

**Oneself as a Universe:**  
**Post-Humanism, Cosmopolitanism, and Contemporary Italian Thought**

by

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*To my beloved Sarah Bennett,  
without whom many of these ideas  
would have never seen the light*

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## Abstract

This project originates from the necessity to explain an uncanny fusion detected between cosmopolitan characteristics which Antonio Gramsci ascribed to Italian intellectual culture and the anti-humanistic connotations displayed by Italian Thought. Traditional cosmopolitan discourses inheriting the legacy of the Enlightenment generally align with humanistic perspectives whereas, as Roberto Esposito observes, Italian Theory has endorsed anti-humanistic viewpoints ever since the age of the Renaissance. How does one explain such a connection? Also, how are we to justify the ascetic categories of *mysticism, weakness, slowness, bareness*, etc. which proliferated among Italian thinkers starting from the late 1970s?

In response to these questions, this work attempts to define the position that contemporary Italian philosophy defends with respect to the current debate on cosmopolitan theory. Neo-Kantian solutions proposed by authors such as Jürgen Habermas, Daniele Archibugi and David Held, will certainly be given some consideration. Importantly, these discourses acknowledge the necessity to rethink the role of both the state and international relations in view of the brutalities perpetrated by 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianisms and the present globalized geopolitical scenario. Advocating a reinforcement of global powers and counting faithfully on the authority of law, these theories nonetheless elicit some perplexities. On one hand, they presuppose a disbelief within people's self-emancipating capacities and, on the other, are not sufficiently critical

of the neoliberal agenda. This is even more evident when considering that most of the said authors do not express skepticism with respect to the promotion of human rights. While human rights are certainly needed now more than ever, in several cases they align with both a profit-oriented and imperialistic mentality.

It is relieving to discover that cosmopolitanism was initially founded by the Greek Cynics as a non-humanistic discourse and that several authors, including Peter Sloterdijk and William Desmond, highlighted similarities connecting Greek Cynicism with contemporary European modes of thinking. The Cynic perspective can help one solve many of the aforementioned doubts, because it rejects conventional societal values such as wealth, fame, and power, while promoting moral ideals of liberty, equality, self-sufficiency, and ascetic practices. In view of these premises, this study will pursue the hypothesis that, beginning with the publication of Massimo Cacciari's *Krisis* (1976), Italian Philosophy and Literature have embraced a critical rhetoric which partially moves away from Marxian views and gradually retrieves cynic ideas. More specifically, the inquiry will unfold along two different paths: the historical-cultural analysis will be utilized as a material support for reaching theoretical-philosophical targets.

Regarding the historical-cultural aspect, I will clarify to what extent contemporary Italian philosophy and literature retrieve Greek Cynic contents. This part of the theory will develop according to three fundamental factors which separate the sphere of the "human" from the domain of the "non-human". The first two factors, "reason" and "language", will be discussed within chapter 2 by exploring the work of Massimo Cacciari, Gianni Vattimo, and literature from the 1977 movement. "History" will represent the third pivotal discriminating factor in chapter 3, focusing on Franco

Cassano's *Southern Thought* and Giorgio Agamben's post-humanism. The ultimate intention, which is philosophical, is to extrapolate from Italian Cynicism a critical cosmopolitan discourse that destabilizes neoliberal ideological structures and dissociates principles of local autonomy from cultural protectionism and anti-immigration claims.

## INTRODUCTION

The time for cosmopolitan ideals as an extravagance restricted to a privileged minority is rapidly withering away.

The current Syrian crisis is but the last of an infinite series of dramatic events which, ever since World War I, in different ways repeatedly perpetuated statelessness, homelessness, Diasporas, migration, and displacement of all kinds. Aggravating this scenario, the increasing expansion of the markets, the persistent and often inconsiderate action carried out by multinational corporations, and the subsequent internationalization of labor during the last fifty years progressively destabilized national sovereignties and local communities, thus forcing myriads of individuals to flee their homeland. The rise of the post-modern era gave birth to a plethora of new forms of global interconnectedness. These can hardly be considered as abstract and high-minded conjectures or historical anomalies, inasmuch as they proliferate as concrete states of affairs that common people inescapably experience on a daily basis. Isn't one sufficiently conscious of this scenario, to separate the primary importance intercultural dialogue and moral exchange have now acquired from a class of paternalistic feelings that only well-off travelers typically have the luxury to enjoy? Isn't one attentive enough for acknowledging, in addition to the educated voyager fluent in multiple languages and wealthy entrepreneurs residing in the comfort of sumptuous hotels, that a new and more awaken cosmopolitan spirit has come into being?

Moving one's focus towards the margins of peripheral vision, one can occasionally see this spirit escaping political persecutions, bloody conflicts, starvation, being dragged by the ocean towards the most unpredictable shores, or even crawling tenaciously across a desert. This spirit's whisper can be heard while roaming around forgotten neighborhoods of large western cities, where idiomatic translation, cultural hybridization, and ethical negotiation do not serve as intellectual distractions but rather represent mandatory ways to survive. It is this same shade that animates on a daily basis thousands of employment offices, wherein long lines of unwaged youths attempt to adapt again and again to different working obligations and environments, which inexorably uproot them from their families and motherlands. The spirit to which I am alluding must not be mistaken with the mere craving for a soothing experience of cultural diversity, because it originates from an anxiety of the uncertain, from one's own total exposure to the whole. Far from seeing the world as a welcoming home, the new cosmopolitan hope unfolds by learning how to look at its own home as precarious, evanescent.

The reader will soon find out that the view defended here has little to do with the promotion of mere compassionate emotions; quite the opposite. The cosmopolitan hypothesis is posited here with the intention to find a potential escape out of the states of dislocation and extraneousness that relentlessly afflict our time. This inquiry will attempt to look at the world through the eyes of those wanderers whose feet are forced to walk on an unstable ground, drifters who have never had the chance to sail under a regular breeze and who, nonetheless, do not seek for comfort within the illusory myth of an idyllic past, but strive to transform their shipwreck into an opportunity for spiritual redemption. The nomadic souls to whom this study is addressed do not perceive themselves as victims; in

all circumstances they look at their struggle as a way to accomplish self-liberation and political emancipation. For this reason, and differently from what numerous discourses preach in our time, ‘exclusion’ will not be feared or demonized, but embraced as a blessing.

In view of these premises, the analysis that will be illustrated here cannot exclusively rely on institutional or legal maneuvers. Cosmopolitan theories that follow this path generally inherit the humanistic legacy of the Enlightenment, which in recent times has exposed numerous flaws. Solutions proposed by Jürgen Habermas, Daniele Archibugi and David Held, who insist on a necessity to reinforce global powers in order to defend democratic practices, certainly deserve some degree of consideration. In addition to claims pertaining to wealth redistribution and principles of self-determination, what these discourses importantly acknowledge is that the shift from a Westphalian geopolitical framework to a post-national scenario required political discourse to rethink the role of the state and of international relations in defense of the individual dignity that 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianisms had brutally violated.

Nevertheless, a blind reliance on the authority of law elicits some perplexities. In fact, this presupposes a disbelief in people’s self-emancipating capacities and, in some circumstances, can result in philosophical perspectives which are not sufficiently critical of the western hegemonic influence and the neo-liberal agenda. Counting devotedly on the Kantian utopia, most of the abovementioned efforts conceive of “humanity” as able to capture an alleged common essence shared by all peoples, and utilize the notion of “human rights” as a conceptual platform for the development of a constitutional language that is called to support global equality and justice. Nevertheless, since the end of World

War II the western promotion of human rights has operated hand-in-hand with an interventionist logic purporting to alleviate “suffering” and endorse “inclusion”, which in some cases also pursued economic profit and political control. In particular, beginning in 1990, financial aid from the North to the South has significantly diminished while states of emergency have multiplied, thus transforming humanitarian interventionism into large-scale business. As a consequence, global poverty has not declined over the last decades, while in several circumstances humanitarian action has been misdirected toward the aims of profit seeking.

The elaboration of a cosmopolitanism that truly represents displaced sociopolitical conditions, therefore, needs to base itself on a model that recovers pre-humanistic ideals such as the ones developed in ancient times by the Greek Cynics. Scholars rarely remark that ancient cosmopolitan thought was founded in defense of political “exclusion” by Diogenes from Sinope (404-323 BC) and his disciples, whose notion of universal identity was attained through the repudiation of all types of community, the opposition to authority of any sort, as well as the rejection of ordinary societal values such as wealth, fame, and power. Cynic cosmopolitanism could not rely on humanistic presuppositions, because Greek thought and language did not own a term denoting an ideal of mankind that would correspond to the Roman *humanitas*. As the Greek cosmos “*is not a human construct, but exists beyond human control and even conception*”<sup>1</sup>, cosmopolitanism originated as a type of thinking that posits an affinity between all forms of life by means of a critical distrust vis-à-vis cerebral abstractions and comprehensive types of philosophical systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Desmond (2008), p. 204.

Owing to the numerous historical similarities that connect contemporary Europe and Greek Hellenism, when cynic doctrines proliferated, the present-day western milieu offers an ideal background for cynic cosmopolitanism to reemerge in its whole. In addition to the comparative accounts elaborated by authors such as Peter Sloterdijk, who has highlighted discursive similarities linking contemporary post-modernism and ancient cynicism, such a hypothesis appears to be furthermore confirmed by the recent emergence of the so called “post-human” doctrines. In this regard, the fusions of biological elements and technological devices that several trans-humanists advocate reappear to a degree within the class of power collisions that, from Nietzsche to Foucault and Agamben, anti-humanist philosophers have identified for describing the history of western knowledge. Following a similar path, the deconstructive attacks on gender, race, and class supremacies carried out by post-colonial theorists have also contributed significantly to removing ‘man’ from the center of the narrative space, which is now arguably more inclined to harbor pre-humanistic cynic perspectives.

All this is particularly true in the case of contemporary Italy where, starting from the end of the 1970s, the synchronized combination of economic growth, urbanization processes and immigration phenomena, characterizing also the Hellenistic epoch, facilitated the reappearance of cynic elements, which resurfaced in Italy more visibly than in any other cultural context. In this regard, this study pursues the hypothesis that, beginning with the publication of Massimo Cacciari’s *Krisis* (1976), Italian Philosophy has embraced a critical rhetoric that partly moved away from Marxian views and retrieved cynic values. Specifically, it will be explained why the nihilistic concepts elaborated by Italian thinkers in recent years can hardly find a satisfactory justification if



not considered through the cynic categories of *asceticism*, *self-sufficiency*, and *dispossession*.

Bearing these postulates in mind, the inquiry will unfold along two different paths, utilizing the historical-cultural analysis as a material support for accomplishing theoretical-philosophical purposes. As regards the former, it will be clarified to what extent and in what forms contemporary Italian philosophy and literature retrieve Greek Cynic contents. This aspect of the theory will develop in proportion to the three fundamental factors that are commonly credited as what separates the sphere of the “human” from the domain of the “non-human”: “reason” and “language” will be discussed within chapter 2, while “history” will represent the third pivotal discriminating element in chapter 3. The ultimate intention, which is narrowly philosophical, will be to dig out from Italian Cynicism a critical cosmopolitan discourse that avoids authoritarianism, destabilizes neo-liberal ideological structures, while also discouraging bigoted and parochial mentalities.

The first chapter, mainly aiming at historical targets, will firstly distance itself from traditional humanistic discourses and also explain why most of them betray the original Cynic spirit. Subsequently, the analysis will rely on William Desmond’s studies on ancient Cynicism, Peter Sloterdijk’s account of post-modernism and Roberto Marchesini’s post-human conjectures so as to highlight discursive superimpositions linking Diogenes’ philosophical school and contemporary western modes of thinking. A more narrow examination comparing Paul Ginsborg’s historical description of Italy with the dominant interpretations of Italian Theory will then reveal why cynic elements have reemerged in this area more prominently than in any other sociopolitical environment. A

cynic reading of Roberto Esposito's *Living Thought: the Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (2010), in particular, proves that the characteristics that the author ascribes to the Italian philosophical debate also apply to the movement founded by Diogenes in ancient times.

Moving forward, the second chapter will evaluate how post-human conceptions of "truth" and "language" affect cosmopolitan political discourse, so as to provide our theory with solid epistemological foundations. Following a critique of the notions of "internationalism" and "resistance" in relation to the contemporary geopolitical dynamics, the analysis will focus on the transition between the strikes on western reason that were fired in Italy during the late 1970s and the vocal quietness of the 1980s. Far from signifying political resignation, this shift is interpreted as an evolution connecting two cynic rhetorical strategies, which switched from a loud *parrhesia* - i.e. frank and open discourse - to a taciturn *diatribe*. Specifically, the inquiry will compare Massimo Cacciari's *negative thought* against the philosophical antecedents of the Frankfurt School, the social atmosphere that animated the end of the 1970s and the literary texts representing the 1977 protest. This analysis will reveal that the *mystical* posited by Cacciari needs be considered in correlation to both the parrhesiatic atmosphere characterizing that time and a cynic conception of knowledge. From Cacciari's viewpoint, truth can be asserted but remains in all circumstances inconsistent. Thus, moral principles, cultural practices, and collective identities, depending upon specific historical events and processes, cannot be labeled as merely arbitrary. However, as they are ultimately rooted within an ontologically incoherent substratum, they materialize and acquire self-awareness by referring at all times to their conceptual opposites.

Such a “multiculturalism of friction” risks endorsing excessively assertive tones, but can be to a degree alleviated if one reclaims some of the hermeneutical views that Italian Theory elaborated in the beginning of the 1980s. Particular attention will be paid to Gianni Vattimo’s *Weak Thought*, which should be looked at as a diatribic strategy of resistance that relies on ontological impurities and contaminations as ideal ways to carry out social change. Locating “truth” within the intersection of philosophy, rhetoric and art, Vattimo associates a fading humanism with the rise of a plethora of mimetic and hybridized forms of expression which combine global influences with local traditions and, thus, have the potential to oppose exploitative and homologating pressures.

This view will be discussed in correlation to the exotic atmospheres of Italo Calvino’s last narrative so as to explain why the current globalized era requires democratic principles and practices to be rethought in view of the post-colonial experience. With the assistance provided by Habermas’ theory of *communicative action*, Appiah’s reflections on cosmopolitanism, and the empirical case-study of post-colonial India, a conflation of parrhesiatic and diatribic elements will be identified. This will be considered as the most fertile terrain wherein an idea of “truth” that disregards universalistic Euro-centric claims and discloses itself as *self-expression* can potentially come into being. This conception of human communication leads one to envision a desirable polycentric cosmo-political scenario whose constitutive molecules do not rely on regressive identitarian views, but rather on social syncretism and cultural interaction.

The third chapter, pursuing more narrowly political purposes, will delve deeply into the abovementioned cosmo-local perspective by evaluating the evolution of Italian Thought following 1990 in relation to post-colonial theories such as Boaventura De

Sousa Santos' *Subaltern Cosmopolitanism*, Homi Bhabha and Sheldon Pollock's notion of the *cosmopolitan vernacular* and Walter Dignolo's idea of *diversality*. All these discourses insist on the primary necessity to reform cosmopolitanism by deconstructing humanistic and linear conceptions of history. For this reason, Italian Theory can give a relevant contribution to this debate. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, although alternative theories of time were surfacing within other western philosophical contexts, this critical inclination resounded at full volume in Italy, likely due to the revolutionary climate that characterized the country in the early 1990s. Arguably, three post-human conceptions of temporality materialized out of the aforesaid sociopolitical crisis, unfolding as *delay*, *suspension*, and *rebirth*. Each of these alternative portraits of history exhibits cynic connotations, inasmuch as they all dismiss humanistic representations of temporality through *dispossessing* maneuvers. Recalling Heidegger's description of man as 'full in world', it will be metaphorically maintained that each of these three lines of thought qualifies the post-human as 'poor in time'.

This analysis will first take into account the cynic aspects characterizing Franco Cassano's reflections on *southern thought*. Positing 'slowness' as an indispensable value to endorse in order to counter capitalistic ideological structures, Cassano looks at the Mediterranean as an independent area wherein new and more desirable forms of solidarity can potentially take shape. A discussion assessing this viewpoint in relation to both Edward Said's discourse on orientalism and Albert Camus' antagonistic neo-humanism will unbury the pivotal role played by the cynic values of *poverty* and *self-sufficiency*. In this theoretical context, these stand for ways to engage with the temporal flow and acquire counter-hegemonic significances. Further considerations relying on

Nancy Fraser's theory of recognition, however, will detect a mismatch between the transformative purposes that Cassano pursues and the affirmative temporal framework that he postulates. What's missing in *Southern Thought* is the effort to extrapolate from marginalized conceptual domains some deconstructive viewpoints that rise above the mere demand of respect for existing identities, while reshaping relations of recognition and destabilizing group separation. Cassano's communitarian perspective will therefore be rectified by referring to a theoretical archetype identified as *quiet maverick*. This phrase, which denotes the capacity to convert isolated states of being into an opportunity for accomplishing beneficial impacts on society, will serve as a paradigmatic model for elaborating more efficient counter-hegemonic cosmo-political strategies.

This paradigm can be defined more clearly by engaging with Agamben's post-1990 philosophical production. Debatably, this represents the most nihilistic peak reached by contemporary Italian Cynicism, as well as what poses the conditions for the development of more affirmative conceptions of the 'political'. Differently from the dominant interpretation of the *Homo Sacer* project, which is commonly associated with catastrophic prophecies, our analysis will look at the notion of *bare life* as a transformative factor that Agamben employs in order to destabilize humanistic ontological frameworks. These narrative interferences are obtained by conceptualizing an alternative understanding of history, which *The Coming Community* (1993), *The Open* (2004), and also *The Time that Remains* (2013) describe as a *suspended* coincidence of temporal openings and closures. From Agamben's views on 'poverty in time' a Franciscan discourse takes shape which cannot be placed exclusively within a metaphysical domain and, for this reason, will be discussed in narrowly cynic terms.

From this perspective, one becomes more aware of how the *Homo Sacer* hypothesis radicalizes Hannah Arendt's extralegal conception of the political, while also giving birth to de-territorialized forms of dissent that challenge established authorities and juridical apparatuses.

An assessment of these philosophical efforts in relation to Derrida's critique of history will suggest the notion of *perpetual rebirth* as the most powerful tool to employ for the theorization of a post-human conception of time. Dismissing the humanistic portrait of cumulative and linear time flow, the cynic perspective perceives a fluctuation of continual dissolving and resurrecting patterns which escape pathological attachments to past and future, and also prioritizes the evanescence of the moment as the only existing dimension. An argumentative line that relies on *perpetual rebirth* overcomes Kant's idea of *Perpetual Peace*, according to which the accomplishment of a stable global order would be made possible by both the expansion of the markets and the authority of international law. Ultimately this generates a cosmopolitan theoretical framework which dissociates ideals of local *self-sufficiency* from cultural protectionism and anti-immigration claims. It also advocates the necessity to carry out extralegal maneuvers in order to rectify effectively the damages produced by post-1990 neo-liberalism.

More concretely, this mode of thinking points to two different directions. On one hand, it can be employed as a theoretical support for non-institutional cosmo-political voices which oppose the neo-liberal agenda and also defend values of political and economic independence. In this regard, the analysis will identify within the Global Justice Movement a complementary intersection between the *isolationist* wing and the *alternative* orientation. Aligning with the former as far as the priority to reclaim a self-

sufficient type of economy is concerned, while also valuing the international demeanor exhibited by the latter, this unorthodox “quiet maverick” dismisses excessively forceful tones. In their place, it pursues silent forms of dissent that substitute self-assertive strategies with ideals of creativity, uniqueness and exceptionality.

On the other hand, the transition between established juridical structures and extralegal modes of cooperation can hardly be obtained abruptly without also causing useless and destructive outcomes. For this reason, this shift must be carried out through a series of normative alterations which will gradually lead juridical apparatuses to a final dismantlement. The *dissolution-rebirth* fluctuation previously hypothesized, therefore, needs to be applied to the domain of law so as to make evolutionary social changes possible in a way that prevents violent repercussions. On this subject, a discussion of Roberto Esposito’s bio-politics, Seyla Benhabib’s jurisgenerativity and Gilbert Simondon’s normative meta-stability will provide legal structures with self-dissolving cosmopolitan devices. As a concrete exemplification of this unusual conception of the juridical, the inquiry will finally focus on secessionist constitutional regulations. It will also take into account European separatist groups which currently strive to obtain a stronger political autonomy while also defending their continental membership. Whether this “separatism in integration” wave can be viewed as a symptom of the rising cosmopolitan subjectivities that are conceptualized here is a debatable hypothesis that optimistically will produce desirable outcomes. One only hopes that these sorts of phenomena will ultimately assist the promotion of self-determination views which reinforce ideals of liberty, hospitality and respect, and disregard narrow-minded biases.

The most desirable outcome would be a cosmopolitan awakening that overflows the European horizons.



## CHAPTER 1

*“For the happiness of the animal, that thorough kynic,  
is the living proof of the truth of cynicism.”*

*Nietzsche, Untimely Observations, 2, sec.1*

### *Cosmopolitanism and Humanism: the Suffering Other*

#### *1.*

The association between suffering and exclusion has never been as powerful as it is in our time.

No matter where we turn our attention, it would seem to be common opinion that whoever happens to live at the borders of a certain social or political space is the one that experiences the most excruciating agony. Borderline individuals – the immigrant, the poor, the person of color - are in most cases stigmatized as healthy carriers of misery, whereas the term ‘minority’ has by now become synonymous with wretchedness. Such an assumption is often posited both by conservative and progressive political voices: the former turn pale at the idea that the suffering conveyed by the excluded ones might be contagious; the latter reinforce their self-esteem by preaching inclusion for reducing other people’s despair. According to majority consciousness, where exclusion is happening

some kind of suffering has to be alleviated; anywhere suffering is occurring, some sort of inclusive action needs to be carried out as soon as possible.

One might come up with several conjectures regarding why such a semantic correlation appears to be reiterated far and wide. The common belief that the growth of the economy gave birth to some sort of global community certainly plays an important role. Many people take for granted that during the last few decades the relentless expansion of the market and persistent investments carried out by multinational corporations brought about a closer connection among societies, thus destroying a plethora of political barriers. It is a widespread belief that ‘globalization’ has taken place, which means that events happening in one part of the planet can still strongly affect sociopolitical environments that are quite far away. Migrations, international terrorism and environmental issues are but a few problems that connect the countries with one another. These have become indispensable points of reference for the elaboration of ethical values, also affecting people’s self-perception. All these factors are leading individuals from different countries to feel part of the same geopolitical space. Considering these details, the hypothesis that globalizing processes are not necessarily ‘inclusive’ and that, on the contrary, are producing spaces of universal segregation is perceived as even more dreadful.

It is well known that at the moment global inequalities are still enormous. Fifteen percent of the world’s population living in industrialized countries has an income of over \$30,000 per year. The powers that rule this demographic control about eighty percent of the global product, whereas the United Nations Development Programme has recently affirmed that about 850 million human beings are undernourished, 1,037 million do not

have any access to safe drinking water, and 2,600 million are not supplied with efficient health care. Moreover, no essential drugs are available for some 2,000 million human beings, no suitable shelters are accessible for 1,000 and no electricity is offered for 2,000 million.<sup>2</sup> Notice that these data acquire an even more frightening significance when considered from the privileged perspective that overviews the extraordinary “inclusive” level reached in the west. Given the increasing connection among western peoples, the anxiety of being left out or abandoned in a condition of isolation is extremely fearsome. This might further explain why the most intolerant attacks on globalization have been expressed in developed countries, whereas in developing areas people’s opinions appear to be more positive.<sup>3</sup>

As discriminatory as this economic expansion has been, it has nonetheless brought about a considerable degree of homogeny. Largely due to the internationalization of the media, people around the world share passions for similar hobbies, leisure activities, music genres, and also look up to the same sport celebrities. The cultural hegemony exercised by the Hollywood has also contributed to standardizing fashion as well as moral values and behavioral manners. All this has been implemented through the proliferation of the English language, which has ‘offered’ itself as a planetary tool of communication. For the sake of precision it must be observed that such a process is only apparently globalizing, especially if we consider that less than five percent of humanity has access to the Internet and that, for instance, in 1999 half of all American households did<sup>4</sup>. However, if we perceive this through the lens of the homologized – namely, the side of the included - we should not be surprised that the incapability to conform appears as a

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<sup>2</sup> See the data provided by Pogge (2007), *Why Inequality Matters*, in Held & Kaya (2007), p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> See David Dollar (2007), *Globalization, Poverty, and Inequality since 1980*, in Held and Kaya (2007), p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> Borradori (2003), p. 122.

weakness, and the subsequent consequence of being excluded as a terrifying possibility. Why should we blame those who give up their uniqueness for the sake of avoiding a miserable isolation? We should not judge them. After all, the desire to avoid exclusion and to be accepted within a community is often postulated as one of the most essential qualities defining humanity. It is perfectly natural for a human being – one often hears – to want ‘to be part of’, to want to belong.

Considering these observations, it is not a coincidence that some scholars have explained the reiterated association between exclusion and suffering as closely related to the evolution of capitalism. Among all studies on humanism and capitalism – including Gramsci’s Marxian account, Foucault’s post-structuralist doctrine, and recent biopolitical theories - Thomas Haskell<sup>5</sup>’s analysis offers the most enlightening considerations for our purposes. Haskell points out that, starting from 1750, the increasing circulation of humanistic feelings paralleled two main factors characterizing western capitalism: the acquisition of a new technological empowerment and the development of an efficient contractual ethics. What is enlightening here is the example of the ‘starving stranger’, through which Haskell shows how the responsibility for suffering experienced by foreigners is felt more intensively in modern times mostly due to western countries having at their disposal the means to cover long distances and rescue people. In this sense, humanitarian feelings are closely related to the idea of a technological intervention which, even when it does not take place, is still perceived as possible:

“Curiously, our feeling of responsibility for the stranger’s plight, though nowhere near strong enough to move us to action, is probably stronger today than it would have been before the airplane. If William Wilberforce had faced this question in

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<sup>5</sup> Haskell (1985).

1800, he at least could have begged off on the grounds that the sea voyage to India was long and costly and he might die en route. This suggests that new technology – using that word broadly to refer to all means of accomplishing our ends, including new institutions and political organizations that enable us to attain ends otherwise out of reach – can change the moral universe in which we live.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to more powerful technological devices, the empathy for the ‘starving stranger’ is perceived more strongly in modern times because of new contractual principles that were adopted by western traders starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Following Weber, Haskell notices how contemporary capitalism could not have thrived without the support of the innovative disciplinary ethics through which western markets traded and optimized their profits. Two moral principles identified by Haskell state that if dealers had not been able to ‘maintain their promises’ or ‘to attend to the remote consequences of their actions’, western business would not have reproduced itself by constantly seeking greater incomes. Such a pragmatic morality was progressively incorporated within the western juridical codes which carried out a gradual separation between contract law and property law, providing the value of liability with more importance. The new humanitarian sensibility was generated as a consequence of this slow transition:

“Those who learned these lessons well and who could take for granted the existence of many others imbued with the same lessons were the first to cross the threshold into a new moral universe, one in which the horizons of causal perception were sufficiently wide, and the techniques routinely employed in everyday tasks sufficiently complex and future oriented, that failing to go to the aid of a *suffering stranger* might become an unconscionable act.”<sup>7</sup>

By combining the previous observations with Haskell’s analysis, one realizes that the association between exclusion and suffering posited by contemporary western discourses does not tell us much about either the ‘excluded ones’ or the ‘sufferers’. After all, we

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 356.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 551.

continue to know nothing about the starving person, who is still a ‘stranger’ just like he was in the beginning of Haskell’s thought experiment. All we know is that, considering the high level of interconnection reached by a well homologated, technologically powerful and ‘morally’ efficient world, it would be irresponsible not to empathize with that ghostly presence. The concern for the suffering other, then, goes way beyond sermons preaching altruism and benevolence, and rather reveals all the fears and vanity of a mentality that labels exclusion as shameful and struggle as pointless.

2.

The rebirth of cosmopolitan thought that took place during the 1970s certainly facilitated the fortification of the suffering-exclusion rhetoric previously described. Many of the philosophers who participated in the cosmo-theory debate during the last few decades have elaborated notions of universal belonging by relying on humanistic views, while often prioritizing values of inclusion. These scholars grounded their discourse on the presumably unifying effects that globalization brought about and which allegedly represent a considerable step forward toward Kant’s perpetual peace among all peoples. Either through the promotion of a universal rationality (Habermas), the idea of a supranational type of democracy (Archibugi), the classification of human needs and capabilities (Nussbaum), or the insistence on global constitutionalism (Held), traditional cosmopolitan thought aspires to formulate a normative language that is able to safeguard all human beings. This type of terminology should offer the basis for the reinforcement of international institutions. For the same reason, most of these philosophers build up their

systems by embracing human rights vocabulary that has been developed after World War II. Nonetheless, considering our previous analysis, a cosmopolitan thought endorsing humanistic values might presuppose an interventionist logic that is also profit-oriented. Promoting inclusive principles, this philosophical perspective also risks perpetuating the western hegemony over both domestic subaltern realities and outer underdeveloped societies.

As a matter of fact, discourses advocating human rights and the corroboration of global institutions have been recently elaborated in relation to the necessity of regulating different types of intervention; from development promotion to humanitarian aid and relief delivery. In this regard, it is common opinion that as long as these efforts are discussed at the interstate level there will often be a risk for single governments to exploit them for pursuing their own economic and political interest. Thus, some suggest creating a world parliament by relying on non-governmental organizations, which should be provided with the unquestionable authority to evaluate human demands and to classify cases of rights violations. For instance, according to Daniele Archibugi's theory of *cosmopolitan democracy* governments should continue to supply the necessary technological means for enhancing economic growth and facing emergencies, while interventions should be coordinated by a more authoritative Security Council. This idea presupposes the belief that in a planet where a plethora of societies intersect one another and where bodies such as NGOs and INGOs express a global demotic voice, self determination principles cannot be respected as long as nation states keep all their power and influence. Following this line of reasoning, some neo-Kantians prescribe replacing sovereignty with constitutionalization, and structuring the geopolitical space according to

different layers of governance. From the local level to the global dimension, people's self-determination would be transferred through the creation of specific political organs supplied with a popular legitimacy. Archibugi's cosmopolitan order, in particular, is shaped in a frame that is less centralized than a federation and more solid than a confederation. This would hinder the establishment of a universal government, while allowing global institutions to intervene within the states in defense of human rights<sup>8</sup>.

Theoretical efforts pursuing this institutional direction should be welcomed with gratitude. After all, violence, social abuses and political oppression still occur on a regular basis in the world and, therefore, the sacredness of the persona needs to be reasserted at all costs. Nonetheless, it is difficult to disregard that traditional cosmopolitan viewpoints considering the notion of 'human rights' as universally applicable do not acknowledge that 1) 'human rights' rhetoric is the consequence of a historical concentration of power, and constitutes the core of a normative language which has generated in some circumstances the very suffering it aims to alleviate, while in other occasions has proven to be inefficient; 2) the growing superimposition between interventionist logic and utilitarian morality has gradually turned humanitarian action into a business, while non governmental organizations, which are still strongly influenced by state policies, have lost a considerable portion of their global demotic content.

In contemporary history, a considerable concentration of power was carried out at the end of World War II, when the limitations of the *League of Nations* became evident to all

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<sup>8</sup>A confederation is an association of sovereign states that underwrite a treaty with the main purposes of preventing war and guaranteeing peace. Two representative examples of confederations are the previously described *League of Nations* and *United Nations* neither of which, according to Archibugi, is sufficiently authoritarian for implementing democracy within the states. On the opposite side of the spectrum are federations of states such as the United States and Switzerland. These have the power to intervene everywhere in defense of human rights but are extremely centralized. A cosmopolitan system constructed on the federalist model would in the long run be incapable of safeguarding social minorities and local cultures, see Archibugi (2006), chapter 4.



political leaders. Woodrow Wilson's project was a weak association of sovereign states that would give up part of their freedom in a few exceptional circumstances. For this reason, the *League* could do nothing to stop the horrifying events related to the Holocaust of the Jews or to prevent the axis Rome-Berlin-Tokyo from pursuing its goals. Habermas, however, acknowledges that the *United Nations* definitely went beyond the Wilsonian project and over the years progressively increased their authority. This is particularly evident considering that the *Council of the League of Nations* was only able to provide its members with advice regarding coercive procedures, while the *Security Council* is able to carry out the military actions it considers indispensable. Article 43, which allows the Council to be in charge of the contingents and logistical support that member states are required to supply, is crucial in this regard.<sup>9</sup> In spite of this considerable empowerment, the post World War II age was a long moment of paralysis for the United Nations, whose normative progress did not bring about anticipated outcomes on the political scenario. The elaborated humanistic ideals reflected a political landscape where global poverty did not diminish and where rights were still dramatically desecrated. It is enough to consider the Vietnam War for understanding how the prohibition of violence established by the UN Charter resulted in the death of millions of innocents. During the period of the Cold War the normative language developed was largely impotent with respect to the political reality.

One might reasonably argue that such helplessness became both evident and unsustainable only at the very end of that epoch, when the victory of neo-liberalism<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Habermas (2006), p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> With this term I will refer to the ensemble of economic doctrines, relying primarily on the work of theorists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, which posit a deregulated form of liberalism as the ideal mode of social development. Some of these discourses were largely implemented across numerous western areas starting from the

over socialist ideologies paralleled the sickening massacres that occurred in Bosnia and Rwanda. The immobility that paralyzed the UN forces in those occasions made the entire world wonder whether what had succeeded was the humanistic principle of *inclusion* or rather a hidden profit-oriented morality. If judging the human rights rhetoric as “the latest example of European perfidy”<sup>11</sup> sounds too pessimistic, certainly one should recognize the misleading essence it embodies.

That such an ambiguous intention has been unveiled after the fall of the Berlin wall, as some optimistic liberal thinkers would claim, is furthermore quite questionable. Starting from 1990 the humanistic interconnection between interventionist logic and profit-oriented morality has grown subtler, thus reaching a stage wherein they have become barely distinguishable. The accelerating growth of globalization corresponded with a considerable reduction of financial aid from rich to poor countries<sup>12</sup> and with a multiplication of states of emergency, which progressively transformed ‘interventionism’ into a business. Alleviating the suffering of the *starving stranger* has become an aspect of governance, so that global powers in several circumstances brought relief where they had previously generated instability. The 1999 NATO’s controversial bombing of Kosovo was likely a turning point in this sense. In that circumstance, NATO’s unauthorized airstrikes led Serbian leader Milosevic to force nearly a half million Kosovars to leave their land, thus causing the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War. In so doing, NATO forces provoked the very humanitarian emergency that they were aiming to prevent. What was new in that occasion was that NATO carried out the relief

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early 1990s. Particularly due to the new rules established by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, a series of policies were approved which aimed at enhancing competitiveness through liberalization of prices, deregulation of trade, austerity measures, and reduction of social expenditures.

<sup>11</sup> Coustas-Douzinis (2013), *The metaphysics of cosmopolitanism*, in Braidotti, Hanafin, and Blagaard (2013) p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Archibugi (2004), p.18.

operations, while humanitarian agencies aligned with it, thus sacrificing their autonomy from western governments which had been preserved in previous times. Both the UNHR and most NGOs requested NATO's support for accomplishing their duties, thus siding indirectly with the armed invasion: "the same agencies that had strenuously guarded their humanitarian space (their independence, impartiality, and neutrality) in places such as Congo and Sudan were now working alongside, getting assistance from, and being directed by a combatant – and doing so with relative ease."<sup>13</sup> Humanitarianism finally revealed its double face and uncovered the role that it plays as an ally of western dominance, which occasionally spreads sickness in order to enforce its own healing therapies. From this perspective, humanistic values could be seen as simple modalities of globalization; that is, as commodities that the western economy sells and utilizes for restoring "linearity and predictable functioning"<sup>14</sup> wherever it finds obstacles.

It is not unreasonable to consider the transition carried out during those years from the notion of "humanitarian intervention" to the one of "responsibility to protect"<sup>15</sup> as a juridical legitimacy of such a commodified humanism which, at the moment, represents a 10 billion dollar business divided into branches and sectors. Some NGOs focus on emergency relief or specialize on long-term development activities; others concentrate on human rights advocacy or combine humanitarian aid with an explicit religious program. Most of them are supplied by a fair trade that was inaugurated in the Arab Gulf state of Dubai and that provides them with the items they need, hires MBAs and logistic

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<sup>13</sup> Barnett and Snyder (2008), *The Grand Strategies of Humanitarianism*, in Barnett and Weiss ed. by (2008) p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> Craig Calhoun (2008), *The Imperative to Reduce Suffering*, in Barnett and Weiss ed. by (2008) p. 86.

<sup>15</sup>The "responsibility to protect" is a norm that has been discussed by the United Nations starting from 2000 and that aims at regulating humanitarian interventions in order to make them more effective. Both "humanitarian intervention" and "responsibility to protect" presume that nation-states forfeit their sovereignty whenever they don't respect human rights, but the latter moves the focus from state-centered motivations to the protection of the populations at risk.

consultants, and offers professional roles and careers<sup>16</sup>. However much de-territorialized and cosmopolitan this industry appears to be, it remains largely supported by state funds, which are delivered directly or through multilateral organizations such as the European Humanitarian Aid Office and various UN agencies<sup>17</sup>.

Let me pause for a moment and spell out the intentions that accompany all these considerations. This is not to create a distrustful atmosphere around the hope that one day all peoples will be able to coexist together in the name of freedom, justice and equality. From this perspective, it would be unconscionable not to endorse the humanistic ideal and, therefore, traditional cosmopolitan discourses should be certainly greeted with gratitude. The ambiguities and counter-effects that a humanistic type of cosmopolitanism potentially implies are nonetheless too evident not to be noticed. Whenever our enlightened values and our concern for the ‘suffering other’ conceal self-absorbed hegemonic objectives, the cosmopolitan faith loses its genuineness. This partly happens as a consequence of the humanistic rhetoric itself, which places suffering outside the human domain, thus banning struggle as purposeless and converting the principle of antagonism into a moribund agony. A cosmopolitanism that claims authenticity should then ally with post-human theory and reconsider the positive significance of ‘exclusion’ that characterized it at its origins.

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<sup>16</sup> See Craig Calhoun (2008), *The Imperative to Reduce Suffering*, in Barnett and Weiss ed. by (2008) p.89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*Back to the Origins: Exclusion as a Blessing*

1.

Would it be possible to develop a cosmopolitan thought that does not demonize ‘exclusion’ and rejects humanistic overtones? If so, what type of subjectivity would such a mode of thinking presuppose? Before dismissing cosmopolitan ideas *in toto* it is worthy to venture down this path for a short while. A convenient historical account and a discussion of contemporary Italian post-humanism will help us disentangle these knots.

Etienne Balibar has recently worked in this direction, advocating a deconstruction of cosmopolitanism which moves from within the western philosophical tradition. Balibar reasonably points out that a cosmopolitan theory dismissing imperialistic meanings cannot be formulated through a mere refusal of Eurocentrism, but only through “a critique which dissolves and transforms it from the inside, in order to produce a self-understanding of its premises and functions.”<sup>18</sup> For this purpose, Balibar suggests to replace cosmopolitanism with the notion of *cosmo-politics*, which he characterizes essentially in two ways: on one hand, as the attempt to turn theory into practice, and to convert the cosmopolitan utopia into the actual programs, actions, and objectives of subjects that are politically connected at the global level. On the other hand, as the acknowledgment that globalization has resuscitated old universal struggles - for instance, between religious and secular groups - and reproduced recent ones, thus widening the geopolitical space where conflicts take place. One might say that this antagonistic cosmopolitan view converts ‘suffering’ into political struggle and so partially rectifies the humanistic perspective previously scrutinized.

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<sup>18</sup> Balibar (2014), p. 84.

My purpose now is to expand on this deconstructive maneuver by considering the concept of cosmopolitanism from a narrowly genealogical viewpoint. The appeal to antagonistic factors that Balibar makes is certainly valuable, but it does not give us a sufficiently strong motivation for maintaining in our philosophical vocabulary the western association between ‘cosmos’ and ‘polis’, which common sense normally regards as an inseparable ally of humanism. A valid ground for such a choice can be provided only if one is able to show that humanistic connotations are not inherent in the very notion of ‘cosmopolitanism’, but are rather due to a distorted evolution of it. Any deconstructive effort will then be incomplete without the will to purge ‘cosmopolitanism’ from its illegitimate attributes and to recover the original purity of the term. If such an excavation leads to nothing, one should appeal to Ockham’s razor and let the couplet ‘cosmos-polis’ evaporate once and for all. Nonetheless I am confident that recovering the authenticity of this semantic association will help us grasp in a deeper manner the essence of the contemporary epoch and develop a more genuine sense of universal belonging.

