[31] What remains is only "the logic of connection"[32] — not logic in the service of totalitarian ideology, but in the service of the efficient interactions characteristic of high–tech capitalism. Berardi here echoes Arendt's two concerns: the substitution of thinking and the freedom to act for logical, cognitive processes, and the loss of common sensual experience.

When we reflect on our everyday interactions with others since the invention of the smartphone, data plans, and social media, "mutation" seems an accurate designation. That digital technology is affecting our social relations is obvious. Without the nuance that face–to–face encounters provide, we rely on emojis, caps, likes, and swipes to express ourselves. Alternatively, with increasing ease we simply refuse the exchange, remaining deaf and mute before the other. This mode of "connective" relating inevitably creeps into our face–to–face interactions: heightened rage over minor irritations, the summary dismissal of a stranger based on a look or gesture, and everyday acts of discourtesy, as thoughtless as a swipe left. The result is what we might expect. With the erosion of empathy, sensibility, and affect,

25. Berardi, *And*, 14–18.
26. Berardi, *And,* 13.
27. Berardi, *And,* 23.
28. Berardi, *And,* 15.
29. Berardi, *And,* 18.
30. Berardi, *And*, 22–23.
31. Berardi, *And*, 23.
32. Berardi, *And*, 15.

the ability to understand the complexity of another's comportment and communication is crippled.

More broadly, the internet binds millions of users together, demanding conformity through political loyalties, virtue–signaling, shared indignation, and the production of identical desires. This demand is perhaps our contemporary variant of Arendt's "iron band of terror" — in this case an "iron band of technology." While fear forced individuals to submit to the iron band of terror, the promise of pleasure invites us to submit to the iron band of technology. In fact, we willingly offer up our privacy and individuality for the recognition and popularity the internet offers us, and for the convenience of online shopping or social connection without commitment. At the same time that we are pressed together, we are pulled apart; our bodies and material needs invisible to one another, we are slowly forgetting the meaning of solidarity, community, and perhaps even friendship. The frustrated longing to belong when there is nothing to belong to leads to a "nostalgic desire for an identity that never really existed in the first place" — a starting point for identity–based violence.[33]

It would be reductive to attribute the organization of loneliness solely to the connective mode of relating instituted by technology. Berardi's work never fails to show the tandem development of capitalism and technology. The anthropological mutation we are witnessing due to digital technologies occurs in a wider context of "capitalist absolutism" whose effects are already apparent in the environment, social welfare, education, the economy, and in the impotence of social movements to reverse these effects. What resistance is possible when solidarity has been eroded, the consequence of increasing competition and productivity, and "an endless intensification of the rhythms of work?"[34]

There are no bodies in charge, nobody is making decisions; in a system of financial abstraction that is founded on "the faceless operativity of automatisms," Berardi states, only the algorithm of capital is growing, independently of the will of its owners.[35]

We are left in a desert, in a "factory of unhappiness" that generates rising rates of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and suicide, all desperate attempts to adapt to desert life or admit defeat.[36] And terror? It is not a stretch to note the connection between isolation and the mass killer who carries out his murderous plan alone. The twenty–first century version of loneliness

33. Berardi, *And*, 67–68.
34. Berardi, *And*, 296–97.
35. Berardi, *And*, 338.
36. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *"In the lonely cockpit of our lives" – Franco "Bifo" Berardi on the German-wings Crash*, Verso Blog, April 2, 2015, https://www.versobooks.com.

operating as the tool of terror is not mass terror carried out by a totalitarian state purging its peoples of an imagined enemy, but the terror of the lonely, armed man, bereft of a world, uprooted and superfluous, deserted even by the interlocutor of his silent dialogue with himself.

3. At Home in the Desert

We could be realizing Arendt's worst fear: that we will feel at home in the desert and adapt to the loss of a pluralistic world, a self, creative thinking and acting. Or as Berardi would add, we may adjust to a disembodied life without empathy, affect, or sensitivity to one another, and to a world in which the *soul* is put to work.[37] Even a cursory sketch of what this adjustment looks like reveals the ambiguity of our responses to the contemporary organization of loneliness.

We could begin with work. For the vast majority, work is now characterized by various degrees of flexibility, precarity, and competition. The content of much of this work is largely cognitive; we are "cognitarians," to use Berardi's designation, not proletarians, putting our minds to work while our bodies remain passively tethered to desks and screens, with the exception of our fingers, tapping on keyboards.[38] Our work is not left at the end of the day since we can bring it with us anywhere. We appreciate this convenience — we often choose it, in fact — but it comes with a cost. Flexibility and competition mean that we do not congregate often or easily. We lose a specific *workplace* social form of interaction that we may not realize we need until we are without it.

The real estate agent, for example, whose paper work is now exclusively digital, laments having no office to go to; she misses having to leave home for another place, chatting with fellow agents over a morning coffee after hanging up her coat and checking her mailbox. The young NGO worker who only meets his busy co–workers once a week for two hours spends the remainder of the week in complete isolation, perhaps mystified by the source of his feelings of emptiness, because this is all that he knows. Cafés are crammed with office–deprived startups avoiding the isolation of working at home. Their baristas are lonely, working in the library–silence of these once lively public spaces. Without a common space to inhabit,

37. Franco Berardi outlines a new kind of alienation, characterized by the demand of post–Fordist cognitive labor processes for the mental, affective, and relational energies of workers (their "souls") that were never historically required for physical labour. See Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e) 2009).

38. Berardi, *The Soul at Work,* 74.

we no longer experience the unique social interaction of the workplace. However fraught with personality clashes, office politics, or banal chitchat, the workplace offers us a space — imperfect and idiosyncratic — to which we belong. It demands our bodily presence and our civility.

Isolation occurs by design — material segregation produces psychic segregation. In academic institutions, for example, disciplinary silos are created and cultivated by competition for funds and recognition. As enrolments and administrative positions rise, space is at a premium, and common rooms for human interaction are low priority. Even if we had such rooms, we would need the time and inclination to use them. Lunch is no longer a break from work but an accompaniment to email time, "eating al desko" as a recent *Guardian* article put it.[39] Increasing levels of course management tasks and the flexibility to carry them out anywhere with internet access mean that we work in our offices as little as possible. On the surface, the effect on students seems negligible, as face–to–face discussions are considered more of an inconvenience than an opportunity.

The isolation of students is evident in their reluctance — or perhaps inability — to form groups for discussion in a classroom. When asked to do so, many sit alone and pull out their cell phones. They are unwilling to raise dissenting opinions, as though there is an unspoken agreement that disagreement is offensive. The students' resistance to thinking on their own is fostered by the social pressure to succeed when the odds are not in their favor. The belief in their own singular gifts and future promise falters in the face of the unforgiving, competitive environment that society has cultivated throughout their childhoods. The relentless pressure to achieve when only a few will be rewarded is surely the source of rising rates of anxiety and psychological breakdown in our student populations. The iron band is in evidence here, destroying the space between them through a conformity that stifles individual thought, and at the same time, destroying human togetherness.

The more we work, the less time we have to be together with others, and the less we are together with others, the more we fall back on work to fill our time. Work becomes life, evident in our obsession with agendas and to–do lists, and life outside work diminishes. As Berardi puts it, "we renew our affection for work because economic survival becomes more difficult and daily life becomes lonely and tedious."[40] For many, work is what we do because there is no one with whom we can do something other than work.

The more impoverished our social life becomes due to work commitments, the more we demand from our intimate others. Coupledom, and

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39. Phil Daoust, "The new rules of eating al desko," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2019, https://www. theguardian.com.

40. Berardi, *The Soul at Work*, 83.

the nuclear or extended family for those who still have one, provide a psychosocial lifeboat; default social units from which we expect care, financial advantage, and in the best of cases, emotional support, companionship, and a "witness" to our daily existence.[41] But given this social unit monopolizes care and social interaction, the family is profoundly *anti–social*, as Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh argue, "a place of intimacy" that "has made the outside world cold and friendless." If we cling to the myth of couple love and the promise of family happiness it is because they are the only options for survival in a harsh social environment; the family is an ideal that renders everything else "pale and unsatisfactory."[42] In this respect, we could argue that the family plays a critical role in the organization of loneliness, but its desirability obscures this role.

Despite this desirability, we are witnessing global declines in marriage, coupledom (cohabiting or not), and childbirth, and a corresponding rise in solo living, especially in urban centers. This does not necessarily mean loneliness is on the rise, but some solo dwellers are affected more than others. The family obligations Barrett and McIntosh allude to are weakening; the elderly are ill with no one to care for them but an elderly spouse if they are lucky, and some are dying alone with no one to notice. When these dead are found, weeks, months, or even years after their lonely deaths, cleaning companies arrive to clear out the maggots and make the apartment habitable again. In one estimate, there are some 30,000 such deaths in Japan each year.[43]

These are random examples of the everyday evidence of our ambivalent adaptations to organized loneliness. When Berardi alludes to another case from Japan, the phenomenon of an extreme self–imposed isolation on the part of vast numbers of (mostly) men, he argues that it must be viewed not merely as the symptom of a psychosocial pathology, but as a form of adjustment. These recluses, called *hikikomori*, are responding "to the unbearable stress of competition, mental exploitation, and precarity"[44] by withdrawing completely from society, rarely leaving their homes, giving up work, and relying on families for financial support. There are hundreds of thousands of such cases living in total isolation for months, years or even decades. Berardi claims this is "a fully understandable withdrawal from hell."[45]

If we feel a certain horror in hearing of this abject isolation and loneliness, self–imposed or resisted, we may conclude that it is reasonable to designate

41. Sheila Heti, "My Life is a Joke," *The New Yorker*, May 11, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com.

42. Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti–social Family* (New York: Verso Press, 2015), 77, 79–80.

43. Anna Fifield, "Cleaning up after the dead," *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com.

44. Berardi, *And,* 104.

45. Berardi, *And,* 105.

loneliness as the basic experience underlying high–tech capitalism, just as Arendt called loneliness the fundamental experience of totalitarianism. But the challenge in responding to the devastation of our social landscape arises from the fact that we lie in a bed we have made — that we have chosen and continue to choose — and now we are learning to adapt. The difference between the iron band of terror and the iron band of technology is choice. We choose efficiency, independence, and convenience because we *can* now in ways we never could before. Loneliness is the price we pay for the freedom of nobody bothering us. This is the implication of Berardi's description of the double meaning of being American (though this seems unreasonably exclusive), which includes, on the one hand, the feeling of freedom when walking in a city where no one bothers us and, on the other, "a sense of loneliness, and the impoverishment of shared sensibility."[46] It follows that to resist organized loneliness we must accept inconvenience, we must allow ourselves to be bothered by others. This means that solidarity, friendship, courtesy, and care, no longer taken for granted, will become forms of resistance.

The answer to how we might prevent the organization of loneliness is both obvious and elusive. Obvious because human togetherness is the antithesis of loneliness, and many of us still know what it means to be close to others; elusive because when loneliness is organized — when it becomes systemic, the new normal — we may forget that it has an antithesis.

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46. Berardi, *And*, 70.

Preve's Uses of Lukács:
Rethinking a Marxian Tradition

Mark Epstein[*]

Abstract

This essay examines Costanzo Preve's uses of György Lukács' *Ontology of Social Being* and related writings from the same period as both provocations and, to some extent, foundations for Preve's project of the *deduzione storico–sociale delle categorie* (historical–social deduction of categories), which Preve named *ontologia dell'essere sociale* (ontology of social being). This essay shows how Preve's discussion of Lukács and his work changes from *La filosofia imperfetta* to *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia* and how, in several respects, at the conclusion of their lives and reflections Preve and Lukács are on opposite trajectories as regard the understanding and evaluation of the idealism–materialism continuum. Both thinkers share the urgency and need of a rethinking and refoundation of the Marxian tradition, one which needs to address many aspects of social reproduction beyond the economic.

Keywords: Costanzo Preve, György Lukács, ontology of social being, materialism, teleology, labor.

There are a number of reasons that led me to focus on Costanzo Preve (1943–2013).

First, Preve and his work are almost unknown in the English–speaking world, especially in the United States. Second, Preve worked most of his life teaching philosophy in a high school, not in the academy. This is one of the perspectives and experiences that nourish his approach to philosophy and its many relations to education, civil society, politics, and the possibilities of informed, probing, and constructive dialogue as a foundation for the *polis*; he is not concerned with professional self–promotion, careerism, and exclusive and exclusionary "domain building" and enclaves for self–referential involution and devolution. Third, Preve also spent most of his life in the militant Marxian left in Italy. Unlike many, he did not simply sell out and try to find a higher or highest bidder for his "technical skills," nor did he dwell in nostalgia and try to explain the many reasons for defeat and failure as being exclusively due to "external enemies." On the contrary, he tried

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to examine some of the root causes within the movements and tradition itself that might pinpoint internal shortcomings, forms of blindness, arrogance, mythologization, and inertia, all of which were fundamental for leading these movements and this tradition astray, rendering them unable to build more dynamic and lasting forms of institutional, social, political, and economic legacy. They also did not foster a legacy of reflections on social interaction and community building. Obviously, many dominant powers in capitalist social formations and modes of production have always targeted the revolutionary Marxian left. Following the misnamed "end of the Cold War," they have done and continue to do everything in their power to erase any and all memories of serious political alternatives to their rule. Preve always remained committed to the political, emancipatory, and revolutionary *telos* of the Marxian tradition, unlike a very large number of superficially "Marxist" schools and tendencies, who essentially made their peace with devolving into almost exclusively verbal and nominal academic "differences" while playing by all the rules of the institutional "games" within. Fourth, Preve explicitly polemicizes with a number of *idées reçues*, which have mostly become dominant in progressive "public" (but especially within academic) discourse, and which all have their origins in postmodern identitarianism,[1] an almost exclusively "verbal" "left" that, in its accommodations with capitalist and imperialist power, simply either dismisses the history and existence of decades (actually, almost centuries) of a militant, organized, and institutionally extremely influential and incisive (for better and for worse) Marxian left, or pretends it never existed. This is one of the major reasons why, within both academic philosophical discourse and public political and civic discourse, Preve's existence is neglected, vilified or (censoriously) omitted. One of the many reasons Preve values Lukács so greatly is precisely because he considers Lukács as someone who continues the great tradition of "not" separating the understanding and practice of philosophy and philosophical reflection into one centered around a *Schulbegriff* (for the bureaucrats of the mind), on the one hand, and a *Weltbegriff* (philosophy and philosophical questions seen as central to all human coexistence and social dialogue, "community," and shared

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1. Preve polemicizes with the fads and superficial thought of much academic research in the humanities that is founded on the influence of postmodernism (and one of its major "fallouts," identitarianism) in many of his later works. See, among others, *La crisi culturale della terza età del capitalismo* (Pistoia: Petite Plaisance, 2010), *Elementi di politicamente corretto, da Nuovi signori e nuovi sudditi* (Pistoia: Petite Plaisance, 2010), *Filosofia del presente* (Rome: Edizioni Settimo Sigillo, 2004), *La teoria in pezzi. La dissoluzione del paradigma teorico operaista in Italia (1976–1983)* (Bari: Dedalo, 1984), but for the most recent analysis, and perhaps the one most focused exclusively on postmodernism, see the next to last chapter (XXXIX) *Il postmoderno filosofico spiegato ai bambini e agli adulti*, in *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia* (Pistoia: Petite Plaisance, 2013), 427–52.

and sharing forms of interaction) on the other.[2] This is a distinction that originated with Kant, whereas, as Preve argues, Hegel, some other great thinkers in the German Idealist and Marxian traditions, and a few others intentionally worked against it.

György Lukács is a central figure in Preve's later work for both biographical, philosophical, and political reasons. Preve considers Lukács to be the preeminent Marxist philosopher of the twentieth century, and he specifically uses the Hungarian philosopher's later work(s), namely, *The Ontology of Social Being*[3] and some related works, as a foundation for his project of the *deduzione storico–sociale delle categorie* (historical–social deduction of categories). Preve also uses the terms *ricostruzione ontologico–sociale* (social–ontological reconstruction) and *genesi sociale delle categorie* (social genesis of categories), and states that for him, *ontologico–sociale* (social–ontological) and *storico–genetico* (historical–genetic) are basically equivalent.[4] Preve honestly and explicitly states that his ontology differs significantly from Lukács'; yet, it is quite obvious that he also considers it very important to claim this "ancestry." Preve strongly empathizes with Lukács as someone who was and has continued to be treated as an outcast during his later life in Hungary for not adhering to an orthodox (neo)Stalinist party line and philosophical dogma about what the legacy of Marx and Lenin was (in other words, in the "East") and, in the "West," for challenging the many fads and protected academic enclaves of "Western Marxism" through a more philologically informed and problematic account of the relations between Marx and Hegel. This challenge occurs especially in Lukács' later works like the *Ontology*, which move towards an explicitly and clearly materialist line of inquiry compared to his much more Hegelian and idealist early works, for instance, his classic *History and Class Consciousness*.[5] This latter work was,

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2. Preve's polemics against academism and the academization of philosophy are longstanding, and form part of his efforts to preserve the role of philosophy in its most encompassing sense in the "public sphere" (though Preve obviously would not be comfortable with the public vs. private dichotomy) while possibly expanding its public role in the renewal of a socratic dialogue as one of the foundations for future cohabitation and community, that is, a contemporary *polis*. Throughout his last work, *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia* (Pistoia: Petite Plaisance, 2013), he emphasizes the importance of the negative consequences of the separation of the *Schulbegriff* from the *Weltbegriff* in understanding philosophy, its status, role, and relations with the broader world of human praxis.

3. I will provide both English and Italian bibliographical references to Lukács' late works as some have not even been translated into English, and others, like *The Ontology of Social Being*, have been translated only very partially, whereas, generally speaking, Italian versions do exist and they are much more complete. György Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being* (London: Merlin, 1980), *Prolegomeni all'ontologia dell'essere sociale* (Milan: Guerini, 1990) and *Ontologia dell'essere sociale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1981).

4. See Preve, *Una nuova storia alternativa*, 5, 10 ff.

5. György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.

symptomatically, always much better received in the West, as were all his early works, while, also symptomatically, the *Ontology* and the *Prolegomeni all'ontologia dell'essere sociale* (*Prolegomena to the Ontology of Social Being*) have been basically almost completely ignored.

The importance of Lukács for Preve, from his break with "scientistic" tendencies in the Marxian tradition (Louis Althusser, Lucio Colletti) in the 1980s to the most important and concluding chapter of his final work, is documented in his research. Preve devotes the concluding and densest section of *La filosofia imperfetta* (*The Imperfect Philosophy*)[6] to reflections on Lukács and, most specifically, the *Ontology*; and the final, longest, most ambitious, and most autobiographical chapter of what was to be Preve's last work, namely, *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia* (*A New and Alternative History of Philosophy*), is mostly dedicated to Lukács, the *Ontology*, and Preve's own research projects centered around the *deduzione storico–sociale delle categorie*. One should add that, in several respects, Preve's project resembles Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, which was also strongly indebted to Lukács' thought, and which attempted to correlate mental and artistic categories with elements of the specific mode of then–contemporary production.

There is a noticeable difference, however, in the manner in which Preve treats Lukács and the *Ontology* in *La filosofia imperfetta* and in his concluding *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia* (one should also note that there is an almost thirty year interval between the two works). In *La filosofia imperfetta*, Preve engages in a contrastive/comparative examination of Lukács (and his work) against Martin Heidegger and Ernst Bloch while addressing a number of the important philosophical specifics of Lukács' text.

Martin Heidegger represents the union of alienation and *intrascendibilità* (non–overcomability) in his critique of the present/capitalism by using a form of *pensiero destinale* (destinal thinking) that is a form of inverted historicism.[7] Heidegger's position is the formalization of a (non/anti)teleological drive towards a point of origin. I would add that this retrogression is one that intentionally attempts to destroy the process of historical construction and accretion of concept–building and knowledge, that is, it is very purposely — Preve also calls it "teleological" — and irrationally directed against all the heritage of the Enlightenment. Preve's assessment of Heidegger as a philosopher–critic, however, is much more positive than Lukács' own evaluation.

Preve then looks at the thought of Ernst Bloch as specifically opposed to Heideggerian *destinalismo* (destinal orientation) in the sense that it purposely

6. Costanzo Preve, *La filosofia imperfetta. Una proposta di ricostruzione del marxismo contemporaneo* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1984).

7. Preve, *La filosofia imperfetta*, 16–17.

seeks to reconsider/resurrect/reinterpret the "forms of possibility" contained in the past (in this sense in opposition both to more traditional forms of Marxism and to what he calls *critica differenzialistica* [differential critique], a phrase which captures certain dominant paradigms of postmodern theorization). For Preve, the crucial distinction in Bloch is between *non–contemporaneità* (non–contemporaneity) and *arretratezza* (backwardness), where Bloch chooses the first over the second, and thanks to this "multiversum," Preve argues that Bloch manages to avoid the pitfalls of historicist temporality (and its major ideological support, abstract humanism) as well as those of both "grand narrative" and "determinist–naturalist" kinds of theoretical structure. Bloch also reinserts *giusnaturalismo* (or the theory of natural rights) as one of the main sources of the Marxian tradition (which Lenin had omitted). In addition, Bloch adds the strong proposal/endorsement of utopia, and utopian actions, in the present, and he also helps eliminate the polarity between "Eastern" and "Western" Marxisms. Finally, Bloch is oriented towards an ontological foundation of *praxis*. Preve makes one pointed criticism of the German utopian thinker, namely, his not conceiving of *praxis* as labor. And this is one of the reasons for his turning towards the thought of the late Lukács as a way out of the most serious impasses.

And, finally, Preve turns to the *Ontology of Social Being* itself. He specifically says that he will not be dealing with the first Lukács (which he associates with *History and Class Consciousness*) or with the second Lukács (which he ties to *The Destruction of Reason*), but instead with the "third and last Lukács," namely, precisely that of the *Ontology*. What Preve, however, does not underscore is that in Lukács' own view, he was moving in very important ways beyond both his early idealist period(s) and his somewhat more "orthodox" Marxist period (influenced by the Eastern context) toward a more intentionally materialist "return" to Marx. This move was helped in important ways by his referring to the work of the very unorthodox neo–Kantian Nicolai Hartmann (who, to my mind, is in many respects closer to materialism than to Kant).

As was the case with Hegel, one should always remember that, for Preve, the history of philosophy is absolutely crucial to the philosophical enterprise and, in Preve's case, is more clearly and explicitly inserted into a wider cultural, socio–ontological, framework and context. For this reason, it is also important to understand his periodization of the broader history of capitalism, which he analyzes always as an economic, political, and cultural totality. He divides it into three "phases":

a) the abstract phase (17th–18th centuries);
b) the dialectical phase (from 1789 to 1991), which exhibits the devolution of the bourgeoisie and is comprised of a proto–bourgeois

Enlightenment and Romantic phase; a "middle"–bourgeois phase (positivist from 1848 and existentialist from ca. 1914); and a "late"–bourgeois phase (from ca. 1968 to 1990), which is increasingly individualistic and libertarian;

c) and, lastly, a "speculative" phase from 1991 onwards (a phase that is both post–bourgeois and post–proletarian). In this phase, capital concretizes and consolidates its absolute dominance, expanding beyond the previous dichotomies: towards the right in the economic sphere, towards the "center" politically, and towards the "left" culturally.

The major reasons Preve resorts to the *Ontology* are as follows:

a) Lukács refuses, simultaneously and symmetrically, both Eastern and Western Marxism;

b) he acutely sees the main characteristics of contemporary philosophy as based on the *solidarietà antitetico–polare* (antithetical–polar solidarity) of neopositivism and existentialism (which are essentially the dominant traits of analytical and continental philosophy, or their founding roots, respectively);

c) probably the key point (and relation) of the *Ontology*, for Preve (but I would venture for any attentive reader of the work), is the central position given to labor (language is therefore also viewed in its relationship to labor–praxis), to concrete human activity as a way of overcoming the abstract polarities between causality and teleology as well as those between necessity and chance. Preve underscores that this implies the passage from an understanding of historical materialism as focused on the commodity form to a historical materialism focused on the "forms" of labor in the capitalist mode of production;

d) a more flexible and adherent concept of "reproduction" (in the Marxian sense), which refocuses it as the "dominant reproductive practice," and which informs the underlying social practices while accounting for them in a flexibly dialectical manner;

e) an incisive conceptualization of ideology that extends beyond the anthropological path of humans as "symbolic animals" to the "real existence of the ideal moment" in the process of reproduction of contemporary capitalism, which also takes into account the dominance of relative surplus value (Aglietta) and the loss of meaning of labor in contemporary capitalism (Harry Braverman);

f) and, finally, a theory of alienation/estrangement that is a historico–ontological conception: under capitalism, individuality is no longer connected to/specified by castes, strata, corporations, and so on but is much more "casual" as to placement, and therefore capital-

ism tries to repress the "universalistic" tendencies in individuals; in his later works, Preve talks increasingly about *disintegrazione* (disintegration), *frammentazione* (fragmentation), and so forth. Preve emphasizes these forms of devolution in the latest contemporary period of capitalism, the post–bourgeois and post–proletarian phase, which is also that of the most deep–rooted dominance and lack of transparency of the global capital relation itself. In other words, the ever more pervasive power of the capital relation to "dissolve" all previous historical, social, institutional, sedimented, and accrued forms of bond, cohabitation, and practice ultimately extends to the cultural, inter–individual sense of identity and relation to the world of individuals who once would have identified, however minimally, with at least some remnants of the heritages and practices of "their" classes. This is what Preve, partially basing himself on Lukács, argues is occurring in contemporary global capitalism.

In using this comparative/contrastive approach, one could state, simplifying somewhat, that Preve uses Heidegger as the representative of a focus on the past and origins, Bloch as focused on the (utopian) future, and Lukács as focused on and working in the present.

The extremely important role this work of the late Lukacs has for Preve is centered around the fact that the labor–teleology relation allows for a much more penetrating analysis of the relation between individuals and labor process(es), as well as more inclusive social groups, and all the extremely varied non–directly economic aspects of the labor–processes itself: it therefore moves towards and opens onto all areas of social reproduction that Marx himself and the most important thinker in the Marxian tradition never really had the time, opportunity or, in some cases, interest to focus on.