Despite the vast literature concerning this topic, it is hardly ever recalled that cosmopolitanism was born in the name of exclusion and that over the centuries lost its original character. The first thinkers that considered themselves *kosmopolitês* - i.e. as citizens of the world – lived in Greece and Minor Asia approximately during the Hellenistic epoch stretching from Alexander the Great’s death (323 BC) to the rise of the Roman Empire and the diffusion of Christianity. It was when the Greek Cynics elaborated the very first idea of a global community by presupposing the demolition of all social conventions and the opposition to authority of any sort. It is not a coincidence that Diogenes from Sinope (404-323 BC), who is commonly regarded as the most

representative exponent of the school, was exiled from his hometown and lived most of his life devoid of the privilege of citizenship. As a political outsider, Diogenes perfectly embodied the kynical<sup>19</sup> idea of virtue which, according to this philosophical orientation, can be achieved solely by confining oneself within areas of exclusion. Because of this ethical principle kynical adepts were prohibited to marry, to ask for membership in their native or adopted cities, to hold political office, and also to vote.

Desmond observes that these anarchic characteristics did not necessarily go against the democratic spirit of the epoch<sup>20</sup>. In fact, kynical doctrines proliferated in the more democratic areas of Greece, particularly in cities such as Sinope, Athens, Syracuse and Thebes, which all had strong democratic traditions, partly explaining the egalitarian and libertarian aspects that characterize Cynicism. Moreover, democracy at that time was often associated with poverty, recalling not only the value of frugality that was embraced by Diogenes' disciples, but also the kynical rejection of aristocratic philosophical principles. Both democrats and Cynics had the tendency to disregard contemplative conceptions of philosophy, while sharing the appreciation for political praxis. This pragmatic component is one of the reasons why the kynical school, which spoke through a plurality of different voices, can hardly be categorized as a unitary philosophical orientation. Kynical ideals were also closely compatible with the democratic value of equality. Cynics believed that virtue could be learned and this is why their speeches were made available to all people, including women, who in those times were never allowed to participate in philosophical discussions. This unbiased demeanor furthermore mirrored

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<sup>19</sup> I will utilize this adjective in order to distinguish the philosophical meaning of the term 'Cynicism' from the way in which contemporary common sense conceives of it. Although the two concepts occasionally overlap, they differ from one another in many respects.

<sup>20</sup> See Desmond (2008), Chapter 5.

the Hellenistic philosophical inclination to appeal to groups beyond the restricted elites of classical schools.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the similarities that connect Cynicism to democracy, it must be remembered that kynical ideas were in any case delivered from ‘exclusion’ and that the kynical notion of virtue was irreconcilable with belonging to any sort of demos. Freedom was defined by the Cynics mostly in unconstructive terms, as freedom from nation and from social conventions, while the kynical ‘state’ required the readiness to live at the margins of the existing communities. Nonetheless, such a proscription of ‘belonging’ allowed Cynicism to embrace positive philanthropic values which democrats normally dismissed: the ideal man for the Cynics had to be just, lawful, prudent, temperate, brave, magnanimous, gentle, mild, and kindly, not only to his friends but to all mankind. It is a shame that none of these positive attributes is ever associated to the contemporary adjective ‘cynical’ which, for some reasons, has preserved only the nihilistic essence distinguishing its Greek ancestor.

The aforementioned qualities constitute the essence of the kynical cosmopolitan ideal, which does not contemplate inclusive connotations, but rather negative meanings. From a kynical perspective, identification with the cosmos presupposes the exclusion from all communities, and can be achieved only by maintaining oneself in the space of an honorable isolation. It is what Crates meant when, by saying that his homeland was “not one tower, nor one roof, but the citadel and home of the whole world”, he emphasized his uprooted political condition. On the same ideological line followed Diogenes’ conviction

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<sup>21</sup> Kennedy (1999), p. 26.



that “The only true commonwealth is the one in the cosmos”<sup>22</sup> as well as Epictetus’ negative equivalence between dispossession of membership and deprivation of wealth:

“I am without a city, without a house, without possessions, without a slave; I sleep on the ground, I have no wife, no children, no little mansion, but only the earth and heavens, and one little cloak. And what do I lack?”<sup>23</sup>

In some circumstances this mentality appeared to be the symptom of a distrust in politics and a desire to escape society, which was a common tendency during the Hellenistic epoch. However, in some other cases Cynicism displayed strong political connotations. Cosmopolitan arguments were employed as forms of resistance with respect to the ruling authorities, while the rhetorical techniques of the *parrhesia* (frank, open speech) and *diatribe* were used for denouncing the immoral behaviors and the inequalities perpetuated in the community. The *parrhesia*, which in the context of the polis had represented the democratic ‘freedom of speech’, was converted by the Cynics into a language of protest when political liberties were revoked under the expansion of the Hellenistic empires. The *diatribe* represented a way of sabotaging the communicative codes imposed by the ruling classes and was often employed by the Cynics in the forms of disturbing noise or silence.

Importantly, because Greek thought and language did not own a term denoting a universal mankind that would correspond to the Roman *humanitas*, kynical cosmopolitanism could not rely on humanistic presuppositions. Scholars point out that the Greek word *anthropos* denoted in all cases an individual creature exhibiting teriomorphic characteristics<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, it could be used as a conceptual substrate

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<sup>22</sup> Desmond (2008), p. 200.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Nybakken is explicit in this regard: “From Homer down through the classical Greek writers the word *anthropos* remained a generic term for individuals. It signified a creature that, although having some characteristics of the

neither for the elaboration of comprehensive ethical systems such as human rights, nor for theorizing an ontological separation between humans and other living forms. This means that cosmopolitanism originated as a mode of thinking that posits an affinity between all living beings by means of a critical distrust vis-à-vis cerebral abstractions and universalistic types of philosophical systems:

“Diogenes does not say that he is a ‘cosmopolitan’ or a ‘citizen of the world’, that is, the *human world*. Rather, he says that he is a ‘citizen of the cosmos’. The *cosmos is not a human construct*, but exists beyond human control and even conception.”<sup>25</sup> (italics mine)

Such a non-humanistic essence is furthermore fully portrayed in the term ‘Cynicism’, recalling Diogenes’ nickname *kynos* (= dog) as well as the wild modes of living that the adepts of this philosophical school embraced. The dog-philosophers defined ethical excellence in terms of simplicity, frugality, and self-sufficiency, and believed that indifference to fortune and rejection of ordinary societal values such as wealth, fame and power, were the only ways in which virtue could be attained. Far from labeling ‘suffering’ as disgraceful, the Greek Cynics conceived of it as the core of every authentic life experience as well as a fundamental moral step toward the achievement of the cosmopolitan ideal. For this reason, kynical routines refused all superfluous comforts, while rigorous physical training, meditation and ascetic rituals were practiced on a daily basis by the Cynics.

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lower animals, nevertheless possessed faculties and powers above them...The Greeks were familiar with this two-fold nature of man, and yet their word *anthropos* seldom, if ever, signified the ‘noble’ or ‘humane’ aspect of man; it was not used to mean ideal mankind.” (1937), pp.397-98.

<sup>25</sup> Desmond (2008), p. 204.

2.

Can cynical cosmopolitanism help us grasp in a deeper way the inner essence of the present epoch? Can it tell us something valuable regarding contemporary European modes of thinking, while also assisting our attempt to deconstruct Euro-centrism from within the western philosophical tradition? And finally, in what sense could it offer the presuppositions for the development of a cosmopolitan thought that dismisses humanistic connotations? Provided that Machiavelli's conception of history as essentially cyclical is trustworthy, I believe that those questions can be positively fulfilled. My reader is about to find out how many uncanny similarities contemporary western realities share with the age when cynical doctrines proliferated. These historical correspondences are fertile terrain for a revival of cynical ideas which - if my thesis is true - Italian thought has retrieved more than any other tradition starting from the end of the 1970s. In spite of the nihilistic aspects characterizing this philosophical demeanor, I believe that it represents a necessary presupposition for the construction of a cosmopolitan thought that offers critical instruments which effectively counter neo-liberal strategies.

If we think, for a moment, of the contemporary globalized western world as a modern Hellenism, a plethora of comparisons will effortlessly appear before our eyes. For instance, the increasing weakness characterizing modern nation-states, whose autonomy has been in recent times jeopardized by the growth of capitalism, seems to recall the condition of the Greek *poleis* between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. During this period, they lost a considerable portion of their political independence. In earlier times, the Greek city-states had been politically self-sufficient but, because of the rise of the Macedonian empire and the expansionist policies implemented by Philip II and his son Alexander,

they gradually transformed into administrative centers. Alexander, in particular, continued the war against Persia that his father had initiated and broadened the Macedonian hegemony over Egypt and Minor Asia. While formally granting democratic autonomy to the poleis that he conquered, Alexander also imposed them heavy taxes and prohibited them to interfere with his imperialistic plans, thus limiting considerably their freedom.<sup>26</sup> This lack of independence became evident in numerous circumstances, especially when the King proclaimed laws and decrees that explicitly disrespected the city-states' self-government.

Also, by accomplishing a substantial concentration of power the Macedonian dynasty brought about a cultural uniformity which partially resounds in the contemporary homologating phenomena that were previously described. Alexander understood that the most efficient way to consolidate his authority over a vast empire was by conflating the Greco-Macedonian culture with the Persian customs. For this purpose, Alexander welcomed to his court oriental rites such as the *proskynesis* – i.e. the Persian kneeling before the king – or the submission of divine honors to the sovereign, which were unknown to the Greeks. It was for this same reason that in 324 BC Alexander proclaimed the *Susa weddings*, through which he married the Persian King's daughter and niece, also allowing thousands of Greek-Macedonian soldiers to marry Persian women. These political moves contributed to create a multiethnic environment that for centuries constituted the core of the Hellenistic. This provides us with a significant antecedent to take into account for a better understanding of the contemporary cosmopolitan milieu.

Even more so Alexander's empire, ultimately encompassing the vast territories located between Greece and Pakistan, led to a considerable economic expansion. As an

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<sup>26</sup> Bettalli, D'Agata, Magnetto ed.by (2013), p.258.

outcome of Alexander's military campaigns, old trading connections between the West and the Far East were rediscovered, while the circulation of coin that was stimulated by his policies facilitated the rising of new commercial routes. All these financial flows led the 'city' to lose its political value and, at once, to acquire a new economic importance. The growth of urban population that took place during that time paralleled the increasing request of primary goods, thus stimulating the circulation of commodities and favoring the intensification of trade.<sup>27</sup> This is one of the reasons why Alexander, who knew how important the Greek poleis were for monitoring the immense territory that he was governing, founded a plethora of new centers and converted the existing ones into bureaucratic apparatuses.

Peter Sloterdijk has recently highlighted some relevant correspondences between ancient Cynicism and contemporary western cultures. According to his analysis, the urbanization procedures implemented in Europe during the last decades represent a fundamental sociological precondition for the potential rebirth of the kynical mentality. From Sloterdijk's perspective, Cynicism unfolds mostly as a refusal of the city and a condemnation of the injustices and inequalities that the city welcomes. The cosmopolitan demeanor then becomes a spontaneous act of protest against both the urban community and the individualistic values of wealth and opulence that it nourishes:

“Socially he (Diogenes) is an urban figure who maintains his cutting edge in the goings-on of the ancient metropolises. He could be characterized as the earliest example of declassed or plebeian intelligence. His “cynical” turn against the arrogance and the moral trade secrets of higher civilization presupposes the city, together with its successes and shadows. Only in the city, as its negative profile, can the figure of the cynic crystallize in its full sharpness, under the pressure of public gossip and universal love-hate. And only the city can assimilate the cynic,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.302.

who ostentatiously turns his back on it, into the group of its outstanding individuals, on whom, its liking for unique, urbane personalities depends.”<sup>28</sup>

Considering the high level of ‘individualism’ endorsed in contemporary metropolitan environments, where ‘virtue’ is portrayed in terms of ‘personal success’ and competition among people is maximized, globalization sets up an ideal sociological ground for the reemergence of kynical cosmopolitanism. Even more so globalizing processes, often uprooting low-class individuals from their native realities, often lead them to live in the peripheries of foreign big cities, thus forcing them to experience segregation, discrimination and poverty. Notice that in past times cosmopolitan ideologies were mostly associated with the lifestyles of the wealthy high-class educated citizens who had opportunities to travel the world, speak different languages, and learn of a diversity of cultures. Meanwhile, in the current post-Fordist epoch this correlation is progressively changing its face, thus bringing the cosmopolitan spirit more closely to the plebeian social strata mentioned by Sloterdijk. In recent years, the option to remain in one’s own native country is perceived more and more as an opportunity that only privileged people are offered. On the other hand, cultural clashes, communication challenges, and adaptation issues, which cosmopolitan discourses typically value as the noblest human experiences, are in fact the existential spaces wherein immigrants and refugees live their daily life. In this scenario, the “city” becomes the frontline wherein “cynicism” is often the only psychological resource assisting displaced people who have escaped the violence and indigence perpetrated in their native countries. Unfortunately, in numerous cases outsiders receive a similar disgraceful treatment from the same people that are allegedly there to provide support.

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<sup>28</sup> Sloterdijk (1983), p.4.

## *Cynicism and Post-Humanism*

### *1.*

The attentive reader will find a further significant correlation between Greek Hellenism and contemporary western realities when considering that during the last decades an increasing contamination between technology and humans has progressively converted ‘individualism’ into ‘singularity’. This concept denotes a form of life whose unique specificity, at least according to some philosophers, can no longer be considered as fully human. Some theorists of the Post-Human thought argue that the impressive technologization of life experimented in the areas of bio-medical engineering, biogenetics, artificial intelligence and cybernetics have brought the human species to end. It is the viewpoint expressed, among many others, by Rosi Braidotti and Roberto Marchesini, whose ample accounts of Post-Humanism involve epistemological, historical, biological and anthropological observations. I will consider these as points of reference for many of my considerations<sup>29</sup>. A discussion of their analysis is needed here in order to understand in what sense contemporary post-human doctrines partly resuscitate the pre-humanistic cosmo-naturalism that was sustained by the Greek Cynics.

For instance, Diogenes would hardly endorse the claims advanced by the *trans-humanists*, who advocate an immoderate manipulation of the human body with the purpose of overcoming on all levels the limits of human life. Trans-humanism is mostly based on the idea that physical limitations should not be considered as constitutive aspects of human nature, but rather as imperfections that can be rectified through technological adjustments. Accordingly, trans-humanists support the development of

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<sup>29</sup> Marchesini (2002), Braidotti (2013).

scientific strategies that either maximize human control over biological elements – i.e. cloning, biogenetic modifications, biotechnologies of any sort etc. – or that aim at transferring the latter into mechanical devices. Examples of these devices include hybrid systems, nanotechnologies, and bio-puters<sup>30</sup>. Proving to be a positive resource in the medical field, where technology is often beneficial for correcting inabilities, in other contexts the trans-human project leads to outcomes that are certainly fascinating but also chilling. In particular I am alluding to the crusade that trans-humanists wage against the idea of mortality as inevitable for all human beings. Trans-humanists perceive of aging and death as conditions that humans could supersede through the refinement and utilization of appropriate technological methods. Some of these strategies are quite bizarre: from traditional hibernation to ‘avatars’, which are virtual reproductions of existing people; from ‘mind uploading’ techniques, through which the entire psychical content of an individual’s brain is first scanned and then transferred into inorganic structures, to the so called “posthumous sons”, obtained by taking spermatic liquid from human cadavers.

These ideas do not sound grotesque simply because they have been primarily represented in fantasy books and movies. What is confusing is rather the trans-human fanaticism which proclaims the end of humanism, while also revealing overgenerous idolatry for the entity ‘human’. What they glorify is in fact the list of qualities – youth, beauty, physical and mental efficiency, invulnerability, etc. - defining the ‘human being’ in his highest Vitruvian purity. This idea of post-human life, after all, does not differ considerably from the artificial prototypes that commercials portray on a daily basis as

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<sup>30</sup> Nanotechnologies are micro-systems that are able to control and modify the reality at the molecular level, while bio-puters are hybrid devices made of organic components.



models of attractiveness and which may inspire practices such as plastic surgery or body building. Rather than healing the dissociation that has occurred between human and non-human universes, trans-humanists elaborate the post-human as an entity that progressively discharges all its non-human biological aspects. Marchesini is then right in saying that there is “una buona dose di sciovinismo umano nel progetto di abbandonare sotto forma di carcassa gran parte dei propri attributi organici per fondersi con la tecnologia”<sup>31</sup> (“in the project of merging oneself with technology a good amount of human chauvinism is needed in order to abandon the carcasses of one’s own organic attributes”). Accordingly, a trans-human cosmopolis would likely be incompatible with Diogenes’ doctrines because it would be founded on a flattering glorification of a ‘civilized’ society, while also banning most of the values representing Cynicism. The obsession for control over life would replace the kynical ‘indifference to fortune’, while the idea of human nature as incomplete without technological support would leave no room for the value of ‘self-sufficiency’. Most of all, it’s the trans-humanistic repudiation of suffering, which from a kynical perspective represents an indispensable requirement for the pursuit of virtue, that would be fully irreconcilable with the *pre-humanism* of the Cynics.

A kynical mind would express similar reservations regarding the *neo-humanistic* claims advanced by thinkers who propose to extend humanistic categories to non-human contexts. Martha Nussbaum, whose *Frontiers of Justice* (2006) should probably be considered the manifesto of this line of thinking, has opened an original philosophical trail by elaborating the ‘capability approach’. Nussbaum’s intention is to rectify the

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<sup>31</sup> Marchesini (2002), p.44.

Rawlsian social contract theory<sup>32</sup>, which postulates equality of “reason” and “power” among the contractual parties and proves unable to address three social problems: justice for physically and mentally impaired individuals, justice for non-human animals, and global justice. In particular, Nussbaum points out that the notion of ‘right’, characterizing ‘freedom’ mostly as a form of protection, can do very little for enhancing the life of socially disadvantaged subjects. For this reason, she replaces it with the term ‘capability’, which portrays the ‘human being’ as a constellation of capacities - including the capacity to live, to be healthy, to reproduce, to own property, to ‘work as a human being’, and to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason in a truly human way<sup>33</sup> - that need to be nurtured and expressed.

Following this line of reason, Nussbaum labels as defective all ethical theories that measure well-being in terms of GNP per capita or define equality as a mere redistribution of wealth and opportunities. The limits of these models rest in that they are not able to provide underprivileged individuals with the necessary means they need for exercising their natural skills. Nussbaum concludes that both national and international political institutions cannot restrict their responsibilities to the defense of the citizens’ immunity; as a further duty, they should aim at distributing as many capabilities as possible to all citizens of the world. People’s prosperity, in fact, depends upon the level of “humanity” that everyone is given, as revealed by Nussbaum’s comments regarding the case of a mentally impaired girl named Sesha: “... if we could cure her condition and bring her up

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<sup>32</sup> The philosophical view endorsed by authors such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Rawls, who all describe society as a contract signed by human beings in order to avoid the violent inconveniences that a state of nature would involve. Rawls, in particular, insisted on the principle of equality of ‘power’ and ‘reason’ among the contractual parties which, accordingly, do not encompass categories such as mentally impaired individuals and non-human animals.

<sup>33</sup> Nussbaum (2006), p.76.

to the capability threshold, that is what we would do, because it is good, indeed important, for a human being to be able to function in these ways”<sup>34</sup>.

I encourage my reader to appreciate the sensible attention that Nussbaum pays to problems concerning socially disadvantaged subjects, whose life conditions she thoughtfully and admirably tries to enhance. One should also acknowledge that Nussbaum has highlighted earlier and more explicitly than others the importance of non-human life for issues of global justice. The conflation of Marxian elements and Aristotelian components that the capability approach encompasses, furthermore, allows Nussbaum to relocate “human rationality” within the animal domain. In so doing, her discourse partly overcomes the culture-nature separation that western philosophies have often taken for granted. However, if one looks at these philosophical efforts from a cynical stance, they do not seem to fully reach their target.

Despite the aforementioned benefits, Nussbaum’s attempt to establish continuity between the ‘human’ and other forms of life still leans excessively toward the former which, in turn, is characterized as the ‘universal norm’ through hypostatical and not completely justified connotations. Some have plausibly wondered why one should list among the fundamental traits defining human flourishing the “capacity to work” and not, for instance, the “right to hunt” or the “right to procreate to the point of overpopulation”.<sup>35</sup> Considering the evolutionary connotations that the human species exhibits, it could be additionally asked why the “capacity to adapt” is not encompassed within Nussbaum’s conception of prosperity. Nussbaum strives to lift up all individuals to the “capability threshold”, without convincingly validating the completeness of her

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.193.

<sup>35</sup> I am referring to Cary Wolfe (2008), p. 12.

model and without asking why and how western systems leave numerous individuals – i.e. animals, people and countries – behind. As an alternative, the cynical path that is unfolding here will suggest looking at marginalized modes of existence not necessarily as anomalies, but rather as symptoms that bring to light malfunctioning societal dynamics. From this perspective, ostracized forms of life also serve as paradigmatic points of reference to take into account for restructuring the system at its foundations. A few examples might make this criticism more tangible.

In view of the mass consumption of antidepressants that proliferate across American schools and universities, western educational apparatuses appear to be inefficient not only with respect to serious cases of mental impairment, but also as far as milder psychological discomforts are concerned. The extremely high expectations that students are required to fulfill by curricula, institutions and families, often elicit in young boys and girls feelings of inadequacy and defectiveness. This frequently leads them to experience daily anxiety, apprehension, and sense of hopelessness, in some unfortunate cases also triggering suicidal desires. The question is now whether it would make more sense to provide as many students as possible with emotional assistance and therapeutic support in order to help them achieve mental stability - as the capability approach would prescribe - or rather to modify their environment so as to prevent those symptoms from surfacing. It is reasonable to think, for instance, that the adoption of evaluation strategies which don't rely on quantitative values or numeric classifications would most likely attenuate competitive tensions and hierarchical dynamics among the students. In taking these steps, their frustrations and stress would be minimized. For the same reason, it is imaginable that the curriculum implemented within several Swedish primary schools, wherein

traditional grades and marks are not employed, turns out to be less traumatic for students with learning issues such as dyslexia or Attention Deficit Disorder.

This line of reasoning does not apply exclusively to the domain of education, but extends to other areas of the society as well. It is no accident that Rawls's philosophical theory, which Nussbaum refers to as a steady point of reference, conceives of "severe depression" as a serious mental impairment<sup>36</sup> and locates individuals affected by it out of the political domain. From a sociopolitical viewpoint, in fact, the rigid healthy-sick dichotomy encompassed by Rawlsian contractarianism presupposes the culture-nature division, thus aligning with modes of thinking that perceive "illness" as a subhuman deviance from the societal "norm". This perspective labels as incurable everything that does not fit properly within the productive machinery. The capability approach, partly dismantling this stereotypical mentality, would nonetheless prescribe to supply severely depressed people with ad hoc assistance, psychological support and pharmacological aid, so as to "humanize" them as much as possible. Despite the honorable intentions, this would hardly uproot the core of the problem. Our criticism, by contrast, moves from the awareness that states of depression proliferate more frequently within advanced capitalistic societies. In these environments the level of efficiency that is needed in order to partake in the productive chain has become extremely demanding, thus amplifying the gap between those who remain hooked and those who fall off. In view of this presupposition, the cynical thinker would conclude that a cutback in working goals, responsibilities and duties, as well as a reduction in the amount of working-hours would most likely restore many sick people to health, while also facilitating the reintegration of unoccupied individuals within the job market.

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<sup>36</sup> Nussbaum (2006), p.112.

For similar reasons, it is true - as Nussbaum points out - that physically impaired individuals are able to thrive like everybody else whenever their societies guarantee them access to all infrastructures and provide them with suitable technological support. One nonetheless wonders whether such an emphasis on technological remedies would eventually risk converting human communities into excessively complex systems, wherein the overabundance of machines and bureaucratic regulations ultimately lead to increased alienation and disease. It is legitimate to hypothesize, on the contrary, that in numerous circumstances people with disabilities could benefit from a simplification of the surrounding environment. As an example, if the 2015 Norwegian decree allowing exclusively bicycles and pedestrians to circulate in downtown Oslo was imitated and recovered in other urban centers, many wheel-chaired people would probably not feel as penalized and frustrated as they do on a regular basis. Such a maneuver would furthermore benefit the entire western community, which is nowadays far and wide afflicted by ecological issues.

Distant from endorsing purely technophobic biases, the cynical position that is defended here rejects nonetheless the interpretation according to which modernization is beneficial regardless. At the same time, it sanctions the idea that in many cases human relationships and psychophysical wellbeing should be given priority over technical progress in order to obtain a healthier society. To use an allegory, nobody would deny a group of hikers climbing a mountain the necessary equipment that is needed for their safety and which is also compatible with their physical features. The question is whether they would decide to carry extra instruments, allowing the weakest elements in the group to walk faster, or would rather invite the head of the crew to slow down whenever

somebody is delayed. Considering that an unreasonable amount of tools would most likely render the entire journey uncomfortable for everybody, post-human cynicism would welcome the second solution. In few words, Nussbaum's perspective looks at the 'norm' as a parameter to pursue and imitate, also striving to rectify all flaws and anomalies. A modern Diogenes, by contrast, refers to the 'excluded' as a privileged model and evaluates whether or not the 'norm' should be modified accordingly.

Despite the honorable purposes, Nussbaum's efforts to overcome traditional humanism are undermined at their core by the theoretical presuppositions of her discourse which: 1) does not include "adaptation" within the list of the fundamental human capabilities, thus characterizing "flourishing" as an autarchic stationary condition; 2) describes human life through a list of fixed ontological properties which, on the contrary, need to be conceived of as necessarily provisional. Let us digress on these two points before moving forward.

Nussbaum clarifies that the capability approach, though universally applicable to all domains, should be case by case modified according to the characteristics of the species in question, which solely is able to provide humans and animals with the appropriate background they need for prospering: "The relevance of the species norm is that it defines the context, the political and social community, in which people either flourish or do not."<sup>37</sup> Through this claim, Nussbaum minimizes the plethora of ontological interconnections that species establish reciprocally in order to survive. Anthropologists mention these interspecies dynamics with a particular regard to the human race, which has always exhibited the evolutionary tendency to hybridize with non-human objects and animals. Marchesini, for instance, points out that in addition to the parental cares that

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 365.

people offer to members of different species, human knowledge has developed for centuries by means of a partnership with non-human animals and, therefore, is teriomorphic by essence. Animals have always provided humans with valuable epistemic, behavioral and also technological models. It is sufficient to think about the messages and information that birds indirectly convey: an abrupt interruption of their whistling transmits states of alert, the configuration of their nest points at geographical coordinates, whereas their migrations indicate seasonal variations<sup>38</sup>.

Moreover, scientists have always examined the anatomic characteristics of animals and tried to reproduce their most impressive skills, so as to acquire a deeper understanding of the human body. The admiration that humans feel for non-human strategies of survival - the entanglement of a spider-web, the construction of a beehive, the hunting techniques utilized by a predator - partly explains why zoologists analyze them constantly as problem-solving models. The same kind of awe justifies the fact that people often imitate animal behaviors; tattoos, piercing and body art, which have become more common in recent years, recall the chromatic methods that some animals employ for self-defense. Similarly, non-human communicative forms are often reproduced in dance and music. According to several scholars, there are reasons to associate such a teriomorphic disposition to the fact that humans are born prematurely with respect to other living beings and, consequently, their pre-adult age is longer. This extended developmental period exposes humans to a plethora of external influences, affecting individuals from multiple ontogenetic perspectives.

For these and other reasons, conceiving of evolutionary processes in Darwinian autarchic terms is nonsense because, particularly as far as the human race is concerned,

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<sup>38</sup> Marchesini (2002), chapter 2.



ontogenetic mechanisms are always a historical debt to the ‘other’. The value of the “species norm” that Nussbaum defends, consequently, collapses if one adopts historicist methods of inquiry, which dismiss self-referential structures and describe life through the hybridizing pressures that a selector applies on a different living form.<sup>39</sup> From this stance, it is evident that prosperity cannot be defined, as Nussbaum characterizes it, in terms of mere “fitness” with respect to a predefined category. In fact, the relationship between individuals and what allegedly is their group of affinity is constantly destabilized by external influences. On the contrary, survival succeeds exclusively if living beings repeatedly question their sense of belonging and redefine their identity according to new configurations. The kynical spaces of “exclusion”, which Nussbaum qualifies as abnormalities that need to be corrected, are therefore ontological areas where individuals, species, and communities can expose themselves to regeneration and renewal. This means that the existential and sociopolitical liberation that Nussbaum endorses can hardly be achieved by highlighting the inadequacy that a living entity displays with respect to its presumed ontological class. One should rather say: true emancipation can be pursued only by emphasizing the completeness that all forms of life embody in their uniqueness and exceptionality as *hybridized singularities*.

What is at stake here is beyond the Darwinian theory of evolution and also beyond the essentialism which “plagues Nussbaum’s later work”<sup>40</sup>. What I am calling into question is the equivalence between “prosperity” and “property” which most essentialist doctrines presuppose. Namely, the philosophical view that perceives “prosperity” as necessarily correlated to the ownership of specific properties and which, on one hand,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> As Cary Wolfe also observes, see (2008), p. 13.

claims to establish what living beings are allegedly supposed to be by nature and, on the other, labels the ones who do not fulfill those preconditions as defective. Aren't we all beautifully faulty, mentally damaged and physically impaired with respect to any kind of ideal norm after all? Isn't this what makes us unique and irreproducible? The distance that separates us from the norm is arguably what provides us with the versatility we need for coping with environmental changes, which demand new ontological "properties" to be acquired and old ones to be discharged. From this stance, the adaptation faculty that Nussbaum overlooks qualifies, in turn, all capabilities and properties as temporary by definition, also positing cynical "dispossession" as a further competence that evolutionary processes structurally require.

If one moves their attention to how modern-day consumerist perceptions of the 'good' associate human prosperity with notions such as "ownership" and "property" - whether these refer to the most exclusive smartphone or the most luxurious BMW - one will realize that the *property-dispossession* dichotomy represents one of the crucial crossroads where ontology and ethics converge. On the theme of "dispossession" I will return several times because it offers a foundation for the construction of a cosmopolitan morality that endorses ontological, social and cultural hybridization. It is also a powerful tool to employ for undermining the capitalistic ideological framework, which Nussbaum does not challenge effectively.

2.

The cynical viewpoint is more aligned with the beliefs of those who have highlighted the detrimental outcomes provoked by the western glorification of the 'human'. According to

this *anti-humanistic* line of reasoning, partly counting on the post-structuralist attempt to explain humanistic categories in terms of power relations, the human subject can be identified by means of specific racial, ethnic, and gender attributes. Such an entity is often depicted by the European, adult, white, male ontological model that inspired most of the horrifying events which occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to Fascism and Nazism, which clearly relied on humanistic preconceptions, Braidotti observes that the crimes perpetrated by the Communist regimes presupposed comparable philosophical viewpoints. The Stalinian system, in fact, was mostly inspired by an immoderate veneration of the orthodox Marxian dialectic which deified the entity ‘man’ as the only agent determining the historical flow. Braidotti believes that this type of humanistic Marxism was successful after World War II because it offered a political alternative to capitalism and simultaneously contributed to the defeat of fascisms. This is why it was adopted by progressive thinkers such as Sartre and de Beauvoir among many others.<sup>41</sup>

Braidotti points out how things changed considerably starting from the 1968 Cultural Revolution, which is also when Michel Foucault published *The Order of Things* (1967) and when critical thought adopted strategies questioning conventional Marxian methodologies. Foucault’s inquiry gave birth to a plethora of anti-humanistic discourses that did not respect dialectical principles. The bio-political aspects of Foucault’s work revealed how the new forms of power utilize humanistic themes in order to reinforce their authority. At the same time, post-structuralist feminism carried out an attack both on the social primacy of the male subject and on the feminist claims describing women through univocal humanistic voices. Following a similar line of reasoning, post-colonial thought aimed at the dismantlement of Euro-centric perspectives by highlighting the racial

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<sup>41</sup> See Braidotti (2013), p.19.

components that characterize humanistic thinking. For Braidotti, *anti-humanism* is mostly represented by these anti-fascist, anti-sexist, anti-racist, and also post-Marxian views that were elaborated during the 1970's by the post-structuralist generation.

Importantly, Braidotti affirms that while *anti-humanism* is an indispensable resource for post-human thought and for the theorization of a pan-human cosmopolitan bond among all people, it should not be confused with some sort of nihilistic cynicism<sup>42</sup>. She carefully distinguishes *anti-humanistic* strategies from the pessimistic claims expressed by post-modern thinkers, whose relativistic and anti-foundational arguments would provide cosmopolitan theory with catastrophic meanings. What she emphasizes is the necessity to elaborate an 'affirmative' type of cosmopolitanism that does not ground the sense of universal belonging on the existential condition of 'shared vulnerability':

“The posthuman recomposition of human interaction that I propose is not the same as the reactive bond of vulnerability, but is an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others.”<sup>43</sup>

I would like to bring my reader's attention on two important points which partly challenge Braidotti's view. First, as I have previously shown, every authentic cosmopolitan thought involves a cynical nihilistic component which, due to historical and semantic reasons, cannot be neglected without a justification. Second, post-modernism differs to a degree from post-structuralism, but in many respects can nonetheless be considered as its inexorable historical epilogue. This is certainly the case of Italian post-modern thought which is going to be the main focus of my analysis.

In Italy post-modern theories - including Gianni Vattimo's *Weak Thought* and to some extent Massimo Cacciari's *Negative Thought* - were partly elaborated in response to

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<sup>42</sup> “...philosophical antihumanism must not be confused with cynical and nihilistic misanthropy.”, Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.50.

the crisis that leftist political discourses underwent at the end of the 1970s. Around that time, partially due to the relevant success achieved by the Italian Communist Party, the humanistic type of Marxism described by Rosi Braidotti was still quite alive in Italy. It revealed all its detrimental essence when, during the so called ‘years of lead’<sup>44</sup>, it channeled some of its revolutionary energy through the actions and massacres performed by terrorist groups. At that point, it was clear that the sense of political autonomy put in jeopardy by the capitalistic modernization of the country could not be defended by making appeal to a Marxian humanistic sentimentalism. It was reasonable to acknowledge that the political dissolution of the humanistic ‘individual’ would have been inevitable, and could have hardly been eluded by endorsing a dialectical type of resistance. It is precisely what Gianni Vattimo affirms when he criticizes the attitude exhibited by the Frankfurt School members who advocated a re-appropriation of political subjectivity against the de-humanizing force of capitalism:

“Adorno’s position is representative not only of a vast number of Hegelian-Marxist thinkers in our culture, but of the various versions of phenomenology and - in another discipline - numerous developments in psychoanalysis that generally tent to position themselves within a *re-appropriative* horizon...”<sup>45</sup> (italics mine)

The dawn of Italian post-modernism paralleled the growing awareness that the only way to oppose capitalism was to facilitate its own self-destruction by undermining the epistemological ground on which the humanistic subjectivity had always relied. Post-modern Italian thinkers realized that the European, adult, white, male subject that post-structuralism had aimed to deconstruct, could not have been completely dismantled without a spirited critique of the western notion of ‘truth’. From this perspective, the anti-

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<sup>44</sup> The period of Italian history that stretches from 1973 to 1980 when domestic terrorism propagated.

<sup>45</sup> Vattimo (1988), p. 45.

foundational and relativistic claims that Braidotti rejects are *prima facie* in continuity with the discourses that post-structuralism had initiated. Vattimo suggests thinking of technology as the apex and, simultaneously, the twilight of western metaphysics. This means that humanistic philosophical discourses endorsing the primacy of the ‘individual’ also brought him to extinction. In so doing, Vattimo offers an epistemological foundation to Foucault’s view of ‘individuality’ as a way in which bio-power nourishes and breeds subjects with the purpose of suppressing them.<sup>46</sup> From this view, post-modernism could be seen as the nihilistic epilogue of the post-structuralist project and, at once, the moment when contemporary philosophy retrieves the full essence of ancient Cynicism. It is what Peter Sloterdijk confirms within the *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), which was unsurprisingly published at the same time as Vattimo’s *Weak Thought* (1983):

“For the kynical realist, the idea of human individuality in times in which war machines, metropolitan streams of traffic, and unleashed production apparatuses consume the individual as their raw material, is no longer a fruitful hypothesis. Let us try the other end, free of any *metaphysics of individuality* and without humanistic nostalgia.”<sup>47</sup> (italics mine)

Post-modernism represents accordingly an indispensable resource for the recovery of cosmopolitan thought in its original form. Asserting the dissolution of humanistic individuality, post-modern thinkers also throw seeds for the rebirth of the Greek ‘teriomorphic singularity’ which is predisposed to interact and hybridize with a diversity of living beings. In this sense, nihilistic definitions of subjectivity are of paramount theoretical importance because of the way they engage with the tele-techno-capitalistic society. On one hand, this imposes more isolated and fragile conditions of life to all people, and on the other it is making them more sympathetic toward their non-human

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<sup>46</sup> See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (1979) chapter 2.

<sup>47</sup> Sloterdijk (1988) p. 442.

surroundings. Technological alienation is not valuable because it drags human beings away from their biological roots, as trans-humanists would claim. Rather, it is beneficial as long as it reminds people of who they really are and of the animal origins from which they come. Following this argumentative line, nihilistic technomorphisms turn into teriomorphisms, predisposing individuals with the capacity to interact with ontological and political differences. A maximization of the level of loneliness is then indispensable for theorizing the kynical coincidence between the “citizen of oneself” and “citizen of the cosmos”<sup>48</sup>. This means that philosophy must lead transcendental forms of subjectivity to dissolution in order to conceptualize a genuine sense of global belonging. In other words, the post-human cosmopolis can be edified exclusively on nihilistic foundations. Moving towards the main thesis, contemporary Italian philosophy, which conflates bio-political arguments with post-modern views, retrieves the dispossessing components that distinguished ancient Cynicism more than any other tradition. Therefore, it provides those foundations in the most explicit way.

### *The Italian Retrieval of Cynicism*

#### *1.*

The kynical element is indispensable for adequately understanding the anti-humanistic accounts of Italian thought that have been elaborated in recent times. Three of these accounts are particularly interesting because they entangle post-human factors with cosmopolitan components in a way that requires a kynical type of clarification.

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<sup>48</sup> See Desmond (2008), p.197.

According to *The Italian Difference* (2009), during the last four decades Italian thought has mostly unfolded around the themes of nihilism and bio-politics. For the editors Chiesa and Toscano, these topics offer a trustworthy portrait of the contemporary Italian society, while also stimulating successfully the international philosophical discussion. Even though nihilistic and bio-political approaches were elaborated first in Germany and France, they needed to be filtered through the Italian exegesis before acquiring a global reverberation. This is particularly true in the case of Foucault's anti-humanistic ideas, which gained international recognition only after 1990 when the concept of bio-politics became pivotal in the Italian debate<sup>49</sup>. In *The Italian Difference* this phenomenon is mostly explained as depending upon the Italian philosophical capacity of utilizing abstract theoretical schemes for the comprehension of contingent epochal events. Both nihilism and bio-politics are particularly versatile categories in this regard because, thanks to their figurative character, they lend themselves to generate meta-political concepts that spontaneously travel toward "the other"<sup>50</sup>. By mixing nihilistic and bio-political arguments Italian Thought is able to describe historical phenomena through long-term conceptual devices, thus proving a powerful tool for transferring philosophical discourses from the national to the transnational level:

"It is all too easy to imagine a Reading Agamben in Bogotá, a Reading Negri in Teheran, a Reading Vattimo in Beijing, a Reading Esposito in Seoul..."<sup>51</sup>

Toscano and Chiesa's view relies furthermore on *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (1996) which, a few years earlier, had also highlighted the relevance of Italian

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<sup>49</sup> As Esposito reminds us, see *Dall'impolitico all'impersonale* (2012), chapter 4, *French Theory and Italian Thought*.

<sup>50</sup> Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p.5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



philosophy within the international scenario. In the introduction, Michael Hardt points out that such an international predisposition rests on the fact that contemporary Italian thought relies on the revolutionary movements that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. During this time in Italy, the attack on the State was more vigorous and persistent than anywhere else in Europe. Hardt observes that between the 1980s and 1990s Italian thought could no longer count on the material substrate supplied by those movements. However, Italy was still a very active laboratory generating new forms of political thinking<sup>52</sup>. Thus, due to the 1970s rebellious experience, Italian philosophy is able to provide other traditions with a plethora of innovative paradigms that are essential for a deeper comprehension of the ongoing globalizing phenomena. Through these observations, Hardt implicitly confirms Gramsci's intuition that in the post-Westphalian political era the cosmopolitan personality that Italian philosophy has always embodied would prove beneficial and Italian intellectuals would no longer feel in contradiction with themselves<sup>53</sup>.

This conclusion is explicitly drawn in the remarkable accounts provided by Roberto Esposito, who also indicates transnational components as the essence of contemporary Italian Thought. Particularly in *Dall'impolitico all'impersonale* (2012) and even more in *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy* (2012) Esposito clarifies the fundamental factor distinguishing Italian anti-humanism from French post-structuralism and German post-modernism. It is the insistence on the bio-political notion of 'life' due to which Italian philosophy appears to be always on the verge to transcend its own borders:

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<sup>52</sup> See Hardt and Virno (1996), Introduction.

<sup>53</sup> Izzo (2009), p.181.

“...la differenza con la filosofia francese sta proprio nella centralità della categoria di ‘vita’, colta dal pensiero italiano fin dal suo inizio. Mentre la filosofia francese, a partire da Descartes, ha privilegiato la dimensione della coscienza o quella, tipica di Pascal, del dialogo interiore, la filosofia italiana dalle sue origini – con Machiavelli, Bruno, Campanella, Vico, fino a Croce e Gramsci – si è concentrata sulla categoria di vita nella sua complessa relazione con quelle di storia e politica.”<sup>54</sup>

(“...the difference with French Philosophy rests exactly in the centrality of the category of ‘life’ captured from the beginning by Italian Thought. While French philosophy, starting with Descartes, has favored the dimension of consciousness or the one, typical of Pascal, of the interior dialogue, Italian philosophy from its origins – with Machiavelli, Bruno, Campanella, Vico, until Croce and Gramsci – focused on the category of life in complex relation to the categories of history and politics.”)

Unlike the French, the German and the English traditions, privileging the reflective dimension of philosophy, Italian Thought favors historical and political themes. These lead theoretical activity to leave its comfort zone and contaminate with outer influences.

It is one of the reasons why Italian philosophy is cosmopolitan by essence:

“Contrariamente all’atteggiamento tipico di altre tradizioni - orientate all’introspezione filosofica, al ripiegamento della filosofia sul proprio movimento interno -, il pensiero italiano ha sempre guardato fuori di sé: alla città politica (con Machiavelli), alla vita infinita dell’universo (con Bruno), alla natura (con Leonardo e Galilei o anche, diversamente, con Leopardi), al mondo della storia (con Vico). Quella italiana non è mai stata una filosofia della persona, del soggetto, della coscienza – ma una filosofia mondana o mondiale, esterna persino ai confini dello stato nazione.”<sup>55</sup>

(“As opposed to an attitude typical of other traditions – oriented towards philosophical introspection and to the retreat of philosophy towards its own internal movement – Italian Thought has always looked outside of itself: to the political city (with Machiavelli), to the infinite life of the universe (with Bruno), to nature (with Leonardo and Galilei or also, differently, with Leopardi), to the world of history (with Vico). Italian philosophy was never a philosophy of the

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<sup>54</sup> Esposito (2012), *Dall’impolitico all’impersonale*, p.161, English translation mine.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp.166-67.

person, of the subject, of the conscience – but an earthly or *world-wide philosophy*, even external to the borders of the nation-state.”)

The problem now is to understand in what sense all these accounts combine anti-humanistic aspects and cosmopolitan components, which are generally portrayed as indiscernible connotations of humanistic thought. What kind of cosmopolitanism is Esposito referring to? A considerate reading of *Living Thought* (2010), which analyzes the history of Italian philosophy since the age of the Renaissance, will provide us with some plausible answers.

In *Living Thought* (2012) Esposito grounds the cosmopolitan core of Italian philosophy on the pre-national milieu that characterized the Italian Renaissance. The author points out that during that time in Italy the ‘national’ did not coincide with the ‘territorial’ because early Italian intellectuals did not operate within the context of a well defined nation-state. Considering the anti-humanistic thread that leads Esposito’s analysis, his discourse likely presupposes Gramsci’s view that the delayed formation of the Italian nation-state was due to the humanistic character of the Renaissance, which Gramsci defined as essentially regressive<sup>56</sup>. As opposed to mainstream historical interpretation, conceiving of the Italian Renaissance as a progressive and secularizing process, Gramsci believed that the humanistic values that the Renaissance recovered from the classical ages were no different from the ideas promoted by Italian Catholicism. The humanistic rediscovery of ‘man’ was mostly inspired by the Stoical *humanitas* which, under the veil of egalitarian and cosmopolitan ideals, had represented the flag of the Roman Empire and then became the symbol of the Christian Evangelization of the world. Interestingly, Gramsci’s critique does not insist on these expansionist components as

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<sup>56</sup> See Gramsci (1964), Vol.II.

much as it does on the conservative repercussions that humanistic cosmopolitanism brought about on domestic Italian politics. Reclaiming the Roman *humanitas*, Italian intellectuals also established discrepancy between Latin and vernacular languages, preserving a stable “detachment” between high culture and crowds: “Humanists are characterized by the conscience of an inevitable *detachment* between the man of culture and the mass.”<sup>57</sup> (Italics mine). The Christian doctrine widened the human-animal dichotomy by waging a crusade against all instincts, while Italian humanists opened a fracture between different literary languages, thus ordering social classes in a stagnant hierarchical way. This humanistic injury, which in other European areas was alleviated by the religious Reformation, delayed both the territorialization of Italian political consciousness and the birth of the nation-state.

What Esposito adds to this analysis is the fact that the humanistic and pre-national milieu that Gramsci describes was characterized by a plethora of scattered cities, which were far from representing a solid political point of reference. In fact, the transition from medieval communes to the towns of the early *Umanesimo* and then of the full Renaissance did not produce anything comparable to a territory united by a political will<sup>58</sup>. Esposito portrays the cradle of Italian philosophy as a de-territorialized context, standing for a geopolitical environment that was cosmopolitan because it was constituted by a diversity of spread urban centers. Like in the case of ancient Cynicism, at the source of a philosophical school we find the ‘city’, which the Renaissance reevaluated both from the financial and the cultural viewpoints. At the same time, the city evolved into a theatre

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>58</sup> Esposito (2012), *Living Thought*, p.20.

where greed, injustices and corruption immoderately reproduced. Let us look at Esposito's text through a cynical lens and see where this leads us.

From a cynical perspective one immediately sees that the de-territorializing essence that Esposito ascribes to Italian philosophy is mostly characterized in negative terms. Italian thought is not cosmopolitan because it constructs speculative notions that are universally applicable or because it elaborates comprehensive normative systems, but rather because it was always excluded from the philosophical domain. Esposito points out that, due to the literary character of Renaissance speculation, Italian Thought was in many circumstances considered a non-philosophy. For Hegel, true philosophical activity restarted during the XVI and XVII centuries, while in more recent times philosophical inquiries concerning the problem of humanism – from Maritain's *Humanisme integral* (1934), to Sartre's *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946) to Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (1947) – completely ignored the Italian origin of the problem.<sup>59</sup> In agreement with Deleuze, Esposito believes that Italy was deprived of its own philosophical legacy.<sup>60</sup> Thanks to such a removal, Italian philosophy was able to establish a partnership with non-philosophical genres and acquire a very versatile argumentative personality: “But what if this escaping outside of itself – its continual de-territorialization – is the most originally living feature of Italian thought?”<sup>61</sup> This means that Italian thought was born in exile and thrived in exclusion. Accordingly, the international demeanor identified by Esposito should be seen as depending upon a cynical condition of political marginalization.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.35.

<sup>60</sup> Esposito (2010), p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.15.

The case of Machiavelli is exemplary in this regard. Even though over the centuries numerous European thinkers have engaged with his texts, most of them relegated him at the periphery of the philosophical sphere or even considered him as a non-philosopher. For Esposito, this is not only due to the literary metaphors that Machiavelli's texts often propose, but also to the practical purposes he pursues. As opposed to philosophical orientations chasing purely abstract targets, Machiavelli's discourse prioritizes praxis over theory. Like the ancient Cynics, Machiavelli does not conceive of philosophy as a disconnected and impersonal deliberation because he believes that thought is never separate from concrete life experiences. These convictions are reflected in Machiavelli's etero-referential style which presumes the philosopher's personal commitment with respect to the ideas that he endorses.

The absence of a pre-political state of nature in Machiavelli's theory depends upon the pragmatic essence of his doctrine, which reduces theory to praxis and conflates the human with the non-human, thus conceiving of the origin of philosophy as narrowly political:

“To maintain that politics is originary, in Machiavelli, is tantamount to saying that it has no origin. It means that there is nothing pre-political, like a state of nature, for example, that politics can take over from, relegating it to an immemorial past. Politics occupies the entire horizon of the real: there is nothing before it or after it, neither a preordained beginning nor a foreseeable end.”<sup>62</sup>

Following Machiavelli, it is due to the same pragmatic essence that Italian political philosophy speaks in most circumstances from a critical perspective. Italian thinkers rarely elaborate political concepts with the purpose of resolving social contradictions or conflicts. Differently from social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes or John

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<sup>62</sup> Esposito (2012), *Living Thought*, p.48.

Locke, whose notions of sovereignty aim at moderating the tensions that endanger human coexistence, for Machiavelli, Bruno and Gramsci the political sphere structurally contains an antagonistic component which cannot be eliminated. This antagonistic spirit resounds in Machiavelli and Bruno's sarcastic tones, recalling the bad speeches performed by the Cynics, and also explains the disassociation from local and national ruling powers that Italian philosophers always proclaimed:

“Not only can Italian philosophy not be reduced to its national role, but its most authentic reason for being lies precisely in the distance it takes from that role.”<sup>63</sup>

One should not be surprised that an ability to overcome sovereign limitations could give birth to a philosophical school that, similar to ancient Cynicism, is not reducible to one sole orientation, but is as fragmented as the scattered urban centers around which it was born. Differently from the one-dimensional tendencies characterizing Cartesianism in France and Lockism in England, Italian philosophy has always spoken through a plurality of voices that no univocal classification would be able to comprehend. Quoting Spaventa, Esposito affirms that the Italian school should rather be seen as the condensation of various European modes of thinking:

“However, this is precisely the source of the contradiction that thwarts any attempt to identify a peculiar trait of Italian philosophy from within it. If Italian philosophy is not a particular orientation of thought, but I would almost say, thought in its fullness, the totality of all orientations, then its difference lies precisely in not having one, in that universality, in which all opposites are united; in that harmonious unity gathering together all aspects of the European intellect (*ingegno*).”<sup>64</sup>

The transnational character of Italian philosophy is explained here in terms of a *dispossession* of identity, which Italian thinkers refuse to own and to be owned by. It is

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p.18.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.17.

due to such a deprivation that Italian theory is able to capture more accurately than other philosophical orientations the cultural diversity that proliferates throughout the European continent and beyond. One should meditate on how such a view acquires an even stronger meaning when considering that international interest for the Italian school emerged with the publication of Giovanna Borradori's *Recoding Metaphysics: the New Italian Philosophy* (1989). In fact, around this time the European Union was rising and the successful growth of neo-liberalism began to imperil numerous national identities.

Nevertheless, if we remove the cynical lens these considerations will lose a large part of their significance. It is through a cynical account that one is able to justify both the aforementioned conflation between cosmopolitan features with anti-humanistic components and also the characteristics that Esposito identifies. Nonetheless, how could one not see Diogenes' shadow behind Esposito's genealogical reconstruction? How could one not look at Machiavelli's mocking reflections on the political city as the cynical counterpart of Leonardo's veneration of nature? How could one not perceive a cynical mind behind Bruno's anti-essentialist theory of life? Does it not make sense to think of Leopardi's *cosmic pessimism* as a metaphysical reverence for the cynical praise of suffering? Did Italian Thought finally become aware of its cynical alter-ego? Why is this cynical specter haunting us at this time?

2.

In Italy, the similarities that I previously highlighted between Greek Hellenism and contemporary Europe began to emerge more visibly at the end of the 1970s, when economic growth, urban expansion and immigration phenomena occurred rapidly all at



once. The perfectly synchronized combination of these factors is certainly part of the reasons why cynical cosmopolitan values surfaced in Italian thought more visibly than in other cultural contexts.

For three years, between 1973 and 1975, a severe economic recession afflicted most of the developed capitalistic countries. The lowest apex in this sense was registered in 1975 when, partly due to the petrol crisis, international trades were abruptly interrupted and Italy was affected in terms of a high level of inflation and a decrease of production. Nevertheless, between 1976 and 1990 Italy experienced an extraordinary growth, which was slow and irregular in the beginning and then more consistent starting from 1980, when capitalism took over and Italy became one of the most powerful industrialized societies in the world. Inflation progressively decreased while the *Gross Domestic Product* (GDP) grew beyond the 2.5 percent per year between 1983 and 1987. By the end of the 1980s Italy surpassed economically Great Britain, thus becoming the fifth financial power of the western world.<sup>65</sup>

An important consequence of this economic evolution was a further growth of the middle class urban population, which in 1971 had represented 38.5 percent of the citizens and reached 46.4 percent in 1983. Such an expansion mostly depended upon the swelling number of public employees, including professional figures, technicians and intellectuals. However, a soft augmentation was also registered in the private sector. At the same time, urbanization processes developing wildly and uncontrollably, represented one of the most challenging issues that the country had to face. At the end of the 1970s three important laws were approved with the purpose of normalizing construction activities, but their

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<sup>65</sup> See Ginsborg (1989), p.549.

implementation was hindered by the inefficient bureaucratic public apparatuses and by the paralyzing alliance between State and private owners.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the urbanization difficulties, by the end of the 70s Italian cities were also challenged by a massive arrival of foreigners. Around that time, Italy stopped exporting labor force and became the targeted destination of thousands of immigrants. Some of them were Northern Africans whose main activity was selling clothing, bags or pendants along the roads or on the beaches. Some others were occupied in a great number of irregular job positions. Italian institutions proved quite unprepared in facing immigration issues. As a result, immigrants joined the elderly and the Italian youth of the peripheries in the social stratum that did not benefit at all from the growing affluence occurring on a national level.

The social and economic events previously described generated an ideal milieu for kynical reactions to multiply, particularly in Italy where kynical cultural elements had been preserved and nurtured for centuries by the Catholic Church. On this subject, several historians have recently highlighted the plethora of spiritual factors that Christianity inherited from ancient Cynicism<sup>67</sup>. After all, Diogenes' praise of poverty is not very dissimilar from the Christian conception of indigence as a way to gain a

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.527.

<sup>67</sup> Historians such as F. Gerald Downing, Burton Mack, Leif Vaage and John Crossan have recently advanced the claim that Cynicism considerably influenced the Christian doctrines and that Jesus himself should be looked at mostly as a kynic philosopher. Their arguments rely first of all on the hypothesis that the Galilee of Jesus' time was not a provincial region but a cosmopolitan area where large towns such as Tiberias and Sepphoris were frequented by many non-Jews and Greek speakers. Jesus was a carpenter, so he likely went several times to the market town of Sepphoris, where Greek language was necessary in order to communicate with customers. In fact, the Gospels portray Jesus as speaking with Pontius Pilate directly, without an interpreter, and most probably therefore in Greek. If this historical reconstruction is faithful, Jesus could have likely been influenced by the speeches held by the Cynics Menippus, Meleager and Oenomaus whose hometown, Gadara, was little more than thirty kilometers from Nazareth and its name is mentioned in two of the Synoptic Gospels, see Desmond (2008).

heavenly kingdom. Also, the kynical dismissal of laws partly reverberates in the free-spirited figure of Jesus who “lived on the edges of official society among fishermen, prostitutes and tax-collectors”<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, ascetic practices have been endorsed by both spiritual traditions, while the kynical pre-humanistic adoration for the cosmos resounds in Jesus’ parables, praising animals as champions of wisdom and expressing unconditional love for mankind. All these analogies furthermore explain why several Christian fathers expressed sympathy for the Greek Cynics.

An examination of the historical connections between Cynicism and Christianity would certainly exceed the scope of this work. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight how kynical values have the tendency to reemerge in their revolutionary purity whenever Christianity strips its humble clothes and takes the shape of a power exhibiting worldly greed and authoritarian tones. As Sloterdijk points out, this is what happened in Italy at the end of the Middle Age, when the authority of the Church was aggressively questioned by heretic sects endorsing ascetic ideals and by religious orders grieving the loss of Jesus’ original message:

“As soon as a power state in the robe of Christianity – whether it be as Papacy or as the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation – was established and the brutal world of the masters began to become too impudent, kynical ascetics appeared in the Middle Ages who, with the death skull and the Great Reaper tried to cut the haughty men of the world down to size.”<sup>69</sup>

From this perspective, *mutatis mutandis* things were not much different in Italy at the end of the 1970s, when the country was about to enter a period of opulence and power was still solidly in the hands of the *Christian Democratic Party*. Although this party had been founded at the end of War World II on the catholic values of fraternity and equality, after

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<sup>68</sup> Desmond (2008), p. 213.

<sup>69</sup> Sloterdijk (1988), p.281.

thirty years it had mostly forgotten its origins, thus becoming a conservative and capitalistic force. While values of frugality and collectiveness were gravitating toward the left side of the political spectrum, the necessity to defeat internal terrorism led Christian Democrats to carry out an aggressive repression of all forms of dissent and to reassert forcefully their authority.

Considering this sociopolitical atmosphere, it is not surprising that during the last four decades kynical voices have reappeared in Italian Thought more than in other philosophical environments. This is precisely what happened starting with the publication of Massimo Cacciari's *Krisis* (1976), which gave birth to a series of critical discourses replacing Marxian elements with mystical connotations. From this perspective, the nihilistic concepts elaborated by Italian thinkers in recent years - including Massimo Cacciari's *negativity*, Gianni Vattimo's *weakness*, Franco Cassano's *slowness*, Giorgio Agamben's *bareness*, and Roberto Esposito's *impersonal* - can hardly find a satisfactory explanation if not considered through the categories of *asceticism* and *dispossession*. In the next two chapters, I will illustrate in what ways post-1970s Italian Thought and Literature have conceived of the post-human through a kynical criticism of "reason", "language" and "time", which are commonly considered as essential attributes of human nature. I will then show how such an anti-humanistic discourse is indispensable for the construction of a cosmopolitan subjectivity which has the subversive potential to destabilize neo-liberal modes of thinking.

Reason and language will be discussed in chapter 2, wherein I will explain why the transition between irrational verbal tones of the late 1970s and the quietness of the early 1980s did not necessarily signify political resignation as much as it stood for a shift

between two kynical forms of expression - i.e. *parrhesia* and *diatribe*. Particular attention will be paid to Massimo Cacciari's *Negative Thinking*, Gianni Vattimo's *Weak Thought*, literature from the 1977 movement, and the exotic atmospheres created by Italo Calvino in *Mr. Palomar* (1983). Finally, a conflation of parrhesiatic and diatribic elements will be identified as the most fertile terrain wherein an idea of "truth" that disregards universalistic Euro-centric claims and discloses itself as *self-expression* can potentially come into being. This conception of human communication leads one to envision a desirable polycentric cosmo-political scenario whose constitutive molecules do not rely on regressive identitarian views, but rather on social syncretism and cultural interaction.

## CHAPTER 2

*“I love him whose soul is overfull, so that he forgets himself  
and all things are in him: thus all things become his downfall.”*

*Nietzsche*

*“A silence, apparently the same as another silence,  
could express a hundred different notions.”*

*Italo Calvino*

*Prelude: on Negri’s Lack of Center.*

It is astonishing to realize that while Giovanna Borradori’s *Recoding Metaphysics* (1989) was bringing new Italian Thought to the attention of the international opinion, several Italian philosophers were proclaiming themselves as stateless thinkers.

In *The Coming Community* (1990), marking the beginning of a new philosophical phase in the evolution of Giorgio Agamben’s thought, the author describes himself as a “poet without homeland”. Also, Massimo Cacciari’s *Geo-philosophy of Europe* (1994) concludes with a chapter titled “The absent fatherland”, characterizing the forthcoming European identity in terms of twilight and self-dissolution. Similar themes materialized a few years later in Roberto Esposito’s *Communitas* (1998), representing an important step for the development of his bio-political discourse, and beginning with an account of the

ontological space where “community” and “nothingness” conflate. Partly due to impolitical assumptions presupposed by these texts, which all express skepticism towards the notion of the “community”, they appear to not partake in the same geopolitical milieu. What they share is rather a condition of marginalization, a voice speaking from the same state of exile.

I have thoroughly explained in the first chapter why this sense of void should be interpreted through cynical philosophical categories. This viewpoint proves even more desirable when one considers that, without the support of the cynical conceptual framework, the abovementioned Italian impolitical discourses lend themselves to be interpreted as symptoms of resignation and surrender. It is in this way that Antonio Negri, for instance, in recent times spoke about Italian nihilism, which seemingly “has always been a weak philosophy, weak in the face of politics and bosses, dictators and popes.”<sup>70</sup> Negri’s criticism is largely elaborated from a Marxian perspective and is particularly merciless a propos the evolution of Italian Theory starting from the end of the 1970s. For Negri, the Italian philosophical fragmentation of this period proved politically irrelevant and, at once, submissive with respect to the ruling powers. Negri’s targets, in particular, are Gianni Vattimo’s *Weak Thought* and Italian post-modernism, which prioritized Heideggerian discourses and dismissed Marxian postulates, thus contributing to separate philosophical activity from the struggles of ordinary people:

“In the twentieth-century decline of ideas and debates, the vilest point was perhaps reached when some, with a certain pride, proclaimed their thought and their definition of contemporary philosophy as weak...Limp thought and the Craxi era go together: however, one should admit that Craxi’s Proudhonism was by all means weightier and philosophically more relevant than Vattimo’s and Ferrara’s light thought.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Negri (2009) *The Italian Difference*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009) p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.14.

Following this line of reasoning, Negri expresses disapproval for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian philosophical ideas, with the exception of those represented by Gramsci and few other Marxian theorists, whose discourses presumably dismiss Hegelian aspects of synthesis and reconciliation, while also bringing ‘resistance’ back to the center of philosophical practice:

“The fact is that difference is *resistance*...A resistance that breaks this horizon of domination not from *the margins* but from *the centre*, or better, which reconstructs a centre, a point which can use as a lever in order to transform reality at the very heart of the system.”<sup>72</sup> (italics mine)

Negri’s sharp provocation offers reasons for reflection and self-criticism. It is undeniable that, particularly after 1980, Italian philosophy was affected by what historians identify as a social ‘reflux’<sup>73</sup>, leading the majority of the population to dismiss political responsibilities and to look for a shelter within the comfort of a private life. Nonetheless, one wonders whether Negri’s evaluation is too ungenerous. Especially when considering that, primarily because of the fragmentation that afflicted the Italian working class starting from the end of the 1970s<sup>74</sup>, philosophical thought lost its material support and was forced to reshape itself in a new way. Negri’s complaint regarding Italian lack of cohesion is most likely an appeal to the Marxian precept according to which if class struggle cannot be carried out successfully, national struggle should be pursued as a means to dismantle capitalistic apparatuses. Nevertheless, this perspective neglects two factors: 1) first, the current inadequacy of the Marxian language of ‘internationalism’,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.20.

<sup>73</sup> The sociological term denoting a general inclination to reject political engagement and to escape the public eye which occurred in Italy between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

<sup>74</sup> See Ginsborg (2001), p.54.



which has progressively dismissed its traditional leftist values, and in the present time is displaying a regressive essence; and 2) the rhetorical ambiguity that characterizes the notion of ‘resistance’, which in some circumstances materializes as the outcome of different and even opposite historical-political narratives. I will briefly clarify these two observations before moving forward.

It is important to notice that after the end of the Cold War, values of ‘internationalism’ have often been borrowed by conservative movements opposing the expansion of capitalism in defense of cultural identities and ethnic self-preservation. Within western scenarios, political claims going up against globalization are currently expressed in two main areas: the Global Justice Movement, on one hand, generally conveying leftist modes of thinking and, on the other hand, extreme right political parties, which in recent times have gained an increasing consent. Opposing the Global Justice Movement, which strives to generate a global counter-hegemonic subjectivity through trans-national connections, conservative parties still rely on the “nation-state” as a ground for elaborating their demands, and in several cases have adopted international strategies. In 2005, for instance, nationalist parties from seven European countries - i.e. the French *Front National*, the Italian *Azione Sociale* and *Lega Nord*, the Spanish *Alternativa Espanola*, the anti-Hungarian *Great Romania Party*, the openly anti-Semite Bulgarian party *Ataka*, and Belgium’s largest party, the *Vlaams Belang* - ratified the “Vienna Declaration” with the purpose to establish a European rightist contact group with a permanent basis in the Austrian capital. In view of the European parliamentary decree that a few years later would allow only pan-European groups to compete in the continental elections, party leaders planned to join forces. Holding annual meetings, they

began to cooperate on a common agenda which asks for the interruption of immigration throughout the European Union and for the protection of Europe against Islamic terrorism. The declaration also dismisses the potential ratification of the European Constitution and demands Asian and African territories to not be allowed to join the Union<sup>75</sup>. Similar objectives were furthermore recovered and discussed in a gathering that occurred in 2009 in Budapest, which proclaimed the birth of the *Alliance of National European Movements*.

Such an international cooperation has most likely been facilitated by shared counter-cosmopolitan and anti-Semitic views<sup>76</sup>. Still, they also relied on rhetorical elements that are traditionally a prerogative of leftist political discourses, and which European rightist leaders have borrowed for fulfilling new voter demands. Anti-imperialistic arguments utilized by Marxian activists during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, have reappeared not only in the Vienna declaration but also in the languages developed by several conservative groups. Some of these factions include the German NPD, the Austrian FPÖ<sup>77</sup> and lately Donald Trump's party, whose jungles evoke "national greatness" and, at the same time, disapprove of the expansionistic policies that have been chased by previous American administrations. The new right has arguably rejected not only the colonial ideologies that characterized 20<sup>th</sup> century fascisms, but also the "free market" doctrines promoted by Thatcherism and Reaganomics during the 1980s<sup>78</sup>, replacing them in some cases with leftist themes such as economic equality and respect for the environment. Significant in this regard is the *International Third Position*, which

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<sup>75</sup> See Belien (2005).

<sup>76</sup> See Lars Rensmann (2011), *Against Globalism: Counter-cosmopolitan Discontent and Anti-Semitism in Mobilizations of European Extreme Right Parties*, in Rensmann and Schoeps (2011), p. 143.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. pp. 138-39.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

advocates for wealth redistribution and ecological policies, while also pursuing an explicitly racist agenda.

This conflation of opposite political elements can be partly explained with the fact that extreme right factions, in comparison to their left-wing counterparts, are currently inclined to receive stronger support “from unemployed, less educated blue-collar workers”<sup>79</sup> who perceive themselves as significantly penalized by the global economy. Due to the necessity to satisfy these people’s expectations, in some circumstances traditional leftist modes of thinking find space within the right area of the political spectrum, thus assisting the international struggle against global capitalism on which conservative leaders are cooperating. Political theorists are then partly accurate when claiming that the events of 1989 buried the old internationalism and replaced it with the phenomenon of “internationality”, denoting “the bland but dangerous homogenization of the world whose very effect is to produce local resistance”<sup>80</sup>. More precisely, one should talk about a transition of internationalism from left to right. Because of this shift, grounding values of “internationalism” on a too cohesive kind of national philosophical thought - which Negri appears to invoke - might lead one to align with regressive themes such as anti-immigration and cultural protectionism. Therefore, it is reasonable to look at both cosmopolitan components and the fragmentation characterizing contemporary Italian philosophy as positive resources that it can employ for facing the challenge of globalization without endorsing intolerant forms of thinking.

Because of this transition of ‘internationalism’ from left to right, the notion of ‘resistance’ advocated by Negri becomes highly problematic. One of the effects that

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 118.

<sup>80</sup> Tom Nairn, “*Internationalism and the Second Coming*”, quoted by Pollock (2000), p.622.

globalization brought about is, in fact, an ambiguous construction of ‘antagonism’, which is sometimes unleashed in the name of ‘equality’ and some others in defense of ‘identity’. Defending equality, anti-globalization claims still target wealth disparities that leftist discourses typically deplore. At the same time, some of these claims also align with the extreme-right will to protect cultural and ethnic identities from the presumed strikes fired by the financial global elite. Because of this ambiguity, the term ‘resistance’ risks being deprived of its conceptual axis and converted into an undecidable tool. Such ambivalence would furthermore prove particularly distressing for the Italian political consciousness, which accomplished democratization at the end of World War II with the relevant support of an anti-fascist movement of ‘resistance’. A symptom of all this is the bizarre case of the *Northern League*, which formed in the early 1990s as an anti-fascist as well as anti-nationalist movement, and at the moment represents one of the main far right political parties sponsoring racism and xenophobia.

On a larger scale, this undecidable mechanism is partially facilitated by economic exploitation which is no longer exercised exclusively on the central area of the Fordist factory, but it is distributed on a plurality of different borderline positions – i.e. precarious workers, immigrants, stateless, etc. – leading the subject of antagonism to disperse into a plethora of marginal and scattered figures which lack social self-awareness. Negri’s association between ‘resistance’ and ‘difference’, revealing discernment of these dynamics, is arguably posited for dismissing chauvinistic conceptions of ‘antagonism’, which would deprive values of resistance of their progressive essence.

In view of these reflections, our concern here is to ask whether cosmo-political theory should rely on the nostalgia for a middle point belonging to the past, or rather on an idea of ‘resistance’ that aims at converting such a loss of centrality to its own advantage. In this second case, what we are searching for is a notion of resistance that dismisses aspects of opposition; namely, a “non-resisting resistance” that is not grounded on Negri’s reconstruction of the centre, but on the kynical ability to think and speak from the edges. Post-humanistic philosophies which carry out a deconstruction of Euro-centrism by replacing theoretical centers with a plethora of inner borders can be helpful for this purpose. Humanistic systems of thought, whether in the form of ideals of the Enlightenment, the Hegelian spirit, or the Communist utopia, had relied on the support provided by both a speculative center and a series of well defined external frontiers - i.e. nature-culture, animal-human, collectiveness-individual, etc. On the contrary, post-humanism associates the end of modernity with a shortfall of axis and with the insurgence of a plethora of inner margins that tear apart philosophical discourse. From the post-human perspective, philosophy should no longer be conceived of as the inquiry that looks at the peripheral line separating the subject of knowledge from the outer world. Rather, it becomes an exploration of the internal edges taking apart the numerous languages and modes of expression which, within the historical-cultural western milieu, engage, melt and occasionally collide with one another.

I have abundantly illustrated in the first chapter how the retrieval of kynical elements allowed Italian post-humanism to unfold along lines which are even more marginalized and de-centralized than the ones drawn by both German philosophy and French Theory. It is no accident that Italian anti-humanistic doctrines were largely influenced by

Massimo Cacciari's *Negative Thought*. This associates the birth of an *alternative modernity* to the emergence of multiple speculative centers vivisectioning philosophical discourse into a plethora of ontological and political inner margins. In the present work Cacciari's voice, speaking the language of *parrhesia*, represents the philosophical spirit that first animated Italian Cynicism during the past four decades. This is what will now be discussed over the next pages, which will clarify how the shift in Italian thought between the late 1970s and the 1980s can be justified through the transition connecting two kynical rhetorical tactics. The main purpose is to take into account such an evolution in order to evaluate how post-human epistemological viewpoints and language theories affect cosmopolitan political discourse.

## *Parrhesia*

### *Negativity and Mysticism: an Alternative Modernity?*

#### *1.*

The disregard of kynical components characterizing contemporary Italian philosophy has prevented most scholars from taking into account the *parrhesiatic* aspect introduced by Massimo Cacciari<sup>81</sup>, which is important for capturing the essence of his philosophical message.

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<sup>81</sup> As a fervent political activist, during the 1960's Massimo Cacciari joined the Italian working class in several protests and cooperated with Mario Tronti, Alberto Asor Rosa, and Toni Negri to the Marxian magazine *Classe operaia*. Because of political divergences interfering between the aforesaid affiliates, Cacciari subsequently enrolled

The *parrhesia*, denoting ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘frank and open discourse’, was a fundamental right of the citizen during the ancient age of the Greek poleis. At that time, it was considered one of the greatest political goods that Greek people were entitled with, which is why the exiled perceived the loss of it as a sorrowful deprivation. Democratic *parrhesia* was nonetheless looked at with a sense of suspiciousness by the fourth-century aristocracy, thinking of it as a dangerous weapon that was given to the masses. It is partly for this reason that it became even more important during the Hellenistic epoch, when political liberties were revoked by the Macedonian dynasties. It was at this time that the Cynics adopted it as a rhetorical tactic for questioning the political authority of the leaders and for denouncing social injustices and immoral practices.<sup>82</sup> Although kynical *parrhesia* displayed strong ethical connotations, Diogenes and his disciples often employed it with political intentions. For the Cynics it made no difference whether a certain speech was pronounced within the private or the public domain: in all cases, their conception of truth presupposed “the ethical imperative to act or speak out”<sup>83</sup>, even at the cost to jeopardize one’s own life. For these reasons, kynical *parrhesia* was frequently expressed in opposition with accepted norms by employing impolite tones which would often elicit tension and in some cases violence: “Truth is, then, the performance of self-

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in the Italian Communist Party and served as a member of parliament between 1976 and 1983, fulfilling duties which were apparently distant from his philosophical concerns. After the passing of Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer, Cacciari left the party but continued to be active for many years within the Italian left. Cacciari’s early texts such as *Krisis* (1976) and *Pensiero negativo e razionalizzazione* (1977) mainly focus on the contemporary ‘crisis of reason’, which presumably brought metaphysical rationality to dissolution, facilitating the emergence of *negative thought*. Far from signifying mere irrationalism, this type of thinking reveals all the inner contradictions that for centuries animated the European tradition.

<sup>82</sup> Kennedy (1999) p. 33.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

sufficiency or Cynic asceticism; this is the parrhesiatic challenge of telling and showing the truth of the self to an audience, regardless of how disruptive this process may be.”<sup>84</sup>

In *Geo-philosophy of Europe* (1994) Cacciari reveals the paramount importance of this topic for understanding both the essence and the evolution of European cultures. The purpose of this section on *Parrhesia* is first to highlight the parrhesiatic connotations that have characterized Cacciari’s philosophy starting from the late 1970s; and second, to evaluate the repercussions that they bring on our post-human cosmopolitan discourse. For these goals, I will analyze Cacciari’s ideas in relation to both the doctrine of Eurocommunism and the revolutionary atmosphere raised by the Italian movements of protest in 1977, when Cacciari’s philosophy changed shape.

Even though Cacciari emphasizes the relevance of the parrhesia in the mid 1990s, most of his reflections on “negative thinking”, which came to light at the end of the 1970s, exhibit kynical connotations. According to the dominant interpretation of contemporary Italian Thought<sup>85</sup>, after the publication of *Krisis: Essay on Negative Thought from Nietzsche to Wittgenstein* (1976) Cacciari’s thought developed very coherently, also influencing the subsequent evolution of Italian philosophy.<sup>86</sup> It is convenient to begin our discussion by taking this text into consideration.

The main objective that Cacciari pursues in *Krisis* is the identification of a post-ideological mode of thinking that allegedly has replaced the traditional forms of western

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> I am mostly referring to Giuseppe Cantarano’s *Immagini del nulla* (1998) which is considered a reliable account of contemporary Italian Thought. For my inquiry, I will also rely on Giovanni Catapano’s “Coincidentia Oppositorum: Appunti sul pensiero di Massimo Cacciari” (2003), offering valuable considerations on Cacciari’s philosophy.

<sup>86</sup> “That Cacciari’s text was central to the development of a number of subsequent tendencies in Italian philosophy, is attested by its influence on the development of ‘weak thought’...”, see Matteo Mandarini (2009), *Beyond Nihilism: Notes Towards a Critique of Left-Heideggerianism in Italian Philosophy of the 1970s*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009), pp. 56-57.



rationality. For Cacciari, a significant correlation links the epistemological instability that quantum mechanics brought to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxian debates regarding the problem of labor. Ernst Mach, on one hand, addressed the first dilemma by interpreting the laws of physics as an economic organization of human sensorial perceptions. *Neoclassical economics*<sup>87</sup>, on the other hand, aimed at finding a solution for Marx's transformation problem<sup>88</sup> by dismissing in toto the mismatch that surfaced in between the value of commodities and their prices in the competitive market. Both solutions ultimately describe social change as a linear and regular process that dismisses all potential contradictions. None of them, however, succeeded. First, Mach did not elaborate a satisfactory account of the clash opposing Newton's Classical Mechanics to Einstein's General Relativity. Second, neither Bohm-Bawerk's neoclassical critique nor revisionist Austro-Marxism were able to explain the monopolistic and protectionist transformation of the economy which occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>89</sup> For these reasons, Cacciari is after a western philosophical path that portrays 'crisis' and 'conflict' as constitutive of the social-historical process. Such a conceptual instrument is what Cacciari baptizes as "negative thought".

There is no need to remind the reader of the antecedents, following Hegel and Marx, who insisted more than others on "negativity" as the most convenient tool to employ for critical purposes. It is nonetheless important to differentiate Cacciari's discourse from the philosophical analysis developed by the exponents of the Frankfurt School. While they all converge on the effort to elaborate a mode of thinking that dismisses unitary and

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<sup>87</sup> An approach to economic theory that opposes Marxism and explains the correlation between goods, outputs and income distributions in terms of supply and demand.

<sup>88</sup> In Marxian theory, this is a problem concerning how the original "values" of commodities transform into the "competitive prices" of the market.

<sup>89</sup> See Catapano (2003), p.480.

synthetic dynamics, Adorno and Marcuse still inscribed their theories within the sphere of dialectics, which Cacciari strives to overcome in toto. The legacy that Cacciari makes appeal to is, in fact, a series of cynical thinkers who from different perspectives carried out an aggressive attack on all forms of Hegelianism.

Interestingly, the initial appearance of this type of “negativity” surfaced through Schopenhauer, whose *asceticism* represents the first evident crisis that western reason suffered with respect to its transcendental claims. Moving from a revision of the Kantian ‘I think’ to a demolition of the Hegelian spirit, Schopenhauer deprived rationality of a large part of its transcendental power, also anticipating the formalization of knowledge that was carried out in following times by Neo-positivists. This ascetical detachment from the reality was then overturned by Nietzsche<sup>90</sup>, dismissing Schopenhauer’s pessimism and conceiving of knowledge as a coercive manipulation of the reality. It finally culminated in the *mysticism* of the ‘second Wittgenstein’, who described language not as a mirror of the outside world but as a series of communicative games that repeatedly oppose, collide and crash into one another. From Schopenhauer to Wittgenstein, western rationality has undergone a negative process that deprived it of its transcendental essences, and which set up the foundations for the dawning of an antagonistic type of *mysticism*.

The true nature of Cacciari’s *mysticism* has been abundantly debated. Some scholars interpret it as a religious conversion, some others as the symptom of an ideologically

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<sup>90</sup> For future reference, it is important to clarify that the way in which Italian thinkers engage with Nietzsche’s philosophy is in all circumstances influenced by the critical edition provided at the end of the 1960’s by Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari. These authors mostly aimed at invalidating the “Nazi, anti-Semitic, antidemocratic depiction of Nietzsche propagated by his sister at the beginning of the century”, see Vattimo (2006), p. 191.

over-determined conception of political struggle<sup>91</sup>. Giuseppe Cantarano is accurate when he categorizes the first hypothesis as unsustainable;<sup>92</sup> after all, Cacciari tells us explicitly that his conception of the ‘mystical’ does not have anything to do with a sense of transcendence:

“Il ‘mistico’ non è l’esperienza del trascendente – *ma l’opposto*. E neppure il ‘mistico’ è la domanda su *come* è il mondo. Il ‘mistico’ è appunto l’esperienza del mondo come *tutto limitato*. Il ‘mistico’ ha origine dal *fatto che il mondo è*.”<sup>93</sup>

(“The mystical is not the experience of transcendence – but the opposite. Nor is the mystical the question regarding how the world is. The mystical is precisely the experience of the world as a limited whole. The mystical originates from the fact that the world is.”)

Because of this substantial disregard of transcendence, Cacciari dismisses religious messages and also takes distance from Marcuse’s conception of negativity, whose main purpose was to offer ontological alternatives to the *one-dimensional* thought spreading within capitalistic society. This observation might be helpful for evaluating the second hypothesis, pertaining aspects of over-determination, which Cantarano does not address. In what sense is the mystical “the experience of the whole limited”? What does Cacciari’s *mysticism* stand for? The thesis defended here is that the mystical that Cacciari theorizes has a kynical essence, signifying the ‘exiled’ language of the *parrhesia*. More specifically, Cacciari’s thought: 1) cannot be considered as fully post-modern: the plethora of parrhesiatic languages posited by Cacciari suggests an “alternative” type of modernity which does not reject completely the values of the Enlightenment nor western metaphysics in general; 2) is inscribable within a parrhesiatic scenario that exceeded the

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<sup>91</sup> See Mandarinini (2009), *Beyond Nihilism: Notes Towards a Critique of Left-Heideggerianism in Italian Philosophy of the 1970s*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009) p. 69.