These open precisely onto the relationship between *comunismo* and *comunità*, the latter being a term which I think it would be very reductive to see merely as *Gemeinschaft* as some, I think, more polemical critics of Preve have attempted to do. For Preve, the human dimension, which in turn implies social and historical contextualization with all of its specificities, is always a part of philosophical interpretation and appraisal, and eventually judgment. In *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia*, it is these human/existential characteristics of Lukács and much more general and overarching characteristics of his philosophy that Preve examines, and the *Ontology* is only the canvas that Preve uses to depict them. So, the existential and human characteristics of Lukács the man also enter into Preve's judgment of the philosopher. The philosophical–existential concepts, categories, and practices which Preve focuses on in the last chapter of his last work in relation to Lukács and his philosophy are:

a) *serietà* (seriousness);

b) *passione durevole* (enduring passion);

c) alienation (and Lukács' fundamental decision not to participate in his own alienation: *Ich mache meine eigene Entfremdung nicht mehr mit*);

d) Lukács' being one of the greatest practitioners of the fusion of philosophy understood as *Schulbegriff* with philosophy understood as *Weltbegriff*;

e) his refusal to accept any sort of verdict given by the "judgment of the facts" (that is, the contingent dominance / prevalence of certain forces and interests at specific moments in history).[8]

A number of directions that the reflections of the later Lukács were taking are what I think made him especially attractive to Preve (a more detailed account can be found in the concluding chapter of *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia*). Hegel remained a central philosophical reference, even for the later Lukács, though in Preve's case this "preference" is taken to an entirely different level, one which, as Preve himself honestly admits, would probably not have found Lukács' support. The *Ontology of Social Being* also attempted to explore the relations between labor (and by implication language) and the economic reproduction of the species, and other areas of human social existence, something which was clearly part of Marx's interests and overall project, but something which Marx's published research, and especially his most influential works addressed mostly only tangentially. Lukács' attention to the everyday and, more generally, to human subjects across a broad spectrum rather than those restricted to working class domains are another significant element in Preve's attraction to the Hungarian philosopher's later works. On more than one occasion, Preve makes the connection to Gramsci's reflections on "common sense" and, to my mind, this is very symptomatic. Both Lukács and Preve were all too aware that the major revolutions that had taken place while identifying with or appealing to the Marxian tradition (the Russian and Chinese being the most significant and emblematic) had not occurred in countries in which the capitalist mode of production was dominant, and in fact had almost exclusively taken place in countries on the periphery of the centers of capitalist production and exploitation and its imperialist forms of expansion. And both Lukács and Preve clearly wanted and needed to take such a macroscopic historical fact into account in their individual rethinking / re–elaboration of the Marxian project. The mythologization of the proletariat as the agent of revolutionary change had very clearly come up against historical realities in the capitalist "West." In this sense, both Lukács and Preve once more underscore the Marxian idea of humans as *Gattungswesen*.

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8. Preve, *Una nuova storia alternativa*, 459, 461, 468, and 472.

On a more concrete philosophical level, Preve repeatedly stresses his debt to Lukács for a number of insights into the landscape of contemporary philosophy. One important example of this is the *solidarietà antitetico polare* of neopositivism and existentialism as complementary forms of distortion of a deeper philosophical analysis and understanding, both of which are instrumental to capitalist (bourgeois in the earlier stages, but Preve argues that today we are witnessing and living in a post–bourgeois and post–proletarian form of globalized capitalism) domination of the philosophical and derivatively ideological landscape.

Significantly, Preve sees his own later work(s) and those of Lukács as committed to a philosophy of *emancipation* and as being premised on the centrality of the concept of *alienation* in Marx; theirs are also philosophies which refuse the (academic, bureaucratic) division between philosophy understood as *Schulbegriff* and as *Weltbegriff*. The philosophical trajectories of Preve and Lukács are, however, almost complementary or diametrically opposed to one another. Whereas Lukács moved away from idealist and Hegelian origins towards forms of research into a materialist re–foundation, Preve moved away (as he states in *Una nuova storia alternativa della filosofia*)[9] from what in his later life he considered a "scientistic" form of Marxism represented by the thought of Althusser and Colletti to research that gave ever more prominent positions to Hegel and the German idealist tradition and, in several ways, tried to make Marx into the ultimate idealist and the culmination of this very idealist tradition itself.

While Preve gives Lukács enormous credit in being able to overcome the "messianic extremism" of his early *History and Class Consciousness* in this late phase of his thought, Preve tends to minimize the fact that Lukács was actually moving "away" from idealism and Hegel, not closer to them. And while Preve honestly states several times that this is his own interpretation of a project related to the *Ontology*, and that Lukács himself might very likely not have agreed, it is only if/when one compares the works of the two authors in some detail and in the context of the overall trajectory of the two philosophers that one realizes the extent to which these trajectories are actually complementary.

Lukács's *Ontology* explicitly gives a lot of credit to the thought of Nicolai Hartmann, who was an, albeit extremely idiosyncratic, neo–Kantian with very pronounced materialist tendencies, and certainly not a Hegelian by any stretch of the imagination. Moreover, very significant portions of the *Ontology* are dedicated to an examination of the relations among the different levels of being: the inorganic, the organic, and the social (human social). This examination is very clearly in line with a strong materialist strand that, starting with Marx, passes through the works of Engels, Antonio Labriola,

9. Preve, *Una nuova storia alternativa*, 8.

and a number of important thinkers in the Marxian tradition worldwide (in Italy, just some of those one could mention are Nicola Badaloni and his idea of "humanized nature" or various reflections by Sebastiano Timpanaro on materialism and the levels of being).

This ontological examination is clearly open to a dialogue with the natural sciences as well as the socio–historical sciences and philosophy, unlike ontological projects such as Martin Heidegger's. Lukács' late reflections also clearly point to the complexity of the relations within this "stratified" ontology, and its different levels and kinds of foundation (the inorganic providing the foundation for the organic, and the organic for the social). Lukács endorses a reflection theory of truth, as did the majority of the most influential thinkers in the Marxian tradition, and this is a version of the correspondence theory of truth. Preve criticizes Lukács for doing so.[10]

Preve is also not always consistent in his description of Marx's thought and the legacy of his tradition. Mostly, he sticks to variants of this account: "[. . .] *dentro* Marx, e non solo *dentro* la lettera, ma anche *dentro* lo spirito, coesistono contradditoriamente statuti teorici diversi, si intrecciano insieme una scienza filosofica della totalità espressiva ed una scienza non–filosofica delle strutture dei modi di produzione sociali."[11] But while he often acknowledges that this non–philosophical science is an essential component of Marx's legacy, and that it is connected, albeit as most socio–historical sciences that deal with human agency in very complex ways, to standards of "truth" of the natural sciences, he far from infrequently insists on privileging the "philosophical" strand of the legacy, and uses this as the foundation for Marx's being pre–eminently an idealist.

Had Preve dealt more in depth with the materialist and stratification aspects of Lukács' *Ontology*, then perhaps a whole series of his own conclusions — from those regarding the reflection theory of truth, to those basically completely divorcing and separating the materialist grounds for truth in the natural sciences from more mediated and ultimately complex criteria for truth (related to "praxis" and human agency) in the socio–historical sciences, not to speak of those related to values and evaluation at the very least in philosophy, and therefore trying to defend an, essentially and paradoxically (given Preve's project of the genetic reconstruction of the origins of the categories), rather autarchical and "privileged" conception of philosophy (for laudable reasons connected to a defense of a shared and communal Socratic dialogue, to a, curiously rather Kantian, theoretical attempt at a prevention of philosophical manipulation and

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10. Preve, *Una nuova storia alternativa*, 478.
11. Preve, *Una nuova storia alternativa*, 496.

"contamination") — might have taken a different direction. Yet I think that what I would regard as "exaggeration" in his turn towards Hegel and idealism can be viewed, in a manner that is precisely dialectically opposed to the trajectory of the later Lukács, as a way of underscoring his break with his "scientistic" earlier period, that is, as a way of wandering between Althusser and Colletti. On the level of philological detail, I think it is a fairly serious mistake by Preve to tend to conflate Colletti with Della Volpe: while there is justification for a critique of Della Volpe as excessively anti–Hegelian in his interpretation of Marx — I would argue as a way to distance himself from the prevailing historicist and "Gramscian" perspectives in the parties of the left during Della Volpe's life — Della Volpe's contributions in the areas of logic and "indeterminate abstraction" are, I think, much more original and fruitful than Preve's omission(s) would allow. His ontology and much of his later thought explicitly tries to found and defend a "specificity" for the philosophical enterprise that is connected to his personal vision of "ontological research" and the reconstruction–genesis of categories of thought.

While Preve, I think, is undoubtedly right to emphasize the dialectical–relational nature of much of Marx's thought, and the fundamental debt it owes to Hegel, I do not believe this is a valid argument against those who believe, as I do (and even Preve partially admits to this when he talks about a "non–philosophical science" in Marx), that Marx fundamentally overcomes and goes beyond Hegel in a materialist direction. I think that Preve is fundamentally mistaken when he attributes a "philosophy of history" to Marx (and to his most original and intelligent followers in the Marxian tradition). The science of the "modes of production" and its foundation in history considers what has accrued in human history so far, which consequently forms a foundation and path that opens onto only a certain spectrum of options for the future (this is completely compatible with the observation that human beings do not make history in circumstances of their own choosing). Though obviously this is at a completely different ontological level, because we are dealing with human agency and history, the accrual and "direction" of history, from the history of the *cosmos*, to the history of geology, to, perhaps above all, the (natural) history of forms of life on our planet, all point to genetic histories and forms of accrual and sedimentation that are *not* reversible and cannot simply be wished away. They therefore significantly restrict the categories of the "possible" in the future. And when Marx does reflect upon *teloi* for the political and social future of human beings, he does so mostly in (I would argue, intentionally) very generic inclusive and shared goals of emancipation, not through specific, let alone predetermined or preformed eschatological points or stages of realization/conclusion/arrival.

Preve's instinct in wanting to emphasize that philosophy deals with (and needs to be allowed to deal with) practice, research, sharing, and dialogue in/with the *carattere storico–disvelativo della verità* (historical–disclosing character of truth)[12] is undoubtedly very important and commendable in its own right. But in his later appraisal of Lukács's *Ontology*, Preve seems to forget many of the materialist teleological features that had been at least partially examined in *La filosofia imperfetta*. Lukács' materialist, stratified ontology deals with teleological issues precisely in a non–theological manner, in connection with the complexities of temporality and history, always attentive to the historical, contextual, and circumstantial specifics of human agency, in a fashion that is not reductively deterministic in the sense of a (neo)positivistic understanding of the natural sciences. The historical and *veritativo* characteristics of philosophy as reflection, research, dialogue, sharing, and practice could find a place within this Lukácsian framework and ontology, whereas Preve's extremely strong return to Hegel and the Greek foundations, while it certainly does propose some interesting and provocative hypotheses in the area of *deduzione storico–sociale delle categorie*, seems at the very least to flirt with borderline theologically inclined conceptions of teleology.

Regardless of these ambiguities in Preve's later philosophical trajectory, I think Preve's re–evaluation and focus on the work(s) of the later Lukács is extremely important and constructive as, I think, is his attempt to re–think/refound the Marxian project, even when taking some of its biases and shortcomings into consideration. I personally think that this opening onto the individual and social construction of the individual in a historical context politically opens the Marxian tradition in very interesting ways; also opened are some of the most interesting materialist strains of frequently marginalized but highly original thinkers such as Raymond Williams or, in terms of artists and craftsmen, William Morris. Such an openness and attention are mostly absent from, for instance, the dominant French traditions (with the partial exception of Lucien Sève, but he is hardly a dominant presence in larger French thought).

Preve's focus on the later Lukács is a constructive proposal for opening up the Marxian tradition against and away from the rigidities of the academic *Schulbegriff*, the dogmas and coercions of the institutional privileges of political forms of sedimented power (in the "traditional" parties of the "left") and instead orienting it toward the dialogical, shared, praxis–oriented research, commitment, and engagement of the *Weltbegriff*.

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12. Preve, *Una nuova storia alternativa*, 461.

A Strategy for a Democratic Future: Constituent or Destituent Power?

Travis Holloway[*]

Abstract

This essay presents two strategies for a more democratic future. A debate is underway in continental philosophy between two different types of democratic activity or strategy. The first form of democratic activity, *constituent* power, is widely known for its attempts to confront existing government institutions and transform them in a variety of ways. A second form of political activity, however, labeled *destituent* power, proposes abandoning the constituent project of reforming government institutions in order to explore another form of politics entirely. The concept of destituent power arises in part out of a concern that it is increasingly difficult to reform governments through protest and assembly and other means, particularly in the wake of several military–style defeats of peaceful demonstrations and occupations around the world. Instead of focusing on reforming these institutions by contesting them, destituent power *destitutes* them by withdrawing from them and dispelling the notion that they represent us. Finally, destituent power specifically targets a neoliberal way of life and asks how we might live otherwise.

Keywords: Destituent Power; Constituent Power; Democracy; Agamben; Politics; Philosophy.

In the 1970s, neoliberal policies and ideas began to transform elected governments and daily life around the world.[1] This neoliberal transformation became the subject of a 1979 lecture course by Michel Foucault and amounted to what David Harvey called a "revolutionary turning–point in the world's social and economic history."[2] Today we are living in another potentially historic moment of transition as emerging populisms on both the left and the right resist the neoliberal policies of the last several decades

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  1. This essay expands a section of a larger article on democracy and neoliberalism that appeared in 2018 in *Philosophy Today*. The section was extended in light of more recent events and scholarship. For further reference, see Travis Holloway, "Neoliberalism and the Future of Democracy," *Philosophy Today* 62, 2 (Summer 2018): 627–50. I would like to thank Peg Birmingham and *Philosophy Today* for allowing a portion of the original essay to be expanded and reprinted, as well as Silvia Benso, Antonio Calcagno, and Nino Chiurazzi for including my work in this issue.
  2. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.

and propose very different alternatives to them. This historic moment, argues Chantal Mouffe in her 2018 book on new populisms, can be accurately described as "the expression of [democratic and authoritarian] resistances against the post–democratic condition brought about by thirty years of neoliberal hegemony," a hegemony which "has now entered into crisis."[3] What remains to be seen is whether a form of resistance to neoliberalism might emerge that would not be authoritarian or identitarian in nature, but democratic both in its political policies and in its way of life. This essay presents two possible strategies for a more democratic future.

Since at least 2013, a debate has been underway in continental philosophy between two different types of democratic power or strategy that have roots in Italian philosophy. The first kind of democratic activity involves what has traditionally been called *constituent* power, or a strategy that places demands upon the state or seeks a change in the policies of the government at hand through demonstrations in public space. Although many continental philosophers have developed theories of constituent power throughout the twentieth century, constituent power has often been associated with the work of Antonio Negri, who argued in his 1992 book *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* that "to speak of constituent power is to speak of democracy."[4]

A *second* form of power or democratic strategy has emerged in recent years, however, that describes itself in opposition to constituent forms of power. This approach, labeled *destituent* power, was put forward in a public lecture by Giorgio Agamben in 2013, and by The Invisible Committee in their recent work *To Our Friends* (2014); it also marks a turn in Agamben's philosophical work. At the basis of this concept lies a concern that efforts to reform current governments through constituent power will only end up strengthening antidemocratic institutions in the end, institutions which proponents believe can no longer be trusted to be representative of actual workers, deteriorating ecosystems, and so on. As an alternative strategy, Agamben and The Invisible Committee have argued for a form of power that they describe not as something "in opposition to" a state in need of reform, but as something *outside* of, *detached* from, or *withdrawn* from the state.

As it is well known, the first form of democratic power or strategy, *constituent power*, operates most often through political demonstration against or in opposition to the state. We can find various iterations of it in theoretical works by Antonio Negri, Jacques Rancière, or Hannah Arendt, who once

3. Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (New York: Verso, 2018), 79.

4. Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State*, trans. Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1.

described a type of power found in the "multitude, appearing [...] in broad daylight" confronting the powers at hand.[5] The defining characteristic of constituent power, explains Étienne Balibar, is that constituent demonstrations or insurrections always take place within a dialectic — "the dialectic of 'constituent power' and 'constituted power,' of insurrection and reconstitution."[6] The task of constituent power is therefore to "openly confront the lack of democracy in existing institutions and transform them," and the "active citizen is the agent of this transformation"[7]. Thus, for philosophers like Jacques Rancière, the goal of protests is to "counteract" or "[challenge] government's claims"; they are "contestations," writes Judith Butler; they introduce what Pierre Rosanvallon calls "counter–democracy" in order to counter the representative system at hand in the hopes of reforming it.[8] This strategy might involve, for example, striking to overturn a specific law or policy, attempting to reform a political party, or forming a new political party.

The role of *destituent* power, by contrast, as Agamben and The Invisible Committee have defined it, is not to challenge and reconstitute power, but to *destitute* it by withdrawing from it and practicing politics elsewhere. According to Agamben, this concept grew out of a concern that it is increasingly difficult and ineffective to criticize governments through public assembly and peaceful protest. It is worth noting that he outlines this concept in 2013 in the wake of the defeat of several occupations and participatory democratic movements around the world, and that it initially emerges in public lectures to activists in Athens and central France. Agamben suggests that it is no longer simply the case that the halls of our congresses are impenetrable and "postdemocratic" because they, the experts, always know better. Or that there is a real sense that little will change if another candidate or party is elected. It is that the streets and the squares of our democracies are militarized zones that make any meaningful democratic action nearly impossible.

For a majority of our populations, democratic revolt is inconceivable. Most cannot imagine how such a thing could ever begin to take place, and those who have dared to try have found themselves assailed by weapons

5. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 38.

6. Étienne Balibar, *Citizenship*, trans. Thomas Scott–Railton (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 117. See also Kropotkin, *Freedom of the press, criticism of the laws, freedom of meeting and association — all were extorted by force, by agitations that threatened to become rebellions. It was by establishing trade unions and practicing strike action despite the edits of Parliament and the hangings of 1813, and by wrecking the factories hardly fifty years ago, that the English workers won the right to associate and to strike*, Peter Kropotkin, from "Representative Government," in *Words of a Rebel*, trans. George Woodcock (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 123–4.

7. Balibar, *Citizenship*, 124.

8. Jaques Rancière, *The Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Concoran (London: Verso Press, 2006), 62; Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 9.

of war. Agamben remarks that we are no longer living in a functioning, democratic society, but a "police state" in which the "police officer [. . .] acts so as to speak as a sovereign."[9] The primary agent in between taxpayers and their representatives — the police — prohibits peaceful demonstrations and assemblies, denies protest permits or reroutes them, utilizes military grade equipment, commits acts of violence against demonstrators, protects fraudulent banks and repossesses homes on their behalf, and surveils citizens. The role of this modern "police" force, as Jacques Rancière put it elsewhere, is to hide dissent, to prohibit a meaningful confrontation, to insist, "Move along! There's nothing to see here!"[10]

Agamben focuses his 2013 remarks in Athens on what he says is "perhaps the most urgent political problem" of "strategy." For him, this concerns a departure from the notion of democracy as constituent power and the consideration of a different strategy: the withdrawal or absence of the *dēmos*, or *ademy*, or what he comes to call destituent power. As Agamben outlines in his public lecture:

> Starting with French revolution, the political tradition of modernity has conceived of radical changes in the form of a revolutionary process that acts as the *pouvoir constituant*, the "constituent power" of a new institutional order. I think that we have to abandon this paradigm and try to think something as a *puissance destituante*, a "purely destituent power," that cannot be captured in the spiral of security.[11]

The concept of destituent power immediately appears in a 2014 work by the anonymous, collective group The Invisible Committee, known for their 2007 work *The Coming Insurrection*. In the Committee's 2014 work *To Our Friends*, they reverse their earlier position on constituent power in *The Coming Insurrection*, writing: "There's no such thing as a democratic insurrection."[12] "Misdirections of this kind encourage us to reconceive the idea of revolution as *pure destitution* instead," which means "leaving the paradigm of government" behind.[13] The title of the second chapter of *To Our Friends* underscores this idea further: "They Want to Oblige Us to Govern. We Won't Yield to That Pressure."

To describe the idea of destituent power in the simplest terms, as one

9. Giorgio Agamben, "For a Theory of Destituent Power" (public lecture organized by the Nicos Poulantzas Institute and SYRIZA Youth, Athens, Greece, november 16, 2013), accessible online at http://www.chronosmag.eu.

10. Jaques Rancière, *Ten Theses on Politics*, in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steve Concoran, New York: Continuum, 2010, 37.

11. Agamben, "For a Theory of Destituent Power."

12. The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, trans. Robert Hurley (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015), 53.

13. The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 74, 79.

person did at a recent 2017 G7 meeting in Italy, "we think the only solution is not to expect any more from these governments."[14] Or as Agamben puts it in his lecture, if our "revolutions and insurrections correspond to constituent power" then «[a] power that was only just overthrown [...] will rise again in another form, in the incessant, inevitable dialectic between constituent power and constituted power."[15] In destituent power, by contrast, constituted power "becomes undone, is rendered inoperative, liberated and suspended from its 'economy'"[16]. What is needed for this, according to Agamben, is the absence or withdrawal of a *dēmos* rather than their insurrection; this, he says, "allows us to depose the fiction of a people that it pretends to represent."[17] This sort of destitution could be thought of as a "coming politics," says Agamben, echoing Derrida's democracy *à venir* or Jean–Luc Nancy's democracy *survenir*.[18]

What is most important about destituent power for Agamben and The Invisible Committee, however, goes beyond politics and government. For them, destituent power permits the embodied, philosophical exploration of alternative forms of life with others. Both are acutely aware of Foucault's insight into the neoliberal mutation of modern government, namely, that neoliberalism, as an extension and transformation of liberalism, ultimately functions through a way of life, and that our populations are managed by this way of life. Neoliberal policies oppose all forms of collectivization and socialization in contrast to the views of philosophers from Aristotle to Hannah Arendt, who once claimed that being deprived of meaningful political community would amount to being "deprived of things essential to a truly human life."[19] In place of community, neoliberals prescribe a way of life that is centered around the axioms of competition, individualism, and self–entrepreneurship.[20] Under neoliberalism, then, our desire for community is occluded by the fantasy of amassing our own self–capital. Taking a phrase directly from Foucault, The Invisible Committee remarks that this way of life has managed to make us all "entrepreneurs of the self."

What Agamben and The Invisible Committee hope for, through withdrawal rather than insurrection, is for us to abandon neoliberal life for a

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14. Marco Rizzo, Interview on *Democracy Now*, April 11, 2017, accessed April 11, 2017, https://www.democracynow.org.

15. Giorgio Agamben, "What is a Destituent Power?," trans. Stephanie Wakefield, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 32 (2014): 70.

16. Agamben, "What is Destituent Power,", 69.

17. Agamben, "What is Destituent Power,", 72.

18. Agamben, "What is Destituent Power," 74.

19. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 198–99, 58. See Aristotle, *Pol.*, 1.2, 3.6; *Eth. Nic.* 1.1–2.

20. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 144.

moment and consider a different form of life. "What is at stake [in destitu-
tion] is living itself," writes Agamben; destitution "coincides completely
and constitutively with . . . *living a life*."[21] Because life under neoliberalism
entails "the obligation to maximize one's one market value as the ultimate
aim in life," adds Judith Butler in a recent book on public assembly, new
political movements must explore a life worth living.[22] Agamben writes
in an earlier essay, "The Friend," that such a life must be shared among
friends, and that what must be shared among friends is the bare fact that
we are alive, that we exist. In *To Our Friends*, The Invisible Committee
elaborates upon this idea further by suggesting that recent democratic
movements ought to be interpreted precisely in this way — as not primar-
ily attempting to reform their current governments through constituent
power, but as freely exploring another form of life with others. They
write:

> The true content of Occupy Wall Street was not the demand [. . .] for better wages,
> decent housing, or a more generous social security, but *disgust with the life we're
> forced to live*. Disgust with a life in which we're all *alone*, alone facing the necessity
> for each one to make a living, house oneself, feed oneself, realize one's potential,
> and attend to one's health, *by oneself*. [. . .] the life in common that was attempted in
> Zuccotti Park, in tents, in the cold, in the rain, surrounded by police in the dreariest
> of Manhattan's squares was definitely not a full rollout of the *vita nova* — it was just
> the point where the sadness of metropolitan existence began to be flagrant. At last
> it was possible to grasp our shared condition *together*, our equal reduction to the
> status of entrepreneurs of the self.[23]

"The stake in all neoliberal analysis," Foucault summarized, is "a *homo
oeconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital,
being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his
earnings."[24] Instead of being "by nature a political animal," one is taught
to become, eidetically, a self–entrepreneur who builds their own capital
by garnering likes on social media, for instance, or amassing a substantial
following on Twitter, or competing on a reality TV show that reconstructs
a life in which one's friends are, in fact, competitors.[25] Of course, in the end,
the human being has no *polis* to enter — only the shell of a state that is
"under the supervision of the market."[26]

By contrast, Agamben likens destituent power to a feast or holiday (*la festa*),

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21. Agamben, "What is a Destituent Power?," 73, 74.
22. Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 15.
23. The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 49.
24. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.
25. Aristotle, *Pol.*, 1.2, 3.6; *Eth. Nic.*, 1. 1–2; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 219.
26. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 116.

"which, on the model of the Hebrew Shabbat, has been conceived essentially as a temporary suspension of productive activity, of *melacha*."[27] The holiday or *festa*, of course, is not only marked by the pause of commerce and exchange; it is defined by friendship and community, or that which is greater than oneself. There is something about the holiday, as Pier Paolo Pasolini once wrote in his poem *Chiusa la festa* ("The Holiday Over"), which allows us to experience life itself; it allows us, in Pasolini's words, to reach the limit of the "flimsy crust of our world" and expose "the naked universe."[28]

Agamben and The Invisible Committee are not the first, of course, to argue for this kind of strategy. It could be said that considerations of destituent power are found in 1980 in the late two chapters on the state in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, in Deleuze's unpublished 1979–1980 lecture course on the state, and in debates on alternative political communities throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, such as Jean–Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1986).[29] One might add to this list Clastres's *Society Against the State* (1974), Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1987), or Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1993) and *Politics of Friendship* (1994) as works that explore destituent power. We could also add texts like Jean–Luc Nancy's *The Possibility of a World* (2013) or *What's These Worlds Coming To?* (2011), which consider the creation or "struction" of alternative political communities. In his recent work, *En quel temps vivons–nous?* (2017), Jacques Rancière mentions Paolo Virno's political theory of "exodus" as a way of thinking about destituent power.[30]

In addition to these philosophical works, one of the earliest examples of this kind of destituent withdrawal as a response to neoliberal government in particular can be found in the mostly rural, agrarian, indigenous and non–indigenous community in Chiapas, Mexico, which withdrew from Mexico, organized itself horizontally, and held the "First International *Encuentro* for Humanity and against Neoliberalism." After Paul Volcker's neoliberal strategy or the "Volcker Shock" drove Mexico into default from 1982 to 1984, Mexico could no longer pay back its debt due to the forced rise in interest rates on Wall Street–backed loans to the Mexican government. As a result, the Mexican government was forced to implement austerity and privatization programs

27. Agamben, "What is a destituent power?," 69.

28. Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Roman Poems*, trans. Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Francesca Valente (San Francisco: City Lights, 2005), 4–7.