<sup>92</sup> “...ma non c’è nulla di più lontano del mistico dal religioso nel pensiero di Cacciari.” Cantarano (1998), p. 328.

<sup>93</sup> Cacciari (1976) p. 94, English Translation mine.

over-determined sphere of Euro-communism, and which involved more radical political positions as well. Cacciari's parrhesia identifies a pluralistic conception of antagonism that the 1977 movement of protest partly implemented 'from below'; 3) Cacciari's parrhesia is utilized for highlighting the internal discrepancies that characterize the western cultural world, which presumably will be able to thrive only by accepting its inner conflicting diversity. This is the main presupposition for what we could identify as a 'multiculturalism of friction', which will be discussed exhaustively at the end of this section.

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Within the fragment mentioned above, the reader will find more than one reason for approving a kynical reading of *Krisis*. First of all, once transcendent significances of the 'mystical' have been ruled out, the expression 'whole limited' most likely indicates a condition of proximity to the margins. It is what Cacciari confirms a few lines later: "È l'esperienza complessiva del *limite così tracciato* che da origine al mistico...Lì dove si trascende il limite, lì non vi è mistico."<sup>94</sup> ("It is the comprehensive experience of an *outlined limit* that gives birth to the mystical...Wherever one transcends the limit, there is no mystical." (Italics mine) In view of these words, it is reasonable to think of Cacciari's *mysticism* as a marginalized conscience that perceives the world from the borders, and to converge with Mandarini's view depicting this type of negativity as a "*marginal position*

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. pp. 94-95.

that is the very condition of immanence but which renders the mystical worldly - and the worldly mystical.”<sup>95</sup> (italics mine)

Moreover, the discharge of the question “how the world is” leads us to disregard the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and to take into account the theories expressed in the *Philosophical Investigations*. From this perspective, the “mystical” cannot symbolize the outer frontier separating ‘subject’ and ‘world’ and circumscribing human reason. It rather becomes the experience of the inner borders segmenting knowledge into a diversity of language-games<sup>96</sup>. The ‘limits’ that Cacciari describes symbolize the lines partitioning numerous speech contests which, in turn, give birth to a wide “family” of different forms of knowledge:

“Se i giochi avessero un’ ‘Idea’ comune, non potrebbero più chiamarsi giochi: essi sarebbero di nuovo riducibili a essenze, rappresenterebbero deduzioni-dimostrazioni di verità assolute. L’*operari* corretto è qui semplicemente *vedere se si dà* qualche tratto in comune tra i *vari* giochi. Si scopre, allora, che i giochi formano una famiglia: si *vedono* somiglianze, parentele, affinità soltanto.”<sup>97</sup>

(If games shared a common “Idea”, they could no longer be defined as games: they would be once again ascribable to essences and would represent deductions-demonstrations of absolute truths. The correct *operari* is here to simply ponder whether different games exhibit some common traits. One discovers, then, that games form a family: *one sees* only similarities, relations, affinities.”)

Such a pluralism of expressive forms does not resolve into mere irrational tones. As opposed to authors such as Apel, Lyotard, and Vattimo, explicitly characterizing their philosophical discourses as *post-modern*, Cacciari does not conceive of the twilight of

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<sup>95</sup> Mandarini (2009), p. 59.

<sup>96</sup> Mandarini’s account is again helpful here: “Cacciari refuses to identify the mystical experience in the early Wittgenstein, for instance, with that of transcendence, on the ground that mysticism is – rather – the experience of (this side of) the limit... Instead, the mystical stems from negative thought’s excision of all reference to a ‘real world’ transcending the limits of language and that, thereby, enables a multiplicity of technics to internalize those very limits, autonomising themselves in a variety of specific ‘language’ games”, Ibid. pp. 59-60.

<sup>97</sup> Cacciari (1976), p.80.

humanistic ideologies as an inexorable fading of western reason. Neither Schopenhauer's *asceticism*, nor Nietzsche's *will to power* or Wittgenstein's *mysticism*, in fact, can be described in mere irrational terms:

“Il Wille zur Macht nietzscheano non solo non ha nulla di ‘irrazionalismo vitalistico’ – non solo non intende recuperare sul piano meramente soggettivo la crisi dei fondamenti scientifici – ma si pone come interpretazione e risoluzione di questa crisi.”<sup>98</sup>

(“Not only does the Nietzschean Wille zur Macht not entail any ‘vitalistic irrationalism’ – not only does it not aim at ‘recovering’ on the merely subjective plane the crisis of scientific foundations – but it sets itself up as interpretation and resolution of this crisis.”)

Cacciari's mystical does not dismantle truth per se; rather, it replaces a unitary conception of “veracity” with a proliferation of different modes of thinking which are all provided with the same accountability. Far from transcending the dimension of reason, *Krisis Thought* unveils all the contradictions that western knowledge conceals, thus bringing a plethora of verbal tensions to the surface of the philosophical and the social conscience. Through such a multiplication of discursive centers and inner margins, Cacciari identifies a negative area which coincides neither with the space of universal reason nor with the domain of the irrational and that, consequently, is perched between the great narratives of modernity and post-modern discourses. Following the fall of humanism, Italian philosophical thought is pushed more and more toward this third dimension: an *alternative* reality, wherein reasonable argumentations can still be elaborated, but truth can be spoken exclusively from ‘exile’.

From this perspective, Cacciari's parrhesiatic conception of the “negative” retrieves part of the speculative themes that had inspired his predecessors of the Frankfurt School.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p.64.

It is sufficient to think of how significantly the condition of ‘exile’ experienced by Adorno, who was forced to leave Germany for several years when the Nazis came to power, influenced both his critique of Hegel’s “positivity” and his *Negative Dialectics*: “I cannot resist telling you that my eyes were opened to the dubious nature of this concept of positivity only in emigration, where people found themselves under pressure from the society around them and had to adapt to very extreme circumstances.”<sup>99</sup> Although Cacciari would hardly welcome Adorno’s catastrophic account of the Enlightenment, *Krisis Thought* possibly brought about in the Italian cultural milieu the same instability that Adorno’s negativity had awakened within the domain of German theory. Following *Krisis*, Italian philosophy achieves for the first time a cosmo-political condition of statelessness.

Considering that Cacciari, unlike Adorno, was never forced to abandon his country, such a strong sense of homelessness needs to be explained through the social-historical factors triggering the resurgence of Cynicism in Italy which have been examined within the first chapter. Furthermore, it was partly due to these phenomena that around the time *Krisis Thought* was developed, the 1977 movement of protest carried out the last vigorous attack on governmental institutions. One should not be surprised if, in such a socially unstable climate, philosophical reflection no longer felt at home.

It could be argued that the margins identified by Cacciari’s conception of the mystical, which does not follow strictly from Marxian postulates, is the superior border that separates middle-class forms of expression from low-class literary codes. In so doing, this mysticism would denote the endorsement of a bourgeois type of antagonism

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<sup>99</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, quoted by Samir Gandesha (2012), *Homeless Philosophy: The Exile of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Exile in Arendt and Adorno*, in Rensmann & Gandesha (2012), p.250.

that disbelieves the workers' revolutionary potential. This is essentially the interpretation provided by Matteo Mandarini. Relying on the intense debate that Antonio Negri established with Cacciari at the end of the 1970s, Mandarini posits a close association between *Krisis* and the Euro-communistic strategy adopted by the PCI at that time<sup>100</sup>. According to him, Cacciari's mysticism presumably conceals an aristocratic notion of "revolution from above" which Negri condemned on all levels. It was first implemented within the doctrine of the *Historic Compromise*, leading the Italian Communist Party to lose the sympathy of the subaltern classes. Subsequently, it turned into a conception of the political which agreed "to the apologetic subordination to existing states of affairs or – at best – to a fetishistic over-determination from above, i.e. to ideology and political opportunism."<sup>101</sup>

This interpretation, which is acceptable if grounded exclusively on Cacciari's cooperation with the Communist Party, should be nonetheless rectified according to the idea of irresolvable conflict that Cacciari's negativity embodies. Enrico Berlinguer's doctrine of the "compromise", in fact, faithfully counted on ideological superimpositions crossing Marxism and Christian doctrines<sup>102</sup> which Cacciari's theory does not envision. The coexistence of the opposites that Cacciari posits in *Krisis* does not presuppose ontological or ethical intersections but absolute incompatibility among different

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<sup>100</sup> Euro-communism was the theoretical model adopted at the end of the 1970s by the Spanish, French, and Italian Communist Parties, aiming to reform Leninism so as to make it more suitable for the western European environments. Moving from Gramscian postulates, Euro-communism isolates the political from the sub-structural, locates within the Party the main responsibility to carry out social change, and conceives of parliamentary reforms as mandatory steps that the revolutionary process undergoes. The Negri-Cacciari alliance dissolved at the end of the 1970s, when the former believed that political struggle had to be accomplished through extra-parliamentary tactics, while the latter decided to endorse the reformatory project pursued by the PCI.

<sup>101</sup> Mandarini (2009), in Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p. 70.

<sup>102</sup> See Ginsborg (1989) pp.478-482.



discursive positions, which are meant to experience a constant state of reciprocal hostility:

“E tutto questo: senza nessuna conciliazione...Potere non è sintesi – se fosse sintesi, non vi sarebbe più bisogno di un potere...C’è un conflitto infinito – come c’è un divenire: un eterno ritorno.”<sup>103</sup>

(“And all this: without any conciliation...Power is not synthesis – if it were synthesis, power would no longer be needed...There is an infinite conflict – as there is a becoming: an eternal return.”)

Based on these observations, Cacciari’s *negativity* appears to be more reluctant to the idea of a negotiation than any reformist Marxian strategy. This was partly acknowledged in the early 1980s by Negri, characterizing *Krisis* as a “wonderful attempt to positively recuperate the efficacy of negative thought”<sup>104</sup>. Far from embodying the opportunistic demeanor that Negri detected, Cacciari’s kynical mysticism represents the attempt to preclude antagonistic ideas from being domesticated by the Christian Democratic hegemony. What I would like to highlight is Cacciari’s effort to elaborate a post-dialectical form of antagonism that encompasses a plurality of different struggles. As Restaino rightly observes, this strategy utilizes the Marxian inheritance within a theoretical context that exceeds the domain of traditional Marxism<sup>105</sup>. Cacciari’s mysticism, symbolizing the frontier wherein a discord between various linguistic positions occurs, presupposes the belief that political struggle could no longer be described in bipolar terms. For this reason, Cacciari’s over-determined cynicism needs to be explained as a counterpart of the cynicism “from below” that was personified, during those years, by the numerous extra-parliamentary groups still active in Italy.

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<sup>103</sup> Cacciari (1976), p.69.

<sup>104</sup> Mandarinini (2009), in Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p. 68.

<sup>105</sup> See Catapano (2003) p.477.

## *Cynicism and Under-determination*

### *I.*

The conflation of “cynical conventionalism” and “hypocritical postulation of the mystical”<sup>106</sup> that Negri detected in Cacciari’s thought at the end of the 1970s should be ascribed, in more positive terms, to the wider kynical atmosphere that characterized those years. A kynical spirit, indeed, animated the numerous extra-parliamentary groups which at that time were still extremely lively in Italy and which furthermore Negri himself endorsed.

Towards the end of the 1970s the leader of *Autonomia Operaia* was still inscribing most of his philosophical reflections within the scope of traditional Marxism. Meanwhile, the Italian social milieu was giving birth to forms of dissent which proclaimed autonomy not only from the entire party system and from the rebellion that had occurred a decade before but, in many circumstances from the actual Marxian ideology. The 1977 movement<sup>107</sup>, in particular, was strongly critical and desecrating with respect to “stereotipi ideologici, modelli, ritualità e miti della tradizione terzinternazionalista”<sup>108</sup> (ideological stereotypes, models, rituals and myths of the Third-internationalist tradition”) and had been the flags of the 1968-69 protest. The struggle carried out by the ‘77 activists was only in part identifiable through centralized Marxian categories such as

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<sup>106</sup> Mandarinini (2009), in Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p. 68.

<sup>107</sup> A spontaneous protest mostly involving extra-parliamentary leftist groups which dismissed political dialogue with both the party-system and the labor unions. Historians usually identify within the movement two main branches: the so called ‘creative’ one, on one hand, was ironic, sympathetic to feminist perspectives and inclined to generate alternative societal structures; the militaristic faction, on the other hand, did not dismiss violence as a revolutionary strategy. Mostly because of the “alternative” aspects qualifying the protest and also due to the recurrent and illegitimate association between the 1977 rebels and 1970s terrorism, the movement was in some circumstances repressed with unjustified aggression by the governmental institutions, and then largely removed from the Italian national consciousness.

<sup>108</sup> Balestrini & Moroni (1988) p. 504, English translation mine.

“working-class” or “proletariat”, which had been the main conceptual points of reference nine years earlier. The new rebellion unfolded along marginal borders that materialized within Italian society, which was striving to exit a phase of economic recession and to be accepted within the advanced capitalistic world. Origins of the new antagonistic subject were, in fact, the borderline areas that Asor Rosa named as “second society”, denoting all the people who were in some ways excluded from the *mechanism of production*: young unoccupied individuals, the youth of the urban peripheries, women, drug addicts, as well as ostracized of all kinds<sup>109</sup>. In view of this social derivation, the attack that the activists accomplished with respect to the nation-state unburied not only the injustices and the inequalities that were perpetrated within the Italian society, but also the traumatic consequences that the post-industrial era was bringing to European communities. These repercussions were furthermore particularly distressing in Italy, wherein de-industrialization processes proved unable to fully relocate the labor shed from manufacturing within an efficient tertiary sector<sup>110</sup>, thus generating an overabundance of borderline social conditions.

Examining in detail the historical evolution of the 1977 movement, which took shape in Rome and faded away in Bologna at the end of the year, would be certainly helpful but here would exceed the scope of our theoretical purpose. What needs to be shown is rather the fair degree of *parrhesiatic mysticism* that was evoked by these particular forms of dissent. The importance of this analysis rests in the fact that part of the kynical cosmopolitan essence embodied by the movement, which was strangled without

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid. Chapter 10.

<sup>110</sup> Ginsborg (2001) p. 13.

compromises by governmental institutions and then substantially removed from national conscience, was most likely preserved within the subsequent Italian philosophy.

First, Cacciari's *negativity* reappears in the 1977 antagonistic demeanor. This replaced the aforementioned "ideological centrality" with the effort to acquire proximity to social margins, also pursuing a kynical self-exclusion. A key element is the way in which the movement engaged with the theme of 'work'. In 1968 the Marxian principle of the "re-appropriation" of work had been adopted as an ideological value by the protest. Differently, in 1977 the considerable instability of the new job market, generating forms of labor that were temporary and precarious, led the rebels to express their disapproval by emphasizing proudly their condition of labor "dispossession". The ideal of the "refusal to work", which had never truly been put into practice a decade earlier, became a moral bulwark for the new activists. In light of this ideal, they were able to portray their job as a secondary obligation, while depicting their ordinary life in terms of nomadism, migration, and statelessness. Cosmo-political values were then utilized by the protesters as kynical tools of dissent. The importance that even Negri placed on the "refusal to work" for replacing "productivity" with "creativity", for providing the proletariat with autonomy and self-valorization, ultimately sabotaging the alliance between capitalism and state apparatuses, reveals the extremely kynical atmosphere within which these ideas were elaborated: "This solitude of mine is creative, and this separateness of mine is the only real collectivity that I know."<sup>111</sup> It is instantaneous to recognize in these words the need for isolation that our discourse on "kynical antagonism" posited within the first chapter. Although Negri would probably reject such an interpretation, some of the ideas that he

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<sup>111</sup> Negri (2005) p. 259.

developed around that time counterbalanced ‘from below’ Cacciari’s over-determined mysticism.

And nonetheless, Cacciari’s marginalization ‘from above’ presupposed a parrhesiatic collision among opposing language-games, while Negri expressed in several occasions doubts with regard to a protest that was encompassing an under-determined plurality of voices. Partly due to the ideological lack of center that was previously described, the new protest was much more segmented and diversified than the one that had taken place in 1968. In 1977 the rebelliousness unfolded through a diversity of accents which were often reciprocally conflicting and contradictory. According to the main sociological accounts, an essential incompatibility distinguished the “spontaneous” and “creative” wing of the movement from the militaristic one. The former was ironic, irreverent and inclined to elaborate alternative social structures rather than opposing the existing ones; the latter still relied on orthodox interpretations of Marxism and, in many cases, looked at violence as the only plausible antidote for accomplishing social change. A plethora of discursive divergences could be furthermore identified within each insurrectionist community. The adoption of avant-guard forms of expression and dissociated languages was one of the reasons why the revolutionary agenda was often restructured from week to week and, in some occasions, “le rivendicazioni del lunedì” were “diverse da quelle del martedì”<sup>112</sup> (Monday’s claims were different from Tuesday’s). Because of such internal inconsistency, converting anti-humanistic metaphors - the divided ‘I’, the dissociated subject, the statelessness syndrome, the loss of identity, etc. - into a real psychosocial condition,<sup>113</sup> the new antagonistic subject could be neither comprehended nor defined by

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<sup>112</sup> Balestrini & Moroni (1988) p.609.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p.612.

any unitary type of narrative. Negri, being in charge of one of the militaristic cells, often expressed reservations regarding such an under-determined variety of tones: “The divergence has, as I stated earlier, invested strategic and tactical projects that tend to diverge. Is there a reason that this divergence should exist? In my opinion, it risks proving fatal for the entire movement.”<sup>114</sup>

Was it because of his centralistic demeanor that Negri was looked at with skepticism in some areas of the movement? Was it due to Negri’s disregard for the kynical factors characterizing that historical phase that he was not fully able to represent the protest? It is reasonable to believe so. And paradoxically, Cacciari’s conjectures appear to depict the spirit of those years, at least in some respects, more faithfully than Negri’s did. It is not by coincidence that a few scholars around that time converged with such an intuition:

“In modo ancora più esplicito, dietro queste pagine dell’autore, più che l’organizzazione marx-leninista dei lavoratori, ci pare di scorgere le linee operative di alcune frange delle attuali autonomie giovanili, cioè di quei giovanetti votati alla droga e alla galera che in questi mesi hanno insanguinato troppe piazza italiane, illudendosi così di accendere il moto liberatorio della rivoluzione. Sembra logico, infatti, che quando il linguaggio non ha più un significato oltre quello convenzionale della matematica e la vita non è che un rischio e una sete di potere in una insanabile conflittualità tragica, l’uomo non sia più un essere razionale e personale soggetto di inviolabili diritti e doveri, bensì un «brutum bestiale», e la società un’arena di violenza e di rapina tra i più forti e i più scaltri.”<sup>115</sup>

(“Even more explicitly, behind these pages of the author (Cacciari) we seem to detect, rather than a Marxian-Leninist organization of the workers, the operative lines of some branches of the current youthful autonomies, meaning those kids oriented towards drugs and jail who, during these past months, have spilled blood around too many Italian squares, while believing to activate, in so doing, the liberating engine of the revolution. It seems logical, in fact, that when language no longer has a meaning, except for the conventional one of mathematics, and life is nothing but a risk and a thirst for power within an unsolvable tragic conflict, man is no longer a rational being nor a personal subject provided with inviolable rights

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<sup>114</sup> Negri (2005) p. 234.

<sup>115</sup> Poppi (1993), p. 155, English translation mine.

and duties, but is a ‘bestial brutum’, and society is an arena of violence and robbery among the strongest and most clever ones.”)

It is mandatory to take distance from the excessively destructive tones characterizing this fragment, which the author partly rectifies at the end of the article and which certainly represent neither the essence of Cacciari’s philosophy nor the authentic spirit that brought to life the 1977 movement. And nonetheless, the association that this passage establishes between Krisis and the protest is not completely devoid of meaning. At the same time, if the commentator had differentiated over-determination from under-determination, he would have likely dismissed the concurrence between Cacciari’s text and those social phenomena, while also exposing their specular correspondence. Far from coinciding geometrically with the irrational and incongruent claims advanced by the movement, Cacciari’s Negative Thought represented nonetheless the effort to understand them and provide them with some sort of rational meaning. Predictably, a similar correlation can be partly detected between Krisis and the literature that the 1977 protest expressed. Let us examine Enrico Palandri<sup>116</sup>’s *Boccalone* (Big Mouth, 1977), a cult text considered to be representative of the movement, to see if it helps us acquire a better understanding of both Cacciari’s *parrhesia* and the essence of that historical moment.

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<sup>116</sup> Enrico Palandri is an Italian writer and translator. Having obtained a degree in dramaturgy from the University of Bologna, where he studied, among others, under Umberto Eco’s supervision, in 1977 he collaborated with Radio Alice in the editing of a book titled *Fatti Nostri*. His first novel, *Boccalone*, was also written during that period, and then published several times by Fachinelli, Feltrinelli and Bompiani. In 1980 Palandri moved to London, where he worked as a language instructor and journalist, ultimately obtaining a position as a Professor of Modern European Literature at the University College. His literary works, including *Le pietre e il sale* (1986), *Le colpevoli ambiguità di Herbert Markus* (1997), and *I fratelli minori* (2010), have been translated in different languages and acknowledged numerous awards.

2.

As partly suggested by the title, referring to the protagonist's loquacious personality, the novel conveys parrhesiatic messages.

Adopting a kynical type of literary language, Palandri draws the skeleton of an innovative antagonistic discourse. Neither the narrative structure nor the communicative expressions employed by the characters reveal dialectical purposes. This is evident because of several reasons. First, although the plot alludes to some of the main political events that occurred in 1977 - i.e. the explosion of the protest in Bologna during the spring, the students' attempt to transform daily city life, the repression carried out by governmental tanks, the killing of a terrorist accomplished by the police in Rome - at the same time it does not follow a linear sequence of episodes. Disregarding the triadic conception of temporality that Marxian theories generally presuppose, the story unfolds as an irregular and divergent flow of existential reflections. Palandri sporadically hints at the surrounding political atmosphere but, quite strangely, mostly focuses on the romantic relationship that the protagonist has with a woman. At first reading such an emphasis on eroticism might appear as a symptom of social disengagement; in reality, it allows the author to express instinctive and unfiltered parrhesiatic feelings, which political narratives generally dismiss. Through the correlation between politics and love, which is generally overlooked, Palandri moves the reader's attention toward the margins of ordinary political discourses, thus faithfully representing the voices expressed by the outsiders of the movement.

Circling the theme of love, the narrative weaves the portrait of a rebellious demeanor which differs considerably from the one that had inspired the '68 revolution. The clash



between erotic desires and working-routine, that Boccalone laments in several occasions, symbolizes not only a refusal of the bourgeois careerist values, but also a dismissal of the '68 ideal of the "re-appropriation of work":

“la mia macchina dei desideri non è sincronizzata con la macchina del lavoro...inventerò me stesso... nel linguaggio che ancora ci appartiene, che non è quello dello scambio, il desiderio non conosce scambio ma solo il furto o il dono”<sup>117</sup>

(“my machine of desires is not synchronized with the machine of work...I will create myself...in the language that still belongs to us, which is not a language of exchange, desire does not know exchange, but only theft or gift...”)

Wearing the metaphorical masks of the thief and the vagabond<sup>118</sup>, Boccalone celebrates the revolutionary principle of the “refusal to work”, also pursuing Diogenes’ self-exclusion from the social system. And nonetheless, despite Negri’s inflexible condemnation of “Nietzsche who went to Parliament”<sup>119</sup>, Palandri makes appeal to *Zarathustra* at the beginning of the story. Boccalone’s erotic attitude is mainly exemplified by the Nietzschean vision of “overflowing” (traboccamento), personifying a political demeanor that is never constrained within the scope of firm ideological theories, but rather overcomes all limitations:

“il traboccamento è invece quando le zone in cui vi eravate riconosciuti si svuotano completamente, le categorie svaniscono come l’etere, in cui vi accorgete parlando di poter affermate le cose e il loro contrario ed anche altro che non c’entra ffatto, che tutto ha ugualmente sense, il che vale a dire più o meno che non ne ha nessuno.”<sup>120</sup>

(“Overflowing happens when the zones with which you had identified become completely empty, categories disappear like ether, in which you realize, while speaking, that you can affirm things and their opposites, and even others that are

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<sup>117</sup> Palandri (2002), p.40, English translation mine.

<sup>118</sup> “...mi piace ancor meno lavorare, se mai dovrò scegliere un lavoro, farò l’accattone...”, Ibid. p. 70.

<sup>119</sup> The title of a text wherein Negri criticized vigorously Cacciari’s philosophy and political choices.

<sup>120</sup> Palandri (2002) pp.11-12.

not related to them at all, and it all makes sense anyways, which more or less means it makes no sense at all.”)

As opposed to the rigid concepts endorsed by traditional leftist political groups and partly retrieved by Negri, Boccalone unleashes chaotic flowing words which are disorderly and scattered, following a plethora of different directions. As in Cacciari’s *Krisis*, a conception of language endorsing Nietzschean-Wittgensteinian themes defends the irreducibility of the *negative* vis-à-vis Marxian concepts and, at once, proclaims the rising of an innovative strategy of dissent:

“non riuscire ad essere soggetti della propria esistenza porta spesso a sentirsi oggetti di un sistema più ampio, totale: dio, il marxismo, tutte le teologie, di questo mondo e anche dell’altro...”<sup>121</sup>

(“Being unable to be subjects of one’s own existence often leads one to feel like an object of a larger, total system: God, Marxism, all theologies, of this world and the other...”)

Boccalone’s rebellion discloses itself through short-term, impulsive and incongruous sentences, animating a narrative that discharges repeatedly its center and seeks proximity with the outer margins of human communication. Such a verbal antagonism unfolds with the support of several parrhesiatic moves breaking the rules of Italian codified language and melt colloquial expressions, impolite phrases and also foreign words – “quantorompi, maddaj, mavalà, affanculo marco!”<sup>122</sup>, “como pasa, muchacha? bien chéri, estò como un caco benigna!”<sup>123</sup>. Palandri’s main purpose is certainly the creation of a literary style that undermines professional conceptions of writing practices. The situationist lesson that was dear to the ’77 protesters, promoting the adoption of artistic languages that could never

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p.61.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. pp.81-82.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

be retrieved by bourgeois social groups, surfaces within Boccalone's multicolored speeches, which lend themselves to be interpreted according to a plethora of divergent readings. Owing to this under-determined essence, Palandri's narrative repeals all types of comprehensive labels and prevents itself from being potentially turned into a commercial product. In a society which has progressively become a "supermercato delle parole"<sup>124</sup> (supermarket of words) wherein every speech materializes as a commodity only an extremely elastic literary discourse is able to defeat the detrimental logic of profit. It is probably why, in the initial acknowledgments, Palandri clarifies that "questo non è un romanzo e che io non sono uno scrittore"<sup>125</sup> ("this is not a novel and that I am not a writer").

Far from delivering pessimistic messages, Boccalone's "krisis" of identity - "I am no longer who I used to be, I change repeatedly my face, I don't know who I am anymore..."<sup>126</sup> - reflects 'from below' Cacciari's negativity, thus positing a multi-centered type of antagonism. A lack of self-identification is in fact utilized by Palandri for sabotaging consumerist processes, which thrive by selling identities as pathological attachments to material objects. Boccalone's confessions provide us with a metaphorical representation for some of the concerns that were expressed in the first chapter with regard to neo-humanistic theories. As opposed to Nussbaum's 'capability approach', characterizing liberty through categories such as property, ownership and species-belonging, Boccalone's homelessness embodies a post-human subjectivity that pursues emancipation by dismissing every potential desire for self-classification and, in this way, counters effectively all forms of commodification. Palandri's *dispossession* of wealth

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p.43.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. Acknowledgments.

<sup>126</sup> "...non sono più lo stesso di una volta, cambio continuamente faccia, non so più chi sono..."Ibid. p.50.

epitomizes a spiritual disposition which deprives itself of all rigid definitions in order to successfully escape marketing dynamics: “Ho scritto solo su me stesso (anche se la differenza tra me e gli altri, l’identità, non so bene cosa sia e non me ne frega più un granché)”<sup>127</sup> (“I have only written about myself, even though I don’t know what the difference between me and the others, the identity, is and I don’t care much about it...”)

As some have rightly argued, Palandri’s narrative ultimately exemplifies a transversal political struggle that disregards social and national barriers, and also has the capacity to alleviate the excessive sectorialization of the collective which is enabled within contemporary western systems.<sup>128</sup> Cacciari’s ‘exiled’ verbal games find their countercultural alter-ego within Boccalone’s stateless condition, also mirroring the erratic pursuits the protagonist performs across both metropolitan dimensions and national borders. The way in which the narrative manages to deconstruct city areas by offering “a liquid and metamorphic representation of the urban space”<sup>129</sup> - in Binetti’s words - reverberates within the transnational journeys through France, Spain, and Turkey that are recounted in the novel. These casual travels initiate the protagonist to a community of wanderers whose desire to evade urban and national control is exemplary of a revolutionary demeanor which converts cosmopolitan ideas into values of resistance. This resistance is devoid of dogmatic content because it is “not influenced, and therefore not limited, by the accomplishment of a programmed purpose”.<sup>130</sup>

Despite Boccalone’s linguistic leaps, the ironic subtitle “a true story full of lies” reveals that this novel is not incompatible with values of truth. Cacciari’s negative

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p.140.

<sup>128</sup> See Righi (2011) p.131.

<sup>129</sup> “una rappresentazione liquida e metamorfica dello spazio urbano”, Binetti (2008) p. 68.

<sup>130</sup> “una potenzialità creativa e rivoluzionaria non condizionata, e per questo non limitata, dal raggiungimento di una finalità programmata” Ibid. p.69.

epistemology is partly preserved in Palandri's text, which does not dismiss completely the possibility for language to adhere to the facts. The truth that is spoken by the protagonist, however, does not exhibit transcendental connotations; rather, it uncovers Boccalone's daily experiences and under-determined perceptions, proving often contradictory and paradoxical. Boccalone speaks the "truth" in the sense that he speaks his own life, without filters or reservations.<sup>131</sup> Spoken life and spoken truth conflate in the experience of the *parrhesia* as it used to be conceived of by the Greek Cynics; namely, as 'true life'. In place of abstract notions of truth, which are predominant in contemporary scientific theories and which Cacciari partially deconstructs in *Krisis*, Boccalone's speeches portray truth kynically. Namely, as a genuine and brave self-exposure which the *parrhesiast* unleashes even at the risk of provoking embarrassment, discomfort, or conflict.

What does the love for a woman have to do with all this? What role does Anna play in the economy of the novel? The purely passionate and unstable relationship that the protagonist has with Anna certainly reverberate within Boccalone's purposeless voyages and the political attacks on the traditional institution of the "family" expressed by the '77 movement. Nevertheless, Anna is a very problematic character. She is described as an extremely sensual creature, but in most circumstances she is revealed as an ethereal shadow. The physical attractiveness and fiery attitude which Palandri ascribes to her collide with her translucent, almost intangible character. Anna's impulsive personality elicits most of Boccalone's existential and political considerations and empowers his *parrhesiatic* demeanor. And nonetheless, Anna is never given the chance to speak,

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<sup>131</sup> "Sono un chiacchierone, mi è difficile non parlare delle cose che ho in testa; la bocca è attaccata direttamente al cervello e amplifica i pensieri, anzi è un tutt'uno col cervello." Palandri (2002), p. 23.

remaining in the background of the entire narrative. Does Cacciari's mysticism reappear in Anna? Is Anna the experience of the edge, the sense of the limit, the entity that renders "the mystical worldly - and the worldly mystical" that was previously discussed? It is reasonable to believe so. Anna accompanies relentlessly the sayable but differs from it; Bocalone is inseparable from her but, at the same time, he can neither comprehend nor overcome her eccentricity. Their romance is just as frustrating as the language-mysticism relation that Cacciari posits in *Krisis*, because Bocalone's verbal expressions presuppose in all cases a voiceless presence. This haunting specter is Anna, the closeness to the margins, immanent and spiritual at once.

*Multiculturalism, Self-Assertion, Self-Expression.*

Let us pause for a moment and reflect. What do all these historical, sociological and literary considerations tell us about Cacciari's negative thought? It will become more evident once we have briefly summarized what we have discovered thus far.

According to *Krisis*, the progressive collapse of humanistic ideologies presumably gave birth to a negative thinking disclosing itself as a perpetual conflict. This type of negativity revealed itself first through Schopenhauer's *asceticism*, and finally in the *mysticism* of the 'second Wittgenstein', conceiving of language not as a mirror of the world but as a series of verbal games opposing one another. Nonetheless, Cacciari's antagonistic mysticism can be described neither as an endorsement of religious tones, nor entirely as the "revolution from above" that was theorized by the Eurocommunitic

doctrines. Our historical, sociological, and literary analysis of the 1977 protest brought to light a plethora of correspondences between Krisis thought and the movement. The ‘mystical’ that is at stake here should be considered in correlation to both the parrhesiatic atmosphere characterizing that time and a kynical notion of truth.

Far from endorsing anti-foundational views, Cacciari nevertheless dismisses transcendental accounts of human knowledge, while describing truth in terms of authenticity and genuine life experience. Mirroring a reality that is contradictory by essence, truth can be asserted but it remains in all circumstances inconsistent. From this stance, moral principles, cultural practices, and collective identities, depending upon specific historical events and processes, cannot be labeled as merely arbitrary. However, because they are ultimately rooted within an ontologically incoherent substratum, they materialize and acquire self-awareness by referring at all times to their conceptual opposites. It is in this sense that Krisis Thought, stepping out of the scope circumscribed by western modernity, cannot be considered as fully post-modern.

Predictably, in *Geofilosofia dell’Europa* (1994) Cacciari indicates the *parrhesia* as the discursive space where Europe’s philosophical and spiritual souls conflate:

“La *parresía* è l’elemento che il Greco avverte come ciò che massimamente lo distingue dal barbaro. L’esule soffre della perdita della *parresía* come della mancanza del bene più grande (Euripide, *Fenicie*, 391). Inutile ricordare che il valore della *parresía* svolgerà un ruolo decisivo nell’Annuncio neo-testamentario. E dunque entrambe le componenti della cultura europea vi trovano fondamento.”<sup>132</sup>

(“The *parrhesia* is the element that the Greek conceives of as what maximally distinguishes him from the barbarian. The exiled person suffers the loss of the *parrhesia*, as of the greatest good. (Euripides, *Fenicie*, 391). It is unnecessary to remind the reader that the value of the *parrhesia* will recover a crucial role in the neo-testamentary announcement. And therefore both the components of the European culture find in it their own foundation.”)

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<sup>132</sup> Cacciari (1994) p.21, English translation mine.

The reference to Christian tradition suggests that Cacciari's parrhesia cannot merely coincide with the 'right to speak' which had been granted within the context of the democratic poleis. In the Judaic doctrinal context the parrhesia was essentially synonymous with the courage to speak in front of God's authority, thus recalling the insubordinate 'true life' that the Cynics posited during the Hellenistic epoch.<sup>133</sup> This kynical reading is furthermore validated by numerous metaphors, symbolizing a rebellious usage of language, which Cacciari borrows from Judaic literature. In *Giobbe nella cultura contemporanea (Job in Contemporary culture, 1989)*, for instance, Cacciari recounts the birth of Western Theology, which allegedly came to being when Job screamed before God's muteness and questioned his normative power.<sup>134</sup> A similar allegory can be found in *Icone della Legge (Icons of the Law, 1985)*, wherein Aaron's parrhesiatic attitude opposes Moses' mystical impassibility. Their conflicting brotherhood is, in turn, interpreted as the impolitical origin of the European identity, whose primordial character is portrayed as stateless and nomadic.

*Geo-philosophy of Europe (1994)* and *The Archipelago (1995)* openly exhibit the repercussions that Cacciari's ontology and epistemology bring to the political domain. According to these texts, the European peoples will be able to manage their destiny only by bringing to the surface their reciprocal tensions, thus recovering the "mystical absence" that characterized their birth. Parrhesiatic strategies, stressing the contrastive

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<sup>133</sup>God is conceived by archaic Judaism as a despot who recognizes freedom of speech exclusively to good men. Consequently, the lack of parrhesia would presuppose bad conscience. Similarly, in the New Testament the *parrhesia* mostly signified virtue, courage and self-confidence: in John's Gospel it is associated to Jesus's public speeches, whereas in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians it denotes the faith and confidence delivered by God to his believers, see Scarpat (2001) Chapter 2.

<sup>134</sup> Cantarano (1998) p. 332.



component of communication, are ideal for this purpose because they highlight moral and political incompatibilities between different belief systems. The Nietzschean metaphor of the ‘overflowing’ is in turn recovered by the late Cacciari for representing a European community that brings to light and encompasses a diversity of communication codes as a means to achieve a condition of unsupported stability. The allegory that Cacciari utilizes is the image of the *archipelago*, an ensemble of islands which fluctuate and from time to time collide, holding the continent on a shaky type of balance. For Cacciari, a true harmony between different European cultures and also between western, eastern and southern universes cannot be obtained by undermining the cultural peculiarities that characterize groups and communities. The European spirit, on the contrary, will be able to thrive only if it acknowledges its internal “coincidence of the opposites”; this offers the conceptual seeds for the emergence of a polycentric social model that could be potentially recovered in other parts of the world. The term *kosmos*, for Cacciari, precisely denotes such a harmony of the divergences, which are not inclined to merge with one another but to find their balance within their reciprocal incompatibility: “*Kosmos*, a pithagoric word: harmony of the different, which Harmony produces...”<sup>135</sup>.

Whether Cacciari’s philosophical theory is exhaustive or compatible with the post-human cosmopolitan discourse developed here is something to ponder considering the concerns that have been addressed within the previous chapter. Cacciari’s effort to posit a non ideological form of “negativity” that reevaluates the importance of the kynical singularity vis-à-vis universalistic systems of thought is significant. One should also appreciate Cacciari’s innovative critique of modernity, as well as his attempt to promote cultural pluralism without the assistance of the values of ‘inclusion’ that were formerly

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<sup>135</sup> Cacciari (1994) p.138.

criticized. Through a series of conceptual rearrangements, describing human communication as a de-centralized and fragmented dynamic, Cacciari provides us with useful tools for enhancing both critical thought and social diversity.

What is problematic is the way in which *Krisis Thought* conceives of ‘conflict’. While dissention *per se* is an indispensable resource for our cosmopolitan theory, which encompasses antagonistic components – i.e. cosmopolitanism as a repugnance that the “plebeian” expresses regarding idealistic belief systems, as Sloterdijk would put it -, at the same time Cacciari conceives of conflict as an ‘end’ and not as an ‘instrument’. For Cacciari, ‘conflict’ is not eradicable in any ways from human life, because it constitutes the ontological core of the reality, thus representing the beginning and the conclusion of all human actions. This ontology of the opposition leads him to ground his notion of the ‘political’ on the Schmittian friend-foe dialectic, according to which social relations presuppose structurally polemic dynamics. Cacciari’s notion of ‘truth’ is polycentric and diversified but, at the same time, generates the foundations for a social scenario wherein discursive positions prove irreconcilable with one another due to some essential incompatibilities. In so doing, *Negative Thought* promotes cultural variety but risks prioritizing values of ‘preservation’ over ideas of ‘transformation’, also condoning the chance for conflict to shift from the domain of language to the sphere of practice. This cannot be endorsed by a radical cosmopolitan theory. Such aporia depends upon two interconnected factors: 1) the logical confusion between the ‘contrary’ and the ‘contradictory’; 2) the misconception of the parrhesia as *self-assertion* rather than as *self-expression*. I will digress on these two points before moving forward.

I owe to Giovanni Catapano the attentiveness on a logical imprecision that Cacciari neglects and that prevents his theory from fully reaching its purposes. I am referring to the confusion between ‘logical contradictions’ and ‘real contradictions’.<sup>136</sup> Cacciari develops an ontological model that admits contradictions of the form A & non-A as postulates, so as to obtain a political theory promoting social diversity. However, he forgets that not all differences are contradictions and that, as a matter of fact, most of them do not logically oppose one another. In so doing, he mistakes the ‘contrary’ - denoting a ‘real contradiction’ of the form black & white - for the ‘contradictory’ - which can be exemplified by the ‘logical contradiction’ of the form black & non-black. Such a misunderstanding is not new in the history of philosophy; Trendelenburg notoriously identified this misunderstanding within the Hegelian system and, more recently, Laclau and Mouffe made appeal to it in order to develop an efficient form of socialist antagonism<sup>137</sup>.

Catapano’s observation that a reasonable multiculturalism does not need to be grounded on ontological contradictions is acceptable.<sup>138</sup> However, Catapano would likely modify Cacciari’s discourse in order to make it compatible with the principle of the “excluded middle” and to re-inscribe it within the domain of modernity. Differently, the view defended here rather leans toward the post-modern perspective insisting on the intermediate area that rests between A and non-A. Kynical cosmopolitanism, that is, prioritizes the Nietzschean dimension wherein ‘facts’ subtly *overflow* within the domain of the ‘interpretations’, and where ‘real contradictions’ - i.e. differences, diversities, antagonisms, which crash in some circumstances but are not necessarily incompatible

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<sup>136</sup> Catapano (2003), p.494.