29. See, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 24: "The nomads invented a war machine in opposition to the State apparatus. History has never comprehended nomadism, the book has never comprehended the outside. [. . .] the war machine's relation to an outside is not another 'model'; it is an assemblage that makes thought itself nomadic." Deleuze and Guattari later remark at length on the difference between the State apparatus and the war machine, which is "anonymous, collective, or third person" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 352).

30. Jaques Rancière, *En quel temps vivons–nous?* (Paris: La fabrique éditions, 2017), 23.

or "debt restructuring" schemes that transformed it into a neoliberal state.[31] What made matters especially difficult in the 1980s for Mexican workers and farmers was compounded by the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, when crops like corn, for instance, were no longer worth much in Mexico. The Zapatistas were formed in the midst of the Mexican debt crisis in 1983, went public on the same day as the passage of NAFTA in 1994, and held the "First International *Encuentro* for Humanity and against Neoliberalism" in 1996. Their deliberate strategy of withdrawal from the neoliberal Mexican government and the formation of an alternative, democratic community is suggestive of a kind of destituent power in the wake of neoliberal government. However, recent movements in public squares or even destituent approaches to money and finance show us that the Zapatista community is far from being the only model of destituent power.

Conclusion

The basic question of this essay is this: In our attempt to find and employ a current strategy for a democratic future, should we theorize and organize around a constituent or destituent form of power? Should we seek to *reform* government through constituent demonstrations and activities or explore destituent alternatives in spaces where political life is still possible? Should we mobilize around popular protests and elections, or withdraw and dissolve the state's legitimacy through lack — namely, the lack of a people who is said to constitute and legitimize it? In withdrawing and assembling elsewhere, could a number of people perhaps begin to imagine something beyond a form of life defined by competition, self–entrepreneurship, and isolation? Could they conceive of a form of politics that is not prescribed by "the market" or distant political representatives? Could another world, even in this limited sense, be possible?

As we have seen in this essay, advocates of destituent power describe themselves in opposition to constituent power. But perhaps destituent power and constituent power are not as mutually exclusive as they suggest. As Jacques Rancière suggested in an interview in 2017, voting to avoid the worst "is the kind of dilemma you can deal with in five minutes."[32] Likewise, in their 2017 book *Assembly*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri seek to combine recent destituent movements with constituent power, writing: "To this destituent endeavor needs to be added a constituent project" (elsewhere, Roberto Esposito has proposed adding an "instituent" power, or the power

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31. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 29.

32. Jaques Rancière and Éric Aeschimann, "Mais pourquoi se disent–ils tous 'anti–système?' Entretien avec Jacques Rancière," Interview published in *L'Obs*, March 12, 2017.

of institutions).[33] But while these two forms of democratic activity may not necessarily be mutually exclusive, it is at least important to recognize why proponents of destituent power maintain that their strategy is distinct from constituent power. Perhaps it is helpful to draw out this problematic in terms of what destituent power "can" and "cannot" do.

Destituent power cannot run a campaign that repoliticizes a country and wins an election, like the recent presidential campaign in Mexico. It cannot reform parties in the sense that Jeremy Corbyn or Bernie Sanders' supporters hope to do. It refuses to create new political parties like Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain. It does not protest government in the hope that things will change. Nor does it propose a general strike with the idea that work will stop until demands are met or policies change. Destituent power cannot nationalize a bank or precious resources, for instance. It cannot pass laws that might reform the prison system or end the corrupt financing of elections. What destitution power can do, however, and what many recent philosophical reflections have focused on, has to do with something else, namely the era of *homo oeconomicus*, or the financialized and depoliticized subject under neoliberalism.

Destituent power knows that neoliberalism ultimately functions through everyday habits of self–entrepreneurship and competition, and that the population of the state is managed by this way of life. The renewed philosophical interest in destituent power therefore attempts to take flight from this way of life. It asks: Is there a "we" for whom a life of self–entrepreneurship, competition, and spectatorship could be replaced with a culture of sharing and political participation? It asks, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari: Would it be possible to flee the "chess game of the State" through "an anonymous, collective, or third–person function?."[34] The work of The Invisible Committee is especially interesting in this regard. In a neoliberal culture of self–entrepreneurship, they write anonymous, collective, and third–person texts. Their latest attempt to *withdraw* and write *to our friends* is an invitation to live differently with others. Despite having once called for protests against the state in an attempt to reform it, their text, *To Our Friends*, signals a new plan entirely. It refuses to govern a failed system and calls for a destituent politics of friendship. The book begins, tellingly, with the following epigraph: "There is no other world. There's just another way to live."[35]

Another example of destituent power in action was when people began sharing free meals together within days of the birth of Occupy Wall Street in New York. This took place, remarkably, in a setting between Wall Street

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33. Hardt and Negri, *Assembly*, 223.

34. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 352. In many ways, *A Thousand Plateaus* is already a destituent response to Foucault's lectures on the state.

35. The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 9.

and World Trade. Sharing food in this way became revolutionary. Eating together rather than alone, eating for free and without financial transaction, all of this became a way of seeing past the form of life into which we have been conditioned without knowing it. Having a coke with you, as Frank O'Hara might put it, became as if "in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we [were] drifting back and forth / between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles // and the portrait show seem[ed] to have no faces in it at all."[36] Participants abandoned the neoliberal project of accumulating capital into their proper names; they shared time and goods as gifts, often anonymously.

    Destituent power allows us not just to imagine that another world is possible. It offers us an experience of what this world might look like — not in the easy and distant realm of reason, but as something real, as something we can taste. It is, ultimately, a shared *aisthēsis* (*synaisthēsis*) among friends.[37] What is shared is the bare fact that we exist, that we are alive. And that the way we are being forced to live is an aberration that has prevented life itself. As destituent power explores a life outside of *homo oeconomicus*, it must be said that such a life would be distinct from Romantic *solitude* or the civil *disobedience* of Libertarians. Destituent power is not internal, but collective and exposed. It takes place when we gather for a holiday, participate in a festival, or pause for a meal with others. At least, the hope is that these experiences would help us to know a place of well–being and see the limits of a life of self–entrepreneurship and competition. Recent destituent movements have had a profound influence on electoral campaigns and young voters in particular. They have begun what some have called a new era of protest. In some places, they have made it possible for mainstream political candidates to speak about economic inequality and class struggle again. But this was never their intent. Destituent movements no longer expect any meaningful change from these governments or believe that they represent them. They are a search for a political future that begins with "knowing what a desirable form of life would be."[38] Because what is needed today, writes The Invisible Committee, is "a different idea of life."[39]

36.   Frank O'Hara, "Having a Coke with You," in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen, with an introduction by John Ashbery, Berkeley (University of California Press, 1995), 360.

37.   See Aristotle's discussion of friendship as *synaisthēsis* or shared aesthetics at Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1170a28–1171b35. See Giorgio Agamben's discussion of this passage in Giorgio Agamben, "The Friend," in *What is an Apparatus?*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25–37.

38.   The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 45, 49.

39.   The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, 52.

Should We Renounce Hegel?
From Existentialism to Hermeneutics

Alberto Martinengo*

Abstract

Renoncer à Hegel is the motto that defines Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics in his *Time and Narrative*. This sort of "parricide" draws the boundaries between hermeneutical rationality and Hegelian reason. Ricoeur's words capture very well how philosophical hermeneutics understood itself in the 1980s, a historical phase in which that tradition showed its fully disruptive power towards modernity. This was the case with Italian hermeneutics which, much more than its French counterpart, found a positive resonance in reflections on postmodernism. The present essay deals with some of the most relevant representatives of that debate: Luigi Pareyson, Valerio Verra, and Gianni Vattimo. The aim is to show that the chapter on Hegel is fully part of the origin and history of Italian philosophical hermeneutics, far beyond the narrow limits of early twentieth–century Hegelianism.

Keywords: Hegel, Pareyson, Verra, Vattimo, Existentialism, Hermeneutics.

1. The Origin of Hermeneutics: A Parricide

In the third volume of *Time and Narrative* (1985), Paul Ricoeur dedicates a few chapters to the "totalization of time" in fictional narrative, that is, to the particular re–configuration of the past, present, and future that a narrative is able to produce. The crucial part of the analysis has two slightly different titles in the French original and in the English translation by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Ricoeur chooses a title that also functions as a "watchword"[1] for his theoretical proposal: *Renoncer à Hegel* [*Renouncing Hegel*]. Instead, the translators opted for a problematic question: "Should we renounce Hegel?». Whichever way it is inflected, Ricoeur's reference to Hegel — as in a sort of parricide — is strategic in drawing the boundaries that separate "hermeneutical rationality" from Hegelian reason:

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1. Jérôme de Gramont, "Ricoeur. Entre paradis perdu et terre promise," *Phasis. European Journal of Philosophy* VI, 5 (2018): 117.

these boundaries are drawn along the ridge between philosophy, history and temporality. Ricoeur formulates his thesis as follows:

> Intellectual honesty demands the confession that, for us, the loss of credibility the Hegelian philosophy of history has undergone has the significance of an event in thinking, concerning which we may say neither that we brought it about nor that it simply happened, and concerning which we do not know if it is indicative of a catastrophe that still is crippling us or a deliverance whose glory we dare not celebrate[2] — and he adds that — the leaving behind of Hegelianism [...] appears to us, after the fact, as a kind of beginning, or even as an origin.[3]

Ricoeur's words capture very well how philosophical hermeneutics understood itself in the 1980s, a historical phase in which, especially in some cultural contexts, that tradition showed its disruptive power towards modernity, that is, towards the line that connects Descartes to Hegel. This was the case with Italian hermeneutics, which, much more than its French counterpart, found a positive resonance in reflections on postmodernism, creating the conditions for an original path in the philosophical debates of the late twentieth century. Gianni Vattimo was the key figure in this respect. On the one hand, he reconsidered Nietzsche's and Heidegger's analyses of "Western metaphysics" and, on the other hand, he radicalized the philosophical debate on the end of modernity: these are the two lines that, crossing each other, make that philosophical period still recognizable today, thirty years later.[4]

However, as soon as one takes a step beyond watchwords and blurred images, one realizes that the chapter on Hegel is fully part of the origin and history of Italian philosophical hermeneutics. And this history is marked by a series of ambiguities and deviations whose most appropriate title might not be the affirmative of the French original of *Time and Narrative* but, more likely, the English translation that comes with a question mark: "Should we renounce Hegel?"

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1984, 201.

3. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 201.

4. The first pages of Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* read: "Indeed, the scattered and often incoherent theories of post–modernity only acquire rigor and philosophical credibility when seen in relation to the Nietzschean problematic of the eternal return and the Heideggerian problematic of the overcoming of metaphysics. At the same time, if Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophical intuitions are to appear once and for all irreducible to the kind of *Kulturkritik* that permeates all early twentieth–century philosophy and culture, they may do so only in relation to those things that are revealed by post–modern reflection on the new conditions of existence in the late industrial world"; see Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 15.

2. Reconsidering Finitude

The relationship between Hegel and Italian philosophical hermeneutics is based on the debates through which existentialism took root in Italy. Luigi Pareyson was the main protagonist of these debates, at least in the 1940s. His personalism revolves around the redefinition of the relation between the finite and the infinite, with Hegelianism as the point of polemical confrontation. As Maurizio Pagano explains in a long article that reconstructs Hegel's presence throughout Pareyson's reflection, in this initial phase, "the central points of his discussion were, on the one hand, the assertion of the value of the finite, understood as an individual or better as a person, and, on the other, a new understanding of transcendence."[5] A second element of rupture was then added to this focus on finitude, which Pareyson embraced in the wake of Kierkegaard and Barth, as well as through direct relationships with Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers: it was the interpretation of existentialism as a historical response to the crisis of rationalism — therefore something similar to the *event in thinking* described by Ricoeur. Referring to the immediate post–war period, Pagano explains:

> If we want to open up a new path, we must first assess the path that has led society and culture to the present, and into the disaster of war. In this context, the diagnosis that emerges is that of a crisis of past culture; and existentialism is usually referred to as "philosophy of crisis." According to Pareyson, what is on the agenda is the crisis of the rationalistic strand of modern thought, that is, of the path that goes from Descartes to Hegel. For this reason [Hegel's] thought is at the center of the crisis and of the debate that aims to overcome it.[6]

The step beyond the "crisis" is precisely represented by the philosophy of the person, which Pareyson systematizes in *Esistenza e persona* (*Existence and Person*, 1950). Its main axis is the incommensurability between the finite and the infinite. Contrary to contemporary versions of existentialism, the finite and the infinite here are not bound by a form of *implication*, that is, by mutual co–belonging — which Pareyson still sees as a "crypto–Hegelian residue." On the contrary, they are two unrelated elements and, on this basis, they make room for a philosophy of the finite as independent from the infinite.[7]

However, Pareyson's business with Hegel did not finish here. It continued underground throughout the following phase of Pareyson's thought, which dealt with aesthetics and, from there, paved the way to his philosophical

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5. Maurizio Pagano, "Presenza di Hegel nel pensiero di Luigi Pareyson," *Archivio di filosofia* LXXXV, 1 (2017): 122.

6. Pagano, "Presenza di Hegel," 123.

7. Pagano, "Presenza di Hegel," 125–26.

hermeneutics. The most important stage of this period was undoubtedly manifest in the work *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (*Aesthetics: A Theory of Formativity*, 1954), in which the reference to Hegel becomes indirect and, to a large extent, implicit. The theoretical background of the book is in fact the tradition of aesthetics that starts with Benedetto Croce. In his preface to the fourth edition of the book (1988), Pareyson makes a significant remark: "Rather than lingering over an umpteenth critique of Croce's aesthetics, this book goes straight to the point, proposing, in place of Croce's principles of intuition and expression, an aesthetics of production and formativity."[8] This sort of "interdiction against Croce" fully marks Pareyson's "role in the Italian aesthetics of the twentieth century," to borrow the title of an essay by Paolo D'Angelo.[9] Yet, when Pareyson mentions Croce, the reader knows that what he says counts as a synecdoche: it applies not only for Croce and his aesthetics but also for Hegel's system as a whole, starting from absolute Spirit. This triangulation, which calls into question the tradition that prevailed in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century, deserves to be explored in depth because it contains fundamental elements of Pareyson's future hermeneutical shift.

3. An Alternative to Hegel

In an essay entitled "Pareyson e Hegel (Pareyson and Hegel)," Mauro Bozzetti writes that Pareyson's personalistic existentialism was above all a "resumption of the dissolution of Hegelianism".[10] In other words, it amounted to breaking away from the contemporary cultural and academic context, and to doing so in a specific way — a way that, in Pareyson's view, had historical, almost epochal, relevance. The decision not to start a polemical confrontation with Croce's legacy confirms the significance of his proposal. In his 1988 preface, Pareyson reaffirms that his intention is to seek out new paths of thought; paths that — as stated by Francesco Tomatis — would enable him to "reinterpret and entirely reconstruct the history of contemporary philosophy and find 'an alternative theoretical line to Hegel'[11].

This preliminary decision was radical and would underlie most of Pareyson's philosophical hermeneutics. In his perspective, existentialism

8. Luigi Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (Milan: Bompiani, 1988), 7.

9. Paolo D'Angelo, "Il ruolo di Luigi Pareyson nell'estetica italiana del Novecento," *Annuario filosofico* 27 (2011): 61.

10. Mauro Bozzetti, "Pareyson e Hegel," in *Luigi Pareyson tra ermeneutica e ontologia della libertà*, ed. Giuseppe Riconda and Ezio Gamba (Turin: Trauben, 2010), 118.

11. Francesco Tomatis, *Pareyson. Vita, filosofia, Bibliografia* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003), 38 (emphasis mine).

did not presuppose revisions, corrections, mutilations or reversals of the Hegelian system, but a break that eliminated any complicity whatsoever with that model. So much so that, for Pareyson, nineteenth–century German existentialism itself was not yet sufficiently distanced from Hegel and had to be criticized: in fact, to Pareyson it was "anti–Hegelian and Hegelian at the same time"[12], that is to say, it considered Hegel as a literally unsurpassable point of modern philosophy. In Pareyson's personalist existentialism, instead, this shift could finally be taken to the extreme. This happened by attributing a new role to Fichte and Schelling, who are fundamental references for Pareyson's personalism and hermeneutics. According to his perspective, Fichte and Schelling could in fact be qualified as both *pre–Hegelian* and *post–Hegelian* philosophers. This view, like Schelling's characterization as a *post–Heideggerian* thinker that frequently recurs in Pareyson's writings, particularly in *Esistenza e persona* and, later, in *Verità e interpretazione* (*Truth and Interpretation*, 1971), was no simple provocation. The theoretically preparatory move of hermeneutics — that is, personalistic existentialism — was in fact a way to decompose and recompose the philosophical tradition. Hence, the possibility of drawing unexpected and deliberately anachronistic lines of continuity and discontinuity.

On this basis, the core of Pareyson's existentialism lies in the thesis that the person — my finite, incarnate, and historically situated person — is not merely negativity, but a perspective that opens onto truth. The person is a concrete dialectic of opposites — finite and infinite, activity and passivity — and is the place where the universal meets history. The aesthetic theme is also embedded in this encounter. In its pre–philosophical inspiration, Pareyson's theory of art as formativity is an appeal to look at the concreteness of the artistic experience. Despite its continuity with *Esistenza e persona*, it would be wrong to consider formativity as the *application* to aesthetics of a theoretical model elaborated elsewhere, that is, of a philosophical system presupposed for its exercise in the aesthetic field. If anything, it is the other way around: Pareyson developed his alternative to the Hegel–Croce *lignée* precisely through the *concrete* problem of artistic experience, and more markedly than in personalist existentialism. Hence, incidentally, his particularly original attention to poetics, which would return several times in the tradition started by Pareyson, for example in Gianni Vattimo. Following a typically anti–Crocean line shared with some other authors (especially Antonio Banfi and Luciano Anceschi), poetics becomes for Pareyson the effective tool with which philosophy could reasonably penetrate the concreteness of artistic practice while respecting its principles, that is, without overwriting them with extra–artistic assumptions.

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12. Pareyson, *Esistenza e persona* (Genoa: il Melangolo, 2002), 78.

After all, the problem of presuppositions is not only a premise of the theory of formativity, but it is its very heart, albeit in a different sense. When, at the beginning of the section entitled "Attempt and Success," Pareyson presented the famous definition of formativity as "such a doing that, while doing, "invents the way of doing,"[13] he was thinking of a specific aspect of human experience exemplified by the production of artistic forms: not the production according to predetermined principles, but the formative activity that creates its own rules. Here is the point: "conceiving by performing," that is "inventing by doing," is the key with which Pareyson rediscovered the connection with the concreteness of artistic production. From now on, this theme would be a full part of the discussion about artistic creativity and improvisation, but for Pareyson it was above all the tool to give substance to his specific departure from Croce's aesthetic: a departure that implied changing the entire horizon of philosophically relevant questions.

4. Historicizing the Truth

Also in aesthetics, therefore, the core question for Pareyson remained that of *Esistenza e persona*, namely the role of the finite, or rather of that finite singularity that I am.[14] A singularity that, in *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, finds in art–making the way to the problem of truth as interpretation. After all, the problem of truth is the common thread through which Luigi Pareyson read, disputed, and recovered Hegel in the different phases of his reflection. He did so in a key that, already in *Esistenza e persona*, attributes to philosophy some fundamental questions that touch on the problem of truth: "Does the recognition of the essential multiplicity of philosophies threaten the uniqueness of truth? Is it possible to have a pluralistic but not relativistic conception of truth? What is the point of view expressed by a perspectival position that reconciles the uniqueness of truth with the multiplicity of

13. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, 59.

14. Mauro Bozzetti insists on Pareyson's definition of "person": "For Pareyson the historical subject is man, for Hegel it is people, epochs, or kingdoms within which the subjects can redeem themselves only by understanding their time and making themselves understood by their time." What is at stake in the rift between the two views is the relationship between the subjective spirit and the objective spirit. To what kind of "person" does Pareyson's existentialism refer? It is evident that from a Hegelian point of view, Pareyson's "person" is a notion that has not attained the objective spirit, let alone produced a synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity. It is not at all the personality of *Science of Logic*. It is not "the individual, the concrete, the subject" which is the result rather than the beginning. It is not the pure personality of which *Science of Logic* speaks: "The highest, most concentrated point is the pure personality which, solely through the absolute dialectic which is its nature, no less embraces and holds everything within itself, because it makes itself the supremely free — the simplicity which is the first immediacy and Universality," G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), § 1811, 841.

its formulations?".[15] To put it more bluntly: Is it possible to think of a notion of truth as an interpretation that is historically connoted, but is not exhausted in history? As previously mentioned, this relationship between history and truth is the result of a view by which Hegelianism erases historicity in its concreteness and nineteenth–century anti–Hegelianism distorts it. However, the history of Italian hermeneutics unfolds along a time period in which the relationship with Hegel varied sometimes significantly: by the end of that period, Pareyson's position changed to the point of being fully overturned.[16]

In fact, in the 1950s, the same period in which Pareyson's existentialism moved into a non–Hegelian philosophical hermeneutics, another approach appeared, whose Italian birthplace was still Turin but whose destination became Karl Löwith's and Hans–Georg Gadamer's Heidelberg — an environment obviously different from Jaspers' and Pareyson's. In this case, the key figure was Valerio Verra. Verra's contribution to Hegelian studies in Italy is in fact inseparable from the hermeneutical perspective in which his contribution developed. And vice versa: his role in the Italian hermeneutic debate consists above all in explicitly reopening the dialogue with Hegel — that is, in embracing the objective of doing philosophy (and therefore also philosophical hermeneutics) *an und mit* Hegel, as is often mentioned.[17]

The distance between Pareyson and Verra can already be seen in their respective historical–philosophical texts.[18] As said earlier, Payerson's goal was to break the unitary logic of development that goes from post–Kantianism to Hegelianism. Verra instead re–attributed a decisive role to Hegel and did so — here is the intersection between history of philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics — by enhancing the dialogic dimension of dialectics.[19] His 1959 article titled "Rinascita Schellinghiana? (A Schellingean

15. Pareyson, *Esistenza e persona*, 10.

16. The following phase of Pareyson's reflection, which took place in the 1980s, was a chapter in its own right, and was the basis of the texts collected in *Ontologia della libertà* (*Ontology of Freedom*, 1995). This was also a fundamental moment for his relationship with Hegel, which then resumed, particularly in relation to the dialectic. Indeed, Pareyson wrote: "Hegel is right: the heart of reality is the dialectic"; however, he also wrote that "Hegel sent this great intuition in a misleading direction, falling into a catastrophic error" and the catastrophe was the *Aufhebung* of the negative by means of necessity; see L. Pareyson, *Ontologia della libertà*, Turin: Einaudi, 1995, 332. On these aspects, see once more Pagano, *Presenza di Hegel nel pensiero di Luigi Pareyson*, 129–134.

17. See for example Claudio Cesa, "Per Valerio Verra," *Studi kantiani* XIV (2001): 177. Cesa is the editor of the posthumous collection that today is the fundamental reference text for a comprehensive overview of Verra's Hegelian research; see Valerio Verra, "Su Hegel," (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007).

18. Riconda, "Valerio Verra e l'ambiente filosofico torinese", *Rivista di filosofia* XCIV, 1 (2003): 111 ff. On the distance between the "Turin philosophy" and Hegel, see also Rossi, "Alla riscoperta di Hegel", *Rivista di filosofia* XCIV, 1 (2003): 123, with references to Guzzo and Abbagnano on one side, and to Solari and Bobbio on the other.

19. Riconda, "Valerio Verra e l'ambiente filosofico torinese", 112.

Renaissance?") already signals the distrust that, for him, hinders the adequate understanding of Hegelian philosophy[20].

Gianni Vattimo reconstructs the context in more explicit terms: for Verra, Hegel is the master "of the radical historicity of the spirit that asserts itself against every claim of metaphysical rationalism," that is, against those same claims that, conversely, Pareyson's hermeneutics faced by choosing existentialism[21]. From Vattimo's perspective, in short, the appeal to historicity — of knowledge, of experience, of being — is the unifying trait of the nascent Italian philosophical hermeneutics. A trait that however, perhaps paradoxically, Verra and Pareyson inflected in opposite ways with respect to Hegel: Pareyson abandoned Croce and Hegelianism altogether; Verra rediscovered Hegel and promoted a profound renewal of his early twentieth–century reception.

Yet this diversity cannot be fully understood without bringing Hans–Georg Gadamer into play. Indeed, his role was essential, and not only for the biographical circumstances that bind Verra to Heidelberg and make him the first "ambassador" of Gadamer in our country. More generally, the impact of *Truth and Method* in Italy definitely contributed to shifting the balance, and it is no coincidence that the Italian translation — signed by Vattimo himself — was one of the first to be published, in 1972. In short, the book had a remarkable and relatively rapid diffusion, whose core was precisely the theme of the historicity of truth. And there are two sides to this coin: on the one hand, by completely rewriting the problem of the objective Spirit, *Truth and Method* strengthened and sanctioned the possibility of a "different" Hegel, as posited by Verra already in the 1950s; on the other hand, its rewriting was linked to the more complex fate of hermeneutics in Italy and should be seen as a non–secondary element, especially in relation to Vattimo's thought.

5. Hegel and the Avantgardes

Now that Verra's position has been clarified, it is useful to shift the attention to the other side of the debate. In fact, although Vattimo claimed on several occasions that weak thought derives from Pareyson's hermeneutics, the gap between the two lines of thought has become more and more significant over the years. Their respective paths in opposite directions was progressive,

20. Valerio Verra, "Rinascita Schellinghiana?," *Il Pensiero* 4 (1959): 70–89. But at the end of the 1950s Verra's path had only just begun, and from then on the gap between him and Pareyson would widen further.

21. Gianni Vattimo, "Da Dewey a Hegel, attraverso Gadamer", *Rivista di filosofia* XCIV, 1 (2003): 130.

but unequivocal. Indeed, it can be clearly seen already in an early text like *Art's Claim to Truth* (1967), in which Pareyson's anti–Crocean aesthetic program and the opening towards Gadamer still coexist. In these pages, Vattimo follows up on the face–to–face confrontation with the Hegelian tradition on which Pareyson had chosen not to dwell. Indeed, Vattimo refers critically to the "substantively Hegelian mindset"[22] that appeared "dominant"[23] in early twentieth–century aesthetics. At the same time, however, this confrontation does not lead to a confirmation of Pareyson's position, but to a path towards the reappropriation of Hegel, albeit problematic and not univocal.