<sup>137</sup> See Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

<sup>138</sup> Catapano (2003), p.494.

from the logical viewpoint - come to the foreground. A few examples in this regard might assist us in making these considerations more tangible.

In recent times one often hears politicians, journalists and media commentators talking about a collision between civilizations, particularly referring to Christianity and Islam, whose principles and moral precepts allegedly circumscribe two incompatible ideological universes. As a matter of fact, in numerous circumstances the welcoming of Muslim rituals within western societies incurred serious difficulties, also generating tension and violence. Take for instance the tradition of the hijab which in several Muslim cultures girls and women are taught since a very young age to wear whenever they appear in public. In Italy a considerable attention has been recently paid to the case of Fatima, a 14 year old Bangladeshi girl living in Bologna, who refused to comply with such a practice and, as a result, was forced to shave her head by her parents. It is impossible to understand or justify in any way the horrifying conclusion of this episode, which ultimately led Fatima to talk to her teachers and then to ask for the protection of Italian institutions.

And nonetheless, why should one look any differently at the hypothetical circumstance of western parents authoritatively and violently prohibiting their daughter from wearing a miniskirt or from putting on some make-up. Conflict and tension notoriously occur in many families due to generational differences, and this is likely more recurrent when people live abroad. For example, second generation American teenagers of Italian, French or Spanish origins often refuse to speak their parents' language because of the fear to be socially ostracized, and consequently establish conflictual relationships with their relatives. If it is true that there is an incompatibility between civilizations, we

would also have to acknowledge the likely incongruity between different familial generations.

To some observers the case of Fatima may appear to be different, because it reveals the supposed irresolvable mismatch separating a religiously oriented mentality from a society which for centuries has grounded itself on secularizing values. Nonetheless, this perspective could be countered by acknowledging Italian rural areas wherein catholic values are still perceived very intensively and, unsurprisingly, head handkerchiefs are even now common among older women. This observation aims to remind the reader of two facts. First, the secularization process has hardly come to end within numerous western areas. Second, many women around the world might choose to wear what apparently looks like a religious dress not necessarily due to moral or spiritual convictions, but simply because it fulfills psychological or physical needs. An illustrative example is the case of the *burkini*<sup>139</sup>. Most recently, several French municipalities have banned the *burkini* as unhygienic and “incompatible” with their secular tradition. Ironically, a high percentage of non-muslim women purchase it because they believe it is more “compatible” with their bodies.

These examples are even more significant if we take into account Appiah’s cosmopolitan theory, which postulates that individuals rarely embrace new behavioral practices based on the acceptance of specific ethical principles. The reference that Appiah makes to the foot binding custom that was practiced in China for thousands of years and quickly disappeared during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is noteworthy.<sup>140</sup> The first campaign for the abolition of this tradition was in the 1910s and 1920s, which relied on

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<sup>139</sup> Combining the terms burqa and bikini, it denotes a bathing suit which covers the whole body except for the face, hands and feet.

<sup>140</sup> Appiah (2006), p.75.

health justifications, showing damages and inconveniences of bound feet. Quite paradoxically, this campaign was less efficient than the following, which made an appeal to the fact that foot binding was not common in any other country in the world. At that point people began to see bound feet as a symbol of ugliness, and as a result the practice faded away. This example shows how people do not always ground their habits and rituals on spiritual reasons, because their pragmatic adaptation instincts often prove to be more powerful. Therefore, discursive frictions and tensions, though indispensable for people to evolve and survive, do not necessarily conceal the structural incompatibility that Cacciari's bivalent ontology takes for granted.

This aporia affects the way in which Cacciari conceives of the *parrhesia*. Converting the friend-foe relation into both an ontological principle and the essence of politics - as Habermas would say - leads one to define the bounds of the 'political' by positing "the *self-assertion* of one collective identity against another"<sup>141</sup>. This appears to be the way in which Cacciari characterizes his language-positions. Each relies on principles that are stable and consistent throughout the entire course of a hypothetical communicative intervention. Cacciari, that is, conceives of *parrhesia* mostly as *self-assertion*, presuming that verbal considerations are directed exclusively outward and never put the speaker's ideological background to the test. On the contrary, the authentic *parrhesia* involves a self-questioning component that the Cynics, partially drawing their views from the Platonic tradition, strongly emphasized. The kynical 'true life' was meant to impinge on the social consciousness not only by denouncing inequalities and injustices, but also through self-critical messages that the *parrhesiast* conveyed with his speeches. In so doing, the speaker's soul would undergo a transformative process which would

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<sup>141</sup> Quoted by Borradori (2003), p.53.

subsequently prove beneficial for the entire community. It is no accident that the Socratic teaching ‘I know that I know nothing’ was maintained as an ethical point of reference by Diogenes and his disciples.<sup>142</sup> Following the Socratic example, kynical parrhesiasts aim at emancipating other consciousnesses as much as they strive to liberate themselves from prejudices and beliefs that they had until the moment of the speech. From this perspective, ‘truth’ cannot be conceived as an act of preservation, as it appears to be in Cacciari’s discourse, but needs to be posited as a form of release, a dispossession of thought. The experience of the parrhesia turns then into an act of *self-expression*, leading the speaker to achieve the highest level of freedom; that is, the removal of one’s own preconceptions.

When Habermas characterizes moral cosmopolitan principles in terms of the combination between “potential for self-criticism” and “power for self-transformation”<sup>143</sup>, his *theory of communicative action* appears to be in agreement with these parrhesiatic connotations. Nonetheless, the view endorsed here rests in between Habermas’s *unfinished modernity*, conceiving of conflict as a communicative mistake that needs to be rectified<sup>144</sup>, and Cacciari’s *alternative modernity*, which de-centralizes western ‘reason’ by positing a plethora of conflicting rationalities. However antagonistic it may be, cosmopolitan thinking is in any case a longing for emancipation and awareness; as such, it should be grounded completely neither on social compliance nor on conflict, but rather on the intermediate space dividing the two. The Kynical perspective acknowledges the necessity of a preliminary amount of tension for accomplishing self-

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<sup>142</sup> These topics have also been discussed meticulously by Foucault, to whom Cynic philosophy was extremely dear, see Flynn (1988) p. 106.

<sup>143</sup> Borradori (2003), p. 50.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p.63.

liberation, while also confining conflict to the oral level. The exiled life-space from which the kynical spirit observes the reality provides one with the capability to accept communicative frictions and also with the desire to comprehend the other's viewpoint, in order to ultimately reconcile with the harmonious geometry of the kosmos. Kynical isolation represents then the area of exception, a micro-universe wherein the reasons of the individual and the reasons of the community are suspended and repeatedly questioned so as to facilitate mutual understanding. Verbal collisions are, therefore, welcomed exclusively with the purpose to enhance reciprocal consideration, also presuming that once this is obtained, tensions significantly decrease.

Despite these limitations, *Krisis Thought* represents the first visible step that Italian Theory took toward the acquisition of the kynical view. Therefore, it is essential for understanding the subsequent evolution of the Italian philosophical ideas and also for our post-human cosmopolitan purposes.

### *Diatribes*

#### *Mediterranean Cynicism*

##### *1.*

The transition between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s led Italian Thought to rectify, at least in part, Cacciari's philosophical discourse through the acquisition of new conceptual tools. This decade has been mostly influenced by Gianni



Vattimo's *Weak Thought*, which has received a fair amount of both approval and criticism. As I anticipated in the beginning of this chapter, some of the most aggressive attacks on this mode of thinking are moved by Antonio Negri, who in several circumstances labeled it as a sterile attempt to combine French post-structuralism and Heideggerianism. Negri believes that *Weak Thought* betrayed the revolutionary spirit that had animated the 1970s, while giving way to a submissive line of thinking that is capable to confront neither neo-liberal nor conservative political forces. For similar reasons, Michael Hardt also underestimates Vattimo's philosophical discourse by labeling 1980s Italian post-modernism as some sort of "poisonous culture"<sup>145</sup>. These evaluations, mostly elaborated from a strictly Marxian perspective, are not willing to admit that the relevant historical and sociological shifts which occurred at the end of the 1970s required dissenting voices to switch drastically their vocal tones.

Hardt is certainly aware that, in the beginning of the 1980s, collective modes of disagreement experienced difficulties not only due to the excessive repression of all forms of protest carried out by the Italian State, but also because of the progressive fading of Fordism. This phenomenon brought about a significant crisis within the working class, thus depriving leftist ideas of their material substrate. The corresponding state of emergence that both the *Italian Communist Party* and the *Labor Unions* underwent, moreover, aggravated a social scenario wherein communitarian forms of political participation were already suffering the increasing pressure exercised by consumerist values. At that point, the institution of the 'family' remained as the one and only 'body' wherein some sort of opposition could be carried out with respect to the relentless neo-liberal invasion.

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<sup>145</sup> Hardt & Virno (1996), p.7.

It needs to be said that the modest successes obtained by capitalism in Italy, wherein it was never able to fully validate Marx's prediction concerning the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, is mostly due to the familial components that distinguish the Italian economy. The proliferation of widespread small entrepreneurship and family oriented companies, in fact, "allowed some real sense of agency to spread far down into the nation's economic activity"<sup>146</sup>, preventing the logic of profit from completely taking over Italian life. Such a *familial resistance*, which anthropological accounts identify as distinctive of several Mediterranean cultures<sup>147</sup>, partially endorsed kynical values of frugality and self-sufficiency, while in some circumstances also supporting the amoral "cynical" individualism which western capitalism was disseminating. What is surfacing here is an ambiguous and dual type of cynicism which, in some circumstances, aligned with the capitalistic accumulation of individual wealth, while in some others opposed it by taking the shape of a bottom-up form of resistance. Debatably, a few cultures appear to be located in a closer proximity than Italy was - and still is - to the line that Peter Sloterdijk draws between *contemporary cynicism*, manifesting itself as pursuit of self-interest, moral carelessness and political resignation, and the virtuous *kynicism* that has been described thus far.

The indistinctness between these two modes of thinking reverberates within the borderline Mediterranean position that Italy occupies and that became more critical during the 1980s. At this time the Italian people began to look at northern countries such as France, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, or west at the Iberian Peninsula, with the same attention and interest that they paid with respect to the Balkans, the Middle East,

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<sup>146</sup> Ginsborg (2001), p. 29.

<sup>147</sup> On this subject, see the fascinating account provided by Bouchard and Ferme (2013), chapter 1.

and south to Africa.<sup>148</sup> This partly explains why, even though Italy was entering the realm of major economic powers, within the scope of the emerging European Union it performed from the beginning a very “erratic” role<sup>149</sup>. Despite the willingness to devolve part of its sovereign power to supranational institutions, Italy’s contribution to continental discussions was minimal, almost evanescent. Also, dispositions such as the 1987 *Fabbri Law*, which sets up a department for implementing European policies, and the 1989 *La Pergola law*, regulating both the translation and approval of all European amendments, were never incorporated properly within the Italian bureaucratic procedures. As a result, Italy had the opportunity to affect European decisions but, with respect to them, behaved always very anarchically.

Italian politicians engaged just as vaguely with the conflicting relationship that was slowly surfacing between western and eastern worlds, whose reciprocal collisions emerged more visibly during the 1980s. Although since World War II Italy had always been a faithful ally of the United States, between 1983 and 1985 the Italian government “took distance from Israel, sought to work with the moderate Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia), and tried to build bridges with Yassar Arafat’s PLO”<sup>150</sup>, thus exhibiting openness with respect to eastern influences.

2.

For all these reasons, a reliable account of contemporary Italian Thought needs to take into consideration the borderline space that Italy progressively came to occupy with

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<sup>148</sup> “The mediterraneità of Italy was to become ever more important during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”, Ginsborg (2001) p.235.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. p. 239.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p. 236.

respect to the western geopolitical landscape during the last 4 decades. Furthermore, if it is true that in Italy “it is not the state or any organization in society which provides examples for the family, but the family which provides metaphors and role models for the state”<sup>151</sup>, than it is reasonable to characterize such a marginal condition through the circular dialectic *cynicism-kynicism* that was previously mentioned in reference to Italian familism. Neither northern nor entirely southern, neither western nor eastern, contemporary Italy is cosmopolitan in the narrowly kynical sense. That is, because it is incapable to fit in any well-defined geopolitical domain.

Within the 1980s historical scenario, governmental repression and consumerist incursion played a major role, whereas international borders were seeking a new configuration. Considering this background, it is no accident that dissension began to be expressed with literary tools which were even more ascetic, more nihilistic, and in some respects more cosmo-political than the ones employed in previous years. After all, the scholars of Hellenism, which is considered here as a historical paradigm of reference, reveal that kynical thought disposes of an argumentative tactic that is less explicit, more subtle, and in this type of circumstances more convenient than the *parrhesia*.

We know from Kustas that Hellenistic *diatribe* was appreciated by both rhetoricians and philosophers precisely because of its versatility. As opposed to the *parrhesia*, strongly insisting on antithesis and contradictions, *diatribe* conveyed indignation by generating a “meeting ground or focus”<sup>152</sup> for the polarizations that had in previous times characterized classical Greek Thought. The Cynics were rarely provided with democratic rights to speak in public meetings, and so they often needed to engage in conversations

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. xiii.

<sup>152</sup> Kustas (1976) p.3.

by means of strategies that would not respect ordinary dialogic rules. Diatribe was ideal in this regard because it aroused ethical concerns through a disruptive rhetorical fusion of logical arguments and emotional elements. Spontaneity and hybridization are the main factors qualifying this discursive genre, which employs “abrupt and pungent diction, dramatic expressions of puzzlement”<sup>153</sup>, as well as sharp irony, hostile silence and even noise in order to deliver feelings of righteous annoyance. Thanks to its hybrid essence, *diatribe* functions by unpredictability and naturalness, thus escaping all possible definitions and allowing ostracized individuals to sabotage and mimetically creep into exclusionary dialogic spaces.<sup>154</sup> For this reason, it was often adopted by the dog-philosophers who, as “street speakers”, used it to break in political discussions from their exiled life-space.<sup>155</sup>

In this section, I will take into account the diatribic elements that characterize the Italian 1980s, showing how the debate that Cacciari established with Vattimo can be better understood when considering the dialectic *parrhesia-diatribes*. I will also explain that through this conceptual dichotomy Italian Thought set up a cosmo-political rhetoric involving counter-hegemonic significances. For these purposes, it will be crucial to focus on the cultural production that came to light in 1983, when some of the philosophical conclusions that Peter Sloterdijk reached with the *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983) reverberated in Vattimo’s *Weak Thought* (1983) and Italo Calvino’s narrative.

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid. pp. 38-39.

<sup>154</sup> See Kennedy (1999) p. 41.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. pp.40-41.

*Impurity as Mimesis: Resistance in the Post-modern world.*

*I.*

Fundamental, in Gianni Vattimo's post-human discourse, is again the philosophy of Nietzsche.

Nevertheless, while Cacciari mostly borrows from Nietzsche the impolitical philosophical perspective, Vattimo's analysis moves from the Marcusean approach prioritizing the artistic essence that the "will to power" theory embodies. This observation, for which I am indebted to Giuseppe Cantarano<sup>156</sup>, is accurate but would remain incomplete without acknowledging the Heideggerian components qualifying Vattimo's post-1980 reading of Nietzsche. For Vattimo, it is true that the crisis of humanism is essentially an outcome of the 'Death of God', leading 'man' to roll from the ontological center to the tangential space 'X' wherein all ordinary values and beliefs need to be reformulated creatively. However, it is also true that such a loss of centrality discloses itself by means of the de-humanizing phenomena that Heidegger detected within the 20<sup>th</sup> century society of technology and rationalization of labor. Following Heidegger, in *The End of Modernity* (1985) Vattimo conceives of contemporary capitalism, technology, and science not as contrasting humanism, but rather as what reveals its inner essence and, at the same time, leads it to a final dissolution:

"Technology is a threat to metaphysics and to humanism in appearance alone, for it is in the very nature of technology that the defining traits of metaphysics and humanism – which both had previously kept hidden from view – should be brought into the open."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Cantarano (1998), p. 226.

<sup>157</sup> Vattimo (1988), p. 40.

Similar to Heidegger, Vattimo also indicated a nihilistic path in order to recover balance once all metaphysical platforms collapsed and ‘Being’ revealed its substantial historicity. Heidegger’s historical ‘Being in the world’ is also a ‘Being toward death’; that is, a life experience whose authenticity is measured according to the capacity to engage with one’s own potential annihilation. Likewise, Vattimo conceives of nihilistic modes of thinking as the key for exiting the space of modernity without a scratch.

It is nonetheless crucial to distinguish *passive nihilism* from *active nihilism*. The former looks at both the late-modern “crisis of reason” and fall of ultimate foundations as dramatic events that need to be redirected through acts of metaphysical substitution or re-appropriation. Whether it materializes as a Marxian effort to liberate social relations from exchange-value, or discloses itself through the critique of mass culture elaborated by the Frankfurt School, in all circumstances *passive nihilism* presupposes the conviction that western metaphysical discourses should be replaced with more authentic “truths”. For Vattimo, such an attitude ultimately degenerates in forms of nostalgic pessimism, political resignation, and even violence. It is reasonable to infer that Cacciari’s *alternative modernity*, replacing humanistic reason with a multiplicity of surrogates, would be categorized by Vattimo as *passive nihilism*.

*Active nihilists*, on the contrary, are able to turn the fall of the ideologies and the de-essentialization of the world into an opportunity for self-liberation. For this ambitious purpose, it is necessary to undermine the spirit of modernity by positing a *weak* form of subjectivity which would substitute rigid conceptions of knowledge with more flexible and symbolic representations. Accordingly, truth can no longer be placed within the domain of metaphysics, but needs to be relocated on the border that philosophy shares

with rhetoric and art. Vattimo believes that knowledge should be grounded neither on transcendental nor on logical foundations; its nature is essentially *hermeneutical* and, as such, dependent upon the wide variety of historical-cultural conditions which each experience presupposes. In all circumstances, truth comes to sight from an impure horizon of meanings, because verifications and evaluations are always formulated within “the space of freedom both of interpersonal relations and of the relations between cultures and generations. In this space no one ever starts from scratch but always from a faith, a belonging-to or a bond.”<sup>158</sup> Epistemic statements do not materialize out of an objectivity towards which minds spontaneously converge; rather, they can be constructed exclusively as outcomes of successful dialogic interactions: “...truth is born in agreement and from agreement, and not vice versa, that we will reach agreement only when we have all discovered the same objective truth.”<sup>159</sup> In place of Massimo Cacciari’s archipelago of multiple rationalities, Vattimo deconstructs Euro-humanism by positing a *weak truth* that unfolds by ‘contamination’ and ‘hybridization’, leading the Heideggerian ‘Being’ to an ultimate twilight.

Although *Weak Thought* is examined within a wide critical literature, scholars have never emphasized the diatribic factors it characterizes. What I am suggesting here is to evaluate Vattimo’s discourse as a cosmo-political tactic of resistance exhibiting the following diatribic elements: a) the conception of ‘hybridization’ and ‘contamination’ as *mimesis*; b) the dual role that is played by ‘irony’ and ‘silence’, which serve both as counter-hegemonic tools and multicultural discursive strategies. Point a) will be

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<sup>158</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought*, in Vattimo and Rovatti ed. by (2012) p.50.

<sup>159</sup> Vattimo (2009), *Nihilism as Emancipation*, in Chiesa and Toscano (2009), p.32.



discussed within the remaining part of this section, whereas point b) will be addressed in the section titled *Democracy and Cosmopolitanism: a Diatribic Perspective* .

In support of our general thesis, characterizing Weak Thought as a diatribic philosophical discourse, it should first be noted that the dichotomy *passive-active nihilism* posited by Vattimo appears to be in line with the couplet *cynicism-kynicism* earlier discussed in reference to the 1980s Italian society, and which Sloterdijk also articulates in his *Critique*. For Vattimo, the nostalgic grief that is a leitmotif among *passive nihilists* ultimately facilitates the proliferation of the *cynical* phenomena that are recurrent within contemporary western environments. In these settings, existential and political pessimism often turn into materialism, opportunism and individualistic greed. Such a perspective partly resounds within the way in which Sloterdijk describes *neo-cynicism*, which he diagnoses as a form of “enlightened false consciousness”. This notion essentially indicates a series of critical discourses formulated through disenchanting tones, which ultimately prove ‘ideological’ because they dismiss the hilarious and satirical weapons that effective emancipating modes of thinking have always employed throughout human history: “The characteristic odor of modern cynicism is of a more fundamental nature – a constitution of consciousness afflicted with enlightenment that, having learned from historical experience, refuses cheap optimism...In the new cynicism, a detached negativity come through that scarcely allows itself any hope...”<sup>160</sup> It is not by coincidence that both Vattimo and Sloterdijk’s main targets are the Frankfurt School and in particular Adorno, whose philosophy is described in the *Critique* as the most exemplary conceptualization of neo-cynicism.

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<sup>160</sup> Sloterdijk (1988), p. 6.

On the other hand, the *diatribic* significances that Vattimo's *active nihilism* involves are evident. Dismissing the primacy of science and reevaluating art and rhetoric for the construction of knowledge, Vattimo provides disciplines which had always been excluded from the domain of truth with the opportunity to speak. In this way, *weak thought* wages war against all sorts of "totalitarian" philosophical discourses and comprehensive theories, while also "pissing against the idealistic wind", as Sloterdijk would tastelessly put it. After all, nothing could feel more intolerable for an orthodox idealist than a viewpoint that considers art - which Plato had condemned as deceitful and the Hegelian system labeled as a secondary form of knowledge - as a genuine way to describe the reality. By way of the impurities defended by Vattimo, philosophy takes off its rationalistic attire exhibiting shamelessly its contaminated body, allowing emotions and instincts to infiltrate theoretical discourses and providing social outsiders with a voice.

An objection could claim that some of these characteristics can be ascribed to Vattimo's philosophy as well as to Post-Modernism in general. In fact, around the same time both French *Post-structuralism* and American *Neo-Pragmatism* aroused similar concerns with regard to the possibility for human reason to define truth in universal terms, also calling for interdisciplinary constructions of knowledge. And nonetheless, Vattimo's hermeneutics pursues philosophical intentions which are less theoretical and more critical than the ones that are chased by the aforementioned schools of thought. For instance, Vattimo acknowledges the considerable debt that *Weak Thought* owes to Richard Rorty's reflections on the limits of knowledge. At the same time, he believes that Rorty's attempt to replace transcendental doctrines with forms of cultural anthropology

would not successfully undermine the humanistic features that qualify western scientific discourses.<sup>161</sup>

Correspondingly, Vattimo appreciates the Post-Structuralist effort to overcome Eurocentric perspectives. However, he also observes that such a move might ultimately celebrate the very values of ‘progress’ and ‘innovation’ which modernity has embodied for centuries. This is the reason why both Foucault’s microphysics of power and Deleuze’s rhizomes are labeled as still too nostalgic of metaphysics<sup>162</sup>, while Derrida’s deconstruction is dismissed as a pure “free play, or the desire for discovering – in continuation – new semantic horizons”<sup>163</sup>. What is needed for Vattimo is not an innovative philosophical discourse, but rather a kynical critique of the ones formulated thus far. This mistrustful demeanor brings to light the diatribic inner essence that *Weak Thought* personifies.

2.

The *mimetic* connotations that qualify Vattimo’s *diatribe* will surface more visibly if one examines the strategy that Weak Thought employs for undermining the philosophical inconveniences on which both French and American post-modern approaches lose their footing. The solution is for Vattimo to conceive of post-modernity not as an ‘overcoming’ but as a *Verwindung* of modernity.

This Heideggerian term, denoting a plurality of different meanings - “to recover from an illness, to resign oneself to something, or to accept (another’s judgement)”<sup>164</sup> –

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<sup>161</sup> See Vattimo (1988), chapter 9.

<sup>162</sup> Vattimo and Rovatti ed.by (1983), p.9.

<sup>163</sup> Borradori (1989), p. 5.

<sup>164</sup> Vattimo (1988), p.39.

stands for an attempt to rethink western history by acknowledging the errors and illusions that it conveyed, without necessarily ignoring the messages and values that the European people inherited. Following the historicist trail that Italian philosophy opened with Gianbattista Vico<sup>165</sup>, Vattimo's project aims at recombining in different manners the narratives that western thought perpetuated, so as to alleviate the 'humanistic malady' diagnosed by Nietzsche, ultimately leading modernity to self-dissolution. In so doing, Vattimo's *Verwindung* gives birth to a series of hybridized and contaminated forms of thinking which remodel the western tradition, while also predisposing it for absorbing external influences:

"To identify the new with the other, as for instance with another culture - whether that of another civilization or of a different language-game, or that of a virtual world contained in those traces of our tradition which never became dominant - ...It means accompanying being along on its twilight journey and preparing for a postmetaphysical world."<sup>166</sup>

Let us grapple with this passage for a while. What should one infer from the identification between the 'new' and the 'other'? Is the 'new' what was always before our eyes, but for some reasons we were not able to see? If not, in what sense can a creative effort engage with cultural inheritances and historical legacies, which are firmly rooted in the past? Is the ultra-metaphysical humanity that Vattimo invokes a long-gone forgotten dimension?

A supposition can be sketched with a sufficient degree of reasonability; that the association of the 'new' with the 'other' counterbalances values of modernization with hybridization dynamics. From this perspective, the 'hybrid' comes across as a powerful resource that critical thinking can employ in order to oppose the updating logic of profit

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<sup>165</sup> As Borradori observes, see (1989), Introduction.

<sup>166</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *Dialectics, Difference, Weak Thought*, in Vattimo and Rovatti ed. by (2012), p. 51.

chased by western capitalism. Far from endorsing techno-phobic views, Vattimo appears to conceive of hybridized forms of life - whether they materialize as transnational identities, trans-class subjectivities, intercultural customs, teriomorphs or even cyborgs - as tools that can be used for identifying an ultra-human space. This is a dimension wherein nature and culture overlap, while science and technology can be liberated from “il loro uso capitalistico”<sup>167</sup> (the capitalistic utilization of them). This means that the homogeneity diffused by globalized markets cannot be opposed by reclaiming ontological “purity”. This maneuver, as we said earlier, would result in a distorted type of nihilism. Rather, it should be disrupted and sabotaged through the mimetic facade that crossbred forms of life build up in order to conceal their real essence. Hybridization, from this outlook, acquires a value of dissent because it is conceived of as *mimesis*.

The fascinating metaphor of ‘The infinite lawn’ that Italo Calvino recounts in *Palomar*<sup>168</sup> (1983) will help us acquire a more solid grasp of this aspect characterizing Vattimo’s thought. A well decorated lawn is a perfect example of an entity which is artificial and, at the same time, natural. The gardener spreads on the ground a selected species of seeds and then, in order to achieve his creative goal, tries to uproot as meticulously as he can all the weeds:

“You have to grasp the entire plant with a curving movement of the hand and delicately slip the roots from the earth, even if you have to pull up a bit of sod and some of the lawn’s rare blades of grass, half smothered by their aggressive neighbor. Then you must throw the interloper in a place where it cannot put down

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<sup>167</sup> Vattimo (1974) *Il soggetto e la maschera*, quoted in Cantarano (1998), p.228, English Translation mine.

<sup>168</sup> It is the novel that best represents Calvino’s last narrative, encompassing post-modern as well as post-anthropocentric themes. The title carries the name of a man who philosophically interrogates the world that surrounds him, and is most likely a reference to the Californian scientific observatory, thus revealing the epistemological intentions pursued by the author. The book consists of 27 short texts which are arranged 3 by 3: numbers 1s generally describe visual experiences of natural phenomena, numbers 2s engage with anthropological and cultural elements, numbers 3s take into account speculative problems, including the essence of time and space as well as the relationship between mind and reality. The chapter called “The Infinite Lawn”, which is considered here, comprises all the aforementioned themes and arguably exemplifies the purposes of the entire work.

roots again or scatter seed. When you start pulling up one weed, you immediately see another appear a bit farther on, and another, and still another. In no time that stretch of lawn, so smooth that it seemed to need only a few touches, proves to be a lawless jungle.”<sup>169</sup>

As much as the artist attempts to eliminate all impurities, the final result will be in any case a conflation of different varieties of plants and elements, because “the harmful grasses are so thickly interwoven with the good that you cannot just thrust in your hand and pull.”<sup>170</sup> Is the artificiality which characterizes the final product, and fulfills the gardener’s ego, real? No, it is not. Despite the appearances, the garden is still made of a plethora of natural imperfections which resisted the homologating pressure applied by the man’s hand. What initially gave the impression of a hopeless surrender is ultimately able to accomplish its purpose; notwithstanding the illusory ‘weakness’, the garden was able to preserve its own inner essence.

Considering the post-human postulates established within the first chapter, the way in which *weak thought* reappears within Calvino’s literary analogy elicits thoughtful reflections. Italian post-modernism aligns with recent evolutionary theories according to which, both in animal and human worlds, mimetic practices are structurally necessary for survival and prosperity to succeed. Calvino’s lawn alludes to those areas of social undergrowth where human life is in close proximity to the survival threshold, where boundaries among individuals are more flexible and ontological fusions are generally more recurrent. From this stance, *weak thought* also recalls a series of low-class modes of expression which, particularly during the 1980s, began to speak hybridized types of languages for conveying dissent and frustration. For instance, I am referring to

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<sup>169</sup> Calvino (1985), p.30.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

phenomena such as graffiti, murales and street art, which combine a large variety of colorful, amorphous and sometimes monstrous representations with the dryness of the urban constructions, dismissing stereotypes portrayed within commercials and pushing antagonistic communication towards the lowest limits of legality. I am also referring to the “punk” movement, which mingled distorted sounds with destructive noises, and largely disregarded the harmonic criteria that had been adopted in most popular music genres during previous decades. I am furthermore alluding at practices such as piercing, tattoos, branding, and body art which in recent years have propagated throughout numerous western areas. Arguably, Italian post-modernism retrieves these *mimetic* phenomena by calling for the necessity to infect philosophical and literary discourse with a variety of bio-cultural contaminations, so as to escape the domestication that occurs within the higher strata of globalized society.<sup>171</sup>

Following this path, *Weak Thought* conceptualizes a bottom-up type of struggle which is cosmo-political by essence. As opposed to communitarian views indicating cultural spotlessness, traditional identities and national myths as the most effective weapons to adopt for defending self-determination, Vattimo’s discourse emphasizes the emancipating essence that self-transformation maneuvers encompass, thus exhibiting theoretical similarities with several cosmo-theories. The antagonistic mimesis posited here, in fact, presupposes not only Habermas’ “potential for self-criticism” but also, and more significantly, the “masking” training which Damian Hill considers as mandatory for constructing a radical cosmopolitan subjectivity:

“Like the actor who underwrites the metaphysical significance of his own personal background, his tastes, dislikes, and idiosyncratic makeup as causal

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<sup>171</sup> I am partly relying here on the post-human theory elaborated by Roberto Marchesini, who has highlighted more than others the mimetic aspects that characterize countercultural phenomena, see (2002) chapter 6.

inhibitors against effecting a real and plausible character, *the aspiring moral cosmopolitan, in the spirit of an autonomous ontological rebel, discounts the particular former narratives of her existence as the unauthored and non-autonomously chosen aspect of her identity* that she now overthrows by the guidance of a spirit of moral creativity that is to be put in the service of a new and radically different person. The mask – the moral persona, the training place – is the provisional reality that permits this transition.”<sup>172</sup>

Correspondingly to Hill’s ontological rebel, who disregards her ideological background because it could prevent her from performing successfully, Vattimo’s *Verwindung* unfolds as a liberation process during which a becoming person, social group, or community interrogate their metaphysical upbringing. In this way, human consciousness is able to explore a wide variety of alternative ethical values and cultural options, while concealing its true self behind numerous masks. Such a mimetic cosmo-political inclination, which is what Vattimo’s identification of the “new” with the “other” essentially stands for, brings further light over the notion of *weakness*. Far from denoting defeat<sup>173</sup>, *weak thought* is rather the attempt to make philosophical discourse many-sided, teratomorphic, and unpredictable. Ultimately, such effort transforms into a de-centralized and non-dialectic type of antagonism that proves more efficient within a post-modern political environment, and which was evoked at the beginning of this chapter. Now let us examine more closely how this diatribic perspective affects political thought by considering the different ways in which cosmopolitan theory looks at democratic practices.

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<sup>172</sup> Hill (2000), p.94.

<sup>173</sup> In addition to Negri, Franco Cassano has also associated *weak thought* with similar meanings, see in particular *Approssimazione* (1989) p. 116.



*Democracy and Cosmopolitanism: a Diatribic Perspective*

*I.*

According to the aforementioned evolutionary conjecture, in the post-industrial world mimetic phenomena recur more frequently in proximity of social undergrowth<sup>174</sup>. In view of this premise, one should reasonably also ask how cosmopolitan theory relates to principles of self-determination and democratic discourses within a diatribic philosophical context.

From a cynical viewpoint, it goes without saying that the language of democracy cannot be elaborated within the “pure” space of rationality that Habermas reclaims from the tradition of the Enlightenment. This is due to two main reasons. On one hand, the attempt to ground democratic principles on solid philosophical foundations would relocate cosmo-political discourses within a metaphysical domain, from which Vattimo’s hermeneutics strives to depart. If we move from the philosophical assumptions Habermas takes for granted, we would still make appeal to a universalistic conception of truth, which our line of reasoning has tried to weaken. On the other hand, the spotless dialogic flows Habermas calls for would not be able to represent those strata of the societies where, as it was previously clarified, impurities and contaminations are constantly occurring. The well-elaborated arguments on which he builds his theory of “communicative action” risk benefiting the most skilled rhetoricians, while excluding from verbal exchanges those who do not have the privilege to develop appropriate

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<sup>174</sup> Roberto Marchesini has also expressed this claim, see (2002) chapter 6.

dialectic capacities.<sup>175</sup> In so doing, Habermas's "ideal speech" would simply annihilate all oral differences, thus sterilizing communicative practices and maintaining stagnant power relations. All these observations arguably converge within Vattimo's account of Habermas's perspective as the "risk of legitimizing a future world dominated by experts of various kind."<sup>176</sup>

The fact that Vattimo utilized these words for contributing to *The Italian Difference*, collecting a series of texts which presumably represent most faithfully the contemporary Italian Theory, is not a mere coincidence. The criticism that Italian Thought addresses to Habermas is not fortuitous, but has a history that can be traced back to the early 1980s. This was when Italian post-modernism suggested displacing the redundant superfluity characterizing present-day democratic practices through the contamination of rational discourse with diatribic silences and ironic tones. The way in which philosophical ideas resurface from literary narratives is astonishing. Let us consider the following paragraphs which are taken respectively from Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* (1985) and Calvino's *Mr. Palomar* (1983):

"Let us start from the not completely unfounded hypothesis that hermeneutics as a specific philosophical position (hermeneutic ontology, as it were) develops in an historical and cultural situation in which dialogue is in fact rendered difficult, not by an overwhelming distance between the interlocutors, but rather by the occurrence of a homologation that makes it insignificant and superfluous."<sup>177</sup>

Following Heidegger, Vattimo is convinced that metaphysical discourses have progressively converted democratic ideas into ideological apathy, and that only a form of communication that relies on the quietness of the "indefinable" would be able to invert

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<sup>175</sup> This critical reflection was suggested to me by Kennedy (1999), p. 38.

<sup>176</sup> Vattimo (2009), *Nihilism as Emancipation*, in Chiesa and Toscano ed.by (2009), p. 34.

<sup>177</sup> Vattimo (1988), p.155.

such a degrading tendency. Philosophy, for this purpose, needs to combine with both ordinary language and poetry, which do not aim at dominating the reality, but rise from it as a 'resound of silence'. The philosophical horizon that is rising here remained, for the most part, always unseen to western thought: silence as a path to democracy. Democracy - the most valuable discovery that presumably the West has ever brought to light, the highest moral ideal, the aspiration that in our time guides and regulates political communication far and wide and which, in turn, finds its nourishment precisely within what common sense considers as one of the capacities that are most representative of the human species, i.e. language - is now exposing its post-human alter-ego: the solemnity of the "unsaid", the dignity of remaining quiet, animal muteness as a privileged mode of expression. Does such a conceptual overturning involve cynical significances?

Let us interrogate Calvino's narrative on this subject. In *Mr. Palomar*, the first dismissal of language occurs metaphorically when the protagonist's attention is captured by the blackbirds' whistle, which is presumably very similar as an ordinary human whistle. Palomar's reflections, pertaining to the way in which these animals are able to convey their messages, lead him to wonder whether the true essence of their communication rests within the silent intervals dividing whistles from one another: "And what if it is in the pause and not in the whistle that the meaning of the message is contained? If it were in the silence that the blackbirds speak to each other?...A silence, apparently the same as another silence, could express a hundred different notions,"<sup>178</sup> The hundreds of significances that Palomar strives to extrapolate from the blackbird's silences would not simply fulfill zoological or anthropological curiosities; they would also fill up the semantic void which saturates the space circumscribing democratic oral practices,

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<sup>178</sup> Calvino (1985), pp. 24-25.

wherein an overabundance of unneeded information has made social interactions pointless. Biting one's own tongue, within this scenario, becomes the most meaningful way to communicate:

“Whether he should refrain from expressing his idea is more debatable. In times of general silence, conforming to the *silence of the majority* is certainly wrong. In times when everybody says too much, the important thing is not merely to say what is right, which in any event would be engulfed in the flood of words, but to say it on the basis of premises and consequences, so that what is said acquires the maximum value. But, then, if the value of a single affirmation lies in continuity and coherence of the discourse in which it is uttered, the only possible choice is between speaking continuously or never speaking at all. In the first case Mr. Palomar would reveal that his thinking does not proceed in a straight line but zigzags its way through vacillations, denials, corrections, in whose midst the rightness of that affirmation of his would be lost. As for the other alternative, it implies an art of keeping silent even more difficult than the art of speaking.

In fact, silence can also be considered a kind of speech, since it is a rejection of the use to which others put words; but the meaning of this silence-speech lies in its interruptions in what is, from time to time, actually said, giving a meaning to what is unsaid.”<sup>179</sup> (Italics mine)

In view of the sarcastic tones employed by Calvino, whose 1980s production is entirely narrated through what Iovino describes as the “silence of the ego”<sup>180</sup>, it is a shame that Italian post-modern discourses have been mostly analyzed from semeiotic and epistemological viewpoints, disregarding their political value. If one looks at Calvino's narrative from a hermeneutical perspective, the blackbird's art of keeping silent - which is more complex and advanced than the human art of speaking - is most likely promoted for providing marginalized voices with expressive power. In circumstances when dialogic practices become flat and empty, the democratic “right to speak” risks penalizing minorities, whereas a diatribic type of muteness might prove a convenient strategy for obtaining attention.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

<sup>180</sup> Serenella Iovino (2014), *Hybriditales: Posthumanizing Calvino*, in Amberson and Past ed. by (2014) p. 222.

On this subject, Italian 1980s post-modernism has been exceptionally farsighted. The worldwide success recently accomplished by populisms of all sorts, mostly obtaining approval from middle and lower social strata, brought to light new dynamics linking democratic practices, language rituals, and channels of information. In particular, the reiterated attacks on the legitimacy of the press, which is no longer considered in numerous political environments as a source of unquestionable truth, result in a two-sided paradoxical phenomenon. First, an overwhelming multiplication of short-term, impulsive, often contradictory verbal perspectives that proliferate on the web and which apparently provide a larger number of individuals with the chance to express their voice. Second, the crisis experienced by political parties, many of which thrive by silencing themselves before the mainstream media. This twofold tendency is certainly evident if one recalls the case of Italy where, starting from the 1990s, “silence” has been utilized repeatedly for gaining consent. The hegemony exercised over Italian politics for approximately twenty years by Silvio Berlusconi, who arguably inaugurated the aforementioned populist wave, was partly obtained through both an incessant denigration of the Italian press and the refusal to engage in ordinary dialogic exchanges with preexisting political groups. In addition, at the end of Berlusconi’s era self-muteness has been adopted even more successfully by the *5 Stars Movement*. This group of post-ideological activists, founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo, in just a few short years became the main Italian political faction by attacking the self-referential party-language, also dismissing interactions with mainstream media.

Should one conclude that we are currently living in a world wherein the most effective way to communicate is to carry out a *dispossession* of verbal communication? Is

it reasonable to assert that in the late-modern society silence is potentially able to enhance feelings of democratic solidarity better than any dialogue? This picture might seem excessively radical. After all, as Habermas would rightly point out, a total dismissal of communication might bring about repercussions which are even more dreadful than the ones that we are trying to prevent. It is nonetheless evident that the argumentative technicalities that characterize certain dialectic mechanisms within western democracies are by now perceived by many as redundant, intangible and, as such, illegitimate. This would explain the crisis that on a global scale is affecting Democratic Parties, which in recent times often appealed to “politically correct” speech as their main discursive strategy. Moreover, flat and unnecessary dialogues prove detrimental also because of the multicultural features characterizing contemporary western environments, wherein an exponential escalation of communication often generates violent misunderstandings between different ethnic and social groups.

In view of these observations and considering how the path toward democracy unfolded throughout the centuries by means of secularization processes – i.e. secularization of religious modes of thinking, secularization of political authorities, etc. - it is reasonable to wonder, from a diatribic perspective, whether ‘silence’ could be adopted as a conceptual instrument for secularizing ‘language’. The silence evoked here would not coincide with a collapse of communication per se. Rather, it stands for a destabilization and de-potentialization of language, which is no longer seen as the recipient encompassing absolute truths, but is asked to continually reassess its emancipatory purposes within a scenario where conflicting interpretations multiply day by day. From this stance, ‘silence’ would disclose itself as the temporary pause where self-doubts fill

the mind. ‘Silence’, as flexible speech dismissing stubbornness and fanaticism, as the uncertainty of a message whose authenticity and intentions are pondered numerous times before being delivered.

Italian post-modernism appears to pursue this hermeneutical trail by adopting both “silence” and “self-irony” as secularization instruments. These categories function as tools reinforcing the democratic principle of ‘non-violence’, and also as weak semantic areas wherein different discursive positions have the chance to carry out self-reflection and self-criticism. In this way, opposing viewpoints are able to question their own cultural legacy and to emphasize reciprocal connection, as Appiah would say, “not through identity but despite difference”<sup>181</sup>. While *Mr. Palomar* undermines verbal homogeneity by conjuring the silence of eastern atmospheres, in more recent texts Vattimo indicates “self-irony” as the fundamental value for coping with the multicultural challenges that the late-modern Babel generates day after day. Vattimo’s opinion is that if traditional identities do not stop taking themselves so seriously, as if they were the most legitimate and respectable, globalizing processes will always be perceived as a threat, eliciting violent reactions. *Self-irony*, presuming that customs, habits and beliefs depend upon contingent historical and sociological components, is the most effective attitude to adopt for pursuing a free and peaceful coexistence. Such a value exceeds the pure space of rational thinking, rather emerging from the diatribic crossroad wherein philosophy and art overlap, and wherein democratic ideas acquire an aesthetic significance:

“It seems clear that the reconciliation of peace and liberty in the post-modern or late-modern world will be attained only on condition that esthetics prevails over objective truth. The variety of lifestyles and the diversity of ethical codes will be able to coexist without bloody clashes only if they are considered as, precisely,

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<sup>181</sup> Appiah (2006), p. 135.

styles not reciprocally exclusive, but compatible like the artistic styles within an art collection – and for that matter within a museum...”<sup>182</sup>

Through the categories of “silence” and “irony”, Italian Post-modernism erodes the aggressive essence of language and indicates the path that leads to a complete secularization of communication. The philosophical outcome is a model of hermeneutical democracy which depicts the public sphere as an area wherein cultural divergences are not more dreadful than the discordant notes coming from a song. As a further result, Italian Thought relocates truth from the domain of “rationality” to the more flexible space of “reasonability”, carrying out the transition from *self-assertion* to *self-expression* that Cacciari had not been able to fully attain.

2.

The point now is to evaluate how the problematic relationship between weakened forms of communication and democratic participation would be discussed from the perspective of Vattimo’s *diatribic* hermeneutics. How can both mutual understanding and self-determination be obtained within a culturally diverse environment? Addressing this question is crucial because it allows us to explore how the “local” relates conceptually to the “global”, and how the “particular” interacts with the “universal” within a kynical philosophical context. For this purpose, I will rely on *Weak Thought* in order to clarify the diatribic developed here with respect to both the multicultural and the humanistic cosmopolitan perspectives.

The multicultural position taken by Will Kymlicka, claiming that democratic practices can succeed exclusively within a vernacular setting, cannot be easily dismissed:

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<sup>182</sup> Vattimo (2007) p. 58.



“Democratic politics is politics in the vernacular. The average citizen feels at ease only when he discusses political questions in his own language. As a general rule, only elites are fluent in more than one language, and have the chance to maintain and develop their linguistic skills continuously, and feel at ease discussing political questions in different languages and in a multilingual atmosphere.”<sup>183</sup>

Considering the importance that our previous analysis placed within communicative authenticity, the cynical philosopher would certainly agree with Kymlicka that democratic participation increases when individuals feel comfortable within their cultural and linguistic setting. It is nonetheless also true that in the contemporary world, wherein mono-cultural environments are becoming extremely infrequent, Kymlicka’s restriction of democracy to the domain of the vernacular might prove a dangerous move. As Archibugi rightly points out, vernacular communities might feel the necessity to purge themselves of all impurities, thus implementing racist policies, social segregation and, in extreme cases, ethnic cleansing.<sup>184</sup>

This risk would nonetheless depend on a distorted way to conceive of the “vernacular”, which in many circumstances is still seen as the immaculate process through which local communities were able to determine themselves without receiving any external influences. In reality, vernacular cultures and languages are the result of a long hybridizing evolution that mingled different elements, often molding local realities through global pressures. Several scholars currently agree that national customs and rituals cannot be merely considered as the result of popular struggles, because cultural uniformity was in many circumstances achieved with the relevant contribution of a top-down type of standardization. Research shows that the reduction of the cultural variation

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<sup>183</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 214, quoted in Archibugi (2008), p. 256.

<sup>184</sup> Archibugi (2008), chapter 10.

within the nations and the expansion of the variation between them partly increased as a consequence of political coercions, which forced the populations to strengthen internal similarities and to minimize external differences.<sup>185</sup>

Such a perspective finds a stronger confirmation within Sheldon Pollock's analysis according to which western vernacularization processes were to some extent affected by cosmopolitan forces. As opposed to Gramsci and Bachtin's hypothesis portraying vernaculars as literary instruments through which people reclaimed autonomy from imperial powers, Pollock argues that vernacular cultures actually materialized with considerable support from the European elites, which "associated with or directly controlled"<sup>186</sup> the local royal courts. From this perspective, the vernacular can no longer be looked at as a symbol of demotic purity, because it materializes from some sort of "Creole" fusion interconnecting the particular with the universal. Kymlicka's perspective, therefore, is meaningful so long as the vernacular is taken for what it really is: a particular form of expression which comes to being and survives with the support of both external and global influences.

Within the circular dialectic that the particular establishes with the universal, on the other hand, humanistic cosmopolitanism prioritizes the universal. While multiculturalists generally strive to preserve cultural autonomy in order to maximize democratic participation, humanists believe that enhancing trans-cultural communication through a centralization of political regulations is in most circumstances preferable, even at the cost

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<sup>185</sup> David Held mentions a series of coercive procedures including the centralization of administrative power, the growing coincidence of territorial boundaries with a uniform system of rules, the creation of new mechanisms of law-making, the alteration and extension of fiscal management, the formalization of relations among states through the development of diplomacy and diplomatic institutions, and the introduction of standing armies, see (1999), p. 86.

<sup>186</sup> Pollock (2000), p. 610.

of reducing democratic involvement. Particularly this is the case of Daniele Archibugi, who endorses this view by mainly relying on the evolution of post-colonial India.

After the 1948 independence from the British Empire, the Indian government made official 18 languages out of the 1,650 vernacular idioms spoken throughout the territory. The system currently allows vernacular languages to be spoken locally and official languages to be used within each of the 18 states, while dialogues between the central government and the single states take place exclusively in Hindi and English. In so doing - Archibugi points out - Indian people were able to establish a relatively successful parliamentary democracy, also improving considerably their economic condition and preventing potential conflicts between local populations from occurring. Thus, the Indian example allegedly shows that unifying territories through the institutionalization of a lingua franca, particularly when English can be chosen for both intra- and inter-national purposes, proves ultimately beneficial.<sup>187</sup>

While Archibugi's observations are significant and worthy of consideration, it is nonetheless dubious whether institutionalization maneuvers such as the one previously described ultimately enhance the cosmopolitan ideals that he endorses. Archibugi is aware that the post-independence political resolutions implemented by the Indian government went to the considerable advantage of the Indian elites, which is partially why economic inequalities in India are still highly unacceptable. He is also aware that the capability to speak English is restricted to 20 percent of the Indian population, and that in numerous southern areas people still refuse Hindi as their main mode of communication. Because of these factors, not only have individuals and peoples been denied political representation, but also cultures whose importance cannot be minimized. The

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<sup>187</sup> See Archibugi (2008), pp. 267-68.

homogenization of culture, of which language standardization is one aspect, ultimately jeopardizes the uniqueness and exceptionality of life, thus inhibiting the capacity for self-expression. This cannot be condoned by a cosmopolitan cynical theory.

These considerations apply significantly to the case of post-colonial India, wherein centralization strategies facilitated the birth of an imperialistic type of universalism which had never characterized its past. Although both in Europe and in India vernacularization processes replaced earlier imperial practices at the beginning of the early-modern era, we know from Pollock that in ancient times Indian cosmopolitanism involved significances which had little to do with the coercive methods utilized by the Romans. As opposed to the ways in which the Roman Empire expanded, Sanskrit power did not unfold by enumerating peoples or standardizing legal practices, nor did it carry out any attempt to transform the world into a metropolitan centre.<sup>188</sup> Within the Sanskrit historical context, power signified a celebration of moral and verbal ideals and, consequently, did not employ cultural symbols as tools for self-legitimization. In the Latin universe the term “cosmos” stood for the “the lands that had fallen under the Roman power”; Indian cosmopolitanism, on the contrary, encompassed “voluntaristic” connotations honouring “all that moves with life”.<sup>189</sup>

Sadly, the institutionalization procedures enforced in post-colonial India did not unbury any of these historical components, but slowly led to the birth of violent forms of universalism such as Hindutva, or fundamentalist Hinduism, which had never characterized Indian culture in previous times. In 1998 the *Bharatiya Janata Party*, representing Hindutva, was able to take control of the national government, also

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<sup>188</sup> Pollock (2000), p. 604.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. p. 606.

providing both its paramilitary section, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (National Volunteers Union) and its ideological section, the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council) with a considerable amount of political power: “The very names of these groups now speak what had never been spoken before, postulating in the one case a single Indian “peoplehood” (janata) and in the other Hinduism as an aggressive universalism (vishwa).”<sup>190</sup> The *Bharatiya Janata Party*, currently representing one of the most influential political groups in the Indian Parliament, pursues a political agenda that includes the enhancement of India’s military and nuclear potential as well as a cultural program of “pseudotraditionalism that has cynically coopted and polluted the cosmopolitan past.”<sup>191</sup> Despite the benefits that Archibugi emphasizes, therefore, the case of India shows that prioritizing excessively the “universal” over the “particular” by way of institutional maneuvers, in some circumstances brings about not only a reduction in democratic participation, but also counter-cosmopolitan effects.

What position would a cynical devotee of ‘weakness’ take with respect to the debate that multiculturalists establish with cosmopolitan humanists? How would Vattimo enter the conversation that I have just described? Arguably, *Weak Thought* would label both philosophical views as forms of *passive nihilism*. The former, because it conceives of “communities” in essentialist terms and, in so doing, might indirectly assist the proliferation of ethnic fundamentalisms. The latter, because it favors comprehensive institutional procedures over bio-cultural diversity and political participation, thus aligning with the all-embracing discourses that western metaphysics has perpetuated for centuries. A diatribic thinker would suggest to combine the value of decentralization that

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid. pp. 617-18.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 618.

are dear to multiculturalists with the importance that cosmopolitan humanists place within trans-cultural communication, so as to open a third and more desirable nihilistic path. More explicitly, cynical cosmopolitanism agrees in part with Kymlicka that the vernacular is ideally the dimension wherein authentic democratic practices succeed, while also conceiving of the vernacular as the space where socio-cultural hybridization needs to occur persistently in order for a community to regenerate and survive. From the diatribic perspective, that is, local realities would be considered as the privileged “exiled” laboratories for the experimentation of cosmopolitan models that can potentially be imitated and adopted in other political contexts. The key would be to look at the vernacular not as a pristine idol to worship, but as a Creole crossroad wherein particular components, global influences and different identities conflate.

As a matter of fact, the correlation linking Creole cultures with western vernaculars has never emerged as visibly as it does in the present moment. When Vattimo points out that globalizing processes will not enforce homologation but rather a plethora of hybridized forms of life<sup>192</sup>, he implicitly compares the anti-colonial struggles carried out for centuries by American, South-Asian and African indigenous people to the series of resistances that western local realities are now opposing to the neo-liberal expansion. *Weak Thought* associates the end of modernity with the end of colonialism, also anticipating the rise of a multitude of cultural forms which do not fully belong to western legacy: “Nella trattazione vattimiana emerge il nesso strettissimo tra fine del colonialismo e crisi della coscienza eurocentrica europea, che filosoficamente chiamiamo fine della metafisica.”<sup>193</sup> (“In Vattimo’s discussion an extremely close connection links

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<sup>192</sup> See Monaco (2006), chapter 3.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p.111, English translation mine.

the end of colonialism to the crisis of the European consciousness, which we name philosophically end of metaphysics”)The oppression that was for centuries disseminated within the isolated spaces of colonialism is now returning and threatening western communities, often triggering aggressive reactions. The attention that linguists and cultural anthropologists are currently drawing to the analogies relating vernacular languages with Creole literary forms, which for a long time were considered as irrelevant and are now provided with “vernacular dignity”<sup>194</sup>, should be seen as an outcome of this epochal transition.

A reasonable idea of democracy can no longer be discussed apart from these historical presuppositions. Bearing in mind Vattimo’s hermeneutics of *Verwindung*, democratic discourses should in all cases take into account the crimes that European colonizers committed for centuries, also acknowledging the responsibility that western peoples owe to the masses of immigrants that once inhabited the colonies and are now being pushed toward the old continent. An association is surfacing here between “democratization” and “creolization” which coincides neither with a reckless promotion of ethnic mixtures nor with mere philanthropic values. Through the former, in fact, we would nourish the meaningless pluralism that one often witnesses within the neo-liberal “society of the supermarket”<sup>195</sup> - to use Vattimo’s expression – wherein traditions and symbols are sold as commodities. The latter, as it was exhaustively clarified within the first chapter, conceal a paternalistic conception of the “foreigner” which stigmatizes “struggle” as inhuman and “exclusion” as shameful, perpetuating in some circumstances the agony that migrants and refugees experience on a daily basis. Rather, what our line of

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<sup>194</sup> Stuart Hall (2010), *Créolité and the Process of Creolization*, in Cohen and Toninato ed. by (2010) p. 27.

<sup>195</sup> See Vattimo (2007), chapter 8.

reasoning is trying to emphasize is the semantic correlation linking cultural blending and social emancipation which Creole customs personify.

Through the elaboration of innovative symbolic strategies numerous native communities were able, at least in part, to displace the inputs that were coercively imposed onto them by transmitting their own cultural inheritance to newborn forms of expression. Despite the evident European influence affecting Creole cultures and languages, Creolization processes took place in all circumstances as a two-way effort in which the colonized was able to alter the colonizer by means of hybridizing tactics. These include “mimicry, signifying, vernacularization, substitution of one term by another, the underground, subversive, rhythmic rereading of an over-ground, dominant harmonics.”<sup>196</sup> All this is recaptured by Vattimo’s exegesis of globalization which, as Monaco observes, provides local groups with the ability to refashion global influences: “il locale risponde all’appello postogli dal globale mutando l’appellante stesso, il globale, e dando origine alla loro commistione e alla proliferazione di forme di vita ibride.”<sup>197</sup> (“Modifying the global, the local responds to the appeal the global invokes, while giving birth to both their union and a proliferation of hybridized living forms”) Following Vattimo’s hermeneutic democracy, prioritizing the superimposition between philosophy, art and rhetoric as the neutral discursive area wherein social struggle does not involve bloody destruction, a plethora of Creole allegories could now be employed by western local communities for opposing the invasive techno-capitalistic logic of profit. Thus, in view of Kymlicka’s close association between “vernacular” and “democracy”, the diatribic philosopher would respond metaphorically that in the post-modern era democratic politics is “politics in the

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<sup>196</sup> Stuart Hall (2010) *Créolité and the Process of Creolization*, in Cohen and Toninato ed. by (2010) p.32.

<sup>197</sup> Monaco (2006), p. 116, English Translation mine.



Creole”: self-determination presupposes in all circumstances the post-colonial experience, which taught us that liberty and emancipation cannot be enhanced without a persistent renegotiation of cultural components.

Massimo Cacciari would likely disregard these considerations as representative of a detrimental system of thought. In chapter 4 of *Geo-philosophy of Europe*, Cacciari takes into account the cosmopolitan value of ‘tolerance’ and criticizes as negligent all philosophical doctrines that promote mutual respect by weakening, forgetting or suspending ontological differences. For Cacciari, these approaches translate social divergence into an illusory appearance, ultimately converting tolerance into a substantial intolerance for all cultural variations.<sup>198</sup> The reference to *Weak Thought* is undeniable. And nonetheless, the evolution of Italian philosophy that has been reconstructed thus far appears to indicate the circular transition between *parrhesia* and *diatribe* as the most convenient device through which epistemological views and language theories challenge political discourse. The parrhesiatic components unburied from Cacciari’s texts are beneficial so long as they contain the uncompromising post-modern tendency to stigmatize values of ‘truth’ as completely insignificant, and impede communication from spilling over the domain of the purely irrational. The diatribic perspective that has been then clarified, on the other hand, allows us to look at ontological and discursive impurities as tools of resistance, also preventing verbal games from becoming excessively self-assertive. By injecting within language a variety of self-critical and self-interrogating intrusive elements, Italian Thought ultimately describes truthfulness in terms of “authenticity”, and characterizes “identity” as a transitory hybridizing process. Following this conceptual trail, one is spontaneously led to envision a polycentric

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<sup>198</sup> Cacciari (1994), p. 144.

geopolitical scenery whose interactive constitutive molecules do not rely, for their survival, on the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy that Cacciari's "archipelago" takes for granted, but on the mimetic factors that have surfaced from *Weak Thought*. In the next chapter we will discover how all this can be further evaluated in view of post-1990 Italian philosophy.

### CHAPTER 3

*“The highest poverty, with its use of things,  
is the form-of-life that begins when all the  
West’s forms of life have reached their historical consummation.”*

*Giorgio Agamben*

*“True generosity towards the future is to give everything to the present”*

*Albert Camus, The Rebel*

#### *Prelude: Temporal Variations, Historical Collapses*

*1.*

The parrhesia-diatribes route that has been discovered from the 1970s and 1980s Italian philosophy, points to a cosmopolitan model which encompasses both local and global components, also employing social fusions and intercultural dialogue so as to conceptualize innovative and more desirable spaces of resistance. This chapter will circumscribe more exhaustively such a cosmo-local perspective by taking into account further repercussions on the moral and political planes. For this purpose, we will continue

to interrogate Italian post-human doctrines, while also referring to the current debate on cosmopolitan theory.

As it was formerly anticipated, the cynical perspective defended here sympathizes with the idea that cosmopolitan theory needs to be reformulated in view of the post-colonial experience. I am referring to authors such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, whose notion of *Subaltern Cosmopolitanism* filters cosmopolitan thought through the eyes of the communities which have been excluded from the western universalistic project. Santos identifies two levels of globalization: the expansion of economic neo-liberalism is in all circumstances opposed by “counter-hegemonic” forces encompassing a “vast set of networks, initiatives, organizations, and movements that fight against the economic, social, and political outcomes of hegemonic globalization, challenge the conceptions of world development underlying the latter, and propose alternative conceptions”.<sup>199</sup> In particular, Santos strives to rethink cosmopolitanism from the perspective of the “south”, a phrase which denotes all forms of subordination - i.e. economic exploitation, racial oppression, gender discrimination, etc. –, and empathizes with all people who happen to be penalized by Euro-centric perspectives.

Even more significantly, I am alluding to the contributions offered by Walter D. Mignolo, Sheldon Pollock and Homi Bhabha to the provocative text *Cosmopolitanism* (2000), which deconstructs traditional cosmopolitan conjectures by looking at them from a plurality of post-modern viewpoints.<sup>200</sup> Mignolo establishes a close correlation between humanistic discourses, evangelizing practices and modern colonialism, also insisting on the urgency to restructure cosmopolitan theory from a more critical stance. The affinity

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<sup>199</sup> Taraborrelli (2015) p. 79.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. chapter 3.

that the kynical position shares with his analysis surfaces in relation to the principle of “inclusion” challenged within the first chapter, and which Mignolo also undermines: “Today silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than wanting to be included. Inclusion is always a reformative project. Bringing themselves into the conversation is a transformative project that takes the form of border thinking or border epistemology...”<sup>201</sup>

“Border thinking”<sup>202</sup> is also a theoretical tool adopted by Pollock and Bhabha. Both authors believe that the humanistic representation of the “self” as an ensemble of concentric circles encompassing progressively wider affinities – i.e. families, friends, cities, regions, nations, etc. - does not give honor to the numerous forms of displacement which proliferate within the contemporary globalized world. From their viewpoint, immigrants, refugees, and the stateless, who are coercively uprooted from their motherlands because of political or economic instability, are the ones who inhabit the most authentic cosmopolitan dimension. As opposed to the idyllic intercultural life-space that humanists dream about, this unfolds through a wide variety of labour exploitations, ethnic discriminations, moral collisions, cultural miscomprehensions, and psychological tensions of all sorts. The antagonistic cosmo-localism that we are trying to define aligns, at least in part, with what Pollock and Bhabha identify as “cosmopolitan vernacular”; namely, a transnational space of exile wherein ideological exchanges, moral negotiations and language translations turn into strategies of existential resistance: “Vernacular cosmopolitans are compelled to make a tryst with cultural translation as an act of survival. Their specific and local histories, often threatened and repressed, are inserted

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p. 98.

<sup>202</sup> Regarding this topic, see in particular Mezzadra & Neilson (2013).

‘between the lines’ of dominant cultural practices. To occupy such an ‘in-between’ space is often the result of oppression and inequality.’<sup>203</sup>

In order to clarify the distinction between the kynical perspective and the aforementioned discourses, in this chapter I will call attention to one of the most fundamental assumptions that they all presuppose. Regardless of the subtle discrepancies that keep these theories apart, they all converge on the hypothesis that a critical type of cosmopolitan theory cannot be posited without deconstructing ordinary conceptions of history. Traditional cosmopolitanism, inheriting the legacy of the Enlightenment and the correlated faith in human reason and progress, mainly relies on the Christian-Newtonian representation of temporality as an entity which flows indistinctively in all parts of the universe and can be quantified in absolutistic terms. Based on these presuppositions, humanistic accounts of time explain history as a linear, regular and cumulative progression of units, which ultimately leads all societies to develop in proportion to the same model. The anti-humanistic trail that our epistemological and linguistic reflections unburied within the previous chapter, therefore, will not be able to reach its ultimate destination without an opportune critique of such a temporal paradigm.

2.

For this purpose, Italian Cynicism can be once again extremely beneficial. Beginning in 1990, Italian Theory evolved via radical attacks on “history” which brought the post-modern discourses that had been earlier formulated to their final nihilistic stage. While it is true that alternative theories of time were surfacing within other western philosophical

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<sup>203</sup> Bhabha (2000), p. 139.

contexts – it is sufficient to recall Francis Fukuyama’s idea of the “last man” and Derrida’s notion of time as ‘out of joint’ – this critical inclination arguably resounded at full volume in Italy, likely due to the revolutionary sociopolitical climate that characterized the country in the early 1990s.

Around that period, the events that were significantly reshaping the global geopolitical scenario reverberated through destructive domestic episodes which led the Italian people to suffer a sorrowful collective trauma. At the international level, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the crisis of the leftist ideologies certainly echoed all over Europe, unsettling numerous sociopolitical environments and electorates. However, the consequences of that collapse proved particularly devastating within the Italian society, which had given birth to the strongest European Communist party and, during the 1970s, the most enduring leftist movements of protest. Moreover, the birth of the European Union, requiring members to devolve part of their sovereignty to the cause of a supranational cooperation, certainly destabilized numerous communities. And nonetheless, sociological data confirm that the post-Maastricht depression was exceptionally intense in Italy, whose debt and inflation were both very high - respectively 103 percent of GDP instead of 60%, inflation of 6.9 percent - while its budget deficit counted 9.9 percent against the required 3 percent.<sup>204</sup>

These international shifts were exercising intense pressure on a domestic scenario which was already problematic, due to what historians usually define as a transition from the ‘first’ to the ‘second’ republic. During this process, numerous strikes were inflicted on governmental institutions, also substantially replacing the political actors that had ruled the country for decades with new ones. The crisis initially materialized in Milan,

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<sup>204</sup> See Ginsborg (2001), p. 265.

where Italian magistrates identified an enormous web of bribes linking the entrepreneurial class to the political elite. The so called “tangente” framework – literally, “city of bribery” – that was disclosed by the magistrates revealed a plethora of corrupted connections which had infected the political system for a long time. Within this system illegal funding to the parties in exchange of personal favors had become a widely accepted practice. The “mani pulite” (clean hands) operations accomplished by investigators and prosecutors brought to court thousands of politicians and businessmen, leading several political factions to dissolution.

The tangente scandals, which were initially restricted to the Northern areas of the country but progressively emerged from all angles of the political apparatus, triggered a series of local attacks on the legitimacy of the Italian government. Among these reactions, the most destructive one was the 1992 birth of the *Northern League*, a political group which claimed to represent a presumably independent Northern culture demanding secession from the state. The arrogant requests advanced by the League, whose rhetoric often degenerated into xenophobic and racist stigmatizations of Central and Southern Italians, were nonetheless symptoms of a wider discontent. In line with the anti-corruption values spreading across the peninsula, protests were also directed against the national taxation system. Many of the complaints expressed by the League found a fertile terrain within the small entrepreneurial class, which had been a close ally of the State in previous decades and now found itself strongly penalized by the post-Maastricht measures. Furthermore, the assaults launched towards the central government from the Northern parts of the country resonated even more loudly in the south, where the influence that was exercised by Mafia clans was not decreasing. The 1992 assassinations



of anti-mafia prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and his assistant Paolo Borsellino revealed the considerable weakness afflicting the state within southern regions, generating significant feelings of hopelessness across the whole nation.

All these events triggered a disruption within the unitary way in which the Italian people had for years perceived the historical flow. From then on, this was arguably going to disperse along three main directions: a) first, the aforesaid Northern attacks on the Roman government were once again bringing to light the importance of the Southern question, which had never before been appropriately addressed by governmental institutions. In 1990 unemployment among southern youths was extremely high - about 44.1% against the 14.6 % of the centre-north - while the GDP reached the lowest peak since 1970. Moreover, although life expectation was considerably shorter than anywhere else in Italy and infrastructures were completely inefficient, local politics was still very amoral and clientelistic.<sup>205</sup> For a government which was already approving numerous privatizing resolutions and reshaping the public system in line with the neo-liberal values of “performance” and “productivity”<sup>206</sup>, this was a sufficiently valid reason for revoking several forms of financial assistance. Consequently, neither northern Italian nor foreign capitals looked at Sicily, Calabria or Campania as lands for potential investments. Simultaneously, the discrepancy between the way in which the temporal flow was experienced in the “modernized” and “efficient” North compared to the presumed *delay* of the South undeniably surfaced yet again.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. pp. 22-25.

<sup>206</sup> I am mainly referring to the government chaired by Giuliano Amato, who was prime minister between 1992 and 1993. In addition to the privatization of several national companies, on January 22, 1993 Amato approved a decree which reformed the public administration according to private administrative law: public employees were going to be treated as private workers, “without special job security, and were to be rewarded for productivity, rendered flexible, and sacked if necessary. Hours of opening to the public were to be extended to the afternoons. Public sector managers were to be given wider responsibilities and constant targets.” Ginsborg (2001), p. 273.

b) The abrupt disappearance of the political parties which had been the main protagonists since the end of WWII – i.e. the Christian Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Republican Party, and the Social-democratic party - left a significant void within the popular conscience. The fading of the Christian Democracy, above all, proved extremely upsetting for a large part of the Italian electorate. Built on catholic moral foundations, it had played a crucial role in the democratization of the country, often banking on its interclass type of political orientation so as to gain consent from a diversity of social strata<sup>207</sup>. The departure of this political faction led the popular consciousness to question the previous fifty years of Italian history, which had flown in the name of liberty and equality and allowed the Italian society to achieve a highly wealthy condition, but were ultimately exposing a rotten core. For many Italians, history was abruptly put on hold. The party-dynamics that they were familiar with were suddenly interrupted, spreading hesitation and indecision across the country and leading the number of non-voters to increase considerably at the 1992 national elections.<sup>208</sup>

Such a state of temporal *suspension* infiltrated numerous social environments, including the political group that had survived the mani pulite scandals without contracting any particular damages. The Communist Party, to which I am referring, by the end of the 1980s had split into several factions and mainly merged into the more moderate and reformist PDS (Democratic Party of the Left). Thanks to the juridical legitimacy that it was still defending, the PDS could have certainly benefited from the crisis more than any other group, and played a crucial role in redirecting Italian politics

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<sup>207</sup> See Ginsborg (1989), pp. 98-99.

<sup>208</sup> See Ginsborg (2001), chapter 8.

towards desirable horizons. On the contrary, “a certain immobility”<sup>209</sup> qualified the attitude chosen by its leaders who, in a moment that was requiring drastic solutions, adopted “caution and mediation”<sup>210</sup> as their strategies, thus nourishing the aforesaid climate of stagnation.

c) Within a social atmosphere characterized by illegality, vacillation and motionlessness, only scattered groups of people perceived the crisis from a more positive perspective due to the potential that this could have ultimately brought about a cultural renovation. These *virtuous minorities* - to use Ginsborg’s phrase - were mostly an expression of urban middle classes relying on public employment which, during the preceding ten years, had developed sharp “critical attitudes towards many aspects of Italy’s helter-skelter modernization. Environmental pollution, the chocking of city centres with public transport, indiscriminate private consumption accompanied by much public squalor – these were all elements which fueled their critique of the politicians’ failure to govern.”<sup>211</sup> Such a reflective demeanor was mainly common among left-wing or catholic citizens who still placed importance on public morality, and identified more intensively than many of their compatriots with both the virtuous phases of the Republic’s history and the dissenting voices still alive within the institutions. Digging within the detrimental outcomes produced by the crisis, these citizens were able to uncover signs of a potential *rebirth* from the arrogant politics which, until that moment, had seemed to be undefeatable.

Claiming that these hopeful expectations have been fulfilled during the following years would likely prove to be delusionally optimistic. What can be affirmed with

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid. p. 283

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. p. 283.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. p. 252.

sufficient accuracy, however, is that the three ways in which time unfolded in Italy beginning in the early 1990s – i.e. *delay*, *suspension*, *rebirth* – found expression within three philosophical critiques of history. All these theoretical efforts exhibit kynical connotations, inasmuch as they dismiss humanistic representations of temporality through *dispossessing* maneuvers. Recalling Heidegger’s description of man as ‘full in world’, one could metaphorically assert that each of these three lines of thought qualifies the post-human as ‘poor in time’. More specifically, *delay* comes from the parrhesiatic spirit that animated Italian Theory during the previous decades, while *suspension* arises from its diatribic soul. As such, *suspension* represents here both the most nihilistic peak reached by contemporary Italian Cynicism and also what poses the conditions for the development of more affirmative conceptions of the ‘political’. This chapter will delve into this analysis in order to understand how post-human conceptions of history affect cosmopolitan theory.

### *Poverty in Time, first attempt: Delay*

#### *Minor Neo-humanisms: the New Autonomy of the South*

##### *1.*

Let us attempt to circumscribe more exhaustively the “exiled” cosmo-local laboratories previously imagined. What type of temporal model would best represent them? In other words, what conception of time would allow local realities to preserve their ontological

and political autonomy, while facilitating intercultural exchange and moral dialogue? How are we to conceive of the historical flow so as to obtain a cosmopolitan discourse that is not assertively “inclusive”, and which permits cultural and ethical differences to coexist without making appeal to any fanaticism of belonging? Addressing these questions without remaining trapped within paradoxical black holes is not an easy task.

An option at our disposal is the discourse that philosopher and sociologist Franco Cassano began to elaborate starting from the early 1990s. Through texts such as *Approssimazione* (Approximation, 1989), *Southern Thought* (1996), and *Paeninsula* (1998) Cassano has aimed at rectifying traditional cosmopolitan perspectives by providing an alternative conception of time. The essence that Cassano’s analysis personifies is narrowly post-colonial because it examines western thought, Mediterranean cultures, and also Italian history through some of the theoretical tools mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. Drawing principally from Edward Said’s considerations on orientalism, Cassano points out that European discourses have frequently portrayed Italy as an exotic and attractive land whose paradisiacal façade coincided with its essential imperfection. Similarly to other Mediterranean realities, Italy has often represented the frontier separating Christian and Islamic worlds, and also the space wherein modernity was never able to reach its ultimate purposes. As such, it comes into sight as the ‘other’ by essence:

“The Mediterranean (...) means backwardness and resistance to modernization...a swamp filled with conflicts, terrorists, superstitions and fundamentalisms: it is anti-modernity (...) never touched by the Protestant reform, the true cure-all that opens every door to modernity (...). The only acceptable meaning is the one mediated by tourism: wonderful landscapes (...) vacation beaches where the disciplined forces of the industrial polis escape to

enjoy their moments of freedom and of sun, and rediscover nature and their bodies.”<sup>212</sup>

For Cassano, such an objectified construction of the south generated a social environment wherein feelings of reciprocity and solidarity substantially disappear, converting life into an isolating and destructive experience. *Southern Thought* claims that western modernity transformed human beings into alienated monads whose shortfall of empathy and capacity to communicate ultimately provides people with an extremely depressive existence. The legacy of the Enlightenment, defended by those who believed that scientific and technological progress would have eventually emancipated human beings, reveals its delusional core when one looks at the ruthless exploitation of labor, the devastation of landscapes and the despoliation of nature that are currently detectible across numerous southern areas.

Interestingly, Cassano places the origins of such a detrimental process within the historical phase when European philosophy dismissed the “Mediterranean”, which in ancient times had represented a geo-philosophical point of reference, and began to look at the Atlantic Ocean as a universe to conquer. The ethical values of balance and moderation endorsed by classical Greek Thought, whose virtuous personality was rooted within the insular climate from which it materialized, at that point had been completely forgotten. The fading of the Greek civilization followed the definite loss of a perfect equilibrium that had been established between soil and water, yielding to a long series of immoderate imperialistic projects which include the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Roman conquests and modern colonialism.

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<sup>212</sup> Cassano, “Contro tutti I fondamentalismi: il nuovo Mediterraneo”, quoted in Bouchard (2011), p. 351.

Such a process ultimately produced a bipolar geopolitical system wherein the “north” discloses itself as the inclination to overcome all borders, also imposing on the “south” an accelerated perception of time. In this regard, Cassano points out how contemporary turbo-capitalism sustains itself on a brutal rationalization of temporality, which in all circumstances aims at maximizing its productive potential. As a matter of fact, the idealization of profit that one witnesses in the present epoch is partly grounded on the assumption that real life does not take place in the present, but is always deferred to a hypothetical future. Individuals are encouraged to achieve as fast as possible this imminent condition, which in all circumstances proves unattainable. The neo-liberal exploitation of the human existence reproduces itself precisely through such a temporal framework, which forces individuals to compete wildly against one another to the point of accepting passively their own annihilation. It is a civilization that Cassano identifies as *homo currens*, ironically denoting the rushing as well as self-destructive routines that people experience within modern society.

How to dismantle this vicious spell? How to stop such a self-devouring mode of social development? The reading of Cassano’s texts defended here identifies an interpretive thread which, on one hand, overcomes Said’s post-colonial views and, on the other, inherits the kynical components qualifying Albert Camus’ philosophical work. I will illustrate in detail the reasons that sustain this exegetic stance before evaluating *southern thought* from a critical cosmopolitan viewpoint.

Following Said, Cassano does not try to solve the aforementioned riddles by relying on the post-modern expedients earlier scrutinized in reference to *Weak Thought*. Said’s complaints pertaining to the “crippling effects of the ‘ideological anti-humanism of

Foucault, Barthes, Lyotard and others”<sup>213</sup> are reclaimed by Cassano, who also believes to a degree that, “despite the (...) influential ideas of a certain facile type of anti-foundationalism (...) is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experiences of Euro-centrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of humanism.”<sup>214</sup> Such a polemic perspective reverberates within Cassano’s evaluation of Nietzsche and Heidegger, whose pioneer philosophical discourses were crucial for the subsequent attacks on western reason. *Southern Thought* looks at them as side effects triggered by the very humanistic malady which they were attempting to heal. Nietzsche’s post-humanism is regarded as an arrogant effort to overcome all possible horizons, a space wherein the ocean becomes a “desert, a loneliness that coherently moves toward its meeting with folly.”<sup>215</sup> Heidegger’s reactionary doctrine, pursuing the opposite path, is interpreted as a “fundamentalism of the land” which proves just as counterproductive: “Neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger shows the path... Those who do not want either to be shipwrecked or become peasants or poets must work more modestly on a double motion, on a contradiction, on the conflicted lawfulness of departing and returning.”<sup>216</sup>

What scholars have yet to emphasize is the essential factor that distinguishes Cassano’s neo-humanistic view from Said’s post-colonial critique. Pushing *Southern Thought* beyond the landscapes defined by the theory of orientalism is, as Cassano explicitly admits, the pivotal role of the temporal element:

“Said’s contribution is certainly valuable in helping to build the autonomy of those who have long been in a subaltern position. But perhaps we should add that, in the

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<sup>213</sup> Bouchard (2008), p. 300.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Cassano (2012), p. 31.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p. 32.



case of the South, symbolic subjection passes also, and especially, through its definition as a space of backwardness and underdevelopment, as an unfinished version of the North. Symbolic dominance plays out around the imposition of a specific conception of historical time.”<sup>217</sup>

The importance to theorize an alternative temporal paradigm leads Cassano to overcome Said’s post-colonial perspective and to develop a Mediterranean *neo-humanism* which dismisses an excess of rationalistic components, while preserving the values of “tolerance” and “liberty” that presumably animate western democratic systems. It is what Cassano strives to do by engaging with the work of Albert Camus.

2.

In a lecture titled “The New Mediterranean Culture” (1937) delivered in Algiers while Europe was suffering discrimination, xenophobia and oppression of all kinds, Camus had formerly envisioned the potential for the Mediterranean to become a geopolitical context where empathy and respect for ethnic and social differences could be rediscovered. Dismissing an imaginary “nationalism of the sun”<sup>218</sup>, the lecture revalued the multicultural tradition of the Mediterranean, wherein East and West meet in an “internationalism no longer inspired by a Christian Principle, by the Papal Rome of the Holy Roman Empire”<sup>219</sup>, but by man himself. Camus’ *minor* humanism, displaying cynical hostility towards transcendental concerns and excessively cerebral lines of reasoning, was mainly grounded on a predilection for nature as well as on skeptical feelings with respect to “that evil toy called Progress”<sup>220</sup>. Cassano appreciates Camus’

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<sup>217</sup> Cassano (2012), p. xxxix.

<sup>218</sup> Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, quoted in Bouchard (2008), p.309.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> See Bouchard (2008), p. 309.

critique of history, which dismisses delusional faiths within teleological or providential purposes, and places in human beings the responsibility to accomplish their own political and spiritual awakening:

“Turning upside down the canon that Christianity and Marxism have in common (both optimistic with regard to the final end of history but pessimistic toward humanity), on a number of occasions Camus declares himself pessimistic toward history and optimistic toward humankind: if history is not the history of salvation, revolution, or progress, and nothing can be expected from it, then the only option lies in humanity and its dignity. For Camus, the aversion to the religion of history is not a secondary theme, the opportunity for a brilliant polemic; rather, it is a decisive juncture.”<sup>221</sup>

Cassano inherits this rebelliousness against history by positing “slowness” as an existential, moral and political ideal. From his standpoint, “thinking on foot” is the ideal demeanor to adopt in order to undermine the structural framework that sustains the contemporary globalizing techno-capitalism:

“We must go slow like an old country train carrying peasant women dressed in black, like those who go on foot and see the world magically opening head, because going on foot is like leafing through a book, while running is like looking at its cover... Going slow is everyone’s ability to be a philosopher, living at a different speed, closer to beginnings and ends, where we experience life at its fullest, either as it begins or as we take leave from it.”<sup>222</sup>

Dismissing the readiness of those who take pride in consuming their daily existence as fast as possible, Cassano looks at “delay” as a conceptual instrument to endorse in order to counter Northern pressures and to provide the southern conscience with ethical and political dignity.