The heart of the "reappropriation of Hegel" carried out by Vattimo's hermeneutics is to be found in the theme of the end of art. The *Ende der Kunst* is precisely the pivotal point where Vattimo's position changes. Let us see how this comes about. In *Art's Claim to Truth*, Hegel is seen as largely responsible for the rhetoric of the non–essentiality of art: a shortcoming that, Vattimo objects, renders subsequent artistic forms — particularly the avantgardes — incomprehensible. Hegel was responsible, in short, for a veritable act of "violence" on art. But the attention that Vattimo paid to the avantgardes, from *Art's Claim to Truth* onwards, would also be the turning point of his interpretation of Hegel. Upon closer investigation, in Vattimo, the avantgardes eventually cease to be a phenomenon that disproves Hegel's thesis of the end of art or that simply renders the conceptual arsenal of Hegelian aesthetics irrelevant; on the contrary, they become the reaction to a complex historical scenario — a scenario that is no other than Hegel's *Ende der Kunst* — and thus do not invalidate that analysis, but instead reinforce it.

Let us have a closer look at this shift. On the one hand, *Art's Claim to Truth* considers the avantgardes and, in particular, the proliferation of manifestos as a demonstration that "Hegelian and post–Hegelian philosophy have not done justice to art"[24], forcing artists to take a complex path of self–questioning and self–justification. On the other hand, however, already in the *Introduzione all'estetica di Hegel* (*Introduction to Hegel's Aesthetics*), published immediately after the 1967 volume, these phenomena are seen as the demonstration of the insuperable need for art, in a sense that is no longer anti–Hegelian, but that, on the contrary, strives for a positive retrieval of Hegel's legacy. Vattimo refers to the thesis according to which, given the necessity for the absolute idea to manifest itself in the form of sensuous appearance, (artistic) beauty is the place where this necessity is fully inscribed. Furthermore — once again in line with Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* — art is necessary because the absolute Spirit's effort to realize

22. Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 17.
23. Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 17.
24. Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 32.

itself as full self–recognition in the other is required by its freedom. And this "need" of the Spirit finds in art something that cannot be found in philosophy: namely sensuous form, understood as the supreme form of absolute Spirit. Freedom, in short, demands to manifest itself concretely — and, at least on a first level, this concreteness cannot do without a sensuous form.

Thus, Vattimo overcomes at the same time both Pareyson's interdiction and the Italian interpretations of the *Ende der Kunst*. This overcoming, from his point of view, is the premise for a new understanding of Hegel: an understanding in which the end of art becomes the core of a more complex framework. This can be seen clearly in his essay "The Death or Decline of Art" (1980), which is the fundamental step of Vattimo's hermeneutics towards an authentic reappropriation of Hegel. The means of this re–appropriation are heavily reminiscent of Heidegger: the end of art, Vattimo writes, must be considered an event like those that mark the "history of Being" — in other words, it is an element that, along with many others, forms the horizon within which the history of modernity unfolds.

Whereas Pareyson speaks of a "blissful union" between Heidegger and Schelling, Vattimo suggests a union between Heidegger and Hegel. In the interplay between the survival and downfall of art, writes Vattimo, the work of art "displays characteristics analogous to Heidegger's notion of Being: it arises only as that which at the same time withdraws from us"[25]. However, this proximity to Heidegger enables Vattimo to take a step further, a step which is decisive in judging whether the union between Heidegger and Hegel is also "blissful." Vattimo's insistence on the notion of downfall has, in fact, an ambitious objective: to bring the matter entirely back to the Heideggerian theme of *Verwindung*. What Heidegger affirms with regard to the *Verwindung* of metaphysics — as opposed to the *Überwindung*, and above all as radically irreducible to the *Aufhebung* — also applies to art. Heidegger's *Verwindung*, recalls Vattimo, must be understood as a process of distortion of certain notions, towards a gradual distancing from metaphysics. In this sense — again, through an explicit reference to the poetics of the avantgardes — Hegel's end of art becomes synonymous with the «'explosion' of aesthetics beyond the institutional limits which are traditionally assigned to it," which has to do with art's capacity for profound self–transformation, problematizing its very limits. "One of the criteria for evaluation of the work of art," writes Vattimo in relation to the avantgardes, "seems to be, first and foremost, the ability of the work to call into question its own status"[26]. In short, the aspect that can least be reduced to the established canon, which

25. Gianni Vattimo, "The Death or Decline of Art," in *The End of Modernity*, 28.
26. Gianni Vattimo, "The Death or Decline of Art," 27.

modern art seeks to violate, becomes a power that "distorts" tradition —
hence indeed a distortion of the canon, not its eradication or "overcoming."
And this distortion is often ironic, as in the case of pop art, or else expresses
a radical mixture of registers, as we find in *Kitsch*. In other terms, from the
avantgardes onwards, one witnesses a phenomenon of *Verwindung der Kunst*
which, to Vattimo, is the most authentic sense of Hegel's *Ende der Kunst*. But
the fundamental question remains, namely, whether this "rediscovery" of
Hegel by Vattimo's hermeneutics is a faithful re–appropriation or whether,
at the end of the day, greater fidelity should be found in the "renunciation"
of Hegel supported by Pareyson.

English translation by S. De Sanctis

Leopardi Beyond Spinoza:
Hegel's Logic of Essence

Angelica Nuzzo*

Abstract

The essay illustrates the meaning of the Absolute that leads Hegel's Logic of Essence to its conclusion by bringing Leopardi's conception of Nature to the center. Hegel's Absolute, I contend, can be best understood as the Nature that appears in Leopardi's 1824 *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese* (*Operette Morali*) and in his late poem *La Ginestra* (1836). Hegel claims that the Absolute of the Logic of Essence "corresponds" to Spinoza's monistic Absolute expressed as *Deus sive natura*. This "correspondence" and the criticism of Spinoza it entails have stirred reactions against Hegel's alleged misunderstanding of Spinoza. Leopardi's intervention will help us understand the core of Hegel's position with regard to Spinoza's substance, and will ultimately allow us to put in a novel perspective the crucial transition from necessity to freedom that this stage of the development of Essence represents.

Keywords: Absolute, Nature, Hegel, Logic, Leopardi, Spinoza.

My task in this essay is to illustrate the meaning of the Absolute that concludes Hegel's Logic of Essence, the second part of his *Science of Logic*, by bringing Leopardi's conception of Nature to the center. Hegel's Absolute, I contend, can be best understood as the Nature of Leopardi's *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese* (1824) and the late poem *La Ginestra* (1836). Hegel claims that the Absolute "corresponds" to Spinoza's substance: *Deus sive natura*. This "correspondence" and the criticism of Spinoza it entails have often stirred reactions against Hegel's alleged misunderstanding of Spinoza.[1] Leopardi's intervention will help us understand Hegel's position toward Spinoza, and ultimately put in a novel perspective the transition from necessity to freedom entailed in the conclusion of Essence.[2] Ultimately,

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1. For such criticism, see for all Birgit Sandkaulen, *Die Ontologie der Substanz, der Begriff der Subjektivität und die Faktizität des Einzelnen. Hegels reflexionslogische "Widerlegung" der Spinozanischen Metaphysik*, in *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus/International Yearbook of German Idealism* 5 (2007), Berlin, New York: 2008, 235–275. See also Angelica Nuzzo, "Truth and Refutation in Hegel's Begriffslogik," in *Die Begründung der Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus*, ed. E. Ficara (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 91–105.

2. I have developed an extensive argument for the claim put forward in this essay in Angelica

I suggest that Leopardi's view of Nature proves to be a better candidate for the transition to the Concept's "realm of freedom" than Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*.

1. The Absolute and the End of Essence

In the Logic of Essence, the second book of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel presents the Absolute as Essence itself in its concluding movement. The Absolute is the identity and totality of its determinations, a "solid" and "substantial" identity that is "absolute" in a sense that anticipates the concept, yet falls short of the concept.[3] It is a totality such that "each of its parts is itself the whole," just as each moment of the concept is "the whole concept."[4] In the absolute, however, difference has vanished. The absolute is sheer *Abgrund*: the "end" of all things. This "negative exposition" of the absolute is essence's first, unsatisfying because merely negative attempt to reach the concept and thereby its end.[5]

There is, however, a more promising strategy than this merely negative one. Hegel suggests that the absolute is "drawn out" of the preceding movement of Being and Essence as its necessary conclusion. Now, the logical "content" is neither imposed contingently from without nor plunged by external reflection into the absolute as *Abgrund*. The content has instead developed according to its own "internal necessity" as "being's own becoming and as the reflection of essence," and thereby *has returned into the absolute as into its ground*.[6] Herein the absolute seems to make an adequate end to essence: it is the necessary and immanent end–result of the preceding overall logical movement, the *Grund* to which such movement "has gone back," not simply *Abgrund* in which difference is dissolved.

Dialectically, the act whereby "the finite founders" in the absolute

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Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel's Logic, Obliquely. Melville, Molière, Beckett* (Albany: SUNY, 2018), chapter 6. Obviously, I do not make any historical claim here. I propose instead a systematic and interpretive "intervention" of Leopardi in order to put this passage of Hegel's Logic in a novel perspective. Notice also that henceforth I capitalize "Essence" to indicate the entire logical sphere of *Wesen*, i.e., the Logic of Essence as a whole, and use "essence" to indicate the protagonist of the immanent development of this sphere in the chapter on The Absolute that I am analyzing. A similar use is made of the capitalized "Concept" as designating the sphere of the Logic of the Concept (*Begriff*). Ultimately, I suggest that Leopardi's view of Nature proves to be a better candidate for the transition to the Concept's "realm of freedom" than Spinoza's *Deus sive natura*.

3. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bände*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and H.M. Michel (Frankfurt a. M., Surhkamp, 1986), voll. 5–6 (henceforth TW followed by volume and page number); here TW 6, 188.

4. TW 6, 273.

5. TW 6, 190.

6. TW 6, 189.

"demonstrates that its nature is [. . .] to contain the absolute within itself."[7] The finite comes to an end in the absolute; this very act, however, is the mark of its eternity, of its identity with the absolute. This is, indeed, Essence's solution to the problem of finitude that has plagued Being first, and then Essence's reflection. By ending in the absolute, the finite is eternal. In its indifferent identity of *Abgrund–Grund*, the absolute destroys finitude but also contains it as identical with itself: *Deus sive natura*. The absolute is the perfectly and incessantly identical activity of production and destruction, the pure repetition in which no manifold, no otherness (hence no change) takes place.

This, however, is not the true end of Essence since the act of going back to the absolute cannot move forward beyond a merely repetitive identity. There is no new beginning after (and from) this end — only incessant repetition or a beginning forced arbitrarily by "external reflection."[8] It follows that the absolute is not *das Absolut–Absolute* — the repetition signaling the stalled predicament of essence at this point.[9] Thus, essence downsizes the identical absolute first to "absolute attribute" and then to mere "mode."[10] Spinoza again.

The attribute appears as the "expression" but also as the externalization of the absolute.[11] The "mode" instead is its sheer alienation, its "loss of itself in the changeability and contingency of being."[12] The end, this time, is the absolute's self–alienation and disintegration. It is not the end of all finite things but far more radically the end of the absolute itself. By revealing the disintegration of the absolute in the "most external exteriority," Nature is the end of the absolute. And yet, Hegel argues that it functions as the end because it is *posited* as exteriority *by the absolute*. There is, however, no escape from identity, which is now repeated and repeated, indifferently, again and again. In the mode, the absolute determines itself but does not determine itself as "an other." It only identically reproduces that "which it already *is*." The absolute has not come to an end, after all. In fact, as the Logic of Being has already revealed, infinite repetition is the opposite of the true end.

At this point, essence moves from mode to modality becoming "blind necessity," the "destiny," and "Nemesis" that decides the limits of existence and action by assigning the non–negotiable limits and thereby the end

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7. TW 6, 189.
8. TW 6, 190.
9. TW 6, 190.
10. TW 6, 191 and 192–ff. respectively.
11. TW 6, 192.
12. TW 6, 193.

of all things.[13] As "the form of the absolute," absolute necessity has left the thought of the absolute behind or has advanced beyond it. Absolute necessity is "blind" and entirely self–enclosed. Differences are present in a new modality unknown heretofore to essence: they are "free actualities" as they refer neither to each other as semblances nor stand in any relation. Essence no longer posits and no longer reflects, no longer manifests itself in something other or even in itself.[14] It abandons entirely the binary logic that has dominated even its self–exposition in the monistic absolute. Essence now "lets go free" its own actuality as absolute necessity. Truly, essence finally lets go of itself and lets itself go. And this is the act that makes the true end of this sphere. Necessity joins freedom in the act whereby essence ends in letting actuality go free. Only at this point can the transition to the Concept finally take place.

2. Remarkable Essay of His

Nature's "exposition" takes place, paradigmatically, in Giacomo Leopardi's 1824 *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese* [*Dialogue Between Nature and an Icelander*], one of the most remarkable works of his *Operette morali*. Nature is the end of the human species and of all living creatures, it is the destiny of destruction from which, ironically and tragically, the Icelander has tried to escape his entire life. On a collective scale, the Icelander's efforts define human civilization, which purports to flee and transform Nature and is instead doomed by her. Leopardi's view in this essay is reinforced in his penultimate lyrical piece, *La Ginestra* (1836), written the year before his death. These texts offer a picture of the poet's late account of Nature and human civilization that embodies as a real figure the way in which Essence makes the end in Hegel's Logic of Essence. In the *Dialogo*, Nature replaces all transcendent, spiritualistic or theological "absolute," which for Leopardi is the product of abstraction and intellectualism, expressing a distinctly modern form of rationalism.[15] Nature is the material, immanent, all embracing, and pervasive "absolute" (in fact, Leopardi concludes with Hegel, not "absolutely absolute"), a force endowed with negative, destructive power. *La Ginestra*, however, goes a step further revealing the possibility of a new creative beginning achieved by the transforming power of poetry. This is

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13. TW 6, 201.

14. These are all modalities of determination that have successively characterized essence in its sphere.

15. See, among the many Zibaldone's texts, *Zibaldone* [p. 1619–ff.], in Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, Turin, Einaudi, http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net, 1135–ff., for Leopardi's view of the absolute in a 1821 note.

the point where Leopardi goes beyond Spinoza offering the true transition to the Concept.

At the beginning of the *Dialogo*, Nature appears to the Icelander as a gigantic presence, seemingly displaying all the features of the (Kantian) sublime — magnitude, might, eternity, infinity. And yet, significantly, she does not generate any moral reverence (rather, she triggers moral condemnation).[16] Nature is a sublime presence, an enigmatic mix between the beautiful and the terrifying; she is living (she is neither an artifact nor an illusory imitation) and utterly detached in her dominating posture. And she is Woman. Although, when seen more closely, Nature displays "the measureless form of a woman,"[17] but neither the conventional traits of womanhood nor the common analogy of nature and woman are invoked. Nature is not the productive, nurturing source and origin of all things but their destructive, pitiless, indifferent end. Nature is *Abgrund* as much as *Grund* of all things. Nature, as *La Ginestra* later maintains, *Madre è di parto e di voler matrigna*.[18] Nature is this contradiction of a productive force that annihilates the very productions in which she is immanent and which constitute her. Nature's negative "exposition," i.e., her indifferently destructive attitude with regard to all living creatures, is at the same time her positive "exposition," i.e., the display of her "absolute" (indeed despotic) power over everything.

The Icelander's encounter with Nature takes place in the inner, wildest heart of Africa — in its uninhabited and heretofore unexplored regions. In its fully displayed actuality, Nature is indeed everywhere, immanent in all its parts (just as everything is inescapably in nature, the Icelander will soon find out at his own expense). And yet she is directly faced and encountered only in its most disquieting, terrifying, and wild manifestations: in the innermost regions of Africa or on the desolate slopes of Vesuvius, for example (*sull'arida schiena/del formidabil monte/sterminator Vesevo*).[19] Indeed, Nature seems to thrive the most where the "human species is unknown," away from the human being and its civilization. For, herein Nature's *potenza* — her infinite power and might — is "better demonstrated than anywhere else."[20]

The Icelander introduces himself as "a poor Icelander fleeing from Nature; and having fled her for almost my entire life in a hundred regions of the earth, I am now fleeing her in this one." Nature ironically responds:

16. See also *La Ginestra* vv. 158ff. for nature's infinity and immensity against which man "is nothing" (v. 173).

17. Giacomo Leopardi, *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese*, in *Operette Morali* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 115–122, here 115.

18. *La Ginestra*, v. 125.

19. *La Ginestra*, vv. 1–3.

20. *Dialogo*, 116.

"So flees the squirrel from the rattlesnake, until in its haste and by its own doing runs into the snake's mouth. I am the one from which you are fleeing."[21] The Icelander's plan is doomed from the start, just as human civilization is in its grandiose yet vain pretension of progress away from Nature. Herein lies Leopardi's poetic refutation of the anthropocentric view that sees the human being as Nature's final end. For, Nature is the indifferent, non–teleological End–*Abgrund* of all things. Such an end is the immanent action of Nature itself, not the intervention of an external final purpose. Indeed, Essence rejects the assumption that its development is guided by the Concept as its end–purpose. And Essence combats this proposition precisely by positing the absolute as its end. Nature *is* the End (*Ende*); it *has* no end (*Zweck* or *Endzweck*). The human being (along with its culture, history, and civilization) is neither the end of Nature nor does it occupy a privileged place within it. The relation is rather the opposite. Nature is the End — the absolute termination and limit — of the human being and the human species as such.

Nature is indifferent to human actions and purposes just as she is to the existence of all creatures. Contrary to the Icelander's argument, Nature's indifference is morally neutral, properly beyond morality and devoid of intentionality. Nature simply "posits" the finite beings that constitute her with no will and no purpose. However, if she does not create them as a caring mother with their interest, happiness, and welfare in view, Nature does not have malevolent intentions either. What man construes as Nature's hostility is, quite simply, indifference. Nature is the power and manifestation of Cosmic Indifference. In this sense, it is "absolute." This is indeed the hardest thought for the Icelander to accept, and, on Leopardi's view, the hardest thought for human reason and for philosophy more generally: it seems that Essence cannot be thought without appealing to the Concept, the end cannot be grasped without recurring to a purpose laying beyond it. But Leopardi's Nature as the material all–powerful absolute rejects this view.[22] Nature's answer to the Icelander is a straightforward rejection of anthropocentrism: "Did you perhaps imagine that the world was made for your sake?"[23] As hard as it is for the human being to accept, Nature has neither awareness nor knowledge of what is supposedly good or bad, beneficial or harmful to individuals in what she does, she has no intention and no aim. Her action is simply and utterly indifferent to all these things.

Nature is an interconnected whole in which all parts work for the sake of

21. *Dialogo*, 116.

22. In the *Dialogo della Natura e di un'Anima*, in stressing the same a–teleological and anti–anthropocentric view of Nature, Leopardi suggests that Nature itself is subject to "blind fate" in all its actions (see *Operette Morali*, cit., 75).

23. *Dialogo*, 120.

the whole. Herein, Nature posits that toward which it acts with destructive power. This is what Nature does and what Nature is. Philosophically, this "truth" leaves the Icelander as puzzled as ever. His exchange with Nature has no resolution as no philosophy seems able to offer an account of Nature that answers the question: Whose gain is the suffering in the universe? Leopardi's conclusion is quite simple: "No philosopher can tell."[24] This is indeed only a human question, to which Nature puts a swift and pragmatic end. "While they were discussing these and similar issues, two lions are said to have suddenly appeared. They were so enfeebled with hunger that they were scarcely able to devour the Icelander. They accomplished the feat, however, and thus gained sufficient strength to live to the end of the day."[25]

La Ginestra entails Leopardi's final poetic answer to the question philosophically left open by the *Dialogo*. It is now clear that poetry alone can address the issue. Or perhaps, more accurately, poetry alone succeeds in changing the question entirely. For the question may very well be unanswerable other than by the act whereby the two emaciated lions devour the argumentative Icelander. Indeed, there is a sense in which Essence's reclaiming an end of its own against the Concept is fully justified and must be let stand. Herein is the truth of Spinoza's substance. There is, however, another aspect to the problem. At least some creatures posited by Nature in existence so as to be annihilated are also the positive manifestation of something that exceeds the destructive power of Nature, although they are themselves inescapably nature. Essence recognizes this point the moment when it overcomes the absolute by declaring it not "absolutely absolute." Importantly, for Leopardi, the human being is not one of these creatures. The poet addresses instead the solitary, "fragrant broom [*la ginestra*]," which is content with her existence on the desolate slopes of the menacing volcano, "innocent" in the acceptance of her "mortal" fate.[26] Far from questioning Nature's alleged "reasons" and from imposing human morality on Nature in order to condemn her in the name of our human entitlement to happiness, the "fragrant broom" accepts her own fate sternly, thereby actively and poetically transforming the end that Nature imposes on her. With her sweet fragrance, the "gentle flower" offers "consolation" to the desert around her, and almost "commiserates" *i danni altrui* — the harm afflicting others but also the harm inflicted by Nature.[27] Suffering cannot be avoided; the end cannot be revoked. It can, however, be poetically accepted and thereby dignified. Nature's action can neither be changed by culture and civiliza-

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24. *Dialogo*, 122.
25. *Dialogo*, 122.
26. *La Ginestra*, vv. 6, 14–15, 305–306.
27. *La Ginestra*, vv. 34–37.

tion nor justified with higher reasons or final purposes. Instead, Nature's absolute indifference should be recognized by a sober a–teleological, non–anthropocentric materialism. This is Leopardi's late poetic conception of Nature as the indifferent and necessary *Abgrund* of existence.

Neither reason nor (utilitarian) morality but the comfort offered by poetry and individual beauty, along with the human compassion and solidarity they engender, are Leopardi's final answer to Nature.[28] At issue is now the way in which Nature's hostility must be acknowledged and transformed. This is the task of poetry — the task of the Concept. At the end of the lyric, the *lenta ginestra* becomes the ally of the poet's fight against the *hubris* and arrogance of human culture,[29] against the foolish progressivism of Enlightenment rationalism (its famously mocked *magnifiche sorti e progressive*),[30] and against the misplaced blame that humans place on one another, thereby inflicting gratuitous harm fighting one another in a Hobbesian way instead of forming a bond of solidarity against their only true enemy. The solitary wild broom carries a message of dignity, consolation, and perhaps solidarity for all human beings who are wise enough to accept their place in Nature with humble Stoicism. This is also the only possible form of freedom available to the human being. Freedom lies in the act of acknowledging necessity, in accepting one's negligible position within Nature and the destiny of destruction that is common to all creatures.

Poetry can achieve what no theology and no rationalist philosophy can. Its achievement is the transformation of the necessary end into a new possibility of life — not its justification, not its postponement or acceleration, not its negation in the search for an impossible eternity. Only poetry — and *le opere di genio* more generally — is able to shake the absolute indifference and insensitivity that in the human being are equal to death. Only the artwork can offer a plausible human response to Nature's cosmic indifference.[31] This is Leopardi's final message. Herein, in the work of poetry, lies the liberating transition to the Concept.

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28. Presently, I want to stress the first (poetry and beauty) over the second point (solidarity); for this, see Cesare Luporini, *Leopardi progressivo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1993), 83, 94.

29. *La Ginestra*, vv. 297, 300.

30. *La Ginestra*, v. 51.

31. *Zibaldone*, [259–261], 271f.

3. Leopardi Beyond Spinoza

Hegel explicitly considers the Absolute of Essence as corresponding to Spinoza's substance.[32] At this juncture, what Hegel criticizes in Spinoza can be considered instead as the perfectly justified merits of his conception of substance. For, while Hegel's criticism is carried out from the more advanced standpoint of the Concept, the destruction of finitude, the absolute's indeterminateness and lack of subjectivity, its rigid and petrified eternity are among the characters that have their necessary place precisely *at the end of Essence*. They are necessary in order to articulate the specific way in which *Essence* makes the end. And there is no other way from Being to the Concept than to pass through the *Abgrund–Grund* of Spinoza's substance. Herein lies, for Hegel, the unsurpassed value of Spinoza's Substance–Absolute. And yet, Spinoza's substance is unable to make the transition to the Concept. This is precisely what Leopardi's Nature does.

In Spinoza's system, substance is the monistic whole; it is «*one* substance, *one* indivisible totality." Hegel underlines that "there is no determinateness that is not contained and dissolved into it." Precisely to this extent, Spinozistic substance is posited at the same level of or as the same totality that essence is, and more precisely, as the absolute with which essence attempts to conclude its movement. There is no determinateness that is not *contained* in the absolute as its *Grund*. But there is also no determinateness that is not *dissolved* in the absolute as its *Abgrund*. Indeed, Hegel recognizes that a valuable insight of Spinozism is that "anything that to the natural way of representing and to the determining understanding appears as self–subsistent (*Selbständiges*) is entirely reduced in this necessary concept to a mere *positedness* (*Gesetzsein*)."[33] Against the abstract freedom common to the formality of Kantian autonomy or the arrogant and illusory independence of Leopardi's Icelander — a freedom that amounts to the stubborn pretension of the finite to claim some form of "independency" or "self–subsistence" of its own, i.e., to claim its being a *Selbständiges* — Spinoza's substance shows the true destiny of annihilation that inescapably awaits the finite within the whole (Nature as the absolute). Freedom lies rather in the acceptance of the necessary identity with the whole. The finite is posited as such as to be annihilated. And it is posited with no further purpose in view. Indeed, this is the hard truth that Nature (substance or the absolute) reveals to the Icelander. There is no need for a Kantian dualism to soften this hard truth, that is,

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32. "The concept of Spinozistic substance *corresponds* (*entspricht*) to the concept of the absolute," TW 6, 195.

33. TW 6, 195.

no need to see an unchanging autonomous supersensible character as oddly coexisting with the conditioned natural progress of humanity.

Hegel famously expresses the "absolute principle" of Spinoza's substance in the proposition "determinateness is negation," a proposition that he considers "true" but also limited. For it remains at the view of "negation as determinateness or quality" and does not advance to negation as self–negation. Ultimately, this means that the individual does not recover from — or does not survive — the negation or annihilation within the absolute; that it does not subsist *as individual* within it. Moreover, for Spinoza, the "manifold act of determining" lies in "an external thinking."[34] While thinking is one with extension, it does not "separate" itself from it. Hence thinking is "not as determining and informing (*als Bestimmen und Formieren*), nor as a movement of return that begins from itself."[35] The absolute's end is not a turning back to a new beginning. Thinking radically ends in the absolute substance but does not make a return back into itself; hence it does not make a new beginning out of itself (which is the nature of the action of subjectivity). Despite its definition as *causa sui*, the absolute is not a creative self–determining power. It is the repetitive power that reproduces itself in a self–identical position, with no otherness and no difference:[36] Nature repeating itself, but truly unable to imagine an utterly different order; thinking identical with extension but unable to differentiate itself from it. However, the capacity to make a new beginning *out of itself* and *after the end* is, for Hegel, the dialectical meaning of the end: not a standstill but an utterly new beginning.[37] Indeed, the end entails the creative act that requires the production of otherness as otherness. Herein we meet the true limit of Spinoza's position. Thinking stalls in the absolute, unable to turn back to itself and unable to gain the "concept of an other by which it would have to be formed" anew, as different from itself.[38] Only the Concept overcomes the limit of Essence. "The concept is not the abyss (*Abgrund*) of the formless substance [. . .] but as the absolute negativity it is that which forms and creates (*das Formierende und Erschaffende*)."[39] This activity of forming and creating is precisely that which Essence's absolute and Spinoza's substance as well as Nature in Leopardi's *Dialogo* lack. They are, however, identical with the productive and transformative power of poetry that, in Leopardi's *La Ginestra*, disclose the only saving possibility beyond the destructive force of Nature.

34. TW 6, 195.
35. TW 6, 195 (my emphasis).
36. TW 6, 196.
37. For a full–fledged development of this point, see Nuzzo, *Approaching Hegel's Logic*, chapter 6.
38. TW 6, 196.
39. TW 6, 277 referring to 195.

Tasting *Vino* with Vico:
Full–Bodied Discourse

Ariana Ragusa*

Abstract

The experience of tasting wine and our earnest attempt to make sense of it draws the body back into discourse, recalling the sensorial and corporeal roots of language creation unearthed by Giambattista Vico in *The New Science*. Vico's narrative strategy will help us to understand the necessity and utility of the bodily metaphors pervading wine discourse. Rather than being mere artifice or ornament, out of a poverty of speech; furthermore, they fulfill the need to express new and uncharted dimensions of reality. Our examination of the sense of taste and its intimately related senses of smell and touch reveals gaps in Vico's story of how language springs from the body. His narrative traces the birth and development of language drawn from only two of our senses: sight and hearing. In other words, the corporeal origins of language creation in the Western intellectual tradition uncovered by Vico are limited to only two aspects of the body; the others remain buried. Finally, we will consider how cultivating the hidden and hedonic senses of taste, smell, and touch can open up new dimensions of our sensorial experience of the earth, one another, and ourselves.

Keywords: Metaphors, Language, Body, Wine, Taste, Vico.

The experience of tasting wine and our earnest attempt to make sense of it draws the body back into discourse, evincing the sensorial and corporeal roots of language creation unearthed by Giambattista Vico in *The New Science*.[1] Vico's narrative strategy will help us understand the necessity and utility of the pervasive bodily metaphors found in wine discourse. Rather than mere artifice or ornament, the metaphors are born of a poverty of speech and they fulfill the need to express new, uncharted experiences of reality. Our examination of the sense of taste and the intimately related senses of smell and touch, moreover, will reveal gaps in Vico's story of how language springs from the body. We will see that his narrative is primarily from only two of our senses: sight and hearing. Finally, we will consider

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1. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Max and Harold Fisch and Thomas Goddard Bergin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984). Hereafter cited as *NS*.

how cultivating our sense of taste can open up new dimensions of our sensorial experience of the earth, one another, and ourselves.

Vico's first public academic address was titled "On the Sumptuous Banquets of the Romans." He meditated upon Roman dining and culinary practices in order to capture their lived experience. In a similar spirit, Vico turned to the Roman comic poets to catch their living, breathing, and daily discourse.[2] His choice to present an oration on the gustatory habits of the Romans during such a momentous step in his career (when he first took up his position as Professor of Latin Eloquence at the University of Naples) offers us a clue about Vico's valuation of the body and its habits in the story of Man. Vico is a philosopher of the body and its ontological relation to place. Below, we will see how Vico's narrative tells the story of the simultaneous transformations of body and place as they expand and diminish.

Wine tasting suits the *habitus* of Vico's cities and academies. The pleasures of tasting wine and evaluating its aesthetic value evokes the luxury and pomp of the sumptuous banquets Vico captures in Homer. The refined sensuality of this age indicates an age in decline, for Vico. In the age of men, the once robust heroes have become frail humans, and the masculine has given way to the feminine. The body lies soft and inert on plush cushions. This is its proper form — the result of refinement and cultivation. Cultured and clean, it "has reached the extreme of delicacy" in which men "lash out at the slightest displeasures."[3] But in the first age, Vico gives digestion a role in the story of our primordial emergence from the forests. His narration begins with the dire search for fresh perennial springs and ends with the sumptuous banquets of the Greeks. The urgent need for drinking water motivated the wandering of the first poets. And this need motivates our powers of invention. For true ingenuity is born of a response to necessity or utility.

We might note that wine culture could provide a study in the symbolic languages of Vico's heroic age, for it seems to be alive and well today: family crests, coats of arms, emblems, and heralds still adorn bottles and chateaux,

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2. Donald Phillip Verene, "Vico and Culinary Art: 'On the Sumptuous Banquet of the Romans' and the Science of the First Meals," , in *New Vico Studies* 20 (2002): 69. Here, Vico prefigures Mikhail Bakhtin's notion that comedy breaks up centralizing, hegemonic discourse. Parodic–travestying forms capture the laughing, breathing, and spontaneous discourse of peoples in dynamic relation to their lived situation. Alternatively, according to Bakhtin, myth has a homogenizing power over language. The *mythos*, fables, or true speech that Vico recovers vibrate with life. He captures them before they become sedimented and centralized into reified myths. There is a strong destabilizing and decentralizing current coursing throughout *The New Science*. It would make sense, then, that Vico took care to stay close to the comics and their unique ability to express the pulsating, lived expressions of the people. The language of the kitchen, too, is often close to the language of everyday speech, far removed from the learned discourse of the academies. Vico digs beneath the inert abstractions of the erudite men to reveal their situated, experiential source.

3. *NS*, par. 1107.

whose images demarcate plots of land. They evoke the secret symbolic language of the heroes, meant to induce awe and perhaps a little fear. This illusory mystique and fabled imagery is especially at work in Burgundy and Bordeaux. This essay, though, focuses on the experience of taste (though this would be an enticing study to take up at a later date).

Recently, there has been growing philosophical interest in taste, food, and wine. A wave of popular academic works on the topic has come mainly from the Anglo–American analytic tradition. Various publications include *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy*;[4] *Philosophers at Table: On Food and Being Human*;[5] *The Aesthetics of Food: The Philosophical Debate*; *Wine & Philosophy: A Symposium on Thinking and Drinking*;[6] *Questions of Taste, The Philosophy of Wine*;[7] *I Drink Therefore I am: A Philosopher's Guide to Wine*;[8] *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty, and Intoxication*[9] amongst others. Although philosophical attention upon the traditionally devalued sense of taste is encouraging, one is disheartened to find these works swamped in debates over the objectivity or subjectivity of taste. Carolyn Korsmeyer's pioneering text, *Making Sense of Taste,* provides the greatest springboard for our reading of Vico and taste.[10]

Korsmeyer elucidates the privileged status of the distal senses of sight and hearing in the Western intellectual tradition. The three devalued senses of taste, touch, and smell are traditionally held to be too bound up with the body to have any substantial cognitive or aesthetic value. These proximal senses have been regarded as ignoble, hedonistic, and

4. Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

5. Raymond Boisvert and L. Heldke, *Philosophers at Table: On Food and Being Human* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2016).

6. *Wine and Philosophy: A Symposium on Thinking and Drinking*, ed. Fritz Allhoff (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

7. *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine*, ed. Barry Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

8. Roger Scruton, *I Drink Therefore I am: A Philosopher's Guide to Wine*(London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009).

9. Cain Todd, *The Philosophy of Wine: A Case of Truth, Beauty, and Intoxication* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2010).

10. I would like to add that I recently invited Carolyn Korsmeyer to speak at my family's restaurant, *Giancarlo's Sicilian Steakhouse* in Williamsville, New York. Her lecture was accompanied by a wine and food pairing meant to invoke the convivial sense of light intoxication and discussion that colored the ancient Greek symposiums. Korsmeyer related how her work on taste prefigured the others listed above by ten years or more. Until recently, she was the lone figure in the forests of taste. I would also like to note that I am currently training to become a certified Sommelier, which motivates my reading of Vico through the fascinating world of wine. I am also training in order to nourish the development of my family's collection of imported wines, *Grivani* and *ana blu: Wines of the Sea*. Our *Wines of the Sea* are based upon the old world concept of *terroir* and, in particular, coastal *terroir*.

feminine. Although Korsmeyer expends most of her effort upon reeval-
uating taste, touch, and smell, and conferring cognitive and aesthetic
value upon them, she is often pilloried by commentators for her relatively
marginal argument that food and wine cannot achieve the status of fine
art. She cautiously excludes food and wine from the traditional categories
constituting fine works of art.

But her argument is more subtle than most commentators appreciate.
By establishing the historicity of the categories of fine art, and their ar-
bitrary dependence upon the two masculine senses of sight and sound,
she ruptures the categories themselves. One of her more generous critics,
Raymond Boisvert, explains, "in declining to grant 'art' status, Korsmeyer
is suggesting that, given the restrictiveness of the category, granting art
status to food is not the most efficacious thing we can do to recognize
and value it aesthetically"[11] Korsmeyer's argument points to our need for
a broader, more robust sense of the aesthetics of taste — one not limited
by traditional categories. Vico presents such an aesthetics, as we shall see.
In tracing the sensuous, savage, and wild beginnings of the fine arts and
recondite sciences, Vico boldly destabilizes the traditional categories, while
Korsmeyer's approach is far more timid and subtle.

Korsmeyer's work is important for our purposes for one other major
reason. It allows us to detect a gap in Vico's recovery of the bodily roots of
recondite concepts. Vico, it turns out, does not trace the beginnings of the
refined arts from the body as a whole, but rather, from only the two distal
bodily senses: sight and hearing.

To examine the relationship between the senses and language in wine
discourse, let us return to the improper, unruly, excessive bodies of the
first poets in Vico's ages of the gods and the heroes. Like the first poets,
tasters seem buried in their bodies, groping for a way, in an almost agitated
spirit, to make sense of the beguiling object before them. There is a secret
dialogue between wine and the body that demands fuller expression. The
recourse to metaphor and poetic expression used by wine tasters indicates
a need and a lack. Beyond mere artifice and play, the poetics taken up
conveys an underlying poverty of speech. Although not as dire, this lack and
need mirrors the impulses that drive invention in Vico's first two ages. The
gross, bodily giants wander the primeval forests in search of freshwater.
Vico is the rare philosopher in the history of Western intellectual thought
who acknowledges the digestive aspect of our being and becoming human.
He elaborates, to a degree, what Raymond Boisvert and Lisa Helde call a
"farmer guided, stomach–endowed philosophy."[12]

11. Boisvert and Heldke, *Philosophers at Table*, 84.
12. Boisvert and Heldke, *Philosophers at Table*, 76.

Why is there a poverty of expression in wine discourse? Despite Vico's heroic return to the first narratives, the senses of taste, touch, and smell have left no story to unearth — there is little for Vico to recover. These senses have remained uncultivated and unexpressed. Though the first beastly poets carried words over from their excessive bodies, they augmented their distal senses in the process. Hence, we are left with a story that ends with the detached, abstract discourse of the age of Man.

Let us consider poetic logic traversed by the first awakening of sight and sound in Vico's narrative. We will look to the creation of the first poetic character in Vico's founding myth, the birth of Jove. After the floods, giants wandered the great forests of the earth. One day, upon the mountain tops, lightning strikes the air and the hiss of the lightning and the clap of the thunderbolts cause the strongest of the wandering giants to shake in fear. They seize their feral wandering and, significantly, stay in one place. For the first time, they "raise their eyes and become aware of the sky."[13] There is a dialogic relationship between the hissing earth and the giants' shouts; they are performing a duet. More importantly, they "see" and "hear" the first signs of the gods. Vision and sound dominate this expressive exchange between the earth and the body. In this primordial scene, we witness the birth of the sky–gods. The proto–humans "express their violent passions by shouting and grumbling, they pictured the sky to themselves as a great animated body."[14] As the age of gods gives way to the age of heroes and then, finally, the age of men, bodies and their gods shrink. The excessive bodies of the poetic giants and the vast bodies of their imagined gods diminish simultaneously. The once great, animated body of the earth and sky ultimately becomes the tiny image of the god, Jove, flown about in a chariot.

Their guttural shouts and songs are quieted in the age of men. Where the written word prevails, the vigor of the vocalic is lost. This silence in the last age is a haunting mirror of the primordial silence of the giants roaming the earth in the first age. They wandered without mothers and "without ever hearing a human voice."[15] Sight eclipses hearing and the written word dominates. The sonorous residue of language is depleted and the power of our primordial bodily eyes is diminished. Vico relates:

> The nature of our civilized minds is so detached from the senses, even in the vulgar, by abstractions corresponding to all the abstract terms our languages abound in, and so refined by the art of writing...that it is naturally beyond our power to form the vast image of this mistress called "Sympathetic Nature."[16]

13. *NS*, par. 377.
14. *NS*, par. 377.
15. *NS*, par. 454.
16. *NS*, par. 378.

The men of the cities and of the academies are incapable of envisioning the primordial images that were once created by wholly bodily imaginations. For the first poets were entirely immersed in the senses, buffeted by the passions, "buried in the body."[17] The unbound, excessive giants are reduced to their delicate human form in the final age of men. And accordingly, the vast, impenetrable forests are reduced to orderly, demarcated cities and academies. As man becomes detached from his body, he also becomes untethered from his sense of place.

I use the word man because Vico's is the story of the birth and end of the concept Man. In the final age, humanity attempts to live through this concept. In Adriana Cavarero's words, we may see this as an age where one "attempts to recognize oneself in the definition Man."[18] This results in a sort of rational madness. Donald Verene explains: "Vico shows that to believe in the reality of the concept is a form of madness."[19] As women were never fully included in the universal concept Man, there is a sense in which they have been spared this tragic fate. Much as Adriana Cavarero has taught us that women joyfully carried on the art of narrative while men struggled to live through the concept, women in this case, too, have remained closer to their bodily senses of taste, touch, and smell. An intellectual tradition that has cast them out of the sphere of rational discourse and, in turn, out of the place of the cities and academies has in fact helped to preserve their sense of self as lived through their proximal, hedonic, and feminine senses. Of course, this is not to argue that women should be displaced from the cities and academies. Instead, the feminine realm of sensorial expression should be celebrated and used as a curative for the fatigue of the concept in the cities and the academies.

Taste, touch, and smell do not make a significant appearance in Vico's tale of shrinking bodies, then, because these feminine senses have never been narrated or granted full expression. Vico's narrative is the story of the birth, death, and decline of the concept Man. And the distal senses of sight and hearing are at the origins of this story. The hedonic, proximal senses remain buried in the body, dormant, feral, uncultivated — without a story.

But Vico's demonstration of the poetic transformation of bodies can be accessed to imagine how a new poetic transformation of the body through cultivating the hedonic senses might take place. For Vico, the body and its relationship with place is always in a state of becoming. It is never reified

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17.   *NS*, par. 378.

18.   Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood,* trans. Paul A. Kottman (London: Routledge, 2000), 8.

19.   Donald Phillip Verene, *Vico's New Science of Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 215.

into one fixed form.[20] The first poets struggle and expend great heroic effort to carve out a sense of themselves and a meaningful place. Their bodily senses are vibrant and fully engaged. At the beginning of things, they "were extremely lively."[21]

The energetic quest for expression is palpable when witnessing wine tasters today, as they grope for words and shout out flavors, aromas, and novel metaphors. Wine discourse is exciting because of the conspicuous ignorance vibrating along its edges. It evokes the animate, untamed ignorance of the first poets. The effort to discover new names for our gustatory experience is tantamount to creating the experience itself. According to Vico, "the name creates the character, the word engenders the thing."[22] The power of the name to create reality fuels the poetic making of the first human places.

The beastly poets create not through knowing, but through ignorance. Vico affirms that "when men are ignorant of the natural causes producing things [...] they attribute their own nature to them."[23] What is more, "the human mind because of its indefinite nature, wherever it is lost in ignorance makes itself the rule of the universe in respect of everything it does not know."[24] New experiences necessitating new metaphors almost always spring from bodies. Vico anticipates the cognitive scientists Lakoff and Johnson's notion that metaphors arise from our bodily experience of reality.[25] Or, as Goetsche frames it, "metaphor is based on the metaphysics of the body."[26]

In *The New Science*, the first narrations are concrete metaphors created through bodily skills. Vico notes that:

> In all the languages the greater part of the expressions relating to inanimate things are formed by metaphor from the human body and its parts and from the human senses and passions. Thus head for top or beginning; the brow and shoulders of a hill; the eyes and needles of potatoes...the flesh of fruits, a vein of rock or mineral, the blood of grapes for wine [...] our rustics speak of plants making love, vines going mad, resinous trees weeping.[27]

The famous Sangiovese grape of Italy and star of the fabled Super Tuscan wines is etymologically rendered as the blood of Jove (we wonder whether

20. *NS*, par. 272.

21. *NS*, par. 499.

22. Nancy Struever, "Vico, Valla, and the Logic of Humanist Inquiry," in *Giambattista Vico's New Science of Humanity*, ed. Georgio Tagliacozza and Donald Phillip Verene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 174.

23. *NS*, par. 180.

24. *NS*, par. 181.

25. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 3.

26. Goetsche, *Vico's Axioms*, 32.

27. *NS*, par. 405.

this is the grape Vico had in mind in his metaphor above). More to the point, bodily metaphors hint at nascent beginnings. If our proximal, hedonic senses have no real story, and are uncultivated and unrefined, we should expect a plethora of metaphors drawn from the body. When a wine is described as skeletal, full–bodied, moody, or shy, we need only to think back to Vico's first poets and their bodily metaphors.

Bodily metaphors dominates wine discourse. Cain Todd affirms that:

> Perhaps the most striking ways in which wines are typically characterized is in their personification; that is, wines are attributed human characteristics and personalities. Physically wines can be big, bold, corpulent, fleshy, skeletal, muscular, masculine, feminine, thin, emaciated. They can be gentle, inviting, cheerful, pretentious, amusing, enticing, proud, vicious, capricious, sly, shy, restrained, voluptuous. Wines can be straightforward, clean, genuine, authentic, honest, pure, commercial. They can possess or lack virtues and vices, and they can be precocious, chic, raunchy, demure, smart, elegant, charming, sophisticated, refined, brilliant, distinguished, gracious, enticing, sumptuous, seductive, opulent – and their opposites [. . .]. They can be energetic, vigorous, spirited, powerful, combative, aggressive, feeble, punny, lacking backbone.[28]

Furthermore, in her essay, "Can Wines Be Brawny? Reflections on Wine Vocabulary," Adrienne Lehrer writes:

> The most interesting words for a linguist are those relating to mouthfeel, which involves two general classes of words: 1) *body*, characterized most generally by the antonymous pair *full–bodied*, and *light*, and 2) other tactile sensations like *hard* or *prickly* [. . .] *Full–bodied* wines can be *heavy, big, flabby, thick, solid* and *deep*. These words, in turn, have associations and yield terms such as *strong, sturdy, solid, powerful, forceful, beefy*, and *robust*. On the *light* side we find *small, little, thin, weak* (all negative), *delicate*, and *fragile*.[29]

These bodily metaphors demonstrate that we are at the beginning of things. As Vico states, "All metaphors conveyed by likeness taken from bodies to signify the operations of the minds must date from the time when philosophies were taking shape. The proof of this is that in every language the terms needed for the refined arts and the recondite sciences are of rustic origin."[30] And today a philosophy of taste is just beginning to take shape.

Vico held the fine arts and sciences up to the light and peered back into their deep history. But food and wine have never reached the status of fine arts such as music, painting, and sculpture or what Tim Crane calls the institutional theory of art. In short, "anything which is in an art museum

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28. Todd, *Philosophy of Wine*, 57.

29. Adrienne Lehrer, "Can Wines be Brawny? Reflections on Wine Vocabulary," in *Questions of Taste*, 128.

30. *NS*, par 404.

(gallery, concert hall, etc.) is a work of art, and anything that is a work of art is in an art museum."[31] The criteria used to judge these works of fine art hinge upon, as we saw above, the senses of sight and hearing.

Vico traces the corporeal origins of these refined arts. But since the hedonic senses were never part of the story, he could not recover them. For there is nothing to uncover — they had not yet found a place to begin their story. A refinement or sedimentation of the hedonic senses has yet to take shape. Although we do not find them in Vico's backward glance, his recovery of the rustic, corporeal origins of the refined arts and sciences helps us to catch a glimpse of the way the dialogic relationship between the body and the earth gives birth to stories. The nascent languages he digs up resemble the fledgling metaphors found in wine discourse today and the poetic transformation of taste is occurring as we speak.

Because of his intense meditation upon the bodily senses, Vico comes close to capturing the multi–modal synaesthetic experience of the senses. His recovery of the corporeal imaginations of the first poets illuminates our primordial *synaesthesia*. He writes, "they spoke of hearing the sun pass at night from west to east through the sea, and affirmed that they saw the gods."[32] This elucidates the originary synaesthetic experience that the French phenomenologist Merleau–Ponty regards as our primordial way of experiencing reality. Learned men distinguish and separate the senses, but this is derivative of a more primordial correspondence between the senses. Tasting wine notoriously brings the interplay of the senses to the fore. For instance, most of what we take to be taste is in fact retronasal olfaction. Moreover, the overall situation affects the taste experience: the color of the tablecloth, the lighting, the music playing, the scent of our friend's perfume, etc. Tasting recalls the chaotic interplay of the senses at work in the primeval forests, where every face appeared to be a new face.

The hedonic senses still commence with the chaotic whirl of the primeval forest — they have yet to discover their Jove. The cycle of spontaneous expression turning toward rigid sedimentation has not run its course. Our received, established discourse has left a part of our corporeal experience of the earth unexpressed. In fact, the poverty of expression found in wine discourse reveals its proximity to the primeval forest. The uncultivated senses of taste and smell point to the forest, where the senses are mixed up in a synaesthetic, amorphous play. The creation of the poetic character Jove lifted the wandering giants out of the chaos and confusion of the senses characterizing the forest. He was called the stayer or establisher because he caused the giants to stop their feral wanderings and establish the first place.

31. Crane, *Questions of Taste*, 143.
32. *NS*, par. 117.

Acting through the poetic character Jove, the poetic beasts burned down the forest so that they could till the land, and more importantly, read the signs of their imagined god Jove. They eliminated the treetops that covered their view of the sky so that they could interpret his divine auspices. Robert Harrison explains, "We find here in Vico's text a fabulous insight, for the abomination of forests in Western history derives above all from the fact that, since Greek and Roman times at least, we have been a civilization of sky–worshipper."[33] Esposito also highlights the savagery inherent in the clearing of the forest. He writes, "The violent erasure of the originary forest, as well as being a reduction of *communitas*, marks a progressive abstraction from its bodily content."[34] The loss of the forest triggers the loss of our connection to the earth, each other, and our own bodies.

The beastly proto–humans crane their neck to the sky and the start of our detachment from the earth and body commences. There is a dialogic response between bodies and place, between the earth and the trembling giants, at the birth of things, but this dialogic exchange weakens and men begin to live in abstract palaces, cut off from the earth and their communities. In the cities, men wander without a place just like the giants did in the chaotic, undifferentiated forests. What is more, place gives way to space and they no longer realize themselves as creatures of the earth, dwelling beneath the sky. Harrison explains, "At the center, one forgets that one is dwelling in the clearing. The center becomes utopic. The wider the circle of the clearing, the more the center is nowhere and the more the logos becomes reflective, abstract, universalistic, in essence, ironic."[35] Like the primordial giants, men once again wander ignorant of places.[36]

Vico's forest mirrors Nietzsche's Dionysian forest, and his cities, Nietzsche's antithetical Apollonian force. The Apollonian form, identity, and difference established in the cities and academies vanish in the forest. Drunken chaos thwarts the Apollonian impulse toward order and individuation. Nietzsche warns, "Drunken reality does not head the individual unit, but even seeks to destroy the individual."[37] Barbarism lurks behind both forces. For Vico, dwelling too close to the forest engenders the barbarism of sense. Conversely, dwelling inside the abstract palaces of cities and academies engenders the barbarism of reflection. These barbarisms are characterized

33. Robert Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6.

34. Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought,* trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 82.

35. Harrison, *Forests*, 245.

36. *NS*, par. 3.

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Clifton Fadiman (New York: Dover Thrift Editions) 4.

by the extremes of chaos and order respectively. The savagery at both ends is comparable to Nietzsche's Dionysian and Apollonian principles. Both Nietzsche and Vico capture the dynamic tension between the forests and the cities; between the promiscuous interplay of the senses and the icy logic of the philosophers; and madness is discovered at both ends.

For both thinkers, the world is always spilling over in excess and can never be adequately captured by discourse. Vico further symbolizes this excess by the gross giants and Nietzsche by the mad god Dionysus. We have not yet touched upon this aspect of wine tasting, namely, intoxication. Wine opens one up to the other. Light intoxication can engender the sense of community that is lost in the solitary boundaries of the cities and academies. Intoxication invites the god Dionysus in and upends boundaries and distinctions, sometimes dangerously so. Nietzsche powerfully conveys the pole of madness brought on by Dionysus and his mad sylvan vines. Conversely, we have seen that living through the concept is also a form of rational madness in Vico. With the excess of Apollonian form and boundaries, men become "beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection than the first men had been made by the barbarism of sense."[38] Vico writes, "no matter how great the throng and press of their bodies, they live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit."[39] The story of the rise and dominance of sight and hearing has left us detached and divorced from our bodies in a state more savage than the condition of the multi–modal, beastly poets.

The birth, rise, and decline of languages in Vico's narration is situated between these two poles of excess: the excess of the body and the excess of form. Discourse emerges from corporeal excess. Esposito writes, "the origin of life itself, in all its expressions — material, ideal, sensory, cognitive emotional and intellectual — is embedded in the corporeal magma from which it can never fully detach itself."[40] The academies and cities can never purify themselves of their murky birth. Their reified, sedimented expressions will always bear traces of the spontaneous, corporeal expressions first born of the forests and its gross beasts.