Cassano’s kynical incitement to *dispossess* oneself of the temporal anxiety and to remain “poor in time” recalls furthermore the principle of *self-reliance*, which was also

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<sup>221</sup> Cassano (2012), p. 64.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. pp. 9-10.

endorsed by Diogenes' disciples in ancient times. What is in fact crucial from Cassano's perspective is to dissociate the concept of "slowness" from the qualities that are commonly ascribed to southern peoples – i.e. laziness, indolence, apathy – and to think of it as the animating core of a self-aware and independent entity. A successful emancipation of the south presupposes the refusal of all external definitions and classifications, as well as the willingness to become an autonomous political subjectivity. In this regard, Cassano's admiration of the morals and customs praised during the classical age of the Greek poleis retrieves the very ethical appeals that the Cynics had made during Hellenism. *Southern Thought* in fact locates the virtuous and moderate aspects characterizing Greek civilization within the coastal shores which the Greeks never overcame in search of territorial conquests. Such a view is historically accurate to the extent that, although the Greek city-states were reciprocally connected for purposes of trade exchanges, they were nonetheless "self-sufficient enough for autarkeia to be regarded as a practical ideal."<sup>223</sup> The importance of self-reliance, which can be detected within Plato and Aristotle's texts, became even more fundamental during the Hellenistic age, when the poleis had substantially lost their political autonomy and had transformed into administrative centers. It was during this time period that the Cynics adopted self-reliance as a fundamental ethical principle, while also comparing moral strength to a perfect city-state that does not need to rely on any other political community for its own survival.

Because of the similar climate from which *Southern Thought* materializes, Cassano's primacy of nature over history acquires kynical connotations, recalling Diogenes' belief that moral integrity and self-reliance allow virtuous individuals to endure through the

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<sup>223</sup> Desmond (2008), pp. 173-74.

uncontrollable misfortunes generated by the temporal flow. In so doing, Cassano's ideal of autonomy circumscribes an exiled subordinate space wherein one can be redeemed from the illusory and harmful chimeras that northern mentalities perpetuate. Unsurprisingly, the delayed life pace that Southern Thought advocates is also associated with the image of a "happy poverty" that Camus experienced during his childhood on the streets of Algiers, "under a happy sun, in a nature with which one feels harmony, not hostility".<sup>224</sup> Despite severe economic restrictions, the Algerian years elicited in Camus joyful memories, evoking a long-gone social environment that dismissed feelings of envy and resentment and enhanced values of solidarity and alliance. What Italian Thought retrieves from Camus' existential experience is an antagonistic conception of "poverty"; poverty, that is, as a counter-hegemonic tool. In what sense can the condition of "poor" be a space of resistance? Is it possible to conceptualize a notion of human prosperity that is not grounded on the material accumulation which the society of consumerism promotes fervently? How are we to remove self-fulfillment from the domain circumscribed by ordinary societal ambitions such as wealth, sumptuousness and supremacy of all sorts? These questions bring forth controversial reflections.

On one hand, it is reasonable to converge with Cassano's observation that optimistic glorifications of poverty are often an expression of privileged social areas, wherein hunger is not truly experienced and contempt for luxury is conveyed with the sole intention to fit in to a particular status. On the other hand, one wonders whether an image of "poor" that ignores the negative features acknowledged by common sense could be in some ways helpful for our critical purposes. The concept we are looking for is devoid of gloomy connotations like "deficiency", "neediness", or "scarcity"; as such, it does not

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<sup>224</sup> Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, quoted in Cassano (2012), p. 76.

entail an urgency to upgrade from supposed substandard circumstances or to chase the status quo definition of “better off”. The notion of “poverty” we are searching for does not disclose itself as an “incompleteness” that needs to be perfected, nor as a potentiality that strives to achieve its own actuality; dismissing any aspirations for the future, it adheres in all cases to the current moment. Poverty, from this perspective, is pure appreciation for the present. Regarded per se, this conception of poverty refuses pitiful and pathetic representations and brings to light the kynical values of “frugality”, “temperance”, “parsimony”, and “simplicity” that *Southern Thought* promotes.

Cassano’s cynicism, depicting poverty a way to engage with the temporal flow, looks at the Mediterranean as a geopolitical universe which can potentially give birth to alternative forms of social development embracing values of moderation. Rejecting the overconfident attitude displayed by northern globalism, the south is the space wherein philosophical thought, moral principles and political practices can reacquire a just balance. In particular, the Mediterranean tradition is vital to the extent it provides the notion of the border, which is commonly regarded as a geographical entity, with an ethical content. From this perspective, the margin is not only what separates different communities from one another, but also what gathers human beings together by reminding them of their physical and moral limitations. Reinterpreting the frontier as an ethical boundary, Cassano envisions the rise of a southern multicultural civilization that, as Bouchard meaningfully summarizes, “is no longer founded upon the progress of history of post-Kantian philosophy, but on the respect for human nature, the necessity of

community and solidarity, the importance of an ethics of measures and limits necessary to counter present-day realities.”<sup>225</sup>

*Recognition, Affirmation, Singularity: the Way of the Quiet Maverick*

I.

In view of the aforesaid kynical factors, is Cassano’s temporal paradigm able to sustain our critical cosmopolitan purposes? Can his conception of the Mediterranean be considered a faithful representation of the antagonistic cosmo-local political spaces that we are searching? These questions cannot be addressed without identifying an evolutionary thread within Cassano’s philosophical production, which arguably underwent a quite relevant shift between the publication of *Southern Thought* (1996) and *Paeninsula* (1998).

In the early 1990s Cassano’s perspective manifests a fair degree of suspiciousness with regards to cosmopolitan discourses, which are merely looked at as high class modes of thinking representing privileged people “who are less tied to a community because they are conscious that they can succeed in other communities.”<sup>226</sup> Bouchard points out that in this philosophical phase Cassano’s neo-humanism is problematic as it occasionally grounds the Mediterranean exceptionalism on geological reasons, thus acquiring essentialist connotations. In some circumstances Cassano justifies the Italian vocation to

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<sup>225</sup> Bouchard (2008), p. 300.

<sup>226</sup> Cassano (2012), p. 49.

cultural openness through the peninsular structure characterizing Italian land.<sup>227</sup> Some distance needs to be taken from this criticism, inasmuch as it illegitimately labels as “essentialist” all philosophical views which rely to a degree on geographical factors. Following Bouchard’s argument, one should condemn every sociological or anthropological discourse which partly explains customs and social practices through elements such as weather conditions, environmental features, or seasonal variations. Consequently, the popular saying that “people are most likely to feel happier during the summer” which, as shallow and superficial as it is, can hardly be considered as a “reifying” belief, should also be stigmatized as “essentialist”. As a matter of fact, the dismissal of essentialist accounts of moral values, cultures and identity does not necessarily entail the approval of constructivist paradigms, representing self-perception as an object that can be elaborated freely and independently from any external inputs. It is reasonable to imagine, on the contrary, that the human psyche is almost certainly provided with the capacity to transcend the limits imposed by the surrounding environment, which nonetheless can affect the moral and existential journey that each person undergoes. In view of these observations, Cassano’s intention can hardly be seen as the mere attempt to confine ideals of cultural diversity within a class of irremovable ontological qualities. At the same time, Bouchard’s concern that an immoderate insistence on the redemption of the south might convert philosophical thought into a “territorializing identity-politics whereby regional, sub-national belonging is promoted to a position of primacy in present-day European geopolitics”<sup>228</sup> should not be indifferently disregarded.

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<sup>227</sup> Bouchard (2011), p. 358.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. p. 358.

The identitarian aspects qualifying Cassano's earlier texts are likely rooted within the epistemological assumptions he borrows from Cacciari's negative thinking, also depending on the aversion exhibited with respect to Vattimo's philosophy.<sup>229</sup> This perspective appears to be smoothly alleviated in *Paeninsula* and the later editions of *Southern Thought*, wherein the author reevaluates more positively the cosmopolitan features characterizing the Italian tradition, ascribing them to a "weak identity", a "weak sense of belonging", "weak frontiers" and a "weak nationalism":

"Questa identità *debole* e paradossale, questo essere accomunati soprattutto dalla critica di se stessi, è la forma negativa e disfattista con cui si presenta agli italiani una loro potenziale qualità, l'assenza di boria patriottica, la curiosità e la disponibilità ad imparare dall'esperienza altrui, quello che molti hanno chiamato cosmopolitismo."<sup>230</sup> (*Italics mine*)

("This *weak* and paradoxical identity, this being gathered above all by self-criticism, is the negative and nihilistic form with which one of their potential qualities reveals itself to the Italians, the absence of patriotic arrogance, the curiosity and willingness to learn from other people's experience, what many have identified as cosmopolitanism.")

Cassano's reassessment of *weak thought* allows him to widen his philosophical views and to engage more positively with critical cosmopolitan discourses. The *Prologue* to the 2006 edition of *Southern Thought* alludes to a metaphorical significance of the Mediterranean, which in this new phase represents neither specific geographical areas nor privileged historical legacies, but "explicitly claims for itself the connection between a South, the Italian one, and the Souths of the worlds."<sup>231</sup> This clarification converts

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<sup>229</sup> In addition to the theoretical similarities that Cacciari's alternative modernity and Cassano's neo-humanism share, they established a personal correspondence displaying agreement on numerous levels (Bouchard, 2011, p. 350). In view of these facts, Cassano's opinion that "per praticare la non-violenza è necessaria una grande forza, esattamente il contrario della debolezza" (*Approssimazione*, 1989, p. 116) clearly reveals skepticism regarding Vattimo's philosophy.

<sup>230</sup> Cassano (1998), p. v, English translation mine.

<sup>231</sup> Cassano (2012) p. xxxvi.



*Southern Thought* into a discourse that speaks on behalf of all social groups which have been damaged by the western project of modernity, thus aligning to some extent with De Sousa Santos' subaltern cosmopolitan idea that "whoever is a victim of local intolerance and discrimination needs cross-border tolerance and support; whoever lives in misery in a world of wealth needs cosmopolitan solidarity; whoever is a non- or second-class citizen of a country or the world needs an alternative conception of national and global citizenship."<sup>232</sup> This theoretical convergence furthermore reverberates within the importance that both authors place on the temporal component, which is equally regarded as crucial for the elaboration of a truly emancipatory discourse.

From our cynical stance, the discursive area crossing over Santos' analysis and *Southern Thought* needs to be revised. Specifically, I am referring to the following two factors, neither of which resounds harmoniously within the approach to cosmopolitan thought adopted here: 1) the ambiguous attempt to achieve "transformative" results by relying on an "affirmative" temporal framework; 2) the related incapacity to convert "individualism" into "singularity". A digression on these two points is needed before moving forward.

Cassano's critical strategy does not place particular importance on redistributive material claims, thus taking distance from moral cosmopolitan theories such as the ones developed, for example, by Pogge and Beitz. As opposed to Pogge, Cassano does not suggest modifying international trade policies in order to allow populations in poverty to achieve wealthier conditions. Unlike Beitz, he does not claim that international relations should be rectified according to principles of domestic redistributive justice.<sup>233</sup> Rather

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<sup>232</sup> Taraborrelli (2015), p. 79.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. chapter 1.

than encouraging a fairer allocation of wealth, *Southern Thought* advocates the cultural *recognition* of specific minorities which for centuries have been neglected, objectified and also classified by means of illegitimate criteria. It is no accident that Cassano compares his idea of the “south” to the way in which several gender theories represent the “feminine”; namely, not as an imperfect or incomplete version of the masculine, but as “a different way of seeing that aims at protecting its own autonomy vis-à-vis the developed world while deconstructing its symbolic arrogance.”<sup>234</sup>

Nancy Fraser’s thoughtful account of recognition strategies, distinguishing *affirmative* methods from *transformative* approaches, is indispensable here for obtaining an exhaustive evaluation of the theory in question.<sup>235</sup> An ‘affirmative remedy’ for injustice intends to rectify social disparities without modifying the fundamental structure that produces them. For instance, within the political context of the United States, an affirmative remedy for racism can be represented by black-identity strategies, endowing African American citizens with more relevant social weight. On the other hand, a ‘transformative remedy’ aspires to repair inequalities by reshaping their inner “generative framework”<sup>236</sup>. In the case of racism, such a method can be exemplified by political modes of thinking which prefer to dismantle the black-white dichotomy as well as ordinary conceptions of race and ethnicity.

Fraser rightfully points out that affirmative recognition strategies are ultimately self-contradictory, inasmuch as they privilege one group over another, thus betraying the egalitarian premises from which they move. Concerning affirmative feminism, for instance, Fraser concludes: “Read through the lens, the cultural politics of affirming

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<sup>234</sup> Cassano (2012), p. xxxviii.

<sup>235</sup> See Fraser (1997), pp.23-33.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

women's difference appears as an affront to the liberal welfare state's official commitment to the equal moral worth of persons."<sup>237</sup> On the other hand, transformative approaches, which Frasier mainly associates with deconstructive philosophical maneuvers, are more self-consistent because their implementation does not betray the universalistic conception of recognition they presuppose.

Cassano's critical purposes appear to be mostly *transformative*, to the extent that *Southern Thought* envisions an alternative mode of social development which should presumably emancipate the entire human species. The kynical values of *autonomy* and *self-sufficiency* that Cassano calls for, moreover, represent the intention to disengage from the whole moral framework sustaining the present-day economy, so as to assist the emergence of new and more desirable ways of life. Despite these transformative aspects, however, Cassano relies on a bivalent temporal paradigm which preserves the very social structure he aims to undermine. Because of the *speed-delay* dichotomy that Southern Thought presupposes, Cassano's line of reasoning risks prioritizing specific identities over others, thus supporting group differentiations and obtaining a self-defeating conceptual system wherein "the reifying Atlantic North becomes, in turn, reified by the Global and Mediterranean Souths"<sup>238</sup>.

For similar reasons, *Southern Thought* also aligns with Santos' conception of the cosmopolitan domain as a "community of victims" - to use Taraborrelli's phrase - who presumably experience oppression more intensively and unfairly than other individuals. I am not suggesting here to minimize the amount of horrifying inequalities, discrimination and brutal violence that occur all over the world on a daily basis. Rather, I am dismissing

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

<sup>238</sup> Bouchard (2011), p. 358.

the *affirmative* perspective in which “evil” is often ascribed to specific parts of human communities that appear to be exceptionally sinful and malevolent. The position defended here, on the contrary, conceives of injustice as indifferently afflicting all people, also locating it within the central core of the human world, whose nuclear framework needs to be restructured. Following this line of reasoning, cynical “border thinking” does not call for a redemption of the oppressed versus the oppressors; quite differently, it looks at the “displaced”, the “marginalized”, and the “ostracized” as life spaces that most authentically represent historical and sociopolitical transitions and which, therefore, have the potential to provide philosophical thought with transformative resources. What’s missing in *Southern Thought* is the effort to extrapolate from these exiled conceptual domains a series of deconstructive maneuvers that rise above the mere demand of respect for existing identities, while reshaping relations of recognition and destabilizing group separation. Pursuing *transformative* purposes through an *affirmative* conceptual framework, Cassano’s theory might prove to be critically ineffective.

2.

Moving onto our second critical point, the aforesaid lack of transformative tools becomes even more visible if one considers the skeptical stance that Cassano takes with respect to forms of social and cultural hybridization. These are substantially dismissed as phenomena that “often obscure the real inequalities and the conflict-ridden aspects of interconnectedness”<sup>239</sup>, and which do not encompass any emancipating potential. From the post-human cosmopolitan perspective, on the contrary, emancipation is strongly correlated to the intimate capacity of overcoming one-dimensional representations of the

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<sup>239</sup> Bouchard (2008), p. 305.

persona that chauvinistic and bigoted mentalities endorse. Individuals who identify as black and Italian or as European and Muslim cannot be merely seen, as Cassano sporadically appears to claim, as outcomes of an arrogant globalism that is inclined to exceed all possible frontiers. Quite the opposite, the presence of the “many” within the “self” is what unfetters the polychrome and polyvalent essence that in all circumstances characterizes human life and which, because of repressive social biases, is often forced to remain hidden. From our cosmopolitan viewpoint, pluralism materializes first internally through the formation of a multisided self-perception, before coming to being. This also means that the cosmopolitan capacity to communicate with the diversity of many, in turn, presupposes the ability to speak and be at ease with oneself.

The theoretical weight of this topic is entirely dismissed by *Southern Thought*, which considers “isolation” and “alienation” as synonyms, and neglects the critical potential that spaces of loneliness generate. Kynical cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, thoroughly distinguishes “isolation”, forcing the individual to experience a vulnerable disconnection from the reality, from “solitude”, which can be described as the voluntary attempt to nourish and express one’s own *singular* and irreproducible essence. It is true that isolated life conditions often result in pathological forms of self-estrangement as well as in unemotional and anesthetized ways to relate to other people. It is also true that all forms of critical thinking necessarily materialize by disengaging from existing communities, whose roles and practices are frequently established by specific privileged groups and, therefore, presuppose class, race, and gender biases. Uniqueness and exceptionality, escaping classifications and standardizations, transpire in all cases from areas of “solitude”.

In support of this view, the problematic condition experienced by contemporary Japanese youth, involving a wider sociological analysis exceeding the goals pursued here, is nonetheless worth recounting. In fact, it brings to light a pattern that is detectable in numerous western areas and is becoming increasingly evident in Italy.<sup>240</sup> Differently from what many communitarians might claim, recent sociological analysis shows that globalizing pressures prove more destructive within societies which are robustly traditional and oppose those influences in excessively inflexible ways. This is what is happening in Japan, wherein conservative elites have responded very aggressively to globalization, refusing to reform the core of the employment system. Dismissing to a high degree the capitalistic flexibility of labor that characterizes the American-style post-industrialization, Japanese institutions have strived to preserve a central, stable and well protected labor force. This maneuver, however, proved ultimately counterproductive, as it worsened feelings of self-estrangement among both precarious workers and unoccupied youth. A major responsibility in this regard rests within the one-dimensional connotations qualifying the Japanese society, which requires all citizens to follow a similar path and labels a failure whoever refuses to conform. Either because of the unwillingness to follow passively the social conventions or the corresponding impossibility to be integrated, many young boys and girls embrace the so-called *hikikomori* lifestyle (literally “pulling inward, being confined”), preferring to confine themselves for months and even years within the isolation of their homes. Despite the relief that television, internet and social media offer to these rebels, whose presence is at the moment observable not only in Japan but also in other western environments, psychologists converge on the hypothesis that

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<sup>240</sup> I will refer in this regard to the thorough and exhaustive analysis carried out by Toivonen, Norasakkunkit & Uchida (2011).

technology cannot be blamed as the root of the pathology. Rather, this root is identified within globalizing influences and the exceptionally conformist personality that characterizes the Japanese community: “withdrawees can thus be viewed as the disempowered victims of the elites’ hot reactions to globalization.”<sup>241</sup>

Cassano’s allegory of the “fundamentalism of the land”, which he considers to be as harmful as a limitless globalism, seems to allude to the “hot” inflexible reactions just described. It is no accident that Japan’s labor market closely resembles the one that has recently surfaced in Italy, wherein it is also extremely “difficult to move inwards from the margins into the core of labor force”<sup>242</sup> and where, consequently, the *hikikomori* phenomenon might become more perceptible in the near future. What Cassano’s total condemnation of “isolation” neglects, however, is the possibility of a different type of “solitary” reaction exhibiting more creative, active and socially efficient connotations. I am referring to the category of individuals that social psychologists identify as “quiet mavericks”; namely, young non-conformists who dismiss the communitarian standards, while also striving to convert their marginalization into an opportunity for positively affecting their society. Focusing still on contemporary Japan, Toinonen, Norasakkunkit and Uchida locate this rebellious figure among social entrepreneurs who lead flexible non-profit organizations or small for-profit companies and who “instead of being openly confrontational with the state, local governments, and corporations, they seek to strategically engage such institutions, promoting their own unconventional ideas as innovations or solutions to social problems.”<sup>243</sup> Working in a large variety of domains, from online trading to art, fashion and other types of business, these invisible dissenters

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<sup>241</sup> Toinonen, Norasakkunkit, & Uchida (2011), p. 8.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

are able to question the status quo by developing original methods, absorbing international ideas of “openness, tolerance of diversity and self-actualization”<sup>244</sup>, and fusing local elements with global values. Although journalists and social analysts generally pay more attention to the loudest and most belligerent no-global movements of protest, these solitary insurgents, relying on “the cultural and social agility to utilize global influences without being defeated by conformist pressures”<sup>245</sup>, ultimately implement resistance in more “tactful” as well as more efficient ways. For these reasons, sociologists believe that, in western social environments, innovative conceptions of labor and alternative notions of successful careers will most likely be elaborated by this group of active loners, who neutralize both blind particularism and arrogant universalism by expressing their unique and *singular* personality.

And after all, isn't a certain degree of solitude indispensable for acquiring freedom of thought? Isn't some sort of voluntary separation crucial for developing innovative ideas? Isn't true creativity somehow self-exclusive and self-ostracizing? Living in “solitude” without confining themselves in “isolation”, quiet mavericks combine successfully global themes with local molecules, also personifying Hannah Arendt's ideal of the self-exiled intellectual, who does not completely disregard the reality, but nonetheless seeks to escape its oppressive essence. Due to the lack of transformative components, Cassano's analysis does not sufficiently value these imperceptible forms of antagonism, thus proving incapable to conceptualize the transition between “isolation” and “singularity” that our critical line of thinking is envisioning. Let us interrogate post-1990 Italian Thought in other areas to see if we are able to fulfill our needs.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. p. 2.



*Poverty in Time, second attempt: Suspension*

*Anthropocentrism, Sovereignty, Law: an Ontology of Formlessness*

*I.*

If we walk the trail paved by Giorgio Agamben in the early 1990s, we will understand why our philosophical apprehension partly alleviates. It was during that time that Agamben began to work on the *Homo Sacer* project, prioritizing political problems over linguistic themes. Agamben's views represent the most nihilistic peak reached during the last forty years by Italian Cynicism, as well as the doctrine that set up the conditions for more positive and affirmative conceptions of the political. Despite its pessimistic façade, Agamben's post-human discourse relies on a critique of history which encompasses powerful transformative factors; as such, it offers the postulates for a more accurate conceptualization of the aforesaid cosmo-local spheres of resistance.

In order to fully grasp the main point of Agamben's discourse, it must be described as an attempt to reform Foucault's bio-political theory and, simultaneously, as a debt owed to Hannah Arendt's philosophical reflections. Inheriting Foucault's methodology, Agamben also employs a biological terminology for interpreting political events, while conceiving of "life" as a discursive outcome of power collisions. As a disciple of Foucault, Agamben values genealogical types of explanation, exploring the connections between language, knowledge and politics in order to understand how "subjectivity" and "identity" result from disciplinary modes of control. What Agamben substantially rejects of his predecessor, is the hypothetical transition between a "sovereign" and a "bio-

political” kind of power which, according to Foucault, took place at the end of the modern age. Foucault firmly distinguishes sovereign power from bio-power. Sovereign power discloses itself through well identifiable rulers whose main authority over the citizens is to take their life or let them live. Bio-power is characterized differently as a de-personified type of power, which relies on capitalistic dynamics, is substantially devoid of agency, and produces subjectivity by fostering life or disallowing it to the point of death.<sup>246</sup> Agamben expresses skepticism apropos this account, to the extent that it does not explain the connections linking sovereignty, modernity and the totalitarian shipwrecks that flooded the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Agamben, deeper clarity can be obtained by combining the two modes of control identified by Foucault within one theoretical paradigm, highlighting the paradoxical way in which power has been exercised throughout western history.

In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) Agamben conceives of western sovereignty as a twofold mechanism which mainly confides in the authority to modify people’s social status at its own convenience. Taking into account the Roman juridical terminology, which planted seeds for the subsequent growth of European civil law, the author locates the essence of western politics within the paradoxical status of the *homo sacer*. This phrase denotes a category of specific citizens who were considered “sacred” by the law to the extent that they could be legally killed by anybody but not sacrificed to the Gods. In other words, the homo sacer condition exceeded both the juridical domain and divine law. On one hand, it did not enjoy the protection of ordinary provisions on homicide; on the other, it was associated with a potential death that did not signify any religious ritual. The real frame concealed within western manifestations of

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<sup>246</sup> For a more comprehensive illustration, see Esposito (2008), chapter 1.

sovereign power rests within the privilege to proclaim such a precarious condition of sacredness, coinciding with the exception to the rule: “The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life – that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed – is the life that has been captured in this sphere.”<sup>247</sup>

Derived from these premises, the influence that sovereign powers exercise over a community is revealed through their capacity to revoke juridical membership at any time. The appeal that contemporary democracies make to their constitutions, therefore, cannot successfully dismantle this vicious mechanism, which narrowly depends upon the alliance that sovereignty establishes with law. Every normative code encompasses factors which regulate “life” by means of a potential suspension of its legal position: “If the exception is the structure of sovereignty, then sovereignty is...the originary structure in which law refers to life and includes it in itself by suspending it.”<sup>248</sup> Juridical procedures and principles cannot help one resolve the aforementioned contradiction because they play a vital role within the construction of the very mechanism that one is attempting to undermine.

As we know, Agamben claims that both the paradox of sovereignty and the related condition of exceptional “sacredness” became more visible during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly in consequence of the atrocities perpetrated by European totalitarianisms. Agamben is convinced that the massacres perpetrated under the Nazi regime in Germany cannot be interpreted as a historical anomaly which drastically deviates from occidental tradition. Quite the opposite, the suffering of the Jews revealed a contradiction that had

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<sup>247</sup> Agamben (1998), p. 53.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

always been inscribed within western politics, and which was ultimately producing the most destructive outcomes. Despite this substantial continuity, Agamben aligns to a degree with Hannah Arendt's view and identifies a main difference that pulls the contemporary age away from previous epochs. That is, the fact that the homo sacer condition, presumably representing the state of exception, has been in recent times proclaimed and applied in innumerable circumstances to the point of becoming the rule. It is in essence what happened at the time of Nazi Germany, when laws tragically became synonymous with the figure of the führer: "The camp is the space of this absolute impossibility of deciding between fact and law, rule and application, exception and rule, which nevertheless incessantly decides between them."<sup>249</sup> The superimposition between norms and facts is what captures the real core of the contemporary epoch, when states of exception reproduce exponentially and uncontrollably. Most of the events taking place in our time - from the occurrence of ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia to the reemergence of neo-fascisms in Europe, from the proliferation of refugee camps across western areas to the US approval of several post-9/11 policies such as the "patriot act" - should be illustrated in these terms. Far from disfiguring western history, all these phenomena are rooted within its bio-political essence, which "is at least as old as the sovereign exception."<sup>250</sup>

Following these hypothesis, Agamben refers to the "concentration camp" as the theoretical paradigm that best describes the human condition within the contemporary age, when recurrent forms of sociopolitical displacement force the large majority of people to experience a constant state of vulnerability. The appeal to humanistic principles

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid. p. 98.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. p. 11.

can hardly lighten such a sorrowful scenario. Drawing again from Arendt's line of reasoning, Agamben expresses some skepticism regarding the promotion of human rights, whose implementation is paradoxically dependent upon the very national powers which often disrespect human dignity. On this subject, Agamben's analysis is provocative as much as it is lucid. The incongruity that is inscribed within the notion of "human rights" can be traced back to the original French code that first proclaimed them. It is not by accident that the 1789 Declaration refers quite vaguely to both "men" and citizens". This linguistic association merely signifies the shift from a religious conception of juridical legitimacy, which had previously placed within God the recipient containing all types of justice, to the Westphalian secularized scenario: "Declarations of rights must therefore be viewed as the place in which the passage from divinely authorized royal sovereignty to national sovereignty is accomplished."<sup>251</sup>

From this perspective, the notion of "human rights" loses its abstract moral character and no longer functions as a regulative point of reference for jurists or governmental policies, because it merely indicates a historical-political transition. Due to the global crisis generated by World War I, national institutions were no longer able to trust in the category of "birth country", because millions of refugees had disseminated across Europe. As a consequence, the notions of 'citizen' and 'human' began to dissociate from one another. The proliferation of non-governmental humanitarian organizations, whose controversial role has been amply examined in the first chapter, can be explained as a further outcome of this disconnection: "The separation between humanitarianism and politics that we are experiencing today is the extreme phase of the separation of the rights of man from the rights of the citizen... we must seriously consider Arendt's claim that

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid. p. 141.

the fates of human rights and the nation-state are bound together such that the decline and crisis of the one necessarily implies the end of the other.”<sup>252</sup>

2.

The political considerations regarding human rights expressed in *Homo Sacer* lead Agamben to take into account the philosophical problem of “anthropocentrism”, which is discussed explicitly in *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002). In this text, Agamben detects structural correspondences linking the aforementioned paradox of sovereignty to the evolution of western knowledge. In particular, Agamben locates the main discursive framework producing states of exception within the philosophical-scientific tradition which, from Aristotle to Heidegger, classified life by means of reiterated partitions such as animate-inanimate, organic-inorganic, etc. This harmful line of thinking is identified as the ‘anthropological machine’; namely, a violent apparatus which elaborates ‘humanity’ and ‘animality’ through a process of *exclusion-inclusion* and generates space between the two entities, while also bringing about a caesura within man himself. Such a vicious conceptual tool achieved its most developed phase within Heidegger’s *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929) and the infamous classification according to which stones are presumably ‘world-less’, animals are ‘poor in world’, and men ‘world forming’. Heidegger’s taxonomy reverberated within the horrifying way in which the perception of the Jewish people was discursively elaborated under the Nazi regime by means of “de-nationalization” and “animalization” of the human.

Moving forward, *The Open* examines the conceptual presuppositions that sustained the Nazi insanity by exploring the borders which separate philosophy and biology, also

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

comparing Heidegger's doctrines to some scientific experiments that were financed by Hitler's administration. Agamben pays scrupulous attention to one specific occasion, when scientists kept a tick alive for eighteen years without sustenance, in a condition of absolute starvation and isolation. The case of the tick, reflecting the agonizing condition of the Muselmann, brought to light what Agamben names *bare life* (*vita nuda*); that is, a mode of existence which materializes within the space dividing men from beasts, and denotes a living being produced coercively and deprived of any juridical recognition.

Because the *bare life* condition, as previously anticipated, represents an exemplary model for interpreting contemporary sociopolitical phenomena, it goes without saying that Agamben's perspective easily lends itself to be interpreted in catastrophic manners. As a matter of fact, more than one thinker referred to the *Homo Sacer* project in apocalyptical terms. On the contrary, the perspective defended here will rely on the cynical aspects that characterize Agamben's post-humanism so as to rectify the aforementioned misreading as follows: 1) despite its cataclysmic connotations, Agamben's *bare life* also functions as an ontological *transformative* tool that is potentially able to dismantle the violent device generating the exceptional logic of sovereignty. 2) Such a displacement, which is mainly pursued by Agamben through a deconstruction of history, exhibits strong cynical connotations. Far from endorsing narrowly religious perspectives, Agamben posits a Franciscan *poverty in time* which calls for a cosmo-political antagonism that thrives outside of all juridical domains. The reasons justifying these claims can be illustrated along the following lines.

Several scholars have evaluated Agamben's doctrine as an essentially pessimistic and dreadful philosophical discourse. For instance, Alain Badiou disapproves of the fragile

aspects characterizing the notion of bare life, which he sees as ultimately “always sacrificed”<sup>253</sup>. Even more disastrous are the considerations expressed by Ernesto Laclau, who perceives the Agambenian state of exception as “the unavoidable advance towards a totalitarian society”<sup>254</sup>, and substantially condemns the *Homo Sacer* project as a form of mere “political nihilism”.<sup>255</sup> Within the Italian philosophical debate, Roberto Esposito partly aligns with these interpretations and highlights the destructive message delivered by Agamben’s bio-politics, which in all cases produces thanato-political outcomes. One should certainly provide these exegetic suggestions with some reliability, to the extent that finding optimistic messages within Agamben’s texts is not a stress-free mission. And yet it is legitimate to wonder to what degree these hermeneutical perspectives are able to capture the multifaceted nature qualifying the *Homo Sacer* doctrine. In fact, a closer look at Agamben’s post-1990 work, which certainly follow from tragic postulates, reveals nonetheless an argument pursuing emancipatory purposes. These are explicitly confessed in *The Open*, which provides *bare life* with the active capacity to potentially dismantle the aforementioned anthropological framework:

“To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new – more effective or more authentic – articulations, but *rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that – within man – separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man.*”<sup>256</sup> (Italics mine)

This intense passage cannot be interpreted without difficulties, because of the paradoxical conclusion that Agamben appears to draw from his analysis: the decrepit entity he

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<sup>253</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logique des Mondes*, quoted in Lorenzo Chiesa (2009), *Giorgio Agamben’s Franciscan Ontology*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009) p. 153.

<sup>254</sup> Ernesto Laclau (2007), *Bare Life or Social Indeterminacy?*, in Calarco & DeCaroli ed. by (2007), p.17.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>256</sup> Agamben (2004), p. 92.



describes as an outcome of a vicious historical process, at the same time should be perceived as the mechanism that may very well break the *exclusion-inclusion* spell from the anthropological machine. It is an uncanny line of reasoning that leaves an open door for potential redemption after all. Let us then look at the aforementioned fragment from the perspective defended by Lorenzo Chiesa, who also remarks that “what is scarcely investigated, or altogether overlooked, by countless analyses of the notion of *homo sacer* is the very fact that, beginning with the introduction of the first volume of his series, Agamben explicitly relates such notion to the possibility of a ‘new politics.’”<sup>257</sup> In view of this more hopeful perspective, what does Agamben mean by ‘Shabbat of both animal and man’? What does the *suspension of the suspension* entail?

The hypothesis that looks at Agamben’s *Shabbat* as a promotion of religious tones, and which is partly endorsed by Chiesa, appears to be excessively simplistic. As I have already clarified elsewhere<sup>258</sup>, such a perspective is one-dimensional because it does not take into account the relevant post-Christian and immanent components that qualify contemporary Italian Theory. Research shows that, particularly after 1990, Italian philosophers have displayed in numerous circumstances the propensity to explain religious concepts in worldly terms, also relying significantly on Agamben’s thought so as to nourish this political-theological inclination.<sup>259</sup> The tension that materializes in between Agamben’s ascetic atmospheres and the lay personality characterizing Italian Theory will not easily find relief if not considered as a kynical phenomenon. I will return again to this topic shortly. For now I will clarify that, distant from advocating narrowly transcendent motives, what Agamben prioritizes in order to accomplish moral and social

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<sup>257</sup>Lorenzo Chiesa (2009), *Giorgio Agamben’s Franciscan Ontology*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p. 152.

<sup>258</sup>Mosciatti (2017).

<sup>259</sup>I am referring in particular to Roberto Esposito (2012), *Living Thought*, chapter 5.

progress is the necessity to carry out specific ontological shifts: “Ontology, or first philosophy, is not an innocuous academic discipline, but in every sense the fundamental operation in which anthropogenesis, the becoming human of the living being, is realized.”<sup>260</sup>

More specifically, Agamben’s discourse calls for the necessity to elaborate an ontology that dismisses the taxonomic divisions perpetrated for centuries within western knowledge, and which describes ‘life’ in more fluid terms. In this regard, it may be demonstrated that *The Open* exhibits a substantial continuity with previous texts. Although in the beginning of the 1990s the idea of *bare life* had not fully revealed itself, *The Coming Community* (1993) had grounded moral activity on an ontological account characterizing human existence as substantially amorphous and undetermined. It is no accident that, precisely in a chapter called ‘Ethics’, Agamben explains the moral subject as pure potentiality; that is, as an entity to which neither specific properties nor teleological purposes can be ascribed. Without such an ontological postulate – Agamben points out – human behavior would be explainable as a series of mere mechanical operations and, consequently, no ethics could be developed:

This is why the only ethical experience (which, as such, cannot be a task or a subjective decision) is the experience of being (one’s own) *potentiality*, of being (one’s own) *possibility* – exposing, that is, in every form one’s own *amorphousness* and in every act one’s own *inactuality*.<sup>261</sup>

In *The Open* Agamben’s *ontology of formlessness* takes a considerable step forward towards the realization of an authentic post-human perspective.<sup>262</sup> The aforementioned principle of “potentiality” is employed in this text in order to destabilize the human-

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<sup>260</sup> Agamben (2004), p. 79.

<sup>261</sup> Agamben (1993) p. 44.

<sup>262</sup> As also remarked by Matthew Calarco (2008), p. 88.

animal dichotomy, which is regarded as the root of all discordant oppositions. The ultimate goal is likely to prevent obsessive identity attachments from forming so as to turn away any kind of social, ethnic or cultural stigmatization. An ethical analysis that does not prioritize such ontological transformation, and which refuses to delve into the bare ‘emptiness’ that Agamben conjures up, is bound to perpetuate the same circular mechanism that it aims to break. It is for this reason that ethical notions such as ‘right’ and ‘value’ are considered as secondary: “It is more urgent to work on these divisions, to ask in what way – within man – has man been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human, than it is to take positions on the great issues, on so called human rights and values.”<sup>263</sup>

Recalling Nancy Frasier’s terminology, one should look at the *suspension of the suspension* for what it really is: a “transformative” remedy through which Agamben steps away from the un-decidable mechanisms that for centuries have distressed western politics and history by transforming the conceptual structure which generates them. Despite its destructive façade, Agamben’s discourse encompasses components that visibly restructure relations of recognition and destabilize group differentiation. From this transformative perspective, the ultimate significance of the *Shabbat* rests within the comparison that *The Coming Community* establishes between the notion of a “whatever singularity” and the trespassed of the Limbo. In this mythical dimension souls are neither blessed nor damned, but thanks to such an uncertain self-perception they represent a fertile terrain for the rise of new and more desirable modes of social life. Whether or not this type of “naked” singularity has the capacity to offer a solid ground for the theorization of the cosmo-local spaces of resistance that we have been looking for will be

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<sup>263</sup> Agamben (2004), p. 16.

evaluated by taking into account Agamben's critique of history. This is regarded in *The Open* as one of the most fundamental theoretical moves to carry out in order to accomplish the ontological adjustments that *Homo Sacer* summons.

### *Franciscan Cynicism: Towards a Transformative Cosmopolitics*

#### 1.

Let us go back to the strange case of the starving tick, described by Agamben through the eyes of the scientist who carried out the experiment:

“He gives no explanation of this peculiar fact, and limits himself to supposing that in that “period of waiting” the tick lies in “a sleep-like state similar to the one we experience every night.” He then draws the conclusion that “without a living subject, *time cannot exist*” [...] what sense does it make to speak of “waiting” *without time and without world?*”<sup>264</sup> (italics mine)

In addition to the “poverty in world” that Heidegger ascribed to non-human animals, this passage characterizes the tick as a *dispossession of time*, providing the “suspension of the suspension” with a significance which is primarily historical. As a matter of fact, in *The Open* the question of “time” identifies a leading thread crossing the entire text. Agamben's argument moves from a description of a thirteenth century Hebrew Bible which contains miniatures representing the history of humanity. One of the images in particular captures the author's attention, because it portrays the end of time and the banquet of the last day. In this picture, the righteous individuals carry animal heads, signifying a post-temporal reconciliation between man and nature and recalling the

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

philosophical conception of history as a narrowly human form of knowledge. Agamben is convinced that the conclusion of history, which in recent times has been generally associated with a cataclysmic anarcho-capitalistic domination of the world, might nonetheless lead the anthropocentric logic that afflicts the West to dissolution. As a result, this could also facilitate the rise of new non-divisive forms of political interaction. This is why, in *The Open*, the author partly converges with Kojève's opinion that "The disappearance of Man at the end of History is not a cosmic catastrophe...", but, more positively, "the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions."<sup>265</sup>

Following Kojève, Agamben believes that the end of history will not take place in the remote future, but to some extent has already occurred during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, phenomena such as the increasing expansion of the economy, the consequent crisis of governmental powers, and the dissemination of the "American way of life", which Kojève considers as a post-historical "eternal present of all humanity"<sup>266</sup>, are bringing time to its final stage. Because of the significant side-effects that globalization has generated - i.e. substantial depoliticization of consciences, shortfall of spiritual purposes, cultural uniformity, etc. - such a scenario is not appraised by Agamben in purely optimistic terms. And nonetheless, Agamben believes that Kojève's perspective is partially accurate and that the end of history is something that should not only be accepted, but also theoretically welcomed in order to displace effectively the exclusive-inclusive factors that torment the western world:

Today, at a distance of nearly seventy years, it is clear for anyone who is not in absolutely bad faith that *there are no longer historical tasks* that can be taken on by, or even simply assigned to, men...man has now reached his historical telos

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<sup>265</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, quoted in Agamben (2004), p. 6.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

and, for a *humanity that has become animal again*, there is nothing left but the depoliticization of human societies...<sup>267</sup> (italics mine)

Filtering this fragment through our previous considerations, it is clear that the theorization of a ‘humanity that has become animal again’, which should be read as a Russellian definite description replacing *bare life*, cannot sustain transformative processes if not accompanied by the conclusion of history. What does this all mean? In what sense would the end of history help us dismantle the exceptional logic of sovereignty?