Vico's ages act more as a dynamic tension rather than a cycle. The creative impulse harnesses forces at opposite ends to give birth to sublime beauty. Vico affirms, "The poetic speech which our poetic logic has helped us to understand continued for a long time into the historical period, much as great and rapid rivers continue far into the sea, keeping sweet the waters born on by the force of their flow."[41] In order to drink sweet water, or to

38. *NS*, par. 1106.
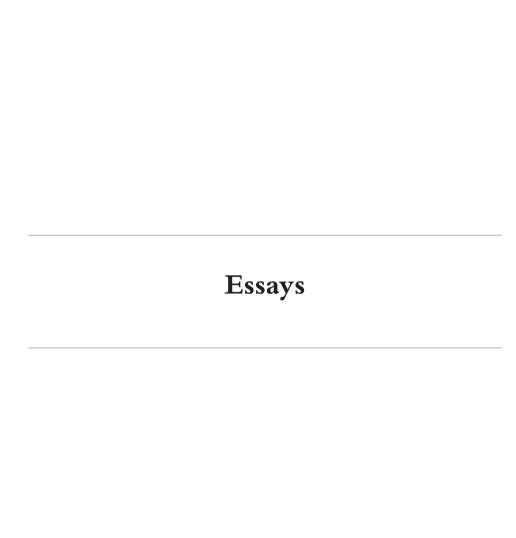39. *NS*, par. 1106.
40. Esposito, *Living Thought*, 76.
41. *NS*, par. 412.

indulge in beautiful wines, we need to keep the channels open, and dwell in a liminal space, somewhere between the forests and the cities. The vineyard is at the threshold of the forests and the cities.

A sense of place or *terroir* remains vital to our experience of wine. Although the French concept is not scientifically proven, one can taste hints of lavender if the wine comes from a vineyard near lavender fields or mineral, saline notes when the vines grow near the sea. Today, the overuse of technology has covered over the grape's expression of *terroir* and, in many cases, it may be impossible to identify where a wine is from. We find our self in the utopic, the no–place characterizing Vico's age of men. Wine making technique can all too often obfuscate the true voice or expression of the grape and its ontological relation to place.

When we respond to a wine's unique expression of *terroir* or the synaesthetic way it conjures up all of our senses, we may reawaken a sense of ourselves as emplaced, sensorial beings. At the very least, the concept of *terroir* offers a beautiful metaphor for the way in which we realize ourselves through our dwellings.

The vineyards, like Vico's clearing in the forest, call us away from the cities and academies. The taster brings the wine to her nose, feels its texture, and tastes its flavors, engaging in a dialogic relationship with the wine. Cultivating this experience awakens the hedonic senses and draws out our powers of expression to poetically transform our selves and our relation to the earth. Here we feel how the world always spills over in excess, forever beckoning new responses. Reminding us, as Vico once did, that the world is always young.

Essays

Messianesimo e teologia politica.
Il *katechon* tra Taubes e Schmitt

Francesca Monateri[*]

Abstract

Messianism and Political Theology. The katechon between Jacob Taubes and Carl Schmitt. The aim of this paper is to investigate the link between aesthetics and politics nested in the image of the *katechon* evoked by Paul in the second letter to the Thessalonians. An image which apparently alludes to the restraining force which holds this world delaying the Second Coming. My purpose is to show how the image of the *katechon* has become conceptually intermixed with a symbolic and figurative legitimation of political power. While Carl Schmitt held the passage on the *katechon* to ground the Christian doctrine of state power as an alternative to nihilism, Jacob Taubes reading of Pauline messianism shows how the *katechon* can be considered as a conservative force. This article focuses on the recurrence of *katechon* in contemporary continental philosophy in opposition at the alarming announcement that the End is now.

Keywords: katechon, Carl Schmitt, Jacob Taubes, aesthetics, Walter Benjamin, Jean Pierre Dupuy

1. Posizione del problema teologico politico

La recente ricomparsa del *katechon* in ambito filosofico come strumento di analisi della contemporaneità[1], che ha addirittura portato a parlare di *Messianic Turn*[2], impone di interrogarsi sul motivo per cui la questione del potere che frena si ponga come stringente nel presente. Per un verso il *katechon* è il centro rimasto irrisolto e, il più delle volte non esplicitato, di

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[1]. Per quanto riguarda la riconsiderazione del *katechon* come strumento di analisi del presente cfr., ad esempio, N. Guilhot, *American Katechon. When Political Theology Became International Relations Theory*, in *Constellations*, 2010, vol. 17, pp. 224–253; C. Schmidt, *The Return of the Katechon. Giorgio Agamben contra Erik Peterson*, in *The Journal of Religion*, 2014, vol. 94, pp. 182–203; M. Arvidsson, *From teleology to eschatology. The katechon and the political theology of the international law of belligerent occupation*, in *Taylor and Francis Inc.*, 2015, pp. 223–236; F. Debrix, *Katechontic sovereignty. Security politics and the overcoming of time*, in *International Political Sociology*, 2015, vol. 9, pp. 143–157.

[2]. S. Prozorov, *The katechon in the age of biopolitical nihilism* in *Continental Philosophy Review*, 2012, vol. 45, pp. 483–503.

quella filosofia politica che continua ad attingere alle categorie del teologico[3]. In questo senso il potere *qui tenet* è un operatore strategico che consente di interrogarsi sul nesso estetica–politica attraverso la teologia politica intesa come uno dei sentieri possibili per leggere il Moderno e la sua eredità[4].

D'altra parte l'attuale ripresa del *katechon* rivela l'anima nostalgica di una contemporaneità che avverte il proprio tempo come tempo della fine. Per partire dalla denuncia del declino dell'ordine economico neoliberale operata da Serge Latouche, Yves Cochet e Susan George, arrivando fino all'idea di Jean Pierre Dupuy di proiettarsi nel «dopo–catastrofe», la contemporaneità sembra annunciare l'impossibilità di riservare il destino catastrofico al futuro, a favore della sconcertante dichiarazione che la Fine è nel presente[5]. Questo contesto sembra denunciare chiaramente il fallimento di un potere che frena ed è particolarmente interessante che la sconfitta della forza *qui tenet* vada di pari passo all'impossibilità di trovare forme soddisfacenti di simbolizzazione e autorappresentazione[6]. Come Vercellone mette in evidenza l'epoca presente rimanda a forme di auto–riconoscimento che, dalla Brexit ai populismi, volgono la pretesa di significazione universale del *katechon* in un «comando a breve»[7]. Il riconoscimento del fallimento del potere che frena porta a cercarlo in «simboli che sembrano surrogarlo senza averne

3. Cfr. L. STRAUSS, *Atene e Gerusalemme. Studi sul pensiero politico dell'Occidente*, a cura di R. Esposito, Torino, Einaudi, 1998 (1983); J. TAUBES, *La teologia politica di San Paolo*, a cura di A. Assmann, J. Assmann, trad. it. P. Dal Santo, Milano, Adelphi, 1997 (1993); C. GALLI, *Genealogia della politica. Carl Schmitt e la crisi del pensiero politico moderno*, Bologna, il Mulino,2010 (1996); H. MEIER, *Carl Schmitt e Leo Strauss. Per una critica della teologia politica*, Siena, Cantagalli, 2001 (1998); G. AGAMBEN, *Il regno e la gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo. Homo sacer II, 2*, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 2007; R. CUBEDDU, *Postfazione* in L. Strauss, *Scritti su filosofia e religione*, a cura di R. Cubeddu, M. Menon, Pisa, ETS, 2017; fondamentale inoltre M. CACCIARI, *Il potere che frena*, Milano, Adelphi, 2013. Tutti gli autori sopra citati rappresentano quella riflessione filosofico–politica che continua ad attingere alle categorie del teologico. Nello specifico, il rapporto tra *katechon* e teologia politica deve, prima di tutto, fare i conti con Carl Schmitt il quale dichiara esplicitamente che il *katechon* è il centro della teologia politica cfr. H. Blumenberg, C. Schmitt, *L'enigma della modernità. Epistolario 1971–1978*, Roma, Laterza, 2012, p. 76.

4. Per alcuni questa strada è completamente sbarrata. Basta pensare alla critica di Blumenberg a Schmitt che sottolinea l'impossibilità di attenersi al concetto di secolarizzazione definendola «una categoria dell'ingiustizia storica». Cfr. H. BLUMENBERG, *La legittimità dell'età moderna*, Genova, Marietti, 1992.

5. Idea chiaramente espressa da Dupuy e che emerge anche nella critica di Foessel per cui resta impossibile evitare l'apocalisse, ma il fatto che sia già avvenuta rappresenta una lieta novella. Cfr. J.P. DUPUY, *Per un catastrofismo illuminato: quando l'impossibile è certo*, Milano, Medusa, 2011; M. FOESSEL, *Après la fin du monde. Critique de la raison apocalyptique*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 2012; S. LATOUCHE, Y. COCHET, S. GEORGE, J.P. DUPUY, *Où va le monde? 2012–2020 une décennie au devant des catastrophes*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2012.

6. Cfr. F. VERCELLONE, *Katechon estetico. Appunti e riflessioni*, in *Il campo della metafisica. Studi in onore di Giuseppe Nicolacci*, a cura di C. Agnello, R. Caldarone, A. Cicatelli, R.M. Lupo, Palermo, Palermo University Press, 2018, p. 281. Vercellone descrive la società dello spettacolo nei termini di un «modello fantasmagorico in cui i contenuti si sono sottratti a qualsivoglia schema formale».

7. ID., *Katechon estetico*, cit., p. 282.

davvero la forza»[8]. Questo non significa che non esista una risposta alla richiesta di identità del presente, ma che, al contrario, esistono icone portatrici di una promessa identitaria che, però, si rivela sempre meno attendibile.

In questa condizione è necessario mostrare il risvolto estetico sotteso alla questione filosofico–politica, o meglio, solamente a partire dal legame tra estetica e filosofia politica è possibile comprendere l'attuale ripresa del tema del *katechon*.

Di fronte a un'epoca nostalgica che rimpiange l'ordine garantito dal potere *qui tenet* diventa fondamentale riconoscere la destinazione politica dell'arte e quella estetica della politica. In un certo senso molte categorie politologiche e filosofico–politiche sono, in origine, metafore estetiche, come, ad esempio, canone, forma e rappresentazione. In questo modo il politico, nel suo stesso sviluppo, sembra nutrirsi di un lessico estetico. Proprio questa prossimità tra estetica e politica ci induce a risalire alle origini del problema, analizzando la Seconda lettera ai Tessalonicesi in cui, per la prima volta, viene posta la questione del *katechon*.

2. Le origini della questione

Tutte le ambiguità nell'interpretazione del *katechon* sono legate al testo paolino e, nello specifico, al greco di Paolo: non a caso, i problemi interpretativi sono decisamente inferiori nella *Vulgata* latina dove il termine *katechon* è reso semplicemente come forza *qui tenet* o *quid detineat*[9].

Gli studi sul greco neotestamentario di Paolo sottolineano la lontananza del lessico paolino dal greco classico[10]. Il problema fondamentale da tenere in considerazione è l'eventuale influenza dell'ebraico o dell'aramaico sul greco di Paolo. Jacob Taubes racconta che, passeggiando a Zurigo con Emil Staiger convennero nel riconoscere il respiro aramaico che si nasconde alle spalle della lingua di Paolo.

> [Stainger disse:] «Sa, Taubes, ieri ho letto le lettere dell'apostolo Paolo». Poi aggiunse, con profondo rammarico: «Ma non è greco, è jiddish!». Al che io dissi: «Certo professore, proprio per questo lo capisco!».[11]

L'idea è che il testo greco di Paolo sia frutto di una elaborazione della

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8. Id., *Simboli della fine*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2018, p. 42.

9. Nonostante la consapevolezza delle differenze di traduzione che intercorrono tra il testo greco e la *Vulgata* latina, in questo lavoro, per rendere più agevole la lettura, ci serviremo dell'espressione potere *qui tenet* come sinonimo di *katechon*. Sulle difficoltà di traduzione del verbo *katèchein* cfr. L. Bagetto, *San Paolo. L'interruzione della legge*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2018, p. 105.

10. Cfr. J. Gabel, C. Wheeler, *The Bible As Literature*, Oxford, OUP, 1990, p. 203.

11. J. Taubes, *La Teologia politica di S. Paolo*, cit., p. 22.

lingua operata dall'interno. Agamben, in proposito, scrive: «Non vi è nulla di più puramente ebraico che abitare una lingua d'esilio»[12]. Sicuramente Paolo parla un misto di greco ed ebraico, è però interessante che Willamowitz lo consideri come classico.

> Il fatto che questo suo greco non abbia a che fare con la scuola o con alcun modello, bensì sgorghi direttamente dal suo cuore maldestramente e in un getto precipitoso, e che, però, sia greco e non aramaico tradotto (come i detti di Gesù), tutto ciò fa di lui un classico dell'ellenismo.[13]

A questo punto è importante mettere in evidenza che proprio per quanto riguarda il termine *katechon* Paolo sembra più vicino a un classico dell'ellenismo che a un ebreo che parla una lingua della diaspora. Esistono numerose attestazioni classiche del termine *katechon* che vanno da Omero a Sofocle o Tucidide, e che attraversano dunque la trattazione epica, tragica e storiografica[14]. In ambito filosofico troviamo il *katechon* nei testi platonici e, in particolare, nella conclusione *dell'Apologia di Socrate*. Socrate, prima di essere condannato da Atene, ricorda ai concittadini che la sua istanza critica non potrà esser fermata nemmeno dalla morte. Molti ancora criticheranno la città e tanti di questi venivano da lui trattenuti. Socrate svolge così nelle parole di Platone il ruolo di *katechon*[15].

Il *katechon* socratico mostra già le difficoltà di traduzione che pertengono al *katechon* paolino, in entrambi i contesti, è difficile affermare con convinzione se *katèchein* significhi trattenere, contenere o nascondere. Il verbo *katèchein* ha molteplici significati le cui differenti sfumature rendono faticosa

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12. G. Agamben, *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla Lettera ai Romani*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2008, p. 12.

13. U. von Wilamowitz–Moellendorff, *Die Griechische und lateinische Literatur und Sprache*, Leipzig–Berlin, Teubner, 1912, p. 159.

14. Omero, *Odissea*, 24, 242; Sofocle, *Edipo a Colono*, 1697; Tucidide, *Storie*, 6, 29.

15. Platone, *Apologia di Socrate*, 39 (c–d): «Οἱ ἐλέγξοντες, οὓς νῦν ἐγὼ κατεῖξ ον, ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ᾐθάνεσθε». È un peccato che Taubes, nonostante i numerosi riferimenti a Platone e Socrate, non conosca, o comunque non citi, questo passo (J. Taubes, *La Teologia politica di S. Paolo*, cit., p. 147; 150; 154; J. Taubes, *Escatologia occidentale*, a cura di M. Ranchetti, Milano, Garzanti, 1997, p. 74.). Nel pensiero di Taubes esiste un esplicito parallelismo tra Paolo e Platone: entrambi si trovano a porre per iscritto teorie orali di maestri mandati a morte dalla comunità. Il problema degli eredi di un simile pensiero è il rapporto tra il maestro e la legge. Taubes mette chiaramente in mostra la strategia paolina per cui mandare a morte il Messia attraverso la legge va solo a svantaggio della legge stessa (*Id.*, *La Teologia politica di San Paolo*, cit., p. 77: «C'è un Messia condannato secondo la legge. *Tant pis*, ciò va tutto a svantaggio della legge»). La strategia di cui si serve Platone nella *Repubblica* sembra essere la medesima: la risposta alla condanna di Socrate è la costituzione di una città giusta basata su una diversa educazione. Sembra abbastanza evidente che l'unico modo di comprendere la critica platonica del X libro della *Repubblica* debba concentrarsi non tanto sulla cacciata degli artisti, ma dei poeti, sottolineando la funzione morale e educativa, in senso lato politica, della poesia nella cultura greca (Cfr. E. Havelock, *Dike: la nascita della coscienza*, a cura di M. Piccolomini, Bari, Laterza, 2003, p. 3).

la comprensione dell'azione svolta e, in ultima istanza, l'esplicitazione del legame strutturale che unisce il potere *qui tenet* all'interrogativo estetico.

Il testo paolino si apre invitando i Tessalonicesi a non farsi trarre in inganno da «qualche lettera fatta passare come nostra»[16]. In un clima culturale che legge la venuta del Signore come assai prossima, l'imminenza del Regno viene ritrattata. A questo scopo l'autore afferma che esiste un ordine degli avvenimenti anche nei tempi ultimi e, prima dall'avvento del Regno di Dio, dovrà sorgere l'uomo dell'"anomia." A questo punto del racconto, l'autore si rivolge direttamente ai propri interlocutori facendo riferimento a quanto ha predicato oralmente a Tessalonica, affermando che, solo chi ha memoria del discorso da lui tenuto, saprà anche cosa in questo momento sta trattenendo (*katechon*) l'avvento dell'"anomia" il cui mistero è già in atto. *L'anomos*, cui il *katechon* si oppone, si manifesterà, spiega la lettera, attraverso segni e prodigi menzogneri e chi vi crederà sarà perduto[17].

In 2 Ts possiamo individuare tre elementi fondamentali che, come un sistema di forze, dipendono gli uni dagli altri nella combinazione delle loro azioni. L'elemento principale è il giorno del Signore, atteso e desiderato, annunciato ma non presente. La Prima Lettera ai Tessalonicesi, di dubbia attribuzione[18], recita che il giorno del signore «verrà come un ladro di notte», sorprendendo chi non vive in una dimensione di attesa[19], al contrario, 2 Ts, sembra ritrattare la prossimità del Regno invitando i Tessalonicesi a non abbandonare le proprie occupazioni, pur mantenendo viva la fede. L'uomo dell'"anomia" è il secondo elemento da tenere in considerazione. Solamente una volta rivelato l'*anomos*, il Signore si mostrerà per vincerlo con «un soffio

16. 2 Ts, 2,2. La traduzione cui ci rifacciamo da qui in avanti per la citazione dei passi biblici è *La Bibbia Tob*, traduzione CEI, prefazione a cura di E. Bianchi, Torino, Elledici, 2018.

17. Cfr. 2 Ts, 2, 1–12: «Riguardo alla venuta del Signore nostro Gesù Cristo e al nostro radunarci con lui, vi preghiamo, fratelli, [2]di non lasciarvi troppo presto confondere la mente e allarmare né da ispirazioni né da discorsi, né da qualche lettera fatta passare come nostra, quasi che il giorno del Signore sia già presente. [3]Nessuno vi inganni in alcun modo! Prima infatti verrà l'apostasia e si rivelerà l'uomo dell'iniquità, il figlio della perdizione, [4]l'avversario, colui che s'innalza sopra ogni essere chiamato e adorato come Dio, fino a insediarsi nel tempio di Dio, pretendendo di essere Dio. [5]Non ricordate che, quando ancora ero tra voi, io vi dicevo queste cose? [6]E ora voi sapete che cosa lo trattiene perché non si manifesti se non nel suo tempo. [7]Il mistero dell'iniquità è già in atto, ma è necessario che sia tolto di mezzo colui che finora lo trattiene. [8]Allora l'empio sarà rivelato e il Signore Gesù lo distruggerà con il soffio della sua bocca e lo annienterà con lo splendore della sua venuta. [9]La venuta dell'empio avverrà nella potenza di Satana, con ogni specie di miracoli e segni e prodigi menzogneri [10]e con tutte le seduzioni dell'iniquità, a danno di quelli che vanno in rovina perché non accolsero l'amore della verità per essere salvati. [11]Dio perciò manda loro una forza di seduzione, perché essi credano alla menzogna [12]e siano condannati tutti quelli che, invece di credere alla verità, si sono compiaciuti nell'iniquità».

18. Sull'attribuzione e la datazione delle lettere di Paolo Cfr. O. Metzger, *Il Katéchon. Una fondazione esegetica* in *Il Katéchon (2ts 2,6–7) e l'anticristo. Teologia e politica di fronte al mistero dell'anomia*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 1990, p. 33. Ma anche J. Gabel, C. Wheeler, *The Bible as literature*, New York, OUP, 1990 p. 210.

19. 1 Ts, 5, 1.

della bocca»[20]. In questo senso, la mancata apparizione dell'*antropos tes anomias* è il primo elemento che ritarda la Seconda venuta. Il *katechon* è, in ultima istanza, ciò che si oppone all'"anomia," ma contemporaneamente ritarda l'avvento del giorno del Signore. In questo senso, da un lato, è evidente l'opposizione del *katechon* all'avvento del Regno, insieme alla certezza che la sua azione non faccia altro che prolungare le sofferenze del presente. D'altra parte, però, il *katechon* si oppone all'"anomia" tenendo in forma l'età. Il *katechon* è contemporaneamente *phobos* dei tempi apocalittici, ma anche dei segni e prodigi di menzogna dell'età dell'iniquo, di un'anomia intesa come delegittimazione del *nomos* vigente.

3. Cacciari e Agamben interpreti del katechon

Il tema del *katechon* è stato ripreso nel panorama filosofico contemporaneo da Massimo Cacciari e Giorgio Agamben che, nell'ottica della nostra ricerca, rappresentano un passaggio filosofico fondamentale per esporre la matrice estetica del problema filosofico–politico. Cacciari e Agamben ci permettono di esemplificare le posizioni contemporanee sul *katechon* interpretato non in chiave filologica con l'intenzione di comprendere cosa Paolo intenda con il potere che frena, ma vedendo nella forza *qui tenet* uno strumento di analisi della contemporaneità. Non è un caso che gli studi attuali sul *katechon* partano proprio dalla riconsiderazione del pensiero di Carl Schmitt, Jacob Taubes e Walter Benjamin come strumenti per la comprensione del tempo presente.

Agamben tratta del *katechon* come paradigma della temporalità contemporanea in grado di produrre un "messianesimo bloccato" per cui il tempo storico inizia ad avere la pretesa di presentarsi come eterno[21]. Questa temporalità, che dimentica la necessità di un confronto con il non profano, sarebbe il paradigma della concezione temporale che le democrazie contemporanee impongono[22]. Il *katechon* sarebbe quindi la base di una distorsione della temporalità che porterebbe le democrazie liberali a presentarsi come "potenze infernali," dal momento che, nel mondo cristiano, l'unica istituzione eterna è l'inferno[23]. Agamben invita così ad agire contro la scomparsa del futuro attraverso un rifiuto dell'eterno presente prodotto dall'azione catecontica[24].

20. 2 Ts, 2,8.

21. G. Agamben, *Introduzione*, in C. Schmitt, *Un giurista davanti se stesso*, *Saggi e Interviste*, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 2005, p. 16.

22. Ivi, p. 17.

23. Id., *La Chiesa e il Regno,* Roma, Nottetempo, 2007, p. 18.

24. Id., *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla lettera ai Romani*, Torino, Bollati Boringhieri, 2000, p. 68. Sul valore politico del recupero del messianesimo operato da Agamben Cfr. C. Salzani, *Introduzione*

Il *katechon* viene dunque letto in questi termini come forza negativa che porta a dimenticare la necessità del confronto con il tempo ultimo, in quanto tempo che prelude la fine effettiva.

Cacciari, per parte sua, si concentra sulle possibili traduzioni del termine ritenendo che sia erroneo concepire il *katechon* come forza che si oppone esteriormente al Regno a venire[25]. Al contrario, il potere che frena tratterrebbe l'*anomos* tenendolo stretto in sé, in un certo senso, detenendolo, ed è in questo modo che impedirebbe all'anomia di manifestarsi apocalitticamente[26]. Inoltre, nell'analisi di Cacciari, ha un rilievo particolare l'esplicitazione del rapporto tra il *katechon* e la forma: il *katechon* è il principio formativo per eccellenza[27]. L'azione catecontica è comprensibile solo nella misura in cui consente di conservare enti, e cioè forme, in vista dell'*eschaton*[28]. Infatti se l'*anomos* vincesse, il Figlio dell'uomo non troverebbe più nulla sulla Terra[29]. In questo modo, il *katechon* è concepito come una forza capace di mantenere la forma del mondo contro la dissoluzione catastrofica dell'*eschaton*.

Cacciari e Agamben sono due possibili punti di partenza per riassumere le posizioni contemporanee sul *katechon*. Da un lato, come Agamben evidenzia, il potere che frena produce una concezione della temporalità che rischia di perdersi nell'assenza di futuro; d'altra parte, come Cacciari mette in luce, il potere *qui tenet* è una forza essenzialmente formativa. Dai due pensatori emerge come il *katechon* conservi la propria duplicità originaria presentandosi, per un verso, come forza negativa che mantiene la storia in un tempo senza fine né scopo, per altro verso, come possibile risposta alla richiesta di stabilità del tempo presente.

Per comprendere come il *katechon* possa diventare uno strumento di analisi della contemporaneità è necessario ricondurre il problema filosofico–politico alla propria matrice estetica sottolineando il rapporto che intercorre tra il *katechon*, la forma e la bellezza intesa come forma riuscita nel modo più compiuto, come sistema simbolico intensamente innervato e attraversato da un nesso organico. In questo senso cercherò di mettere in luce come il *katechon*, concepito positivamente, sia presentato nei termini di forza in grado di mantenere la forma del tempo presente, se non addirittura di crearla. Al contrario, quando prevale una concezione negativa, il potere

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a Giorgio Agamben, Genova, Il Melangolo, 2013, p.167. Salzani insiste sul fatto che non vada ricercata nei testi di Agamben «la questione religiosa, ma piuttosto il paradigma di tempo storico e azione politica».

25. Cfr. M. Cacciari, *Dell'inizio*, Milano, Adelphi, 1990, p. 623.
26. Cfr. Ivi, p. 624.
27. Cfr. Ivi, p. 625.
28. Cfr. Ivi, p. 631.
29. Cfr. Ivi, p. 630.

che frena sembrerebbe presentarsi come forza che impedisce un'apocalisse intesa nei termini di dissoluzione di questo mondo a favore di un ordine formale alternativo. I due autori attraverso cui mettere in luce il nucleo estetico in luce il nucleo estetico del *katechon* sono Carl Schmitt e Jacob Taubes che rappresentano due modi alternativi di intendere il rapporto tra il *katechon* e la forma.

4. Schmitt e il katechon

Nel 1974, in una lettera indirizzata ad Hans Blumenberg, Schmitt dichiara di occuparsi del *katechon* da più di quarant'anni e, contemporaneamente, che il potere che frena deve esser considerato come centro della Teologia Politica[30]. In verità il *katechon* è documentato negli scritti di Schmitt solamente a partire dal 1942, eppure, se guardiamo il motivo del rapporto tra anomia sociale e darsi della forma, caos e forze stabilizzatrici, l'interesse nei confronti di un potere frenante è presente già nei primi scritti[31].

Schmitt ha diversi interlocutori con cui si confronta sulla teoria del *katechon* tra cui possiamo elencare, oltre a Blumenberg e Taubes, Pierre Linn, Max Weber e Hans Freyer[32]. La prima volta che il *katechon* compare nei testi di Carl Schmitt è in *Lotta per i grandi spazi e l'illusione americana*. In questo testo egli si riferisce alla scelta degli Stati Uniti di partecipare alla Seconda guerra mondiale presentandoli come *katechon*[33]. Così il potere *qui tenet* è qui concepito come elemento che ritarda lo sviluppo storico

30. Cfr. H. Blumenberg, C. Schmitt, *L'enigma della modernità. Epistolario 1971–1978*, cit., p. 76.

31. Cfr. A. Amendola, *Carl Schmitt tra decisione e ordinamento concreto*, Napoli, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1999.

32. In particolare sarebbe fondamentale ricostruire la genesi della teoria del *katechon* sviluppata da Schmitt a partire dalla lettura del potere che frena operata da Hans Freyer. Freyer nota che nel *katechon* è possibile riconoscere un movimento dialettico di conservazione e rinnovamento: la forza catecontica, per Freyer, permetterebbe di mantenere l'eredità del passato superando le forme dell'esistente. (Cfr. H. Freyer, *Weltgeschichte Europas 2*, Wiesbaden, Dieterich, 1948.) Großheutschi sostiene che la concezione del *katechon* di Freyer, a metà tra tensione al radicamento e capacità di dislocazione storica, sia assolutamente originale e sconosciuta a Schmitt che non arriva a una elaborazione tanto complessa del potere che frena. (Cfr. F. Grossheutschi, *Carl Schmitt und die Lehre vom Katechon*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1996). Al contrario, sulla scia di Maraviglia, vorrei dimostrare che, al di là di piccole divergenze, Schmitt riprende l'idea di creatività propria della concezione del *katechon* elaborata da Freyer (M. Maraviglia, *La penultima guerra. Il katéchon nella dottrina dell'ordine politico di Carl Schmitt*, Milano, LED, 2006, p. 257). L'idea sarebbe di dimostrare non solo che esiste una continuità tra le due concezioni del *katechon*, ma che gli elementi di comunicazione sono legati a una simile concezione della contemporaneità. Proprio nei *Fondamenti del mondo moderno* l'analisi sociologica della modernità, svolta da Freyer, sembra avvicinarsi alla teoria della secolarizzazione di Schmitt (Cfr. Cfr. H. Freyer, *Les fondements du monde moderne. Théorie du temps présent*, trad. Fr. L. Piau, Paris, Payot, 1965).

33. Cfr. C. Schmitt, *La lotta per i grandi spazi e l'illusione americana*, in *Scritti politico-giuridici 1933-1942. Antologia da Lo Stato*, Perugia, 1983, pp. 122–123.

universale. In questo senso chi assume un ruolo catecontico si limita a tenersi aggrappato a ciò che è ormai vecchio e decadente. In questo primo testo il *katechon* non ha nessuna accezione positiva, è solo la senile incapacità di cogliere i tempi che non può che ritardare il corso storico. La critica agli Stati Uniti ritorna in *Terra e Mare* (1942) dove Schmitt denuncia l'arretratezza della visione americana in quanto incapace di intendere l'andamento del tempo presente[34], il suo *Zeitgeist*. Eppure, nelle pagine successive, Schmitt sembra variare lievemente la concezione del *katechon*: Rodolfo II, in quanto *katechon*, ha saputo ritardare lo scoppio della Guerra dei trent'anni[35], ha saputo quindi trattenere il presente dinnanzi al precipizio di una rovinosa catastrofe.

In questi due testi, anche se la concezione del *katechon* sembra molto simile, esiste già una variazione assiologica. Nel primo, il *katechon* svolge una funzione negativa, quasi nostalgica, operata da chi non sa riconoscere il cambiamento storico. Nel secondo caso, per riprendere Maraviglia, il *katechon* resta «una categoria di re–azione»[36], priva cioè di iniziativa storica, che però può essere concepita positivamente se intesa come freno a uno sviluppo rovinoso. Non a caso, l'entrata in guerra degli Stati Uniti fa presagire a Schmitt le sorti dell'Asse e, proprio mentre acuisce il senso di una disfatta imminente, si impegna in una riflessione che intende assumere un ruolo difensivo nei confronti di una catastrofe escatologica e apocalittica.

Attraverso quasi dieci anni di riflessione Schmitt arriva a elaborare, soprattutto sulla scorta di Tertulliano, una teoria che concepisce il *katechon* come forza positiva[37]. Schmitt sistematizza la propria interpretazione del *katechon* nel *Nomos della Terra* (1950) dove, rifacendosi esplicitamente a Tertulliano, egli scrive che i padri della Chiesa «concordano nel ritenere che soltanto l'*Imperium Romanum* e la sua prosecuzione cristiana spieghino il sussistere dell'eone e il suo mantenersi saldo contro lo schiacciante potere del male»[38]. Ma esiste un secondo punto, oltre alla concezione pos-

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34. Cfr. C. Schmitt, *Terra e Mare*, Milano, Adelphi, 2003, pp. 104–105.

35. Cfr. Ivi, p. 82. Il *katechon* ha la medesima accezione di salvezza contro la catastrofe anche in riferimento all'Impero di Carlo Magno (Ivi, p. 21).

36. M. Maraviglia, *La penultima guerra*, cit., p. 211.

37. Sull'elaborazione dell'idea di *katechon* in Schmitt da forza negativa a positiva, oltre al testo già citato di Maraviglia, cfr. G. Meuter, *Der Katechon. Zu Carl Schmitts fundamentalistischer Kritik der Zeit*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1994; F. Grossheutschi, *Carl Schmitt und die Lehre vom Katechon*, Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 1996; A. Scalone, *Katechon e scienza del diritto in Carl Schmitt*, in: «Filosofia politica», XII, n. 2, 1998, pp. 283–292; H. Hofmann, *Legittimità contro legalità. La filosofia politica di Carl Schmitt*, ESI, Napoli 1999, pp. 252–253; A. Motschenbacher, *Katéchon oder Grossinquisitor? Eine Studie zu Inhalt und Struktur der Politischen Theologie Carl Schmitts*, Marburg, Tectum Verlag, 2000.

38. C. Schmitt, *Il Nomos della terra. Nel diritto internazionale dello "Jus pblicum europaeum"*, trad it. E. Castrucci, a cura di F. Volpi, Milano, Adelphi, 2003 (1974), p. 44.

itiva del *katechon*, che è ancora più importante sottolineare. Nel *Nomos della Terra* il potere che frena non compare solo in riferimento all'Impero cristiano, ma esso viene ripreso da Schmitt in rapporto alla posizione politica dell'Inghilterra. Quest'ultima, egli sostiene, avrebbe voluto portare un nuovo ordine globale di fronte al caos creato dallo sradicamento del politico, ma troppo debole per riuscire in questa impresa, l'Inghilterra diventa «la potenza tradizionale per aree determinate del Mediterraneo e della via per le Indie» e in questo modo, conclude Schmitt, essa «svolse il ruolo di *katechon*»[39]. A questo punto, il *katechon* è non solo forza conservatrice, ma produttiva, forza che sembra in grado di promuovere un ordine nuovo[40]. In questo senso il potere *qui tenet* non viene concepito come ciò che deve esser "tolto di mezzo" al fine di accelerare l'avvento del Regno di Dio, ma come ciò che legittima il presente attraverso, e lo vedremo, la costituzione di un sistema simbolico rappresentativo. In questo senso il potere che frena diventa forma dell'autorappresentazione legittimante del potere. Il *katechon* sarebbe così strutturalmente connesso a un'espressione "figurativa" del potere, a una rappresentazione intesa nei termini di incarnazione visibile dell'invisibile, idea che prende corpo.

5. Il katechon e la forma

Nei testi di Schmitt, in particolare nel *Romanticismo politico*, esiste una sorta di rimpianto per la pienezza formale che la modernità non riesce a produrre[41].

Il *katechon* di Schmitt si oppone a un'anomia intesa come nichilismo di un mondo borghese incapace di assumere su di sé la responsabilità del senso[42]. Schmitt ama molto la frase di Donoso Cortés, ripresa anche da Taubes, secondo cui il liberalismo si deciderebbe sulla soglia dove alla domanda «Gesù o Barabba» è possibile rispondere indicendo una commissione d'inchiesta[43]. In questo modo l'anomia per Schmitt coincide con l'assenza di senso provocata dalla mancanza di una capacità decisionale. Egli scrive nei propri diari che «il *katechon* è l'unico modo perché la storia abbia un

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39. Ivi, p. 303.
40. Cfr. M. Maraviglia, *La penultima guerra,* cit.
41. Cfr. C. Schmitt, *Romanticismo politico*, a cura di C. Galli, Milano, Giuffrè, 1981, p. 18.
42. Cfr. H. Bredekamp, *Walter Benjamin's esteem for Carl Schmitt*, in J. Meierhenrich, O. Simons, *The Oxford Handbook of Carl Schmitt*, Corby, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 668: «The consctuction of the *katechon* was used as an alternative to nihilism not only by the Catholic Schmitt but also by Protestants like Dietrich Bonhoeffer».
43. Cfr. J. Donoso Cortes, *Saggio sul cattolicesimo, il liberalismo e il socialismo*, a cura di A. Giovanni, Milano, Rusconi, 1972, p. 233.

senso per un cristiano»[44]. Il cristianesimo, qui evocato, deve esser letto come Cattolicesimo romano[45]. Nel *Cattolicesimo Romano come forma politica*, che risale al 1923, Schmitt insiste sulla possibilità di analizzare il cattolicesimo da un punto di vista politico proprio perché esiste un'idea politica del cattolicesimo la cui essenza è una «specifica superiorità formale»[46]. La capacità del cattolicesimo di produrre un conio valido per il presente, si basa, secondo l'autore, sulla «rigorosa attuazione del principio di rappresentazione»: la Chiesa è quindi depositaria della «forma politica» perché possiede la forza della rappresentazione[47]. La Chiesa merita un'analisi politica, e soprattutto, se Cattolicesimo romano e *katechon* coincidono, il vero depositario della forma politica è il *katechon*. Esiste, in questo senso, uno stretto legame tra il *katechon* e la forma per cui è opportuno, prima di tutto, analizzare cosa Schmitt intenda con forma.

Come abbiamo iniziato ad accennare, in Schmitt, il concetto di forma non può prescindere dal concetto di rappresentazione. Esistono, secondo l'autore, diverse concezioni della forma. Per esempio, il pensiero economico conosce la forma «"soltanto" come precisione tecnica», questa forma è però lontanissima dall'idea di rappresentazione dal momento che «richiede la presenza reale della cosa»[48]. Per la forma del pensiero economico, non si può quindi parlare di *Repräsentation*, ma solo di *Vertretung*, di sostituzione. Questa rappresentazione avviene su un piano immanente, tra oggetti o soggetti materialmente presenti. In questo senso

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44. Id., *Glossario*, a cura di P. Dal Santo, Milano, Giuffrè, 2001, p. 91.

45. Come rilevano gli interpreti italiani di Schmitt e, in particolare Galli ed Esposito, Schmitt va presentato "prima di tutto" come pensatore cattolico (Cfr. C. Galli, *Il cattolicesimo nel pensiero politico di Carl Schmitt*, in *Tradizione E Modernità Nel Pensiero Politico Di Carl Schmitt*, a cura di R. Racinaro, Napoli, Ed. Scientifiche Italiane, 1987; R. Esposito, *Cattolicesimo e modernità in Carl Schmitt*, in *Tradizione e Modernità nel pensiero politico di Carl Schmitt*, cit.). Anche secondo Günter Maschke il cattolicesimo di Schmitt non può essere un particolare trascurabile soprattutto se contestualizzato all'interno di un ambiente accademico protestante. L'interpretazione di Maschke, sviluppata in contrapposizione alla *Schmitt–Literatur* tedesca maggioritaria, intende come testo–chiave per lo studio di Schmitt proprio il *Cattolicesimo romano come forma politica*. (G. Maschke, *La rappresentazione cattolica. La teologia politica di Carl Schmitt con uno sguardo ai contributi italiani*, in *Trasgressioni*, Firenze, La roccia di Erec, 1991, p. 21). È Hugo Ball che per primo pone al centro dell'interpretazione di Schmitt il cattolicesimo vedendolo non come un presupposto del pensiero di Schmitt, ma un punto di arrivo. Ball sottolinea che «si potrebbe probabilmente individuare una contraddizione negli scritti schmittiani nel fatto che la forma teologica del sistema non è presente fin dall'inizio non scaturisce da una fede fondata, ma da conseguenze» (H. Ball, *La Teologia politica di C. Schmitt*, in *Aurora Boreale*, a cura di S. Nienhaus, Napoli, Ed. Scientifiche Italiane, 1995, pp. 110). L'idea di Ball è che Schmitt sia prima un politico e solamente dopo un teologo (Ivi, p. 97) in una sfera dove il politico diventa «forma politica» e la teologia «cattolicesimo romano» (Ivi, p.118). L'interpretazione di Ball risulta così fondamentale per sottolineare il nesso strutturale che intercorre tra il *katechon* e la forma.

46. C. Schmitt, *Cattolicesimo romano e forma politica. La visibilità della Chiesa, una riflessione scolastica*, a cura di C. Galli, Bologna, il Mulino, 2010 (1923), p.18.

47. *Ibidem*.

48. Ivi, p. 42.

siamo di fronte a una rappresentazione che si dà solo nei termini di uno «stare per altri»[49]. Al contrario la rappresentazione come *Repräsentation* concepisce la trascendenza del riferimento, non si tratta più, potremmo dire, di una delega, ma di relazioni di personificazione: il rappresentante porta in sé un'idea che con lui prende corpo, è l'incarnazione dell'invisibile[50]. La differenza tra *Vertretung* e *Repräsentation* non è tematizzata da Schmitt all'interno del *Cattolicesimo Romano*, ma rimane implicita a seconda dell'impiego di uno dei due termini. Se però l'alternativa tra le due è un'alternativa tra immanenza e trascendenza, diventa abbastanza evidente che a seconda della rappresentazione che intendiamo abbiamo due modi di concepire il potere. Da un lato, la rappresentazione come *Vertretung* impone una concezione del potere tecnico–funzionalistica; dall'altro la *Repräsentation* si rifà a una concezione *personalistica* del potere per cui il cattolicesimo non è in alcun modo riducibile a «un affare di cuore» (n. 50), ma diventa esempio di una "morfologia politica" vincente contrapposta alla rappresentazione politico–statuale che si rivela, al contrario, fallimentare. Schmitt scrive: «Quando lo Stato diventa Leviatano scompare dall'universo rappresentativo» (n. 51)[51].

Questo significa che nel momento in cui lo stato si automatizza e assume la forma di un meccanismo cieco, la sanzione del sacro con le sue funzioni rappresentative rimane nelle mani della Chiesa in grado di dar vita «alla triplice grande forma»[52]. Per Schmitt, esistono tre tipi di forme unificate dal cattolicesimo: la forma estetica dell'arte, giuridica del diritto e la forma come potere storico–mondiale. Ma, nello specifico, è «la bellezza estetica della forma» l'elemento fondamentale del cattolicesimo. È bene sottolineare che, per Schmitt, il trionfo del cristianesimo grazie alla sua capacità estetica non deve essere inteso come «il fasto esteriore di una bella processione» o «la grande architettura», ma la sua «capacità formale»[53].

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49. Ivi, p. 43.

50. In questo senso per Schmitt diventa fondamentale sottolineare che il Papa «non è il profeta, ma il Vicario di Cristo» (Cfr. Ivi, p. 29). Sull'elaborazione dell'incarnazione come modo di gestire il rapporto tra visibile e invisibile operata in ambito cattolico sembra importante sottolineare la definizione di correlativo oggettivo data da T.S. Eliot: «The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked» in T.S. Eliot, *Hamlet and his Problems*, in *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, Londra, Methuen, 1920. Schmitt parla di questo saggio di Eliot all'inizio di *Amleto o Ecuba* come di «un buon salvacondotto» di cui preferirebbe servirsi «solo in caso di estrema necessità» in C. Schmitt, *Amleto o Ecuba. L'irrompere del tempo nel gioco del dramma*, a cura di S. Forti, C. Galli, Bologna, il Mulino, 1983, p. 40.

51. Ivi, p. 43.

52. Ivi, p. 44.

53. *Ibidem*.

Nel *Cattolicesimo Romano* Schmitt non tratta esplicitamente del *katechon*, ma la riflessione proposta sulla Chiesa di Roma è fondamentale per comprendere che il problema del potere che frena è strutturalmente connesso alla teologia politica come chiave ermeneutica per la comprensione della modernità. Il *Cattolicesimo romano* precede e anticipa la teoria del *katechon*, consentendoci di gettare lo sguardo sulla necessità sentita da Schmitt di individuare un ordine politico. La riflessione di Schmitt ricerca un freno che trattenga la contemporaneità dalla dissoluzione e la sua proposta politica è di vedere la Chiesa di Roma come *katechon*.

Ancora più importante è che per Schmitt il Cattolicesimo può opporsi al caos proprio grazie a categorie estetiche: non solo dal momento che esiste, secondo Schmitt, una continuità tra estetica e cattolicesimo, ma proprio la natura intrinsecamente estetica del cattolicesimo può consentirgli di svolgere un ruolo catecontico. così al di là di un'analisi del cattolicesimo di Schmitt che tenga in considerazione le ragioni biografiche e politiche, bisognerebbe trattarne chiedendosi come abbia influito nell'elaborazione delle categorie con cui ha interpretato la modernità.

6. Evo cristiano e negromanzia

Per riuscire a studiare il rapporto tra il *katechon* e la forma nel pensiero di Schmitt, bisogna partire dalle condizioni di possibilità della teologia politica, dal dibattito con Peterson interno al mondo cattolico, che avviene cioè tra due pensatori cattolici che partono da presupposti teologici e confessionali comuni. Bisogna in questo contesto tener presente che è Schmitt stesso a dichiarare che il centro della teologia politica deve essere individuato nel *katechon*[54]. Non è un caso che l'impossibilità cattolica di una teologia politica espressa da Peterson venga giudicata da Schmitt come una freccia di Parto[55], scagliata, in un certo senso, a tradimento. La teologia politica non è il solo elemento di confronto tra i due, al contrario, secondo Agamben, il dibattito si svolge proprio intorno a un non–detto che rappresenterebbe la vera posta in gioco della discussione. Questo non–detto, per Agamben, riguarda proprio il *katechon*[56]. In questo senso la disputa tra i due sarebbe inerente alla fondazione dell'esistenza storica della Chiesa. L'indagine sul *katechon* da parte cattolica sarebbe un tentativo di rendere l'escatologia inoperante, esattamente come avviene tra il II e il V secolo, quando cioè, la

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54. Cfr. H. Blumenberg, C. Schmitt, *L'enigma della modernità. Epistolario 1971–1978*, cit., p. 76.

55. C. Schmitt, *Teologia politica II. La leggenda della liquidazione di ogni teologia politica*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1992, p. 4.

56. Cfr. G. Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo*, cit., p. 19.

patristica latina impone una concezione positiva del *katechon* a favore di una permanenza della Chiesa nelle strutture di questo mondo. Così *katechon* e Cattolicesimo romano sarebbero strutturalmente connessi alle condizioni di possibilità della teologia politica.

Schmitt definisce la Chiesa romana come «il fantasma che sta appollaiato sulla tomba dell'*imperium romanum*»[57]. In questo senso l'intera teologia politica non può in alcun modo esser ridotta a un'analogia strutturale: la Chiesa è l'erede dell'Impero Romano che non viene rappresentato solo dall'Impero cristiano medievale[58], ma continua a operare anche dopo la fine del medioevo. Per essere più precisi il ruolo catecontico, svolto prima dall'Impero Romano e poi dalla Chiesa cattolica, non può in alcun modo restare vacante pena la dissoluzione del mondo e il diffondersi del caos. Il fatto è che con la fine del medioevo non si è concluso l'Evo cristiano. È importante sottolineare che per Schmitt siamo ancora al suo interno, che quanto pensiamo di avere decostruito ritorna come un fantasma a chiedere vendetta. Questo significa che la teologia politica non è riaffermazione della trascendenza, ma dimostrazione che essa non è mai scomparsa. La teologia politica non è un modo di riportare il teologico nel politico, ma di riconoscere che la teologia permane nella politica proprio in quanto non siamo mai usciti dall'Evo cristiano.

«Nous sommes toujours — comme en 500 ou 800 — dans les *aion* chrétien», annota Carl Schmitt nel 1948, e prosegue «toujours en agonie, et tout évènement essentiel n'est qu'une affaire du *Kat–echon*, c'est–à–dire de celui qui tient, *qui tenet nunc*»[59]. Questa permanenza dell'Evo cristiano, della teologia nella politica, crea una prolungata agonia che assume le forme di un "per sempre" greco. Siamo nell'*aiòn*, scrive Schmitt, in quell'assenza di temporalità che si pretende eterna.

Il mostruoso fantasma evocato da Schmitt è quanto la modernità ha cercato di rimuovere credendo possibile una totale autonomia del piano politico e dell'ambito delle sue decisioni. Esiste per Schmitt una corrispondenza strutturale tra i concetti teologici e i concetti della teoria dello Stato[60], per cui la derivazione dei secondi dai primi non può essere compresa a par-

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57. C. Schmitt, *Glossario*, cit., p. 380.

58. Cfr. Id., *Il Nomos della terra*, cit., pp. 42–47.

59. Id., *Glossario*, cit., p. 112. Schmitt conosce perfettamente il francese sin dalla prima giovinezza grazie alla madre, Louise Steinlein, di origine alsaziana.

60. Com'è noto Schmitt inizia il saggio sulla teologia politica affermando che «Tutti i concetti più pregnanti della moderna dottrina dello Stato sono concetti teologici secolarizzati. Non solo in base al loro sviluppo storico, poiché essi sono passati alla dottrina dello Stati dalla teologia, come ad esempio il Dio onnipotente che è divenuto l'onnipotente legislatore, ma anche nella loro struttura sistematica, la cui conoscenza è necessaria per una considerazione sociologica di questi concetti» C. Schmitt, *Teologia politica*, in *Le categorie del politico. Saggi di teoria politica*, a cura di G. Miglio, trad it. P. Schiera, Bologna, il Mulino, 1972, p. 61.

tire da un punto di vista esclusivamente storico. Analizzare come i concetti giuridici derivino da concetti teologici significa, al contrario, accettare che «affiorano delle reminiscenze teologiche» nell'argomentazione giuridica[61]. In questo senso non è possibile parlare di autonomia del piano politico, dal momento che la politica non è ancora riuscita a rendersi veramente autonoma. L'immagine del fantasma che abbiamo chiamato in causa per introdurre l'idea della permanenza nell'Evo cristiano è, prima di tutto, il fantasma della teologia che ricorda alla politica l'impossibilità di considerarsi autonoma per fondazione e legittimazione.

Nell'indagine sul *katechon* non si sottolineerà mai abbastanza che Schmitt ha esplicitamente dichiarato che il potere *qui tenet* è il centro della teologia politica[62]. In quanto punto focale per lo studio teologico–politico della contemporaneità, il *katechon* è strutturalmente connesso a una specifica concezione della secolarizzazione. Per questo motivo va sottolineata una cesura nella produzione di Schmitt a partire dall'incontro con Max Weber[63]: sicuramente Schmitt deriva da Weber l'idea che l'essenza della modernità sia nella secolarizzazione, ma la declina in termini tanto differenti da permetterci di parlare di due paradigmi opposti di secolarizzazione[64]. La strategia weberiana vede la secolarizzazione come crescente disincanto di un mondo che si prepara a fondare la propria autonomia[65]. Al contrario, come già messo in evidenza, la teologia politica di Schmitt si propone di smascherare questa tesi mostrando come la teologia continui ad agire, anche se nascostamente, nell'ambito della politica[66]. In questo senso la teologia politica di Schmitt altro non è che una presa di coscienza del ruolo che la teologia continua a svolgere sul piano politico.

Per finire, la teologia politica di Schmitt e, nello specifico, la sua teoria del *katechon* che ne rappresenta il centro, è un tentativo di legittimare l'epoca attraverso una presa di coscienza della sua struttura profonda. Verrebbe così da concepire Schmitt come un negromante che cerca di riportare in vita

61. Ivi, p. 63.

62. Cfr. H. Blumenberg, C. Schmitt, *L'enigma della modernità. Epistolario 1971–1978*, cit., p. 76.

63. Cfr, C. Galli, *Il cattolicesimo nel pensiero politico di Carl Schmitt*, cit., p. 13.

64. Cfr. G. Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria*, cit., p. 15. Questi due paradigmi di secolarizzazione ricordano quanto Perone vede nella contrapposizione tra Löwith e Blumenberg che, secondo l'autore, «esemplificano i due corni di questa alternativa, evidenziando, il primo, la permanente radice cristiana ed enfatizzando, il secondo, il carattere di autoaffermazione del moderno» in C. Ciancio, A. M. Pastore, G. Ferretti, U. Perone, *In lotta con l'angelo. La filosofia degli ultimi due secoli di fronte al cristianesimo*, Torino, SEI, 1989, p. 368.

65. Cfr. M. Weber, *L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*, trad.it. P. Bussesi, Firenze, Sansoni, 1965.

66. Idea che ricorda la prima tesi sul concetto di storia di Walter Benjamin, secondo cui il manichino detto «materialismo storico» può vincere solo se prende a servizio la teologia, rappresentata da un «nano gobbo» perché è «piccola e brutta, e tra l'altro non deve farsi vedere» in W. Benjamin, *Sul concetto di Storia*, a cura di G. Bonola e M. Ranchetti, Torino, Einaudi, 1997 (1966), p. 21.

il fantasma del cattolicesimo romano. Il che è centrale non solo al fine di contestualizzare il problema del *katechon* all'interno del suo pensiero, ma anche per mostrare che esso non può esser letto solo in termini di conservazione dell'ordine esistente. Se, come ho cercato di evidenziare, l'ordine terreno che questa forza è capace di mantenere è concepito positivamente in un momento di crisi, è fondamentale mostrare che la risposta alla crisi non è soltanto un conservare o addirittura reiterare l'ordine precedente, ma soprattutto un produrre un ordine alternativo. Il *katechon* di Schmitt ha così completamente pervertito il proprio senso originario: non solo non è concepito come forza negativa che si oppone alla realizzazione del Regno di Dio, ma è perfino inteso in termini di produzione formale e innovazione del senso.

Eppure il pensiero di Schmitt rimane legato a un lamento nostalgico incapace di cogliere una possibilità alternativa di legittimazione simbolica che non dipenda da un potere frenante che ha già fallito. Il problema di Schmitt è in una fine del tempo immaginata come catastrofica: solamente recuperando una concezione differente della Fine diventa possibile intendere diversamente l'azione del *katechon*.

7. Taubes e il katechon

Negli studi sul *katechon* è lasciato in secondo piano il rapporto tra Carl Schmitt e Jacob Taubes. È fondamentale ripartire dal dialogo tra Taubes e Schmitt per evidenziare il nesso strutturale che intercorre tra il potere frenante e la legittimazione simbolica di un'epoca storica. Nell'Aprile del 1978, Taubes scrive a Schmitt di aver «riflettuto molto sulla forma "catecontica" dell'esistenza, poiché anche il *mysterium judaicum* rientra in essa»[67].