It is important to clarify that Agamben does not envision a conclusion of temporality as such, but rather calls for a *messianic* reformation of the western conception of time. Far from coinciding with the definitive dissolution of history, temporal messianism disrupts ordinary chronological models by intermittently conflating all temporal planes together; it is “the time of the end...the time that contracts itself and begins to end...the time that remains between time and its end.”<sup>268</sup> Agamben, that is, relocates time within a suspended dimension wherein ‘origin and ‘end’, ‘beginning’ and ‘conclusion’ occasionally tend to overlap. This model moves away from the one-dimensional representation on which western common sense generally relies. Temporal messianism, signifying neither a progressive accumulation of instants nor a linear series of actions or achievements, spasmodically pulls together sequential openings and closures, thus undermining both the capitalistic maximization of production and the technocratic forms of control that the Occident has expressed ever since the modern age. From this stance, it is easier to identify the semantic correlation that Agamben establishes between

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<sup>267</sup> Agamben (2004), p. 76.

<sup>268</sup> Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, quoted by Lorenzo Chiesa (2009), *Giorgio Agamben’s Franciscan Ontology*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009) p. 157.

*ontological formlessness, temporal suspension* and *Shabbat*. Because of a deficiency of qualitative and also quantitative attributes, messianic time is hardly conceivable in purely rational terms; nevertheless, one can perceive it as an existential experience on the day of Saturday (*Shabbat*), which interrupts work activities while putting on hold the ordinary gestures that people mechanically repeat during the week.

Unlike Cassano's doctrine of *slowness*, which aims at rectifying the western temporal flow without completely dismantling the framework that regulates it, Agamben summons an alternative temporal dimension wherein more radical sociopolitical shifts are set free. What Agamben describes is a temporal experience that is able to disentangle the undecidable riddle of sovereignty by suspending the juridical framework that sustains it. Messianic life, enabling human beings to "carry out good works independently from the law"<sup>269</sup>, completely disengages from both existing power relations and legal preconditions, thus generating, in Chiesa's terms, "a new kind of sovereignty diametrically opposed to the sovereignty exercised by the anomic form of law."<sup>270</sup> Agamben's *poverty in time*, therefore, ultimately stands for a transformative bio-political discourse that adopts neither *dialectic* nor *affirmative* strategies, but which triggers the emergence of alternative forms of political autonomy through both the deactivation of applicable normative provisions and the creation of extra-normative modes of action and interaction.

The kynical spirit that this discourse personifies comes assertively to the foreground in one of Agamben's most revealing texts. *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form of Life* (2013), to which I am alluding, provides a detailed historical-philosophical

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>270</sup> Lorenzo Chiesa (2009), *Giorgio Agamben's Franciscan Ontology*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009) p. 160.

reconstruction of the phenomenon of western monasticism, focusing in particular on the Franciscan order. The book takes into account the spiritual movements of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and discusses the living style of the Franciscan friars by examining meticulously their rules, ascetic rituals and daily practices. Why would a philosophical project that explores the conceptual borders separating “community”, “sovereignty”, and “law”, give preferentiality to such an uncanny topic? What does the theme of monasticism have to do with issues pertaining to globalization, capitalism or sociopolitical transformation? These perplexities can only be soothed if supported by our cynical hypothesis, which is confirmed by the very first pages of the text, describing the ancient monastic orders in narrowly earthly terms. Far from placing importance on transcendent entities or theoretical issues regarding the nature of divinity, these religious groups looked at daily life as their main concern:

“...in any case what they state and claim does not actually concern theological or dogmatic questions, articles of faith, or problems of scriptural interpretation. Instead, what is at stake is life and the way of living...The claim of poverty, which is present in all movements and which in itself is clearly not new, is only one aspect of this way or form of life...”<sup>271</sup>

Diogenes’ insubordinate demeanor surfaces even more forcefully from the absolute primacy that the Franciscan rule placed within “the actual exercise of the virtues”<sup>272</sup>, which is in all circumstances more valuable than doctrinal abstractions or the “profession of vows”.<sup>273</sup> Moving from the association that the Franciscan literature introduces between “rule” and “form of life”, Agamben’s bio-political cynicism prioritizes the living incarnation of ethical values over any written text. In particular, Agamben refers to the

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<sup>271</sup> Agamben (2013), p. 92.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. p.107.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.



Franciscan example as an effort to elaborate a set of principles that are able to adhere spontaneously to all their concrete implementations, and which fill up the void separating the universality of the norm from the *singularity* of each living being. The *ideal of poverty* is praised in order to reduce such a distance. Relying on the cathartic power that self-dispossessing modes of thinking convey, Franciscanism indicates the way to emancipate oneself from all types of property so as to step out of the sphere of law. Paradoxically, the Franciscan rule epitomizes a normative code that dismisses in toto its formal structure, and which finds in the kynical actuality of “true life” the one and only way to be illustrated.

2.

In view of these considerations, Agamben’s appeal to what is probably the most kynical phenomenon characterizing Italian history suggests in all probability the effort to redirect Italian Thought towards an alternative direction. Of primary importance is the retrieval of critical tools which in some ways undermine the greedy logic of appropriation and materialistic accrual that the West pursued for centuries. Agamben looks at Franciscanism as a revolutionary phenomenon that had pointed to a different path, which was irresponsibly ignored during the subsequent epochs by European rulers and people. It goes without saying that the praise of poverty in question has little to do with the invocation of an eternal life or the mere celebration of the Christian monastic tradition. Rather, it indicates an antagonistic instrument which has the capacity to undermine consumerist moral frameworks, also weakening the alliance that capitalistic systems have established with juridical apparatuses:

“In one case as in the other, what remained untouched was perhaps the most precious legacy of Franciscanism, to which the West must return ever anew to contend with it as its undeferrable task: how to think a form-of-life, a human life entirely removed from the grasp of the law and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation. That is to say again: to think life as that which is never given as property but only as common use.”<sup>274</sup>

Bearing in mind this significant paragraph, Lorenzo Chiesa’s suggestion to look at the homo sacer as a political hero who carries out a “silent form of resistance”<sup>275</sup> should definitely be welcomed. However, what Chiesa does not clarify is that the real essence concealed by this rebellious asceticism cannot be justified through the unworldly domain of “faith” because, quite differently, it is rooted within the kynical atmosphere which has animated Italian philosophy during the last forty years. Agamben’s bio-political cynicism, materializing as “an individual and solitary flight from the world”<sup>276</sup>, then gives origin to “a model of total communitarian life”<sup>277</sup> which challenges existing capitalistic and juridical establishments.

All this symbolically merges within Saint Francis’ legendary ability to speak with birds and wolves, also mirroring his unconditional love for all other living creatures. Suspended between bios and zoe, the Franciscans created an alternative ground for the rise of a post-human “coming community” dismissing the particularity of social-juridical conventions and ultimately identifying with the wholeness of the cosmos. The cosmopolitical connotations that characterize Agamben’s discourse, which have been neglected by numerous scholars, partly follow from the Arendtian presuppositions that inspire the *Homo Sacer* doctrine. Because in our time all individuals are potentially *homini sacri*,

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid. p. xiii.

<sup>275</sup> Lorenzo Chiesa (2009), *Giorgio Agamben’s Franciscan Ontology*, in Chiesa & Toscano (2009), p. 153.

<sup>276</sup> Agamben (2013) p. 9.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

Agamben certainly retrieves Arendt's idea of the Holocaust as "a civilizational breakdown with global meaning"<sup>278</sup>, while converting the figure of the Muselmann into an exiled political rebel. Moreover, the *bare* communities he envisions display Arendtian characteristics to the extent that they are substantially devoid of specific identities, and yet still rely on concrete bonds as "preconditions of meaningful public life"<sup>279</sup>, urging political theory to "think and act within the limits"<sup>280</sup>. In line with Arendt's view, Agamben would hardly endorse "megalomaniac"<sup>281</sup> cosmopolitan objectives such as the removal of all territorial borders or the idea of a world citizenship. It is no accident that in recent times he expressed a fair amount of skepticism with regard to the *Ius Soli* decree discussed within the Italian parliament.

Arguably, Agamben's kynical departure from Arendt unfolds through a radicalization of her unclear conception of the juridical. Despite Arendt's reservations pertaining to the notion of "human rights", which are often declared but rarely concretely enforced, she still acknowledges the importance of international law for protecting individuals from their governments and forestalling crimes against humanity. Because of this ambiguity, Arendt's notion of "a right to have rights", which emphasizes the necessity of a unified humanity providing the occurrence of homelessness, statelessness and political abuses with reasonable solutions, can be interpreted in two different ways: either as a call for more sensitive juridical responsibilities or as a provocative dismissal of legal norms in general. Rensmann favors the second interpretation, describing Arendt's work as a philosophical effort which, "rather than delegating global challenges primarily to formal

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<sup>278</sup> Lars Rensmann (2012), *Grounding Cosmopolitics: Rethinking Crimes against Humanity and Global Political Theory with Arendt and Adorno*, in Rensmann & Gandesha ed. by (2012), p. 130.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. p. 129.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

legal principles or appealing to abstract morality”<sup>282</sup>, focuses on “situated political responsibility and particular politics of human dignity in order to realize, and rectify the universal”.<sup>283</sup> Moving towards a similar direction, Balibar takes a step forward and identifies within the “right to have rights” a polemic essence which substantially makes it a “right to disobedience”:

“The right to have rights is not a moral notion; it is a political one. It describes a process which started with resistance and ends in the actual exercise of a constituent power, whichever particular historical form this may take. It should therefore also be called a right to politics, in the broad sense, meaning that nobody can be properly emancipated from outside or from above, but only by his or her own activity.”<sup>284</sup>

Agamben’s retrieval of Arendt radicalizes this interpretation. The cosmo-political singularities he theorizes are grounded on the *abdication omnine iuri* (abdication of all rights) which regulates the Franciscan rule and lifestyle. Relying on this postulate, Agamben converts Arendt’s “right to have rights” into the uncompromising “right to renounce all rights” that is personified spiritually, practically, and politically by the monastic order. This means that, in the *Homo Sacer* context, voluntary exile is not conceived of as the momentary space for intellectual reflection that Arendt envisions, but as the exclusive domain wherein social transformation can ultimately succeed.

For Agamben, the opportunity for such a cosmo-political redemption is paradoxically offered by the dissemination of capitalistic bio-power, which in the present epoch repeatedly converts rules into exceptions, thus transforming human life into an experience of shared self-exposure. Despite the detrimental consequences brought about

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Étienne Balibar, *Ambiguous Universality*, quoted by Patrick Hannafin (2013), ‘A Cosmopolitics of Singularities’, in Braidotti, Hanafin, Blaagaard ed. by (2013), p. 42.

by globalization, this also sets up the conditions for the rise of societies with no identity that challenge the arrogant authority held by local dynasties, interregional aristocracies, and national powers:

But this also means that the petty bourgeoisie represents an opportunity unheard of in the history of humanity that it must at all costs not let it slip away. Because if instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the already improper and senseless form of individuality, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety as such, in making of the proper being-thus not an identity and an individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity – if humans could, that is, not be-thus in this or that particular biography, but be only *the* thus, their singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into a communication without the incommunicable.<sup>285</sup>

The alliance that the neoliberal bourgeoisie establishes with western state apparatuses is what sustains them and corrodes them at the same time. In fact, these apparatuses reproduce through detection, recognition and identification procedures, whereas neoliberal forces tend to nullify all modes of belonging, thus giving birth to a proliferation of unclassifiable communities and, in turn, to an ongoing “struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity)”.<sup>286</sup>

As a temporary conclusion, it is realistic to assert that a cynical interpretation of Agamben’s post-1990 work provides Italian Thought with ontological and political resources which can be employed for obtaining a more accurate definition of the critical cosmo-localism conceptualized throughout this chapter. Despite the catastrophic appearance, Agamben’s bio-politics encompasses transformative factors which have the capacity to convert ‘exiled’ life-spaces and areas of dislocation into forms of collective antagonism. Pivotal is the value of “poverty”, which again stands for a way to engage

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<sup>285</sup> Agamben (1993), p. 65.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. p.85.

with the temporal flow and exhibits the ability to undermine the bridge linking bio-power, consumerist moral structures and juridical apparatuses. Let us now ponder the potential repercussions that this analysis brings about.

### *From Perpetual Peace to Perpetual Rebirth*

1.

A Derridean theorist would most likely look at our second discussion on ‘poverty in time’ with some hesitancy. Differently from the post-human approach favored thus far, Derrida does not conceive of history as the outcome of the Agambean man-animal bivalence, and certainly does not think of it as suspended or concluded:

This abyssal rupture doesn’t describe two edges, a unilinear and indivisible line having two edges, Man and Animal in general. The multiple and *heterogeneous* border of this abyssal rupture has a history. Both macroscopic and microscopic and *far from being closed*, that history is now passing through the most unusual phase in which we find ourselves...<sup>287</sup>(italics mine)

The association between heterogeneity and temporality, established by Derrida in many of his works<sup>288</sup>, reflects an attempt to construct a notion of history that relies on aspects of segmentation in order to dismiss self-referential components. For Derrida, time should be thought of as ‘out of joint’, namely as heterogeneous, irregular and asymmetrical. Such a philosophical move reveals an effort to deconstruct humanism by highlighting the plurality of living forms which Agamben’s unclothed ‘area of exception’ neglects. The

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<sup>287</sup> Derrida (2002), p. 399.

<sup>288</sup> See for instance *Specters of Marx* (1994) and *Politics of Friendship* (1994).

idea of “the Animal” as a universal category opposed to the “Human” cannot adequately explain the considerable differences keeping species and individuals apart, because it minimizes “the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee...”<sup>289</sup> It is for this reason that Derrida is doubtful regarding Agamben’s view, whose shadow surfaces more visibly from the following passage:

That is why I would hesitate to say that we are *living through* that (if one can still confidently call *life* the experience whose limits tremble at the bordercrossings between *bios* and *zoē*, the biological, zoological, and anthropological, as between life and death, life and technology, life and history, and so on). I would therefore hesitate just as much to say that we are living through a historical turning point.<sup>290</sup>

Life cannot be constrained within bipolar stratagems and certainly cannot be enhanced by claiming that history has entered a limbo dimension, as the Homo Sacer hypothesis suggests.

Whether or not Derrida’s *heterogeneity* is more beneficial for our critical purposes than the principle of *suspension* formerly discussed is hard to tell; both deconstructive strategies arguably provide cosmopolitan theory with functional tools. The problem could be rephrased by asking whether narrating history from a plurality of different viewpoints would be more beneficial than putting history on hold. One could argue that recounting and teaching WWII in a French high school from multiple national, regional, and even local perspectives would provide future generations with a more vivid awareness of the suffering and traumas experienced by a diversity of people; even more so when reading, for instance, Russian, Japanese and American history manuals in their original language. It is possible that this approach would ultimately weaken both nationalistic and

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<sup>289</sup> Derrida (2002), p. 402.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid. p. 399.

chauvinistic feelings, thus facilitating socio-cultural dialogue and reinforcing values of tolerance.

Despite these potential benefits, however, the Derridean pluralism of perspectives would hardly allow us to recount a history that is not perceived as the victory of few protagonists over the anonymity of large masses. Historical events would still circumscribe a narrative space where “illustrious” names show off their brave deeds and accomplishments, forcing the rest of the passersby to accept a role of mute spectators. History, that is, would still be transmitted through the celebration of the heroes of the past and would continue to be used for discrediting specific minorities or social groups, thus perpetuating unequal as well as hierarchical social arrangements. Only a history with no names and no characters - which is *prima facie* a paradox - would provide ordinary individuals with both a voice and a relevant chronological role. This epistemological method, however, would arguably produce results that are as indeterminate as the Agambean temporal contractions, which encompass stronger antagonistic components to the extent that give subordinate human beings the chance to affect the evolution of events.

On the other hand, the temporal contractions extrapolated from Italian Theory may appear reckless. Minimizing the importance of history for the construction of shared communitarian feelings, this strategy might bring about the definitive breakdown of ‘identity’ as such, sporadically endorsing a stronger individualism and potentially leading many communities to an inescapable collapse. And nonetheless it could prove to be a good strategy for telling which societies are based on the sincere agreement of moral values and ideas, and which ones ground themselves on meaningless myths resurfacing



from the past. What this line of reasoning is pointing to is not a total dismissal of historical knowledge per se, which to a degree provides human beings with self-understanding and critical tools. Rather, the attack is carried out on the illegitimate way in which long-gone irrelevant events are occasionally used for defending political views and self-determination claims. Past traumas and shared states of suffering are without a doubt crucial for the initial development of a social organism, but might hold back the community once it fully comes to being. For this reason, collective traumatic memories ultimately need to be released and liberated so as to give way to new purposes, ideals and modes of solidarity that are more suitable to the current situation. In so doing, old degraded communities spontaneously dissolve, giving way to new and more desirable social groups. However hazardous this path seems to be, it is a risk worth taking.

Following this argumentative trail, the cosmo-political perspective represented here reclaims values of political autonomy, while conceiving of sovereignty not in terms of mere self-preservation, but as a dynamic capacity to undergo and alternatively survive processes of dissolution and renewal. The notion of “coming community” that is at stake points neither to an idealistically unified global scenario nor to a vague community of the future. Rather, it denotes a living social body that is willing to sacrifice what it currently is in order to become what it is not yet and which, for this reason, experiences reiterated states of evaporation and reincarnation. From this stance, every affirmative bio-political discourse presupposes the nihilistic path walked thus far.

For these reasons, the kynical “poverty in time” identified within Italian philosophy acquires a concrete bio-political significance through the notion of permanent “rebirth”. The values of *self-dispossession* that have animated this entire discourse reverberate

within a post-human notion of *motherhood* which, as Esposito thoughtfully points out, is called to disregard the semantic association between “pregnancy” and “ownership” perceived by common sense. Identifying the creature with the creator’s property, traditional conceptions of maternity generate biological correlations which link “nativity” and “nation”, “citizen” and “motherland”, thus endorsing ethnic and racial political discourses. On the contrary, the original generation of life must be conceived of as an act of self-deprivation “that decenters and overturns it into its opposite: in an originary in/origin that, far from belonging solely to itself, splits from itself, divides into its own other, and thus in the other from its own (nell’altro da ogni proprio).”<sup>291</sup> If interpreted from a post-human perspective, the category of “birth” can hardly be utilized for promoting regressive or essentialist conceptions of the social:

“Rather than enclosing the extraneousness within the same biological or political body (and also canceling it), birth now puts (rovescia) what is within the maternal womb outside. It doesn’t incorporate but excorporates, exteriorizes and bends outside (estroflette). It doesn’t assume or impose but exposes someone (male or female) to the event of the existence. Therefore it cannot be used, in either a real sense or a metaphoric sense, as protective apparatus for the self-protection of life.”<sup>292</sup>

Moving away from Kant’s humanistic idea of *Perpetual Peace*, envisioning a stable global order which would ultimately rely on the expansion of the markets and the authority of international law, the position defended here relies on “perpetual rebirth”. This phrase represents a fundamental ring within a dynamic cosmo-local theoretical framework which contemplates values of independence as well as cultural openness and sociopolitical contagion. It also advocates the necessity to carry out extra-legal

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<sup>291</sup> Esposito (2008), p. 175.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid. p. 176.

maneuvers in order to effectively rectify the damages produced by post-1990 neoliberalism.

2.

In view of this argumentative thread and of the Franciscan post-humanism endorsed here, these theoretical efforts should pursue two main directions: 1) a stronger emphasis on the value of *self-reliance* which the original Franciscan rule, praising “charity” and “begging” as moral ideals, underestimates. This flaw can be rectified by combining Italian Cynicism with some of the claims recently advanced within certain areas of the Global Justice Movement; 2) Agamben’s decisionist<sup>293</sup> account of the juridical appears to be excessively simplistic, to the extent that the interaction between legal spheres and extralegal forces can hardly be explained as a mutually exclusive mechanism. The transition between socio-legal apparatuses and utopian extra-legal types of community, in particular, cannot take place all at once but through a series of steps which progressively liberate ‘life’ from normative constraints. For this reason, an alternative and more desirable conception of the juridical needs to be elaborated in order to lead existing legal structures to dissolution. A discussion of these two conclusive points will be illustrated as follows.

The earliest Franciscan code distinguishes “property” from “use”; as opposed to the former, the latter is in line with natural law which imposes individuals to preserve their own existence but does not prescribe them to have any possessions. Towards the end of

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<sup>293</sup> *Decisionism* is the juridical theory commonly ascribed to Carl Schmitt, who identified the essence of law within the unconditioned verdict proclaimed by political authorities.

the 13<sup>th</sup> century an intense dispute about this subject emerged between Conventuals and Spirituels. Conventuals conceived of the renunciation of ownership as the true essence of the Franciscan message, while Spirituels insisted on the necessity to practically embrace “poverty” as a lifestyle. Agamben highlights the limits circumscribing this controversy, which ultimately was not able to generate a solid theory of “use”. According to Agamben, more fruitful results could have been obtained by making an appeal to Saint Paul’s teachings and particularly to the Pauline letters, wherein “using the world as not using it or not abusing it defined the Christian’s form of life.”<sup>294</sup> The reference to Saint Paul, whom *The Time That Remains* (2005) had chosen as the author’s main philosophical interlocutor, is not fortuitous; it evokes once again the conceptual relation linking alternative conceptions of time and the moral ideal of self-sufficiency previously brought to light. It is no accident that recent research looks at Saint Paul’s invitation to be “*autarkes* in all circumstances, in plenty as in want”<sup>295</sup>, as one of the most evident proofs of the influence that Greek Cynicism exercised on the early Christian Fathers. These historical and theoretical connections deserve a deeper analysis.

Regardless, it may be demonstrated that exploring the way in which the concept of *self-sufficiency* relates to the temporal flow can help one obtain a more lucid definition of the border separating “property” from “use”. It is evident that an account explaining “time” in terms of abrupt contractions of openings and closures, which locate the highest value of every human experience within the evanescence of the moment, can hardly sustain a notion of social life that is grounded on “property”. In view of the appreciation for the present that this perspective entails, “property” can be described as the anxiety of

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<sup>294</sup> Agamben (2013), p. 139.

<sup>295</sup> Downing (1992), p. 63. For the sake of precision, it needs to be clarified that, while the Cynics’ influence on Paul’s thought is evident, the author points out that this conception of *autarkeia* displays Stoic characteristics.

the past and the future, while “use” will be defined as “poor” by essence, as it focuses primarily on transitory instants. A rich and stingy person who is devoured by the fear to lose the fortune earlier accumulated does not “use”. Poorer people who pursue opulence out of the apprehension of being ostracized from society do not use either; in so doing, they perpetuate the same sickness. What must be exorcised is not wealth per se, but the pathological attachment to temporal dimensions which are alternative to the current one and force the human psyche to suffer a constant state of panic. A genuine “use” presupposes mental indifference with respect to the temporal flow, as well as total faith in one’s own *self-reliance*. In this way, life is perceived as ephemeral and unrepeatabe, providing individuals with the capacity to adapt to any series of events. In view of these considerations, a convenient way to rectify our Franciscan perspective could be to employ Italian Cynicism as a theoretical support for non-institutional cosmo-political subjectivities which oppose the neoliberal agenda and also defend values of political and economic independence.

Some of these claims have recently been advanced in several areas of the Global Justice Movement (GJM). Inheriting a number of ideas from the new social movements of the 1970s, the GJM formed at the end of the 1990s as a reaction to a series of transnational policies - the so called “structural adjustment policies” (SAP) - which had been previously established by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Through a series of maneuvers including austerity strategies, reduction of social expenditures, liberalization of prices, and removal of state subsidies, the SAPS aimed at both deregulating trade and enhancing competitiveness. These measures, which were often approved without the endorsement of the trade unions and instantly exacerbated

social inequalities, received immediate criticism by numerous activists and intellectuals. A first reaction, in this regard, took place in Mexico with the 1994 surfacing of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, which originated from the preexisting indigenous movement, but mainly aimed to oppose the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that the Mexican government was ratifying in cooperation with United States and Canada. A major victory was obtained a few years later by no-global activists against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) that was endorsed by the World Trade Organization (WTO). The approval of this treaty, enabling governments to accelerate trade settlements and authorizing multinational corporations to sue politicians whenever they would obstruct their plans, was successfully hindered through a well coordinated strategy of dissent.<sup>296</sup>

All these concerns found their ultimate expression in the occasion of the 1999 ministerial conference organized by the WTO in Seattle, where approximately thirty thousand activists were able to prevent representatives from entering the meeting. Although previous protests had facilitated the emergence of a large-scale type of political activism, for the first time people realized that “global civil society had a major, direct impact on the conduct and outcome of an official summit.”<sup>297</sup> This is the main reason why the events of Seattle are commonly seen as the official birth of the GJM, which became more concrete two years later with the creation of the World Social Forum (WSF) and the global days of action, receiving millions of supporters. Since then, thousands of no global organizations proliferated all around the world, including “civil society organizations, transnational advocacy networks, unions, religious groups, and

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<sup>296</sup> Moghadam (2013), p. 179.

<sup>297</sup> Mario Pianta and Raffaele Marchetti (2007), *The Global Justice Movements: the Transnational Dimension*, in Della Porta ed. by (2007) p. 37.

individual activists opposed to neoliberalism and war.”<sup>298</sup> Some of the main objectives that no-global activism pursues involve alleviation of debt and poverty in third-world areas, penalization of financial speculations, fair regulation of trade and labor, ecological issues, and transformation of international governmental institutions.

It is reasonable to hypothesize that the post-human cynicism elaborated here has the capacity to provide some of these cosmo-political voices with theoretical support; even more so if one considers that, along with France, Italy harbors the highest number of no-global forums in the world<sup>299</sup>. However, a few aspects need to be clarified in order to evaluate to what extent such a combination of ideas would be realistic. First, it must be acknowledged that, despite the honorable claims and intentions generally chased by no-global organizations, in numerous occasions GJM gatherings resulted in violent and bloody outcomes which are hardly beneficial. These destructive effects can partly be explained by the lack of coordination and democratic structure that characterize many of these groups<sup>300</sup>. At the same time, they might also be due to the excessively resentful tones promoted within some spheres of the movement, wherein an immoderately polemic rhetoric leads one to adopt methods which are merely oppositional and contrastive. A look at the main four tendencies denoting the different attitudes that the “movement of the movement” exhibits with respect to globalization will help us clarify our ideas in this regard<sup>301</sup>: 1) a *supportive* wing, which consists of a few NGOs and mostly aligns with the belief that contemporary globalization represents the one and only way to prosperity, that public debt depends entirely upon governmental corruption and that all types of

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<sup>298</sup> Moghadam (2013), p. 171.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. p. 190.

<sup>300</sup> And which has been also detected by Mary Kaldor, see Taraborrelli (2015), p. 58.

<sup>301</sup> It is the interpretive model adopted by Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor in the exhaustive *Global Civil Society 2001* (2001).

transnational capital flows are ultimately beneficial; 2) a *reformist* inclination, which does not aim to dismantle globalization but rather to correct the injustices and inequalities that it generated. Far from invoking a radically new global order, reformists strive to alleviate the excesses produced by the internationalization of the economy through re-regulation and redistribution procedures such as debt reduction or transnational investment taxation; 3) an *isolationist* tendency, including groups such as *Focus on the Global South*, *Global Exchange*, and *50 years is Enough*<sup>302</sup>, which call for a total dismantlement of globalization and defend values of economic and political subsidiarity. Isolationists believe that all transnational capital flows are detrimental and that a return to an economy administrated locally and nationally is the only option. Representatives of this view are generally not interested in building cross-border networks<sup>303</sup> and claim that policies should be elaborated in all circumstances according to principles of self-sufficiency; 4) an *alternative* faction, embracing organizations such as *Zapatistas*, *Adbusters* and *Reclaim the Streets*<sup>304</sup>, which do not necessarily seek to overthrow capitalism as much as they aim at developing unconventional and more desirable ways of life. Those who align with this school of thought place a primary importance on cultural and environmental themes. Additionally, they refuse “the existing institutions and centres of global powers”<sup>305</sup>, and “concentrate on building separate, alternative arrangements and mechanisms whose viability is important in environmental and community issues.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Meghnad Desai and Yahia Said (2001), *The New Anti-Capitalist Movement: Money and Global Civil Society*, in Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor (2001), p. 65.

<sup>303</sup> See Mario Pianta (2001), *Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society*, in Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor ed. by (2001), p. 189.

<sup>304</sup> Meghnad Desai and Yahia Said (2001), *The New Anti-Capitalist Movement: Money and Global Civil Society*, in Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor (2001), p. 69.

<sup>305</sup> Mario Pianta (2001), *Parallel Summits of Global Civil Society*, in Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor ed. by (2001), p. 189.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.



Disapproving of the perspectives represented by *supporters* and *reformists*, who for the most part neglect authentically transformative purposes, the cosmo-political view defended here identifies a complementary area in between the *isolationist* and the *alternative* orientations. More specifically, it retrieves the claims pertaining to a self-sufficient and subsidiary type of economy advanced by the *isolationists*, while also valuing the international mentality exhibited by the *alternatives*. Considering that present-day de-territorialized media repeatedly generate connections between events which occur far away from one another, the attainment of a subsidiary and locally organized type of economy requires a significant degree of intercultural awareness, ideological exchange and transnational cooperation. This cannot be obtained by means of a merely separatist demeanor. Dismissing in toto large-scale networks, the purely isolationist perspective promotes a rhetoric that is merely oppositional and, at the same time, risks endorsing the regressive view according to which cultural protectionism and anti-immigration claims need to be defended in order to undermine economic exploitation. In so doing, it might ultimately prove both ineffective and violent. Quite differently, the cynical post-human view relies on the alternatives' conviction that "the resistance will be as transnational as capital"<sup>307</sup>, also pursuing silent forms of dissent that replace self-assertive strategies with ideals of creativity, uniqueness and exceptionality. As a "quiet maverick", this cosmo-political subjectivity dismisses excessively forceful tones and engages in awareness raising campaigns as well as in actions of negotiations both with powers and institutions. It also utilizes the transnational platform so as to create

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<sup>307</sup> One of the mottos adopted by *Reclaim the Streets*, see Meghnad Desai and Yahia Said (2001), in Anheier, Glasius, and Kaldor (2001) p. 75.

autonomous forms of association and coexistence that challenge existing community frameworks.

3.

As a further rectification of our Franciscan Cynicism, it was said that Agamben's decisionist account of the juridical appears to be excessively simplistic. A consistent explanation of the legal framework that assisted the Nazi establishment, for instance, cannot simply rely on the Schmittian perspective to which the *Homo Sacer* theory refers. For Roberto Esposito, what sustained the regime was not a reiterated extralegal type of decision, but a twofold combination of juris-naturalism and normativism<sup>308</sup> which merged with one another, achieving their most radical and destructive potential. Such a conceptual fusion allowed biological discourses to rule over normative procedures, while also providing laws with the ultimate authority to decide for all forms of life: "Biology and law, life and norm hold each other in a doubly linked presupposition. If the norm presupposes the facticity of life as its privileged content, life for its part presupposes the caesura of the norm as its preventive definition."<sup>309</sup>

The hypothesis that 'norm' and 'life' cannot be merely seen as mutually exclusive, as Esposito observes, is furthermore corroborated by the jurisgenerative factor identified by Sheila Benhabib. According to her analysis, the force of law cannot be simply described as an instrument of domination, to the extent that normative concepts and practices in

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<sup>308</sup> Hans Kelsen is credited as the creator of this doctrine, which establishes a close correspondence between 'right' and 'norm' and conceives of law as a tool that can be employed for enforcing order through justice. The normativistic theory classifies rules as 'juridical' when they depend formally upon other norms which are more substantial and hierarchically superior.

<sup>309</sup> Esposito (2008), pp. 183-184.

some circumstances display the capacity to enhance both personal and social awareness. In turn, extralegal pressures are occasionally able to redirect the message towards the opposite destination by influencing concrete decisions taken by magistrates and law-makers: “Law can also structure an extralegal normative universe by developing new vocabularies for public claim making, by encouraging new forms of subjectivity to engage with the public sphere, and by interjecting existing relations of power with anticipations of justice to come. Law anticipates forms of justice in the future.”<sup>310</sup>

In view of these considerations, the transition between established juridical structures and extralegal modes of cooperation invoked by Agamben cannot be abruptly obtained without also causing outcomes that are both useless and destructive. Quite differently, this shift needs to be carried out through a series of normative alterations which will gradually lead juridical apparatuses to a final dismantlement. Therefore, the cosmopolitical *dissolution-rebirth* fluctuation previously posited must now be transferred onto the domain of law so as to ensure that social processes evolve without violent repercussions.

For this purpose, Benhabib’s jurisgenerative approach is certainly beneficial. First, she highlights the necessity to switch from international law to cosmopolitan principles, which are not restricted to the scope of mere treaties between states but also aim at protecting individual safety. Second, because of the jurisgenerative factor, Benhabib’s cosmopolitan norms spontaneously elicit interpretive and vernacularizing reactions which allow concrete social bodies to appropriate and tailor them according to specific historical-cultural characteristics. Take for instance the “equality before the law” universal principle, which acquires different forms depending upon the area wherein it is

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<sup>310</sup> Bebbhabib (2009), p. 226.

enforced. Canada, Israel, and India think of it as compatible with privileges enjoyed by specific castes or minorities, which would be highly unacceptable in the United States. Quite differently, in contexts such as France and Germany the principle is mainly associated with gender issues. Benhabib refers to each of these normative implementations as a *democratic iteration*; this phrase does not indicate a purely technical maneuver, but a process involving concrete social struggles that sustain and take control of it: “The neglect of social movements and actors of social transformation and jurisgenerative politics in recent theorizing has led to a naïve faith in legal experts, international lawyers, and judges as agents of democratic change. They may be that as well, but surely democratization without political actors who seek to empower themselves by creating new subjectivities in the public sphere, new vocabularies of claim making, and new forms of togetherness is neither conceivable nor desirable.”<sup>311</sup>

Benhabib’s jurisgenerative component is an extremely valuable resource that cosmopolitan theory should certainly retain. However, because of the post-human premises that assist our discourse, the kynical perspective locates the cosmopolitan essence reproduced by the abovementioned *iterative* device not necessarily within the common reference that all particular implementations make to the same universal principle – i.e. “equality before the law”, “freedom of thought”, “freedom of association”, etc. Rather, the cosmopolitan core is associated with the willingness that a supposed juridical apparatus exhibits to sacrifice and dissolve itself in order to give birth to a newborn and more convenient system of rules. Far from coinciding with its comprehensive capacity, the cosmopolitan potential that qualifies a normative framework is measured in terms of what Simondon would define as its *meta-stability*. Namely, the

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid. p. 222.

aptitude of the system to preserve throughout time its own flexibility, adaptability and translatability into different forms: “The tendency to eternity becomes therefore the consciousness of the relative: this latter is no longer the will to stop becoming or to render absolute an origin and to privilege a normative structure, but the knowledge of the meta-stability of the norms.”<sup>312</sup> It is evident, from this stance, that in order to obtain a satisfactory proximity between ‘norm’ and ‘life’, every juridical code needs to encompass a nihilistic factor that predisposes it to “its prefigured destruction as a system and its possible translation in another system...”<sup>313</sup>

As an exemplification of this type of normative *meta-stability*, one could mention the regulation of secession processes, which rarely appears within existing constitutions and is now more than ever of primary importance. Since the fall of the Yugoslavian state, involving ethnic cleansing and brutalities of all kinds, the European continent witnessed the surfacing of a plethora of separatist movements which risk perpetuating civil wars and fratricide violence. This scenario must be prevented at all costs, particularly if one considers how in recent times some of these movements do not necessarily rely on ethnic, racial or tribal factors, but rather manifest a fair degree of social-cultural openness. Political analysts remind us that the three most successful European separatist factions - i.e. the Catalan separatist party (CiU), the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) - have little to do with identitarian claims and, interestingly, classify themselves as supporters of the European Union. This is predominantly true as far as the cases of Flanders and Scotland are concerned, neither of which grounds its potential autonomy on specific historical reasons. As a matter of fact, Flanders acquired

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<sup>312</sup> G. Simondon, *L'evoluzione psichica e collettiva*, quoted in Esposito (2008), p. 188.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

political self-awareness after the formation of the Belgian nation-state, whereas Scotland justifies its autonomist demands through arguments regarding wealth equality, ecologic issues, and social justice. The paradoxical “independence in Europe” motto representing these tendencies can neither be associated to nationalistic types of projects nor to “a last desperate attempt to leap aboard the sinking ship of statehood”<sup>314</sup>. Quite differently, it appears to stand for an effort to combine values of local self-reliance with political unification purposes of a supranational scope.

In view of the fact that international law generally struggles with recognizing local self-determination outside colonial contexts, secessionist procedures must first be regulated at a national level through proper constitutional adjustments. It is reasonable to hypothesize, as several political analysts do<sup>315</sup>, that a constitutionalization of the right to secede would hardly facilitate a general collapse of states and communities and that, on the contrary, would be more likely to dishearten extremist aspirations. A confirmation for this conjecture rests on the fact that whenever governmental institutions were open to negotiate with local representatives, autonomist groups replaced radical purposes with more moderate claims. In 1995 the Canadian government allowed Quebecois separatists to express their voice and requests through a referendum. Surprisingly, the majority of the votes revealed a need to obtain more political autonomy, while remaining part of the Canadian nation-state. Similar outcomes emerged more recently in England, whose ruling powers repeatedly disapproved of a hypothetical divorce from Scotland but have made themselves available for cooperating with Scottish delegates. Following the Canadian antecedent, the 2012 Edinburgh agreement approved by the British government

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<sup>314</sup> Stephen Tierney (2005), *Reframing Sovereignty? Sub-state National Societies and Contemporary Challenges to the Nation-State*, quoted in Connolly (2013), p. 101.

<sup>315</sup> In addition to Connolly (2013), I am also referring to Archibugi (2008), chapter 9, and Weinstock (2001).

authorized the popular vote to be expressed, also envisioning a possible situation in which “Scotland would obtain virtually complete internal autonomy (including full fiscal powers) but would remain part of the United Kingdom for external purposes, such as defense and foreign affairs.”<sup>316</sup> The referendum took place on September 14, 2014, exposing a 44.7% of pro-independence votes and a 55.3% representing the will to maintain political unity.

Differently from the strategies adopted by Canada and Scotland, Spanish institutions have thus far dismissed any type of consultation with the Catalan independence party, claiming that secessionist discourses are not considered by the constitution. Expectedly, violence occurred on October 1, 2017, when police forces were employed in order to block a referendum that had been authorized by the Catalan parliament. This kind of centralized repression will most likely boost up autonomist ambitions, whereas normative flexibility and a more open dialogue would perhaps alleviate the Catalans’ desire to leave. In so doing, local regions would acquire maximum self-sufficiency, without necessarily jeopardizing a general convergence of political intentions.

It is obvious that the European institutions, which hold the responsibility to recognize newborn societies from the outside, play an important role in these evolutionary processes. As Connolly thoughtfully suggests, the opportunity for regions to engage in paradiplomacy might prove to be a farsighted normative maneuver. Allowing local delegates to sit at the continental round-table, such an operation would also permit them to pursue local interests further than the national borders. Catalonia and Flanders have been able to thrive in this sense, showing that a regionalized conception of Europe, which was portrayed within the Maastricht treaties but was never concretely pursued, could

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<sup>316</sup> Connolly (2013), p. 76.

successfully materialize<sup>317</sup>. By and large, whether this “separatism in integration” wave can be viewed as a symptom of the rising cosmo-local subjectivities conceptualized here is a debatable hypothesis that will optimistically produce desirable outcomes. The Scottish situation<sup>318</sup> appears to be the most promising in this regard. Dismissing cultural and linguistic justifications, the SNP in fact defends its European status with the fundamental intention to escape the neo-liberal framework imposed by the 1980s Thatcherism. One only hopes that these types of phenomena will ultimately assist the promotion of self-determination views which disregard narrow-minded biases and reinforce ideals of liberty, hospitality and respect, facilitating a cosmopolitan awakening that overflows the European horizons. In this way, displaced emotions and exiled feelings will perhaps be able to reconcile with the harmony of the whole, thus eliciting an experience of truth that does not unfold as a greedy conquest of the totality, but as the perception of one’s own inner essence. At that point it will be clear for all that genuine forms of togetherness are rooted in the steadiness of solitude, that a sincere sense of identity is ultimately grounded on the plasticity of the shapeless, and that it is realistically possible to perceive oneself as local or national in the heart and as a citizen of the world in the mind.

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid. pp. 80-82.

<sup>318</sup> Whose exhaustive account would certainly require further considerations that exceed the scope of this work...



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