La forma ebraica del *katechon* è, per Taubes, il rabbinismo che cerca la stabilità nelle proprie strutture. Se nel pensiero di Schmitt l'azione frenante del cattolicesimo romano ha un valore positivo, in Taubes, il *katechon* è debolezza, ovvero coincide con i «secoli dell'esilio». Taubes scrive: «non è l'idea messianica che ci ha imposto una vita vissuta nel differimento», al contrario, aggiunge: «tale vita in sospeso è dovuta all'egemonia rabbinica»[68]. In quanto l'azione frenante svolta dalla classe sacerdotale rabbinica non ha alcun significato positivo, ma è solo una prolungata agonia che produce

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67. J. Taubes, *Lettera del 8/4/1978*, in C. Schmitt, J. Taubes, *Ai lati opposti delle barricate. Corrispondenza e scritti 1948–1987*, a cura di G. Gurisatti, Milano, Adelphi, 2018, p. 65.

68. Id., *Il buon Dio sta nel dettaglio. Gershom Scholem e la promessa messianica*, in *Il prezzo del messianesimo. Lettere di Jacob Taubes a Gershom Scholem e altri scritti*, a cura di E. Stimilli, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2000, p. 55.

una «vita in sospeso», Taubes diventa la dimostrazione di una possibilità di concepire negativamente l'opera del *katechon*, per cui il fallimento del potere *qui tenet* non viene più rimpianto, ma quasi agognato. Il *katechon* in Taubes viene così ad assumere nuovamente la propria connotazione originaria di potere che trattiene e arresta, in senso lato, reazionario, e intanto, perde quel connotato produttivo che, come si è visto, assume nel pensiero di Schmitt.

Taubes scrive: «Il *katechon*, ciò che arresta, su cui posa lo sguardo Carl Schmitt, è già un primo segno di come l'esperienza cristiana del tempo della fine venga addomesticata, adattandosi al mondo e ai suoi poteri»[69]. Il *katechon* si configura agli occhi di Taubes come ciò che addomestica la *Endzeit*, cioè la concezione del tempo che è alla base dell'escatologia del cristianesimo originario e, contemporaneamente, diventa forza legittimante del potere. Nella serie di lezioni che Taubes dedica alla *Teologia Politica di San Paolo* il *katechon* viene ripreso ancora una volta in riferimento a Schmitt. Quest'ultimo non è presentato solo come un teorico del *katechon* il quale, attraverso una certa interpretazione del termine paolino, intende proporre una filosofia conservatrice; al contrario, Schmitt stesso è il *katechon*. Schmitt diventa l'incarnazione della forma catecontica di esistenza e lo diventa proprio in quanto giurista il cui compito, come Taubes scrive, è legittimare l'esistente[8]. Il *katechon*, in questo senso, non è altro che una forza legittimante dell'ordine presente e Taubes aggiunge in termini critici: «Qualunque ne sia la forma»[70]. Contro questo che potremmo ormai chiamare pensiero catecontico, Taubes propone un atteggiamento apocalittico. Nel pensiero di Taubes, che pone al centro il concetto di rivoluzione, è impossibile una rivalutazione positiva dell'azione del *katechon* che si presenta come *phobos* di forze che non siamo in grado di controllare.

È fondamentale sottolineare come il *katechon* coincida, per Taubes, con i rabbini e i giuristi: sono gli interpreti e i custodi della legge che si oppongono al messianesimo ebraico. Come ricorda Taubes, per il giurista, ma potremmo aggiungere anche per il rabbinismo, «vale un'unica regola: finché è possibile trovare anche solo una forma giuridica, non importa con quale artificio, è necessario applicarla, altrimenti il caos dilaga»[71]. L'identificazione del *katechon* con il giurista non è tanto una critica a Schmitt, ma a una forma di lettura della legge come conservazione dell'ordine esistente a cui contrapporre un pensiero apocalittico capace di produrre un senso alternativo per il presente, in grado di rivelare l'aspetto eversivo ed emancipativo del messianesimo.

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69. J. Taubes, *Carl Schmitt. Un apocalittico della controrivoluzione*, in *In divergente accordo*, cit., p. 33.
70. Id., *La teologia politica di San Paolo*, cit., p. 186.
71. *Ibidem*.

8. Messianesimo e Rivoluzione

È noto il radicato interesse di Taubes per l'interpretazione di Paolo, un interesse che egli stesso definisce autobiografico[72], e che lo porterà, pur sapendo di esser malato di cancro in fase terminale, a tenere un ultimo seminario a Heidelberg dedicato alla teologia politica di San Paolo. Anche nell'unico libro pubblicato da Taubes stesso nel 1974 con il titolo di *Escatologia Occidentale*, una rielaborazione della sua tesi di dottorato, compare un capitolo dedicato alla figura di Paolo in rapporto alla dissoluzione del mondo antico[73]. Taubes si sente spinto verso Paolo da una fatalità ineluttabile, come scrive ad Armin Mohler, suo compagno di studi a Zurigo:

> Non saprei fare neppure un passo nella mia vita miserabile e spesso tortuosa (in realtà non saprei fare comunque passi avanti), senza tenermi fermo a questi tre momenti [l'amore, la pietà, il perdono]; e ciò mi riporta sempre — contro la mia stessa volontà — a Paolo.[74]

Il problema è chiedersi che cosa Taubes cerchi in Paolo e la risposta non può prescindere dalla sua concezione della storia dell'escatologia. Non è un caso che Taubes litighi con Gershom Scholem, uno dei suoi maestri teorici, sull'interpretazione del pensiero di Walter Benjamin. Quella tra Taubes e Scholem è una disputa che si gioca sulla concezione del messianesimo[75]. Taubes rimprovera Scholem per non aver pubblicato la lettera indirizzata da Benjamin a Schmitt che riconosce un debito teorico del primo nei confronti del secondo[76]. Egli sembra riscontrare in Benjamin l'autore che meglio si confronta con la sconfitta del *katechon*. Se per Benjamin, nel *Frammento*

72. Cfr. J. Taubes, *La teologia politica di san Paolo*, cit., p. 19.

73. Cfr. Id., *Escatologia occidentale*, cit., pp. 86–93.

74. Id., *In divergente accordo. Scritti su Carl Schmitt*, cit., p. 45.

75. Cfr. E. Stimilli, *Il messianesimo come problema politico*, in J. Taubes, *Il prezzo del messianesimo*, cit., p. 153.

76. Ci riferiamo qui alla lettera che Walter Benjamin invia a Carl Schmitt nel 1930 annunciandogli che riceverà una copia del *Dramma barocco tedesco* e ammettendo il proprio debito intellettuale nei suoi confronti («Egregio Professore, / riceverà a giorni dalla casa editrice il mio libro *Il dramma barocco tedesco*. [. . .] noterà quanto il libro le debba nell'interpretazione della teoria della sovranità del XVII secolo. Oltre a ciò, forse posso anche dirle che dalle sue opere più recenti, in particolare *La Dittatura*, ho tratto una conferma del mio metodo di ricerca nella filosofia dell'arte dal suo nella filosofia dello Stato» in J. Taubes, *In divergente accordo*, cit., p. 71). Taubes denuncia più volte l'esistenza della lettera e critica Scholem di scarsa trasparenza intellettuale tanto nella conferenza pubblica su Schmitt come apocalittico della controrivoluzione (J. Taubes, *In divergente accordo*, cit., p. 37) che nelle lettere private (J. Taubes, *Il prezzo del messianesimo*, cit., p. 135: «[La teoria di Benjamin deriva] dalla Teologia politica di Carl Schmitt — v. la lettera di Benjamin a C. S. che "giace" nell'archivio Benjamin, ma che non è stata pubblicata — e perché poi? — e ciò nonostante, grazie a una mia iniziativa, sta facendo il giro tra alcune persone interessate)». La lettera di Taubes risale al 1977. Per quanto riguarda il debito di Benjamin denunciato nella lettera a Schmitt cfr. G. Gurisatti, *Introduzione*, in C. Schmitt, J. Taubes, *Ai lati opposti delle barricate*, cit., p. 22.

teologico politico, il metodo della politica mondiale deve prendere il nome di nichilismo; secondo Taubes questo nichilismo deve esser letto come «*morphé* di questo mondo che si dilegua»[77]. In questo modo Taubes cerca di rintracciare nel pensiero di Benjamin una proposta politica che faccia fronte al mondo di rovine lasciato dal *katechon*. Il *Frammento Teologico Politico*, invitando la politica mondiale a chiamare il proprio metodo nichilismo[78], sembra voler invitare ad adoperarsi per eliminare il potere che frena, proponendosi di accelerare la fine dei tempi. Lo stesso *Dramma Barocco* vede l'intuizione allegorica, in cui l'immagine è rovina[79], come unica forma estetica in grado di rappresentare l'epoca. Esiste così una possibilità alternativa al *katechon*: un linguaggio in grado di partire dalle rovine consapevole del proprio aspetto melanconico. Taubes nella lettura di Benjamin cerca, in altri termini, una produzione formale in grado di confrontarsi con il mondo in frantumi lasciato dal potere *qui tenet* dopo la propria sconfitta. Si affaccerebbe così la possibilità di una proposta che non rimpianga l'azione catecontica, ma accetti un nuovo ordine che si delinei attraverso forme espressive differenti e consapevoli della loro fragilità.

Per Taubes la forza che frena deve essere criticata nei termini di forza legittimante del potere. Il *katechon* risulta così, agli occhi di Taubes, incapace di istanza critica, legato all'accettazione dell'esistente. Taubes dedica l'inizio dell'*Escatologia Occidentale* al concetto di rivoluzione sottolineando che «anche la rivoluzione ha le sue forme ed è in forma proprio quando scardina le forme irrigidite, le positività del mondo»[80]. L'apocalittica non è mai riaffermazione di un vuoto nulla per questi teorici del messianesimo, Taubes scrive a questo proposito che il principio apocalittico contiene in sé due poteri: uno che distrugge le forme e uno che le crea[81]. Il movimento costitutivo dell'apocalittica è, in questi termini, un distruggere per creare.

Solamente attraverso una concezione dell'apocalittica intesa come nuova logica del senso è possibile trovare un'alternativa alla logica catecontica. Se la fine del tempo non è negazione di ogni forma, ma possibilità di contestare la costituzione di questo mondo a favore di una dialettica morfologica alternativa, il *katechon* può ritornare al proprio significato originario. In questo modo il potere *qui tenet* non sarà più rimpianto nostalgicamente, ma criticato come elemento che proroga l'avvento del senso ultimo. A questo punto la concezione apocalittica cambia volto cessando di essere intesa

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77. J. Taubes, *La teologia politica di San Paolo*, cit., p. 137.

78. W. Benjamin, *Sul concetto di Storia*, a cura di G. Bonola, M. Ranchetti, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, p. 254.

79. Cfr. W. Benjamin, *Il dramma barocco tedesco*, Torino, Einaudi, 1971, p. 151: «Le allegorie sono nel regno del pensiero quel che sono le rovine nel regno delle cose».

80. J. Taubes, *Escatologia Occidentale*, cit., p. 31.

81. *Ibidem*.

come caos di cui si deve necessariamente accettare l'esistenza, ma ponendosi nei termini propositivi di differente dialettica del senso. La fine del tempo cessa così di essere negazione di ogni forma, diventando possibilità di contestare la costituzione di questo mondo a favore di una dialettica morfologica alternativa.

9. Catastrofe e redenzione

Per comprendere i due modi differenti di intendere l'azione del *katechon* bisogna prendere in considerazione tutta la storia delle interpretazioni ricoprendo un arco temporale che va dalla patristica latina al dibattito novecentesco. In questo lunghissimo percorso esistono due possibili concezioni del *katechon*: se il potere *qui tenet* si oppone al Regno di Dio svolge un compito negativo; al contrario, se esso contrasta l'esplosione anomica, assume un valore positivo. Il *katechon* è così concepito negativamente da un punto di vista teologico per cui l'indifferenza verso questo mondo porta ad attendere, se non addirittura accelerare, la sua fine. Al contrario, da un punto di vista politico, il *katechon* si presenta come energia centripeta in grado di mantenere la forma di questo mondo. Alle spalle di queste due diverse concezioni, esistono, in verità, due differenti dialettiche del senso: nel primo caso, il *katechon* è una forza che contrasta l'avvento del senso ultimo rappresentato dalla seconda venuta; nel secondo, esso si presenta come ciò che detiene il senso di questo mondo opponendosi alla sua dissoluzione anomica.

Il processo secolare che porta a intendere positivamente il *katechon* nasconde il tentativo di cercare un accordo tra il Regno di Dio e il regno dell'uomo. In questo senso, per comprendere le differenti interpretazioni del potere che frena, bisogna ripartire dalle prime posizioni che intendono la sua azione come positiva, e che mirano a trovare un accordo tra la prima comunità cristiana[82] e l'Impero Romano. Proprio iniziando a intendere positivamente l'azione del *katechon* e, contemporaneamente, sostenendo la sua identificazione con Roma, la comunità cristiana cessa di essere una comunità politicamente in conflitto con l'Impero che, per parte sua, passa da persecutore della nuova religione a suo difensore. I cristiani diventano, in questo modo, coloro che detengono la riserva escatologica in grado di garantire il governo terreno dell'Impero Romano. Il movimento di positivizzazione del *katechon*, come mostrano le opere di Tertulliano e Origene, è svolto consapevolmente con l'intenzione di rispondere alle accuse che

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82.   Intesa come insieme di fedeli che formano l'unico corpo di Cristo. È Paolo stesso a ricorrere a questa immagine teologico–politica di grande fortuna. Cfr. 1Co 1, 12.

vengono rivolte alla comunità cristiana che, contemporaneamente, viene legittimata come unica in grado di gestire il futuro salvifico dei cittadini[83]. Schmitt rappresenta il culmine di questo percorso di positivizzazione del potere che frena che, però, ha già in se stesso i germi della propria sconfitta. La teologia politica di Schmitt rappresenta in questo senso un rimpianto nostalgico per l'incapacità del potere *qui tenet* di produrre una rappresentazione legittimante adeguata all'epoca a lui contemporanea.

Solamente un pensiero apocalittico è in grado di denunciare il carattere effimero dell'azione del potere *qui tenet*. Jacob Taubes rappresenta il punto conclusivo di un pensiero escatologico in grado di confutare la pretesa di organizzazione del senso propria del *katechon*[84]. Taubes, insieme a Benjamin, diventa l'esponente di un pensiero messianico inteso come consapevole constatazione del fallimento del *katechon*: di fronte alla disfatta del potere *qui tenet* la proposta non è di riesumare un potere frenante che ha già fallito, ma scegliere di vivere senza la sua azione.

La prima serie interpretativa, che si basa su una concezione positiva del *katechon*, si fonda su specifiche categorie oppositive. Ad esempio, nella patristica latina, l'opposizione fondamentale è tra ordine e caos. Il primo è garantito dal *katechon*, il secondo è il rischio insito nel *mysteryum tes anomias*. Questa stessa opposizione ritorna nel pensiero di Schmitt, per cui il *katechon* diventa l'ultimo baluardo contro l'avvento del caos nichilistico. In questa prima serie di interpretazioni il *katechon* è così schierato dalla parte della forma e l'apocalittica della sua dissoluzione. Questa linea interpretativa arriva fino a Cacciari che vede nel *katechon* il principio formativo per eccellenza[85]. In questo senso il potere *qui tenet* è una forza in grado di contenere in sé l'anomia intesa come perdita di cogenza della forma. Esposito, riprendendo l'argomentazione di Cacciari, evidenzia come il *katechon*, nel detenere in sé l'anomia, si trovi, in verità, nell'impossibilità di debellare definitivamente l'*anomos*[86]. L'azione del potere che frena non è, secondo Esposito, esclusivamente positiva. Egli scrive che «la sua funzione è positiva, ma negativamente»[87]. Proprio a partire da questa idea possiamo ricostruire

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83. Celso rivolge ai cristiani l'*Alethès Lògos* intorno al 176–180 d. C. che noi conosciamo attraverso la refutazione di Origene del 250 d. C. Celso sostiene che le comunità cristiane siano in costante opposizione alla società politica in cui vivono. Punto centrale dell'argomentazione è il rifiuto dei seguaci di Cristo a partecipare alla vita pubblica basata su sacrifici, spettacoli teatrali e feste. Cfr. Tertulliano, *Apologeticus adversos gentes pro Christianis*, XXXII, 1–3; Origene, *I principi. Contra Celsum e altri scritti filosofici*; cit, II, 50. Sul punto cfr. G. Filoramo, *Il sacro e il potere. Il caso cristiano*, Torino, Einaudi, 2009, pp. 91–102.

84. Soprattutto cfr. J. Taubes, *Carl Schmitt. Un apocalittico della controrivoluzione*, in *In divergente accordo*, cit., p. 33.

85. Cfr. M. Cacciari, *Dell'inizio*, cit., p. 625.

86. Cfr. R. Esposito, *Immunitas. Protezione e negazione della vita*, Torino, Einaudi, 2002, p. 76.

87. *Ibidem.*

la seconda serie di interpretazioni che si concentrano non sull'opposizione del *katechon* all'*anomos*, ma sulla sua capacità di contrastare l'instaurazione del Regno di Dio in questo mondo.

Questa seconda linea interpretativa si basa su categorie completamente differenti. Il *katechon* non appare più nei termini di potere formativo contrapposto alla deformazione anomica, al contrario, esso diventa ciò che trattiene un'anomia già in atto. Questo significa che il *katechon* non è in grado di trattenere la forma dalla sua dissoluzione, ma solamente "nella" sua dissoluzione, condannando il presente a una prolungata agonia. Nell'interpretazione di Jacob Taubes il *katechon* si rivela fallimentare nel suo tentativo di presentarsi come unico detentore del senso; esso è, al contrario, ciò che differisce il senso ultimo insito nella crisi apocalittica. In questo modo l'apocalisse può diventare un'alternativa a quella che abbiamo delineato nei termini di una logica del senso catecontica. L'escatologia di Taubes non si presenta come un *velle nihil*, ma come contestazione delle categorie di questo modo che mira a una produzione morfologica alternativa[88]. Questa è la linea interpretativa che arriva fino ad Agamben. Egli sostiene che il potere *qui tenet*, diventi il paradigma di un modo di concepire il tempo storico in cui sembra impossibile ogni azione politica di dissenso[89]. Per questo motivo diventa necessario opporre al potere che frena un pensiero che recuperi le categorie del messianesimo[90].

All'interno di questo vasto quadro temporale bisogna considerare, prima di tutto, che cambiano le concezioni del *katechon* a seconda dei diversi modi di intendere la fine. Chi vede l'apocalisse come caos e catastrofe concepisce il *katechon* positivamente recependo la sua azione in termini rassicuranti. Al contrario, la fine può essere intesa in termini positivi come ciò che pone termine alle sofferenze del presente, o addirittura, come compimento che detiene il senso ultimo. In questo secondo caso, l'azione del *katechon* appare negativamente come ciò che proroga la fine attesa.

Abbiamo cercato di mostrare che l'interpretazione del *katechon* come elemento positivo o negativo nella storia della salvezza sia sempre militante, legata cioè a una specifica posizione politica: dalla volontà di arrivare a un accordo tra la comunità cristiana e l'Impero di Tertulliano e Origene fino, attraverso un lunghissimo percorso, al Reich di Carl Schmitt, e alle posizioni antiautoritarie di Taubes e Benjamin. È importante mettere in luce questo

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88. J. Taubes, *Escatologia Occidentale*, cit., p. 31: «Il principio apocalittico contiene in sé un potere che distrugge le forme e uno che le crea. A seconda delle situazioni e dei compiti prevale una delle due componenti, né l'una né l'altra però possono mancare. Se manca l'elemento demoniaco distruttivo, allora il rigido ordinamento, la positività che vige nel mondo, non può essere superata. Se però, attraverso l'elemento distruttivo non appare la nuova alleanza, la rivoluzione affonda ineluttabilmente nel vuoto nulla».

89. Cfr. G. Agamben, *Introduzione*, in C. Schmitt, *Un giurista davanti se stesso*, cit., p. 16.

90. Cfr. Id., *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla lettera ai Romani*, cit., p. 68.

aspetto per capire che il tema del *katechon* è strutturalmente connesso a un problema di legittimazione simbolica del potere. In questo senso è una questione non solo filosofico–politica, ma anche estetica.

10. Un problema estetico

Il *katechon* risulta vittorioso nel momento in cui riesce a instaurare una relazione positiva tra immanenza e trascendenza attraverso l'utilizzo di categorie estetiche. Il *katechon* non è solamente la forza che mantiene enti, e cioè forme, in vista dell'eschaton[91]; ma esso ottiene successo quando riesce a produrre dei sistemi simbolici in grado di soddisfare la richiesta identitaria di un'epoca. La lotta tra il Regno di Dio e il governo terreno, che si nasconde alle spalle della storia del potere che frena, può essere risolta attraverso l'incarnazione come rapporto soddisfacente di trascendenza e immanenza, invisibile e visibile. Non è un caso che l'immagine della Chiesa che emerge dalle riflessioni di Schmitt sul *Cattolicesimo Romano* corrisponda alla figura dell'imperatore elaborata da Eusebio di Cesarea[92]: l'imperatore di Eusebio e la Chiesa di Schmitt sono *eikon*, immagine capace di rendere visibile un ambito ideale altrimenti invisibile[93].

Per altro verso, il *katechon* risulta fallimentare quando l'innovazione simbolica è affidata all'apocalittica. La fine del tempo può proporsi come logica del senso alternativa al *katechon* proprio grazie all'invenzione di forme nuove. La stessa figura dello stato come corpo mostruoso del Leviatano deve far riflettere sulla doppia natura di questa immagine. Il Leviatano è l'ordine formale garantito dal *katechon* inteso come forza centripeta che riesce a detenere la forma politica. Ma il Leviatano è contemporaneamente la bestia escatologica per eccellenza, l'animale del banchetto allestito per la celebrazione di un ordine nuovo. Schmitt stesso è consapevole della duplicità del Leviatano, come mostra all'inizio di *Terra e Mare*[94], eppure non

91. Cfr. M. Cacciari, *Dell'inizio*, cit. p. 631.

92. Sul rapporto tra Costantino I ed Eusebio di Cesarea è particolarmente interessante l'analisi svolta da Jean Flori secondo cui, proprio a partire dalla conversione di Costantino, si può iniziare a parlare di una «spiritualizzazione dell'interpretazione profetica». Il che significa che il regno di Dio viene concepito in maniera sempre meno "terrestre" e l'attesa escatologica si esprime in modo sempre meno anti–Romano. Cfr. J. Flori, *La fine del mondo nel Medioevo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2008, pp. 43–48. Inoltre, si può ben comprendere il ruolo svolto a corte da Eusebio di Cesarea a partire dall'ironica annotazione di Overbeck che lo definisce «l'arricciatore della parrucca teologica dell'imperatore Costantino» in F. Overbeck, *Über die Anfänge der patristischen Literatur*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966, p. 28.

93. Cfr. Eusebio, *Elogio di Costantino. Discorso per il trentennale, Discorso regale*, a cura di M. Amerisie, Milano, Paoline, 2005, 7, 12.

94. C. Schmitt, *Terra e Mare*, cit., p. 19: «Ma gli ebrei — continuano i cabbalisti — celebrano poi il solenne, millenario banchetto del Leviatano, di cui Heinrich Heine narra in una famosa poesia».

interroga il *katechon* fino in fondo, non arriva a elaborare la teoria di un corpo smembrato che può rientrare fisiologicamente in un ordine alternativo. Questa è la dialettica morfologica alternativa garantita dall'apocalittica e che, a ben vedere, ha a che fare con una dimensione fagocitante delle forme lasciate dal passato. Non è solo una poetica delle rovine in grado di risignificare il rifiuto come messa in discussione dell'ordine che lo crea, ma totale rifiuto della forma politico–giuridco–estetica per eccellenza.

L'epoca presente rimanda a forme di auto–riconoscimento che rivelano l'esigenza di trovare una legittimazione per il nostro tempo analoga quella avvertita da Blumenberg per l'età moderna[95]. Si può forse parlare a questo proposito dei miti della nostra contemporaneità come di miti «a bassa intensità», per riprendere il titolo di un recente libro di Ortoleva[96]. Ai suoi occhi i miti sono sempre più richiesti e la loro produzione si fa sempre più intensa, come intenso e anche arbitrario è il loro dissolversi. Cominciando dalle fiction televisive per venire alla pubblicità e ai racconti a fumetti, verrebbe da chiedersi se molte delle narrazioni moderne, con la loro grande capacità identificante, non siano un surrogato del *katechon* perduto. Ma non si tratta di questo soltanto. La domanda fondamentale è se si dia storicamente la possibilità di costituire una mitologia davvero efficace per il nostro tempo. È abbastanza evidente che su questa via si pone un interrogativo fondamentale per l'estetica. A ben vedere il problema non è solo quello di una *facies* estetica del *katechon*, come si è cercato di mettere in luce nelle pagine precedenti, ma forse anche di una possibilità catecontica per l'estetica — declinata in senso proprio e, in senso lato, in chiave politica — laddove il laboratorio mitopoietico viene messo al servizio delle esigenze di legittimazione del sistema politico–economico. In questo senso bisognerà cercare di rispondere alla questione se sia possibile difendere le ragioni di una rinascita della mitologia quale racconto efficace e condiviso. Esiste, declinata in questi termini, una chance catecontica per il sapere estetico.

Non si tratta, a ben vedere, di una questione meramente astratta, di come mettere a sistema le diverse interpretazioni del *katechon*. In realtà, al fondo delle questioni filosofico–politiche, vi sono sempre interessi vitali il cui significato, spesso, viene smarrito dalle controversie scolastiche. Nel caso specifico, per il *katechon* è in gioco la possibilità di diventare nuovamente efficace per l'uomo del nostro tempo. Ciò è possibile solo a condizione di recuperare una relazione positiva tra immanenza e trascendenza, visibile e invisibile. Uno studio quindi tutto centrato sul recupero di strutture di significazione già sconfitte rischia di mancare completamente i suoi destinatari. A conti fatti, la sconfitta del potere che frena annunciata dal

95. H. Blumenberg, *La legittimità dell'età moderna*, Genova, Marietti, 1992.

96. P. Ortoleva, *Miti a bassa intensità: racconti, media, vita quotidiana*, Torino, Einaudi, 2019.

panorama filosofico attuale sembra definitiva. Al diluvio di immagini nella società contemporanea sembra impossibile opporre un potere frenante. Resta da rispondere alla questione su dove vadano ora collocate quelle risorse mitopoietiche che si coagulavano nel *katechon*. Sembra necessario, in questo senso, ripensare alla legittimità del nostro tempo anche in chiave estetica.

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